

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7581>



Against the war in Ukraine

**In this hour of great danger, in
solidarity with the Ukrainian
resistance, let's rebuild the
international anti-war
movement**

Publication date: Friday 25 March 2022

- Debate - Ukraine -

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We present below our understanding of the tasks facing the Western left in particular. We hope to contribute to the debate and the construction of the peace movement, solidarity with the Ukrainian left and social movements, refugee support and anti-racism, and the strengthening of alternatives to imperialism in the west and the east of the European subcontinent.

We live in a world of permanent war. This conflict has a global impact, on food and fuel prices, on trade relations, on regional integration, and on the way the left understands war, imperialism and solidarity.

The international anti-war movement had become less active in recent years, despite conflicts in Yemen, Congo, Ethiopia, and of course, more than once in Ukraine. We now face an urgent challenge of rebuilding our international solidarity and peace movements.

The reconstruction or strengthening of anti-war movements poses different challenges for socialists in an imperialist country or not, in a NATO country (with bases and American missiles (like the Spanish State) or without (like France), in a country threatened militarily by Russia (Georgia) or dependent on a Russian security guarantee (Armenia).

Here in Europe we must make every effort to strengthen the links between anti-war resistance in the West and East of our sub-continent, on all sides of the conflict. We must understand each others' specificities, and find ways to act together on a continental and global level around common axes of mobilization (see below).

We in the west of Europe could start by asking the question: why did we not see this war coming sooner? Left comrades and allies from Ukraine, Russia and other countries in the region have been sounding the alarm bells for several years. But many in the western left believed that the rise in military tension on the borders of Ukraine was essentially a means of pressure exerted by Moscow on the NATO countries. We only took into account the NATO factor - our own struggle against our own ruling class.

We now see things more clearly. Putin's speeches just before and since the invasion make clear Russia's imperial project, in its military, economic, political and cultural dimensions.

This conflict has come at a moment of deep crisis in NATO, after the debacle in, and tensions during the Trump administration. Internal divisions were evident, with some European NATO countries proposing a stronger West European military coordination, with a weakening of US coordination. US President Biden chose other levers to regain US control in the Asia-Pacific zone, with redefinition of the role of the Quad and the establishment of the AUKUS (at the cost of relations between the US and UK on the one hand and France on the other).

The military assets of the United States and NATO were (and remain) weak in Europe, compared to the Cold War period. This weakness showed in Biden's immediate response to the Russian invasion, when he immediately announced that there would be no military intervention by the US. Several European NATO countries, particularly those with a historical memory of Russian or Soviet invasion and occupation, expected quite a different stance.

Putin intended to win quickly and place the Western powers before a *fait accompli*, as he had successfully done many times, in Chechnya, Syria, Donbas, Crimea, and Kazakhstan. This time, Putin's planners underestimated the resistance of the army and population of Ukraine - both Ukrainian and Russian speakers. Nevertheless, Putin's show

of force exposed and accentuated the divisions within NATO. Almost every day, leaders of NATO countries make contradictory statements about what the alliance's strategy is, particularly regarding support to Ukraine.

The conflict has also exposed a three way split in the European left. Social democrats and greens have become the biggest cheer mongers for NATO, as in previous conflicts. Part of the anticapitalist left has been unable to find its feet in a conflict imposed by a non-western imperialism. These comrades are confused. They refuse to go beyond the mildest criticism of the Russian invasion, reluctant to extend solidarity to Ukraine, and insisting against all the evidence that NATO is sole or main responsible, Ukraine is a western puppet or proto-fascist state, and Russia the real victim. Their position is 'campist' - they automatically support whoever is against the Western ruling class. Ukrainians, and also Syrians, have tried for years to warn the Western left against this dead end politics. Let us hope some comrades eyes will finally open now that there is a second Russian imperialist war to deal with.

The campist failure is not just in the military and geopolitical dimension. The starting point of solidarity is surely the defence of populations who are victims of war. The campists fail to act in solidarity with the Ukrainian population, in the name of their twisted geopolitical considerations. They coldly separate human suffering, recognising the victims of US imperialism, and marginalising, ignoring or denying the existence of victims of other imperialisms (in Syria, the victims of Bashar al-Hassad and his Russian supporters, in Eurasia the Chechens, Georgians and Ukrainians, and in China the Uygur and Tibetans).

We reject that approach. We consider that empathy towards populations affected by war, repression, and exile is a fundamental driving force of internationalism and militant ethics.

'If you tremble with indignation at every injustice then you are a comrade of mine.'

Ernesto Che Guevara

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Theses on the peace movement

This is an unjustified war of Russian imperialism against the poorest country on the European continent. Russia should immediately end all forms of interference in Ukraine, and withdraw all its troops and mercenaries, and immediately de-fund pro-Russian militias in the Donbas. United Nations peacekeepers should be deployed in the territory of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and in Crimea, until the definitive status of these territories can be peacefully resolved, based on the will of the population, including former residents who have left these regions as a result of conflicts in recent years.

*We support Ukrainian armed resistance; we desire Ukraine's liberation from its foreign occupiers by any legitimate means. It follows that **we are in favour of the supply of defensive armament to the Ukrainian authorities and people.** We recognise Ukrainians' right to obtain weapons from any source, including from NATO countries.*

We particularly support the delivery of weapons most suitable for the needs of a popular resistance, including anti-tank weapons and anti-aircraft defence systems. We reject the impossible preconditions and excuses of those

who oppose a Ukrainian victory by demanding that Ukraine must first guarantee that no weapons fall into the hands of the extreme right or criminal elements (impossible), or that Ukraine should only purchase weapons from non-aligned countries even when NATO countries will provide them for free.

In the face of a war of aggression, solidarity means recognizing the right of Ukrainians to defend themselves. That the Ukrainian government is capitalist does not change the situation. Nor does the existence of the extreme right, in Ukraine like everywhere else, and actually less than in many countries, Russia in particular.

It is not up to us to decide for the Ukrainians the form of their resistance. So far, they have engaged in a multifaceted armed struggle. Pacifism and passive resistance would not have been enough to avoid the tragedies and the human cost of this war, of which we are all aware. A lightning victory for Putin would have been an encouragement for him to go even further.

Ukraine's own armaments industry is not sufficient to meet the country's immediate needs, and was heavily damaged during the conflict. It does not produce the specific weapons which are most required, and not in sufficient quantities.

Faced with the risk of escalation into continental war and use of nuclear weapons, we must oppose any moves towards direct conflict between NATO and Russia.

Direct conflict between imperialist countries would bring much greater suffering, with potentially global negative impacts. The Ukraine conflict is the latest in a long series of indirect confrontations between the NATO countries and Russia, earlier the Soviet Union, stretching back into the Cold War. Moves that could provoke an entry into direct inter-imperialist conflict include 'tactical' use of small nuclear or chemical weapons inside Ukraine, NATO imposition of a 'no fly zone' over parts of Ukraine, and presence of NATO troops inside Ukraine.

Western support for Ukraine in this conflict, including the supply of defensive weapons and non-military aid does not make this a direct inter-imperialist war, just as the numerous conflicts during the Cold War were not inter-imperialist wars, even if the West and the USSR usually provided support to opposing parties.

Against the Russian invasion, we call for Boycott, Sanctions and Divestment (BDS)

We support state sanctions that target the personal property of the Russian elite, and trade and financial sanctions which reduce the Russian state's income and its ability to continue its invasion and occupation of Ukraine.

We also support civil society initiatives for boycott and pressure on corporations to divest from Russia, whenever the target is direct support for the Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine.

This is not the first time that we have advocated the use of international sanctions. We called for sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa. We do so now, as part of the BDS campaign in defence of the Palestinians, and with regard to Burma (Myanmar) ever since the military coup last year. The type of sanctions is obviously a fundamental question. We must not align ourselves on this matter with Washington or Brussels. Rather, we must take into account the opinion of the Ukrainian progressive currents concerning the nature of those sanctions which can be defended and those which must be condemned, in the specific current situation. Since the invasion, the Ukrainian population has been overwhelmingly in favour of the sanctions proposed by Western governments. The Ukrainian left has not objected to any specific sanctions so far. The Russian radical left does not oppose BDS so far, neither do they call for BDS.

Sanctions have focused on reducing Russian access to financial markets and banking services, alongside a rapidly expanding list of import/export bans. Some of the eastern EU member states are calling for a total ban on trade with Russia. The larger western economies so far prefer targeted bans and punitive import taxes on Russian products. These sanctions will certainly cause a severe recession in Russia, even if China and other Western Europe has so far avoided the most effective sanction: reducing its purchase of Russian oil and gas [1]. Western companies have nevertheless started reducing their purchases from Russia, enabling Asian, particularly Indian and Chinese buyers to obtain big discounts on oil purchases.

Boycott by civil society and pressure on institutions to divest their investments in Russia has been widespread and diverse in the few weeks since the invasion. Anticipating demands from civil society and from western governments, a growing number of multinational and smaller corporations are suspending or terminating their Russian operations. There is also a trend of consumers refusing Russian goods and services, which negatively impacts the Russian economy, with the main impact falling on the general population rather than decision-makers.

There is also a largely spontaneous movement of cultural and sporting boycotts. This has signalled Western condemnation of Russian policies and actions and solidarity with Ukraine.

Some boycotts express a hostility to Russian culture or Russian citizens as such. These cause unjustified discrimination, alienate well-meaning Russians, and reinforce an aggressive Western campaign of demonisation of the Russian 'other.'

All refugees from Ukraine must receive the best welcome. *For the first time, the European Union has activated its "temporary protection" directive, in the favour of these refugees, which gives them access to work, study and social protection. This precedent must now be used for the benefit of other refugees (Syrians and others). Under pressure from civil society, several European states have already extended "temporary protection" and other country-specific measures (free transport, etc.) to all Ukrainian refugees - citizens or foreigners previously resident in Ukraine. We should continue the pressure, also in solidarity with refugees from other countries. We denounce the institutional and widespread racism exposed in the much greater western humanitarian response to Ukrainian suffering compared to the suffering of non-white refugees from other conflicts and catastrophes.*

Ukraine's western neighbours - all of them EU member states except for Moldova. These are among the poorest countries in Europe. Most refugee support services in these countries are provided by civil society. The state is failing to provide housing and social protection and is too slow in expanding the health and education facilities required for those refugees who will stay. The state must do more.

All EU countries should share the financial burden of refugee crises.

The flood of refugees testifies to the extreme violence of this war. It is rare to witness such an exodus in such a short period of time. It suggests a genocidal, 'cleansing' and elimination of Ukrainian and disloyal elements from the planned territory of the 'New Russia' colonies.

The international anti-war movement must be independent of the great powers. *That means not aligning itself with the Western powers (United States, European Union, Great Britain) as the western liberals, social democrats and greens have done. It also means not aligning itself with Russia or China with a 'campist' position (supporting whichever 'camp' is against western imperialism).*

A pro-Russian, campist alignment inside the peace movement would mean avoiding criticism of Russia's regional imperialist expansion, uncritical acceptance of the Russian claims of genocide against Russian-speaking Ukrainians,

legitimising the Russian-controlled puppet statelets in the Donbas, and calling for the right of self-determination (separation from Ukraine and integration into Russia) for areas under Russian military control, in a Russian-controlled process. It would also mean falsely portraying Ukraine's bourgeois government as a fascist or illegitimate western puppet government and exaggerating the size and influence of the Ukrainian nationalist far-right, while minimising or ignoring the increasingly authoritarian and reactionary nature of the Moscow regime itself.

A pro-western alignment would mean avoiding criticism of NATO militarism and the European Union's neo-colonial economic expansion into Eastern Europe. It would mean legitimising anti-democratic moves by the Ukrainian political and economic elite. It may increasingly mean justifying restrictions on civil liberties in the western countries, and criminalising anti-western opinions and political activity.

We are opposed to NATO expansion and aggression. *We oppose all increases in military spending by NATO countries. Indeed, we call for reductions in military spending in favour of social, health and education sectors in particular. We oppose all future expansion of the already extensive NATO facilities in Europe and propose a reduction in NATO forces as an essential element of the demilitarisation of the East European space. We oppose all NATO deployment outside its member countries. We oppose any countries joining NATO. We are in favour of any country leaving NATO, and the dissolution of the alliance. The future security of European countries, particularly the poorest countries, must be based on a broad and non-confrontational framework.*

Throughout Western Europe, increases in military budgets are expected. Germany in particular is taking a historic turn in terms of its military commitments. European NATO countries continue to hesitate between the classic, US-led integration, and a more autonomous European integration (Germany and Netherlands have already integrated their tank battalions and marines, more joint units, and joint procurement and logistical support are planned). Both options have imperialist ambitions; the European-led approach would likely only mean a refocusing on the near abroad, and a lower engagement in US-led global expeditionary forces.

We see no contradiction between calling for reduction of military spending in NATO countries and supply of weapons to Ukraine. In fact, donation of weapons to Ukraine without increasing military budgets in NATO countries would contribute to the reduction of the NATO stock of weapons. Of course, this will only have a limited effect, since the NATO countries are providing Ukraine with mostly older weapon series, particularly the Soviet-era weapons still in use or in storage by the NATO members in the east of the EU [2].

In the European NATO countries, there is also growing popular support for the reinforcement and construction of military bases, and the installation of the most advanced technologies of warfare of the United States. Some NATO members in the east of the EU propose to donate their own soviet-era armaments to Ukraine, in exchange for more modern weapons from the richer NATO members further west. The three Baltic former Soviet republics and all of the USSR's former satellite countries in Europe are now in NATO.. Many of these countries have a border with Russia, Ukraine and/or Belarus, and a relatively recent memory of Soviet/Russian aggression and occupation. The current conflict has proved understandable feelings of insecurity, which the authorities and mainstream media are of course further encouraging.

It is likely that the governments of some European countries, which are currently neutral, will apply to join the Organization, and there is growing public support for this. Western European neutrals would probably be welcomed into NATO, as would the former-socialist countries in south-east Europe (former Yugoslavia, Albania) where Russia has no territorial claims. There will be continued pressure on the EU neutrals (Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Austria and Malt) to participate in joint peacekeeping, conflict prevention and other civil-military cooperation with EU NATO members in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The scope of the CSDP is likely to be widened, drawing the neutrals more and more into a de facto alliance dominated by NATO members.

The only former Soviet republics in Europe which have not joined NATO are Belarus, a (rather dependent) ally of Russia, as well as Moldova and Ukraine. NATO might continue to make false promises of future membership to these two countries, but the current conflict has confirmed NATO's refusal to expand further into the former USSR space. However, NATO military support will likely be increased to these countries and to other western allies in the former USSR, notably Georgia, which has its own recent history of conflict, invasion and occupation by Russian forces and local allies. Local populations are likely to prefer the perspective of NATO membership, in the absence of credible alternative security arrangements.

We are opposed to all deployment of Russian troops outside Russian borders. *We are opposed to all international deployment of police forces between the member countries of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). We favour the dissolution of the CSTO.*

If Russia is partially or largely victorious in this war, Moscow will be increasingly likely to threaten or use force in its relations with Belarus, and the former Soviet republics in the south Caucasus and Central Asia. The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) has a police focus, but could be expanded. However, only Belarus and Armenia are militarily and economically dependent on Russia; other CSTO states may be tempted to diversify their alliances, particularly towards China. A Russian defeat would likely accelerate this process. While the Russian goods and labour markets remain important for many of these countries, oil and gas producers like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have more options for economic development.

The elimination of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons is more important than ever. *Russia, the US, France and the UK should reiterate their commitment to no first use of nuclear weapons.* Faced with the current military stalemate, Putin has repeatedly upped the strategic ante by brandishing the nuclear threat and then firing a medium-range hypersonic missile at a target near the Polish border. Both sides have accused the other of planning chemical or biological attacks. We see that, instead of making war impossible (the 'balance of power' doctrine and concern with 'mutually assured destruction'), possession of nuclear weapon is actually used to enable conventional warfare in the heart of Europe, under the shelter of the atomic umbrella of the aggressor. The peace movement has long argued that only nuclear disarmament could free us from this threat. Putin has proved us right. But beware: all the powers possessing nuclear weapons seek to make them politically acceptable, and again and again come forward with concepts for tactical use of smaller, more acceptable nuclear weapons.

Theses on solidarity with Ukraine

For national liberation! Ukrainians have the right to live in peace!

We have all seen the banners carried by Ukrainians in the diaspora in peace demonstrations: "If Russians stop fighting, there will be no war; if Ukrainians stop fighting there will be no Ukraine." The stronger the Ukrainian resistance, and the greater the ability of progressive Ukrainians to participate in and shape that struggle, the better the peace, and the better society Ukraine will be afterwards.

Outsiders should not call for peace at any price, while Ukrainians massively support continued military resistance. In this context, peace at any price means maximising the Russian gains at the Ukrainians expense.

Ukraine is likely to offer a constitutional commitment to neutrality and reiterate its existing refusal of permanent foreign bases (the only foreign power maintaining troops permanently in Ukraine is Russia, which has had forces stationed in parts of the Donbass and Ukraine for several years already). Russia has demanded that Ukraine be permanently denied some categories of heavier or offensive weapons. The question, then, is what security

guarantees will Ukraine have in the new peace? Russia and the West promised to respect Ukraine's borders when Ukraine gave up all its nuclear weapons (the only country ever to do so). The value of those promises is now sadly clear to everyone. Presumably Ukraine will seek some kind of UN or OSCE mandate. The greatest obstacle to such a deal will be Russian opposition, and the continued threat of Russian intervention, particularly if Russia maintains its de facto colonies in the Donbass.

We denounce the war crimes committed by the Russian army in Ukraine. *In addition to the unjustified invasion, Russia has attacked civilians, and attacked civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals. Russia has prevented civilians from leaving besieged cities, while also threatening civilians with military tribunals if they do not leave. The fact that western leaders are denouncing Russian war crimes doesn't mean that we should be silent! Rather, we denounce all war crimes and crimes against humanity, regardless of the responsible actor. We denounce the hypocrisy of the Western powers who denounce Moscow by invoking international legality and great humanitarian principles which they themselves have repeatedly violated.*

The victors of this war will likely establish some kind of tribunal. Our preference is for independent courts in a democratic Ukraine, with a perspective of restitution and reconciliation between Ukrainians, and between the citizens of Ukraine and citizens of Russia.

The rights of minorities in Ukraine must be recognised. But advocating this right must not fuel Putin's discourse, which claims to intervene to defend Russian-speaking Ukrainians threatened with genocide. *The question of the return to legal linguistic equality, and the use of the country's various languages in education, administration and the media, including in the Donbass and in the Crimea, cannot be resolved under Russian occupation. A genuine concern with minorities in the Ukraine must also incorporate measures to protect the Ukrainian and Tartar minorities in Crimea, more than one quarter of the population, who have lost virtually all linguistic and cultural rights since the Russian invasion and unilateral incorporation of that territory into the Russian Federation.*

Russia has successfully spread propaganda regarding the situation of Russian-speakers in the Donbass region, leading to the confusion of many western leftists and in some cases their support for Russian demands. We should be clear that the self-proclaimed people's republics in the Donbass are Russian-backed entities, run by an alliance of Russian envoys, local mafia and far-right adventurers. There is massive social, political and cultural repression, worse than anywhere on the European continent and worse than anywhere in the Asian part of Russia. Russia has recognised these 'states,' without defining their borders. Presumably Russian troops will impose fake referendums in neighbouring regions and gradually integrate these into the 'New Russia' colonial project. In this context, to call for immediate Russian-speakers self-determination in these regions is to give effective support to Russian colonisation of Ukraine and the consolidation of extremely reactionary colonial administrations. The Ukrainian left, which includes many activists from the Donbass, calls for the reinforcement of Russian-speaking Ukrainians' rights as part of a new democratic arrangement after the expulsion of the invading forces.

As our friends from the Social Movement Ukraine point out, Putin's discourse perversely joins the discourse of Ukrainian-speaking ultranationalists, who have always considered Russian-speaking Ukrainians to be of dubious loyalty.

Reject all 'clash of civilisations' poison!

The vast majority of Russian-speaking Ukrainians are fighting against the invaders. Even in the cities recently occupied by the Russian army, unarmed civilians demonstrate their rejection of the occupation in large and peaceful demonstrations. Russian-speaking Ukrainians continue to fall as victims of the Russian war, find themselves victims of bombardments or find themselves on the roads of exile. Recognising the overwhelming loyalty of

Russian-speakers, the Ukrainian government recently unblocked Russian social media and encouraged citizens to directly engage with their family and friends in Russia. A partial or full victory for Ukraine may provide the basis for reintroduction of Russian-language into public administration, education and public media. Conversely, a Ukrainian humiliation may encourage the far right to again target Russian-speaking Ukrainians as a disloyal and untrustworthy element.

Inside Russia, and among Russian-speakers in other countries, Russian imperialism is also promoted as a cultural and political crusade to restore Russian ethnic/linguistic/cultural domination in the regions formerly part of the Russian or Soviet empires. One element of this is the denial of Ukrainian identity (Ukraine does not have a meaningful history separate from that of Russia, the Ukrainian language is a dialect of Russian, Ukrainian culture is a folk variant of Russian culture, etc.). Parts of the western left have been vulnerable to this great-Russian propaganda, perhaps because their regional knowledge is limited to their study of the Russian component of the revolution in the Russian empire and the Russian component of anti-Stalinist resistance in the USSR. Also perhaps because of the low status of Ukrainian culture, in the west, reflecting its marginalisation as the poorest country on the continent, and the concentration of Ukrainian migrants in the most unstable and worse paid sectors of the West European economy. Whatever the explanation, the failure of most of the western left to engage with Ukrainian thinkers and activists is a continuing source of amazement and dismay to us.

There is also a resurgence of western claims of 'civilisational' superiority, contrasted to Russian 'orientalism' and barbarism. In this western discourse, which has deep, reactionary roots 'Europe' is synonymous with civilisation and progress, and anyone to the east or the south is only admitted to civilisation and progress to the extent that they demonstrate loyalty to 'western' values.

We support political, financial and material solidarity with the forces of the left and the independent social movements in Ukraine.

By providing leftist solidarity to the resistance of the Ukrainian people, we are helping the Ukrainian left to the best of our ability to strengthen itself, instead of leaving the field open to neoliberals and the far right. We advocate practical and concrete people-to-people solidarity. We cannot be satisfied with a simple political position or declarations of principle, or with a criticism of our own government.

Solidarity is needed on both sides of the front line. We don't impose solidarity, we offer it. We take the lead from the Ukrainian resistance and the anti-war movements in the aggressor country. That means, in the first place, listening, in the second place, thinking, and then acting.

We should not associate ourselves with the numerous western left calls for peace at the expense of Ukrainians. Some of these initiatives are well-intentioned. But they remain arrogant proposals, drafted and promoted by Westerners, about Ukrainians, without Ukrainians.

The left forces in the Ukraine are fully engaged in all aspects of the liberation struggle. Supporters of some groups have joined the same military or civil defence forces, but the scale of these initiatives is still small. The left has developed several humanitarian initiatives which deserve our support. Ukrainian progressives continue to organise, lobby and publish for civil and political demands, and resist all attempts to impose reactionary reforms using the war as a pretext. There are also left activists in the Ukrainian diaspora, playing an important role in the peace movement and refugee aid initiatives.

The Russian left, feminist and peace movements face increasing repression, but continue their efforts. They are supported by a growing diaspora mobilisation of Russian progressives. In previous wars, the families of dead soldiers

have played an important role in raising public awareness and protesting against militarism, alongside students and other activist communities.

The left in Belarus is numerically weak but continues its efforts for democratisation and social justice. There are underground networks encouraging and facilitating desertion and emigration of young men called for military service, as well as unconfirmed reports of sabotage of logistical operations.

Left-wing parties in Central Europe (former satellite countries of the USSR, now members of the European Union) increasingly act in political solidarity with the Social Movement (SR) in Ukraine, relaying its proposals and even withdrawing from left-wing forums like the Progressive International, which avoid taking a position on the liberation of Ukraine.

Several progressive groups in Ukraine have started fundraising. Progressive associations in the Netherlands, Germany and elsewhere organize fundraisers for progressive and humanitarian initiatives in Ukraine.

In terms of material support, labour unions in France, for example, are preparing to send a workers' convoy to show solidarity and deliver aid.

We reject Russian and western imperialist plans for Ukraine. Russian troops out! Ukrainian goods, services and workers should have access to Western markets, without any obligation on Ukraine to open its own markets. Ukraine's debt should be cancelled. Funds from any Western sanctions should be transferred to the Ukrainian authorities.

Moscow's efforts for the capitalist economic integration of the former USSR under Russian domination has stalled in recent years. In response to earlier western sanctions, Putin has imposed a change in Russia's long-term strategy, disengaging from western economic circuits and western-dominated institutions, increasing domestic agricultural and industrial capacity through import substitution and intensive investment into strategic sectors. Putin wants to reverse Ukraine's economic integration into the European Union as a peripheral territory, and the planned privatization of Ukrainian land into the hands of Western companies. Instead, he has resolved that the forcible reintegration of Ukraine, the second largest economy in the former USSR but now the poorest country in Europe, will cement Russian imperial dominance over its "near abroad" for another generation.

His ambition is to integrate the fertile plains and industrial centres of Eastern Ukraine into the Russian economic space, strengthening Moscow's dominant role in the production of a wide range of agricultural and mining products, as well as its industrial capacity and its competitiveness. Following the annexation of Crimea, this invasion aims to expand Russia's access to the Black Sea, the only year-round navigable sea route on Russia's European edge.

For this project, Putin's Russia needs "only" eastern and southern Ukraine. Without the fertile black soil and industry of the east and without its coast, any Ukrainian rump state would be impoverished, deprived of resources and at the mercy of all its neighbours. Conservative strategists in Moscow have already floated the idea of offering Poland, Hungary and Romania territories in the west of Ukraine, reopening a Pandora's box of tensions between the various European countries and nations.

Ukraine will likely be bankrupt after this conflict, and its economy disrupted, and degraded, particularly if Russia maintains control of territories in the East and South of the country.

Western imperialism will seek control over whatever Ukrainian territory Russia does not occupy, based on the

existing neoliberal and unequal EU partnership agreements with neighbouring countries

25 March 2022

PS:

Updated on 27 and 28 March 2020 to correct typographical errors and ambiguities identified by readers, and to align the English and French versions of this article, produced by the authors.

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[1] Rather than accelerating the transition to renewable sources of energy. Western countries are using the war to justify an expansion of nuclear energy and coal-burning.

[2] Including Germany, which inherited and withdrew from service the entire arsenal of the GDR armed forces.