

Zelensky replaces general at the behest of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion

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29 June 2024

President Volodymyr Zelensky has replaced Ukraine's Joint Forces Commander Lt. General Yuriy Sodol with Brigadier General Andrii Hnatov at the behest of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion. Sodol was also in charge of ground forces along the frontline in the eastern Donetsk, Lugansk and Kharkov (Kharkiv) regions, where Ukrainian forces have continued to incrementally lose territory to Russia for the past year.

Following his dismissal, Ukrainian news outlet *Ukrainska Pravda* obtained a letter from Bohdan Krotevych, Chief of Staff of the Azov Brigade of the National Guard, that had been sent to the State Investigation Bureau of Ukraine (SBI) and published its key points.

In the letter, Krotevych blamed Sodol for the loss of Mariupol, a major shipping port now under Russian control.

In addition to poor planning and communication attributed to Sodol, Azov did not receive “a single extra cartridge prior to the defense of Mariupol,” according to Krotevych. He also blamed Sodol for having killed “more Ukrainians than Russians” due to his use of undermanned and outgunned counterattacks. Krotevych wrote that “the Lieutenant General commands the troops ‘inadequately’.”

For a junior officer such as Krotevych to publicly criticize a senior commander during war time would be highly unusual and grounds for discipline, as the *Kyiv Post* reported: “In most NATO armies an officer making public charges in wartime would have been arrested for insubordination—at least.” But to date, Krotevych, an open neo-Nazi, has not been sanctioned. On the contrary, bloggers with hundreds of thousands of followers that are allied with Zelensky repeated Krotevych's charges, arguing the Azov officer had an excellent point, and Zelensky himself responded to

Krotevych by dismissing Sodol.

Zelensky's bowing to the Azov Battalion on the appointment of a key general underlines both the highly unstable situation and the reactionary character of his regime. Under conditions of growing anti-war sentiments and an ongoing bloody debacle at the front, Zelensky is relying ever more heavily on far-right forces, allowing them to call the shots.

Although Ukraine is constantly touted as a bastion of “democracy” by the NATO war propaganda, in reality, fascist forces such as the Azov Brigade have been given extraordinary powers at the highest levels of the state. This policy has been encouraged by the imperialist powers which have played the central role in promoting and arming Azov.

Earlier in June, the United States lifted a ban on sending weapons and training to Azov under the Leahy Law, which prohibits the US government from using funds for assistance to units of foreign security forces that may have committed human rights violations. “This is a new page in the history of our unit,” Azov said in a statement following the news of its now official assistance from United States imperialism.

“Eligibility for US assistance will not only increase Azov's combat effectiveness, but, most importantly, will help save the lives and health of the brigade's personnel,” the unit said. “Azov is becoming more professional and more effective in defending Ukraine against the invaders.”

The State Department justified its decision by blaming Russian disinformation, which “has actively worked to discredit” the unit. It also stated that while vetting Azov for military assistance they “found no evidence of Gross Violations of Human Rights” committed by the 12th Azov Special Forces Brigade. Around the time that the ban was lifted, the elite

Stanford University welcomed the Azov Battalion at its Slavic Department and removed the Azov Battalion from the website of its “Mapping Militants Project, an influential government-funded initiative that tracks extremist groups.

While American news outlets such as CNN and NBC uniformly claim that Azov had “moved on” from its neo-Nazi background and attributed its former stigma to “Russian disinformation,” the truth is that its leaders continue to support neo-Nazism.

The organization traces its heritage back both to Nazism and far-right Ukrainian nationalist organizations, such as Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B) and the Ukrainian Insurgency Army (UPA), which were responsible for the massacres of tens of thousands of Jews and Poles, as well as Ukrainians during World War II. Its founder Andriy Biletsky, previously the leader of the fascist paramilitary Patriot of Ukraine organization, is an outright white supremacist who in 2010 stated that the mission of Ukraine is to “lead the white races of the world in a final crusade ... against Semite-led Untermenschen [subhumans].”

Despite the State Department’s assurances regarding Azov’s supposedly sparkling human rights record, between 2015 and 2016, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights connected Azov with war crimes, including mass looting, unlawful detention and torture.

As for Krotevych, who personally intervened to remove Sodol, X user and Azov investigator Moss Robeson revealed that Krotevych recommended that new Azov recruits read a 1953 memoir by Nazi war criminal Albert Kesselring and has clearly not “moved on” from neo-Nazism, as suggested by the pro-NATO Western media.

At the same time, the removal of Sodol also speaks to ongoing intense conflicts within the Ukrainian ruling class and military leadership. Sodol himself was reportedly an “old school” member within the leadership of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and promoted by former top General Valery Zaluzhny. Meanwhile his replacement Hnatov is younger and part of Zelensky’s plans of “cleaning house and replacing Soviet-trained senior officers with a new, younger generation of generals,” as the *Kyiv Post* reported. Zaluzhny, who reportedly refused to order major

attacks the presidential administration wanted, was himself removed in February after months-long public conflicts with the president.

The empowering of neo-Nazi figures such as Krotevych and the open backing of fascism by Western imperialism comes as the Zelensky regime is escalating the persecution of opponents of the war and suppression of democratic rights. On April 25, the Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk, who has fought for the unification of the Ukrainian and Russian working class, was arrested on bogus charges by the fascist-infested secret service, SBU, and now faces life in prison. Only weeks later, the Ukrainian government officially banned the *World Socialist Web Site*, for which Syrotiuk was writing.

The attacks on democratic rights have become so blatant that even the *New York Times* had to admit some of them in a recent article titled “A Big Step Back: In Ukraine, Concerns Mount Over Narrowing Press Freedoms,” in which it reported on systematic spying on journalists by the SBU and bans on interviews with opposition politicians. However, as the WSWS already noted, neither Bogdan’s arrest nor the banning of the WSWS in Ukraine were mentioned in either report even though they were published days after the publication of an Open Letter by David North to the Ukrainian government and the organization of pickets at Ukrainian embassies in half a dozen countries demanding the freedom of Syrotiuk.

Just as the State Department is attempting to cover up the crimes and history of Azov, the *New York Times*—as the official mouthpiece of the US intelligence and military apparatus—is tasked with running cover regarding the true nature of the attacks on democratic rights in Ukraine whose primary targets are left-wing opponents of the war such as Bogdan Syrotiuk.



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