The NATO-Russia War in Ukraine enters its second year

WSWS Editorial Board
24 February 2023

Today marks one year since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The war, instigated by NATO's relentless expansion and the global geopolitical and economic interests of US and European imperialism, is escalating toward a Third World War with potentially catastrophic consequences.

In the initial stages of virtually every war, the governments claim to be acting in self-defense and focus attention on the issue of who fired the "first shot." This is usually followed by relentless atrocity propaganda aimed at demonizing the enemy. However, inevitably, as the casualties pile up and the initial expectations of both sides are frustrated, the deeper causes and driving factors are revealed. This is the case with the war over Ukraine.

As it enters its second year, the conflict has evolved into an open, even if as yet undeclared war of US and European imperialism, with its NATO satellites, against Russia. The lies are being stripped away. The war is not about the defense of Ukraine, let alone the defense of a non-existent Ukrainian "democracy." It is, rather, an imperialist war, which has as its aim the military defeat of Russia, the removal of its government and the imposition of a puppet regime. This outcome is intended to place Russia's vast natural resources under the direct control of US and European corporations, establish the domination of US imperialism over the Eurasian landmass and clear the path for war with China.

In pursuit of these aims, the US and NATO are crossing all their previously proclaimed "red lines." In just the first two months of 2023, the US and the European powers have announced the deployment or planned deployment of battle tanks, long-range missiles and fighter jets to Ukraine.

In his trip to Kiev and Warsaw this week, Biden reiterated that the goal of the war is a strategic defeat of Russia. The US government is not interested in negotiating a cease fire and the end of the conflict on terms that concede anything to Russia. The Biden administration has created a situation where there can be no retreat, because to do so would irreparably undermine its prestige and credibility, and lead to the breakup of NATO. Victory in this war has become an existential question for American imperialism.

The situation for the Ukrainian masses, who are viewed as expendable, is profoundly tragic. Despite all the claims of major advances by Ukraine on the battlefield, the population of the vassal state is being bled white. While the US media, without clear evidence, boasts of massive Russian casualties, there is almost total silence on the horrific scale of Ukrainian losses. There are credible reports that place the number of Ukrainian soldiers killed at between 150,000 and 200,000. A generation of Ukrainian youth is being sacrificed by the neo-con warmongers in the Biden administration.

And notwithstanding all the propaganda efforts to glorify the Ukrainian regime, the ex-comedian Zelensky is nothing but a front man for the corrupt oligarchs who control the country and the neo-Nazis who are entrenched within the military. Without the massive infusion of money and armaments, the regime would not survive another week.

The incessant calls for the shipment of more advanced weaponry reflect the growing fears that the expected Russian offensive will result in the full-scale collapse of the Ukrainian army and regime. The situation Ukraine confronts is not one that can be resolved merely with tanks and aircraft. The deployment of NATO troops is necessary. The aim of Biden's visit was to overcome divisions within NATO and prepare public opinion for this next step.

As always, the actions of imperialism are justified with lies and hypocrisy. In his speech in Warsaw, Biden declared that "at stake in this conflict" is "the freedom of democracies throughout the world." He delivered this speech before a meeting of the East European members of NATO, all of which are dominated by right-wing and authoritarian governments.

The fact that the Ukrainian regime and its military forces are saturated with neo-fascists is beyond dispute. The history of Ukraine is being rewritten on the basis of a narrative that promotes as a national hero Stepan Bandera, the fascist mass murderer and ally of the Third Reich who led the notorious Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.

The government of Poland, which invited Biden to deliver his address, is controlled by the far-right Law and Justice Party, which has criminalized speech and historical research into Polish anti-Semitism, while transforming Poland into a beachhead for US aggression against Russia. In an interview with *Haaretz* this week, Polish ex-President Lech Walesa noted that the state of democracy in Poland is so grave that it would require a "revolution in the streets with the use of force… That's how far the Law and Justice Party has gone in destroying democracy and freedom."

The *Wall Street Journal*, the newspaper of the American financial oligarchy, laid out the real issues in an editorial this week ("America's Choice in Ukraine"). "The fastest route to peace," the *Journal* states, "is defeating Mr. Putin…" Wary of the absence of popular support for the war, the *Journal* counsels the Biden administration to "speak more directly to the Americans who are increasingly skeptical of the stakes in Ukraine, and ground his case for US support in core national interests, not Wilsonian flights about foreign 'sovereignty' and democracy."

All discussion of the war in the US and European media is based on the propaganda narrative of an "unprovoked war," unleashed without cause by the evil Vladimir Putin. All that occurred in the years and decades prior to February 24, 2022 is simply ignored. This war, unlike any other, is without historical causation.

In fact, the conflict with Russia is a continuation of an unending series of wars and interventions launched by American imperialism since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Faced with the protracted decline in its global economic position, including growing threats to the position of the dollar as the world reserve currency, and riven by internal crisis, the United States sees in its military power the means of maintaining its global hegemonic position.

© World Socialist Web Site

The conflict with Russia was set into motion by the decades-long expansion of NATO up to the borders of Russia. In 2014, the US spearheaded a right-wing coup in Ukraine to overturn a pro-Russian government, which initiated the eight-year civil war in the east. In the eight years preceding the Russian invasion, Ukraine was armed to the teeth with tens of billions of dollars in military equipment, turning it into a de facto member of the NATO military alliance.

On the part of Russia, the decision to launch the "Special Military Operation" one year ago was a desperate and reactionary response to the catastrophic consequences of the dissolution of the USSR by the Stalinist bureaucracy, the restoration of capitalism and the creation of an oligarchic regime based on the theft and privatization of state assets.

The interests for which the Putin government is fighting are not those of the Russian masses, but of the capitalist ruling class. It launched the invasion with the hope that it could reach a compromise settlement with the United States, including recognition of the "security interests" of the Russian state, and which would allow the Russian oligarchy to plunder the resources of Russia without the direct interference of the imperialist powers.

Putin is attempting to generate support for the war by whipping up reactionary national chauvinism. But the war is deeply unpopular within the working class and broad sections of the youth.

There is a widespread and rapidly growing awareness that the war is the outcome of the dissolution of the USSR and the restoration of capitalism.

Similar sentiments exist among masses of Ukrainians, who have been dragooned into this war by the venal ruling class.

The answer to this war is not to be found in the military victory of either side, but in a unified struggle of the Russian and Ukrainian working class against imperialism and all bourgeois governments.

The aims of US and European imperialism mean that no solution to the conflict is acceptable except the military defeat of Russia. And beyond Russia, American imperialism is already preparing the conflict with China, which US generals anticipate will erupt within the next three years.

The governments are indifferent to the impact of their policies on masses of people. During the course of the now three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ruling class has implemented a policy that has led to the deaths of more than 22 million people. The US and NATO powers have responded to the catastrophic earthquake in Turkey and Syria, which has killed as many as 150,000 people, with a collective shrug, as a brief disruption to the task at hand: the escalation of war.

But the same contradictions that produce imperialist war also produce the objective foundation for social revolution. The First World War created the conditions for and was brought to an end by the Russian Revolution of October 1917. Today, even as the ruling class is trying to drag humanity into World War III, revolutionary struggles are erupting throughout the world.

In France, millions of workers have participated in mass demonstrations against the Macron government's attack on pensions. In the UK, hundreds of thousands of workers have launched strike action, despite the efforts of the union apparatus to contain and suppress opposition. In Sri Lanka, tens of thousands have demonstrated against the IMF-backed austerity measures being implemented by President Ranil Wickremesinghe, installed after the mass protests last year forced the ouster of the hated regime of Gotabaya Rajapakse.

The United States itself is a social powder keg. Social inequality is at levels not seen since the years preceding the Great Depression of the 1930s. The subordination of all of social and economic life to the speculative mania on Wall Street and the war policy of the ruling class has meant the gutting of social infrastructure, revealed in the catastrophic rail derailment and environmental pollution this month in East Palestine, Ohio.

The building of a movement against war depends upon a correct identification of its fundamental causes and the social interests driving it. It must be directed at mobilizing the social force that can end war, the international working class.

Workers and youth throughout the world must reject the false and reactionary "anti-war" movement that is being promoted by sections of the middle class based on a reactionary "left-right alliance" of demoralized middle-class liberals and disoriented radicals with outright fascists.

In the "Rage Against the War Machine" rally organized last weekend, protesters who claim to be on the left joined hands with Libertarians and fascist and anti-Semitic forces, claiming that only in such an alliance could the drive to World War III be halted. Similar coalitions are being promoted internationally, including by the Left Party's Sahra Wagenknecht in Germany, who has worked to close ranks with the fascistic Alternative for Germany (AfD).

This "left-right coalition" has nothing to do with opposing imperialism, but rather serves to disorient and block the development of a socialist anti-war movement based on the working class.

In the final analysis, the stated opposition of the far-right to the US-NATO war against Russia is bound up with divisions within the ruling class over the direction of foreign policy.

It should be recalled that in the years leading up to World War II, such reactionary tendencies were brought forward as supposed proponents of peace. In the US, it was associated with the "America First" movement of the Nazi sympathizer Charles Lindbergh, who opposed Roosevelt's policies not on an anti-imperialist basis but on the basis of reactionary nationalism and anti-Semitism. In England, this tendency was associated with Oswald Mosely, who founded the British Union of Fascists.

Opposing those who justified an alliance with right-wing isolationists and the fascist Lindbergh in order to stop the entry of the United States into the war that had erupted in 1939, *The Militant*, publication of the American Trotskyists, warned in September 1941:

> The masses hate imperialist war and view the Roosevelt war program with suspicion, and justly so. But they cannot get the answer to the warmongers from the isolationists.
>
> For the isolationists do not lead a struggle against the real cause of war. As a matter of fact, they serve only to distract attention away from the real cause of war, which must be fully understood before war can successfully be opposed...
>
> They can infuriate and arouse backward and narrow–minded elements against the warmongers with such propaganda, but they can never mobilize them to prevent or end war that way.
>
> The only answer to the war is revolutionary internationalism, which preaches a destruction of the cause of war, the capitalist system.

The warning issued by the Trotskyists in 1941 retains its full significance. The policy that claims that the fight against war justifies an alliance with fascists can only result in war and fascism.

The essential premise for a struggle against war is an understanding of its causes. All discussion of opposing war that avoids the subjects of capitalism and class struggle is a waste of time.

The building of a movement against war and imperialism, which is dragging mankind toward the apocalypse of nuclear war, requires the building of a socialist, revolutionary and internationalist movement of the working class. It requires the connection of the fight against war to the fight against exploitation, inequality and the capitalist profit system.

In the second year of the war in Ukraine, the growing movement of workers throughout the world must be developed as a conscious political

© World Socialist Web Site

movement for socialism. This is the anti-war program for which the International Committee of the Fourth International and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties are fighting.

On February 25 at 1:00 pm EST, the World Socialist Web Site *and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality are holding an online panel discussion, "The War in Ukraine and How to Stop It." We urge all WSWS readers to register and attend.*

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site