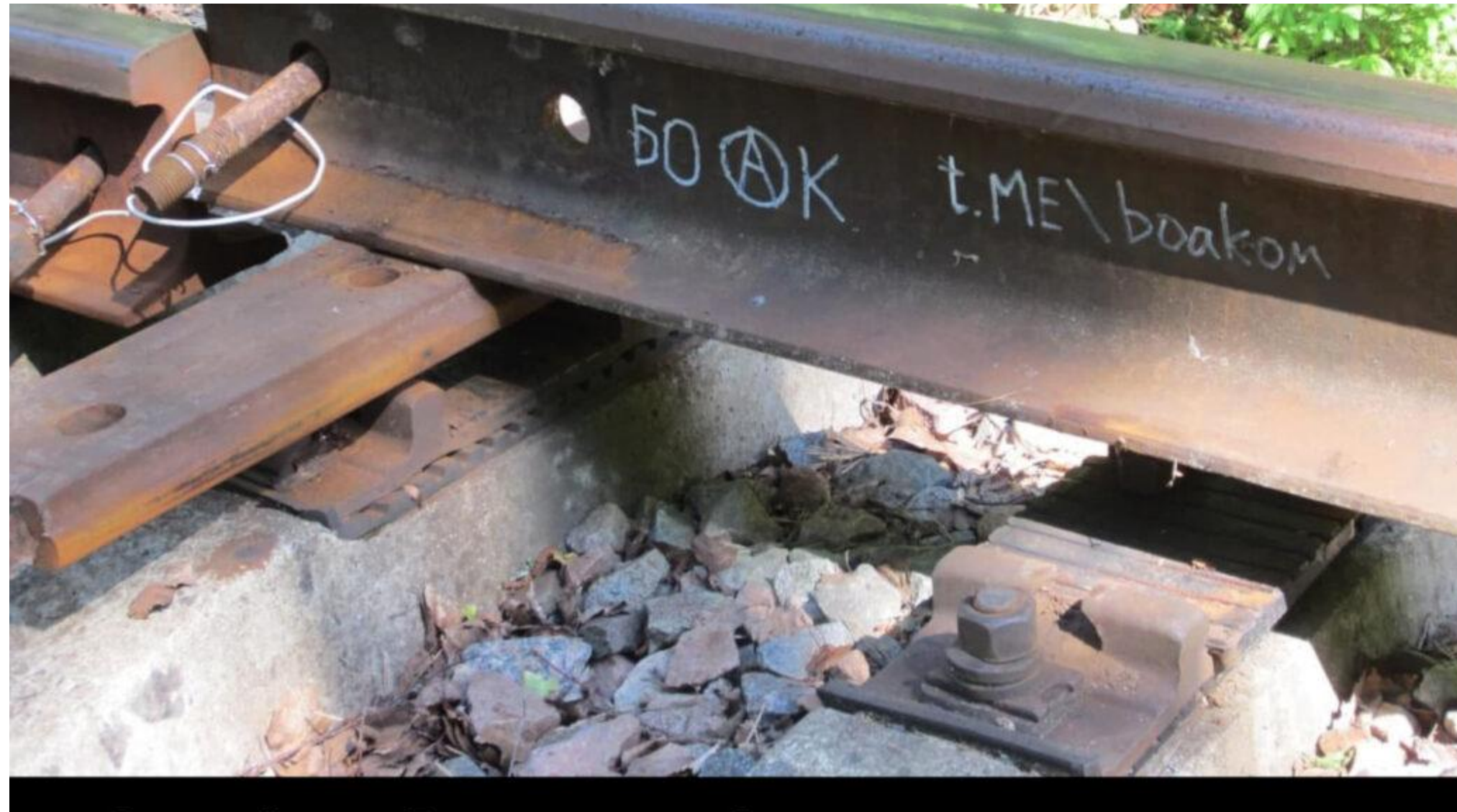


Ongoing Sabotage and Resistance to War in Russia and Ukraine: Interview with BOAK/Anarchist Communist Combat Organization



An interview with BOAK, the Anarchist Communist Combat Organization, a Russia-based group advocating sabotage and guerrilla struggle and the development of a social revolution against authoritarian regimes in eastern Europe. [This interview was first broadcast on the Final Straw Radio Show.](#)

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Submitted by R Totale on July 18, 2022

TFSR: Would you please introduce yourself with whatever names you'd like to use, philosophical or organizational affiliation you want to share, and generally where you're speaking from?

ACCO/BOAK: We consider ourselves revolutionaries and combatants against Putin's authoritarian regime, as well as all other oppressors in Eastern Europe. We fight for a horizontal, self-managing society based on solidarity, freedom, equality and radical ecology. We believe that revolutionary organization is a necessary tool to achieve this goal and we are longtime participants in anarchist movements. We are the members of the Anarcho-Communist Combat Organization and the collective of «Anarchist Fighter» information channels.

TFSR: What is the Anarcho-Communist Combat Organization? What do you do, who participates and what are your short term and long term goals?

BOAK: BOAK (Anarcho-Communist Combat Organization) is a group of anarchists standing for direct action and guerrilla methods of struggle as the most adequate, although not only, way to achieve social revolutionary objectives, especially against clearly authoritarian states like today's Russia or Belarus.

Guerrilla struggle as well as any other kind of revolutionary activities (including the most "peaceful" and legal) should be performed in organized, disciplined and militant way. Anarchists need political organization of committed revolutionaries with combative potential. The same is applicable to broader opposition movements in Russia and Belarus. During our activities we try to implement this vision.

We can speak about our short and long term goals.

As short term goals we can name the further development of our organization, development of communication with other organizations and groups, for us to grow powerful enough to make a difference in a mid term term goal – building a social anarchist revolution in Russia.

And our long term goal would be completing this revolution and building a new, free and just society, according to our ideals.

TFSR: How did you come to anarchist politics in a place where its been increasingly criminalized and a left movement seems so erased? And how do you respond to western "anti-Imperialists" who promote the Russian state as a bulwark against imperialism?

BOAK: We came to the anarchist movement several generations ago. Before the current harsh wave of repression which has been peaking since late 2017 through today. Different members of our collective came to anarchist ideas by different paths. But at some point it was our militancy which brought us together and since then we continued analysis and practice collectively.

However, even though our movement is threatened to be criminalized or erased, it still can attract new generations of revolutionaries to join. The clear example is Kansk case in Siberia where secret services prosecuted young guys who got interested in militant anarchism. We believe there are a lot of our potential comrades throughout the country because anarchism has the aura of being the movement of consistent and determined fighters against the ruling regime.

We believe all people with anti-imperialist views need to understand that there is more than one Imperialist in this world. And Putinist Russia is definitely an imperialist force, which constitutes even more immediate threat for the peoples of the region than even U.S. imperialism (look at the Kazakhstan this January or Ukraine now).

TFSR: Can you speak more about what your vision of a social revolution is and how it could engage those other opposition movements that don't identify as anarchist? Organizing under a repressive regime that criminalizes speech and assembly seems difficult.

BOAK: Very generally speaking, revolution is the process of major political change which is performed with the participation of broad social layers and made outside existing legal procedures. Social revolution means considerable social changes in addition. It can not be mere simple replacement of ruling figures. For now, any overthrowing ruling cliques in Russia and Belarus promises notable changes in our societies.

Of course we would prefer this changes have libertarian trajectory. For this, strong revolutionary organization is necessarily required. At the same time, overthrowing authoritarian regimes in our countries will be definitely the task for the broad popular movement, not a single political party or organization. Inside this movement there is, predictably, hard competition between different political groups and their projects. If anarchists are serious about libertarian revolution, we need to prepare to engage in this struggle.

We believe, that at least in the beginning there will be coordination of very different political initiatives, united by a common goal.

And, in process of achieving this goal, pros and cons of different ideologies and their approaches will be seen. And we believe, that anarchist ideology would be the one which will respond to the problems better than the rest, and will give people the opportunity to build a new society without bad diseases of the old one.

TFSR: Does it seem like there is an upswing in anarchist theory and politics in Russia, or more of an increase in tactics and anti-state organizing without engaging anarchism?

BOAK: It wouldn't be truly correct to speak about any upswing in anarchist theory in Russia. It is actually in crisis and there is an intense search for the light at the end of the tunnel. However, such a situation, together with dramatic historical events we participate in can bring new ways and understandings of how to promote anarchist ideas and practice. Maybe the libertarian idea of confederation can gain some grounds, since the bloody horror we experience now is a direct result of oppressive and unjust social models of the Empire and the Nation State.

TFSR: Did you come into being with the escalation of the war with Ukraine in February or was the group around before that?

BOAK: The group has existed for years, as has the Anarchist Fighter page and channels. We decided that the moment of truth, which is this war for our region, was the proper time to announce the existence of the organization and its name publicly.

TFSR: Because of the way the corporate news cycle operates here in the USA, news of the Russian war on Ukraine is no longer grabbing so many headlines. Where is the conflict at right now as Ukraine gathers more western weapons and what is your sense of popular viewpoints and understandings of the conflict?

BOAK: It is obvious that the war is in a very hot, maybe crucial point. The big battle is raging in Donbass for weeks now and it looks to be in its culmination stage. Even though corporate Media in the West have started to “forget” about this war, it is not at all less intense than in first months and not less decisive for our region.

TFSR: Is there an anti-war movement in the Russian Federation controlled areas? We heard about media censorship, Newspeak criminalization of calling it a “war”, the brutal arrests of protesters in cities like Moscow and St Petersburg. Is this still going on or has the public protest been beaten back by the violence?

BOAK: Yes, repressions are at a high level. Censorship, arrests, tortures and prison sentences are all here. The more vocal and mass protests of the first days of war in Russia were generally suppressed by the government. However individual actions of a different kind are being performed, often by courageous artists or activists. These are still taking place more or less regularly.

What seems to be more important is that soon after the war started, there appeared a different current of resistance – spontaneous and decentralized actions of sabotage against different governmental institutions, first of all – military conscription centers. It really became a phenomenon already and we hope soon it will take more organized, mass and radical forms.

As you know, we also put an effort to contribute to this part of struggle.

TFSR: Please assume that our listenership has not seen news of the actions against oppressive regimes in Belarus & Russia. Can you speak about some of the actions of individual artists and activists that inspire you? And what about these recruitment center actions? What do they look like, how many, and what sort of reaction do you hear from the population?

BOAK: Direct action against oppressive regime in our countries has a very long history. Starting from NRA (New Revolutionary Alternative), who blasted main building of the FSB in 1999, along with several military recruitment centers. Later there was “Black Bloc”, who led an anarchist guerrilla group for several years and never was caught. Mikhail Zhlobitsky, who bombed FSB building in Arkhangelsk paid with his life. Or the four anarchist who returned to Belarus in 2020 to fight against Lukachenko’s oppression known as the Anarchists Partisans case. And so on, and so on. We can clearly see that resistance was always here.

But now, when the tyrannical nature of Putin’s regime has become obvious for anybody, direct action became a method of very broad swath of the people.

In the last months there were 18 arsons of military recruitment center's all over Russia

Not all of them were very successful – sometimes the fire was too small.

But in several cases – for example – in Mordovia – documents of young people who would be forced to go to army were destroyed. In Nizhnevartovsk, Luhovicy, Omsk some rooms of military centers were burned down.

Also, as we mentioned, direct action became a job of non-activists. It lead to some arrests at first, but people learn very fast, so now in the latest actions there are almost no arrests at all.

Reactions of people is different, for instance some are subject to military propaganda. But a lot of them understand, that this war leads to the deaths of many people including their sons and husbands, who would be sent to Ukraine to die in Putin's war.

There are also other actions, apart from arsons of recruitment centers. For example, there were several cases of the derailling of trains. Also, attacks on electrical equipment of railroads, and cellphone towers in the border regions.

TFSR: How do you support other groups or individuals whose actions you share affinity with?

BOAK: We support all the people of good will who take part in the current, sharp conflict on the side of fighting for freedom. Everyone who confronts the Putin and Lukashenko regimes, especially those who do it inside these countries. We also support all fellow anarchist and other anti-authoritarian revolutionaries, struggling for freedom and justice worldwide.

As to concrete steps – we use our info-channels both for sharing skills, useful for direct actions, and to spread the word of different groups of comrades who send us reports and communiques about their actions. After the start of the war, we also started to collect donations to support different revolutionaries and groups who need financing for their activities. We already sent our first small stipends on request, based on trust.

TFSR: Could you speak more about these info channels? Also in relation to this, individuals have received fines and other penalties for participating in supposedly private Telegram chats in relation to protests, direct actions and solidarity. Since we know that Telegram is not a secure method to avoid surveillance from the Russian & Belarusian state, how have you addressed the need for security culture while promoting resistance culture?

BOAK: We started our propaganda activity with site bo-ak.org

But we also understand that people more likely use social networks now to gain information, so to address bigger audiences we also opened several social accounts – in vk.com (a Russian social network), telegram, twitter, youtube etc.

Some of our channels were banned and other didn't have much success (and we also were forced to move our website to the darknet), so now we write on these platforms:

boakor7dmr63zguccltp6nki56ou4oppirhyllfck7yd3sifywinhkyd.onion/ – our main site. You can mostly find theoretical articles there, alongside our most important news and communiques about our actions .

<http://boakmirror.noblogs.org/> – is a mirror of the site, not on the dark web.

https://t.me/BO_AK_reborn – is our main channel in Telegram

We post here useful advises about how to organize direct action, our ideological articles, news of resistance and communiques about our actions.

https://vk.com/bo_ak and <https://vk.com/zloyancom> – our channels in VK.com

About security – Vk is the least secure platform of all. It's a pity because there is a lot of people still using it, so to not lose them we post our main news there. But we don't make contacts and we strongly advise all from communicating on VK and to switch at least to Telegram.

Telegram also isn't absolutely secure, of course. So our method is – use burner phones (and, preferably, use virtual numbers bought by cryptocurrencies anonymously). Also, we suggest using telegram only through TOR or VPN. Never believe anybody on the Internet, never give anybody info about yourself that you don't want to fall into the hands of the police.

And we promote this approach to our readers every time we can.

Also, for important dialogues, we use and propose for others to use – email with pgp-encryption. We believe it is more secure than telegram – at least, you need to worry only about person on other end of conversation, and not about messenger which transfers it.

TFSR: A former guest of ours from Russia mentioned that many Russians avoid military conscription and so often soldiers are from neighboring, central Asian countries reliant on Russian trade and goods. Who generally is fighting in Ukraine in the Russian military?

BOAK: We can roughly distinguish two groups in Russian occupier's forces. First are the true “dogs of war”, fighters of Wagner, different Spetsnaz elite units and contract soldiers for whom war is the lifestyle. They are to a big extent indoctrinated by the chauvinist reactionary ideology of the regime. The second group is soldiers who still signed a contract voluntarily but were recruited in poor, economically depressed regions where military service is one of the very few options for social promotion. These people are also victims of imperialist ambitions of Putin's clique. It is not the coincidence that often these guys are from Russian “internal colonies” or so-called national republics, undeveloped and robbed by the metropolis, from places such as Buryatiya, Dagestan and elsewhere.

We are hearing about foreign citizens from Central Asia in the Russian army for the first time and it sounds unlikely. It should not be confused with the soldiers from Russian-identified national regions. Also, there was a news some time ago, that Russia is recruiting soldiers in Syria, but we didn't see any proof to it.

TFSR: How are sanctions continuing to impact regular people and can you speak to the relationship between state rhetoric about Russian capitalist self-sufficiency and the reality of climate change (droughts impacting food production, etc)?

BOAK: The impacts of sanctions don't hit regular people fast. At first, it could look like everything is OK. But then you go to the shop, and see that some products which you need (and not some luxury stuff) costs triple what it did before, and other things you can't buy at all.

We can see that people in Russia have begun to suffer from sanctions, but for now it is more like rage in the air, with people asking “why does everything cost so much!?” Most of them still think that it can somehow return to normal situation (even if they don't have ideas about how, exactly). So the government isn't feeling a backlash yet.

But situation changes every day.

As for the question of if Russia could become self-sufficient – our answer is “Under the ruling regime – no way”. It couldn't become so without sanctions, with such high prices on oil and surplus moneys – so there is zero chances it

does it now. Maybe Russian society could become more self-sufficient if it would engage in grassroots participatory economic approaches.

With the current system Russia may cover some of its needs in food or clothes. But something more complicated – electronics, cars, machines – we don't think so. It could try to buy them from China or through other countries (known as "gray" imports). But Russia is very big, and it needs a lot of different stuff. We don't think gray imports could cover all of it. And, of course, time is essential here too – warehouses are not full anymore, and Russia doesn't have years to build trading chains.

So we believe very soon people in Russia will feel scarcity again, even stronger than it was in the Soviet Union.

TFSR: How is greater evidence of state repression shifting people from a pro- or neutral to antiwar stance? Or is it not doing that? And if so, is state propaganda evolving in response to those shifts, or just relying on fear, etc to maintain control. [several news stories recently about army officers, uh, violently harming soldiers and actually being sentenced by courts – but maybe they're just being used as examples for the state to be like 'of course we would never be okay with this' – a la Derek Chauvin's conviction in USA for killing George Floyd to prove that ~the justice system works~]

BOAK: It seems to us that in Russia there isn't a big shift in propaganda as you describe (like when the State tries to portray a situation as if there were some bad people in the system, but system overall works well).

Even after clarity on the events in Bucha in Ukraine, Russia has taken the position that "this is all lies, our soldiers are saints". And sadly a lot of people prefer to believe it. Because if you don't believe it, then you need to do something, because "your" State is pure evil. And it is very scary to do something in times like this.

So, it's a pity, but evidence of state repression itself may be couldn't shift mass people in Russia to anti war stance. At least, when the propaganda machine is working so hard to tell "all that is a lie"

But it works together with other facts – that your quality of life is worse than before, that your son returned from the war dead (or worse – didn't come home at all, and leaders pretend that they don't know anything and just want you to go away).

And all this together can actually change people's stances.

TFSR: I think in the USA and other places there are assumptions that if Putin were to leave office or be removed (as Joe Biden threatened at one point), that Russia could join the happy menagerie of Liberal Capitalist Republics. Can you talk about what a "change of strongman" could mean short of a social revolution in Russia or Belarus?

BOAK: The "change of strongman" in Russia may happen in very different contexts. In the worst case it will be just internal replacement of figures in power within the ruling clique, and the system will hardly change (which in turn could inspire further uprising). Another option is overthrowing of governing elite or at least a change of its course one way or another. In the post-soviet period we saw the case of president Yeltsin that liberal economic policies can be easily combined with pretty autocratic political steps. So, a new "more liberal" leader either from current establishment or from opposition would hardly guarantee real social-political shift.

Real changes require not a "change of strongman" but liberation from all strongmen. Implementation of the practices of self-government. However we also can't exclude some "provisional period", when the change of

government may cause the weakening of the State in general and give way for further social changes. Libertarian revolutionaries need to be prepared to take as much social grounds as possible in this moment.

In any case, there is no place for Russia in “the Western world” simply because global elites and the conditions of the global market don’t allow any mass welfare outside of the zone of global Metropolis. So, Russian society is unavoidably facing the challenge to find the ways to its prosperity outside of the false recipes suggested by “the happy menagerie of Liberal Capitalist Republics”.

As for Belarus – its current political system seems to be even more dependent on exactly one person than the Russian one. If Lukashenko left the country, Belarus would experience either the attempt to be fully swallowed by Russian imperialists or a path through intense changes with unwritten trajectory.

TFSR: We have seen disinformation in the US polarizing families and communities over the last decade. Are you witnessing similar effects around the difference between “special operation to remove nazis and liberate our little brothers in the Ukraine” versus “imperialist invasion to re-compose the lost Empire”? Are there strategies/resources for dealing with the effect of state propaganda on the interpersonal level (avoiding the dissonance becoming toxic and insurmountable? Also, are leveraging state power against each other in interpersonal conflicts, by engaging state services like in Soviet times? (this question was proposed by a Russian-American anarchist comrade)

BOAK: Yes, it happens the same in Russia and neighboring countries with the families and friend circles. Maybe we can say that older generations sometimes are more eager to carry the regime’s agenda (of course with the myriad of exceptions). We believe it should be confronted on interpersonal levels – all the consumers of state propaganda should see with their own eyes that people rejecting it are their loved ones, not some evil portraits from the television. If you defend your position calmly, with good arguments, friendly approach and finally with love – you have good chances to be heard.

TFSR: How can listeners outside of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine act and speak in solidarity with movements of resistance to Lukashenko, Putin and the war in Ukraine? How can we support those taking direct action and those who’ve been criminalized? And how can we stay informed?

BOAK: Direct actions against authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe can be taken worldwide. We are very inspired by the occupations made by Western comrades in the houses of Russian oligarchs. All of their business interests, estates and Western partners are legitimate targets in this context. All the public, symbolic actions of solidarity are also very welcome. Any expression is important, inspiring and appreciable.

Not least is information flow. We would ask comrades to spread our word in their circles and spaces. Particularly to fight Kremlin bullshit narrative about “antifascist fight against Ukrainian nazis and NATO”. Also donation campaign and material aid collection for libertarian structures in Eastern Europe is really a strong basis for sustainability of our struggle here.

We would recommend some information resources having more or less regular updates in English: avtonom.org for Russia; Resistance Committee for Ukraine and Pramen for Belarus. We, as “Anarcho-Communists Combat Organization”, also try to translate key news and texts into English.

BOAK links:

- tor browser: <https://www.torproject.org/download/>
- Onion Site: <http://boakor7dmr63zguccltp6nki56ou4oppirhyllfck7yd3sifywinhkyd.onion/>
- Non-Onion mirror: <http://boakmirror.noblogs.org/>
- Telegram Channel: https://t.me/BO_AK_reborn
- VK Channels:
 - https://vk.com/bo_ak
 - <https://vk.com/zloyancom>

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