

Biden endorses anti-Russian “Crimean Platform” amid Ukrainian government fears of US foreign policy shift

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On Wednesday, US President Joe Biden granted Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky a meeting for which the Kiev government had had to beg Washington for well over a year. Following the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became central to the US-led NATO encirclement of and war preparations against Russia. The US played the principal role in funding a far-right coup in Kiev in February 2014, which toppled the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovych.

After the two-hour meeting between Zelensky and Biden, the White House published a joint statement, confirming Washington's support for Ukraine's aggressive and provocative “Crimean Platform” and its military build-up against Russia in the Black Sea. The statement reiterated the lies of “continued Russian aggression” and pledged that Washington would retain its “commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

The “Crimean Platform” was announced by Kiev in March and involves a provocative strategy for Ukraine to “retake” Crimea, presumably by military means. The Crimea is a strategic peninsula in the Black Sea that was annexed by Russia in March 2014 following a US-backed coup in Kiev and a referendum on the peninsula. Crimea's main city, Sevastopol is also the base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine's highly provocative announcement of the strategy to “retake” Crimea earlier this year triggered a significant military crisis in the Black Sea region. The “Crimean Platform” initiative held its first summit with representatives from all NATO countries on August 23.

Biden also pledged an additional \$60 million this year to deliver Javelin missiles to Ukraine, on top of \$400 million that were already granted this year. By contrast,

the US has so far provided only \$55 million for just 2.2 million vaccine doses to assist Ukraine in vaccinating its population of 40 million people, and will provide an additional \$12.5 million, a fraction of its support for the Ukrainian military.

The statement also insisted on ongoing “reforms” of Ukraine's economy, which involve large-scale privatizations, as well as far-reaching cooperation between Ukrainian and US intelligence.

While the joint statement declared that the US continued “to oppose” the Russian-German Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, there was no indication that Washington would undertake any measures to revise its recent deal with Berlin, which effectively allows the pipeline to be completed and go into operation. The pipeline is expected to cost the Ukrainian economy billions of dollars annually because of lost revenue from transit fees. Both the joint statement and Biden also made but very vague statements of support for “Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations,” that is, its repeated and insistent requests to be granted accelerated access to NATO.

Zelensky later said he had invited Biden to Ukraine, but that the US president said that he would “come when he can, he is a very busy man.” The Ukrainian president travelled on to California to meet with representatives of Apple and speak at Stanford University.

Prior to the meeting with Biden, Zelensky and his delegation had met with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. Austin and the Ukrainian defense minister Andrei Taran signed a new strategic defense framework agreement. While details have not been revealed, the agreement reportedly focuses on deepening military cooperation in the Black Sea, reforms of Ukraine's defense industrial sector, as well as cybersecurity and intelligence.

The Russian press has warned that the new agreements would be directed against Russia's strategic nuclear forces. Most of Russia's nuclear arsenal dates back to the Soviet period, when the Ukrainian Soviet Republic was the main manufacturer of weapons, including nuclear weapons. The closer cooperation between American and Ukrainian intelligence, the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* wrote, could entail Ukraine providing intelligence about Russia's nuclear weapons to the Pentagon.

Zelensky's visit to the US was overshadowed by the staggering debacle US imperialism has just suffered in Afghanistan. Ukraine, which has supported the criminal NATO war, was unable to evacuate dozens of its citizens in time before the withdrawal was completed.

The rapid shift in focus of US imperialism away from Afghanistan and the Biden administration's unceremonious dropping of support for its Afghan stooges has sent shock waves through the Ukrainian oligarchy. Torn by conflicts and widely hated in the desperately impoverished working population, it is heavily dependent on funding and political support from Washington.

In the lead-up to the February 2014 coup, which toppled the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich, the US pumped some \$5 billion into supporting the "opposition," including various fascist formations like the Azov Battalion. Since then, billions more were given to the government in Kiev, including \$2.5 billion for the Ukrainian military, which has been fighting against pro-Russian separatists in East Ukraine. The civil war has claimed over 15,000 lives and displaced millions, with no end to the conflict in sight.

An advisor to Zelensky, Andrew Mac, told the *New York Times* in advance of the Zelensky-Biden meeting, "The situation in Afghanistan seems to indicate a realignment of U.S. global commitments, and President Zelensky wants to hear from President Biden where Ukraine fits in." In an indication of just how worried Kiev is, Tymofiy Mylovanov, an adviser to Mr. Zelensky's chief of staff, told the newspaper, "We are very different from Afghanistan, and we would like to emphasize this. We are an independent country, not a failed state, and our military has managed to resist the Russians, not the Taliban."

Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the Russian Security Council, mockingly commented, "Did the fact that Afghanistan has the status of a main U.S. ally outside of NATO save the ousted pro-American regime in Kabul? A similar situation awaits those who are banking on America in Ukraine." He predicted that Ukraine "is going

to disintegrate and the White House at a certain moment won't even remember its supporters in Kyiv."

Fears in Kiev of Washington dropping or reducing its support were fueled earlier this year by the summit between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The summit was part of the Biden administration's effort to somewhat ease tensions with Russia, while orienting US foreign policy more directly toward preparations for war against China.

A few weeks later, Berlin and Washington announced a deal over the Russian-German Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. The deal was struck without consultation with the Ukrainian government, and the invitation to Zelensky to Washington was issued once the deal was announced. The Biden administration has also refused to make any commitment to accelerating Ukraine's accession to NATO, a central and stated goal of the 2014 coup.

The shifts in US foreign policy have fueled bitter conflicts within the Ukrainian ruling class and stirred up far-right forces against president Zelensky. Ever since coming into office, Zelensky has faced multiple violent demonstrations from the far right, which has opposed any efforts to negotiate a settlement with Russia over East Ukraine, as well as Zelensky's attempts to work more closely with Berlin. In one of the most recent attacks, in mid-August, right-wing thugs held a demonstration before his office, demanding that he work more closely with the US and that he not "capitulate" to Russia in negotiations over the conflict in East Ukraine. In a highly unusual move this summer, Zelensky, who is the commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces, was temporarily banned from visiting the front of the civil war.



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