

# **A Divided Opposition: The Ukraine War and the Critique of Geopolitical Reason**

**Western States Legal Foundation Commentary**

**November 2022**

*A working paper for a future peace movement, by Andrew Lichterman.\**

*We must complete our recovery from the embers of dead empires in a way that does not plunge us back into new forms of domination and oppression.* Statement by Ambassador Martin Kimani of Kenya, United Nations Security Council Urgent Meeting on the Situation in Ukraine, The United Nations, New York, N.Y., February 21, 2022.

## **Introduction**

The Ukraine war marks a profound shift in global affairs, one whose nature cannot yet be fully understood. In the near term, it has resulted in setbacks not only for peace and disarmament but for many aspects of work for a more fair and peaceful global society in balance with the ecological limits and rhythms of the planet. In regard to work for nuclear disarmament, we are seeing threats to use nuclear weapons shaping a war crisis to an extent not seen since the depths of the Cold War.

The decision by the Russian government to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine came as a surprise to most. I did not expect this war, nor do I see easy answers for what to do about it. It also has brought significant divisions among those who long have been opposed to war. For me, all of this suggests that we need to rethink some of the assumptions and frames of reference we use to understand the world and guide our work.

I have tried to think the question through from the perspective of peace movements, and with the realization that in the present moment what we have are not mass movements but weak and scattered anti-war forces rooted in remnants of movements past. An obstacle to this is that much of the public discourse about matters of war and peace today, even in anti-war circles, is conducted in the language of geopolitics. It is a language that portrays countries as actors, describing the actions of “the United States” or “Russia” as if all who reside within their borders speak and act with unified intentions and a single voice. Sometimes the name of a country’s leader is substituted for its name, but typically for purposes more polemical than analytical. It is a top-down frame in which the interests and competitions of a few “great powers” take center stage, and the actions and intentions of all other people and governments are pushed to the margins and devalued. Viewing countries and their “national interests” as undivided units,

---

\* Andrew Lichterman is a senior research analyst at the Western States Legal Foundation, and a member of the coordinating committees of United for Peace and Justice and the Abolition 2000 Global Network to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons. The opinions expressed here are his own.

geopolitical thought also elides the societal dynamics that make the rulers of countries likely to choose the path to war.

Geopolitical theories first developed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century to inform and justify the practice of inter-imperial competition and colonial rule. The descendants of those theories have not strayed far from their roots. If we are to have an effect, peace movements and those who hope to build them must begin with the realization that our role is distinct from the role of governments and those who are in a position to advise them. I believe that the prevalence of geopolitical themes and logic in the way we talk war and its causes has contributed to the divisions among those who long have worked for peace.

In the opening sections I summarize my own position on this war. I do so because the piece as a whole is shaped by that perspective. I state these views strongly and yet I hold them provisionally, recognizing the difficulty of understanding both the causes of this war and the broader civilizational crisis we face. The second section addresses the international law aspects of the recent purported annexations of four regions in Ukraine by the Russian government. I include it because I believe the annexations cast further light on the Russian government's war aims, and because the clear illegality of the Russian government's actions is a consideration in shaping our understanding of the war and our strategies to oppose it.

The main body of the piece aims to explore the role of geopolitical concepts in shaping anti-war discourse about the Ukraine war. The opening sections address why a kind of geopolitical vernacular might have become prevalent in anti-war discourse. The next takes a brief look at the history of geopolitical thought, and what it highlights and obscures. I then address factors I believe to be important that fall largely outside the geopolitical frame, including dynamics in the Russian Federation's history and politics that might have played a role in pushing its rulers towards war, and the role and voice of people in Ukraine. I close with sections on how we might try anew to develop other, more "bottom up" ways to think about war and its causes, and on how we might speak against this war and all wars now, and after this war ends.

Some elements of this piece mainly address anti-war work in the United States, but I believe that many of the issues I raise also are present elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

**The anti-war forces of the world should speak with one voice: Tell Russia's Government to stop its illegal aggressive war and annexation of territory in Ukraine.**

In February 2003, millions of people filled streets and squares in the United States and world-wide to oppose the impending war of aggression soon to be launched by the United States government and allied governments against Iraq. A sustained global movement against that war continued for years. In February 2022, the government of Russia launched a massive invasion of Ukraine. There were some mass demonstrations against the war in its early stages in Europe and courageous protests in the first weeks in Russia, the latter quickly suppressed. In the United States and the rest of the world, the remaining fragments of the traditional "peace movement" were mostly silent, their small numbers split between those who opposed the war of aggression and those who have excused the Russian government's war making as a justified response to policies of the United States and its European allies, particularly NATO expansion.

Now the Russian government has compounded its illegal aggression by claiming to annex four regions of Ukraine. In his address announcing those illegal annexations, President Putin interpreted the Western anti-war forces' reluctance to criticize Russia's aggression and their focus on Western governments as the main instigators of the war as an affirmation of his government's revanchist, neo-imperial agenda, claiming that "we have many like-minded people in Europe and the United States, and we feel and see their support."

It is imperative that we show that this is not true. The main and immediate cause of this war is that Russia's rulers, a group of people at the helm of an authoritarian state, chose to launch a war of aggression against a smaller, less well-armed neighbor. The main reason we face a rising threat of nuclear catastrophe is because those same people chose to use that threat of nuclear war to intimidate all other governments who have sought to aid Ukraine in its defense.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin on September 30 made it clear that his government will accept nothing less than surrender to its violent annexation of the Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson regions of Ukraine, insisting that it was a *fait accompli* that "will not be discussed."<sup>2</sup> Earlier, on September 21, President Putin announced the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of Russians, who will be forced into the war effort without their consent.<sup>3</sup> In both speeches President Putin reiterated his willingness to use force without limits, including use of nuclear weapons, to achieve the illegal war aims of his government.

Like the United States, the country the Russian Government rules is a nuclear-armed continental empire. It can command the resources and industrial capacity to continue to make war indefinitely against a much smaller adversary. The Russian government will not be defeated, so long as its people are willing to continue to fight and die in another country, killing people very much like them to fulfill the ambitions of their rulers. As was the case for the United States in its wars in Vietnam and Southwest Asia and the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan, the war is likely to end only when Russia's armed forces lose the moral and political will to continue, or when the growing domestic opposition to the war threatens the grip of Russia's rulers on power. Clearly opposing Russia's aggression, attempted annexations, and nuclear threats provides support for those in Russia and its military who are courageously risking harsh punishment by refusing to fight or by resisting the war at home. It also could help erode the confidence of Russia's rulers in their strategies to weaken and divide support for Ukraine's defense against their aggression.

Those who wield the most economic and political power in all the most powerful states share responsibility for sustaining and profiting from a global economic and state system that is unjust, undemocratic, ecologically unsustainable, and so violently competitive that it predictably generates round after round of increasingly destructive wars. With each round the winners have done their utmost to cement their economic and political power, engendering resentments and perpetuating antagonisms that set humanity on the path to the next. Vanquished empires are dismembered by the victors or collapse. New leaders in defeated countries invoke the glories of the past and stoke the inchoate resentments of the present to pave their path to power. They cite the post-war arrangements unfairly imposed and make claims conjoining geopolitical necessity with inevitable national destiny to mobilize their publics for war. We must find a way to escape

this deadly dialectic. The first step, necessary in a nuclear-armed world to preserve even the possibility of addressing the deeper causes of all this, is an absolute rejection of wars of conquest and aggression. Hence all those working for peace should unambiguously oppose and condemn the Russian government's illegal war, and its attempt to seize lands outside their borders and to impose their rule on the millions of people who live there.

### **Annexations amidst a war of aggression**

*No territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force shall be recognized as legal.* United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2625, Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation Among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, 1970.<sup>4</sup>

President Putin's announcement of the annexation of Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson has demonstrated that his government's minimum war aims are to seize this resource-rich region of Ukraine and to incorporate it into the Russian Federation. Putin underscored this intention by declaring that in any negotiations the annexations "...the choice of the people in Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson will not be discussed. The decision has been made, and Russia will not betray it."<sup>5</sup> Neither the annexations nor the referenda conducted a few days beforehand have a shred of legitimacy.

Putin's assertion that the people of the annexed regions made a meaningful "choice" fails the test of common sense. These votes were hurriedly conducted in regions that are war zones. Russian forces do not occupy portions of the territory claimed; the inhabitants of those areas were unable to participate in any vote. Many of the cities and towns currently in the hands of Russia's military and other forces under its command have been devastated and are barely habitable. Active combat continues across much of the region. In addition, there have been credible reports that Russian forces have imprisoned, tortured, and killed significant numbers of civilians in areas they occupy.<sup>6</sup> For all of these reasons, a large portion of the populations that supposedly had the right to vote in these plebiscites have fled westward into Ukraine or beyond. Those who remained were given the "opportunity" to vote under the watchful eye of officials approved or installed by the Russian government, often accompanied by armed soldiers. Although there may be instances where a region and its population can freely and lawfully secede from one state and accept annexation by another, there must be both a credible process and freedom from use of force or other coercion by the annexing state. Neither is present here.<sup>7</sup>

At the end of World War II, the making of aggressive war was recognized at Nuremberg as "the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole."<sup>8</sup> Although for some purposes acts of "aggression" can be hard to define, wars conducted to seize the territory or to overthrow the government of another state have been recognized as clearly illegal wars of aggression and as posing particular dangers to international peace.

Article 2 of the United Nations Charter prohibits member states from "the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state...." (Article 2, sec.4). In 1974, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA) adopted by consensus a definition of

aggression. Heading the list of acts constituting aggression was “[t]he invasion or attack by the armed forces of the territory of another state, or any military occupation, however temporary, resulting from such invasion or attack, or any annexation by the use of force of the territory of another State or part thereof....”<sup>9</sup> In a preambular paragraph the UNGA also reaffirmed that “the territory of a State shall not be violated by being the object, even temporarily, of military occupation or of other uses of force taken by another State in contravention of the Charter, and that it shall not be the object of acquisition by another State resulting from such measures or the threat thereof....”

The 1974 UNGA definition of aggression since has been referenced by the International Court of Justice in cases involving the use of force.<sup>10</sup> The definition of aggression in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court closely tracks the 1974 UNGA resolution; its provision concerning invasion and occupation or annexation resulting from an attack is identical.<sup>11</sup>

The Russian government’s claim of a developing military threat from NATO also cannot provide a legal justification for attacking any country, particularly one that was not at the time nor likely to soon become a NATO member. Russia was not under attack or under any threat of imminent attack by either Ukraine or NATO.<sup>12</sup>

Nor can the Russian government’s assertion that its invasion of Ukraine and annexation of its territory was justified due to the much-disputed events surrounding the removal of President Yanukovich in 2014, or claims of “genocide” in Ukraine against Russian speakers. Both the Russian government’s narrative that Yanukovich was overthrown by “Nazis” who now rule the country and its genocide claims have no serious evidentiary support.<sup>13</sup> Such claims long have been used by governments to inflame public opinion and to mobilize their populations for war. The UN General Assembly in its definition of aggression recognized this, stating that “No consideration of whatever nature, whether political, economic, military or otherwise, may serve as a justification for aggression.”<sup>14</sup> The United Nations International Law Commission highlighted this point as well, noting in its commentaries on the “State of Necessity” in international law that wars of aggression and annexation represent a special case:

“The question whether the obligation breached for reasons of necessity was peremptory or not will have to be settled, in each particular case, by reference to the general international law in force at the time the question arises. The only point which the Commission feels it appropriate to make in this commentary is that one obligation whose peremptory character is beyond doubt in all events is the obligation of a State to refrain from any forcible violation of the territorial integrity or political independence of another state. The Commission wishes to emphasize this most strongly, since the fears generated by the idea of recognizing the notion of state of necessity in international law have very often been due to past attempts by States to rely on a state of necessity as justification for acts of aggression, conquest and forcible annexation.”<sup>15</sup>

Further, the General Assembly definition of aggression declares that “No territorial acquisition or special advantage resulting from aggression is or shall be recognized as lawful.”<sup>16</sup>

The past actions of the government of the United States and other governments to bomb, invade, and occupy countries on the grounds of one or another claim of necessity or “preventive” defense of course can no more be justified than can those of Russia’s government. Arguing that past transgressions of fundamental norms of international law set a precedent permitting other governments to follow suit may be fodder for easy debating points in a UN Security Council in which few of the governments that hold permanent seats are in any position to cast the first stone. But from the perspective of the vast majority of humanity, such “whataboutism” is little more than a recipe for the collapse of what remains of an international legal order and a spiral downward into pure rule by force, endless war, and barbarism.<sup>17</sup>

Like all legal orders existing up to now, the agreements that forged the post-World War II legal order were hammered out by elites in rooms where most of us had no voice. But like all legal orders that have been more than a thin veil over a mailed fist, it includes norms that are redeemable and universalizable. This includes the norms prohibiting states from using military force to invade other self-governing jurisdictions to seize territory, overthrow their governments, and deny their people a voice in shaping their own futures. We strengthen this fundamental norm by supporting it consistently, and weaken it by picking and choosing which wars of aggression we oppose. Movements for peace long have opposed aggressive wars launched to overthrow governments and to impose occupation authorities or puppet governments. We should continue to do so in the case of the Russian government’s war of aggression and conquest against Ukraine.

### **The Russia-Ukraine War and the Critique of Geopolitical Reason**

*Should the Left support the division of the world into imperialist spheres of influence? A year ago, the very posing of such a question would have surprised me, since the answer seems obvious: of course not. Unfortunately, the apparent sympathy with Russian aggression against Ukraine by many on the Western left has shown that this is not so obvious.* Taras Bilous, “Eastern Europe’s Tragedy. How the Spheres of Influence Policy Amplifies Reaction,” *Commons*, a journal of social criticism in Ukraine, August 11, 2022.<sup>18</sup>

The anti-war forces of the world, today not a mass movement but rather scattered remnants of movements past, have been further fragmented by the war between Russia and Ukraine, so divided that there is no agreement even on what to call it. Those who believe that it is most of all a war of aggression launched by those who rule in the Russian Federation have been discouraged by this split—as have many of those who understand the war and its main causes differently. Those of us who see the government and military of Russia as the main aggressors are dismayed that many of our long-time colleagues place the greatest blame on the governments of the United States and its NATO allies, some acknowledging only perfunctorily that this is a war of aggression and seldom addressing their demands to stop the war to the government of the aggressor, and some supporting the Russian government’s war outright as justified. We are puzzled and saddened when people who have spent years diligently studying and opposing the way their governments lie to their publics and the world about their own wars of aggression, but now seem to accept without question the narrative of Russia’s government about Ukraine, its history, and the causes of this war. Once upon a time, when there were broader movements for

peace and justice, most of us accepted as baseline truth that *all* governments lie. Finally, we are disappointed that most in Western “anti-war” circles largely ignore the voices of people much like us who are far closer to the war: the independent Left in Ukraine and in other post-Soviet and Warsaw Pact states, and the Russian people who are resisting or fleeing war and conscription.

I believe all of these things are connected. I do not mean this in any conspiratorial sense; the fragmentation of anti-war opinion about this war is complex, and the roots of some divergent views may go back deep into the Cold War and even before. I also do not think that those I disagree with have suddenly lost their critical faculties or become willing shells for Russian government propaganda. Rather, there are long-term trends that made it unlikely that the remnants of the Left and past peace movements would respond to the Ukraine war in any unified way.

### **The decline of movements and the rise of geopolitical thinking**

There are a variety of reasons that people who see themselves as generally against war have not unambiguously condemned the Russian government’s war of aggression against the government and people of Ukraine. A few long have adhered to whatever view of the world put out by Russia’s government, and continue to do so despite the profound change in the character and ideology of that government since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many more mainly were in the habit of opposing only U.S. wars, because for decades after the Cold War there mainly were U.S. wars to oppose and nothing resembling a large-scale war of aggression launched by an ascendant or revanchist government willing to challenge the hegemonic military and economic power of the United States.

The three decades since the Cold War in the United States and Western Europe also were a time in which there were few sustained large-scale social movements. There were episodic efflorescences of social mobilization around particular issues ranging from the anti-globalization movement to the mass demonstrations against the U.S. government’s war in Iraq, but none were sustained for more than a few years. The collapse of the Soviet Union accelerated the subsiding of already weak political currents that sustained some system-critical discourses about the nature of the global and economic system and the root causes of modern wars. Since the financial crisis of the late 2000’s, there have been other upsurges of activism and protest in the U.S. such as Occupy, the various strands of activism addressing climate change, and the Movement for Black Lives. So far the climate change movement has gained the broadest support, but despite much talk about “intersectionality” few organizing efforts have escaped their single-issue “silos” or offered a critique that connected the nascent movements at the level of root causes.

Lacking movements with visible social power seeking to transform society in ways that might someday eliminate the causes of war, anti-war activists looked for approaches that at least seemed to counsel prudence in matters of war and peace. Many found one in international relations realism, a doctrine influential in both academic and policy-making circles. As Nicolas Guilhot argued in his intellectual history of political realism,

“The degeneration of the soft-power policies of ‘democracy promotion’ of the 1980s into the militarized democracy promotion of the G.W. Bush administration have made global transformative agendas an easy target of realist critique. Increasingly, realism seems to be the only language left if one is to impugn imperial adventurism and its moral contradictions while being taken seriously within policy-making and opinion circles. Very tellingly, realism seems to have captured the imagination of some on the Left, for whom it represents the only possible counterpoint to depoliticized visions of a neoliberal world order.”<sup>19</sup>

Those already having an affinity for a materialist political analysis might be particularly drawn to the harder, more “geopolitical” versions of realism, for example the work of John Mearsheimer, one of the most visible and frequently cited mainstream critics of NATO expansion. Also frequently featured in anti-war webinars and publications are retired military figures who have become critics of U.S. foreign policy. Most frame the war as a proxy conflict between “Russia” and “The United States,” and stress NATO expansion as the main cause of the decision by Russia’s government to go to war. All accept one or another account of the 2014 fall of the Yanukovich government as instigated by Western governments and mainly accomplished by extreme right elements, including “Nazis.” Missing from these narratives are other dynamics in the history, politics and polity of the Russian Federation that might have led its rulers to choose to launch this war. Also conspicuously absent are more nuanced versions of Ukraine’s history in the post-Soviet era, and particularly any accounts coming from Ukraine or its diaspora. Although the extremity of their rhetoric varies, the positions of some of the remaining U.S. anti-war coalitions share these frames, their emphases and absences.<sup>20</sup> I believe that the prevalence of geopolitical concepts and logic in the remnants of the peace movement and the Left, although sometimes couched in the language of “anti-imperialism,” is one of the main causes.

### **From Geopolitics to Realism: The Ascent and Repression of Nationalist Imperialism**

To better understand how we got here, we need to take a short detour through the history of geopolitical thought. What do we mean by geopolitics, and what is its relation to international relations realism, the form in which we most commonly encounter it in the U.S.?

Both geopolitics and the “harder” forms of realism share some fundamental assumptions and frames.<sup>21</sup> The main “actor” is the Nation-state, conceived as a hermetic sovereign entity with a single, undivided national interest. Further, the only actors who really matter in both kinds of theory are “great powers,” which before 1945 mainly meant actual or *de facto* empires, and after 1945 meant *de facto* empires with nuclear arms. Less powerful regions or countries are viewed mainly as objects with little agency, fields of struggle in which the “great powers” compete for control of resources, markets, cheap labor, and subaltern militaries. Competition among nation-states for economic and military dominance punctuated by wars is assumed to be an eternal and inescapable fact of human existence. Geographic factors, control of geographical space, and other material factors have the most weight in explaining both the motives and the capacity of “great powers” to make war. The vast majority of the billions of human beings who have and always have had little voice in such matters are assumed to be at one with their rulers, visible



only as inputs or obstacles, assets or deficiencies in the endless competition for “great power” primacy.

This is, of a course, a highly simplified and schematic version of geopolitical and realist world views. But it is just such a bundle of schematic, seldom-examined concepts that has become the everyday parlance for discussing matters of war and peace, the stuff of opinion pieces and webinars not only in the remnants of anti-war movements and the Left but across much of the political spectrum.<sup>22</sup>

Geopolitical thought took shape at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the theory and practice of imperial competition and colonialism, and never has strayed far from its roots. Matthew Specter sees the roots of U.S. international relations realism in earlier geopolitical thought:

The “competitive globalization” of late nineteenth century nation-states was the main context in which the Atlantic realist tropes of great power competition as a Darwinian struggle first took shape. It was the era of imperialist globalization that gave realism its first stamp....<sup>23</sup>

Geopolitics was a discipline developed to guide those who rule in the most powerful states, and to justify their exploitation, enslavement, displacements, and mass killings of other peoples to themselves and to their own populations. The actors in its narratives of Darwinian competition were Peoples usually defined in ethnic-racial-religious terms. These Peoples, at one with the Nation-State which are their vehicle, competed with one another to conquer lesser peoples and to exploit the riches of the earth. Those Nations with the capacity to rise to the top were “Great Powers,” who competed for spheres of influence, made agreements with one another and at times went to war. Theirs was the province of rule-ordered diplomacy, international law and the laws of “civilized” warfare. Darwinian and Malthusian tropes of natural competition in a world of limited space and resources justified endless struggles among the great powers. Narratives of civilizational superiority, binaries of civilization and barbarism, justified the subjugation and exploitation of “lesser” peoples without regard to law.

Paul Reinsch, a leading figure in early international relations theory, wrote in 1900, “[T]he natural wealth of the remoter regions must be utilized for the benefit of mankind, and if any nation or tribe, by the use of antiquated methods of production, or by total neglect of certain parts of its resources, such as mines or forests, stands in the way of this great need, that nation or tribe must pass under the political power or tutelage of a nation that will draw from the earth the utmost quantity of produce.”<sup>24</sup> “National imperialism,” in his view, “...takes as its basis a national state and is not inconsistent with respect for the political existence of other nationalities; it endeavors to increase the resources of the national state through the absorption or exploitation of undeveloped regions and inferior races, but does not attempt to impose political control upon highly civilized nations.”<sup>25</sup>

Such doctrines of national imperialism were central to geopolitical thought up to World War II. The post-war reception of geopolitical concepts and their incorporation into strands of international relations realism, however, largely elided its nationalist core. There were a number of reasons for this. The most obvious was that the virulent extreme nationalisms that had been

conjoined with geopolitical rhetoric by fascist parties and governments had discredited geopolitical theories that accorded nationalisms and narratives of national civilizational mission a central role. The growing influence of the new social sciences pushed international relations theory towards more neutral and purportedly objective grounds for explanations of how states interact.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the ideological driver of the central “great power” confrontation of the Cold War was not competing identity-based nationalisms but competing economic and political ideologies making universal claims.<sup>27</sup>

The arms race further sharpened the attention of international relations theory on the confrontation between the now nuclear-armed “great powers.” The inherent danger of confrontations among nuclear-armed militaries lent intuitive weight of existential proportions to the bedrock geopolitical assumption that only the most powerful states matter. In place of the manifestly Eurocentrist and racist rationalizations provided by early 20th century geopolitical theories for the predations and subjugations of the imperialist states now sat the Bomb. This allows the power games of geopolitics to be represented instead as neutral, technocratic exercises of “crisis management,” “realist” assessments by those who threaten us all with catastrophic war of what must be done to preserve the peace. In a nuclear-armed world, allowing the nuclear-armed ruling classes to divide up the world among them, to cut their deals over the heads of other “lesser” governments and peoples and even their own populations can come first to seem a practical necessity. We are discouraged from even questioning the legitimacy of their claims to a “sphere of influence.” Over time this “necessity” that is really the avoidance of an immense and unnecessary evil can come to be seen as a moral good, the best imaginable outcome, the height of “statesmanship.”

Looming over all discussion of the Ukraine war is the terrible danger of nuclear war, a threat Russia’s rulers have been determined to exploit. When viewed in this light, the prudent choice, the “right” choice, might seem simple: find a way to compel the government and people of Ukraine to accept any deal that will stop the war. The Bomb is like a black hole, distorting everything in the legal political, and moral field around it. No living thing can long survive its use, and no ethical or legal norms can long survive its very existence. This is the reality that the International Court of Justice cryptically acknowledged in its 1996 advisory opinion on nuclear weapons, writing that “In the long run, international law, and with it the stability of the international order which it is intended to govern, are bound to suffer from the continuing difference of views with regard to the legal status of weapons as deadly as nuclear weapons.”<sup>28</sup>

As a strictly *prudential* matter there may be instances where those working for a more peaceful, fair, and ecologically sustainable global society would advocate an agreement by nuclear armed governments made “over the head” of their less powerful allies to avert the immediate risk of nuclear war. But there are no *a priori* rules for determining whether a particular agreement is necessary to lower the risk of nuclear war, or even that some particular deal to carve up yet another region of the earth among the nuclear terrorist governments will in fact reduce that risk, immediately or in the longer term. And there often is no easy way to tell, particularly from a great geographic and social distance, whether one imaginable deal or another can be made.

Geopolitical thinking devalues the lives and aspirations and voice of the people who don't live in "great powers." Their lands and cities and futures are conceived as something to be bartered or fought over, valued only for their resources or cheap labor pools or as subaltern militaries or as "buffer zones" against attack by some other great power. Looking at the war in Ukraine from the geopolitical perspective, NATO expansion and its role in struggles for dominance between the nuclear armed Great Powers "the United States" and "Russia," each portrayed as actors with a unified "national interest," are clearly visible. The internal dynamics in the complex polity that is the Russian Federation which might drive those who rule in Russia to choose a war of aggression against Ukraine as a solution to their problems of rule are not. Nor are the people or government of Ukraine visible except as pawns or victims of one "great power" or another.

### **Peace Movements and imperial wars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

*We cannot deny the existence of Russian imperialism just because this reality does not fit into our theory of imperialism. Instead, what we need to do is develop a genuine analysis of what Russia is and what Russia does.* Russian socialist and political economist Ilya Mateev.<sup>29</sup>

The question of whether the Russian government's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of its lands is "imperialist" must be viewed in light of the history of successive Russian governments since the time of formal empires and explicitly inter-imperial competition.

Tsarist governments were sending out their troops and traders across Asia to assemble a colonial empire at the same time the Western empires were assembling theirs. Their expanding domain encompassed a diverse array of people, languages, and ways of life, as did the empires of Western Europe. You don't have to get on a boat to build an empire.<sup>30</sup> The Empire's successor state, the Soviet Union, added still more lands and peoples to both its empire and the region its rulers considered their "sphere of influence" after World War II. As the Soviet Union, it held on to what might be thought of as its "imperial" conquests for much longer than most of its counterparts. Russia's current rulers have no more right to determine the destinies of the peoples and lands once under Tsarist or Soviet rule but now outside their borders than do governments in Europe or the United States have to dominate colonies they once ruled.

The Russian Revolution occurred amidst the chaos and the collapse of the old empires that had ruled most of Europe. It was a time of emerging nationalisms throughout the continent, with political movements and factions of all kinds seeking to carve new states out of the old empires or mobilizing new, post-imperial ideologies and forms of nationalism in their remnants. The new Bolshevik rulers from the outset faced complex problems of rule as nationalist movements erupted all around the periphery of the old empire, and addressed the problem with a dual system of rule: a formally decentralized federal system with a centralized Communist Party.<sup>31</sup> In many places Bolshevik forces prevailed over some competing nationalist movements only after periods of armed struggle. This tension and its management remained a feature of the central government's rule throughout the Soviet period. Periods in which government policy mandated more centralization tended to be accompanied by cultural and linguistic Russification. This was reinforced by the growing presence of Russian-speaking officials and skilled workers in what already had been trading, industrial, and administrative centers of the empire, by movement of

workers to areas (like Ukraine) depopulated by war or famine, and by forced displacements of populations labeled by the government as politically unreliable (such as the Crimean Tatars.)

The fragmenting of the Soviet Union upon the collapse of its Communist government manifested the continued existence, however transformed, of antagonisms between Soviet and national identities. These tensions persisted within the Russian Federation, and its rulers continued to manage them by adjusting recognition of the languages, cultures and autonomy of the diverse ethnic republics, promotion of Russian as a universal national language, and centralization of power in the Federal national state.

The government led by Vladimir Putin came to power facing economic instability and centrifugal political forces that seemed to threaten further disintegration, with the Chechnya wars only the most violent of the struggles to solidify Russian government rule. They filled the empty central political space once occupied by the Communist Party with an informal power structure anchored in the security services and largely cemented by patronage. In the 2000's they pursued a course of political centralization that at first tried to balance strong Russian nationalist currents with maintaining a degree of cultural and political autonomy for the republics. Over time, deploying Russian nationalism as a primary strategy of rule won out. Putin's government carried through a variety of institutional changes ranging from banning of ethnic and religious political parties to elevation of the status of Russian language to increased central control over educational curricula.<sup>32</sup> In an analysis of Russian government's nationalities policy in the 2000's, Veera Laine and Konstantin Zamyatin see it as highly contested terrain but conclude:

In post-Soviet Russia, there have been several competing projects in the field of nationalities policy. Of these, the civic nation-building project was closely connected to the overall democratization of the state in the 2000s, but to claim that it "failed" in Russia does not properly address the dynamism of the contestation. Instead, one may ask whether nation-building as a whole became overridden by the regime's primary aim of securing its own power. In the course of the 2000s, nation-building as a political project became subordinate to the consolidation of authoritarian rule and dominated by narratives of patriotism, heroic national history, and other similar accents on Russian ethnicity in identity politics.<sup>33</sup>

Laine and Zamyatin argue that Russia's government has sought to resolve the contradictions of defining "Russianness" in a multi-ethnic polity "by adopting concepts of compatriots and "the Russian World" to map the mental boundaries of the Russian nation to extend beyond the borders of the Russian Federation itself."<sup>34</sup> This wider definition was reinforced in the 2020 amendments to Russia's constitution, which added a new paragraph stating that "The Russian Federation provides support to compatriots living abroad in the exercise of their rights, ensuring the protection of their interests and the preservation of the all-Russia cultural identity."<sup>35</sup> Over time, the ideological void left at the center of Russian Federation governance by the end of Communist Party rule was filled by a revanchist nationalist vision powered by resentment among the elites for the loss of what they saw as their rightful status as a "great power." That vision resonated with the fears and frustrations of all those whose status and economic security had disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> Writing in 2021, Laine and Zamyatin

observed that “[i]n the foreign policy context, and after 2014 in particular, Russia’s eagerness to protect the rights of compatriots has acquired an imperial, even irredentist, tone.”<sup>37</sup>

The massive February 2022, invasion of Ukraine, purportedly to protect “compatriots living abroad” but also to restore rule over lands and people central to the “Russian World” as portrayed by Russia’s current rulers, confirmed this judgment. The trajectory of the government’s struggles to deploy Russian nationalism as part of its strategy of rule deepening into a revanchist war of conquest and annexation remind us that identity-based nationalisms have a history of taking on an ideological power of their own, one that can narrow the political options of those who deploy them. The often-contradictory path of the Russian government’s deployment of nationalism at home and its actions in Ukraine also suggests we need to better account for the role of domestic political forces, including factional conflicts of interest among ruling blocs.<sup>38</sup> We must consider the way decisions to go to war are made by constellations of dominant economic and state organizations seeking to maintain their privileged place amidst competitive pressures in the global economy, currents of domestic discontent, and factional contests for power.<sup>39</sup>

All of this falls outside a geopolitical frame within which states are portrayed as unitary actors. Modern geopolitical and realist theories that place a strong emphasis on spatial and material factors also implicitly assume that rulers will act at least somewhat rationally in the service of a unified “national interest.” This pushes to the margins the way that those who rule – and those who contend with them for state power-- pursue ideological strategies at home that depend heavily on exploiting powerful emotional currents such as fear and resentment. Geopolitical discourse thus largely elides the role of nationalisms both as instruments of rule at home and as ideological forces that can acquire their own momentum that further inclines those who deploy them towards heightened inter-state conflict and war.

This brief, non-expert cut through the terrain of Russia’s history does not mandate a conclusion that domestic drivers were the main force behind the decision of its rulers to launch their war against Ukraine. But I would hope it would demonstrate that the causes of this war are more varied and complex than simply NATO expansion, the *idée fixe* of much of the anti-war discourse. Further, I hope it would cause one to reconsider with some skepticism the Russian government’s narrative about Ukraine’s history since 2014, accepted by many in the remnants of the Western peace movements with little critical reflection.

One might note, for a start, that the controversy that led to the Maidan demonstrations and the fall of the Yanukovich government was not about NATO expansion, but rather about whether Ukraine would choose to forge closer economic ties to the European Union or to Russia.<sup>40</sup> Nationalisms are ideological tools deployed to contend for, consolidate, and sustain state power. Newly independent Ukraine was a fluid, multi-cultural polity, its “national” identity ripe for contestation. Constellations of oligarchs emerged there as elsewhere across the post-Soviet space, their internecine competition dominating Ukraine’s politics, their economic interests and regional political bases variously aligned with their counterparts in Russia or with financial, corporate, and government institutions and interests in Europe and the United States. Linguistic nationalisms became prominent instruments in their struggles for rule, encouraged and reinforced

by patrons in both Russia and “the West.” None of these forces outside Ukraine had a legal or moral right to determine its future. And certainly none had the right to attempt to settle the matter by launching a war that would devastate the country, killing many thousands of the people who live there.

The alternation in power of the major oligarchic factions resulted in large part from their failure to build an economic and political system that worked for the majority of Ukraine’s inhabitants. The Maidan mass protests brought a spectrum of Ukraine’s people with an assortment of grievances into the streets, many not part of any organized political structure. Contrary to the oft-repeated trope that the fall of the Yanukovych government constituted a “coup” instigated by Western governments and carried out mainly by neo-Nazi forces, Ukrainian analysts critical of the role in Ukraine of both Russian and Western governments and economic actors paint a far more complex picture:

In sum, although one cannot rule out Western imperialism as a factor of Ukrainian political crisis and especially its role in post-Maidan Ukraine, it is important not to exaggerate them, redefine what is meant by imperialism in the current context, and develop a more empirically based analysis. Transnational capital interests in Ukraine seem to be underestimated in comparison to NATO expansion – even if one is to consider NATO a military arm of Western imperialism – and geopolitical conflict with Russia, which is a point of contradiction even among Western states, elites, and class fractions. There is no sufficient evidence about consistent Western strategy of governmental change in Ukraine, while the role of classical democracy promotion mechanisms is overestimated. The combination of Western state power, power of international (financial) institutions, embedded interests of transnational capital, and (geopolitical involvement of) NATO in an “accumulation strategy” with “a hegemonic project” ... is a more convincing argumentation yet still requires a significant amount of conceptual nuance and empirical analysis. The West exploited the opportunity with Yanukovych’s overthrow; however, the new oligarchic ruling elites in Ukraine have been capable of defending their interests rather efficiently, with only occasional lost cases...<sup>41</sup>

In his speech announcing the annexation of Ukraine’s territory, Vladimir Putin framed his government’s war as part of an “emancipatory, anti-colonial movement against unipolar hegemony” that “is taking shape in the most diverse countries and societies.”<sup>42</sup> Ishchenko and Yurchenko argue to the contrary that “... Putin is very explicit about his ambition of winning a seat at the table among the great powers in the ‘multipolar world’ and of a recognition for Russia’s ‘spheres of influence’ – the areas where Russian interests will be assumed as prior to any other great power or that of a domestic government. Russia is challenging US and EU interests in particular areas of global politics, but it is not challenging the global imperialist structure, nor is it challenging its capitalist makeup from which Russia and its oligarchs directly benefit.”<sup>43</sup>

Many who warn against a “new Cold War” at the same time suggest as an alternative the Russian government’s version of a “multipolar” world, apparently seeing no contradiction in doing so. But the “multipolar” world envisioned by Putin’s government would in fact resemble that of the

Cold War in spatial-geopolitical terms. Russia's rulers project a world divided among a few *de facto* empires with recognized spheres of influence encompassing countries outside their borders, hermetically sovereign and free to rule and dominate in their domains free of any internationally recognized norms other than their expansive view of "sovereignty" itself, unconstrained by "Western" norms and values.<sup>44</sup> They portray much of the current international legal order, including human rights, as only one of several competing "civilizational" narratives and normative orders, all of which should be allowed to develop without interference from the others. There is some truth in this, too, but only as a description of the existing state of affairs.<sup>45</sup>

Calling the new round of confrontation and war among nuclear-armed governments a "New Cold War" likely understates its dangers. The strategies of rule and contending for rule at work in much of the world have unleashed political forces more similar to those that drove the wars and historic atrocities of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Russia and China already have authoritarian nationalist governments. A White Christian Nationalist party remains in close contention for power in the United States. Similar elements hold state power or are significant contenders for it in much of the rest of the world. This time around, furthermore, there are material conditions unprecedented in the capitalist era: global ecological overshoot with symptoms ranging from climate change to pandemics, and the exhaustion of capitalism's "outside," frontiers with resources and human labor to be exploited and new markets to be made. These novel factors so far only have made ruling national elites more reluctant to reform economically stratified economies at home and more likely to pursue zero-sum forms of international competition. Increasing use of such instruments as technology control regimes and sanctions further blur the lines between economic competition and military conflict. And with little to offer most of their people in terms of hope for a better future, they deploy identity-based nationalisms to displace discontent, to divide and rule and maintain discipline at home, and to mobilize their publics for war.

The Western Left and the remnants of the peace movements have properly devoted much of their attention to critiquing the civilizational narratives and actions of their own governments. The Western story of an idealized liberal capitalism that operates according to a fair and consistent "rule of law" and protects human rights has often been used as a stalking horse for military interventions. But in the current crisis, those seeking the path to a more peaceful, fair, and ecologically sustainable global society also need to think clearly about whether we can get there simply by accepting competing "civilizational" narratives and normative visions largely shorn of purportedly "Western" values like democracy and human rights. In the "multipolar world" as framed by those who rule in Russia and as demonstrated by their actions, even what constitutes self-determination and sovereignty itself really will be matters to be adjudged by "great powers" in their purported "spheres of influence." The (quite accurate) argument that throughout centuries of imperial competition and colonialism the rulers of Western "great powers" have often acted as if these were the rules does not justify that the ruled and voiceless anywhere should accept them. A civilization at its ecological limits cannot survive a global economic and state system dominated by endless competition among nuclear-armed neo-imperial capitalist governments for much longer. Neither Russia nor any other "great power" government is even suggesting, much less incarnating, any genuinely different way forward.

The solution is not to align ourselves with or even to silently accept the ambitions and the wars of ascendant or revanchist contenders in the hope that weakening the incumbent hegemon will make space for something better. Those who still harbor dreams that violent revolutions amidst the ruins of great power wars can be the midwife of a better future need to consider again both the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the nature of the civilizational crisis we face. Gunther Anders, an early and trenchant critic of the nuclear age, observed that we, the modern humans who invented nuclear weapons and built them in their thousands, are “incapable of mentally realizing the realities which we ourselves have produced.”<sup>46</sup> Further, Anders argued, those who hold the power to use the Bomb “remain incapable, of looking upon their contraption as anything but a means to further finite interests, including the most limited party interests.”<sup>47</sup> In the age of weapons of mass destruction, the work of trying to build something different must be nonviolent.

We failed to stop this war. There are no mass peace movements, and what opposition there is to this war remains divided. Lacking the social power at present to much affect the fundamental forces driving competition among those who rule in the most powerful states, we must at least try to hold them to their own commitments to abjure the threat or use of force to change the status quo. We must in every instance oppose wars of aggression, adding what weight we have to support for that fundamental norm. This alone will not create a world at peace, but it is necessary to keep open the space and time for non-violent social transformation that might address the root causes of war.

***The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House. Audre Lorde.*<sup>48</sup>**

From the perspective of peace movements, geopolitical considerations and “realist” views should be understood only as the entrenched rules of the game that rulers and their advisors long have followed, and that they have convinced themselves and each other are natural, necessary, and inescapable. In the worlds of one critic, they are “a theoretical articulation of the spontaneous ideology of state managers.”<sup>49</sup> As such, the state managers who are adherents of geopolitics and the versions of realism emphasizing hard power can make perpetual arms racing and war a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>50</sup>

The fact that those who rule today in many states see the world this way may give these theories some predictive value. As such they can inform prudential judgment, our analysis only of what is possible given the existing state of affairs, including the existing distribution of wealth and power both within and among states. But it is essential that we view geopolitical and “realist” frameworks as at most descriptive and never as normative, never as what should or must be as opposed to what is. Unlike law, which both manifests and serves to manage the tensions between the power and desires of those who rule and the rest of us, these theories view the world entirely from the perspective of the rulers. The conceptual frame of geopolitics is limited to the imperatives of holding and deploying power in what is portrayed as an endless, inevitable struggle for dominance among the world’s most powerful states.

It is a truism that how we talk about things shapes how we think about them. Those who hope for effective movements for a more fair, peaceful, and ecologically sustainable global society need a new way of talking about war and its causes. One marker of geopolitical thinking is that the



relevant actors are described as countries: “Russia” or “The United States” or “Ukraine.” Naming states as unitary actors implies that they are adequate and legitimate representatives of all who reside within their boundaries. It assumes that the choices our governments make are also ours. We need to develop (or develop again) different, more specific language to talk about governments, how they wield their power, and who really has the power to affect their decisions.

For a start, the labels for the actors in this language should not be just the names of states. We need to be more specific—at minimum we should say Russia’s government or the U.S. government, or “those who rule in country A or B.” Where possible we should try to be more specific still, identifying the organizations and interests contending to gain, influence, and exercise state power. If we cannot do that, it means we have more analytical work to do. Even such preliminary, clumsy efforts to revise the conventions of how we talk about “the international” matter. They remind us that the Russian people are not our enemy, nor are Ukraine’s people “Nazis.” They encourage us to consider that people who live within the current internationally recognized borders of Ukraine who speak Russian may not want to be ruled by those who now rule in Russia. They also might lead us to contemplate the possibility that most people living in either Russia or Ukraine would not consider each other enemies without strenuous efforts by their rulers to convince them it was so—or unless the government of one of those countries launched a war that left people in the other with few choices but to fight, flee, or face military occupation.

Other ways of talking about these matters, of course, are not unprecedented, even in popular debates. A marker of traditional Left discourse was a sharp distinction between the roles and actions of the rulers and the ruled. A marker of how far much of today’s “anti-imperial” discourse has strayed from those roots is the prevalence of framing the relevant actors as univocal States when discussing matters of war and peace. None of the governments of the nuclear-armed great powers are especially democratic. Most have authoritarian nationalist factions either in control of government or as a major force in their polities. We need to start talking again about who actually rules, and what their interests are, not just in “the West” but everywhere.

And we need to do more in this than merely recycling old Left and anti-war frameworks that have a bit more political economy in them. Most thinking about the role of military-industrial complexes has not been revised for decades.<sup>51</sup> We must understand the workings of a fully globalized capitalism under novel conditions that threaten both its existence and ours: the exhaustion of unexploited natural and human frontiers upon which is economic growth dynamic always has depended, and the destruction of the ecosystems all life depends on by that dynamic of endless growth. We will need to rethink fundamental concepts like “self-determination,” and the meaning of the Nation-state itself.

Marxian theories of imperialism with their focus on material factors always have been weak concerning the role of nationalisms and more generally identities. They have this in common with other contemporary international relations approaches, most of which still seem to assume blood and soil nationalisms have been safely consigned to the past. We need to incorporate into our understanding of the causes of war the systematic generation of friend/enemy distinctions

and other forms of difference, both in how societies are ruled and in how rulers prepare their publics to make war. One needs only to read today's headlines to see that these are integral to strategies of rule and contention for rule in this moment. Their nature is rooted in the history of the modern Nation-state. Developed over time by rulers struggling to paper over the antagonisms in class societies by creating a mythic unity of a single People, often defined in linguistic, religious, and ethnic terms,<sup>52</sup> the Nation-state and nationalist ideologies have proved lasting and supple instruments to displace the discontents of undemocratic and unjust societies onto enemies both foreign and domestic. "Blood and soil" nationalisms are not an inexplicable aberration, but a strategy of rule and contending for rule inherent in the structure of the modern Nation-state itself, and likely to be effective under certain conditions. These dangers lurk even in states with constitutions that are formally cosmopolitan. With authoritarian nationalist forces in government or contending for power world-wide, we urgently need to understand these forces better, and the social and economic conditions that underlie their resurgence.

We will need much broader movements if we hope to prevent wars, movements of enough breadth and depth to begin to address war's causes. The locus for deepening our understanding of all of this is in conversations with the movements focused on the civilizational ecological crisis and with the movements seeking to protect and give voice to communities most vulnerable to the resurgence of identity-based authoritarian nationalisms. There also is useful work going on in academia, but little new thinking has diffused into the world of anti-war activism. When there are mass movements, the boundaries between mainstream institutions like universities and the movements become more permeable, with conversations more equal and the movements having an effect on the questions asked and explored. We have no peace or broader system-critical mass movements now, but we should be thinking of ways to jump start such exchanges of ideas.

In general, we need to spend less time on social media sloganeering and more on reading, critical analysis, and more searching discussion. The remnants of the peace movements past have fragmented further into a bundle of insular monocultures, with actual debate a rarity. The pandemic and the proliferation of web video platforms have exacerbated this. With face-to-face local events still uncommon, the already-small universe of U.S. anti-war activists now hears from an even smaller array of voices, with Zoom allowing local groups to easily schedule appearances by the same handful of nationally-known anti-war figures. This also tends to suppress rather than encourage the kinds of deeper cross-issue discussion we need, for it is in local settings that cross-issue contacts typically are made and relationships built. From the most general to the most particular, we need to rethink our theory and our practice.

### **Speaking Against War, Now and After.**

*It seems to us that for many on the Left outside Ukraine, the chief task seems to be to 'get it over with' and quickly come to some definite conclusion (e. g., that the war can in no way be won; that the Ukrainian state is this or that anyway, so why care; that there is no fundamental difference between bourgeois democracy and a 'D/LPR'-style society, since both are forms of capitalist rule, etc.). Once this is done, people move on to thinking and writing about other issues... Meanwhile, the majority of Ukrainian workers still seem to bet on an alternative they*

*prefer over others: the vision of an unoccupied, independent Ukraine.* “The Tragedy of the Ukrainian Working Class,” Interview with the Karmína collective, Slovakia/Czech Republic.<sup>53</sup>

Peace movements by definition are not in a position to whisper in the ears of those who rule; we are voices raised outside their walls. Demands for negotiations are easy to make, but are not enough. In the midst of war, we have no real idea what negotiated outcomes are possible. We are likely to be the last to know when negotiations that matter are going on.<sup>54</sup> It is appropriate to criticize governments allied with Ukraine for rhetoric that might make a negotiated outcome more difficult to achieve, such as encouraging war aims beyond defending Ukraine against aggression, for conducting military exercises, and for increasing forward deployed forces in ways that further heighten tensions. But our first and loudest demand should be that the government that launched the war of aggression end it and withdraw their forces.

Regarding military aid, we should recognize the reality that the countries providing aid to Ukraine have been measured in their assistance, trying to avoid forms of military assistance more likely to expand the war beyond Ukraine’s borders. Anti-war movements generally have not made ending the resistance of people who are victims of aggression or denying them the means to resist effectively a major focus of their demands.

The time to address the status of NATO will be after the Ukraine war is over—assuming we survive it. In the midst of this war and with a U.S. public generally ill-informed about international matters, “no to NATO” demands so lack context that their main effect likely is to self-marginalize those who make them. A meaningful discussion about NATO needs to be part of a broader debate about “security” world-wide, one that includes people as well as governments. In this regard we need to be mindful that the predominant geopolitical focus in anti-war discourse on the confrontation between “The United States” and “Russia” has elided consideration of the “demand” side of NATO membership, why it was an attractive option for governments and at least a considerable part of the populations in the post-Soviet, post-Warsaw Pact space. In the wake of the Russian government’s war of aggression, any serious peace movement will have to rethink these issues. A stable set of security arrangements for Europe will need to account not only for the security demands of Russia’s government, but of those other governments and people as well. And if this debate aims at more than a temporary “stability” fix, it will need to encompass the ecological and economic requisites of genuine human security and how to transform a Nation-state system that still allows largely unaccountable elites to choose nationalism, militarism, and war as the solution to their problems of rule.

Even creating the conditions for such broader public discussions will require breaking through the “security” solutions that will be promoted by governments, by broader military and foreign policy establishments, and by the rest of the range of powerful organizations that benefit from armed enforcement of the status quo. They will use the Russian government’s war of aggression to push for more of the same: further militarization of Europe and beyond under the NATO banner (or perhaps under some other flag or flags; the war has for the moment submerged schisms within Europe and between some European governments and the United States that may emerge after in new forms). They will also likely push for continued reliance on so-called nuclear “deterrence.”

We must instead make the lesson how close to the brink we have come. Nuclear weapons have proved not be a weapon of defense, but rather to be most “useful” to nuclear-armed aggressors to intimidate those they attack and all who might aid them. And in our current global economic and state system, the conditions can arise in any and all of the nuclear armed states that would lead their rulers to choose war as the solution to their problems of rule. The weakness of Russia’s conventional military forces revealed by this war also provides space to pause and pull back from a further arms build-up and expansion of NATO, and for a more sweeping debate about “security” and for real negotiation, for the first time, of a post-Cold War settlement in Europe.

If the Russian government is defeated and seen to be so by its public, and particularly if the Russian polity falls into a post-war political crisis, we should push our governments to avoid the disastrous errors of Versailles and of post-Cold War triumphalism. Boris Bondarev, a Russian diplomat who resigned the foreign service amidst the war, argues that

If Ukraine wins and Putin falls, the best thing the West can do isn’t to inflict humiliation. Instead, it’s the opposite: provide support. This might seem counterintuitive or distasteful, and any aid would have to be heavily conditioned on political reform.... Providing aid would also allow the West to avoid repeating its behavior from the 1990s, when Russians felt scammed by the United States, and would make it easier for the population to finally accept the loss of their empire.<sup>55</sup>

The costs of reparations, of rebuilding Ukraine, should not be imposed on Russia’s people alone, most of whom had little to say about their government’s decision to go to war. Whether and how the coincidence in time of the peak of global neoliberalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union and most other socialist governments were structurally related is a problem for future historians. It seems likely, however, that the political and economic climate in which the governing coalitions in the post-Soviet space emerged played a significant role in creating the conditions for a new round of neo-imperial competition, and for the resentment-powered nationalisms that helped push that competition towards war. The emergence of an authoritarian, nationalist, and ultimately aggressive government in the Russia Federation likely is a manifestation of larger systemic dynamics. But it is also in this sense the collective responsibility of the top strata of government and “private” organizations and their inhabitants globally that hold the most power and also derive the greatest benefit from the current order of things.

Restoring Ukraine in the wake of this war will be an environmental remediation and redevelopment project of monumental proportions. Rather than focusing narrowly on military aspects of “common security,” those working for peace should also be thinking and talking about a positive program for post-war Ukraine. We should be advocating a program of reconstruction in which the people of Ukraine have real voice, that rebuilds infrastructure and industries in ways that are ecologically sustainable, and that leaves Ukraine’s people and government in a position to determine their own futures free of debt either to global financial interests or to other governments. An approach encompassing a broader vision of human security for Europe and beyond is likely to be the only way to reach a settlement for this war that might be stable for the long term. Such a program for Ukraine could be a model and one way to spark a conversation

about broader reparations for other regions devastated by war and by long-established patterns of uneven, extractive, and unjust development.

It is not too early to start discussing how we might develop this broader vision. It may seem utopian, but so too will be any approach that posits a change in direction on the scale likely required if we are to have a humane future. This conversation also provides another way to make connections between work against war and other movements that in this moment have broader support and are further along in developing similar themes. An example is the Draft Declaration on Human Rights and Climate Change, which includes a provision stating that

All human beings have the right to active, free, and meaningful participation in planning and decision-making activities and processes that may have an impact on the climate. This particularly includes the rights of indigenous peoples, women and other under-represented groups to equality of meaningful participation. This includes the right to a prior assessment of the climate and human rights consequences of proposed actions. This includes the right to equality of hearing and the right for processes to be free of domination by powerful economic actors....<sup>56</sup>

Saying “No to NATO” is not enough. We must be able to convince people in the countries the NATO governments claim to defend that there is a more “secure,” a more positive way forward than hunkering down in the relatively privileged bastions of late capitalist consumerism behind ever more dangerously militarized frontiers.

Many of the people and organizations most visible in protests against role of the U.S. and NATO in the Ukraine war have for decades brought forward the voices and stories of peoples victimized by U.S. wars and neo-imperial exploitation. Their failure to do so now is a striking contrast. Ukraine is a preeminent example of people and regions denied agency, rendered virtually invisible by geopolitics and the geopolitical visions of the most powerful governments in era after era. Its land has been fought over by one empire after another, its people slaughtered and starved in huge numbers whether as civilian victims or soldiers mobilized in wars chosen in far off imperial capitals.

This is not an endorsement of the nationalist projects of those who rule or contend for rule in Ukraine. Once this war ends, if the people of Ukraine are in a position to exercise their own voices, they will face a long path of overcoming their country’s corrupt form of capitalism. They will also need to overcome the dueling nationalist projects that oligarchic factions used to divide them and to contend with one another for power, creating the conditions for external forces, -- the “great powers,” -- to seek to carve Ukraine up as has happened again and again in the past. These power struggles will not end until there is far more profound systemic change in the intertwined global economic and state systems.<sup>57</sup> But preventing the struggles among the powerful from erupting into major war must be a first priority for all of us, and a step towards that is a global peace movement willing in one voice to clearly and unambiguously oppose all, not just some, wars of aggression.

It is time to demand unequivocally that the Russian government end this war. We should do so not to endorse one nationalist or imperial vision over another, but because aggression is the

greatest and most dangerous crime. We must first end this war to keep alive the hope that future wars may be prevented, and we must do so by insisting with one voice on the basic principle that any attempt by any government to change the boundaries or governance of any self-governing jurisdiction is unacceptable, illegal, a crime of the most fundamental order. Only then might we find the political space to begin addressing the causes of the endless cycle of wars that the global capitalist and state system generates and that geopolitics portrays as natural and necessary, as the inevitably inhumane side of the human condition.

---

<sup>1</sup> There are divisions in the anti-war forces elsewhere that bear some similarities to those in the United States. See, for example, the summary of positions in Germany on the war in Angela Klein, “‘Stop the War!’ Discussions of the German Left,” Posle, October 12, 2022. <https://posle.media/language/en/stop-the-war-discussions-of-the-german-left/> and regarding similar divisions in India see Achin Vanaik, “Ukraine: Divisions Among The Left,” *Radical Socialist*, October 30, 2022 <http://www.radicalsociast.in/articles/world-politics/974-ukraine-divisions-among-the-left>

<sup>2</sup> President of Russia Vladimir Putin, Signing of treaties on accession of Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson regions to Russia, Moscow, September 30, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>

<sup>3</sup> President of Russia Vladimir Putin, Address by the President of the Russian Federation, September 21, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2625, Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation Among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, A/RES/2625(XXV) 24 October 1970.

<sup>5</sup> President of Russia Vladimir Putin, Signing of treaties on accession of Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson regions to Russia, Moscow, September 30, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>

<sup>6</sup> See Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, “Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine,” Advance Unedited Version, A/77/533 2/17, October 18, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/A-77-533-AUV-EN.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See generally Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-Operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV), 24 October 1970. Regarding the illegality of an annexation purportedly by consent where the annexation was accomplished under threat of military force see the discussion in the Nuremberg judgment of the annexation of Austria, “International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg), Judgment and Sentences, October 1, 1946: Judgment,” *American Journal of International Law*, vol. 41, No. 1 (January 1947) p. 172, pp. 192–194.

<sup>8</sup> The International Military Tribunal for Germany, *Judgment of the International Military Tribunal for the Trial of German Major War Criminals: The Nazi Regime in Germany*, (September 30, 1946), The Avalon Project, Yale University. <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/09-30-46.asp>

<sup>9</sup> Definition of Aggression, United Nations General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX), 14 December 1974, Article 3(a).

<sup>10</sup> See Elizabeth Wilmschurst, Introductory Note, Definition of Aggression, General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX) 14 December 1974, United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law, 2008. <https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/da/da.html>

---

<sup>11</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8bis.

<sup>12</sup> For more on this point, see Andrew Lichterman, “The Peace Movement and the Ukraine War: Where to Now? Western States Legal Foundation Commentary,” March 4, 2022. <http://wslfwef.org/docs/The-Peace-Movement-and-the-Ukraine-War.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> I discuss the Russian government narrative about the recent history of Ukraine and reasons to view it skeptically further below.

<sup>14</sup> Definition of Aggression, General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX), 14 December 1974, Article 5 para.1.

<sup>15</sup> Draft Articles on State Responsibility with Commentaries Thereto Adopted by The International Law Commission on First Reading, January 1997 97-02583 Commentary on Article 33, State of Necessity, Para 37, p.256.

<sup>16</sup> Definition of Aggression, General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX), 14 December 1974, Article 5 para.3.

<sup>17</sup> In the Fall of 2002 with the United States deluging the world with its own flood of propaganda ‘preparing the information space’ for the coming war with Iraq, we warned of the precedent that would be set by a war of invasion and occupation, a war of aggression without legal basis:

“Finally, the example of the world’s most powerful state claiming the right to conduct a “preventive” war on the grounds that it is necessary to fight “terrorists” and to remove threats of “weapons of mass destruction” could be invoked by others pressing for war, Russia in Chechnya and Georgia, Israel against those its government suspects of supporting terrorism, India against Pakistan, perhaps precipitating the first nuclear warfare since Hiroshima and Nagasaki.” Andrew Lichterman and John Burroughs, “War Is Not the Path to Peace: The United States, Iraq, and the Need for Stronger International Legal Standards to Prevent War,” Western states Legal Foundation and Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, Commentary issued on United Nations Day, October 24, 2002, United Nations, New York.

<sup>18</sup> Taras Bilous, “Eastern Europe’s Tragedy. How the Spheres of Influence Policy Amplifies Reaction,” *Commons*, a journal of social criticism in Ukraine, August 11, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Nicolas Guilhot, *After the Enlightenment: Political Realism and International Relations in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2017, pp.5-6

<sup>20</sup> On the more extreme end of the spectrum, see “UNAC says: ‘End the U.S.-NATO proxy war with Russia’,” *Workers’ World* June 27, 2022. <https://www.workers.org/2022/06/65084/>; and for a more moderate version see Code Pink, Ukraine Crisis FAQs, <https://www.codepink.org/ukrainefaq>.

<sup>21</sup> Modern geopolitics is a form of realism, but not all international relations realisms are encompassed by geopolitics. “Only when a contemporary realist watches the world with the gaze of the military strategist and only when that gaze is used for foreign policy advice in terms of national primacy or aggrandisement (whether territorial or not) does realism become akin to neoclassical geopolitics.” S. Guzzini, (Ed.). *The return of geopolitics in Europe?: Social mechanisms and foreign policy identity crises*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.27-28.

<sup>22</sup> There are more nuanced versions of international relations realism, and in the United States their practitioners have been among the most prominent critics of the U.S. government’s foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In his new book *The Atlantic Realists*, Matthew Spencer in this regard highlights among others the work of Andrew Bacevich and the Quincy Institute, critics of NATO expansion and of the manner in which the U.S. and allied governments have responded to the war in Ukraine while going further to acknowledge its complexities than does the everyday anti-war discourse. Ultimately, however, Specter concludes that “the imperial blind spots and democratic deficits of Atlantic realism run too deep for it to be an effective resource for contesting the prerogatives of empire or renewing democracy.” Matthew Specter, *The Atlantic Realists: Empire and International Political Thought Between Germany and the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022), p.212.

---

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Specter, *The Atlantic Realists: Empire and International Political Thought Between Germany and the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022), p.9.

<sup>24</sup> Paul S. Reinsch, *World Politics at the End of the Nineteenth Century as Influenced by the Oriental Situation*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1900), p.11.

<sup>25</sup> Paul S. Reinsch, *World Politics at the End of the Nineteenth Century as Influenced by the Oriental Situation*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1900), p.14.

<sup>26</sup> Together with the centrality of the ideological struggle between competing economic systems, the growing influence of the new social sciences in the discourse about how wars are conducted also elided the racist elements of U.S. ways of making war from WWII onward. On this note see Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 242-254; Sophia Dafinger, “Taken On Faith”: Expertise In Aerial Warfare and the Democratic “West” In The Twentieth Century,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* No.67, Fall 2020, pp.101-121.

<sup>27</sup> On these points see generally Nicolas Guilhot, *After the Enlightenment*.

<sup>28</sup> International Court of Justice, *Advisory Opinion on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons*, 8 July 1996, para.98.

<sup>29</sup> Federico Fuentes and Ilya Matveev, “Russian anti-war socialist: ‘Putin cannot tolerate an independent Ukraine’” interview with Ilya Matveev, *Green Left*, Issue 1354, July 18, 2022. <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/russian-anti-war-socialist-putin-cannot-tolerate-independent-ukraine>

<sup>30</sup> Further, Sandra Halperin contends that there is not a clear distinction between “imperial” development and “national” development, at least in terms of the impacts on the regions and populations being developed. “The notion of *national* territoriality,” she argues,

“was promulgated as part of an apparatus of economic, political, and social control. It emerged in the context of expansion of production for export and of cross-border commercial networks, the monopolization of land and industry, and the development of new forms of exploitation. It was linked with the struggles of elites to gain greater control of resources within the increasingly differentiated realms—burgeoning cities and deindustrializing hinterlands—which characterized the territories claimed by states. However, the territorial states that developed in Europe and that, throughout the nineteenth century, were developed and promoted by Europeans there and elsewhere, resembled far more closely the city-state polities of the past 5000 years than the nationally integrated state form of national cultural imaginaries and nation-state ideology.” Sandra Halperin, *Re-Envisioning Global Development: A Horizontal Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.91.

Ecological historians also have noted this exploitative relationship between capitalism’s major cities and their rural hinterlands; see, for example, William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991).

Halperin argues that following a period of Keynesian, more extensive development of national spaces in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, in the neoliberal era we have seen the return and intensification of the concentration of financial, managerial and high-value-added economic activity in a relatively small number of “global cities.” (On this point see also Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014). These patterns of extraction, development, de-industrialization and abandonment of rural hinterlands have had a profound and pervasive effect on global politics, effects that to date have been exploited most successfully by authoritarian nationalist factions from Brexit to the rise of Trumpism.

<sup>31</sup> See generally Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); and Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), pp.48-51.



---

<sup>32</sup> See generally Veera Laine and Konstantin Zamyatin, “Russia’s Nationalities Policy Before and After The 2020 Constitutional Amendments: Is The ‘Ethnic Turn’ Continuing?” Finnish Institute of International Affairs, June 2021.

Also noteworthy is the resonance between efforts by the Russian government to impose a standardized Russian history curriculum throughout the country and the current sharp controversies over U.S. history and how it is taught.:

“During the 2010s, the state authorities became increasingly interested in using Russia’s “thousand year-long” history as a part of identity politics and patriotic upbringing in particular. The Kremlin’s view on the matter is selective and authoritarian, as it has reserved for itself the role of interpreting the past and safeguarding the “correct” representations of history in society. In line with other discursive changes regarding the nation in the 2010s, the Kremlin has stressed the role of shared history in fostering national unity. In the field of education, there have been plans to introduce a single history textbook, as well as to make a unified history exam compulsory for all Russian students. Neither of the plans has been realized exactly as anticipated but nor have they been abandoned, and the state authorities’ aim to canonize history is clear.” Laine and Zamyatin at p.11.

<sup>33</sup> Veera Laine and Konstantin Zamyatin, “Russia’s Nationalities Policy Before and After The 2020 Constitutional Amendments: Is The ‘Ethnic Turn’ Continuing?” Finnish Institute of International Affairs, June 2021, p.6.

<sup>34</sup> Veera Laine and Konstantin Zamyatin, “Russia’s Nationalities Policy Before and After The 2020 Constitutional Amendments: Is The ‘Ethnic Turn’ Continuing?” Finnish Institute of International Affairs, June 2021, p.7

<sup>35</sup> Article 69.3, quoted in Veera Laine and Konstantin Zamyatin, “Russia’s Nationalities Policy Before and After The 2020 Constitutional Amendments: Is The ‘Ethnic Turn’ Continuing?” Finnish Institute of International Affairs, June 2021, p.10.

<sup>36</sup> As David Lewis writes,

“Sergei Medvedev characterised the 2000s in Russia as a decade during which ‘*ressentiment* was transformed into state policy’, through the propagation of a ‘myth of geopolitical defeat, humiliation and pillaging of Russia by world liberalism and its henchmen Yeltsin, Gaidar and Chubais’ (Medvedev 2014). Medvedev, along with other liberals, views this as a profound misreading of the actual reality of the 1990s, but acknowledges the power of resentment (or the subtly deeper meaning of the French and Russian term, *ressentiment*) both among elites and the wider population. Most significantly, argues Mikhail Yampolsky, *ressentiment* unites elites and the wider population:

All of Russian society, from Putin to the last pointsman [*strelochnik*] are all equally the bearers of *ressentiment*. For Putin the source is the non-recognition of himself and of Russia as equal and respected players on the world stage; for the pointsman – his helplessness in the face of the police, officials, courts and bandits . . . The *ressentiment* fantasies of the authorities at a certain moment entered into a strange resonance with the *ressentiment* fantasies of ordinary people. (Yampolsky 2014)

This strangely democratic experience of *ressentiment* rested on a powerful bond between a disaffected population and an elite that itself felt marginalised by Western-centric global elites.” David G. Lewis, *Russia’s New Authoritarianism Putin and the Politics of Order* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p.13.

<sup>37</sup> Veera Laine and Konstantin Zamyatin, “Russia’s Nationalities Policy Before and After The 2020 Constitutional Amendments: Is The ‘Ethnic Turn’ Continuing?” Finnish Institute of International Affairs, June 2021, p.10.

<sup>38</sup> “Similarly to the criticisms of analyses of Western imperialism, one needs to take seriously the inconsistency and contradictions of Russian actions in Ukraine that too were partly caused by the ongoing conflict of interests between Russia’s dominating ruling and capitalist blocs.... A possible explanation lies in contradictions between the more aggressive and anti-Western siloviki and the more cautious liberal fraction of Russian ruling class with assets in the Western countries, with Putin playing the role of an “arbiter” between them (Dzarasov 2016b).” Volodymyr

---

Ishchenko and Yuliya Yurchenko, "Ukrainian Capitalism and Inter-Imperialist Rivalry," I. Ness, Z. Cope (eds.), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019, p.15.

<sup>39</sup> See Alexander Anievas, *Capital the State and War: Class Conflict and Geopolitics in the Thirty Years' Crisis, 1914-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press) 2014, pp. 7-9.

<sup>40</sup> A former Soviet republic with dense social and cultural ties and Russian-speaking mass media that might present a more open and possibly more successful political and economic model could be seen by Russia's incumbent government as a threat to their rule, even if not to the well-being of the mass of their population. This aspect of international (or perhaps inter-imperial) competition, conjoined with competition for dominance in key technologies, has remained of central concern to Russia's government. In a major 2018 address to Russia's Federal Assembly, President Putin warned that

"Technological lag and dependence translate into reduced security and economic opportunities of the country and, ultimately, the loss of its sovereignty. This is the way things stand now. The lag inevitably weakens and erodes the human potential. Because new jobs, modern companies and an attractive life will develop in other, more successful countries where educated and talented young people will go, thereby draining the society's vital powers and development energy." Vladimir Putin, Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, Moscow, March 1, 2018 <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

<sup>41</sup> Volodymyr Ishchenko and Yuliya Yurchenko, "Ukrainian Capitalism and Inter-Imperialist Rivalry," I. Ness, Z. Cope (eds.), Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019, *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, p.13. See also, for example, Marko Bojcun in a January 2022 interview in which he characterized Ukraine's current politics thusly:

"There's a range of political parties, which by and large, are instruments of powerful financial and oligarchic groups. There is no mass social democratic or labour movement party. However, contrary to the fantasies of the pro-Russian left in the West, the far right is a fairly marginal force. It has attracted no more than 2.3% of the popular vote in any national election. Compare that to Germany, to Austria, to France." "Self-determination for Ukraine!," Interview with Marko Bojcun, author of *The Workers' Movement and the National Question in Ukraine: 1897-1918* and *Towards a Political Economy of Ukraine*. <https://ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org/2022/01/07/self-determination-for-ukraine>. And see Volodymyr Artiukh, "The political logic of Russia's imperialism," *Commons*, June 15, 2022. <https://commons.com.ua/en/authors/artiuh-volodimir/>

<sup>42</sup> "An essentially emancipatory, anti-colonial movement against unipolar hegemony is taking shape in the most diverse countries and societies. Its power will only grow with time. It is this force that will determine our future geopolitical reality." Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, Address on Signing of treaties on accession of Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson regions to Russia, September 30, 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Volodymyr Ishchenko and Yuliya Yurchenko, "Ukrainian Capitalism and Inter-Imperialist Rivalry," I. Ness, Z. Cope (eds.), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019 p.15.

<sup>44</sup> "Moscow has rejected certain aspects of the universal understanding of international law as primarily Western, especially if they emphasize democracy and human rights. These ideas and principles, or the way they have been invoked by the West, are seen as potential threats to the political stability and even the territorial integrity of Russia, as well as the domestic control of military and security matters in former territories of the Russian Empire. Moscow often views the West's focus on human rights and democracy as a disingenuous means to promote regime change and undermine state sovereignty. In Moscow's understanding of international law the Russian Federation is still a great power and has, for historical, geographical, cultural, linguistic, and even religious reasons, special rights and prerogatives in the post-Soviet space. This can be considered the doctrine of Russian hegemony in the post-Soviet space. According to this doctrine, the West, when acting within post-Soviet Eurasia, is arrogantly trying to dictate and promote normative standards in cultures and regions that are unfamiliar to it." Lauri Malksoo, "Post-Soviet Eurasia, *Uti Possidetis* and the Clash between Universal and Russian-Led Regional Understandings of International Law," *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 53, no. 3 (Summer 2021): 787-822, 795.

---

See also on this point Gregorio Bettiza and David Lewis, “Authoritarian Powers and Norm Contestation in the Liberal International Order: Theorizing the Power Politics of Ideas and Identity,” *Journal of Global Security Studies*, Volume 5, Issue 4, October 2020, pp. 559–577; and Trine Flockhart & Elena A. Korosteleva (2022): “War in Ukraine: Putin and the multi-order world,” *Contemporary Security Policy*, DOI: 10.1080/13523260.2022.2091591, p.2.

<sup>45</sup> See Chia-Yu Liang and Ferran Perez Mena, “Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine and the Return of Civilisational Politics: An American and French Tale,” e- International Relations, Apr 27 2022, <https://www.e-ir.info/2022/04/27/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-and-the-return-of-civilisational-politics-an-american-and-french-tale/>; and also Gregorio Bettiza and David Lewis, “Authoritarian Powers and Norm Contestation in the Liberal International Order: Theorizing the Power Politics of Ideas and Identity,” *Journal of Global Security Studies*, Volume 5, Issue 4, October 2020, Pages 559–577.

<sup>46</sup> Günther Anders, “Theses for the Atomic Age,” *The Massachusetts Review*, Spring, 1962, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Spring, 1962), pp. 493-505, 496.

<sup>47</sup> Gunther Anders, “Reflections on the H-bomb,” *Dissent*, 3:2, Spring 1956, pp. pp.146–155, p.147.

<sup>48</sup> “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” is the title of a collection of works by Audre Lorde, containing an essay with the same title. *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House* (Great Britain: Penguin Random House,) 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Alex Callinicos, in Alex Callinicos and Justin Rosenberg, “Uneven and combined development: the social-relational substratum of ‘the international’? An exchange of letters,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 21:1 (2008), 77 – 112, 83-84.

<sup>50</sup> Guzzini, S. (Ed.). “The return of geopolitics in Europe? : Social mechanisms and foreign policy identity crises,” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012), pp.33-34.

<sup>51</sup> See Andrew Lichterman, “Rethinking the Military-Industrial Complex,” Western States Legal Foundation working paper, 2018. <http://wslfweb.org/docs/RethinkingtheMilitaryIndustrialComplexWSLF2018.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> On the inherent tension between the modern State’s role as the instrument of one “People” and the protection of “the Rights of Man,” see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1979), pp.230-231.

<sup>53</sup> The Tragedy of the Ukrainian Working Class, Interview with the Karmína collective, Sozial.Geschichte Online, September 20, 2022, pp.15-16. [https://sozialgeschichteonline.files.wordpress.com/2022/09/karmina\\_interview\\_ukraine\\_sgo\\_34\\_vorveroeffentlichung-1.pdf](https://sozialgeschichteonline.files.wordpress.com/2022/09/karmina_interview_ukraine_sgo_34_vorveroeffentlichung-1.pdf) (Slovakia and the Czech Republic)

<sup>54</sup> The Cuban Missile Crisis, for example, was resolved in negotiations initiated and for the most part conducted in secret. The nature of the deal that ended the crisis were not known to the public and the time, and the controversy among scholars over its exact terms continued even after the end of the Cold War. The Ukraine war for a variety of reasons arguably presents a more difficult negotiating context than the Cuban Missile crisis. On the Cuban Missile Crisis Negotiations see Od Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* New York: Basic Books, 2017), pp.304-310, and Jim Hershberg, “Anatomy of a Controversy,” *The Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 5, Spring 1995. [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba\\_mis\\_cri/moment.htm](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/moment.htm)

<sup>55</sup> Boris Bondarev, “The Sources of Russian Misconduct: A Diplomat Defects from the Kremlin,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Draft Declaration on Human Rights and Climate Change, II.13. For the full text of the Declaration and a commentary on its origins, intentions, and legal basis, see Kirsten Davies, Sam Adelman, Anna Grear, Catherine Iorns Magallanes, Tom Kerns and S Ravi Rajan, “The Declaration on Human Rights and Climate Change: a new

---

legal tool for global policy change,” *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment*, Vol. 8 No. 2, September 2017, pp. 217–253. <https://doi.org/10.4337/jhre.2017.02.03>; passage cited here at p.252.

<sup>57</sup> “On the crossroads of empires, the capitalist greed has brought the country into economic servitude, bred multiple Ukraines, and thrown national identities into transmutation. Many generations to come will have to struggle to disarm the seeds of enmity sown by the manufactured myth of the ‘Other’ within, in one’s self, in one’s past and memories sacrificed to the empire of capital.” Yuliya Yurchenko, *Ukraine and the Empire of Capital: From Marketisation to Armed Conflict* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), p.183.

Western States Legal Foundation 655 13th Street, Suite 201  
Oakland, California USA 94612-1201  
(510) 839-5766 • [www.wslfweb.org](http://www.wslfweb.org)  
[www.facebook.com/WesternStatesLegalFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/WesternStatesLegalFoundation)