

Russian Hands Off Kazakhstan!

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Every socialist should stand in solidarity with the Kazakh people in the face of Russian imperialism, argue Phil Hearse and Neil Faulkner

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Russian autocrat Vladimir Putin has sent paratroopers into Kazakhstan to prop up a corrupt dictatorship facing a popular uprising.

Russia is one of the world's most heavily armed imperialist superpowers. The Kazakh dictator Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has called for Russian support because his own regime is beginning to lose control of its security forces as protests erupt in major cities across the country.

The mass protests began in response to rising energy prices, but they have quickly expanded into a general uprising against corruption, cronyism, inequality, and poverty. Government buildings have been attacked, statues torn down, and the police have either lost control or, in some cases, gone over to the protestors.

Though information is scanty due to a state shutdown of mobile and internet communication, there are reports that many have been killed in gun battles between protestors and loyalist security forces.

Russian imperialism

Of the world's three main imperialist powers - the United States, China, and Russia - Russia is by far the weakest economically, especially in high tech and manufacturing. It tries to compensate for this by sales of gas and other primary products, by aggressive use of military power outside its borders, and by using its position as the world's second largest exporter of military hardware. It is the main arsenal for dozens of reactionary regimes and brutal dictatorships around the world.

Putin is using his military to push into the Middle East and Africa and of course to dominate the countries on Russia's immediate periphery - either by direct military intervention or by threatening such.

Since the collapse of Communism (or Stalinism), Russia has transitioned from a centralised state-capitalist regime to a state dominated by independent billionaire oligarchs centred around the Putin bureaucratic apparatus. The regime is a mix of corrupt crony capitalism and authoritarianism, militarism, and nationalism.

The post-Communist regime expected to be able to control its immediate periphery, mainly states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. The Russian leadership was shaken by the 'revanchism' of the West, which pushed the borders of NATO into the heart of what had once been the Soviet Union. Hence the Russian pushback in the borderlands.

But the regime has also been shaken by popular uprisings against allied dictatorial regimes - in Ukraine, Belarus, and now Kazakhstan in particular.

Direct military intervention

Russia's main external military intervention has been its brutal campaign in Syria, to support the morbidly violent Bashir al-Assad regime, where it has not only been slaughtering thousands of civilians from the air, but putting Russian troops - how many is not known - on the ground.

Much of this effort has been to defend its naval base at Latakia, near the Syrian city of Tartus, that gives it direct access to the Mediterranean. Its previous annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea was mainly to defend its naval base at Sevastopol and its Crimean airbase. Latakia and Sevastopol are essential to ensure Russian military presence in the Mediterranean and Middle East.

As we have always argued in relation to the United States, military power leverages economic power. In November 2021, Putin sent his most advanced military jet, the Su-57, on a non-stop mission from Russia to the United Arab Emirates, demonstrating Russian technological prowess in advance of the project for Russia and the UAE to jointly build a supersonic passenger jet.

Russian troops, disguised as mercenaries, are propping up the regime in the Central African Republic in return for Russia access to the CAR's mineral wealth. Mali plans to replace French troops with Russian soldiers, again to prop up the regime.

Arms sales

Russia is the key external arms supplier to India, Egypt, China, Myanmar, Pakistan, and a dozen other countries. In the past three months alone, Russia has signed military cooperation agreements with Nigeria and Ethiopia, Africa's two most populous nations.

Doubtless some of these states are buying Russian planes and tanks because they are cheaper than their American equivalents; buying Russian arms is not going to shift Egypt from being a staunch ally of the United States. Nonetheless, in general, providing the weaponry to enable dictators to stay in power leads to economic, political, and diplomatic influence.

Against campism: for solidarity with the oppressed

The political and military confrontation between the United States and China, and between the West and Russia, has caused significant shifts in the Left worldwide. There is a small but important surge of support for China, probably more significant than at any time since the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.

But support for China also merges into sympathy and support for Russia. Junge Welt a Marxist daily newspaper in Germany, for example, has called a conference on the theme of 'Hands Off Russia, Hands Off China'. It is as if the Bolsheviks had adopted the slogan 'Hands Off Germany' in 1917.

Uncritical support for Russia and China is unsurprising on the Stalinist Left, but now extends much further. This has stymied progressive support internationally for the Hong Kong democracy movement and the Uighurs of western China, who are facing mass incarceration in concentration camps and cultural genocide.

In 1989 most sections of the non-Stalinist Left identified with and supported the Tiananmen Square democracy movement. Today, on the other hand, there is widespread reluctance to take a stand against the dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party.

Also notable is relative silence on Russia's role in Ukraine and the Middle East. Where are the mass anti-war demonstrations against the genocidal massacre and mass torture of the Russian-backed Assad regime in Syria? How widespread has been denunciation of the role of Russian airplanes in the deliberate bombing of hospitals and residential areas in rebel-held Idlib province in Syria?

Uncritical attitudes towards Russia and China are based on 'campism' - the idea that the world can be analysed in terms of progressive and reactionary camps, with Russia and China in the progressive camp.

In North America, this is sometimes referred to as 'Marxism', a reference to the late Sam Marcy, founder of the US Workers World Party, which today continues to back the Chinese dictatorship. A flavour of their approach can be found here.

The campist infection is seeping into the Left inside the US Democratic Party. In Britain, campism is on full display at the Morning Star website side, backed up by the micro-faction Socialist Action.

A leading contemporary theorist of campism is Socialist Action leader John Ross, a former advisor to Ken Livingstone and now employed at a Chinese University. Ross is the author of China's Great Road, which sings the praises of the Chinese dictatorship and its economic miracle.

The language is similar to that of Stalinists in the 1930s, who broadcast across the world the success of the latest Soviet Five-Year Plan in increasing wheat output and steel production - as if economic growth were not part and parcel of capitalism, and as if it did not depend on the exploitation and impoverishment of the working class.

Ross is unapologetic in his support for Assad and Russia in Syria, because, he says, there are two sides and if you do not back Assad then you back Islamic State. In other words, socialists and all progressives have to choose their 'camp'.

Our enemy's enemy is not our friend. The Russian people were not allies of the Kaiser when they overthrew the Tsar in 1917. The struggle for socialism never involves supporting one capitalist power, one imperialist war-machine, against another. It involves international solidarity, world revolution, and the self-emancipation of the working class by mass struggle from below.

Hands Off Kazakhstan! Down With the Dictatorship! Solidarity With the Kazakh People!

Phil Hearse, Neil Faulkner

Below we publish a statement by Kazakh socialists:

In Kazakhstan, there is now a real popular uprising and from the very beginning the protests were of a social and class nature, since the doubling of the price of liquefied gas on the exchange was only the last straw in an overflowing cup of patience.

After all, the demonstrations began precisely in Zhanaozen at the initiative of the oil workers, which became a kind of political headquarters of the entire protest movement.

And the dynamics of this movement is indicative, since it began as a social protest, it then began to expand, and labour collectives used rallies to put forward their own demands for a 100% increase in wages, cancellation of optimisation results, improvement of working conditions, and freedom of trade union activity. As a result, on 3 January, the entire Mangistau region was engulfed in a general strike, which spread to the neighbouring Atyrau region.

It is noteworthy that already on 4 January, Tengizchevroil oil workers went on strike, where the participation of American companies reaches 75%. It was there that in December last year, 40,000 workers were laid off and a new series of layoffs was planned. They were subsequently supported during the day by the oilmen of the Aktobe and West Kazakhstan and Kyzylorda regions.

Moreover, in the evening of the same day, strikes of miners from the Armelormittal Temirtau company began in the Karaganda region and of copper smelters and miners from the Kazakhmys corporation, which can already be regarded as a general strike in the entire mining industry of the country.

And here they also put forward demands for higher wages, lowering the retirement age, the right to their own trade unions and strikes.

At the same time, indefinite rallies on Tuesday began already in Atyrau, Uralsk, Aktyubinsk, Kyzyl-Orda, Taraz, Taldykorgan, Turkestan, Shymkent, Ekibastuz, in the cities of the Almaty region, and in Almaty itself, where the merging of streets appeared on the night of 4/5 January in an open clash of demonstrators with the police, as a result of which the city akimat [government centre] was temporarily seized. This caused Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to declare a state of emergency.

It should be noted that these demonstrations in Almaty were attended mainly by unemployed youth and internal migrants living in the suburbs of the metropolis and working in temporary or low-paid jobs. And attempts to calm them down with promises by reducing the gas price to 50 tenge, separately for the Mangistau region and Almaty, have not satisfied anyone.

The decision of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to dismiss the government, and then remove Nursultan Nazarbayev [the former dictator] from the post of chairman of the Security Council, also did not stop the protests, since on 5 January, mass protest rallies began in the regional centres of Northern and Eastern Kazakhstan, where they had not previously existed - in Petropavlovsk, Pavlodar, Ust-Kamenogorsk, and Semipalatinsk. At the same time, attempts were made to storm the buildings of regional akimats in Aktobe, Taldykorgan, Shymkent, and Almaty.

In Zhanaozen itself, at their indefinite rally, workers formulated new demands - the resignation of the incumbent president and all Nazarbayev officials, the restoration of the 1993 Constitution and the associated freedoms to create parties and trade unions, plus release of political prisoners and an end of repression. A council of aksakals [elders] was immediately created, which became an informal authority.

Thus, the demands and slogans that are now used in different cities and regions were broadcast to the entire movement, and the struggle received a political content. Attempts are also being made on the ground to create committees and councils to coordinate the struggle.

At the same time, troops were pulled together in Almaty, Aktau, and Zhanaozen, and if everything went peacefully in the Mangistau region and the soldiers refused to disperse the protesters, then shootings began in the southern capital, and on the night of 5/6 January special forces were introduced, which began a clean-up of the airport and neighbourhoods captured by the rebels. According to various sources, there are already dozens killed by the demonstrators.

In this situation, there is a danger of violent suppression of all protests and strikes, and here it is necessary to completely paralyse the country with a general strike. Therefore, it is urgent to form unified action committees on a territorial and production basis in order to provide organised resistance to military and police terror.

In this regard, the support of the entire international labour movement, communist movement, and organised Left is necessary in order to organise a large-scale campaign in the world.

The socialist movement of Kazakhstan demands:

- 1) An immediate cessation of hostilities against the people and the withdrawal of troops from the cities!
- 2) Immediate resignation of all Nazarbayev officials, including President Tokayev!
- 3) Release of all political prisoners and detainees!
- 4) Ensuring the right to create trade unions and political parties and to hold strikes and meetings!
- 5) Legalisation of the activities of the banned Communist Party of Kazakhstan and the Socialist Movement of Kazakhstan!

We call on all the workers and working people of the country to implement in practice the demand of the executed oil workers of Zhanaozen - to nationalise, under the control of labour collectives, the entire extractive and large-scale industry of the country!

P.S.

- Anti*capitalist Resistance. 06.01.2021:
<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/russian-hands-off-kazakhstan/>

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