

Who gets NATO's weapons in Ukraine?

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As the war in Ukraine continues, NATO has been pouring weapons into the country under the banner of a campaign supposedly aimed at protecting “free” and “democratic” Ukraine from Russia. One of the many questions that is never raised in the media is: Who is getting these weapons?

Workers must oppose Russia’s invasion of Ukraine from the standpoint of revolutionary socialism. However, the claims of the imperialist powers that they and the Zelensky government are defending “freedom and democracy” against “Putin’s Russia” are cynical and dangerous lies.

Since the US-backed far-right coup in Kiev in 2014, which overthrew a pro-Russian government, Ukraine has been systematically transformed into a launchpad for war against Russia. The build-up of its military and the far right has been a central component of this process and shaped the way that this war has evolved.

The large-scale weapons deliveries now underway are not only a direct provocation against Russia. Their primary beneficiaries, both politically and militarily, are far-right forces in both Ukraine and internationally, who are being strengthened and emboldened.

The Ukrainian armed forces and the Geneva Conventions

Officially, the weapons will primarily go to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. What is not stated, however, is that for the past week, Ukraine’s Armed Forces have been making statements that they intend to undertake actions that likely violate the Geneva Conventions—they constitute war crimes.

On Twitter, Telegram, Facebook and elsewhere, the country’s military has been conducting a depraved social media campaign, posting photos and videos of dead Russian soldiers. The gruesome images—and the glee with which they are posted—testify to the reactionary and right-wing nature of the forces fighting on behalf of imperialism in Ukraine.

The official Twitter account of the Armed Forces of Ukraine is airing particularly violent content, including a number of videos of the burned and dismembered bodies of Russian soldiers who had been traveling in tanks and armored vehicles. They may have been killed by the much-publicized US-made Javelin anti-tank missiles.

On Tuesday, the Facebook account of the Commander of Ukraine’s special forces announced it would no longer take Russian artillerymen prisoner, but kill them on the spot. The post also threatened that surrendering to Ukraine’s special forces

would be worse than death and that captured Russian artillerymen would be “cut up like pigs.”

These posts are the announcement of the intent to commit war crimes. Such policies are in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions regarding the treatment of prisoners of war (POW), which call for the humane treatment of POWs “in all circumstances.”

The social media accounts of Ukraine’s far-right forces, many of which are fully integrated into the army, are likewise rife with violent content and exhortations to commit atrocities against Russian soldiers.

Serhiy Sternenko, a well-known far-right “activist” who is currently serving in Ukraine’s military, has been busy since the start of the war popularizing anti-Russian slogans such as “Russophobia is not enough!” and posting content of dead Russian soldiers.

Among the posts shared by Sternenko was a photo of a dead Russian paratrooper whose parachute failed to open, a dead and frozen Russian soldier, as well as videos of burned Russian tanks and bodies. The celebration of death is accompanied by mocking jokes.

One particularly gruesome TikTok video circulating on right-wing Ukrainian social media shows a young Russian soldier singing behind the wheel of a Russian vehicle. The video later cuts to a video of the same soldier dead in a field from a direct shot to the head.

Significant effort has gone into such propaganda, and it is clearly backed by the Ukrainian government, which is attempting to demonstrate that killing people is “cool” and “fun,” as the leader of the Neo-Nazi group C14 Yevhen Karas told his audience at a political seminar named after the Ukrainian Nazi-collaborator Stepan Bandera in early February. Karas has also bluntly stated that it is precisely because neo-Nazis like him love killing Russians that the West supplies them with weapons.

The Ukrainian armed forces may also be violating the Geneva Conventions by regularly recording and posting videos of captured or surrendered Russian soldiers on social media. Many of the soldiers appear extremely young and are clearly of a poor or rural background, and made to serve in a deadly campaign by the Russian oligarchy. Several seem to be answering under duress and in one video a Russian soldier refuses to shout the right-wing Ukrainian slogan *Slava Ukraini!* (Glory to Ukraine!) while being humiliated by Ukrainian interrogators.

The Geneva Conventions prohibit POWs from “insults” and “intimidation” being displayed for “public curiosity,” all of which the Ukrainian military is violating with such social media postings.

This reactionary online campaign has reached such a level that even the war-mongering *Washington Post* noticed and published an article titled, “The gory online campaign Ukraine hopes will sow anti-Putin dissent probably violates the Geneva Conventions,” on Thursday.

The Azov Battalion and the far right

The Azov Battalion, which openly glorifies Nazism and Ukrainian Nazi collaborators and played a principal role in the 2014 coup, has been accused of many war crimes, as well as rape and assassination. Since 2014, it has fully been integrated into the National Guard, thus receiving arms and training from the government. The Ukrainian government allows the Azov Battalion and other far-right formations to run “youth camps,” where children as young as 9 years old are indoctrinated with fascist ideology and taught how to use weapons.

It is these forces that are now receiving a significant portion of the massive weapons deliveries by NATO. The Azov Battalion is reportedly heavily involved in the battle over Mariupol, a city in southern Ukraine. According to a report by *Newsweek*, it has also formed its own “Azov territorial defense detachment” in Kiev.

Even as he has been threatened and attacked by far-right tendencies like the Azov Battalion, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has made every effort to further integrate neo-fascist and paramilitary forces into the war effort. At the very beginning of the war, he announced that convicted criminals, including those serving sentences for war crimes, would be amnestied if they were ready to take up arms against Russia. He has called on “foreign fighters” to join the war in Ukraine.

Jonathan Brunson, a former political analyst for the US embassy in Ukraine, bluntly told *Newsweek* that before Russia’s invasion, “aid to the far-right was plausibly accidental. ‘But that may no longer be the case, because ‘all hands on deck’ means just that—and enables Ukraine’s far right to play a heroic role they otherwise wouldn’t.’”

Not just the Ukrainian far right, but neo-fascist forces from all over the world, including the US and Europe, will now receive combat experience with the most advanced weapons in the world. They will also be able to continue developing their international networks, to which the Ukrainian far right, and especially the Azov Battalion, have long been central.

Speaking to *Newsweek*, Hans-Jakob Schindler, senior director of the Counter Extremist Project, said: “Immediately after the invasion, some groups within Ukraine affiliated with right-wing extremism, in particular the Azov Regiment, which is now part of the Ukrainian Interior Ministry, have put out public calls on social media for volunteers to come and join them. The Azov Regiment issued fairly detailed travel instructions via its social media channels but made clear that a) travel will not be facilitated until the individual is in Ukraine and b) no payment will be given for the volunteers and c) several months of service should be expected.”

US preparations for an “insurgency” in Ukraine

The arming of Ukraine’s far right and its integration into the military effort is neither an accident nor a “mistake.”

The imperialist intervention in Ukraine has historically relied on the mobilization of fascistic forces. The CIA and other Western intelligence services established close ties with Ukrainian Nazi collaborators after the war, integrating them into their structures and deploying them in the Cold War against the Soviet Union.

The build-up of the far right in the lead-up to the 2014 coup and ever since stands in these traditions.

Moreover, since 2015, the CIA has engaged in systematic preparations for an “insurgency” in Ukraine. In January, a report by Yahoo News revealed that for the past eight years the CIA has been overseeing “a secret intensive training program in the U.S. for elite Ukrainian special operations forces and other intelligence personnel.” The program, according to Yahoo, involved “training in firearms, camouflage techniques, land navigation, tactics like ‘cover and move,’ intelligence and other areas, according to former officials.” A former CIA official told the news site that “The United States is training an insurgency,” teaching Ukrainians how “to kill Russians.”

A former senior intelligence official said, “If the Russians invade, those [graduates of the CIA programs] are going to be your militia, your insurgent leaders. We’ve been training these guys now for eight years. They’re really good fighters. That’s where the agency’s program could have a serious impact.”

Over the past year, US officials have repeatedly threatened that they intend to turn Ukraine, which used to be the world’s third-largest nuclear power, into “another Afghanistan” for Russia. This is what is now underway. Unless the working class intervenes in this conflict on an independent, socialist program, the far right, in Ukraine and internationally, can only emerge strengthened and emboldened from this reactionary campaign.



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