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UKRAINE WAR AND THE US WORLD ORDER



The competition to win the 21st century

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Cover photo: US Navy 030807-F-0000X-001 A US Air Force B-2 Spirit and two B-117A Nighthawks fly in formation

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The implications of the war in Ukraine are enormous, not only for those caught up in it but also for the future of global relationships between nations and blocs – for war or peace.

War, of course is not new and recently peoples across the world have grim experience of it in countries invaded by the West and wars conducted by their proxies. This includes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen. In recent decades hundreds of thousands have died, millions have been injured, had their homes destroyed and been made refugees.

Ukraine - US responsibility

The war in Ukraine is different, however, in that it is a confrontation between Russia, an emerging power rich in natural resources with a strong military including nuclear weapons and, effectively, the United States. In this it has the full support of the Conservative government in the UK. As Simon Korner sets out in *War in Ukraine and the competition to win the 21st century* it is the United States that has shaped the world in which this conflict escalated and it calls the shots on the direction of the war and sanctions. This war is an outcome of the United States' determination to retain its status as the world's only superpower. It will allow no challenges to that. Korner and Pat Turnbull in, *NATO – a danger to peace and security*, describe the military encirclement of Russia which has progressed steadily since the end of the Soviet Union and in defiance of commitments given to Soviet leaders that NATO would not expand eastwards. The 14 countries that have joined NATO since have brought nuclear and other offensive weapons closer to Russia's border, representing a growing threat. That build up over time and, more immediately, the increased shelling

of Donetsk and Luhansk by Ukraine set the scene for the Russian reaction when it went into Ukraine.

Global tensions and sanctions

Korner goes on to explore the ramifications of the war for global relations between regional powers, the developing world and inter-imperialist rivalries. On the surface the United States is getting its way, forcing the EU, particularly Germany, into line but many tensions remain. Germany totally capitulated to US demands to end the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and upped its military spending to record levels. The US is keeping the pressure on EU countries to end imports of oil and gas from Russia as it seeks a market for its own liquified natural gas. But differences are emerging within the EU over this. What is perhaps most surprising in the current situation, however, is not that countries have capitulated to the US, but that so many have refused to join in with sanctions. This includes big swathes of the global south and important economies like India and Turkey.

The sanctions regime being imposed at the behest of the United States demonstrates its role in determining the direction of the war. It has expressed no interest in negotiations and wants to prolong the war to debilitate Russia as far as possible. It is prepared to fight to the last drop of Ukrainian blood to achieve this. Alex Davidson describes in, *Sanctions: an act of war*, the many problems being caused by US sanctions over and above the problems caused by the war itself. The major loser is unlikely to be Russia, which has alternative financial systems and markets to get round the effects of sanctions and is self-sufficient in food and energy. It will, rather, be US allies particularly in Europe who are dependent on Russian gas and oil supplies as well

as essential metals used in high tech products and nuclear technology. The effects on the developing world will be even worse with a looming food crisis. The United States itself is relatively isolated from the impact of the sanctions it is imposing on the rest of the world. As it stokes war with Russia and threatens the same with China, it is also undermining European economies and further impoverishing the developing countries. It is creating a world of chaos and dependency which it can better control.

However, the all-out confrontational strategy of the US to face down any country which threatens its superpower status is creating a reaction which is also weakening its authority and dominance. A key feature of this, which Davidson describes, is the shift from countries using the dollar in transactions to other currencies.

United States threat to peace

The United States is pursuing a highly aggressive strategy in world affairs and is now overtly talking about war with China over Taiwan. Using the same playbook that it deployed in Ukraine, it is moving ever closer to reneging on international agreements over the status of the island, seeking to provoke a response from China as it did with Russia.

The United States strategy threatens lives and economies across the globe. That is why in the midst of the censorship and blanket propaganda of the mainstream media which promotes only the US line with no dissent we must, as Frieda Park says, *Keep our eye on the ball*. The United States is creating a dangerous and unstable world and represents the major threat to world peace. That is what we need to focus on.

Keeping our eye on the ball

by Frieda Park

The news we are getting about Ukraine is selective, biased, emotive and rigorously censored. No alternative views are permitted; not even the slightest criticism or questioning can be heard on the airwaves. The neo-Nazis of the Azov battalion are endorsed, frequently popping up on TV without the slightest demur. There is a total amnesia about its history, once reported in the press here as vicious right wing thugs attacking minorities, trade unionists, the left, anti-fascists and even International Women's Day celebrations. Azov has not changed since then and does not even claim to have changed. It still uses a version of the Waffen-SS insignia as its symbol and is still described in Wikipedia as "...a neo-Nazi unit of the National Guard of Ukraine based in Mariupol...". [1] The promotion and arming of neo-Nazis in Ukraine, and encouraging mercenaries to go and fight there, is creating a right wing terrorist threat to the whole of Europe and beyond.

Lack of opposition

The combination of the media onslaught, the lack of alternative views and being placed on the defensive by the unexpected Russian intervention has disarmed the left and the peace movement. The recent history of NATO's culpability in creating the conditions for this crisis is being forgotten, voices are muted and, even worse, some are falling into line with the West's war objectives. There are trade union



PHOTO BY STEVE BLAKE

Mastiff armoured vehicle of the sort the UK is sending to Ukraine

organisations which have called for further sanctions against Russia, the boycotting of Russian oil tankers and for more arms for Ukraine.

It is not quite so monolithic in other countries. Some examples: In Italy, trade unionists blacked a shipment of arms for Ukraine which was disguised as humanitarian aid. In Spain, where Unidas Podemos is part of the government, there has been strong opposition among its MPs to sending arms to Ukraine. In Greece some MPs from Syriza, as well as KKE MPs, walked out when President Zelensky addressed the Greek parliament flanked by Azov battalion commanders. In Germany 20 prominent figures, including the former Vice President of the Bundestag, Antje Vollmer, wrote to the government calling on it to halt arms deliveries to Ukraine.

Here, however, the lack of opposition to British government and US strategy is making it harder to mobilise for a peaceful, negotiated solution and against pouring further arms into Ukraine which are fuelling the war and making the situation worse. It is also making it harder to mobilise in the longer term against the future war aims of the United States as it tries to maintain its position as the world's only superpower.

There is a danger that, unchallenged, the West's narrative on the Ukraine crisis becomes the template by which future such conflicts are understood, at least in the West. We need to keep our eye on the ball of what the US is up to as it tries to ensure its hegemony. The line it is pursuing, with China now explicitly in its sights, is highly destabilising

and contains the seeds of future wars. A plague on both your houses, equally blaming both sides, is too simplistic and lets the US off the hook for its responsibility in creating the world order which gives rise to these conflicts. We, therefore, need to constantly expose the continuing military build-up and interventions by NATO, the US and its allies across the globe and the increasing threat of nuclear war.

Alongside that it will be necessary to challenge the narratives that will be used to bolster the argument for war, like the selective demonisation of other countries and their leaders. That doesn't mean to say that these will be good people with progressive governments, but let's face it that is not the criteria for US hostility or support. They are happy to promote alliances with the likes of Israel and Saudi Arabia. While the media here heaps opprobrium on Vladimir Putin the war criminal Tony Blair gets a knighthood. So we need to ask why are they focusing

non-aligned movement, since the end of the last century the United States and other imperialist powers have sought to impose their power across the globe. They have done so using brute force to maintain their stranglehold over weaker nations and the developing world in order to extract their resources and exploit the labour of their peoples. This force takes the form of economic coercion, military might and control of assets, produce and markets. The US has deployed vicious sanction regimes. Including in the case of Ukraine these sanctions impact adversely on the living standards of ordinary people in Europe and the developing world. There have also been the invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, the ongoing attempt to overthrow the government of Syria and wars in Yemen and in Africa. It is rank hypocrisy for the West to denounce Putin and Russia for what it is doing in Ukraine when it has destroyed countries across the Middle East and is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thou-

have challenged the US world order, undermining its global power. This is completely unacceptable to the United States and is at the root of tensions across the globe. The US is deeply concerned about these signs of independence. Even with its most determined efforts it has failed to bring many countries of the global south into line over Ukraine. Many have refused to impose sanctions on Russia, including Turkey, a NATO member, or to back the US at the United Nations.

We need to argue for respect for the sovereignty of other countries and their right to independence from the United States in world affairs. There need to be peaceful solutions to tensions and differences, including an end to the widespread use of sanctions by the US to enforce its will. If this does not happen then there will be more Ukraines, more war and more suffering.

A lot of things could be said about Ukraine, but some effective immediate demands might be:

- No to sending more arms to Ukraine and no to arming neo-Nazis and mercenaries.
- Government cash to alleviate the cost-of-living crisis - not for war.
- For a negotiated peace in Ukraine.
- No to the United States and NATO's global war drive

[1] These are just a few examples of past exposés of Azov in the media:

Ukraine must stop ongoing abuses and war crimes by pro-Ukrainian volunteer forces - Amnesty International 8/11/14

Commentary: Ukraine's neo-Nazi problem - Reuters 19/3/18

Inside A White Supremacist Militia in Ukraine - YouTube Time Magazine 8/1/21

The far-right group threatening to overthrow Ukraine's government - Newsnight - YouTube 23/7/15

...the lack of opposition to British government and US strategy is making it harder to mobilise for a peaceful, negotiated solution and against pouring further arms into Ukraine which are fuelling the war and making the situation worse.

on some countries and not others, and ensure we are not side-tracked by the story they want to tell. That story is one of diverting attention from their real motivations to protect their geo-political and economic interests by focusing on other issues like human rights.

Western hypocrisy

The hypocrisy of the US, Britain and the other Western countries knows virtually no bounds. Untrammelled by socialist countries or a strong

sands of civilians in the illegal wars it has waged – men, women, children, killed indiscriminately.

However, the United States' unipolar world in which others have to bow to its power, including its allies in Europe, has been challenged in recent years, not just by smaller countries in the developing world, but by bigger powers who do not wish to be dictated to by the US. This includes China, Iran and Russia. They are all very different sorts of countries and in different ways

War in Ukraine

and the competition to win the 21st century

by Simon Korner

One view of the Ukraine war is that it is a struggle between two imperialist poles. But that suggests the US and Russia are evenly matched adversaries as Germany and Britain were in 1914 whereas America is clearly the world's military hegemon, with all of NATO's power under its sole command, while Russia is a regional capitalist power, challenging the US, but with nothing like the same reach or influence.

Because America is the main danger to world peace, it should be our main focus. This is not to overlook Russia's capitalist nature, nor the fact that capitalist competition necessarily produces wars. But our period differs from Lenin's in that American imperialism has no historical equal in terms of strength and global reach. Reducing the war to contesting imperialist camps obscures this fact. If attention is distracted away from the principal warmonger and dominant ideological manipulator, it takes the pressure off it. And Marxists have always made tactical use of contradictions between capitalist powers. In World War 2 (WW2), the USSR allied with Britain and the US to defeat the more immediate Nazi danger. Today, world peace requires the hindering, at the very least, of US imperialism. Whether this war will do that, as Russian airpower clearly did in Syria – is not yet clear. But certainly, rhetorically condemning Russia is not the job of the British left, while cheer-leading for Russia is neither necessary nor effective.



PHOTO BY MISSILE DEFENSE AGENCY

Part of Lockheed Martin Aegis system bound for Romania

Military threat

America's expansion of NATO eastward since 1991 was designed to weaken and provoke Russia. Russia represents a problem for the US because it is not only a non-compliant rival that was drawing Europe closer to itself, and thus away from US control, but is nuclear-armed and a potential ally of China – the US's main rival and future target. Yes, Russian capitalism must seek to expand, but the current Ukraine war is not about capitalist empire-building, whatever Putin's expressed nationalist views, rather an aggressive defence against America's aim of dismantling Russia. Even the pro-western Yeltsin warned President Clinton that he could never allow NATO to expand eastwards.

After the western-backed overthrow of Ukraine's democrati-

cally elected president in 2014, the Russian-speaking eastern regions of the Donbas, a largely industrial working-class area, rebelled against the illegitimate government and seceded from Ukraine. Since then, almost 14,000 people have been killed in Ukraine's 8-year war to retake the Donbas. The high death toll, as well as the placing of NATO nuclear missiles in eastern Europe and the massive arming of Ukraine's military, were sufficient evidence to convince Russia of NATO's warlike intent. Ukraine's history as part of the USSR has given it nuclear know-how and over 50 tons of plutonium. Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies, Paul Rogers, says putting new anti-ballistic missiles into Poland and Romania was a game-changer because the new Aegis system can evade Russia's sophisticated missile defence and strike first. So when President Zelensky announced in

Munich (19/2/22) that Ukraine – already one of NATO’s Enhanced Opportunity Partners – had the right to disregard the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 between the US and Russia, under which Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons, the threat was taken seriously. The threat was made more potent by the US hav-

of soldiers from NATO countries. Apart from its billion-dollar weapons supplies to Ukraine – whose defence budget rose from \$1.7 billion in 2014 to \$8.9 billion in 2019, and is now far higher – America has been running biolabs, as Victoria Nuland, the hawkish US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, has admit-

Azov battalion, into an elite corps, according to a George Washington University study (IERES-Papers-no-11-September-2021-FINAL.pdf). The most prominent fascist leader Dmytro Yarosh is officially advisor to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Ukraine, an indication of the high level of fascist integration into the state machine. The banning of Communist and other opposition parties, the anti-trade union laws – developed under British tutelage – and the violent threats that destroyed a proposed deal between Ukraine and the Donbas in 2019, show the fascists’ continuing and powerful grip. Ukraine was rated a hybrid Authoritarian-Democratic state by *The Economist* in 2020, a state that, according to *The Times of Israel* (27/12/18) “designated as a national holiday the birthday of a Nazi collaborator”. Not that you’d know it from the western media white-wash of Stepan Bandera and other Ukrainian WW2 fascists – reminiscent of the whitewashing given to jihadi terrorists in Syria, rebranded as ‘moderate’ rebels.



PHOTO BY BOB MCNEELY

Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton promises broken

ing torn up the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty as well as the agreements made under the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Liberal commentator Jonathan Steele said: “Convinced that NATO will never reject Ukraine’s membership, Putin has now taken his own steps to block it.”

Along with the push to join NATO, Ukraine’s army trebled in size between 2014 and the start of this year, trained by the Americans and the British under a longstanding programme, effectively binding Ukraine into NATO structures. The SAS and US Delta special forces have long been active on the ground in Ukraine, according to *Le Figaro*, with all foreign recruits in Ukraine co-ordinated by the US. Up to 40% of the most combat-ready Ukrainian units are reportedly composed

of soldiers from NATO countries. Apart from its billion-dollar weapons supplies to Ukraine – whose defence budget rose from \$1.7 billion in 2014 to \$8.9 billion in 2019, and is now far higher – America has been running biolabs, as Victoria Nuland, the hawkish US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, has admitted. These biological weapons facilities could “assert Ukraine’s cultural and economic independence from Russia”, according to a Daily Mail report – so they’re hardly conducting harmless civilian research.

Fascist grip

A further threat, one frequently airbrushed out by the western media, is Ukraine’s significant fascist element. This is not confined to the Azov regiment; there are around 30 other groups including Aidar, Right Sector and Svoboda, totalling over 100,000 members, according to Reuters. These fascists act as violent enforcers throughout the whole Ukrainian army. Fascist ideology dominates the largest Ukrainian military training centre, the National Army Academy, where US and Canadian forces have been training members of Centuria, a wing of the

The rebranding of Ukrainian fascism is part and parcel of the propaganda that calls the Ukraine war the first use of force to change territorial borders in Europe since WW2, ignoring NATO’s violent detaching of Kosovo from Serbia in 1999. The Serbia war was a testing ground for NATO in the post-Soviet era, targeting a non-belligerent country outside the NATO area. 78 days of bombing left 3,500 civilians dead.

Russia’s response

Why couldn’t Russia restrict itself to a tactical defence of the Donbas rather than intervening strategically? Russia argues that this would have left Ukrainian weapons supply lines open from the west and most of the airspace in Ukrainian hands. Russia had been caught off guard in 2014 by the rapidity with which Ukrainian ethno-nationalism had led to war in the Donbas, and so this time moved far more quickly

and decisively. Up to 130,000 Ukrainian troops, placed on the border with Donbas in December 2021, were preparing for an imminent attack in late February, according to military documents found in a captured Ukrainian military HQ (Telegram, 25/3/22, Russian Ministry of Defence). OSCE observers recorded increased heavy artillery fire from 16 February 2022 onward, leading to the flight of 100,000 refugees to Russia. Moreover, Zelensky had decreed the previous year that Ukraine would retake Crimea, a majority-Russian region whose people had voted overwhelmingly to join Russia in 2014 and who remained happy with that decision 6 years later (including the Tatar minority), according to *The Washington Post* (18/3/20). Russia felt that it had the choice of waiting for war to come to it, or acting.

Impact and outcomes

Overall, the volatile and highly unstable situation in Ukraine could become even more dangerous if a NATO No Fly Zone were established, as many western hawks are calling for, or if there is a significant direct intervention by NATO forces (in addition to the existing western ‘volunteers’). The worst case scenario, apart from nuclear war between NATO and Russia, would be a long war of attrition in Ukraine – precisely what the US and UK are engineering. The US State Department foresees the conflict continuing throughout 2022. Imperial historian Neil Ferguson (March 22) says Biden wants to “lock Russia in a quagmire...” The best case scenario would be successful peace talks based on a declaration of Ukrainian neutrality, that is, NATO expansion halted; Crimea officially ceded; Donbas recognised, and the fascist stranglehold on Ukraine destroyed.

Russia’s intervention has sacrificed a great deal. Russia now faces an even more aggressive NATO, Finland and Sweden are applying to join, and the latter, like Germany,

already breaking its taboo on sending arms to a country at war. Ukrainian nationalism has grown, Russophobia in Ukraine and the West has risen to unprecedented levels and, on a human level, millions of people have been displaced and traumatised.

The severing of Russia from Europe has been a major US victory. The war has corralled Europe into line. It’s forced Germany to ditch Nord Stream 2 and kill off trade with Russia, at a stroke giving the US a far bigger share of the European energy market. This year it will sell 15 billion cubic meters of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to EU markets and plans to double this by 2030. The US market for LNG infrastructure – pipelines, terminals and so on – is set to grow by \$1.12 billion over the next 4 years. This is, among other things, an American energy war.

The US military industrial complex has also benefited massively. The CEOs of Raytheon and Lockheed have both welcomed the opportunity for future weapons sales. The US government’s promise of \$13.6 billion of arms to Ukraine will ensure their profits and those of Northrop Grumman, Boeing, General Dynamics and other arms-makers for years to come. The green light for Germany to militarise – with a defence budget of \$110 billion, twice what it spent last year, including buying American F-35 fighter planes – will also benefit American and German arms companies. Britain’s BAE Systems, France’s Thales and other European weapons producers have all seen their shares rise sharply since the war began.

Ukraine could well end up the Syria of Europe, with ongoing war, and flooded with ‘lethal aid’ – much of it going straight to Nazi terrorists. Ukraine had a booming economy in the USSR. By 2020, 45% of the population were categorised as poor, victims of mass privatisation. Last year Ukraine’s growth rate was 5th lowest in the world. Even before

the war, 10 million Ukrainians had moved abroad for work. The World Bank estimates that Ukraine’s GDP has fallen 45% since the war began.

Another major loser is the Global South. Russia and Ukraine account for over 25% of global wheat exports, 33% of barley and 20% corn. Twenty-five African countries depend on Russia for more than a third of their wheat imports, which Russia supplies at concession prices. Now food prices, at their highest level ever, according to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (8/4/22), will hit them hard. A separate UN report on 16 March 2022 warned of civil unrest, food shortages and recession. Russia and Ukraine also provide about 40% of the global supply of fertilizer: shortages will damage local agriculture. Combined with energy price rises, the effect is that people are going to starve, and many countries will turn back to coal as they’re shut off from Russian resources.

Here at home, anti-NATO voices have been muffled. Labour is out-hawking the Tories on increased British arms spending. Trade unionists have been blacking Russian oil tankers rather than arms shipments to Ukraine. Overall, we’re in the worst situation we’ve ever been in in terms of the dangers of world war, increased state and big-tech authoritarianism and censorship, and ideological weakness and division. We are still free to publish – but that freedom is uncertain. Information sources are disappearing every day, banned by Twitter and Facebook and the government. The American tech industry’s near-total domination of the narrative has encouraged support for war in western populations, with liberals calling for more weapons for Ukraine, taken in by the myth that this is doing good.

The cost of living crisis has nowhere near reached its peak – and is being blamed solely on the war.



PHOTO BY ZSSEN

On the other hand, there are several contradictions emerging ...

The war has highlighted differences between the West and the Global South, which has almost universally refused to impose sanctions on Russia – with a good number, particularly of African nations, abstaining on two UN anti-Russia votes, a higher number on the second vote. Brazil’s Dilma Rousseff said Russia had had no choice but to make itself heard. South Africa’s Cyril Ramaphosa blamed NATO for the war, though neither leader condoned Russia’s intervention. The 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Conference rejected sanctions, as did the ASEAN countries and India. Even a NATO member like Turkey refused to sanction Russia. The same goes for the Gulf States, normally obedient American puppets. While we should be careful not to exaggerate its significance, this refusal to kowtow to a policy the Americans regard as a dividing line – you’re either with us or against us – is some-

thing new and represents an objective challenge to US supremacy.

Other contradictions. In America, the oil industry has successfully argued for sanctions to be softened so they don’t harm US companies. The US government has removed Russian fertiliser from the sanctions list as American agribusiness depends on it. American firms like Boeing that rely on Russian titanium are being hit. Prices for other vital metals used in electronics have risen, because Russia controls 50% of the world market. The same goes for noble gases such as neon, argon, helium, essential for the production of microchips.

Germany, France & the EU

Germany has been humiliated by the US. It was Biden, not Germany, who on 8 February 2022 unilaterally announced the ending of Nord Stream 2 if Russia invaded Ukraine, saying, “There will no longer be a Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it” (France 24). Gazprom, part German owned, will lose \$4.5 billion from the abandonment of the pipeline. The Federation of German Industries says an energy embargo “threatens to punish Germany and the EU more severely than the aggressor.” High food and energy prices combined with low growth are leading to stagflation, and not just in Germany. Germany’s energy minister has pre-

dicted “mass unemployment, poverty” if his country stops using Russian oil and gas. Inevitably, as *Bloomberg* has pointed out (9/3/22), “Germany has emerged as the main roadblock to broaden European Union sanctions against Russia...” Once it has the military means to resist the US – after its rapid militarisation – Germany will once more become the biggest military power in Europe and potentially the third biggest in the world, threatening Russia directly, but also eventually a potential rival to the US itself.

Both Germany and the US want a weakened Russia they can exploit. Both actively stirred up the Maidan protests using their secret services. But these two competing powers have different interests and use different methods. Germany has traditionally preferred to use economic means to wield its influence and guarantee its supply of cheap labour in eastern Europe, and thus its domination over the EU. The US has dominated Europe above all through its military presence, and now through proxy war.

As for France, Macron’s mediation attempts have shown French imperialism’s equivocal position, both allied with, and seeking autonomy from, the US. France faces the loss of an estimated \$17 billion from the sanctions. Macron said on 7 March 2022 “It is impossible to build a lasting peace if Russia doesn’t participate in building a comprehensive security architecture on our continent... Our responsibility is to preserve all the ties that we can preserve.” Not quite the US line. Tellingly, Total is the only western oil company to have stayed in Russia, unlike Shell and BP. Renault has continued production – along with other French firms. France, which is using the war to increase its defence spending – by 25% this year – wants to lead an enlarged EU army, something it’s been moving towards for years, under NATO’s auspices, but actually to further its own ambitions. Now, with Germany on the



Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, closer allies?

way to becoming a great military power, France will have to fight for its military leadership of Europe. The Franco-German inter-imperialist struggle will play out within the EU.

Meanwhile, the EU as an entity has sent weapons to Ukraine – the first time it has armed a country outside the bloc – and seized the chance to speed up its own militarisation with its new 5,000 strong rapid reaction force. It is also developing a new €5bn European Peace Facility, which allows the EU to export arms and training to other countries, alongside its €40 billion European Defence Fund which is establishing a European military-industrial complex, whose centrepiece is a new European jet fighter.

Russia and sanctions

Turning to Russia, the West has defaulted on its debts and frozen Russia's gold and currency reserves. The US has banned the supply of dollar banknotes, to damage Russia's oil exports which are traded in dollars. The EU has done the same with the Euro. The rouble's value plunged 40% initially but has since recovered. Trade has fallen, although the rise in energy revenues is at the moment offsetting those falls – the oil price has risen and valuable metals have shot up in price too. While not all

Russian banks have been targeted, Sberbank, one of the biggest, and publicly owned, has been shut out of the US banking network, unable to make or receive international dollar payments – the first time a major bank has been targeted like this. Its stock market value has crashed.

Import restrictions will damage Russia's productive capacity. Factories could have to stop production without foreign components. 5 million workers in foreign and mixed-ownership firms – 10% of the workforce – face potential unemployment.

To protect itself, Russia is controlling the outflow of capital and may start paying its external debts in roubles – effectively a default. It has around \$600 billion of foreign exchange reserves, plus large gold reserves. In a conventional financial crisis these reserves would give it autonomy in the face of limited sanctions, as happened in 2014. But now, if it can't access them, it may be in trouble, even though a big portion of its reserves are not in dollars. Russia could be reduced to bartering gold for imports if it can't exchange gold for dollars. Altogether, the freezing of Russia's foreign gold and foreign-exchange reserves represents a huge escalation by the West. It is also the punishment being meted out to Venezuela, Iran and Afghanistan.

Having to defend the rouble's value could quickly drain the country's reserves. The last time it had to do it, during the 2008 financial crisis, it cost it \$200 billion.

Russia could nationalise foreign companies that pull out. But nationalisation doesn't guarantee production, if essential parts are missing. And Russia has appeared to want to keep economics separate from war to a degree – so far even keeping the gas pipeline through Ukraine to Europe flowing throughout the conflict. "Russia's monetary authorities are still playing by western rules, even after Russian foreign exchange reserves were captured by the West," according to Sergey Glazyev (*The Cradle*, 14/4/22).

Relations with China

Trade with China may not plug Russia's economic gap in the short term. Meanwhile, sanctions are giving China leverage over Russia in terms of prices for Russia's energy supplies and other exports.

So far, Russia says it will ensure pensions, benefits and salaries are protected, but that might not prevent mass immiseration, as inflation kicks in.

More broadly, sanctions are speeding up the development of a non-western Russia-China bloc. Bloomberg comments, "Russia's exclusion from the critical global system... could backfire, drive up inflation, bring Russia closer to China and shield financial transactions from Western scrutiny. It could also encourage the development of a SWIFT alternative that could ultimately undermine the supremacy of the US dollar."

Russia has already set up an alternative payment system. Sberbank is issuing Mir bank cards in conjunction with China's UnionPay system. 40% of Russians already have a Mir card and will now be able to use it outside Russia. Russia's largest pri-

vate bank, Alfa Bank, will also issue Chinese UnionPay cards instead of Visa or Mastercard. Russian transactions using the Chinese renminbi have risen exponentially. Perhaps most importantly, Russia and its trade bloc, the Eurasian Economic Union last month agreed to develop a monetary and financial system with China. This marks a clear move away from the dollar.

For China, Russia's decoupling from the West could prove beneficial, so long as the war in Ukraine doesn't escalate. China can now buy up Russian assets too toxic for Western investors, particularly energy. China has relaxed restrictions on imports of Russian wheat, addressing its own food insecurity, while also alleviating the impact of sanctions on Russia. In the future, the new overland Power of Siberia 2 pipeline will allow Russian energy to flow to China, out of reach of the US navy. Right now, though, China may not rush to embrace Russia, for fear of US sanctions. Sinopec, one of China's state-owned energy companies, has suspended a \$500 million deal with Russia for that reason. Huawei, too, reportedly halted sales in Russia and furloughed some staff for fear of sanctions (*Telecoms*, 13/4/22).

Meanwhile, the US is trying to bully China into distancing itself from Russia. So far these attempts have been rebuffed – China has called the US “the culprit and leading instigator of the Ukraine crisis” and criticised the arming of Ukraine. But Chinese capitalists – especially those susceptible to US sanctions – are putting the pressure on. One prominent western-oriented academic, Professor Hu Wei, has argued, for instance, that China shouldn't end up tied to Putin on the wrong side of a new Iron Curtain.

Weaker dollar

De-dollarisation could gather momentum if other countries with big dollar holdings begin exchanging dollars for gold to evade American

punishment for flouting sanctions. As the economic commentator Wolfgang Münchau warned, “For a central bank to freeze the accounts of another central bank is a really big deal... As a direct result of these decisions, we have turned the dollar and the euro, and everything that is denominated in those currencies, into *de facto* risky assets”. India is already setting up a direct rupee-rouble payments system for its trade with Russia. Saudi Arabia is pricing its Chinese oil sales in renminbi rather than dollars.

This de-dollarisation is at an early stage, and the dollar's dominance remains huge, with the euro in second place. But the change points to something significant. If an alternative, non-western bloc does develop, the effect will be to shrink the area of exploitation available to western capital. Martin Wolf in *The Financial Times* said: “What might emerge are two monetary systems — a western and a Chinese one — operating in different ways and overlapping uncomfortably.”

In conclusion, the war has, at least in the short term, united the West and divided Russia from Europe, as part of the American strategy to prepare for war on China. Taiwan will be America's next target. The US has been winning the propaganda war against China just as it has with Russia. It's tearing up its long-held One China policy and the post-WW2 peace treaties – by framing Taiwanese secession as a fight for freedom from tyrannical China – just as it's torn up the agreements made with Russia at the end of the Cold War, provoking the current crisis. Influential US neo-cons are already calling for full recognition of Taiwan and military guarantees if it declares independence, while the US is arming Taiwan and is threatening to station troops there. Meanwhile, Japan is remilitarising too. The influential former Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, is calling for American nuclear weapons to be stationed on Japanese soil, and Japan could potentially join

the AUKUS alliance of the USA, UK and Australia.

While America has benefited from the Ukraine war in the short term, its longer term credibility as the world's superpower has been damaged. The war – coming after failures in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan – has highlighted the limits of US rule. This will only make it more dangerous. We should take Biden seriously when he says: “We are in a competition to win the 21st century, and the starting gun has gone off.” A recent article from the influential Atlantic Council (*Washington Must Prepare for War with Both Russia and China*) made US strategy clear: “The use of Ukraine as a battleground against Russia is part of the US's full-out siege and containment of China.” Biden's recent announcement that the US is prepared to use nuclear weapons first is a worrying sign. After 30 years of unipolarity, American global pre-eminence is no longer assured. Which means it will soon fight for it head-on.

Practical demands

In practical terms, most immediately we should be demanding that Britain stop sending weapons to Ukraine – stop pouring petrol on the flames. In Italy the trade union movement has refused to handle arms shipments – that would be a great advance here. We should also be calling for the restoration of nuclear and pan-European security treaties torn up by the US. Last but not least, we should campaign for Britain to leave NATO and establish an independent peace-oriented foreign policy.

One final point: Ilan Pappé's 4 ironic comments cut through the sanctimonious hypocrisy of the West: “White refugees are welcome; others less so. You can invade Iraq, but not the Ukraine. Sometimes neo-Nazism can be tolerated. Hitting high-rises is only a war crime in Europe.”



Zapolyarnoye oil and gas field, Russia

PHOTO BY CHURSAEV13

SANCTIONS: an act of war

by Alex Davidson

The United States provoked the war in Ukraine and now has clear aims in prolonging it, namely: of severely weakening Russia economically by the imposition of historically unprecedented sanctions; of isolating Russia in all areas of life including culture and sport; of encouraging Russophobia; and of promoting social unrest in Russia with the intention of effecting regime change in order to produce a more compliant regime in Moscow.

The White House spelled it out: "... The United States and more than 30 allies and partners across the world have levied the most impactful, coordinated, and wide-ranging economic restrictions in history. Russia will very likely lose its status as a major economy, and it will continue a long descent into economic, financial, and technological isolation." [1]

The US House of Representatives approved the "Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act" through which the US will provide more armaments to Ukraine over an indefinite period with no re-payments asked for until well into the future. [2] It is questionable if Ukraine could ever pay this money back. (Britain made its final World War 2 Lend-Lease re-payment to the US in 2006). In addition, the Ukrainian government is currently asking the US and

EU for \$7.5 billion per month just to keep paying salaries and pensions. The Lend-Lease Act is separate from the ongoing US effort to send Kiev weapons from the Pentagon stockpile. Biden has already spent \$3.7 billion since February 2022 authorised by Congress for the purpose. The American armaments manufacturers are not complaining. [3]

Western sanctions initially sent the rouble plummeting with it plunging about 30% against the US dollar. However, Russia's central bank moved quickly and increased interest rates (from 9.5% to 20%). This helped to stabilise the rouble and since then it has recovered its value to pre-war levels allowing the Russian central bank to lower interest rates to 17% and then to 14%.

The graph opposite illustrates the rouble's recovery from its low point of 130 roubles to the dollar (early March 2022) to 72 roubles to the dollar (early May 2022).

Gas and oil

The US has been intent on killing Nord Stream 2, designed to bring more gas from Russia to Europe, and to replace it with American Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). The Americans have been working on this for some years and had managed to wean a number of European countries (eg Poland, Lithuania,

Croatia) off Russian gas and get them to start importing American LNG. The US succeeded in getting Germany to shut down Nord Stream 2, one of its early successes in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

However American LNG and other gas suppliers cannot fully replace Russian gas in the short-to-medium term. Europe is currently still importing 40% of its gas from Russia, even during the war, as it has done for decades. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that a complete European ban on Russian oil and gas imports would "clearly" raise global prices and may inflict harm on Europe and other parts of the world. Yellen stated, "It could actually have very little negative impact on Russia, because although Russia might export less, the price it gets for its exports would go up." [4] The high price of gas was already hitting European consumers prior to the war in Ukraine. The price will go even higher with a gas shortage and American gas is far more expensive than Russian. Europe could lose thousands of industrial jobs as businesses curtail output because of energy shortages. The sanctioning of Russian gas will hit the peoples of Europe badly while America will be unaffected. [5]

Russia has said that "unfriendly countries", that is those countries imposing sanctions, must pay for

Russian gas in roubles. Poland and Bulgaria refused and had their gas cut off in April 2022. The EU Commission said on 22 April that European Union companies may be able to comply with Russia's proposed system to pay for gas in roubles without falling foul of the bloc's sanctions against Moscow. "A face-saving compromise may be found. One solution might be for European customers to pay for the gas in euros through Gazprombank, which would, in turn, pay exporter Gazprom in roubles. That solution would also shield Gazprombank, one of Russia's top three lenders by assets, from the imposition of sanctions that would otherwise hobble the financial system. The alternative would be the mutually assured debilitation of Russia and the big European economies dependent on its gas." (Lex, *The Financial Times*, 28 April 2022)

A key issue for Russia is how to make the transition to China as its key gas customer. The new 2600-km pipeline originating in the Russian gas fields in Yamal, in northwest Siberia will reach full capacity in 2024. The interconnector through Mongolia will take 3 years to build so everything will be in place around 2025. And then there's the Arctic LNG 2 project which is even larger than Yamal and is 80% ready.

The EU is proposing to stop importing Russian oil by the end of 2022. With oil prices rising the oil majors

are reporting huge profits: Chevron's have nearly quadrupled and Exxon Mobil earnings have doubled to \$5.5 billion. BP has announced bumper profits (£4.9 bn. in first quarter) although it has written off its \$25 billion stake in the Russian oil giant Rosneft.

India has bought 13 million barrels of Russian crude oil since late February compared with 16 million barrels it bought in the whole of last year. India is one of the many countries which has not adopted sanctions against Russia. India is part of QUAD (the alliance of the US, Australia, Japan and India) directed against China. The US views India as "shaky" on sanctions and is working hard to prise it away from its relationship with Russia built over decades.

The dollar still dominates but...

Afghanistan's \$9 billion reserves were frozen by the US when the Taliban took control and Biden has now ordered that ½ of these be paid as compensation to victims of 9/11. Not surprisingly there were protests across Afghanistan in reaction to this move by the US as the people are starving.

Now some \$300 billion of Russia's foreign currency reserves have been frozen by the US, UK and EU. This is half of Russia's foreign cur-

rency reserves. It is theft by another name: financial warfare. Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations, Zhang Jun, spoke at the UN Security Council and said, "Arbitrary freezes of foreign exchange reserves of other countries also constitute a violation of sovereignty, and is tantamount to weaponizing economic interdependence...Such practices undermine the foundation of world economic stability, and bring new uncertainties and risks to international relations."

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) published a working paper on March 24 titled *The Stealth Erosion of Dollar Dominance: Active Diversifiers and the Rise of Nontraditional Reserve Currencies*. [6] The report documents "...a decline in the dollar share of international reserves since the turn of the century..." with central banks around the world increasingly diversifying their holdings. The study notes that this "...decline in the dollar's share has not been accompanied by an increase in the shares of the pound sterling, yen and euro, other long-standing reserve currencies and units that, along with the dollar, have historically comprised the IMF's Special Drawing Rights." Instead, "...the shift out of dollars has been in two directions: a quarter into the Chinese renminbi, and three quarters into the currencies of smaller countries that have played a more limited role as reserve currencies." The researchers describe this "...evolution of the international reserve system in the last 20 years..." as a "...gradual movement away from the dollar."

In 2000, more than 98% of international foreign exchange reserves were held in the "big four" hegemonic currencies: the US dollar, euro, Japanese yen, and British pound. Less than 2% of reserves were held in what the IMF calls "nontraditional" currencies. But as of 2021, the share of nontraditional currencies had shot up to 10% and there is every indication that this

US DOLLAR RUSSIAN RUBLE (UTC+1)



source: tradingeconomics.com

figure will only keep growing. The IMF's first deputy managing director, Gita Gopinath, made remarks reflecting this historic shift, in a report by *The Financial Times*, (FT) titled *Russia sanctions threaten to erode dominance of US dollar, says IMF*. [7] *The FT* wrote that the crushing Western sanctions imposed on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine "... including restrictions on its central bank, could encourage the emergence of small currency blocs based on trade between separate groups of countries." Gopinath added, "We are already seeing that with some countries renegotiating the currency in which they get paid for trade..."

Western sanctions on Russia have forced Moscow's trading partners to seek alternative payment mechanisms. China and Russia have moved toward boosting their bilateral trade in each other's currencies. Bangladesh has said it is considering using yuan to evade sanctions and continue trading with Russia. India has created an alternative payment mechanism using rupees and roubles, to get around Washington's sanctions.

This weaponization of the dollar has given rise to a feeling in large parts of the world that America cannot be trusted with their dollar reserves. This could be one of the unintended consequences of US sanctions. However, despite these trends the dollar's dominance will stay for a while.

Visa Mastercard out of Russia

After western sanctions were imposed on Russian banks in 2014 Moscow reshaped the country's payments system. Russia built a domestic payment system from scratch as a bulwark against Visa and Mastercard pulling their services again. A National Card Payment System (NCPK) was created to process card transactions in Russia. NSPK launched in 2014 and by 2015 it had signed deals with Mastercard and Visa to handle all

There are a growing number of countries, including Brazil and India, embracing alternative payment networks which could also reduce the power of western sanctions.

domestic payments in the country. In 2015 Russia introduced its own payment card, Mir (Russian for peace or world), which runs on the NSPK's infrastructure. There are now more than 100 million Mir cards in circulation, about one-third of total market share.

Visa and Mastercard suspended their services at the start of March 2022. American Express, PayPal, Japanese card network JCB and Western Union have also suspended services. Russia is now reaping the rewards for creating an alternative payments system that has helped mitigate the effect of these new severe sanctions. Ordinary Russians have not felt much change as domestic transactions operate as normal including for cards bearing the Visa and the Mastercard logos now running through the Russian system.

UnionPay, the Chinese payment card, has a small share of the Russian market but it is now expected to play a much larger role. There are some 9 billion UnionPay cards in circulation, which is half of the global total of bank cards and about 2 billion more than Mastercard and Visa combined.

There are a growing number of countries, including Brazil and India, embracing alternative payment networks which could also reduce the power of western sanctions.

Food crisis

The sanctioning of Russian wheat (largest exporter of wheat with 21% of world exports) and fertilisers (23%) will have a devastating effect on the Developing World already subject to a food crisis. It will be the poorest who will suffer the most. With the increase in wheat prices, Egypt, which is the world's largest importer of wheat, has seen its food prices soar since the war in Ukraine. Brazil and India are the world's largest importers of fertiliser and if these countries were to follow the path of western sanctions it would have a profound effect on their agriculture as Russia and Ukraine are the main producers.

Metals, nuclear and high-tech industries

Many European companies rely on a steady supply of Russian metal exports such as nickel, palladium, copper and chromium. Palladium is vital for carmakers, as it is a critical component in the production of automotive catalytic converters, which clean exhaust fumes in petrol and hybrid vehicles. Russia accounts for 37% of world production of Palladium. The price has increased 13% since the war in Ukraine and is affecting car production costs in the west. Nickel is used in stainless steelmaking but is also an important component for lithium-ion batteries which are needed to power electric cars. Russia is Germany's biggest provider of nickel, accounting for 39% of the country's supply. It also provides around 25% of German imports of palladium, and between 15% and 20% of the heavy metals chromium and cadmium, which have a range of industrial uses.

Russia, the market leader, supplies around 20% of the world's class 1 nickel (99.8% pure). High grade nickel has been in increasingly short supply for a few years now. More advanced electric car batteries store more energy and need

more class 1 nickel. The boom in electric vehicle production around the world has seen demand for nickel surge. [8]

The war in Ukraine saw a 250% rise in one day (8 March) leading to the closure of the London Metals Exchange for six days. It has worried Tesla CEO Elon Musk who said that nickel shortages are the top risk in the production of lithium-ion batteries. He has now bought Twitter.

Although Russia bears the brunt of Western high-tech sanctions, the European Union will also face problems in sectors where it relies on Russian and Ukrainian commodities and technologies. Some nuclear power stations in Europe are exposed, including existing plants that use Russian technology and planned plants with Russian involvement, as supply of both parts and fuel will be affected. Russia provides 30% of enriched uranium, plutonium, nuclear reactors and reactor parts to the EU. There are 18 Russian nuclear reactors in the EU and others were being planned.

Russia and China are technologically behind the US in terms of high-tech although some commodities used in high-tech supply chains are sourced mainly from Russia. The production and development of semi-conductors is monopolised by US firms and they lead the field in the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Research and Development is predominantly tied to military/space development. Drones, satellites and various robotic systems are critical in modern warfare. The development of unmanned, aerial and naval autonomous systems and AI capabilities are the latest weapons of war. The US has some five times the number of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) compared to Russia.

US determined to rule the world

The US rejected any effort to prevent war in Ukraine, did everything to provoke it and will extract whatever advantages they can from its continuation. The Ukrainian people are mere pawns in the US proxy war with Russia. Russia, threatened by the incremental expansion of NATO right up to its border, the eight years of attacks on the Donbas, the ever-closer stationing of US nuclear weapons and the non-implementation of the Minsk Agreements, finally compelled it to react.

Russia is largely self-sufficient in terms of food and energy and in that regard can withstand these unprecedented western sanctions as have other countries (Cuba, North Korea, Venezuela) but it faces a US/NATO enemy determined to continue to rule the world.

[1] The White House, Briefing Room, 6 April 2022

[2] Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022 (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/3522>)

[3] US Department of State, *US Security Cooperation with Ukraine*, Fact Sheet, 24 April 2022 (<https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-ukraine/>)

[4] Agence-France Press (AFP), 21 April 2022

[5] Escobar, Pepe, *Sit back and watch Europe commit suicide: If the US goal is to crush Russia's economy with sanctions and isolation, why is Europe in an economic free fall instead?*, The Cradle, 7 April 2022

[6] IMF Working Paper by Barry Eichengreen (Professor of Economics at University of California) along with IMF economists Chima Simpson-Bell and Serkan Arslanalp. (<https://www.imf.org/en/Search?q=the%20stealth%20erosion%20of%20dollar%20dominance&sort=relevancy>)

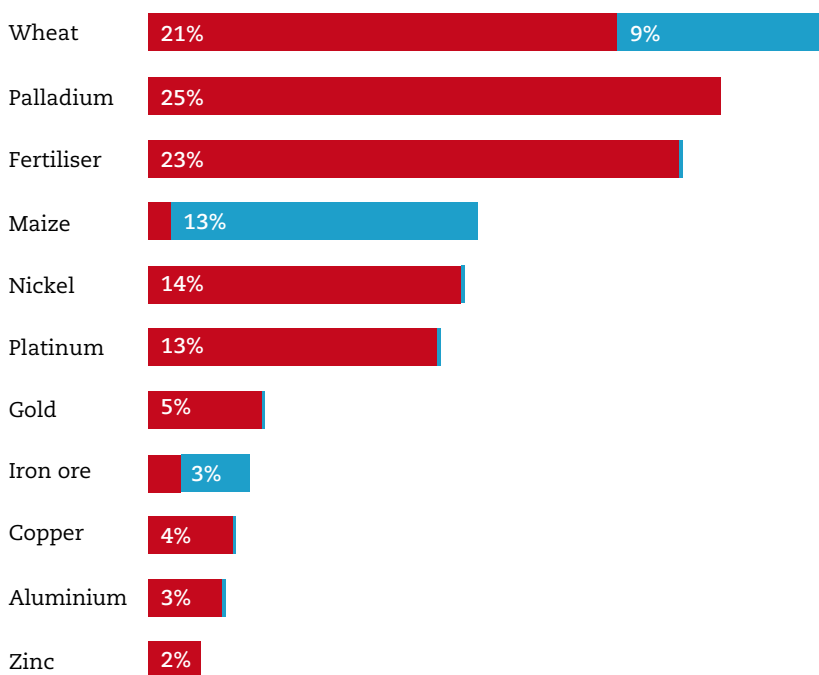
[7] *The Financial Times*, 31 March 2022

[8] *The Wall St. Journal*, 14 March 2022

Datawatch

Reliance on exports from Russia and Ukraine

Proportion of total world exports



Figures for 2020

Chart: The Spectator (7S1cm) • Source: OECD - Economic and Social Impacts and Policy Implications of the War in Ukraine • Created with Datawrapper

UKRAINE

NOT IN THE WESTERN MEDIA

by Gregor Tassie

This article is based on personal experience and what is being reported in the Russian media. [1]

Russia's military intervention in the Ukraine would have been better handled if the Russian Government had put forward a well-presented exposé to the international media of what the Ukrainian regime has been doing to its own population, and the regular shelling of civilian housing in the Donbass over the last 8 years. This could have been used to gain sympathy and understanding of its concerns for Russians living in the Donbass and the security concerns over NATO encroachment eastwards by using all means possible - through the UN, using diplomacy and openly through social media and other means.

Actions by Zelensky's regime include discrimination against the Russian population in the east and south of Ukraine, arrests of political opponents, banning of the Communist Party and banning celebrations of the defeat of fascism on Victory Day, along with mysterious killings of political opponents. It also withdrew the Russian language from schools and banned its use in public discourse. There was 'de-communisation' and the destruction of monuments to Soviet politicians and Army heroes.

All of this has been enforced through the growing influence of neo-Nazi groups in the country, led by Azov, Right-Sector, C14, Svoboda and others who have secured key positions in the state security,



President Zelensky with Prime Minister Boris Johnson

police and armed forces. [2] The Minsk-2 agreement on normalising the dispute over the Donbass should have been the means for achieving cooperation of the UN, and other international bodies, yet NATO and the US ignored this demand in successive negotiations. The final element prompting Russia's military action was certainly the announcement by Zelensky at the Munich Conference that Ukraine would consider acquiring nuclear weapons.

Without this exposé of Ukraine's anti-Russian actions since the western inspired coup in 2014, the information war has been long lost by Russia, with closure of its news outlets and control of the agenda by both western mainstream and social media leaving no room for alternative news or unbiased views. By effectively banning different opinions or information, the Russian view is banned on most

social media sites, which justify this by claiming opponents are just 'Putin's puppets'. In such a major international crisis this 'monopoly of the truth' represents a particularly dark day for a 'free press' in Western countries, and curiously this has been accompanied by increasingly harsher controls in the UK with the 2022 Nationality and Borders Bill, and the proposed "reform" of the Human Rights Act by the Tory government.

News in Russia and the West

How are the Russian people finding out what is happening? Twelve TV stations are broadcasting from Moscow plus dozens more in regions of the country, reporting on the war from both the Donbass and other parts of the country where fighting is ongoing. Most importantly the central TV and radio have regular discussion panels debating aspects

PHOTO COURTESY OF CREATIVE COMMONS

of the conflict covering the military, political, diplomatic and economic issues. Questions are raised about the direction of the war, with new stages developing daily. Additionally, there are many bloggers who have daily podcasts on the war, often discussing questions not raised by other media outlets. It is difficult to find a more open approach, compared to the relentless and aggressive manner in which the western media is handling the war and which has caused 'Russophobia', perhaps the most harmful tendency since the 1930s.

Contrary to Russian broadcasting, the Kiev regime has masterminded the opportunity to propagate the 'human aspects' of the war. On one of the first days of the war, Ukrainian media reported a commander shouting at a Russian naval boat in profane language, after which it was alleged that the Russians shot all the Ukrainian soldiers on the border post on Snake Island. That this strange report came from Kiev was alarming; however, two days later Russian media showed a naval vessel bringing 80 Ukrainian prisoners unharmed into Sevastopol harbour after their surrender on Snake Island. Despite this, the Ukrainians issued a postage stamp to commemorate something that had never happened, creating a 'fake' propaganda image. All the captured Ukrainian troops were allowed to go home.

One of the major attempts at demonising the Russian army was the reporting of 'atrocities' committed by Russian troops in the wealthy upmarket Kiev suburb of Bucha following their withdrawal on 30 March 2022. Videos taken by the Ukrainian army showed the streets free of bodies, and the Bucha mayor smiling in an interview on the following day. [3] It was April 2/3 that photos were taken of bodies with white arm-bands (white or red bands identify Russian troops or supporters, whereas blue or yellow identify Ukrainians) lying dead at various places yet

without any sign of blood. The real facts emerged on 10 April, when a video was shown of dead bodies being moved onto the road by Ukrainian troops using ropes for photo sessions at Bucha. Around the same time on social media there appeared film of Russian prisoners being tortured and shot by neo-Nazi Ukrainian soldiers. Russian technicians recorded Ukrainian security services on intercepted phone conversations discussing finding bodies for a photo shoot at Bucha, and videos have emerged taken by Ukrainian police advising on suitable spots to 'place bodies'. [4] Further suggestions of 'atrocities' have been made in relation to other towns from which the Russians have retreated, but no dead bodies are to be seen on the streets. The rhyming of the very name 'Bucha' with the word 'Butcher' has been used to the maximum as propaganda for the Kiev regime, fitting into the agenda of demonising Putin and Russian troops generally. [5]

In addition, a Ukrainian doctor declared on Kiev TV that he would not be against castrating captured Russian troops in hospitals. More and more videos are emerging of captured Ukrainian soldiers admitting their killings of civilians in the Donbas and elsewhere, one saying on video that he 'was just interested in seeing how she died.' There have been many incidents of Russian troops being tortured in captivity, and a captured TV crew were beaten up before being exchanged. [6] None of these issues has been covered by western media.

Another event fabricated by the Kiev regime was the alleged Russian shelling of the railway station at Kramatorsk, then occupied by Ukrainian troops. More than 50 civilians died when a missile hit the station, but the line of attack showed it was from a Ukrainian-occupied position 40 miles away and the missile was of a type no longer used by Russian troops. Yet this was declared a 'war crime' by Zelensky's propaganda media.

A large prisoner swap in mid-April of 251 soldiers was not carried through by the Ukrainian side, who did not release captured Russian troops after they got their own troops back.

Most significantly, many of the 'atrocities' reported by the Western media are being exposed as fakes. Zelensky told Boris Johnson that Ukraine would not be observing the Geneva Convention on Human Rights of war prisoners. There have also been several attacks on Russian towns near the border, and terrorist attacks well within Russian territory on military targets and villages, causing deaths and injuries. The behaviour by Ukrainian troops seems to underline the neo-Nazi background of today's Ukrainian army and the mercenaries working with them. Little of this is appearing in western media outlets.

The BBC has refused to visit such areas for fear of being accused of becoming 'Putin's' puppets.'



PHOTO BY SEBASTIANDOES

As they gained territory, the Russians discovered US and German documents about long standing chemical labs in Ukraine which were developing lethal weapons including numerous chemical substances some of which were used in experiments on humans. Despite these being shown at the UN and to international authorities, they have been largely ignored or suppressed. This is despite Victoria Nuland, US Under Secretary of State, confirming their presence and US cooperation there.

The presentation of the war in Ukraine is very similar to that of the western media playbook for the war in Syria – accusations of bombing

...Zelensky has stepped up his aggressive talk in interviews and in his speeches to foreign leaders, and has been demanding more weapons, rather than humanitarian aid.

civilians and hospitals, genocide, and the use of chemical weapons. All of these 'events' have been used to facilitate more lethal weapons being sent to Ukraine, with wide public support.

Peace talks frozen

There is some concern in the West, however, about the direction the war is going after the Russian withdrawal from around Kiev, and the failure of the peace talks. Hostile words by Zelensky, the granting of lend-lease armaments by the US, which are free just now but will have to be paid for later by Ukraine, and Josep Borrell's disturbing statement about finishing the war 'on the battlefield' show there is no sincerity from Ukraine or the West regarding peace talks. Statements from western politicians indicate that the war is going to go on for at least a year or more to the end of 2023.

Prospects for peace talks seem frozen currently, as the Ukrainian side reneged on the agreement made at Istanbul to recognise the independence of the Donetsk and Lugansk republics and Russian sovereignty over Crimea, although there remain lines open for exchange of information. Since then Zelensky has stepped up his aggressive talk in interviews and in his speeches to foreign leaders, and has been demanding more weapons, rather than humanitarian aid. It is interesting that the huge amounts of aid given by the EU far exceeds that given to African countries during the Covid pandemic. The problem for the Ukrainian military is that most of these weapons, including tanks and howitzers, are being destroyed as and when they cross the border; even more are being discovered on newly occupied territory, which will now be used by the Russian army instead. Another issue is that the amount of military hardware being given away by the UK and Germany is depleting their own defence capacity which only leads to further military spending. This has been

verified by both British and German government figures. One certain winner from this war are the top US arms companies who will have huge orders in coming years.

Russian opinion

Speaking to Russians from different backgrounds, it would seem that many are concerned about the war, not only those who have relatives in Ukraine, but also those who remember recent conflicts in Chechnya and Syria. Most support the army – a popular slogan is 'Stand by our people' – and many, both young and old, wear the letter Z or Red Star badges to publicly indicate support. One friend of mine was visiting relatives in Ukraine before the war and was not allowed to leave through a 'humanitarian corridor' by people he called 'neo-Nazis'. Following this, he was picked up as a conscript by the neo-Nazis since when we have not heard any more from him. The hope in the West that Putin is being weakened or losing support is baseless because all the main parties are united, from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) to the right-wing LNDRP, the governing United Russia Party and the Orthodox church, and at least 80% of the population. [7] The war has actually increased the level of support for Putin to the high 70s in polling. To date, the war effort has been strongly backed by 30,000 troops from Chechnya, Syria and South Ossetia, with medical support coming from Armenia and Central Asian states.

It was the CPRF that played a decisive role by moving the resolution in the Duma for the recognition of the Donbass republics which got unexpectedly massive support from the other parties. This led to major proposals by the Party for increases in pensions and welfare support being approved by Putin and help for small and medium sized businesses to avoid layoffs. Cash-back schemes were also paid out to people who lost their holidays, as well as emer-

agency flights for Russians stranded abroad when flights were cut off by the EU. There has also been discussion of the possibility of nationalising some of the oligarchs' oil and gas companies. These measures were originally proposed years ago by the CPRF, but now this is a step forward to alleviate the consequences of sanctions. Indeed, sanctions are not having any tangible effect as oil and gas supplies are already en route to countries in Asia.

Many of the Western companies who have abandoned the Russian market will find it hard to gain trust there again as their place will be filled by other companies from Asia and Latin America as well as newly set up Russian companies. The former dependence on US and European passenger aircraft will be replaced by newly built Russian aircraft, and those Boeings and Airbus-

es currently in Russian airports will be nationalised by the government. Despite the attempt to destroy the economy, the bank of Russia stated that it has enough funds in hand to avert any default by western creditors. Several European states have refused to sanction Russia (Hungary and Serbia) and notably Austria and Germany are already stating that carrying through sanctions is going to have grave consequences.

Suggestions have been made that Russia should annex the regions of Kherson and Zaporozhye in the south of Ukraine adjoining Crimea to protect the Russian-speaking population there. Pensions and welfare payments have already been paid out in Kherson. A meeting to discuss annexation to Russia was overwhelmingly passed in Zaporozhye on 20 April. It is becoming clearer that when this conflict

is over, both Russia's and Europe's places in the world order will be quite different, and perhaps US hegemony fatally altered.

[1] Gregor Tassie is fluent in Russian and has strong links with Russia and the former Soviet Union

[2] Understanding Ukrainian Nazism | MR Online

[3] Global lies over Bucha: How people's minds are manipulated. - waronfakes.com

[4] <https://srbin.info/en/svet/sta-se-zaista-dogodilo-u-buci-novinar-raskrinkao-ukrajinsku-provokaciju/?ysclid=1280nv381a>

[5] The provocation in Bucha as an excuse for the Western intervention | Katehon think tank. Geopolitics & Tradition

[6] Execution of Russian POWs by AFU and Georgian fighters on March 30 (Video 21+) South Front

[7] Latest Russian Polls: Attitudes Toward Ukraine War, Sanctions, Protests, Emigrating | Russia Matters

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Britain stokes the fires of war in Ukraine



PHOTO BY STUART HILL

New Light Anti Tank Weapon of the type supplied to Ukraine

by Milly Cunningham

During a visit to India on 21/22 April 2022, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson told journalists: ‘We are currently training Ukrainians in Poland in the use of anti-aircraft defence, and actually in the UK in the use of armoured vehicles.’ 120 armoured vehicles had been supplied to the Ukrainian armed forces by the UK.

As reported by the BBC, *The Mirror* and *The Daily Mail*, on 23 April a Russian intelligence source told RIA Novosti that at least two teams from the UK’s elite Special Air Service (SAS) forces had arrived at a military base near Lviv in western Ukraine, travelling from ‘the city of Hereford in the UK, where SAS headquarters is located’. The source described each group as consisting of eight to ten officers, specialising in sabotage, guerrilla warfare, and the recruitment of agents in hos-

tile territory (in other words, areas controlled by the Russian military), adding, ‘These aren’t ordinary special forces. They’re intellectuals. In each group there is always an ideologist – a professor of sorts – and the rest are experts in their specific areas’. [1] [2]

Russia’s Investigative Committee said it would look into media reports of the arrival of the SAS teams, especially considering that SAS forces have established themselves as ‘experts in organising mass protests, assassinations of political figures as well as preparing terrorist attacks’. RT’s view of the SAS: ‘When deployed in conflict areas, SAS sabotage teams usually operate under the guise of medical or humanitarian workers, including the White Helmets’. [2] This group, founded by British military officer James Le Mesurier, became renowned for their faked videos of alleged atrocities by the Syrian armed forces.

Talks about British arms sales to Ukraine seem to have started in October 2021. *Army Technology* web site quotes *The Times*: ‘The UK government is reportedly holding talks in Ukraine on their first weapons deal...said to represent the first time the UK had sold weapons to an eastern European country...The talks are over the supply of maritime Brimstone missiles and air-to-surface Brimstone missiles for Ukrainian vessels [and] also cover the supply of missiles for aircraft... The UK has only provided Kyiv with training and non-lethal equipment in the past.’ [3]

Forces Net gave further details of the weaponry the UK was supplying to Ukraine. It reported (17/1/22): ‘The Defence Secretary confirmed the first weapons systems arrived in Ukraine today... “A small number of UK personnel will provide early stage training for a short period of time, within the framework of Op-

eration Orbital, before returning to the UK,” Ben Wallace told MPs.’ [4] Operation Orbital is the British programme to train Ukrainian forces.

On 25 February the site reported ‘The NLAW – next generation light anti-armour weapon – has a reach of up to 1 kilometre and has been supplied to Ukraine by the UK’. [5] On the supplies of NLAW, Wikipedia quoted various sources: ‘Preceding the...Russian invasion of Ukraine, the UK supplied 2,000 NLAW systems to Ukraine, with another 1,615 delivered by 9 March 2022...On 24 March 2022, the UK pledged to deliver a further 6,000...NLAWs were the most numerous and advanced guided anti-tank missile in Ukraine as of April 2022...The unit cost is US\$30,000 – 40,000.’ [6]

Alongside these weapons, the government was sending additional Javelin anti-tank systems; loitering munitions, which hover over the battlefield before attacking their target; Starstreak air defence systems; as well as ballistic helmets, body armour and night vision goggles. [7]

The International Donor Coordination Centre in Stuttgart was established with servicemen and women from the British Army 104 Logistic Support Brigade, following the first International Donor Conference convened by Defence Secretary Ben Wallace. This was on 25 February - a day after the Russian military intervention started. In April there was a Second International Donor Conference where the UK brought together more than 35 international partners.

In early April, senior officials from the Ministry of Defence hosted a Ukrainian delegation on Salisbury Plain to demonstrate UK equipment which will contribute to future planned support packages. The report added: ‘The UK has a deep and longstanding bilateral defence relationship with Ukraine and since 2015 has trained over 22,000 as part of Operation Orbital and the UK-led Maritime Training Initiative.’ [8] As

well as armoured vehicles, Britain planned to send new anti-ship missile systems. The Prime Minister had also announced ‘a further £100 million worth of kit for Kyiv, including anti-tank and anti-aircraft weaponry’, and guaranteed an additional £385million in World Bank lending to Ukraine, taking total UK loan guarantees to £770million. [9] Defence Secretary Ben Wallace indicated on a visit to Romania on 8 April that the heavily armoured vehicles would be Mastiff six-wheel-drive patrol vehicles. [10]

What are the weapons? Arms manufacturers profit from war.

The Mastiff patrol vehicle carries eight troops plus two crew. It is currently on its third variation – no report on whether this is the type supplied to Ukraine. It is armed with the latest weapon systems, including a general purpose machine gun, a heavy machine gun or an automatic grenade launcher. Mastiffs are manufactured by the US company *Force Protection Inc.* In an original order the UK Ministry of Defence bought about 108, worth about £35m – these vehicles were deployed in Iraq during December 2006. During 2007 the Ministry of Defence announced the purchase of another 140 Mastiffs in a contract worth around £100m. [11] Mastiff 2 was deployed in Afghanistan from 2009. [12]

Wikipedia provides further details about some of the weaponry being supplied by the UK to Ukraine. The NLAW was developed in Sweden by Saab Bofors Dynamics on behalf of the British and Swedish defence authorities who bought the system in a joint venture. It is mainly produced in the UK by Team MBT LAW UK, which includes 14 subcontractors, most notably Thales Air Defence, formerly Shorts Missile Systems, a joint venture between a French and a British firm which in 2000 became solely owned by

‘The UK has a deep and longstanding bilateral defence relationship with Ukraine and since 2015 has trained over 22,000 as part of Operation Orbital and the UK-led Maritime Training Initiative’.

the French firm. [6] Starstreak is a short-range man-portable air-defence system also manufactured by Thales. Nicholas Drummond, a defence industry consultant, posted on Twitter (14/8/20) that the cost of Starstreak was £100,000 per missile, with the cost per engagement £1,800 (five to six rounds at £300 per round).

The Brimstone missile was used extensively in Afghanistan and Libya. It was developed by MBDA UK for Britain's air force. The cost per missile was quoted as £175,000 each in 2015. Brimstone is a 'fire-and-forget' missile which is loaded with targeting data by the weapon systems officer prior to launch. [6] It was also deployed by the RAF on the Tornado jets that attacked Syria in 2015. [13]

MBDA, a developer and manufacturer of missiles and missile systems, is a joint venture between Airbus, Leonardo, and BAE Systems. Its headquarters are in Le Plessis-Robinson, France. The joint venture is 37.5% BAE Systems, 37.5% Airbus, and 25% Leonardo. Airbus Defence and Space has its corporate headquarters in Ottobrunn, Germany, has a presence in 35 countries, employs 40,000 people from 86 nationalities and contributes to 21% of Airbus revenues. Leonardo is an Italian transnational headquartered in Rome. It is the eighth largest defence contractor in the world based on 2018 revenue. The Italian government holds 30.2% of the company's shares and is its largest shareholder.

BAE Systems is a British transnational arms, security, and aerospace company based in London. It is the largest arms contractor in Europe, and ranked seventh largest in the world based on applicable 2021 revenues. As of 2017, it is the biggest manufacturer in Britain. Its largest operations are in the UK and US, where its BAE Systems Inc. subsidiary is one of the six largest suppliers to the US Department of Defence. In 2017, 98% of BAE Systems'

total sales were military related. BAE Systems is indirectly engaged in production of nuclear weapons. Through its share of MBDA it is involved with the production and supply of the ASMP missile, an air-launched nuclear missile which is part of France's nuclear stock. The company is also the UK's only nuclear submarine manufacturer and thus produces a key element of the UK's nuclear weapons force. BAE Systems is the main supplier to the UK Ministry of Defence. In the year ended 31 December 2021, its turnover was £19,521 million, its profit before tax £2,110 million, its net profit £1,912 million, and its earnings per share 55.2 pence, up from 40.7 pence at the end of December 2020. [6]

[1] General accuses Boris Johnson of disclosing military secrets, RT, 23/4/22

[2] Russia to investigate alleged SAS activities in Ukraine, RT, 23/4/22

[3] UK reportedly in talks to sell weapons in first arms deal with Ukraine, *Army Technology*, 21/10/21

[4] UK providing light anti-armour defensive weapons to Ukraine amid Russian tensions, *Forces Net*, 17/1/22

[5] Ukraine: Russian tanks destroyed by UK weapons, *Forces Net*, 25/2/22

[6] *Wikipedia*, quoting a range of sources

[7] UK to bolster defensive aid to Ukraine with new £100m package, *gov.uk*, 8/4/22

[8] UK Defence Ministers host Ukrainian government to plan future military aid, *gov.uk*, 7/4/22

[9] Britain to supply Ukraine with 120 armoured vehicles, *Forces Net*, 10/4/22

[10] Britain will send armoured vehicles to bolster Ukraine's fightback against Russia, *The Telegraph*, 8/4/22

[11] Mastiff 2 Force Protection Vehicle, *armedforces.co.uk*

[12] Mastiff 2 Protected Patrol Vehicle, *Army Technology*, 9/9/09

[13] Brimstone Missile Joins Syria War as UK hits Islamic State, Benjamin D. Katz, *Bloomberg*, 3/12/15

Militarisation of Europe peace movement needed more than ever...

by Arthur West

There was a worrying development in the European Union's military role in March 2021. In what could probably be described as a watershed moment for its Defence policy, EU Foreign Ministers agreed to create a fund to allow the EU to send aid and military equipment all over the world. The money for these arms and military equipment comes from a so-called European Peace Facility budget heading. This fund is financed through contributions from member states. It is intended that €5 billion will be available in the fund to be spent in the years up to 2027.

The measure met with stinging criticism from Hannah Neumann MEP who is a foreign policy spokesperson for the Greens in the European Parliament. She said: "This so called European Peace Facility will allow the EU to export lethal weapons around the globe, including to conflict regions."

The funds being made available to this new budget heading are being kept separate from the EU's main seven-year budget to get round the bloc's rules against spending its budget on weapons.

At the end of February 2022 it was being reported that through this so-called Peace Facility the European



Peace campaigner Bruce Kent

Union will provide Ukraine with £500 million in arms and aid. According to European Union Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell £450 million of the money being provided to Ukraine will be for lethal arms. While the much smaller amount of £50 million will be provided for non-lethal supplies such as fuel and protective equipment.

Many supporters of the EU would argue that it is an organisation which can provide a path to a more peaceful world through promoting trade and cultural links. However, the creation of this so-called Peace Facility seems to be a cover for increased involvement of the bloc in a military role. It could also, as organisations such as Oxfam have warned, risk fuelling conflict and human rights abuses around the world.

A peaceful world

There is now a case for looking to other organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to

provide a way forward to a more peaceful world. The OSCE is the largest security-oriented organisation in the world and has observer status at the UN. Its mandate includes involvement in issues such as promoting arms control, human rights and freedom of the press. It can also play a role in supervising fair and free elections. The organisation employs 3500 people and has its secretariat in Vienna. It has 57 participating states that includes both Russia and the US.

A progressive and sensible option for Scotland and the UK in these post Brexit times might be to support and help strengthen the role of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. It would provide a refreshing alternative to being involved in the increasing military direction of the EU.

Perhaps one of the tasks which could be remitted to the OSCE could be to set up a Europe wide consultation to begin the difficult task of drawing up a new common security

framework for the whole of Europe. This might seem unlikely given the current unimaginative and narrow positions being adopted by political parties across Europe in relation to building a peaceful and stable world.

The tragic war in Ukraine and the continuing conflicts in places such as Palestine, Yemen and Western Sahara makes the world a depressing place. According to Amnesty International there at least 26 million refugees in the world fleeing war, climate change and poverty. This is why it is necessary for the Peace Movement not only to campaign on issues such as nuclear weapons and increased military spending - it must provide ideas for resolving conflicts without recourse to violence and war.

Movement for the Abolition War (MAW) which was founded in 2001 and whose first chair was legendary Peace Campaigner Bruce Kent says that security for people should be understood in holistic terms of human and planetary well-being. The organisation seeks to persuade governments and organisations to diversify from arms manufacture and military spending towards peaceful technologies and away from the use of wars to resolve conflicts and tensions between nations. It seems to me that organisations like Movement for the Abolition of War and the wider Peace Movement are currently needed more than ever.

It is about time more politicians followed the example of former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and started making deep and meaningful links with the Peace Movement across the UK

Arthur West is former chair of Scottish CND and member of the Movement for the Abolition of War.

NATO

A DANGER TO PEACE AND SECURITY

by Pat Turnbull

The former President of Bolivia, Evo Morales is organising an international campaign to dissolve NATO (Telesur 10/3/22). 'NATO is a danger to world peace, to security, so we are in the task of reaching agreements with social movements, not only in Latin America, but in all continents, to eliminate it. If nothing is done against NATO, it will be a permanent threat to humanity,' he said. Morales also pointed a finger at the United States, the prime mover and beneficiary of NATO, saying, 'The US always provokes wars to sell its weapons, interventions, military bases, to take over natural resources.' [1]

Aggressive alliance

There is plenty of evidence that NATO is an aggressive alliance, and not the defensive body it always claims to be.

Since promising Gorbachev not to move any further east than the German border, NATO has expanded steadily eastwards to include 14 more states in central and eastern Europe, including the three former Baltic Soviet republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, so that its forces now stand on Russia's borders. This expansion was at a time when Russia was either weakened by the chaos following the dissolution of the USSR, or suing for peaceful cooperation, even membership, of NATO. So using the Russian military intervention in Ukraine as an excuse for further co-opting Finland and Sweden cuts no ice.

NATO broke the post-World War II peace in Europe. On March 24, 1999,

US-led NATO forces bypassed the United Nations Security Council and began the 78-day bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 12,000 strikes, over 10,000 tonnes of explosives were dropped and more than 3,000 missiles fired, targeting everything from medical facilities to residential buildings and schools. At least 2,500 civilians were killed. During the bombing, NATO used depleted uranium bombs prohibited by international conventions.

China is one of NATO's main targets. Three Chinese journalists were killed in the bombing of Yugoslavia, when NATO bombs struck the Chinese embassy. In the words of Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Wang Wenbin: 'Born out of the Cold War, NATO serves no other purpose than war. It has never contributed to peace and security of our world and will never do so. All those who truly love peace and are committed to advancing peace will resolutely reject NATO's continued expansion.' [2] Russia is another chief target of NATO. On 19 March, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov recalled further NATO aggression: 'NATO also acted in Iraq without a United Nations Security Council resolution. In Libya, it did have a resolution, but it only covered establishing a no-fly zone...NATO bombed all the army positions from the air, which the UN Security Council did not warrant, and brutally killed Muammar Gaddafi without trial or investigation...Now Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has declared that NATO must bear global responsibility...So, NATO is ready to 'defend itself' in the South China Sea...A really unusual type of defence.' [3]

Nuclear alliance

NATO is a nuclear alliance, and an instrument for the enforcement of United States hegemony in an increasingly multipolar world. It puts Europe on the front line mainly in the interests of the United States.

In November 2021 NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg spoke at the Nuclear Policy Symposium. Blaming the Russians and Chinese he said: 'As long as [nuclear weapons] exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance...We are working to enhance the resilience, responsiveness, and effectiveness of our nuclear forces. The strategic forces of the Alliance form the foundation of NATO's nuclear deterrence. Particularly those of the United States. They are the supreme guarantee of Allied security. The United States' nuclear weapons forward-deployed in Europe are the most tangible demonstration of this. The independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France have a deterrent role of their own, and contribute significantly to the overall security of the alliance. Other Allies also provide important capabilities and infrastructure, like dual-capable aircraft, in support of NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements.... they have helped prevent further nuclear proliferation in Europe'. [4]

Steadfast Noon, NATO's so-called 'annual deterrence exercise' began on 18 October 2021, and involved dozens of planes and 14 NATO countries. This year the bases used for the drills were Aviano AB and Ghedi, in Italy. [5] These airbases house an estimated 15 and 20 United States B61-3/-4 gravity bombs respectively. More bombs are de-

ployed in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Turkey. The US is developing the more accurate B61-12, which will replace all existing gravity bombs and was scheduled to have the first production unit completed in late 2021. 'Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands are in the process of acquiring the new F-35A fighter jet, which conducted in September its final flight test to complete the nuclear design certification process and ensure compatibility with the B61-12...The aircraft do not carry live bombs during the exercise flights.' [6]

It is stretching the claim of preventing nuclear proliferation pretty far to include five European countries in storing US atomic bombs, and include 14 European countries in drills to deliver them. Europe is on the front line of the risk of nuclear conflict. The USA, which controls the use of the nuclear weapons, is far in the rear.

It may be argued that no one would be so insane as to genuinely consider deploying nuclear weapons. But the United States has considered it. Walter Pincus reports that the US has roughly 150 nuclear bombs stored in the five European countries. Referring to Presidential Oral Histories, a collection of interviews with former US government ministers, he says: 'The issue of possibly using US tactical nuclear weapons came up in late 1990 as the US was preparing Operation Desert Storm to push Saddam Hussein's Iraqi troops out of Kuwait.

'As [Dick] Cheney [then Secretary of Defence] put it when questioned at the Miller Centre in March 2000, "If he [Saddam] uses biological or chemical agents against our troops, all bets are off and we reserve the right to use any means at our disposal to respond...The threat clearly was that we'd use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons." Cheney went on, "I said, I want to know how many tactical nuclear weapons will it take to destroy a division of

the Iraqi Republican Guard...I found out it takes 17 weapons".

US Secretary of State James Baker also used the threat of use of nuclear weapons in a conversation with Tariq Aziz, Saddam Hussein's closest adviser, in January 1991. 'Baker said, "Based on the real-time example of how such a threat really worked to protect our troops, the Obama 2010 Nuclear Posture Review made a mistake when it said it would only use conventional weapons against a non-nuclear state that employed chemical or biological weapons.'" [7]



Former President of Bolivia Evo Morales

Threats have also been issued in relation to the current conflict in Ukraine. On 24 February Reuters reported the words of French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian on French television TF1: 'I think that Vladimir Putin must also understand that the Atlantic alliance is a nuclear alliance,' words most likely to have prompted the Russian decision to put their forces on nuclear alert. [8]

Europe – the frontline

NATO has always been a threat to peace in the image of its creator, the United States. The United States is the only country to have dropped nuclear bombs, on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. In November 1945 US plan 329 envisaged a nuclear strike

against 20 targets in the Soviet Union, its recent ally in the battle against Nazi Germany. In December 1945 plan 432/D provided for hitting the USSR with 196 atomic bombs. In 1949, under the Dropshot plan the United States was to use 300 nuclear bombs against the Soviet Union.

Europe has always been the US's front line. In March 1948 the Western European Union (WEU) was set up, a closed and exclusive military bloc made up of Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. A supreme allied command was established under British Field Marshall Montgomery. The WEU had full US support. This was the first post war military bloc, set up in the teeth of repeated Soviet efforts to maintain a peaceful united Europe.

Early in 1949 the Soviet Union proposed a joint declaration renouncing war against each other as a means of resolving international disputes, to conclude a Peace Pact, and begin gradual disarmament. The western response was that on 4 April 1949, in Washington, twelve countries – the US, Canada, Great Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Portugal - signed the North Atlantic Treaty. On 5 April The Wall Street Journal named it 'the triumph of jungle law over international cooperation on a world scale.' The Soviet government sent a memo on 31 March to some of the governments that would be party to the treaty: 'This is a clearly aggressive treaty aimed against the USSR, a fact even officials of the parties to the Treaty admit in their public statements.' The US got down to setting up 429 large and 3,400 smaller military bases worldwide, most of them round the Soviet Union, including tactical nuclear weapons and the bases from which they could be used.

After the Federal Republic of Germany had been made a NATO

PHOTO BY ENFASMX

member, on 11-14 May 1955, the USSR, Poland, Bulgaria, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and Albania held a conference in Warsaw and signed a defensive treaty – the Warsaw Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. It was dissolved in July 1991 – but NATO continues.

Peaceful cooperation

The high point of peaceful cooperation in post-war Europe was the 1970s, eventually scuppered by the US and NATO. The 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, held in March and April 1971, advanced a comprehensive peace programme. Treaties between the USSR and other socialist countries were signed with the Federal Republic of Germany, and the German Democratic Republic was internationally recognised as a sovereign state. Years of hard work in the teeth of opposition from the warmongers in NATO finally achieved a summit conference of 33 European countries plus the United States and Canada in Helsinki. The final act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was signed in Helsinki on 1 August 1975. It included ten important principles such as sovereign equality, refraining from the threat or use of force, territorial integrity of states, and peaceful settlement of disputes. Cooperation among states should improve the well-being of peoples and aid in the narrowing of differences in the levels of economic development. Steps were to be taken towards the ultimate achievement of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

However, powerful forces in the United States and other NATO countries saw that an end to the arms race would deprive them of their super profits and launched a campaign against détente, and against the Helsinki accords. In March 1978 US President Carter, no

doubt advised by Zbigniew Brzezinski, his assistant for national security affairs, announced a reappraisal of the US military strategy, shifting the emphasis once more to threats and build-up of tensions. In August 1980 he issued his Directive 59, essentially proclaiming ‘limited nuclear war’ as a means of attaining the US’s imperial goals and stipulating a first strike against targets in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. This flew in the face of the 1972 adoption, by an overwhelming majority of the 27th United Nations General Assembly, of the Soviet-sponsored ‘Resolution on the Non-Use of Force in International Relations and Perpetual Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons’.

The December 1975 session of the North Atlantic Council concentrated mainly on arms production, specifically on standardisation. The May 1977 North Atlantic Council summit agreed on 140 steps to enhance western preparedness for war. A North Atlantic Council session held in Washington in May 1978 approved a special comprehensive rearmament programme worth 80 billion dollars and scheduled to last 15 to 20 years. The aim for military superiority to dictate to independent states was completely at variance with the Helsinki Final Act.

At its December 1979 session the meeting of foreign and defence ministers of the NATO countries, clearly under pressure from Washington, approved plans to produce and deploy in Western Europe new US medium-range missiles targeted on the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries. The missiles were deployed in the Federal Republic of Germany, Great Britain, and Italy, and subsequently in Belgium and the Netherlands. On the same day as these plans were approved, President Carter announced a broad programme of further US military build-up, including the creation of NATO’s Quick Reaction Alert Force for operations beyond the NATO region. In 1980 the US

began the manufacture of cruise missiles, and the Trident system of nuclear submarines.

In May 1980 the Warsaw Treaty Political Consultative Committee declared: ‘If the decision [to produce and deploy new US medium-range missiles in Western Europe] is carried out the situation on the European continent will sharply worsen, since a growth of destructive potential in Europe will inevitably affect the political climate and the vital interests of the peoples of the continent, [and] will entail new huge expenditures which will lay a still heavier burden on the peoples.’ [10] This is as true today as it was then. The governments of Europe need to start to consider the real needs of their populations and not the war-like demands of NATO. People the world over should rally to Evo Morales’s call: ‘Dissolve NATO!’

[1] Evo Morales: NATO is a threat to the world; must be dissolved, Telesur, 10/3/21

[2] Wang Wenbin: NATO serves no other purpose than war, Friends of Socialist China

[3] Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov: Leaders of Russia Management Competition, Moscow, March 19, 2022

[4] Speech by Jens Stoltenberg at the Nuclear Policy Symposium, NATO web site, 2/11/21

[5] Steadfast Noon 2021, Airshow Stuff, 21/10/21

[6] NATO concludes annual nuclear exercise, Arms Control Association, December 2021

[7] Why NATO is practising Nuclear Strike Missions, Walter Pincus, The Cipher Brief, 29.10.21

[8] France says Putin needs to understand NATO has nuclear weapons, Swissinfo, 24.2.22

[9] US outlines the step that may cost Putin an ‘astronomical’ price, RT, 22.4.22

[10] Danger: NATO, Anatoly Grishchenko, Vladimir Semenov, Leonid Teplinsky, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1985

TIMELINE OF NATO AGGRESSION

1990

Reunification of Germany. Gorbachev is assured that NATO will expand no further east

1991

The end of the Soviet Union

1991

Slovenia and Croatia declare formal independence from Yugoslavia, and recognise each other

1992

15 January. The 12 members of the European Community, prompted by Germany, recognise Slovenia and Croatia. The break-up of Yugoslavia is underway

1999

NATO launches its bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which lasts 78 days. At least 2,500 civilians die

1999

The Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary join NATO

2000

Yugoslav 'colour revolution' ousts President Milosevic

2001

NATO for the first time invokes its collective defence clause. The war on Afghanistan begins. 176,000 will die (Costs of War Project)

2003

US/UK war on Iraq begins. Roughly a million will die (Opinion Research Business poll)

2004

Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania join NATO. The last three are former Soviet republics directly on Russia's border

2004

'Colour revolution' in Ukraine

2008

War in Georgia. Georgia has a 556 mile border with Russia

2008

NATO agrees that Georgia and Ukraine will become members

2009

Albania and Croatia join NATO

2011

NATO war on Libya. In 2020 a UN envoy will describe the continuing effects on civilians as 'incalculable'

2011

War on Syria begins. This involves NATO members, particularly the USA. At least 350,000 will die (UN figures). Russia will intervene in support of Syria

2013

Croatia joins the European Union bringing its total membership to 27

2014

'Colour revolution' in Ukraine. Donetsk and Lugansk declare independence. Up to 14,000 civilians will die there in military attacks in the coming years

2014

Crimea secedes from Ukraine to Russia after an overwhelming referendum decision

2014

Minsk agreement signed - never implemented by Ukraine

2017

Montenegro joins NATO

2019

Ukraine includes membership of NATO in its constitution

2020

North Macedonia joins NATO

2020

Attempted 'colour revolution' in Belarus. Belarus has a border of 770 miles with Russia

2020

Defender 2020 NATO military exercises in Europe, focused on Germany, Poland and the Baltic



Cruise missile being launched from USS Philippine Sea 31/3/99 aimed at a target in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

PHOTO BY RICHARD ROSSER

2021

Defender 2021 NATO military exercises in Europe, focused on the Black Sea and the Balkans. 'One of the largest US Army led military exercises in decades' (Army Times, 15/3/21). Ukraine and Georgia are participants

2021

December. Russia presents a proposal for a Ukraine which will never join NATO and will recognise the independence of Donetsk and Lugansk

2022

January. Collective Security Treaty Organisation responds to request for support from Kazakhstan to combat a terrorist threat. Kazakhstan has a border of 4,750 miles with Russia, the longest continuous international border in the world

2022

February 24. Russia launches military campaign for 'demilitarisation' and 'denazification' of Ukraine. Ukraine has a border of 1,426 miles with Russia

2022

Defender Europe 2022. It is announced in May 2021 that Ukraine will participate.

NATO'S literary fiction

‘so the reader may better understand’

by Clare Bailey

During the Trump presidency there was open talk of NATO's days being numbered. Trump announced it was obsolete, repeatedly threatened to pull the US out of the alliance altogether and accused other members of freeloading. The American deep state, however, was through those years busy planning NATO's immediate future. One of the imperatives was the need for still greater freedom of manoeuvre, and central to achieving this aim was the need to abandon the official pretence that NATO is a 'defensive alliance' and to redefine it as a global 'security alliance'.

Fictional intelligence

Inside a wing of NATO's operations known as the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) is something called the 'Innovation Hub', a site where ideas and 'scenarios' are tested in the public domain. It's a strange place on NATO's website, offering space and plausibility to right-wing academics, hawkish 'visionaries' and pseudo-theoreticians, some of whom transfer to other platforms like Twitter to do NATO's work.

Two years ago the Hub was trying out fiction as a means of producing and trialing the language and rationale for this significant move to be openly offensive, a decision we can now see being aired publicly by officials, for example, in Liz Truss the UK Foreign Secretary's Mansion House speech on April 27th 2022, 'We need a global NATO', she told her City of London audience, 'ready to tackle global threats. We need to pre-empt threats in the Indo-Pacific... we must ensure democra-



cies like Taiwan are able to defend themselves.' [1]

It's not surprising to find public versions of NATO's internal deliberations on its public access website, nor is the use of art forms by the US propaganda machine anything new – the CIA and the Pentagon have a longstanding relationship with Hollywood, for example. What is interesting in this instance is the co-opting of the short story into NATO's arsenal as FICINT – Fictional Intelligence. In the Foreword to a document called *Cognitive; a 6th domain of operations*, [2] presenting three interconnected stories and a rationale for the use of fiction, the Supreme Commander of Allied Command Transformation calls science fiction 'visionary literature'. He goes on to define its purpose as inspiring 'product design' (aka weapons of the future) and 'fostering the transformational thinking the Alliance needs [in order] to adapt.'

The subject of these stories published in 2020 was the redefinition of NATO's role in the light of what it terms threats from enemies. They are co-authored by two writers with an interest in science and war fiction (one of whom also works as a

senior fellow at the Brent Scowcroft Center on Strategy and Security at the Atlantic Council, while the other is an EU-NATO liaison with expertise in the 'weaponisation of neurosciences'). The stories are set in 2028 and dramatise war games and an urgent conversation between two NATO officials, one on the way to deliver a key speech, the other a scientist with important truths about the Human Domain to impart. According to the authors, the use of character and story is, 'so the reader may better understand' the ideas. In wooden dialogue one character explains to the other: 'NATO's main issue is its positioning, positioning between being a defense actor or being a security actor. Everything else, short, middle and long term threats stem from this existential question.'

6th domain of warfare

There's nothing new in NATO using fiction you might say, NATO's entire identity has been a fiction since its inception in 1949, when it described itself as a collective defence against communist aggression. And yet as many have sensed there is something new going on since NATO at last succeeded in provoking Russia

to act in Ukraine. The propaganda war being waged alongside the physical war has a character and intensity we have not seen before. The campaign, coordinated across all media and all NATO members, has been seamless and relentlessly exclusive of critical dissent. The priming of internet and social media activists has been integral. Everything was ready for this.

The ACT Commander talked about adaptation. The adaptation NATO must undertake as the armed expression of US imperialism is to a world in which that system of domination is facing its own decline. In the FICINT story, set, remember, in 2028, it is adapting to a world in which ‘enemies’ are bent on destroying Western democracy, where ‘committed minorities’ undermine from within, as the scientist explains:

‘...the adversary was a European non-state movement calling itself Libertas. It had shifted forms at this acute moment of crisis it generated. It’s goal was to accelerate

the breakup of 20th century alliances and national boundaries in Europe that it believes are going to repeat the conflicts that ravaged Europe during the prior century. The group has been active since the early 2020s, recruiting people through programs like the Erasmus scholars initiative.’

And, he goes on to say, ‘...we are not good at identifying “committed minorities”, these communities of zealots scattered around the world, focusing on our vulnerabilities and targeting our centers of gravity, threatening individual nations and international organizations such as NATO.’

A character called Dekker discovers his daughter has been caught up in the snares of Libertas:

‘The wrist cuffs on Dekker’s suit tightened, calling his attention to new information he needed to see. It was a deeper dive into Corinne’s social networks. The analysis and calculations were complex but the spherical-shaped model’s conclu-

sion was simple: Libertas had been influencing his daughter’s digital existence on everything from the movies she loved to the friends she thought she chose. This had been going on for over eight years.’

As NATO trains its sights on China, the effort to co-opt and control every area of our lives will intensify. Everything, short stories and all, will be put to use in the creation of the ‘complete data picture’ NATO is pursuing. After land, air, sea, cyber and space, the Human Domain is, in NATO’s words, “the 6th domain of warfare” [3] – and our languages and stories are its circulatory systems.

[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretarys-mansion-house-speech-at-the-lord-mayors-easter-banquet-the-return-of-geopolitics>

[2] <https://www.innovationhub-act.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/ENG%20version%20v6.pdf>

[3] <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/05/20/countering-cognitive-warfare-awareness-and-resilience/index.html>

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GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

by Marianne Hitchen

Stark warnings are being issued from all quarters about an impending global food crisis. The World Bank says food prices could jump by 37% (BBC 21/4/22) and, as with the coronavirus pandemic, this will hit the working class everywhere the hardest.

War in Ukraine, combined with Western sanctions against Russia, rising inflation and the effects of the pandemic and climate change on global economies, are widely pre-

are major producers of wheat and sunflower oil, goods which are heavily imported by Middle Eastern countries. The biggest importers of these foods are Egypt (\$3bn), Turkey (\$1.5bn), Indonesia (\$603m), Bangladesh (\$525m), Nigeria (\$394m) and Yemen (\$317m) (*Aljazeera* 29/3/22). It is estimated that war in Ukraine has disrupted the export of one third of the world's wheat.

According to Tewodros Mekonnen, economist at the International Growth Centre, countries such as Ghana, Ethiopia and Kenya are al-

War in Ukraine, combined with Western sanctions against Russia, rising inflation and the effects of the pandemic and climate change on global economies, are widely predicted to “push hundreds of millions into poverty and lower nutrition...”

dicted to “push hundreds of millions into poverty and lower nutrition, if the crisis continues” (David Malpass, World Bank president).

Russia and Ukraine are among the world's biggest producers in agriculture and food. Russia also produces key nutrients in fertilisers, such as potash and phosphate, on a huge scale. “Half the world's population gets food as a result of fertilisers, and if these are removed then yields for some crops could drop by 50%”, claims international agribusiness boss, Svein Holsether. Fertiliser prices are already high due to soaring gas prices and, with Western sanctions against Russia, set to get higher.

The most immediate effects of the Ukraine war on food availability are likely to be felt in the Middle East and Africa. Russia and Ukraine

are ready hard hit by soaring energy and food prices, and Somalia is enduring the worst drought for 4 decades. “If some [countries] compromise by reducing fertiliser imports, food production would shrink and food prices would rise higher” (*TeleSUR* 18/4/22).

Svein Holsether again: “We have to keep in mind that in the last two years, there's been an increase of 100 million more people that go to bed hungry ... so for this to come on top of it is really worrying”.

The cost of living crisis in the UK has steadily deepened as official data reveal that the rate of inflation hit 7% in the 12 months to March 2022. This is the highest level for 30 years, and the figures do not even reflect the average 54% increase in energy bills, after the energy price cap was raised on April 1st 2022.

Yet with prices rising faster than wages, the British government continues to resist pressure to do more to help those already struggling to make ends meet. Money saving guru Martin Lewis has pleaded directly with chancellor Rishi Sunak for political intervention. He says that his money management tips used to be about “do I go to the hairdressers, or do I go to the pub and have a takeaway. Now it's about prioritising feeding my children over feeding myself. That is simply not tenable in our society and there is absolute panic - and it has not even started yet”.

While governments continue to prioritise the interests of the profiteers from war and misery over the interests of the many, things can only get much worse. Capitalism will not change course unless compelled to do so - by political and economic pressure, including class struggle.

From
The Socialist Correspondent
10 years ago

“What Palestinians are facing is not the punishment of a few militants; it is the punishment of a whole people because of their ethnic and colonial status. Welcome to apartheid Israeli-style, which some of those who knew apartheid in its original South African form say is even worse.”

Issue 15 Summer 2012

Israel's Palestinian Political Prisoners

Brian Durrans

Class, race & health care

a letter from South Africa

by James Grant

Times change, and so do the pressures on governments which are expected to respond to health-related emergencies - but not often with the intensity associated with Covid 19. A few years ago my theme would have been very different, the pandemic under discussion then might have been HIV-AIDS.

A couple of months ago I had a discussion with a journalist friend about the meaning of dystopia. I had not come across the word until 2018. We agreed that we are now living in such a world every day because of the current pandemic. Dystopia implies chaos, despair and fear, all of which are relevant not just to the current South African experience but to other countries as well. I intend to show that the current crisis places in sharp relief some issues of broader significance for the governance of the country.

The health care system

South Africa is arguably one of the better resourced and managed African states. But it is not well placed if wider international comparisons are made. The inadequate quality of care in the public health sector has been evidenced in numerous ways. The resource scarcity that exists has been worsened by procurement processes which have been seen as sufficiently corrupt to cause some members of the governing class to face charges in the courts. The dossier of alleged transgressors includes a former Minister of Health who held that portfolio when alarm bells about the pandemic were first heard and was soon after accused of illegally manipulating tender processes. Covid can be seen as yet

another area of policy implementation symptomatic of continuing weaknesses in the state and the ruling party, as observed in this publication in 2018 (Davidson 2018). [1] It is also a feature of governance elsewhere in Africa.

Although better placed than most African states, South Africa does not have a unified and reasonably coherent health system resembling those of welfare states such as the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS). What it does have is a dual system in which the private sector is a very powerful player, with expensive facilities and services which would not be out of place in California, whilst the public sector runs a large number of lower quality hospitals and clinics all over the country. These public facilities are under resourced in relation to need whilst at the same time are expected to serve the majority of the population. What does exist is a radical plan drawn up a decade ago, but not yet approved, which is partly based on the original idea of UK's NHS (Brauns and Wallis 2014). [2] Although this plan was powerfully driven by the then Minister of Health (not the one accused of corruption), himself a doctor with experience of practising in some of the more disadvantaged areas of the country, it has faced resistance from the private sector and a cautious Treasury. It is clear that capitalism has been a dominant factor in holding the plan back. However, it appears to have been given a revival as announced in the recent President's State of the Nation Address (SONA 2022); [3] but it may be stymied again. Thus what seems highly desirable from the perspectives of public health and social justice may still fall foul of influen-



PHOTO BY ITU PICTURES

President Cyril Ramaphosa

tial mind sets including many in the medical profession. In the health sector there are significant interests driven by capitalism, health care being big business in South Africa. For example, there are private companies that are major players such as Netcare and Life, and some universities - for example, the University of Cape Town's private hospital (the university is a public institution but its hospital is private). This consequential inequality is part of a wider legacy of apartheid in which race is not necessarily the only stand-out factor which is creating inequality as class is more of a factor than it once was.

Also important is another dimension of the country's health system, much of which falls within the sphere of local government. Public health is not just about curing the sick. It is also about the conditions in which people live, as Engels showed us in nineteenth century England (Engels 1845). [4] If he were to visit the 'townships' of Cape Town, for example, he would be saddened to see such health risks as over-crowding, poor sanitation,

hunger, dangerously constructed housing which is poorly maintained and serviced (often shacks made out of unsuitable material and in areas liable to floods) and conditions conducive to crime. All of this can be found five minutes' drive from the city's international airport. It is almost equally close to bourgeois suburbs where ostentatious wealth prevails and where even a modest home can cost the equivalent of £150, 000, which is a hugely excessive amount for the vast majority of people, most of whom are black. In addition, the signs are that unemployment is close to 50% and rising. Precise figures cannot be given as unemployment is not fully documented but the situation is especially dire for school leavers and even university graduates. In Marxist terms, this can be called 'the reserve army of the unemployed' (oddly this useful term is not often deployed in South African debates despite its aptness). I gather that in the USA reference is now made to 'environmental racism' (Lexington 2022: 40). [5] It would be reasonable to apply this term to South Africa. Much of the spatial profile of South Africa as a whole has serious health care implications (for example, even the cost of travelling to be vaccinated is difficult if you are unemployed).

Covid and frontline workers

All of the above helps to show why Covid has been no ordinary challenge for South Africa's health system. It has been a difficult task for it to overcome the apartheid legacy. The addition of Covid to the mix has made the pressures much harder to face.

Part of the pressure of course falls upon those whose role is to provide a wide range of health services. A key point arising here is the critical role played by front line workers such as nurses, hospital clerks, the providers of emergency services,

and carers (who are often unpaid or low paid family members). Mostly these are working class people. There has been a tendency to take such workers for granted despite their strategic importance. The role of top leadership in health policy and management has to be given its due weight but the danger is that such a perspective can become a distortion of the reality. The effectiveness of any health system rests on what happens at the point of delivery where vaccinations are done, tests are conducted, patients admitted to hospitals and provided with conditions which are as conducive as possible to their recovery. Even if there were no pandemic, the need for more focus on such workers would be clear. It is perhaps an unintended consequence of Covid that this issue has emerged so strongly.

There is also a more general point to be made. Do we give enough attention to other types of frontline workers such as refuse collectors and school teachers? In both cases their roles are relevant to Covid as, for example, schooling has had to be changed drastically in all sorts of ways, and refuse collectors are essential to minimise environmental health risks. Such workers are far more important parts of the state than is often assumed, only being noticed when the functions they serve malfunction (e.g. refuse not being collected, classroom toilets flooded after a storm, strikes).

As elsewhere, what has also been brought into focus by the pandemic is the importance of data and the difficulties associated with it. This has several dimensions but in broad terms there are three points of particular relevance. One is the fact that the collection of reliable data is highly important in the management of the pandemic but is difficult and therefore unreliable, especially in remote areas. Secondly, interpretation of the numbers needs to be carried out with care; failure to do so can distort policy and its management. For example, in the



PHOTO BY MNISH196

South African health care workers

South Africa case it is not easy to pinpoint reasons for differences between geographical areas unless all relevant variables are duly considered. For instance, the provinces with the most Covid cases are also those in which the most economic activity takes place and with higher population densities, but what does that mean in terms of some sort of causal link? Population density is certainly a major factor but other conditions such as inadequate sanitation and poorly resourced local clinics and hospitals are also problematic. Thirdly, the problem of data interpretation appears to have worsened because of the ascent of social media into very many aspects of people's lives including the realm of policy debate in ways not dreamt of two decades ago. In relation to Covid, the 'anti-vaxxer' phenomenon is an example.

Corruption and state capture

Covid has provided eagerly grasped opportunities for what in South Africa are termed 'tenderpreneurs'. This word was invented at the turn of the century and is used to describe business persons who depend heavily on the award of state tenders within all 'spheres' (tiers) of government. It is very much part

of what has been termed 'state capture' which is currently the subject of a comprehensive commission headed by a senior judge. Some devastating conclusions have already emerged. The signs are that some further devastating conclusions will emerge. Tendering and corruption have been combined with some frequency. There has also been a widespread and distorted use of the word 'comrade' which, shorn of any revolutionary meaning, refers to business connections between persons disingenuously claiming to be political activists who are associated with the ruling African National Congress. Cronyism would be another word to use. Covid opened up all sorts of such opportunities, the taking up of which sometimes fell short of acceptable ethical and legal standards. Another term that might be used to describe the South African situation is 'kleptomania' to refer to people who cannot resist the temptation to make money illegally and/or unethically. The urgency of the need to speed up the response to the pandemic created enough chaos for formal processes to be flouted too easily and thus made it essential to take corrective action. For example, a key area has been the procurement of personal protective equipment such as latex gloves, eye and face protection and clothing. This has occurred despite legislation aimed to rectify processes. The National Treasury has been concerned by the situation and its possible consequences (National Treasury 2020, <http://www.news24>). [6]

Covid 19 is important but it is just one example of a bigger problem facing African states, albeit a hugely important one. It highlights the continuing need to build a developmental state based on more than just political leadership but on bureaucracies which have expertise together with merit recruitment, which are much more responsive to the needs of a largely impoverished and black public, and are as close as possible

to practising zero tolerance to corruption. Perhaps such a state would be one that corresponds to what some on the South African left call the National Democratic Revolution - which, however, should be seen merely as an aspiration as it is not yet an achieved reality. It is difficult to see any of the two opposition parties coming to power or, if they were to, improving on the increasingly discredited African National Congress - as shown, for example by recent elections. One - the Democratic Alliance - would probably promote capitalism more robustly, while the other, the Economic Freedom Fighters, has a populist slant which might have the effect of hastening the tide of corruption.

The picture I have painted may appear bleak, that of a curmudgeon, but there is room for hope. For example, the resilience, competence and compassion of those who are directly involved in the provision of health services cannot be ignored. In many cases the conditions under which health staff work make high demands which have largely been met, much as in other parts of the world. The vaccine programme has been reasonably successful after a patchy and somewhat delayed roll out. There has been some resistance among members of the public to taking the needle but it seems to have been less problematic than in most other countries. A similar point can be made about Covid 19 testing and treatment. Six months ago a new Finance Minister was appointed. There are signs that one result may be that there will be more focus on building an effective state (Whitehouse 2021:92). [7]

The overall effort has benefitted from the involvement of private sector and non-governmental organisations (your correspondent was twice vaccinated in a temporary facility in a church which he would not have otherwise entered). But this does not mean that delivery of health services can readily benefit from involving the high cost private sector. This

is for various reasons, not least of which is that the majority of people needing care are too poor to pay the costs likely to be charged. It is better to argue differently. The pandemic in South Africa has demonstrated both the need for, and potential of, a public sector which is well regulated, separated from predatory business and well resourced - even if a comprehensive and affordable 'cradle to the grave' service along welfare state lines has to be deferred for now.

This article has a similar focus to a presentation made by the author to a virtual seminar in 2021 convened by the Morocco based organisation United Cities and Local Governments of Africa addressing contemporary issues facing public management in Africa. The talk was titled: 'Public Management in Africa in the time of Covid'. He is a participant in the health care sector in South Africa as an educator, patient, researcher and employee of the non-governmental organisation - Dementia SA.

[1] Davidson, A. 2018. 'What now for South Africa and the ANC?' In *The Socialist Correspondent*. Issue 30

[2] Brauns, M. and Wallis, M. 2014 'Performance management and public policy. The case of the health sector in South Africa' in *Administratio Publica*, 22/1 pp149-170

[3] SONA (State of the Nation Address) 2022. <https://www.stateofthenation.gov.za>

[4] Engels, F. *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. (London: Penguin 1987)

[5] Lexington. 2022. 'Environmental Justice in the balance' in *The Economist* (January 29th)

[6] National Treasury 2020 <https://sacoronavirus.co.za>. News 24 <https://www.news24//southafrica/news/ppecorruption.police.officers.among.15.arrested.in.connection.with.r15m-latexglovestender1022027>

[7] Whitehouse, D. 2021. Interview in *The Africa Report* (October-November-December)

P&O - bad apple, rotten system



P&O ferries in dover harbour. One is the Pride of Kent which was declared unfit to sail

PHOTO BY MICHAEL HENDRYCKX

by Helen Christopher

Often people only campaign and strike when they feel that they have no other choice, when they face a great injustice or it is a fight for their very survival. So it is for the 800 P&O workers sacked by video call in March. Their fight for re-instatement is continuing with their union, the RMT, taking direct action like blockading ports and fighting through the courts. It has called for a boycott of P&O.

The RMT has rightly pointed out that P&O's actions are not fire and rehire – workers are not being given even that option. This is simply fire. New overseas staff have replaced the sacked RMT members on wages which are barely half the UK minimum wage. P&O were forced to U turn on an attempt to reduce these already meagre wages even further.

Peter Hebblethwaite, CEO of P&O ferries, is painted as the villain of the piece in the ruthless sacking of the workers. His frank admission that the company broke the law in failing to consult with staff and unions about the proposals makes him rightly a target – even Grant Shapps and the Tories joined in the condemnation - but this also serves to deflect attention from the bigger picture of the endemic attack on workers' rights across all sectors of the economy. Hebblethwaite was in any case only expressing what we have all often experienced that “consultation” is pointless with management going through the motions because it has to. So by his logic why bother?

Of course, the double standards have been well on show. A millionaire boss shamelessly admits to breaking the law, but consequences seem to be slow in coming. (Just as fines for Downing Street parties

were slow to come until it became unavoidable or perhaps politically expedient.) Ferry services have failed to run due to the problems created by the mass sacking. Two ferries were detained as “unfit to sail” by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency because of failures in staff training. Despite the Tory bluster the government has raised no questions about the fitness of P&O to run these vital services nor has there been any suggestion that it might be sacked for its failures.

If it had been the RMT that had defied anti-trade union laws, the full legal might of the state would have already been brought to bear to seize its funds, have its officials up in court and destroy its organisation. This is not a question of one law for the rich – but of no laws for the rich. However, this could prove a dangerous precedent. If the working class draws the lesson that, if there are no laws for the rich then

why should they be bound by oppressive and unjust laws?

P&O itself has had an inglorious history. It shipped opium to China after the Opium war which was designed to subjugate China to British rule. Over 11 years from 1847 it transported 642,000 chests of the drug. In 1987, the well-named Herald of Free Enterprise ferry sank off Zeebrugge killing 193 people. In his report on the sinking Lord Justice Sheen wrote that Townsend Thoresen, owned by P&O, possessed a "disease of sloppiness" which "permeated the company's hierarchy". An inquest jury found a prima facie case that the company was guilty of corporate manslaughter and the Crown Prosecution Service charged the company and 7 of its employees. There were no convictions. The representatives of capital again faced no legal sanction.

No doubt Hebblethwaite and P&O are bad apples, but the whole system is rotten, characterised by fire and rehire, bogus self-employment, casualisation and zero hours contracts. Working people being pushed into mass poverty in the cost-of-living crisis, whilst wages and benefits are squeezed. Yet energy and other companies still make huge profits.

Wider struggles

The media will not help us join up these issues or publicise them for us. Trade union, political and community organisation is essential to do that and to mobilise people. There are other battles going on. Workers have sometimes been successful in disputes against fire and rehire tactics, such as Go North West Buses, where, after a strike by Unite members lasting 85 days, the company withdrew its proposal to fire and rehire bus workers and agreed not to use the tactic again. Members of the Educational Institute of Scotland at Forth Valley College won a fight over fire and rehire in June last year. Lectur-

ers were sacked, with the college proposing to rehire them as Instructor-Assessors on worse pay and conditions. After a lengthy dispute involving industrial action, the management was eventually forced to backtrack and the lecturers were reinstated on their original contracts.

Where workers have been successful in winning battles on fire and rehire they have sometimes used legal mechanisms, but they have only won where they have also been prepared to take industrial action. But these have often been local disputes, reflecting the fragmentation of the workforce in industries over recent years.

However, there are some national disputes. The Universities and Colleges Union is battling huge cuts of 35% to members' pensions which management is trying to impose. The union has completed three waves of strikes and following a further successful ballot of members in April, it will now call more strikes at 39 universities and a marking and assessment boycott at 41.

The RMT is currently holding a ballot of 40,000 railway workers in Network Rail and across 15 train operating companies over pay and proposals to cut jobs and terms and conditions. All-out strike action across the railways is threatened. Mick Lynch, General Secretary of the RMT says: "The way for trade unions to effectively take on the cost-of-living crisis is to stand up for their members at work and take industrial action when employers are not moved by the force of reasoned argument. A national rail strike will bring the country to a standstill, but our members livelihoods and passenger safety are our priorities."

If it had been the RMT that had defied anti-trade union laws, the full legal might of the state would have already been brought to bear to seize its funds, have its officials up in court and destroy its organisation.



Paul Muldoon (1951-) was born in Armagh and attended Queen's University, Belfast where he was tutored by Seamus Heaney. Since 1987 he has lived and worked in the US. 'Meeting the British' is the title poem of a collection published in 1987 and refers to the Native American uprising of 1763-66 known as Pontiac's Rebellion. The two named men were British officers commanding forces that, amongst other horrors, deliberately infected Native Americans with smallpox by giving them 'gifts'.

Paul Muldoon in Tepoztlán, 2018 / PHOTO BY ALEJANDRO ARRAS

Meeting the British by Paul Muldoon

We met the British in the dead of winter.
The sky was lavender

and the snow lavender-blue.
I could hear, far below,

the sound of two streams coming together
(both were frozen over)

and, no less strange,
myself calling out in French

across that forest-
clearing. Neither General Jeffery Amherst

nor Colonel Henry Bouquet
could stomach our willow-tobacco.

As for the unusual
scent when the Colonel shook out his hand-

kerchief: *C'est la lavande,
une fleur mauve comme le ciel.*

They gave us six fishhooks
and two blankets embroidered with smallpox.