

Ukraine continues strikes on Russian city of Belgorod

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Ukraine carried out another series of rocket strikes on the Russian city of Belgorod on Friday, resulting in at least two civilians with shrapnel injuries.

Friday's attack marked the seventh consecutive day that Ukraine had carried out strikes on Belgorod, which is located just 25 kilometers from the Ukraine border and is often characterized by Ukrainian nationalists as "historic Ukrainian lands." The attacks have been described as "indiscriminate" by Russian authorities and have resulted in the deaths of a number of Russian civilians. A number of Belgorod residents have begun leaving the city due to the ongoing attacks.

On December 30, Ukraine carried out its largest attack to date on Belgorod, resulting in the deaths of at least 25 civilians who were celebrating the New Year at the city's main square. More than 100 were wounded and five of those killed were children, according to Belgorod authorities.

In response, Russia called an emergency UN Security Council meeting last Sunday, where the Russian ambassador to the UN Vasily Nabenzya called the strikes, "a terrorist attack by the Kyiv regime against a civilian city."

"In order to increase the number of casualties of the terrorist attack they used cluster munitions," Nabenzya claimed.

The strikes mark a significant escalation in the targeting of the Russian civilian population and attacks inside Russian territory by NATO-backed Ukraine. Already, the NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine has resulted in an estimated 400,000 Ukrainian military deaths and tens of thousands of Russian dead.

The Ukrainian government has yet to comment directly on the attacks. Russian President Vladimir Putin has sworn the attacks "would not go unpunished."

According to Russian media reports, the attacks were ordered personally by Zelensky and carried out by the head of Ukrainian military intelligence (HUR), Kiril Budanov, and the neo-Nazi Kraken regiment, which was formed by veterans of the better-known fascist Azov regiment. The Kraken regiment forms part of the HUR and thus operates separately from the regular Ukrainian Armed Forces.

This suggests that the attacks were likely carried out outside the command of the regular Ukrainian Armed Forces, led by General Valery Zaluzhnyi, who has been embroiled in a public conflict with Zelensky over the war's future direction. Zaluzhnyi publicly warned in November in the British *Economist* that the war was at a "stalemate." His statements were quickly contradicted by Zelensky and his cabinet, who promptly canceled the upcoming 2024 presidential elections, in which Zaluzhnyi would have been his main rival.

On Friday, Budanov, the head of Ukrainian military intelligence, appeared on Ukrainian television and claimed that Ukrainian special forces had carried out another raid in the Belgorod region and injured a "rather iconic person" within the Russian military. Budanov, who was reportedly favored as Zelensky's pick to replace former Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov, is clearly being empowered by Zelensky to carry out an adventurist military campaign.

Over the past year, Budanov's military intelligence service has been central to a series of drone attacks, including on Moscow and the Kremlin, and incursions into Russian territory that have been spearheaded by fascist forces. A year ago, a picture circulated of Budanov in his office with a map of Russia, carved up between different powers, behind his desk.

The United States and the European imperialist

powers have defended the attacks despite the civilian casualties. British envoy Thomas Phipps cynically blamed Moscow for all civilian deaths as a result of the war.

“There are hundreds of thousands of Russian soldiers in Ukraine. There is not a single Ukrainian soldier in Russia. If Russia wants someone to blame for the deaths of Russians in this war, it should start with President Putin,” Phipps said.

As the 30,000 dead civilians in the Gaza genocide—and the millions of dead in the US wars in the Middle East—demonstrate, Western imperialism has no qualms about indiscriminate mass murder as long as it serves their interests. According to the UN, more than 10,000 civilians, including more than 560 children, have been killed and over 18,500 have been injured since Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

While Russian attacks against Ukrainian cities that have resulted in civilian casualties are quickly picked up as headline news in Western media and condemned as war crimes, not a word is said against the Israeli government slaughter of over three times as many civilians within just three months, carried out with weapons supplied by the US.

After the disastrous failure of the NATO-orchestrated “counteroffensive” in 2023 and the deaths of over 125,000 Ukrainian soldiers in just a few months time with no territorial gains, the Zelensky government is now clearly resorting to provocative attacks on both military and civilian targets in order to elicit a stronger Russian response and in turn maintain imperialist backing for the war.

Already, the logic of the war, which de facto is waged between NATO and Russia, is extending well beyond Ukraine. On Friday, US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby responded to the increasing volley of missile attacks by Russia with unsubstantiated claims, suggesting that Russia was now using missiles and ballistic launchers supplied by North Korea.

“The most effective response to Russia’s horrific violence against the Ukrainian people is to continue to provide Ukraine with vital air defense capabilities and other types of military equipment,” Kirby said. “Iran and the DPRK [North Korea] are standing with Russia. Ukrainians deserve to know that the American people and this government will continue to stand with them,”

Kirby added, indicating that the Ukraine war is being viewed as a precursor to a much larger world war by the American ruling class.

While provocatively striking inside Russia, the Ukrainian government is also doubling down on its efforts to mobilize yet another half-million Ukrainians for the continuation of the war.

With a reported death toll of at least 400,000, Ukraine is in dire need of both soldiers and ammunition. Prior to the Christmas holiday, Zelensky announced that the Ukrainian military would conscript 500,000 soldiers to continue the war and later submitted a draft law to parliament to take up the issue.

According to Ukrainian news outlet New Voice, General Zaluzhnyi told Ukrainian parliament during a meeting of the National Security Council, “I need people. The Russians have already called up 400,000 and are preparing several hundred thousand more. And who do I have?” Zaluzhnyi added, “There will be 80 days of training for each person mobilized. But give me people.”

The Ukrainian media is reporting that the mobilization has effectively begun. Viktor Yahun, a leading figure in the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), which has played the central role in cracking down on political opposition to the war and the Zelensky regime, told Espresso TV that “mobilization must be total” and that had to be a “total check of who and where” everyone is. “If a person has not passed the military medical commission and has not provided documents proving that he or she is working for the defense, not the economy, all the rest are excuses.”

Yahun then demanded that those who refuse to serve in the armed forces be deprived of their citizenship: “I would deprive of citizenship those people who say they do not want to fight. If you don’t want to fulfill your duties, then what rights can you have?”



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