The narrative of the “unprovoked war” in Ukraine falls apart

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Since the start of the Ukraine war in 2022, the White House and the entire US media have proclaimed that the conflict was an “unprovoked war” launched by a single man, Vladimir Putin, on February 24, 2022.

The phrase “unprovoked” has become ubiquitous in the US media’s description of the war. *The Washington Post*, *New York Times* and broadcast news have used the phrase hundreds of times.

In an op-ed published Wednesday, Thomas Friedman, the *Times’* chief transcriber of CIA intelligence briefs, wrote, “From the start of this war, there has been only one place to be to understand its timing and direction — and that’s in Vladimir Putin’s head… this war emerged entirely from there.”

The mantra of the “unprovoked war” has become to Ukraine what “weapons of mass destruction” was to the Iraq War, or “Remember the Maine” was to the Spanish-American War.

The idea behind the endless repetition is the theory that “the bigger the lie, the more readily it will be believed.” The public is expected to accept that this is the first war in history without any historical antecedents or economic motives, the first war based entirely on the psychology of one man.

But on Tuesday, the *Washington Post* published an interview with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who stated that the war in Ukraine “didn’t start in 2022. The war started in 2014.”

Stoltenberg continued, “And since then, NATO has implemented the biggest reinforcement of our collective defense since the end of the Cold War… Until 2014, NATO allies were reducing defense budgets. Since 2014, all allies across Europe and Canada have significantly increased their defense spending... this is a huge transformation of NATO that started in 2014.”

Thus, according to Stoltenberg, the war did not begin in February 2022 with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but in 2014, eight years earlier.

This admission confirms two points that the *World Socialist Web Site* has made repeatedly since the outbreak of the war. First, that the conflict has a historical background. Second, that the 2022 invasion was a desperate response to the escalating efforts of NATO to bring Ukraine into its orbit.

Stoltenberg states that the war began in 2014, but he does not explain what actually happened. The year began with the US-backed regime change operation in Ukraine, overthrowing the government of President Victor Yanukovych, who had opposed measures to integrate Ukraine into a political association and trade pact with the EU, which was itself preparing for integration into NATO.

The coup was financed by what US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland boasted was “over $5 billion” in US funding.

The overthrow of the Yanukovych government was spearheaded by fascistic and ferociously anti-Russian organizations, including Right Sector and the Svoboda Party. In the following years, the government of Petro Poroshenko, installed after the coup, carried out violence and repression against the Russian-speaking population of eastern Ukraine, leading to the deaths of over 14,000 people between 2014 and 2022.

The US- and NATO-backed regime-change operation, as the WSWS noted in 2014, had “the intention of provoking a confrontation with Russia.”

The coup did provoke a response by the Kremlin, which understood that it would hand control over the Crimean peninsula, the home of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, to NATO. This would allow the United States to station its own fleet at the Port of Sevastopol, giving the US military dominance over the Black Sea.

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In response, Russia annexed Crimea following a referendum in which the overwhelming majority of the population of the enclave supported leaving Ukraine.

While publicly claiming to support a ceasefire under the framework of the "Minsk Accords," the NATO powers instead worked systematically to funnel billions of dollars in weaponry into Ukraine in preparation for a war, the aim of which would be the reconquest of eastern Ukraine and the Crimean peninsula.

In 2021, the Ukrainian government approved a strategy for the military reconquest of the Crimean peninsula, which was then de facto codified with the US-Ukrainian Strategic Partnership of November 2021.

In demanding assurances prior to the outbreak of the war that Ukraine would not join NATO, Putin explained that if Ukraine became a NATO member, the entire NATO alliance would be pledged to support Ukraine in a war to reconquer Crimea, which, he said, would lead to a nuclear war between NATO and Russia.

The invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was the reaction of the Putin government, representing a faction of the Russian oligarchy, seeking to defend its interests while at the same time hoping that it could reach some sort of accommodation with the imperialist powers.

The US and NATO, however, are determined to realize through the war the aims that motivated the 2014 coup. Later in the interview with the *Post*, Stoltenberg declared that "all NATO allies agree that Ukraine will become a member of the alliance," contradicting the ubiquitous claims by the US media and political establishment that the Russian government's concerns about Ukraine joining NATO were simply made up.

Stoltenberg's declaration is, in effect, a pledge to plunge NATO headlong into direct conflict with Russia.

The lie of the "unprovoked war" has been accepted and promoted not only by the political establishment and the state-controlled media in the US, but also, shamefully, by the vast majority of academics. Outside of the meetings held by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, there has been no serious attempt on campuses to explain the underlying background and causes of the war.

Of particular significance is the ferociously pro-war and pro-imperialist position taken by nominally "socialist" organizations—which in fact represent privileged sections of the upper-middle class. They have completely endorsed the propaganda narrative.

The pro-CIA Pabloite publication *International Viewpoint*, for example, published a statement by the "Russian Socialist Movement" on May 1 denouncing "half-solidarity and false pacifism," which "makes morally problematic any form of alignment with military preparations of one's own government."

In other words, it is the task of the "left" to support the military actions of the US and NATO powers, because to do otherwise would be to serve as "the instrument of the aggressor"—Russia. The statement ends with a call for "increased arms transfers to Ukraine, which will enable it to return its annexed territories." On all points, *International Viewpoint* merely echos the statements of Stoltenberg himself.

All of those social forces that have defended Washington's propaganda narrative stand exposed by the war. Far from constituting "defensive" actions to save Ukrainian lives from Russian attacks, the United States is determined to fight till the last Ukrainian to achieve its goals of reconquering the Crimean peninsula and imposing a strategic defeat on Russia.

The more the war continues and expands, the more nakedly its imperialist character emerges. It is becoming clear that American imperialism, not content with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, is seeking the military defeat, breakup and conquest of Russia as the prelude to an effort to militarily subjugate China.

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