

Respect the referendum! Hands off Donbass, Zaporozhye and Kherson

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Donetsk residents at a polling station on the final day of the referendum on joining the Russian Federation, Sept. 27. “Despite permanent cannon fire, the atmosphere at voting stations is festive with music playing and offers of tea and sweetmeats to visitors,” Donetsk News Agency reported. Photo: Donetsk News Agency

On Sept. 30, Russian President Vladimir Putin, the leaders of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics, and the Zaporozhye and Kherson regions officially signed a treaty of accession uniting these areas with the Russian Federation.

The accession of these regions, formerly part of Ukraine, came after a five-day referendum held from Sept. 23-27, in which the vast majority of voters who participated said “yes” to joining the Russian Federation: 98.72% in Donetsk, 97.87% in Lugansk, 97.80% in Zaporozhye and 96.75% in Kherson, [reported teleSUR](#). Refugees from these regions now living in Russia also voted.

The Ukrainian government called on its supporters to boycott the vote.

“We will definitely rebuild destroyed cities and towns, houses, schools, hospitals, theaters and museums” in these regions, [Putin said](#). “We will restore and develop industrial enterprises, factories, infrastructure, social and pension systems, health care, and education.

“We call on the Kiev regime to immediately cease fire, all hostilities, to stop the war that it had unleashed back in 2014, and to return to the negotiating table.”

In the U.S. and other NATO countries, the referendum was condemned and dismissed as an act of annexation by Russia against Ukraine. They described the [2014 Crimean referendum](#), with over 95% supporting joining Russia, the same way.

Biden’s ‘Armageddon’ threat

Washington seized on this development to call for even more weapons and money

for the regime in Kiev – above and beyond the \$70 billion already committed by the U.S. to war in Ukraine so far this year.

At a big-money Democratic Party fundraising event on Oct. 7, U.S. President Joe Biden [ramped up the threats](#), saying the danger of “nuclear Armageddon” was greater than at any time since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Biden claimed that Russia’s president threatened to use “tactical nuclear weapons or biological or chemical weapons.” His remarks were widely reported.

In fact, Putin has not threatened those things. What Moscow officials have said is that the accession of the four regions extends the constitutional protections of the Russian Federation to these areas, including the country’s nuclear deterrent.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, however, took Biden’s remarks as an opportune moment to call on NATO to [launch “preemptive strikes”](#) on Russia. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov described it as “a call to start a world war.”

Lest Biden’s and Zelensky’s statements be taken for empty posturing, the U.S. attacked the [Nord Stream gas pipelines](#) in the Baltic Sea Sept. 27, while the Security Service of Ukraine carried out a terror attack on the [Kerch Strait Bridge](#) connecting Crimea and the Russian mainland on Oct. 8.

Self-determination

Western governments claim that the referendum was illegitimate, explaining it as an imperial land grab by Russia. These claims are stripped of context or respect for the desires and concerns of the residents of these regions.

Any election held under wartime conditions naturally faces difficulties and limitations. For example, in Donetsk, the capital of the Donetsk People’s Republic, residents voted under fire from daily Ukrainian artillery attacks and with the [threat of miniature land mines](#) scattered across the city by Kiev’s troops.

But people refused to be intimidated; there was no doubt that they would vote in favor of joining the Russian Federation, which has provided invaluable humanitarian aid and military support during Ukraine's 8-year war against the Donbass mining region.

International election observers came on short notice, representing countries and movements around the world, and gave the thumbs-up to the conduct of the referendum. Invitations were extended to the official election commissions from 100 countries, though few of these bodies were willing to risk Washington's wrath.

In the DPR alone, 133 observers from 28 countries worked during the five days of the referendum. On the final day of voting, observers from Britain, Germany, Syria, Togo, Spain, Colombia, South Africa, Ghana, Serbia, India, Iceland, and Latvia worked at polling stations in the cities of Donetsk and Makeyevka, [Donetsk News Agency reported](#).

Observers came from places like Venezuela - a country whose election results have been frequently disregarded by the U.S. and NATO, despite a sterling record of election conduct ratified by international observers, including U.S. progressives.

Emergency measure

U.S. officials and media outlets argue that annexing Ukrainian territory was Russia's goal all along. But this flies in the face of the facts. Every action Russia has taken since 2014 has been aimed at preventing this scenario.

Moscow insisted on upholding the 2015 Minsk II agreements brokered by France and Germany, which provided a pathway for Donetsk and Lugansk to rejoin Ukraine with more autonomy. It did so even after it became painfully clear that Ukraine (under Washington's orders) would never respect or live up to its side of the agreement.

In fact, a movement to join the Russian Federation had been building in Donbass and eastern Ukraine since 2014, particularly after Ukraine launched its “Anti-Terrorist Operation” against the residents of Donetsk and Lugansk. Russian officials discouraged this, often to the frustration of residents living under the wartime conditions imposed by Kiev.

Moreover, the accession of these war-torn areas at this time is a huge burden to the Russian Federation. U.S. and Western economic sanctions are being continuously tightened, and more resources must be spent defending the country from NATO. The need to institute a partial draft to strengthen the Special Military Operation further hampers Russia’s economy by removing people from the workforce.

The decision to hold the September referendums was an emergency measure of last resort – just like the Russian military intervention in February – to prevent a NATO-armed genocide against the people of the region.

Movement skeptics in the West should ask themselves: Why would the majority Russian-speaking population and other national minorities choose to remain under a Ukrainian regime that every worker understands to be in the pocket of Washington and the European imperialists? One that bans the use of their languages and their political parties?

Why would residents of Donbass choose to stay in Ukraine when the “patriots” that fill the ranks of Kiev’s neo-Nazi military battalions speak of them as subhumans to be driven from their homes, at best, or slaughtered? When anti-fascists and other political opponents of the Kiev authorities have been killed, jailed, or forced into exile since 2014?

Language portraying residents of Donbass and Russia as subhuman “savages” has now entered the mainstream of Western media, especially in op-eds and think-pieces geared to prepare the population for open war against Russia.

Support Donbass resistance

Left and anti-war movements in the U.S. will not be able to mount an effective resistance to the growing crisis and the threat of world war until they grapple with a real understanding of the dynamics of the U.S. proxy war in Ukraine.

There was an outcry over the reported deaths of 12 civilians after massive Russian missile strikes on military and infrastructure targets in Western Ukraine Oct. 10. The strikes came in response to the Ukrainian terror attack on the Kerch Strait Bridge.

Any civilian death in wartime is tragic. But no mention was made of the fact that this many people are routinely killed on any given day [by Ukrainian attacks on civilian targets](#) in Donbass - and that this has been going on for nearly a decade.

[Struggle-La Lucha has long argued](#) that the anti-fascist liberation struggle of the Donbass people, through its deep historical resonance with the workers of Russia and other former Soviet countries, has compelled Russia's government to aid their resistance.

The official Western narrative, which unfortunately is shared by much of the U.S. left, stands reality on its head, depicting the people of Donbass as pawns of Russia, or simply beneath notice.

With three decades of growth of the NATO war alliance, the U.S. government has been tightening a noose around Russia since the early 1990s. The Donbass resistance since 2014 has helped to push the capitalist regime in Moscow to take measures for the survival of Russia's sovereignty after decades of relying on diplomatic maneuvers and attempts to come to an understanding with the bandits in Washington and Western Europe.

But U.S. imperialism has no interest in compromises or understandings with Russia,

just as it has worked tirelessly to prevent Ukraine from negotiating an end to the current conflict. It wants to dismantle and dominate the Russian Federation as a stepping stone to dismembering the People's Republic of China.

