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Blood, Money and Imperial War



Photo by Marek Studzinski

As we approach the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the only obvious certainty about the conflict is that some corporations are making a killing from the killing. Although there has been armed conflict in Ukraine since 2015, it wasn't until the Russian invasion in 2022 that most western governments acknowledged the fact. Since that date in 2022, NATO governments and their cohorts have pumped tens of billions of dollars into the war. Despite this infusion of military aid, the conflict seems to be stalemated. Meanwhile, the clown prince of Kyiv—otherwise known as President Zelenskyy—continues his ostentatious and overblown solicitation of arms manufacturers and the governments that work for those manufacturers. It seems not a day goes by where Mr. Zelenskyy is not demanding more lethal and more numerous weapons and money. His demands border on the homicidal and reflect the reality of an arrogant and self-centered regime with a belligerent military alliance backing it up. Meanwhile, his allies in Washington, Berlin and London feed his government's self-importance while they lose count of the Ukrainian dead.

Calls for peace talks are rejected by the NATO powers almost before they make the news. These rejections are supported by social democrats, Green party bureaucrats, Democrats and Republicans, and certain elements of the socialist movement in the US and Europe. Somehow, this latter bunch have convinced themselves that this battle set up and conducted through the world's greatest imperial government and its military alliance is a war for Ukrainian national liberation. World War One should have taught us that supporting one side or the other in a war between imperial governments is a foolhardy and bloody endeavor. As a point of order, even though I only address Washington and its co-conspirators in this piece, that doesn't mean I consider Moscow without blame.

I recently read a press release from the World Bank. As the reader probably knows, the World Bank is part of a predatory lending system that includes various western governments and the International Monetary Fund. Its lending practices usually require the government borrowing the money to prioritize paying interest on the loan before pretty much anything else. This usually means that the debtor is forced to privatize many of its social services and end fuel and food subsidies to the poor. Quite often, the way the loans are structured means they will never be paid off unless the receiving nation sells off its publicly owned lands, educational systems and privatizes its health care—often by outsourcing it to a foreign entity.

Anyhow, back to that press release. The essence of the release was this: “As of January 2023, the World Bank has mobilized over \$18 billion (most of it from the US) in emergency financing, including commitments and pledges from donors to help blunt the widespread human and economic impacts of the war.” Without a tinge of irony or acknowledgement that it is the continual escalation of the war that is causing the devastation and death in Ukraine, this endeavor goes by the acronym PEACE, which stands for Public Expenditures for Administrative Capacity Endurance. The monies provided to the fund are used to pay salaries of government workers, pensions, assistance for the poor, assistance to compensate payment of utility bills, assistance for children with disabilities, among other things. This is only a small amount of the funds given to Kyiv to sustain the war. Meanwhile, most of Britain's public sector are conducting work stoppages because their salaries have not kept up with the inflation caused in large part by the conflict and the sanctions put in place by Washington and the NATO alliance.

Chambers and Partners is a legal firm that caters to big time investors; the kind of investors that can afford to buy up socialized services and industries in nations that neoliberal capitalism is hoping to dismantle. Ukraine has been one of these countries since the 1990s, when it became a sovereign nation. These efforts were uneven at best until recently, even though US and EU investors had stepped up their privatization efforts since the turmoil of 2014 and 2015 in Ukraine. However, according to the Chamber and Partners website, that is now changing. I quote an article titled “Ukraine relaunches privatization: future belongs to

the brave” from that website here (mind you, this is just a small snapshot of the transfer of wealth taking place):

“After the full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, the ongoing privatization in Ukraine was suspended. But when initial Russian offensives were repelled, the Ukrainian Government renewed its course towards privatization. As a result, four landmark events happened in recent months:

* On 19 August 2022, the new Law No. 2468-IX on privatization (1) entered into force. It relaunched auctions for small privatization under new conditions and changed the procedure for large privatization. The procedures were simplified, reducing all timelines while still abiding by transparency.

* On 7 September 2022, Mr Rustem Umerov was appointed as a new Chairman of the State Property Fund of Ukraine. Since his first day in office, Mr Umerov has repeatedly proclaimed his goal to make privatization as easy as possible for foreign investors.

* On 19 September 2022, the first privatization auction since the full-scale Russian invasion took place. This event marked the renewal of privatization under new simplified terms.

* On 4 October 2022, the State Property Fund received another 800 state-owned enterprises under its control. According to the Ukrainian Minister of Economy Mrs Yuliya Svyrydenko, some of those enterprises may soon be allocated for privatization.” (<https://chambers.com/articles/ukraine-relaunches-privatization-future-belongs-to-the-brave>; accessed 2/9/2023)

In other words, the rush is on. In a rather despicable version of an eBay auction, while military conflict continues its own form of destruction, the oligarchs who preside over Ukraine are selling off the public wealth of the people they say they are fighting for. If we were to be honest here, the article referred to should be titled “Ukraine relaunched privatization: future belongs to the greedy.”

As far as the flow of weapons to Ukraine goes, occasionally one comes across an interesting anecdote. Perhaps the most interesting one comes from Denmark, where “the ruling Social Democrats and their right-wing coalition partners have decided to increase Danish military spending to 2% of the GDP by 2030.” (People’s Dispatch 2/8/2023) In order to do this, the ruling coalition is considering taking away a national holiday to raise 3 billion kroner that would pay for the increase in arms expenditures; I suppose from the taxes generated. Not only is this related to NATO’s arming of Ukraine in the NATO-Russia conflict, it is also part of an ongoing drive by Washington to get members of the alliance to spend two percent of their gross domestic product (GDP). If one recalls Donald Trump’s boorish visit to Europe to talk about NATO and his comments about ending the alliance, one of his main complaints was that no government in the alliance was meeting this two percent goal, despite an understanding that this was a requirement. Of course, the bulk of the weaponry alliance members are allowed to buy is manufactured by the US war industry and its European

affiliates. In other words, part of belonging to this belligerent alliance is a requirement to support the US permanent war economy. Large protests opposing the cancellation of the holiday to increase the arms budget have been held by left parties, national trade unions and others across Denmark.

Furthermore, people across the NATO alliance are seeing their lives become more expensive because of the sanctions on cheaper fuel, the inflated prices of fuel imported from the US, food and other necessities, and the cutbacks in subsidies that help pay for those goods. In what I can only understand as pathetic and reminiscent of the Bush presidents wars against Iraq so that “Americans can recreate” however they want while preserving the American way of life as if it was somehow superior, Zelenskyy told the European Union parliament that Kyiv’s soldiers and NATO’s mercenaries were fighting for “the European way of life.” Besides the fact that the European way of life is one that includes genocidal colonialism, neverending wars and fascist Italy and Germany as part of its history, I can’t think of a worse reason to risk nuclear war.

There is only one way out of this situation. It begins with peace talks between Moscow, Washington, Kyiv and Brussels. There are antiwar protests coming up in the next few weeks. Every one of them calls for a negotiated settlement and a ceasefire. If you have a political difference too great to overcome with one or the other organizations currently organizing these protests, organize your own. History tells us that antiwar movements often begin on the margins. It is only when a certain critical mass is reached that the popular will of those who oppose imperial wars is truly heard. The time we need to reach that critical mass is fast approaching. Like all wars, this war has a life of its own that, if left unchecked, might be the death of us all. Negotiations, not escalation.

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