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Chomsky on Peace Talks in Ukraine

March 2022



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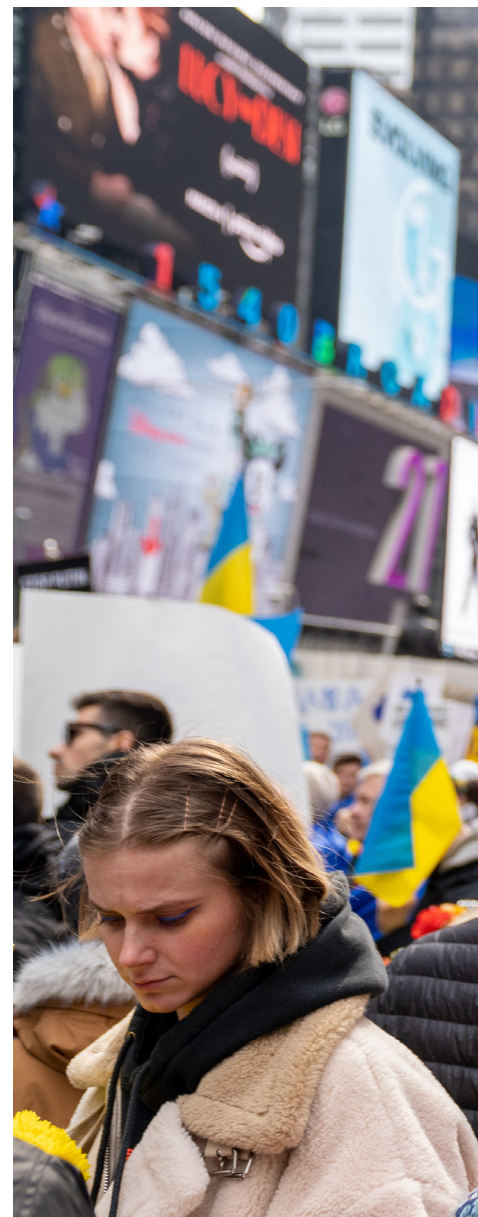
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Ukraine: A Conflict Soaked in Contradictions and New Patterns in War and Media

By Vijay Prashad

Surprise and horror have defined the reaction to the Russian military intervention

in Ukraine. That's likely because although the intervention has followed the contours of a modern land war, it has also marked a break with the past in a number of ways. The world has become used to military interventions by the United States. This is, however, not a U.S. intervention. That in itself is a surprise—one that has befuddled reporters and pundits alike.

Even as we deplore the violence and the loss of life in Ukraine resulting from the Russian intervention (and

the neofascist violence in the Donbas), it is valuable to step back and look at how the rest of the world may perceive this conflict, starting with the West's ethnocentric interest in an attack whose participants and victims they believe they share aspects of identity with—whether related to culture, religion, or skin color.

White Wars

War in Ukraine joins a sequence of wars that





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have opened sores on a very fragile planet. Wars in Africa and Asia seem endless, and some of them are rarely commented upon with any feeling in media outlets across the world or in the cascade of posts found on social media platforms. For example, the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which started in 1996 and which has resulted in millions of casualties, has not elicited the kind of sympathy from the world now seen during the reporting on Ukraine. In contrast, the startlingly frank comments from political leaders and journalists during the conflict in Ukraine have revealed the grip of racism on the imaginations of these shapers of public opinion.

It was impossible recently to get major global media outlets interested in the conflict in Cabo Delgado, which grew out of the capture of the bounty of natural gas by TotalEnergies SE (France) and ExxonMobil (U.S.) and led to the deployment of the French-backed Rwandan military in Mozambique. At COP26, I told a group of oil company executives about this intervention—which I had covered for Globetrotter—and one of them responded with precise accuracy: “You’re right about what you say, but no one cares.”

No one, which is to say the

political forces in the North Atlantic states, cares about the suffering of children in Africa and Asia. They are, however, gripped by the war in Ukraine, which should grip them, which distresses all of us, but which should not be allowed to be seen as worse than other conflicts taking place across the globe that are much more brutal and are likely to slip out of everyone’s memory due to the lack of interest and attention given by world leaders and media outlets to them.

Charlie D’Agata of CBS News said that Ukraine “isn’t a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan, that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilized, relatively European—I have to choose those words carefully, too—city, where you wouldn’t expect that, or hope that... [a conflict] is going to happen.” Clearly, these are the things one expects to see in Kabul (Afghanistan) or Baghdad (Iraq) or Goma (the Democratic Republic of the Congo), but not in a “relatively civilized, relatively European” city in Ukraine. If these are things that one expects in the former cities respectively, then there is very little need to be particularly outraged by the violence that is witnessed in these cities.

You would not expect such

violence in Ukraine, said the country’s Deputy Chief Prosecutor David Sakvarelidze to the BBC, because of the kind of people who were caught in the crossfire: “European people with blue eyes and blond hair being killed every day.” Sakvarelidze considers the Ukrainians to be Europeans, although D’Agata calls them “relatively European.” But they are certainly not African or Asian, people whom—if you think carefully about what is being said here—certain world leaders and international media outlets expect to be killed by the violence unleashed against them by the global great powers and by the weapons sold to the local thugs in these regions by these great powers.

Worst War?

On February 23, 2022, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres—in a heartfelt statement about the Russian military intervention in Ukraine—said, “In the name of humanity do not allow to start in Europe what could be the worst war since the beginning of the century.” The next day, on February 24, with Russia launching “the biggest attack on a European state since World War II,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen



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condemned this “barbaric attack” and said that “it is President Putin who is bringing war back to Europe.” “Bringing war back to Europe”: this is instructive language from Von der Leyen. It reminded me of Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), where the great poet and communist bemoaned Europe’s ability to forget the terrible fascistic treatment of the peoples of Africa and Asia by the colonial powers when they spoke of fascism. Fascism, Césaire wrote, is the colonial experiment brought back to Europe.

When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, neither the United Nations secretary-general nor the president of the European Commission came forward to make any immediate condemnation of that war. Both international institutions went along with the war, allowing the destruction of Iraq, which resulted in the death of more than a million people. In 2004, a year into the U.S. war on Iraq, after reports of grave violations of human rights (including by Amnesty International on torture in the prison of Abu Ghraib) came to light, then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called the war “illegal.” In 2006, three years after the war had begun, Italy’s Prime Minister Romano Prodi, who had been the pres-

ident of the European Commission in 2003, called the war a “grave error.”

In the case of the Russian intervention, these institutions rushed to condemn the war, which is all very well; but does this mean that they will be just as quick to condemn the United States when it starts its next bombing campaign?

War Stenography

People often ask me, what’s the most reliable news outlet? This is a hard question to answer these days, as Western news outlets are increasingly becoming stenographers of their governments (with the racist attitudes of the reporters on full display more and more often, making the apologies that come later hardly comforting). State-sponsored outlets in Russia and China now increasingly find themselves banned on social media sites. Anyone who counters Washington’s narrative is dismissed as irrelevant, and these fringe voices find it hard to develop an audience.

So-called cancel culture demonstrates its limits. D’Agata has apologized for his comment about Ukraine being “relatively civilized, relatively European” compared to Iraq and Afghanistan

and has already been rehabilitated because he is on the “right side” of the conflict in Ukraine. Cancel culture has moved from the chatter of social media to the battlefields of geopolitics and diplomacy as far as the Russian-Ukraine conflict is concerned. Switzerland has decided to end a century of formal neutrality to cancel Russia by enforcing European sanctions against it (remember that Switzerland remained “neutral” as the Nazis tore through Europe during World War II, and operated as the Nazi bankers even after the war). Meanwhile, press freedom has been set aside during the current conflict in Eastern Europe, with Australia and Europe suspending the broadcast of RT, which is a Russia state-controlled international media network.

D’Agata’s reliability as a reporter will remain unquestioned. He “misspoke,” they might say, but this is a Freudian slip.

Calculations of War

Wars are ugly, especially wars of aggression. The role of the reporter is to explain why a country goes to war, particularly an unprovoked war. If this were 1941, I might try to explain the Jap-

anese attack on Pearl Harbor during World War II or the Japanese assumption that the Nazis would soon defeat the Soviets and then take the war across the Atlantic Ocean. But the Soviets held out, saving the world from fascism. In the same way, the Russian attack on Ukraine requires explanation: the roots of it go deep to various political and foreign policy developments, such as the post-Soviet emergence of ethnic nationalism along the spine of Eastern Europe, the eastward advance of U.S. power—through NATO—toward the Russian border, and the turbulent relationship between the major European states and their eastern neighbors (including Russia). To explain this conflict is not to justify it, for there is little to justify in the bombing of a sovereign people.

Sane voices exist on all sides of ugly conflicts. In Russia, State Duma Deputy Mikhail Matveev of the Communist Party said—soon after the Russian entry into Ukraine—that he voted for the recognition of the break-away provinces of Ukraine, he “voted for peace, not for war,” and he voted “for Russia to become a shield, so that Donbas is not bombed, and not for Kyiv being bombed.”

Matveev’s voice confounds the current narrative: it brings into motion the plight of the

Donbas since the U.S.-driven coup in Ukraine in 2014, and it sounds the alarm against the full scale of the Russian intervention.

Is there room in our imagination to try to understand what Matveev is saying? **Z**

This article was produced by Globetrotter.

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Belarus Military Dissent Could Be a Key to Peace in Ukraine

By Zoltán Grossman

One key to ending the war in Ukraine may be in an unexpected place: Belarus.

On February 28, Ukrainian intelligence warned that Belarusian troops would join the Russian invasion, but the reports were refuted by U.S. intelligence, and those troops did not cross the border. Now we may know why: massive dissent within the Belarusian military.

First a little background. Massive pro-democracy protests rocked the regime of Alexander Lukashenko in 2020, after he stole an election from opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya. Lukashenko called on Putin to send Russian troops to crush the protests, and threats forced Tikhanovskaya to flee to Lithuania. Some military officials and draft-age youth also left at the time. Lukashenko’s hijacking of a civilian jetliner last year caused most countries to cancel all flights to the capital of Minsk. He most recently allowed Russia to use Belarus as a staging area for the Ukraine invasion.

One of Tikhanovskaya’s senior advisers, Franak Viacorka, confirms that Putin had planned for the Belarusian military to join his invasion (which Minsk denies). But the plan was foiled by a series of resignations by senior military officials, who fled the country and contacted the opposition-in-exile. Moreover, hundreds of young Belarusians of draft age have also

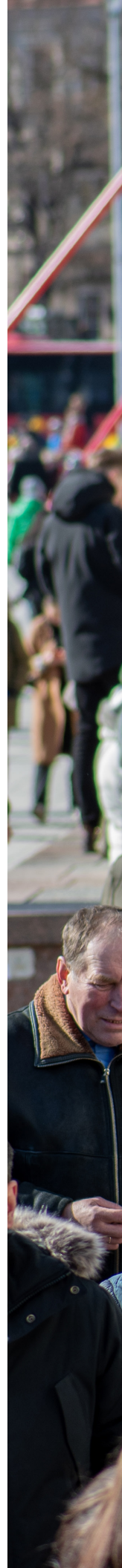






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fled across the closed borders, which is “dangerous and expensive.”

Viacorka commented, “We know there is a high degree of demoralization among officers in the military. In addition, there is a great deal of demoralization among conscripted soldiers, who are fleeing the country’s borders en masse to any destination possible, including Russia, Kazakhstan, and the Baltic states.”

He continued, “In recent

days, we have seen growing pressure from commanders of military units not to intervene in the fighting in Ukraine. There are officers who took sick leave, others who have asked to end their contracts with the military, even at the price of reimbursing all the expenses from their military service. We’re talking about thousands of dollars.”

According to Viacorka, “The biggest problem for them is that they have no practical way of leaving Be-

larus. In the past, they could have left for Georgia, but now all the flights there from Belarus have been canceled for the next six months. There are no flights to Western Europe, and it’s very difficult to get flights to Istanbul. So the only way to defect is to cross the border with neighboring countries illegally. Many officers are still unwilling to risk this step.”

Viacorka concluded, “Belarus has made its military infrastructure available to the



Russians, but Belarusian units have yet to enter Ukrainian territory. Moreover, we are seeing that units stationed adjacent to the border with Ukraine have been returned to their bases. It seems the decision to involve the Belarusian military in fighting was changed as a result of pressure from top brass and the refusal by simple soldiers to fight.”

In a dramatic development, Major General Viktor Gulevich, Chief of General Staff,

wrote a letter of resignation to Belarus Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin, discussing the military reluctance to join the invasion. The letter (posted online by former Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Nosov) said: “Conducting explanatory work with the commanders of military units did not yield results. I have the courage to assume that the replacement of the commanders of these military units, who could not organize the formation of

groups on the ground, will not give us the result we need. In view of the above, I ask for your decision regarding the acceptance of my resignation.” An article about the letter, which Minsk refutes, was in the London daily *Express* (3-7-22).

Viacorka’s interview was on the same day in the leading Tel Aviv daily *Israel Hayom* (3-7-22), which also reported that “many Belarusian fighters—the equivalent of around five military units—

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have joined the Ukrainians to fight the Russians. The ‘partisan’ movement of opponents of the Belarusian regime has deployed its people throughout the country to thwart the deployment of Russian military forces inside Belarus...”

The article added that “human-rights organizations have reported Belarusian men aged 18 to 58 have been ordered to register with recruiting stations in person and to leave their cellphones and passports with the authorities to make it more difficult for them to flee the state. According to the reports, they are required to appear at the recruitment offices with family members, who are told they will be punished should their relatives not show up when they are called to fight for their country.”

So the road to peace in Ukraine may run through Minsk, but not because of the 2014-15 Minsk Accords between Russia and Ukraine (which died when Putin invaded Ukraine). If mass protests again erupt against Lukashenko’s rule, this time perhaps backed by partisans or even military defectors, he may not be able to call on Putin to help again, as Russian forces are bogged down in Ukraine. It may not yet be possible for Russians to topple Putin from power, but Belarusians have already come close to ousting his junior partner Lukashen-

ko, and could possibly do so again.

With all of Russia’s attention on launching an offensive into Ukraine, the defense of Belarus itself is almost certainly being neglected. If military dissent or a renewed rebellion distracts Lukashenko, Ukrainian forces could conceivably launch an audacious counterstrike on Russian military staging areas, or even back a Belarusian uprising. According to Reuters (3/10/22), Lukashenko actually told his Defense Ministry that the Belarus army must “prevent any attempt - presumably by Ukrainian forces - to cut off Russian supply lines and ‘strike at Russians from the rear,’” apparently meaning within Belarus itself.

If such a revolution in Belarus is successful, it could be a game-changer for Ukraine. The new government in Minsk would probably order Russian forces to leave the country, denying Putin his northern front in Ukraine. Even Putin may be unwilling to take on both Ukraine and Belarus at the same time. An ouster of Lukashenko would be a flashing red warning sign to Putin that he might be next.

As a geographer, I can speculate that a new government in Minsk would also widen the geopolitical options available in the region. It is highly

doubtful that Belarus would apply to be part of NATO, risking a backlash from Moscow, so it could instead declare neutrality, with neither NATO nor Russian troops allowed. More confidently assured by security on his northern border, and facing a brutal Russian occupation, Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky could drop his goal of joining NATO, and accept neutrality as part of a peace settlement.

In that case, Belarus, Ukraine, and (already neutral) Moldova would together form a neutral zone between NATO and Russia, which could actually bring a modicum of stability to Eastern Europe. We can only hope, but whatever the outcome, the possibilities of ending the Ukraine War may be found in capitals other than Kyiv and Moscow. **Z**

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Thinking About the Unthinkable in the Ukraine Crisis

By Mel Gurtov

We might be inclined to think that the most urgent decisions on Ukraine have been made: decisions on military aid to the Ukraine government, on humanitarian aid to refugees and Ukrainian civilians still in the country, and on support of NATO countries bordering Russia.

But to think so would be mistaken. As the military and humanitarian situation in Ukraine deteriorates, Thomas Friedman writes, “it will become more and more obvious that our biggest problem with Putin in Ukraine is that he will refuse to lose early and small, and the only other outcome is that he will lose big and late.”

Putin can’t stand to lose, which means a preference for total destruction of Ukraine rather than a settlement. More devastation will confront the U.S. and NATO with frightening choices.

Here are some that come to mind.

First, as Ukraine cities burn in the wake of Russian targeting of civilian structures, we will face another Grozny or Aleppo—that is, utter destruction by a military machine that is impervious to reason. Will the West simply stand by helplessly as Kyiv is reduced to rubble?

Second, the humanitarian disaster will reach appalling proportions. Food, fuel, housing, and water will be unavailable to large parts of the Ukraine population. Look at Mariupol; it may become the norm for trapped populations. Will the West be willing and able to deliver assistance in defiance of the Russians? Can eastern Europe absorb the millions more people who are trying to get out of Ukraine?

Third, continued Ukraine resistance will be heroic but very costly in casualties. If we witness Russian forces committing atrocities—killing captured soldiers and otherwise violating the laws of war—will the West do anything to rescue resistance fighters?

Fourth, should a Ukraine insurgency make headway, with support from outside Ukraine, it is conceivable that Russia will detonate a “tactical” nuclear weapon or use a chemical or biological weapon to inspire fear and promote surrender. How, if at all, will the West respond? (Note,

by the way, the Russian disinformation campaign, being echoed in Chinese media, about supposed U.S. bioweapon laboratories in Ukraine and a U.S. program to assist Ukraine’s nuclear weapon program).

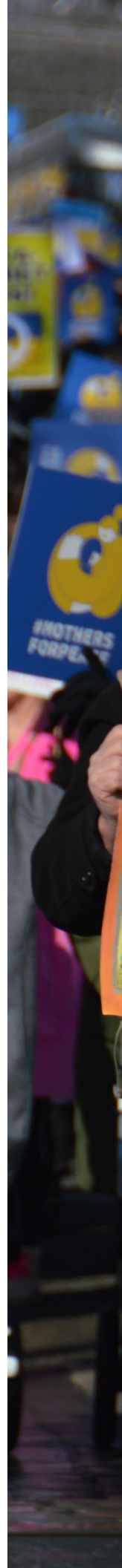
Fifth, Ukraine’s leadership might be captured and killed, confined outside the country, or put on trial. Can that valiant leadership be saved?

Sixth, Russian fire might be directed, by accident or design, at NATO forces that are providing military aid from within Poland or the Baltic states. Will NATO respond to such attacks?

Seventh, another Ukraine nuclear power plant might be taken over by the Russians, only this time creating radiation leakage. Will there be a response to such an event?

The world community will be shocked and outraged by events like these. But shock and outrage have happened many times before, yet rarely have they led to a strong, unified response.

The challenge for NATO is that up to now, the Russians have controlled the rules of engagement. NATO is constantly searching for low-risk counteraction, for now rejecting options such as sending Soviet-era fighter jets to Ukraine, establishing a total or limited no-fly zone in Ukraine, or creating an es-





cape corridor for refugees.

But as the Ukraine situation moves from dire to catastrophic, political pressure in the U.S. and Europe is likely to mount for “taking the gloves off”—challenging Putin to respond to high-risk NATO initiatives. The argument that we must let sanctions on Russia take full effect, and rely in the meantime on Ukraine’s guerrilla resistance, is likely to weaken as the tragedy unfolds on TV and in social media.

There are no easy answers here: sitting by while a country is destroyed vitiates the UN Charter, Europe’s security, and NATO’s reason for being, whereas taking forceful action may lead to a conflict involving weapons of mass destruction and the commitment of NATO armies.

Either way, we can’t avoid confronting worst-case scenarios of the kind I have outlined. As two writers conclude in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, “The West and Russia may now be entering into the terminal stages of an insecurity spiral—a series of mutually destabilizing choices—which could end in tragedy, producing a larger European conflagration even if it doesn’t go nuclear.”

We’re at a perilous moment. The administration has to make decisions and invite public debate on how, or

whether, to save Ukraine. **Z**

Mel Gurtov, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Portland State University and blogs at In the Human Interest.

How Russian Feminists are Opposing the War on Ukraine

By Ella Rossman

I was raised by my grandparents in a small city in Moscow province. I called my grandmother “mom” for as long as I can remember. Ten years ago, I was abroad on a summer study trip when she died suddenly. My relatives decided not to tell me so that I could finish my studies in peace. But, of course, from their silence, I deduced that something terrible had happened at home. I was so paralysed with fear that I didn’t even ask. I waited for the end of my studies in appalling oblivion.

When I returned, my grand-

mother was already buried. I never saw her body and for a long time couldn’t believe that she was no more. She just disappeared, and it seemed to me that at any moment she would appear again. It took me years to realize that she was really gone. I also had to cope with agoraphobia, and begin to get out of the house and travel again.

The death of my grandmother completely changed my life, but also made me who I am today. It made me a feminist activist, as I wanted to do something that would restore harmony and meaning to the world that I had lost. It made me a scholar, as I wanted to better understand those who had been like parents to me.

Now I am in London. Since October, I have been writing a thesis on the gender history of the USSR at University College London (UCL). I am studying the lives of girls and young women who were raised in the Cold War-era Soviet Union—women like my grandmother. It took me a long time to gain the courage to leave for another country, and I did it only when I had no prospects left in Russia.

In recent years, feminism in Russian society has been developing and growing, as has interest in gender studies in general. But this development has taken place in spite





CAN'T TAKE
OUR
FREEDOM

of the state and the authorities, who persecute anyone who doesn't toe the party line.

"Through a glass, darkly"

Four months after I left Russia, something terrible has again happened at home, and on a much more monstrous scale. The government that I never elected and had opposed all my adult life has attacked its neighbor, Ukraine, without declaring war. The country where I have relatives and friends, which I

have visited numerous times, is now burning.

Russian soldiers are killing civilians and destroying entire cities in Ukraine, and I am far away again and see it all "through a glass, darkly." I get a terrible feeling of déjà vu and despair from the news—but also from seeing how everything repeats itself and becomes only scarier.

The most terrifying part is the feeling that it isn't just my own past repeating itself, but that the whole traumatic history of Eastern Europe is turning into some kind of ouroboros—a giant snake eating its

own tail. When I read about the hundreds of thousands of people leaving Ukraine, I remember the story of my grandfather, who was from a Jewish family in Ukraine and had to flee Kharkiv in 1941 when it was occupied by the Nazis.

He was a six-year-old boy, and both his parents were serving on the front line (his father as a soldier, his mother as a surgeon). He left by train with his grandmother, Berta, for the city of Berezni-ki in the Perm Krai region of Russia. Berta was so old that my grandfather thought she



would not survive the weeks-long trip. My grandfather had a name tag on his clothes with information about relatives in Siberia in case he was found alone.

Now the gears of history are turning in the opposite direction. As a historian, I understand that I can't draw loose historical analogies or simply say that history repeats itself. But I can talk about how one trauma leads to another, how the memory of suffering or resentment creates new disasters.

In Vladimir Putin's speeches and state propaganda, the

war in Ukraine is justified by a web of references to the Second World War, the Cold War and certain "traditions" that have become an important part of Russia's historical culture and public mythology. History is alive for Putin, as well as for his circle and many other Russians, who still think of Russia as an empire or a superpower, and not just a country.

As a result of this, civilians are fleeing Kharkiv again, just as they did 81 years ago. But now the occupiers are the Russian soldiers. They have already come up with their

own version of the swastika: the Russian military, and the regime's propaganda, are using the letter "Z" as a symbol of victory over Ukraine.

This symbol has been daubed on the doors of anti-war activists in Russia, who are on the streets every day protesting against their country's invasion of Ukraine. The police painted the same symbol on the Moscow office of the Memorial human rights organisation during a raid a few days ago. The letter "Z" has become a symbol of terror, repression and censorship in Russia, and a sign of war

Photo Ayman Haykal/Shutterstock



and occupation in Ukraine.

Stop the Vicious Circle

The only thing that gives me hope today is that there are thousands of people who want to stop this endless repetition of Eastern Europe's past and think about its future. These people are historians and social scholars, intellectuals, human rights defenders, activists and members of civil society.

They include feminist activists, who became the first group to create an anti-war movement in Russia following the invasion of Ukraine—the Feminist Anti-War Resistance that I am happy to be part of. Our manifesto has already been translated into 14 languages. Feminists from all over Russia, as well as from the UK, Italy, Switzerland and other countries, have taken to the streets in protest using our symbols.

I believe that if we unite our forces and intellectual abilities, we will be able to stop the vicious circle, end this war and find a way to take a fresh look at the future of Russia and other countries in the region. For this, we need solidarity between the anti-war movements inside and outside of Russia.

It's important not to separate all Russians from the rest of the world: it will just lead to the weakening of opposition inside Russia, and its total destruction by Putin's regime. Unfortunately, this regime cares neither about the lives of the Ukrainian people nor about the lives of Russians, whom Putin's people are ready to kill (like Alexey Navalny) or torture (like feminists in the police station two days ago) for any kind of protest.

I believe that uniting anti-war forces inside and outside of Russia now is the only way to stop a voracious ouroboros that devours more and more people. For me, personally, building this kind of solidarity will be one of my goals from now on. **Z**

The Publication of Origin for this article is *Open Democracy*.

Ella Rossman is a historian, doctoral student at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies and feminist activist from Russia.

If High Gas Prices Are So Painful, Shouldn't We Move Away

From Fossil Fuels?

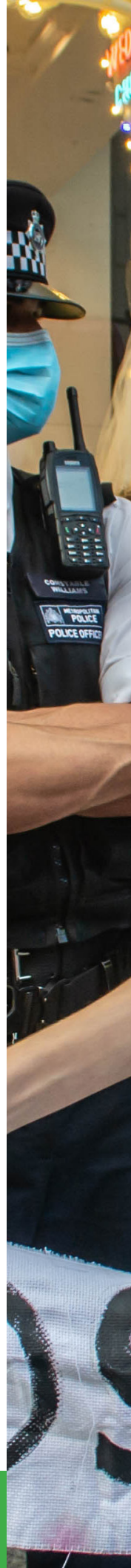
By Sonali Kolhatkar

Long used to cheap gas at the pump, Americans are experiencing serious sticker shock these days as gas prices rise to \$6 or even \$7 a gallon. News headlines are linking this sharp increase to Russia's war on Ukraine. Guilt-inducing memes are cropping up on social media shaming people for complaining about the high gas prices in the face of Ukrainian suffering.

Such logic is based on the idea that oil companies have no control over the price of oil and that high prices are stemming, almost “naturally,” from an imminent scarcity of oil as a result of a ban on Russian energy imports.

Whether or not this is true, an economy based on a source of energy that is so fickle will always be vulnerable. So where are the calls for ending our dependence on oil and gas?

Collin Rees, senior campaigner with Oil Change International, told me in a recent interview that there is “a complex interplay” of forces that determine prices, and in fact, “the U.S. doesn't actually import that much Russian oil and gas.” Only about 8





percent of all oil and gas imported into the United States comes from Russia. When accounting for domestic oil and gas production, the Russian contribution to American fossil fuel use is a paltry 2 percent.

Rees explains that if Russia's war on Ukraine had any effect, it was that "increased fear among investors [has] driven up prices." So, no, the Russian war on Ukraine has little direct connection to the hike in gas prices at the pump. Rather, it is investor fear over losing out on current and future profits that is pushing prices up.

Still, it is important to point out that oil has become a convenient ransom note in the war: the West threatens to stop importing Russian oil, while Russia threatens to cut off oil supplies to the West. "It's a complex issue with a lot of leverage on both sides," says Rees.

In the meantime, for those Americans struggling to make sense of what they're seeing at the pump, prices actually began rising in 2021 as pandemic-related quarantines eased and Americans resumed commuting and travel. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, last year "[r]ising crude oil prices and increased gasoline demand contributed to... the highest average nominal

price since 2014." Additionally, "[t]he average price for retail gasoline increased by more than \$1.00/gal between the start and the end of 2021."

"The oil industry is a boom-bust industry," says Rees. "This is an extremely volatile industry that goes through price spikes and price dips, and for that reason it's not something that we want our economies to be hooked to in the future."

But the fossil fuel industry is already using the price spike to make the case for generating more oil and gas and to demand the sale of more oil and gas drilling leases. If the logic of Russian oil scarcity as the reason for price increases is to be believed, then conversely, it's easy to make the case that increasing supplies will bring down prices.

The idea that supply and demand drives prices is an elegant one that fits well with the myths we have all been fed about capitalism. Ever the opportunist to ensure corporate profiteering, Tesla CEO Elon Musk tweeted, "Hate to say it, but we need to increase oil & gas output immediately. Extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures."

But it's not just Musk. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said recently, "In this moment of crisis, we need more supply... right now, we

need oil and gas production to rise to meet current demand."

In other words, Americans are being told we have to accept that the price of isolating Russia for its war on Ukraine is more expensive gas, and the price for ensuring cheaper gas is to increase reliance on fossil fuels.

Only a few months ago, Granholm admitted that "the energy industry is making enormous profits. They're back up... above where they were before the pandemic started." Rees concurs, saying the industry is "raking in massive profits" amounting to "obscene amounts of money." In fact, the top 24 oil and gas companies in the world made \$174 billion in profits in the first 9 months of 2021.

The organization Earthjustice points out that with the windfall, these companies "are buying back their own shares, funneling dividends to their shareholders, and paying lobbyists to demand cheap new federal leases so they can stockpile them for future profit."

It's easy to mock Americans for paying more attention to the price of oil than the price of milk. But decades of artificially low oil prices, combined with out-of-reach electric vehicles, have created a dependence that is not the fault of ordinary people. Oil profiteers and their allies









in Washington, D.C., are to blame for ensuring that our economy remains wholly reliant on a product that also threatens the survival of our species through resulting climate change.

President Joe Biden during his March 1 State of the Union address could have used high oil prices to boldly tout his climate justice agenda. He could have linked the volatility of oil prices to the need for less reliance on oil. But he did neither.

Instead, he assured Americans that there would be plenty of oil, saying the United States was “releasing 30 million barrels from our own Strategic Petroleum Reserve,” adding, “we stand ready to do more if necessary.”

Biden, who ran for president on an ambitious climate justice platform, and who appointed the first Native American Interior Secretary, Deb Haaland, known for her climate activism, has betrayed his own agenda. The *Washington Post* in January pointed out how “Biden has outpaced” his pro-oil predecessor, Donald Trump, on issuing oil and gas drilling leases on public lands.

What’s bizarre is that our continued reliance on oil and gas is no longer financially sensible even by the logic of capitalism. Leading environ-

mental activist and founder of 350.org Bill McKibben wrote in the *Guardian*, “scientists and engineers have dropped the cost of solar and wind-power by an order of magnitude, to the point where it is some of the cheapest power on Earth.”

“Big oil and gas [have] bought out our politicians,” explains Rees about why there remains such a continued dependence on a destructive and dwindling resource, whose prices are volatile, and whose sources are politically fraught.

Just as the fossil fuel industry and its political allies are using Russia’s war on Ukraine and resulting high prices to justify increased dependence on the resource, now is the time for advocates of sanity and safety to use this moment to instead pivot as far away from petroleum as fast as possible.

Rees concludes, “It’s more critical than ever in these moments to recognize that this is a chance to free ourselves from that dependency, to free ourselves from that cycle of conflict and fossil-fueled harm and pain and death, and to build a better world, hopefully.” **Z**

This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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The Imperialist Roots of Putin’s Policy

By Lawrence S. Witter

A key factor that explains Vladimir Putin’s military invasion of Ukraine is traditional Russian imperialism.

Throughout the world’s long and bloody history, other powerful territories (and, later, nations) expanded their lands through imperial conquest, including Rome, China, Spain, France, Britain, Germany, Japan, and the United States.

Russia was no exception. Beginning with the small principality of Moscow in 1300, Russia employed its military might to crush neighboring peoples and gobble up territory across the vast Eurasian continent. Under the czars, it became known as the “prison of nations.” By the early 20th century, Imperial Russia was the largest country in the world—and, also, one of the most brutal and re-





Photo by Karavanov_Lev/Shutterstock

actionary.

When the Bolshevik Revolution occurred, part of its impetus was a revolt against the imperialist role of Russia and other great powers of the era. Vladimir Lenin denounced imperialism, loosened the Russian grip on some subject countries, and promised that, within the Soviet Union, the new Soviet republics would have self-determination.

Unfortunately, with the rise of Joseph Stalin, that anti-imperialist impulse was abandoned. When it came to the Ukrainian People's Republic, which had not fulfilled the grain production quota set by the Kremlin, Stalin, in 1932-33, shipped off 50,000 Ukrainian farm families to Siberia and ordered the seizure of Ukraine's grain crop. Massive starvation followed in Ukraine, causing an estimated four million deaths. Not surprisingly, this treatment did not endear Ukrainians to the Soviet regime.

Although most Russians—and most Communists—were horrified by the rise of Nazi Germany during the 1930s, Stalin signed a pact with Hitler (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) in August 1939. Its secret provisions turned over the independent nations of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, as well as the eastern half of Poland, to the USSR, which soon occupied them. It

also provided a green light for the Soviet invasion of Finland (which led to Soviet seizure of a portion of that country) and Soviet seizure of a portion of Romania. As the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact also provided Soviet endorsement of Nazi Germany's imperialist ambitions, Hitler promptly launched World War II.

In June 1941, however, things shifted dramatically, for Hitler, overly ambitious, began a full-scale military invasion of the Soviet Union, thereby double-crossing his ally. In the ensuing bloody conflict, the Russians fought fiercely against Germany for their very survival. They were aided by Britain and the United States, both of which also took on the powerful Japanese armed forces in the Pacific.

After World War II, although Ribbentrop was tried at Nuremberg and executed, Molotov and Stalin were not, for, of course, they were on the winning side of the war. As part of the spoils of victory, the Soviet Union incorporated Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and eastern Poland into its territory.

This proved only the beginning of a new round of Russian imperialism. In the aftermath of the war, the Soviet Union took control of most nations in Eastern Europe and retained them as vassals

and unwilling partners in the Warsaw Pact. They included Poland, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Bulgaria, and East Germany. The Soviet Union retained its grip on them through Communist Party dictatorships that it imposed, occupations by Soviet troops, and military assaults, most notably bloody invasions of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), where Communist regimes proved too independent for the tastes of the Kremlin. In Hungary, Soviet military repression produced 20,000 Hungarian casualties (including 2,500 deaths) and 200,000 refugees.

When the reform-minded Mikhail Gorbachev finally stopped enforcing Soviet imperial rule in Eastern Europe, revolutions in these countries swept aside the tired pro-Soviet dictatorships and reasserted their national sovereignty. Not surprisingly, many of these newly independent countries then began to apply to join NATO—not because they were forced to do so, but because they feared a reassertion of Russian domination.

Events in Ukraine illustrate this desire for freedom from Russian control. Gorbachev allowed a referendum on Ukrainian independence to take place in 1991. In a turnout by 84 percent of

registered voters, some 90 percent of them voted for independence from Russia. As part of its independence arrangement, Ukraine—which had the third largest nuclear arsenal in the world—handed over all its nuclear weapons to the Russian government. In turn, as part of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, Russia formally pledged to respect Ukraine's sovereignty.

But the Russian government began to backtrack on its agreement with Ukraine. It was happy with the rule of Viktor Yanukovich, a pliable pro-Russian politician. But when the political tide turned against him and he was ousted from office because he blocked Ukraine's membership in the European Union, Russian leaders were incensed. Ukraine was turning toward the West, and this, they believed, could not be tolerated. In a clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, the Russian government deployed its military power to seize Crimea and take control of Russian-language separatist regions in eastern Ukraine.

Of course, the Russian government sought to justify its actions with flimsy claims, then and subsequently. It said that there was no military intervention by Russia. But clearly there was. It said that there were fascists in Ukraine. True enough; but there were

also plenty of fascists in Russia and in many other lands. Ukraine's government, it said, was under the control of an unrepresentative Nazi cabal. But Zelensky was elected with 73 percent of the vote, remains wildly popular, and is certainly no right-winger or authoritarian. Can we say the same about Vladimir Putin?

When one looks at what Putin has declared in his recent pronouncements, his dominant motive is clear enough. Denying that Ukraine has any right to statehood independent of Russia and glorifying the expansionism of his country's Czarist and Stalinist past, he is caught up in a reactionary nostalgia for empire. Or, to put it simply, he longs to Make Russia Great Again.

To safeguard the interests of smaller nations, as well as international peace, Putin—like other arrogant rulers of powerful countries—should be encouraged to discard outdated imperial fantasies and accept the necessity of a world governed by international law. **Z**

Dr. Lawrence Wittner, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany and the author of *Confronting the Bomb* (Stanford University Press).

Peace Talks in Ukraine “Will Get Nowhere” If U. Keeps Refusing to Join

Noam Chomsky interviewed by C.J. Polychroniou



C*J. Polychroniou: Noam, while a fourth round of negotiations was scheduled to take place today between Russian and Ukrainian representatives, it is now postponed until tomorrow, and it still seems unlikely that peace will be reached in Ukraine any time soon. Ukrainians don't appear likely to surrender, and Putin seems determined to continue his invasion. In that context, what do you think of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's response to Vladimir Putin's four core demands, which were (a) cease military action, (b) acknowledge Crimea as Russian territory, (c) amend the Ukrainian constitution to enshrine neutrality, and (d) recognize the separatist republics in eastern Ukraine?*

Noam Chomsky: Before responding, I would like to stress the crucial issue that must be in the forefront of all discussions of this terrible tragedy: We must find a way to bring this war to an end before it escalates, possibly to utter devastation of Ukraine and unimaginable catastrophe beyond. The only way is a negotiated settlement. Like it or not, this must provide some kind of escape hatch for Putin, or the worst will happen. Not victory, but an escape hatch. These concerns must be uppermost in our minds.

I don't think that Zelensky should have simply accepted Putin's demands. I think his public response on March 7 was judicious and appropriate.

In these remarks, Zelensky recognized that joining NATO is not an option for Ukraine. He also insisted, rightly, that the opinions of people in the Donbas region, now occupied by Russia, should be a critical factor in determining some form of settlement. He is, in short, reiterating what would very likely have been a path for preventing this tragedy—though we cannot know, because the U.S. refused to try.

As has been understood for a long time, decades in fact, for Ukraine to join NATO would be rather like Mexico joining a China-run military alliance, hosting joint maneuvers with the Chinese army and maintaining weapons aimed at Washington. To insist on Mexico's sovereign right to do so would surpass idiocy (and, fortunately, no one brings this up). Washington's insistence on Ukraine's sovereign right to join NATO is even worse, since it sets up an insurmountable barrier to a peaceful resolution of a crisis that is already a shocking crime and will soon become much worse unless resolved—by the negotiations that Washington refuses to join.

That's quite apart from the comical spectacle of the posturing about sovereignty by the world's leader in brazen contempt for the doctrine, ridiculed all over the Global South though the U.S. and the West in general maintain their impressive discipline and take the posturing seriously, or at least pretend to do so.

Zelensky's proposals considerably narrow the gap with Putin's demands and provide an opportunity to carry forward the diplomatic initiatives that have been undertaken by France and Germany, with limited Chinese support. Negotiations might succeed or might fail. The only way to find out is to try. Of course, negotiations will get nowhere if the U.S. persists in its adamant refusal to join, backed by the virtually united commissariat, and if the press continues to insist that the public remain in the dark by refusing even to report Zelensky's proposals.

In fairness, I should add that on March 13, the *New York Times* did publish a call for diplomacy that would carry forward the "virtual summit" of France-Germany-China, while offering Putin an "offramp," distasteful as that is. The article was written by Wang Huiyao, president of a Beijing nongovernmental think tank.




**EVIL MUST BE
PUNISHED
OR IT SPREADS!**


**PUTIN
HANDS OFF
UKRAINE!**


**PUTIN
HANDS
OFF**

Black Sea 1991 - May 2014

**TERRODIST
MÖRDARE**

**SLAVA
UKRAINE!**



It also seems to me that, in some quarters, peace in Ukraine is hardly on top of the agenda. For example, there are plenty of voices both in the U.S. and in U.K. urging Ukraine to keep on fighting (although western governments have ruled out sending troops to defend Ukraine), probably in the hopes that the continuation of the war, in conjunction with the economic sanctions, may lead to regime change in Moscow. Yet, isn't it the case that even if Putin actually falls from power, it would still be necessary to negotiate a peace treaty with whatever Russia government comes next, and that compromises would have to be made for the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine?

We can only speculate about the reasons for U.S.-U.K. total concentration on warlike and punitive measures, and refusal to join in the one sensible approach to ending the tragedy. Perhaps it is based on hope for regime change. If so, it is both criminal and foolish. Criminal because it perpetuates the vicious war and cuts off hope for ending the horrors, foolish because it is quite likely that if Putin is overthrown someone even worse will take over. That has been a consistent pattern in elimination of leadership in criminal organizations for many years, matters discussed very convincingly by Andrew Cockburn.

And at best, as you say, it would leave the problem of settlement where it stands.

Another possibility is that Washington is satisfied with how the conflict is proceeding. As we have discussed, in his criminal foolishness, Putin provided Washington with an enormous gift: firmly establishing the U.S.-run Atlanticist framework for Europe and cutting off the option of an independent "European common home," a long-standing issue in world affairs as far back as the origin of the Cold War. I personally am reluctant to go as

far as the highly knowledgeable sources we discussed earlier who conclude that Washington planned this outcome, but it's clear enough that it has eventuated. And, possibly, Washington planners see no reason to act to change what is underway.

It is worth noticing that most of the world is keeping apart from the awful spectacle underway in Europe. One telling illustration is sanctions. Political analyst John Whitbeck has produced a map of sanctions against Russia: the U.S. and the rest of the Anglosphere, Europe and some of East Asia. None in the Global South, which is watching, bemused, as Europe reverts to its traditional pastime of mutual slaughter while relentlessly pursuing its vocation of destroying whatever else it chooses to within its reach: Yemen, Palestine, and far more. Voices in the Global South condemn Putin's brutal crime, but do not conceal the supreme hypocrisy of western posturing about crimes that are a bare fraction of their own regular practices, right to the present.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine may very well change the global order, especially with the likely emergence of the militarization of the European Union. What does the change in Germany's Russia strategy—i.e., its rearmament and the apparent end of Ostpolitik—mean for Europe and global diplomacy?

There is a brief period in which course corrections remain possible. It may soon come to an end as U.S. democracy, such as it still is, continues on its self-destructive course.

The major effect, I suspect, will be what I mentioned: more firm imposition of the U.S.-run, NATO-based Atlanticist model and curtailing once again the repeated efforts to create a European system independent of the U.S., a "third force" in world affairs, as it was sometimes called. That has been a fundamental issue since the end of World War II. Putin

has settled it for the time being by providing Washington with its fondest wish: a Europe so subservient that an Italian university tried to ban a series of lectures on Dostoyevsky, to take just one of many egregious examples of how Europeans are making fools of themselves.

Meanwhile, it seems likely that Russia will drift further into China's orbit, becoming even more of a declining kleptocratic raw materials producer than it is now. China is likely to persist in its programs of incorporating more and more of the world into the development-and-investment system based on the Belt-and-Road initiative, the "maritime silk road" that passes through the UAE into the Middle East, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The U.S. seems intent on responding with its comparative advantage: force. Right now, that includes Biden's programs of "encirclement" of China by military bases and alliances, while perhaps even seeking to improve the U.S. economy as long as it is framed as competing with China. Just what we are observing now.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine may also have dealt a severe blow to our hopes of tackling the climate crisis, at least in this decade. Do you have any comments to make on this rather bleak observation of mine?

Appropriate comments surpass my limited literary skills. The blow is not only severe, but it may also be terminal for organized human life on earth, and for the innumerable other species that we are in the process of destroying with abandon.

In the midst of the Ukraine crisis, the IPCC released its 2022 report, by far the most dire warning it has yet produced. The report made it very clear that we must take firm measures now, with no delay, to cut back the use of fossil fuels and to move toward renewable en-

ergy. The warnings received brief notice, and then our strange species returned to devoting scarce resources to destruction and rapidly increasing its poisoning of the atmosphere, while blocking efforts for extricating itself from its suicidal path.

The fossil fuel industry can scarcely suppress its joy in the new opportunities the invasion has provided to accelerate its destruction of life on earth. In the U.S., the denialist party, which has successfully blocked Biden's limited efforts to deal with the existential crisis, is likely to be back in power soon, so that it can resume the dedication of the Trump administration to destroy everything as quickly and effectively as possible.

These words might sound harsh. They are not harsh enough.

The game is not over. There still is time for radical course correction. The means are understood. If the will is there, it is possible to avert catastrophe and to move on to a much better world. The invasion of Ukraine has indeed been a severe blow to these prospects. Whether it constitutes a terminal blow or not is for us to decide. **Z**

C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of Truthout's Public Intellectual Project. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).





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DEATHS do
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STOP WAR

PEACE

СЛАВА УКРАЇНІ
ГЕРОЯМ СЛАВА
ВІТАЄМО УКРАЇНУ

УКРАЇНІ-МИР
РОСІЯМ-СВОБОДА

NEEDS
SHELTER
YOUR HELP

OURSKY
WILL HANDLE
THE REST

PUTIN
HANDS OFF
UCR

STOP
PUTIN

FEELING SAFE
WITH BLOODY
NEIGHBOR?

NO WAR
NO PUTIN
Totalitarianism

СТЫД

STOP PUTIN THIS WAR

How the U.S. Started a Cold War with Russia and Left Ukraine to Fight It

By Medea Benjamin & Nicolas J.S. Davies



The defenders of Ukraine are bravely resisting Russian aggression, shaming the rest of the world and the UN Security Council for its failure to protect them. It is an encouraging sign that the Russians and Ukrainians are holding talks in Belarus that may lead to a ceasefire. All efforts must be made to bring an end to this war before the Russian war machine kills thousands more of Ukraine's defenders and civilians, and forces hundreds of thousands more to flee.

But there is a more insidious reality at work beneath the surface of this classic morality play, and that is the role of the United States and NATO in setting the stage for this crisis.

President Biden has called the Russian invasion "unprovoked," but that is far from the truth. In the four days leading up to the invasion, ceasefire monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) documented a dangerous increase in ceasefire violations in Eastern Ukraine, with 5,667 violations and 4,093 explosions.

Most were inside the de facto borders of the Donetsk (DPR) and Luhansk (LPR) People's Republics, consistent with incoming shell-fire by Ukraine government forces. With nearly 700 OSCE ceasefire monitors on the ground, it is not credible that these were all "false flag" incidents staged by separatist forces, as U.S. and British officials claimed.

Whether the shell-fire was just another escalation in the long-running civil war or the opening salvos of a new government offensive, it was certainly a provocation. But the Russian invasion has far exceeded any proportionate action to defend the DPR and LPR from those attacks, making it disproportionate and illegal.

In the larger context though, Ukraine has become an unwitting victim and proxy in the resurgent U.S. Cold War against Russia and China, in which the United States has surrounded both countries with military forces and offensive weapons, withdrawn from a whole series of arms control treaties, and refused to negotiate resolutions to rational security concerns raised by Russia.

In December 2021, after a summit between Presidents Biden and Putin, Russia submitted a draft proposal for a new mutual security treaty between Russia and NATO, with 9 articles to be negotiated. They represented a reasonable basis for a serious exchange. The most pertinent to the crisis in Ukraine was simply to agree that NATO would not accept Ukraine as a new member, which is not on the table in the foreseeable future in any case. But the Biden administration brushed off Russia's entire proposal as a nonstarter, not even a basis for negotiations.

So why was negotiating a mutual security treaty so unacceptable that Biden was ready to risk thousands of Ukrainian lives, although not a single American life, rather than attempt to find common ground? What does that say about the relative value that Biden and his colleagues place on American versus Ukrainian lives? And what is this strange position that the United States occupies in today's world that permits an American president to risk so many Ukrainian lives without asking Americans to share their pain and sacrifice?

The breakdown in U.S. relations with Russia and the failure of Biden's inflexible brinkmanship precipitated this war, and yet Biden's policy "externalizes" all the pain and suffering so that Americans can, as another wartime president once said, "go about their business" and keep shopping. America's European allies, who must now house hundreds of thousands of refugees and face spiraling energy prices, should be wary of falling in line be-





hind this kind of “leadership” before they, too, end up on the front line.

At the end of the Cold War, the Warsaw Pact, NATO’s Eastern European counterpart, was dissolved, and NATO should have been as well, since it had achieved the purpose it was built to serve. Instead, NATO has lived on as a dangerous, out-of-control military alliance dedicated mainly to expanding its sphere of operations and justifying its own existence. It has expanded from 16 countries in 1991 to a total of 30 countries today, incorporating most of Eastern Europe, at the same time as it has committed aggression, bombings of civilians and other war crimes.

In 1999, NATO launched an illegal war to militarily carve out an independent Kosovo from the remnants of Yugoslavia. NATO airstrikes during the Kosovo War killed hundreds of civilians, and its leading ally in the war, Kosovo President Hashim Thaci, is now on trial at The Hague for the appalling war crimes he committed under the cover of NATO bombing, including cold-blooded murders of hundreds of prisoners to sell their internal organs on the international transplant market.

Far from the North Atlantic, NATO joined the United States in its 20-year war in Afghanistan, and then attacked and destroyed Libya in 2011, leaving behind a failed state, a continuing refugee crisis and violence and chaos across the region.

In 1991, as part of a Soviet agreement to accept the reunification of East and West Germany, Western leaders assured their Soviet counterparts that they would not expand NATO any closer to Russia than the border of a united Germany. U.S. Secretary of State James Baker promised that NATO would not advance “one inch” beyond the German border. The West’s broken promises are spelled out for all to see in 30 declassified documents published on the National Security Archive website.

After expanding across Eastern Europe and waging wars in Afghanistan and Libya, NATO has predictably come full circle to once again view Russia as its principal enemy. U.S. nuclear weapons are now based in five NATO countries in Europe: Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Turkey, while France and the U.K. already have their own nuclear arsenals. U.S. “missile defense” systems, which could be converted to fire offensive nuclear missiles, are based in Poland and Romania, including at a base in Poland only 100 miles from the Russian border.

Another Russian request in its December proposal was for the United States to simply rejoin the 1988 INF Treaty (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty), under which both sides agreed not to deploy short- or intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe. Trump withdrew from the treaty in 2019 on the advice of his National Security Adviser, John Bolton, who also has the scalps of the 1972 ABM Treaty, the 2015 JCPOA with Iran and the 1994 Agreed Framework with North Korea dangling from his gun-belt.

None of this can justify Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, but the world should take Russia seriously when it says that its conditions for ending the war and returning to diplomacy are Ukrainian neutrality and disarmament. While no country can be expected to completely disarm in today’s armed-to-the-teeth world, neutrality could be a serious long-term option for Ukraine.

There are many successful precedents, like Switzerland, Austria, Ireland, Finland and Costa Rica. Or take the case of Vietnam. It has a common border and serious maritime disputes with China, but Vietnam has resisted U.S. efforts to embroil it in its Cold War with China, and remains committed to its long-standing “Four Nos” policy: no military alliances; no affiliation with one country against another; no foreign military bases;



and no threats or uses of force.

The world must do whatever it takes to obtain a ceasefire in Ukraine and make it stick. Maybe UN Secretary General Guterres or a UN special representative could act as a mediator, possibly with a peacekeeping role for the UN. This will not be easy—one of the still unlearned lessons of other wars is that it is easier to prevent war through serious diplomacy and a genuine commitment to peace than to end a war once it has started.

If and when there is a ceasefire, all parties must be prepared to start afresh to negotiate lasting diplomatic solutions that will allow all the people of Donbas, Ukraine, Russia, the United States and other NATO members to live in peace. Security is not a zero-sum game, and no country or group of countries can achieve lasting security by undermining the security of others.

The United States and Russia must also finally assume the responsibility that comes with stockpiling over 90% of the world's nuclear weapons, and agree on a plan to start dismantling them, in compliance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the new UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

Lastly, as Americans condemn Russia's aggression, it would be the epitome of hypocrisy to forget or ignore the many recent wars in which the United States and its allies have been the aggressors: in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Somalia, Palestine, Pakistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen.

We sincerely hope that Russia will end its illegal, brutal invasion of Ukraine long before it commits a fraction of the massive killing and destruction that the United States and its allies have committed in our illegal wars. **Z**

Medea Benjamin is cofounder of CODEPINK for Peace, and author of several books, including *Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Is-*

lamic Republic of Iran.

Nicolas J. S. Davies is an independent journalist, a researcher with CODEPINK and the author of *Blood on Our Hands: The American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq.*

Why Europe Needs to Take a Hard Look at Itself

By Boaventura de Sousa Santos

Europe needs to take a hard look at itself. Because it has proved to be incapable of dealing with the causes of the Ukraine crisis, Europe is now condemned to deal with its consequences.

Although the dust of this tragedy has not even begun to settle, we are forced to conclude that Europe's leaders did not and do not have what it takes to deal with the situation at hand. They will go down in history as Europe's most mediocre leaders since the end of the Second World War. They are now making sure that they do their best in terms of humanitarian assistance, and their efforts in that regard should not be questioned. But the reason they are doing it is to save face in the light of the biggest scandal of our time. Over the last seventy years they have ruled over populations who have been at the forefront in terms of organizing themselves and demonstrating against war wherever it happens to be waged. But it turns out that they were not able to defend those same populations from the war that had been brewing at home since at least as early as 2014. The European democracies have just shown that they have a government without the people. There are numerous reasons for coming to this conclusion.

Both Russia and the U.S. have been preparing for this war for some time. In the case of Russia, there had been clear indications, in recent years, that the country was accumulating huge gold reserves and giving priority to

a strategic partnership with China. This was especially noticeable in the financial sphere, where a bank merger and the creation of a new international currency are the ultimate goal, and in the sphere of trade, with its Belt and Road Initiative and the tremendous possibilities for expansion that it will open up throughout Eurasia. As regards relationships with its European partners, Russia has proved to be a credible partner, while making clear what its security concerns were. These were legitimate concerns, if we only stop to think that in the world of superpowers there is neither good nor bad, only strategic interests that need to be accommodated. That was the case with the 1962 missile crisis, when the US drew a red line in respect of the installation of medium-range missiles 70 km from its border. Let it not be thought that the Soviet Union was the only one to give in, because the US also removed its medium-range missiles from Turkey. Trade-off, accommodation, lasting agreement. Why wasn't it possible in the case of Ukraine? Let us turn to the preparations on the U.S. side.

Faced with the decline of the global dominance it has enjoyed since 1945, the U.S. is trying at all costs to consolidate its zones of influence, so as to maintain its advantages in trade and access to raw materials for U.S. companies.

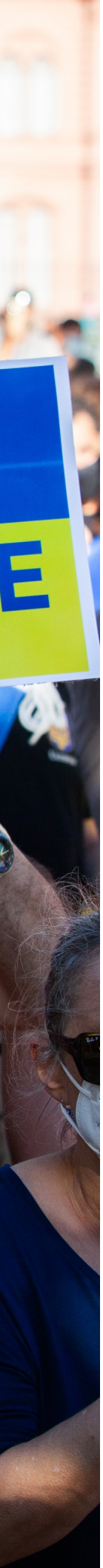
What is written below has been gleaned from official and think tank documents:





We stand with
UKRAINE

We stand with
UKRAINE



The policy of regime change is not aimed at creating democracies, but rather at creating governments that are loyal to U.S. interests. Not a single democratic State has emerged from the bloody interventions in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya. The promotion of democracy was not what led the U.S. to actively support coups that deposed democratically elected presidents in Honduras (2009), Paraguay (2012), Brazil (2016) and Bolivia (2019), not to mention the 2014 coup in Ukraine. China has been the U.S.'s main rival for some time now. In the case of Europe, the U.S. strategy rests on two pillars: to provoke Russia and to neutralize Europe (and Germany in particular). In 2019, the Rand Corporation, a well-known organization dedicated to strategic studies, published a report entitled "Extending Russia," produced at the request of the Pentagon. The report details how to provoke countries in ways that can be exploited by the U.S. It has this to say about Russia: "We examine a range of nonviolent measures that could exploit Russia's actual vulnerabilities and anxieties as a way of stressing Russia's military and economy and the regime's political standing at home and abroad. The steps we examine would not have either defense or deterrence as their prime purpose, although they might contribute to both. Rather, these steps are conceived of as elements in a campaign designed to unbalance the adversary, leading Russia to compete in domains or regions where the United States has a competitive advantage, and causing Russia to overextend itself militarily or economically or causing the regime to lose domestic and/or international prestige and influence." Do we need to hear more in order to understand what is happening in Ukraine? Provoke Russia into expanding and then criticize it for doing so. NATO's eastward expansion—against what was agreed with Gorbachev in 1990—was key in triggering the provocation. Another im-

portant step was the violation of the Minsk accords. It should be pointed out that when the Donetsk and Luhansk regions first claimed independence, following the 2014 coup, Russia did not support the claim. It favored autonomy within Ukraine, as provided for in the Minsk accords. It was Ukraine—with U.S. support—that tore up the agreements, not Russia.

As for Europe, its number one concern is to consolidate its status as a minor partner that does not dare interfere with the zones of influence policy. Europe has to be a reliable partner, but it cannot expect reciprocal treatment. That is why the EU—to the clueless surprise of its leaders—found itself excluded from AUKUS, the security pact between the U.S., Australia and the UK for the Indo-Pacific region. The minor partner strategy requires that Europe become more dependent, not only in military terms (something that NATO can always be relied on to ensure) but also with regard to the economy and the area of energy in particular.

U.S. foreign policy (and democracy) is dominated by three oligarchies (for oligarchs are not the monopoly of Russia and Ukraine): the military-industrial complex; the gas, oil and mining complex; and the banking and real estate complex. These complexes yield fabulous profits thanks to so-called monopoly rents, i.e., privileged market positions that allow them to inflate prices. Their goal consists in keeping the world at war and increasingly dependent on U.S. arms supplies. Europe's energy dependence on Russia was thus something unacceptable. And yet, in Europe's eyes, it was not a question of dependence, but rather of economic rationality and a diversification of partners. With the invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing sanctions, everything fell into place as planned. The stocks of the three complexes rose immediately, and the champagne began to flow. A mediocre, ignorant Europe, totally lacking in strategic vision, falls help-

lessly in the hands of these complexes, which will soon let Europe know what prices it will have to pay. Europe will be impoverished and destabilized because its leaders failed to rise to the moment. Worse than that, it can't wait to arm Nazis. Nor does it seem to remember that, in December 2021, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution—proposed by Russia—aimed at “combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fueling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.” Two countries, the U.S. and Ukraine, voted against it.

The current peace negotiations are misconceived. It makes no sense that negotiations should be solely between Russia and Ukraine. They should be between Russia and the US/NATO/EU. The 1962 missile crisis was resolved between the USSR and the U.S. Did anyone think of inviting Fidel Castro to the negotiation table? It is a cruel delusion to believe that there can be lasting peace in Europe without any concessions from the Western side. Ukraine, whose independence we all advocate, must not join NATO.

Have Finland, Sweden, Switzerland or Austria ever needed NATO in order to feel safe and to get ahead? The truth is that NATO should have been dismantled as soon as the Warsaw Pact came to an end. Only then would the EU have been able to establish a defense policy and military defense capabilities suited to its own interests rather than those of the US. What threats were there to Europe's security to justify NATO's interventions in Serbia (1999), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2004) or Libya (2011)? Will it be possible, after all this, to go on calling NATO a defensive organization? **Z**

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FIGHT
LIKE
HELL FOR
PEACE
&
DEMOCRACY

PUTIN
GO HOME

СЛАВА УКРАЇНІ
ГЕРОЯМ СЛАВА

Ще
не
вмерла
України

РАЗЫСКИВАЕТСЯ
ЖИВЫМ ИЛИ
МЕРТВЫМ



НА ХУЙ
ОСІ
КУЙ

We live on a planet in motion, a world of collision and drift. This was once an Earth of super-continents—Gondwana, Rodinia, Pangea. The eastern seaboard of the United States sidled up against West Africa, while Antarctica cozied up to the opposite side of the African continent. But nothing in this world lasts and the tectonic plates covering the planet are always in motion. Suddenly—over the course of hundreds of millions of years—supercontinents cease to be super, breaking into smaller land masses that drift off to the far corners of the world.

More recently, those itinerant continents were carved up by human beings into countries. A couple—China and India—are now home to more than a billion people each. But even modest-sized nations can be massive in their own right. Spain and Canada, neighbors in Pangea hundreds of millions of years ago, now have populations of almost 47 million and nearly 38 million, respectively, making them the 30th and 39th most populous countries on this planet. But together, they're no larger than a nation-less nation, a state of the stateless that exists only as a state of mind. I'm talking about the victims of conflict now adrift on the margins of our world.

The number of people forcibly displaced by war, persecution, general violence, or human-rights violations last year swelled to a staggering 84 million, according to UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency. If they formed their own country, it would be the 17th largest in the world, slightly bigger than Iran or Germany. Add in those driven across borders by economic desperation and the number balloons past one billion, placing it among the

three largest nations on Earth.

This “nation” of the dispossessed is only expected to grow, according to a new report by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), an aid organization focused on displacement. Their forecast, which covers 26 high-risk countries, predicts that the number of displaced people will increase by almost three million this year and nearly four million in 2023. This means that, in the decade between 2014 and 2023, the displaced population on this planet will have almost doubled, growing by more than 35 million people. And that doesn't even count most of the seven million-plus likely to be displaced by Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine.

“It is extremely worrying to see such a rapidly increasing number of displaced persons in such a short time,” said Charlotte Slente, the secretary general of the Danish Refugee Council. “This is where the international community and diplomacy need to step up. Unfortunately, we see a decreasing number of peace agreements and a lack of international attention to countries where displacement is predicted to rise most.”

Homeless Survivors of Nameless Wars

The history of humanity is a story of populations in motion, people eternally impelled and compelled and propelled to travel from here to there. The luckiest have always shoved off of their own volition, in comfort and with happy hearts. Many others have been shoved along in chains or at the point of a bayonet; forced to flee as bombs were crashing down around them; or because soldiers in military trucks or motorcycle-riding jihadis, armed with Kalashnikovs, came roaring into their villages.



War Torn

By Nick Turse



It's hard to wrap your mind around the enormity of 84 million people on the run today. It means that the population of the forcibly displaced is now more than double the number of Europeans driven from their homes by the cataclysm of World War II; 6 times the number of those displaced by the traumatic partition of India and Pakistan in 1947; or 105 times the number of Vietnamese "boat people" who fled to Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand during the 20 years that followed the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Thought of another way, about one in every 95 people on this planet is involuntarily on the move. Add in those driven by economic imperatives and one of every 30 people on Earth is now a migrant.

As of last June, nearly 27 million people were refugees on what Bob Dylan once called the "unarmed road of flight"—with 68% of them hailing from five countries: Syria (6.8 million), Venezuela (4.1 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million), South Sudan (2.2 million), and Myanmar (1.1 million). Far more of the forcibly displaced are, however, homeless within their own lands—victims of conflicts that go largely unnoticed by the wider world.

In 2018, I watched as a postage-stamp-sized camp for displaced people in Ituri Province in the far east of the Democratic Republic of Congo mushroomed from hundreds of people to more than 10,000, spilling beyond its borders and necessitating the creation of another sprawling encampment across town. At the time, women, children, and men in Ituri were being butchered alive by militiamen armed with machetes. And the attacks have never fully abated. Three years later, the violence and displacement continues.

In the first 10 days of this month alone, militiamen carried out eight attacks in Ituri. On February 1st, a massacre at a displaced persons camp there killed 62 people, injured 47, and displaced 25,000, adding to the already

astronomical numbers in Congo. Around 2.7 million Congolese were driven from their homes between January and November 2021, according to the United Nations, swelling the grand total of internally displaced people in that country to 5.6 million.

In 2020, as I traveled an ocher dirt road in Burkina Faso, a tiny landlocked nation in West Africa, I watched an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe. Families were streaming down that road from Barsalogho about 100 miles north of the capital, Ouagadougou, toward Kaya, a market town whose population had almost doubled that year. They were victims of a war without a name, a lethal contest between Islamist terrorists who massacre without compunction and government forces that have killed more civilians than militants.

And the suffering there persists as that conflict continues to force people from their homes. The number of internally displaced Burkinabe jumped 50% last year to more than 1.5 million, while another 19,200 people fled to neighboring countries, a 50% increase over 2020. This year, according to the Danish Refugee Council, an additional 400,000 Burkinabe will likely be displaced. And that's only part of a wider regional crisis that has engulfed neighboring Mali and Niger where another one million people have been rendered homeless.

Across the continent, the civil war in Ethiopia that began in November 2020 has left it with one of the world's largest internally displaced populations. At the end of that year, 2.1 million people had already been put to flight within the country. By the close of 2021, that number had doubled to 4.2 million. As in Congo, violence and displacement has left some of the unluckiest doubly victimized. Earlier this month, for example, Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia's Barahle refugee camp were attacked by armed men who killed five of them, kidnapped several women, and sent

more than 14,000 refugees fleeing to other towns.

Afghanistan has been the site of still another conflict-driven crisis. Since the U.S. invasion of their country in 2001, almost six million Afghans have been either internally displaced or become refugees, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project. Similarly, more than 10 years after the start of the civil war in Syria, half that country's population remains trapped in limbo with about 6.6 million of them refugees abroad and 6.7 million displaced within their own country.

The February 2021 military takeover in Myanmar similarly spawned a mammoth displacement crisis with armed clashes, including airstrikes and shelling, accelerating the suffering. There are now at least 980,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from Myanmar in neighboring countries and around 812,000 internally displaced people there, including 442,000 forced from their homes since the coup.

Continental Divide

In 2014, about nine million of the world's displaced lived in low-income countries. Today, that number stands at an estimated 36 million and is forecast, by the Danish Refugee Council, to increase to 40 million by the end of 2023. The displacement crisis "disproportionally affects poorer countries and areas that already have enough on their plate," said the Council's Charlotte Slente. "We see that humanitarian funding is inadequate in a number of countries where displacement is taking place."

The DRC's forecast, based on a sophisticated model utilizing more than 120 indicators related to conflict, as well as to governance and environmental, demographic, and economic factors, suggests that Burkina Faso,

Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan and Sudan will all experience significant displacement in 2022 while Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Somalia are likely to see substantial increases in 2023. All told, the Council predicts that the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa driven from their homes will jump by more than five million by the end of next year.

In 2020, as I traveled down a road in a comfortable SUV with a heavily armed police escort toward the conflict zone in Burkina Faso, I watched families who had hitched up their donkeys and piled everything they could—kindling, sleeping mats, cooking pots—into sun-bleached carts heading the other way. If we were still living on the super-continent of Pangea, they could have bypassed the way station in Kaya and headed west through Mali and Guinea, ending up in Miami, Florida. But today that city of "cutting-edge art galleries, top-notch restaurants and funky but chic boutiques" where the median home price is \$471,000 and a country where 80% of the population lives on less than \$3 per day are a world apart or, rather, separated by 250 million years and 5,200 miles.

We live in a world where continental drift has left so many displaced Afghans, Burkinabe, Congolese, and others bottled up inside their own borders or in neighboring nations that are ill-equipped to bear the burden. The tyranny of the oceans that separate those displaced by conflict from safety has been intensified by callous governments, sealed borders, and heartless policies that curtail and criminalize humanity's most ancient response to danger: flight.

The very least the world's comfortable classes could do is throw money at the problem. The U.S. government—responsible for up to 60 million displaced people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen due to its war



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on terror—bears a special responsibility, but hasn't stepped up. "Funding constraints continue to hamper [the] humanitarian response to displacement," reads the Danish Refugee Council's 2022 Global Displacement report. "Looking at the current forecasts for 2022 and 2023, crises where humanitarian funding and attention from the international community is lacking, displacement is forecast to increase significantly."

In the countries where humanitarian response plans were more than 50% funded in 2021, displacement is predicted to increase by an average of 59,000 people. In those where funding was less than 50%, it's projected to jump by 160,000 people, on average. "The international community needs to step up with extra support to the countries that are most affected by displacement," said the DRC's Slente.

If only.

One day, our itinerant continents will slam back together with, according to some forecasts, North America crashing into Africa, old neighbors rejoined after so much time apart. It will, unfortunately, be 300 million years too late for those now within the nationless nation, those rendered homeless by war, violence, and persecution. Our arbitrary borders, miserly aid, and cruel policies ensure that those most victimized by conflict will remain adrift, wandering the planet in search of safety, discarded by the rest of us as marginal people on the margins of an unforgiving world. Z

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