

Russia in the aftermath of the Crocus City Hall attack

The danger of the imperialist carve-up of the former Soviet Union and the tasks of the working class

Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists

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The terrorist attack on March 22 in the Crocus City concert hall near Moscow has shocked not only the population of Russia, but also the rest of the world. The barbaric attack killed at least 144 people and injured nearly 700.

The Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists expresses its sincere condolences to the families of the victims. We denounce the attack which bears the imprint of NATO and its proxy regime in Kiev. But we also oppose the reactionary response by the Russian oligarchy to the attack: Playing into the hands of the imperialist powers which seek to foment a regime change and civil war, the Russian parliament and far-right oligarchs have instigated a pogrom-like atmosphere against immigrants in Russia.

In order to prevent a disaster, the working class must intervene in the crisis on an independent basis. This requires a political understanding of the historical impasse confronting the working class as a result of the Stalinist destruction of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism.

A terror attack, made in Washington and Kiev

Everything about the attack in the country's capital indicates that those who perpetrated it acted as mercenaries. The four captured terrorists were all young migrant laborers from Tajikistan, a desperately impoverished former Soviet republic in Central Asia. Two of them had been trained in Turkey just weeks prior. They were to receive 500,000 rubles, a bit over \$5,400 for their act. Russian media reports indicate that the terrorists carried out the slaughter while being on drugs, aimed at reducing anxiety.

The instant denials of involvement by the Ukrainian government and the White House have no credibility.

The pro-NATO media echoes these denials by pointing out that the Afghanistan-based terrorist organization ISIS-K (Khorasan) has claimed responsibility for the attack. If true, this only reinforces the all but evident conclusion that these four individuals acted on behalf of US and Ukrainian intelligence. ISIS-K, like its predecessor ISIS, is largely a product of US imperialism. It is known to include US-trained intelligence and military personnel that had earlier fought for NATO in Afghanistan, and began to join ISIS-K after the US troop withdrawal in 2021 to fight against the now ruling Taliban regime.

Even more than the technical aspect of the terrorist attack, the evaluation of the political context and NATO's strategy in the war against Russia suggests direct involvement by Kiev and Washington. The situation on the

front has become nothing short of catastrophic for Ukraine. It is suffering from a severe shortage of men and ammunition and continues to lose territory to Russian forces.

In response to the recent, significant military setbacks, Kiev and its imperialist backers are responding by escalating the war on two fronts: First, through ever more direct military intervention in Ukraine, including the sending of NATO troops by France. And by opening up a second front inside Russia to destabilize the Putin regime.

Terrorist attacks and the mobilization of various fascist elements have, in fact, long formed an important part of imperialism's war against Russia. This includes ongoing and evermore brazen bombings of the Russian Belgorod region; the car bombing of far-right Putin supporters like Daria Dugina; the terrorist attack on the Kerch Bridge, and the bombing of the Nord Stream gas pipeline.

Just days before the Crocus City Hall attack and in the midst of the Russian presidential election, neo-Nazi forces launched an incursion of Russian territory involving tanks. The *New York Times* praised these attacks as "daring," expressing the hope that they would "undermine the sense of stability in Russia and divert the country's military resources from Ukraine." The neo-Nazi forces behind these incursions, as the *Times* acknowledged, "were openly backed by Ukraine's military intelligence." Using similar language, the *Times* gloated days after the Crocus City Hall attack that it constituted "a blow to Mr. Putin's aura as a leader for whom national security is paramount."

As the WSWs wrote in a March 25 perspective on the events at Crocus City Hall, the US and NATO are pursuing three goals:

First, to embolden opposition to the Putin regime within the oligarchy and state apparatus; second, to provoke a military response by the Kremlin that can serve as the pretext for a further escalation of the war by NATO; and third, to foster ethnic and religious tensions within Russia that would destabilize the regime and facilitate the carve-up of the entire region by the imperialist powers.

The crisis of the Putin regime

Already, the attack has emboldened both NATO-backed forces and the ultra-right faction of the Russian oligarchy and state apparatus under the

Putin regime.

One such NATO-backed oppositionist in the oligarchy is Ilya Ponomaryov, who has lived in Kiev since 2015. Ponomaryov is also a long-time friend of the ex-oligarch and NATO-backed oppositionist Mikhail Khodorkovsky. In a recent interview, Ponomaryov praised the terrorists as “comrades from Tajikistan” who had confirmed his earlier “prediction” that Moscow could relatively easily be seized militarily.

Ponomaryov’s comments are significant: he has been an important figure behind the incursions of Russian territory, the drone attacks and the development of a counter-insurgency within Russia. Ponomaryov openly advocates an overthrow of the Putin regime and the carve-up of Russia along ethnic lines, based on mobilizing sections of the state apparatus. From Kiev, Ponomaryov is overseeing operations of the neo-fascist Russian Volunteer Corps and the Freedom of Russia Legion, which have spearheaded the incursions into Russian territory.

Meanwhile, far-right oligarchs inside Russia have responded to the attack by demanding that the Putin regime escalate the war and crack down on immigrants. The billionaire Konstantin Malofeev, founder of the openly reactionary and religious Tsargrad channel, wrote that “a second front has been opened up against Russia” by the “Anglo-Saxons” with the aim of dividing and subjugating the country. He continued, “But we are not a British colony, not a banana republic. We are Great Russia, heir to the Empire of the Third Rome. ... We have become the largest state in the history of mankind thanks to the unique imperial spirit of the Russian people. We have fought and will fight to the victorious end with our real enemies in Washington and London.”

In the same piece, Malofeev denounced the terrorists as “four filthy drug addicts” and wrote that the attack had “made the darkest warnings about the threat posed by ‘labor’ immigrants from Central Asia to Russia’s national security come true.”

The Russian parliament (Duma) and police have also helped create a pogrom-like atmosphere against immigrants. Russia is home to a Muslim population of 14 million to 20 million and an estimated 17 million migrant laborers, most of them from Central Asia and the Caucasus.

In a clear encouragement of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim violence, the four terrorist suspects were demonstrably tortured and violently beaten before being dragged into court. In the press, ultra-right chauvinists are demanding the return of the death penalty.

The Duma has quickly passed two anti-immigrant bills: One will limit the time migrant workers can stay in the country to two years, and another one abolishes paid maternity leave for migrant families. Putin added more to the fire by declaring that 2023 allegedly saw a 75 percent increase of “crimes” by “illegal” immigrant workers. The government, Putin announced, would develop “preemptive anti-criminal measures in the area of migration.”

Immediately following the arrest of the perpetrators, the estimated 1 million Tajik workers in Russia were advised not to leave their homes in the evenings. In Blagoveshchensk, a store owned by Tajik citizens was set on fire. In Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities, large-scale anti-immigrant campaigns have begun in apartment buildings and factories.

Human rights groups have described the indiscriminate beatings and torture of detained immigrants in St. Petersburg. On social media, lists with the names of Tajik cab drivers have been circulated to encourage a boycott. As one immigrant who was violently beaten up told a newspaper: “We are the most defenseless. I did not even go to the police because I’m scared. There they beat me, it hurts and is denigrating, but when I go to the police they might also arrest me.” The Tajik Ministry of Labor has reported that an atmosphere of “fear” and “panic” prevails among Tajik immigrants has prompted many to flee Russia.

The YGBL emphatically rejects this promotion of anti-immigrant sentiments. It stands in the tradition of the Great Russian chauvinism employed both by the tsar and then the Stalinist regime against the

working class. Under the tsar, antisemitism was systematically whipped up by the government to divide the revolutionary movement of the working class. Stalinism also resorted to national chauvinism, including the promotion of outright xenophobia and antisemitism, to disorient the working class and mobilize right-wing forces in support of the bureaucracy. Similarly, today, the promotion of anti-immigrant chauvinism is fundamentally directed against the working class, and aimed at preempting its unification across ethnic, religious and national boundaries.

Well aware of the imperialist aim of instigating national divisions within the country, Putin has been overall more careful in his public statements than figures like Malofeev and continues to stress that Russia is a multi-national and multi-religious country. Nevertheless, he is compelled to accommodate the far-right elements in the oligarchy and state apparatus because of the very nature and historical origins of his regime, its hostility to the working class, and its ever greater reliance on the whipping up of Great Russian nationalism.

As we explained in our statement on the recent presidential elections, Vladimir Putin is a Bonapartist figure whose regime emerged out of the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. The principal function of his regime consists, above all, in the preservation of the privileges of the tiny stratum of oligarchs that has emerged as the new ruling class of Russia through the looting of Soviet state property. In the words of Trotsky,

By Bonapartism we understand such a regime when the economically dominant class ... finds itself forced, in the interests of preserving its property, to tolerate over itself the uncontrolled command of a military-police apparatus crowned by a “savior”. Such a situation is created in periods of particular aggravation of class contradictions: Bonapartism is intended to keep them from exploding. (Leon Trotsky, “More on Bonapartism,” *Bulletin of the Opposition*, No. 43, April 1935).

To preempt this “explosion” of class tensions, Putin is desperately seeking to mediate between the working class and the oligarchy, between the different factions of the oligarchy, and between the national and economic interests of the oligarchy and the interests of Western imperialism. But the ever more aggressive offensive by imperialism and its fueling of internecine struggle within the oligarchy, as well as the development of the class struggle, make this balancing act ever more tenuous. Within the oligarchy, Putin is under fire from all sides. The pressure on him to either escalate the war, capitulate completely to imperialism or be overthrown in a regime-change operation is growing by the day.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the imperialist drive to subjugate the region

The historical impasse confronting the working class can only be understood in the context of the Stalinist reaction against the October Revolution of 1917, which culminated in the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union. While Putin has initiated the invasion of Ukraine with an attack on the October Revolution and Vladimir Lenin, the disastrous course of the war has, in fact, confirmed that the revolution provided the only viable solution to the great historical problems confronting the masses of that region.

The strategy of the Putin regime to deploy military pressure to force a

deal with the imperialist powers has failed. Every attempt by the Kremlin to reach a settlement is interpreted by NATO as weakness and exploited. And now that the proxy forces of NATO in Ukraine are facing a military debacle, the response by the imperialist powers has been to open up another front in the war within Russia itself, and to prepare the sending of NATO troops into Ukraine. One “red line” after another has been dropped. NATO is at war with Russia, the second-largest nuclear power in the world, in all but name.

Underlying this seemingly irrational and crazed escalation of the war by the imperialist powers are profound historical and economic driving forces.

The destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a new period of imperialist wars and social revolution. David North, the chairperson of the international editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and of the Socialist Equality Party (US), explained in August 1990 that the unfolding crisis in the Persian Gulf,

*...marks the beginning of a new imperialist redivision of the world. ... As it proclaims the “failure of socialism,” the imperialist bourgeoisie, in deeds if not yet in words, proclaims the failure of independence. The deepening crisis confronting all the major imperialist powers compels them to secure control over strategic resources and markets. Former colonies which had achieved a degree of political independence, must be resubjugated. In its brutal assault against Iraq, imperialism is giving notice that it intends to restore the type of unrestrained domination of the backward countries that existed prior to World War II. (David North, “On the Eve of the First Iraq War,” *A Quarter Century of War: The U.S. Drive for Global Hegemony, 1990-2016*, Mehring Books 2016, p. 6).*

A few months later, the US initiated the bombing of Iraq with the endorsement of the Soviet bureaucracy. But in its embrace of imperialism, the Soviet bureaucracy paved the way for the colonial subjugation of the entire region. The October Revolution and establishment of the Soviet Union cut off vast resources of the globe from direct imperialist control and exploitation for decades. Establishing direct access to these resources again became a major priority in the geopolitical and economic calculations of the imperialist powers. In May 1991, the International Committee of the Fourth International warned,

With the connivance of the Kremlin, imperialism is asserting with increasing brazenness its right to assume control of the vast territories of the USSR. It is impossible for the imperialists to ignore the economic significance of the Soviet Union’s raw materials, vast productive potential and huge market.

And in a lecture in Kiev in October 1991, David North presciently stated with regard to the national republics of the former Soviet Union such as Ukraine,

Declaring “independence” from Moscow, the nationalists can do nothing more than place all the vital decisions relating to the future of their new states in the hands of Germany, Britain, France, Japan and the United States. ... The return to capitalism, for which the chauvinist agitation of the nationalists is only one guise, can only lead to a new form of oppression.

The developments of the past 30 years have provided a brutal and tragic confirmation of these warnings. Large portions of the Middle East have been devastated by imperialist aggression with millions killed. The former Soviet republics were turned into capitalist nation-states, ruled by criminal oligarchies, riven by ethnic, tribal, religious and national conflicts, and marked by extreme levels of social inequality.

The so called “independence” of Ukraine served the self-enrichment of a tiny stratum of oligarchs and privileged layers of the middle class. For the country’s working class, it has been a catastrophe. Ukraine, a country that had been occupied in two world wars by Germany, has been transformed into a launching pad for yet another imperialist war against Russia. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have already been slaughtered. Those who have so far survived are faced with social destitution.

Tajikistan, where the suspected terrorists are from, is another tragic example of the combined disaster of capitalist restoration and explosion of imperialist wars. It is the poorest of all former Soviet republics with almost half of its population lacking access to clean water. Half of its GDP is derived from remittances. The dire situation facing Tajikistan was significantly influenced by US interventions in neighboring Afghanistan. Afghan militant Islamist mujahedeen that were funded by the US in the 1980s to wage a war against the Soviet army were directly involved in a civil war that ravaged Tajikistan from 1992 through 1997.

The imperialist wars of the past three decades and the growing encirclement of Russia and China have now reached a qualitatively new stage: Driven by internal crises and faced with a rapidly declining position of US and European imperialism on the world scale, above all vis a vis China, the imperialist powers are lurching toward a new attempt to redivide the world. From their standpoint, the resources of the former Soviet Union are indispensable for the impending war against China.

The working class of the former Soviet Union confronts an existential threat. If the situation is left in the hands of the ruling oligarchy, the alternatives posed are between a direct conflict with NATO, which threatens the use of nuclear weapons, and a carve-up of the entire region through a series of civil wars and regime-change operations.

Workers and youth across the former Soviet Union can only fight against the existential threat posed by the imperialist onslaught by returning to the path of 1917, i.e., the path of class struggle and socialist revolution. They need a party that is completely independent of the all factions of the oligarchy and imperialist powers, and fights for the historical interests of the international working class. Only the world Trotskyist movement, which is embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International, represents such a party. Its building is therefore the most urgent task in the fight to unite workers internationally around the program of world socialist revolution.



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