

Appearing with Germany's Merkel, Obama backs Ukraine crackdown

By Bill Van Auken
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Appearing at a joint White House press conference Friday with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, President Barack Obama voiced full backing for the bloody crackdown against pro-federalization protesters in eastern Ukraine, while ratcheting up US threats against Russia.

Even as the scale of bloodletting by the Kiev regime's troops and its fascist allies in the Right Sector was becoming clear, the American president issued an explicit endorsement of the government's military attack on the pro-Russian population in the east and south of the country.

Obama stated, "As Ukrainian forces move to restore order in eastern Ukraine, it is obvious to the world that these Russian-backed groups are not peaceful protesters."

He continued, insisting that "The Ukrainian government has the right and responsibility to uphold law and order within its territory." The onus fell on Moscow, he claimed, "to use its influence with these paramilitary groups so that they disarm and stop provoking violence."

As Obama spoke, a fascist mob led by the neo-Nazi Right Sector was carrying out a massacre of pro-Russian demonstrators in Odessa, killing dozens. In the east of the country, fully armed troops and Right Sector thugs, backed by armor, artillery and helicopter gunships, attacked centers of the anti-Kiev protests in Slovyansk and other cities, setting the stage for a bloodbath.

Yet Obama praised Kiev for its "remarkable restraint" and placed the full blame for the violence wracking the country on Russia. He made no call for the Ukrainian regime to disarm the fascist paramilitary groups such as the Right Sector that brought it to power and now comprise its shock troops for the assault on the east.

Washington has given the order for this offensive, coming just days after the coup regime in Kiev declared itself "helpless" in the face of the eastern protests, particularly given Moscow's warning against any use of armed force against Russian-speaking people of the region.

According to *Financial Times* foreign affairs columnist Gideon Rachman: "The Ukrainian government's hesitation up until now may also reflect the conflicting pressures the government is under from its Western allies. The German government in particular has been putting the Kiev authorities

under intense pressure not to go on the offensive. This reflects both innate German caution and the fact that four of the OSCE hostages being held by separatists in Slovyansk are Germans. The Americans, by contrast, have been urging the Ukrainians to assert their authority in the east."

Friday's Rose Garden press conference was meant to signal US-German unity in the face of the Ukraine crisis, but it was impossible to entirely paper over differences between the two imperialist powers. These emerged most explicitly over the US National Security Agency's wholesale spying in Germany and internationally, which—as revealed by Edward Snowden—extended to the cell phone of the German chancellor and the communications of officials at every level of the German government.

Obama claimed Washington had taken significant measures to allay European concerns, while insisting on its need to spy on all of its supposed allies. Merkel, who stressed US-German unity in the "war on terror," discreetly allowed that there remained a "difference of opinion" on surveillance policies and there could be no return to "business as usual."

While the two heads of state claimed agreement on imposing additional, more punishing "sectoral sanctions" targeting Russian industry unless the government of Vladimir Putin bows to Western demands, neither spelled out the specifics of such measures, and there was a significant difference in the tone each adopted.

Merkel, expressing the interests of German big business, which reaps substantial profits off of its investment and trade with Russia, insisted that her government did not want stiffer sanctions, though it was prepared to impose them, and preferred a diplomatic solution.

Obama voiced no such qualms. He expressed the determination to "impose costs on Russia" and declared Washington's "unwavering Article 5 commitment" under the NATO alliance to defend any member state coming under military attack. This invocation came as the Pentagon continued to stage provocative deployments of US paratroopers in the former Soviet Baltic republics and Poland.

What are Washington's aims? It would appear that the US has decided to deliberately escalate tensions with the aim of drawing Russia into an invasion of eastern Ukraine, thereby

creating the conditions for roping Western Europe into draconian sanctions and even war.

This strategy underlies the lies and distortions employed by the American president in an attempt to indict Russia as the source of violence in Ukraine. He denounced Putin for thinking that he had the “right to violate the sovereignty of another country, to violate its territorial integrity,” a privilege that Washington reserves for itself, invading, attacking and overthrowing governments from Afghanistan to Iraq, Libya, Syria and beyond.

Casting himself as the champion of Ukrainian independence and freedom, Obama insisted that “Ukrainians should be able to make their own decisions.” He denounced the position, which he attributed to Russia that “the Kremlin has veto power over decisions made by a duly elected government in Kiev.”

The only problem here, of course, is that the “duly elected government in Kiev” was overthrown last February in a US-orchestrated, fascist-led coup that installed an unelected ultra-nationalist government in which neo-Nazis from the Right Sector and the Svoboda party hold prominent positions.

In orchestrating the February 22 putsch that overthrew President Viktor Yanukovich, Washington and Berlin exercised their own veto over the legally constituted government’s decision to align itself more closely with Russia rather than with the European Union.

In the press conference, Obama ridiculed “Russian propaganda” for “suggestions or implications that somehow Americans are responsible for meddling in Ukraine.” He continued, “Our only interest is for Ukraine to be able to make its own decisions and the last thing we want is disorder and chaos in the center of Europe.”

Does Obama believe that everyone in the world is an idiot? US officials have boasted about American “meddling,” including his “point person” on Ukraine, Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland, who has bragged repeatedly about Washington pouring \$5 billion into the country to install precisely the kind of regime it brought to power in February.

The same Nuland was recorded last fall in the infamous “fuck the EU” taped phone conversation advising the US ambassador as to who among the Ukrainian opposition leaders should head a new government, dubbing “Yats,” her pet name for Arseniy Yatsenyuk, as its leader. Once the smoke had cleared from the mayhem in Kiev’s Maidan square, it was indeed “Yats” who was proclaimed prime minister.

It should be recalled that in the run-up to the coup, Washington was insisting that Yanukovich had to step down because he had dared to use force against the protesters who had erected barricades in the center of Kiev and seized government buildings. Secretary of State John Kerry declared his “disgust” over the government’s decision to “meet the peaceful protest ... with riot police, bulldozers and batons, rather than with respect for democratic rights and human dignity.”

Now the US-backed regime brought to power through armed

violence is suppressing protesters who have seized government buildings, employing not bulldozers and batons, but tanks, helicopter gunships and automatic weapons. Washington is fully supporting, and by all appearances directing, the operation. Seldom has the hypocrisy of US imperialist policy been exposed so nakedly and in such short order.

Precisely such a scenario has been repeatedly invoked by Washington as a justification for military intervention in countries thousands of miles from US shores. This includes Libya in February 2011, when Gaddafi’s dispatch of military units to secure the rebellious province of Benghazi and subdue its armed protesters was seized upon as the pretext for launching a US-NATO war to topple his regime.

Now the Obama administration is directing, in the name of “democracy” and “human rights,” a military crackdown against anti-Kiev regime rebels in eastern Ukraine. It feels no need to explain the howling contradictions in its propaganda narrative because it has complete contempt for the democratic will of the American people, who are overwhelmingly opposed to US military provocations against Russia, and because it knows that the corporate-controlled media will continue to function as a state propaganda organ and raise no embarrassing questions.

It appears that the US is intent on drawing Putin into an intervention in Ukraine, a former Soviet republic on Russia’s border, to protect pro-Russian protesters against the violence of the state. This will then be used by Washington to justify an escalation of economic warfare and military deployments against Russia, potentially igniting a nuclear Third World War.

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