

The crisis in Ukraine

**The International Committee of the Fourth International
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The crisis that has erupted in Ukraine following the right-wing coup engineered by the United States and Germany and the intervention of Russia into Crimea has created the most dangerous international confrontation since the end of World War II. Almost overnight, in a manner not seen since the 1930s, ultimatums are being issued and military forces are being placed on high alert in Europe.

All of the claims that the dissolution of the Soviet Union signaled the end of the 20th century era of wars and revolutions have been blown to pieces by the events of the past several days. The 20th century was the “unfinished century,” whose unresolved economic, social and political contradictions underlie the explosive tensions of the present century. One hundred years after the outbreak of World War I and 75 years since the beginning of World War II, mankind is again facing the dangers of world war and fascism.

The principal responsibility for the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine rests with the United States and Germany. Both countries, along with their European Union allies, systematically intervened to channel popular dissatisfaction with the corrupt regime of President Viktor Yanukovich behind ultra-right nationalist and fascist forces. Their aim all along was to topple the elected government and install a regime aligned with Western imperialism and willing to participate in its well-advanced plans for the geopolitical isolation and carve-up of Russia.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel met with leaders of the right-wing opposition. Her party, the Christian Democratic Union, financially supported the Udar party of former boxer Vitali Klitschko. Top European Union officials marched with the Svoboda party fascists and Right Sector armed gangs in Kiev’s central square.

US Undersecretary of State for Europe and Asia Victoria Nuland made at least four trips to Kiev, joining the neo-fascist “protesters” and meeting with opposition figures Klitschko, Arseny Yatsenyuk and the notoriously anti-Semitic Svoboda leader Oleh Tyahnybok. She acknowledged in December that the US had poured \$5 billion into Ukraine since the 1990s to build up US proxy forces in the country.

Nuland’s leaked telephone conversation with Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, in which they discussed installing Yatsenyuk after toppling Yanukovich, exposed the degree to which Washington was manipulating events in the country.

There is no question but that Russia is confronted with an existential threat. The integration of Ukraine into the expanding anti-Moscow alliance would render Russia more vulnerable to imperialist aggression and destabilization. Future operations will

unfold not only on the periphery of Russia, but within its borders. The United States and the European imperialist powers will have no difficulty finding new “human rights” causes to encourage, finance and arm.

However, the dangers confronting Russia—which threaten its dismemberment and reduction to semi-colonial status—cannot be lessened, let alone overcome, by the Putin regime’s resort to military force. No support can be given to the actions of Putin. His response to the aggressive actions of US and German imperialism is bereft of any progressive content.

Putin represents oligarchs who enriched themselves by plundering state industry following the dissolution of the USSR. His regime is incapable of making any appeal to the Ukrainian working class or to progressive sentiment within the country. Instead, he seeks to whip up chauvinism both in Russia and eastern Ukraine, adding to the dangers of civil and sectarian warfare stoked up by the Ukrainian fascists and their American and German backers.

The statements of US spokesmen such as Secretary of State John Kerry on the crisis reek of hypocrisy and deceit. Over the weekend, Kerry condemned Russia’s “violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity” as being in contravention of the United Nations Charter and “a threat to the peace and security of Ukraine, and the wider region.”

Kerry, who voted in 2002 to authorize President George W. Bush to invade Iraq on the basis of lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, declared, “You just don’t in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on [a] completely trumped up pretext.” The fact that such statements can be made without any challenge from the “mainstream” media only underscores the complete integration of the corporate-controlled media with the American intelligence and military apparatus and its role as a purveyor of state propaganda.

But the record of Washington speaks for itself. Just over the past 25 years, the United States has invaded, bombed or overthrown governments in Panama, Grenada, Somalia, Haiti, Sudan, Serbia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. It has carried out assassinations and cyber attacks against Iran and is intervening massively to overthrow the government of Syria.

The United States does not accept any nation’s right to sovereignty or territorial integrity. Once a country runs afoul of the predatory interests of US imperialism around the world, it is targeted for attack and regime-change.

Nor is there the slightest democratic content to the fascist-dominated protest movement in Kiev and western Ukraine. The extreme nationalist forces dominating these protests trace their

political lineage back to the Ukrainian fascists who allied themselves with the Nazi invaders in World War II, who murdered millions of Ukrainians. The predecessors of Svoboda and the Right Sector aided in the annihilation of the country's Jewish population. Since the installation of the new far-right government, reports have proliferated of fascist attacks on Jews in Kiev.

Washington and Berlin, in utilizing these forces to install a puppet regime and gain effective control over Ukraine, are stoking an explosion of tensions between various ethnic and religious groups that threatens to dwarf the bloodbath that accompanied the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, which was likewise instigated with US and German support.

Germany's role is particularly sinister. In making a renewed thrust into Ukraine, it is reviving the legacy of German imperialism in World War I and World War II, both of which saw German troops invade Ukraine and carry out mass atrocities. Its intervention in Ukraine coincides with public declarations by German officials calling for a revival of German militarism and apologies by leading academics for Hitler and the Nazis.

The US-German regime-change operation in Ukraine is part of a broader drive ongoing since the breakup of the Soviet Union to integrate former Soviet republics in Europe and Asia into US imperialist-dominated military, economic and political structures such as NATO. This has included the Western-orchestrated "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine.

The coup in Ukraine represents a major milestone in this campaign. Effective US control of Ukraine opens up the possibility of US or US-linked troops being stationed directly on Russia's western border. It threatens Russia's Black Sea fleet in Crimea, which is Moscow's only water route into the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans and the Middle East. It will be used as well to push Georgia into NATO and fuel separatist and secessionist agitation by a wide variety of ethnic and religious minorities within Russia.

This does not alter the fact that Russia's intervention into Crimea is politically bankrupt. The Putin regime is an organ of capitalist restoration and the product of the degeneration and overthrow at the hands of Stalinism of the economic and social foundations of the workers' state established by the 1917 October Revolution. It is a comprador regime with no real independence from imperialism.

It cannot make an appeal to the working class in Ukraine under conditions where it is imposing brutal austerity measures on Russian workers, repressing political dissent, and whipping up Russian chauvinism in an attempt to divert social opposition at home.

In the Ukraine events, the world is witnessing the catastrophic consequences both within Russia and internationally of the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. These consequences are the ultimate outcome of the nationalist policies pursued by the Stalinist regime that usurped political power from the Soviet working class and repudiated the program of world socialist revolution upon which the October Revolution was based.

One of the issues that propelled the 1917 revolution was the struggle against imperialist domination of Russia. But this could be successfully fought only through the revolutionary mobilization

of the working class based on a socialist and internationalist program. If nationalism could not protect Russia from imperialist predations in World War I, then all the more reactionary and impotent are attempts to invoke it today.

It is worth recalling Trotsky's warnings that the dissolution of the Soviet Union would result in Russia's descent to a semi-colonial status. Trotsky in the 1930s, under conditions of the Stalinist regime and its reign of terror against all socialist elements in the country, raised the slogan of an independent Soviet Ukraine, insisting that independence on a bourgeois basis could have only the most reactionary implications. A bourgeois Ukraine, moreover, could be nothing other than a plaything of the various imperialist powers. So it was then, so it remains today.

The ICFI denounces all those liberal and pseudo-left political organizations and publications that have promoted the Kiev protests as a genuinely democratic and even revolutionary movement. They have deliberately concealed the fact that it is not a working class movement. They have sought to hide the links of the leaders to forces who collaborated with the Nazis and the Holocaust in World War II.

The answer to the imperialist plans to carve up Russia and gain direct control over vast territories and resources cannot be found in the promotion of Russian nationalism, no more than the grievances of the long-suffering Ukrainian masses can be resolved by the promotion of Ukrainian nationalism. The crisis that has erupted in Ukraine poses with the greatest urgency the need for the working class to assert its own interests on the basis of its own independent program. It is the absence of a revolutionary leadership fighting to mobilize the working class on the basis of such a program that has enabled fascistic forces, financed and backed by US and German imperialism, to gain the upper hand.

The answer to this crisis is the unification of the Ukrainian and Russian working class on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program. Ukraine has a powerful revolutionary history. In the 19th century, Ukrainian-born Marxists rejected the program of nationalism and instead championed the program of working class internationalism. The greatest of these was Leon Trotsky.

It is to these great traditions that workers and youth must return today, in Ukraine, Russia and internationally, through the building of the world party of socialist revolution, the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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