The Ukrainian “counter-offensive”: A new stage in the US-NATO war against Russia

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The US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine is entering a new stage this week, with reports of a significant increase in fighting along a broad front Monday and enormous casualties.

The Russian Defense Ministry reported on its official Telegram channel that Russian forces countered a Ukrainian offensive on the Vremevka outpost in South Donetsk, which is currently controlled by Russia. It stated that over 1,500 Ukrainian soldiers were killed and that Russia seized 28 tanks, including eight German-made Leopard tanks.

Russia also reported an offensive of Ukrainian troops toward the south, against the territory along the coast of the Sea of Azov that connects Crimea and the Donbas, both held by Russia or pro-Russian forces since 2014. A Russian-appointed official in the city of Zaporizhzhia said that the fighting in the south involved extensive shelling and strikes by Ukraine using British-French Storm Shadow missiles.

It is apparent that Monday’s operations mark the beginning of the long anticipated “summer counter-offensive.” While there is, at present, limited information, one thing can be said with certainty: The fighting will result in a vast increase in the number of deaths, both Ukrainian and Russian.

In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* Sunday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky acknowledged that “a large number of soldiers are going to die,” but “we are going to do it.” Reliable estimates place the death toll of Ukrainians in the war so far at 300,000.

Every aspect of the war, including the “counter-offensive,” is being directed by the Biden administration, the Pentagon and NATO. It is being led by forces trained by NATO and armed with NATO weapons, including depleted uranium shells supplied by the UK. Operationally, it is organized from Washington and the Pentagon. The masses of Ukrainians are being exploited as cannon fodder. Among the first divisions thrown into the battle, many are raw draftees with little or no training.

The US and the NATO powers are determined to inflict a Russian defeat, with dreams of a military parade of NATO troops in the streets of Moscow. The *Financial Times* wrote on Monday that “there has been a notable change of tone among senior western officials, who have appeared increasingly skeptical about Russian military capabilities. Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, last week made a clear case for an outright Ukrainian victory based on ‘territorial integrity’ [that is, retaking all territory presently controlled by Russia] in a speech that also disparaged Russia’s military ‘as the second-strongest in Ukraine.’”

The FT also cited comments by Ben Wallace, the UK defense secretary, that Ukraine could take back Crimea as part of the offensive. “What we’ve seen on the battlefield is that, if you punch Russian forces in the wrong place, they’ll actually collapse,” he said.

Such statements combine propaganda with self-delusion. The Ukrainian military has been bled white over the past 15 months. It is entirely reliant on the US and NATO, not only to provide training and weaponry, but increasingly the manpower necessary for escalating the war.

The operations in Ukraine are only one part of a barely disguised, undeclared war between NATO and Russia, which is expanding in intensity and geographical scope.

Developments on the ground in Ukraine have been timed to coincide with a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Oslo, Norway late last week. This meeting itself was to prepare a full NATO war summit next month in Vilnius, Lithuania, only a short drive from the Russian border. Behind closed doors, the leaders of the NATO powers are discussing and implementing the next stage in the escalation.

Already, Ukraine, operating under the direction of the US, has launched drone strikes targeting Moscow, begun shelling Russian cities, and organized incursions into Russian territory, using vehicles and equipment provided by the US and its NATO allies. Poland has become directly involved in the conflict, with members of the so-called “Polish Volunteer Corps” of Polish citizens participating in cross-border raids from Ukraine into Russia.

An article in the *Washington Post* (“Defend ‘every inch’ of NATO territory? New strategy is a work in progress”), published Monday, opens with a description of French paratroopers being dropped into Estonia, which borders Russia and is only 150 km from St. Petersburg. The *Post* notes that the French war exercises in Estonia are “part of a stepped-up rehearsal of what it would take to reinforce a [NATO] battle group” in the country.

Speaking of what can only be described as a massive military mobilization, the newspaper writes, “NATO has bolstered its eastern flank in part by establishing battle groups in four additional countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia,” with 10,000 troops across eight battle groups. Dozens of ships and hundreds of planes, along with ground-based air defense, have been sent to countries on Russia’s border, particularly the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

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War games are taking place currently throughout Europe, including the massive “Defender Europe 2023” exercise, which began on April 22 and involves 26,000 troops from the US and its allies. The final component of the operations, “Saber Guardian 23,” began last week and is centered on the Black Sea, to the south of Ukraine. It involves soldiers and sailors from Albania, Bulgaria, Belgium, France, Greece, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and the United States.

Given the statements of leading US and NATO officials that they are committed to the military defeat of Russia, the Putin government will be compelled to interpret all these actions as possible preparations for NATO incursions into Russian territory. The purpose of all these operations is to support the Ukrainian offensive by distracting Russian military commanders from exclusive focus on the Ukrainian front and compelling them to divert forces to other border regions.

In the capitals of the NATO powers, a mood of reckless hysteria prevails. Over the weekend, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, confronted by protesters at a gathering of his Social Democratic Party outside of Berlin, unleashed a Hitlerian rant against Russia and denounced Putin as a “murderer” and a “warmonger.”

The White House has rejected calls for a ceasefire or negotiated settlement to the conflict that does not include full capitulation by Russia. Encouraged by Russia’s failure to respond to each escalation, the Biden administration has concluded that there is no “red line” that it cannot cross.

In an article published under the headline “Biden Administration Shrugs Off Ukraine’s Attacks in Russia,” the *New York Times* wrote on Monday that the White House has discarded the pretense of discouraging direct attacks in Russia by Ukraine, using US-supplied weaponry. “Behind closed doors,” the *Times* wrote, “senior administration officials have seemed even less fazed. ‘Look, it’s a war,’ one senior Pentagon official said last Thursday. ‘This is what happens in a war.’”

In an indication of the recklessness that pervades ruling circles, the *Times* added:

> U.S. officials say that while the threat of nuclear escalation is not gone, Ukraine’s cross-border operations are not the type of action that is likely to provoke the use of a nuclear device. American intelligence officials have said they believe Russia would use a tactical nuclear device only if Mr. Putin’s hold on power was threatened, its military began to completely collapse in Ukraine or it faced the loss of Crimea, which Russian forces seized in 2014.

However, all the conditions listed—unseating or killing Putin, imposing a massive military defeat on Russia and retaking Crimea—are part of the US-NATO war aims in the conflict. The position of US military planners is that nothing, not even the prospect of nuclear war, can be allowed to “deter” the actions of the US and NATO.

As for the Putin government, which represents a faction of the Russian oligarchy, its “special military operation” in Ukraine was based on the conception that a show of force would create the basis for a negotiated settlement that recognized Russia’s interests. This neo-Stalinist conception of “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism, modified under the new conditions of capitalist restoration, has resulted in a political disaster.

The working class of Russia, Ukraine and Eastern Europe confronts the full consequences of the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR. Not only are Russians and Ukrainians fighting a fratricidal war on territory that was once part of the Soviet Union, but the Putin regime is entangled in an ever-expanding war for which it has no solution.

Confronting NATO’s relentless escalation, Putin is under increasing pressure from sections of the military for a more drastic response. But even if Russia is able to defeat the present counter-offensive, the conflict will not come to an end.

The US-NATO war against Russia is evolving rapidly into a protracted struggle that is increasingly violent, bloody and global in character. The conflict has entered into the gravitational field of total war—that is, a war of unlimited destruction, complete disregard for life, and to which all social needs of the mass of the people are subordinated. Its corollary is the direct assault on the working class in all countries and the obliteration of democratic rights.

It is to be expected that the news reports on developments on the battlefield attract immense attention. But exclusive focus on the military operations of NATO, its Ukrainian proxy and the Russian regime is a mistake. Of far greater political significance in determining the direction of the war and the fate of humanity is the development of the international class struggle, armed with a conscious revolutionary socialist strategy.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties and Groups will expand their global campaign to build a mass anti-war movement of the working class and student youth.

The working class must respond to the “counter-offensive” in Ukraine with its own international offensive against war in Russia, Ukraine, Europe, the United States and throughout the world. The same capitalist crisis that produces war also creates the objective basis for such a movement. This year has already seen mass strikes and demonstrations of millions of workers, fueled by the soaring cost of living and extreme exploitation.

The urgent need is to connect the developing movement of the working class with the fight against imperialism, which is dragging mankind toward the apocalypse of nuclear war. It is necessary to combine opposition to militarism and war with opposition to inequality, exploitation and the capitalist system that is the root of all the crises confronting mankind.

We urge all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to become active in building this movement against war and for socialism.

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