

NATO-Ukrainian murder of Russian General Kirillov and the escalating global imperialist war

Andre Damon
18 December 2024

On Tuesday, the Ukrainian secret service assassinated Igor Anatolyevich Kirillov, the Russian lieutenant general in charge of its nuclear and chemical defense forces, in a terrorist bombing outside his home in Moscow.

Kirillov is the highest ranking member of any nuclear-armed military to have ever been assassinated. The murder was striking not only for its brazenness but for the degree to which the US and British media and political establishment have openly defended it.

The killing of a military leader outside of a battlefield in a terrorist bombing is, under international law, classified as an act of “perfidy” and is prohibited under the Geneva Conventions.

But this flagrant war crime was hailed by the British and American media. The *Times of London* called it a “legitimate act of defense” in a lead editorial, while the *Telegraph* called it “ingenious” and the *Wall Street Journal* “audacious.”

After former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev made a thinly veiled threat to retaliate against NATO officials and even the *Times* staff, UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy said, “I stand with the *Times*,” in what could only be viewed as an endorsement of the newspaper’s editorial position that the murder was “legitimate.” This declaration followed statements by UK and US officials effectively endorsing the murder.

The killing is but the latest in a series of extremely provocative measures taken by Ukraine, backed by the United States and NATO, with the intention of escalating the war in the weeks before the inauguration of incoming President Donald Trump on January 20.

Last month, the Biden administration and the government of UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer authorized Ukraine to carry out strikes using NATO weapons deep inside Russia, followed just days later by the beginning of strikes using American ATACMS ballistic missiles and British Storm Shadow cruise missiles.

The Kremlin responded to these actions by adopting a revised nuclear doctrine to classify attacks on Russia by non-nuclear states with the assistance of nuclear powers as attacks by those nuclear powers—effectively authorizing a potential Russian retaliation against NATO.

On November 21, the *New York Times* reported that the Biden administration was discussing allowing Ukraine to deploy nuclear weapons. The *Times* wrote, “Several officials even suggested that Mr. Biden could allow Ukraine to have nuclear weapons again, as it did before the fall of the Soviet Union.” Meanwhile, officials from Germany and France confirmed that they are actively discussing the deployment of European troops to Ukraine.

Russia responded by launching an intermediate-range ballistic missile armed with multiple reentry vehicles, which are capable of delivering nuclear missiles, on the city of Dnipro in Ukraine.

The aim of NATO’s provocative actions is to create “facts on the ground” ahead of the inauguration of Trump in one month.

Prior to the election, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre warned that Trump is a “fascist” who would be a “dictator on day one.” But the outgoing Biden administration has dropped all criticism of incoming US President Donald Trump’s stated aim of establishing a dictatorship in the United States.

Instead, its sole concern in the transition is to continue to escalate Washington’s wars all over the world, with its central priority being the escalation of the conflict with Russia.

Trump and prospective members of his administration have publicly criticized Biden’s authorization to strike deep inside Russia, as well as the killing of Kirillov. Sections of his administration have stated that they favor a negotiated settlement of the Ukraine war in order to focus US military efforts on the militarization of the Pacific in preparation for conflict with China.

Both the outgoing Biden and incoming Trump administrations share the goal of enforcing American hegemony and the dominance of the dollar through unrestrained military violence. Trump was the first American president to authorize the large-scale provision of lethal weapons to Ukraine in 2019, helping to transform Ukraine into a NATO proxy and provoking the Russian invasion of February 2022. In 2018, the Trump administration unveiled a national security strategy that declared, “Great power competition—not terrorism—is now the primary focus of US national security.”

A difference in the foreign policy of the two administrations has to do with packaging. While Biden falsely claims that Washington’s wars all over the world are driven by benevolent altruism, Trump has admitted that the US conducts wars in order to plunder natural resources, expressed most bluntly in his demand for the US to “take the oil” from Iraq.

Increasingly, the US political establishment and media are recasting the war in Ukraine in the Trumpist language of imperialist plunder. The tone for this shift was set by US Senator Lindsey Graham, who asserted in September, “They’re sitting on \$10 to \$12 trillion of critical minerals in Ukraine... I don’t want to give that money and those assets to Putin to share with China.”

In an essay published Wednesday in the *Washington Post*, columnist Marc A. Thiessen asked, “Does Trump want Putin to get Ukraine’s \$26 trillion in gas and minerals?”

Thiessen declared, “Ukraine is not only the breadbasket of Europe; it is also a mineral superpower, with some of the largest reserves of 117 of the 120 most widely used minerals in the world. Of the 50 strategic minerals identified by the United States as critical to its economy and national security, many of which are quite rare yet key to certain high-value applications, Ukraine supplies 22.”

He added, “The American people have already invested about \$183 billion to help Ukraine. ... Shouldn’t US taxpayers get a return on that investment? Do we want Ukrainian titanium going into American planes, or into Russian and Chinese fighter jets that will threaten the United States and its allies? Do we want Ukraine’s lithium and rare earths powering American-made electronics and electric vehicles, or Chinese ones?”

In an article in *Foreign Affairs* titled, “The Price of American Retreat: Why Washington Must Reject Isolationism and Embrace Primacy,” Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell declared that “The United States’ security and prosperity are rooted in military primacy.” He added, “The United States urgently needs to reach a bipartisan consensus on the centrality of hard power to US foreign policy.”

McConnell argues that the only way to dominate China—the stated central foreign policy aim of the Trump administration—is through a military victory over Russia. “Standing up to China will require Trump to reject the myopic advice that he prioritize that challenge by abandoning Ukraine.”

Whatever differences may exist over the relative priority of the European and Pacific theaters within the US political establishment, there is support within all factions of both the Democratic and Republican parties for expanding the decades-long effort by US imperialism to wage war all over the world to preserve and expand US global hegemony.

This reality was underscored with the overwhelming passage Wednesday by the US Senate of the National Defense Authorization Act—the largest military funding bill of any country in human history, which mandates the expansion and modernization of the US nuclear arsenal, alongside funding for military operations all over the world.

Whatever demagogic criticisms of Biden’s Ukraine policy Trump has made, the entire US political establishment is committed to a massive expansion of war all over the world, waged with the methods of terrorism, assassination and genocide pioneered in Israel’s US-funded war of extermination in Gaza.

These wars are to be paid for with a frontal assault on the social, economic and democratic rights of the working class, which Trump will immediately move to implement upon taking office. Plans are already being made for the slashing of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, the privatization of the US Postal Service, and the dismantling of all remaining workplace and environmental protections. These actions, which will pad the bank accounts of the financial oligarchy, will all be justified in the name of the “war effort.”

It is of vital importance to link the movement in the working class in defense of its social and democratic rights with the struggle against imperialist war on the basis of a socialist perspective of ending the capitalist system, which is the root cause of war and dictatorship.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact