

Amnesty International documents war crimes by pro-Kiev militia

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Amnesty International released a report September 8 on war crimes committed by pro-Kiev forces against ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine. The document, “Ukraine: Abuses and war crimes by the Aidar Volunteer Battalion in the north Luhansk region,” is the result of a two-week research mission in the region. It confirms that the Kiev regime is using extreme-right militias to suppress pro-Russian opposition to February’s Western-backed coup—with the tacit backing of the US and European Union (EU).

The Aidar battalion is among some 50 “volunteer” units that constitute a vital part of the “Anti-Terrorist Operation” in eastern Ukraine mounted by the government of President Petro Poroshenko. Amnesty does not state the political affiliations of the Aidar battalion, whose motto is “God is with us”, although it is described elsewhere as extreme-right. Like numerous other fascist organisations, its members were active in the Maidan protests sponsored by Washington and Berlin that ousted former President Viktor Yanukovich in February.

Before the events documented by Amnesty in north Luhansk, Aidar was involved in an assault on Shchastia, 24 kilometres from Luhansk, in which 10 civilians died, and the abduction of leading personnel including Mayor Sergei Kravchenko.

The report states, “While hailed by many nationally as a committed fighting force, the Aidar battalion has acquired locally a reputation for brutal reprisals, robbery, beatings and extortion.”

Some of the abuses “amount to war crimes, for which both the perpetrators and, possibly, the commanders would bear responsibility under national and international law.”

Those abducted were accused of being Russian collaborators, severely beaten and robbed. Amnesty cites the kidnap of four miners from Novodruzhesk, August 25-27, one of whom is undergoing chemotherapy for lung

cancer. He detailed how the Aidar battalion arrived at his home in a minibus, forced him at gunpoint to the floor, kicked and beat him, breaking his jaw. He was taken to a makeshift detention centre, where 12 to 15 others were being held, and kept blindfolded and bound with tape. He was finally released but only after his keys, wallet and bank cards had been stolen.

A local businessman accused of being a separatist was seized on August 25 by Aidar militia, who stole €1,700 he had in his car. A day later, he was told that the battalion was handing him over to a unit of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), “but I could see they were the same people.”

On August 23, the home of 82-year-old Olena in the village of Olexandrivka near Severodonetsk was raided by Aidar members, apparently seeking her grandson whom they accused of being a separatist. Firing automatic weapons, they hit Olena, who was hiding in the garage. She underwent seven hours of surgery for “significant abdominal injuries.”

Amnesty says it had raised its concern at such abuses with an Aidar commander who “confirmed that the battalion used a ‘simplified’ procedure for detentions.” Police and military authorities in Severodonetsk confirmed that there were 38 criminal cases against members of the Aidar battalion, mainly for robbery.

Although these had been passed on to the ministries of defence and interior, they were “without tangible result thus far,” the report states.

Amnesty presents the crimes it documents as the result of a failure on the part of the Ukrainian authorities to bring “Aidar and other volunteer battalions under effective lines of command and control.”

Otherwise, it states, the activity of such battalions “risks significantly aggravating tensions in the east of the country and undermining the proclaimed intentions of the new Ukrainian authorities to strengthen and uphold the

rule of law more broadly” (emphasis added).

Such assertions conceal the bogus character of Kiev’s commitment to the “rule of law.” An August 29 report by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that the Ukrainian parliament had approved three laws expanding the law enforcement powers in eastern Ukraine that “appear to be in conflict with international human rights norms and standards.”

Moreover, Poroshenko’s reliance on extreme-right militias is not a matter of poor command structures. It is integral to Kiev’s reactionary political objectives. This includes not only the prosecution of a brutal civil war in the east and the impoverishment of Ukrainian workers through its pact with the EU and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Above all, it is aimed at providing a pretext for military action against Russia.

Earlier this week, the German public broadcaster ZDF published video shot by Norway’s TV2 of Ukrainian soldiers wearing Nazi symbols on their helmets and swastikas. The right-wing US magazine Foreign Policy described the situation in Mariupol, now at the centre of the fragile ceasefire agreed last week between Moscow and Kiev. Amid the Ukrainian flags over burned-out administration buildings, it reports, another symbol is just as prominent, the Wolfsangel (Wolf Hook) of Hitler fascism.

Members of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion are playing the central role in the authorities’ battle for control. Founded by Andriy Biletsky, head of the fascist Social National Assembly and Patriots of Ukraine, the battalion is sponsored by Ukraine’s third-richest oligarch, Igor Kolomoysky, who also finances other paramilitary units.

Kolomoysky is Jewish and holds dual Ukrainian and Israeli citizenship, a fact that underscores the perfidious role of Israeli foreign policy, which in the service of its Washington paymasters promotes the most reactionary and anti-Semitic forces.

“Pro-Russian forces have said they are fighting against Ukrainian nationalists and ‘fascists’ in the conflict, and in the case of Azov and other battalions, these claims are essentially true,” Foreign Policy states. Kolomoysky, it suggests, “appears to have been behind the attack on the Russian embassy in Kiev,” on June 14, when it was attacked with Molotov cocktails by rightists.

Foreign Policy states the Azov battalion’s political platform supports the natsiokratiya system of government devised by Ukrainian nationalists in the 1930s and 1940s, “who fought Soviet forces but were also guilty of atrocities such as the murder of thousands of Jews and

Poles.”

It cites Oleg Odnorozhenko, deputy commander of the Azov Battalion, “a historian by trade,” calling for “Europe and the United States to take a more aggressive stance on Russia and begin shipping weapons to Ukrainian pro-government forces.”

In other words, the stated aim of the battalion, which has pledged to “defend Mariupol to the end,” is to draw the Western powers into a conflict with Moscow.

For Foreign Policy, “The pervasiveness of these paramilitary units has raised concerns about their influence over the government,” while the Wall Street Journal noted anxiously that far-right battalions like Azov had promised to march on Kiev once the war was finished in the east.

The rightist units are bitterly hostile to the 12-point plan that produced a ceasefire in the east and set out steps towards decentralisation of power in the east. They have a vested interest in seeing it wrecked.

But, in this respect, there is little to separate them from the Ukrainian regime itself, and many of its Western backers. While agreeing to a ceasefire, Kiev has worked to press its offensive in the east in time for elections, due in October, that will rubberstamp EU/IMF rule.

Poroshenko boasted recently that five NATO countries—the US, France, Italy, Poland and Norway—had pledged to help supply weapons. For their part, the civil war in eastern Ukraine has provided the NATO powers with a pretext to implement long-standing plans for the military encirclement of Russia. To this end, they have proven only too willing to work with Nazis and other far-right elements.



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