

Hundreds reported dead in first day of Russia-Ukraine war

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Ukraine is in the grips of a full-scale war after Russia launched large-scale bombing raids early Thursday morning local time, in the biggest military operation by Russia since the Afghanistan war.

While it is not clear whether the Russian military has deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure, bombs have fallen on multiple residential complexes, killing and wounding civilians. Masses of people have sought refuge in bombing shelters and subway stations; others are desperately trying to flee the country.

According to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, 137 people, including 10 officers, have been killed, and 316 have been wounded. The Russian Defense Ministry has published no casualty numbers. The Ukrainian army claims to have destroyed 7 Russian planes, 7 helicopters and over 30 tanks and to have killed at least 450 Russian soldiers.

As of this writing, Russian troops are advancing on Kiev. Within hours after the beginning of the attack, the Russian army had taken Kiev's airport and parts of south Ukraine. They have also taken the area around the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster in 1986. Russia's Black Sea Fleet has reportedly also launched attacks in the Black Sea south of Odessa.

Reports of Russian ground troops invading from Belarus have been denied by both the Russian and Belarusian governments. The armed forces of the self-proclaimed "People's Republics" of Donetsk and Lugansk (Luhansk), which were formed in the wake of the US-backed far-right coup in Kiev in February 2014 and recognized as "independent" by Putin on Monday, have joined the Russian army in fighting the Ukrainian military. The Pentagon claims that Russia dropped 160 missiles on Ukraine in the first day of the war.

The Russian Defense Ministry declared on Thursday night that its "goals" for the day had been achieved, with over 80 military targets eliminated. In-fighting seems to be ongoing in almost every part of the country.

The Ukrainian government has mobilized the entire population, announcing that everyone would be given

weapons and announcing an amnesty for all those willing to fight. Far-right forces that have played a critical role in the 2014 coup and the war preparations over the past eight years have taken to arms, while former President Petro Poroshenko appears to have set up an independent military command center in Kiev to coordinate the capital's defense.

Newsweek published an article on February 24, indicating that US officials were expecting Ukraine to fall within 96 hours. Sources close to the Zelensky government indicated that they were not counting on holding up much longer. NATO has rejected calls by the Ukrainian government to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine, arguing that it would result in a direct confrontation with Russia.

In the night to Friday, Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky stated, "We don't fear talks with Russia. We don't fear speaking about security guarantees for our state. We don't fear speaking about a neutral status. But what kind of guarantees do we have for this [status] to be maintained? Which countries will give them [these guarantees] to us? We need to talk about the end of this invasion. We need to talk about a ceasefire."

In response to Russia's attack, the US and EU have announced far-reaching economic sanctions that target virtually the entire Russian banking sector and amount to all-out economic warfare. Russia's stock exchange was closed for most of Thursday, and the ruble plunged to historical lows. Other regional currencies, including Ukraine's Hryvnia and Kazakhstan's Tenge have also collapsed. A run on the banks began across Russia with banks reportedly running out of dollars by the evening. Ordinary people, who often only make a few hundred dollars a month, saw their meager savings shrink dramatically within hours. On European markets, gas prices rose by 60 percent.

In a clear indication that the Kremlin's war against Ukraine will be accompanied by class war at home, Putin's first step domestically after the beginning of the attack was to meet with the leaders of big business. Appealing to the oligarchs to understand his decision to go to war, he stated, "I see the task on the part of the government ... as providing

you with good conditions. To ensure more freedom. There can only be one answer [to the impact of the sanctions]: to provide more freedom for entrepreneurial activity.”

For the vast majority of the Russian population, which has been battered by skyrocketing food prices and a horrific surge in COVID-19 cases—Russia reported over 130,000 new cases on Thursday as the pandemic has already claimed up to 1 million lives in the country of 142 million—the outbreak of war has come as a complete shock. Putin gave his speech announcing the beginning of the war at 5:50 a.m. local time (9:50 p.m. EST), making it easier for the war mongerers in Washington to follow his moves than it was for ordinary people in Russia or Ukraine.

The hashtag #???????? (meaning “no to war” in Russian) was the number one trending hashtag in Russia on Twitter all day, with posts by many ordinary people and youth posting from Russia and Ukraine. One wrote, “I’m Russian. I’m scared of what our president does. All my dreams about life fade as long as war escalates. No one ever asked me or any other citizen if we wanted it. Ukraine is not an enemy, and I scorn the idea of war.” Another wrote, “Why are we being taught throughout our childhood: ‘You have to remember the war, so that the horrors of World War II, of the Great Patriotic War, won’t be repeated.’ And where is this memory now?”

Yet another wrote, “I don’t know who is to blame but I think that the people are not to blame. ... People don’t want war for territory. ... Don’t drag the people into affairs by the government. Please stop this.” A 15-year-old student wrote, “I want my grandmother to be able to afford food and medication, for my brother to be able to earn money for the family. For my friends and relatives to be able to just go online, and that their houses won’t be bombed. I want a future for my cousin who needs medication. I want peace.”

Some 2,000 people joined antiwar protests in Moscow, and several thousands joined a protest in St. Petersburg. Many smaller protests took place throughout the country. The Russian state has responded with a violent crackdown, reportedly arresting over 1,700 people.

The pro-US liberal opposition has organized several of these demonstrations as it has launched an aggressive campaign against the Putin regime over the war. Alexei Navalny, who has long been built up by the US and Berlin as a pro-imperialist critic to the Putin regime, released a statement against the war while standing trial on Thursday. A large number of prominent politicians and public figures, including Ksenia Sobchak, who has longstanding ties to Russia’s oligarchy and Putin himself, and journalists from state-run media like Russia Today and Tass, have signed an appeal against the war.

Workers must be warned: Far from representing a “peace”

faction within the oligarchy, these layers speak for sections of the oligarchy and upper middle class that seek a direct integration of Russia into NATO and a dismemberment of Russia, in alliance with imperialism. Just like the Putin regime itself, they have emerged out of the decades-long reaction by the Stalinist bureaucracy against the October Revolution of 1917 and its violent suppression of the Trotskyist opposition to Stalinism.

The bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 created the grounds for the decades-long imperialist encirclement of Russia and the escalating provocations by imperialism that have now provoked the Putin regime into this catastrophic war. Neither faction of the oligarchy that emerged from this counterrevolution has anything to offer to workers but war, austerity and repression.

The struggle of workers in Russia, Ukraine and everywhere against this war must be based on the principles of revolutionary internationalism and irreconcilable opposition to both imperialism and all factions of the oligarchy in Russia and Ukraine.

In its statement on the war, the International Committee of the Fourth International wrote: “The ICFI calls for an immediate end to the war. In opposing the invasion of Ukraine, we denounce the policies of US/NATO imperialism, whose claims to be defending democracy and human rights are blood-drenched with hypocrisy. ... The overwhelming sentiment in the working class throughout the world is opposed to war. ... This opposition, however, must be developed as a conscious political movement for socialism. This means the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties in every country.”



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