

Who in the Lord's name gave the US the right? A question for Mr. Biden

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On Tuesday afternoon, US President Joe Biden delivered remarks from the East Room of the White House announcing sanctions against Russia in response to its recognition of the independence of two provinces in Eastern Ukraine.

The disarray in the White House was reflected in the timing of the meeting itself. Initially scheduled for 2:00 p.m., it was moved to 1:00 p.m. late Tuesday morning. The assembled reporters, however, were kept waiting for an hour and half before Biden emerged to deliver a perfunctory 10-minute statement and promptly left without taking any questions.

In the course of his remarks, Biden asked a telling question: "Who in the Lord's name does Putin think gives him the right to declare new so-called 'countries' on territory that belongs to his neighbors?"

This is a question, however, that much of the world would like Biden himself to answer. The "flagrant violation of international law" that Biden accused Russia of perpetrating is precisely what the United States has repeatedly done, with Biden directly and personally involved.

At one point Biden began to refer to the history behind the present conflict over Ukraine. Referring to Putin's address Monday on the recognition of Donetsk and Lugansk, Biden said: "Yesterday, we all heard clearly the full extent of Vladimir Putin's twisted rewrite of history, going back more than a century as he waxed eloquently, noting that..." In mid-sentence, the aging US president thought better of his brief excursion from his written remarks: "Well, I'm not going to go into it."

Let us, however, "go into it." One can oppose, as socialists do, the reactionary chauvinism, tinged with neo-tsarist nostalgia, of the Putin regime while exposing the blatant lying and hypocrisy that pervades every aspect of US policy in the present crisis.

The imperialist-instigated breakup of Yugoslavia, culminating in the 78-day bombardment of Serbia in March-June 1999, is particularly instructive.

The process of dismantling Yugoslavia began in December

1991, concurrent with the dissolution of the USSR, with Germany's unilateral recognition of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia. This was followed in April 1992 by the Bush administration's recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent "nation" meriting its own state. The moves by German and US imperialism to recognize the independent states in Yugoslavia fomented bloody national conflicts throughout the 1990s, including the Croatian War of 1995.

The catastrophe stoked by the US and NATO powers was used, in 1999, to justify direct military intervention. Waving the banner of "humanitarianism," eagerly supported by layers of the upper middle class and academia, the Clinton administration launched its war against Serbia to enforce the secession of the province of Kosovo. It was accompanied by all sorts of claims of human rights violations that were ultimately demonstrated to be grossly exaggerated.

The war was carried out by NATO, which did not obtain a resolution from the United Nations and was therefore acting in direct violation of international law. It culminated in the installation of a government in Kosovo run by the Kosovo Liberation Army, which the US had previously designated as a terrorist organization and which would subsequently be exposed for engaging in drug running, prostitution and the trafficking in human organs.

During the runup to the Kosovo War, Biden was the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where he joined with Republican Senator John McCain in campaigning aggressively for war. "If I were president, I would just bomb him [Serbian President Slobodan Milošević?]," Biden said in October 1998.

During the war against Serbia, the current Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, occupied the position of Senior Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council, the principal advisor to Clinton on Europe. In 2002, he landed the position of Democratic Staff Director for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, working as a principal advisor for Biden.

At a March 2008 meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee held to discuss the status of Kosovo nearly a decade after the bombardment of Serbia, Biden explicitly proclaimed “the right to declare new so-called ‘countries.’”

“In the modern world,” Biden stated in opening the meeting, “sovereignty isn’t an ancestral right; it’s a sacred trust between the government and its people. ... We live in a world where history matters, but so do human beings. Kosovo could not remain a territorial souvenir of Serbia’s past imperial glory. So while resolving Kosovo’s status through a unilateral declaration of independence is hardly ideal, I believe it was necessary. I am proud the United States was among the first countries in the world to recognize the newly independent Kosovo.”

In 2000, following the Kosovo War, the Clinton administration released a National Security Strategy document that asserted the right of the US to intervene in any country based on either “national interests” or “humanitarian interests.” Among the “vital interests” that the document listed as a justification for military intervention were “ensuring uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies, and strategic resources.”

This assertion of the unrestrained right to wage war on any country was developed further by the Bush administration under the doctrine of “preemptive war,” which was used as the rationale for the criminal war of aggression against Iraq in 2003, which led to the deaths of 1 million Iraqis.

The “humanitarian” pretext for the Kosovo War was followed by the “responsibility to protect” doctrine, used to justify the US-led war against Libya in 2011, under the Obama administration, with Biden as vice president. The war culminated in a massive bombing of Libya, the overthrow of the government of Muammar Gaddafi, and his torture and murder by US- and NATO-backed forces.

Finally, there is the background to the present crisis itself, which arises out of the 2014 regime change operation. The coup was spearheaded by far-right groups with the aim of overturning the government of President Viktor Yanukovych, which the US considered to be too close to Russia. As the Obama administration worked to install a government that would bend to its interests, Biden again played a central role, traveling to Ukraine six times as vice president.

None of these historical questions are ever even broached in the media, which acts as if the United States has not been engaged in continuous and expanding war for three decades.

The *New York Times*, in an editorial published on Tuesday (“A Pointed Response to Putin’s Provocations”) praises Biden’s announced sanctions in response to what it called “Vladimir Putin’s bewildering aggression toward Ukraine.”

The *Times* expresses its astonishment “that all this is happening in Europe in 2022, nearly eight decades since the

end of World War II and more than three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union. ... Though it was inevitable that a vast empire like the Soviet Union would not collapse without aftershocks, and these have regularly broken out in Central Asia, the Caucasus and Europe—including Russia’s annexation of Crimea—the notion of a vast seizure of territory in Europe via a full-scale war had seemed no longer possible.”

This is rubbish. The strategists of American imperialism interpreted the dissolution of the Soviet Union three decades ago as an opportunity to use military force to restructure global relations. In the process, the US has proclaimed, and exercised, the “right” to invade, bomb and instigate regime change operations in countries throughout the world. The NATO military alliance has been systematically extended throughout Eastern Europe, to the very borders of Russia. Now, the US is instigating a conflict with Russia over the sacred “principle” that Ukraine be allowed to join NATO as well. The American ruling class has in its sights a “vast seizure of territory” in the form of the breakup of Russia itself.

In the preface to *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony (1990-2016)*, WSWs International Editorial Board Chairman David North wrote: “The last quarter century of US-instigated wars must be studied as a chain of interconnected events. The strategic logic of the US drive for global hegemony extends beyond the neocolonial operations in the Middle East and Africa. The ongoing regional wars are component elements of the rapidly escalating confrontation of the United States with Russia and China.”

Six years later, this prognosis is becoming a reality. The entire world is confronted, as a consequence, with the danger of a third world war and everything that this entails. The resort by the ruling class to war, however, is not an expression of strength but of weakness. The ruling elites in the US and all capitalist countries are turning to war in a desperate attempt to find a way out of insoluble domestic crises, above all, the growth of the class struggle, fueled by two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is this social force, the international working class, that must be mobilized against imperialist war, as an essential component of the fight for socialism.



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