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Nationalism: A Satanic Religion



Image by [Samuel Branch](#).

The centipede crept from between where the damp bag of sand rested on the concrete. I recoiled at first, but my curiosity for all things that crawled took over. I looked at the creature crawl away until my brother stomped on it. We were with our father as he and a half dozen other men moved the bags of sand from a truck and stacked them along the outside walls of our church basement. They staggered the bags like bricks four or five bags high. The church basement they were supposed to protect was where us elementary schoolchildren would shelter should there be a Soviet attack. It was October 1962. We lived about twenty miles outside of Washington, DC. My father, like many of the recently-arrived men in our town, worked for the National Security Agency. Their fear of a war, much less a nuclear war, with the Soviet Union was both tempered and intensified by the data they gleaned from the thousands of telegrams, phone calls, and other messages the

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agency intercepted each week. I had turned seven a few weeks earlier and was already both concerned and bored with the extra prayers we had to say every morning in our Catholic school next to the sandbagged church. After asking the nun who taught me why our prayers were only about the American people and not the Russians, Cubans or anyone else, I was told to be quiet. My father's response to the question was similar. I was told I would understand one day. I was wondering if I would ever make it to that day.

As other instances arose in my life that also raised this question about praying for everyone and not just one nation or another, I eventually realized that there was no understanding this type of insanity. In most instances where the people of a nation share a cultural heritage, modern nationalism is the weaponization of that culture. In nations where the population is composed of people from different cultures (like the US), that weaponization becomes the militarization of a supposed shared set of principles (freedom, liberty, etc.) Quite often in the latter case, the mix of cultures becomes its own battlefield as the dominant culture tries to maintain its dominance. This latter situation is certainly the history of the United States, where those who identify with the original colonists consider themselves the true "Americans." No matter what the case, the allegiance to the nation-state makes no sense. Like organized religion, most of us aren't getting much benefit from this concept. There were and are heroic struggles against occupation, colonial oppression and imperialism, but the idea of fighting for an artificial construct like a nation seemed as ridiculous as fighting for some god(s) who may not exist and certainly didn't care about humans battles with each other. Likewise, it became clearer and clearer to me that the only people who benefited from wars for god and nation were, for the most part, not the people I knew.

This presented a problem for me when I began siding with the national liberation forces in Vietnam, Angola and elsewhere around the world. After all, a fair amount of the propaganda in support of these struggles spoke about a national struggle—a struggle for a nation. While I never flew or carried a flag for any nation since I was a Boy Scout and once was enlisted to carry the US flag on the Fourth of July, I wasn't offended when I marched alongside the flag of the Vietnamese NLF or other popular struggles. Yet, I couldn't get a hundred percent behind these flags. Conversations and reading helped me realize that revolutionary struggles for national liberation were not the same as independence struggles that were not revolutionary. Still, to borrow a phrase from anarcho-communists Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer: "If national liberation is said to be a good breakfast but a poor supper", this meant that there

must be a greater goal than the replacement of a colonial or occupation government with a government by the popular forces. In Christie and Meltzer's understanding, that goal would be a genuine social revolution. Implicit in their statement regarding breakfast and supper is that such a revolution begins with a revolutionary struggle for national liberation. Yet, that beginning does not guarantee the social revolution. In fact, given the essential role economics plays in how society is structured, it becomes obvious that this social revolution requires the end of the existing economic system—precisely because it created and enforced that system.

There are those who insist that the Ukraine-Russia conflict is a Ukrainian struggle for national liberation. I cannot agree. The Ukrainian people had most recently achieved independence in 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated. As their government struggled to find its way as a capitalist nation, it alternated between alignment with Moscow and with the west under the direction of Washington. With covert and overt subversion from both of these powers, the government remained shaky while the newly-minted capitalist class raped and robbed the national economy, sending their tribute to either Moscow or the West, depending on the inclinations of the government in power. The opportunities for even more wealth by this class grew exponentially after a protest movement in 2014 was manipulated by Washington and encouraged extreme right-wing nationalist elements in their bloody mission. After failed negotiations and an invasion by Russian forces, the Kyiv military fought hard while the ministries started accepting arms from Washington and its cohorts in the NATO military alliance. In what Washington continues to bill as a worldwide outpouring, Kyiv and NATO claim the world is on their side. Yet, virtually every nation outside of Europe that has ever been a colony of one European nation or the other refuses to support either side in this unnecessary conflict. If anyone should know what constitutes a national liberation struggle, it would be these nations. Their silence speaks volumes. Most of the world wants the conflict to end.

Relatively few in the world see this conflict as a national liberation struggle. Many consider it a war between two imperial powers (obviously of differing strengths) with the people of Ukraine so far paying the highest price, with the energy and arms industries of nations involved seeing the highest profits. Unless this conflict provokes World War Three, it will end and the Ukrainian people will still be victim to a corrupt capitalist government intent on privatizing public services per IMF and other financiers' instructions. There will be no destruction of the capitalist system, no liberation from the vultures already picking at Ukraine's flesh. The Russian people, meanwhile, will continue

to live under the circumstances currently represented by President Putin. Unless, of course, the Russian government is overthrown; a scenario about as likely as the US government sharing a similar fate.

Nationalism in imperial nations and their client states is often linked to aggressive militarism. This in itself should be enough to raise suspicions as to its true intent. One need look no further than the conflict in Ukraine to see this. Instead of taking more time to work out an agreement to prevent war, Kyiv and its backers pushed even harder against peaceful resolutions until Moscow ran out of patience and attacked. If any of the governments truly cared about the fate of the Ukrainian people or the troops of all nations beyond their use as political pawns, they would have avoided a military response to the stalemate in negotiations. Bloodshed, however, seems to stir the soul of those without patience. When it can be sold as something noble to those who don't necessarily agree, war results. Toss in the designs and desires of empire and things can really go awry. After all is said and done, the mother, the child, the farmer and the worker will still suffer at the hands of the powerful. They will suffer the costs of victory and defeat. The national victory will truly only be the victory of those whose hands they suffer from.

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