**Conflict in Europe**

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Wednesday, Jan 25, 2023

Decolonization is a term I don’t use. It’s too passive and, like other supposedly left politics that avoid/ignore discussion of class, it opens the space where capitalists can creep in and stifle genuine revolutionary change. In other words, one oppressive structure is replaced by several–all of them assuming the permanence of capitalism and its current hierarchies. This results in the decolonized colonies remaining colonized, only then they are part of a unipolar system ruled directly and indirectly by US imperialism. The illusion of liberation or, to be more accurate since liberation is not the intention, the illusion of independence.

Ukraine does not have the means to get what it wants militarily without the financial and military support of Washington, which is using this conflict as a means to push Europe back to where it was in the 1950s-1970s. In other words, one goal of this war drive in Europe is to make Europe once again dependent on Washington for most of its military and economic backing. Washington rejected a peace dividend in the 1990s and built up its military while rejecting Europe’s thoughts of its own defense forces that included cooperation with Moscow for European security. Meanwhile, Europe’s economy grew.

The US wants both military and economic dominance. The response of the Russian government to being once again cast in an adversarial role was not an accident. It was the intention of post-Soviet US foreign policy to create military conflict with Moscow. Moscow acted as almost any state would, especially one with Moscow’s legacy. While this obviously does not excuse the invasion of Ukraine, it does explain it in terms by which such states operate.

Recently, a statement from an adhoc group of leftist supporters of NATO supplying weapons to Kyiv issued a statement in solidarity with the Kyiv government and its demands. Without spending too much time on the statement, there are a couple assumptions it is based on that I think should be addressed. First, is its presentation of all “imperialisms” as equal. Russia’s military basing in less than a half dozen outside states and China’s commercial dealings in the world are not equivalent to Washington’s military presence all over the globe or its ultimate control of the world economy via the dollar. Those who argue that Russia’s military involvement in Syria and Ukraine are a reaction to long time encroachment by Washington are correct. Iran’s involvement is similarly motivated. My pointing this out doesn’t indicate support for either government (or for China). It merely restates what should be obvious: Washington remains the primary imperialist power in the world hundreds of times over nd most conflicts now ocurring are the result of Washington’s imperial reach.

Most supporters of Kyiv never talk about the nature of the Ukraine government or that Kyiv has had military conscription with the threat of prison since at least March 2022. Likewise, they dismiss peace as an “abstract.” Also, supporting the right of every oppressed people to self-determination while rejecting the right of the oppressed people in the Eastern provinces of Ukraine to their own self-determination is hypocritical. If they think whatever progressive forces existing in Ukraine will be in power after the war ends most likely through negotiations, they really are being foolish about how nazis work. I take Zelensky’s popularity with a grain of salt. It’s as superficial as his smile.

The early twentieth-century socialist Franz Mehring wrote this on the question of Polish self-determination in an essay titled “The Polish Question”: “The age when a bourgeois revolution could create a free Poland is over, today the rebirth of Poland is only possible through a social revolution in which the modern proletariat breaks its chains” If one replaces the nation of Poland with Ukraine, this statement still rings true. In other words, Ukraine will not free if it wins This is true whether Ukraine wins everything it wants in the current conflict or if it settles for a settlement that doesn’t include all the land it considers its own.

One other common pronouncement by those who support the war against Russia is that those of us calling for peace talks are dealing in meaningless abstractions.

It seems to me that if we want to talk about abstractions, then the idea that there any progressive forces in the Ukrainian government (as leftists supporting Kyiv in the war claim) is certainly one. Furthermore, the idea that these progressive forces will have a say in a future government is even moreso. In fact, I’m curious to see what these elements of the left will say if Kyiv wins and then continues to deny many workers the right to unionize, while privatizing health care, public housing, and energy. If and when the Russian forces do withdraw, most Ukrainians will be no less oppressed than they were in 2021. That is, unless they are among the oligarchs and the fascists who have propelled much of this nationalist drive since its inception. You can bet these latter elements will demand a bigger role in a post-conflict government and will go after its “enemies.”

Among other reasons, this is why peace talks need to begin. As far as Kyiv is concerned, victory on the battlefield is not only an uncertainty, it is unlikely without a wider conflict. Moscow, despite its apparent military shortcomings, has the military advantage even with Nato weaponry pouring into Ukraine. However, the political advantage is with Kyiv. It is an advantage that should be used towards coming to an agreement which all sides will honor. That will happen now or later at a negotiating table, not on the battlefield.

The pretense that this conflict began in 2022 is just that. So is the claim it began in 2014. It began in 1947, give or take a few months. Washington decided it was going to use it’s postwar advantage to dominate the world economically and militarily. Despite some major setbacks along the way, it has mostly succeeded. Today’s international situation is unfolding as a period of great challenge to the hegemonic dreams of the United States; perhaps even greater than the period following its defeat in Vietnam and Iran. Yet, Washington continues to reject cooperation or detente with its chosen enemies, choosing instead to continue its warmongering, inflaming an already dangerous dynamic.

Excerpted: ‘Meditations on the Conflict in Europe’.

Courtesy: Counterpunch.org