

Ukrainian journalists protest army censorship of reporting on the counteroffensive

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The National Union of Journalists of Ukraine has appealed to the Armed Forces of Ukraine over its severe restrictions on reporting in combat zones of the country's stalled NATO-backed counteroffensive.

The appeal comes in the wake of a report by French newspaper *Le Temps* that the Ukrainian government had effectively banned all foreign journalists from visiting the front unless they had received personal permission from the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Valery Zaluzhnyi, a known admirer of the Ukrainian fascist Stepan Bandera.

As the head of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine Serhiy Tomilenko reported on Facebook on Wednesday, "In recent days, the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine received numerous appeals from accredited journalists regarding severe restrictions on the work of mass media at the front. In particular, the media claim that the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine has now completely banned filming in the combat zone, any coverage of special and foreign equipment, and the admission of the media to positions and command posts."

Tomilenko noted that the National Union seeks "to protect the interests and rights of journalists" and requested that the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine offer answers to several questions concerning the restrictive ban on journalists working at the front.

"In particular, it is important for us to hear answers to the following questions: what contributed to such a large number of restrictions for accredited journalists regarding the coverage of events at the front? Do all these prohibitions apply only to our Ukrainian colleagues or to foreign ones as well? (The National Union has received reports that priority for work in the war zone is being given to representatives of foreign mass media)," Tomilenko wrote.

Tomilenko couched his appeal in pro-war nationalist terms, prostrating his organization before the right-wing government of President Volodymyr Zelensky. He claimed, "In fact, all these bans make it impossible for media representatives to show Russian aggression, tell and write about it, as well as highlight the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian defense forces to the occupiers."

In the *Le Temps* article, Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Maliar claimed that the bans were a matter of "operational security" and cited an air attack on Ukraine's 82nd Brigade that allegedly occurred in response to a *Forbes* article published from the front.

Maliar's lying claims are typical of government officials who seek to both justify their attacks on democratic rights and cover up their own responsibility for the mass death of workers and youth. During the second Iraq War, the administration of President George W. Bush banned coverage of coffins of US soldiers returning from Iraq.

In reality, Ukraine's Western-backed counteroffensive was destined to fail and result in mass Ukrainian casualties against an entrenched and well-fortified Russian army, a fact that was well known by the CIA and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, as investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reported last week.

According to Hersh's sources, the counteroffensive propaganda "was a show by [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky and there were some in the administration who believed his bulls..t."

Rather than "operational security," the fact that the Zelensky government has cracked down further on its censorship of the front is further confirmation that Zelensky's vaunted counteroffensive is "slow and bloody," as the *Wall Street Journal* admitted earlier this

week.

Since the start of the counteroffensive in June, over 5,000 pieces of military equipment have been destroyed. It is estimated that at least 40,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed, and undoubtedly tens of thousands more Ukrainian soldiers are permanently disabled or disfigured.

While the Ukrainian government has intensified its restrictions as of late, censorship of journalists has been the policy of the NATO-backed Zelensky government throughout the course of the war.

Earlier in March, in the run-up to the ongoing counteroffensive, the Armed Forces of Ukraine updated its policy on journalists' access.

"From now on, the commanders in the areas of responsibility will determine the zones for the presence of media representatives by their decisions. The following zones are provided: 'green', where the work of accredited media representatives is allowed without the accompaniment of a public relations officer or a press officer; 'yellow', where media representatives are allowed to work only accompanied by a press officer; and 'red', where the work of accredited media representatives is prohibited," the Armed Forces representative Bohdan Senk stated.

The change was also protested by journalists at the time who objected to the arbitrary and restrictive nature of the "red zones," which they claimed were being applied to even peaceful areas.

As the Ukrainian Institute for Mass Media reported about the protest, "Members of the Media Movement, Ukrainian and foreign journalists declare the inadmissibility of the new excessive restrictions on the work of the media during martial law. 'Zoning' as it is introduced by operational-strategic groups of troops actually makes it impossible for journalists to work not only along the entire front line, but also in peaceful settlements."

The increasing mass censorship of journalists has been noted even by publications that generally support the war and the relentless US propaganda of "unprovoked Russian aggression."

As Luke Mogensen, a contributing writer at the *New Yorker*, told the *Intercept* in June, "I've covered four wars, and I've never seen such a chasm between the drama and intensity and historic import of the reality of the conflict on the one hand, and the superficiality and

meagerness of its documentation by the press on the other. It's wild how little of what's happening is being chronicled. And the main reason, though not the only one, is that the Ukrainian government has made it virtually impossible for journalists to do real front line reportage."

The Zelensky government's blatant attack on freedom of the press and its systematic undermining of any factual and honest reporting on the war not only exposes, yet again, the lie that the imperialist war waged against Russia in Ukraine is about "democracy." It also underscores that nothing that is reported in the official pro-war media about what is happening in Ukraine can be taken at face value.



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