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## Clashes in Ukraine signal escalation of US-EU intervention

By Oliver Campbell and Peter Symonds

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Violent clashes between police and protesters yesterday in Kiev mark an escalation of the campaign by the pro-Western opposition to oust Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. The opposition, backed by the United States and German governments, aims to install a far-right regime committed to integrating Ukraine within the European Union and implementing its demands for austerity measures.

Bloody street-fighting erupted when opposition protesters marched on parliament, demanding it pass a planned law to decrease Yanukovich's powers. When the vote went against them, the opposition supporters attacked the headquarters of the ruling Party of the Regions. Clashes between police and protesters erupted and spread throughout the city.

The unrest has been the bloodiest since the pro-EU protests began some three months ago. Latest reports indicate that at least 19 people have been killed, including police and protesters. Hundreds, possibly thousands, have been injured, at least 200 people seriously.

The opposition demonstrators, many of whom are affiliated with the neo-fascist Svoboda party and other extreme right-wing groups, appeared to be heavily armed. One of the fascistic organisations involved, Right Sector, called for all those with arms to take them to Independence Square and engage in combat with the authorities.

Media footage shows anti-government protesters, some wearing helmets emblazoned with fascist symbols, firing rifles and small arms at riot police, as well as throwing molotov cocktails. During the storming of the Party of Regions headquarters, they killed at least one office worker. Several interior troops were reportedly taken as “prisoners” before government forces secured control of the building.

Opposition leaders called on supporters to continue fighting. Vitali Klitschko, head of the UDAR (Punch) party, which has close ties to the German state, demagogically told demonstrators: “We will not leave here. This is an island of freedom. We will defend it.” Violent clashes continued throughout the night and early Wednesday morning, paralysing the city.

The bloody scenes in Kiev are the direct result of the campaign waged by the US and Germany to oust Yanukovich after he rejected proposals for closer EU ties and signed a deal with Russia accepting financial aid. In their efforts to prise Ukraine out of Moscow’s orbit and isolate Russia, Washington and Berlin are openly working with the extreme-right parties.

Top US State Department official Victoria Nuland has repeatedly visited opposition leaders in Ukraine, including the head of the Svoboda party, Oleh Tyahnybok. Leaked phone calls between Nuland and the US ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, exposed the extent of Washington’s micro-management of opposition leaders as it seeks to install a new client regime. (See: “Leaked phone call on Ukraine lays bare Washington’s gangsterism”)

The protests and violence in Kiev followed a meeting in Berlin on Monday in which opposition leaders Klitschko and Arseniy Yatsenyuk called on top German officials, including Chancellor Angela Merkel, for greater support, including to press for sanctions on the Ukrainian government.

Also on Monday, Russia agreed to purchase \$2 billion in Ukrainian bonds, giving the Yanukovich regime a financial breathing space that would have been unwelcome in opposition circles as well as in Berlin and Washington.

In the wake of the clashes in Kiev, the US, Germany and the EU immediately blamed Yanukovich and ratcheted up the pressure for his removal. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier declared: “Whoever is responsible for decisions that may lead to further bloodshed in the center of Kiev and other parts of Ukraine should expect Europe to reconsider its previous reservation on imposing sanctions on individuals.”

According to a White House statement, Vice President Joe Biden contacted the Ukrainian regime to express Washington's "grave concern" over the violence, and "made clear that the United States condemns violence by any side, but that the government bears special responsibility to de-escalate the situation."

The US and German responses signal an intensification of the imperialist drive to install a puppet regime in Kiev and transform the Ukraine into a bastion for further provocations and intrigues aimed at dismembering Russia itself and reducing it to a dependent semi-colony. The promotion of right-wing Ukrainian nationalists is part of a broader strategy of exploiting the many ethnic, national and religious divisions within the former Soviet Union to secure dominance over the region.

The subordination of Ukraine is one of the longstanding geo-strategic ambitions of German imperialism, stretching back to World War I. Germany's current aggressive policy toward Ukraine coincides with the revival of German militarism. At the recent Munich Security Conference, top German officials stated that the time had come when Berlin had to abandon the post-war restraints and restrictions on the use of military force.

US imperialism has pursued a relentless strategy of weakening and isolating Russia for more than two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Starting with the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Washington has encouraged and supported so-called colour revolutions in the former Soviet republics. It invaded Afghanistan to establish a base of operations into Central Asia and sought, through sanctions and military threats, to carry out regime-change in Iran and Syria, Russia's closest allies in the Middle East.

The ability of imperialism to intervene aggressively is the direct outcome of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the restoration of capitalism and the opening up of the former Soviet republics to the plunder of global transnational corporations. In opposing the present imperialist intervention in Ukraine, no political support should be given to Yanukovich or Russian President Vladimir Putin, who represent corrupt, grasping oligarchs who have enriched themselves at the expense of the working class.

The only social force capable of opposing the imperialist intrigues, military threats and drive to war is the international working class. The starting point is a rejection of all forms of nationalism and a political fight to unify workers in Ukraine with their class brothers and sisters throughout Europe, Russia and internationally. That requires a common struggle to abolish the bankrupt profit system and establish a planned world economy to meet the pressing social needs of all.