**Flames of war**

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The massive aid package for Ukraine announced by the US may have created a ripple of excitement among the war-mongers and investors sitting in the power corridors of Washington but it should be a source of concern for millions of American and European citizens who might witness an escalation of tensions in the continent.

The $40 billion package approved by the US Senate with an overwhelming majority vote of 86 to 11 reflects the desire of the American ruling elite to squander public money ruthlessly on a conflict that has the potential of escalating into a nuclear Armageddon. This latest allocation of funds is in addition to $13.6 billion that the US allocated in March in emergency assistance for the war-ravaged country bringing the total of Washington’s aid to Ukraine to a historic $53 billion since the eruption of war in February this year.

The pretext of extending help and succour to the hapless Ukrainian people has been employed to justify this mammoth allocation of funds but in reality, out of this staggering $40 billion, only a paltry one billion dollars, has been set aside for the refugees whose plight has moved many across the world. The largest chunk will go to death and destruction, which means out of the package, $20 billion will be pocketed by US arms manufacturers and defense industries’ executives. Another large chunk will be used to run state affairs which means paying salaries to the employees of the government. Most of this will go to Ukrainian soldiers. So, in a way, a large share of this $40 billion will go to the non-productive sector of the economy. This $20 billion in military assistance would ensure, according to the US government, a steady stream of advanced weapons that have been used to blunt Russia’s advances while $8 billion will be allocated for general economic support and $5 billion to address global food shortages.

The aid package is being criticized by various circles in the US and other parts of the world. American workers believe that it is being done at the expense of the American people who badly need assistance from the government after the devastation of the contagion that claimed over a million American lives besides hitting the marginalized sections of society in an unprecedented way. The pandemic has also increased poverty among the people in the second largest democracy.

Patrick Martin, a left-wing intellectual writing for the World Socialist Web Site, argues the package is a watershed event. He claims that the aid demonstrates the commitment by the Biden administration to supply virtually unlimited resources to a war which threatens to unleash a nuclear holocaust upon the world. “Having pushed the regime of Vladimir Putin relentlessly through two decades of Nato expansion to the east, and arming Ukraine to the teeth for a proxy war with Russia, American imperialism is rushing ahead recklessly, regardless of the danger of triggering World War III.”

He asserts that the aid is being given at a time when the American working classes are already facing myriad of economic hardships and that such aid should be extended to American masses instead of pumping it into this terrible conflict. He is of the view that in this $53 billion, the US could hire 500,000 teachers at $106,000 a year in salaries, provide a $6,000 raise to every nurse, teacher and nursing home worker in America (9.25 million workers) and offer a $1,000 raise to every worker in America making less than $15 an hour (52 million workers).

Martin observes, “Inflation is devastating the living standards of working people. By one analysis, the average American household will pay nearly $2,000 more for gasoline in 2022 and an additional $1,000 extra for food, to say nothing of rising rents, increased mortgage payments as interest rates are hiked by the Federal Reserve and other soaring costs.”

It is widely believed that the Democratic Party is peace loving, hating war and the military industrial complex but Democrats in the House of Representatives voted unanimously for the Ukraine war funding, 219-0. Martin claims that the Democratic Party has emerged as the war party of American imperialism. “There is no distinction in that regard between the ‘CIA Democrats’ – those who entered Congress in 2018 direct from the CIA, the Pentagon or the State Department – or those nominally adhering to the ‘left’, the Bernie Sanders wing of the party.”

It is not only the American ruling elite that has been generous towards Ukrainian war efforts; European ruling circles have also demonstrated their desire to foment the flames of the conflict. They have also pledged over $18 billion for the war-hit country – and again most of this is likely to benefit European arms manufacturing and the defence industry. The two centers of capitalism have always been reluctant in showing such generosity towards the people of the Global South that badly need funding to battle hunger and starvation. For instance, only a paltry five billion dollars is needed to end extreme hunger in Africa but the doors of Paris, London, Berlin and Washington are closed for such donation.

There is no denying the fact that the war has been very catastrophic for Ukrainian people and their government, which says that the country needs $4-5 billion per month in short-term funding, while over the longer term it will require a recovery strategy similar to the Marshall Plan for Europe after World War II. The war is believed to have destroyed infrastructure worth over $500 billion and reconstruction effort could cost $600 billion. The conflict has also badly hit the Ukrainian economy that is one of the top wheat exporters in the world and the International Monetary Fund expects Ukraine’s economy to contract 35 per cent in 2022 as a direct result of the war.

But pumping more money to prolong the bloody events will not serve the interests of Western, and especially European, people. Europe is heavily dependent on imports from Russia. Moscow supplies 40 per cent of the bloc’s gas and 27 per cent of its imported oil. It also provides them with coal and other items. It is surprising that the European ruling elite are ready to spend $220 billion to ditch Russian energy and have an ambitious project of squandering $314 billion by 2030 to end their dependency on Moscow but they are reluctant to ponder over peaceful means of settling this dispute which is likely to affect the European continent the most.

Europe should remember that it has been a battleground during the two catastrophic global wars. Most of the 70 million people who perished during World War II were from the continent. Any new conflict would plunge it into a deep crisis, pushing the continent towards the verge of annihilation.

The American and European elites might benefit from a possible war of attrition and the reconstruction, thinking that they are inflicting deep wounds on the Russian Bear but conflicts tend to be unpredictable. Therefore, it is the duty of European people to pressure their government into accepting the authority of the UN, letting the global body come up with a solution. Moscow should also realize that its plan has boomeranged on Putin’s administration, forcing the country to sell its imports at discounted rates, squandering public money on a senseless conflict and prompting Finland and Sweden to mull joining Nato. Russian and European people should wage a joint struggle to force Putin to withdraw his troops and prevent the West from fanning the conflict.

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