

In Ukraine, US Vice President Biden issues new threats against Russia

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US Vice President Joe Biden visited Ukraine at the end of last week to threaten Russia with “rising costs and greater isolation.” His visit heralds an intensification of the suppression of pro-Russian separatists in the east, increasing austerity for the working class throughout Ukraine and the ratcheting up of tensions between the United States and Russia.

This was the third time in the last seven months that Biden has made an official visit to Ukraine. His latest visit came exactly one year after the beginning of the Maidan protests in Kiev—protests that were encouraged and instigated by the US and Germany as part of a regime-change operation on Russia’s doorstep. The campaign, which was supported by extreme right-wing and fascistic groups, resulted in the ousting of then President Victor Yanukovich as part of an effort to place Ukraine firmly in the orbit of the United States and Europe.

Speaking at the Presidential Administrative Building in Kiev, Biden encouraged the Ukrainian government to press forward with its draconian economic reform agenda to meet the demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF has promised \$17 billion in loans to prop up the collapsing Ukrainian economy. Biden reassured his audience that the American government is “looking for opportunities to improve Ukraine’s business climate and increase trade and investment.”

One of the new business opportunities in Ukraine that has already directly benefitted the Biden family is in the field of natural gas. Less than two months after the institution of the pro-Western government, Joe Biden’s son Hunter was appointed to the board of directors of Burisma Holdings, the largest private producer of natural gas in Ukraine. Burisma currently holds permits to drill for gas in the Dnieper-Donets and Azov-Kuban

Basins, covering much of eastern Ukraine.

While in Kiev, the vice president also announced a further \$23 million in assistance to the Ukrainian government. So far this year the Obama administration has committed \$320 million in aid to Ukraine, with a \$118 million dedicated to providing equipment and training to bolster the Ukrainian Armed Forces, State Border Guard Service and the National Guard.

While the US government has so far officially provided only non-lethal assistance, it has not ruled out the possibility of openly arming the Ukrainian military.

Testifying before the US Congress last week, Anthony Blinken, President Barack Obama’s deputy national security advisor and his nominee for deputy secretary of state, called for the supply of arms to the Kiev regime. “I believe that, given the serious Russian violations of the agreement that they signed... that one thing that could hopefully get them to think twice and deter them from further action is strengthening the capacity of the Ukrainian forces, including with defensive lethal equipment,” Blinken said.

Responding to questions from reporters about Blinken’s statement, State Department spokesman Jeffery Rathke insisted that “nothing is off the table.”

In his address, Biden denounced Russia for threatening Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. “It’s simply unacceptable in the 21st century for countries to attempt to redraw borders by force in Europe, or anywhere for that matter; or to intervene militarily because they don’t like a decision their neighbor has made,” Biden said.

Biden was speaking as a representative of a government that intervenes in every corner of the globe—including in Ukraine itself—to “redraw borders by force” or otherwise work to overthrow governments as it sees fit.

The US vice president went on to condemn Russia's response to the Western-backed crackdown on pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine as a "flagrant violation of the bedrock principles of our international system." He also rejected the outcome of elections held on November 2 by the separatists as a "Kremlin-orchestrated farce" and reasserted the refusal of the American government to recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea.

Biden warned that any failure to abide by a ceasefire agreement signed in Minsk in September would result in "rising costs and greater isolation" for Russia.

Behind the scenes, there is also discussion about the possibility that Ukraine will join NATO, the US-led military alliance. The newly-formed government in Kiev has reportedly set NATO membership as one of its top priorities, along with reclaiming Crimea.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov responded by charging that the US and its EU partners are seeking via economic sanctions to overthrow the regime of President Vladimir Putin. "Western leaders publicly state that the sanctions must hurt [Russia's] economy and stir up public protests. The West doesn't want to change Russia's policies. They want a regime change. Practically nobody denies that," said Lavrov speaking to the Assembly of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy in Moscow on Saturday.

While acknowledging the danger posed by the US and its European partners, Lavrov, speaking on behalf of the Russian oligarchy, indicated a desire to establish a new accommodation between Russia and the EU. "The EU is our largest partner. Nobody is going to shoot himself in the foot and reject cooperation with Europe, but everyone understands that it won't be business as usual anymore. But we don't need the kind of business we had." He expressed the hope the Russia and the EU could "cooperate as equals."

Even as Lavrov raised the possibility of an accommodation with the EU, its foremost member state, Germany, is leading the charge to militarily encircle and economically isolate Russia. Speaking in Sydney, Australia last week, German Chancellor Angela Merkel accused Putin of "trampling on international law," and "placing in question the entire European order of peace."

What is desired above all by Germany and the United States is the subjugation of Russia to the will of the

imperialist powers. Developments in Ukraine are being utilized to place ever-greater economic and military pressure on Russia, raising the very real danger of war between nuclear-armed countries.



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