

The RADICAL

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Trump and Ukraine

The latest televised clash between Zelensky and Trump on February 28, 2025 will in the eyes of some sections of the global public (even in India) raise serious doubts about the widespread claim that the Ukrainian government has been a 'proxy' of the US against Russia and that the threat of NATO expansion was the primary reason for Russia's invasion. In fact, there has to date never been any chance of a required consensus on this since each NATO member has a veto. Rather, what occurred in Washington will give greater support to those who have rightly insisted that the primary character of the conflict has always been the Ukrainian determination to fight back as much as possible (hopefully with external support) against an illegal, brutal and morally unjustified military assault by an imperialist Russia. This will not, of course, deter those who have claimed that NATO expansionism is the root cause who will now scurry back to regurgitate the various deceits and myths about how Russia was 'pushed to react' as it did and how it was even willing to militarily retreat shortly afterwards through a peace agreement whose prospects were stymied by the intransigent refusal of the US/UK conveyed via Kyiv.

These are claims that need to be exposed for the basic falsehoods they are which is the purpose of this collection of articles written at different times since February 2022 till today. This is particularly necessary in India where the political spectrum from different shades of the left/far-left to different liberal hues to different shades of the right/far-right, rationalise Russian behaviour towards Ukraine in the name of Indian 'national interest', or because of ideological softness on Russia (refusing to see it as a lesser but still imperialist power), or because of the adoption of standard Realist approaches to understanding

global order and how geopolitics operates. If sustaining falsehoods and believing in the supposed compulsions of *realpolitik* is one part of this pro-Russia brief, the other is silence or minimisation of the import of uncomfortable realities by such advocates.

So ignore or dismiss as inconsequential Moscow's violation of the 1994 Budapest Agreement where Ukraine gave up its nuclear arsenal in return for a commitment that its territorial integrity would never be violated. That Russia voiced nuclear warnings to a non-nuclear Ukraine should not be taken as indicative of the Putin government's character. It was just an unfortunate and silly lapse that doesn't detract in any way from the recognising the merits of the Russian case. Similarly, don't situate the Russian assault on Ukraine in some chain of supposedly imperial behaviour by referring to Russia's military and political actions vis-à-vis a host of countries in its 'near abroad' and even further afield: the conflict with Ukraine must be seen as *sui generis*. And of course, don't take seriously what are to be regarded only or primarily as rhetorical excesses of Putin that signify little or nothing. Yes, he has even before 2014 questioned the legitimacy of Ukrainian existence as a separate entity (his speech in April 2008 to the Russia- NATO Council at Bucharest). But don't be so childish and politically naïve as to take all this as a serious motivating factor for the invasion though he did first march on Kiev with even the US and the West thinking he would capture it very quickly.

Pushing for a Ceasere

But let us now turn to the current reality. Trump's foreign policy actions need to be assessed at two levels. On one hand there have been his specific interventions in West Asia and regarding Russia - Ukraine. The other is with respect to what these

changes signify more generally for his foreign policy orientations? What is the strategic thinking – if there is one---behind these changes especially with respect to the future of the US relationship to much of Europe? What of the US-China face-off? How serious is this new administration about going in for major tariff protection policies for the US economy and what will be the impact of this in the US and abroad? Is he serious about his proposed major overhauls at these political and economic levels? It would seem wisest to wait and see since he has yet to substantially walk his talk. But what we can focus on here is his determination to push through some kind of peace deal between Russia and Ukraine be it only temporary. This kind of talk has really made the headlines only after Trump replaced Biden.

Both Zelensky and Putin have said they are open to a ceasefire deal. Again, the question will be what terms would be acceptable to both and perhaps more importantly what will satisfy the US enough so as to put maximum pressure on Ukraine to accept. To begin with, there was no tripartite meeting but initial discussions held between only the representatives of the US and Russia in Saudi Arabia. Even Trump is not dumb enough to realize that Ukraine will never *legally* accept Russia's territorial claims as distinct from factually recognizing the reality of Russian possessions and then go in for some compromise. Zelensky went to Washington to sign with Trump a deal offering access to its substantial wealth in various minerals, the revenues from which Kviv could make arms purchases and carry out reconstruction. Whether as an ordinary citizen or as President, Trump has always made expanding his business interests and promoting the US's economic footprint and acquisitions, a priority. [Incidentally, Ukraine's physical resources (a list is provided in one of the articles in the collection given here) is also a reason

for why Putin invaded.] But after the public fracas in the White House matters have become trickier not only on this economic front but also regarding the question of whether and what kind of a ceasefire deal will take place.

Trump's shift towards Russia at the expense of Ukraine and its possible implications for the US-Europe relationship that includes but goes beyond the NATO military alliance has clearly shaken the major European powers namely, UK, France and Germany along with most other members of the EU. While Hungary's Orban has welcomed this shift Poland, adjacent geographically to Ukraine, is seriously disturbed. A recent European summit of leaders from leaders from France, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Turkey, Finland, Sweden, Czechia and Romania, as well as the NATO secretary-general and the presidents of the European Commission and European Council has endorsed an effort led by the UK, France and Ukraine to work out and propose its own ceasefire deal. But this initiative is not to be taken as an expression of serious defiance of the US by Europe despite its assurances of greater material and moral support to Zelensky. Europe cannot match the scale of military support that the US can give to Kviv and it knows that without US support for any such deal, Russia will not accept even as it has declared its willingness to accept European troops as part of a peacekeeping force. In any case there was never going to be any American troops on the ground nor Russian acceptance of any official NATO contingents to playing such a peacekeeping role.

In any future ceasefire deal, key issues will be the nature and extent of demilitarized zones and their monitoring and effective implementation. Since in the Donbas the majority of Russian speakers are ethnic Ukrainians and not ethnic Russians, Kviv will want some legal forms

of protection for all i.e., no replacement of their citizenship status from Ukrainian to Russian. Would Putin agree to this? Ukraine continues to hold some territory in the Donbas region and will want to retain its control there. Will Putin agree to this or does he think that given his slow military advance he can continue to fight and eventually take the whole of the region if he is not awarded these by the deal itself? Will the US be able or willing to persuade Putin to settle for less than the whole of Donbas? Or will there be no deal and the war continues? As part of a final deal Ukraine will accept not being part of NATO. In any case even before the invasion of Ukraine, the latter had no chance of becoming a member any time soon since there were already objections to this by a number of existing NATO members each having veto power. This gives a further lie to the Russian claim that fear of NATO membership was the key reason for the assault. Indian left 'Campists' who say as much, have to think that Putin was so stupid that he never realised that his invasion would most likely extend its membership, which it has. This was a price Putin knowingly was more than willing to pay in seeking to destroy Ukraine's existence and take it over completely; or at least take over a substantial part.

Kyiv will also want, after any deal, to move towards acceptance within the European Union. This Russia may not be too bothered about. But the more important issue is what security guarantees and protection to assuage Ukrainian fears of a future Russian assault can Europe on its own give without getting the necessary US backing that alone can be taken seriously by Putin? Otherwise Russia can carry on fighting for more territorial gains. In short, the priority for Europe is not so much supporting Ukraine at all costs or even at high cost to itself, but to somehow patch up the worrying rift that has opened up between itself and the US under Trump.

The likelihood then is that Europe will try and work out a deal with terms that are face-saving enough to not be seen as a complete sell-out and which then gets agreement from a Kyiv with or without Zelensky at the helm. If such is the eventual outcome then, to a lesser or greater degree, Russia will remain in the driver's seat. Or perhaps even better for Moscow would be if Trump now forges a deal bilaterally with Putin and then giving Ukraine and Europe a take-it-or-leave-it option? Or will Ukraine insist on continuing to fight, even with diminished outside support, rather than accept terms considered too deeply unjust? The existing relationship of forces both on the battlefield and in the wider diplomatic arena clearly favours a deeply unfair and humiliating ceasefire. A war-weary Ukrainian public may well feel it has no choice but to accept this, taking comfort that for some uncertain times to come no more lives will be lost and that a slow and painful recuperation of some sort can begin.

We here in India can only wait and see as to what finally emerges. But progressives here always have a certain choice. In our political lives and commitments do we subscribe to the principles of a universal humanism enabling us to be true internationalists willing to identify with the victims of injustice anywhere? Or should we, whether passively or actively, side with the victimizers rationalising their immoralities in the name of realism? What has happened to Ukraine is a deep injustice and the principal victimizer here is Putin's Russia. The collection of articles presented here will hopefully help clear the cobwebs, deceptions and dishonesties that have led too many on the left to rationalise and otherwise defend Russia. We in RS express our unconditional but always critical support to Ukrainians in their struggle to free themselves of the Russian imperialist yoke imposed upon them.

[Editorial team]

A Democratic, Socialist Ukraine, and the Right of Self Determination for all Oppressed Nationalities

Kunal Chattopadhyay and Achin Vanaik

Russian Imperialism is the Aggressor

We unequivocally condemn the Russian aggression on Ukraine.

Beyond all discussions about how right wing the Ukrainian regime is, what relationships it has with neo-Nazis or with the NATO, there are certain basic truths. Ukraine had been an oppressed nation under Tsarist Russia, which denied the distinctiveness of Ukrainian language and culture. Even after the February Revolution, the Ukrainian bourgeois democrats had found little support in Petrograd from the Russian Provisional government. It was the Bolshevik Party that inscribed the slogan of the right of all oppressed nations to self-determination. They accepted this for Finland, as well as for the Ukraine. Even at the discussions at Brest-Litovsk, the Bolshevik delegation from Soviet Russia acknowledged the right of Ukraine to self-determination, while insisting that puppet regimes put up by an imperialist power were not expressions of genuine self-determination.

In this sense, Vladimir Putin, who seeks to extend the power and authority of Russian imperialism, is absolutely correct in stressing that modern Ukraine was created by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. That was, however, negated by the repressions of the Stalin era, the violence on the Crimean Tatars, the terrible famine, and general Stalinist assimilationist policies.

As Putin put it clearly in his speech, "It is logical that the Red Terror and a

rapid slide into Stalin's dictatorship, the domination of the communist ideology and the Communist Party's monopoly on power, nationalisation and the planned economy - all this transformed the formally declared but ineffective principles of government into a mere declaration. In reality, the Union Republics did not have any sovereign rights, none at all. The practical result was the creation of a tightly centralised and absolutely unitary state. He rued, nonetheless, that "It is a great pity that the fundamental and formally legal foundations of our state were not promptly cleansed [by Stalin] of the odious and utopian fantasies [of Lenin] inspired by the revolution, which are absolutely destructive for any normal state."

Putin does not see the conflict with Ukraine as an international conflict. He wants to revive the imperial ambitions of Russia, and in that, Ukraine has a major place. As the second biggest of the Republics of the former USSR, it occupied a major space. Russian imperialism has been created out of the former Stalinist bureaucracy. Vladimir Putin, with his ex-KGB credentials, neatly summarises that transition. Russia has had a painful transition to capitalism and therefore, has emerged as capable of only a weaker imperialism than the US. But it is imperialist nevertheless.

The Former Soviet Union broke up, and while Moscow would like to assert its hegemony everywhere, it has been forced to take small steps, since other

imperialist powers, as well as national ambitions of formerly dominated nations, pose hindrances. Nevertheless, Putin has been relentless in his march, both in domestic terms, and internationally.

Within Russia, opposition voices have been stopped, the media is state controlled, and Putin and his minions have been wielding uninterrupted Presidential authority for a generation. Internationally, in 2008, to prevent Georgia from joining NATO, Putin (then running the show from the prime minister's desk behind Dmitry Medvedev) invaded its territory. This justification was claimed by citing support for the secession of the provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which Putin encouraged to claim independence. In 2014, apprehensive that if Ukraine joined NATO Russia would find itself hemmed in, Putin invaded and took over Crimea. Doing so violated the 1994 Budapest Agreement wherein Ukraine gave up the third largest nuclear arsenal in return for treaty-written security assurances that its territorial integrity and sovereignty would be fully respected by foreign powers, specifically including Russia. Ukraine expressly hoped to forestall illegal military interventions.

Putin also intervened militarily in that same year in the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine encouraging separatist groups there to declare independence. Unlike in Crimea where ethnic Russians are in a small majority, in the Donbas eastern region the majority are Ukrainians who speak Russian while ethnic Russians constitute around 40% of the region's population. In both the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, Putin believed that the US was too weak to confront him. In 2008, the US was stuck in the Iraqi crisis of its own brutal making, and in 2014, after accepting failure in achieving

all its goals, it pulled almost all its troops out of Iraq, finding itself with a partial revival of the post-Vietnam War military paralysis. That the US finally pulled out of Afghanistan abandoning its puppet government and did little more than express its displeasure at the sending of Russian troops to Kazakhstan in January this year to prop up the authoritarian regime, may well have figured in Putin's own calculations.

Post-Soviet Ukraine: An Oligarchic Rule

Given Russia's recent aggression, why did we get to the point of this renewed, large-scale invasion? After all, the 2014-15, war over the Donbas led to the deaths of thousands. Over 150,000 were ousted from their homes. To begin an analysis of recent developments we need to return to the 2014 Maidan protests. In turn, to understand them, we need to go back to the foundations of independent Ukraine, the rise of the oligarchy, as well as the weakness of Ukraine's economy despite its extraordinary wealth of resources, which act as a magnet for competing imperialist interests.

The 1996 constitution of Ukraine, approved under President Kuchma, gave the president more powers than parliament, but not to the same extent as in Russia: it was a presidential-parliamentary republic, rather than a purely presidential one. This was also a very important factor in the evolution of the political system. Presidential elections were not winner-takes-all contests to the same extent as in many other former ex-Soviet countries.

With the state's assistance, figures like Rinat Akhmetov, Ihor Kolomoyskyi, Viktor Pinchuk and Victor Yanukovych acquired old Soviet industries at fire-sale prices, and then made huge fortunes not

so much by investing or upgrading as by using them to make quick money, shifting their capital to Cyprus or other offshore havens. For many years, Leonid Kuchma and his prime minister, Victor Yanukovych were also able to balance on the question of whether to integrate into Europe's economic sphere or Russia's, moving decisively neither to the West nor the East. This shielded Ukraine's oligarchs with a degree of protection, preventing them from being swallowed by stronger Russian or European competitors. It's worth pointing out, too, that the oligarchs were able to play a different role in the political system from their Russian counterparts: here the state was unable to dominate them and exclude them from participation as Putin did.

The end result of the 2004 large-scale public protests labelled the "Orange Revolution" saw no structural change, only a mere change of oligarchic elites. The unrest erupted because of illegal manipulation, corruption and electoral fraud (to which the Central Election Commission was a party) in favour of Yanukovych against the other main candidate, Viktor Yushchenko in the presidential run-offs of that year. The Ukraine Supreme Court ruled in favour of a re-vote which was won by Yushchenko, a former prime minister between 1999 and 2001. The then President Kuchma could not legally run again beyond the two terms of office he had already served. At any rate, his own reputation and credibility had been fatally scarred by a major earlier scandal when irrefutable evidence was revealed that he had ordered the kidnapping of a journalist. In 2004 constitutional amendments were passed by parliament to balance the system into more of a parliamentary-presidency one. Since the office of President now meant

less, Kuchma agreed to stop backing Yanukovych.

After winning, Yushchenko's pushing of a nationalist anti-communism discourse could not prevent his popularity from tumbling, mired as he was in corruption along with favoured oligarchs. He was also solely preoccupied with political manipulations--dissolving parliament, dismissing members of the Constitutional Court to get his own way--than with addressing the travails of a deeply unstable economy. This was dependent on fluctuating export revenues and investments as metal prices dipped, inflation levels rose with the growth rate plummeting from 12% in 2004 to 3% in 2005. With the advent of the Great Recession and growth falling to 0.1% in 2008 and minus 2.9% in 2009. Yushchenko was ousted in the 2010 elections coming fifth with just 5.45% of the votes. Even today the per capita income of Ukraine is less than it was in 1991 while its population has fallen from 50 million from then to 41 million at present.

Elected as President in 2010, Yanukovich tried to revert to the 1996 constitution. This also meant half the MPs in the Rada (Ukraine's parliament) would be elected in first-past-the-post constituencies again, and half from party lists. As well as attempting to monopolize political power, Yanukovych tried to concentrate financial and economic power around his own team, especially his family. The result was a tremendous amount of personalized corruption as well as alienation and dissension from a host of other oligarchs.

Yanukovych's announcement on 21 November 2013 that he would be suspending negotiations on the EU Association Agreement was the initial trigger for the protests that eventually led

to his downfall. Yet this fate was not pre-ordained. Ukraine was quite evenly split about with 40 per cent were in favour of signing the Association Agreement and 40 per cent supported an agreement with the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union. So when the protests began it was definitely not a nationwide people's revolt.

Why would this matter so much, either for the EU or for Russia? This can be explained when we look at the Ukrainian economy. It is the second-largest country by area in Europe and has a population of over 40 million, 6 million more than Poland.

● ***Ukraine ranks as:***

- 1st in Europe in proven recoverable reserves of uranium ores;
- 2nd in Europe and 10th in the world in terms of titanium ore reserves;
- 2nd in the world in terms of explored reserves of manganese ores (2.3 billion tons, or 12% of the world's reserves);
- 2nd largest iron ore reserves in the world (30 billion tons);
- 2nd in Europe in terms of mercury ore reserves;
- 3rd in Europe (13th in the world) in shale gas reserves (22 trillion cubic meters)
- 4th in the world by the total value of natural resources;
- 7th in the world in coal reserves (33.9 billion tons)
- ***Ukraine is an important agricultural country. It ranks as:***
- 1st in Europe in terms of arable land area;
- 3rd in the world by the area of black soil (25% of world's volume);

- 1st in the world in exports of sunflower and sunflower oil;
- 2nd in the world in barley production and 4th in barley exports;
- 3rd largest producer and 4th largest exporter of corn in the world;
- 4th largest producer of potatoes in the world;
- 5th largest rye producer in the world;
- 5th in the world in bee production (75,000 tons);
- 8th in the world in wheat exports;
- 9th in the world in the production of chicken eggs;
- 16th in the world in cheese exports.
- ***Ukraine is an important industrialized country:***
- 1st in Europe in ammonia production;
- Europe's 2nd's and the world's 4th largest natural gas pipeline system;
- 3rd largest in Europe and 8th largest in the world in terms of installed capacity of nuclear power plants;
- 3rd in Europe and 11th in the world in terms of rail network length (21,700 km);
- 3rd in the world (after the U.S. and France) in production of locators and locating equipment;
- 3rd largest iron exporter in the world
- 4th largest exporter of turbines for nuclear power plants in the world;
- 4th world's largest manufacturer of rocket launchers;
- 4th place in the world in clay exports
- 4th in the world in titanium exports
- 8th in the world in exports of ores and concentrates;
- 9th in the world in exports of defence

industry products;

- 10th largest steel producer in the world (32.4 million tons).

Beyond any claims to self-determination or buffer-state, it should now be clear why both imperialist blocs wanted Ukraine. And the EU with its 'merely' economic offer was dangerous for a Russia still unable to compete industrially with the West and sees expanding its already extraction based export economy as its best way forward.

The Euromaidan and After

In the beginning, the Euromaidan movement of Nov. 2013-Feb. 2014 mostly consisted of middle-class Kyivians and students, who were mainly driven by a European ideology. There was also a strong anti-Russian, nationalist component. In fact, any idea of a Ukraine built on a nationalist rather than democratic foundation would have to incorporate a degree of anti-Russianism. The Maidan protests posed the choice between the EU Association Agreement and the Russian-led Customs Union in very stark, almost civilizational terms: is Ukraine with Europe or with Russia? Is it going to line up with Putin, Lukashenko (Belarus) and Nazarbaev (Kazakhstan) or have nothing to do with them?

However, regardless of that, the Maidan protests were from the beginning large movements. The very first protests saw 50,000 or more people in Kyiv. On 30 November there was a crackdown on the movement. The TV channels, owned by the oligarchs, who had been supporting Yanukovich, suddenly showed the crackdown in a bad light. The protest held in Kyiv on 1 December was enormous, with up to 200,000 people present. The movement also spread geographically: there were Maidans in almost every city. There

was a considerable far right presence, which included neo-fascists but the protests were far from only neo-fascist. In reality, only a tiny minority of the protesters at the rallies were from the far right. However, they acted in a united way and managed to mainstream their slogans.

After this initial explosion there was intensification and spread. From mid-January onwards, the protests seemed to enter a third phase. Negotiations between the government and opposition continued even as violence was escalating, right up to Yanukovich's ouster on 22 February, 2014. Perhaps the major turning point was the shooting of protesters in the centre of Kyiv by snipers on 18, 19 and 20 February. There was another important development on 18 February in the west of Ukraine, where protesters started to attack police stations and raid their arsenals, getting hold of guns in large quantities. This happened in Lviv, in Ternopil, in Ivano-Frankivsk and in many other areas.

This development changed the situation drastically. The riot police were ready to disperse protesters when the latter were armed with sticks, stones and Molotov cocktails, but they were not ready to die for Yanukovich. After 18 February, the western parts of Ukraine were under the control of the protesters, who occupied the administrative buildings, police and security service headquarters. In some places the police shot at protesters, but in many areas they left without offering much resistance.

The Yanukovich government fell in late February. Putin, and a section of the left that sees in Putin its dream of continued resistance to 'imperialism' (identified with the USA or the West alone), have repeatedly asserted that what happened was a fascist coup. A

'coup' suggests a planned, organised conspiracy to take power whereas this was far from the case. Moreover, the far right was only one component of the government that came in. Finally, the assumption that the far right was a tool of US imperialism ignores the internal dynamics, and treats all national conflicts in a left version of geostrategic theories that focus, to an unreasonable degree, only on great power rivalries.

At any rate, the Russian annexation of Crimea gave enormous advantages to the new government, since it gained a lot of legitimacy, and could push social issues into the background, highlighting 'national unity' against foreign aggression.

Fearing a Russian social and political movement like Maidan, Putin described the post-Yanukovich regime in Kyiv as dominated by anti-Russian fascists, distorting reality in order to legitimate his annexation of Crimea and the so-called need to "protect" Russophone populations. While "Ukrainians" were often identified with "fascists", the "hybrid war" instrumentalised by Moscow in Eastern Ukraine to destabilize the country's turn toward western institutions, transformed political life in Ukraine. It had the effect of increasing hate and the hysterical rhetoric of vengeance which has been used by the ruling elites all over the country as excuse for their anti-social politics. The sectors of the left that see in Maidan a US/NATO conspiracy are thus effectively tagging all Ukrainians as fascists and the Russian speakers as progressives. As a matter of fact, what happened since 2015 is very different. To be sure, Volodymyr Zelensky is no radical and did not have a positive programme. But the electoral triumph of this television comedian reflected a

moment when Ukrainians were trying to reject the oligarchy. With 73% of the votes, he won a landslide victory. In fact, however, there was simply a reconfiguration of the oligarchs.

Re-establishing the status of Ukrainian culture and language are an inevitable part of the national sovereignty and identity project due to historic and current geopolitical reasons. In a way, Russia's aggression and frequent Kremlin's remarks on Ukraine being a non-country and non-culture has also helped to promote a dangerous binary of supposedly inescapable opposition between Ukrainian nationalism and Russian nationalism in a country where near everyone can read and understand Russian, where 70% of the population including huge numbers of Ukrainians can also speak it, and where Ukrainian is the language of state while Russian dominates the market for cultural goods and products. Their complete separation is impossible due to intimate historic intertwining and the future of the Ukrainian language and related culture needs to be built on its own terms, embracing the nation's multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism.

We also need to consider that the Donetsk National Republic and the Luhansk National Republic, the Russian backed regimes, have shown a clear hostility to any multiculturalism. One of the first acts of the Russians in Crimea and the Donbass was to replace multilingual signs with Russian only ones. Ukraine, at least, has a system where the minority language has to be officially supported in a municipality if the number of speakers is over a certain level (10%); and there are other languages like Hungarian, Rumanian, Polish, Tatar.

Re-establishing a language and

a culture that has been historically repressed are important and necessary but it also calls for a balancing act vis-a-vis Russian and related expressions of culture. But Poroshenko, the President before Zelensky, wanted to go beyond that pushing a more aggressive anti-Russian line. However, the reverse also holds true. Those who want to blame the Ukrainians for Putin's invasion need to remind themselves again of his own stance. In his Presidential address to Russia's citizens on Feb. 21 preparing them for the invasion, he said: "I would like to emphasise again that Ukraine is not just a neighbouring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space."

Such rants have been typical. According to Putin, Lenin with his principle of the 'right to self-determination' is the real culprit.

Or as Putin puts it: "From the point of view of the historical fate of Russia and its peoples, the Leninist principles of state building turned out to be not just a mistake it was, as they say, much worse than a mistake."

Again, it was "Lenin's harsh directives on the Donbass which was literally squeezed into Ukraine" but history has now taken its revenge because " 'grateful descendants' have demolished monuments to Lenin in Ukraine. This is what they call de-communization."

Putin promises to complete the job: "Do you want de-communization? Well, that suits us just fine. But it is not necessary, as they say, to stop halfway. We are ready to show you what real de-communization means for Ukraine."

Even as they decry Putin's invasion Western anti-socialist ideologues have every reason to welcome this anti-communist rant and indictment of Lenin

and what he stood for. But will those on the left who support Putin do a rethink?

The US, the EU and NATO: Inter-Imperialist Rivalry

There is no doubt that the US is the biggest and most powerful imperialist globally. It has the worst record in supporting brutal dictatorships abroad and in carrying out unacceptable military interventions in other countries. It holds the record for being directly and indirectly responsible for killing civilians, an overall tally since WWII which easily surpasses several millions.

But this does not excuse the behaviour of other countries big, medium or small, seeking to establish and expand their regional or global hegemony and dominance. These other powers include several West European allies of the US and bodies like NATO but also the likes of Israel, Turkey, India, Pakistan and of course Russia and China. No doubt there are and can be other entrants into this broad club of imperialist and aspiring imperialist powers. The justifications made for such expansionism is invariably to cite the demands of 'national security' and the need to 'react' against other named culprits. The international Left must be careful not to fall into the politics of defending the presumed 'lesser evil' or even denying or diminishing its imperialist character. We must avoid succumbing to the 'anti-imperialism of fools'. In the case of Russia there should be no reason for confusion.

Let us explore this issue of Russia's relationship with the US and NATO since the Soviet break-up. NATO has, in our eyes, never had any justification whatsoever, so we oppose its existence, full stop. However, even by the logic of the Cold War which it had advanced, it should have been wound up once the

Warsaw Pact ended.

In fact, of course, the US-led NATO not only did not wind up. It not only broke promises not to expand further, but has deliberately done so to extend its reach as close as it can to the borders of Russia. Of course we oppose and condemn this because it means undermining the global search for greater peace and justice, subordinates smaller and weaker countries, deepens ruling class alliances, and enables greater exploitation of the ordinary working masses of their own and other countries. Nor should we be at all surprised that the members of this imperialist club everywhere will resort to bullying their neighbours and seeking to expand their hard power and dominance as much as possible.

From Yeltsin to Putin, Russian leadership has constantly talked of its 'legitimate security needs'. 'Needs' is always a more effective word to use than 'ambitions', which would not go so well with the term 'legitimate'. After the Soviet break-up Russia became, militarily and nuclearly, the second power in the world. Does anybody in their right mind think the US or NATO will or want to risk actually invading it territorially? But like all imperialists and aspiring ones, Russia too wants to establish and consolidate its own 'sphere of influence', a euphemism to disguise the actual project. Like any imperial power that project amounts to externally dominating as much as possible that designated region whose borders are always open to expansion.

Despite US and NATO expansion it is absurd to think that Russia's actions in its 'near abroad' or further afield, are seriously motivated by the fear of its 'security being deeply imperilled'. Its actions are not mere 'reaction' or

self-defence. Indeed, the most likely outcome of what Russia has done will be the strengthening of the commitment to NATO and possible (some would now say likely) expansion of NATO membership in Europe as well as a stronger stimulus to countries in the Asia-Pacific region to align and come closer to the US and its alliance structures.

We must categorically oppose all imperialisms. When apportioning global and historical blame for imperialism's iniquities, the lion's share obviously falls on the US and its allies. But this truth must not be used to rationalise away the iniquities and behaviour of other imperialists. Putin did not just send troops under the Russian dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to Kazakhstan as a 'reaction' to the West or as a 'compulsion' flowing from its 'legitimate security needs'. He did so to stabilize a pro-Russian brutal authoritarian regime repressing its own people.

Two further brief comments need to be made here. We have seen hypocrisy at an unprecedented level, both regarding Ukrainian resistance, and regarding the refugees, by the EU and the Western media. These are countries and media that have always condemned Palestinian resistance as terrorism, but they are today all for civilian resistance to the Russians. We take their 'support' to the Ukrainians as disingenuous, linked to the interests of the ruling classes of the Western powers, and not in the least motivated by genuine concern for democratic rights. The same goes for the media and state hypocrisy about accepting Ukrainian refugees, as it comes from countries that have been brutal towards refugees from North Africa in the recent past. Twitter, which has blocked accounts for crowd funding for Cuba (on non-military issues) is

allowing crowd funding for military help to Ukrainians. This shows the clear links between apparently independent agencies and Western imperialist powers.

Indian Reactions - the Regime and the Big Parliamentary Left

What has been the response to the invasion of Ukraine in India? Shamefully but expectedly the Hindutva Modi government expresses concern but no condemnation even as it has a de-facto strategic relationship with the US. Unlike Hungary, led by the far right leader, Orbán, who opportunistically agreed to EU sanctions, India's stance is closer to Brazil's in that it prefers to tip-toe a "neutral" line. Modi wants to keep Russia happy due to supposed diplomatic and military requirements. Greater security for India does not mean that Indian regimes should significantly reduce military spending to help eradicate poverty, or resolve the border dispute with China through give-and-take, or seek to promote peace in South Asia. Rather it should be interpreted to mean we must acquire more and more military power not merely to protect borders but to power project in South Asia and beyond, as any aspiring regional hegemon should be doing.

New Delhi claims that its priority now is to evacuate Indian citizens from Ukraine. We fully support this. But the

government's refusal to condemn the invasion makes getting the vital moral-political support from both the people and the government of Ukraine more difficult negatively affecting the speed and efficiency of evacuation and further endangering the lives of Indian citizens. Regarding the invasion, the bourgeois opposition parties are either silent or in the case of the Congress party, its official stand is no different from the government's. No surprises here.

As for the major parties of the Left, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM does not go beyond calling the Russian action 'unfortunate' and along with the Communist Party of India (CPI) plays the tune of the real culprit being the US and NATO to which Russia has reacted. The same was at least initially the case with the Workers Party in Brazil. There is not a shred of class analysis in statements by these parties which claim to be Marxist. But in India neither of these parties has yet publicly declared that Russia (or China) are capitalist countries, let alone that they are imperialist powers. They refuse this analysis even as Putin, the ruling class there and the Russian public have no illusions that theirs is anything else but a capitalist country, and one that is egregiously in the wrong economically and politically. How long will the parties of the mainstream Indian left keep burying their heads in the sand?

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Ukraine: Divisions Among the Indian and Global Left

Achin Vanaik

It was never expected that the response to the war on Ukraine of the Left internationally, would be so divided. Broadly there have been four positions held by those who consider themselves to be anti-capitalist socialists of one kind or the other. The arguments, rationalisations and justifications provided by the first three of these groups do, in some degree or the other, overlap.

The First Group

The first group (which is certainly the smallest of the four categories) includes those who fully support the Russian invasion as well as those who while not going gung-ho in supporting the invasion will neither call it an invasion nor condemn it in even the mildest of language. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation fully supports the action which it describes only as a “special military operation”. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM calls the war “unfortunate” and insists that US/NATO expansionism is the real cause forcing Russia to behave as it did. The older and smaller Communist Party of India (CPI) says much the same without using the word “unfortunate” even, and makes a meaningless general call for peace in the region. That is to say, neither of these parties make even a cursory criticism of the Russian action and put not just primary but sole blame on the US/NATO. Whatever the leaders and ideologues of these two parties in India may think privately, in public they do not even declare that Russia (and China) are now capitalist countries let alone that they are imperialist. In fact, a principal ideologue of the CPM, Vijay Prashad who has written a number of good books on the Middle East and

on the Indian diaspora in the US, says that the only imperialist country in the world is the US. So France and the UK, despite their behaviour in Africa, the Middle East or elsewhere are no longer to be seen as imperialist powers despite their past. While lower order powers making military-political incursions abroad whether they be Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Israel, etc. are also absolved of any charge of being weaker imperialist countries or even sub-imperialisms. It is not just that the US is the biggest imperialist power with the ugliest historical record which it is; but that it is uniquely imperialist! However, this claim cannot be used to hide the ugly and unjustified behaviour of either China or Russia or even the former USSR. Loyalty to the CPM/CPI, however, has generally triumphed to the point where its acolytes and leaders repeatedly defend the indefensible whether it is the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 or of Czechoslovakia in 1968 or post-Soviet Russia in Chechnya, Ukraine and elsewhere.

Second Group: Two Variants

The second group do condemn the Russian invasion in milder or stronger forms. But they generally avoid reference to Ukraine’s ‘right to self-determination’. If one were to endorse this clearly and unequivocally or even half-heartedly, then what follows as a matter of logic is endorsing the right to resist of the Ukraine people, whatever be the nature of their current government, to fight as they see fit to regain their freedom and sovereignty. However, the central preoccupation of this group of leftists is to focus on the iniquities of the US and NATO. The latter’s expansionist drive is not seen as the sole reason for

the invasion but it is seen as the main reason. This is the dominant prism used for understanding the why of the invasion and what the response of the Left and progressives should be to this development. Depending on whether one sees Russia as itself an imperialist country or not, there will be variation in the degree of culpability to be attached to Russia. a) Those reluctant to identify Russia as an imperialist power (even if of much lesser weight than the US) can then talk of its 'misadventures' or its 'imperial' behaviour but above all emphasize its 'reactive' character, 'mistaken' though this is or might be. They will highlight the iniquities of the Ukrainian government, its right wing and even its supposedly far-right or Nazi character which can then serve as a kind of excuse for Russia's assault. b) Then there are those who say very clearly that Russia (and China) are imperialist powers though weaker than the US. Hence there is an inter-imperialist dimension to the Ukraine issue and a corresponding geopolitics that must be unravelled. That there is a geopolitical dimension that has to be addressed is obvious since the impact and implications of the Russian invasion are not confined to Ukraine and yes, these inter-imperialist rivalries have also been playing out within Ukraine's own internal politics.

The crucial question is how much weight to give to this inter-imperialist dimension as a causal or explanatory factor behind Russia's decision to invade. Those subscribing to approach a) given above, will give much more weight to the geo-political dimension (they are reluctant to call Russia imperialist) and will in their arguments provide at least implicit rationalisations, even justifications, that will greatly soften their explicit words of formal condemnation. Supplementary arguments will be used to buttress their case. There will be talk

of Kiev's repression in the Donbas region where pro-Russia separatist forces are presumably wanting to exercise their choice of political self-determination. This argument then becomes a cover of sorts for Russian intervention in the past (the 2014 takeover of Crimea) and the 'understandable' desire of Moscow today to 'counter' this drive against the more culturally Russified eastern part of the Ukraine. Focussing more attention in one's arguments on the 'Nazi' character of the government and the ruling classes for example, becomes a way of diverting attention away from the fact that it is the huge mass of ordinary working people in Ukraine who are angry, who are suffering deaths, injuries and devastations from the military assault and who are fighting back in whatever way they can. To pretend or even imply that the broad masses are dupes of their authoritarian rulers is shameful. One can certainly criticise the far-right forces and ruling government in Ukraine but there are liberals, socialists, Marxists, feminists who are very much part of the forces resisting the Russian forces. This is rarely if ever mentioned; nor is it pointed out that Ukraine's quite flawed democratic polity is less flawed than that of Putin's Russia (which has its own far right Nazi-like groups). Instead, most efforts are made to promote the view that since the 2014 Maidan protests (supposedly engineered by Washington) the Kiev regime is basically a puppet or near-puppet regime of the US led West.

Those subscribing to approach b) will usually say a lot more about Ukraine's sovereignty being violated. They will make more noises about the suffering of the Ukrainian people and that they are resisting. They will generally be more critical of both the domestic and external behaviour of Putin and the Russian ruling classes---after all, Russia is an ambitious imperialist power. Its recent record from 1990 onwards can be brought in to

defend the argument that they too are an imperialist power though not one able to match the US. So Russia's military-political interventions into Afghanistan, Georgia, Moldova, Abkhazia, Tajikistan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Kazakhstan, Chechnya, Armenia and Azerbaijan and its own establishment of a pact of countries over which it can exercise some degree of control and influence, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) are much more likely to be pointed out. But since this lot of leftists also claim that the primary factor in causing this war is inter-imperialist rivalries, this section of the Left will also greatly underplay the more fundamental reason for why the Russian government carried out this invasion. Ironically, this is not something that Putin and the key decision-makers and supporters around him have ever been shy of publicly voicing---that the very formation of a post-Soviet Ukraine as an independent country is unacceptable and that, in part or preferably whole, it should cease to exist and be part of a Greater Russia and subordinate to the dictates from Moscow. That Putin declared as much to the Russian people just before invading is either ignored or only very briefly mentioned in the most cursory way. No, it is US/NATO expansionism that is the main culprit alongside the geopolitical ambitions of Russia beyond the specific concern with Ukraine that must be understood to make proper sense of what has happened.

In both the cases of a) and b) it is essentially assumed that Putin is so naive that he would not recognise that his attack on Ukraine (the country had not even reached the stage of getting a NATO Membership Plan), far from weakening this western expansionism, would solidify and spur it forward towards greater hostility and efforts to militarily encroach nearer Russia's

borders. It should occasion no surprise that Finland and Sweden have now decided to become members of NATO thus providing newer border outposts against Russia. It is also revealing that Putin has dismissed these developments as of little worry or consequence indicating that for him, capturing as much as he can of Ukraine and dismembering it is a much greater priority than concern about US/NATO expansionism. Both a) and b) use the language of this being a 'proxy war' between Russia and the US-led West. What an extraordinary claim!

The term 'proxy war' is used in cases where within some country there is an internal conflict between two major forces, something like a civil war situation where two major external forces or blocs are militarily-politically respectively supporting opposing sides. The 'external' aspect is then to be seen as the major arena of contestation rather than the internal conflict itself. The geopolitical dimension is given a higher political status and concern than the national dimension. Is it any wonder then that upholders of this approach go on and on about the global impact of the war in Ukraine, of how global food supplies are being affected and how a new Cold War is emerging and how this new and growing tension is making matters globally worse. All true of course. But this then should lead to a more severe and forthright condemnation of the culprit Russia which has caused it and should reinforce support from the international Left for Ukrainian resistance. Moreover, to call this basically a 'proxy war' is absurd. It is an *actual* war launched by one side, Russia against another capitalist country which is not itself an imperialist country or a weaker imperialist power or even a sub-imperialist one. The use of the term 'proxy war' disguises what is the central characteristic---that for Ukraine

this is a war of national liberation against a foreign power out to crush and subordinate it and that Ukraine therefore deserves the support of the international left which must always be both unconditional in defending its right to self-determination and yet always prepared to be critical and even opposed to the ways its government and other forces may go about conducting this struggle.

As for the possible advocacy and exercise of the right to self-determination in Donbas and Crimea, this cannot ever be justifiably done under the military jackboot of a foreign occupier. The military takeover of Crimea in 2014 followed by a referendum under occupation was a deliberate and ruthless violation of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum whereby Russia, in return for retrieving Ukraine's nuclear arsenal (then the third largest in the world) promised never to violate its territorial integrity---a betrayal that gets little or no mention among the geopolitical preoccupations of the Left rationalisers of Russian behaviour.

Third Group

This third group is for peace and an end to militarism. It notes the suffering of the Ukrainian people and condemns Russia for what it has done. But for various reasons---the danger of further military escalation, the nefarious designs of the US for wanting to 'bleed' Russia over time by continuing the war---it wants a settlement as quickly as possible. This group is therefore against US/NATO supplying of arms to Ukraine---a posture also held by the first and second group of leftists discussed above. Another common position held by these three groups is that economic sanctions against Russia should be opposed because these will hurt ordinary working people economically. That they are in fact endorsing and supporting an undeclared regime of sanctions

against the Ukrainian people (their desired embargo on arms) whereby on a mass scale the suffering endured by Ukrainians---millions displaced as refugees, physical deaths and injuries, destruction of homes and devastation of everyday life is far beyond what can happen in Russia through sanctions---does not even seem to register on the minds of these leftists. How is this settlement to be achieved? Why, through diplomacy presumably! And how is that going to happen? Is a ceasefire and settlement to be somehow imposed on the belligerents or at least made more possible through pressures applied from outside powers? Since Russia is much the more powerful side in this war isn't it logical that it would be easier to achieve a settlement by pressuring the weaker side, the Ukrainians? In brief, what follows from this logic is that for the peace advocates, in the name of a practical and realistic assessment of the balance of forces on the ground, the least consideration should be given to what the Ukrainians themselves think or want.

Ukrainians want justice; they want a retreat of Russia, they want reparations. Their only hope of being able to move some way at least towards these goals depends on changing the course of this war in a direction whereby the costs to Russia, material and political, become progressively higher. Weapons support, whatever be the motivations of the suppliers which are not the same as those of the Ukrainian people fighting, is vital. Certainly, those outsider motivations can be fiercely criticised by left voices but solidarity with the people of Ukraine is primary. They have to decide whether and when to stop fighting. We on the outside can disagree with tactics, strategies and policies and warn about this or that. But we must respect their freedom of agency to decide as they see fit because they are the people oppressed! On this issue the position of

Chomsky and other peace votaries like him is not to be upheld or supported.

Fourth Group

This fourth group aligns itself with what the anti-Stalinist Marxists and Socialists and Socialist Feminists and progressive Anarchists of Ukraine themselves say. Listen to us, they say. We are as much against the US and NATO as you in the West and elsewhere are. But this war is not about Russian security concerns but primarily about its imperialist ambitions. We are fighting this war; we need political, moral, material support and yes a continual supply of weapons to enable us to effectively resist this military onslaught. The more determinedly the international left supports us the stronger can the Ukrainian left become internally, for we are much more aware than you outsiders of our own class and internal divisions and its dangers even as we are broadly united as we must be, in opposing the Russian military and its government. We, like leftists internationally, also want a dismantling of NATO which has now become more difficult to attain. But what about the dismantling of all imperialist blocs like the CSTO about which you say little or nothing?

Any end to this war, whether temporary or prolonged or permanent will be shaped by the course this war will take. And that trajectory will itself depend on the strength and durability of the will of the Ukrainian people to keep resisting this great injustice done to them. The calculations of the US and other Western powers, that currently say they support Ukraine, are always subject to change and to the proclivity of their elites/governments to making unprincipled deals with others including Russia if they think this will best suit their 'national interests'. The international revolutionary and democratic left should be the most principled supporters in

the fight against injustices everywhere. Even as we criticise those sections of the Western left who are not prepared to give unconditional yet critical support to Ukraine and go on and on about the Russian invasion as basically a reaction to the US and its allies, we can be grateful that at least they are strongly critical of and opposed to their own governments for their imperialist behaviour or collusion in imperialist pacts like NATO.

In India, however, too many liberals as well as many of those who see themselves as on the left refuse to similarly attack the stand of the Indian government but actually applauded its so-called neutrality on the war in Ukraine. This is an India which is, in all but name, a strategic ally of the US and whose own imperialist ambitions to become a dominant regional (perhaps global) power require it to maintain a strong military relationship with Russia and Israel and with the US as well. India has the second largest army in the world. It has the third largest military budget and is the fourth largest purchaser of arms. Its healthcare expenditure as a proportion of GDP is the fourth lowest in the world and it has the largest absolute number of malnourished and undernourished people in the world. India itself is a lower order imperialist power with ambitions to become an ever more powerful imperialist one. Why should leftists support such an orientation let alone cover it up with false references to India having a foreign policy of 'strategic autonomy' or 'neutrality'?

In a world divided into separate nation-states the left everywhere must always also take a stand against the pernicious, immoral and unprincipled positions adopted by its own national governments. This, much of the Indian organised left has failed to do. The position of the Radical Socialist (RS) group is clear. That the Communist Party of India

Marxist Leninist-Liberation (CPIML-Liberation) has at least called for Russian withdrawal and for solidarity with the Ukrainian people is to its credit but is more strongly concerned to condemn US “warmongering”. The Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) does condemn Russia and declare its support for Ukrainian sovereignty and resistance. However, its public statement is a very long and rambling text which spends most of its time making generalities about ‘proletarians of the world unite’ and of ‘turning the imperialist war into a civil war and revolution’. The statement has more to do with propagandising the general perspectives of the Party than with analysing or focusing on the specificities of the Russia-Ukraine issue. One of the more interesting sidelights revealed in the text is that the CPI-Maoist calls China a “social imperialist” country. This means it sees China as still not a capitalist country but one which turned towards social imperialism presumably after the leadership of Mao ended. That the two biggest parties of the mainstream Indian left---the CPM and CPI--have neither condemned Russia nor the stand of the Indian government nor offered solidarity to the Ukrainian people, is but another symptom of why we need to build a newer revolutionary and democratic left in India.

An Addendum

Many of those who position themselves on the anti-capitalist radical Left nonetheless have viewed the war in Ukraine through a lens which saw the primary conflict as between a much stronger and more hegemonic imperialist power the US, and a weaker one, Russia. Even for those who didn’t give primary status to this imperialist face-off, some did believe that this would require them to more generally support the lesser imperialism since counter-balancing against the stronger US (and allies)

opens up greater spaces globally for progressive forces and struggles against capitalism. Another term when used on the left buys into a similar kind of thinking. This is the belief that in today’s world there is real merit in supporting the development of ‘multi-polarity’ as against a unipolar order represented by the US. In effect, the way is made clear for these sections of the Left to, in some way or the other, take sides with the “lesser evil” imperialism and to endorse its regressive foreign policy behaviour.

A Realist Discourse

This language of ‘poles’ and ‘polarity’ (whether of unipolarity, bipolarity or multi-polarity) is a standard refrain in the Realist discourse on international relations and foreign policy behaviour and is used by right wing and liberal thinkers who have no interest whatsoever in fighting against capitalism, domestically or globally. So why do leftists who believe they are inspired by Marxism, adopt the same terminology not only using the term ‘multi-polarity’ as a conceptual tool but also ascribing virtues to it as a desired outcome?

In this Realist discourse, states are seen as the primary actors on the world stage. But the state entity that that they refer to is understood as a ‘national territorial totality’ when it is actually a much smaller set of apparatuses that is encased within a much wider social formation involving all kinds of tensions and relations between the state and civil society, between different sections in that larger social order, with above all, the division between classes. All states are class states that are structurally biased towards the interests of their ruling classes. In the post-1990 overwhelmingly capitalist world we live in today, these are the interests of capitalists, weaker or stronger, more or less dependent, on others. However, this much more

important social and divisive reality, is covered up and obscured by the notion of the state in its foreign policy acting as a 'national territorial totality'. The fact that world politics is very much shaped by the competition among the most powerful such states, each pursuing the interests domestically and externally of their own capitalist classes and TNCs, is similarly obscured.

Talk of polarity (single, dual or multi-) is another way of shifting the understanding of vertical power relations away from its social and class nature to a supposedly horizontal set of power relations between a few 'poles', each of which is also understood as a 'national territorial totality'. A state defined in such a way is then axiomatically pursuing the 'national interest' and to question this means one is being anti-national and unpatriotic. There is all too often much wisdom in the saying that "patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel."

Revolutionary Marxists should (a) unconditionally but critically support oppressed nations subject to military invasions by imperialist powers even if they are capitalist and autocratic e.g., opposing the US invasions of 1991 and 2003 of Iraq. b) They should support progressive anti-capitalist forces and struggles in all countries (whether liberal democratic or authoritarian); be against their own capitalist ruling classes even if these capitalists are feeble and subordinate to other ruling classes in other countries. c) It is important to fight for greater democratization even within a capitalist country and to oppose any steps being taken toward greater authoritarianism internally. However, when it comes to the external bullying and imperialist behaviour of the stronger countries it is not their internal political character i.e., whether they are liberal democratic or authoritarian that is the key explanatory factor but their capitalist

character. All such imperialist behaviour and efforts to establish their respective 'spheres of influence'---a euphemism for bullying and trying to subordinate in one way or the other weaker neighbouring and even more distant countries---must be opposed.

No Longer the Cold War Era

What about the idea that multi-polarity provides greater global space for progressive and revolutionary struggles? In today's world this is a dangerous delusion. Today's world order is fundamentally different from that in the Cold War era. Then the world was not 'Bipolar'---a deeply misleading term---but had a systemic divide. That is to say, there were two fundamentally different socio-economic systems, a capitalist vs. a non-capitalist bloc arraigned against each other. The existence of such a non-capitalist but far from socialist bloc meant that an objective space was created for progressive struggles in the developing world to advance, most notably decolonization. But even here the primary reason for successful liberation came from the internal struggle for national liberation howsoever much it may have been helped by outside material and political support. Even so, in this misnamed 'Socialist or' Communist' bloc, because of their governments ridiculous belief in the possibility of "socialism in one country", the nationalism became much more important than socialist aspirations which required the strongest commitment to the principles of Proletarian Internationalism. The end result was nationalist hostilities and rivalries---Stalin vs. Tito, the Sino-Soviet split, the USSR against Albania, China militarily attacking Vietnam (1979), Kampuchea's war with Vietnam, not to mention the diplomatic games played between the USSR and the US, the former's repressions against progressive and pro-Socialist struggles in Hungary

(1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), and the shameful entente between Mao's China and the US under Nixon. The best characterisation of the external behaviour of the most powerful non-capitalist regimes of USSR and China is that they were deeply contradictory--- both progressive and reactionary.

Today's world order is very different. The most powerful countries are now capitalist and imperialist. Different imperialist powers (US, Russia, China and a few others) are interested in supporting regime change in other countries if this can result in governments that are more amenable to their own regime. Even better if after such changes they become subordinate or best of all if they become basically puppets. Of course over time, even such alliance arrangements and networks because of imperialist competitions will be subject to shifting compositions among their country-members. But the one thing to be absolutely sure about is that none of these imperialist powers want to promote or see anti-capitalist regimes emerge anywhere. Capitalist competition will always create temporary or longer term winners and losers as well as shifts in power rankings. But what remains the common global commitment is that the world must remain capitalist.

Nor do the imperialist countries care whether their allies are internally

more democratic or authoritarian--- the crucial thing is that they remain allies and subordinates. As for the weaker and smaller countries which are capitalist or seeking to establish a more stable or independent capitalism, they too are bitterly opposed to progressive anti-capitalist politics and struggles. Why then should revolutionary leftists see any virtue in today's world of such inter-imperialist rivalries? We should not be fighting to shift the world from a "super-imperialism" to a "multi-imperialism" but against all imperialist and capitalist states. Our strategic allies in this much longer term domestic and global struggle are not governments but progressive and anti-capitalist forces and organisations everywhere.

From the time of Marx till the 1990s despite all ups and downs, the banner of internationalism was upheld by the Left. Today, contra the hopes of Marx, it is the biggest capitalists of the world who are saying "Despite all differences let us try and unite to protect and strengthen the world capitalist order since we having nothing to lose, certainly not our privileges"!

The struggle for the Revolutionary Left to once again capture the banner of internationalism has now become more necessary than ever.

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Reality Check on Ukraine: Busting Myths and Misconceptions

Achin Vanaik

Those who have seen the Russia Ukraine conflict mainly through the 'proxy war' prism have sought to defend their position through certain deceptions and mystifications about presumably key events in the longer history of the relations between the two countries, essentially from 2013 onwards. This paper is primarily though not solely meant for an Indian readership that, given the biases of the public media and the level of public political discourse constrained as it is by the powers that be, may not have had easy access to data and arguments puncturing these claims.

The Supposed Coup in Ukraine in 2014

1. Between November 2013 and February 2014 *hundreds of thousands* protested against the President V. Yanukovich, making this a popular uprising **not** an orchestrated coup by the US. That others forces inside or outside (like the US) will try to manipulate such mass upsurges when they unexpectedly break out is unsurprising but to call the Maidan protests and its outcome a coup is ridiculous.
2. The only flimsy basis for the coup accusation is the claim that the replacement---not for the next President---but for the caretaker Prime Minister was one preferred by the US adviser V. Nuland. He was A. Yatsenyuk and was chosen as interim PM by the Ukrainian parliament out of three possible choices. The previous PM M. Azarov belonging to Yanukovich's 'Party of the Regions' had resigned on January 28, 2014. Incidentally, the pro-Russia Yanukovich (and therefore designated as an opponent of the US) had on January 25 offered the Premiership to the same Yatsenyuk clearly indicating that the new PM was not a stooge of the US but something of a general compromise candidate acceptable to a wide range
3. The peak of the protests was reached in February when police fired and killed a 100 protestors and Yanukovich fled to Russia (along with his estimated wealth of several billion dollars) on February 21 fearing an imminent impeachment. On February 22 the whole Ukrainian parliament including *every single member of the Yanukovich's own Party* voted to expel him as President---were all bribed or otherwise subordinated to the wishes of the US? On February 23 the parliament appointed O. Turchynov as interim President, a name not figuring in the leaked Nuland correspondences that were supposed to have exposed US machinations to get their own personnel in power. In May the parliament elected P. Poroshenko as President.
4. In the subsequent parliamentary elections in October 2014 the parties of Yatsenyuk and Poroshenko got a majority of seats with the Party of Regions getting less than 10% and the far-right 'neo-Nazi' parties that were also supposedly behind and dominating the Maidan protests could not clear the threshold and got no seats.

The Crimean Question

1. Ukraine after the break-up of the USSR had the third largest arsenal of NWS. It gave this up to Russia in return for the finalized 1994 Budapest Memorandum where the UK, US and Russia agreed to fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. This was carried out when B. Yeltsin was head of Russia. In 2011 Putin is reported to have told Clinton "I don't agree with this deal. And I don't support it. And I am not bound by it". [See <https://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article67205>]. Indian supporters and rationalisers of the Russian invasion have failed to seriously condemn this imperialist behaviour, preferring largely to ignore this brutal violation.
2. The plan to annex Crimea and the 'Peoples Republics' in Donbas was discussed before the fall of Yanukovich. In this regard a document was presented for discussion to the Presidential administration and a year later this was revealed and published in full by the Russian newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta* of February 26, 2015.
3. On February 27, 2014 Russia invaded Crimea, threw out the democratically elected autonomous state government replacing it with stooge members of the 'Russian Unity' party which had received only 4% in previous state elections.
4. Between March 6 and 16 an **illegal** referendum because held under military rule took place and Russia claimed 97% support for Crimea joining Russia. International observers were invited only from far-right European parties that already declared their support for Crimea's

incorporation in Russia. However, the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group said the turnout was between 30 to 50 percent. Moreover, despite Crimea being the only part of Ukraine with a slim ethnic Russian majority population, in a February 8 to 18, 2014 Ukraine-wide poll, only 41% of the population of Crimea favoured joining Russia. *We are to believe that such are the powers of Russian persuasion that a month later this has become 97%*. Incidentally, the referendum deliberately excluded a third option of staying in Ukraine but with the existing very popular status of being an autonomous unit with corresponding specific powers.

5. Historically the indigenous population of Crimea are Tartars. But both Tsarist and Stalin's rule ensured that from once being the overwhelming majority they would be reduced to around 12% today. They were totally opposed to the referendum. They also had their own *Mejils* (parliament). Putin disbanded this and the *Mejils* in exile demands the return of Crimea to Ukraine.

Donbas

1. Ethnic Ukrainians are 58% of the Luhansk oblast (region) and 57% of the Donetsk oblast in Donbas and a considerable number of ethnic Russians have no desire to be independent of Ukraine. Large numbers in this region support having some kind of autonomous or special status especially after the 2019 law which rescinded the status of Russian as an official language even as it retained it for municipal areas having a significant Russian speaking population. Clearly there is more displeasure in Donbas

with the Kiev government than in western Ukraine and it led to their own peaceful protests. But this does not translate into majority support for independence or for Russian absorption.

2. Nor can it be seen as justification for Putin's claims let alone his invasion in 2014 and his mercenary troops that promoted and allied with small local separatist groups to oust existing regional governments in Luhansk and Donetsk. This was a decisive step in *militarizing* a conflict with resulting deaths and casualties that should and could have otherwise been avoided. Then concocted referendums in May 2014 claimed large majorities were for secession. However, in April 2014 a Pew Research Centre poll showed that only 18% in the East wanted to secede and only 27% of Russian speakers. [See <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2014/05/08/despite-concerns-about-governance-ukrainians-want-to-remain-one-country/>] The first Prime Minister of the 'Donetsk Peoples Republic' was A. Borodia, not only a citizen of Russia but an officer in the FSB (successor of the KGB) and a far-right ultranationalist. [See <https://www.thebulwark.com/what-really-happened-in-ukraine-in-2014-and-since-then/?fbclid=IwAR1HIWBW9EztL8cug0xcRc96wJnQUb64M2JusQNW1725kGUWMxNnO6EdBps>]
3. A civil war like situation subsequently merged between the Ukrainian army and the separatists whereby the latter not having anywhere near sufficient support from the civilian population in the East had to count on the involvement of mercenaries (mostly far-right) as well as from sections

of the Russian military. Moscow claimed these latter incursions were accidental crossings across the border or soldiers on leave deciding on their own time to intervene to help their fellow Russians. It is in this situation that the ceasefire Minsk agreements emerged.

The Two Minsk Agreements

1. Minsk I was signed in September 2014 by Ukraine, Russia, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the leaders of the self-declared but not formally recognized 'Luhansk Peoples Republic' (LPR) and 'Donetsk Peoples Republic' (DPR). Apart from a ceasefire, release of hostages and illegal detainees, the two key provisions were a) adoption of and then early elections in particular districts of Luhansk and Donetsk in accordance with the Ukrainian law 'On temporary Order of Local Self-governance'; b) withdrawal of illegal armed groups, fighters, military equipment and mercenaries from Ukraine; c) a designated buffer zone. The OSCE would monitor the implementation.
2. It was the Separatists who soon violated the agreement going on the offensive to capture the Donetsk airport which it had not held at the time of agreement leading to a resumption of fighting. There was direct intervention this time by Russian forces as well as new heavy weaponry brought in and in February 2015 Minsk II was signed via mediation by France and Germany. Violation of Minsk I had already shifted the ground situation in favour of Russia and its allied Separatists when the new status quo

-
- of Minsk II was established.
3. Now a new Constitution was to come into force by 2015 end providing for decentralization and local elections in Donetsk and Luhansk as part of a comprehensive political settlement. The withdrawal of Russian and illegal armed forces and military equipment would begin immediately and be fulfilled under the supervision of the OSCE after completion of the political settlement with full restoration of Ukrainian control over its state borders. If the Ukrainian side can be said to have stalled over the process of completing the political settlement the other side certainly stalled over their responsibilities on the military-security side. Indeed, between 2015 and 2022 the OSCE observer mission repeatedly confirmed incursions of fighting Russian troops, military equipment and vehicles, and periodic convoys returning to Russia carrying the bodies of Russian soldier casualties who were posthumously awarded service medals in Russia.
 4. There was a sharp difference between the Ukrainian government and Russia and its proxies about the nature of the proposed decentralization. The former wanted a three tier structure of power delegation at the oblast, district and community levels to best provide public welfare services as well as maximize accountability and control to those at the lowest community level. Russia wanted a federalized system with much greater powers to the states to even decide their foreign policy. This would mean much greater authority to regional elites with whom pro-Russian oligarchs could join up with and even move in the direction of subsequent secession. How to then amend the Ukrainian constitution was made hostage to this bitter divide. [See <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25029>]
 5. This is the logic behind Putin's basic approach to the question of special status of the Donbas Republics and mirrors what he has sought to do in Georgia and Moldova. Russia occupies South Ossetia and Abkhazia and has a strong military presence there but calls them independent republics. Only four other countries Venezuela, Nauru, Nicaragua and Syria recognize their independent status. In Moldova, Russia controls the breakaway but still unrecognized Transnistria region where it is claimed that Russians are oppressed and where too, the Russian military has a presence.
 6. Minsk II despite all its deficiencies and the skepticisms on both sides about its efficacy, nevertheless to the very end, still represented a situation of lower intensity conflict far superior to outright full-scale war that later emerged. It is not Ukraine but Russia that two days before its February 24, 2022 invasion, declared Minsk II invalid and walked out of it.

The March-end 2022 Deal That Failed

1. There are those in the pacifist camp as well as those who give undue explanatory weight to NATO expansionism as the main factor for Russian 'reaction' that a peace deal was in the offing at March end 2022 but was scuttled by the US/UK because they wanted to further 'bleed' Russia and had control over Zelensky and his government. The official Russian claim by its foreign minister S. Lavrov was that Ukraine would take NATO membership off

the table, settle for Western security guarantees---the nature of which still had to be finalized---and then Russia would withdraw to the pre-invasion line. Although Russia has shown duplicity repeatedly one is here supposed to take it at its word.

2. Proponents of this story cite an interview given to an Israeli journalist by N. Bennett, the former PM who worked as a mediator for that possible settlement; and on a report in the English language newspaper *Ukrainska Pravda*. Yet as a close and detailed study of both reveals, there were hesitations on both sides---Zelensky wondering whether Putin could be trusted and Putin unhappy about the security guarantees being offered because they would cover the whole of Ukraine including Donbas. The real reason for the negotiations being scuttled was not Western opposition but the Russian escalation despite the ongoing talks when it carried out the massacre in Bucha, photographic and video evidence of which emerged on April 1, 2022. Putin unsurprisingly claimed this was a fabricated account. The very sources cited to claim that the West was responsible for the Deal failing, actually confirm that Bucha was the turning point and Deal breaker. [See <https://www.thebulwark.com/no-the-united-states-and-its-allies-did-not-blow-up-a-ukraine-russia-peace-deal/>] As for the April 2022 visit by Boris Johnson and his warning message that Putin could not be trusted was no new revelation to Zelensky.
3. The real unfolding story begins with the 2014 Russian troop invasion that illegally took over Crimea and installed Russian military presence, directly and indirectly in eastern Ukraine. These actions were not because of fear of NATO expansion or because the US was waging a proxy war---the misleading claims currently made for explaining the 2022 *further* troop invasion. The preparations for what was meant to be the culminating act in this longer term process of deliberately eroding and destroying Ukrainian sovereignty was taking place throughout 2021 right up to February 24, 2022.
4. That is why even as Russia said it was seeking to 'liberate' Donbas immediately marched on to try and capture the capital Kiev itself. It is when, unexpected by everyone including the US and NATO, the heroic and successful resistance by Ukraine prevented Putin from succeeding in this endeavour that the March-end talks took place. For Putin this was a stalling tactic and it should be clear from this long history of what Russia has been doing since 2014 that Putin has never intended to retreat to the pre-February 24, 2022 military status quo.
5. *The fundamental character of this conflict is not that it is a proxy war or a 'hybrid' war but that it is war of national liberal and national defence on one side against a criminal and illegal invasion and occupation by a Russia guilty of terrible and inhuman war crimes against the civilian population of Ukraine.* For a principled left, Indian and international, the stand must be one of an unconditional but always critical support and solidarity with the Ukrainian people in their fight for self-determination This stance includes accepting their right to get arms, advice and intelligence

support from anywhere even as we can warn against the motivations of their suppliers. We oppose US imperialism and NATO expansion even as we oppose the imperialism of Russia.

What Now?

As a sober assessment of the ground situation is that a war of attrition has emerged and is likely to continue. Russia has ensured that NATO has actually expanded its membership and encroachment area with the incorporation of Finland and Sweden. One would have to think Putin a complete fool to believe that he did not know he was going to strengthen and help expand NATO by his 2022 invasion even if he had succeeded in all his conquering aims. Both his own public declarations to his own citizens and his foreign policy behaviour towards his neighbours and towards the members of the military alliance structure, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CTSO) that Russia heads, make clear that his primary goal has always been to take over as much Ukrainian territory as possible as part of his wider pursuit to re-establish Russia's own formal and informal empire. The question of autonomous and devolved powers for the people of Luhansk and Donetsk to be exercised by their democratically elected and accountable representatives has always been subordinate to Russian

ambitions and purposes.

Since this has become a war of attrition there will be calls for ceasefire and possible negotiations from many sides. Given the existing and likely relationship of forces on the ground any finally negotiated agreement will most likely mean some degree of Russian control over Ukrainian territory and therefore an injustice. The very fact of Ukrainian resistance has significantly reduced Russia's bargaining power but not eliminated this. It is not for those of us outside to impose our 'solutions' or proposals to end the war let alone to call for an end to arms supplies to Ukraine. On the contrary, it is for us to call for creating the kind of pressure that can push Russia to retreat if not withdraw completely. It is for the people of Ukraine and their political representatives to decide whether to have an agreement and if so, of what kind and containing what compromises? And this may well result from the undue influence and power of the very government elites that say they support the just struggle of the Ukrainian people but prioritise their own class interests. This situation is not in our hands. But what is clear is that our moral and political commitment must remain solidarity with the just struggle of the Ukrainian people and respect for their right to decide their political future.

Reprinted from 'The Radical' Summer 2023

Resolution on Ukraine: Fourth International World Congress Belgium 23rd to 28th February, 2025

The 18th World Congress of the Fourth International took place in Belgium from 23 to 28th February. The wide-ranging discussion covered the international situation in all its aspects from the structural polycrisis in its environmental, economic, social and political aspects to the movements of resistance, and the need to build and strengthen our own International. One particular point of debate was how as internationalist revolutionary Marxists we express our opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and our solidarity with the resistance of the Ukrainian people to this invasion, to the neoliberal policies of the Zelensky government and to neoliberal militarization.

We publish here the resolution presented by the majority of the outgoing IC, approved by the congress by 95 votes in favour, 23 against, 3 abstentions and 5 no votes, and the alternative resolution presented by a number of delegations rejected 31 for, 80 against, 9 abstentions. WE RADICAL SOCIALIST HAS VOTED FOR THE ADOPTED (MAJORITY) RESOLUTION.

ADOPTED (MAJORITY) RESOLUTION

1. In February 2022, Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in an attempt to turn the country into a Russian satellite. This attempt has caused hundreds of thousands of dead and wounded already. But the regime in Moscow has long been characterised by expansionist Greater Russian imperialist ideology, which sees superpowers as endowed with the right to extend their zone of influence by all means possible, challenging established norms of international law and legitimising a new era of imperialist redistribution. Thus, for the Kremlin, the daily increasing human cost of this aggression is no reason to cease it, and further intensification is instrumental to terrorise the Ukrainian people into submission.
2. What was supposed to be a “special military operation” to bring down the Kyiv government in a matter of days has turned into a three-year entanglement in full-scale war. This development was unexpected not only for Putin but also for the Western powers – Biden even offered to help Zelensky evacuate. It is precisely the determination and resilience of the Ukrainian resistance that has thwarted Putin’s plans to this day.
3. The invasion of Ukraine was not only an attempt to reassert the role of Russia in the capitalist competition but also a deliberate attempt to tighten control over Russian society and crush all dissent. Anti-war activists have been prosecuted and sentenced to long prison terms on trumped charges. Socialist organisations, such as that of our comrades in the Russian Socialist Movement, have been forced to disband, and their members have had to flee. While feminists continue to mobilise, they do it under constant pressure with threats of imprisonment for even uttering the word “war”.
4. As internationalists, we defend Ukraine’s right to self-determination and their right to resist the invasion.

People's movements are an integral part of this resistance, waging a struggle on two fronts: against the occupants and against the Zelensky government. In this unequal fight, we stand together with other progressive forces in the country. We urge all internationalist left to develop political and material solidarity with trade unionists, feminists, and social and democratic activists in Ukraine. Just as the Fourth International has been doing this since the beginning of the aggression within the framework of the "European Network of Solidarity with Ukraine" (ENSU/RESU) and together with the Ukrainian left-wing organisation, Sotsialnyi Rukh.

5. Once again, we underline that we have no illusions about the nature of Ukraine's regime. Their government is right-wing and neo-liberal, not shying away from mobilising fear to stay in power. It is just as keen to satisfy domestic capitalists as to reassure the Western powers of its ability to adapt to their demands. Its anti-social and anti-democratic policies are counter-productive in terms of defending Ukraine. They oppose the needs of its working classes, provoke their resentment, undermine social trust, and, as a result, the government relies on increasingly authoritarian measures. This makes standing with the Ukrainian wage earners and their organisations all the more important. We cannot abandon them when they desperately need solidarity, especially if our vision of emancipation is that of a struggle from below, where the people rise to fight, independent from the government and the great powers.

6. Russia's attack on Ukraine is part of the global crisis of capitalism, increasing

inter-imperialist tensions, and the rise of the far right and militarism. The Russian regime has been interfering in Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, backed Bashar El Assad's reactionary regime, and has been increasing its involvement in Africa. The United States is manoeuvring in South America, Asia-Pacific, Europe and Africa, keeps arming Israel and supporting all its aggressions. France, for its part, is trying to hold on in Africa, too and is repressing the Kanak independence fighters. That is not to mention how Putin's war of aggression generally revitalised NATO, previously declared "braindead," and allowed major Western powers to strengthen and expand it.

7. By invoking the Russian invasion, Western governments pretend to be powerless to support those hit by inflation and increasing energy costs, thus tacitly undermining the solidarity they appeal to. In the meantime, right-wing forces are increasingly targeting Ukrainian refugees or pitting them against other migrants.

8. Admittedly, the support that the USA and Western governments are giving to Ukraine is not based on anti-colonial viewpoint given how they enable Israel's colonialism to go unchecked. Western imperialist powers are using the war to try and weaken their Russian rival while at the same time using Ukraine's need for aid to impose their own stranglehold on the country. However, this is no reason when the Ukrainian people, in their hour of need, deserve all the means necessary to defend themselves, to refuse such means, or for us to sabotage their provision.

9. Now it is up to the left to mobilise

and demand that support to Ukraine's people is given unconditionally, instead of being tied to implementing and deepening neoliberal measures. This is why we call for the immediate and full cancellation of Ukrainian debt, respect for labour law, and maintenance of public services, the expropriation of big capitalists, and the fight against corruption to aid the Ukrainian people and oppose imperialist power.

10. Today's globally increased arms spending shows that more than ever, we must campaign against the insane programmes of mutual strategic rearmament, particularly nuclear, against the arms trade, which is very often directed towards dictatorships, and for democratic control (nationalisation) of the arms industry - at the same time as we support the right of colonised peoples to defend themselves, including by arms.

11. As we write these lines, Russia is launching new attacks. The destruction of whole towns, infrastructures and ecosystems serves to impose the hold of Great Russian imperialism, as are the abduction and deportation of children, the destruction of Ukrainian culture, and the suppression of freedoms in the occupied zones. Putin is open about his demands punishing Ukraine for stubbornness: recognition of the illegal territorial acquisitions; replacement of Zelensky's "illegitimate and Nazi" government; drastic reduction of the Ukrainian armed forces; non-membership of NATO.

12. It is clear that part of the far right in the West would prefer an agreement with Putin that would enhance their shared ultra-reactionary agenda, and

that would leave Ukraine powerless and divided, reduced to a neo-colony of Russia. The government of China provides concrete support to the Kremlin while presenting demands for Ukrainian surrender as proposals for negotiations. A section of the European and US ruling classes may also be tempted at some point by a peace that would give Putin some satisfaction but would also restore trade relations with Russia and China.

13. Trump now considers the Ukrainians to be responsible for the war. His predatory, mercantilist stance, demanding "repayment" for past aid to Ukraine through the seizure of the country's mineral and rare earth resources, and other privileges to come, is a particularly brutal and odious illustration of this logic.

14. Parts of the self-proclaimed anti-war left agree with this and are prepared to leave Ukraine at the permanent mercy of the Russian regime, either out of anti-U.S. campism or pacifism. We believe that any 'peace' based on such conditions and imposed against the will of the Ukrainian people will only be the prelude to more occupation and violence in the future. Now, it is time for the left to build its own credible strategy on security based on popular participation and control. This has become more crucial than ever in the face of the inter-imperialist "deals" struck between Trump and Putin.

The only lasting solution to this war can be reached through:

- non-recognition of annexations and the complete withdrawal of Russian troops;
- subjecting any negotiations and

agreements to the democratic control of the people;

- ensuring Ukraine's ability to defend itself against any future imperialist encroachments.

A lasting peace is possible only when it is based:

- on the right of Ukraine and its constituent minorities to freely determine their future and develop their cultures, independent of external pressure, the interest of the oligarchs, neoliberal ruling regimes or extreme right-wing ideologies;

- on the respect for political, social, and labour rights, including the right to strike, peaceful assembly, and free elections;

- on the right of all refugees and people displaced by the war to return home or settle in the countries where they currently reside;

- on having Putin's dictatorship dismantled and all political prisoners and prisoners of war free.

We see our fight against the war in

Ukraine as part of a struggle against militarism and imperialism. The fight against the war and for international solidarity requires:

- dismantling all NATO, CSTO, and AUKUS military blocs;

- establishment of a system of international relations based on equality of all nations, control from below, open diplomacy and condemnation of all forms of imperialist and nationalist aggression;

- cancellation of the Ukrainian debt;

- the creation, under the control of Ukraine's citizens, of a fund for reconstruction, defence and the improvement of living conditions, financed by exceptional taxes on the profits of Western capitalists who conducted business with their Russian counterparts and the profits of arms companies and other war profiteers, as well as by the expropriation of the fortunes of Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs.

28 February 2025

ALTERNATIVE (MINORITY) RESOLUTION

In order to have a useful solidarity orientation towards the working people of the region and to maintain our tradition of anti-imperialism and class independence, the war in Ukraine must be understood in its geopolitical and historical context on the basis of a rigorous materialist analysis of the facts that have led to it, in order to avoid mischaracterisations and hasty conclusions. Based on these premises, the aim of this resolution is to develop

an alternative orientation to the one that our current has held since 2022.

Since this resolution was originally written, dramatic developments have confirmed our general analysis. On 12 February, Trump had a phone call with Putin and announced that peace talks would begin. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio then met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergie Lavrov in Saudi Arabia in order to start the process of

carving Ukraine up. Both the Ukrainian government and the EU were humiliated by being left out of the process.

Trump incredibly blamed Zelensky for starting the war. He demanded 50% of Ukraine's raw materials, without even offering any security guarantee in exchange. He repeatedly refused to promise Ukrainian involvement in the formal peace talks which are set to begin. The US, together with Israel and Russia, voted against condemning the Russian invasion in Ukraine.

It is a picture of the new world order envisaged by Trump - where the post WW2 so-called 'international rules based order' is to be torn up. Trump appears to be driven by two calculations - primarily as part of a pivot to focus on the US' most significant rival, China, and secondarily as a way of meeting the expectations of his electoral base.

If concluded, this will be an inter-imperialist peace, just as the war was, as well as being a legitimate Ukrainian struggle against aggression, an inter-imperialist proxy war. It will be based on a large give-away of territory to Russia and rare earth resources to the US.

The fact that it is likely that the US administration's new position will lead to the end of the war only underlines the proxy character of this conflict. Without US active support, regardless of the personal preferences of Zelensky and the government, they will not be able to continue to fight. They will likely be forced to go along, despite objections, with a humiliating peace.

The idea that in response to this development we should place demands on the Trump administration to continue

to send arms to Ukraine is absurd. It would line us up with the more hawkish section of the capitalist class in the west.

Instead, while denouncing the unjust carve-up of Ukraine by the US and Russia, we need to focus our agitation on support for the people of Ukraine with working class methods. We should redouble our call for a cancellation of Ukrainian debt. We should actively oppose the attempts to steal the natural resources of Ukraine by Russia and the US. We should seek to deepen our relationships with Ukrainian trade unionists, left activists and others. We should seek to build movements against the process of European militarisation which is now likely to be further accelerated.

The long dynamic of stagnation that has been dragging on since the Great Recession of 2007-2008, which began in the major imperialist centres, the added impact of the pandemic and the changes in the international correlation of forces resulting from the displacement of the major centres of value production to the South and the East, as well as the exhaustion of the dynamics of financialisation as a mechanism for recovering profits with little or no accumulation... have opened up two underlying dynamics at the global level:

(a) a sharpening of inter-imperialist tensions.

b) a growing political instability resulting, in general terms, from the interaction of the following vectors: a strengthening of the radical right, a crisis of the political management forces and the fragmentation and global weakening of the left, from social democracy to the revolutionary left.

In relation to the first dynamic,

there are today four major hotspots of inter-imperialist tension (Palestine and the Middle East, Ukraine and Eastern Europe, the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, Taiwan and Southeast Asia), and two open wars in full escalation (Israel's war - with American and European support - against Palestine, Yemen and Lebanon and its attacks on Syria and, above all, Iran and three years of war in Ukraine since its invasion by Russia and a NATO proxy war against the Russian Federation). Several diplomats, analysts and activists are warning of the risk that the current escalations could push in a double direction: a convergence of open conflicts and the risk that they could ignite all areas of tension, leading to a global conflict with a high risk of the use of nuclear weapons.

In this resolution we will open the focus in space and time to address the causes, nature and possible outcomes of the war in Ukraine, as well as affirming the anti-imperialist commitment, the anti-militarist line and the internationalist solidarity with the Ukrainian and Russian working classes of the Fourth International.

Opening the focus

The current tension in the world has to do with the attempt by the West, mainly the US, to prevent by commercial, financial, political and military means the decline of its power in the world. Washington's disastrous ongoing war since the end of the Cold War, which has resulted in some 4 million dead and 40 million displaced people in the arc from Afghanistan to Libya to Iraq and the wars in the former Yugoslavia, has to do with the neo-con conception, common to Republicans and Democrats, of world domination alone formulated in 1992 and practised ever

since. The rise of China, the reaction of Russia and the increasing alienation of the global South, i.e. the majority of the world's population, have long pointed to growing tensions in the world.

The American priority for Europe, well known and documented, was to separate Germany from Russia and to prevent the integration of the European Union into the Eurasian geo-economic conglomerate whose main driving force is Beijing (this conception was clearly incorporated in the documents adopted by the NATO summit in Madrid in June 2022). China is the EU's largest trading partner. Russia was its main energy partner. The US is severing both relationships. Russia's has already been achieved and at best the rupture will last a few decades (the attack on Nord Stream in the North Sea symbolises very well what is at stake). China is more difficult, but it is also making progress (AUKUS, growing collaboration between NATO and Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, etc.). The result will be, already is being, a growing subordination of the EU to the US, a severe economic recession in Germany (directly impacted by the energy disconnection from Russia and the ongoing tariff war with China), a rise of the extreme right and the deepening of the political crisis in the EU opened more than a decade and a half ago by the Euro crisis, the political and social crisis in Mediterranean Europe, the Brexit, and the criminal policies of repression of immigration.

Characterising the conflict

On the left, there has been a twofold tendency to simplify the causes and nature of the war in Ukraine. Some

reduce it to a national liberation struggle against an 'unprovoked' invasion by an authoritarian regime. This view is not far from the initial discourse of not a few NATO and EU officials, who insist on demonising Putin and portraying him as a madman intent on rebuilding what Reagan called the Soviet 'empire of evil' and conquering all of Eastern Europe. Others speak of an inter-imperialist clash without further ado (the discourse of much of the BRICS and of Stalinist or Mao-Stalinist formations nostalgic for the USSR), ignoring the Russian invasion and disregarding the right to self-determination of peoples, thus trying to justify and excuse Putin's decision.

In order to correctly characterise the ongoing conflict it is inevitable to understand that there is a dialectic between the two dynamics (national oppression and inter-imperialist clash). But the dynamics of the war have undoubtedly imposed a change in its dosage, insofar as the will to resist of a majority of the Ukrainian population at the beginning of Putin's invasion has been progressively subordinated to the aims, methods and political-military direction of the powers that support Kiev against Russia. At the same time, the stagnation of the military situation in the framework of a long war of attrition has since favoured growing disaffection, alienation and increasingly anti-war attitudes among growing swathes of the population (such as the massive flight of conscripts and the no less massive desertions of Ukrainian soldiers, disbelieving in the illusory promise of victory).

While there is no doubt that the Russian Federation is solely responsible

for a condemnable and criminal invasion, like all imperialist aggressions, it is patently false to claim that it was 'unprovoked'.

Looking back in anger

It is necessary to recall a few facts to set the context of the invasion of 24 February 2022:

- The Cold War was never fully closed after the collapse of the former USSR and the Eastern Bloc more than thirty years ago. The conversion of entire fractions of the former bureaucracies to ethno-nationalism in order to stay in power, as was already the case in the former Yugoslavia, the intervention of the great powers to operate a neoliberal and mafia capitalist restoration and to encourage clashes for their own benefit has been a constant since the 1990s in Eastern Europe.

- It is impossible to understand the current conflict without seeing the trauma of the decomposition of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the countries of the East, the dialectic of the armed conflicts that have taken place in the world since the end of the Cold War (NATO's attacks on the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Libya or the two American invasions of Iraq. In all cases except Afghanistan these were states traditionally allied with Russia), as well as the extension of NATO without and against Russia and the enlargement of the EU towards Eastern Europe, aspiring to this capitalist, neoliberal and increasingly despotic supermarket the countries of the former Soviet sphere of influence.

The material basis that explains the great antagonism between a NATO

hegemonised by the US and Russia is the nature of Russian political capitalism, which, since the early 2000s, is no longer permeable to the penetration of the interests of transnational globalised capitalism, and tries to secure the interests of its own oligarchies on the basis of an authoritarian and anti-worker bonapartist power that seeks to safeguard its traditional zones of influence and its extractivist rentierism.

- Nor is Putin's imperialist and militarist reaction understandable without taking into account that what has broken out in February 2022 is the conclusion of a dispute for influence in Ukraine between Russia on the one hand and the US and the EU on the other. As recently as the 1990s, during Bill Clinton's presidency, Ukraine was the third largest recipient of US aid, only behind Israel and Egypt. A war foretold by many analysts, not for years, but decades in some cases.

- It is also important to remember that the invasion ordered by Putin in 2022 would have been impossible had there not been civil war dynamics in Ukraine since 2014, initiated after the overthrow of Yanukovich and the subsequent Russian occupation of Crimea, dynamics undoubtedly amplified and deepened by Russia's covert intervention and the military (we are talking about 3 billion dollars in military assistance between 2014 and 2022), financial, and technical support of the US and other NATO countries to Kiev in the inter-Ukrainian conflict (in the words of Stephen Kotkin, 'Ukraine is not in NATO, but NATO is in Ukraine'). The lack of political will to implement the Minsk I and Minsk II agreements

('they were for gaining time', in the words of Angela Merkel) also opened the door to the Kremlin's turn to coercive diplomacy in autumn 2021, when, as is now public knowledge, it demanded a commitment from NATO not to integrate Ukraine, which was rejected by the military organisation in full awareness of the consequences of such a refusal.

All the actors in the conflict have trampled on the right of self-determination

While all the imperialist powers involved in the Ukrainian conflict invoke, in one way or another, the right of self-determination, they have all trampled on it (something similar happens, incidentally, with the 'anti-fascism' and 'anti-Nazism' invoked by both sides, when, as is well known, both the Russian and Ukrainian governments rely on far-right forces and currents to stimulate militarism in their respective countries).

Putin's neo-Tzarism has obviously trampled on Ukraine's right to self-determination, a reprehensible 'invention' attributed to Lenin's malice, even if it then organises 'referendums' of little legitimacy in territories such as Crimea (despite the fact that a majority of its population was probably in favour of the 2014 annexation due to the enclave's specific history) or none at all in the areas it occupies in the Donbas.

Neither has the nationalist regime in Kiev, between 2014 and 2022, respected the cultural rights of Russian speakers and their will to achieve political autonomy in Ukraine (not to mention the right of self-determination of the Donbas).

But Western imperialism did not respect Kiev's self-determination either when it sabotaged the pre-agreement reached at the Ukraine-Russia peace talks in Turkey in April 2022 (because the war had not yet served to wear Russia down militarily enough, as Boris Johnson would argue), nor when they tell Ukraine what to attack, when and with what weapons, totally subordinating Ukrainian decision-making to their own interests. Western governments do not care about the economic and demographic ruin of Ukraine, which has already lost a third of its population, a whole generation of maimed youth, hundreds of thousands of dead, orphans and widows, as well as a fifth of its national territory. The sole aim of Western imperialism has been to wear Russia down.

Dynamics, implications and risks of the conflict

- None of the proxy wars of the Cold War were fought in the North, let alone on the borders (and even within the borders) of a great power like Russia. Today the debate is whether or not to attack a nuclear power with long-range weapons in the face of evidence that Ukraine cannot win a conventional war of attrition... or else recognise reality and the 'defenders of Ukrainian self-determination' end up forcing Zelensky to negotiate. In the Cold War there were nuclear arms limitation treaties, today that has been systematically sabotaged, first by the United States and more recently by Russia. This has led to a scenario that is probably more dangerous than the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, where the Monroe Doctrine, which prohibits the presence of interests, allied regimes or military

bases of other great powers, not on the borders of the United States, but in the Americas as a whole, was applied.

- It is also worth recalling that the initial enthusiasm of Western foreign ministries for the prospects opened up by NATO's proxy war against Russia on the back of Ukraine led not a few of their exponents to cherish the prospect of a Slavic Afghanistan (to use Hilary Clinton's expression), which would bleed Russia dry to the point of forcing regime change in Moscow. Biden, Von der Layen, Borrell and Stoltenberg repeated ad nauseam that the war crimes committed made negotiations impossible and that Russia's total defeat must be forced. In view of what has been tolerating to Netanyahu on a daily basis for more than a year now, the hypocrisy of Western imperialism is utterly scandalous.

While this has been the case from the beginning, it is now increasingly clear that this war cannot be concluded with a total military victory by either side without transforming the conflict into a direct inter-imperialist war with a very high risk of the use of nuclear weapons, which by its very nature, obviously, no one can win. It is therefore quite conclusive that fuelling the conflict with Western weaponry (first small arms, then armour, cluster bombs, fighter planes and medium- and long-range missiles) has contributed to escalating and prolonging the war, multiplying deaths and destruction and bringing us dangerously close to a world war. The recent 'plan for victory' being presented by Zelenski in Western chancelleries is quite explicit in seeking 'victory' by committing NATO to open war against

Russia. Indeed, one of the great dangers of this war is that passive nuclear deterrence is being eroded and the great risk is that Putin will decide to replace it with active nuclear deterrence (read use of some tactical nuclear weapon to restore his credibility), something that cannot be completely ruled out (the insistence by Western politicians that 'the Russian nuclear threat is a bluff' is very irresponsible and dangerous, something that is unfortunately also thought by people on the left).

All available information suggests that Russia is slowly and not without difficulty winning a terrible war of attrition with huge casualties on both sides, has been able to resist economic sanctions and has strengthened its geopolitical and geo-economic ties with China. In building a war economy and coping with the impact of sanctions, Russia has not only strengthened the repressive aspect of its authoritarian Bonapartist regime (remember that Putin is a moderate, considering that the Kremlin is full of people demanding nuclear strikes on Paris, London and Washington...), but has been forced to engage in a process of reindustrialisation that is allowing for significant economic growth rather than the collapse sought by Washington and Brussels. While this favourable conjuncture for Russia may very quickly suffer if there is a reduction in the price of oil (a gender operation by Saudi Arabia to weaken Russia and Iran is not out of the question), it seems that the war has driven a geopolitical and geo-economic structural change of as yet unknown scope.

- Information is also emerging that points to Ukrainian authorship of

the Nord Stream sabotage with the assistance of one or more NATO countries in the action (and undoubtedly with Washington's authorisation, if not direct involvement in the attack), dispelling initial accusations of alleged Russian authorship.

On European militarisation

The 'Europe of defence', an old EU project that has been promoted and legitimised thanks to the war in Ukraine, not only translates its desire to reinforce its 'hard power', especially in the melé to control resources in Africa in the dominant extractivist logic, but also aims to consolidate its role as a vassal force supplementary to the United States in a project of global imperialist domination that does not seem viable, given the correlation of forces. At the same time, Europe's military build-up is a flight forward, reflecting the disquiet generated among its leaders by the internal crisis in the United States.

- The Putinist invasion has allowed NATO to expand into Finland and Sweden, adding new tensions with Russia and ending a long history of neutrality for these countries (which partly cushioned important tensions during the Cold War). All of which had to be done on the condition that Sweden agreed to facilitate the extradition of several Kurdish militant refugees to the Scandinavian country and that NATO looked the other way while the Turkish Erdogan regime launched a full-scale invasion of Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan—a war that has, incidentally, gone completely unnoticed in the Western mass media. As is well known, NATO has been defending democratic values in Turkey today since the Cold War,

just as it did when it hosted Salazar's Portugal and the colonels' Greece in the past.

In its relationship with Russia, the EU has not had diplomacy for many years. It has a 'human rights policy', i.e. the selective political use of human rights to put pressure on its adversary. It has an image policy and cultural war propaganda: just look at the abundance of Russophobes to whom it awards its literary and citizens' prizes, from the neo-con Anne Applebaum, to the Ukrainian writers Serhij Zhadan and Andrei Kurkov, whose main merit is cultural racism against everything Russian, to the detested French President Emmanuel Macron, who is crowing about sending French troops to Ukraine. It also has a policy of sanctions, which at the moment are turning against it, and finally it has a military policy. The Brussels world has all this, but it has no diplomacy. Statements such as that of the head of European diplomacy, Josep Borrell, that 'the situation will be decided on the battlefield', show a purely military logic.

There is a structural link between European militarisation and European and NATO military intervention in Ukraine. On the one hand, the militarisation of the continent is related to the very needs of military intervention and the growing European involvement in the conflict. On the other hand, the war in Ukraine creates a pretext to accelerate and reintroduce a more far-reaching strategic agenda of European militarisation and has created a political climate in which it is very difficult to fight it. It is therefore contradictory to formally oppose the militarisation of Europe while supporting the growing

and endless military intervention in Ukraine, when Ukraine is the main driver of militarisation on the continent.

A catastrophic war for the peoples of Ukraine and Russia

- This war has been catastrophic from every conceivable point of view: for the level of death and destruction (some estimates speak of almost a million deaths), for the militarist and reactionary spiral it has spread among the great powers, for the immense destruction of resources it entails in a world that must invest massively in energy transition and urgent climate stabilisation measures... In short, because it has fuelled the dynamics of fascisation typical of ultra-nationalist spirals, both in Russia and Ukraine, but also in Europe and the rest of the world. Feeding the current war and supporting NATO interventionism leads to an endless escalation in which only increases the spiral of death and destruction in Ukraine, with no prospect of a real outcome, and the risk of the situation getting out of control and the spread of the conflict to third countries.

The only solution for Ukraine's self-determination is negotiations to end hostilities and for Ukraine to return to neutrality and renounce NATO membership.... Had the March-April 2022 negotiations not been sabotaged, nearly three years of war would have been avoided and hundreds of thousands of lives saved... and Ukraine's negotiating position would have been much more favourable immediately after Putin's initial assault on Kiev was repelled. Now, when even NATO, through Rutte's mouth, recognises that

the war can only be concluded at the negotiating table, having nurtured it for years for the sole purpose of using the Ukrainians as cannon fodder in its proxy war against Russia, it is going to see far more damaging negotiations for Ukraine. Nor can it be ruled out, as signs are beginning to show, that NATO will negotiate behind Ukraine's back when the military organisation comes to the conclusion that it no longer needs its services. There are plenty of precedents for this in history and it was perfectly foreseeable from the beginning of the war.

The martial law imposed by the Zelensky government, which has outlawed parties, persecuted activists and imposed ultra-liberal shock therapy on the population, also allows him to prolong his rule without going to the polls. His fate is tied to the support of Western powers and it is no longer evident that a majority of the Ukrainian population is in favour of continuing the war. A poll by Ukrainian media outlet ZN in June 2024 claimed that 44 per cent of the population supported immediate peace negotiations.

Given the situation in the Middle East, and bringing up Zelensky's statement that Ukraine aspires to become 'A Greater Israel with a face of its own' and that 'security' will be the great asset (indeed, Ukrainian troops have participated in almost all of Washington's military adventures since the 1990s, including Afghanistan and Iraq) and central theme in post-war Ukraine, it is important to remember that the use of the suffering of innocents has served before to legitimise the creation of gendarme-states totally subservient to imperialist interests. Just

as the 'holocaust industry' has served the criminal interests of Zionism, it is not out of the question that the Kiev regime will capitalise on the current suffering of the Ukrainian people to legitimise the creation of a new Israel in Eastern Europe, making its antagonism with Russia its great economic, political and military asset. The founding of the state of Israel also initially confused large sections of progressive opinion, served to wash away Europe's guilty conscience over the Judeocide and allowed the discourse of the 'only democracy in the region' and 'civilisation against barbarism' to be agitated... with results that are well known eighty years later.

The tasks of revolutionary Marxists

The war in Ukraine has galvanised a whole series of reactionary tendencies that were already present in the European Union, the United States and Russia: the rise of militarism, the expansion of NATO, the increase in military budgets, the reconfiguration of the military industry, it has helped to bury the environmentalist agenda, it has fostered national unity around 'democratic' defensism, ethno-nationalism and has accelerated the authoritarian turn in all countries.

In this sense, the international Fourth International is committed to promoting processes of organisation and struggle against these tendencies, nurturing and participating in the movements against war, militarisation and for denuclearisation. The new internationalism must begin to organise against the interests and policies of the bourgeoisie in each country. Taking up the slogans 'War on war' and 'The enemy is at home' is essential for the working

class to be aware of the dangers to which the current inter-imperialist dynamic is leading us, and thus to take up the best traditions of the workers' movement against warmongering and militarism. In this sense, the Fourth International will propagate the following demands:

- Immediate peace without annexations and the withdrawal of Russian troops.
- Demilitarisation and denuclearisation of the borders. An end to arms shipments by imperialist countries.
- The right of return of all war refugees, including insubordinates and deserters from both countries.
- Immediate amnesty for political prisoners, restoration of the right to demonstrate, assemble and organise and an end to emergency legislation in both Russia and Ukraine.
- Reception of refuseniks, deserters and refugees from both sides without bureaucratic and legal obstacles in the countries where they decide to settle, if necessary.
- The expropriation of the Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs who have used ethno-nationalism to stay in power and send the proletarians of both countries to the slaughter.
- Abolition of the Ukrainian foreign debt and an end to the economic and financial colonisation of Ukraine by international capital, as well as the neo-liberal and anti-working class measures of the Zelensky government.
- Dissolution of all military blocs (NATO, CSTO, AUKUS, etc.).
- Right of self-determination of the Dombas and Crimea.
- The Fourth International is also in solidarity with the dissident social, trade union and political organisations persecuted and/or directly hit by the effects of the war in both countries, especially our comrades of the Russian Socialist Movement and Sotsialnyi Rukh in the Ukraine.
- With the fight against their own bourgeoisies in Ukraine and Russia. No to agreements with imperialism in Ukraine, no to militaristic projects in Russia. For internationalist fraternisation and an end to the conflict, without revenge and without plundering.
- Solidarity with the Ukrainian and Russian working class, stop the war and the suicidal militarist spiral!

28 February 2025

*Interview with Oleksandr Kyeselov by Robin Singh at the
World Congress of the Fourth International between
February 23 and 28, 2025 in Belgium*

Robin: *First tell us a little about yourself.*

Oleksandr: I began with the Communist Youth. But the CP environment was not very leftist. Somewhat nostalgic for the good old days of the Soviet Union seen through the prism of the past. At the same time, they were connected to the oligarchs who dominated the Ukrainian economy. Then in my university I was connected to the Anarcho-Syndicalists. When Putin's first war against the Ukraine started in 2014, my hometown Donetsk was invaded and occupied. So I left as I did not want to live under Russian occupiers. I took on jobs as a migrant worker. After living abroad in various countries I returned to Ukraine in 2020. It was then that I joined Sotsialnyi Rukh.

Robin: *Please say briefly what the politics of Sotsialnyi Rukh are like.*

Oleksandr: Sotsialnyi Rukh is a socialist organisation committed to internationalism, socialist feminism, anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism. Since 2022, we have been carrying out a difficult campaign.

We have tried to convince the international left that in the case of the war between Russia and Ukraine, we have a powerful imperialist force and a much weaker opponent which has a long history of being oppressed by Great Russian chauvinism. At the same time within Ukraine we have fought for the rights of workers and for all democratic organisations.

Robin: *Three years of war have been completed. Please tell us about the situation and the attitude of the people to the war.*

Oleksandr : Of course, many people are disappointed. Nobody had expected a long war. Putin had even refused to call it a war. Biden had offered Zelensky a flight out, assuming governmental collapse. But that did not happen.

But this has been a terrible war. Severe damages have occurred to the economy. There are regular breakdowns of basic things like energy supply and water. People spend enormous amounts of time on survival so activism gets far less time.

Robin: *A large part of the left in India seems to feel that this is an inter- imperialist war, a proxy war. They do not see the right of self-determination for the Ukrainian people as paramount, and when we bring it up, they respond by talking about the rights of the Russian minorities.*

Oleksandr: That brings up a number of issues at one go. So let me respond one point at a time.

I have heard people say that our slogan in both Russia and Ukraine should be, "the main enemy is at home". I must tell you, this is a total misunderstanding of the slogan. This is not a war between two imperialist powers, or even two reasonably equivalent powers. Ukraine gave up one of the world's largest nuclear arsenals in exchange for a guarantee

by Russia, USA and others to honour and protect the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Putin has broken that commitment before international law not once but twice.

Ukraine is a distinct nation. Great Russian chauvinism has always denied that---under the Tsars, under Stalin. At the start of the current invasion Putin was absolutely clear on that. He blamed Lenin and the principle of the right of oppressed nations to self-determination for the very existence of Ukraine.

One more dimension in the case of those who hesitate to support Ukraine is, they bring up the character of Zelensky and his regime. When you express solidarity with Palestine do you insist that before you do so the governing authority in Palestine must be of a political odour of your liking. Then why a different attitude to Ukraine and the Ukrainian people?

You must understand that Zelensky was elected by an overwhelming majority. Outside, he is being projected as a clown or a comedian. But that is not his image for the Ukrainians. As I said, right at the start, he refused to flee. No one expected the war to last so long. His rating actually went up as Ukraine resisted. As the country's elected leader he said, in effect, I am here. I am not fleeing. This gave a spirit to the people.

Moreover, you can see that he is resisting the US imperialist demands for the materials deal. It is not even a deal. Trump is not offering a guarantee for the security of Ukraine in exchange for the mineral wealth. He demands it for past

help given by Biden with no guarantee for future safety. And he does it like a bully of a locality strutting on the world stage. We are not admirers of Zelensky. But we have to say that under terrible provocation he kept his cool and fought for the honour and dignity of his country.

How, after the latest developments, do sane people claim this to be a proxy war, an inter-imperialist war? We are living in a world with several powerful imperialist states. Wars of national liberation, wars of national self-determination, cannot be seen as some chemically pure wars. To fight an imperialist aggressor, you need weapons. Your seller may be another imperialist. They will have their own agenda and will not be your unconditional supporter. But unless socialist and working class movements and organisations are strong enough to produce weapons, not just hand-guns but major weapons, you cannot walk away from them.

As for the Russian question, people need to know more history of our region. If you are talking about Russian speakers, we have two kinds. There are the ethnic Russians, and there are the Ukrainians who speak Russian. I know. I am one such.

The Crimea had a heavy concentration of Russians because Stalin threw out the Tartars who had lived there for a long time. The so-called Donbas area is mixed. It grew up with Stalin's forced industrialisation and there were people from twenty-thirty nations living and working there. Russian was the Lingua Franca. There is a Russian minority problem in countries of the former USSR

like there is a problem of Hindi speaking minority in a few provinces like yours in India.

Robin: *We are told that Zelensky is a dictator and has suppressed the Ukrainian left. How correct is that?*

Oleksandr: Not quite correct. I told you a part of the Ukrainian left was close to the oligarchs. Some had strongly supported Yanukovich. Under Russian pressure he scrapped an economic agreement with the EU, which was a major issue for the Euromaidan uprising. He fled to Russia. The CP was banned. But because Ukraine is trying to cooperate with the EU they were allowed to appeal before the European Court and to contest under another name. Leftists who are not pro-Russian have not suffered that degree. However, we have fought against use of wartime powers against trade unions and the left. Because we now have martial law, trade unions find

it difficult to strike. Also, male leaders can be conscripted. So one good thing is, a lot of women are being brought into union leadership positions. So, yes there are difficulties before the working class and there is a need to distinguish between supporting Ukraine's right to national self-determination and support for the Zelensky regime politically. The problem is that as a considerable part of the left had been pro-Russian, when the invasion happened, right-wing elements volunteered for the front and gained.

War has also hit the left---conscription, battlefield injuries, other issues. But do you think Ukraine, or large parts coming under Russian control, will help the Ukrainian left? Does Putin assist the Russian left? Or does he repress it worse than anything Zelensky has done? We can gain our position by combining class independence with anti-Putin, anti-imperialist struggles.

Some Notes on Ukraine

1. Tsarist Russia was rightly described as a “prison house of nations” which included the denial of the very existence of a Ukrainian people and nationality with its language repressed.
2. A contribution of world-historic importance was the Leninist political perspective of respecting the ‘right of self-determination up to and including secession’ of an oppressed nationality.
3. This slogan and perspective was central to the ability of the Bolshevik led Russian Revolution to establish after the Civil War the USSR as a Federation of Republics. The case of Ukraine populated by a substantial minority of ethnic Russians especially in the more urbanised and industrialised eastern part helped the emergence of Ukrainian communists and though substantially ethnic Russians there were Ukrainians and leaders won over to the USSR because of Lenin’s perspective. Most of the peasantry and peasant regions---the west and south were very largely ethnic Ukrainian. Post-Tsarism the national question was starkly posed. Ukrainian communists faced bourgeois nationalist forces and in southern Ukraine Anarcho-Communist movement led by Nestor Makhno. From 1917-20 a Ukrainian civil war also with Makhno joining the Red army twice to fight the Whites, and then being defeated by the Red Army with the Bolsheviks not accepting a free anarchist state within Ukraine.
4. Fatal mistake by Lenin in 1921 when after pushing Polish forces back to behind the Polish border invades Poland and loses and withdraws. Parts of Ukraine lay then in Poland, Hungary, Romania, along with a Soviet Ukraine.
5. Stalin’s Russia from late 1920s carries out political repression against opponents---a growing Great Russian Chauvinism which had started and worried Lenin before he died---leading to political repression against those in Ukraine and other republics wanting more freedom and more self-governance and restoration of their language. The other great tragedy was forced collectivisation which hurt the Ukrainian peasantry greatly, promoting a severe famine of anything between 1 to 7 million deaths there and leading to 50% decline of population in Kazakhstan.
6. Trotsky in 1939, given the damage done by Stalin’s brutalities, supported the right of Soviet Ukraine to secede and join with the Western part to form a united Ukraine. He believed this would be conducive to the formation of a ‘Workers and Peasants Ukraine’ which would in due course consider joining the USSR.
7. Parts of Ukraine lost to Poland, etc., recovered by Stalin in WWII both through the pact with Hitler, and after.
8. Post-WWII and post-Stalin, Ukraine rapidly industrialises and modernises to become one of the most prosperous regions in the USSR with coal, metallurgy and manufacturing units. But the East-West divide in Ukraine between industrial and peasant areas and between Russian speakers and Ukrainian speakers persists. Since the

Soviet federation, before its collapse, was structured in such a way as to enable the elites of the different Republics to enjoy considerable power in their regions within the framework of the overarching Communist party, there was no reason for these elites in Ukraine and elsewhere to be unhappy.

9. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, certainly the ruling Ukrainian elites saw advantages in breaking away. But the subsequent economic course saw both the enrichment and formation of oligarchs in all parts of Ukraine. On one side were those involved in export and processing of agricultural products, extraction for sale of the countries great wealth of numerous kinds of mineral ores and in the imports of finished and consumer products of all kinds from the West. In the east where most industrialisation had taken place, capitalists could not seriously compete with the higher productivity and superior quality of industrial products of the West, and relied on the Russian market. Meanwhile, economic decline for the majority was serious and rapid. Ukraine is the poorest country in Europe. Uniquely its population fell from around 50 million in 1992 to 2001 (the last and only census taken) to around 41 million while its per capita income today is less than that in 1992 even as there are immensely rich oligarchs. Credit arrangements with to the IMF and trade imbalances means continuing government support for Neoliberal austerity measures no matter which party is in power.

The Constitution of 1996 established a presidential-parliamentary political system where the main electoral parties were much less ideological than

oligarchic-controlled entities exercising patron-client relationships. Successive governments have resorted to playing a balancing game, both economically and politically, between Russia and the EU/US. Different elected Presidents and differing party make-ups in Parliament have meant different degrees of leaning to one side or the other in this balancing game. However, the relatively greater freedom as compared to post-Soviet Russia as well as the economic safety-valve for ordinary Ukrainians to be able to migrate to Europe, has pulled the ordinary public in the west and centre of the country---mostly ethnic Ukrainians--towards wanting to deepen the ties with the West. Over time, as a result of the mass protests in 2004 and 2014 and the Russian annexation of Crimea and promotion of separatism among the largely Russian speaking population of the Eastern Donbas, there have been two key developments alongside the continuing economic trials and tribulations. Even though some 70% can speak Russian and almost all can read and understand both Russian and Ukrainian, there has over time developed a deepening geographical and cultural division with two growing, more exclusivist, movements of Ukrainian Nationalism and Russian Nationalism confronting and contesting each other. In this binary, right wing forces have grown on both sides with Kiev governments becoming more repressive and authoritarian while maintaining selective biases towards different sections of society.

10. The “Orange Revolution” of 2004 saw mass protests against a fraudulent electoral outcome favouring Yanukovych with the SC ruling in December for a re-

vote in the Presidential run-off which has Yushchenko winning as President even as constitutional amendments make the system parliamentary-presidential. His reign is a mess with him pushing a Ukrainian nationalist anti-communism line which because of economic failures, can't prevent his political decline. In 2010 the pro-Russia oligarch Yanukovich from Donbas, becomes President and annuls the 2004 constitutional amendments to make it a presidential-parliamentary system again. He first actively seeks a closer economic relationship and a possible free trade area with the EU even as he is seen as being close to Russia and Putin with whom there is talk of Ukraine possibly joining a Eurasian Customs Union. Yanukovich alienates other oligarchs by centralising great power with himself and his family who also become hugely wealthy while his government pushes austerity on the public. Within the political establishment and among the wider public there is a roughly equal division between opponents and supporters of fuller EU integration. Among opponents there is also the legitimate fear of a significantly greater weakening of the Ukrainian economy.

11. The suspension of negotiations with the EU provoked the mass protests (the Euromaidan protests from Nov. 2013 to Feb. 2014) which were attracted more by the general lure of coming closer to Europe than by any real awareness of the economic implications. It is the government crackdown that changes the nature of the protests to now becoming about civil rights. So the protests become not just pro-Europe but also against government/police brutality

with strengthened far-right involvement creating more anti-Russian nationalism. These far-right factors are electorally not that significant but in terms of their grassroots organisation and capacities to shape matters on the streets they had disproportionately greater weight. Yanukovich is forced to resign as matters escalate with parliament turning against him as well as former allies. This resignation brings an end to the protests but the Russian annexation of Crimea that takes place a week before his resignation helps create a deeper polarisation and longer lasting polarisation between the two cultural-nationalist alignments. Subsequent Ukrainian governments are more anti-Russian and pro-West while Russian far-right 'volunteers' move into the Donbas and help the formation of two separatist pro-Russian groups of Donetsk National Republic and Luhansk National Republic that declare themselves independent. The 2014-15 Minsk I and II agreements stall matters with promises of greater autonomy for the two regions and of the DNR and LNR not to be recognised by Russia as independent states.

12. While no progress in applying the Minsk II agreement takes place since both sides violate it and it is never seriously followed up. The 13 principles were

1. Immediate, comprehensive ceasefire.
2. Withdrawal of heavy weapons by both sides.
3. OSCE monitoring.
4. Dialogue on interim self-government for Donetsk and Luhansk, in accordance with Ukrainian law, and

-
- acknowledgement of special status by parliament.
 5. Pardon, amnesty for fighters.
 6. Exchange of hostages, prisoners.
 7. Humanitarian assistance.
 8. Resumption of socioeconomic ties, including pensions.
 9. Ukraine to restore control of state border.
 10. Withdrawal of foreign armed formations, military equipment, mercenaries.
 11. Constitutional reform in Ukraine including decentralisation, with specific mention of Donetsk and Luhansk.
 12. Elections in Donetsk and Luhansk.
 13. Intensify Trilateral Contact Group's work including representatives of

Russia, Ukraine and OSCE.

It is after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the Russian support to the repressive Kazakhstan regime in January 2022 that matters escalate at the rhetorical and material levels with Putin's demands for security guarantees from the US and NATO to never extend to Ukraine and for the Ukrainian govt. 's renunciation of any such future plans. This was accompanied by heavy military build-ups on the Russian side of the border. Between 2014 and 2019 the Presidency of Poroshenko was of no help in soothing tensions. The hopes placed in his successor President Zelensky, a Russian speaker who sought to maintain the balancing act between Europe and Russia, were not fulfilled.

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The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser.

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