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Ukrainian parliament, army leadership celebrate birthday of the fascist mass murderer Bandera

On January 1, 2023, hours after the Ukrainian armed forces engaged in an airstrike on a Russian military base that led to the death of at least 89 Russian soldiers—most of them raw recruits—the Ukrainian parliament, army leadership and local officials celebrated the 114th anniversary of Stepan Bandera, the figurehead of Ukrainian fascism.

Bandera advocated the establishment of an “ethnically pure” Ukrainian state in alliance first with German and then with US imperialism. He personally participated in multiple targeted political assassinations of Polish politicians in the 1930s. During World War II, the Bandera-led Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and its paramilitary wing, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), participated in the Nazi-led genocide of hundreds of thousands of Jews in what is now Ukraine and Poland; in 1943-44, the OUN-B and UPA engaged in massacres of an estimated 70,000 to 100,000 Poles. Amidst the impending defeat of Nazi Germany, the OUN-B reoriented toward an alliance with US and British imperialism. Throughout the post-war period, it collaborated with Western governments and intelligence agencies in efforts to undermine and ultimately destroy the Soviet Union.



Polish civilian victims of the UPA massacre in Lipniki on March 26, 1943, public domain via Wikimedia commons.

To celebrate the birthday of this fascist mass murderer, the Ukrainian parliament (Rada) on Sunday tweeted an image of Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, the head of the armed forces, under a portrait of Bandera. The tweet quoted Bandera, “The complete and final victory of Ukrainian nationalism will come when the Russian empire ceases to exist.” The Ukrainian parliament’s account added, “A fight against the Russian empire is currently underway. And the guidelines of Stepan Bandera are well known to the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.”

Zaluzhnyi is a well-known admirer of Bandera. While overseeing an army that is de facto armed and co-led by NATO to wage war against Russia, he has repeatedly been photographed with far-right paraphernalia.

After a public outcry above all in Poland, the Ukrainian parliament’s Twitter account quickly deleted the post celebrating Bandera. In particular, the far-right Polish government of the Law and Justice Party (PiS), which forms a main bastion of NATO in Eastern Europe and has played a central role in the war against Russia, publicly protested the tweet.

Radosław Fogiel, a senior representative of PiS, wrote, “The commemoration of Stepan Bandera, responsible for the mass murder of the Polish population, on the profile of the [parliament] of Ukraine must raise objections. This must be made clear, especially to friends – all the more so [now] that Ukraine has new, true heroes.” Poland’s prime

minister Mateusz Morawiecki told PAP that Warsaw took “an extremely critical [stance] towards any glorification or even remembrance of Bandera.”

The friendly worded protest by the far-right PiS party, which itself includes and is in alliance with openly neofascist and anti-Semitic elements, was motivated not only by concerns that the open celebration of Bandera in Ukraine will anger its nationalist base. There clearly is also recognition that the open celebration of one of Eastern Europe’s most notorious mass murderers by the Ukrainian state will alienate broader sections of the Polish population, which is suffering the massive socioeconomic fallout of the conflict, and raise serious questions about the real character of the NATO proxy war against Russia on its borders.

Outside of Poland, the open celebration of Bandera has met with deafening silence in the bourgeois press. Apart from the liberal Israeli *Haaretz*, not a single major international newspaper reported on the tweet of the Ukrainian parliament.

Haaretz correctly placed the celebrations of Bandera’s birthday in the context of a long history in which Ukrainian officials have denied his crimes and sought to promote both the OUN and the UPA. The newspaper also noted that the Israeli embassy released no statement in response to the tweet by the Ukrainian parliament. A source in the Israeli embassy told *Haaretz*, “we’ve made our position clear many times, but apparently there is nothing we can do, at least at the moment.”

The silence especially in the American and Western European press is an extension of a campaign of war propaganda which has sought to cover up the fact that the imperialist war against Russia which is now being waged in Ukraine critically relies on an alliance with the modern-day adherents of Bandera. For the past year, there has been a concerted campaign to whitewash and glorify the neofascist Azov Battalion, whose members have been repeatedly quoted in the media without any discussion of their neo-Nazi orientation.

Above all, however, the silence about the celebration of Bandera’s birthday by the Ukrainian parliament and the head of the Ukrainian army betrays the criminal complicity of the imperialist powers in the promotion and strengthening of Ukrainian fascism. In fact, the figures leading the celebrations for Bandera’s birthday in Ukraine are in close contact with leaders of the US military and political establishment.

On January 3, three days after the post of him celebrating Bandera was displayed on the Ukrainian parliament’s Twitter account, Zaluzhnyi had his first direct phone call with Mark Milley, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the call, Zaluzhnyi thanked Milley for US-delivered air defense systems. On his Facebook page, Zaluzhnyi wrote, “I

highly appreciate General Milley's leadership in providing military aid to Ukraine. Mutual trust and a common vision help to increase the ability of the Ukrainian army to defend the peaceful cities and villages of our country, which is a guarantee of security in all of Europe."

From December 31 until this morning, the enemy launched 14 cruise missiles and employed 94 "Shahed-136" kamikaze drones. I thanked General Milley for the foreign-manufactured anti-aircraft missile systems provided with his active assistance. Today, they are primarily saving the lives of Ukrainian civilians.

We also discussed the Defence Forces needs in order to continue the fight against the aggressor. I highly appreciate General Milley's leadership in providing Ukraine with military aid. Mutual trust and shared vision assist in ramping up the capabilities of the Ukrainian military to defend our state's peaceful cities and villages, which guarantees security throughout Europe.

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The Facebook post by Valerii Zaluzhnyi, head of the Ukrainian armed forces, with the chairman of the US Joint Chief of Staffs, Mark Milley. [Photo: WSWS]

The AFL-CIO too is deeply involved in the cover-up and the ties by the US state machinery with the Ukrainian far right. In October, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten, visited Ukraine as an agent of American imperialism and its war machinery. During her pro-war tour, Weingarten deliberately covered up the horrific crimes of the OUN against the Jewish population and met with the

mayor of Lviv, Andriy Sadovyi, who has long been a central figure in the state-led rehabilitation of Ukrainian fascism and an open admirer of Stepan Bandera.



One of Randi Weingarten's tweets on her meeting with Lviv's mayor Andriy Sadovyi from October 12, 2022 [Photo: Randi Weingarten]

On January 1, Sadovyi led an official celebration of Bandera’s 114th anniversary in the city of Lviv, one of the biggest events in the country honoring the fascist leader. On his Facebook page about the anniversary, Sadovyi praised Bandera’s biography as a “story of indomitability.” He wrote, “A new generation, which grew up on the example of Stepan Bandera, have gone into battle with the new Moscow horde. The generation of winners. Glory to Ukraine (Slava Ukraini)!”



The Facebook post by Lviv mayor Andrii Sadoviy, celebrating the 114th birthday of Ukrainian fascist Stepan Bandera. [Photo: WSWS]

The deep ties of all of the representatives of the US imperialist war machine expose, once again, the true character of the war waged by NATO against Russia in Ukraine. Having built up the Ukrainian army and state and the far right for many years as a stooge for war with NATO, they deliberately provoked the reactionary invasion of Ukraine by the oligarchic Putin regime. Now, with the help of fascist elements in the Ukrainian state and army, they are determined to escalate a war that has already led to an estimated 200,000 casualties on both sides, and threatens humanity with nuclear catastrophe, in order to establish their full control over the vast resources of the former Soviet Union.

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