

Ukrainian President Zelensky deepens alliance with far right

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Amidst the ongoing military confrontation with Russia, reports have emerged proving that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is seeking to appoint the far-right Serhiy Sternenko as head of Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) in Odessa, in an attempt to further his alliance with neo-Nazi forces.

As the former head of the neo-Nazi Right Sector in Odessa, Sternenko was directly implicated in the 2014 Trade Unions House massacre of 46 people. He is a convicted criminal and currently under investigation for murder.

Andriy Bohdan, the former head of Zelensky's administration, confirmed the president's offer in a Facebook post in response to questions by a reporter with the online news site Strana. When asked if the rumors were true that Zelensky had offered the position to Sternenko, Bohdan replied, "I think he did it right when they were quickly forming a list of government deputies. An acute personnel shortage as they say."

While Sternenko had previously claimed that he met personally with Zelensky and was offered the position in 2019, ties between the two had never been officially confirmed by anyone close to the president.

Confirmation of the offer demonstrates that the administration of Zelensky, who came to power in 2019 due to widespread disillusionment and disgust with his right-wing nationalist predecessor Petro Poroshenko, has in fact continued and increased the conspicuous alliance of Ukraine's oligarchy with neo-Nazi thugs.

As a far-right political operative, Sternenko has a bloody political and criminal history including drug charges, kidnapping and murder.

In February of this year, he was found guilty and sentenced to seven years and three months in prison for the 2015 kidnapping and robbery of Serhiy Shcherbych, an Odessa district councilor and member

of the pro-Russian Rodina Party.

Following the verdict, protests broke out across the country led by Ukrainian far-right nationalist forces calling for Sternenko's release. The protests resulted in the trashing of Zelensky's presidential offices, with 27 police officers injured in the process.

Sternenko has likewise been supported by Ukraine's most prominent right-wing politicians, former President Petro Poroshenko and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who both criticized Sternenko's sentencing.

In addition to kidnapping charges, Sternenko is under investigation for the killing of Ivan Kuznetsov. Kuznetsov was killed in 2018 after another man confronted the infamous Sternenko and his girlfriend in the streets of Odessa. According to reports, after a fight broke out Sternenko chased down a fleeing Kuznetsov for over 100 meters and eventually stabbed him to death.

Sternenko first came to political prominence as a right-wing supporter of the US-backed coup in 2014 that ousted the elected pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich. The coup heavily relied on neo-fascist forces such as Sternenko, his Right Sector and the Azov Battalion.

Later, as leader of the Right Sector in Odessa, Sternenko was directly implicated in the massacre of 46 people who were horrifically burned to death by right-wing thugs on May 2, 2014, after being forced to take shelter in Odessa's Trade Unions House.

Since the Odessa Trade Unions House fire, Sternenko's Right Sector thugs have interrupted a number of memorial events by family members to the victims. None of them have ever been held accountable for the massacre.

Despicably, in the Western press Sternenko is often

depicted as a “pro-democracy” and “anti-corruption” activist who has been unfairly prosecuted.

Sternenko previously wore typical neo-Nazi military garb, but now is often seen dressed in a suit with glasses. He even earned himself a law degree in an effort to appear more respectable, garner support from Western imperialism and hide his neo-Nazi ties.

Recently, the rabidly anti-Russian Washington D.C.-based Atlantic Council think tank attempted to whitewash the bloody nature of Sternenko and Ukraine’s far right which the think tank itself supports.

Turning the truth on its head regarding the events of the Odessa massacre in 2014, the Atlantic Council wrote, “Sternenko has been in the public eye for a number of years and has frequently attracted controversy. He initially rose to prominence as head of the Odessa branch of Ukrainian far-right nationalist group Right Sector, and was actively involved in efforts to prevent a Kremlin-led takeover of the Black Sea port city in spring 2014 during the initial phase of Russia’s ongoing hybrid war against Ukraine.”

In March, thanks to the support he received from the US-backed section of the Ukrainian ruling class, Sternenko was released from jail on house arrest. Several Ukrainian parliamentary members had offered to pay Sternenko’s bail, including members from Zelensky’s own Servant of the People party.

Sternenko had been taken into custody after his sentencing in February and is now out on a pending appeal. His case is following a pattern in the Ukrainian judicial system where far-right thugs are rarely convicted or, even when convicted, can later skip out of jail and prison on appeal.

Sternenko’s release conspicuously coincided with the ramping up of hostilities with pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine and tensions with Moscow as well as Zelensky’s crackdown on the pro-Russian opposition in Ukraine.

In February Zelensky undemocratically banned the popular pro-Russian television stations ZIK, NewsOne, and 112 Ukraine, ostensibly to combat Russian “disinformation.”

The channels are affiliated with pro-Russian opposition leader and oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk, who favors a negotiated peace settlement with Moscow and the Donbass separatists. This past week, Zelensky moved even further, banning the stations from

YouTube in Ukraine.

By banning the channels, Zelensky has furthered his dangerous confrontation with Moscow over Crimea and the separatist-controlled Donbass region. He has also taken out media outlets which often expose the comfortable relationship between the pro-NATO section of the Ukrainian oligarchy and right-wing anti-Russian fascists like Sternenko.

One of the banned channels, 112 Ukraine, has reported previously on the recruitment and promotion of figures such as Sternenko by the SBU following the anti-Moscow coup in 2014. According to a June 2020 report from 112 Ukraine, Sternenko’s ties to the SBU date back to 2014 and that for some time while in Odessa as head of the Right Sector Sternenko basically worked as a paid employee of the SBU.

For the Ukrainian government, which recently announced a strategy to “retake” Crimea and continues to engage in a potentially catastrophic confrontation with Moscow with the military support from the US, figures such as Sternenko are indispensable for carrying out their dirty work both in the war zone, and when it comes to suppressing popular opposition.

Ukraine’s right-wing Minister of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov, who is closely affiliated with neo-Nazi forces such as the Azov Battalion, recently called for the neo-fascists, whom he called “patriots,” to ready themselves to protect the “motherland” from Russia. These statements, like Zelensky’s increasingly open ties with the country’s far right, are further proof that the Ukrainian ruling class is counting on such elements to serve as the spearhead in a potential war with Russia.



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