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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Audiences Held 'Hostage' By Mock Ukrainian Soldiers in Pro-War Play

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The hostage-taking scene from Russia's pro-war play titled "Polite People." **vk.com/vlshow**

Theatergoers south of Moscow were held "hostage" and shot at by actors playing Ukrainian soldiers during an immersive play that glorifies Russia's invasion of its neighbor, local media reported Tuesday.

Opening scenes from the production titled "Polite People" showed actors dressed in Ukrainian military uniforms violently capturing audience members and shooting them with what appeared to be prop assault rifles.

One female captive can be heard screaming "it hurts" and "let go" as the actors drag her onstage.

Embed:

Russia's Kaluga treats spectators to an "immersive play about Donbas hostilities".

> Actors dressed in the Ukrainian army uniform stormed into the hall, shot rounds into the air, and took people "hostage."https://t.co/Oq2XXwB2kX
>
> Video: Nika TV pic.twitter.com/iIA3AJQwKu
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> — Novaya Gazeta Europe (@novayagazeta_en) November 8, 2022

"Polite People" is a euphemism for the Russian soldiers without insignia who occupied Crimea before Moscow annexed the Ukrainian peninsula in 2014.

"The creators wanted to immerse the audience into the atmosphere of what Donbas residents had experienced for eight years," the Kaluga region's Nika TV broadcaster said, using the term for eastern Ukraine's separatist-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Actor Vilen Babichev, who portrays one of the Ukrainian troops, told Nika TV the play aims to show Russian audiences "the nature of the enemy that invaded our territories eight and a half years ago."

President Vladimir Putin has justified Russia's deadly invasion of Ukraine with unbacked claims that Kyiv is committing "genocide" against Russian-speaking residents of the Donbas.

"Polite People" is funded through a 10.1-million ruble ($165,000) Russian presidential grant.

Its author, Luhansk-based musician and film studio director Roman Razum, said the project aims to "create positive content to counteract negative content that carries an immoral ideology and counters the Russian cultural code."

"We show that these aren't just Ukrainian [soldiers], but fighters fully trained by NATO and supplied with weapons for many years," Razum told Nika TV.

The play premiered in Kaluga on Monday following dates in occupied Luhansk and four Russian cities in late October and early November. It is expected to go on tour across a handful of other Russian cities until late November.

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