

# Kiev denies war plans against Russia as conflicts within the Ukrainian ruling class escalate

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Even as the US continues to ramp up its anti-Russia war preparations, the general commander of the Ukrainian Armed Forces denied his country is planning a military invasion of Crimea and the separatist-controlled Donbass region in eastern Ukraine, despite the armed forces' holding its own military exercises near the Russian-controlled peninsula.

Responding to a question over claims that Ukraine is planning its own offensive operations, General Ander Valery Zaluzhny stated that there had been "no orders, no conversations about a military operation to enter the currently occupied territories of Donetsk and Lugansk or currently occupied Crimea—such conversations and such plans have not been drawn up."

Both the Kremlin and representatives of the so-called People's Republics in Donetsk and Lugansk in East Ukraine have warned over the past month that the number of active combat operations near their borders has been increasing.

On Thursday, Ukrainian forces conducted military exercises with its Hurricane rocket launcher system and released a slickly produced video of the missiles pointed towards Crimea. Despite this, Ukrainian Defence Minister Alexey Reznikov backed Zaluzhny by stating, "The Ukrainian armed forces are not planning any offensive in Donbass."

The Ukrainian officials' denials cannot be taken at face value. Since early 2021, the "recovery" of Crimea and the Donbass have been part of the official military strategy of Kiev. The implementation of this strategy means preparations for a direct military conflict with Russia. Since the US-backed coup of 2014, which overthrew a pro-Russian government, the Kiev regime has waged a civil war with the aid of fascist paramilitary forces and Western arms and funding against separatists in East

Ukraine.

Over the past weeks, NATO, with the US and UK taking the lead, have dramatically ramped up their war preparations, delivering Javelin missiles and other weaponry to the Ukrainian army. This has been accompanied by a press campaign glorifying the far-right paramilitary "volunteer" groups that have played a central role in the civil war for years.

The escalating war crisis has deepened divisions within the Ukrainian ruling class and state apparatus.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky confounded Washington recently when he denied its incessant warmongering claims that a Russian invasion is "imminent." Clearly, the US ruling class was less than pleased with Zelensky's comments. The *Washington Post* quoted a "senior US official" who stated, "We're his most important ally and he's poking us in the eye and creating daylight between Washington and Kyiv. It's self-sabotage more than anything else."

Zelensky's calls to at least temporarily tamp down the hysteria emanating from Washington were in part motivated by the serious damage that the war propaganda has done to Ukraine's economy and the stability of his government. With the Zelensky administration's approval ratings at record lows, the war drive has already caused a 10 percent decline in the value of the country's currency.

Foreign investors are leaving the country in droves, causing the Ukrainian bond market interest rates to soar. In such a situation, the Ukrainian state, which is already heavily indebted to the IMF, is finding it nearly impossible to borrow money to continue to function.

However, Zelensky's appeals for calm do not signal a fundamental change in its march towards war. Even while calling upon Washington to not create "panic," his government has continued its expansion of Ukraine's

military capabilities.

On Tuesday, Zelensky signed a decree to increase the size of the Ukrainian armed forces —currently numbering 250,000—by 100,000 over the next three years. On Thursday, Zelensky met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey in Kiev. The two presidents signed a free trade agreement, and Ukrainian officials touted a deal to produce Turkish-designed Bayraktar TB2 aerial drones in Ukraine.

Ukraine first deployed the drones against Donbass separatists in October, despite their use being prohibited by a ceasefire and the 2015 Minsk Accords. The use of the weapon marked a significant escalation in the nearly eight-year-long civil war. Such drones were employed heavily by Turkish-backed Azerbaijan in its surprise victory over a Russian-backed Armenia in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war.

On his visit, Erdogan also attempted to present himself as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine, announcing plans to act as a host for three-way talks. Erdogan, who is hoping to use the talks to increase Turkey's influence over the strategic Black Sea region, claimed negotiations were a certainty despite unclear stances from both Kiev and Moscow on the issue.

Zelensky had previously maintained that all discussions be held in Ukraine. After his meeting with Erdogan, he suddenly declared, "It doesn't matter where the talks with Russia take place."

Whether Zelensky has any real say over Ukraine's stance on negotiations with Russia is highly questionable, as his statements are regularly walked back or contradicted by other Ukrainian officials as the warfare within the ruling class and state apparatus escalates.

On Tuesday, Zelensky's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, essentially sabotaged any basis for negotiations by stating that the Minsk Accords Agreement would never be implemented by Ukraine as it represented the "Russian viewpoint." Kuleba also rejected any possibility of a special federated status for the breakaway regions as required by the Minsk accords. Speaking with Poland's *Rzeczpospolita* newspaper, he said, "No Ukrainian region will have a right to national state decisions. This is set in stone! There will be no special status, as Russia imagines it, no voting power."

Aside from his own foreign minister, the Ukrainian government and military contains within it far-right elements who would welcome the removal of Zelensky.

Arsen Avakov, Zelensky's former interior minister and a man notorious for his close ties to the neo-Nazi Azov

Battalion, recently called for both early presidential and parliamentary elections on national television. He obliquely suggesting he did not want to see Zelensky be ousted in another "Maidan," the name of the right-wing protest movement that preceded the 2014 coup.

"The economic situation is tough, the energy situation is complicated and the mood of people is not good. The political situation is threatening the country, which should be resolved, in my opinion, not in a 'Maidan' and revolution, but in early elections, which would be the correct and civilized way," Avakov declared.

In a thinly veiled appeal to the neo-fascist forces he helped build up as interior minister, Avakov called for opposition forces to support the country but in the meantime "consolidate our forces" in preparation for early elections and the potential end of the Zelensky presidency.

Petro Poroshenko, who became president after the 2014 coup, and suffered a massive popular defeat to Zelensky in the 2019 election, also recently returned to Ukraine to stand trial for treason. Upon his return, the state refused to detain him and he immediately began a press campaign attacking Zelensky for his alleged softness toward Russia and lack of war preparations.

The Canadian newspaper *Globe and Mail* recently revealed that the decision to not arrest Poroshenko was made after the personal intervention of Canada's prime minister, Justin Trudeau, and deputy prime minister, Chrystia Freeland. According to the newspaper, Freeland spoke to Zelensky's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, in the days before Poroshenko's return to dissuade the government from detaining the "chocolate oligarch." The US secretary of state also expressed official support for Poroshenko through a Twitter message.

In yet another sign of preparations to oust Zelensky, a plot to stage violent demonstrations and clashes with security forces was uncovered and prevented last week. The Russian outlet *Kommersant* suggested, based on the revelations by the Ukrainian Interior Ministry, that the plans had likely originated with far-right forces embedded within the state security apparatus.



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