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Russia/Ukraine

Ordinary Russians Don't Want This War

- IV Online magazine - 2022 - IV565 - February 2022 -

Publication date: Friday 25 February 2022

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Russia attacked Ukraine last night [23-24 February]. The worst fears have been confirmed. The extent of the invasion is not fully understood, but it is already clear that the Russian military has attacked targets all over the country, not just in the South-East (along the border of the so-called “people’s republics”). This morning, Ukrainians in various cities were woken by explosions.

Vladimir Putin has made clear the military objective of the operation: the complete surrender of the Ukrainian army. The political plan remains unclear — but perhaps most likely means the establishment of a pro-Russian government in Kiev. The Russian leadership assumes that resistance will quickly be broken and that most ordinary Ukrainians will dutifully accept the new regime. The social consequences for Russia itself will obviously be severe — already in the morning, even before Western sanctions were announced, Russian stock exchanges collapsed and the fall in the ruble broke all records.

Putin’s speech last night, in which he announced the outbreak of war, represented the unconcealed language of imperialism and colonialism. In this sense, his is the only government that so openly speaks like an imperialist power from the early twentieth century. The Kremlin is no longer able to hide behind other grievances — including even NATO enlargement — its hatred of Ukraine and desire to teach it a punitive “lesson.” These actions are beyond rationally understood “interests” and lie somewhere in the realm of “historical mission,” as Putin understands it.

Since Alexei Navalny’s arrest in January 2021, police and the security services have essentially crushed the organized opposition in Russia. Navalny’s organization was deemed “extremist” and dismantled, demonstrations in his defense resulted in some fifteen thousand arrests, and almost all independent media were either closed down or branded “foreign agents,” severely limiting their operation. Mass demonstrations against the war are unlikely — there is no political force capable of coordinating them and participation in any street protest, including even a single-person picket, is swiftly and severely punished. Activist and intellectual milieus in Russia are shocked and demoralized by the events.

One reassuring sign is that no clear support for war is discernible in Russian society. According to the Levada Center, the last independent polling agency (itself branded a “foreign agent” by the Russian government), 40 percent of Russians do not support the official recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk “people’s republics” by the Russian authorities, while 45 percent of Russians do. While some signs of “rallying around the flag” are inevitable, it is remarkable that despite complete control over major media sources and a dramatic outpouring of propagandistic demagoguery on TV, the Kremlin is unable to foment enthusiasm for war.

Nothing like the patriotic mobilization that followed the annexation of Crimea in 2014 is happening today. In that sense, the invasion of Ukraine disproves the popular theory that the Kremlin’s outward aggression is always aimed at propping up domestic legitimacy. On the contrary, if anything, this war will destabilize the regime and even threaten its survival to some extent, as the “2024 problem” — the need to put up a convincing show of Putin’s reelection, when Russians next vote for president — is still on the table.

The Left around the world needs to unite around a simple message: no to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There is no justification for Russia’s actions; they will result in suffering and death. In these days of tragedy, we call for international solidarity with Ukraine.

24 February 2022

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Source [Jacobin](#).

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