

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد
بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY PATRICK COCKBURN
24.11.2022

What is Russia Fighting for Today?



Photo by [Don Fontijn](#)

It's curious to see the US military advocate diplomacy to end the war in Ukraine, while President Joe Biden and his senior officials oppose it. Much to the embarrassment of the administration, Mark Milley, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, says that Ukraine is unlikely to win back the Crimea and it is time for talks. "You want to negotiate from a position of strength," Milley said in a speech in New York last week. "Russia is on its back."

Soldiers tend to have a better balanced sense than politicians about the way in which advantage in war can swing backwards and forwards. They ought to have after their grim experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, in both of which the US thought at one point that it had won a total victory.

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

Milley may well be right, but it is difficult to see why Ukraine should negotiate while it is winning victories on the ground. As for President Vladimir Putin, he will scarcely want to talk until his army has achieved something other than stage shambolic retreats and lose territory captured in the first days of the invasion.

What indeed are Russia's war aims? On 24 February, and for a couple of days afterwards, they were clear enough: Russia wanted to conquer Ukraine and install a proxy government, much as in Czechoslovakia in 1968. It did not happen: the invasion failed miserably to achieve any of its objectives, so what exactly is Russia fighting for today?

As for the war itself, the Ukrainian victories at Kharkiv and Kherson show that the Russian army is a shambles and it has never recovered from the initial debacle. But the ground war in Ukraine is only one part of the conflict: another is the Russian drone and missile assault on Ukrainian electricity, gas and water supplies. As we have seen in conflicts in the Middle East, precision-guided missiles and drones, once the monopoly of the US, are the new face of war, against which total defence is impossible. The Russians are avoiding direct attacks on the two nuclear plants in western Ukraine, but they are destroying the transmission cables and substations that cannot be speedily replaced.

The other front in the conflict is the economic war against Russia which has turned out to be a spectacular boomerang with ruinous consequences for European economies. Sanctions are a collective punishment on ordinary Russians, but do not directly target the Kremlin. Sanctions did not remove Saddam Hussein in Iraq over 13 years or Bashar al-Assad in Syria over a decade, and there is no reason to suppose that they will work against Putin.

Beneath the Radar

It has been a bad few weeks for politicians normally identified as populist nationalists: Boris Johnson failed to make a comeback as UK prime minister after being evicted from 10 Downing Street earlier in the year. Jair Bolsonaro lost the presidential election in Brazil. And now Donald Trump is having to fight off Republican rivals after a disappointing performance in the midterms.

But Benjamin Netanyahu, the first example of this type of politics whom I ever encountered, is back in business in Israel at the head of an extreme right wing government with a stable majority in the Knesset.

First elected prime minister in 1996, he ticks all the same boxes as the other populists – and has shown greater staying power. But there are still seven million Israeli Jews and seven million Palestinians between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean and nothing

has finally been resolved about how they will exist together. Here is a good expert analysis of what has happened by the International Crisis Group and the US/Middle East Project.

Cockburn's Picks

Edible Economics: A Hungry Economist Explains the World by Ha-Joon Chang is a fascinating and persuasive approach to the economic state of the world.

Patrick Cockburn is the author of *War in the Age of Trump* (Verso).

CounterPunch 22.11.2022