

U.S. hand behind Ukraine's naval provocation

written by Greg Butterfield

December 7, 2018



A residential building in Zolotoe-5, a village in Donetsk, burned after shelling by Ukraine's military Dec. 6. Credit: Inside Donetsk

On Nov. 25, three Ukrainian military ships entered the Kerch Strait, a narrow

waterway linking the Azov and Black seas in eastern Europe, where a recently completed bridge connects Crimea with the Russian mainland. The ships veered into Russian territorial waters, ignoring warnings from the Russian side. The Ukrainian vessels uncovered their artillery guns and rotated them into firing position.

The Russian Coast Guard pursued and fired on the ships. Six Ukrainian sailors were wounded and 24 were detained. The ships were impounded in Crimea.

Moscow explained that the Ukrainian ships had violated Articles 19 and 21 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and promised to stop any further attempts to challenge its territorial integrity. (Sputnik, Nov. 30)

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko condemned Russia's actions as premeditated aggression. Western politicians and corporate media joined the chorus, calling for "consequences" against the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin. U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley condemned Moscow for "outlaw actions" (Washington Post, Nov. 26), while President Donald Trump canceled a planned face-to-face meeting with Putin at the G20 summit in Argentina. (CNN, Nov. 29)

In a Nov. 29 interview with the German newspaper Bild, Poroshenko called on NATO to deploy war ships to the Azov Sea.

Earlier, he rushed a measure to the Rada, Ukraine's parliament, seeking to put the entire country under martial law for 60 days, claiming he had evidence of an imminent Russian invasion. The Rada rejected this version, but passed a revised declaration of martial law encompassing 10 regions of Ukraine bordering Russia, the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, and Transnistria, effective Nov. 28. (Los Angeles Times, Nov. 27)

What's really going on? Did Russia break international law? Is Putin preparing to

invade Ukraine?

No. In reality, Russia acted in self-defense. Ukraine's right-wing, NATO-armed regime staged a dangerous provocation. And there's every reason to believe this was done with Washington's prior knowledge and approval.

U.S. role in Ukraine

Why would Ukraine take such a provocative act against a neighboring military power?

In 2014, a coup actively supported by Washington overthrew Ukraine's legally elected government. Since then, Kiev has issued an unending torrent of threats against Russia, allied itself with NATO, banned workers' organizations and waged a bloody war against the Donbass region at the cost of over 10,300 lives.

Some of the first measures enacted by the new regime were meant to strip the country's Russian speakers — the majority in eastern and southern Ukraine — and other national minorities of their language rights. Opposition to the coup in these areas came swiftly.

Crimea was part of Russia until the mid-20th century. In a 2014 referendum held there, people voted overwhelmingly to leave Ukraine and rejoin the Russian Federation. Moscow accepted the vote, while Ukraine and its Western allies still refuse to recognize it.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov cut to the heart of the matter: "I understand that some of our Western colleagues deeply regret that they failed to build a NATO naval base in Crimea, but there's nothing to be done: such is the course of history, such is the will of the Crimean people." (Tass, Nov. 28)

Since breaking off its historic trade relations with Russia, Ukraine's economy has

become dependent on International Monetary Fund loans. These are contingent on deeply unpopular austerity measures that benefit U.S. and western European capitalists.

Meanwhile, the U.S.-dominated NATO military alliance trains and “advises” (gives orders to) Ukraine’s military. The CIA is deeply embedded in the country’s internal security forces.

All of this to say, Poroshenko couldn’t dream of carrying out such a dangerous maneuver, risking open conflict with the more militarily powerful Russia, without Washington’s consent — assuming the whole thing wasn’t dreamed up in the halls of the Pentagon.

Washington’s goal: surround Russia

Poroshenko, one of a small circle of oligarchs who enriched themselves off the suffering of Ukrainian workers and farmers after the destruction of the socialist Soviet Union in the 1990s, faces re-election in early 2019. With little domestic support and stiff opposition from ultrarightists, he’s eager to prove himself useful to his masters on Wall Street and in Washington.

For example, Ukraine and neighboring Moldova boycotted the U.N. General Assembly vote condemning the U.S. blockade of Cuba. Ukraine was one of the two votes in favor of all the anti-Cuba amendments put forward by the U.S., which were roundly defeated. (Associated Press, Nov. 1)

For Washington, ratcheting up the conflict in Ukraine has proven a useful way to put pressure on Russia for that country’s support of Syria — and to draw attention away from the crimes of the Pentagon and U.S.-backed rebels there.

Whipping up a new round of anti-Russia charges also takes the spotlight off recent exposures linking armed white supremacists in California and Ukrainian fascist

organizations that have received financial support from Kiev's government and military training from the Pentagon. (See Max Blumenthal's "Blowback: An inside look at how U.S.-funded fascists in Ukraine mentor U.S. white supremacists" at MintPressNews.com.)

But most of all, Ukraine's Kerch provocation was another step in U.S. imperialism's long march to surround and ultimately break up the Russian Federation — a goal pursued relentlessly by both Republican and Democratic administrations since the early 1990s.

Russia's capitalist government, though based on the counterrevolution that overturned socialism in the USSR, and often carrying out reactionary policies at home, has opposed U.S. aggression in Syria and Ukraine as a matter of survival.

In the aftermath of the Kerch incident, Ukrainian parliamentary deputy Ivan Vinnik admitted an intensification of behind-the-scenes talks between officials in Kiev and Washington on the establishment of a U.S. military base in eastern Ukraine, following the example of Poland.

Commenting on this report in the Russian Free Press on Nov. 28, Alexander Shatilov, dean of Sociology and Political Science at Moscow's Financial University, said: "Washington is trying very hard to encircle Russia with bases and unfriendly regimes on all sides. ... In addition, the Americans are building a network of laboratories for testing biological weapons around Russia. This applies not only to Ukraine, but also to Georgia and Armenia. So I would not rule out that the U.S. may take the risk and go into Ukraine openly."

Working-class people in the U.S. have nothing to gain from supporting war fever against Russia and its allies — whether that call comes from the Trump regime or the Democratic Party. It is the anti-fascist, anti-imperialist resistance waged by the Donbass republics and inside Ukraine that deserves our support.

We need money for better-paying jobs, health care and schools, infrastructure repairs and environmental cleanup — not more military bases and provocations that threaten to pit workers against each other for the benefit of war profiteers.

