

Written 2022.02.27, revised 2022.03.01

Now, six days after the start of Putin's brutal invasion, not one major city in Ukraine is under Russian control. The invading forces are facing an armed population, while in Russia, thousands of people in Moscow, St Petersburg, and many other cities have defied Putin's bloody tyranny by demonstrating against the invasion.

On 21 February (three days before the invasion) President Putin announced that Russia would now regard Donetsk and Luhansk, the two Russian-backed and controlled break-away areas in eastern Ukraine, as 'independent' states. The Russian government subsequently confirmed that it supported the claim of those statelets to the whole of the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine (the break-away districts only cover a third of the Donbas). The Donetsk and Luhansk 'states' were originally established as part of the previous Russian military intervention in Ukraine in 2014/15, at the same time that Putin occupied and annexed Crimea.

With his false declaration of independence, Putin consigned the Minsk agreements to the rubbish-bin of history, along with any further French and German attempts to negotiate a compromise. The Minsk agreements were negotiated in 2015, as a 'European solution,' between Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany. They were never implemented, but if they had been, Donetsk and Luhansk would have become autonomous provinces of Ukraine - and they (in reality, Putin) would have had a veto on decisions by Ukraine's central government.

The real meaning of 'independence' for Donetsk and Luhansk is that Putin discarded the policy of weakening Ukraine by creating internal chaos and division. The plan now is a Russian military conquest *of the whole country*.

That plan was put into operation in the early hours of 24 February, by which time the Russian forces surrounding Ukraine totalled 190,000. Those forces attacked by land, sea and air. Army units crossed into Ukraine from Belarus, from Crimea, by sea at Odessa, and across the Russian/Ukrainian border in the north and east. Kyiv, the capital, and other cities were awakened by massive missile bombardments. The bombardments have continued and even been extended - with, for instance, airports and military airfields under attack and an oil depot and pipelines bombed and blown up in Kharkiv. This is by far the biggest military operation in Europe since the end of World War Two in 1945 (even bigger in

DEFEND AN INDEPENDENT UKRAINE

Ukrainians: the progressive workers and oppressed peoples of the world stand with you!

Russian soldiers: Putin is your enemy, not the Ukrainian people!

scale than the disastrous wars and western interventions that tore apart the former Yugoslavia in the 1990's, and still dominate political relations in the western Balkans).

Without any doubt, Russian forces not only greatly outnumber Ukraine's but have much more powerful and sophisticated armaments. The Ukrainian army and airforce are larger, better equipped and better trained than they were in 2014, and it has always been clear that the Ukrainians would put up a determined resistance. But the general consensus among Western military "experts" was

that the Ukrainians would inevitably be overwhelmed, relatively quickly, by the Russian military onslaught. Those assumptions have now been overturned, not because of any technical miscalculations, but because the famous statement of Von Clausewitz, that "War is politics by other means," is true in more complex ways than is generally understood. To put this more precisely:

1 The politics of the Russian elite, and of the US government and NATO in this war, are clear enough; the politics of the Ukrainian and Russian (and western) masses could only become clear in ac-



INTERNATIONAL TROTSKYIST COMMITTEE
FOR THE POLITICAL REGENERATION OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

Revolutionary Workers League (U.S.)
Revolutionary Internationalist League (U.K.)
www.itc4.org

tion. That has happened – and it has radically changed the military and political situation. The Ukrainian army and airforce are fighting bravely (and it seems like a small miracle that the airforce is still operational) but they are part of a political/military struggle that is very much wider. They are now part of *an armed population* that – and this is a very important factor – unites Ukrainian and Russian speakers.

2 The armed population is fighting heroically and creatively, and they are fighting for a *free and independent Ukraine*. Whatever political differences there will certainly be, this is not fundamentally a war for NATO – an organisation that (as recent research has indicated) the majority of Ukrainians do not trust.

3 This war is deeply unpopular in Russia. The demonstrations are only a sign of that (though a significant one). Moreover, the opposition to the invasion is encouraged by the growing awareness that the elite itself is divided over Putin's policy.

4 The discontent with Putin's rule in Russia and, even more, the mass mobilisation and self-organisation of the Ukrainian people, are having a profound impact on the attitude of the Russian soldiers in Ukraine. The history of the twentieth century shows that mass, prolonged bombardment is not enough, by itself, to break the spirit and resistance of citizens, who are convinced they are defending the survival of their own homes, families, and country against a predatory enemy.

5 To win control, an invader must have troops that come into close contact with the defenders and the civilian population, especially in the cities; that means mainly the infantry and armoured units (tanks, etc.) a high proportion of whom are likely to be conscripts, which is certainly true of the Russian troops in Ukraine. It has become clear that the increasingly slow progress of the invasion is due to the simple, mutually reinforcing facts that the hearts and minds of Russian conscripts are not in this fight and the hearts and minds of the Ukrainian people are. That becomes clearer as more and more Ukrainian civilians are confronting Russian soldiers *and being listened to*.

6 To put it simply, more and more of those soldiers are realising that *Vladimir Putin is the Russian soldiers' real enemy, not the Ukrainian people*.

7 In World War I, Lenin famously called on the rank-and-file soldiers of the two hostile imperialist armies to “turn the guns the other way” – to recognize that it was the exploiters and oppressors on both sides who were their real enemies, not the soldiers on the other side. On the front, socialist agitators led soldiers to defy their officers. Bolsheviks organized the fraternization of Russian and German soldiers.

8 In Ukraine, undoubtedly, there are Russian officers as well as rank-and-file soldiers who are already taking the first step of this perspective: recognizing that the cruel Putin regime is the real enemy of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, alike, and that Ukrainians are the Russians' sisters and brothers.

9 Throughout history, oppressed peoples, surrounded by richer and more powerful oppressors, have been forced to accept “assistance” from one oppressor in order to survive the onslaught of another. This is the situation today of the Ukrainians who must “ally” with the US and NATO and join the European Union in order to defend themselves against Putin's aim to devour their nation. This does not cancel, but rather intensifies, the importance of the Ukrainians' historic commitment to genuine independence from all would-be exploiters of their country.

These developments have made Putin more desperate (the nuclear alert announcement) and at the same time they have forced the Russian government into talks with the Ukrainian leadership. They have almost certainly alarmed the Chinese leadership and led them to put pressure on Putin, and increased the divisions within his own circle of advisors and ministers. The global wave of support inspired by the national struggle in Ukraine has given the NATO powers and the EU cover to send more armaments to Ukraine and impose harsher economic sanctions on Russia – but their aim is not to build the mass movement of the Ukrainian people fighting to be a really free and really independent nation. That would be almost as alarming to the western imperialists as it is to Putin. The aim

of the western imperialists is to co-opt that movement (and its worldwide supporters) and turn it into a support base in their struggle for global supremacy. With regard to the NATO/EU powers the aim is to be the chief exploiters of Ukraine. With the USA specifically, it is to create an obstacle to China's ‘Belt and Road’ project.

The growing national resistance in Ukraine must understand that it created its own victories and owes nothing to NATO. Any support from NATO, the EU and the US comes with strings attached. The forces fighting for a free and independent Ukraine must cut the strings and control how the support, military or otherwise, is used. The Ukrainian soldiers and masses should now carry out systematic fraternisation with the Russian forces. The Russian soldiers will then find their own ways to deal with commanders who order them to fight Ukrainian brothers and sisters.

Without trying to predict future developments, all revolutionary, socialist and progressive forces in Ukraine, Russia and internationally must recognise the significance of the latest developments. A new face of eastern Europe has become visible, a new and progressive political force is emerging in the former Soviet republics. The two struggles – for a free and independent Ukraine and for the overthrow of the Putin dictatorship in Russia – are completely entwined with one another, in real practical action.

To achieve victory that struggle must overthrow and remove the oligarchs of both countries who are the real allies of both Putin and NATO.

The ITC and the immigrant-rights fighters of BAMN and the Movement for Justice welcome the historic developments of the last five days and send this message of solidarity to all our Ukrainian and Russian brothers and sisters in struggle.

This statement by the International Trotskyist Committee (ITC) is distributed by the following organizations:

BAMN Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration & Immigrant Rights, and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary
(855) ASK-BAMN [855.275.2266] email@bamn.com
www.bamn.com IG: @joinbamn snapchat: join_bamn



Movement for Justice By Any Means Necessary
movementforjustice.co.uk
contact@movementforjustice.co.uk
facebook.com/movementforjustice
@followMFJ