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USA

# The Crisis in Ukraine: Major Challenge to the US Antiwar Movement

- Debate - 2022 - Ukraine -

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**With Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine a crisis of historic proportions has emerged front and center in world politics. The warmongering US corporate media headline the Biden Administration's every pronouncement, daily blaring that Putin's Russia is the aggressor, that Russia is bombing civilians, that it is intent on taking over all of Ukraine and that it poses a threat to NATO, if not to all of "democratic" Europe. All the corporate institutions of manufacturing consent are united behind the Biden administration's imposition of unprecedented and crippling economic sanctions against Russia. Germany and France have been pressured to bend to US demands to cancel the planned Nord Stream 2 undersea pipeline that would have carried cheap Russian gas across the continent to Western Europe. No doubt, elimination of all Russian gas pipelined through Ukraine, not to mention the Middle East, remains a top priority of US oil giants, ever eager to sell US-fracked gas everywhere, even if the costs to Western European countries are double or triple the current Russian rates.**

## Corporate media manufactures consent

Oil wars are the US stock-in-trade, from, the outright theft of Iraq's oil via the US war that killed 1.5 million Iraqis to the sanctions, coup attempts and hot wars against Venezuela, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Iran, all aimed at keeping their competitive oil off the world marketplace, if not transferring it outright to US corporations.

All have been "justified" with CIA-manufactured pretexts. "Venezuela had rigged its elections, Syria shot down innocent protestors in Damascus, Iraq had weapons of mass destruction aimed at the US, Qaddafi was planning to obliterate 50,000 innocent Benghazi protestors, Iran was developing nuclear weapons, and, long ago, Vietnam fired on a US destroyer in Tonkin Bay." The list is endless. The result has been the US imperial slaughter of literally of millions of innocents around the world. That slaughter continues to this day.

## Divisions in U.S. antiwar movement

The Ukraine crisis has taken its toll, at least for the moment, on the still modest forces of the U.S. and international antiwar movements, with two poles emerging with counterposed strategic conceptions. In the U.S. a growing minority, perhaps a majority, feels compelled to denounce with equal fervor both sides, Russia on the one, and US/NATO on the other.

In sharp contrast, organizations representing the major antiwar coalitions demand: "No to US/NATO War in Ukraine! No wars with Russia! No sanctions! No to NATO and NATO expansion" – a central cause of the present crisis – and, "Fund human needs, education, housing, the environment & healthcare not war!"

The later forces coalesced on Tuesday, Feb. 22 in an impressive nationwide webinar initiated by the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC). Some 1,500 activists registered. 903 attended. This focused demonstration of unity opened with representatives from 13 national antiwar organizations briefly presenting their views, followed by a broad-ranging discussion that engaged experienced antiwar fighters from every corner of the US.

The initial presenters aimed at exposing the history of the atrocities perpetrated by the US war machine, from the Vietnam War era to today. A week of coordinated national and international protests, March 1-7, was unanimously approved. The webinar speakers were:

Joe Lombardo, UNAC, chairing • Ajamu Baraka, Black Alliance for Peace, with an opening statement, followed by Leela Anand, ANSWER coalition • Medea Benjamin, CodePink • Sara Flounders, International Action Center • Margaret Flowers, Popular Resistance • Bruce Gagnon, Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space • Joe Jamison, US Peace Council • Margaret Kimberley, Black Agenda Report • Jeff Mackler, United National Antiwar Coalition • Nancy Price, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (US) • Susan Schnall, Veterans For Peace • and David Swanson, World Beyond War.

## The nature of U.S. imperialism today

Implicit and/or explicit in their remarks was that the US imperialist government, with 1,100 military bases around the world in 110 countries is by far the world's greatest purveyor of force and violence. This all-encompassing violence includes an Orwellian-like US and worldwide surveillance system, cyber wars aimed at disrupting or disabling vital communication and power generating systems, drone wars, sanction wars against 40 nations, embargo-blockade wars, CIA Special Operation wars, death squad assassination wars and open military interventions aimed "regime change" and conquest. It also includes wars of multi-lateral UN-sponsored "humanitarian" interventions in the name of "democracy" as is the case of the present US/UN occupation of Haiti.

President Obama's Democrats conducted seven simultaneous wars. President Biden today follows on his heels. Indeed, the Biden administration, in a required report to the U.S. Congress a few months ago, listed 158 countries where U.S. military operations are underway. Need we add that the US's AFRICOM conducts military operations in 53 African countries, all against "terrorism" no doubt!

In contrast China maintains a single military base outside its borders – in Djibouti, at the Horn of Africa, while Russia maintains some six military bases, mostly in the former Soviet Republics and one in Syria.

## Misapplication of mathematical "Law of Identity"

In our view, the mathematical formula of Identity, that is, "Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other," does not apply to the realm of world politics. As we shall demonstrate, it cannot be fully and formally applied to U.S. imperialism, on the one hand, and to Chinese and Russian imperialism on the other, however much the latter countries engage in heinous practices aimed at extracting wealth from poor and oppressed people.

U.S. imperialism spends more on its military, at least \$1 trillion annually, including the CIA budget, than most of the rest of the world combined.

A more accurate assessment of the global military state of affairs demonstrates that China and Russia are near totally surrounded by U.S. military bases.

The US today has expanded NATO membership to the borders of Russia and armed 30 NATO countries while

organizing for years, on land and sea, periodic joint military “games” on Russia’s and China’s borders. Today, Ukraine ranks third, behind only Israel and Egypt in receiving US military aid, with the Biden administration at this moment shipping additional billions to its puppet regime.

# The 2014 US-backed fascist coup in Ukraine

Here, we recount the critical events surrounding the 2014 US-backed fascist-led coup in Ukraine that removed the pro-Russian capitalist Viktor Yanukovich government and replaced it with one oriented to an alignment with the European Union, NATO and U.S. imperialism.

The events that transpired in Ukraine in 2014 were not a matter of speculative interpretation. My Ukrainian friends were on the scene during the Maidan Square (Independence Square) protests, where thousands mobilized in the center of Kiev to protest government corruption and the steep decline in their standard of living and quality of life. Out of nowhere, from nearby rooftops, a hail of assassins’ bullets rained down on the peaceful protestors below, killing many. The perpetrators were automatically assumed to be under the direction of Yanukovich’s government.

It was only later, after the ensuing fascist-led coup, that the truth was revealed, inadvertently described by U.S. representative to the European Union, Victoria Nuland. Her intercepted and taped communications explicitly repudiated the CIA-generated corporate media coup pretext aimed at justifying the fascist-led takeover of the Ukrainian Parliament, the Rada. Nuland’s source, a top Baltic state official, informed her that it was the fascist-led groups that opened fire on the Maidan crowds as a prelude to their planned armed takeover of the Rada.

The fascist gangs had eventually succeeded in dominating the Maidan protests, mobilizing their armed supporters from across the country. US Senator John McCain and other US dignitaries were seen sharing the stage with fascist leaders. Nuland, cultivating America’s “peaceful intentions,” was photographed famously distributing cookies to the protestors. Meanwhile, the fascist-led armed gangs stormed the Rada and physically banned Yanukovich’s majority representatives from entering the building. Yanukovich fled for his life.

In his article, “Thoughts on the Current Crisis in Ukraine” Joe Lombardo, UNAC’s national coordinator, aptly describes in detail the U.S. role in the coup.

## US imposes Ukraine’s new president

“The question then arose as to who would take Yanukovich’s place. We may remember the hacked call between Victoria Nuland and the US ambassador to Ukraine. In that call she named the person the US chose to replace Yanukovich; it was Arseniy Yatsenyuk a hard right member of Fatherland, which was a right-wing, ultra-nationalist, anti-Russian formation. It appeared that the Europeans, especially the Germans, wanted a more moderate figure to head Ukraine. They favored Vitaly Klitschko, a boxer turned politician with more moderate views than Yatsenyuk. During the hacked call, we heard Nuland say, “F\*\*\*K the EU,” and, of course, the US pick, Yatsenyuk, became the first Prime Minister of Ukraine after the coup. The new finance minister in the coup government was Natalie Jeresko, from the US and Joe Biden’s son took a position on the board of the largest natural gas company in the country earning a salary of \$50,000 per month.”

The U.S. backed rump minority government declared itself the leaders of the nation. Nuland remarked in her intercepted phone call, that Vice President Biden, in charge of the Ukraine events at that time, would give the

ultimate "atta boy" to the coup leaders.

The US had previously laid the ground for the coup, pouring \$5 billion into Ukraine over the years to support hundreds of NGOs aimed at moving Ukraine into its orbit.

## Ukrainian army's fascist militias

The coup government instantly passed a series of laws that focused on repudiating the Yanukovich government's signed agreements with Russia for bailout loans on terms far more favorable than previously offered by the EU. They formally banned the Russian language as one of the two official languages recognized for centuries. The Russian language was banned in instruction in the public school system.

Fascist-led militias, the Azov Brigade of the Ukrainian military, openly employed fascist symbols like swastikas and used Nazi salutes. Organized by the pro-Nazi Svoboda and Right Sector organizations, they were assigned by the coup government to march on Eastern Ukraine to challenge the Russian majority in those regions. World War II Nazi collaborator, and Jew killer, Stephen Bandera, has been rehabilitated and designated "hero of Ukraine."

In Odessa, 48 Russian-speaking coup opponents were murdered by fascist goons. These coup opponents had sought refuge in the House of Trade Unions that was set afire. Many of the occupants were compelled to jump from the burning building. Survivors were slaughtered by the fascist mobs while the police looked on and eventually arrested some still living victims. The following day 30,000 Odessans mobilized to free them.

## The Donetsk and Luhansk independent republics

In the face of the coup government's overt threats, it is no wonder that the beleaguered Russian-majority-speaking provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk – the Donbass – on the border with Russia, declared their independence from the Kiev coup regime and eventually established the independent Donetsk Peoples Republic (DPR) and Luhansk Peoples Republic (LPR).

Faced with the coup government's military advance to the east and south, Russian forces entered Crimea and fortified its major port at Sevastopol, that had always, by agreement, been under Russian control since Ukrainian independence in 1991. The Russians soon after organized a referendum on Crimea joining Russia that was overwhelmingly approved. Wikipedia reported, "The official result from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was a 97 percent vote for integration of the region into the Russian Federation with an 83 percent voter turnout, and within the local government of Sevastopol there was also a 97 percent vote for integration of the region into the Russian Federation with an 89 percent voter turnout." Few doubted the legitimacy of the vote.

Faced with orders to the fascist-led coup government's soldiers in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea to attack the Russian forces, virtually the entire Ukrainian Army there deserted, with the vast majority instantly joining the Russian Army. Barely a shot was fired.

## The Minsk Protocols

Since that time, for the past eight years, a state of near permanent war has prevailed in the Donbass region with the U.S. government backing the Ukrainian Army's unrelenting attacks. The Minsk Protocols, signed on Sept. 5, 2014 and Feb. 12, 2015, after the negotiations between the Ukrainian coup government, Russia, Germany and France, were purportedly aimed at stopping the bloodshed via a ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front lines, release of prisoners of war, and a Ukrainian constitutional reform granting self-government to certain areas of Donbas's. In practice, none of these Minsk Protocols were implemented, as the Ukrainian Army's ceaseless incursions into the Donbass region aimed at subjugation and conquest as opposed to pursuit of a negotiated settlement. Some 100 "ceasefire" agreements were repeatedly violated. Some 14,000 people in the Donbass have lost their lives to the fighting. The Ukrainian government refused to implement the Minsk-projected elections in Luhansk and Donetsk. Endorsed by a UN Security Council resolution, the gist of the Minsk accords was to preserve the territorial integrity of Ukraine via a federalization process that would return the breakaway republics in exchange for their local autonomy. The latter implied that the resources of a federated Donbass, especially the vast fossil fuel reserves, and access to pipelines, would be under the control of local/regional governments, a proposition that US imperialism never accepted.

Thus, the Ukrainian government, with a refurbished image following post coup elections from which the major Yanukovich Party of Regions and the Communist Party, the two largest parties in the country, were largely excluded or marginalized, ceaselessly pressed forward, under the leadership of the new president, former actor/comedian, Vladimir Zelensky, to establish total control of the Donbass. His government has today amassed 150,000 soldiers in the region, poised for a final assault on the Russian-speaking and pro-Russian populations. At that point the two independent republics asked for and received Russian aid.

Any serious assessment of the origins of present Ukraine crisis informs us that yet again, US imperialism is compelled by its very nature to pursue war by any and all means to advance the interests of the corporate elite who essentially rule the US. Von Clausewitz's historic maxim, "War is the continuation of politics by other means," holds true today as never before. The end result of all present and past U.S. wars, coups, sanctions and institutional terror unleashed against poor and oppressed nations, unless unchallenged, results in the US corporate elite emerging with the "spoils," that is, the wealth of its victims.

## Again on the "law of identity"

That Russia and China are capitalist/imperialist states in my view does not negate our responsibility to assess their actions in the context of unfolding events. Were we to blind ourselves to the reality of the events that transpired in Ukraine since the 2014 US-instigated fascist coup and place an equal sign between US and Russian imperialism, we would be gravely mistaken. We would be substituting the proposition that whomever fired the first shot is to be categorically condemned, rather than assessing what caused that shot to be fired. Similarly, defining the US, China and Russia as imperialist countries and concluding that they must be equally condemned with regard to all matters is pure sophistry. That US imperialism planned and orchestrated a fascist-led coup aimed at obliterating the minority Russian-speaking people, 30 percent of the population, and that the same US government seeks to orchestrate Ukraine's affiliation to NATO, replete with nuclear weapons on Russia's doorstep, cannot be removed from any serious assessment equation. That US oil cartels are poised to steal Ukraine's fossil fuel and other resources vital to its well-being and that the US seeks to commandeer Ukraine's pipelines to boost US monopoly corporate profits must also be factored into any honest assessment of the crisis before us. Need we ask in the first place what right the US imperialist government has to police the world? We are not neutral in these matters.

Nor are we neutral with regard to Ukraine's oppressed Russian-speaking population's right to exist, that is, their right to self-determination. They have asked for Russian aid in this crucial matter. We do not object to Russia's providing it even if Vladimir Putin's motives are dubious to say the least, including his conjuring up Czarist-era notions of

resurrecting the Russian Empire and rejecting Lenin's historic championing of the right of poor and oppressed nations to self-determination.

Without the slightest equivocation, we support this right of all poor and oppressed nations to be free from imperialist war and conquest. This includes their right to seek aid from other nations, including imperialist nations, to help defend their sovereignty, if not their very existence.

This principle fully applies to all beleaguered nations, including Syria, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Afghanistan.

In Syria, the Bashar al Assad government fell victim to a US/NATO/Gulf State monarchy 10-year war that slaughtered 500,000 Syrians. With the US-backed jihadist armies occupying three-quarters of Syria, poised to take Damascus and with the US government's Secretary of State at that moment, John Kerry, preparing to install yet another coup government beholden to the US, the Syrians asked for Russian aid. The result was the defeat of that US regime change horror.

While we lend no political support to the capitalist governments of poor and oppressed nations we stand with them as they defend themselves from imperialist intervention, war and conquest.

In Venezuela, following the failed US-orchestrated coup aimed at installing the US puppet reactionary Juan Gaidó in the presidency, the US implemented a barrage of punishing sanctions and an embargo/blockade that, according to a UN report, led to the death via starvation of 50,000 Venezuelans. When Russia and China later provided food and medical aid to Venezuela, and some weapons as well, only the most hidebound "leftist" formalists condemned Venezuela for receiving it.

## Afghanistan

After 20 years of U.S. imperialist war and devastation, the destruction of the countryside and some one million Afghans dead, the U.S. imperialist beast was forced to withdraw – defeated. The same with the 20 years of the Russian war against Afghanistan before it. Both these defeats, at terrible costs, represented victories for the Afghan people, regardless of the fact that the victory was led by the obscurantist forces of the Taliban. It was, nevertheless supported by the vast majority of the Afghan people, who had no taste for imperialist tutelage. The defeat of imperialist interventions everywhere best positions the working masses of occupied nations to challenge their own repressive governments. Today, the construction of a united front, democratic and mass action antiwar movement capable of defeating the US warfare state's endless atrocities must stand high on the agenda of all serious activists. US working people, allied with the nation's oppressed and exploited have a key role to play in the coming struggles.

US imperialism lit the fuse that ignited and sustains the present war in Ukraine. The US antiwar movement's simple demand "US/NATO Out Now!" remains central to its future success.

*February 28, 2020*

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