

# Putin threatens nuclear war

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**Joe Biden, president of the USA, warns of nuclear “armageddon” if Russian President Vladimir Putin uses nuclear weapons against Ukraine. Biden believes that the world is closer now to nuclear war than at any point since the Cuban missile crisis, 60 years ago.**

Biden’s assessment is right.

The US is increasingly alarmed about Putin’s violent anti-Western rhetoric and nuclear threats. Joe Biden’s spokesperson says, “Russia’s talk of using nuclear weapons is irresponsible, and there’s no way to use them without unintended consequences.”

That is partly a statement of fact, and partly a warning. The US has also directly spoken of “catastrophic consequences” for Russia if Putin uses nuclear weapons.

Former CIA director and retired US general, David Petraeus, has argued in favour of a massive conventional weapons response to any Russian use of nuclear weapons.

Workers’ Liberty remains opposed to any direct US involvement in the Ukraine war, including in response to a Russian nuclear attack on Ukraine. Retaliatory attacks by the US and other Western powers against Russia would almost certainly lead to an immediate, catastrophic, widening of the war in Ukraine.

A rational reply to a nuclear attack — yet another war crime, but one of enormous proportions — committed by Putin’s Russia, is not to trigger a Third World War in which many millions of civilians would become the victims of nuclear terror.

Our policy is to help the Russian working class replace Putin with a government which will end the Ukraine war and withdraw Russian troops from Ukraine.

Ultimately the only way forward is for the international working-class to fight for a socialist world without nuclear weapons. But clearly that’s not an immediate solution. The fact is that there is no adequate, immediate answer to a Russian nuclear strike.

Workers’ Liberty is being consistent. During the Cold War stand-off between the USSR Bloc and the West we argued for unilateral nuclear disarmament. We opposed the policy of destroying Russian cities, killing tens of millions of working class people in the process, in retaliation to a nuclear strike on the West.

Even if London and Glasgow were destroyed, the answer would not be to incinerate Moscow and Minsk. The response to a terrible war crime is not another terrible war crime.

How did we get here?

As Vladimir Putin’s Russian army invaded Ukraine on 24 February Putin appeared to threaten

Western powers with nuclear war: "Whoever tries to hinder us [i.e. attempt to stop the invasion] should know that Russia's response will be immediate and will lead you to consequences that you have never faced in your history."

On 21 September, as Russia lost some conquered territory in Ukraine, Putin stated, "The citizens of Russia can rest assured that the territorial integrity of our Motherland, our independence and freedom will be defended, I repeat, by all the systems available to us... This is not a bluff." His focus on defending Russia's "territorial integrity" was a shift from Russia's previous nuclear weapons protocol which only allowed nuclear weapons use if Russia faced an "existential threat".

Responding to Russian losses, Vladimir Putin is now attempting to mobilise at least 300,000 more troops to fight in Ukraine. He has formally annexed four Ukrainian regions following blatantly rigged referenda.

Back in February Putin justified his war in Ukraine by the need to rid Ukraine of Nazis. He expected a quick victory. Now he is obliged to shift his strategy. He has cut gas supplies to Europe to pressure the EU states, especially Germany. And he attempted to alarm the US and European powers enough to force them to stop providing Ukraine with weapons and to press Ukraine to sign a lousy peace deal favourable to Russia.

A US government official recently commented: "Putin has tried to rattle his sabre, tried to scare us off, tried to make us think twice about our strategy. He has not succeeded."

Now Putin is attempting to reframe his story. The war, says Putin, is now about Russia's survival. Putin claims, ridiculously, that "the West wants to destroy our country."

As Workers' Liberty has warned repeatedly, recently, Ukrainian battlefield victories are simultaneously a liberation but also usher in a period of increasing and serious danger. Putin reasonably believes that a Russian defeat in Ukraine may mean his downfall in Russia. And he is not willing to be defeated at home.

Putin may lash out. Nuclear war is possible. We must fight to prevent it.

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