

Biden administration pushes for NATO accession of Finland, Sweden, as Senate passes \$40 billion aid package for Ukraine

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Following the defeat of the Ukrainian army in Mariupol on Tuesday, a city of great strategic significance in the Ukraine war, the American ruling class is taking further steps to prolong and expand its proxy war with Russia in Eastern Europe.

On Thursday, the Senate voted 86-11 in favor of a massive \$40 billion aid package for Ukraine. All votes against the bill came from the Republican right. The bill brings the total US aid for Ukraine in just over the past two months to \$54 billion. It has been rammed through above all by the Democrats, all of whom support the unprecedented US arming of Ukraine's army and fascist forces and the stifling of any public discussion about its implications. Once US President Joe Biden signs the bill, it will go into effect.

A few hours before the Senate vote, Biden held a joint press conference with Finland's President Sauli Niinistö and Sweden's Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson, both of whom had just applied for NATO accession. In the press conference, Biden provided yet another display of the extraordinary recklessness and arrogance that now dominate the highest levels of the American state.

Following objections by Turkey, a NATO member, against the accession of Finland and Sweden and warnings by the Kremlin that Russia will be forced to respond with appropriate "military technical means" to such a step, Biden effectively declared that the US will do everything to ensure the fastest possible accession of both countries to the military alliance.

The US president emphasized that both countries had the "the full, total, complete backing" from the US for their membership requests. He also all but acknowledged that Washington had been the principal driving force behind the move of Finland and Sweden to join NATO. According to Biden, discussions with Finland's Sauli Niinistö already took place last December; further meetings took place in the weeks leading up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and then again in March. "We've consulted closely at every stage,"

the US president stated.

Clearly, the plans for Finland and Sweden to join the alliance had been made well before Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine—an invasion that NATO has worked to provoke for years and is now exploiting the long-awaited pretext to realize plans for massive rearmaments and a direct military confrontation with Russia.

Biden thanked Democratic Party leaders for helping "to move this to the Senate as quickly as possible" and announced that the White House would submit a bill to Congress later that day to approve the request by Sweden and Finland.

He also reiterated that the US was committed to Article 5 of the NATO treaty which obliges all NATO countries to help a member in case of a military attack. The US will "defend every inch of NATO territory," Biden said. The US president stressed that Finland's and Sweden's request to join NATO underscored that "NATO's door remains open."

For years, Ukraine has sought admission to the alliance. A guarantee that NATO not admit Ukraine was one of the main security guarantees that the oligarchic Putin regime demanded—and was denied—before it decided to invade Ukraine.

Finnish President Niinistö, for his part, stressed that the Finnish army was "one of the strongest in Europe," while Swedish Prime Minister Andersson promised that her country would "reach 2 percent of GDP [for military spending] as soon as practically possible." Both indicated that they counted on their countries joining NATO in a "swift" process and said that they were in the process of conducting negotiations with all NATO members, including Turkey, now and over "the coming days."

The Senate vote and the demonstrative press conference on Thursday are calculated moves to further escalate the NATO proxy war in Ukraine in the wake of Russia's seizure of the strategic port city of Mariupol in the southeast of the country. Mariupol had been under siege by Russian forces

for almost three months with both Russia and Ukraine focusing much of their military fighting power on gaining control over the city. The neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, which has been fully integrated into the Ukrainian army, played the central role in the Ukrainian military's combat operations against Russian troops and were the last to surrender at the Azovstal factory.

Now, according to Russian press reports, over 1,800 Azov fighters have surrendered. The Putin regime, which itself appeals to Russian far-right forces and Great Russian chauvinism, is exploiting its military victory in Mariupol to bolster its own war propaganda, in which the Kremlin falsely portrays its reactionary war for security guarantees from the imperialist powers as a fight against fascism.

The victory in Mariupol also strengthens Russia's military and strategic position after three months in which the Russian army has suffered catastrophic military losses, including thousands of soldiers, several generals and the flagship of its Black Sea fleet, the Moskva. With control over Mariupol, Russia can establish a land bridge in eastern Ukraine, connecting the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea, which Russia annexed in March 2014 after the US-backed coup in Kiev in February, and the territories around Donetsk and Lugansk, where fighting still continues to range.

From both a military but also a political standpoint, the loss of Mariupol is, thus, a significant blow to the Kiev regime and its war strategy. As of 2020, far-right paramilitary forces made up some 104,000 troops, or 40 percent, of the Ukrainian army. Azov, which has been headquartered in Mariupol since 2014, is by far the largest of them.

The Azov Battalion has also played a major role in the propaganda of the Kiev regime and the imperialist powers which have consistently portrayed them as "heroes" and the best defenders of Ukraine. Now, the pro-imperialist media is doubling down on the legitimization of these Hitler-admiring fascists.

The *Washington Post* on Thursday ran an editorial declaring that the Azov Battalion had been "reformed" and that they "deserve the accolades they are receiving from their government." In fact, the neo-Nazi orientation of the Azov Battalion is beyond dispute. It openly places itself in the tradition of the Nazi collaborators of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, which murdered tens of thousands of Jews and Poles in World War II and uses symbols and emblems that hail back to Nazi formations like the SS. The founder of the Azov Battalion, Andrei Biletsky, publicly called for a "crusade of the white nations of the world against the Semitic-led subhumans."

It is not despite but because of the Azov Battalion's fascist orientation that they have been built up by the Ukrainian

state and the imperialist powers as shock troops in the war against Russia. Fascists from around the world have been encouraged to join Azov in Ukraine, and a good portion of the tens of billions of NATO weapons and tanks that have been pouring into the Ukrainian army are ending up in their hands.

With the push for the NATO accession of Sweden and Finland and the gigantic \$40 billion aid package, Washington is signaling unambiguously that the response of US imperialism to this setback is not a return to the negotiating table but a further escalation of its proxy war with Russia.

Commenting on the implications of the expansion of NATO to Scandinavia, Nikita Liponuv noted in the Kremlin think tank magazine *Russia in Global Affairs* that the Kremlin had "for many years" warned Finland and Sweden "publicly and privately about the military-political consequences of joining the alliance."

With Finland and Sweden in NATO, Liponuv warned, the Baltic Sea would effectively become territory controlled by NATO. The alliance's border with Russia will double in size and "the entire region is becoming another theater of confrontation between Russia and the West. ... In the long-run, we can forget about a nuclear-free Northern Europe."

He continued, "The accession of the two Nordic countries to the alliance will affect the politico-military situation not only in Europe, but also in the Arctic: Seven of the eight permanent members of the Arctic Council will represent NATO. The trend among Western Arctic powers to increase defense spending and military buildup in the High North, which began even before the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis, will continue and may intensify."



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