

The Russian invasion of Ukraine: one year on

Saturday 18 February 2023, by [CHOO Chon Kai](#), [PSM \(Malaysia\)](#) (Date first published: 18 February 2023).

24th February 2023 marks the 1st anniversary of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, a watershed event that has reshaped the geopolitical balance in the 21st century towards a greater degree of global instability.

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World opinion is divided on the question of war in Ukraine, and so is the Left internationally. Most people on the political Left are against the war, but differ on many questions related to the war and actions that needed to be taken. Some [view](#) the war in Ukraine as an inter-imperialist war “waged for the interests of the monopolies and the bourgeois classes and not the peoples”; some view Russia as the lesser evil against US imperialism, thus focusing their criticism on US imperialism but falling short of condemning Russia; some [express](#) solidarity with the Ukrainians in their resistance to Russian military aggression; while some [view](#) Ukraine as pawn or proxy for the US imperialism to weaken Russia. The question of arming the Ukrainian resistance against Russian invasion is also a divisive one and puts the Left in a dilemma: supporting military aid to Ukraine is being seen as equivalent to siding with US imperialism and NATO militarist expansionism, while opposing military aid to Ukraine would be seen as condoning Russian atrocities in Ukraine.

Imperialist geopolitical rivalry behind the war in Ukraine

The ongoing Russian war on Ukraine has already resulted in the deaths of thousands of Ukrainian civilians and tens of thousands of troops on both sides, with the actual number could be much higher, in addition to at least 14,000 killed between 2014 and the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, while millions were forced to flee their homes. The invasion has had negative impacts on international food supplies that have caused a rapid increase in food prices and shortages of food supplies around the world, as well as worsening the energy crisis in Europe. The war in Ukraine is also subjected to the risk of escalation into a nuclear war, which will be catastrophic to the entire world.

The current war in Ukraine is the continuation of the war in Donbas that broke out in 2014 following the Euromaidan protests that ousted pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich from the presidency, the installation of a pro-Western government in Kyiv, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, and pro-Russian unrest in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. The latest stage of the conflict — the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine — is the product of geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the Western powers led by the United States (US).

One major factor that fuelled the conflict to escalate into a full-scale war in Ukraine is the aggressive push by the warmongering US over the years to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) eastward to Russia’s border. NATO is an antique from the 20th-century Cold War that

survived in the 21st century to serve as the mechanism for US-led Western imperialist domination and militarization.

While we must strongly criticize and condemn the imperialist policies of the US and NATO for contributing to the escalation of geopolitical conflicts, we must not ignore or downplay the Russia's role as the direct aggressor in the case of the war in Ukraine. An aggressor is an aggressor, and we need to be clear about this to avoid ending up becoming apologists for the aggressor. We must oppose US imperialism and NATO militarism, and so must we oppose Russia for its irresponsible and barbaric actions towards Ukraine. Russian military aggression on Ukraine, a sovereign independent state since 1991, is unjustifiable for whatever reason the Kremlin claims.

Beside the Kremlin's "security concern" about the NATO eastward expansion, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has a very nationalist-chauvinist basis. As in his [speech](#) just three days before the invasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin is basically denying the existence of Ukraine by claiming "modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia" and blaming Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin for "separating, severing what is historically Russian land". Putin's attitude towards Ukraine is clearly what Lenin denounced as "Great Russian chauvinism".

Some who claimed to be anti-imperialists [view](#) the war in Ukraine in a positive light, as it is paving the way for the creation of a multipolar world, with Russia in the "vanguard of the multipolar world". Such a view is counterproductive to challenging imperialism. It only serves to reinforce Russia's desire to maintain its sphere of influence in the region.

Although US imperialism has caused massive devastation and suffering in many parts of the world, we do not have to side with or uncritically support repressive authoritarian regimes in our fight against US imperialism. With disastrous military adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq, and its dominance being challenged by emerging economic powers such as China, US imperialism, which emerged as the sole world superpower following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, has already been in decline over the last decade. While Russia is still far from being on par with US imperialism in terms of its economic power and political influence, it does not stop any of its autocratic nationalist-chauvinist-minded leaders like Putin from pursuing their wet dream of imperialism for an emerging capitalist economy, like what had happened before during Tsarist Russia or the post-World War II Soviet Union. We certainly don't need a multipolar world based on wars between a declining imperialist superpower and a wannabe imperialist power.

Putin [claimed](#) that on 24th February 2022, the day the Russian military launched its invasion of Ukraine, the goal of his so-called "special military operation" was to "demilitarise and de-Nazify Ukraine", along with protecting the Russian-backed "people's republics" in the Donbas region. One year on, it is quite clear that the whole invasion is far from achieving the goal of what Putin has claimed is "de-Nazification". Instead, the war has fuelled more anti-Russian far-right sentiment in Ukraine and elsewhere, provided fertile ground for the growth of neo-Nazism, and pushed the Ukrainian government led by Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a more anti-democratic and authoritarian direction.

The Russian war on Ukraine has also emboldened NATO to increase its effort of militaristic expansion in Europe, and certainly defeated the anti-imperialist cause to dismantle NATO.

The war has also reduced the already limited democratic space in both Russia and Ukraine, allowing an increasingly authoritarian trend to flourish. This is detrimental to progressive social movements.

We need to end the war, but how?

The war in Ukraine has to be ended if we want to avoid further catastrophic consequences. Prolonging military conflict is not going to benefit anyone except the weapon manufacturers or the military-industrial complexes.

It would be relatively easy to end this war, or at least to achieve a cease-fire in order to lay the foundations for peace negotiations, if Russia paused its military aggression and withdrew its troops from Ukraine, but this appears unlikely given the Kremlin's continued demand that Ukraine give up all regions annexed and occupied by Russian troops.

There were numerous attempts to hold peace talks to resolve the military conflict in Ukraine, but to no avail, as no sustainable solution was agreed upon, and both sides (including NATO, which backed Kyiv) did not sincerely resolve the problem in a mutually respectful and peaceful manner. Russia is attempting to bully its way into the Kyiv administration's capitulation and the cessation of territory from Ukraine, while the Ukrainian side is determined to defend its territory from foreign occupation.

War is never the answer. Military solutions will only lead to more devastation and conflict. Diplomacy based on mutual respect among all parties is the only sustainable way out of the conflict and to seek solutions for complex geopolitical questions. But any peace talk must be built on sincerity and trust. The only sincerity for the Kremlin to show is to stop the military aggression immediately, while the West, which backed Kyiv, should also tone down its aggressive rhetoric to build bridges for negotiation. Governments that chose to be neutral in this conflict, especially India and China, also have a role to play — at least persuade both sides (Russia and NATO) to cease hostilities and negotiate.

Nevertheless, we must be cautious that the call for an immediate cease-fire and peace talks does not degenerate into an implicit call for Ukraine to capitulate and subordinate itself to Russian domination. Negotiation does not imply capitulation, yet certainly all parties need to make compromises. But the bottom line has to be respect for the Ukrainian people's democratic right to self-determination and freedom from imperialist domination, and the same should also go for the people in Donbas and Crimea.

Here are some demands that we should push for to end this conflict:

- Immediate cease-fire and peace negotiations based on mutual respect;
- Withdrawal of Russian troops;
- The deployment of UN peacekeeping forces consists of troops from non-NATO countries to enforce the cease-fire;
- Support for the anti-war movement and democratic struggles in Russia;
- Support the democratic right to self-determination for the Ukrainian people as well as the people in the Donbas region;
- NATO must stop its eastward expansion.

The measures listed above will be difficult to implement as long as the US imperialist and Russian nationalist-chauvinist leaders insist on defending their interests. It is an imperative task for the people who mobilized from below to press for these changes.

The Russian war in Ukraine is part and parcel of the latest stage of the global capitalist crisis. The cutthroat competition for political-economic interests between declining US imperialism and emerging capitalist economies has set the backdrop for the “New Cold War” and more geopolitical conflicts. The struggle for peace in Ukraine and elsewhere in the world cannot be separated from the struggle against global capitalism, racism, sexism, nationalist-chauvinism, climate injustice, and ecological destruction. We need to (re-)build international solidarity among the working class and ordinary people to challenge the global capitalism that continues to breed injustices, crises and wars.

Choo Chon Kai
Coordinator
International Bureau
Parti Sosialis Malaysia
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P.S.

- THINKLEFT - PSM, FEBRUARY 18, 2023:
<https://thinkleft.net/2023/02/18/the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-one-year-on/>