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U.S. wars, sanctions, economic austerity fuel global refugee crises



Fires rage in Baghdad as U.S.-led coalition forces attack the city, March 19, 2003.

The outpouring of sympathy for refugees fleeing the current war in Ukraine is nonstop. Continuous news feeds show pictures of damaged buildings, crowded trains, women and children packed into shelters — even a memorial of 100 empty, high-tech strollers symbolizing children who died.

Western media pundits claim this is the first time there has been a refugee crisis in Europe since 1945. They conveniently ignore the brutal U.S./NATO war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Or more telling, the 1.5 million refugees who fled Eastern Ukraine under intense fighting in provinces resisting the 2014 U.S.-backed right-wing coup.

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Every war has a disproportionate impact on women and children. The major difference between this conflict and the U.S. and/or NATO aggressions in Asia and Africa is that the U.S. is trying to use Ukraine as a battering ram against Russia, making it useful to promote sympathy for Ukrainian refugees, who are the cannon fodder for the war.

Since most Ukrainian refugees are white Europeans, the corporate media in the U.S. and Western Europe use racism, white supremacy and class orientation in their propaganda campaigns.

Racist media reports

Several racist media reports described Ukrainians fleeing war zones as “more civilized,” “more educated” and “more worthy,” compared to the 6.7 million refugees from the U.S.-driven conflict in Syria — commenting “they seem so like us.” (Daniel Hannan, The Telegraph, Feb. 26).

Al Jazeera English apologized for Peter Dobbie’s comment, that: “These are prosperous, middle-class people. They are not obviously refugees trying to get away from the Middle East or North Africa. They look like any European family that you’d live next door to.”

“We are in the 21st century; we are in a European city, and we have cruise missile fire as though we were in Iraq or Afghanistan. Can you imagine!” said a commentator on BFMTV, France’s leading news channel, during a live broadcast. (aninjusticemag.com, March 8)

These comments all ignore that the Middle East and Northern Africa had prosperous, educated workers and professionals before the U.S./NATO wars targeted and destroyed their countries.

‘Shock and awe’

The March 19, 2003, illegal U.S.-British attack, invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq began with “shock and awe,” a blitz bombing of Baghdad, destroying infrastructure and claiming tens of thousands of lives.

U.S. media avoided showing suffering Iraqis. Western reporters were tightly embedded within U.S. military units. Pentagon officials delivered “news briefings.” There was scant mention of the one-million-plus Iraqis who died as a result of this invasion and the decade of sanctions that preceded it and even less attention to the millions of Iraqi refugees forced to flee their homes or their homeland.

In the earlier 1991 Persian Gulf War, a U.S. aerial bombing attack targeted the Amiriyah civilian air-raid shelter in Baghdad, killing 408 Iraqi women and children on Feb. 13, 1991, and giving no advance notice for them to flee. No U.S. media highlighted this deadly catastrophe at the time.

Western media pundits actually cheered these wars, as they have so many other U.S. wars and occupations.

White-supremacist ethnic cleansing

Since the first arrival of Europeans in the Western Hemisphere 530 years ago, genocidal policies have murdered nearly 56 million Native people. Since 1776 the United States has invaded 70 nations, including lands of numerous Indigenous peoples. According to Donald Fixico, Arizona State University professor of history, by 1900 Indigenous populations in the U.S. had been decimated from millions to around 230,300. (history.com, Oct. 25, 2021)

Millions of Africans died as a result of the U.S. and European slave trade from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Many perished in the “Middle Passage” — the voyages enslaved Africans endured in the holds of slave ships crossing the Atlantic. Millions more died under the unspeakably brutal conditions of enslavement.

In 1948, global imperialism encouraged and allowed Zionists to violently uproot 90% of Palestinians from their land, wiping out over 500 Palestinian towns and villages and creating over 750,000 refugees who were permanently barred from returning to their historic homeland. The world bourgeois media has remained silent where the crimes of Israel are concerned.

Since 1950, the U.S. has invaded over 50 countries on every continent except North America, creating countless refugees, those fleeing war as well as the impact of U.S. economic sanctions — war by another name.

The civilian death toll in the U.S. war in Korea (1950-53) is estimated at over 3 million people. The U.S. implemented a scorched-earth policy, leaving few buildings standing on the land that is now the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. To this date there is no peace accord between the U.S. and the DPRK.

U.S. wars in Southeast Asia ripped apart Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in the 1960s and 1970s. The effort to dominate the region failed, but the massive destruction left 4 million dead, millions maimed and 2 million Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees desperate for resettlement.

84 million displaced people

The U.N. High Commission for Refugees estimates that in 2021, over 84 million people remained forcibly displaced worldwide, as a result of wars, violence and persecution. These numbers were double the totals of the previous decade and an increase of 1.6 million over 2020. These statistics include 26.6 million global refugees and 50.9 million internally displaced people.

Many left their home countries because of environmental disasters fueled by global warming. Many made the painful but conscious decision to leave home to escape violence and in search of less oppressive economic conditions.

No Western media banner headlines or top-of-the-hour coverage highlighted these humanitarian crises.

U.S. and EU politicians made no calls for immediate intervention, even though the numbers of refugees were greater than the entire population of the most populous EU member, Germany. Many of these refugees were fleeing wars initiated or backed by the United States and its NATO allies, including France and Britain. The majority of these 84 million refugees were people of color.

U.S. wars caused refugee crisis

For over a century, the U.S. has repeatedly intervened in countries in Central and South America and the Caribbean, including Haiti — creating an ongoing refugee crisis. In recent years U.S. economic sanctions drove over 5 million Venezuelans to leave their country, because of economic insecurity and shortages of food, medicine and essential services.

U.S. wars seeking to overturn governments in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Yemen and South Sudan are part of the “endless war” that President Joe Biden pledged to end when he issued his political platform in July 2019. Combined with equally deadly economic sanctions, they are responsible for the U.N.-documented surge of millions of refugees — mostly fleeing their homelands.

Almost half of Syria’s 23 million population was displaced by 11 years of U.S./NATO sanctions, their arming and financing of mercenary forces and bombing of infrastructure. There are currently 6.7 million Syrian refugees.

Over 3.5 million Afghan people have been displaced since the start of the U.S. brutal occupation in 2001. Despite a deepening humanitarian crisis, after U.S. forces withdrew in August 2021, the Biden administration seized \$7 billion of Afghanistan’s funds, which are needed to run essential government services.

Seven months of U.S./NATO bombing in Libya in 2011 destroyed the entire infrastructure of that modern African state. Two million Libyans — one-third of Libya’s pre-NATO intervention population — sought refuge in Tunisia.

South Sudan — the U.S. “creation” carved out of war-torn Sudan through a referendum orchestrated by the U.S. in 2011 — has the largest number of refugees in Africa. There are currently 4.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance including refugees and asylum-seekers. Over half of South Sudanese refugees are children.

The U.S. has played a pivotal role in the genocidal war in Yemen since 2014, supplying weapons and military assistance to Saudi Arabia. As of 2021 over 4 million people in Yemen have been internally displaced in one of the poorest countries in the Middle East.

Numerous U.S. spokespeople, including President Joe Biden, are calling for Vladimir Putin to be charged with “war crimes” by the International Court of Justice – the World

Court. However, the U.S. asserts that its own governing officials or military commanders — clearly guilty of multiple war crimes — cannot be prosecuted by the court because the U.S. withdrew from the court’s “compulsory jurisdiction” in 1986 — after the court ruled the U.S. owed Nicaragua war reparations.

Few countries in Europe willingly offered refuge to those fleeing the U.S./NATO wars in Africa and the Middle East. European states closed their borders to millions fleeing conflicts. The U.S. built walls on the border with Mexico to stop the mostly Central American refugees from entering and appealing for asylum.

Imperialist wars created the conditions that caused refugees to flee. This gigantic wave of forced migration — from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Central and South America to Europe and the U.S. — has resulted in the largest dislocation of humanity since World War II.

The opportunist sympathy for Ukrainians — expressed in racist terms — does nothing to remove the imperialists’ responsibility for this crisis.

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