

NATO grants Ukraine enhanced status as US steps up military aid

By Jason Melanovski
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On June 12, NATO officially recognized Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner. According to the imperialist alliance, Ukraine will now benefit from “enhanced access to interoperability programs and exercises, and more sharing of information.”

Ukraine is the sixth country to be offered special partner status, along with Georgia, Jordan, Australia, Finland, and Sweden. Kiev has already sent its military forces to a number of NATO’s operations, including Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that he was “grateful to the members of the Alliance for recognizing Ukraine’s significant contribution to joint peacekeeping operations in the world.” The deputy prime minister for European integration, Olga Stefanyshyna, announced that, on the basis of its new status, Ukraine will “be able to exchange operational information [with NATO] previously closed to us.” According to Stefanyshyna, Ukrainian delegates could now also participate in special NATO bodies as liaison officers for interaction and information exchange.

Unsurprisingly, Russia has reacted negatively toward the announcement. Russian Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov stated that Ukraine’s new status does not “contribute to the strengthening of security and stability in Europe.”

The Ukrainian government has been engaged in a now six-year-long civil war against Russian-backed separatists in Eastern Ukraine that has claimed the lives of over 14,000 people, including over 3,000 civilians. The war has also displaced over 2 million from their homes. A 2019 UNICEF report found that over half a million children in the country “continue to face grave risks to their physical health and psychological well-being.”

The US and NATO heavily funded the Ukrainian

military in this conflict, providing some \$18 billion in military and other aid to the country since the 2014 US- and German-backed coup in Kiev, which triggered the outbreak of the civil war.

The move to more closely integrate the Ukrainian military into NATO structures further heightens the risk of a full-scale war between Russia and NATO on Ukrainian soil. It is taking place amid the most profound economic and social crisis since the Great Depression, making clear that the imperialist powers are responding to the growing class tensions by escalating their drive to war.

Coinciding with the NATO status change, the United States approved a \$250 million military aid package that was supported by both the Trump administration and Congressional Democrats and Republicans. A US military official told the *Military Times* that the military aid “keeps a fair amount of Russian forces tied down that would otherwise be doing things directly against U.S. interests.”

Just days later, the United States announced that it had sent another \$60 million in military aid to Ukraine including Javelin anti-tank missiles. Shortly thereafter, the US State Department announced it had cleared the sale of 16 naval patrol boats and other military equipment weapons, sensors, and communications gear worth \$600 million to Ukraine.

While US President Donald Trump has, in some respects, displayed an ambivalent attitude toward Ukraine, mostly because of tactical considerations bound up with the raging infighting within the American state, he has in reality not diverted from the long-term goal of the American ruling class to turn Ukraine into a proxy in a potential war against Russia.

Despite being criticized from the right for being a Russian “secret agent” and impeached for holding up

military aid to Ukraine, Trump was the first US president to openly send Ukraine lethal military aid in April 2018 with the initial delivery of Javelin anti-tank missiles to the country.

According to some estimates, the United States has given approximately \$7 billion to Ukraine since 1992. Ukraine is regularly the top recipient of foreign aid from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the region. Based on the figures by the US State Department, Ukraine has received \$2 billion just from USAID since the 2014 coup.

Within Ukraine itself, the prospect of NATO membership has long generated controversy, with little support for the move among the Ukrainian working class, especially in eastern Ukraine, which shares close economic and social ties to Russia.

Prior to 2014, several public opinion polls demonstrated that while Ukrainians supported EU membership in hopes of improving their impoverished living standards, support for NATO membership was significantly lower.

Former President Viktor Yanukovich, who was ousted by the 2014 coup, opposed seeking NATO membership. However, since the 2014 coup, the entire Ukrainian ruling class has moved fully toward increasing the country's ties to NATO.

Despite garnering much of his support for criticizing the brazenly nationalistic and militaristic regime of former President Petro Poroshenko and declaring that he sought an end to the war in eastern Ukraine, since taking office Zelensky has continued to modernize Ukraine's military forces in order to meet NATO standards.

Zelensky has also called for the country to receive full NATO membership, which he well knows would drastically increase the possibility of an all-out NATO-Russia military conflict. It would eliminate any possibility for a negotiated settlement to the ongoing civil war in eastern Ukraine. His government has reportedly worked since the fall of 2019 on the enhanced opportunities partner status.

Following months in which Zelensky faced intense pressure from sections of the oligarchy and the country's far right over his engagement in the Normandy talks about the conflict in East Ukraine with Germany, France, and Russia—but not the US—in a

surprise government reshuffle in early March, Zelensky brought in a series of officials with close ties to Washington.

While Ukraine remains Europe's poorest country, according to the IMF, its defense spending now amounts to approximately 5.5 percent of the country's GDP. Prior to the Western-backed coup in 2014, Ukraine's military spending accounted for just 1 percent of GDP.

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