

A wolf in clown's clothing: Philosopher Slavoj Žižek pens shameful pro-imperialist op-eds in the Guardian

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Slavoj Žižek, a celebrity in certain academic and pseudo-left circles, has now twice come out on the pages of the *Guardian* in support of NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

The central point of these articles is made in their titles and leaves little to the political imagination of the reader. The most recent one, published on June 21, opens with, "Pacifism is the wrong response to the war in Ukraine—the least we owe Ukraine is full support, and to do this we need a stronger NATO." The prior article, published on May 23, begins with a point of similarly unmistakable ideological provenance: "A question like 'Did US intelligence-sharing with Ukraine cross a line?' forgets the fact that it was Russia that crossed the line—by invading Ukraine."

These sorts of positions could have been advanced by any number of pro-war and pro-imperialist authors or outfits. In this sense, Žižek's interventions are just a drop in the miserable bucket of war propaganda inflicted on the population by the bourgeois media on a daily basis.

In fact, they place the author on the most intransigent and Strangelovian wing of NATO supporters. In the latest article, for example, Žižek calls for the "unconditional" rejection of any negotiated settlements involving territorial concession to Russia, including in the majority Russian-speaking Donbas region. In the other, he dismisses an "obsession with the red line"—that is, giving any consideration to how Russia might respond to further escalation of the conflict on NATO's part, such as providing intelligence for the sinking of the warship *Moskva* or the killing of several Russian generals.

Like many other more conventional bourgeois intellectuals, Žižek fulminates against those who dare contest the official narrative about the war in Ukraine, provides political cover for present and future machinations of actual imperialism, and, inciting the further escalation of the war, moves the needle closer to a global conflict of unfathomable consequences.

Žižek brings to this sordid business not only his distinctive brand of spitting buffoonery, but also the influence he still retains among sections of the pseudo-left, particularly in academia. As sober and dull as the reactionary initial theses of his articles may be, what follows them is extraordinarily

fanciful: pseudo-philosophical ramblings involving everyone from John Locke to John Lennon, contorted historical analogies according to which, for example, "leftists" who "show understanding for Russia" are like those who advocated neutrality between Nazi Germany and the Allies prior to 1941, and more.

Here is Žižek's analysis of Russia's geopolitical calculations leading to and after the war in Ukraine.

First, Putin once stated something to the effect that being without sovereignty effectively reduces a country to the status of a colony. From this, Žižek promptly deduces that Putin seeks to colonize Ukraine. Naturally, Putin's "imperial view" then also threatens with colonial bondage not only the Baltic states and Finland, but also, in a remarkable geographical leap, Bosnia, Kosovo and ultimately, Europe in its entirety.

If that was not enough, according to Žižek an even more sinister Russian plot is afoot.

Russia is not simply indifferent to environmental concerns but seeks in fact to "profit from global warming." Thus, it actively facilitates it in conjunction with its other nefarious plots to secure control of the Arctic passage transportation routes as the icecaps melt away. This—not the extension of NATO borders and military assets amassed directly next to Russian territory—is the real reason why, according to Žižek, Russia is "so mad at the Scandinavian countries when they expressed their intention to join [NATO]."

But there is more. Having seized the whole of Ukraine and "developed" a newly verdant Siberia, Russia "will dominate so much food production that it will be able to blackmail the whole world." Presumably, as an old Mike Myers character might say, to extort from the helpless global community ... one million dollars.

We do not have any political sympathy for Putin and his regime. But we trust readers will recognize the cartoonish character of Žižek's account, as well as the totally one-sided application of his fantastical geopolitical sensibilities.

After four months of war, Russia has already proven incapable of projecting its military force to decisively defeat a country resting on its immediate border. Its economy is in some

respects a third world one, insofar as it is dependent on the primary resources it exports, such as gas and oil. As to the fact that, since the collapse of the USSR, NATO leapt 800 miles eastward by various means, that American imperialism has a finger and a military base in every pot, that it spends more on what it euphemistically calls its “defense” than the next 10 powers combined and significantly more than 10 times as Russia does ... there is not a word from Žižek about that.

Žižek’s stab at geopolitical analysis may be unlikely to win anyone else over to the NATO cause, but the real money lies elsewhere. Žižek tries to provide a left-wing gloss to his war-cry by advancing the idea that a kinder, gentler NATO, and thus kinder and gentler NATO wars, could be possible if Europe were to play a more independent role in the alliance.

American imperialism is left largely untouched by Žižek’s fanciful critical scrutiny, certainly in its longstanding machinations in Ukraine and Eastern Europe more generally. His articles include two throwaway lines on Trump and an admission that George W. Bush committed crimes in Iraq as Putin is doing in Ukraine. Žižek, who supported Obama in 2008 and 2012, has unsurprisingly nothing to say about the provocations carried out by the Biden administration against Russia. However, American imperialism still serves as a generically “bad” counterpoint to “good” Europe.

According to Žižek, Europe has been “ignoring the brutal reality outside its borders,” and “now it’s the time to awaken,” lest “the European legacy will be lost.”

It is not the first time Žižek invokes Europe in this manner, to peddle the illusion that it does now or at least it could in the future represent both a less barbaric capitalism and a more humane foreign policy.

Even Žižek’s vicious attacks against immigrant workers in Germany on the heels of the incidents in Cologne on New Years’ Eve of 2015, punctuated as they were with denunciations of the lower classes, demands for border controls, and the employment of military forces, still included the idea that, unlike the American model, “Europe’s capitalism ... has something to offer to the world.”

Žižek’s invocation of a progressive Europe is false. What is left of the old European social democracies after decades of austerity policies, often carried out by the old social democratic parties? Far from a continent slumbering in passive innocence and only about to be rudely awakened by Putin’s behavior, Europe is already a violent place, both domestically as well as standing guard at its borders. The recent massacre of dozens of refugees in the Spanish enclave of Melilla is one of myriad examples of this.

But what is even more false is Žižek’s notion that, whatever “leftist” political merits Europe might presently have, they can be preserved and enhanced by means of a renewed military commitment against Russia in Ukraine and through the institutional framework of NATO.

Prompted by the conflict in Ukraine, Germany has already

tripled its military spending and sent signals it intends to put those assets to use against Russia. What possible “progressive” outcome could this have? How could it not play into the hand of the most fascistic and aggressive layers of the bourgeoisie, not only in foreign policy, but domestically as well?

There is one last feature of Žižek’s argument that is worth examining: his statement of support for Julian Assange, and indeed a demand for his “immediate release.” This is found in Žižek’s more recent article, written on the day Assange’s extradition to the US was approved by the British government.

Žižek makes this point while discussing George W. Bush’s recent slip of the tongue with respect to the Iraq War, and once more in the service of his attempt to rally support behind NATO. He claims that Bush’s crimes are “fully comparable with what Putin is doing in Ukraine.” In point of fact, they are not (See: “George W. Bush inadvertently tells the truth about the Iraq War”). He then notes that, since Assange exposed the same magnitude of war crimes, those who oppose the Russian invasion should also demand his release.

Žižek’s defense of Assange is empty and cynical posturing, inserted in a political argument calculated to strengthen the very forces that have been responsible for the hounding, jailing and torture of Assange. These include not just the United States, but also European powers like England and Sweden that Žižek demagogically extols to sow illusions that a better NATO is possible.

The war in Ukraine has brought to the surface the fundamentally reactionary character of the theory and politics of the pseudo-left. This tendency palmed off a virulently irrationalist subjectivism as a variety of left thought. Indeed, they claimed to be great champions and innovators of Marxist thought. This intellectual charlatanry has been exposed most clearly in the person of Slavoj Žižek.



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