

Russia sends troops into East Ukraine, Biden announces sanctions

Clara Weiss
22 February 2022

Events in the war crisis over Ukraine between Russia and NATO overtook each other on Monday. The day began with news that two reconnaissance-sabotage units of the Ukrainian army had crossed into Russia's Rostov region and ended with Russian President Vladimir Putin ordering Russian troops to enter the East Ukrainian separatist republics of Donetsk and Lugansk which he had just recognized as "independent."

Amid a barrage of war propaganda in the Western media and belligerent speeches by US President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, fighting between the American-funded Ukrainian army and pro-Russian separatists in the East Ukrainian Donbass has escalated since Thursday. There have been thousands of violations of the ceasefire that was brokered in 2015.

The civil war erupted in the wake of the February 2014 coup in Kiev, which had been heavily funded and backed by the US and was effectively carried out by far-right forces like the Right Sector and the Azov Battalion. The conflict has already claimed over 14,000 lives and left at least 3.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance—almost a tenth of Ukraine's population.

Since Thursday, civilian infrastructure across Donetsk, including kindergartens and schools, has been subject to shelling. According to the separatists in Donetsk, one civilian was killed in Monday's shelling by the Ukrainian military.

On Friday, separatists in Donetsk and Lugansk initiated the mass evacuation of the civilian population to Russia, excluding men aged 18 to 55. So far, at least 49,000 people have reportedly arrived in Russia, most of them in the Rostov region. Kilometer-long lines of cars waiting to cross the border have been reported since Friday.

Up to 700,000 women, children and elderly people may be evacuated from Donetsk alone. With most of these people already completely impoverished before they were forced to flee, they are now faced with the loss of virtually all of their belongings and a catastrophic social and public health situation in Russia, where over 150,000 new COVID-cases

are being reported every single day.

As the fighting continued to escalate over the weekend, the separatist authorities called upon all men capable of carrying arms to take weapons into their hands.

On Monday afternoon Moscow time, it was reported that the Russian secret service FSB, along with troops from the interior ministry, opened fire and killed five Ukrainian soldiers, while taking one captive. Russian news had also reported on Friday that Ukrainian bombshells had exploded in Rostov near the border with Ukraine.

Also on Monday afternoon, Putin convened an extraordinary session of Russia's National Security Council, arguing that the situation in the Donbass had become "critical." The meeting was also attended by the heads of the separatist so called "People's republics" of Donetsk (DNR) and Lugansk (LNR). Both were formed by pro-Russian separatists in the wake of the 2014 coup in Kiev. At the meeting, one leading Russian official after another argued in favor of Russian recognition of these republics as "independent."

Late Monday evening Moscow time, Putin gave an hour-long address to the nation. Beginning with an anticommunist tirade in which he denounced the 1917 October Revolution and claimed that Ukraine was a "creation" of "Bolshevik, Communist Russia," Putin devoted much of the speech to glorifying the Tsarist Russian Empire and various Tsarist generals.

He pointed to the systematic encirclement of Russia by NATO, complaining that US President Bill Clinton responded "extremely coolly" when he asked him in 2000 whether or not the US would support Russia's accession to NATO. The Russian president then discussed at length the implications of the US-backed coup of 2014 for Russia, which, in his words, had turned Ukraine de facto into a "colony" and "puppet" of the US.

Putin noted that Ukraine's adoption of a new military strategy in March 2021 meant that the country was openly preparing for war with Russia. With the US and NATO ignoring Russia's demands for security guarantees and de

facto arming Ukraine, Russia, he said, had a “knife at its throat.” Putin also alleged that a “genocide” against Russians was taking place in East Ukraine and argued that the Kiev government has de facto ignored the Minsk Agreements of 2015.

On that basis, Putin claimed that recognizing the separatist territories of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk “People’s republics” was the only way to safeguard Russia’s security interests.

Right after the speech, Putin signed two decrees recognizing the DNR and LNR as “independent” and calling for the preparation of treaties of friendship between the republics and Russia. The decrees also stated that, until such an agreement would be signed, the Russian Ministry of Defense would provide troops to both republics “to safeguard peace.” Shortly thereafter, Putin gave the order to send Russian troops into Donetsk and Lugansk.

Putin’s speech led to the most severe collapse on the Russian stock market—by over 14 percent—since the 2008 world financial crisis. Since Monday was a holiday in the US, most of the sell-off was driven by European and regional, including Russian, investors. Some of Russia’s biggest companies and banks, including the state-owned oil company Rosneft and Sberbank, lost between 21 and 25 percent of their value. On international markets, the Brent oil price rose above \$97 per barrel, the highest price since 2014.

US President Biden immediately denounced Putin’s move as a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and signed a decree prohibiting any trade with the DNR and LNR. In the decree, he described the recognition of the DNR and LNR as an “an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.” Everyone who engages in trade with or donates to the authorities of the DNR and LNR will henceforth be banned from entering the US.

So far, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, who have been engaged in a year-long civil war with US-backed Saudi Arabia, have endorsed Russia’s recognition of the DNR and LNR. Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega indicated that he supported Putin’s decision but has not officially recognized the separatist republics.

US officials announced that more sanctions will be forthcoming on Tuesday. The EU and UK also announced severe sanctions, as did Japan and Australia.

In a brief address to the nation, Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky, who had already spoken with Biden, claimed, in clear defiance of his government’s saber rattling and official military strategy, that it was only interested in “peace.” He insisted that Putin’s recognition of the DNR and LNR constituted a threat to Ukraine’s territorial integrity and that Ukraine was entitled to “self-defense”

under these conditions.

Monday’s escalation comes after weeks in which the US and NATO recklessly ratcheted up tensions with Russia, including by sending 5,000 troops of the 82nd Airborne Division to Poland and 300 Javelin missiles to Ukraine, and unleashing a torrent of war propaganda in the media.

The unfolding war crisis is the culmination of the decades-long effort to encircle Russia and subjugate the entire former Soviet Union as part of the attempts of US imperialism to maintain its global hegemony.

Fundamentally, the drive to war is rooted in the decline of US imperialism and the profound crisis of the world capitalist system, which has been severely accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Sitting on top of a social powder keg, the US ruling class, in particular, has been driven into a war frenzy, desperate to find a path to divert the immense social tensions outward and close ranks within the ruling class.

The dynamics unleashed by these processes are rapidly spinning out of control. In its statement from February 14, the International Committee warned, “War with Russia in Ukraine, however it begins or whatever the course of its initial stages, will not be contained. It will follow an uncontrollably expansive logic. Every state in the region will be drawn into the conflict. The Black Sea, which laps across the shoreline of seven countries, will be transformed into a cauldron of escalating conflict, sweeping across Transcaucasia, the Caspian Sea region, Central Asia and beyond.”

Workers and youth must draw the necessary conclusions: the only way to fight against the threat of world war is by building a socialist anti-war movement and a revolutionary leadership within the working class.



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