

In run-up to Trump-Putin talks, Russian offensive encircles Ukrainian units in Pokrovsk

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Since US President Donald Trump announced on August 8 his plans for talks today with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska, Russian troops have mounted an offensive in Ukraine's Donbas region.

While Russian troops have generally advanced very slowly in Ukraine, this time they advanced 15 kilometers starting around August 11. The offensive, reportedly spearheaded by infantrymen driving motorcycles to evade drone fire, reached the villages of Zolotiy Kolodyaz and Vesele. From there, it could cut off the main road along which supplies arrive to Ukrainian troops in cities they still hold in the Donbas, such as Pokrovsk and Kramatorsk.

Russian pincer movements are closing around both Pokrovsk and Kostiantynivka. These cities, where tens of thousands of Ukrainian troops are reportedly trapped, are key nodes in the main Ukrainian fortified belt in the northern Donbas. The offensive threatens to smash through this belt, removing the last major obstacle to a Russian attack into Ukraine's central plains—and major cities like Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia and the capital, Kiev.

This would put in question the survival of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's regime. The Ukrainian army, having suffered terrible losses in three years of war, would have to try to rebuild lines of defensive fortifications in the plains, where they would be even more exposed to drone, missile and artillery bombardment than in the comparatively uneven terrain of the Donbas.

Sources close to NATO and its Kiev puppet regime confirmed the broad outlines of reports from ostensibly neutral or pro-Russian sources. US-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFL/RL) cited Finnish reserve officer and military analyst Pasi Paroinen: "If the Ukrainians don't restore the situation quickly and the Russians are able to consolidate and expand this into a proper breakthrough, then it could be one of the more significant events of this war."

Even these pro-NATO sources make clear that the

Ukrainian army has been bled white. Russian "motorized assaults have been effective, in part because there aren't enough Ukrainian soldiers to adequately occupy trenches or foxholes," RFE/RL wrote. It cited Polish military analyst Konrad Muzyka who, after visiting Ukrainian lines, said: "The fall of Pokrovsk is just a matter of time at this stage. ... Ukrainians don't have the manpower to fight in the city, the capacity to conduct a flanking maneuver to cut Russians off from southern parts of the town."

Bloody fighting continues in the area, and several Ukrainian brigades have been redeployed to plug the gap. Forces from the Azov Battalion, a neo-Nazi unit whose flag bears the Wolfsangel symbol of the World War II-era SS Das Reich division, have deployed there to prevent the front line units from fleeing amid mounting popular disillusionment with the war in Ukraine. (See also: [Does Ukraine face a "Syrian scenario"?](#))

Russian units are reportedly trying to consolidate their control over key roads that Ukrainian forces may not have had time to fully mine, and over which they could try to deploy larger tank formations for a rapid breakthrough. At the same time, Russian bombings in Ukraine are escalating. Yesterday, Russian missile strikes destroyed four factories building German-financed Sapsan ballistic missiles capable of bombing Moscow from launch sites inside Ukraine.

This offensive exposes the disastrous consequences of the NATO powers' stoking of a fratricidal war between two ex-Soviet republics, Ukraine and Russia. They backed a far-right coup in Kiev in 2014 to topple pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, plunging Ukraine into civil war as Ukrainian-nationalist units like the Azov Battalion attacked Russian-speaking areas in eastern Ukraine. They then relentlessly armed the far-right Kiev regime against Russia.

After Putin's reactionary decision to invade Ukraine in 2022, the NATO alliance, represented by then-British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, intervened to instruct Ukrainian

officials to break off peace talks offered by the Kremlin. This set into motion a three-year war that has killed or wounded millions. Despite NATO support, Ukrainian forces ultimately found themselves outgunned by their Russian opponents.

While US and European media avoid any real discussion of Ukrainian casualties—Zelensky once advanced the transparent lie that only 31,000 Ukrainians have died—these casualties are clearly horrific. Washington insiders like former Trump administration advisor Colonel Douglas MacGregor have spoken of 1.8 million Ukrainian dead. Whatever the true figures are, the current offensive makes clear that Ukraine has lost a substantial portion of its fighting-age population.

The Kremlin's current military successes do not in any way change the bankruptcy of its nationalist policy. A reactionary tool of the post-Soviet Russian capitalist oligarchy, it is organically oriented to deals with imperialism. Its calls to agree upon a new "security architecture" for Europe with its "Western partners"—annexing the largely Russian-speaking Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions of Ukraine, which it mostly already holds—have one visible and fatal flaw.

Such plans rely on finding someone to establish a government in the western Ukrainian rump state that will serve as a buffer between Russia and NATO. However, it is evident that the European Union (EU) and powerful factions of the American ruling class are determined to keep their hold over Ukraine and continue using the existing Ukrainian regime as a tool against Russia. The EU in particular views war with Russia not only as critical to its geopolitical objectives, but to justify an unpopular policy of rearmament financed by massive social cuts targeting workers.

Even though Russian forces are on the offensive, a bitter political crisis has unfolded in the Russian ruling elite in the run-up to Putin's meeting with Trump. While certain factions argue the Pokrovsk offensive puts the Kremlin in a stronger position to cut a deal in Alaska, others, particularly around the army and intelligence services, argue for rapid military escalation. Speaking for the former faction, Professor Vladimir Priakhin wrote in the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*:

In our opinion, we should refrain from overly optimistic assessments of the possible outcomes of the negotiations. Most likely, we are at the very beginning of a difficult path to settlement. ... But we must not forget that the White House's "concessions" became increasingly noticeable as our

units advanced from the front line in Donbas.

In reality, far from making "concessions," both Washington and Kiev have kept issuing threats as Trump prepared for his Alaskan summit. Trump warned Russia of "severe consequences" if Putin does not agree to NATO demands for an immediate ceasefire, while Zelensky yesterday declared that Ukraine would never give guarantees not to join NATO.

But a "peace" on this basis would be no less fragile than the brief truce that followed the 2015 Minsk Accords between Berlin, Paris, Kiev and Moscow. Indeed, NATO would then be able to post troops in the western Ukrainian rump state, directly on the borders of the enlarged Russian federation.

As for Russian Duma deputy Lt. General Viktor Sobolev, he said Trump-Putin talks would "under no circumstances" end the war, calling to add Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolaiv oblasts to the list of regions to be annexed. Whether or not the Russian army can carry out Sobolev's particular plan for conquest, any large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine carries one very clear risk. It can provoke a direct clash with NATO, either if NATO invades western Ukraine to keep it from being overrun by Russia, or if it begins bombing Russian forces outright.

The working class internationally is being brought face to face with the reactionary consequences of the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. It must come to grips with the fact that a horrific escalation of the bloodshed, including escalating military clashes between the world's major nuclear powers, is posed as an imminent danger.

Whatever the outcome of today's talks, there will be no lasting military-diplomatic resolution of the NATO-Russia war, which is inextricably bound up with imperialism's plans for war against China's rising economy, and for neo-colonial war across the Middle East. This war can only be ended, and the danger of a potentially civilization-ending global war averted, by building an international, socialist and anti-war movement of the working class.



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