

US moves embassy from Ukraine's capital Kiev to the western city of Lviv

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Amid an ongoing war frenzy in the American media, the US cleared out its embassy in the Ukrainian capital Kiev and relocated its diplomatic staff 340 miles west to Lviv, near the border with Poland. Since Thursday, the Biden administration and the corporate press have peddled unsubstantiated allegations that a Russian invasion is "imminent," naming Wednesday as a potential date for the military offensive.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the State Department has ordered the destruction of networking equipment and computer workstations and the dismantling of the embassy telephone system. Classified material, along with 56 of the embassy's workers, were moved to Washington on Sunday. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken commented, "These prudent precautions in no way undermine our support for or our commitment to Ukraine."

The move of the US embassy came as dozens of countries have called upon their citizens to immediately leave Ukraine and numerous other states have announced the closure or downsizing of their embassies. The OSCE Special Mission to Ukraine has received orders from the US and UK to withdraw its forces from the Donbass and has begun to do so on Sunday. Several airlines have suspended service to Ukraine while others are struggling to receive insurance coverage for their flights over Ukrainian airspace.

Over the weekend, some 20 charter flights and private jets carried Ukraine's oligarchs out of the country, including the two richest Ukrainians, Rinat Akhmetov (\$11.54 billion) and Viktor Pinchuk (\$2.6 billion), as well as many other members of Ukraine's "richest 100" list.

In yet another sign of growing frictions between Kiev and Washington, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who had earlier rejected the latest US allegations of an impending invasion by Moscow, denounced the moving of the US embassy as a "big mistake," adding, "I think they have to return, otherwise we as a state have to draw certain conclusions. Believe me, we will draw these conclusions."

A source in Zelensky's "Servant of the People" party told the Ukrainian outlet strana.ua that the president had told the

parliamentary caucus on Monday that "three friendly countries are making up a story about war. He tried to explain to us in the caucus that we are being played with, but that we are resisting."

The secretary of Ukraine's Council of National Security and Defense, Alexei Danilov, backed Zelensky's line on Monday, stating that Ukrainian intelligence has found no evidence substantiating the Western warnings of an invasion by Russia in Ukraine in the near future.

In an address to the nation on Monday, Zelensky said that, "We are being told that February 16 will be the day of the attack, we are turning it into the day of national unity." Zelensky stressed that the Ukrainian government was preparing for all possible scenarios and that the Ukrainian army was ready to defend the state. He also emphasized that East Ukraine and Crimea would "return to Ukraine" but "exclusively through diplomatic means." This statement directly contradicts the military strategy to "retake" Crimea and East Ukraine that his government adopted in early 2021.

As the CIA and State Department have made one unsubstantiated allegation about a "Russian false-flag operation" after another, the Kremlin and pro-Russian separatists have warned that the Ukrainian army is planning a provocation in East Ukraine. According to Russian news reports, the Ukrainian military has amassed about half of its 250,000 troops near the front line in East Ukraine. This would amount to roughly the same size as Russia's reported troop deployment near Ukraine's border.

While Zelensky has been denying both war plans by Kiev and the threat of an imminent invasion by Russia, it is far from clear that his government is in control of the Ukrainian military, let alone the substantial fascist paramilitary forces in the country. Last summer, Zelensky, formally the commander-in-chief, was banned by the military leadership from visiting the front line in East Ukraine for several days, a highly unusual move that was never fully explained.

Earlier this month, the Ukrainian Interior Ministry claimed to have thwarted a plot to stage violent demonstrations against the government, which would have demanded a

military offensive in the Donbass and Crimea. It is to be assumed that these plans involved forces either actively or formerly employed by the Ukrainian security forces as well as the far right.

US-armed and funded far-right paramilitary forces like the Azov Battalion have staged multiple demonstrations against Zelensky over the years with similar demands, several of which were addressed by former president and oligarch Petro Poroshenko (net worth \$1.5 billion).

Poroshenko returned to Ukraine in January and only avoided arrest in a treason case thanks to the direct intervention of the US and Canada. He has since been engaged in a press campaign, attacking Zelensky for his supposedly soft line on Russia. Zelensky's former interior minister, Arsen Avakov, who has close ties to both Washington and Ukraine's far right, recently called for early elections, threatening Zelensky that, otherwise, he might be ousted in another "Maidan"—the name of the right-wing protests in the leadup to the February 2014 coup.

In a clear indication that Washington is eyeing Zelensky's removal, the *New York Times* claimed Zelensky's attempts to "caution against panic and overreaction" made him appear "nearly delusional about the grave risks his country faces."

In another remarkable shift, Zelensky indicated on Monday that his government may give up on its goal to join NATO in the near future, stating: "Maybe the question of open doors [to NATO] is for us like a dream." In his address to the nation, Zelensky only mentioned Ukraine's efforts to join the EU, but not NATO. Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz, visiting Kiev, said at a joint press conference with Zelensky, "The question of [Ukraine's] membership in alliances is basically not on the table, that's why it's very strange to see that the Russian government has made something that is basically not on the agenda the subject of a major political problem."

In reality, Ukraine's joining of NATO was a central goal of the US-orchestrated February 2014 coup in Kiev. Over the past three years, the Zelensky government has pushed for an acceleration of the process of including Ukraine in the alliance. The Kremlin has long denounced such a move, with Putin recently declaring that Ukraine in NATO would mean war between Russia and NATO. A guarantee that Ukraine will not join NATO was one of the principal demands that the Kremlin submitted to NATO in December that the US has flat-out rejected.

While avoiding any clear statement on the controversial Russian-German gas pipeline Nord Stream 2, which both the US and Ukraine want to see stopped, Scholz said on Monday that Berlin was working, together with the US and EU, "very intensely" on a "package of sanctions" that would

have "substantial influence on the potential for Russia's further economic development." He also announced that Germany would give Ukraine another \$150 million in financial aid.

Scholz has come under significant pressure from both the US and within his own coalition with the Greens and Liberal Democrats to tell Putin, during his visit to Moscow Tuesday, that a war between Russia and Ukraine would mean the end of Nord Stream 2. Germany is one of the biggest importers of Russian gas; overall, 40 percent of Europe's gas supplies come from Russia, with some countries like Hungary depending almost entirely on these deliveries for their gas consumption.

On Monday, gas prices in Europe rose to over \$1,000 for 1,000 cubic meters, while oil prices passed the \$95 per barrel mark. Since January, Europe has also significantly increased its imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG). In a recent piece, the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* pointed out that America's LNG industry, which became the world's largest exporter of LNG in December, was making hefty profits off the Ukraine war crisis.

Meanwhile, the US and NATO continue to ratchet up military tensions in a clear attempt to provoke all-out war. In a phone conversation with UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson—who has been co-leading the NATO provocations against Russia with the US—US President Joe Biden discussed further reinforcements to NATO's eastern flank. Johnson and Biden also stressed again that the EU must decrease its dependence on Russian gas.

On Monday, Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov and President Vladimir Putin had a public discussion stressing the need for further diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis. A day prior, Russia launched military drills in the Black Sea involving over 30 warships, on top of ongoing joint military drills with Belarus. Pointing to the provocative moves and military exercises by NATO in the Black Sea last year, Dmitry Zhukov, a retired army captain of the first rank, told the Russian *Gazeta.Ru*, "The US lays claim to the Black Sea. Moscow has to either accept this or respond. A hypothetical situation in which NATO ships patrol the Black Sea while our military is sitting on the shore and just looking at it is unacceptable for Moscow."



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