

From the Tops Market massacre to Ukraine's war crimes in Donbass

written by John Parker
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John Parker speaks at Burning Books in Buffalo, N.Y., Sept. 17. SLL photo

Talk given at Burning Books in Buffalo, New York, on Sept. 17, during the Eyewitness Donbass and Russia national speaking tour.

We have to first address the most recent accusations against Russia regarding alleged mass graves since the ruling class is flooding the airwaves with this.

In the first place, I'd like to ask – who is the source of that information? Well, according to Reuters, which tries a little harder to show a semblance of objectivity, the source is solely the police. So the sources are the police and Ukrainian President Zelensky repeating this accusation.

Since 2014, however, the police and official sections of the military in Ukraine are led by open supporters of the World War II Nazi German occupation and celebrate the symbols of Nazi Germany.

Second – the Euromaidan Press, one of the very few media outlets still allowed to operate in Ukraine, is widely circulating this story on social media. It also ran stories pushing allegations of rape by Russian soldiers, “confirmed” by former Ukrainian Ombudsman Lyudmyla Denisova, who claimed that 25 teenage girls were kept in a basement in Bucha and gang-raped; nine of them were said to be pregnant.

After evidence showed those claims were completely false, these accusations called into question the legitimacy of other Ukrainian government claims. The Ukrainian parliament promptly fired Denisova.

However, these stories had already gotten a very wide circulation. The same exact stories are still being circulated. Now, has Zelensky ever set the record straight on those lies as they continue today?

Third – has the U.S. corporate media been caught passing on outrageous lies that push U.S. imperialist war? Remember the crying and sad 15-year-old girl from Kuwait testifying before a very sympathetic and angered legislative body in

Washington about babies being thrown from incubators by Iraqi soldiers, verified by corporate media? It was beamed around the world to build support for the first Iraq War.

Or how about the weapons of mass destruction and chemical weapons stories passed on as verified truth, but weren't? At least 500,000 Iraqi children died of U.S. sanctions as a result of those tales, which all turned out to be unverified lies by the Pentagon and the Kuwaiti monarchy.

U.S. fueled Ukrainian civil war

Enough of that. I want to talk about playgrounds.

Playgrounds are wonderful. I saw the joy when my child was between ages 3 and 8 playing on the playground. Here we have the science of physics and engineering used for the sole purpose of creating see-saws and swings designed to hold a child's weight, manufacturing squeals of joy from children, not bombs.

But children can't live on playgrounds alone. They need nourishment. Speaking of that, isn't it incredible that there was a shortage of infant formula in the richest country in the world? But there was plenty of money for weapons for Ukraine.

In fact, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken last week brought another \$2.8 billion to Kiev. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Some \$70 billion has now been pledged for the war just this year. It's the largest single transfer of arms in U.S. history.

See, the war didn't start with the Russian intervention on Feb. 24. The U.S. began this war against Russia in 2002, and in a more concerted effort in 2004 with NGOs like the National Endowment for Democracy fomenting civil war in neighboring Ukraine.

Do you remember Blackwater, the corporation that provides mercenaries to the U.S.

military? They are the folks who shot at Black people trying to escape the floods in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina.

Well, U.S. military advisers and Blackwater (now called Academi) trained fascist forces in Ukraine, with Washington sending them weapons for the coup in 2014 against a democratically elected Ukrainian government.

Up to this year, they spent \$22 billion in that effort.

This war for oil profits and to increase threats against Russia and China includes the desire to further expand NATO, the most belligerent, violent, and aggressive military alliance in the history of the world. When Martin Luther King Jr. said “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today – my own government,” he would have surely included the U.S.-led NATO.

After the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, NATO was free to bomb Yugoslavia’s passenger trains, demolish homes and kill Chinese journalists, then go on to the wars of Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan. In fact, the number of NATO countries doubled in 20 years and encircled Russia like a noose. And when Ukraine, following orders from the U.S., called for its inclusion in NATO, with weapons that would be controlled by Nazi forces like the Azov Battalion, Aidar Battalion, Right Sector, and others – this presented an existential threat to Russia.

When 150,000 Ukrainian troops were lined up at the border of the Donbass region earlier this year, after increasing their bombings from 70 per day to 1,400 between Feb. 15 and Feb. 22, the people of the now independent republics of Lugansk and Donetsk formally requested protection from the Russian government to stop a humanitarian crisis caused by the Ukrainian military. The Russian military had a responsibility to stop a genocidal nightmare pushed by the U.S.

U.S. media cover-up

Why hasn't all of this been reported by the corporate media?

When the U.S. targets a country for war, the media lose their pretense of objectivity and become an arm of the Pentagon. They report without verification any stories that fit the narrative vilifying the people and leadership of the targeted country.

Ukraine has purged itself of any public opposing views against this U.S. proxy war against Russia. Journalists not willing to play along have either been jailed or killed and media outlets are closed for simply reporting the truth.

There are two major manufacturers of U.S. propaganda in Ukraine, established with money from NGOs like the National Endowment for Democracy, the European Endowment for Democracy, and other U.S. intelligence and NATO funders. They are the Kiev Independent and the Euromaidan Press.

The Kiev Independent has a cozy relationship with the Azov Battalion, one of those fascist organizations that got money and weapons in 2014. Azov is now an official part of the Ukrainian military, and along with other fascist and white supremacist groups including Aidar, Right Sector, and Svoboda, they especially target the Donbass region.

Azov sends out videos and reports of "verified" atrocities by the Russian military and the Kiev Independent funnels these stories and videos to Western media, while also disseminating them through social media.

The Euromaidan Press had an interesting and heart-wrenching story about an older couple who were simply trying to get humanitarian aid to a shelter established by the Ukrainian military to protect people in Rubizhne, a city in the Lugansk region, from the Russian military which, they said, were targeting civilians.

What is so interesting about this story is that the alleged account they wrote about happened a few weeks before I visited Rubizhne.

Euromaidan Press' story becomes more dramatic when it is revealed that this well-meaning couple met up with bullets from a Russian checkpoint. The woman, they wrote, was instantly killed, but the man lasted just long enough to call his son and speak to him for the last time before the last beat of his heart.

The reality of Rubizhne

Heart-wrenching, isn't it? However, the fact is that the shelter in Rubizhne, which I visited and at one point held 350 people, was filled with people who were escaping the bombings of their homes, not by Russian tanks, but by Ukrainian tanks – according to them. And, the Russian military was not in control of the area when this story allegedly happened – the Ukrainians were.

Larissa, the manager of the shelter in Rubizhne, was brought to tears when she told me what had happened weeks before we arrived. She said the people in the shelter, including her daughter, were under threat of starvation, with no food or water or fuel to run the well, nor the ability to go out and get these things, due to the heavy fighting going on while this area was under Ukrainian control.

She said that even under those conditions, Russian military personnel made the choice to risk their lives to bring water, food, and vital supplies to the shelter. If not for that humanitarian aid, they may not have survived.

As we traveled further west in the Lugansk region, we ran across a tuberculosis hospital that had been retrofitted by the Ukrainian military to make war against civilians and used in violation of the 2015 Minsk II agreements.



Memorial for the victims of the Tops grocery massacre in Buffalo. SLL photo: Sharon Black

That facility was full of artillery – 122mm shells that penetrate tanks and aircraft. The walls had been redecorated with symbols of Nazi Germany and the emblem of the Azov Battalion – the same one used by the 18-year-old white supremacist who massacred Black shoppers at the Tops grocery on Jefferson Avenue here in Buffalo.

We then traveled to Krymske, which in 2015 was occupied by the Ukrainian military. They violated the ceasefire treaty by using this location and bunkers just east of it for the sole purpose of bombing civilians and the Lugansk Peoples Militia in the neighboring town of Solkinyki.

Ukraine's assault on these areas began in 2014 when the people of the Donbass region decided not to go along with the backsliding of history created by the U.S.-sponsored coup: a new anti-Russian government of puppets to U.S. interests and fascists who glorified World War II German Nazis and their collaborators in Ukraine.

So, with a vote of over 89%, the people of the Donbass region voted to have two independent republics – the Lugansk People’s Republic in the north of Donbass and the Donetsk People’s Republic in the south.

However, instead of honoring the democratic wishes of the people of Donbass, the new coup government in Kiev began massacring civilians in this region with tanks, resulting in the occupation of Krymske by the Ukrainian military, until late February 2022 when the combined forces of the Lugansk People’s Militia and the Russian military forced them out.

The first impression you get when entering the town of Krymske is how normal-looking the homes and buildings are, unlike in Solkyniki, where the homes look more akin to Swiss cheese and the administrative buildings are more rubble than structure.

This is due to the constant bombing of Solkyniki by the Ukrainian forces from 2014 until February 2022. By 2017, in fact, the civilian population there had to flee for their lives.

In Krymske, however, although they did not have to fear being bombed by the forces of the Lugansk People’s Militia, the horror this population faced was the occupation of a military led by Nazis.

U.S., Ukraine and white supremacy

Before coming here today, we visited the Tops supermarket on Jefferson Avenue. What was once abstract in our heads became very real when we saw the pictures of those who had died at the corner memorial there.

This community understands the ugly danger of white supremacy all too well. And it has also raised its head most blatantly and proudly in Ukraine today, thanks to the billions of dollars in U.S. support given to the Azov Battalion and other white

supremacists since 2014.

Andriy Biletskyi, founder of the Azov Battalion, said in 2010 that the Ukrainian nation's mission was to "lead the white race of the world in a final crusade..." Today followers of the Azov movement are encouraged to commit atrocities wherever they are living and post them on social media.

In 2019, Olena Semenyaka, the head of international outreach for the Azov movement, told Time Magazine that Azov's mission was to form a coalition of far-right groups across the Western world, with the ultimate aim of taking power throughout Europe.

She also acknowledged contacts with the U.S. Rise Above Movement (RAM) and said that RAM members came to Ukraine from the U.S. to "learn how to create youth forces in the ways Azov has."

After this meeting, RAM members participated in and helped organize the August 2017 Unite the Right riot of neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, North Carolina, where Heather Heyer was killed by a white supremacist who drove into the counter-protest she participated in. Three RAM members were arrested for inciting and organizing violence there and sentenced to a little over two years in prison.

How does this relate to right here, right now?

Brenton Tarrant, who killed 51 Muslims in March 2019 as they worshiped in a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, wrote in his manifesto that he visited Ukraine. He also wore the emblem used by Azov (the same one we saw on the wall in the tuberculosis hospital) when he did the killing. He featured the Azov emblem in his manifesto.

The recent killing here in Buffalo was done by an 18-year-old white supremacist who said he was influenced by Tarrant — and the beat goes on.

In spite of protest from a former FBI agent about the danger of white supremacist groups here in the U.S. that have international ties, the FBI refuses to put the Azov Battalion, RAM or other white supremacist groups on their terrorist list, which would give them more legal avenues to shut them down. Instead, the FBI recently went after the African People's Socialist Party for simply having relations with a legal Russian organization.

The FBI has a history of assisting or orchestrating assassinations against Black organizations and activists from Martin Luther King Jr. to Fred Hampton to Malcolm X. We, especially Black and Brown peoples, can't rely on them. We have to rely on ourselves and the solidarity from our working class.

We can't rely on those who don't give a damn about the threat to Black people from these fascist groups, like the Biden Administration and the Democrats, all of whom voted to continue to support feeding these monsters in Ukraine. They are no better than the racist Republican Party when it comes to white supremacy and the murder of our children by either the cops or fascist organizations.

The money they are literally sending up in smoke to bomb ethnic Ukrainians, ethnic Russians, and other peoples in Ukraine could have saved countless lives from COVID - which, by the way, hits us Black people three times harder - or solved the homeless crisis and stopped the march towards poverty for our entire class due to inflation. But they don't give a damn about our security or our children's lives.

We are at a critical juncture. What lies before us is the threat of World War III. What lies before us is the threat of unprecedented poverty due to the rise in costs of basic necessities. What lays before us is a return to Jim Crow laws and the lynchings we have already seen in the form of shootings of stores, shootings of churches - all resurrecting the past horrors of the bombing of the church in Birmingham by the KKK.

But if we unify our struggles, if we pledge our solidarity to every movement of working and poor people and people of color; to women and gender non-conforming people and our trans family; to Starbucks and Amazon workers fighting for a union; to Haitian immigrants fighting for their lives along with the entire immigrant community; and pledge to never let U.S. imperialist war be allowed to decimate our class and our struggle – instead of us fearing them, they will tremble at our strength and actions.

Let's get organized and unified, now! You can do that by keeping in touch with the Socialist Unity Party and joining our efforts to unify and reinvigorate a truly anti-imperialist movement in this country.

