

On the Influence of Neo-Nazism in Ukraine

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A short history of neo-Nazism in Ukraine in response to NewsGuard's charge that Consortium News published false content about its extent.



Torchlight parade behind portrait of Bandera on his birthday, Jan. 1, 2015. (Wikimedia Commons)

The U.S. relationship with Ukrainian fascists began after the Second World War. During the war, units of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B) took part in the Holocaust, killing at least 100,000 Jews and Poles. Mykola Lebed, a top aide to Stepan Bandera, the leader of the fascist OUN-B, was recruited by the C.I.A. after the war, according to a 2010 study by the U.S. National Archives.

The government study said, "Bandera's wing (OUN/B) was a militant fascist organization." Bandera's closest deputy, Yaroslav Stetsko, said: "'I...fully appreciate the undeniably harmful and hostile role of the Jews, who are helping Moscow to enslave Ukraine.... I therefore support the destruction of the Jews and the expedience of bringing German methods of exterminating Jewry to Ukraine....'

The study says: "At a July 6, 1941, meeting in Lwów, Bandera loyalists determined that Jews 'have to be treated harshly.... We must finish them off.... Regarding the Jews, we will adopt any methods that lead to their destruction.'

Lebed himself proposed to "cleanse the entire revolutionary territory of the Polish population," so that a resurgent Polish state would not claim the region as in 1918. Lebed was the "foreign minister" of a Banderite government in exile, but he later broke with Bandera for acting as a dictator. The U.S. Army Counterintelligence Corps termed Bandera "extremely dangerous" yet said he was "looked upon as the spiritual and national hero of all Ukrainians...."

The C.I.A. was not interested in working with Bandera, pages 81-82 of the report say, but the British MI6 was. "MI6 argued, Bandera's group was 'the strongest Ukrainian organization abroad, is deemed competent to train party cadres, [and] build a morally and politically healthy organization....'" An early 1954 MI6 summary noted that, "the operational aspect of this [British] collaboration [with Bandera] was developing satisfactorily. Gradually a more complete control was obtained over infiltration operations ..."



The CIA moved to protect Ukrainian nationalist leader Mykola Lebed from criminal investigation by the Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1952. RG 263, Records of the Central Intelligence Agency.

C.I.A.'s Allen Dulles asks U.S. Immigration to allow Lebed re-entry to U.S. despite murder conviction. (From Hitler's Shadow. Click to enlarge.)

Britain ended its collaboration with Bandera in 1954. West German intelligence, under former Nazi intelligence chief Reinhard Gehlen, then worked with Bandera, who was eventually assassinated with cyanide dust by the KGB in Munich in 1959.

Instead of Bandera, the C.I.A. was interested in Lebed, despite his fascist background. They set him up in an office in New York City from which he directed sabotage and propaganda operations on the agency's behalf inside Ukraine against the Soviet Union. The U.S. government study says:

"CIA operations with these Ukrainians began in 1948 under the cryptonym CARTEL, soon changed to AERODYNAMIC. ... Lebed relocated to New York and acquired permanent resident status, then U.S. citizenship. It kept him safe from assassination, allowed him to speak to Ukrainian émigré groups, and permitted him to return to the United States after operational trips to Europe. Once in the United States, Lebed was the CIA's chief contact for AERODYNAMIC. CIA handlers pointed to his 'cunning character,' his 'relations with the Gestapo and ... Gestapo training,' [and] the fact that he was 'a very ruthless operator.'"

The C.I.A. worked with Lebed on sabotage and pro-Ukrainian nationalist propaganda operations inside Ukraine until Ukraine's independence in 1991. "Mykola Lebed's relationship with the CIA lasted the entire length of the Cold War," the study says. "While most CIA operations involving wartime perpetrators backfired, Lebed's operations augmented the fundamental instability of the Soviet Union."

Bandera Revival



Bandera monument in Lvov. (wikimapia.org)

The U.S. thus covertly kept Ukrainian fascist ideas alive inside Ukraine until at least Ukrainian independence was achieved. "Mykola Lebed, Bandera's wartime chief in Ukraine, died in 1998. He is buried in New Jersey, and his papers are located at the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University," the U.S. National Archives study says.

The successor organization to the OUN-B in the United States did not die with him, however. It had been renamed the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), according to *IBT*.

"By the mid-1980s, the Reagan administration was honeycombed with UCCA members. Reagan personally welcomed [Yaroslav] Stetsko, the Banderist leader who oversaw the massacre of 7,000 Jews

in Lviv, in the White House in 1983,” *IBT* reported. “Following the demise of Yanukovich’s regime, the UCCA helped organise rallies in cities across the US in support of the EuroMaidan protests,” it reported.

That is a direct link between Maidan and WWII-era Ukrainian fascism.

Despite the U.S. favoring the less extreme Lebed over Bandera, the latter has remained the more inspiring figure in Ukraine.

In 1991, the first year of Ukraine’s independence, the neo-fascist Social National Party, later Svoboda Party, was formed, tracing its provenance directly to Bandera. It had a street named after Bandera in Liviv, and tried to name the city’s airport after him. (Svoboda won 10 percent of the Rada’s seats in 2012 before the coup and before McCain and Nuland appeared with its leader the following year.)

In 2010, pro-Western Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko declared Bandera a Hero of Ukraine, a status reversed by Yanukovych, who was overthrown.

More than 50 monuments, busts and museums commemorating Bandera have been erected in Ukraine, two-thirds of which have been built since 2005, the year the pro-American Yuschenko was elected. A Swiss academic study says:

“On January 13, 2011, the L’vivs’ka Oblast’ Council, meeting at an extraordinary session next to the Bandera monument in L’viv, reacted to the abrogation [skasuvannya] of Viktor Yushchenko’s order about naming Stepan Bandera a ‘Hero of Ukraine’ by affirming that ‘for millions of Ukrainians Bandera was and remains a Ukrainian Hero notwithstanding pitiable and worthless decisions of the courts’ and declaring its intention to rename ‘Stepan Bandera Street’ as ‘Hero of Ukraine Stepan Bandera Street.’”

Torchlit parades behind Bandera’s portrait are common in Ukrainian cities, particularly on Jan. 1, his birthday, including this year.

Mainstream on Neo-Nazis

From the start of the 2013-2014 events in Ukraine, **Consortium News** founder Robert Parry and other writers began providing the evidence NewsGuard says doesn’t exist, reporting extensively on the coup and the influential role of Ukraine’s neo-Nazis. At the time, corporate media also reported on the essential part neo-Nazis played in the coup.

As *The New York Times* reported, the neo-Nazi group, Right Sector, had the key role in the violent ouster of Yanukovych. The role of neo-fascist groups in the uprising and its influence on Ukrainian society was well reported by mainstream media outlets at the time.

The BBC, the NYT, the *Daily Telegraph* and CNN all reported on Right Sector, C14 and other extremists’ role in the overthrow of Yanukovych. The BBC ran this report a week after his ouster:

And this one in July 2015:

After the coup a number of ministers in the new government came from neo-fascist parties. NBC News (green check) reported in March 2014: “Svoboda, which means ‘Freedom,’ was given almost a quarter of the Cabinet positions in the interim government formed after the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovych in February.”

Svoboda's leader, Tyahnybok, whom McCain and Nuland stood on stage with, once called for the liberation of Ukraine from the "Muscovite-Jewish mafia." *The International Business Times* (green check) reported:

"In 2005 Tyahnybok signed an open letter to then Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko urging him to ban all Jewish organisations, including the Anti-Defamation League, which he claimed carried out 'criminal activities [of] organised Jewry', ultimately aimed at the genocide of the Ukrainian people."

Before McCain and Nuland embraced Tyahnybok and his social national party, it was condemned by the European Parliament, which said in 2012:

"[Parliament] recalls that racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic views go against the EU's fundamental values and principles and therefore appeals to pro-democratic parties in the Verkhovna Rada [Ukraine's legislature] not to associate with, endorse, or form coalitions with this party."

Such mainstream reports on Banderism have stopped as the neo-fascist role in Ukraine was suppressed in Western media once Putin made "de-nazification" a goal of the invasion.

The Azov Battalion, which arose during the coup, became a significant force in the war against the Russian-speaking people of the Donbass, who resisted the coup. Its commander, Andriy Biletsky, infamously said Ukraine's mission is to "lead the White Races of the world in a final crusade for their survival ... against the Semite-led Untermenschen."

In 2014 the now Azov Regiment was officially incorporated into Ukraine's National Guard under the control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It is further integrated into the state by working closely with the SBU intelligence service. Azov is the only known neo-fascist component in a nation's military anywhere in the world.

As part of the Ukraine military, Azov members have still sported yellow arm bands (until this week) with the Wolfsangel once worn by German SS troops in World War II. Including the atrocities it has continued to commit, Azov shows the world that integration into the state has not denazified them. On the contrary, it may have increased its influence on the state.

The U.S. and NATO have also trained and armed Azov since Barack Obama had denied lethal aid to Ukraine. One reason Obama declined sending arms to Ukraine was because he was afraid they may fall into these right-wing extremists' hands. According to the green-checked *New York Times*,

"Mr. Obama continues to pose questions indicating his doubts. 'O.K., what happens if we send in equipment — do we have to send in trainers?' said one person paraphrasing the discussion on the condition of anonymity. 'What if it ends up in the hands of thugs? What if Putin escalates?'"

NewsGuard's Objections



Collage of Neo-fascist leader Oleh Tyahnybok meeting with McCain, Biden and Nuland. (Facebook image by Red, White and You of clip from film *Ukraine on Fire*)

NewsGuard's argument against the major influence of neo-Nazi groups in Ukraine rests on neo-fascist political parties faring poorly at the polls. This ignores the stark fact that these groups engage instead in extra-parliamentary extremism.

In its charge against **Consortium News** for publishing "false content" about neo-fascism in Ukraine, NewsGuard's Zack Fishman wrote:

"There isn't evidence that Nazism has a substantial influence in Ukraine. Radical far-right groups in Ukraine do represent a 'threat to the democratic development of Ukraine,' according to 2018 Freedom House report. But it also stated that far-right extremists have poor political representation in Ukraine and no plausible path to power — for example, in the 2019 parliamentary elections, the far-right nationalist party Svoboda won 2.2 percent of the vote, while the Svoboda candidate, Ruslan Koshulynskyy, won just 1.6 percent of the vote in the presidential election."

But this argument of focusing on elections results has been dismissed by a number of mainstream sources, not least of which is the Atlantic Council, probably the most anti-Russian think tank in the world. In a 2019 article, a writer for the Atlantic Council said:

"To be clear, far-right parties like Svoboda perform poorly in Ukraine's polls and elections, and Ukrainians evince no desire to be ruled by them. But this argument is a bit of 'red herring.' It's not extremists' electoral prospects that should concern Ukraine's friends, *but rather the state's unwillingness or inability to confront violent groups and end their impunity*. Whether this is due to a continuing sense of indebtedness to some of these groups for fighting the Russians or fear they might turn on the state itself, it's a real problem and we do no service to Ukraine by sweeping it under the rug." [Emphasis added.]

"Fear that they might turn on the state itself," acknowledges the powerful leverage these groups have over the government. The Atlantic Council piece then underscores how influential these groups are:

"It sounds like the stuff of Kremlin propaganda, but it's not. Last week Hromadske Radio revealed that Ukraine's Ministry of Youth and Sports is funding the neo-Nazi group C14 to promote 'national patriotic education projects' in the country. On June 8, the Ministry announced that it will award C14 a little less than \$17,000 for a children's camp. It also awarded funds to Holosiiv Hideout and Educational Assembly, both of which have links to the far-right. The revelation represents a dangerous example of law enforcement tacitly accepting or even encouraging the increasing lawlessness of far-right groups willing to use violence against those they don't like.

Since the beginning of 2018, C14 and other far-right groups such as the Azov-affiliated National Militia, Right Sector, *Karpatska Sich*, and others have attacked Roma groups several times, as well as anti-fascist demonstrations, city council meetings, an event hosted by Amnesty International, art exhibitions, LGBT events, and environmental activists. On March 8, violent groups launched attacks against International Women's Day marchers in cities across Ukraine. In only a few of these cases did police do anything to prevent the attacks, and in some they even arrested peaceful demonstrators rather than the actual perpetrators."

The Atlantic Council is not the only anti-Russian outfit that recognizes the dangerous power of the neo-fascist groups in Ukraine. Bellingcat published an alarming 2018 article headlined, "Ukrainian Far-Right Fighters, White Supremacists Trained by Major European Security Firm."

NATO has also trained the Azov Regiment, directly linking the U.S. with far-right Ukrainian extremists.

The Hill reported in 2017 in an article headlined, "The reality of neo-Nazis in Ukraine is far from Kremlin propaganda," that:

"Some Western observers claim that there are no neo-Nazi elements in Ukraine, chalking the assertion up to propaganda from Moscow. Unfortunately, they are sadly mistaken.

There are indeed neo-Nazi formations in Ukraine. This has been overwhelmingly confirmed by nearly every major Western outlet. The fact that analysts are able to dismiss it as propaganda disseminated by Moscow is profoundly disturbing.

Azov's logo is composed of two emblems — the wolfsangel and the Sonnenrad — identified as neo-Nazi symbols by the Anti-Defamation League. The wolfsangel is used by the U.S. hate group Aryan Nations, while the Sonnenrad was among the neo-Nazi symbols at this summer's deadly march in Charlottesville.

Azov's neo-Nazi character has been covered by the New York Times, the Guardian, the BBC, the Telegraph and Reuters, among others. On-the-ground journalists from established Western media outlets have written of witnessing SS runes, swastikas, torchlight marches, and Nazi salutes. They interviewed Azov soldiers who readily acknowledged being neo-Nazis. They filed these reports under unambiguous headlines such as "How many neo-Nazis is the U.S. backing in Ukraine?" and "Volunteer Ukrainian unit includes Nazis."

How is this Russian propaganda?

The U.N. and Human Rights Watch have accused Azov, as well as other Kiev battalions, of a litany of human rights abuses."

Neo-fascism has infected Ukrainian popular culture as well. A half-dozen neo-Nazi music groups held a concert in 2019 commemorating the day Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

Amnesty International in 2019 warned that “Ukraine is sinking into a chaos of uncontrolled violence posed by radical groups and their total impunity. Practically no one in the country can feel safe under these conditions.”

Zelensky & Neo-Nazis



Zelensky with an Azov member (right) addressing the Greek Parliament in April. (Greek Parliament TV)

One of Ukraine’s most powerful oligarchs from the early 1990s, Ihor Kolomoisky, was an early financial backer of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion. According to a 2015 Reuters (green-checked) report:

“Many of these paramilitary groups are accused of abusing the citizens they are charged with protecting. Amnesty International has reported that the Aidar battalion — also partially funded by Kolomoisky — committed war crimes, including illegal abductions, unlawful detention, robbery, extortion and even possible executions.

Other pro-Kiev private battalions have starved civilians as a form of warfare, preventing aid convoys from reaching separatist-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine, according to the Amnesty report.

Some of Ukraine’s private battalions have blackened the country’s international reputation with their extremist views. The Azov battalion, partially funded by Taruta and Kolomoisky, uses the Nazi Wolfsangel symbol as its logo, and many of its members openly espouse neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic views. The battalion members have spoken about ‘bringing the war to Kiev,’ and said that Ukraine needs ‘a strong dictator to come to power who could shed plenty of blood but unite the nation in the process.’”

In April 2019, the F.B.I. began investigating Kolomoisky for alleged financial crimes in connection with his steel holdings in West Virginia and northern Ohio. In August 2020 the U.S. Department of Justice filed civil forfeiture complaints against him and a partner:

"The complaints allege that Ihor Kolomoisky and Gennadiy Boholiubov, who owned PrivatBank, one of the largest banks in Ukraine, embezzled and defrauded the bank of billions of dollars. The two obtained fraudulent loans and lines of credit from approximately 2008 through 2016, when the scheme was uncovered, and the bank was nationalized by the National Bank of Ukraine. The complaints allege that they laundered a portion of the criminal proceeds using an array of shell companies' bank accounts, primarily at PrivatBank's Cyprus branch, before they transferred the funds to the United States. As alleged in the complaint, the loans were rarely repaid except with more fraudulently obtained loan proceeds."

Meanwhile, the Azov backer's television channel had by this time aired the hit TV show *Servant of the People* (2015-2019), which catapulted Volodymyr Zelensky to fame and ultimately into the presidency under the new Servant of the People Party. The former actor and comedian's presidential campaign was bankrolled by Kolomoisky, according to multiple reports, including this one by Radio Free Europe (not rated).

During the presidential campaign, *Politico* reported:

"Kolomoisky's media outlet also provides security and logistical backup for the comedian's campaign, and it has recently emerged that Zelenskiy's legal counsel, Andrii Bohdan, was the oligarch's personal lawyer. Investigative journalists have also reported that Zelenskiy traveled 14 times in the past two years to Geneva and Tel Aviv, where Kolomoisky is based in exile."

Before their run-off election, Petro Poroshenko called Zelensky "Kolomoisky's puppet." According to the Pandora Papers, Zelensky stashed funds he received from Kolomoisky off shore.

During the campaign Zelensky was asked about Bandera. He said it was "cool" that many Ukrainians consider Bandera a hero.

Zelensky was elected president on the promise of ending the Donbass war. About seven months into his term he traveled to the front line in Donbass to tell Ukrainian troops, where Azov is well-represented, to lay down their arms. Instead he was sent packing. *The Kyiv Post* (green check) reported:

"When one veteran, Denys Yantar, said they had no arms and wanted instead to discuss protests against the planned disengagement that had taken place across Ukraine, Zelensky became furious.

'Listen, Denys, I'm the president of this country. I'm 41 years old. I'm not a loser. I came to you and told you: remove the weapons. Don't shift the conversation to some protests,' Zelensky said, videos of the exchange show. As he said this, Zelensky aggressively approached Yantar, who heads the National Corps, a political offshoot of the far-right Azov volunteer battalion, in Mykolaiv city.

'But we've discussed that,' Yantar said.

'I wanted to see understanding in your eyes. But, instead, I saw a guy who's decided that this is some loser standing in front of him,' Zelensky said."

It was a demonstration of the power of the military, including the Azov Regiment, over the civilian president.

After the Russian invasion, Zelensky was asked in April by Fox News about Azov, which was later defeated in Mariupol. “They are what they are,” he responded. “They were defending our country.” He then tries to say because they are part of the military they are somehow no longer neo-Nazis, though they still wear Nazi insignia (until Tuesday). (Fox’s YouTube post removed that question from the interview, but it is preserved here:)

Outrages Greek Officials

Also in April, Zelensky infuriated two former Greek prime ministers and other officials by inviting a member of the Azov Regiment to address the Greek Parliament. Alexis Tsipras, a former premier and leader of the main opposition party, SYRIZA-Progressive Alliance, blasted the appearance of the Azov fighters before parliament.

“Solidarity with the Ukrainian people is a given. But nazis cannot be allowed to speak in parliament,” Tsipras said on social media. “The speech was a provocation.” He said Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis “bears full responsibility. … He talked about a historic day but it is a historical shame.”

Former Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras called the Azov video being played in parliament a “big

←

Tweet



Andrij Melnyk 
@MelnykAndrij

At the outset of my visit to Munich
met with UKR community & laid down
flowers on the tomb of our hero
Stepan Bandera

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mistake.” Former Foreign Affairs Minister Nikos Kotzias said: “The Greek government irresponsibly undermined the struggle of the Ukrainian people, by giving the floor to a Nazi. The responsibilities are heavy. The government should publish a detailed report of preparation and contacts for the event.”

Former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis’ MeRA25 party said Zelenky’s appearance turned into a “Nazi fiesta.”

Zelensky has also not rebuked his ambassador to Germany, Andrij Melnyk, for visiting Bandera’s grave in Munich, which provoked this reaction from a German MP: “Anyone like Melnik who describes the Nazi collaborator Bandera as ‘our hero’ and makes a pilgrimage to his grave or defends the right-wing Azov Battalion as ‘brave’ is actually still benevolently described as a ‘Nazi sympathizer.’”

Zelensky has closed media outlets and outlawed 11 political parties, including the largest one, Eurosceptic Opposition Platform for Life (OPZZh) and arrested its leader. None of the 11 shut down are far-right parties.

Donald Trump was rightly castigated for remarks he made about white supremacists in Charlottesville. But Zelensky, whose oligarch backer funded Azov, and who brought a neo-Nazi to address a European Parliament, is given a pass by a Democratic administration and the U.S. media though he condones the far worse problem of neo-fascism in Ukraine.