

Amid deepening crisis of Putin regime, US steps up regime-change operation

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Eight months into its disastrous war in Ukraine, the Putin regime is facing a severe political crisis.

The mobilization of 300,000 reservists in response to a massive military debacle in northeastern Ukraine in September has aggravated an already far-reaching socioeconomic crisis while escalating frictions within the ruling elites and state apparatus.

To avoid being mobilized, more privileged layers of the middle class have left the country in a panic, with reports suggesting that as many as 400,000 men have fled to neighboring countries. In an indication of the social layer involved, the German magazine *Spiegel* ran a portrait of two young men involved in a bitcoin company who made it to Georgia under the headline “Latte Macchiato in Tiflis.” Prior to their flight, they had each been earning \$5,000 a month in Russia, more than many workers make in an entire year.

The vast majority of the Russian working population, by contrast, is left to face the devastating economic fallout from both the economic warfare by the imperialist powers and the mobilization drive. Those drafted have to pay for their own uniforms, which can cost up to \$3,000, and first-aid kits. The mobilization of thousands of working-age men will also leave their families without the main income earners of the household.

The ongoing military route of Russian forces in Ukraine is a result both of the imperialist buildup of the Ukrainian army into a formidable, modern fighting force, and the disastrous miscalculations of the Kremlin which launched the invasion of Ukraine in February believing that it could force the imperialist powers to the negotiating table. Instead, NATO has used the provoked invasion as the welcome pretext to launch a full-scale war against Russia, in which the Ukrainian armed forces are but a proxy.

Already, tens of thousands of Russian soldiers are estimated to have been killed and wounded. Media reports indicate that in the North Caucasian republic of Dagestan,

where a particularly large number of men had signed up as contractors with the Russian army to escape poverty, virtually every single village has reported battlefield dead.

As one military debacle has followed another—with Russia losing more territory over the past week in the very regions it now seeks to annex—the Ministry of Defense and general staff have come under almost constant fire from military figures and politicians, including Russian President Vladimir Putin himself.

The head of the Chechen republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, openly attacked the Ministry of Defense in the aftermath of the fall of Lyman this weekend. Kadyrov declared that he could not understand “what the Ministry of Defense is reporting to the commander-in-chief,” adding that “more radical measures, including the deployment of low-yield nuclear weapons” should be taken. Shortly after these statements, Putin promoted Kadyrov to the rank of colonel general, his second promotion in the military ranks this year.

On Wednesday, General Andrei Kartapolov, who is the current head of the State Duma’s Committee for Defense and the former deputy defense minister, demanded that the Ministry of Defense “stop lying” about the state of the war. He warned that their ongoing “lies” would make the population lose confidence in the Kremlin.

He then compared the severity of the situation to the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in World War II, stating: “Today the enemy is on our soil as well. And I’m not even talking about the newly acquired subjects of the Russian Federation [in East Ukraine]. Practically all the border villages of the Belgorod region have been destroyed. Our city of Valuiki [about 15 kilometers off the Russian-Ukrainian border] is under constant fire.”

On Thursday, Kirill Stremousov, the deputy governor of the Kherson region in southern Ukraine, which Russia is now annexing, attacked Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, encouraging him to kill himself. Stremousov said, “Many

people are saying that as an officer, the defense minister could simply shoot himself for being the one who let things get to this state.”

On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin joined the public attacks on the Ministry of Defense, blaming the military leadership for “mistakes” made during the mobilization drive. Contrary to Putin’s initial announcement that only those who have combat experience would be mobilized, thousands of Russians, including many who are elderly, sick or fathers of many children, received draft notices even though they had been promised to be exempted.

Thousands are now reportedly being sent home after having received draft notices “by mistake.” Media reports on Thursday indicate that regional governors have initiated a purge of lower-ranking military personnel responsible for overseeing mobilization in the provinces.

Since the beginning of the war, Russian generals and top officials of the Ministry of Defense have barely appeared in public. The Russian press now speculates that the public criticism of the Ministry of Defense by the Kremlin could be the precursor to a significant reshuffle of the military leadership.

As frictions within the Russian elites and state apparatus are emerging into the open, Washington and its allies in the Russian and Ukrainian oligarchy have clearly stepped up their efforts at a regime change in Moscow.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky notably responded to Putin’s move to annex the four regions in East Ukraine by insisting that there would be no more negotiations with Russia as long as Putin was president. The Ukrainian government has since issued a decree, formally banning any negotiations by Kiev with the Kremlin under Putin.

On September 30, the day of Putin’s annexation speech, the *Washington Post* published a lengthy op-ed by the imprisoned Alexei Navalny, the figurehead of the pro-NATO so-called liberal opposition to the Putin regime. In the piece, Navalny effectively called for NATO to adopt regime change in Russia as the official strategic goal of this war.

Navalny’s calls for the institution of a “parliamentary democracy” in Russia as the outcome of such a regime change are, of course, no less a fraud than the “bombing for democracy” narrative that served as the basis for virtually every US war in the Middle East and North Africa in the past decades. The result of this imperialist operation would be even more disastrous, leading to the carve-up and a series of civil wars in the largest country in

the world, with a large, multiethnic population of over 140 million and the world’s second largest nuclear arsenal.

With his usual bluntness, John Bolton, a leading figure in the US national security establishment first under President George W. Bush and then Donald Trump, spelled out the critical role of the Russian military in what he openly described as a “coup.” In a piece this week, Bolton wrote: “It is from the colonels and one-star generals, and their civilian-agency equivalents, where the most-likely co-conspirators to take matters into their own hands. These are the decision-makers whom the dissidents must identify, persuade and support to facilitate regime change.”

Ultimately, the social layers that the imperialist powers base themselves on in their regime change operation are the same social layers that the oligarchic Putin regime is based on as well: the oligarchy, the state and military apparatus and layers of the upper middle class.

Like the Putin regime itself, its opponents in the ruling class and state have emerged out of the Stalinist reaction against the October revolution which culminated in the restoration of capitalism and destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991. While the liberal opposition is advocating a direct alignment with US imperialism, they share with the Putin regime a deep-rooted fear and hatred of the working class.

Workers must respond to this immense crisis and the war by developing their own, independent opposition to the Putin regime. This requires unequivocal opposition to the machinations of the imperialist powers and their proxies in the Russian oligarchy and state apparatus, and the building of a socialist leadership in the working class, that is, a Russian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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