

# **The ‘Azov’ Note: The Ukrainian War and Paramilitarism**

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Since the Russian invasion, the paramilitary militia ‘Azov’ of the National Guard of Ukraine division has drawn special attention. This article examines its organizational traits, ideologies, pre-war activities and military operations during the Russian invasion. In gathering the information, the author paid special attention to wipe out the elements of ‘Russian propaganda’ by focusing on open sources, mainly the online editions of US, Canadian, British, French, Greek, Bulgarian and Turkish news agencies. Russian news clips were carefully excluded, except for those produced by the Ukraine media or those transmitting the simple official remarks of the Putin government. The results of the analysis point to a number of conclusions. Before the war, Azov was a unique mixture of paramilitary and political movements. Its military wing formed an autonomous fighting unit composed of volunteer soldiers, both domestic and foreign, operating on its own command structure beyond the control of the government. Its political wing espoused neo-Nazi ideologies equivalent to the alt-right movements in the West and owned a political party and various social organizations. After the invasion, as its battalions played significant roles in the key battles, the military wing became one of the mainstream combatants of the Ukraine government while keeping intact the strong link with its political wing. As a result, Azov attracted a more diverse crowd and consolidated its image as ‘the patriotic defender of the nation’, despite the well-grounded accusations of persecution against the civilian population. In light of the growing dependence of the Ukraine government on Azov’s military prowess, there is serious concern that this group will gain more political momentum in the future.