

The Invasion of Ukraine One Year On

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As Russia's barbaric invasion of Ukraine approaches its one-year anniversary, [Fred Leplat](#) writes about the ongoing battle and why Western leftists should continue to support the Ukrainian resistance.

Friday 24 February 2023 will mark one year since the Russian army invaded Ukraine on the orders of Putin and his regime. A year of indescribable suffering and bloodshed for the Ukrainian people. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians have died, and millions of civilians are refugees abroad or are internally displaced. Innumerable war crimes have been committed by Russian troops. The death and destruction inflicted on Ukraine falls under the UN definition of genocide.

The invasion on 24 February 2022 was totally unjustified. Russia was at no risk of invasion from Ukraine, and there was no imminent security threat from NATO. The purpose of the invasion was to make Ukraine a loyal satellite of Moscow and to grab the mineral and agricultural resources of Ukraine. It is an imperialist adventure, no different from those carried out by Western imperialism, such as the colonial wars of the 19th century. Putin wants to return Ukraine to being a colony, as it was under the Tsars. Putin has justified the war by claiming that the country needed to be "denazified," and that Ukrainians were not, in any case, a distinct people with their own language and history.

The Ukrainian people have rightly refused to be passive victims of this war of aggression and are actively and massively resisting the invasion. For them, it is a war of national liberation and independence. It is an entirely legitimate resistance, which internationalists and revolutionaries should support unconditionally. The support for their military resistance against invasion, like for other similar wars by imperialism, is regardless of the character of the Ukrainian government. While the Zelenski government is bourgeois and neoliberal, it is not a far right nationalist or even a neo-fascist regime like the one in Russia. However, we should be critical of the Zelenski government, which has embraced neoliberalism, is attacking labour rights, and seeks to join the European Union and NATO. We should support Ukraine's left and labour movement in their opposition to Zelenski's neoliberal reforms, and we should join them in discussions about post-war reconstruction based on social, climate, and economic justice, and we should call on our governments to cancel, not just postpone, Ukraine's debt.

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Anyone who is an internationalist and anticapitalist should be in solidarity with the resistance (armed and otherwise) of the people of Ukraine against the invasion and destruction of their country. That means supporting the right of Ukraine to obtain all the military equipment necessary, from wherever possible, including NATO, to liberate their country. The supply of arms should be without strings or illusions in NATO and the West because the supply of arms can be used to control

the scope and duration of the war and to force Ukraine into an unacceptable peace deal. Russian and Western imperialism should not decide the future of Ukraine for its people.

NATO and Western imperialism are backing Ukraine for their own geopolitical interests, so there should be no illusion that NATO and Western imperialism are forces for democracy. They will back countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia that are undemocratic and wage war on their weaker neighbours. Like most wars, the one in Ukraine has several characters. While the main character is one of national liberation, there is also, indirectly, a proxy war between Western and Russian imperialism. Western imperialism has regularly intervened in struggles for national independence and liberation to subvert and limit the goals of the popular struggle. This in no way should stop internationalists from supporting the people of Ukraine in their resistance against the occupation, destruction, and annexation of their country. This means providing political and material solidarity, in particular to leftist, feminist, and trade union organisations in Ukraine.

The people of Ukraine did not start the war, and they have no choice but to fight militarily against the onslaught of the Russian army. They desperately want peace to stop the destruction and deaths. Ukraine put forward a ten-point peace plan in December, which includes the release of all prisoners and deportees; restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity; the withdrawal of Russian troops; and the cessation of hostilities. But the response of Sergey Lavrov, Putin's foreign minister, was a threatening ultimatum: "Our proposals for the demilitarisation and denazification of the territories controlled by the regime, the elimination of threats to Russia's security emanating from there, including our new lands, are well known to the enemy... The point is simple: fulfil them for your own good. Otherwise, the issue will be decided by the Russian army." Russia's intentions remain clear: carry on the war to annex the whole of Ukraine.

While all wars end with a negotiated settlement, it is a delusion to believe that a ceasefire now would be respected by Putin, that he would withdraw his troops back to the 23 February 2022 positions, and that he would agree to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity. As long as the people of Ukraine want to and are able to fight for the liberation of their country and are satisfied with a peace deal, they should be supported. A call today simply for peace talks without also calling for an immediate withdrawal of Russian troops is tantamount to calling on the Ukrainians to accept the annexation of part or the whole of their country. It removes from the Ukrainians any role they should have in the crisis in which they are at the centre and fails to support their right to determine the future of their country.

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The situation is, of course, very dangerous for world peace. There is a risk that the proxy war will escalate into a direct clash between Western and Russian imperialisms. NATO has used the Russian invasion to give itself a new purpose. After the failure of the 20-year-long war against Islamist terrorism, it now presents itself as a defender of liberal democracy and smaller nations. NATO has seized the opportunity to accept new members and obtain massive increases in the military budgets of member countries. But NATO is not a force for democracy. It is the military wing of Western imperialism, acting or at least threatening to act when its economic wing (e.g., the IMF, the World Bank, and the European Central Bank) cannot defend its geopolitical interests when rival imperialist powers threaten its position as the dominant world power bloc. When internationalists support the Ukrainians' right to resist the Russian invasion militarily and obtain arms from NATO countries, they are not endorsing NATO. There have been many movements of national liberation in the past that called upon imperialist countries for arms without being condemned by socialists: Irish nationalists in 1917, the Spanish republic in 1936, the communist resistance in World War Two, to name a few.

The cynicism of Western imperialism in their claim that it is supporting resistance against an unjust invasion of a small country can be judged by its enthusiasm for a war crimes tribunal. It is undoubtedly evident that Russian troops have committed war crimes and arguably even a genocide. A war crimes tribunal should be set up. But Western imperialism also committed war crimes when NATO invaded Afghanistan in 2001, justifying it as necessary to fight terrorism and as part of a "clash of civilizations." It also committed war crimes when Blair and Bush illegally invaded Iraq in 2003 on the spurious grounds that there were weapons of mass destruction that posed an imminent threat. Yet Blair and Bush escaped justice.

A year after the brutal and unprovoked invasion, a global week of action is being organised against the Russian aggression and in solidarity with Ukraine. Socialists and internationalists need to show that they support Ukraine's right to fight back against Russia's invasion. If we are not seen as being on the side of the people of Ukraine, then the only voices they will hear will be those of western imperialists, not those of socialists and internationalists. We cannot let that happen.

Solidarity with the people of Ukraine!

Russian troops out!

Fred Leplat

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P.S.

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