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Two Voices from Russia & Ukraine on Putin, Resistance Inside Russia & Their Views on Anti-Imperialism

Friday 14 October 2022, by [GOODMAN Amy](#), [MAKICHYAN Arshak](#), [PEREKHODA Hanna](#), [SHAIKH Nermeen](#) (Date first published: 13 October 2022).

Russia launched a fourth day of missile strikes against multiple Ukrainian cities and towns Thursday, targeting Ukraine's electricity systems and leaving many areas without power. The escalated attacks come after President Vladimir Putin had accused Ukraine of blowing up a key bridge connecting Russia to Crimea last week. Meanwhile, the United Nations General Assembly has voted overwhelmingly to condemn Russia's annexation of four territories seized from Ukraine. "The invasion of Ukraine is not some type of historical inertia. The ideology of Putin is a product of the past two centuries," says Hanna Perekhoda, a Ukrainian graduate history student at the University of Lausanne, whose family in Donetsk was thrown into war eight years ago. Berlin-based Russian climate activist Arshak Makichyan, who fled his country in March, says that while he doesn't believe negotiations with Putin are possible, the international community should engage Russian civil society as part of any solution toward ending the war.

AMY GOODMAN: This is *Democracy Now!*, [democracynow.org](#), *The War and Peace Report*. I'm Amy Goodman, with Nermeen Shaikh.

We turn now to the war in Ukraine. Air raid sirens were heard across parts of Ukraine today as Russia launched a fourth day of missile strikes targeting multiple Ukrainian cities and towns. Many of the strikes have targeted Ukraine's electricity system, leaving many areas without power. Ukrainian officials said some of the Russian attacks near Kyiv were carried out by Iranian-made drones. This comes as Western leaders are vowing to provide more arms to Ukraine, as well as new air defense systems. Russia escalated its attack on Ukraine after a massive explosion Saturday damaged a key bridge connecting Russia to occupied Crimea.

Meanwhile, at the United Nations, the General Assembly has voted 143 to 5 to condemn Russia's annexation of four territories seized from Ukraine. The four countries joining Russia were Belarus, Nicaragua, North Korea and Syria. This is Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD: The United Nations will not tolerate attempts at illegal annexation. We will never recognize it. The United — these United Nations will not tolerate seizing a neighbor's land by force. We will stand up to it. These United Nations will not tolerate the destruction of the U.N. Charter.

AMY GOODMAN: Thirty-five nations, including China and India, abstained from the U.N. vote condemning Russia's annexation. This is Geng Shuang, China's deputy U.N. ambassador.

GENG SHUANG: [translated] We have always believed that any action taken by the General Assembly should be conducive to the deescalation of the situation, should be conducive to the early resumption of dialogue and should be conducive to the promotion of a political solution to this crisis. The draft resolution submitted to this emergency special session for voting will not help achieve the above-mentioned objectives. Therefore, the Chinese delegation will abstain.

AMY GOODMAN: To talk more about the war in Ukraine, we're joined by two guests. Arshak Makichyan is an exiled Russian antiwar, human rights and climate activist. We spoke to him in Moscow just before he fled Russia in March, now based in Berlin, the Russian government currently trying to revoke his Russian citizenship. We're also joined by Hanna Perekhoda. She is a Ukrainian Ph.D. student in history at University of Lausanne in Switzerland. She's a member of the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine, born and raised in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, and speaks both Russian and Ukrainian.

Hanna, let's begin with you. You were in Moscow doing your academic studies right before Russia invaded Ukraine, and you grew up in Donetsk, in the occupied region of Ukraine where this vote just took place that the vast majority of countries in the world just condemned at the United Nations. Can you talk about the significance of both? What was it like to grow up there? What do you understand about that vote, and to be in Russia right before the invasion?

HANNA PEREKHODA: OK. Thanks for having me.

Well, it's a little bit difficult question, but, yes, being a Ukrainian born in Donetsk and having all my family in Donetsk — actually, the war started for me not this year but eight years ago. And me, my circle of friends and my family were affected by the war when the Russia started in 2014.

And being in Moscow just before, I was there for my academic research. And my academic research is — a big part of it is about the Russian imperial and national ideology. So, being a historian and working on Russian contemporary imperialism and also Russian imperialism in historic perspective, I was kind of more prepared, I think, for the invasion than most of the people who were kind of very surprised by it.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Hanna, you've talked about some of the reasons that you think Putin launched an invasion of this scale. And you've also argued that we need to take into account the national and imperial dimensions of the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, and that the resistance that the Ukrainians are putting up is most analogous to anti-colonial struggles. Could you elaborate on that and explain the reasons that you think Russia launched this invasion?

HANNA PEREKHODA: Well, yes. For me, one of the dimensions of Russian contemporary imperialist ideology is that it is driven by the resentment of a fallen empire, and what is important, by a resentment of a nationalizing empire. Actually, the national narrative of Ukraine and that of Russia are kind of in a total contradiction in this sense: Ukraine, as a political community, can only survive outside of Russia, because Russia denies its right to exist, while for Russian nationalists, Russian nationalist elites, their nation is incomplete, if not impossible, without Ukraine within it. So, these two narratives are kind of mutually exclusive. And these kind of nationalizing empires, like Russia, today's Russia, are very dangerous, because in the current Russian perspective, Ukrainians must recognize that they are Russians; otherwise, they must be destroyed. And this is not a marginal discourse; this is something you hear every day on the Russian state TV channels.

So, yeah, it's a state that invades another independent state, protagonizes war crimes at a huge scale, and at the same time holds a discourse and practices that can be qualified as an incitation to

genocide, because there are, for example, numerous cases when children are separated from their Ukrainian families, sent to Russia and adopted there.

But I want to emphasize that, of course, history is important, but it cannot fully explain the reasons of this invasion, because history is a source of discourses and practices, but in order to influence the reality, these discourses must be reactivated. And the invasion of Ukraine is not some kind of a historical inertia. The ideology of Putin is a product of, you know, past two centuries. But Putin's political regime that reactivates these ideas is a product of the past, like, 30, 20 years.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Arshak Makichyan, you fled Russia earlier this year, very soon after the invasion. Could you explain why you left and what the state of opposition to this war in Russia now is? And respond to what Hanna said.

ARSHAK MAKICHYAN: Before this war, we were living in an authoritarian regime. I was doing activism in Russia. I was protesting. But after this war, yeah, we were trying to organize protests. We were protesting every day, every weekend. But now Russia is not an authoritarian regime; it's a dictatorship. And our instruments, peaceful protests, they are not working anymore in Russia. So we are thinking to go somewhere to think what to do next. And yeah, now you cannot have a revolution in Russia just with peaceful protest.

And propaganda in Russia is working very well, and they are using, yeah, a lot of money from Europe, a lot of money from the world, that are coming from fossil fuels, and now they're earning more money than before the war on fossil fuels. And they are using this money to manipulate with people's opinions. They are using this money to continue this war.

So, yeah, peaceful protests, they are not working anymore in Russia. So I think I can be more effective using my social media, using my voice to speak up against the war, when I am not in prison or not tortured, like many of my friends are being now who are still in Russia. So, it was a more strategical decision. It was not because I am afraid. Yeah, it's not about, yeah, being afraid, because we want to be effective, and Russian civil society needs the representation, because Russia will have a future, and Russian people want to have a place in the future. Otherwise, Russian propaganda is using it against Ukraine. It's using to mobilize people for the war. But I think the Russian people, they are not — they are not supporting the war. They do not want to die for Putin's ambitions, for Putin's imperialistic ambitions. And they want their normal lives back. And so, I am trying to raise my voice. I am trying to represent Russian civil society.

Yes, Putin is a terrorist. This war was a terrible thing. Russian state is a terrorist state. I agree with that. But we need to think for solutions. And, of course, negotiations with people like Putin is not a solution. It's wrong to have negotiations with people like them. But we need to start a dialogue with Russian civil society, because Russian civil society is part of solutions. We do understand that imperialism is bad. We do understand that fascism is bad. And we are trying to oppose Putin. We're trying to create ways to oppose him. And there is an antiwar movement in Russia, and they deserve every kind of help that is possible. And we need to talk about it, I think.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to ask Hanna Perekhoda, as you speak to us from Switzerland, again, born and raised in Donbas, studied in Moscow just before the invasion. You talk about in order for conditions of peace to be achieved, Russia has got to withdraw from Ukraine. You also advocate the dissolution not only of NATO but also the Russian-dominated military alliance. Can you talk about this and how your anti-imperialist views have changed, or not, through this invasion and occupation by Russia of Ukraine?

HANNA PEREKHODA: OK. Well, this is a very complex question. And I think I would go in the

same — more or less, the same direction as the previous speaker. I think there is a kind of — my position on imperialism was provoked, and my thinking about it was provoked, by a stereotype which I heard a lot in the Western countries in the left milieu, a stereotype that says that this war started because Putin was scared by NATO or because he was humiliated by the West. In my opinion, it's quite the opposite. He started the war when NATO was weak, and he felt like everybody would let him do it, like, because it was always the case until now. He knows that the rich countries, dependent on fossil fuels, on oil and gas, that these countries continued, actually, to trade with him for years when he was already killing Chechens or Syrians. And even when he started a war in Ukraine eight years ago, nothing changed fundamentally. So, yes, I agree with my previous speaker, and it's something that I want to emphasize every time I speak or write on this issue. The key word for me is "impunity" and economic cynicism of the Global North, of the rich Northern countries and Western countries.

And I think when we talk about this war, we tend to overestimate the extent to which the behavior of Russian elites is motivated by real security concerns. Yes, their attack on Ukraine is basically an attempt to preserve the security, but it is not the security of Russia that they preserve. They are preserving the security of their political regime. And to ignore the difference between the two means that we forget that Russia is not Putin. And I want to say the same thing as the previous speaker, that it is Russia, it's Russian ordinary people, and their interests are exactly on the opposite to the interests of Putin and his mafia.

So, I mean, if we disregard Russian internal politics, the relations between the ruling classes and society of this country, if we adopt this kind of a geopolitical perspective, which I had also before, we won't be able to understand anything about this war. And I think this war showed me and showed a lot of people around me that it is not so much about Ukraine, it's about Russian internal relationship between elites and people. It's about Russian predatory elites trying to preserve their regime, the regime that allowed them to plunder Russia in total impunity for years. And yeah, Putin's regime needed a real war, because he thought it would stabilize his crumbling power. So, for me, the change in this perception in how to think about the imperialism is to be able to understand what are the internal reasons, what is happening inside of Russia, because if we adopt just a geopolitical perspective, it is a very easy and lazy way to analyze the world, and it doesn't work.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Arshak, could you respond to what Hanna said, in particular, the feelings of and perceptions of ordinary Russians vis-à-vis the Putin regime? You've also talked about the mass mobilization, the conscription that's taking place now of Russians. Hundreds of thousands of them have fled. And many who have spoken to the media, though they've not revealed their names out of fear for their safety, as well as the safety of their families still in Russia, they've said things like, "How can I take part in a war without a wish to win the war?" "This is a war of the Russian government, not of the Russian people," and so on, comments like this. So, your sense of what ordinary Russians are feeling now and their sense of the Putin regime?

ARSHAK MAKICHYAN: Russian ordinary people are feeling horror, because they are left alone with dictatorship. There are left alone with millions of police. And this police is financed by Europe, by fossil fuel money. So, we need to help them to escape the war, because it's very strange for me when European countries are shutting down the borders for people who are trying to escape from mobilization, because if these people would be able to escape the mobilization, then they won't be taking part in the war. Of course, yeah, they can be more brave and fight Putin by bare hands, but it's not possible to fight a police state. Putin has millions of police. And it's not easy to have a revolution. You cannot go just to Kremlin with your bare hands and, yeah, have a revolution. It's not so easy to have a revolution in a dictatorship where all media are controlled by government, where all independent media were declared foreign agents —

AMY GOODMAN: Arshak, we have 10 seconds.

ARSHAK MAKICHYAN: — and had to flee. So, yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: We have 10 seconds, Arshak.

ARSHAK MAKICHYAN: Yeah?

AMY GOODMAN: If you could finish your statement?

ARSHAK MAKICHYAN: Yes. So, Russian people, they don't support the war. They are afraid to oppose the war, I think.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, Arshak Makichyan, we want to thank you for being with us. Again, your own citizenship in Russia is threatened to be revoked, exiled Russian antiwar, human rights activist in Berlin. And, Hanna Perekhoda, I want to thank you for joining us from Lausanne. I'm Amy Goodman, with Nermeen Shaikh.

Amy Goodman
Linda Thomas-Greenfield
Geng Shuang
Hanna Perekhoda
Nermeen Shaikh
Arshak Makichyan

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