

Biden backs Ukrainian president's militarist policies in phone conversation

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US President Joe Biden held an hour-long phone conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Thursday in which Biden assured Kiev of US support in its increasingly dangerous escalation of tensions with Moscow. However, the US president stopped short of delivering Zelensky's major requests for immediate sanctions against Russia and increased direct military support.

According to a White House statement on the conversation, Biden stressed that there would be "no decisions or discussions about Ukraine without Ukraine" and "made very clear that one nation can't force another nation to change its borders."

Regarding Russia's opposition to Ukraine's potential accession to NATO, Biden reportedly affirmed to Zelensky that his government would never enter into an agreement with Moscow that explicitly vetoed Ukraine's entrance.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has called NATO expansion into Ukraine a "red line," a stance which was rejected by Biden in a two-hour video conference call on Tuesday.

However, Biden gave Ukraine no guarantees for a NATO membership anytime soon, much to the disappointment of the Ukrainian ruling class and Zelensky, who had spent the past summer openly campaigning for rapid accession to the anti-Russian military alliance.

While the Biden administration has pledged military aid, it has also said it would not send US troops to Ukraine in case of full-scale war.

As noted by the WSWS, by simultaneously goading Kiev and then demurring, the Biden administration is following a policy recently expressed by the statement made by Democratic Senator Chris Murphy that "Ukraine can become the next Afghanistan for Russia

if it chooses to move further."

Zelensky in return called for the United States to impose immediate sanctions against Russia, rather than waiting for a military conflict to break out. He also requested substantial military equipment that could be potentially used against the Russian army.

Despite claiming that his government was ready to enter direct peace negotiations with Moscow and abide by the 2015 Minsk protocols peace agreement, Zelensky is well aware that both requests constitute a provocation to Moscow and would set his country even further down the path of war.

Biden's backing of Ukraine's "sovereignty" is particularly telling as it directly contradicts the 2015 Minsk protocols, which call for Ukraine to grant special federated status to the breakaway regions of Donetsk and Lugansk.

Zelensky also stressed to Biden that he would only enter further discussions on the Minsk protocols once Kiev was back in control of the separatist-controlled regions, essentially negating any possibility that the Minsk protocols could ever lead to a negotiated peace and end the over seven-year-long civil war that has killed over 14,000.

Despite initially coming to power over widespread popular disillusionment with the nationalist, militaristic politics of former President Petro Poroshenko, Zelensky, with the backing of NATO, has made a series of aggressive, reckless decisions that have now led his country to the brink of a full-scale war with Russia.

Earlier this year, the Ukrainian government issued a new national security strategy, announcing its intention to "recover" Crimea, the peninsula in the Black Sea that was annexed by Russia after the US-backed 2014 coup that overthrew a pro-Russian government in Kiev and threatened to deprive the Russian navy of its only major

warm water port. The strategy was a clear declaration that Ukraine was preparing for war against Russia and had no intentions to peacefully resolve the civil war in the Donbass.

In September, the Biden administration explicitly expressed its support for Ukraine's "Crimean Platform."

Zelensky's government has also entered into an increasingly close military alliance with Turkey, earlier purchasing armed drones that Ukraine first used against separatist forces in October.

As Russia has gathered its forces across the border in response to a massive NATO build-up in the Black Sea, Zelensky, rather than even attempting to abide by the Minsk protocols, has continued to undertake measures that are not only intended to antagonize Moscow and sabotage peace negotiations, but also directly attack the basic democratic rights of the Ukrainian population.

On December 2, Zelensky initiated five bills into the Ukrainian parliament that would be used to deny Donbass residents citizenship and voting rights. Based on these bills, the Ukrainian government would also be able to rescind citizenship from anyone participating in "actions threatening Ukraine's national security and national interests."

These undemocratic measures can be used to deny citizenship and voting rights not only to separatists in the Donbass, but any Ukrainian who opposes the right-wing nationalist and war-mongering policies of the Zelensky government. Rigged elections open only to "true" Ukrainian citizens—as defined by the government—would also become a real possibility.

The measures would also strip citizenship from Ukrainians with Russian passports. Such a move would be particularly punitive against the Donbass region's working class population as many workers there have relatives living in Russia and have begun using Russian passports to travel across the border.

The undemocratic measures, of course, would have no effect on Ukraine's obscenely wealthy oligarchs who travel across the world wherever they please.

Despite constantly espousing rhetoric about "democracy" and "freedom," the Zelensky government has become increasingly authoritarian, banning pro-Russian opposition media and press and openly prosecuting journalists for supposed "treason."

At each step on the path towards war with Russia,

Zelensky has been backed by both NATO and Ukraine's various far-right paramilitary groups, which play an oversized role in Ukraine's politics due to their usefulness to the state and oligarchy in carrying out the war against separatists in the east.

In late November, Zelensky warned that his government would face a coup, orchestrated by Russia and the billionaire oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, on December 1. Akhmetov, who has a net worth of \$7.3 billion, owns a number of media outlets, which have become openly critical of Zelensky.

Yet, ironically, when December 1 came to pass, Zelensky was threatened not by Akhmetov or the pro-Russian opposition, but rather by the far-right, which marched on Kiev, accompanied by former President Petro Poroshenko, and demanded Zelensky's resignation.

Regarding the Minsk Protocols, various right-wing speakers shouted, "No agreements, no compromises!"

Such threats are a clear message that any negotiated peace with separatists in the East can trigger another coup by far-right elements, who already played a central role in the 2014 coup, which was fully backed and, in large measure, funded by Washington and Brussels.

It is to these elements that Zelensky adapts himself as he leads the country down a path that threatens a war which can only end in disaster for the world's working class.



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