

Ukraine's attack on Iranian ship exposes global character of imperialist war

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The Ukrainian attack on an Iranian cargo ship in the Caspian Sea marks a new stage in the fusion of the NATO war against Russia with the US-Israeli war against Iran. It confirms David North's 2026 May Day warning: "World war is not a future threat but a presently unfolding reality."

World war is not emerging through a single declaration. It is unfolding as a process: through the linking together of regional wars, proxy operations, sanctions, blockades, naval deployments and long-range strikes. Ukraine's intervention against an Iranian target gives this process sharp expression.

The Ukrainian long-range drone strike killed one sailor and wounded another. It targeted an Iranian-owned vessel, the *Ana*, in the Caspian Sea—a body of water bordered by Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, but not Ukraine. Kiev claimed the ship was transporting drones and missiles to Russia. Tehran denounced the attack as aggression against a commercial vessel.

The attack exposes the central fraud of the propaganda surrounding the Ukraine war. For years, the war has been presented by the imperialist powers and their media as a purely defensive struggle by Ukraine against an "unprovoked" Russian invasion. This lie has been used above all in Germany, to justify the largest rearmament since Hitler and a renewed military offensive against Russia.

The Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was reactionary. It was the response of a capitalist oligarchic regime to the relentless encirclement and provocation of Russia by NATO. It divided Russian and Ukrainian workers, strengthened NATO and gave the imperialist powers a pretext to escalate. But it was neither "unprovoked", nor does it change the character of the war now being waged by NATO through its Ukrainian puppet.

Ukraine's strike on an Iranian ship makes this unmistakable. A war supposedly waged in defence of

Ukrainian sovereignty has produced a Ukrainian attack on an Iranian vessel far from Ukraine's borders, at the very moment when the United States and Israel are waging a criminal war of aggression against Iran.

The war fronts are not separate. They are being consciously connected. Ukraine is no longer only NATO's proxy against Russia; it is becoming an auxiliary force in the broader imperialist offensive against Iran and all states viewed as obstacles to US and European domination of Eurasia.

This completely exposes the pseudo-left tendencies that claim the Ukraine war is the "good war," while Gaza and Iran are the "bad wars." Zelensky himself has shattered this fiction. Ukraine is not standing apart from the US-Israeli war in the Middle East; it is actively intervening in it. To support NATO's war through Ukraine while denouncing the genocide in Gaza or the assault on Iran is to support one front of the same global imperialist onslaught.

It is impossible to oppose the genocide in Gaza or the US-Israeli war against Iran while remaining indifferent to, or actively supporting, the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. Zelensky has made this explicit. By attacking an Iranian ship and presenting Ukraine as useful to Washington in the conflict with Tehran, Kiev is showing that it is prepared to serve imperialism wherever this secures more weapons, money and political support. Ukraine is offering itself as an attack dog of the imperialist powers.

This is the transformation of Ukraine into the Israel of Eastern Europe: a militarized outpost of imperialism, armed to the teeth, dependent on imperialist finance and weapons, ruling through fascistic forces and used against the strategic enemies of the United States and Europe. The claims that Ukraine is fighting for "democracy" are a fraud. The Zelensky regime has outlawed opposition parties, suppressed independent trade unions, prolonged

rule under martial law, glorified Nazi collaborators and jailed socialist opponents of the war, including Bogdan Syrotiuk.

The bourgeois press is beginning to acknowledge, in distorted form, the process long analysed by the *World Socialist Web Site*. The *Financial Times* cited the Ukrainian strike in the Caspian in a column titled “Ukraine, Iran and how regional wars go global.” The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* welcomed the attack as a message not to Tehran, but to Trump: Zelensky was showing that Ukraine and the US have “the same enemies” and that Kiev is “not only a supplicant,” but can make itself useful to Washington.

The attack is being applauded in Germany because it presents Russia and Iran as a single enemy complex and binds the United States more firmly to the Ukraine war. Berlin fears that Trump could seek a separate arrangement with Putin that would reduce US involvement and cut across German and European aims in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Its answer is to intensify the war and fuse the fronts together.

Germany, Britain, France and the other European powers have used the Ukraine war to launch the largest rearmament since the Second World War, revive conscription and transform Europe into a war economy. They also support the US-Israeli assault on Iran and Israel’s genocide in Gaza. Their differences with Trump are not between war and peace, but over leadership, timing, costs and spoils.

Ukraine is not acting as an independent national force. Its long-range war against Russia has been politically covered, financed, militarily enabled, technologically supported and strategically coordinated by NATO, above all by Germany, Britain and the United States. Whatever the precise operational chain of command behind the Caspian attack, it was carried out within this broader NATO war framework.

The route targeted is of major strategic significance. Astrakhan, on the northern Caspian, is a key logistics hub between Russia and Iran, and the Caspian corridor has become an alternative route for commerce, energy and military supplies. Ukrainian attacks on Russian energy infrastructure, US-Israeli threats against Iran’s oil export infrastructure and the Strait of Hormuz, and NATO’s military pressure on China are interconnected fronts. Ships, ports, refineries, pipelines and sea lanes are becoming direct targets in a war over the arteries of the world economy.

The official justification for the Caspian attack is that

Iran has supplied Russia with drones and other weapons used against Ukraine. But the same argument can be made by every state involved. Iran may claim the right to attack Ukrainian or NATO-linked targets because NATO arms Israel and the United States bombs Iran. Russia may claim the right to attack NATO logistics hubs because NATO arms and directs Ukraine. This is the logic of world war: every front becomes the justification for escalation on another.

The developing world war does not arise from the alleged aggressiveness of an “axis of adversaries,” encompassing Iran, North Korea, Russia and China, as the imperialist press claims. It is rooted in the historic crisis of world capitalism and the drive of US and European imperialism to reverse their decline through war. Iran, Russia and China are being targeted because they are viewed as obstacles to the domination of Eurasia and the world economy by the imperialist powers.

There is no progressive camp among the capitalist governments involved. The United States, Germany, Britain, France and Israel are waging predatory imperialist wars. The Zelensky regime is a right-wing NATO puppet government. The Putin regime represents the Russian oligarchy; the Iranian regime is incapable of mobilizing the working class against imperialism.

Workers in Ukraine, Russia, Iran, Israel, Europe, the United States and China have no interest in killing one another for the profits and strategic ambitions of their ruling classes. The urgent task is to build an international anti-war movement rooted in the working class, break with all capitalist parties, develop rank-and-file committees to oppose arms production, military transport, conscription, austerity and repression, fight for the release of Bogdan Syrotiuk and all anti-war prisoners and build the International Committee of the Fourth International as the revolutionary leadership of the international working class.



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