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Ukraine and the pro-imperialist intellectuals

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The “Open letter on the future of Ukraine” issued by a group of Western academics and foreign policy operatives is a vile defense of the ongoing far-right protests in Ukraine supported by Washington and the European Union (EU). It peddles the old lie, repeated over nearly a quarter century of imperialist wars and interventions in Eastern Europe since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, that US and EU policy is driven only by a disinterested love of democracy and human rights.

It states, “The future of Ukrainians depends most of all on Ukrainians themselves. They defended democracy and their future 10 years ago, during the Orange Revolution, and they are standing up for those values today. As Europeans grow disenchanted with the idea of a common Europe, people in Ukraine are fighting for that idea and for their country’s place in Europe. Defending Ukraine from the authoritarian temptations of its corrupt leaders is in the interests of the democratic world.”

The identity of the imperialist powers’ local proxies demolishes the open letter’s pretense that the imperialist powers are fighting for democracy. They are relying on a core of a few thousand fascistic thugs from the Right Sector organization and the Svoboda Party to topple the Ukrainian regime in a series of street protests, replace it with a pro-EU government hostile to Moscow, and

impose savage austerity measures. Washington and the EU are not fighting for democracy, but organizing a social counterrevolution.

In November, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich backed away from plans to integrate Ukraine into the EU and push through tens of billions of dollars in social cuts against workers to pay back Ukraine's debts to the major banks. Fearing an explosion of mass protests, he accepted a bailout from Russia instead. The far-right opposition redoubled its efforts, as dueling anti-government and anti-opposition protests spread in Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking parts of the country, respectively.

While EU intervention threatens Ukraine with social collapse and civil war, the open letter stands reality on its head, presenting the developments in Ukraine as a threat to the EU: "It is not too late for us to change things for the better and prevent Ukraine from being a dictatorship. Passivity in the face of the authoritarian turn in Ukraine and the country's reintegration into a newly expanding Russian imperial sphere of interests pose a threat to the European Union's integrity."

In fact, neither Ukraine nor Russia has threatened to attack the EU. It is Ukraine—with its energy pipeline network, strategic military bases, and heavy industry—that is emerging as a major prize in an aggressive thrust by US and European imperialism to plunder the region and target Russia. While US and European imperialism threaten to attack Moscow's main Middle East allies, Syria and Iran, they are threatening Russia's main Eastern European ally, Ukraine, with regime-change or partition.

The drive to impose untrammelled imperialist domination of Eastern Europe, which began after the restoration of capitalism with escalating NATO interventions and wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, is at a very advanced stage. It is setting into motion the next campaign, for regime-change and ethnic partition in Russia, where Washington is studying a variety of ethnic groups—from Chechens, to Tatars and Circassians—whose grievances can be mobilized against Moscow.

This is raised quite directly in leading sections of the Western press. The *Financial Times* of London wrote Sunday, "Mr. Yanukovich and Mr. Putin are leaders of a similar type and with a similar governing model. If Ukrainians push the man in Kiev out of power, Russians might wonder why they should not do the same to the man in the Kremlin."

By aligning themselves with the US-EU drive to dominate Eastern Europe, the signatories of the open letter are embracing what historically have been the aims of German imperialism. Berlin twice invaded Ukraine in the 20th century, in 1918 and 1941. Significantly, imperialism's proxies in Ukraine today are the political descendants of Ukrainian fascists who helped carry out the Ukrainian Holocaust as allies of the Nazis—whose policy was to depopulate Ukraine and prepare its colonization by German settlers through mass extermination.

Now, at this year's Munich Security Conference, top German officials stated that Berlin plans to abandon restrictions on the use of military force that Germany has obeyed since the end of World War II.

The disastrous consequences of the Soviet bureaucracy's self-destructive policies and the light-minded approach of Mikhail Gorbachev as he moved to dissolve the USSR—believing that the concept of imperialism was a fiction invented by Marxism—are emerging fully into view.

Trotsky warned that the dissolution of the USSR would not only restore capitalism, but also transform Russia into a semi-colonial fiefdom of the imperialist powers: “A capitalist Russia could not now occupy even the third-rate position to which czarist Russia was predestined by the course of the world war. Russian capitalism today would be a dependent, semi-colonial capitalism without any prospects. Russia Number 2 would occupy a position somewhere between Russia Number 1 and India. The Soviet system with its nationalized industry and monopoly of foreign trade, in spite of all its contradictions and difficulties, is a protective system for the economic and cultural independence of the country.”

This is the agenda being laid out by imperialism and its fascist proxies: to return Russia and Ukraine to semi-colonial status through internal subversion, civil war, or external military intervention. Processes are being set into motion that threaten the deaths of millions.

Mobilizing the working class in struggle against imperialist war and neocolonial exploitation is the central task in Eastern Europe. Due warnings must be made. In the absence of such a struggle, given the bankruptcy and unpopularity of the region's oligarchic regimes, there is every reason to think that determined fascist gangs—supported by imperialist governments and given political cover by pro-imperialist academics and diplomatic operatives—will succeed in toppling existing regimes.

This underscores the reactionary role of the signatories of the open letter. Some are top diplomats or “non-governmental” imperialist operatives—such as former foreign ministers Ana Palacio of Spain and Bernard Kouchner of France, and Chris Stone and Aryeh Neier of the US State Department-linked Open Society Institute of billionaire George Soros. Most, however, are academics and intellectuals who are lending their names to give credibility to far-right reaction in Ukraine, through a foul combination of learned ignorance and historic blindness.

Some of the names on the list of signatories evoke regret—such as Fritz Stern, a historian who was once capable of writing seriously on historical questions.

Others, like that of postmodernist charlatan Slavoj Zizek, come as no surprise. They only confirm the alignment of affluent sections of the middle class with imperialist brigandage, and the reactionary role of pseudo-left thought in training mouthpieces for imperialism.

After decades of intellectual war on Marxism in universities and the media, cultural life is in a disastrous state. Hostile to the Marxist conceptions of imperialism and the role of material

interests in driving its policies, these layers are left unmoved by imperialist crimes—the destruction of Fallujah during the US occupation of Iraq, the drone murder campaign in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Their pens spring into action, however, when EU politicians excite their moral glands by denouncing regimes targeted for imperialist intervention. They can be led by the nose, even behind fascists, with a few empty invocations of human rights.