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The political significance of the NATO-Ukrainian attack on Kursk



People gather at an apartment building damaged after shelling by the Ukrainian side in Kursk, Russia, Sunday, Aug. 11, 2024. [AP Photo]

Six days ago, Ukraine launched a military offensive against the Kursk region of Russia. In that time, several thousand troops have advanced as much as a dozen miles beyond the Russian border. Russia has, up to this point, been unable to repel the offensive, and advancing columns of Russian reinforcements have been destroyed in long-range strikes. On Monday, Russia began evacuations from Belgorod, another nearby border region, as Ukrainian forces claimed to have crossed the border there.

The Kursk offensive is of limited military effectiveness, but its political significance is substantial. It is an immense political humiliation for the Putin regime and a demonstration that NATO has no “red lines” in its escalation against Russia.

The United States, Germany and the European Union have endorsed the Ukrainian offensive, all the while claiming not to have been involved in its planning and coordination.

Such claims of NATO non-involvement are absurd. The attack comes just one month after the NATO summit in Washington, which formally transferred oversight of the arming and training of the Ukrainian army directly to NATO. Ukraine's Kursk offensive, using American and German tanks and long-range missiles, is in reality being coordinated from Washington, Berlin and London minute by minute.

Eighty-three years ago, at the start of Operation Barbarossa in June 1941, German tanks poured over the border of the Soviet Union. Today, German armored vehicles are once again driving into Russia, manned by Ukrainian forces that often display the same insignia, including swastikas and the double-sig rune used by Himmler's SS.

Two years after the start of Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi forces were decisively defeated in the largest land battle in history in the Kursk region of Russia.

Now, the *Economist*, the leading publication of British imperialism, has proclaimed the start of the "Second Battle of Kursk," hailing an offensive that falls on the exact month of the 81st anniversary of Hitler's defeat in that same region.

The attack on Kursk has demonstrated, in the words of Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, that "a significant part of the global community considers [Russia] a legitimate target for any operations and types of weapons."

It inevitably follows that if it is permissible for Ukraine to attack Russia using NATO weapons, it is also permissible for NATO troops to attack Russia directly.

The Biden administration's self-declared limitations on direct involvement in the war, one after another, have been systematically dismantled. In 2017, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the US first officially provided Ukraine with lethal weapons. Then came armored vehicles and tanks in 2023, and F-16 fighters and long-range missiles in 2024. Then came the authorization to use those weapons inside Russia. Now, Ukraine, using US and German armored vehicles, has directly launched a ground assault on Russia.

The next "red line" that NATO will cross could be the deployment of its own troops, including for a military offensive against Crimea.

The Ukrainian regime, which hails as its ideological leader Nazi collaborator and Holocaust perpetrator Stepan Bandera, has created the jumping-off point for the legitimization of a war to subjugate Russia. When last year the ambassadors of the major NATO powers, including Germany, joined with the entire Canadian parliament in

applauding the Nazi war criminal Yaroslav Hunka, they were expressing the fundamental political content of NATO's war against Russia.

The oligarchic regime in the Kremlin, which emerged out of the Stalinist bureaucracy's destruction of the USSR and restoration of capitalism, has no viable, let alone progressive, response to the drive by NATO to subjugate Russia.

On Sunday, the Atlantic Council think tank published a blog post assessing Russian President Vladimir Putin's response to the attack:

Ukraine's offensive is now posing serious questions about the credibility of Russia's saber-rattling and the rationality behind the West's abundance of caution. After all, the Ukrainian army's current invasion of Russia is surely the reddest of all red lines. If Russia was at all serious about a possible nuclear escalation, this would be the moment to make good on its many threats. In fact, Putin has responded by seeking to downplay the invasion while pretending that everything is still going according to plan.

Indeed, NATO is determined to cross every "red line" it had previously set to limit its own involvement in direct war with Russia; this now includes the "reddest of all red lines": direct attacks on Russian territory.

The recklessness of this policy is impossible to overstate. The Russian government has publicly proclaimed that an attack on Russian territory would be met with the use of nuclear weapons. The NATO powers are all but daring Russia to make good on this threat, an action that could spark not only full-scale war between Russia and NATO, but a thermonuclear exchange capable of destroying all of humanity.

The attack on Kursk has exposed the weakness of the bourgeois state that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Time and time again, Putin has insisted that the Russian oligarchy is a well-behaved, anti-communist "bourgeois" regime, desperate to do whatever is necessary to salvage what it can of its relationship with the United States.

As Putin plaintively explained in his interview with Tucker Carlson earlier this year:

We were trying to persuade them. We were saying, "Please don't. We are as bourgeois now as you are. We are a market economy, and there is no Communist Party power. Let's negotiate."

However, the imperialist powers are not interested in negotiation. Rather, they are determined to dominate and to compel Russia to accept American dictates. All of Putin's pleading for the imperialist powers to be "rational" only increases their recklessness. They are determined to militarily crush Russia, overturn its government and ultimately dissolve

the country, using Yugoslavia as a model, into a group of warring statelets that can be exploited by imperialism.

Putin himself is under enormous pressure from a substantial section of the Russian oligarchy that wants an agreement with NATO that will allow them to access their Western bank accounts and their yachts. This social layer fears the radicalization of the working class much more than it fears NATO.

At the same time, the continuous escalation on the part of the NATO powers can create the conditions in which the Putin government feels compelled to make good on its threats of military retaliation.

Putin no doubt believes that a possible Trump presidency would reduce the scale of direct US-NATO involvement in the war against Russia. But it was the Trump administration that first authorized direct US-NATO weapons sales to Ukraine that were so critical to the build-up to the present war. Regardless of the outcome of the US presidential election, US imperialism is determined to subjugate the whole of the former Soviet Union, no matter the cost in human lives.

The Kursk offensive is part of a global eruption of imperialist violence all over the world, targeting not just Russia, but China and Iran as well. On Monday, the US announced the deployment of a group of warships to the Middle East threatening Iran, making it clear that the present global military escalation is taking place worldwide.

The escalating NATO war against Russia demonstrates, once again, the full and disastrous consequences of the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, which marked the final betrayal by the Stalinist bureaucracy of the 1917 Russian Revolution. At the time, the proponents of dismantling the Soviet Union claimed that this would create the conditions for “peaceful coexistence” with the US and NATO. Imperialism, they claimed, was a myth invented by Lenin. Three decades later, it has become clear that imperialism is, indeed, very real, and it has selected Russia as a target for destruction.

There is no solution to the escalation of imperialist war outside of the building of a mass anti-war movement, based on the traditions of the October Revolution, uniting the workers of Europe, Asia, the Americas and the whole world in the struggle to overturn the capitalist system that is the root cause of imperialist war.

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