

<file:///Users/markuscarlsson/Desktop/Ukrainian%20Pacifist's%20Message%20to%20the%20World:%20U.S.,%20NATO%20&%20Russia%20Share%20Responsibility%20to%20Avoid%20War%20%7C%20D.html>

Ukrainian Pacifist's Message to the World: U.S., NATO & Russia Share Responsibility to Avoid War

STORY FEBRUARY 16, 2022

AMY GOODMAN: This is *Democracy Now!* I'm Amy Goodman, with Juan González.

We end today's show in Ukraine, where the nation's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, has declared a national unity day. The United States is warning allies Russia could invade Ukraine as soon as today, prompting Ukraine's president to declare Unity Day. On Tuesday, Russia announced it was pulling some troops from the Ukraine border, but the United States and NATO have voiced skepticism about the claims.

We go now to Kyiv, to the capital, where we're joined by Yurii Sheliazhenko, the executive secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement and a board member of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, also member of the board of directors at World BEYOND War and a research associate at KROK University in Kyiv.

We welcome you to *Democracy Now!* Can you describe what this day is like for you in Kyiv today, what Unity Day means? And what you are calling on your country, Russia and the West to do?

YURII SHELIAZHENKO: Well, thank you for having me.

Today Ukraine celebrates Unity Day, which is not real national holiday, but it is a patriotic rally ordered by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky, who said, "We are being intimidated by the great war, and the date of the military invasion has been set." And this is his message expressed by current command to officials and loyalists to wave national flags and sing national anthem. Zelensky formulated the message as following: quote, "We are confident in our armed forces, but our military must also feel our support, our cohesion and our unity," end of quote. But I represent Ukrainian pacifist movement, and I don't buy this. We can't put our trust into Ukrainian army, because there is no military solution to current crisis.

Russia is amassing troops on their territory near Ukrainian border, while NATO countries increase its military presence near and around Ukraine. Both sides are saying it is just a drill. Russia denies any intentions to invade but warns it will not allow attempts of Ukraine to establish control over Crimea or Donbas by military force.

Western media predict imminent war, fail in predicting. My friend David Swanson even put a counter on these lies about imminent Russian invasion at the website WorldBeyondWar.org. Western governments call back their diplomats and citizens and even military advisers to leave no fingerprints on the predicted massive bloodshed. Russian media reports Putin have at the table a proposal to recognize independence of Donetsk and Luhansk separatist republics, which would be the end of Minsk agreements and will lead to escalation. And Russian media blame Ukraine for noncompliance with Minsk agreements. They say there are signs that Ukrainian Armed Forces, encouraged by military aid and political support of United States and NATO, are preparing to regain control over Donbas by force.

President Zelensky, elected in 2019 after promising peace, stated that peace should be on our terms. He continue to refuse to enter meaningful negotiations with pro-Russian separatists of Donbas. According to Minsk agreements, it causes military escalation in Donbas. He shut up pro-Russian media in Ukraine, like his predecessor Poroshenko blocked Russian social networks and pushed official language law, forcibly excluding Russian from public sphere. All these measures are killing any possibility of public dialogue about peace and justice, replacing democratic deliberation with blind trust to army, to delusions of restoring national unity in divided society by a brutal military force.

Zelensky's party, Servant of the People, committed to increase military spending to 5% of GDP. In 2022 budget, they increased military spending to 6% of GDP. They welcomed 10 NATO military drills in Ukraine this year and welcomed buildup of United States and the United Kingdom military bases in Ukraine. With the majority in parliament, presidential political machine concentrates political power in Zelensky team's hands and multiplies militarist laws, such as draconian punishments for evaders from conscription and creation of new national resistance force, increasing personnel of Armed Forces in Ukraine by 111,000, creating military units in local governments for mandatory military training of millions of people, aimed to mobilize whole population in the case of war with Russia.

According to [annual report](#), "Conscientious Objection in Europe 2020," those who refuse to kill have a little chance to legal recognition and protection of their beliefs during conscription in Ukraine and in Russia, too, not to say in separatist people's republics, as they also have mobilization. Alternative nonmilitary service

arrangements are hardly accessible, discriminatory and punitive in nature. So, current military buildup and Zelensky's attempt to mobilize whole population of Ukraine to war with Russia gravely undermines democracy and human rights in our country.

The escalation towards major war in Ukraine is unnecessary. Our government became part of it when we recklessly took side of the West in global power struggle. And instead, we should be neutral country. We should commit to universal peace. People of Ukraine, as well as all people in the world, want to live in peace and be happy. Both great powers of the West and the East share equal responsibility to avoid escalation of war in Ukraine and beyond Ukraine and give up nuclear stockpiles threatening to kill all life on the planet because of these absurd political quarrels. I believe all governments should join Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. If global leaders fail to negotiate sustainable peace in good faith, instead of blame game and violent settlement of their power dispute on the local battlefield in Ukraine, it will be a shame. But, unfortunately, Ukraine became a battlefield of the new Cold War between the United States and Russia.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Well, Yurii, Yurii Sheliazhenko, I wanted to ask you, in terms of the — you're making the point that all the militaries of these countries are seeking to justify their own existence. I'm wondering your sense of how nationalism is playing into this drumbeat for war, especially nationalism within the Ukraine or from right-wing groups within Ukraine.

YURII SHELIAZHENKO: Well, it is part of the influence of — both great powers created social networks of clientele, nationalist clientele of Russia and nationalist clientele of the West. So, when Ukraine became battlefield of the new Cold War between United States and Russia, these two great powers are competing for control over Ukraine, using and inflating in their global power struggle militant nationalism of Ukrainian government and similar militant nationalism of pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk. Peaceful life of Ukraine was destroyed by these militant nationalisms and great power struggle. Eight-year bloodshed took thousands of lives of civilians, turned millions into refugees and internally displaced persons, devastated our economy and debilitated our society.

That's why we are grateful for all people supporting peace in Ukraine and around the world. There are wonderful CodePink actions in United States, and we do a report with Medea Benjamin, against the war in Russia. And tomorrow our friends in Berlin, in

Germany, with call for deescalation of conflict between Russia, Ukraine, United States and NATO countries. Our friends in Berlin are making human chain between the embassies of United States and Russia. It is the best symbolic way to show how bonds of humanity between people should prevail over fear, hatred and hysterical warmongering. All conflicts —

AMY GOODMAN: Yurii, we want to thank you so much for being with us, and we will be revisiting you soon. Yurii Sheliashenko is the executive secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, board member of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection and World BEYOND War.

By the way, all of our transcripts are online of every show, of every segment, at democracynow.org. I'm Amy Goodman, with Juan González. Stay safe.

The original content of this program is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/). Please attribute legal copies of this work to democracynow.org. Some of the work(s) that this program incorporates, however, may be separately licensed. For further information or additional permissions, contact us.