Stop the escalating NATO war against Russia!

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21 November 2024

This week, the US and UK authorized the use of NATO long-range weapons deep inside Russia, crossing a "red line" that Russian officials said would lead to military retaliation, including the potential use of nuclear weapons.

On Sunday, President Joe Biden authorized the Ukrainian regime in Kiev to use ATACMS missiles to bomb Russia. Then, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who has publicly lobbied Washington since September for this policy, said London would let Kiev bomb Russia with its Storm Shadow missiles. Kiev fired ATACMS missiles on Tuesday and Storm Shadows on Wednesday.

The alarm must be sounded in Europe and internationally. Bombing another country is an act of war. Whether or not war has been declared, a state of war effectively exists between the world's major nuclear-armed powers.

The Russian government has responded to these provocative attacks with increasingly blunt warnings of a military response. Far from stepping back from the brink, Washington and its NATO allies in Europe are continuing to escalate attacks on Russia.

Starmer has made clear that the danger of nuclear war will not deter him from bombing Russia. He was asked about the shift that the Kremlin announced in its nuclear doctrine in September, allowing Russian nuclear strikes on nuclear-armed states like Britain that arm other countries to bomb Russia. Calling Russian warnings that it will respond to attacks on its territory "irresponsible rhetoric," Starmer declared that Russian threats to respond with nuclear weapons are "not going to deter our support for Ukraine."

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock endorsed the bombing of Russia and dismissed warnings of nuclear war, saying, "We will not be intimidated, no matter what new things are trumpeted time and again." French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said bombing Russia was already "an option we would consider," claiming there is "nothing new" in the US-UK bombing of Russia.

Russia has begun taking retaliatory measures. On Thursday, it fired an intermediate-range ballistic missile, identified by Ukrainian and NATO sources as an "Orestnik" variant of the RS-26 Rubezh missile, at Dnipro. Normally, such a missile would carry four independently maneuverable nuclear warheads, each of which is 20 times more powerful than the US nuclear bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. With a 5,800 km range, it can destroy any city or military base in Europe. However, this missile was unarmed and damaged its target, a Ukrainian missile factory, simply by crashing into it at 12,000 km per hour.

In a nationwide televised address, Russian President Vladimir Putin indicated that this strike was a warning to NATO. "In response to the use of US and British long-range weaponry, on 21 November this year, the Russian armed forces carried out a combined strike. … In combat conditions, a test was carried out of one of the latest Russian intermediate-range missile systems.

"We have the right to use our weapons against military facilities of those countries which allow their weapons to be used on our facilities," Putin continued. "We are ready for any developments. If anyone still doubts this, they shouldn't. There will always be a response."

It is utterly reckless to dismiss Russia's statements as a bluff. Whatever the form, Russia will retaliate to the ever more aggressive actions of the NATO powers.

Yesterday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova denounced the US missile base in Poland at Redzikowo, calling it "blatantly provocative." She said the base had been identified as a "priority target for potential destruction."

Explaining the dangerous logic of escalation, WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North wrote in a comment published on X Thursday:

> If Putin were to directly warn Starmer that further use of the Storm Shadow missiles against Russia will result, without question, in direct retaliation against Britain, Britain would not call off further attacks.

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> At this point, the US and NATO must believe that Russia will in all likelihood respond with a significant act of military retaliation. But the avoidance of such retaliation is no longer of decisive importance. The United States and the major Western powers are committed to Russia's defeat and will not back down. And it now appears that Putin has concluded that he cannot avoid direct conflict with his "Western Partners."
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> The situation is extraordinarily dangerous—and the danger is intensified by the fact that the general public seems to have no idea that we stand on the brink of a catastrophic war.

In 2022, as Biden debated whether to send tanks to Ukraine, he warned of the danger of an "Armageddon." He said he knew Putin "fairly well" and that Putin is "not joking when he talks about the use of tactical nuclear weapons." Now, despite Putin's escalating threats, Biden has sanctioned the bombing of Russia.

The European powers, having fought Russia alongside Biden for nearly three years, are concerned by Trump's threat to scale back US military support for Kiev and impose tariffs to block European exports to America. Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna is calling for European "boots on the ground" in Ukraine, as French President Emmanuel Macron did this winter. The European powers are pressing to escalate the war so as to independently assert their own imperialist interests.

The emerging Third World War, of which the war against Russia is a component part, is a war of plunder. "The war in Ukraine is also a battle for raw materials," states the Germany Trade and Invest (GTAI) agency, pointing to Ukraine's "large deposits of iron, titanium and lithium, some of which are now controlled by Russia."

Even greater riches, in critical minerals but also oil and gas, would fall to them if they could subjugate Russia. Their decision to stop purchasing cheap Russian energy has devastated Europe. Since then, Reuters reports, industrial electricity prices have jumped 280 percent in Germany, over 200 percent in France, Italy and the Netherlands, and 103 percent in Spain. Europe is hemorrhaging factories and jobs as these energy price hikes have made European goods globally uncompetitive.

And so, earlier this year, Polish President Andrzej Duda called for crushing Russia and dividing it into 200 powerless ethnic statelets. Claiming there is "no more space" for Russia in today's world, he declared provocatively:

> Russia is often called the prison of nations, and for a good reason. It is home to over 200 ethnic groups … Russia remains the largest colonial empire in the world today, which unlike the European powers has never undergone the process of decolonization, and has never been able to deal with the demons of its past. There is no more space for colonialism in the modern world.

Another factor driving the European bourgeoisie's war escalation is the intensification of the class struggle. Staggering under a massive debt burden after decades of bank bailouts, the European states are each planning tens of billions of euros in cuts to key social programs to divert them into military spending, even as working class anger mounts over job losses. After massive strike struggles in the last two years, the European governments are deeply unpopular and despised among workers.

Russian military strikes could serve as a pretext to further militarize society, outlaw strikes, reestablish conscription and intensify policies of austerity and war rejected by broad masses of the working population.

The deep-rooted opposition to imperialist war among workers in Ukraine, Russia, Europe, America and internationally must be activated and mobilized in a struggle against their "own" capitalist governments.

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