

# US to train special police forces in Ukraine

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Last week, Arsen Avakov, head of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) announced that Kiev is working with Washington to create a unified special police force analogous to American SWAT teams. The force is to be called KORD (*Korpus operativno-raptovoy diy*—Instantaneous Tactical Actions Corps). Following its American counterpart, KORD will consist of “assault teams” that execute high-risk police actions with a 15-to-20-minute response time.

The announcement came as the US began sending military equipment to Ukraine. In addition, this week, Ukraine’s parliament voted to approve the presence of foreign peacekeeping forces and military units of foreign states on the country’s soil. The move lays the groundwork for the holding of joint military exercises on Ukrainian territory with US and Polish forces planned for this year.

The creation of US-trained SWAT teams in Ukraine makes clear that Kiev is preparing to suppress popular opposition to its right-wing austerity program and the brutal war the government is waging in the country’s southeast. Earlier this month, the parliament announced plans to cut pensions for working retirees by 15 percent, a move that will impact 20 million Ukrainians.

Plans to create a Ukrainian SWAT force were first announced last October by the public relations office of the People’s Front, a political party formed last year by current prime minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. MVD head Avakov is also a member of the People’s Front. According to the October announcement, the Ukrainian SWAT force will be formed primarily out of the Ministry of Internal Affairs volunteer battalions and squadrons, which began serving as special forces units in the country in April 2014.

Since last August, these units have been armed with heavy weaponry from the country’s Ministry of Defense and have played a key role in fighting the

ongoing civil war. Many of them, such as the Azov Battalion (now a unit of the Ukrainian National Guard), have gained worldwide notoriety for their open embrace of fascist insignia, as well as murderous attacks on civilian targets.

There are more than 30 such units in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, ranging up to 500 members each. Other volunteer units exist within the Ukrainian Defense Ministry and National Guard. Still others have not been formally incorporated into state structures but have fought alongside government forces. KORD will bring all of the Ministry of Internal Affairs special units into a unified national force.

According to Avakov’s statement last week, the United States has allocated \$26.4 million for the restructuring of Ukraine’s police and the creation of the SWAT teams. US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt noted that American police specialists have already been involved in this work.

“The agreement is not just about \$26 million,” Pyatt added, making clear that the US State Department foresees a US police/military presence on Ukraine’s border with Russia. “It’s also about long-term support by the United States for the Ukrainian people and specifically this government of Ukraine. This agreement also will make it possible for us to collaborate in support for [Ukrainian] border guards.”

Specialists from the United States, as well as from Georgia, Israel, and other countries, have already participated in the training of the volunteer forces in Ukraine, and American military personnel will begin working with units of the Ukrainian National Guard this spring. Signs of the presence of American mercenaries in Ukraine have been reported since as early as March 2014—before the start of the armed conflict in the Donbass.

The US-trained SWAT teams in Ukraine will be used not simply as paramilitary units for the suppression of

the rebellion of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. The American police are to share with their Ukrainian counterparts their rich experience in quelling civil disorder and suppressing political dissent.

In Kostyantynivka, a city in the Kiev-controlled part of Donetsk Province, civil unrest erupted on Monday after a group of Ukrainian army troops riding in an infantry fighting vehicle ran over and killed an eight-year-old girl. At least two other people, a woman and a child, were also injured in the accident. A preliminary investigation discovered that the driver of the vehicle had been drunk. Shortly after the accident, approximately 100 Kostyantynivka residents gathered near the incident site and the Ukrainian military's barracks to protest the ongoing militarization of the city by the Ukrainian government.

The protests in Kostyantynivka, which involved the burning of at least two police vehicles, provoked a sharp response from local police and the capital. Illya Kiva, a local Interior Ministry representative, blamed Russian-backed separatists for what he called provocations and pleaded for citizens not to join the protests. Avakov's adviser and Rada deputy Anton Herashchenko stated, "If somebody in Kostyantynivka comes out with a gun in his hands against the Ukrainian government, taking advantage of this auto accident for mass disorder, then there will first be one warning shot, and then we will shoot with deadly force. If there won't be enough time for a warning, then deadly force will be applied immediately."



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