

Corporate media parrots the Azov Battalion

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Over a month into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Western corporate media now uncritically passes on information sourced from the fascist Azov Battalion.

During the 2014 United States-backed coup of elected President Viktor Yanukovich, the general stance of Western media towards Kiev was uncritical, downplaying or ignoring the leading role fascist forces played in bringing down the Yanukovich government.

These forces, including the Svoboda Party and the Right Sector, out of which the Azov Battalion emerged, openly place themselves in the traditions of Nazi collaborationist organizations like the OUN-B and the UPA, which were responsible for the massacres of tens of thousands of Jews, Poles as well as Ukrainian civilians during World War II.

So blatant was the presence of prominent neo-Nazi forces in Ukraine that following the 2014 coup and outbreak of civil war in the eastern Donbass region, several media outlets such as *Time*, *USA Today*, the *New York Times* and others released stories admitting that indeed, the most dedicated soldiers within Ukraine's Armed Forces were neo-Nazis.

In a 2015 *USA Today* article titled "Volunteer Ukrainian unit includes Nazis," Azov Battalion spokesman Andriy Diachenko admitted that 10 to 20 percent of Azov's members were neo-Nazis.

Time magazine noted in a January 2021 article "How a white-supremacist Milita uses Facebook to Radicalize and Train New Members," that Azov's neo-Nazi ideology and history were undeniable.

Regarding Azov founder Andriy Biletsky and his former Patriot of Ukraine group, *Time* reported that "Biletsky's nickname within the group was Bely Vozhd, or White Ruler, and his manifesto seemed to pluck its narrative straight from Nazi ideology. Ukrainian nationalists, it said, must 'lead the white nations of the world in a final crusade for their survival, a crusade against the Semite-led Untermenschen,' a German term for 'subhumans,' with roots in Nazi propaganda."

Even though the US was funnelling billions of weapons

into Ukraine's military and paramilitary, Azov-related articles often attempted to distance the United States from the backing of Azov. Thus, a 2015 *New York Times* article on Ukraine's far-right militias attempted to reassure its readers by uncritically reporting that "Americans are specifically prohibited from giving [military] instruction to members of the Azov group."

In reality, pictures show that US officers have long been involved in training members of the Azov Battalion.

Now, with NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, all such pretences by the media have been abandoned. The Azov Battalion is integrated into Ukraine's National Guard and is now playing a prominent role in the war, especially in Mariupol, a predominantly Russian-speaking city in southern Ukraine, control over which is of key strategic significance.

As the Western media plays a critical role in distributing imperialist propaganda on the war, "information" from the Azov Battalion is now propagated directly to Western audiences—often with no mention of its ties to neo-Nazis.

NBC's chief foreign policy correspondent Richard Engel led the way in whitewashing Azov when in early February he showed the Azov Battalion training Mariupol residents in the use of weapons and first aid. Despite the fact that Azov's use of a Wolfsangel insignia, which is associated with Hitler's SS in the Second World War, was clearly identifiable, Engel failed to mention Azov at all.

On March 22, CBS News published a defence of Azov titled "The Azov Battalion: How Putin built a false premise for war against 'Nazis' in Ukraine."

In the article, CBS quoted Ruslan Leviev, an analyst with the Conflict Intelligence Team, as an expert in its defence of Azov.

Leviev flatly lied to CBS: "There are no Nazi battalions in Ukraine."

"There is (the Azov) regiment ... There are (estimated) several thousand people who are in this regiment. It is indeed a group where many members adhere to nationalist and far-right views. But a lot of people also join it

because it is one of the most prepared and fit-for-war units,” Leviev assured CBS.

Later, on April 1, CNN featured a video on the Erin Burnett Upfront show of Azov Battalion Captain Bohdan Krotevych claiming that Russian forces had created “mountains of corpses on the streets,” noting that Krotevych is part of “ultra nationalist far-right battalion.”

But this disclosure had no impact on Burnett, who repeated Krotevych’s accusations as a statement of fact. Burnett also relayed Krotevych’s claim that the Mariupol bombing had killed 400 people, 100 more than the widely quoted figure of 300 dead.

On March 29, CNN published a story titled “A far-right battalion has a key role in Ukraine’s resistance. It’s neo-Nazi history has been exploited by Putin,” defending Azov as an “effective fighting force” and downplaying its neo-Nazi ideology as a matter of the past.

After covering the myriad fascist violent incidents, and quoting at length from its leaders, the article denounces any questioning of the information coming from Azov regarding the war, such as the bombing of the Mariupol theatre as “Russian disinformation.”

Despite going to great lengths to sanitize Azov, the story was too truthful for the Ukrainian bourgeoisie, as parliament member Serhiy Taruta published an open letter and on Facebook called on CNN to quit publishing “Russian propaganda.”

Serious questions remain regarding the bombing of the Mariupol Theater, which Russia has accused Azov of blowing up as a false flag operation to elicit support for a no-fly zone in Ukraine. Whatever the nature of the bombing, it was quickly seized upon by Western media outlets and governments to call for an intensification of the anti-Russia war drive.

As Max Blumenthal reported on the GrayZone, Azov photos of the theatre bombing were quickly disseminated through western media outlets with no disclaimer that they were taken by a neo-Nazi militia.

Azov Battalion Deputy Commander Svyatoslav Palamar has been widely used as a source on the situation in Mariupol, including by CNN, the *New York Post* and the *Telegraph*. Again, no mention is made of Azov’s neo-Nazi ideology.

Blumenthal also noted that the western media reporting on the bombing was largely based on tweets from *Kyiv Independent* reporter Illia Ponomarenko, who has admitted to being “consecrated” into the Azov Battalion.

Ponomarenko has built a large following on Twitter since the beginning of Russia’s invasion and serves as a

conduit for Ukrainian war propaganda back to western audiences.

A cheerleader for Ukrainian nationalism and war, Ponomarenko regularly posts gory photos of dead Russian soldiers and calls for NATO to intervene in the war on Ukraine’s behalf, thus assisting a social media campaign by Ukraine’s armed forces and the far-right that directly violates the Geneva Convention for the humane treatment of prisoners of war.

Notably, Ponomarenko’s employer, the newly created *Kyiv Independent*, receives its funding from western imperialism, including Washington’s National Endowment for Democracy and the EU’s European Endowment for Democracy.

More recently, photos of the apparent killing of civilians in Bucha first appeared on the social media accounts of figures such as Ponomarenko and the far-right “activist” thug Serhii Sternenko. The photos and reports were then fed to Western media outlets, which again seized upon them to call for increased sanctions against Russia and the prosecution of President Vladimir Putin as a war criminal.

Photo captions by the *New York Times* indicate that Azov Battalion soldiers were among the first to enter Bucha on April 2 after Russian forces left the town on March 30. Despite this fact, claims of a wanton Russian massacre are promoted uncritically while those calling for investigation before judgement are smeared as “Russian trolls.”



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