



Max Blumenthal: US is Arming Neo-Nazis in Ukraine

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AARON MATÉ: It's The Real News. I'm Aaron Maté. A surge of neo-Nazism and anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe has a strong US tie. The Polish Senate has approved a law that criminalizes the assigning of responsibility to Polish nationals for the crimes of the Nazi Holocaust and for using the term Polish death camp. Poland's far-right government is a close US ally and was openly embraced by President Trump in a visit last July. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, it has just been revealed that the US has supplied military assistance to the Azov Battalion, a far-right militia known as a bastion of neo-Nazism within the Ukrainian armed forces.

Max Blumenthal is a bestselling author and senior editor of the Grayzone Project. His recent piece published by The Real News is called *The US is Arming and Assisting Neo-Nazis in Ukraine While Congress Debates Prohibition*. Welcome, Max. Let's start with what you have reported for The Real News about Ukraine. You call this a truly scandalous episode of close-to-covert US support for neo-Nazism in Ukraine. Explain what's going on now.

MAX BLUMENTHAL: The Azov Battalion is essentially a militia that's grown out of the Patriot of Ukraine Party, which was a neo-Nazi, white nationalist party founded by a street demagogue named Andriy Biletsky, who has pledged to restore the honor of the white race, his words, through his Social National Party in the Ukrainian parliament, advanced laws forbidding race mixing, this kind of thing. The Azov Battalion became active after the civil war began in the Donbass region in Eastern Ukraine, when pro-Russian separatists sought to secede, partly because of the neo-Nazi incipency in Kiev. They didn't want any part of it. They speak Russian. Their language was not going to be recognized by the new government. So, the Azov Battalion was ultimately incorporated into the country's National Guard and military through the Ministry of Interior, through Arsen Avakov, who has been basically a

supporter of its agenda all along. He also at one point installed another figure from Patriot of Ukraine, Dmitry Yarosh, as the police commissioner in Kiev. This is another neo-Nazi figure.

All along, we saw these denials, especially in 2014 during the Maidan so-called Revolution of Dignity, which was actually a right-wing nationalist coup against the democratically elected government. We heard liberal voices like Timothy Snyder or neoconservative operatives like Jamie Kirchick deny the very existence of neo-Nazism in the ranks of the Maidan. Now, I think it's very clear that Azov is on the march, and I'll get to that in a minute.

What I did here at The Real News was compile a series of reports, including from Azov's own website, that demonstrate that US military trainers have visited Azov in the field to train and exchange logistical information. They appeared in uniform with Azov Battalion members who were wearing the wolf's angel patch, which is a Nazi SS symbol, a runic neo-Nazi symbol on their arm. This is just a scandalous spectacle. Not only that, contracts have been revealed showing that the Texas-based AirTronic arms company has produced PSRL-1 grenade launchers that were actually authorized under this watch of the State Department and delivered directly into the hands of the Azov Battalion. The US has armed Azov. Azov actually scrubbed photographs from its website that showed them in the field with those very weapons.

One reason this is significant is because the Azov Battalion functions in a lot of ways like ISIS has in Syria and Iraq, where it receives foreign fighters. It's received sniper training from a Swedish military veteran, and it received a French farmhand named George Montaux. At some point in 2016, Montaux returned from Azov camps in the east with a trove of weapons that was enormous. I mean, we're talking about hundreds of pounds of C4 explosives, automatic weapons and grenade launchers, and he was on his way to Western Europe to attack a soccer festival and carry out attacks on synagogues and mosques. This would have been one of the most significant terror attacks in recent European history.

So, it's a scandalous episode and now we've learned in the last week that the Azov Battalion has formed a National Corps, which is both a political party and a street militia that is deployed into the streets of Kiev. A neo-Nazi militia is deployed into Kiev. They're not fighting pro-Russian separatists. They're there to "restore law and order". This is part of the wider agenda of the far-right nationalist and neo-Nazi movement in Ukraine. It's called the Reconquista. It's been spelled out by Andriy Biletsky, their chief ideologue. And the idea is to essentially recapture the so-called white countries in Europe, Ukraine being the bastion of the white reconquest of Europe. So, you have hundreds of armed neo-Nazi militia members in Kiev right now. They have actually interrupted a city council meeting. They took over a city council meeting in central Ukraine.

It's beginning to look like a putsch. President Poroshenko is weaker than ever. He's even been denounced by the Kiev Post, which is basically an arm of the pro-NATO Atlantic Council. He's, I don't know why, getting attacked by all of the pro-Maidan Western commentators.

Meanwhile, this neo-Nazi putsch is happening completely beneath the radar of US media and it's absolutely terrifying, not only to the Jewish community of Ukraine but to average Ukrainians.

AARON MATÉ: Max, in the piece, you quote anti-Nazi activist Efraim Zuroff, who says that Ukraine has more statues for killers of Jews than any other country. I found that chilling. There have been efforts in the US Congress to bar the delivery of weapons to neo-Nazis in Ukraine but they've been defeated. Is that right?

MAX BLUMENTHAL: Well, they haven't been defeated. They've been continually pulled from Congressional defense authorization bills and there is one prohibition that's been proposed. The House Appropriations Bill contains the language forbidding weapons to Azov, but in the meantime, while Congress dithered, the Trump administration authorized the shipment of tandem anti-tank missiles, extremely advanced anti-tank missiles from Raytheon. The US's envoy to Ukraine, Kurt Volker, who is connected to Raytheon through various means which I explained in a separate article at Truthdig, is in favor of this arms shipment, and it's inevitable that it will reach Azov because as I said, Azov has been absorbed into the national Ukrainian military and are considered some of the best fighters.

Another point is that if you look at the 600 or so Azov National Corps members who deployed to Kiev to restore national order, just the cost of their coats alone would cost over 1.7 million dollars, according to several Ukrainian media sources. Who's paying the bills for them? How are they able to maintain advanced weaponry, such high-level uniforms? All of these questions suggest that they're operating hand in glove with the Ukrainian military, the Ukrainian government, specifically the Interior Ministry of Arsen Avakov.

AARON MATÉ: Let's talk about Poland. You have this law just passed this week by the Polish Senate that criminalizes the criticism, essentially, of Poland's role in the Nazi Holocaust. I was struck by the language from the State Department in response to this. It was very mild. They talked about it jeopardizing strategic relationships, saying that, "The resulting divisions that may arise among our allies benefits only our rivals." Mild words there from the US towards a very close ally openly embraced by Donald Trump.

MAX BLUMENTHAL: Yeah.

AARON MATÉ: Your thoughts on the role of the US in supporting the Polish government. And also, one of your areas of focus, which is Israel, which also has developed ties to Poland, although they have criticized this legislation.

MAX BLUMENTHAL: Yeah. First, I should mention that Ukraine has enacted very similar legislation, forbidding, basically banning any Ukrainian citizen from condemning Nazi collaborators like Stepan Bandera or Roman Shukhevych, who had streets, boulevards and memorials named for them across Ukraine. These were the Jew-killers that Efraim Zuroff was referring to. In fact, Stepan Bandera Boulevard in Kiev leads to Babi Yar, one of the sites of

Jewish slaughter that's remembered in Holocaust history. That's just disgusting to me and it should be to everyone else. American Jewish organizations have been very silent on this matter.

In Poland, the government, the Law and Justice Government, this right-wing nationalist government which received Trump very warmly, Trump gave that speech where he echoed a lot of their language about the clash of civilizations and values, has enacted a law forbidding Polish citizens, the Senate has passed a law forbidding Polish citizens from referring to Polish death camps. Essentially, they want to delete the extensive collaboration of Polish citizens including people who are considered heroes by Polish nationalists today, from the annals of the Holocaust because they were Nazi collaborators. They were war criminals who were involved in the mass slaughter, the industrial slaughter of Jews.

The Israeli government has been very upset about this. This week, Israeli media has been turning to the so-called bubbies, the grandmothers who came to Israel after the Holocaust out of the Displaced Persons camps. One of the things that haven't been really mentioned in Israeli media is the fact that the Israeli government last year signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Polish Law and Justice government. Part of that memorandum of understanding was that Israel recognizes Poland's need to ban expressions relating to Polish death camps. Israel just signed on to that. They basically signed on to the legislation that their government is condemning.

Why did they do that? Well, Israel has a long history, and the Zionist movement has a long history, of collaborating with anti-Semites including Nazi Germany, to advance its own narrow national interests. In this case, we recently saw Poland abstain from a UN vote condemning the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. And Poland recently signed a 14.5 million dollar deal to import Patriot missiles from Israel that are mostly made by Israeli arms manufacturers.

Israel's basically looking to Eastern Europe as the future support base for its own Likud right-wing government. Israel really has no place to condemn Poland, or Ukraine, or any other country that engages in banning certain recognitions of the Holocaust because Israel's government has authorized its own legislation to forbid its Palestinian citizens from observing their own destruction, specifically the nakba, which represented the organized campaign of ethnic cleansing from 1947 to 1948, and the ongoing campaign of destruction and dispossession of the Palestinian people. So, those are really shared values between Israel and the Polish government and those shared values are reflected in the Memorandum of Understanding.

AARON MATÉ: On that historical point about the history of figures in the Zionist movement, prominent figures collaborating with anti-Semites. There's an episode of the Moderate Rebels podcast, hosted by Max Blumenthal and Ben Norton, with guest Joseph Massad on this topic and we'll link to that on The Real News website on this page.

Max Blumenthal, bestselling author, senior editor of the Grayzone Project, thank you. And thank you for joining us on The Real News.

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