

West promotes election held at gunpoint in Ukraine

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With just days before presidential and municipal elections are to be staged in Ukraine by the Western-backed, right-wing “interim government,” the regime’s defense ministry announced Wednesday that its so-called “antiterrorist operations” against dissident populations in the east and south of the country are proceeding at full strength.

“The active phase of the antiterrorist operations is currently continuing,” ministry spokesman Vladislav Seleznyov said Wednesday. “Residents in the eastern regions of Ukraine can observe this. There is currently a planned rotation of troops and forces included in the antiterrorist operation.”

Washington and its Western European allies are promoting Sunday’s election as a means of legitimizing the Western-backed, neo-fascist-led coup which toppled Ukraine’s elected president and installed an illegal regime whose leaders were handpicked by US officials.

The idea that a legitimate election could be held, as the army employs tanks, artillery and helicopter gunships to suppress political opposition in large portions of the country, is ludicrous. This fraudulent exercise is being staged, with unconditional US support, just two weeks after the May 11 referenda on autonomy in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that the State Department denounced as illegitimate. The Ukraine crisis has provided a unique window into the cynicism and hypocrisy of American imperialist foreign policy.

Washington has stepped up its own intervention, sending the US Navy guided missile cruiser Vella Gulf to the Black Sea in conjunction with the vote. Meanwhile, Vice President Joe Biden issued another threat against Russia, vowing during a visit to Romania that if Moscow “undermines” Sunday’s vote, the US will impose stiffer economic sanctions and step up the eastward drive of NATO.

Since the Ukrainian regime launched its “antiterrorist” operation, sending troops and National Guard units composed of Right Sector neo-fascist thugs against eastern and southern Ukraine, at least 127 people have been killed, according to a United Nations estimate.

One clear indication of the atmosphere in which the elections are being staged came last month when presidential candidate Oleg Tsarev, a former deputy in deposed President Viktor Yanukovich’s Party of Regions and a supporter of federalization, was set upon by a right-wing mob following a television appearance in Kiev. Beaten to the point that he had to be hospitalized in critical condition, he has since withdrawn his candidacy and called for a boycott of the vote.

Similar and even worse brutality has been meted out by the fascistic elements that form a pillar of the regime against any political groupings deemed left-wing, including the “Borotba” (“Struggle”) group and the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU), whose members have been killed, beaten, arrested and faced assassination attempts.

For the first time since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the election is being held under conditions in which no candidate representing the predominantly Russian-speaking regions of eastern and southern Ukraine is participating.

Meanwhile, the Kiev regime is ruthlessly cracking down on Russian media inside Ukraine, arresting, detaining, interrogating and deporting all those reporters whom it suspects of failing to toe the propaganda line being set by Washington. (See: Ukrainian regime detains journalists working for Russian media).

In tandem with this repression, the Kiev regime, with US and German backing, is going through the motions of “round table” discussions supposedly aimed at defusing tensions between the regime and the eastern and southern regions. These talks, involving politicians linked to one or another of the country’s ruling billionaire oligarchs, have systematically excluded any representatives of the populations that are protesting and are under attack.

Ukraine’s parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, voted overwhelmingly Wednesday in favor of a “memorandum on peace and conciliation,” which purportedly was a product of the “round table” exercise. The resolution called for returning the Ukrainian troops now laying siege to the eastern and southern regions to their barracks and an end to

violence by all sides. It also stipulated that Ukraine's joining of any international union—such as the European Union or NATO—must be approved by a referendum.

A provision that would have provided amnesty for those who seized government buildings in eastern and southern Ukraine was removed from the final version of the memorandum.

The resolution was clearly intended to distract from the real conditions on the ground that were bluntly spelled out by the defense ministry and thereby lend the election a false shred of credibility. They were likewise aimed at placating the government of President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, which had previously questioned the legitimacy of the election.

There was an indication that as far as the Russian regime goes, the gesture had some effect. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin said Wednesday that the memorandum constituted “the first public and distinct, though late, step toward the realization of the April 17, 2014 Geneva Agreements.”

These agreements, reached between the US, Russia, the European Union and representatives of the Kiev regime, called on all sides to “de-escalate tensions” by ending violence, disarming “illegal armed groups,” ending occupations of government buildings and extending an amnesty to protesters. The Kiev regime, backed by Washington, interpreted this accord in an entirely one-sided fashion, ignoring the illegal armed groups such as the fascistic Right Sector, which is one of its key supporters, as well as the occupations in Kiev and Western Ukraine, while rejecting any amnesty for protesters in the east.

The Putin regime's lending of credibility to this memorandum—despite the clear contradiction between it and the actions of the Kiev regime on the ground—was joined with an announcement from Moscow that all Russian military forces were being withdrawn from areas near the Ukrainian border. Ukrainian officials confirmed on Wednesday that no Russian troops were positioned within 10 kilometers of the frontier.

The Russian government's actions are bound up with the interests of the semi-criminal oligarchy that forms the key constituency of the Putin regime. On the one hand, the desire to defuse tensions over Ukraine is tied directly to concerns within this ruling layer that the conflict with the West—where most of them bank their wealth—and increasing sanctions threaten their interests.

This concern was reportedly expressed this week at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum, where 32 Russian billionaires are scheduled to attend, but US corporate and financial executives are staying away as a result of pressure from the Obama administration.

Moscow was also anxious to placate concerns on the part of Beijing over the annexation of Crimea and the potential redrawing of borders and their implications for their own problems with unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet.

Putin joined Chinese President Xi Jinping Wednesday in overseeing the signing of a massive 30-year gas deal reportedly worth \$400 billion. While the deal had been under discussion for the past decade, the recent confrontation with the West over Ukraine apparently provide the impetus for reaching an agreement on pricing that had formerly been illusive.

As the election in Ukraine draws closer, the Putin regime may also believe that it will place in power a corrupt oligarch with whom Moscow can do business.

The clear frontrunner in all of the polls in Ukraine is Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine's so-called “chocolate king,” who amassed a \$1.3 billion personal fortune by grabbing former state-owned factories in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism. The latest poll placed his support at 53.2 percent, compared to barely 10 percent for his main competitor, former Prime Minister Yulia V. Tymoshenko, the so-called “gas princess,” who was jailed on corruption charges and released only after the US-backed coup in Kiev.

Poroshenko, Ukraine's seventh-richest individual, has deep ties to the entire oligarchy. One of his closest associates is Dmytro Firtash, the Ukrainian gas tycoon, who is linked to Russian crime bosses and is currently in Austria awaiting extradition to the US on racketeering and bribery charges.

While touted as the one oligarch who backed the violent protests in the Maidan that culminated in February's coup, Poroshenko was not only the foreign minister in the Western-aligned government of President Viktor Yushchenko, but also the minister of economic development and trade under the deposed Yanukovich.



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