



The West's war aims in Ukraine

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THE WORLD situation in 2022 is characterised by multiple crises?the most immediate and far reaching in its global consequences is the war in Ukraine, which has massively boosted re-armament, the expansion of Nato, the world's biggest war-waging alliance, and with it the global hegemony of the USA, coupled with a global food crisis.

Added to these factors destabilising and fragmenting the globalised world economy are the previous two years of closures and interruptions of international supply chains as a result of the Covid pandemic and the failure of Cop26 in Glasgow to do anything meaningful about the threatened climate catastrophe manifested in the growing series of draughts, floods and wildfires.

Every one of these crises has at its root capitalism's profit system and the economic warfare between the great powers expressed in sanctions regimes and blockades. These factors, along with the destructive regional wars in Syria, Yemen, the Horn of Africa and now Ukraine, are all expressions of the highest stage of capitalism?imperialism.

Nato expansion

In 1989?1991 it might have seemed, with the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and the reunification of Germany, that Nato's mission as defined by its founders was concluded. Indeed for the next 10 years Russia?suffering a massive decline in its GDP and then the departure of the three Baltics states, Ukraine and Georgia?hardly posed a threat to the Nato states despite its wars in Chechnya.

Yet, under American pressure, the alliance continued to encroach; admitting Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary whilst rebuffing Boris Yeltsin's and then Vladimir Putin's suggestion that Russia might join or that it be replaced by a pan-European Security Treaty.

Nato's interventions in the Balkans and later involvement in America's wars in the Middle East showed it was far from a defensive or peaceful alliance. Meanwhile, thanks to the soaring prices of oil and gas, Russia recovered from its prostration and began to reassert its 'right' to be treated as a 'great power' and project that power in the Middle East.

Pro-Russian and even neutral regimes were hit by the so-called 'colour revolutions' in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004). Whilst these had genuine domestic causes in discontent with the oligarchic regimes, US diplomats and NGOs played an obvious role. These coups showed the danger of a similar fate for Putin's increasingly authoritarian Bonapartist regime, especially when the boom in oil and gas prices came to an end with the recession.

Russian imperialism

From 2008 onwards, faced with America's repeated refusals to treat capitalist Russia with respect as it had the Soviet Union, despite its logistical help to the US and its allies' occupation of Afghanistan in 2001, Vladimir Putin moved to forcefully reassert its prestige.

Russia graduated to the imperialist club economically with its ruling class of billionaire oligarchs, rested on a rentier capitalism, as well as space, nuclear and weapons technology industries inherited from the Soviet Union and developed by Putin. Putin's regime curbed the independent power of the oligarchs and restored state control to strategic industries

In 2008, Putin responded to Georgia's pro-Western orientation with the short but decisive incursion into its Abkhazian

and South Ossetian autonomous regions. This set the pattern for his interventions in 2014, when the pro-Russian Ukrainian president Yanukovich was overthrown by the Maidan coup, prompting the seizure of Crimea and the intervention of Russian forces to support separatists in the Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts.

The invasion of Ukraine

The Maidan Coup of December 2013 to February 2014 saw the overthrow of the elected pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich by an alliance of Ukrainian neoliberals, far right nationalists and fascists, with the aid of US diplomats and NGOs. Thus, Ukraine was taken from Putin's orbit to Nato's, becoming a semi-colony of the West, under IMF and EU economic control and receiving Nato arms and training.

In response Putin seized Crimea with its huge naval base and, somewhat grudgingly at first, supported a de facto secession of parts of Luhansk and Donetsk, alienated by the nationalist measures of the new regime in Kyiv and the atrocities committed by fascists.

The Russian invasion on 24 February this year intensified the situation. The atrocities we saw in Fallujah and Aleppo, we now see in Bucha, a suburb of Kyiv, and the devastation of Mariupol as a result of a three-month pitiless bombardment which destroyed 95 percent of the city, killing thousands. This is now being repeated in other cities in the eastern provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk.

The scale of the dislocation of life is revealed in the flight of five million refugees across Ukraine's western borders and the internal displacement of over seven million people. This is the war of an imperialist power violating the sovereignty of a nation that the Russian dictator says has no right to exist.

However, if Putin and his regime are the immediate aggressors, the actions of the United States and its European Allies since the breakup of the Soviet Union and particularly since 2013 have equally provoked this war. In addition to the encroachments of Nato into Eastern Europe, since 2014 the United States and other Western countries have armed Ukraine with missile systems and small drones able to take out Russian tanks, plus surface-to-air missiles to shoot down Russian aircraft, also retraining its armed forces for asymmetric warfare.

The United States alone provided Ukraine with more than \$2.5 billion in military aid during this period and since February has sent Ukraine an additional \$3bn in military aid, including 1,400 Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and 5,100 Javelin anti-tank missiles, along with Mi-17 helicopters, patrol boats, long-range artillery and counter-drone tracking radar systems and coastal defence vessels. On 19 May, Biden introduced a Bill promising a further \$40bn in 'aid' to Ukraine.

Washington's aim is not only to strategically weaken Russia but to assert its dominance over its own allies, like Germany and France in Europe, and subordinated countries around the world. Proving that no one messes with the US and gets away with it is a lesson aimed above all at its strategic rival, Xi Jinping's China.

The new cold war

As part of this strategy is the return to Cold War policy towards Russia, represented by the unprecedentedly severe sanctions blockade of Russia. In response, Russia has blocked Ukrainian grain exports through Odessa, causing global food shortages. Russia has demanded an easing of sanctions in return for lifting the blockade. Meanwhile, Nato countries, led by Britain, are threatening to send warships to open the port with the possibility of a direct clash with the Russian navy.

US strategy is the expansion of Nato to cover the whole of Scandinavia, combined with the construction of an equivalent to Nato in the Asia-Pacific region, a US dominated alliance for confrontation with China. It is seeking to prevent its 'relentless rise', something which it sponsored in the 1990s and first decade of the new century. But when China, having restored capitalism, albeit under a supposed Communist Party, developed into an imperialist 'great power' in its own right, this threatened to cut short a 'second American century'.

That is why the US under Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton announced a 'pivot to Asia'. This was disrupted

somewhat by Trump's chaotic presidency, but Joe Biden has doubled down on his Democratic predecessor's strategy. Along with Australia and the UK, he has founded AUKUS, a pact to supply the former with nuclear submarines.

Biden is also upgrading the so-called Quad (the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) – Australia, Japan, India and the US – as well as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. Washington is working hard to draw India more closely into its system, despite Narendra Modi's refusal to join the sanctions against Russia, a major arms supplier to India. Biden's pledge to militarily defend Taiwan if it were attacked by China is premised on this new military alliance in the making.

Germany, which long defied US pressure to increase its defence spending to the Nato level of 2%, that defied US pressure to abandon the Nord Stream 2 pipeline agreement and continued with reliance on Russian gas and oil supplies, has now been forced into a huge increase in military spending and to turn for fuel supplies from sources in or close to the US and its allies in the Middle East.

All this has been accomplished under Social Democrat Chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose party that has long defended continued economic relations with Russia as part of an increased autonomy of the EU from Washington, an objective pursued even more outspokenly by France. This policy now lies in ruins, as does the century-long neutrality of Finland and Sweden.

The objective of the US and its allies is not the liberation of Ukraine or the protection of democracy in Taiwan but rather stopping Putin and Xi Jinping causing trouble for America and its subordinate allies and semi-colonies around the world.

War and revolution

The horrors and misery caused by Putin's invasion and the economic chaos threatened by Nato's response pose the question of how a war like this can end. At various moments Volodymyr Zelensky has indicated that a ceasefire and even a peace settlement might be possible, including the country not joining Nato in return for a pan-European defence settlement, but US spokespersons as well as pressure from Ukrainian right-wing nationalists and fascists quickly ruled this out.

What is certain is that none of the combatants, Putin, Zelensky, Biden, Johnson or the leaders of the EU, will resolve this war in a way that ensures a stable and lasting solution for the peoples of the region. None of them can be relied on to seek or offer a democratic and lasting solution to it.

Over a decade ago Workers Power and the League for the Fifth International recognised that a new period of inter-imperialist rivalry was replacing the unipolar absolute domination that America has enjoyed since 1991 and saw the horrors of the Afghan and Iraq war and the other war on terror interventions.

Moreover, the boom phase of globalisation ended in the bust of 2008. Lowering interest rates to near zero in the 2010s to stimulate recovery failed to see a return to serious growth. Now even cautious rises in central bank rates are fuelling inflation without economic growth (stagflation). The war and sanctions could well trigger a full-blown recession.

The policy of the labour movements of all the countries towards the current conflict should be that taken by revolutionary socialists like Karl Liebknecht and Lenin during the First World War: the main enemy is at home. In Britain, we must oppose all further military interventions and the West's claim to represent a fairer or more democratic version of capitalism, as opposed to Putin or Xi's authoritarian regimes. The centuries of global oppression committed by our own capitalist overlords, stretching right up to the present day, reveal such claims to be baseless.

Today, we fight for all Russian forces out of Ukraine, the end of the G7 sanctions regime and the Russian blockade of Ukraine's ports, the dissolution of both Nato and the CSTO and for turning the war in Ukraine into a revolution against the rulers of both countries, opening the road to a socialist United States of Europe.

