Ukraine's President Zelensky calls for "war coalition in the parliament"

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As the US and EU announced far-reaching sanctions on Russia on Tuesday, further escalating the conflict, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky called for a "war coalition" in Ukraine's parliament and began reviewing proposals to sever diplomatic ties with Russia.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin had recognized the separatist enclaves in Donetsk and Lugansk, which declared themselves "People's Republics" in the wake of the US-backed 2014 coup in Kiev, as "independent" and ordered that Russian troops be sent into the area. The Russian parliament approved the deployment of Russian armed forces on Tuesday. Speaking at a press conference, however, Putin said his order did not mean that "the troops will go there right away."

In response to questions from journalists about the 2015 Minsk Agreement, he insisted that Kiev had de facto sabotaged and ignored the agreement for many years, including by assassinating one of the signatories of the agreement, a separatist leader from Donetsk. He also insisted that, given its Soviet-era nuclear infrastructure, Ukraine could easily acquire nuclear weapons should it decide to do so. This weekend, Ukraine's Zelensky threatened at the Munich Security Conference that unless the "territorial integrity" of his country be guaranteed, they would revoke the 1994 Budapest Agreement in which Ukraine gave up its nuclear arsenal, then the third largest in the world.

Putin stressed again that any settlement of the conflict would require a significant demilitarization of Ukraine, as the missiles currently stationed there would enable NATO to hit targets deep in Russia's territory.

On Tuesday, Moscow announced it would evacuate all its diplomats from Ukraine.

In Kiev, the move by Putin on Monday has been seized on by the oligarchy and the far right to further escalate the conflict and prepare the grounds for open war. Ukraine's Foreign Ministry, which is headed by Dmitry Kuleba, a participant in the right-wing protests that led up to the 2014 coup, submitted a formal proposal to Zelensky to sever diplomatic ties with Russia. Kuleba who was on a visit to Washington, added that he had always felt that "this should have been done already back in 2014."

Two parliamentary deputies, Oleksiyh Honcharenko from the "European Solidarity Party" of former President Petro Poroshenko, and Olga Savchuk, a deputy of the neo-Nazi Svoboda party, presented similar bills to the parliament. They will now be reviewed by parliamentary commissions, while Zelensky stated that he would consider the proposal by the Foreign Ministry.

The fascist deputy Savchuk also presented another proposal in parliament, calling for the closure of Ukraine's borders with both Russia and Belarus and the proclamation of a state of war in Donetsk and Lugansk. Savchuk is a prominent member of Svoboda, which openly glorifies the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, as well as the Waffen SS Galicia Division.

Svoboda played an important role in the 2014 coup and then formed part of the government of Arseniy Yatsenyuk that emerged from it. The head of Svoboda's parliamentary faction, Oleh Tyahnibok, recently stated that Russia had to be "dismembered" into "20 national states" in order for the Crimean peninsula to return to Ukraine—which is the stated aim of Ukraine's official military strategy.

In yet another example of the intimate ties between Ukraine's far right and the American state, Savchuk is an alumna of the US Congress's Open World Leadership Center, which boasted in 2019 that she had been elected to Ukraine's parliament.

Poroshenko's European Solidarity party too has extensive ties to both the US and EU, as well as the far right in Ukraine. Poroshenko has repeatedly addressed far-right rallies directed against Zelensky and any negotiated

settlement of the conflict in East Ukraine.

The former Ukrainian president, whose net worth is around $1.5 billion, recently returned to Ukraine where he was able to avoid arrest in a treason case thanks to the direct intervention of the US and Canada. He has since conducted a campaign attacking the Zelensky government from the right and accusing it of being insufficiently "decisive" in the conflict with Russia. Over the past weeks, Zelensky has repeatedly rejected claims by the Biden administration that a Russian invasion was "imminent" and denounced the US war propaganda as "hysteria."

In a hint that powerful factions of the American state and intelligence agencies are now moving against Zelensky, the campaign against him has now been taken to the pages of the *New York Times*. On Monday, the outlet, which functions as little more than a press agency for the CIA during war crises, published a comment by Ukrainian journalist Olga Rudenko on Monday under the title "Ukraine's President is in over his head." Rudenko, who recently completed a fellowship at the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, a hub for the US business and political elite, wrote that "Mr. Zelensky's behavior" was "odd to the point of erratic."

She then acknowledged that Zelensky, should he make any "concessions to Russia particularly over the conflict in eastern Ukraine," would face "hundreds of thousands of people" on the streets and suffer the same fate as Yanukovich who was overthrown in 2014. What Rudenko, of course, did not say, is that the alleged "revolution" of 2014 was carried out by fascist thugs who were then funded and have since been further armed and built up by the American state.

Zelensky's response to the pressure from the far right and Washington has been to call for a "war coalition" with these neo-fascist forces and to step up war preparations. On Tuesday evening, he held a closed meeting with all parliamentary factions. At the meeting with Poroshenko's European Solidarity faction, Poroshenko reportedly presented proposals for a significant buildup of the military capabilities of Kiev and troop deployments to the north and northeast of the country.

After these meetings, Zelensky made an address to the nation. In a statement that was clearly addressed first and foremost at his critics among the oligarchs and neo-fascist bands, he said, "All Ukrainian politicians must now be state actors, and leave their ambitions aside, for the sake of our state. Everyone understands that we now need a war coalition in the parliament, unity, and quick and important decisions for the economic stability and military defense capability of our state. Today, all politicians and parties have just one color: Blue-yellow [the colors of the Ukrainian national flag]."

Making clear that his government was preparing for war against Russia, Zelensky insisted in the address that Russia had "unilaterally" reneged on the Minsk Agreements and stated, "We will not give anyone anything [of our territory]. We are people not of 2014 but of 2022. We are a different people now, we have a different army." Indeed, the imperialist powers have pumped billions into Ukraine's military since 2014. Since 2020, Ukraine is also an "Enhanced Opportunities Partner" of NATO, which involves "enhanced access to interoperability programs and exercises, and more sharing of information."

Zelensky told the Ukrainian people that they must all now be prepared for "hard labor" every day in order to safeguard the country and concluded his speech with the nationalist "Slava Ukraini" greeting, which, while now commonplace in Ukrainian politics, is closely associated with the fascist politics of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in the 1930s and 1940s.

That evening, Zelensky also signed a decree calling for the mobilization of all military reservists but said there was no need yet for a general mobilization. He will be meeting with representatives of Ukraine's business elite to discuss large-scale investments into the further buildup of Ukraine's armed forces.

The military conflict in East Ukraine meanwhile continued to escalate. In Donetsk, a blast on a highway killed three civilians on Tuesday, according to separatist authorities. Another major blast occurred in the city center Wednesday night with no casualties reported. The separatist authorities described the blast which occurred at the city's television center as a "terror attack." In Lugansk, two civilians were reportedly killed when a Ukrainian shell hit a car.

According to Russian news reports, over 100,000 refugees from East Ukraine have now arrived in Russia; 30,000 of them are children.