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In Newly Released Letter, Ukrainian Activists Declare Solidarity With Palestine

Thursday 23 November 2023, by [KISHCHUK Yuliia](#), [SMITH Ashley](#) (Date first published: 22 November 2023).

Leftists in Ukraine are insisting on the urgent need to build solidarity without exception among oppressed peoples.

Part of the series: [Struggle and Solidarity: Writing Toward Palestinian Liberation](#)

Our world is being torn asunder by two horrific wars. Israel is carrying out a genocidal war against Palestine, massacring and wounding tens of thousands of people in Gaza. At the very same time, Russia continues its imperialist war to annex Ukraine, killing and maiming untold numbers in the process.

Instead of building solidarity between Palestine and Ukraine's struggle for self-determination, various imperialist powers as well as some on the left have practiced selective solidarity, supporting one and not the other. Ukrainian activists have challenged this approach by issuing a "[Ukrainian Letter of Solidarity with Palestinian People](#)."

Truthout contributor Ashley Smith interviews one of the organizers of the letter, Yuliia Kishchuk, about the two struggles, their similarities and differences, and the urgent need to build solidarity without exception among exploited and oppressed peoples.

Kishchuk is an interdisciplinary researcher and activist. Her research interests include Ukrainian visual arts from the late socialist period, decolonial and postcolonial methodologies, environmental humanities and feminist theory.

Ashley Smith: The Biden administration and other governments including that of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's in Ukraine have drawn an equivalence between Ukraine and Israel. What's wrong with that, and what has been its impact? Isn't the better parallel between Ukraine and Palestine?

Yuliia Kishchuk: Ukraine did not take someone else's land or bombard civil infrastructure, so comparing Ukraine to Israel lacks analytical accuracy. People who compare Ukraine and Israel usually do not think of Israel as a settler-colonial state. In their conceptualization, Israel is a successful country that manages to survive while being "surrounded by enemies."

They also claim that Israel is "the only democracy in the Middle East." This ignores the fact that while proclaiming liberal values, Israel occupies Palestinian land and abuses the rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories.

In fact, Israel and Russia share more in common. They use the same justification of "the right to self-

defense” to invade and occupy a land that lawfully does not belong to them.

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Their political regimes are also similar; both are far right and authoritarian and fuel their population with hateful and even genocidal propaganda about Ukrainians and Palestinians. They are both oppressor states.

In this situation, the oppressed nations are Ukraine and Palestine. Both experience occupation, land grabbing and ethnic cleansing. Both Ukrainians and Palestinians feel the United Nations has been and will be largely ineffective as long as Russia and the United States have a veto in the Security Council.

To pressure Israel and Russia, we both employ sanctions and boycott businesses that are operating as usual. Strong ties to the land prevent Ukrainians and Palestinians from even considering giving up their occupied territories as a solution.

Due to enduring events like the Nakba, Holodomor and Joseph Stalin’s forced displacement, both Ukrainians and Palestinians carry deep generational trauma exacerbated by ongoing aggressions. We have a common though distinct experience of national oppression.

In the midst of these two struggles, the question of ceasefire has come up. In the case of Gaza, most on the left support a call for a ceasefire and pair it with other demands like ending Israel’s siege, its occupation and its apartheid state. In the case of Ukraine, those that support its struggle do not support a ceasefire. What do you think of this contrast? How should we think about the ceasefire demand in concrete rather than abstract terms?

There is a core difference between the two demands. In the case of Gaza, the demand for a ceasefire comes from Palestinians, while in the case of Ukraine, this demand is imposed on us by the groups of Western leftists who ignore our voices.

Calls for a ceasefire in these two cases have very different targets and politics. The Western left’s call to “end war in Ukraine” is mainly addressed to Ukrainians and their allies, not Russia, the invading force. Thus, it is a demand for oppressed people to stop their struggle for liberation and is therefore reactionary.

In the case of Gaza, protests are directed at Israel and Western governments, urging them to take tangible steps to halt the ethnic mass killing of Palestinians. It is therefore a challenge to Western imperialism and Israel, the oppressor nation, and therefore progressive.

In the Palestinian context, an immediate ceasefire would save the lives of civilians. In the case of Ukraine, a ceasefire or peace talks would ratify occupation of Ukrainian land and subject civilians in those territories to repression, torture and killing.

Both Ukrainians and Palestinians recognize that lasting peace necessitates justice and concrete security assurances. Therefore, in both cases, a ceasefire alone does not represent the ultimate demand.

What is the history of Ukraine’s relationship with Palestine? What formal political positions has it taken in the UN and in diplomacy?

Ukraine is committed to the two-state solution. Diplomatic ties between the two nations were

officially established on November 2, 2001, marked by the opening of the Palestinian Embassy in Kyiv. Ukraine has consistently backed UN resolutions denouncing Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories.

In the most recent vote in the [UN on November 12](#), Ukraine voted in favor of ending the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This resolution called for an international investigation into Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories in the West Bank. It is also crucial to note that Palestine did not support the annexation of Crimea in 2014, fully supporting territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Moreover, our peoples have concrete ties. Prior to the full-scale invasion, more than 4,000 Palestinians had made Ukraine their home. Many of them had arrived to pursue education, build families and establish businesses.

Conversely, thousands of Ukrainians, predominantly women and children, were residing in occupied and besieged Palestine, including [830 in Gaza](#). The exact number of children born into Ukrainian-Palestinian households is not known, but tragically, they now endure the compounded trauma of war, displacement and occupation.

One challenge for Ukraine and its struggle for liberation from Russian imperialism has been winning support from the Global South. By contrast, Palestine has overwhelming support from the Global South as they see in it an echo of their struggles for liberation. What impact has the Biden administration and Zelenskyy's equation of Israel and Ukraine had on these dynamics? How can that be changed?

The recent announcement by Volodymyr Zelenskyy has significantly damaged Ukrainian diplomatic relations with the Global South. Drawing parallels between Ukraine, a nation combating imperial invasion, and Israel, a country engaged in illegal occupation while bombing schools and hospitals, is morally erroneous, confuses the oppressed and oppressor, and disrupts the solidarity between oppressed peoples.

I believe the most significant mistake made by the Ukrainian political establishment, Western journalists and politicians is framing resistance against Russia's imperialist invasion using civilizational rhetoric, reminiscent of Samuel Huntington's racist discourse about a "clash of civilizations." It's no surprise that such rhetoric fails to resonate with the Global South.

By centering the fight as a defense of European civilization, we overlook and fail to acknowledge Western imperialism's colonial past and the atrocities it continues to inflict on oppressed nations throughout the world. Therefore, recognizing and being more sensitive toward the colonial experiences of the Global South are crucial for building solidarity. Navigating this perspective without sounding Eurocentric poses a challenge that requires careful thought, dialogue and communication.

Simultaneously, Russia presents itself as a decolonizing force that opposes Western imperialism. It does not miss a chance to condemn war crimes committed by its rivals, like in case of Vladimir Putin's recent claims in support of Palestine. But, of course, this reeks of hypocrisy as his regime commits ongoing war crimes in Ukraine.

We must see that Western and non-Western imperialisms operate similarly, and we have to oppose them both. Only such opposition to all imperialisms can foster the real solidarity between decolonial struggles throughout the world.

Russia has carried out an imperialist invasion of Ukraine with the tacit support of China.

At the same time, China and Russia have both called for a ceasefire and postured as friends of Palestine, despite having deep economic and diplomatic relationships with Israel. For its part, the U.S. has supported Ukraine in its struggle for liberation but backed Israel, its apartheid regime, occupation and current genocidal war. What does this mean for the relationship of the two national liberation struggles with these various imperialist powers?

Unfortunately, I am quite pessimistic about this at the moment. Pragmatic alliances make it hard to pursue lasting solidarities between Ukraine and Palestine.

Among Ukrainians, it is hard to sympathize with Palestine since it is often equated to Hamas, which is often seen as a Russian and Iranian proxy. There is a common misapprehension in Ukraine and in the West that Palestinians support Russia, while in fact 71 percent of [Palestinians opposed the invasion of Ukraine](#).

So, this is challenging, but we should build bridges of solidarity.

Much of the left in various forms has fallen into a trap of selective solidarity. Many have not supported Ukraine in its struggle against Russia. Others have not supported Palestine in its struggle for liberation from Israeli occupation. What do you think about this pattern? What's the alternative to such selective solidarity?

We must foster solidarity that transcends the simplistic politics left over from the Cold War. This entails supporting all exploited and oppressed peoples irrespective of their governments' political stances.

While a solely pragmatic approach might suggest that there's little room for solidarity between Ukrainians and Palestinians, I hold onto the belief that there exists something beyond mere pragmatism and the adage "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Solidarity is hard work, and it often comes from the place of feeling distress by addressing uncomfortable questions about the existing geopolitical order and problematic alliances. However, it also requires creating a space filled with mutual empathy and understanding.

Last year in Hebron, I met a Palestinian activist whose brother is in the Kharkiv territorial defense units resisting Russian imperialism. I also talked with many people who genuinely empathized with Ukrainians.

I think that moving beyond selective solidarity will only be possible by cultivating mutual understanding of shared experiences of atrocities and occupation. Ukraine is a real place with real destruction and war, so is Palestine. Only by building solidarity from below without exception can we win our common struggle for a better world.

Ashley Smith is a socialist writer and activist in Burlington, Vermont. He has written in numerous publications including *Truthout*, *The International Socialist Review*, *Socialist Worker*, *ZNet*, *Jacobin*, *New Politics*, and many other online and print publications. He is currently working on a book for Haymarket Books entitled *Socialism and Anti-Imperialism*.

Yuliia Kishchuk

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