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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By Patrick Martin
23.11.2019

US, EU gave over \$20 billion in military and economic aid to Ukraine since 2014

Testimony by two high-ranking US national security officials, on the final day of the public hearings on the impeachment of President Trump, have shed new light on the central issue in the impeachment crisis: the enormous and protracted effort by American and European imperialism to use Ukraine as a base of operations against Russia.

David Holmes, the chief political counselor at the US embassy in Kiev, testified alongside former National Security Council official Fiona Hill, who had the main responsibility for US policy towards Russia and Ukraine from March 2017 to July 2019.



David Holmes, a U.S. diplomat in Ukraine, leaves after testifying before the House Intelligence Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington (AP Photo/Julio Cortez)

The key passage in Holmes' testimony came in response to a question about the comparative scale of US and European security and economic assistance to Ukraine, and the significance of the \$391 million in military aid Trump held back for 55 days. Holmes explained that this was only a fraction of the \$1.5 billion in US military aid to Ukraine since 2014. He continued:

The United States has provided combined civilian and military assistance to Ukraine since 2014 of about \$3 billion plus ... three \$1 billion loan guarantees—those get paid back, largely... The Europeans, at the level of the European Union plus the member states combined since 2014, my understanding have provided a combined \$12 billion to Ukraine. This would bring to \$18 billion the combined imperialist backing for Ukraine since the ultra-right CIA-backed coup in 2014 (absurdly dubbed the “Revolution of Dignity” in official parlance). Other reports suggest that Holmes somewhat underestimated the EU contribution.

According to Carl Bildt, former prime minister of Sweden, co-chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations, the EU and its members states and related financial institutions have provided over 15 billion euros, or about \$16.4 billion. An EU spokesperson told the press that this total “covers grants and loans from different sources/instruments within the EU budget and European Financial institutions.”

The \$16.4 billion from the EU, combined with the \$6 billion in loans and grants from Washington, would bring the combined total to some \$22.4 billion over the past five years, for an annual average of nearly \$4.5 billion—comparable to the US annual aid to Israel or Afghanistan.

Ukraine shares a 2,000-kilometer border with Russia, which once was an internal border between constituent republics of the Soviet Union. Providing tens of billions to build up Ukraine as a base of operations against Russia is a blatant provocation. How would Washington react if China or Russia poured billions into arming a hostile anti-American government in Canada or Mexico, one installed, moreover, by a political coup backed by Beijing or Moscow?

What are the imperialist powers—the United States, Germany, France, Britain, etc.—getting for their money? Ukraine is being transformed into a front-line state against

Russia, the spearhead of plans for an eventual NATO war against that country, for which advance forces have already been stationed in the Baltic states and Poland.

From a comparatively ragtag military force in 2014, the Ukrainian army has become, according to the testimony of Holmes, “arguably the most capable and battle-hardened land force in Europe.” Ukraine numbers 250,000 men and women in its regular armed forces, plus 80,000 in the reserves: larger than Germany or France, second only to Russia on the European continent.

The Ukraine government spends 5.4 percent of Gross Domestic Product on the military—a far higher proportion than the countries of western Europe—and its state-owned arms production company, Ukroboronprom, has made Ukraine the world’s 12th largest arms exporter from 2014 to 2018, more than NATO countries like Canada and Turkey.

Last week, the Ukrainian Navy took possession of two former US Coast Guard cutters, with more ships coming, leading one naval official, Andrii Ryzhenko, to boast that “we may patrol over all the Black Sea.”

Impeachment witnesses from the State Department, National Security Council and Pentagon have made repeated references to the ongoing “hot war” in eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian military forces confront Russian-backed separatists in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

This conflict has been carefully studied by US military planners, strategists and tacticians, as an invaluable arena for observing the Russian tactics and learning how to combat them.

An unclassified report by the U.S. Army’s Asymmetric Warfare Group says: “U.S. Forces should now begin contemplating how our formations should best prepare themselves for the threats that the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) face and identify gaps within our own doctrine ... America has not encountered this type of conflict for nearly a generation and needs to transform to fight and win in complex maneuver warfare.”

In other words, the imperialist-backed military buildup has qualitative as well as quantitative significance.

David Holmes is not a minor figure. His past postings include Moscow; New Delhi, India; Kabul, Afghanistan; Bogotá, Colombia; and Pristina, Kosovo. He served in Washington as the Director for Afghanistan on the National Security Council, suggesting he is a highly influential official. His position, political counselor at the US embassy in Kiev, is frequently the one used as a cover by the CIA station chief in foreign capitals.

And despite the title of “political counselor,” Holmes has personally reviewed the military operations of Ukraine. He told the House Intelligence Committee, “I have had the honor of visiting the main training facility in Western Ukraine with members of Congress and this very Committee, where we witnessed first-hand U.S. National Guard troops, along with allies, conducting training for Ukrainian soldiers. Since 2014, National Guard units from California, Oklahoma, New York, Tennessee and Wisconsin have trained shoulder-to-shoulder with Ukrainian counterparts.”

It is this massive imperialist military build-up that underlies the political crisis in Washington that has produced the impeachment inquiry. The military-intelligence apparatus and its Democratic Party attorneys have not targeted Trump merely because of his demands on Ukraine to investigate a political rival.

They are responding because Trump’s actions in withholding military aid disrupted one of the most critical ongoing imperialist operations. That is what is meant by the constant Democratic and media refrain that Trump is guilty of endangering US “national security.”

In Washington terminology, “national security” means pursuing the worldwide objectives of American imperialism. It has nothing to do with defending the American people from some threat, nor, for that matter, defending the population of Ukraine. Rather, this operation is part of the preparations for future wars that would bring the two largest nuclear powers into direct conflict, with incalculable consequences for humanity.

Every member of the House Intelligence Committee bows down before this political objective. Republican members sought to defend Trump by pointing to his greater willingness to send “lethal aid” to Ukraine, including Javelin anti-tank missiles, although he insisted on selling them to the Ukrainians for a profit.

Similarly, at the Democratic presidential debate on Wednesday night, every Democratic candidate endorsed the impeachment narrative, in which Trump is to be removed, not for his real crimes against immigrants and democratic rights, or his efforts to build a racist and fascist movement, but because he has come into conflict with powerful elements of the national-security apparatus.

21 November 2019