

Ukrainian government deploys armed drones against separatists

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Despite its obligations under the signed 2015 Minsk Accords peace agreement, the Ukrainian government is continuing to ramp up its military capabilities against Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. In late October, it deployed Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones there for the first time ever.

In response to an ostensible shelling by separatists, Ukraine used the TB2 drone to destroy a Russian-made howitzer, provoking the deployment of Russian troops to the Ukrainian border and the renewed risk of a full-scale war between Moscow and NATO-backed Kiev.

The attack in the separatist-controlled village of Hranitne, which was reported on favorably by the *New York Times* on Tuesday, is another demonstration that the government of President Volodymyr Zelensky is committed to a policy of escalation as it seeks to reintegrate the breakaway provinces of Lugansk and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine.

For the past year the Ukrainian ruling class has sought to deepen military ties with the Turkish government, with both powers seeking to diminish Russian naval control over the strategic Black Sea region. The Ukrainian government offered Ankara advanced missile technology and in exchange received the coveted Turkish-made armed aerial drones.

Drones played a pivotal role in Azerbaijan's defeat of Russian-backed Armenia last year in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, and the Ukrainian oligarchy quickly became enamored with their potential use against its own Russian-backed separatists.

Kiev received the first shipment of drones in July and plans to purchase approximately 50 of the TB2 drones. In September, the two sides signed a memorandum to create a joint drone training and maintenance center in Ukraine.

Russia has predictably reacted with hostility to the

use of drones in Ukraine, which could spark a new wave of targeted bombings and assassinations by Kiev in the more than seven-year-long war that has claimed the lives of over 14,000.

Speaking Saturday on Russian state television about drones and Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin accused the Zelensky government of violating the 2015 Minsk accords, which specifically ban the use of aerial weapons:

“Now the current president cheerfully reports they're using Bayraktars, that is, unmanned aerial vehicles. Europe said something incomprehensible and the US even supported it and officials in Ukraine openly say that they used them and will use them further.”

With Russian troops now amassed across its northern border in response to its drone use, the Zelensky government has continued to duplicitously depict Russia as the aggressor while domestically preparing for war and refusing to abide by the 2015 Minsk peace accords that call for a cease fire, free elections, and a special federated status for the breakaway provinces.

Speaking of the reported Russian troop buildup, Zelensky hypocritically stated via a recorded video speech, “I hope the whole world can now clearly see who really wants peace and who is concentrating nearly 100,000 soldiers at our border.”

In reality, the right-wing government of Zelensky, which originally came to power thanks to mass opposition to the militaristic, nationalist policies of former President Petro Poroshenko, has taken increasingly reckless actions in order to provoke Russia and gain military and economic support from its imperialist backers, namely the United States, France and Germany.

In March of this year, Zelensky and the country's National Security and Defense Council provocatively

approved a strategy that is aimed at retaking Crimea and reintegrating the strategically important peninsula. This step ultimately led to a similar Russian troop buildup along the border last spring, although Moscow later withdrew its forces.

In addition to the purchase of Turkish drones, Zelensky's foreign policy since that time has only increased the risk of all-out war between the two countries.

Following the pull-back of Russian forces, the Zelensky government spent the summer begging for NATO membership and held a number of joint military and naval drills that were openly directed against Russia.

In August, the Zelensky government held its inaugural "Crimea Platform" summit, which brought together its imperialist backers in Kiev. Zelensky took photos with world leaders and declared "Crimea is Ukraine."

In response, the Russian government openly declared its opposition to Ukraine's NATO accession, stating, "President Putin has repeatedly noted the issue of the potential broadening of NATO infrastructure on Ukrainian territory, and (he) has said this would cross those red lines that he has spoken about before."

NATO's major powers have recklessly backed Kiev's escalation. On Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron warned Putin via a phone conversation that he would be prepared to defend Ukraine in case of war between the two countries.

"Our willingness to defend Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity was reiterated by the president," a French adviser to Macron told reporters regarding the phone call between the leaders of the two nuclear-armed countries.

The US has sent a missile destroyer, the tanker USNS John Lenthall and the staff ship USS Mount Whitney, to participate in the US Joint Forces Command Europe military drills in the Black Sea.

This past Sunday, the British press reported that the UK was preparing to send 600 troops to Ukraine.

Ukraine itself has deployed 8,500 troops to its side of the border with Russia and announced that parts of its naval fleet would move from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov, whose waters are claimed by Russia.

The tensions between Moscow and Kiev are escalating as the conflict between neighboring Poland

and Belarus escalates over a refugee crisis in which thousands of desperate migrants seeking safe harbor in the EU have been trapped at the border and brutalized by Polish forces. Russia, which is allied to Belarus' government, is accused of playing a central role in orchestrating the crisis.



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