

Amid mounting losses, Zelensky rules out negotiations with Russia

Jason Melanovski
30 March 2023

In an interview Tuesday with The Associated Press, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky outlined his motivations for sacrificing likely untold thousands of Ukrainian soldiers in an effort to hold on to the eastern city of Bakhmut. He gave the interview while traveling on a train throughout Ukraine on a PR trip to drum up support for the war.

Through the course of the English-language interview, Zelensky admitted that losing Bakhmut to Russian forces would increase calls for a compromise settlement from both within and outside the country.

Should Bakhmut fall, “Our society will feel tired,” Zelensky said. “Our society will push me to have compromise with them.”

In the interview, Zelensky also made clear the war likely would not continue without US support.

“The United States really understands that if they stop helping us, we will not win,” Zelensky stated, when asked about a potential change in US support should Biden lose a re-election bid in 2024.

As Zelensky is well aware, any negotiated compromise over the now 13-months-long war would be politically unacceptable both to the country’s domestic fascist forces such as the Azov Battalion and to its primary backer the United States, if it did not include the return of the entirety of Russian-controlled territories.

In October of last year, Zelensky signed a decree that formally ruled out any peace negotiations that involved current Russian President Vladimir Putin. Since then, countless Ukrainian government officials have stated that the war will only end when all of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea are “retaken.”

No serious peace negotiations have taken place since April 2022, when a deal was reportedly in place to end the war but was sabotaged after British Prime Minister

Boris Johnson flew to Ukraine in a surprise visit to urge Kiev to continue the war with its nuclear-armed neighbor no matter what.

As the establishment Ukrainian news outlet *Ukrainska Pravda* reported at the time, Johnson brought two “simple messages” to Kiev:

The first is that Putin is a war criminal; he should be pressured, not negotiated with. And the second is that even if Ukraine is ready to sign some agreements on guarantees with Putin, they are not. We can sign [an agreement] with you [Ukraine], but not with him. Anyway, he will screw everyone over,’ is how one of Zelensky’s close associates summed up the essence of Johnson’s visit...

Johnson’s position was that the collective West, which back in February had suggested Zelensky should surrender and flee, now felt that Putin was not really as powerful as they had previously imagined.

Moreover, there is a chance to “press” him. And the West wants to use it.

Since August, and tens of thousands of lives lost, fighting is still centered on the “meat grinder” of Bakhmut. Russia views the city as essential in order to achieve its stated goals of gaining control over the entirety of the Donetsk and Lugansk provinces. Ukraine and its Western imperialist backers view Bakhmut as an opportunity to weaken Russian forces before a planned offensive this spring. As one Western official stated openly, “Bakhmut, because of the Russian tactics, is giving Ukraine a unique opportunity to kill a

lot of Russians.”

For Zelensky and his band of advisers, the fact that defending Bakhmut involved sending thousands of troops to certain death is of little importance as long the war’s momentum continues.

When Zelensky visited Washington in December, he obscenely gave a Bakhmut flag to the US Congress and called the city the “fortress of our morale.”

Such enthusiasm is apparently not shared by Ukrainian soldiers who are paying the price for the disastrous imperialist war with their lives.

Earlier in March, Volodymyr, an infantryman from the 93rd Mechanized Brigade, admitted to the pro-government *Kyiv Independent* he felt ill prepared for the battle and struggled to eat after fighting in Bakhmut for months.

“When they drive us to Bakhmut, I already know I’m being sent to death,” Volodymyr stated bluntly.

While the Western media and NATO have played up Russian losses in the battle, claiming at least five Russian soldiers were killed for every Ukrainian, there is no way to verify this claim. It is clear that Ukrainian forces have admitted to high casualty rates of their own in several interviews.

Valeriy, another Ukrainian infantryman, told the *Kyiv Independent* that “only a few” of the original 27 members of his platoon were not killed or wounded in battle at Bakhmut.

Furthermore, soldiers who do survive the battle often refuse to return and become “refuseniks,” now subject to lengthy punitive prison sentences under recent changes to military law made by the Zelensky regime. Vladyslav from the 58th Independent Motorized Infantry Brigade told the *Independent* that many soldiers in his platoon refused to go to Bakhmut as Russians approached. Moreover, according to the *Independent*, “During the last rotation in late February, Vladyslav said that only eight out of 25 soldiers in his platoon headed out to Bakhmut – and the rest said they couldn’t go because of sudden fever or body pain.”

As Zelensky’s remarks make clear, the Ukrainian ruling class plans to continue the mass slaughter both in Bakhmut and throughout the country during the upcoming offensive, backed by billions in NATO and US weapons.

Earlier this month, the magazine *Politico* reported

that more than 100,000 Ukrainian soldiers have died in the war already. The pre-war population of the country was less than 40 million, out of which over 8 million have since fled, and several million are living in territories controlled by Russia.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact