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The US-Ukrainian Strategic Partnership of November 2021 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has raised the specter of nuclear war and is acquiring an ever more violent and bloody character. Even taking into account the unending propaganda in the media, horrific incidents, such as the destruction of a maternity hospital in the southern port city of Mariupol, reveal an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe.

Scores of civilians, including children, are dying. Millions have been forced to flee, and casualties among Russian soldiers are estimated in the thousands. It is a war waged by a regime that rules in the interests of a corrupt capitalist oligarchy, whose wealth is based on the theft of state assets following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The fact that Putin has justified his invasion by denouncing the democratic principles upon which Lenin and the Bolshevik government established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1922 testifies to the historically retrograde and reactionary character of his regime and the war itself.



President Joe Biden announces a ban on Russian oil imports, toughening the toll on Russia's economy in retaliation for its invasion of Ukraine, Tuesday, March 8, 2022, in the Roosevelt Room at the White House in Washington. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

The assault on Ukraine, with its devastating impact on the civilian population, must be condemned. Its claims to be acting in defense of Russia are incompatible with socialist principles – which places international class solidarity above reactionary assertions of

national defense – and are refuted by facts. Russia is now more isolated than ever, and the economic consequences of the war threaten the Russian working people with impoverishment.

But this socialist condemnation has nothing in common with the deceitful and hypocritical denunciations emanating from the vast propaganda organs, which cover over the central role played by the United States and its NATO allies in deliberately instigating the war. The narrative in the media, which presents the invasion as an unprovoked action, is a fabrication that conceals the aggressive actions by the NATO powers, in particular the United States, and its puppets in the Ukrainian government.

The reckless provocations of US imperialism and the Ukraine-Russia war can only be understood against the background of the Soviet bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Far from opening up a period of "peace and prosperity" under capitalism, the collapse of Stalinism marked a new stage in the crisis of world imperialism. It was followed by the "volcanic eruption of US imperialism" that Leon Trotsky had predicted in 1934.

In Europe and Asia, the US pursued a strategy aimed at encircling and subjugating Russia. Directly violating its earlier promises that the Soviet bureaucracy and Russian oligarchy were delusional enough to believe, NATO has expanded to include almost all major countries in Eastern Europe, apart from Ukraine and Belarus.

In 2014, the US orchestrated a far-right coup in Kiev that overthrew a pro-Russian government that had opposed Ukrainian membership in NATO. In 2018, the US officially adopted a strategy of preparing for "great power conflict" with Russia and China. In 2019, it unilaterally withdrew from the INF Treaty which banned the deployment of intermediate range nuclear missiles. Preparations for war with Russia and the arming of Ukraine were at the center of the Democrats' first attempt to impeach Donald Trump in 2019.

Over the past year, in the wake of the January 6 fascist coup attempt, the Biden administration recklessly escalated provocations against Russia.

The key to understanding this is the US-Ukrainian Charter on Strategic Partnership, signed by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on November 10, 2021.

Dispensing with the usual cautious language of diplomacy, the Charter's language was that of an offensive military alliance. It pledged to "hold Russia accountable" for "aggression and violations of international law" and "its continuing malign behavior."

The Charter endorsed Kiev's military strategy from March 2021 which explicitly proclaimed the military goal of "retaking" Crimea and the separatist-controlled Donbass, and thereby dismissed the Minsk Agreements of 2015 which were the official framework for settling the conflict in East Ukraine.

The US stated that it would "never recognize Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea" and that it "intends to support Ukraine's effort to counter armed aggression" including with "sanctions and other relevant measures until restoration of the full territorial integrity of Ukraine."

Washington also explicitly endorsed "Ukraine's efforts to maximize its status as a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner to promote interoperability," that is, its integration into NATO's military command structures.

Ukraine's non-membership in NATO is and was, for all intents and purposes, a fiction. At the same time, the NATO powers exploited the fact that Ukraine is not officially a member as an opportunity to stoke a conflict with Russia that would not immediately develop into a world war.

The US was fully aware that fascist forces in Ukraine would play the principal role of shock troops against both the Russian military and opposition within the population. The Charter endorsed the historical narrative of Ukraine's far right of a "Holodomor," which falsely presents the forced collectivization of agriculture under Stalinism in 1929-1933 and the resulting famine as a "genocide" targeting Ukrainian nationals.

A passage in the document reads, "The United States and Ukraine intend to continue to cooperate closely to promote remembrance, including increased public awareness of the

Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine, and other brutalities committed within and against Ukraine in the past.”

Yet no mention is made of the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews, and the crimes of Ukrainian fascists, who collaborated with the Nazi occupiers during World War II. The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) massacred tens of thousands of Jews, Poles, as well as Ukrainian opponents of fascism during the war and in its immediate aftermath.

Their descendants, from the fascist Svoboda Party to the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, are now deeply integrated into the Ukrainian state and military and are being heavily armed with NATO weapons.

It will fall to historians to uncover what promises the Ukrainian oligarchy received from Washington in exchange for its pledge to turn the country into a killing field and launching pad for war with Russia. But one thing is clear: The Kremlin and Russian general staff could not but read this document as the announcement of an impending war.

Throughout 2021 and in the weeks immediately preceding the invasion, Russia's President Vladimir Putin repeatedly warned that Ukraine's integration into NATO and its arming by the Western powers constituted a “red line” for Russia and demanded “security guarantees” from the US and NATO.

However, the US contemptuously dismissed all these statements, and NATO staged one major military exercise on Russia's borders after another—including the massive Defender 2021 exercises in May and the Operation Sea Breeze in the Black Sea in June and July. Finally, in the weeks leading up to the war, while constantly warning of an impending Russian invasion, the Biden administration made no diplomatic effort to avoid it and everything to provoke it.

Backed into a corner, the Putin regime calculated that, with the invasion of Ukraine, it could somehow reverse Russia's encirclement since 1991 and reach a deal with imperialism. It is the response to imperialism by a historically bankrupt class that is the heir of everything that is reactionary in Russian history — from Tsarism to the Stalinist reaction against the socialist revolution of October 1917.

The sinister provocations of US/NATO, resulting in the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, has created a politically nightmarish situation that can escalate to full-scale nuclear war. And even if some sort of ceasefire is cobbled together, it will prove to be nothing more than an interlude between yet another violent eruption.

Only one force can stop the drive toward disaster: the united struggle of the international working class against imperialist militarism, the historically obsolete nation-state system that divides the world into hostile camps, and the capitalist system which, in its relentless drive for profits, drives humanity toward destruction.

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