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Civil war looms as pro-US regime threatens massacre of east Ukraine protesters

By Alex Lantier

11 April 2014

Ukraine stands on the brink of civil war, as the unelected pro-Western regime that seized power this February in Kiev threatens a bloody crackdown on protesters occupying local government offices in cities across traditionally pro-Russian sections of eastern Ukraine.

Protesters are demanding a referendum to federalize Ukraine and limit the authority of the new, far-right regime in Kiev. Some protesters have also called on their areas to vote to join Russia, as the former Ukrainian region of Crimea did last month, or declared independent “people’s republics” in Donetsk and Kharkiv.

Andrei Senchenko, the deputy head of the presidential administration in Kiev, said his regime’s security forces would “shoot to kill” if protesters did not abandon buildings in Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv by today.

Senchenko’s threats echoed those of Irina Farion, a legislator from the Fatherland Party of US-backed Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk. She demanded death for the protesters saying,

“Today’s reaction is unacceptable. The measures should be much tougher. Our people laid down their lives. That’s why those creatures that arrive here deserve only death.”

Interior Minister Arsen Avakov said that a “special police task force” had arrived from western Ukraine to Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv, after local police units refused to launch a crackdown. He was apparently referring to the deployment to eastern Ukraine of units of the Kiev regime’s new National Guard and of the fascist Right Sector militia, which led the February putsch in Kiev that toppled pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich.

Kiev’s reckless and hysterical calls for a bloody crackdown on pro-Russian forces in regions of Ukraine with large Russian populations threaten not only to tip Ukraine into civil war, but to lead to a direct clash between Ukraine and Russia. Last month, describing precisely a scenario of a crackdown in eastern Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he reserved the right to intervene militarily to defend Russians in the region.

“If we see such uncontrolled crime spreading to the eastern regions of the country, and if the people ask us for help, while we already have the official request from the legitimate president [Yanukovich], we retain the right to use all available means to protect those people. We believe this would be absolutely legitimate,” he said.

Under these explosive conditions, the NATO powers are backing Kiev and signaling their own military escalation, directly posing the risk of war with Russia, a nuclear-armed power.

Yesterday, photos in the Russian media and videos posted to YouTube showed columns of Ukrainian military trucks and towed artillery on the roads of eastern Ukraine.

Inhabitants of nearby towns who tried to block the convoys in the streets were assaulted. One woman told *Russia Today*, “At about 2pm, we received information that military hardware had arrived at our local train station. We went there and saw armored personnel carriers, military vehicles and troops. The whole town gathered nearby.” When townspeople blocked the vehicles, “The soldiers twisted the arms of pensioners, there were two men standing there and [soldiers] drove over their feet. I was pulled back by local coal miners when I tried to stop the vehicles.”

The Kiev regime is preparing an armed clash with protest groups and militias that have emerged across eastern Ukraine. Protesters in Donetsk—including thousands of pensioners, workers, and defectors from the Ukrainian army and police forces—strengthened barricades around the occupied government building and prepared weapons, including Molotov cocktails.

“In Donetsk airport, about a hundred people from the National Guard have been housed. Around a hundred Right Sector thugs are also in the city, as well as a hundred employees from a private US military company operating under contract with the Kiev junta. In total, there are around 300

professionals or well-trained and motivated fanatics. This is a major force, but we are ready to fight,” Sergey Tsyplakov of the Donbas People’s Militia told RIA-Novosti.

In Lugansk, where protesters stormed the SBU intelligence service’s city headquarters and took over the arsenal there, a group calling itself the Southeast Command issued a statement pledging to defend itself militarily against Kiev’s security forces.

“We represent veterans of the [Soviet] Afghan war, former border guards, and other peaceful trades, and we have just a single legitimate demand: we want a referendum,” it declared. “If you go against us, welcome to hell. We’ll make a decent stand. Godspeed, officers!”

US and European officials’ dismissals of the east Ukraine protests as small, unpopular conspiracies orchestrated by Russia are flatly contradicted by reports on the ground, which suggest they enjoy broader support in the population, though not from the Kremlin.

Ukrainian officials traditionally aligned with Russia are denouncing the protests and trying to end them. This week, Nikolai Levchenko—a Donetsk officeholder of the Party of Regions, Yanukovych’s former ruling party—demanded that protesters abandon occupied buildings and return home. “Those who have occupied buildings, especially those with weapons, pose a danger to everyone in Donbas,” he said, referring to the mining basin around Donetsk and Lugansk.

The German daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* remarked yesterday on the social gulf separating the eastern Ukraine protests from the Western-backed, middle-class protests in Kiev’s Independence Square (Maidan) that led to the fascist putsch in February.

It wrote, “In Kiev, on the Maidan, there were youth, students, pro-European businessmen, start-up entrepreneurs, the middle classes. But here in the east, it is not a pro-Russian uprising, but a social revolt, according to Donetsk journalist Dennis Kasansky. He seems to be right.” The paper said protesters in the east were “the underprivileged, those who are called the losers of modernization by contemporary research.”

Responsibility for the escalating risk of bloodshed lies squarely with the aggressive policies of the Obama administration and its European allies. They incited and backed a putsch by fascist, anti-Russian forces like Right Sector, aiming to geo-strategically cripple Russia by installing a pro-Western, anti-Russian regime in Kiev. Now, the NATO powers are backing Kiev’s hysterical threats of a crackdown and calling for escalating Western military intervention in Europe.

NATO’s top military commander in Europe, US Air Force General Philip Breedlove, said he was preparing plans for a military build-up to surround Russia with NATO troops. “Essentially what we are looking at is a package of land, air and maritime measures that would build assurance for

our easternmost allies,” Breedlove said in an interview with the AP. “I’m tasked to deliver this by next week. I fully intend to deliver it early.”

Asked if US soldiers would be posted to “frontline” states bordering Russia, he said yes: “I would not write off contributions from any nation.”

Breedlove based his call for a NATO build-up on claims that Russia is mounting its own massive military build-up and preparing to invade Ukraine, for which NATO had presented no evidence. Yesterday, however, it released a handful of pictures showing Russian fighter jets and helicopters on a runway, a Russian artillery unit, and a Russian Special Forces unit.

Breedlove’s claims that these proved the existence of 40,000 Russian troops massing on the Ukrainian were contradicted by Anthony Cordesman, the military analyst at the Washington, DC-based Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank. AP cited him as saying “it’s unclear from the images how much of a buildup of Russian forces there has been in the border area.”

“They show there is a mixture of light and heavy forces and that they could go quickly ... But that’s all they show,” Cordesman said.

CNN reporters traveling along the Russian-Ukrainian border earlier this week reported that they had seen no sign of the Russian army.