

The NATO-Russia conflict spirals out of control

Statement of the WSWS Editorial Board

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The war between Russia and Ukraine, now well into its third week, is rapidly and dangerously spiraling out of control, with both sides invoking “World War III” and the prospect of nuclear war.

History teaches that wars are often initiated without the combatants understanding where they lead. Now, under conditions in which both sides are taking major military losses, the military logic of escalation begins to take on a dangerous life of its own.

The Russian government of Vladimir Putin finds itself waging a war against NATO in all but name, with Ukraine as the battlefield. It is responding by ever more directly targeting NATO itself.

On Sunday, a Russian missile strike leveled a military training base just 15 miles from the border with Poland, a NATO ally. The base had been used by NATO personnel to train Ukrainian forces and had previously hosted international NATO drills. On the same day, the US State Department confirmed that an American journalist, Brent Renaud, had been killed in Irpin, outside the capital of Kiev. The head of Kiev's regional police claimed he was shot by Russian forces.

The strike on the military base came one day after Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov threatened to target NATO arms convoys. “We warned the United States that pumping Ukraine with weapons from a number of countries orchestrated by them is not just a dangerous move,” he said, “but an action that turns the corresponding convoys into legitimate targets.”

The Putin government, under threat from NATO’s relentless expansion, had expected that it could bring pressure upon Washington to negotiate a security agreement that would stop the increasingly open incorporation of Ukraine into the anti-Russia offensive alliance. Confronted with the Biden administration’s

belligerent refusal to guarantee Ukraine’s non-NATO status and the escalation of attacks on the predominantly Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine, Putin ordered the offensive. The Putin regime clearly underestimated the extent of Ukraine’s NATO-backed preparation for war, and the invasion has proved to be a disastrous miscalculation. The Kremlin is now seeking to offset initial setbacks by escalating the scale of its military operations.

As the conflict develops, the US and NATO are involving themselves ever more directly in the proxy war against Russia. The imperialist powers provoked the conflict with the idea that they could bog down Russia in an Afghanistan-like conflict, using the fact that Ukraine is not officially part of NATO to pursue the war without provoking a direct conflict between Russia and NATO.

However, as the war has developed, the fiction that NATO is not directly involved is increasingly impossible to maintain. Over 20 countries, including most members of NATO, have poured missiles, anti-aircraft systems, aircraft, vehicles and other weapons into Ukraine. The United States, having transferred over \$350 million in weapons to Ukraine in the span of just two weeks, authorized another \$200 million in military equipment over the weekend.

Ukraine reports that 20,000 foreign fighters have joined to fight on its side against Russia, while Voice of America reported that 3,000 Americans had volunteered to travel to Ukraine.

In response to the Russian strike, the United States said that it would shift its missile defense systems further east, with the Pentagon announcing the deployment of two additional Patriot missile batteries in Poland.

In the US media, there is an atmosphere of absolute

war hysteria, with demands for further escalation made without the slightest concern for the consequences. The prospect of a nuclear third world war, for decades viewed as a civilization-ending cataclysm, is now debated on the Sunday talk shows.

The Biden administration's extremely provocative actions are being denounced as insufficient by sections of both parties of the US political establishment.

Last week, 40 Republican US Senators published a letter demanding that the Biden administration take possession of Polish MiG-29 aircraft and fly them from a US Air Force base in Germany into Ukraine, an action that the Biden administration said could provoke Russian retaliation against NATO.

Significant sections of both political parties are demanding that the United States military impose a no-fly zone over parts of Ukraine by shooting down Russian aircraft, which the White House has warned would lead to a third world war.

In addition to the military logic itself, the war hysteria is being utilized to drive everything else, aside from the weather, from media coverage. The COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to kill more than 1,200 people in the US every day, is completely ignored. Boundless hypocrisy is the norm. While denouncing Russian actions in breathless terms, the media on Sunday ignored the brutal mass execution of 81 people in Saudi Arabia, a close US ally.

The escalating war between the US-NATO and Russia over Ukraine is at the same time a war against the entire working class. With surging prices causing real wages to plummet, workers are simply told to grit their teeth in the name of defending "freedom"—that is, the right of Ukraine to join the NATO military alliance. "NATO Needs More Guns and Less Butter," demanded a March 7 op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, calling for Social Security and Medicare to be gutted.

In just a matter of weeks, the war has set the stage for a massive realignment of government expenditures around the world. Last week, the United States passed the largest military budget in history, while slashing remaining funding for the COVID-19 pandemic. Germany has utilized the crisis to triple its military budget.

The war will, in other words, become the occasion for a massive reduction of living standards for the working class, in which real wage declines caused by runaway

inflation are accompanied by social austerity and court-mediated injunctions against strikes in the name of "national security."

The consequences of the war will be even more disastrous for the working classes of the former Soviet Union, which face the prospect of total economic collapse, mass unemployment, and even mass hunger. Workers in Russia and Eastern Europe are confronting the full consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The claim that the restoration of capitalism would create prosperity and some kind of peaceful coexistence between Russia and world imperialism is being exposed as a fantasy.

War has a logic of its own. While Russia may have underestimated the response of NATO to the invasion, and NATO may have underestimated the response of Russia to its provocations, the working class cannot underestimate the danger of the crisis spiraling into a world war involving the use of nuclear weapons.

Whatever the developments in the short term, there is no way out of this crisis within the framework of capitalist politics. Only one force can stop the looming catastrophe: the international working class, united in a struggle against imperialism, militarism, the historically obsolete nation-state system, and the capitalist social order.



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