

Ukraine continues offensive inside Russia

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The Ukrainian military's offensive into two Russian border regions, Kursk and Belgorod, is entering its second week. Kiev claims to have captured 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles), including at least 74 settlements and hundreds of prisoners of war. The troops carrying out the first invasion of Russia since the end of World War II were trained in the UK, and are using American and German battle tanks as well as American-supplied HIMARS rockets.

So far, Ukraine has blown up two bridges in the region and has interdicted a key rail line that the Russian army used to deliver supplies and troops to the front in Ukraine.

The destruction of the bridges has also disrupted ongoing efforts to evacuate residents from the combat zones in both Kursk and Belgorod. Over 180,000 people have already been evacuated, and the continuing evacuations indicate that the Kremlin is not anticipating a quick end to the fighting.

Nevertheless, according to Russian news reports, a significant number of civilians still remain in areas now occupied by Ukrainian forces. The Russian paper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* cited Russian pro-Kremlin war journalist Aleksandr Kharchenko as saying, "A large number of our citizens are under the control of the Ukrainian forces."

On Sunday, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky declared that the goal of the incursion was to create "a buffer zone." He stated, "it is now our primary task in defensive operations overall: to destroy as much Russian war potential as possible and conduct maximum counteroffensive actions."

Russian authorities also claim that Kiev is preparing an attack on the nuclear power plants in the Russian region of Kursk and Zaporizhzhia in southeast Ukraine, currently controlled by Russian forces. Fighting around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest in Europe, is ongoing.

Underscoring both the involvement of the US in the operation and its predatory character, retired general David Petraeus, one of the greatest war criminals of the US invasion of Iraq, and later head of the CIA, praised the Ukrainian invasion on the BBC Global News Podcast. "This is not unlike when we did the invasion of Iraq, a great

armored brigade did the thunder run through Baghdad and ends up on the airfield and they said, 'Hey, let's just gonna stay here'. Let's develop the situation, let's see what happens from here, how does the enemy respond. I think that's where they are."

Whatever the immediate military and political calculations behind the incursion, its underlying strategy and goals reveal the imperialist character of the war waged by the imperialist powers against Russia. NATO deliberately provoked the invasion by the Putin regime in order to use Ukraine as a staging ground for a much broader war whose ultimate goal is the carve-up of the entire region.

No one has been more open about these goals than Ukraine's military leadership. Both the ex-head of the Ukrainian armed forces, Valery Zaluzhny, and the head of military intelligence, Kirill Budanov, have repeatedly been photographed with a map of a carved-up Russia, divided up between different powers. Based on this map, a substantial portion of what is now southeastern Russia, including the Kursk, Belgorod and Rostov regions, would fall to Ukraine in a modern-day version of the long-standing aim of the fascists of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) to establish a "Greater Ukraine".

This strategy includes not only military offensives into Russian territory but also terrorist attacks within Russia, such as the March Moscow Crocus City Hall attack, which killed over 140 people, and political assassinations. From the standpoint of the imperialist powers, the ultimate aim is to weaken the Putin regime militarily and politically, in order to create conditions for its overthrow by NATO-backed sections of the Russian oligarchy and state apparatus as part of an effort to bring the entire region under their direct control.

The Putin regime, which has emerged as a Bonapartist regime out of the Stalinist bureaucracy's restoration of capitalism, is, by its very class and political nature, extremely vulnerable to such pressures. As the WSWWS has explained, its principal function consists of safeguarding the vast social privileges of the oligarchy. It has sought to do so by balancing, first, between different sections of the oligarchy, second, between the oligarchy and imperialism,

and third, between the oligarchy and the working class. But the entire strategy of imperialism and its proxy in Ukraine, which consists of both ever more aggressive military offensives and systematic efforts to fuel tensions within the oligarchy, is undermining the Kremlin's policies.

So far, the Putin regime's response to the first imperialist-backed invasion of the country since the defeat of the Nazis by the Red Army in World War II has been markedly muted, itself one of many indicators that conflicts are indeed raging behind the scenes. The incursion came shortly after the Putin regime initiated a major purge of its army leadership. Moreover, just days before the incursion, the Kremlin had negotiated a prisoner swap with Washington, in which it released several of the most prominent representatives of the NATO-backed opposition, most notably Vladimir Kara-Murza and several members of the team of the late Alexei Navalny, long the central stooge of imperialism in the oligarchy.

A lengthy interview aired by Russia's leading state TV channel, "Rossiia," with the president of Belarus and one of the principal allies of Putin, Alexander Lukashenko, on Saturday, provided some insight into the considerations and heated discussions within the oligarchy. Lukashenko reiterated Putin's warnings that NATO was preparing a direct entry into the war which would mean "World War III". He stated that with the invasion of Kursk, Ukraine was trying to provoke Russia into a general mobilization to "destabilize society from within, we are not prepared to do this, we don't want this." Lukashenko also claimed that Ukraine had amassed 120,000 troops on its border with Belarus and that Minsk had responded by mobilizing a third of its military—some 65,000 men—to the already heavily mined border. He then spoke at length about Belarus's preparations for a potential war with NATO member Poland and threatened that Ukraine's Kursk invasion could end in its own "destruction."

He insisted repeatedly, "We don't want escalation. We don't want this war against all of NATO. We don't want it. But if they go for it, then we won't have a choice." Lukashenko then discussed the stationing of tactical nuclear weapons by Russia on Belarusian territory. When asked whether he was prepared to "press the red button," he emphatically declared that he was, as soon as the borders of Belarus were violated. "If you don't want this, then let's sit down at the negotiating table and let's end this little fight [i.e., the war in Ukraine]." He went on to claim that there are "no Nazis" in Ukraine anymore and that the Kremlin's supposed goal of the "de-Nazification of Ukraine" had been effectively accomplished.

Of course, the Putin regime, which is itself steeped in Great Russian chauvinism and maintains extensive ties to

the far-right, never wanted, nor could it undertake, a serious struggle against fascism. Nevertheless, these statements by Lukashenko, made on Russian state television as Ukrainian troops on Russian soil are using Nazi insignia on their uniforms, suggest that significant sections of the state and oligarchy are responding to the invasion by intensifying discussions on how to reach a negotiated settlement with imperialism as fast as possible.

At the same time, other sections in the oligarchy warn that the country must prepare for a protracted war and a potential second mobilization. One characteristic comment on the right-wing pro-Kremlin website *Vzglyad.Ru* evoked the memory of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, which claimed the lives of 27 million Soviet citizens, and warned that "Victory will require a protracted war."

The imperialist-backed incursion of Russia, the first such invasion since 1941, and the political disarray it has provoked within the oligarchy underscore above all the catastrophic outcome of the Stalinist betrayal of the 1917 October revolution, which culminated in the destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991. Whatever its bitter and violent infighting, the Russian oligarchy that emerged out of this counter-revolution is infinitely more concerned with preempting a movement within the working class than with the danger posed by imperialism.

The imminent threat of an imperialist carve-up of the region and nuclear war can only be countered, on a progressive basis, through the intervention of the working class, which must conduct its struggle independently from all sections of the oligarchy and the imperialist powers, based on the socialist and internationalist traditions that inspired the October Revolution.



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