Ukrainian army suffers major setbacks, as Trump election sows doubt on US war plans in Ukraine

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The Ukrainian army is suffering major setbacks as uncertainty mounts over what US policy towards Ukraine will be after Donald Trump's re-election as president.

Yesterday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed Trump, claiming his victory would in fact allow for greater US-NATO intervention against Russia in Ukraine. He said, "Congratulations to Donald Trump on his impressive election victory! I recall our great meeting with President Trump back in September, when we discussed in detail the Ukraine-US strategic partnership, the Victory Plan, and ways to put an end to Russian aggression against Ukraine."

But neither Zelensky's "Victory Plan" nor Trump's "Art of the Deal" will solve the catastrophe of the war in Ukraine. NATO was not waging a war to defend Ukrainian democracy against an aggressive but militarily inept Russian foe, as the NATO imperialist powers have claimed during the nearly three-year war, but using Ukrainians as cannon fodder in a failed attempt to crush Russia. It is increasingly difficult even for imperialist media to hide that Ukraine has been not liberated but shattered, and that opposition to the NATO war is mounting among Ukrainian workers.

Ukrainian forces are in full retreat. In October, Russian troops took Vuhledar, a city southeast of Donetsk, and began threatening Toretsk and Pokrovsk. According to Western military analysts, Pokrovsk, a key strongpoint and logistical center, is the last major obstacle blocking a Russian march on Dnipro and the Dniepr River, which cuts Ukraine in two. If Russian troops advanced along this line, it could force the Ukrainian army to withdraw from all of southeastern Ukraine to avoid being encircled.

The French military newsletter *La Vigie* stated:

Advances [by Russian forces] from Avdivka to Pokrovsk and Toretsk and the bypassing of Vuhledar come after major efforts, in regions highly valued and aggressively defended by both sides. The current apparent resignation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine contrasts with their initial combativeness. … If Toretsk falls, all the central Donbass will be open to Russian troop maneuvers. If Pokrovsk falls, there is no defense behind it until one reaches the Dniepr. If Vuhledar falls, the unification of the [Russian] fronts in the Donbass and Zaporizhzhya is possible.

Moreover, Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskiy said yesterday that the Kremlin is massing 45,000 troops north of Ukraine, near Kursk. He said 10,000 North Korean troops had joined Russian troops there. These forces, he said, aim to seize the pocket of Russian territory near Kursk held by Ukrainian troops and then drive into northern Ukraine near Sumy.

Russian drones and missiles are attacking military and strategic targets across Ukraine, which Ukraine's air defenses are powerless to prevent. Yesterday, they claimed to have shot down 38 of 63 drones launched at nine regions of Ukraine: Odesa, Mykolayiv, Kyiv, Sumy, Kirovohrad, Zhytomyr, Cherkasy, Chernihiv and Zaporizhzhya. The governor of Zaporizhzhya reported that missile strikes on his region had killed seven and wounded 25 yesterday.

Over the last week, there were reportedly large-scale Russian drone and missile strikes on major Ukrainian cities, including Kiev, Kharkiv and Odesa, where the strategic Zakota Bridge was hit.

Under these conditions, Trump's occasional claims that

he will negotiate overnight an end to the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine have no credibility whatsoever. Not only are NATO and its puppet regime in Ukraine for now in a desperately weak position, but the war in Ukraine itself is only part of a far broader war for world hegemony that Trump has pledged to escalate, bombing Iran or imposing crippling trade sanctions on China. But such NATO attacks on Russian allies would inevitably provoke renewed conflict between NATO and Russia in Ukraine.

Yesterday, Zelensky denounced the danger posed by Shahed drones built by Iran and delivered to Russia for use in Ukraine and called to bomb Iran. Zelensky said, "This year, we have faced the threat of Shahed drones almost every night—sometimes in the morning, and even during the day. These strike UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles), supplied to Russia by Iran, have become one of the primary instruments of Russian terror against Ukraine. … We require the capability to destroy Shahed storage bases as well as the entire infrastructure for their production and logistics."

Zelensky has already advocated bombing drone production facilities in Iran and Syria to escalate the war on Russia across the Middle East. Last year, the *Guardian* published plans he discussed with NATO officials, calling for "missile strikes on the production plants of these UAVs in Iran, Syria, as well as on a potential production site in the Russian Federation. … The above may be carried out by the Ukrainian defense forces if partners provide the necessary means of destruction."

While Zelensky and Trump discuss military escalation, opposition to the war is mounting among Ukrainian workers. The military debacle is provoking mass outrage against the Zelensky regime, which treats workers' lives as expendable as it prosecutes a war based on imperialist geostrategic interests. Amid growing concern in the NATO ruling classes over the course of the war, this is even beginning to provoke coverage in pro-war media like France's *Le Monde* daily.

One Ukrainian writer, Stanislav Asseyev, whom *Le Monde* identified as close to Ukrainian military intelligence, admitted that masses of Ukrainians are deserting from the army. Citing the case of Serhiy Hnezdilov, a soldier who publicly announced on social media that he was deserting, Asseyev said: "It's a problem that has already gone beyond 100,000 people. We have an immense army of deserters who are wandering around the country. And Hnezdilov said: Let's stop this, because we are losing."

Asseyev added, "Soldiers are not blind. They see very well how part of society avoids mobilization orders, they see piles of cash going to bribes. … So once again, what is the solution for them? To desert."

Le Monde journalists also went to Kryve Ozero, a town with a pre-war population of 7,500. One resident, Lt. Colonel Ihor Hryb, committed suicide rather than take older soldiers from his poorly-armed, poorly-trained territorial defense unit into a fight with Russian army troops near Vuhledar. One resident of the town told the daily: "We only had machine guns but neither artillery nor armored vehicles. Ihor knew what that meant: Everyone was going to die." Another added, "We are not children. We understood right away that it was a one-way ticket."

In his unit, another resident of the town told *Le Monde,* "Ihor knew everyone. Some people knew him since childhood, others were old enough to be his father. But he knew he could never have come home if he had obeyed these orders."

Though Hryb's refusal to take his unit into battle has for now saved the lives of many townspeople, another told *Le Monde*, the losses are still massive: "At Kryve Ozero, we have lost 76 men. But look at how many wounded we have!"

This tears apart *Le Monde*'s claims that Ukraine has lost 58,000 men in the war and confirms reports—often dismissed as Russian propaganda in imperialist media—that hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have been killed. Indeed, even in a city where many soldiers' lives were spared, over 1 percent of the pre-war population has nonetheless been killed. But if 1 percent of Ukraine's pre-war population has died in the war, this would mean a staggering 420,000 deaths.

The way forward is the unification of Ukrainian and Russian workers and youth, together with their class brothers and sisters in the NATO coutnries, in a socialist movement against the NATO-Russia war. The necessary political basis of such a movement is the Trotskyist perspective of international socialist revolution and opposition to the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which paved the way for NATO imperialism to incite a fratricidal conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

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