

Zelensky otorga al comandante del Sector Derecha Dmytro Kotsyubaylo el premio "Héroe de Ucrania"

How Ukraine's Jewish president Zelensky made peace with neo-Nazi paramilitaries on front lines of war with Russia



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While Western media deploys Volodymyr Zelensky's Jewish heritage to refute accusations of Nazi influence in Ukraine, the president has ceded to neo-Nazi forces and now depends on them as front line fighters.

Back in October 2019, as the war in eastern Ukraine dragged on, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky traveled to Zolote, a town situated firmly in the "gray zone" of Donbas, where over 14,000 had been killed, mostly on the pro-Russian side. There, the president encountered the hardened veterans of extreme right paramilitary units keeping up the fight against separatists just a few miles away.

Elected on a platform of de-escalation of hostilities with Russia, Zelensky was determined to enforce the so-called Steinmeier Formula conceived by then-German Foreign Minister Walter Steinmeier which called for elections in the Russian-speaking regions of Donetsk and Lugansk.

In a face-to-face confrontation with militants from the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion who had launched a campaign to sabotage the peace initiative called "No to Capitulation," Zelensky encountered a wall of obstinacy.

With appeals for disengagement from the frontlines firmly rejected, Zelensky [melted down](#) on camera. “I’m the president of this country. I’m 41 years old. I’m not a loser. I came to you and told you: remove the weapons,” Zelensky implored the fighters.

Once video of the stormy confrontation spread across Ukrainian social media channels, Zelensky became the target of an [angry backlash](#).

Andriy Biletsky, the proudly fascist Azov Battalion leader who once [pledged](#) to “lead the white races of the world in a final crusade...against Semite-led Untermenschen”, vowed to bring thousands of fighters to Zolote if Zelensky pressed any further. Meanwhile, a parliamentarian from the party of former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko openly fantasized about Zelensky being blown to bits by a militant’s grenade.

Though Zelensky achieved a minor disengagement, the neo-Nazi paramilitaries escalated their “No Capitulation” campaign. And within months, fighting began to [heat up](#) again in Zolote, sparking a new cycle of violations of the [Minsk Agreement](#).

By this point, Azov had been formally incorporated into the Ukrainian military and its street vigilante wing, known as the National Corps, was deployed across the country under the watch of the Ukrainian Interior Ministry, and [alongside the National Police](#). In December 2021, Zelensky would be seen delivering a “Hero of Ukraine” award to a leader of the fascistic Right Sector in a ceremony in Ukraine’s parliament.

A full-scale conflict with Russia was approaching, and the distance between Zelensky and the extremist paramilitaries was closing fast.

This February 24, when Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukrainian territory on a stated mission to “demilitarize and denazify” the country, US media embarked on a mission of its own: to deny the power of neo-Nazi paramilitaries over the country’s military and political sphere. As the US government-funded [National Public Radio insisted](#), “Putin’s language [about denazification] is offensive and factually wrong.”

In its bid to deflect from the influence of Nazism in contemporary Ukraine, US media has found its most effective PR tool in the figure of Zelensky, a former TV star and comedian from a Jewish background. It is a role the actor-turned-politician has eagerly assumed.

But as we will see, Zelensky has not only ceded ground to the neo-Nazis in his midst, he has entrusted them with a front line role in his country’s war against pro-Russian and Russian forces.

The president’s Jewishness as Western media PR device

Hours before President Putin’s February 24 speech declaring denazification as the goal of Russian operations, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky “asked how a people who lost eight million of its citizens fighting Nazis could support Nazism,” according to the [BBC](#).

Raised in a non-religious Jewish family in the Soviet Union during the 1980’s, Zelensky has downplayed his heritage in the past. “The fact that I am Jewish barely makes 20 in my long list of faults,” he joked during a [2019 interview](#) in which he declined to go into further detail about his religious background.

Today, as Russian troops bear down on cities like Mariupol, which is effectively under the control of the Azov Battalion, Zelensky is no longer ashamed to broadcast his Jewishness. “How could I be a Nazi?” he wondered aloud during a public address. For a US media engaged in an all-out information war against Russia, the president’s Jewish background has become an essential public relations tool.

A few examples of the US media’s deployment of Zelensky as a shield against allegations of rampant Nazism in Ukraine are below (see mash-up above for video):

- PBS NewsHour noted Putin’s comments on denazification with a qualifier: “even though President Volodymyr Zelensky is Jewish and his great uncles died in the Holocaust.”
- On Fox & Friends, former CIA officer Dan Hoffman declared that “it’s the height of hypocrisy to call the Ukrainian nation to denazify — their president is Jewish after all.”
- On MSNBC, Virginia Democratic Senator Mark Warner said Putin’s “terminology, outrageous and obnoxious as it is — ‘denazify’ where you’ve got frankly a Jewish president in Mr. Zelensky. This guy [Putin] is on his own kind of personal jihad to restore greater Russia.”
- Republican Sen. Marsha Blackburn said on Fox Business she’s “been impressed with President Zelensky and how he has stood up. And for Putin to go out there and say ‘we’re going to denazify’ and Zelensky is Jewish.”
- In an interview with CNN’s Wolf Blitzer, Gen. John Allen denounced Putin’s use of the term, “de-Nazify” while the newsman and former Israel lobbyist shook his head in disgust. In a separate interview with Blitzer, the so-called “Ukraine whistleblower” and Ukraine-born Alexander Vindman grumbled that the claim is “patently absurd, there’s really no merit... you pointed out that Volodymyr Zelensky is Jewish... the Jewish community [is] embraced. It’s central to the country and there is nothing to this Nazi narrative, this fascist narrative. It’s fabricated as a pretext.”

Behind the corporate media spin lies the complex and increasingly close relationship Zelensky’s administration has enjoyed with the neo-Nazi forces invested with key military and political posts by the Ukrainian state, and the power these open fascists have enjoyed since Washington installed a Western-aligned regime through a coup in 2014.

In fact, Zelensky’s top financial backer, the Ukrainian Jewish oligarch Igor Kolomoisky, has been a key benefactor of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion and other extremists militias.



The Azov Battalion marches with Nazi-inspired Wolfsangel flags in Mariupol, August 2020

Backed by Zelensky's top financier, neo-Nazi militants unleash a wave of intimidation

Incorporated into the Ukrainian National Guard, the Azov Battalion is considered the most ideologically zealous and militarily motivated unit fighting pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donbass region.

With Nazi-inspired Wolfsangel insignia on the uniforms of its fighters, who have been photographed with Nazi SS symbols on their helmets, Azov “is known for its association with neo-Nazi ideology...[and] is believed to have participated in training and radicalizing US-based white supremacy organizations,” according to an FBI indictment of several US white nationalists that traveled to Kiev to train with Azov.

Igor Kolomoisky, a Ukrainian energy baron of Jewish heritage, has been a top funder of Azov since it was formed in 2014. He has also bankrolled private militias like the Dnipro and Aidar Battalions, and has deployed them as a personal thug squad to protect his financial interests.

In 2019, Kolomoisky emerged as the top backer of Zelensky's presidential bid. Though Zelensky made anti-corruption the signature issue of his campaign, the Pandora Papers exposed him and members of his inner circle stashing large payments from Kolomoisky in a shadowy web of offshore accounts.



President Zelensky (C) meets with billionaire oligarch and business associate Ihor Kolomoisky on September 10, 2019

When Zelensky took office in May 2019, the Azov Battalion maintained de facto control of the strategic southeastern port city of Mariupol and its surrounding villages. As Open Democracy noted, “Azov has certainly established political control of the streets in Mariupol. To maintain this control, they have to react violently, even if not officially, to any public event which diverges sufficiently from their political agenda.”

Attacks by Azov in Mariupol have included assaults on “feminists and liberals” marching on International Women's Day among other incidents.

In March 2019, members of the Azov Battalion's National Corps [attacked the home](#) of Viktor Medvedchuk, the leading opposition figure in Ukraine, accusing him of treason for his friendly relations with Vladimir Putin, the godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter.

Zelensky's administration escalated the attack on Medvedchuk, [shuttering](#) several media outlets he controlled in February 2021 with the open approval of the US State Department, and [jailing the opposition leader for treason](#) three months later. Zelensky justified his actions on the grounds that he needed to "fight against the danger of Russian aggression in the information arena."

Next, in August 2020, Azov's National Corps [opened fire](#) on a bus containing members of Medvedchuk's party, Patriots for Life, wounding several with rubber-coated steel bullets.

Zelensky failed to rein in neo-Nazis, wound up collaborating with them

Following his failed attempt to demobilize neo-Nazi militants in the town of Zolote in October 2019, Zelensky called the fighters to the table, [telling](#) reporters "I met with veterans yesterday. Everyone was there – the National Corps, Azov, and everyone else."

A few seats away from the Jewish president was Yehven Karas, the leader of the neo-Nazi C14 gang.

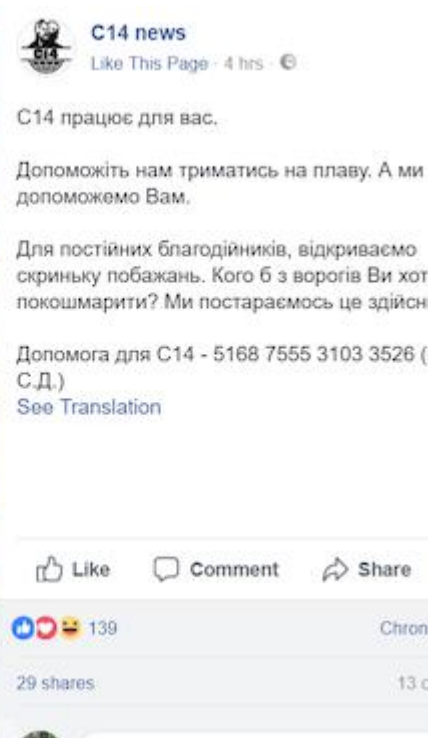


Zelensky meets with "veterans" including Yehven Karas (far right) and Dmytro Shatrovsky, an Azov Battalion leader (bottom left).

During the Maidan "Revolution of Dignity" that ousted Ukraine's elected president in 2014, C14 activists took over Kiev's city hall and plastered its walls with neo-Nazi insignia before [taking shelter in the Canadian embassy](#).

As the former youth wing of the ultra-nationalist Svoboda Party, C14 appears to draw its name from the infamous 14 words of US neo-Nazi leader David Lane: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."

By [offering](#) to carry out acts of spectacular violence on behalf of anyone willing to pay, the hooligans have fostered a cozy relationship with various governing bodies and powerful elites across Ukraine.



C14 neo-Nazi gang offers to carry out violence-for-hire: “C14 works for you. Help us keep afloat, and we will help you. For regular donors, we are opening a box for wishes. Which of your enemies would you like to make life difficult for? We’ll try to do that.”

A March 2018 [report](#) by Reuters stated that “C14 and Kiev’s city government recently signed an agreement allowing C14 to establish a ‘municipal guard’ to patrol the streets,” effectively giving them the sanction of the state to carry out pogroms.

As The Grayzone [reported](#), C14 led raid to “purge” Romani from Kiev’s railway station in collaboration with the Kiev police.

Not only was this activity sanctioned by the Kiev city government, the US government itself saw little problem with it, [hosting Bondar at an official US government institution](#) in Kiev where he bragged about the pogroms. C14 continued to [receive](#) state funding throughout 2018 for “national-patriotic education.”

Karas has [claimed](#) that the Ukrainian Security Service would “pass on” information regarding pro-separatist rallies “not only [to] us, but also Azov, the Right Sector and so on.”

“In general, deputies of all factions, the National Guard, the Security Service of Ukraine and the Ministry of Internal Affairs work for us. You can joke like that,” Karas said.

Throughout 2019, Zelensky and his administration deepened their ties with ultra-nationalist elements across Ukraine.



Then-Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk onstage at the neo-Nazi “Veterans Strong” concert

After Prime Minister attends neo-Nazi concert, Zelensky honors Right Sector leader

Just days after Zelensky’s meeting with Karas and other neo-Nazi leaders in November 2019, Oleksiy Honcharuk – then the Prime Minister and deputy head of Zelensky’s presidential office – [appeared on stage](#) at a neo-Nazi concert organized by C14 figure and accused murderer Andriy Medvedko.

Zelensky’s Minister for Veterans Affairs not only attended the concert, which featured several antisemitic metal bands, she promoted the concert on Facebook.

Also in 2019, Zelensky defended Ukrainian footballer Roman Zolzulya against Spanish fans taunting him as a “Nazi.” Zolzulya had [posed beside photos](#) of the World War II-era Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera and [openly supported](#) the Azov Battalion. Zelensky responded to the controversy by proclaiming that all of Ukraine backed Zolzulya, describing him as “not only a cool football player but a true patriot.”

In November 2021, one of Ukraine’s most prominent ultra-nationalist militiamen, Dmytro Yarosh, [announced](#) that he had been appointed as an advisor to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Yarosh is an avowed follower of the Nazi collaborator Bandera who led Right Sector from 2013 to 2015, [vowing](#) to lead the “de-Russification” of Ukraine.



Dmytro Yarosh poses with Ukraine's Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces

A month later, as war with Russia drew closer, Zelensky awarded Right Sector commander Dmytro Kotsyubaylo the "Hero of Ukraine" commendation. Known as "Da Vinci," Kosyubaylo keeps a pet wolf in his frontline base, and likes to joke to visiting reporters that his fighters "feed it the bones of Russian-speaking children."





Zelensky awards Right Sector commander Dmytro Kotsyubaylo the “Hero of Ukraine” award

Ukrainian state-backed neo-Nazi leader flaunts influence on the eve of war with Russia

On February 5, 2022, only days before full-scale war with Russia erupted, Yevhen Karas of the neo-Nazi C14 delivered a stem-winding public address in Kiev intended to highlight the influence his organization and others like it enjoyed over Ukrainian politics.

“LGBT and foreign embassies say ‘there were not many Nazis at Maidan, maybe about 10 percent of real ideological ones,’” Karas remarked. “If not for those eight percent [of neo-Nazis] the effectiveness [of the Maidan coup] would have dropped by 90 percent.”

The 2014 Maidan “Revolution of Dignity” would have been a “gay parade” if not for the instrumental role of neo-Nazis, he proclaimed.

Karas went on to opine that the West armed Ukrainian ultra-nationalists because “we have fun killing.” He also fantasized about the balkanization of Russia, declaring that it should be broken up into “five different” countries.



Yevhen Karas delivering the Nazi salute.

“If we get killed...we died fighting a holy war”

When Russian forces entered Ukraine this February 24, encircling the Ukrainian military in the east and driving towards Kiev, President Zelensky announced a national mobilization that included the [release of criminals](#) from prison, among them accused murderers wanted in Russia. He also blessed the distribution of arms to average citizens, and their training by battle-hardened paramilitaries like the Azov Battalion.

With fighting underway, Azov’s National Corps gathered hundreds of ordinary civilians, including grandmothers and children, to train in public squares and warehouses from Kharviv to Kiev to Lviv.

On February 27, the official Twitter account of the National Guard of Ukraine [posted](#) video of “Azov Fighters” greasing their bullets with pig fat to humiliate Russian Muslim fighters from Chechnya.

A day later, the Azov Battalion’s National Corps [announced](#) that the Azov Battalion’s Kharkiv Regional Police would begin using the city’s Regional State Administration building as a defense headquarters. Footage [posted](#) to Telegram the following day shows the Azov-occupied building being hit by a Russian airstrike.

Besides authorizing the release of hardcore criminals to join the battle against Russia, Zelensky has ordered all males of fighting age to remain in the country. Azov militants have proceeded to enforce the policy by brutalizing civilians attempting to flee from the fighting around Mariupol.

According to one Greek resident in Mariupol recently [interviewed](#) by a Greek news station, “When you try to leave you run the risk of running into a patrol of the Ukrainian fascists, the Azov Battalion,” he said, adding “they would kill me and are responsible for everything.”

Footage posted online appears to [show](#) uniformed members of a fascist Ukrainian militia in Mariupol violently pulling fleeing residents out of their vehicles at gunpoint.

Other video filmed at checkpoints around Mariupol showed Azov fighters [shooting and killing](#) civilians attempting to flee.

On March 1, Zelensky [replaced](#) the regional administrator of Odessa with Maksym Marchenko, a former commander of the extreme right Aidar Battalion, which has been [accused](#) of an array of war crimes in the Donbass region.

Meanwhile, as a massive convoy of Russian armored vehicles bore down on Kiev, Yehven Karas of the neo-Nazi C14 posted a [video](#) on YouTube from inside a vehicle presumably transporting fighters.

“If we get killed, it’s fucking great because it means we died fighting a holy war,” Karas exclaimed. “If we survive, it’s going to be even fucking better! That’s why I don’t see a downside to this, only upside!”

[AZOV BATTALION C14 FASCISM NATIONAL CORPS NEO-NAZIS RUSSIA UKRAINE UKRAINIAN NEO-NAZIS VLADIMIR PUTIN VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY](#)



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The editor-in-chief of The Grayzone, Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of several books, including best-selling [Republican Gomorrah](#), [Goliath](#), [The Fifty One Day War](#), and [The Management of Savagery](#). He has produced print articles for an array of publications, many video reports, and several documentaries, including [Killing Gaza](#). Blumenthal founded The Grayzone in 2015 to shine a journalistic light on America's state of perpetual war and its dangerous domestic repercussions.