US Secretary of State Blinken visits Kiev amidst ongoing tensions with Russia

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US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Thursday in Kiev, pledging Washington's support as the former Soviet republic continues its military escalation with Moscow.

The visit, the first by a senior Biden administration official, comes on the heels of Russia's announcement on April 22 that it was withdrawing the bulk of its forces near the Ukrainian border as it had completed its military drills there.

During his visit, Blinken reaffirmed the US commitment to Ukraine's "sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence," and also encouraged the country to continue to fight "corruption" and pass "reforms." In reality, both are demands to prosecute the pro-Russian section of the Ukrainian oligarchy and to accelerate unpopular privatization measures of the Ukrainian economy.

"Ukraine is facing two challenges: aggression from outside, coming from Russia, and in effect aggression from within, coming from corruption, oligarchs and others who are putting their interests ahead of those of the Ukrainian people," Blinken told reporters after his meeting with Zelensky.

For the Ukrainian government, the visit proved to be somewhat of a disappointment as it received no guarantees of NATO membership despite openly pleading for an invitation for months.

After a meeting with Polish President Andrzej Duda on Monday, Zelensky again reiterated his desire for an invitation, stating on Twitter, "Ukraine needs a clear signal about the European and Euro-Atlantic prospect. Postponing these issues for 'later,' 'some day,' '10 years' has to end."

However, Blinken simply stated that Ukraine's "Euro-Atlantic" aspirations were being discussed and said that the US was "actively looking" into strengthening its military presence there without providing any details.

In a move clearly meant to antagonize and provoke the Kremlin, the State Department's undersecretary for political affairs, Victoria J. Nuland, accompanied Blinken on his trip to Kiev.

Nuland was one of the most vociferous supporters of the US-backed coup that overthrew the elected pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych in 2014 and installed an anti-Moscow right-wing government.

In 2014, a taped conversation between Nuland, then assistant secretary of state, and the US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt was released in which Nuland and Pyatt bluntly discussed their desired make-up of an incoming post-coup government in Kiev. The phone call marked a particularly revealing moment in US foreign policy as it laid bare US gangsterism. At one point, Nuland cried "F*** the EU" while criticizing some European countries for their hesitancy to immediately embrace the anti-Moscow right-wing coup.

In addition to serving in the Obama administration, Nuland also served as a foreign policy advisor to the war criminal Dick Cheney from 2003–2005 and later as US Ambassador to NATO during President George W. Bush's second term. Nuland was a proponent of placing permanent NATO bases on its borders with Russia.

The appearance of both Blinken and Nuland in Kiev demonstrates that the US plans to continue using Ukraine to antagonize and weaken Russia militarily. At the same time, the US is using the carrot of NATO membership with the Ukrainian ruling class.

While Ukraine's far-right paramilitary groups regularly boast of fighting for "glory" and "defending the motherland" until the last man, in reality Ukraine

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would stand little chance in the case of an all-out war with a militarily and economically superior Russia, facts of which both Blinken and Nuland are undoubtedly well aware.

Ukraine's armed forces consist of just 209,000 compared to Russia's 900,000. Despite receiving over $2 billion in military assistance since 2014, Ukraine's defense spending in 2021 stands at $4.3 billion compared to Russia's military budget of approximately $70 billion. In addition, Ukraine has continued to rapidly lose huge numbers of people and now numbers just 35 million. It is also Europe's poorest country, according to the World Bank.

While in Ukraine, Blinken conspicuously failed to condemn the far-right elements that the US deployed in 2014 and which continue to play an oversized role in Ukraine due to their alliance with the Ukrainian oligarchy and Western imperialism.

Last week, the far right held a march in Kiev to celebrate the 78th anniversary of the establishment of the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS, also known as the 1st Galician. The Nazi unit was composed of Ukrainians and German volunteers and conscripts and was deployed against Soviet and Polish partisans during World War II.

Since 2014, such elements have been given free rein to hold marches, attack ethnic minorities and kill journalists and political opponents. The imperialist powers consider them highly useful in carrying out their war plans in the region and suppressing the working class.

It is thus no coincidence that Blinken failed to publicly condemn the march both in his remarks in Kiev and prior to his visit. Instead, he called on Russia to end its "irresponsible and destabilising behaviour" following G7 talks in London earlier in the week.

Zelensky, who himself has a Jewish background, condemned the march in a statement only nominally and sought to conflate the crimes of fascism with the Soviet Union. He released his statement only after NATO member Germany and NATO ally Israel publicly condemned the march.

The Ukrainian far right has been instrumental in preventing a negotiated settlement to the now over seven-year-long civil war in eastern Ukraine that has claimed the lives of over 14,000 Ukrainians.

A major point of contention has been a special federated status for the separatist-controlled areas of the Donbass region. Such a move has been called a "red line" by Ukraine's neo-fascist organizations. These organizations, including the Azov Battalion and the Right Sector, have close ties to Interior Minister Arsen Avakov and have threatened another coup in Kiev if a negotiated settlement is reached with Moscow and the separatists.

When Zelensky sought to negotiate with Germany, France and Russia—but without the US—about a ceasefire in the fall of 2019, thousands of neo-fascists marched in Ukraine against his government with the support of former President Petro Poroshenko. In early 2020, Zelensky then reshuffled his government, bringing in many figures with close ties to the US.

Zelensky has since also deepened his administration's alliance with the far right. Most recently, he has been seeking to appoint the notorious neo-Nazi Serhiy Sternenko from the "Right Sector" as head of Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) in Odessa.

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