

Spain's PSOE-Podemos government arms Ukraine's neo-Nazi Azov Battalion

Alice Summers
30 March 2022

Weapons sent to Ukraine by Spain's "progressive" Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government are being used by a neo-Nazi militia, the Azov Battalion.

In a March 15 video posted on YouTube by the National Corps, the political wing of the Azov Battalion, a militia member can be seen unwrapping and demonstrating how to use weapons. The video explains that these anti-tank missiles are Instalaza C90 grenade launchers from Spain, RPG-75 grenades from Czechia and Pansarskott m/86 portable missiles from Sweden.

The description of the video reads: "Azov video instructions on how to use disposable rocket-propelled anti-tank grenade launchers to destroy light armoured vehicles and enemy tanks."

The arming of neo-Nazi groups gives the lie to the absurd claims made by Spain and the other imperialist powers that they are defending "democracy and freedom" in Ukraine against the dictatorial and expansionist ambitions of Vladimir Putin's Russia. Russia's invasion of Ukraine was desperate and reactionary, but it is a response to decades of imperialist encirclement, threats and provocations. NATO is waging a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, with far-right paramilitary units like Azov acting as imperialism's shock troops.

The Azov Battalion was founded in 2014 by the anti-Semite Andriy Biletsky. It incorporated many members of Biletsky's former ultra-nationalist, white-supremacist organisations, Patriot of Ukraine and the Social-National Assembly. These tendencies traced their political roots back to the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, headed by Nazi-collaborationist Stepan Bandera, and its affiliated Ukrainian Insurgent Army.

Azov, which uses Nazi insignia and openly glorifies Ukrainian Nazi collaborationists, was officially incorporated into the Ukrainian National Guard in November 2014, months after a far-right coup in Kyiv toppled pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych, in

which Azov had played a key role. Since then, it has received arms and training from the government.

It is only one of the more prominent of around 80 far-right militias in Ukraine built and equipped to fight Russian-speaking separatists in the east of the country. Many of these organisations are now fully integrated into the Ukrainian army.

Another of these groups is the neo-Nazi C14, led by Yevhen Karas. In a speech at the start of February at a seminar named after the Nazi-collaborationist Bandera, Karas gloated of having received large quantities of weaponry from "the West." He said they were being armed because of their eagerness to kill Russians.

"We are now being given so much weaponry," Karas declared, "not because as some say 'the West is helping us', not because they want the best for us, but because we perform the tasks set by the West, because we are the only ones who are ready to do them. Because we have fun: we have fun killing and we have fun fighting ... That is the reason for the new alliance [with] Turkey, Poland, Britain and Ukraine."

The NATO powers' arming of neo-Nazi groups is not an unfortunate and unforeseen side-effect of a supposed defense of the Ukrainian people, but a deliberate policy choice. These forces are being armed and emboldened because of their rabid Russophobia and willingness to act as pawns for imperialism.

Spain's PSOE-Podemos government has fully involved itself in the imperialist war drive against Russia. There are around 800 Spanish troops deployed in Eastern Europe against Russia, including a detachment of 130 airmen and four Eurofighter jets that regularly mount provocative missions from Bulgaria into the Black Sea near the Russian coast. There are also three Spanish warships patrolling the waters of the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea with NATO naval groups.

According to a communication from Spain's Defence

Ministry at the start of March, Madrid has sent 1,370 C90 grenade launchers, 700,000 rounds of ammunition and an unspecified number of machine guns and light machine guns. Many of these arms will have ended up in the hands of the neo-fascist militias.

“It is a very important delivery because it allows a very individualised defence and can be used even by people who don’t have much experience in using weapons,” Spanish Defense Minister Margarita Robles said in a television interview in early March. “Ukraine is a country which is being attacked and Ukrainians are carrying out a legitimate defence of their lives, which are the most important things we have,” she added.

Asked last week about whether Spain will send more weapons to Ukraine, Robles refused to rule this out. During a visit to the Albacete-Los Llanos air base in the east of Spain, she stated: “In principle it is a possibility, as long as Ukraine needs them and asks us for them.”

“When these deliveries are carried out,” she continued, “it will be done in the same way as last time, with much carefulness and discretion, because there is a great risk for the people that make these transfers and for the countries which received this material.”

No “care” or “discretion” was exercised to prevent weapons from being funneled to neo-Nazis.

According to right-wing newspaper *Okdiario*, dozens of former Spanish soldiers have also travelled to Ukraine to join in the war against Russia. Figures from the Ukrainian government’s ‘International Brigades’ website, which encourages foreigners to come to Ukraine to fight, indicated that more than 12,000 Spaniards had searched for information on how to enlist.

The PSOE-Podemos government has tacitly encouraged civilians and retired soldiers to travel to Ukraine. Asked about the consequences of fighting in Ukraine, Spain’s Justice Minister Pilar Llop replied, “It is possible that people from different nationalities can go. ... Our justice system does not prohibit this possibility.” Spain’s National Intelligence Centre (CNI) is reportedly monitoring the activity of Spaniards fighting in Ukraine in case they become “radicalised.”

Pablo Iglesias, the founder and former leader of “left populist” Podemos party has responded to revelations of his party’s arming of Ukrainian neo-Nazis with mealy-mouthed criticism.

Taking to Twitter on 16 March, Iglesias declared, “It is very serious that arms sent to Ukraine by our government have ended up in the hands of a neo-Nazi group. If this is true, the poor argument that these Nazis only had British

arms falls to pieces. Condemning the invasion of Russia does not justify arming Nazis.”

Iglesias did not draw broader conclusions from the fact that the party he led is arming neo-Nazis. His empty criticisms notwithstanding, Podemos parliamentary spokesperson Jaume Asens said this month that it is “legitimate for the international community to provide aid to the [Ukrainian] state under attack.”

Spain’s own armed forces are riddled with fascists. In December 2020, WhatsApp messages from top retired air force officers were leaked in which they threatened mass murder and called for a coup. “As a good fascist,” one declares, “[I believe] there is no choice but to start shooting 26 million sons of b*tches,” their estimate of how many left-wing voters there are in Spain.

A few weeks later, a WhatsApp chat of 121 active-duty soldiers was released in which they denounced communism and voiced their support for the fascist retired officers. At the same time, numerous videos emerged of Spanish soldiers singing fascist songs while making the fascist salute.

Iglesias downplayed the issue at the time, responding to the fascistic coup threats by saying: “What these gentlemen say, at their age and already retired, in a chat with a few too many drinks, does not pose any threat.”

Podemos is a pro-war party tied to all Spanish imperialism’s recent crimes. Before taking power with the PSOE, it recruited leading officers, including former Air Force General and Chief of the Defence Staff Julio Rodríguez, who led the Spanish army’s participation in the US-led neo-colonial wars in Libya. Rodríguez is now a leading member of Podemos and Podemos Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Diaz’s chief of staff.

An anti-war movement of the working class internationally must urgently be built to prevent the ruling class from plunging the planet into a potentially nuclear conflict. This requires a ruthless break with middle class, pro-imperialist parties like Podemos, and the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Spain and in every country.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact