

# **Three Years of Resistance to Imperialism and the Struggle for Autonomy**

**The View of the BOAC Militant**

The Combat Organization of Anarcho-Communists

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Three years ago, a full-scale invasion of the troops of the fascist Russian state into Ukraine began. For the entire modern anarchist and revolutionary left movement in the post-Soviet region, including the Combat Organization of Anarchist Communists, this may have been the most serious test of our existence. We took up the challenge of history and joined the battle. Unfortunately, it is already possible to see how the struggle of the anarchist region in these difficult three years is beginning to be forgotten. This should not be the case. We must remember the martyrdom and critically analyze the experience gained in the struggle – this is the only way to achieve our revolutionary goals.

## **Socio-political Situation**

What did we have to face on February 24, 2022, what was the socio-political situation? In previous years, the Russian state, through repressions, almost completely crushed all the sprouts of independent public self-organization in the territory under its control. As part of this policy of state terror, the anarchist movement was dealt a serious blow. We also remember the young hero and martyr Mikhail Zhlobitsky, who embarked on the path of selfless struggle against the state repressive machine. Despite Misha's heroic deed and other attempts to resist, state control over society was extremely strong and only tightened every day.

We also saw how Putin, after some cooling in relations between the two dictators, nevertheless at a critical moment provided political support to the Lukashenko regime. This played an important role in suppressing the popular uprising that began in August 2020 in Belarus. The defeat of Ukraine, its occupation or the installation of a puppet pro-Russian government in Kiev would inevitably lead to a regime of state terror in this country as well. We had no illusions about the Ukrainian neoliberal state, and we saw the repression it carried out – this repression was also directed directly against us. Nevertheless, the level of independence of society from the state and opportunities for public self-organization were significantly higher in Ukraine at the beginning of 2022 than in Russia and Belarus. Therefore, for us, as anarchists and revolutionaries, it was obvious that it was necessary to stand up for society when it faced fascist imperial aggression.

It was also clear that Russia's war against Ukraine was genocidal in nature. This was embodied not only in the mass murder of civilians, although in Mariupol and elsewhere the Russian army was very "successful" in such atrocities. The genocidal policy was also expressed in the desire to subordinate Ukrainian society, which had historically already been subjected to Russian colonization, to the imperial narrative and imperial hegemony (including cultural hegemony), to paralyze any collective actions through state terror, and to eradicate the very collective memory of resistance. The Russian regime not only wants to conquer new lands, it also seeks to deprive the surviving Ukrainians of their will, dignity and any sense of community, mentally impose on them the role of disenfranchised slaves of the imperial metropolis. This makes the Russian invasion of Ukraine similar to the genocidal policy of the Turkish state in Kurdistan and to the genocide carried out by the state of Israel in Palestine.

## **Partisan Struggle in Russia**

In the first six months of the full-scale war, the guerrilla actions of the BOAC received a huge resonance both in Russia and Ukraine, and outside the post-Soviet region. Our attacks were so

loud because they were carried out by a revolutionary organization. It is also important to note that the guerrilla resistance of the BOAC was accompanied by a deep ideological analysis of our actions and propaganda work. This served to achieve revolutionary goals and prevented the instrumentalization of our struggle by any statist forces. Our partisan resistance was not only effective and loud, it was and remains autonomous, independent of any state actors.

Attempts were also made to expand the partisan resistance and draw new friends into it. One of the methods we used for this was the creation of the Revolutionary Anarchist Fund. Interaction with the new comrades is carried out on the principles of maximum transparency in the conditions of brutal state repressions, if necessary, the necessary skills of conspiracy are trained. We consider deception and consumer attitude towards friends unacceptable. On this foundation, we will continue to work to create an organized anarchist partisan movement on the territory of the Russian Federation.

## **Struggle for autonomy in the face of war**

From the very beginning of the full-scale war, one of the founders of our organization, Dmytro Petrov, and our other comrades have been working to create a separate anti-authoritarian combat unit in Ukraine. Such a unit could become a platform for organized revolutionary activity in the post-Soviet space and an autonomous military-political subject, an alternative to statist, reactionary and capitalist forces. The leitmotif of our struggle was not the preservation of the “territorial integrity” of the Ukrainian state or the defense of post-Soviet neoliberal “democracy” from the post-Soviet fascist empire. As noted earlier, we saw the relative independence of Ukrainian society, its potential for public self-organization – something that was suppressed by the dictatorial regimes in Russia and Belarus. And we stood up to defend society from the statist force that came to Ukraine with fire and sword to eradicate any manifestations of independence.

We are anarchists and revolutionaries, and participation in a war on the same side as the state, in the ranks of the state-controlled armed forces, is an obvious and significant contradiction. To some extent, the article by our heroically deceased comrade Dmitry Petrov “Four Months in the Anti-Authoritarian Platoon in Ukraine” is devoted to the discussion of this contradiction. Dima wrote:

“Obviously, becoming part of the vertical hierarchy is problematic for an anti-authoritarian. However, we deliberately took this step. I think everyone in our platoon will agree that taking part in the resistance is more important than the negative side of being temporarily included in the army system. Could we wage an armed struggle separately from the state army in the current conditions? The answer is definitely not. Most of these ideas are expressed far from Ukraine and the local situation. First, we are not sufficiently organized, and we do not have enough resources to seriously claim the formation of an independent armed force. At the same time, the Ukrainian state has enough strength and will to suppress any fully autonomous force. In such a situation, guerrilla warfare independent of the state is possible only in the territories occupied by the Russian army.

However, the most important reason is that the interests of the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian society today coincide in the task of repelling brutal aggression (but not in many other areas!). Therefore, an attempt to organize a separate resistance at the moment is unlikely to meet with

anyone's understanding. At the same time, the current situation in the Ukrainian armed forces gives considerable space for various political groups wishing to fight the occupiers."

It is important to note once again that our participation in the defense of society in this format was not a spontaneous decision, and even more so not assimilation into alien structures, but part of a verified revolutionary strategy. All revolutionary movements in their struggle had to face contradictions and overcome them. The presence of contradictions cannot be a reason for inaction and dogmatism. At the same time, we must constantly examine our actions and how they correspond to our revolutionary goals. This is what the martyr Dmitry Petrov taught us, and we learned our lesson.

In addition to fundamental ideological contradictions, interaction with state armed structures means a number of other difficulties. This is the need to obey the authorities, who are far from anarchic ideas, to interact with the command, sometimes having a dubious level of competence and not controlled by any democratic structures, and much more. And yet, during the full-scale war, several attempts were made to organize military actors with some level of autonomy. The most famous and successful of these projects is the Anti-Authoritarian Platoon, which operated in the first months of the full-scale invasion in the territorial defense of the Kyiv region. It ceased to exist in the summer of 2022, but the struggle for autonomy in the face of war did not end. In the spring of 2023, Dmitry Petrov and several other comrades received permission to create their own anarchist unit. The end of this project was put by the heroic death of Dima, as well as the internationalists Finbar Kaferka and Cooper Andrews, near Bakhmut on April 19, 2023.

In 2023–2024, comrades associated with the BOAC fought as part of the Siberian Battalion unit of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, consisting mainly of opposition-minded citizens of the Russian Federation. The comrades did not have any autonomy in this structure. Nevertheless, the comrades managed to convey their views to a relatively wide audience through contacts with major Russian opposition and Ukrainian mainstream media. This interaction with the media served to increase the recognition of the anarchist movement, and was also a form of ideological self-defense, preventing ideological assimilation. Our comrade, a supporter of the BOAK, a fighter of the "Siberian Battalion" Vladislav Yurchenko died heroically on August 9, 2024 during the landing of Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups on the Kinburn Spit in the Mykolaiv region.

## **What to do now?**

Capitalist forces, now increasingly led by outright fascists like Donald Trump, are joining Putin's colonial division of Ukraine. Therefore, we will continue to fight the state and capitalism – at the local and global levels. Including through the organization of partisan resistance on the territory of the Russian Federation. It is no less important to critically analyze and pass on the experience gained over the past three years to comrades both in the post-Soviet space and in other countries. We see that very little is still known about the revolutionary resistance in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, although there is interest in it at the international level. It is necessary to have an ideological discussion and build bridges with revolutionaries around the world.

Keeping the memory of the martyrs in our hearts, we will continue the struggle!

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Note: I am not the author, I simply translated this text—Alexander Harris

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