

# **WHY HAS PUTIN INVADED UKRAINE?**

## **PART ONE**

### **AN EXAMINATION OF SOME CONTENDING VIEWS**

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# **Introduction**

There has been considerable confusion, both on the Right and Left, about the nature of Vladimir Putin's regime and his reason for invading Ukraine. Many on the Right consider this to be a resurgence of the old 'Russian Communism', pointing to Putin's origins in the Soviet KGB, and his desire to restore the old USSR's boundaries. However, Putin, a one-time CPSU member, became bitterly hostile to his old party, and its failure to hold the territory of the old Tsarist Russian Empire together. Some on the Left, particularly amongst the fragments of the former official Communist Parties (i.e. those backed by the states of the USSR or People's Republic of China - PRC), but also amongst the dissident (non-state backed) Communists (e.g. Trotskyists and other Maoists), see Putin's Russian Federation as a victim of US imperialism and NATO expansion. However, whatever Putin's changing attitudes to NATO, he has always seen it as part of the global imperial world in which he wants Russian imperialism to take its part.

Imperialism is not a US creation but has been a global system since the sixteenth century. All states, including the USA, have to accommodate to a wider global imperialism. And US imperialism has been losing its position as global hegemon for some time. It faces a rising imperial PRC, already dominant in East Asia, but extending its field of operations worldwide. And even though the Russian Federation has declined more rapidly as a global imperial power, US imperialism no longer has the ability to impose its will close to the Russian Federation borders, nor in certain areas of the Middle East or Central Asia. This had allowed the Russian Federation to step in militarily in Transnistria (part of the old Moldovan SSR), Abkhazia and South Ossetia (part of the old Georgian SSR), Syria, eastern Ukraine and in the Armenia/Azerbaijan wars. And on 24<sup>th</sup> February this year, sensing US weakness after the fall of Kabul on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021, Putin invaded Ukraine (following his earlier attacks in 2014). By 8<sup>th</sup> April, this latest invasion had already cost 1627 civilian deaths and 2267 civilian injuries (conservative estimates),<sup>1</sup> and 4.5 million refugees and 6.5 million internally displaced persons.<sup>2</sup> Many homes have been devastated and there have also been attacks on hospitals and schools; whilst Mariupol is already looking like a Second World War Stalingrad, or a post 2<sup>nd</sup> Chechen War Grozny.

## **a) Imperialism as a global system**

The term 'Imperialism' has been used to describe two phenomena. This has contributed to the confusion on the Left, especially for some from the former official and dissident Communist traditions. Therefore, it is important to

acknowledge both the differences and similarities between the two types of imperialism and how they relate. Thus, there have been empires going back to Antiquity (e.g. Egyptian, Sumerian, Indus and Yellow River, and the later Macedonian and Roman) and to the Middle Ages (e.g. Carolingian, Abbasid, Song). Furthermore, empires developed in South and Central America (Inca, Maya and Aztec) unknown to others in the world. In these historical periods there was no overarching global system, and large areas of the world were not incorporated into empires.

However, there have been some common features, shared by these older imperial states, and in some cases directly transmitted to later imperialist states. These include their ruling classes' subjugation and/or subordination of peoples living beyond their founding state's initial geographical limits. Through a process of 'othering', these ruling classes saw themselves as superior and acted accordingly. They used force and established laws to uphold their privileges and to maintain others in an inferior position. This led to different degrees of toleration, contempt or outright hostility towards people/s both within and beyond all these empires' margins.

Marxists, and others on the Left, however, have also used the term 'Imperialism' to describe the global system which developed under capitalism. Within this system, all states and societies have to bend to the rules of an overarching capitalist domination. Capitalist profitability rather than looting or tribute collection, became the prime motivating factor for this imperialism. It took a long period, though, before surplus value extraction based on waged labour, or wage slavery, became the dominant form of profit-making. The sales of the proceeds of plunder, including precious metals sometimes taken in taxes, various forms of unfree labour including chattel slavery, domestic slavery and child labour, uneven trading relations, punitive interest payments and debt peonage, all contributed to profit-making in the early phase of capitalism. They can still be found today.

This global system has changed its forms, beginning as a **mercantile imperialism** in the late fifteenth century. Initially mercantile capitalism still hadn't fully broken from the earlier forms of empire. This was highlighted when the Portuguese entered the Indian Ocean, and the Spanish invaded the Aztec and Inca empires as Catholic crusaders and conquistadors. The Dutch Netherlands, France and England (later the UK) were more clearly mercantile capitalist in character. This was followed by **free-trade imperialism** from the mid-nineteenth century, promoted by the UK state. A case can be made that it wasn't until this free trade imperialism that capitalism finally became the dominant global socio-economic system. The UK only promoted free trade imperialism once it had become the

global hegemon. This was very much associated with the Industrial Revolution, which led to the creation of the modern working class. However, in most other parts of the world, including the British Empire, there were still very large numbers exploited through various forms of unfree labour (e.g. indentured and corvee), peasants trapped in forms of serfdom, whilst other small farmers were heavily indebted through taxation and subjected to uneven exchange relationships. And this capitalist domination of the world was further reinforced when other imperial centres emerged, and **monopoly capitalist imperialism** became dominant from the end of the nineteenth century. Free trade increasingly gave way to protectionism. This aggravated form of competition contributed to two world wars.

There are Marxists today who tend to confine the term ‘Imperialism’ to this later phase of the capitalist global system. And this is sometimes associated with another claim, that the preconditions for capitalism were created in England, the Dutch Netherlands, France and the infant USA. These states’ subsequent take-over of overseas colonial territories is then seen as having led to the external imposition of capitalism, with little agency given to the previous rulers or peoples of these colonised territories. For some, including briefly Karl Marx himself<sup>3</sup>, but more recently the late Bill Warren,<sup>4</sup> imperialism was given a progressive role in history. Such thinking has been persuasively challenged by Alex Anievas and Kerem Nisancioglum.<sup>5</sup> They point to the centrality of overseas coerced labour and of unpaid domestic labour, and their associated forms of racism and sexism, in the long-term historical development and maintenance of capitalism.

Nor have these super-exploitative features been confined to a historical phase of ‘primitive accumulation’, which Marx identified. Anievas and Nisancioglum show that the forms of exploitation and oppression associated with ‘primitive accumulation’ and domestic slavery were necessary to sustain societies and states based on the direct exploitation of wage labour. For some Marxists, capitalism may sometimes have resorted to coerced labour, but that is past history or, when it occurred later, this was done largely for opportunistic reasons to make super-profits. Capitalists’ resort to domestic labour is not seen to produce any capitalist surplus value. Its role in providing a massive amount of unpaid labour which helps to sustain the wider capitalist system is hardly recognised, nor its role in depressing the wages, particularly in the care sector. ‘Primitive accumulation’ and domestic slavery have been part of the genetic make-up of capitalism from the beginning to the present day. So, the wider political struggle for liberation, as well as the economic struggle for emancipation, cannot be disconnected.

Some Marxists claim that we still live under monopoly capitalist imperialism, or, after Nicolai Bukharin’s and Vladimir Lenin’s further theoretical development

during WW1- **state-monopoly capitalist imperialism**. Such thinking has tended to pull in two opposite directions. For an earlier Bukharin (he later abandoned the theory in this form) and the neo-Luxemburgists, there was no longer any room in the world for national capitalist development. Working class opposition in any crisis would take on an immediate communist character. They argued that support for national self-determination could only take on a reactionary role. This would hinder the internationalisation of the revolution and of economic production. More recently, in 2000, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri wrote *Empire*, which argued that “the rise of Empire is the end of national conflict”<sup>6</sup>. This could be seen as a Left version of the claim made by Francis Fukuyama’s 1992, in his *The End of History and the Last Man*, that humanity had reached “the end-point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”<sup>7</sup>

But, after the ending of the 1916-21 International Revolutionary Wave, the theory of state monopoly capitalism took another political turn. This contributed to Bukharin’s later support for a more national road to Socialism. Stalin’s Popular Front politics also flowed from such thinking. It was argued that under state monopoly capitalism the working class should lead a popular democratic alliance with the progressive middle class and small businesses against the state and the monopolies. Today, in some Left thinking, a new Right, symbolised by Donald Trump and Boris Johnson, has taken on the role of the old state monopoly imperialist enemy. As a consequence, they argue that another Popular Front alliance is now needed.

Back in 2011, at the height of the most recent revolutionary upsurge, around the Arab Spring, the Indignados and Occupy, Paul Mason, author of *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*, could be seen as representative of early Bukharinite thinking. This book retrieved some valuable nineteenth century working class history. However, with the Left almost everywhere in retreat since 2015, Mason has now taken a national Popular Frontist turn in his *How to Stop Fascism; History, Ideology and Resistance*, published in 2021. This more resembles later Bukharinite thinking. Mason wants to build a Labour Left/Centre led alliance, accepting Sir Keir Starmer as party leader. The aim is to win control of those national political institutions currently in the hands of the Hard Right before they pass over to full-blown Fascism. Mason also believes that NATO can be reformed.<sup>8</sup>

The usefulness of the old Marxist monopoly or state monopoly capitalism/imperialism as analytic categories has been superseded by others which can better understand the significant shifts that have taken place at a global level.

These shifts have involved new production and distribution techniques, changed ways of enforcing labour discipline, massive environmental degradation, neo-colonialism, Fascism and official Communism. These were not accounted for by the Marxist categories developed over a century ago. Nevertheless, just as key features of earlier features of imperialism were passed on to its later forms, this is true of today's version of capitalist imperialism. One key feature of state monopoly capitalism, which still prevails, is the domination of a limited number of imperial states. These have been able to annex, colonise or subordinate the whole or parts of other states and enforce colonial, neo-colonial or client state relationships.

Reflecting the need to update earlier theories, in order to address changing conditions, other categories have been developed. Some of these have concentrated directly on production and distribution, e.g. Fordism, post-Fordism and most recently Platform Capitalism. However, although the economic changes these categories have addressed are important, those wishing to identify the major linked socio-economic and political changes since WW2, have produced other categories. These have included **social market capitalism** (pursued mainly by Social Democrats and Christian Democrats with 'One-Nation' Conservative and Liberal support after WW2), and **neo-liberal capitalism** (pursued initially by socially reactionary conservatives after 1979/80, and later by socially liberal, Social Democrats and Liberals). And today neo-liberalism is being contested by a new **national authoritarian capitalism** often in a Right populist guise.<sup>9</sup> In economic terms, this could also be considered 'neo-liberalism in one country', and in political terms, undisguised illiberalism. Together these further heighten inter-imperialist tensions and the possibility of direct imperialist military clashes.

Marxists had already identified the role of finance capital under monopoly capitalism (Rudolf Hilferding) and state monopoly capitalism (Bukharin and Lenin). However, finance capitalism has taken on a more central role particularly following the ascendancy of neo-liberalism. This is also the case in the more statist-run CPR. For a number of years, the CPR has attempted to make the yuan a global currency, with the longer term aim of overtaking the dollar. And the importance of financial sector has also been highlighted during the current Ukraine war. Putin has tried to strengthen the position of the rouble, by insisting that exported Russian fuel and raw materials are paid for in this currency to lessen any Russian Federation dependence of the dollar or euro.

## b) The historical role of specific empires within the global system

Having outlined the significance of understanding imperialism as a global system, it is also necessary to see how particular national imperialisms relate to this. This will provide a clearer understanding of Putin's current behaviour in Ukraine.

Imperialism as a global system has never been the creation of a single state, although only a small number of states have developed imperial ambitions. Hegemonic and competing imperial powers have changed over time, as some states have risen, whilst others have fallen. Other states have pursued nationalist irredentist policies to extend their immediate borders, without becoming imperial powers with even wider ambitions. These have led to bloody conflicts, e.g. following Greater Serbian ambitions in Bosnia and Kosovo. But their particular local nature means they tend to be more geographically confined than directly imperial conflicts. Nevertheless, some states with irredentist ambitions have been able pursue these in a particularly brutal fashion when they have enjoyed long-standing imperialist state patronage, e.g. Israel in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, and Saudi Arabia in Yemen, both backed by US and British imperialism.

The UK was the first hegemonic global imperial power, but was challenged by French, Tsarist Russian and most seriously by German/Prussian imperialism. Later, US imperialism took on a declining Spanish empire, following the domestic genocide of many Native Americans and the continued capitalist use of Black chattel slavery, taking over from its British imperial predecessor. The USA, wanting first to reinforce its position in the Pacific, only reluctantly became sucked into conflict with German imperialism in two world wars. The US ruling class was far more enthusiastic in its WW2 battle with Japanese imperialism, which it had been preparing for some time, even if initially wrong-footed at Pearl Harbour in 1941. But such was the ruination of German imperialism, the devastation of French imperialism and the indebtedness of British imperialism following WW2 that the USA emerged as the hegemonic imperial power in the north Atlantic (hence the centrality of NATO founded in 1949), and this included its domination over Western and Southern Europe previously dominated by Germany, France and the UK.

Germany, defeated in two world wars and only permitted by US, Russian, British and French imperialism to be rearm to a limited extent, no longer has any territorial annexationist ambitions, although the racism inherited from its earlier imperialism remains a feature of German society. Japanese imperialism developed significant power in East and South Asia and the Pacific. But following Japan's defeat in World War 2, and the brutal US imperial vengeance at Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945, it was eliminated as another imperial contender. Japan has still retained a deeply racist culture inherited from its days of empire. Italian imperialism (like

Japanese) was originally sponsored by British imperialism to counter greater imperial challenges. However, after stepping on British imperial toes, the Italian empire was dismantled after WW2, but this still left a racist legacy in Italy.

Other imperial powers, which never became significant global players, have included Austria-Hungary Sweden, Denmark and Belgium. Today, none of these states, nor their successors, have any global ambitions. But like the major imperialist powers, although to differing extents, these states still display a racism which developed from their earlier imperialist past or has been maintained through their still privileged relationship within global imperialism.

In the past, one-time global imperial powers, such as Portugal, the Dutch Netherlands and Belgium, managed to get imperial life-support, when they were ‘adopted’ by British imperialism. And since WW2, the much-shrunken British empire (with its most valuable territories lying in various tax havens, central to the City of London’s operations) has itself sought life-support from US imperialism. This was once called a ‘Special Relationship’, but for its current advocates, it might better be characterised as a hoped-for ‘America First, Britain Second’.

France has followed a different path to prop up its imperialism. After WW2, acknowledging that the US wanted to replace it as an imperial power in many areas of the world, France initially sought US support instead as an anti-Communist power. However, with France defeated in Vietnam in 1953, the USA took on this particular role itself. France was also defeated by 1962 in the national revolution in Algeria, which constitutionally had still been part of the French state. However, despite these significant setbacks, France increasingly used the EEC, later the EU, as a cover to maintain a neo-colonial relationship with many ex-French colonies (along with Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK), through the 1964 and 1971 Yaounde Conventions, the 1976, 1981, 1985 and 1986 Lome Conventions and the 2000 Cotonou Agreement.

Like the UK, France has resorted to military force to defend its continued imperial interests, particularly through wars in Africa. In this it has been very much helped by the fact that Germany, the most economically powerful EU member state, has been limited by the post-WW2 military restrictions. A significant role for Germany within the EU, along with France, has been to develop the euro as a global currency. This has benefitted both. But the EU has never developed the key feature of a state, its own armed forces. Thus, the shared imperial interests of EU member states and those sections of European capital backing the EU tend to be promoted by largely economic rather than military means. This reflects the more advanced nature of production in the EU, especially Germany compared to

South-eastern and Eastern Europe and the former colonies of France, Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal. However, France, like the UK has never felt constrained by the EU, when it comes to militarily asserting its own imperial interests.

And the leaders of Brexit Britain, now no longer sharing the neo-colonial benefits of the EU, have pushed for Empire2. This is not something that has much chance of success, given the continued waning of UK state power at a global level. Johnson's recent visit to India didn't persuade Modi to fall into line over Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Furthermore, the snubs given to various royals on their trips to even the smallest Caribbean Commonwealth states also highlight the hollowness of Empire2. Hence 'America First/Britain Second' remains Johnson's best hope, even if the UK has been pushed to the back by Joe Biden, eager to reconnect with the other EU powers. Johnson had placed his hopes on the election of Marie Le Pen as French president and now hopes for the return of Trump.

The 1949 Chinese Revolution was the first major setback to post-WW2 hegemonic US imperialism. The USA tried to reassert its hegemony by intervening and enforcing the division of Korea in 1953, by creating a client state in South Vietnam in 1955, and by backing the bloody crushing of Indonesian Communists in 1965. The US setback in Cuba in 1956 was contained by the USSR climbdown in the Missile Crisis of 1962, but the attempted Bay of Pigs invasion a year earlier failed to overthrow Fidel Castro. And in 1975, the USA was defeated in Vietnam, severely undermining its imperial hegemony.

And part of imperial USA's attempt to contain the USSR challenge was rapprochement with the PRC, beginning with President Richard Nixon's meeting with Mao-Tse Tung in 1972. The PRC was officially recognised by the USA in 1979. The Chinese government set up Special Economic Zones to attract US and other foreign capital. But neither the CCP's brutal clampdown at Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989, nor the collapse of the USSR in 1991, substantially derailed further US/PRC rapprochement. The PRC's continued commitment to opening up markets, was just seen as another variation of the opportunities for enrichment provided to the US backed 'Harvard Boys' in Central and Eastern Europe through the wholesale privatisations of former COMECON member state assets.

But the crushing of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 ensured that Chinese oligarchs remained CCP members or allies fully committed to the PRC and its leaders' aspirations. This contrasted with Russian kleptocratic oligarchs who personally siphoned off vast amounts of their former state's wealth, buying expensive property in London, Paris, Athens, California, Florida, Dubai, Tel Aviv

and Limassol, football teams and art galleries, and hiding their money in shell accounts in Wall Street and City of London tax havens. Putin did eventually rein in these oligarchs' overseas activities, to ensure they also promoted the interests of the Russian imperial state, after some selected poisonings ('pour encourager les autres' - a la Russe). But by this time, the Russian Federation had lost any serious economic base for a leading imperial power and remains largely dependent on primary sector exports, especially fossil fuels and minerals. It uses military force to compensate for these weaknesses.

The PRC, though, was permitted to join the World Trade Organisation in 2000. PRC leaders ensured that its growing wealth and its exports, contributed more effectively to the CCP's state aims. Export production was based more on the more advanced secondary and tertiary sectors, initially using imported new technologies. In the process, many very rich oligarchs emerged, but if they departed from the CCP line, they were removed in periodic 'corruption' trials and executions ('pour encourager les autres' - a la Chinois). But US corporations, welcoming immediate profitable investment opportunities and cheap Chinese imports which kept wages down, could not see the dangers for US imperialism. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the British ruling class massively invested in loans to US companies, whilst welcoming low cost imported foodstuffs which also kept wages down. Both UK and US investments contributed to their later competitors' industrial take-off.

But the 1991 collapse of the USSR seemed to leave the USA as the unquestioned global hegemon. However, the inability of the USA to impose a regime to its liking in Iraq after the brutal war from 2003, and the continued rise of the PRC, highlighted the underlying weakness of US imperialism. This has been recently accentuated in the US defeat by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021. Chillingly, these reversals have led to a new US imperial strategy. Wherever it cannot assert its will, it creates maximum mayhem and leaves behind 'failed states' hoping to prevent these areas falling under the sway of Chinese or Russian imperialism.

Many former official and some dissident Communists, though, have equated either Socialism (or more ironically 'Workers States', where workers had no say) with nationalised property. Thus, they have been in denial about the imperialist nature of the old USSR or the PRC, where private capital had been largely eliminated or marginalised. But imperialist powers, whatever their balance of state-owned and privately-owned interests, are states which first seek to become significant players beyond their original 'national' cores, at a continental level, and often over their adjacent seas and oceans. These have included the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, British, German-Prussian, Japanese and US empires, but they have also

included the USSR, its successor the Russian Federation and the PRC, modified continuations of earlier Russian and Chinese empires.

The CCP leaders of the 1949 Chinese Revolution, unlike the leaders of the national revolutions, which broke up the Ottoman empires in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, gave priority to the restoration of the boundaries of the earlier Ming/Qing empires. These were two, pre-capitalist, tributary state empires, which left a deep legacy of Han superiority. These empires had included Tibet and Xinjiang which, in 1949, still had non-Han majorities. There was a decade of CCP-led imperial restoration, between 1949-59, to restore the full territorial extent of the old Ming/Qing empires. Partly building upon this imperial restoration, a more recent turbo-charged, state capitalist, PRC, still controlled politically by the CCP, has emerged as a major imperial power with global ambitions. It is now the main challenger to US imperialism.

But imperialism has never been, nor is ever likely to be, a one-state controlled system. Today, the USA is a declining hegemon, with its weakening economic clout compensated for by its overall military superiority. The PRC's continued economic growth is constantly reinforcing its imperialist ambitions and it could overtake the USA economically by 2030.<sup>10</sup> But the PRC is still much weaker in military terms, apart from the size of its army which is easily the world's largest.

India is perhaps more like an earlier Japan, a regional contender, but in Southern Asia and the Indian Ocean. Today India is powerful enough to thwart any UK post-Brexit Empire2 illusions. But despite a growing Indian oligarch presence in the USA the relative strengths of the US and Indian economies places India in a subordinate position and it is no global imperial contender. Modi is in a stronger position in relation to the much weaker UK with many wealthy Indians, reflected in the membership of the Tory cabinet. Modi attempts to court US and British imperialism. Modi points to India's undoubtedly victim status under the British Empire, whilst at the same time claiming not only the territories of earlier empires (e.g. the Maratha and much of Moghul empires, like the People's Republic of China claims the Ming/Qing imperial legacy) but also territories conquered under British imperialism. Furthermore, Modi is trying to create a Hindu supremacist state in a similar way to the PRC Han supremacist state. Many millions of oppressed nationalities and potential nations lie within India and China.

Both British and French imperialism continue to decline, although they remain nuclear armed, more as imperial fig-leaves, since the use of these weapons could only be with the consent of the USA. But the UK's role in the global finance sector (underpinned by the constitutionally privileged position of the City of London) and

its disproportionately large navy, are used to try to offset this decline. Russia's long imperialist legacy in the world and the current role of the Russian Federation will be examined in more detail in the next section.

### **c) The legacy of Russian imperialism**

Tsarist Russian imperialism had roots going back to the late sixteenth century, with its extension to the Black and Caspian Seas and deep into Siberia. Tsarist Russia came to wider European notice by making its weight felt in the West after the Battle of Poltava in 1709, and through its role as the gendarme of Europe in 1815 and 1848. During much of the nineteenth century, Tsarist Russia also extended its territories to the Caucasus (with its own genocidal legacy against the Circassians) and Turkestan, with ambitions well beyond towards Chinese Turkestan (Xinjian today), Mongolia and Manchuria. This produced the tradition of 'Russia, One and Indivisible.' This was backed by Russian tsars supported by Russian Orthodox patriarchs.

Thus, Tsarist Russia had ambitions across two continents. But the collapse of the Tsarist regime in 1917, during the 1916-21 International Revolutionary Wave, did not lead to the break-up of inherited imperialist territories, except on Russia's western border. Here new national states, Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were established but against the 'Russian' Revolution, and not through its realisation. Initially, though, many people from nations and nationalities (ethnic groups) in these borderlands did welcome the new revolutionary wave. After the horrors of WW1, they were looking for a more universal order, which could end such murderous and destructive wars. But under pressures, both external and internal, the Russian Communist Party (bolshevik) - RCP(b) leadership promoted 'Bayonet Bolshevism', in these areas. They tried to extend the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR) by military force across the territory of the old Tsarist Russian empire.

After the initial formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922, it continued to be dominated by the RCP(b), which only became the All-Union CP(b) (AUCP(b) in 1925. In effect, the USSR and the AUCP(b) remained firmly under Russian control, a reflection of their continued imperial nature. The massive northern area of former Tsarist Russian Turkestan remained part of the RSFSR as late as 1935. It was only then carved up from above by the one-party AUCP(b) into 2 new union republics (Kazakhstan and Kirghizstan), without any attempt at democratic self-determination.

And just as the formation of the specifically unionist USSR and the later AUCP(b) were designed to maintain Russian imperial control, so was Stalin's new 1936 USSR constitution. Whereas the 'federalism' of the earlier RSFSR constitution only provided bureaucratic devolution to the various national republics, the 1936 constitution was of a more recognisably federal nature. It introduced a second chamber, the Soviet of Nationalities, with 32 deputies from each national republic, 11 from each autonomous republic, 5 from each autonomous oblast and 1 from each national district. This constitution also retained what had long been dead letter in practice. It offered each nation and nationality the right of self-determination. However, this was negated when Stalin constitutionally embedded for the first time, what had long been the actual practice in the USSR, the leading role of the AUCP(b). In the one-party, bureaucratic, police state of the USSR, the only mechanism for raising the issue of national self-determination was the AUCP(b). This led to a 'Catch 22' situation. If anybody raised this issue in the AUCP(b), they were accused of 'National Bolshevism' or being agents of imperialism, and subjected to police harassment, job loss, imprisonment, internal exile, labour camps, or being shot.

And from 1939-41, the Ribbentrop-Molotov (in effect the Hitler-Stalin) Pact represented an inter-imperialist carve-up, this time beyond the USSR's borders. This allowed the USSR to annex former non-ethnically Russian, Tsarist imperial territory in the west, until Hitler reneged on the deal. The WW2 Yalta and Potsdam conferences of 1945 amounted to other inter-imperialist carve-ups, this time in Europe and Asia. The outlines of these deals were mainly determined by the USA and USSR, reflecting the strength and disposition of their military forces on the ground. A much-weakened UK and British empire was already reduced to playing mainly a support role, a reflection of their greatly decreased power. One of Stalin's aims was to restore much more of the lost territory from the old Tsarist Russian empire, than had been achieved between 1918-24, or temporarily re-established under the Hitler Stalin Pact. And, after an initial period of the wholesale looting of Eastern and Central Europe, the relationship between the states there and the USSR was regulated economically by the COMECON after 1949, and militarily by the Warsaw Pact after 1955. These states were politically USSR clients subordinated economically and militarily by a new form of neo-colonialism. The USSR also used its continental bases to extend its field of operations globally.

Since the collapse of the USSR, COMECON and the Warsaw Pact in 1991, the new Russian Federation has tried to prop up Russian imperialism in a number of other ways. First, the Russian Federation adopted an older British precedent, and formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The CIS initially included 10 former USSR republics, some of which later left. Following this

attempt to maintain its imperial reach, the Russian Federation tried to join NATO, and become one of its leading member states upholding shared imperialist interests. Putin was very much in favour of this. The Russian Federation wanted to prevent the extension of NATO's nuclear hardware to its borders, but it did not challenge NATO as such. Despite the loss of so much imperial territory, following the break-up of the USSR in 1991, the Russian Federation still remained committed to Russian imperialism; just as the loss of French and UK state territory in Algeria and 26 Counties of Ireland, left both states looking for new ways to maintain their imperial power.

After the overthrow of the former USSR client regime in Afghanistan in 1992, at the hands of US and UK backed Sunni Islamic supremacists, Putin's concerns were initially primarily directed against the rise of such forces. They were gaining growing influence, not only on the Russian Federation's Central Asian borders, but even within its own state boundaries, particularly in the north Caucasus, and especially Chechenya. although here Putin enjoyed western support. It was only in 2000 that the Russian Federation gained control of the breakaway Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, following the most brutal post-WW2 war in Europe. Amnesty estimated 25,000 civilian deaths and 5000 missing. Grozny was levelled to the earth, with pictures eerily reminiscent of the German Nazis' destruction of Stalingrad. Putin played a major role in this.

During this period, Putin thought that his own 'success' in Chechenya might contribute to the Russian Federation being welcomed as part of an expanded, anti-'Muslim terrorist', NATO imperialist alliance. And the US 'Shock and Awe' offensive against Baghdad in 2003 and the levelling of Fallujah in 2004 showed that it was unlikely to be squeamish about the methods such a reformed NATO might use. Back in 1900, the imperialist powers of the UK, Russia, Germany, Japan, USA, France, Austria-Hungary and Italy sent military forces to invade Qing China to suppress the Boxer Rebellion. In 2003, Putin went as far as to propose a UN-led invasion of Iraq, with NATO and Russian Federation military forces. As in 1900, in the face of their intense inter-imperialist competition, such cooperation could only have been short-lived. However, should Putin have achieved his aims at that time, the world would have faced a different inter-imperialist alliance and carve-up, with other horrific consequences. Perhaps Iran would have been reduced to the same imperially created wasteland as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and much of Syria.

But the USA initially stone-walled, before clearly rebuffing Putin's overtures. After the 1991 collapse of the USSR, the USA was still in its 'end of history' triumphalist mode. Even beyond Twin Towers in 2001, the USA remained

confident it could still use Muslim supremacists for its own imperialist ends. Since 2016, the USA has opted to support the ‘former’ al-Qaeda (responsible for Twin Towers) Al Nusra Front in Syria against the dictatorial Arab nationalist, Bashar al-Assad, who had faced a popular challenge dating from the 2011 Arab Spring. For a brief period, the USA depended on the revolutionary democratic, Kurdish People Defence Units (YPG) to break the extreme Islamic supremacist ISIL. Once achieved, the US was quite happy to leave the YPG and Kobane to the ‘tender mercies’ of the Turkish ethnic supremacist, Recep Erdogan. Meanwhile, as much to break the spirit of those many Syrians, who had bravely defied Assad’s dictatorial and corrupt regime, as to oppose Sunni Islamic supremacist forces, Russian airstrikes reduced Aleppo and Homs to new ‘Groznys’.

Following the Russian Federation’s failure to be recognised as a key imperialist player, after being denied NATO membership, Putin began to assert Russian imperialist interests by other means. The Russian Federation provided military support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia in their breakaways from the Georgian Republic. Those new pro-US politicians who took power in Georgia in 2003, were committed to Georgian ethnic supremacism. Putin saw his chance and backed Abkhazia and South Ossetia with their non-Georgian populations. Instead, the Abkhaz government promoted the ethnic cleansing of the Georgian majority, leaving a majority Abkhaz community. Putin’s military backing prevented South Ossetia from becoming fully absorbed into the Georgian state.

But national self-determination options are strictly limited, as Putin’s actions elsewhere in the Caucasus have highlighted. So, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia now use the rouble as their currency and could well join the Russian Federation. If Chechenya represents one extreme method of subordinating a Caucasian republic to the Russian imperialism, then Putin’s success in dictating the terms of the settlement in Nagoro-Karabakh in 2020, after the war between Azerbaijan and its Armenia-backed residents, represents another. Land-locked Armenia, responsible for promoting some ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis in and close to Nagoro-Karabakh in 1993 has, after its defeat in 2021 by Azerbaijan backed by Turkey, nowhere else to turn. It is now a dependent client state of the Russian Federation.

Nevertheless, the Russian Federation remains a declining imperial power. Primary products still form the majority of its exports, highlighting its continued economic weakness. This is one reason that Putin has been unsuccessful in creating an economic counter-weight to the EU. He formed the Eurasian Economic Community in 2000, and its successor, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2014. These names have deliberately mimicked the old European Economic

Community, but the ‘Economic’ was retained after the conversion of the Russian controlled EEC to the EEU, to distance itself from any claim of being a political union. The EEU only consists of the Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan and Armenia and has far less member state economic interaction than the EU member states and is much more dominated by a central power, the Russian Federation.

Putin, though, has attempted to use direct political pressure elsewhere, threatening to cut off oil and gas supplies. Such pressures were one reason why the initial 2014 Maidan protests in Ukraine pursued a more pro-EU orientation. The EU’s relationship with peripheral non-members may be a form of neo-colonialism, but it was hoped that EU rules-regulated trade would replace the kleptocratic and gangster activities of Russian oligarchs (and for some the Ukrainian oligarchs too). And EU attempts at regulation also appeared to be better than the US backed system of behind-the-scenes cartel agreements to rig prices, in league with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. And in Brexit Britain we can now see the impact of oligarch power (British, Russian, Saudi Arabian, Gulf State, and Indian) where politicians and Johnson’s Tory government are openly bought. And the Tories preside over rampant profiteering and racketeering on an unprecedented scale.

Putin has tried to compensate for the Russian Federation’s economic weakness by asserting its military power. The Russian Federation has the world’s greatest number of nuclear weapons (though not necessarily as technically advanced as the USA), and easily the biggest army in the theatre that currently matters— Eastern Europe. The Russian Federation’s attempted equivalent to NATO is the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). As well as the EEU members, this military alliance also has Tajikistan as a member, whilst both Serbia and Uzbekistan have observer status.<sup>11</sup> The CSTO briefly intervened, earlier this year, to assist the authoritarian Kazakhstan leader, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, in the face of popular rebellion. Alexander Luvshenko, president of Belarus, recently challenged by popular mobilisations because of his own authoritarianism, has provided back-up assistance to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. There is some evidence that Syria’s Assad is prepared to send military forces. But so far, direct military assistance has not come officially from the CSTO, but from a coalition of those highly politically indebted to Putin - a new ‘coalition of the willing’.<sup>12</sup>

And whereas all earlier forms of Russian imperialism, from Peter the Great onwards, had to look West for technological assistance, Putin’s Russia is prepared to look East to another imperialist power – the Peoples Republic of China. This has the potential for new tensions to emerge, with the PRC today replacing Prussia-Germany’s imperial role in the past, and the Russian Federation becoming its

subordinate ‘Austria-Hungary’. And it is an indication of the growing strength of Chinese imperialism that its leaders have a number of options following Putin’s war in Ukraine. These include adopting a semi-detached attitude, with the possibility of President Xi Jinping and the PRC becoming an inter-imperial arbitrator, rather like Chancellor Otto von-Bismarck and Prussia-Germany were able to do in Africa at the 1884-5 Berlin Conference ‘Scramble for Africa’ negotiations. The PRC did not support Putin but abstained over the UN anti-Ukraine war resolution on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. Otherwise, the PRC could sit back, waiting for the USA to become bogged down in an economically costly tit-for-tat sanctions war. The USA waited until 1917 to become involved in WW1, and until 1941 to become involved in WW2, looking for the exhaustion of the European imperialist powers. Or, in a more chilling scenario, if Putin is seen to ‘get away with it’, the CPR could invade Taiwan.

And if the increased competition leading up to the First World War led to what Rosa Luxemburg called ‘barbarism’; the growing contradictions of the current imperialist global order threaten either nuclear annihilation or catastrophic environmental degradation. Although another possible alternative might be, what the late Istvan Meszaros termed, “barbarism if we are lucky.”<sup>13</sup> There are large areas of the world, particularly in Africa and the Middle East where that barbarism already exists.

#### **d) Fascism, Putin and the nature of the Russian state**

The mainstream media presentation of the Ukrainian war, in the UK and the Russian Federation, both invoke the Second World War struggle against the Nazis. This should provide a warning that something is seriously amiss here. Yet there is a common feature in their accusations. Neither side means by opposition to Nazism opposition to Fascism as such. The term ‘Nazi’ has become severed from the essence of what constitutes Fascism, only to be used as a term of abuse. Fascism involves the use of brutal extra-constitutional paramilitary forces, and a resort to extreme racism, national and male chauvinism to crush the working class and other exploited groups, who provide a challenge to the existing state.

Fascism, though, can take two different forms. The first form is the **restoration of an old political order**, after a limited period of bloodletting, e.g. the Loyalists in the Ulster Volunteer Force mobilised in support of the Ulster Covenant 1912, and other Loyalists in the pogroms of Irish Nationalists from 1920-23, 1936 and 1969; the White Russian armies and militias used to try and restore the Tsar from 1917-18 or the rest the Tsarist regime up to 1920; and the Freikorps in 1919 and

the attempted Kapp Putsch in 1920, which tried to restore as much of the Kaiser's Prussia-Germany as possible. The more radical form of Fascism also resorts to racism, national and male chauvinism, and paramilitary force, but leads to the **establishment of a new corporate order**, snuffing out all elements of democracy by means of a permanent police state. This form of Fascism was first established in 1925 by Benito Mussolini in Italy and then taken further in Adolf Hitler's Third Reich in 1933. Under this system, both the capitalist and working classes are coerced to meet the state's imperial aims. But the owners of certain loyal private companies were still amply rewarded. In Nazi Germany, Krupps and I.G. Farben were provided with slave labour. There have also been hybrid versions of these two forms of Fascism, e.g. Spain and Portugal, where the powerful traditional Catholic hierarchy retained an important political role.

The current Putin regime, backed by his Russia United party, sees itself more in the 'Russia One and Indivisible' restorationist mode. The three main upholders of the old 'Russia One and Indivisible', were the tsar, the Russian Orthodox patriarchy and the Tsarist Russian state machinery. In the face of democratic and Socialist challenges, the tsarist regime had also resorted to the extra-constitutional Black Hundred gangs (like the Irish/Ulster Loyalists from 1912, representatives of the earlier extra-constitutional, restorationist form of Fascism). Clearly today, the tsar himself cannot be restored, but Putin sees his own imperial presidency as performing the same role. And although the Russian Orthodox Church isn't the Russian Federation's established church, the privileged position given to it by the state-controlled media gives it that de facto status. Its leading Patriarch Kirill, of Moscow and all-Rus (i.e. Russia, Ukraine and Belarus), is a major supporter of Putin and in particular his current war upon Ukraine, including the use of Russian Fascist forces. Kirill hopes to eliminate the 'schismatic' Ukrainian Orthodox church. This church finally became autocephalous (autonomous) in 2018 under the equally reactionary, Patriarch Filaret. He transferred his earlier Russian ultra-nationalism to Ukrainian ultra-nationalism. He wants to eliminate the Russian Orthodox church in Ukraine.

But Putin has gone to much greater lengths than the Ukrainian or other European governments to also involve the other wing of Fascism into the running of the state. The Far Right, Liberal Democratic Party (which despite its name is neither liberal nor democratic) led, until his recent death, by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, has been licensed as part of the official 'opposition'. So has the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). The CPRF's ideology is not Fascist but glorifies the days of Stalin's USSR. Its Hobbesian strong-state 'Socialism' is based on Party-State control of the economy and society. The CPRF is also concerned about the decline in the number of ethnic Russians, and hence is a supporter of reactionary

anti-LGBT+ and anti-abortion laws, so there can be a boost in Russian family numbers. To this end, the CPRF seeks cooperation with Russian Orthodox patriarchy.

Other parties, which have emerged in the Russian Federation, which could threaten Putin's power, are dealt with far more brutally, denied access to state controlled media, their leaders jailed, beaten up or 'disappeared'. However, Putin's licensed 'opposition', although sometimes feeling his 'stick', is also wooed by the 'carrot' of access to the state-controlled media and behind-the-scenes funding. The 'Reds' own organisations sometimes display three-panelled posters, showing a Russian tsar, Stalin and a Russian Orthodox patriarch. In effect the Putin regime amounts to an institutionalised 'Red'-Brown coalition, with the 'Reds' in a tolerated subordinate position.

Nevertheless, Putin also permits the existence of Mussolini and Nazi inspired Fascist forces, often financed by particular Russian oligarchs. The Wagner Group, led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, runs a mercenary army. This army has acted on behalf of Putin in Syria and now in Ukraine. Its method of operation is very similar to the US-based private mercenary army, Blackwater, run by former US naval officer, Erik Prince. (It also remains quite legal even under 'liberal' Joe Biden, despite being illegal under international humanitarian law<sup>14</sup>). These companies' 'independence' also provides their governments the cover of deniability. But Putin also tolerates the Russia's most influential full-blown Fascist, Aleksandr Dugin, who first organised the National Bolshevik Front, later the Eurasia Party, and became an advisor to the Russian State Duma speaker (who was also a member of Putin's United Russia). Dugin "calls for an illiberal totalitarian Russian Empire to control the Eurasian continent from Dublin to Vladivostok to challenge America and 'Atlanticism.'"<sup>15</sup>

Clearly such an attempt to create a two continents-wide Russian imperial order has little more prospect of success than the Johnson's Empire<sup>2</sup>. But two other Russian billionaire oligarchs, who are ultra-Russian Orthodox, are trying to build an alternative White Christian alliance which stretches around the whole of the northern hemisphere from Chukotka in far north-eastern Siberia, west through the rest of the Russian Federation, on through Europe, across the Atlantic to the USA, Canada and Alaska. Certainly, such an alliance faces its own major contradictions, since it seeks the cooperation of Russian Orthodox, traditionalist Roman Catholic and Protestant supremacist forces. However, significant well-financed Hard Right leaders from each of these Christian denominations are currently prepared to set aside their views of each other as schismatics, heretics and anti-Christians, in order to

build an 'internationalism from above', pro-patriarchal family, anti LBGT+ and anti-abortion alliance.

Thus, the Far Right, ultra-Russian Orthodox, billionaire oligarchs, Alexey Komov and Konstantin Malofeev have heavily funded the American Protestant supremacist, World Congress of Families (WCF), one of the wealthiest and most influential Hard Right organisations in the USA.<sup>16</sup> The WCF promotes laws attacking LBGT+ and abortion rights<sup>17</sup> This Hard Right, in states with more liberal social laws, is currently promoting anti-trans legislation and is the main financier behind this campaign. But for the WCF, this is just a first step against gays, lesbians, pro-abortion feminists, progressive lecturers, teachers and others involved in the social welfare sector.

When it comes to others on the Far Right, Putin keeps his options open, promoting or dumping them, to serve the Russian imperialist state as he sees fit. But whatever the Russian Federation's balance between traditional 'Russia One and Indivisible' restorationist and Fascist Duginist and other Far Right forces, it remains an imperialist police state, promoting kleptocratic oligarchic interests, and takes coercive action well beyond the Russian Federation's borders. This has included the deployment of Spetsnaz (special operations forces), which have operated in Ukraine from 2014 and in the UK (e.g. the poisoning of double-agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter in 2018) and also the most likely force behind the shooting down of the Malaysian Airlines Flight 117 on July 2014 over the separatist and RF controlled part of Donetsk.<sup>18</sup> (And, of course, the USA has a long record of similar activities abroad, including the shooting down of Iran Air Flight 655 in 1988).

## e) The British Right, Putin, 'Nazis' and Fascists

The British Right like to invoke Winston Churchill 'leading' the struggle against the Nazis. Some even see Boris Johnston, as a latter-day Churchill (which is how he sees himself), and the leader of the British fight today against the latter-day 'Nazis' headed by Putin. But Churchill was long enthusiastic in his support for Fascist states and for Fascist methods. He was a supporter of Mussolini.<sup>19</sup> And in 1937 Churchill said, "One may dislike Hitler's system and yet admire his patriotic achievement. If our country were defeated, I hope we should find a champion as indomitable to restore our courage and lead us back to our place among the nations."<sup>20</sup> At that time Churchill did not want to impose Fascism on Great Britain, because he thought that as an undefeated imperial power, this was still not necessary. But he thought that Fascist methods should be used whenever the existing UK state itself was strongly challenged. And Churchill had not been

squeamish about resort to Fascist forces elsewhere, e.g. in Ireland, or in supporting the brutal methods used by British armed forces in India, Egypt or Kurdistan. His deeply engrained British racism led him to say, “I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes.”<sup>21</sup> When questioned by the UK government’s Peel Commission in 1937 about British complicity in ethnically cleaning Palestinian Arabs to make way for Jewish settlers, Churchill said, “I do not admit that the dog in the manger has the final right to the manger even though he may have lain there for a very long time.” He denied that “a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America, or the Black people of Australia,” by their replacement with “a higher grade race.”<sup>22</sup>

Churchill opposed the German Nazis not because they were Fascists, but because they threatened British imperial interests. And on becoming PM of the UK in May 1940, Churchill clearly stated his overriding imperial war aims. “Without victory, there is no survival. Let that be realised; no survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for, no survival for the urge and impulse of the ages.”<sup>23</sup> And in 1944, when the Greek Communist-led Partisans had liberated most of Greece, Churchill turned to Greek Nazi collaborators and to British troops to crush them<sup>24</sup> (something Stalin allowed as a quid pro quo for being given a free hand elsewhere). Furthermore, when Labour took office in July 1945, they sent 20,000 troops to Saigon and 60,000 troops to Indonesia to hold Vietnam and the Dutch East Indies for French and Dutch imperialism, rearming Japanese troops to help them.<sup>25</sup> The Attlee government’s differences with Churchill were over how much of the British empire could still be saved.

And Putin has also called his war against Ukraine an anti-‘Nazi ‘crusade. But Putin’s anti-‘Nazism’, like Churchill’s, is not because Hitler was a Fascist. If there is one CPSU leader, Putin can still find some time for, it is Stalin. Putin has defended the Hitler-Stalin Pact on almost identical grounds. They both claimed that it was a necessary after the British and French capitulation to Hitler at Munich in September 1938.<sup>26</sup> Like Stalin, Putin thinks in Russian imperialist terms, so he accepts the secret protocol, which allowed the USSR to annex huge areas of Poland, Lithuania and Romania, with its consequent mass repression. Putin today is no doubt also pleased that the Stalin’s NKVD handed over hundreds of German CP members, living in exile, to the Gestapo.<sup>27</sup>

Just as Churchill wanted to fight a British imperialist, not an anti-Fascist war, Stalin wanted to fight a Great Patriotic War. This invoked Russian Slavs against German Teutons. This was highlighted in Sergei Eisenstein’s propaganda film *Alexander Nevsky*,<sup>28</sup> which won the Stalin Prize in 1941. And the Red Army invasion from 1944, and the post-war occupation of Eastern and Central Europe from 1945, were accompanied by the mass ethnic cleansing of Germans. This

policy, along with some territorial restoration and additions in Ukraine, Byelorussia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia (the last two as compensation for losses elsewhere), was pushed by Stalin in an attempt to win over ethnic Slav Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Poles, Czechs and Slovaks to support what he clearly understood as a Slav USSR. At Stalin's prompting, the Russian dominated USSR, the Ukrainian and Byelorussian SSRs were given membership by the infant UN in 1945, in an attempt to further emphasise the 'Slavness' of the USSR.

But in the course of the Great Patriotic War, in areas of what had been the USSR, before being occupied by Nazi Germany, Russian Nazi collaborators emerged. Some Fascists from the post-1917, counter-revolutionary, White Russian tradition, and the later more radical Fascist Mussolini-admiring, Russian Fascist Party<sup>29</sup> were involved. However, the leader of the Russian Liberation Army (RLA) was Andre Vlasov, one of 180 ex-USSR generals and officers who signed up.<sup>30</sup> By 1943, several hundred thousand Russians had joined.<sup>31</sup> But Putin describes all who consider themselves Ukrainians to be 'Nazis', because some Ukrainians supported the collaborationist Ukraine Insurgency Army (UIA) led by Stepan Bandera. But when it comes to calling people 'Nazis', Putin's Great Russian chauvinist and imperialist logic does not extend to all Russians, despite extensive RLA collaboration with the Nazis.

There are Fascists in Ukraine today, just as there are in every state, including the UK (e.g. BNP, Britain First, English Defence League and their Scottish and Welsh Defence League allies, the Loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland), Scotland (Soil nan Gaidheal), and Ireland (the National Party). The Ukrainian state has tried to use Fascists, something very widespread in Europe, including the UK state. The main components of Ukrainian Fascism have been Svoboda formed in 2004, the Right Sector formed in 2013, both with paramilitary wings. The paramilitary Azov Battalion was formed in 2014. During the 2014 Maidan Protests, some of these Ukrainian Fascists countered the pro-Russian president, Victor Yanukovych's resort to the thuggish Berkut special police forces and Russia supporting Fascists with their own armed and anti-Russian Ukrainian actions. The Ukrainian Fascists' most brutal action (after Russian-supporting Fascist armed provocation) was the burning down of the Trade Union House in Odesa, where 42 were killed.<sup>32</sup>

Once the pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarch, Yanukovych had been replaced by the anti-Russian Ukrainian oligarch Petro Poroshenko, the Azov Battalion began to receive direct government support and heavy arms. It was partly integrated into the National Guard. It played a significant military role in opposing the Russian-backed Fascists supported by Putin. Ironically, apart from their competing Ukrainian and Russian ultra-nationalism, they both share very similar versions of

Fascist ideology, based on White Christian supremacy. Their members in the USA both work in the same Far Right, White Christian milieu and have tried to cultivate supporters of Trump and the US Far Right.

During WW2, the Bandera-led UIA and the Vlasov-led RLA, collaborated with the Nazis and killed many Jews. However, like the Ustase in Croatia, killing Jews was not as much a priority for the UIA as killing other ethnic groups – the Serbs for the Ustase, and the Poles and Russians for the UIA. Furthermore, just as the RLA probably gained wider support, arising from the many Russian deaths in Stalin's 'Great Famine', so the UIA also gained support arising from the many Ukrainian deaths, accentuated by Stalin's specifically anti-Ukrainian offensive, together known as the Holomodor. Today's Ukrainian Fascists do celebrate Bandera and the UIA. Some apologists point out that at times the UIA fought the German Nazis, as did the RLA on occasion. But this was only because Hitler would not provide the cooperation both groups of Fascists wanted to set up their own independent Fascist states. He always considered Ukrainians and Russians to be inferior 'untermenschen' and treated them accordingly. This led to far more Ukrainians and Russians joining the Partisans, or remaining in the Red Army, Navy and Air Forces. Together they played the major part in defeating the German Nazi forces and their allies.

However, the RLA and UIA contributions to the killing grounds of Nazi occupied USSR have to be seen alongside Stalin's own brutal role, after the Hitler Stalin Pact. In occupied Poland this included the 1940 Katyn massacre; in the occupied Baltic States this led to the execution, deportation or enforced conscription of over 200,000 people. Things did not improve after Hitler reneged on the Pact. Many, particularly Moslem peoples, had longer-standing reasons than Stalin's Russian and Ukrainian victims to oppose the regime. Not surprisingly, in desperation, some also sided with the German Nazi armies. However, Stalin imposed a 'collective guilt', particularly upon the Crimean Tatars and Chechens. They were deported en masse to Siberia, many dying on the way, and those surviving being subjected to forced labour. The proportion of deaths have been estimated from 18% to 46% for each nationality.<sup>33</sup> Some were deported whilst their family members were fighting in the Red Army.

But tellingly, even when the German Nazi threat was removed after the Second World War, Stalin and successive USSR governments refused to let the deportees return to their homes. The US policy of interning Japanese Americans was ended in 1944 when Japan no longer represented a military threat. Many Japanese Americans continued to suffer from racist discrimination though, whilst the deported indigenous Aleuts of the Alaskan islands did not receive compensation until 1988 for their internment and deaths through disease. However, it was only

in 1957 under Nikita Khrushchev that Chechens were allowed to return to Chechenya, and only in 1989, under Mikhail Gorbachev that Crimean Tatars were allowed to return to Crimea. Neither group was allowed to return to their original homes unless they were unoccupied, nor did they receive any compensation.

Resort to Fascists has been a quite common feature of Conservative, Liberal and Social Democratic parties. In the UK, successive Conservative and Labour governments resorted to the use of Loyalist death squads in Ireland, North and South from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. The Social Democratic, Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) used death squads in Euskadi from 1983-7.<sup>34</sup> When elected in 2020, another PSOE government, this time with Left populist Podemos support, did pardon nine jailed Catalan politicians who had exercised the right of national self-determination following a majority vote in the Catalan Generalitat (parliament). They had organised a non-violent campaign for an independent Catalan Republic. But the PSOE-led government refused to acknowledge the role of the largely unreformed, semi-Francoist, Castilian legal system in Spain and the pressure of the Far Right Vox, in the jailing of these political prisoners. So, despite the limited pardons, they continued to ban these Catalan politicians from standing in elections for 10 years and allowed a further 3000 activists to be pursued by the Spanish state. The violent actions of the Spanish police and Vox were ignored. Yet, despite this history of using Fascists, the UK and Spanish states are still considered to be parliamentary democracies.

The Christian Democrat, Austrian Peoples Party entered a coalition with the Hard Right, Freedom Party of Austria. In Slovakia, the Social Democratic Party has been prepared to join a coalition with the Hard Right Slovak National Party. These Hard Right parties are ultra-nationalist and have Fascist skeletons in their cupboard. In the 2022 Hungarian general election, the Social Democratic and Green parties entered into an electoral alliance with the Far Right Jobbik to try and beat the incumbent Hard Right, Fidesz government, led by Victor Orban. But the Russian Federation, already in the hands of Putin's Hard Right authoritarian government, makes the most extensive use of state managed full-blown Russian Fascists and 'Communist' parties. The latter glorify the USSR's past, providing a pseudo-internationalist cloak to mask Putin's imperialist 'Russia One and Indivisible'.

With all its faults, Ukraine remains a parliamentary democracy, which has not yet passed over to the authoritarian Hard Right nationalism of Putin's Russian Federation, Lukashenko's Belarus, Orban's Hungary or even Jaroslaw Kaczynski and Andrzej Dudas' Poland (where a powerful women's movement still provides a real opposition). In politics, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelinsky more resembles that strange creature of neo-liberal fightback in France, the Liberal populist, Emmanuel Macron. The range of parties in Ukraine is similar to other

European parliamentary democracies. Along with Ukraine, they have all pursued privatisation, undermined public welfare provision, resorted to ethnic nationalism and the persecution of migrants and minorities, particularly Muslims and Gypsies (or Travellers) and courted Jewish supremacist Israel. But in these regards, the UK has often had a worse record than Ukraine. Genuine Socialists don't call for or provide apologetics for imperialist military intervention to overthrow such states. We build our own working class and other oppressed-based opposition and seek wider solidarity on an 'internationalism from below' basis.

Given all those accusations of 'Nazism', how has the Ukrainian Far Right been rewarded in the Ukrainian parliamentary and presidential elections, following their supporting role in Maidan? In the 2014 parliamentary elections, Svoboda only got 6 seats (a big fall), and the new Right Sector 1. In the 2019 parliamentary elections Svoboda fell to 1 seat, whilst the Right Sector got 0. They performed no better in the presidential elections. The Azov Battalion did play a significant role in the defence of Mariupol in 2015. In the process, it was reported to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, for clear war crimes.<sup>35</sup> But despite Putin's 'Nazi' accusations, Mariupol was not ethnically cleansed of Russian speakers. The Azov Battalion was only part of the Ukrainian defence forces there. Since Putin's 2022 invasion, Vadym Boychenko (originally elected mayor as a member of the anti-Maidan party) has been very publicly seen speaking for the defence of Mariupol against Putin's brutal attacks. Russian-speaking Boychenko has condemned Putin's false generalised 'Nazi' allegations directed at all Ukrainians. No pro-Maidan parties or Ukrainian speakers stood in the Donetsk and Luhansk elections.

One issue over which the Ukraine government has been publicly accused of 'Nazism' by Putin and others has been over its attitude towards the Russian language. Most recently this has been highlighted in the 2019 Law on Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language. This law is primarily designed to promote the Ukrainian language and restrict use of the Russian language. (It also has the effect of undermining some other languages found in Ukraine, e.g. Yiddish, since they aren't EU officially recognised languages.<sup>36</sup>) But Zelinsky, like other inconsistent Liberals over many issues (e.g. over BME and LBGT+ rights), has defended the liberal principle of language rights for Russians in Ukraine,<sup>37</sup> albeit unsuccessfully.

Furthermore, the Ukrainian government's attitude to language rights is far from unique in Europe. Theresa May's Tories were in coalition with a DUP from 2017-19. The DUP has consistently refused to recognise Irish language rights. Nobody has called for the Republic of Ireland to invade the Six Counties! Such behaviour can only be undertaken by imperialist states. And the online vitriol directed by Ukrainian ultra-Nationalists against the Russian language and speakers,

reciprocated by Russian ultra-Nationalists, can be matched by that of British Unionists (not all on the Right) directed against the languages and speakers of Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic.

If there is one distinctive feature of Nazism as a form of Fascism, acknowledged by any genuine anti-Fascist, it is the genocidal persecution of Jews. This was done through the use of gas chambers in Poland, by Nazi organised death squads, by working slave labour to death, and through starvation and disease in Germany, Poland and other Nazi occupied territories. In Poland, nearly 3 million or 90% of Jews died, and in occupied USSR 1,340,000 Jews died, 44% of the total<sup>38</sup> (here there was some possibility for escape). Unbelievably though, Putin supporter, Russian agent and Duma deputy, Maria Butina used an interview on the BBC to call the Jewish Ukrainian president, Zelinsky a Nazi! Before this, she had served 18 months in a US prison for trying to establish ties between Moscow and the Trump administration.<sup>39</sup> For her, 'Nazi' is just a term of abuse to describe anyone who disagrees with Great Russian chauvinism and imperialism. And for Trump, the promoter of an attempted Fascist coup on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, anyone who disagrees with American chauvinism and imperialism is also called a 'Nazi'.

Many Socialists do try to prevent Fascists from organising publicly to spread their hate and violence. This is done through No-Platforming. But this is confined to organised Fascists. It is not common practice to target individual Far Right supporters at work or elsewhere, unless they attack others. There is an understanding that some Far and Hard Right supporters can be weaned away through collective action, e.g. during trade union struggles. But when the Hard and Far Right and their apologists attack those they call 'Nazis', they extend their hatred, and potential violence to major social and political groups, and in Putin's case to a whole nation. In this, Putin is far closer to the Nazism he pretends to oppose.

## e) **Putin's little helpers 1 - Boris Johnson and the City of London's 'Oligarchs United'**

What is the political nature of those purporting to oppose Putin's war in Ukraine? UK state leader, Boris Johnson, following his mentor Churchill's attitude to Hitler, is not opposing Putin because of his oppressive and repressive politics. Johnson's Brexit Britain is not as far along the road to a national authoritarian state as Putin's Russian Federation, but it is following the same political trajectory. Johnson's clampdown on dissent has been shown in the state's long-term detention and preparedness to hand over Julian Assange to the US state. This seems designed to

push him to suicide, or to have appeared to commit suicide. Both the falsely charged Leonard Peltier of the American Indian Movement and Mumia Abu-Jamal of the Black Panther Party have been in US jails since 1977 and 1984 respectively. This is considerably longer than the iconic Russian political prisoner, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (author of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*), sent to a USSR labour camp from 1945-53 and internal exile in Kazakhstan up to 1956.

The Tories' Police and Crime Bill is designed to severely limit political protest.<sup>40</sup> Their Election Bill is meant to reduce voter participation through mandatory ID, which will exclude the most marginal in society. It also allows long-term, ex-pat, British oligarchs of more than 15 years to donate to the Tories.<sup>41</sup> The Tories' Nationality and Borders Bill is designed to intensify the effects of the already draconian Immigration Bills<sup>42</sup> and ratchet up by several notches the government's already brutal and murderous 'hostile environment'.<sup>43</sup> If there is truth in the accusation that Putin intends to forcibly deport many thousands of Ukrainians to Siberia (he only denies the use of force), then he has already been upstaged by Priti Patel's decision to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. Here detainees already suffer from arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and torture in official and unofficial facilities".<sup>44</sup>

The Tories' have resorted to on-line platforms to produce constant disinformation and lies. They have also resorted to attempted election manipulation using the self-described, "global election management strategy"<sup>45</sup> private intelligence firm, Cambridge Analytica. These methods have as much in common with Putin's manipulative methods, as they have with the US Far Right, e,g. Breitbart. Indeed, there is considerable overlap between them.

Indeed, when you examine Johnson's opposition to Putin, the most striking thing is how the government is going to great lengths to protect Russian oligarchs in the UK. These oligarchs have paid millions into Tory coffers. Johnson gave Evgeny Lebedev, a Russian billionaire, and liberal social gadfly, a peerage. Johnson is particularly indebted to him for the free use of properties in Perugia Italy and at Hampton Court for partying.<sup>46</sup> However, Lebedev is the beneficiary of his father Alexander's extensive kleptocratic looting of old USSR assets. Like Putin, he was a former KGB officer and worked with him before they fell out.<sup>47</sup>

The Tories have tried to minimise the number of Russian oligarchs facing sanctions, with the highest profile being Roman Abramovich, until recently the owner of Chelsea FC. The reason for this is clear. London isn't just the location of 'Londongrad' but also of 'Londonistan', home to Saudi Arabian Arab oligarchs. They have used Saudi state power to ensure they cream off vast amounts of their

country's oil revenues. Here they have legalised kleptocracy. They also have a record of super-exploitation of domestic staff,<sup>48</sup> including the use of sex slaves.<sup>49</sup> Saudi oligarchs, like Russian oligarchs, pay the Tories well. And both appreciate that 'British justice' is the best that money can buy. The Tories' strategy to protect wider oligarch interests appears to be to give the Russian oligarchs time to arrange property sales to other oligarchs. Some property may well end up owned by oligarchs with worse records. Thus, the current owner of Newcastle United is the Saudi Arabian Public (state backed) Investment Fund.<sup>50</sup> This is controlled by Mohammed bin Salman, responsible for the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, supporter of the Chinese 'Uighur re-education' camps in Xinjiang, and business associate of Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law.<sup>51</sup>

However, in changing political circumstances, other oligarchs' large mansions and other properties could be made very publicly visible. Despite being worth countless billions, these visible property assets represent only a small proportion of the financial wealth which is legally hidden away in the City of London's tax havens. A politically discredited Johnson may have to go, and some token oligarchs' property might have to be forfeited, but the City will ensure that the UK, and London in particular, remains home to 'Oligarchs United'. There may even be a shell account for Putin! 'Oligarchs United' is open to oligarchs of whatever nationality.

The Tory Cabinet includes Rishi Sunak, the richest man in the House of Commons, and Priti Patel, also one of the richest women in the UK. Both are children of East Africa-Indian refugees. But as with a few other ruthlessly careerist migrants, desperate to be seen as British ruling class 'insiders', Patel constantly derides the current 'outsiders' - those migrants trying to reach these shores today. By 2020, over 300 had died,<sup>52</sup> drowned or asphyxiated in containers. That number continues to rise.<sup>53</sup>

The UK's earlier neo-liberal regime, under Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg, ensured that public provision was rolled back, and extensive privatisation enforced. But this was meant to be accompanied by open competition to get government contracts. Certainly, there was behind-the-scenes corruption, shown in Mark Thatcher "trading shamelessly on his mother's name son",<sup>54</sup> and when Labour's Peter Mandelson was twice forced to resign.<sup>55</sup> However, what was once considered corruption has now been mainstreamed by the Tories, with money for contracts handed out to party donors, even when they have no capacity to fulfil them. The Tories have set up a special government Advisory Board consisting of large contributors to Tory coffers.<sup>56</sup> This body doesn't have constitutional status but is

very like some of the shadowy background groups of oligarchs found in the Russian Federation.

And Labour is not likely to put up much resistance to this. Mandelson has enjoyed close relationship with Russian oligarch, Oleg Deripaska, one of seven sanctioned by the Tory government because of their links to Putin.<sup>57</sup> And Blair, an early friend of Putin, has been a well-paid advisor to Nursultan Nazarbayev, Putin's favoured autocrat in Kazakhstan.<sup>58</sup> Sir Keir Starmer, ever sycophantic before the rich and powerful, congratulated Lebedev when Johnson made him a baron.<sup>59</sup> However, he is no doubt kicking himself in not realising early enough that the British ruling class had transferred its backing from Eurosceptic support for EU membership to Europhobic backing for Brexit. Bank of England governor, Sir Mark Carney announced his support for the Johnson Deal, over a month before the 2019 general election.<sup>60</sup> Starmer has now declared his backing for Brexit. And in his attempts to woo ruling class support by attacking Johnson, often from the Right, he may well find that old UKIP-Lite, Blue Labour tradition useful. And as has already been shown, Social Democrats elsewhere in Europe have already struck deals with the Hard and even Far Right.

It is not the Tory government's intention to pursue an open or even much of a proxy war against Putin's Russian Federation, despite all their bluster. The US and NATO want to be in control of any post-war deal with Putin. That means limiting military backing for Ukraine to far less than Putin has at his disposal, but still with enough arms contracts to whet the appetites of the UK arms industry. Putin's war is aimed at getting a new imperialist deal between the USA and NATO, the same as NATO's. But of course, any such deal could only stabilise things temporarily, as in the case of German, French and British deals at Algeciras in 1906 and after the Agadir Crisis in 1911 before WW1, or the Munich Pact in 1938 before WW2.

However, wars don't follow rules and can have unpredictable outcomes. Therefore, the threat of the use of nuclear weapons today cannot be ruled out. If this nightmare scenario were ever to come about, one thing that is clear. Tory Cabinet members would be very unlikely to stay in the UK. They would be helicoptered and then flown out quicker than those US Vietnamese agents in Saigon in 1975, or their Afghan agents in Kabul in 2021. The Tories already have form on this over Brexit. Jacob Rees-Mogg transferred funds to Dublin to avoid the financial consequences of Brexit<sup>61</sup> Vote Leave leader, Nigel Lawson transferred his residency to a Gascony mansion.<sup>62</sup> Although Stanley Johnson has a second home in Greece, his son, Boris makes more use of the overseas residences of friendly oligarchs like Baron Lebedev. None of these people face the post-Brexit travel problems of

ordinary ‘Brits’ flying to Europe or of cross-Channel lorry drivers. Instead, the Tory ‘chumocracy’ has access to private planes, special airport lounges, flunkies to make arrangements, and financial advisors to keep up with latest exchange rates, hedging against losses and hiding their clients’ monetary dealings in tax havens.

And we know how the Tories would treat other now desperate UK asylum seekers trying to leave. Their ‘Me First’ concerns are only for themselves. The UK government has the worst record in Europe when it comes to admitting Ukrainian refugees.<sup>63</sup> In public Patel has promised to admit 200,000 refugees, but behind-the-scenes she has continued the government’s ‘hostile environment’ policy, drastically forcing down these numbers by bureaucratic methods and through reduced staffing. Asylum applications have been ‘disappeared’ from the official website<sup>64</sup> Patel has also attacked the Republic of Ireland for implementing the EU’s three years, open door policy for Ukrainian refugees.<sup>65</sup>

## **f) Putin’s little helpers 2 - the Right Populists and Fascists**

As a result of long-term imperialist competition, the USA, Chinese and Russian empires now have a different relationship with each other than they did twenty years ago. This opens up the possibility for renegotiated imperial alliances, territorial adjustments and for shifting politics to the Hard and Far Right. These possibilities are at the heart of Putin’s war aims. And with the opportunities provided by Putin’s reactionary social agenda, some European and US Right Populists and Fascists are also prepared to accept an imperialist realignment over Ukrainian territory and revised spheres of influence.

It is instructive to look to the lead-up to WW1 to see how different imperialist powers responded in changing political situations. For most of the nineteenth century, the leaders of the British empire felt threatened by the ‘Russian Bear’ and ‘La France du Tricolore’. However, the rise of Prussia-Germany and the occupation of Alsace and much of Lorraine, led France into an alliance with Russia in 1894. The UK had actively backed Prussia-Germany and given Bismarck a special role at the Congress of Berlin in 1884. But by the end of the nineteenth century, the rise of German commercial and naval fleets led a key section of the British ruling class to join France and Russia in the Triple Entente of 1907. They began to prepare for a joint war against Prussia Germany, whilst an equivalent pro-war party emerged amongst the military Junkers in Prussian-Germany. These changes of alliances were aided by Britain’s backing for Japan during the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese War. The Japanese victory severely curtailed Tsarist Russian

ambitions in eastern Asia, diverting them south to the Hapsburg Austria-Hungarian and Ottoman empires.

One effect of this was to undermine the longstanding British and French support for the Ottoman empire. This backing had been given to prop up ‘the Sick Man of Europe’ to stymie Russian imperialism. Now, another option came to the fore. That was for Tsarist Russia, constitutional monarchist UK and the republican France (highlighting the opportunist politics often found in imperial alliances) to divide up Ottoman empire between them. It was this that pushed the Ottoman empire into a last-minute alliance with Prussia-Germany, just before WW1 broke out. However, prior to WW1, Italy had been part of the Triple Alliance with Prussia-Germany and Austro-Hungary. But, by 1915, the Triple Entente was able to break Italy away, with promises of territorial aggrandisement at the cost of Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman empires.

Before the outbreak of WW1, inter-imperialist jostling had led to negotiated transfers of territory in Africa and Oceania to Prussia-Germany. And long-term Prussia-German imperial plotter, Bismarck, realised as early as 1888, that Heligoland, a British-held island on the German North Sea coast, would represent a possible British threat to German naval power. He traded Zanzibar, important for British imperial ambitions in East Africa, to get Heligoland.

Fast forward to today, and we can see that the USA’s main imperial contender is no longer the old USSR or the Russian Federation but the PRC. After its debacle in Iraq and Afghanistan, US imperialism had clearly over-extended itself. Democrat President Barack Obama tried to reorient US imperial policy to contain the PRC in what he called ‘the strategic pivot’. However, US imperialism remained bogged down in Afghanistan. It was unable to deal with the consequences of the Iraq War it had started, which spilled over into Syria when ISIL emerged. It found it very difficult to handle the consequences of the Arab Spring. In Egypt, the USA initially backed the least radical challenger, President Mohamed Morsi in 2012, only to retreat to supporting a representative of the old order, Abdal al-Sisi in a military coup in 2013. Iran had been the location of one of the USA’s most deadly policies – generalised sanctions, which hit women and children particularly harshly. Obama’s attempt in 2015 to retreat from this, by means of a nuclear processing deal with Iran, had relatively little impact. A frustrated US administration, egged on by Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, then resorted to exactly the policy which had failed in Afghanistan and Iraq - bombing Libya.

The creation of another imperial wasteland did not provide any more stability for US imperialism. Worse, it enabled the PRC to sit back and watch the USA further weaken itself through imperial over-reach. Chinese CCP leader, Xi Jinping, could now exert maximum pressure in East Asia and the south-west Pacific, with the USA unable to do much about it. Why was it so hard for Obama to make the US ruling class understand its longer-term interests? Many US corporations were doing very well out of their investments in the PRC. Cheap Chinese imports kept down US wages, and any economic sanctions could hit the US economy hard, especially as Chinese corporations had taken over many US companies. Thus, some corporate CEOs backed Hilary Clinton, a war-hawk with regard to Russia, to keep their Chinese interests on the road.

It was Donald Trump, representing a growing section of the US ruling class, as well as many figures in the military, who began to pursue a foreign policy, which appreciated the need for US retreat in some arenas, the better to advance in others. This was tied to his ‘America First’ policy. This was designed to tear up previous neo-liberal, multilateral, international agreements; including with the EU, and to enforce trade deals on a one-to-one state basis. For most states this is bit like letting a new-born baby enter the boxing ring with the world heavyweight champion, who can also line his gloves with lead! At an international level, the Investment State Court system, already pioneered under neo-liberalism, would be extended and replace multilateral state deals. This would empower corporations to sue states for any losses on profit-making investments, even if they threatened peoples’ lives, health, livelihoods or severely degraded the environment. This is an update of British imperialism of Victorian times, when slave owners were compensated for the abolition of slavery, and the UK went to war with China to enforce the opium trade.

Supporters of ‘America First’ became a very significant group in the US ruling class shortly after their Brexit counterparts took the leadership of the British ruling class in 2016. Trump called his presidential candidacy later that year, ‘Brexit Plus, Plus, Plus’ (whilst Marine Le Pen relaunched herself as ‘Madame Frexit’). US ‘dark money’ played a considerable part in the Brexit campaign. Trump also found common ground with Putin in wanting to prevent the EU, as yet still a non-state body with no independent military forces, from emerging as another imperial competitor with the euro becoming a major world currency.

Trump though appreciated that developing new alliances meant some US imperial retreats in Europe and major adjustments to imperial spheres of influence elsewhere, particularly in the Middle East. and Central Asia. And as a particularly brash businessman he knew this would involve horse-trading. Trump is quite open about seeing political negotiations as being a game of bluff, threats, bribes, costly

legal actions to bankrupt any opposition, lies and bullying subordinates to get what he wants. And this is little different from how Putin and his oligarch backers behave. The one thing these two oligarchs do in elections is attack “oligarchs”. The purpose behind this, though, isn’t to ditch the oligarchy of which they are very much members, but to get state support for their particular clique of oligarchs.

Oligarch-style business horse-trading was shown in Trump’s dealing with Putin over Syria. Neither minded too much who crushed those brave communities of resistance involved in the original Arab Spring in 2011. But Trump realised that Putin’s lethal backing for Assad was tied to the Russian imperial desire to have a naval base on the Mediterranean at Tartus and an airbase at Latakia. The Israeli government also assessed the Assad regime as being probably the least bad option for them in Syria. However, Israel was not going to allow Iranian proxy forces, especially Hezbollah, to gain any long-term position in Syria. The net effect of this was that Putin was permitted to back Assad by whatever means he thought necessary, whilst Israel was free to attack Iranian and Hezbollah forces in Syria.

Reflecting this attempt to balance between hostile imperial forces, Trump displayed uncharacteristic restraint when US forces launched a limited Cruise missile on the Syrian Sharyat airbase in 2017, in response to Assad’s use of chemical weapons.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, when Obama had begun to wind down US land forces in Afghanistan, he depended more and more on drones. The local Afghan leaders, financed by the USA, were very corrupt and siphoned off much of the allotted military aid into their overseas bank accounts. This led to the military collapse of the US’s corrupt Hamid Karzai-led client regime.

However, Trump got a better deal with Israel’s leaders. To prepare for this, he allowed the corrupt President Benjamin Netanyahu to make Jerusalem Israel’s capital and to take full control of Syria’s Golan Heights, in the face of international opposition. And what did Trump get in return? The USA has been able to resort to ‘Israelisation’ like the British government’s resort to ‘Ulsterisation’ from the mid-1970s. US forces are limited to offshore naval fleets and to more distant military bases around the Mediterranean, from which they can still deliver lethal strikes, whilst Israeli forces are constantly in the imperial frontline. When it came to Putin’s war with Ukraine, Netanyahu’s successor, Naftali Bennett, a Hard Right, Jewish supremacist, did not rush to condemn or introduce sanctions. He met up with Putin two days after his invasion with an offer to ‘mediate’.<sup>67</sup>

Putin has open friends in Donald Trump and Nigel Farage and closet friends amongst the Tories. Johnson also suppressed a parliamentary report into Russian oligarch donations to the Tories before the 2019 general election.<sup>68</sup> US Democrat

attempts to impeach Trump over his links with Putin provided plenty of evidence of these but were unable to prove that Trump aided Putin in changing the course of the 2016 US presidential election.<sup>69</sup> This is not surprising because Trump's links with Putin and Russian oligarchs have been designed primarily not to benefit Putin but to benefit Trump – 'Me First' being his motto. Furthermore, in the golden days of the 'Harvard Boys', plenty of Democrats were in league with Russian oligarchs too. More recently some, like Biden's son, Hunter, have transferred their support to Ukrainian oligarchs<sup>70</sup>.

Any democrat should be concerned at these and other attempts by the state and business to buy support to advance their own interests. However, US and British attempts to denounce foreign interference in elections are a bit rich given the US and UK record of interfering in overseas elections. These have included organising successful coups in Iran in 1954, Guatemala in 1954, Congo in 1960, Brazil in 1964, and Chile in 1973 and assassinating politicians, Salvador Allende in 1973, Walter Rodney in Guyana in 1980. And there were attempted coups in Venezuela against Cesar Chavez in 2002 and Maduro in 2020 and eight CIA attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro.

One way that Putin has attempted to gain influence is by cultivating Hard and Far Right politicians, parties and paramilitary groups in the EU including the Front National in France, the Lega Nord in Italy, the People's Party in Austria, Alternative fur Deutschland in Germany,<sup>71</sup> Golden Dawn in Greece, Jobbik in Hungary and Atak in Bulgaria.<sup>72</sup> Le Pen, Hard Right, Rassemblement National (RN) (former Far Right Front National) and winner of 42% of the vote for the French presidency, is a supporter of Putin's aims to come to a strategic rapprochement with NATO.<sup>73</sup> Although realistic enough to know that NATO influence over western Europe will not be easily shifted, Le Pen wants to downgrade French NATO membership, to make closer links to the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation is much closer to the anti-LGBT+, anti-abortion and openly national chauvinist policies, which the RN supports. And the majority of former UKIP and current Tory members supported Le Pen too,<sup>74</sup> despite her preference for Putin's Russian Federation.

However, Le Pen only stated openly, what neo-liberal politicians from Emmanuel Macron to Joe Biden are already preparing for. In the absence of an international movement from below in support of the Ukrainian people, then some NATO-Putin deal will be imposed, and President Zelensky will be forced to front it, or be removed. Large sections of the ruling class in various NATO member states know that Putin is unlikely to be overthrown externally. Indeed, as with Israel's attitude

to Assad, they see Putin as the least bad option at the moment for the Russian Federation.

But Putin's invasion has proved beneficial to NATO too, even if Ukraine were to be forced to cede territory to the Russian Federation. Finland and Sweden have already indicated they want to sign up to NATO. The whole of the Scandinavian landmass, unlike the Baltic States, could provide enough territory in depth to be defended. This also goes for Poland, already a member. Germany and other NATO members look ready to increase their financial contributions to NATO. The UK, of course, is already the US number one supporter in NATO. Furthermore, escalating debt could force Ukraine to accept even more state and private company sell-offs to western companies. Some quick-footed or new Ukrainian oligarchs could then be found to take on an intermediary role. Ukraine would not be allowed to become a full member of the EU (although the long-term promise will be held out). Instead, a territorially diminished Ukraine would have to accept a revised neo-colonial relationship.

### g) **Putin's little helpers 3 – The Right's Left outriders**

Although Putin and the Russian Federation, often using 'independent' Russian oligarchs, have provided open support and very large sums of money to Far Right organisations in Europe and the USA, they have also cultivated some on the Left. The Russian Federation state-backed *Russia Today (RT)* and Sputnik are two forums given money to promote these links. *RT* has certainly invited Hard Right politicians, like Nigel Farage, and several Tory MPs, e.g. Mike Freer, also member of Conservative Friends of Israel;<sup>75</sup> and Johnny Mercer, breaker of the very loose ministerial code regarding second jobs and defender of British soldiers accused of war crimes in Northern Ireland.<sup>76</sup>

But *RT* has also promoted some, once identified with the Left, including the ultra-unionist George Galloway and the Scottish national populist, former SNP First Minister, Alex Salmond. They have hosted their own *RT* TV shows. The purpose behind promoting such apparently contradictory politicians is similar to how hedge fund managers operate, buying and shorting assets so they can profit whichever way their investments go. This has helped to promote other Putin objectives, e.g. undermining David Cameron's UK pro-US, pro-EU government; and breaking up potential competition using Brexit to undermine the EU. Although state-owned, the *RT* programmes' format is copied from the US Hard Right Fox News, and other similar channels.

There has been a long history of official Communist flirting with the Far Right. In 1922, diplomatic negotiations took place between the USSR and Germany leading to the Rapallo Treaty. This provided a cover for a secret deal with Hans von Seeckt, Far Right, anti-Semitic leader of the post-war German Reichswehr. Under this deal ships, airplanes, artillery, rifles and chemical weapons were produced for the Reichswehr on USSR soil. Leon Trotsky was in favour of this.<sup>77</sup> (Later, von Seeckt became a support of Hitler's Nazis.) Leading Comintern official, Karl Radek along with others developed a theory which viewed Germany as a victim of imperialism. This did not recognise that Far Right Reichswehr officers had no interest in fighting an anti-imperialist war, but were German imperial revanchists, wanting to revive the German Reich, first by dismembering Poland, and later by seeking vengeance against France. In 1923 Radek made overtures to the German Fascists under a policy known the Schlageter Line.<sup>78</sup> These policies followed the ending of the International Revolutionary Wave. They led to a state-backed National Bolshevism quite prepared to join with the Far Right in other states by forming Red/Brown alliances. In these the 'Reds' were subordinate, a continuing feature of such alliances today with Putin. And whenever, the Far Right no longer feel their need, the National Bolshevik 'Left' are dumped. - very brutally so, when Hitler tore up the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Unless you are a Putin believer, or trapped by abstract political schemas, which in classic religious and political sect style, try to shoehorn events into preconceived dogmas, then the nature of the Ukraine war is very obvious. Ukraine is the victim of Russian imperialist aggression. In a wider imperialist world dominated by global capitalism, the leaders of Ukraine, like the leaders of every other state, have to try and manoeuvre between the competing imperial powers. There has been a history, led by competing oligarchs in Ukraine, of jostling between Russian and Western imperialism (with a further division on whether to adopt a more pro-EU or pro-US strategy). There hasn't been an anti-imperialist struggle in well over a hundred years which did not attract the attention other imperialist powers looking to weaken their imperialist competitors. Thus, one common feature of all imperialist powers facing anti-imperialist resistance is to lay the blame, not on its own exploitation and oppression, but as something stirred up by other imperialist powers. Those claiming to be on the Left who fall into this trap deny the exploited and oppressed any agency and end up as 'campists' who tail end one imperial power or other. And sometimes, this lack of belief can extend to the exploited and oppressed in their own country, looking instead to other imperialist powers to install 'Left' Quisling regimes, as happened over much of Eastern Europe, after WW2.

And this subordination under global imperialism also goes for some declining imperial powers like the UK, which has been 'licensed' by the USA to indulge in

some imperial bullying in agreed areas of the world. States can lose even the restricted national self-determination possible under imperialist conditions and become client states. This appears to be what is happening to Lukashenko's Belarus, as it becomes an open tool for Putin's Russian Federation. But in relation to the USA, Ukraine is probably as politically independent as Canada. Ukraine and Canada are flawed parliamentary democracies but are not yet client states. And they have yet not travelled as far along the road to national authoritarianism as several other states, including the UK.

Socialists across the globe, adopting the principle of 'internationalism from below', should support Socialists in other states who try to challenge attempts by their ruling classes to worsen workers' pay and working conditions and undermine the democratic rights of the oppressed (women, LBGT+ and BIPOC). Only an imperialist apologist of the worst order would say that the way forward for any such state with these socio-economic deficits is for an imperialist state to invade, annex and balkanise it. Under such thinking, Putin is allowed to invade Ukraine, impose his own stooge government, and detach selected parts of the state's territory. Some of the more shame-faced Left say 'No' they are opposed to Putin's invasion. But because Ukrainian politicians have asked for NATO and EU membership (neither of which have been granted) the Ukrainian people cannot be allowed to defend themselves. They should just accept a Putin/NATO imposed deal instead.

In the worst scenario now possible, Putin would impose his chosen Quisling on a rump Ukraine. Even this though would not meet Putin's original 'Russia One and Indivisible' war aim, which was the elimination of Ukraine altogether. However so unexpected and strong were the initial Ukrainian communities of resistance, that Putin appears to have back-tracked to the forced annexation of some Ukrainian territory. And what sort of regimes would be imposed by Putin in those parts of Ukraine which he detached? The Chechen Republic is run by the political thug, Ramzan Kadyrov, with a particularly murderous record<sup>79</sup> The parts of Donetsk and Luhansk seized by Russian separatists with Putin's backing in 2015 have been under the control of either the local Russian Hard and Far Right or of Putin appointees.<sup>80</sup> Leonid Pasechnik, president of the breakaway Luhansk Republic, joined Putin's United Russia party in 2021.

Transnistria is a one-party statelet, run by President Vadim Krasnoselsky, promoted by the Sheriff company oligarchs and backed by the Obnoveinie party, affiliated to Putin's Russia United. However, unlike some areas, where Russian supremacists have been so 'committed' to getting the vote out, that election or referenda participation rates with a 100+% turn out have been recorded, the 2020

Transnistria Supreme Council elections, which returned 29 Obnovienie candidates and 3 additional Sheriff backed ‘Independents’, only recorded a 28% turnout. But then the official candidates’ 100% clean sweep of all the seats in Transnistria makes it appear that there is some opposition in Putin’s Duma, where other parties can be found. The key thing is that political conditions are even worse in Putin’s satellite statelets than in the Russian Federation itself. This is the kind future which awaits any further areas of Ukraine which remain under RF occupation.

It is perhaps not so surprising that some sections of the British unionist Left find little problem with Putin annexing Ukrainian territory and imposing his stooges. Their nostalgia for the old USSR is often linked to their nostalgia for Clement Attlee’s post-war Labour government, or the relatively brief 1974-6 reforming period of the two Harold Wilson Labour governments. British unionism has had a long history on the Left. The old, self-declared Marxist, Social Democratic Federation and the infant Independent Labour Party both based their ‘British road to socialism’ politics upon the Victorian, Radical/Liberal tradition, which saw ‘Great Britain’ as ‘a beacon of progress’ in the world. The Union and Empire provided the basis for their hoped-for reforms.

But following the debacle of WW1, many on the ‘Left’ could see that Great Britain was no longer so great, or the holder of the ‘baton of progress’. But the emergence of another unionist state meant that this ‘baton’ could now be handed over. The lead role was taken by the USSR. A ‘British road to socialism’ which was already a feature of the early CPGB, had been challenged by Irish and Scottish communists, e.g. Roddy Connolly<sup>81</sup> and John Maclean.<sup>82</sup> *The British Road to Socialism* was later to be enshrined by the CPGB on a programmatic basis under the guidance of Stalin in 1951. And like their Radical and Liberal predecessors, Left unionists, consisting of official and dissident Communists and Left Labour, became divided over the best way to maintain the Union - by administrative or political (Home Rule) devolutionary means.

The most reactionary manifestation of ‘Left’ British unionism today is George Galloway. After leading his own vanity ‘Just Say Naw’ campaign against Scottish independence from 2013-14; he joined Nigel Farage and Labour’s Ulster Unionist-supporting MP Kate Hoey, in 2016 to campaign for Brexit. He voted for the Brexit Party in 2019. Galloway helped to form All-for-Unity in 2020, with various Hard and Far Right supporting members. They stood as anti-SNP candidates in the list seats during the 2021 Scottish parliamentary election, telling voters to support Tory candidates in the constituency seats. They got a derisory vote.

Galloway has held a special admiration for Nicolae Ceausescu, former Romanian Communist, ostentatious spendthrift and national dictator. When questioned about his preparedness to work with the Right, Galloway answered that this only amounted to “allies in one cause. Like Churchill and Stalin.”<sup>83</sup> Presumably he sees himself as Stalin! Galloway’s Workers Party of Britain (WPB), formed in 2019, has links to the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (CPGB(ML)). The CPGB(ML) is a Maoist and ultra-unionist organisation which denies the existence of English, Scottish or Welsh nations, recognising only a ‘Great British’ nation. The WPB and CPGB(ML) are examples of the sort of party which would be quite prepared to work in ‘Red’/Brown alliances.

But there are also some Socialists and even some Republicans in Ireland and Scotland who have revealed themselves as Putin apologists. Whilst usually rejecting Putin’s invasion in words, they can see no further than a Putin/NATO deal, one furthermore before which Putin should be left to continue his military invasion of Ukraine unchallenged. Clare Daly, Irish Left, Independents 4 Change MEP correctly rejected generalised EU sanctions, but she didn’t argue for sanctions targeted at the Russian Federation state apparatus and Russian oligarchs. Instead, she called for “peace... delivered by diplomacy, by dialogue.” But she doesn’t say who will do the “diplomacy and dialogue,” but it will clearly be Putin and NATO. Furthermore, she opposes the Ukrainian people’s right to resist, hinting that the rapid surrender of the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk recently occupied would bring on early negotiations. Under this scenario, the terms of any negotiations would be set by those occupying Ukrainian territory - Putin’s Russian imperialists and their Far Right ‘Russia One and Indivisible’ backers. If you went into a trade union dispute by allowing the bosses’ thugs to occupy union offices, be given a free rein to attack union members, and were also told that the best thing you could do was offer no resistance, then you wouldn’t expect to get a very good deal!

Whilst Daly comes from the old partitionist Irish Militant tradition, even she (along with the Communist Party of Ireland, and the Socialist Worker Network electoral front, People before Profit) and some dissident Republicans, who have become Putin apologists, must be aware of the sort of regime Unionist breakaways impose on the territories they control. They know the history of the 50 year ‘Ulster’-British, Unionist/Loyalist and Protestant supremacist Six Counties Orange statelet from 1922-72, including its history of pogroms.

In 1921, Ulster Unionists received 77% of the vote for their partitioned parliament, after only receiving 29% of the all-Ireland vote in the 1918 Westminster general election, which provided Sinn Fein with a mandate to set up the 32 Counties Irish

Dail. However, in the 1991 independence referendum, the Donetsk oblast voted in favour of Ukraine's independence by 64%, whilst the Luhansk oblast voted by 68%.<sup>84</sup> You can be pretty sure that those who now advocate an Irish reunification referendum in Northern Ireland would be cock-a-hoop at winning these percentage votes in East Antrim and North Down! But one thing is sure, the methods and the regimes that the Russian Federation and its Far Right 'Russia One and Indivisible' backers would need to impose in their occupied areas, to prevent Ukrainian reunification would make the post-1920 Ulster Unionists look restrained! What is happening to Mariupol would just be the start.

Another Putin apologist is the fading celebrity Left Scottish nationalist, Tommy Sheridan, currently member of Alex Salmond's vanity party, Alba.<sup>85</sup> Alba is moving rightwards across the political spectrum on many issues under the cloak of a newly declared republicanism (opposition to the monarchy not opposition to the UK state's Crown Powers and the championing of the sovereignty of the people). But even this 'republicanism' doesn't sit well with Alba leader, Salmond's record as one of the most pro-Elizabeth politicians in Scotland. And Salmond the 'sex pest' (his defence lawyer's 'off-the-record' words<sup>86</sup>) is now opposing transgender recognition on the grounds of defending women's 'safe spaces'! Sheridan, looking for the earliest Scottish IndyRef2, would also be cock-a-hoop at the 92% support in favour independence, which was gained in the 1991 Ukrainian independence referendum in 1991 with a large majority in every single constituency (except Crimea with a small majority where there was also a high abstention rate).

But Sheridan in his apologetics for Putin's invasion, has written that, "Putin and Russia have acted rationally from their point of view and in response to very real and frightening aggression from the US run NATO". Yes, NATO has extended its borders and provided arms to East European states, just as Putin has done with the CSTO in Belarus, Central Asia and Syria. But there has been no "frightening aggression"— invading and bombing say Kaliningrad or St. Petersburg close to NATO's borders. NATO has confined that to the Middle East and Central Asia, where Putin has happily joined in too.

Sheridan also goes on to repeat the Putin accusation of "outrageous internal attacks on Russian speaking people and communities by the Ukrainian security forces, many of whom are openly Nazi enthusiasts."<sup>87</sup> Sheridan's equation of all Russian language speakers in Ukraine with supporters of the Russian Federation; and Ukrainian language speakers with supporters of Ukraine is the equivalent of equating all English language speakers in Scotland with supporters of the UK and confining support for an independent Scotland to Lallans or Gaelic speakers. But

supporters of a Scottish democratic republic seek to unite speakers of all the languages spoken in Scotland.

There have certainly been past attacks on Russian speakers by Ukrainian Fascists, but Sheridan cannot explain why an elected Russian-speaking mayor (and formerly anti-Maidan) is the spokesperson for Mariupol. Ukrainian President Zelensky is a Russian speaker first, although fluent in Ukrainian too. There are certainly no elected pro-Maidan, Ukrainian-speaking mayors in either Far Right controlled Donetsk or Lukansk. And what does he think will be the future for any Ukrainian language speakers in areas controlled by the Russian Federation army and the Far Right paramilitaries? As ‘Russia One and Indivisible’ supporters they deny existence of Ukrainians. There is chillingly only one way of making that a reality.

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Other Putin Left apologists offer different degrees of support for, or opposition to Putin over his invasion of Ukraine. Most claim though that they are opposed. It’s just that he was provoked by NATO. And presumably if Putin defeats NATO in Ukraine, or if this Left can force NATO to offer Putin a deal, he will turn into a pacifist lamb and the Russian Federation will give up being an imperial power – and pigs might fly! And many of these Left Putin apologists are also people who campaigned for Brexit, claiming that this would shift politics to the Left, providing fertile ground for Socialists! But when the ‘No’ to EU membership vote was passed (helped by the disenfranchisement of most non-UK EU residents and 16-18 year olds, who had been given the vote in the 2014 IndyRef1), the Socialist Party and the SWP just gave up standing candidates in the 2017 Westminster general election. Meanwhile the Hard and Far Right offered plenty of choice.

Corbyn-led Labour caused some excitement amongst these two non-Labour Left sects, but Corbyn did little to halt the wider gallop to the Right. Theresa May moved into a parliamentary alliance with the DUP, the most reactionary party in UK mainstream politics, only to be upstaged by Boris Johnson with his new Brexit Britain in 2019. So, we should be extremely wary of these Socialist parties’ predictions for Ukraine following any Putin-NATO deal.

And some amongst this Left, like the ex-SWP and ex-International Socialist Group (Scotland), now organised around the *Conter* ‘think tank’, are backpedalling on support for transgender rights. They use the same language as the Hard Right – anti-“woke”. The more shamefaced say the Left should avoid the Hard Right’s ‘culture wars’ and concentrate instead on economic issues. But when the Hard Right launches a culture war, you don’t concede that territory, but fight back on all fronts. The arguments used to attack transgendered people are just rehashes of those once used to attack gays and lesbians, and before that, women, when they fought for their rights. They must once more be reduced to their physical or biological sexual roles and condemned as sexually predatory for failing to abide by socially conservative-imposed norms. Capitalism isn’t just a system of exploitation, but also of oppression and alienation. The vast majority of transgendered people are working class and the Socialist answer to Hard and Far Right’s divide-and-rule tactics is to campaign to unite our class in its diversity and to provide solidarity.

When it comes to the democratic right of national self-determination, you either support it globally, or treat it as a cynical ploy only to be exercised by your camp, e.g, US President Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Principles in 1918. And for those, dogmatic Socialists, who say that the right of self-determination should always be subordinated to the higher principle of Socialism, are they seriously arguing that Putin’s Russia is invading Ukraine to bring about Socialism?! Putin’s Russian Federation is based on capitalism in the political form of an oligarchical kleptocracy. And if the turbo-charged, state capitalist, PRC invades Taiwan, it will not be to bring about Socialism either, but to impose the yuan and bring the Taipei stock exchange in line with those in Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen, as is already in the process of being enforced in Hong Kong. And those who disagree, if they are not just ‘disappeared’, will end up in the ‘re-education’ camps like those in Xinjiang.

All sides in a military war situation produce exaggerated stories and other disinformation. For many years, the SWP, in a less lethal class war situation, developed a certain notoriety on the Left for their constant inflation of numbers of people attending SWP-approved events. However, together with the police they provided us with a useful service. Halve the SWP estimate and double the police estimate and you will get a rough approximation of the numbers attending! The method used by many Putin apologists is to question the numbers killed by Russian occupying army attacks, and to relay some of their false claims, using the various media outlets promoted by Putin. In a war situation there will indeed be what amount to war crimes on both sides. But for any anti-imperialist, it is quite clear that the promoters of an imperial war of occupation will be responsible for the

overwhelming number of deaths, injuries, tortures, rapes and the destruction of homes, schools and hospitals.

However, there is one arena, where British, Stop the War Coalition (STWC) (based primarily on SWP breakaways, the Communist Party of Britain and their supporters amongst the declining Corbynistas) are trying to find support and that is amongst the wider Pacifist movement. This has its roots in the old CND and anti-war movements. Their members and supporters are quite understandably worried about the real possibility of nuclear escalation. They attend conferences and demonstrations, where they may encounter STWC members and supporters. Some pacifists are prepared to take non-violent direct action. They deserve our respect.

In an attempt to win over such pacifists, some STWC members have invoked a missed opportunity to end nuclear weapons in Central and Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact in 1989 and the USSR in 1991. But the only concerted efforts to bring about generalised nuclear disarmament from the 1980s through to the collapse of the USSR, were made by civic organisations. e.g. European Nuclear Disarmament (END) (1980) and the Helsinki Citizens Assembly (HCA) (1990). These, and other organisations brought together supporters from both Western and Eastern Europe, often ex- or dissident Communists, e.g. E. P. Thompson, Ken Coates, Roy Mevdeev, along with Left intellectuals. e.g. Anthony Barnett. However, they tended to look to liberal reformers, e.g. Mikhail Gorbachev (USSR) and Vaclav Havel (Czechoslovakia) and the then more radical dissenters, Rudolf Bahro (East Germany) and Boris Kagarlitsky (USSR), to bring about their hoped-for nuclear disarmament (at least in Europe) and extensive demilitarisation. But despite the collapse of the USSR, its successor state, the Russian Federation retained and has upgraded its nuclear weapons, highlighting its continued imperial ambitions. It was the only USSR successor state to do so. Ukraine, which held a third of the former USSR's nuclear weapons decommissioned them from 1994.

So, US and Russian imperialism still confront each other. Both remain nuclear armed. Their constant mutual jostling will not lead to the abolition of either alliance but alters their current extent and their ability to deploy nuclear weapons near to each other's borders. And, in the unlikely event of a Central and Eastern European nuclear-free zone, extending from Finland, the Baltic States, Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Romania, Moldova to Ukraine, to be reciprocated by Belarus and the Russian Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad, this would still leave the principal bases of US-controlled nuclear weapons within Western Europe including the UK, and Russian-controlled nuclear weapons within the

Russian Federation intact. The threat of nuclear war would not be ended, since both NATO and the CSTO have long-range nuclear capabilities, whilst the remaining inter-imperialist competition between these states would continue to stoke tensions just as they did up to February 2022 before Putin resorted to his most recent war.

After the collapse of the Warsaw Pact in 1989 and of the USSR in 1991, the Russian Federation founded the Collective Security Organisation in 1992. This evolved into the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). This was an imperialist response to the USA's NATO imperialist pressure. The impact of these continued imperial alliances was seen when Havel became the first president of the post-1989 Czechoslovak Republic. He gave his support to NATO. Meanwhile, Mevdeev, elected to the Russian Congress of People's Deputies in 1989, went on to support Putin. In 2015, Kagarlitsky, then courted by the STWC, went on to become an ultra-Russian nationalist, cooperating with the Russian Far Right over the initial invasion of Ukraine.<sup>88</sup>

So where do today's pacifists look to prevent nuclear escalation over Ukraine? Many would quite rightly be wary of direct negotiations between Putin and NATO. So, they look to the UN as an alternative. But the UN was set up by the major imperialist powers. The vetoes of the nuclear armed, USA, Russian Federation (the USSR before), China, the UK and France on the UN Security Council, prevent it being used to bring about nuclear disarmament. In 2017, the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was passed by its General Assembly, with 122 in favour, 1 against and 1 official abstention. Sixty-nine nations did not vote, amongst them all of the states with nuclear weapons and all the NATO members. Today there are more, not less nuclear weapons in the hands of the 5 major imperial powers.

Some anti-war supporters are prepared to support military action, if it is done in the name of the UN, thus getting international state approval. But the UN still remains incapable of taking any effective action which is not supported by all the main imperial powers. In 1947, the UN initially approved a deal handing over Palestinian territory to a new Jewish supremacist state of Israel (without any consultation with the Palestinian people). Despite this being officially backed by the UN General Council, the New Yishuv/Israeli official army Hagannah, backed by ultra-Zionist paramilitaries, still launched what Palestinians call Naqba (The Catastrophe). Naqba ethnically cleansed huge numbers of Palestinians and took over additional territory, forcing many into exile and reducing those remaining to second class subjects, liable to arbitrary repressive measures. (And this was backed by Stalin's USSR at the time, hoping to win Israeli support. Israeli mass

ethnic cleaning was little different to Stalin's policy towards Germans in Eastern and Central Europe). The UN did nothing about this.

The UN today would be no more be able to prevent Putin from adopting similar measures on the territory occupied by the Russian Army and the 'Russia One and Indivisible' Far Right paramilitaries. In 1995, the UN role at Srebrenica during the Serb massacres of the Moslem Bosniaks, provided another chilling warning, whilst the US-backed Dayton Agreement the same year ratified the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This could be a foretaste of the UN's most likely political role in Ukraine. On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, there was another vote in the UN General Assembly, this time to oppose the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24<sup>th</sup>. 141 member states supported the resolution, only 5 voted against and 35 abstained. But with a Russian veto on the Security Council no further action could be taken.

The less the Ukrainian people are able to militarily resist Putin's invasion today, the greater the immediate concessions that will be demanded by Putin, through Russian imperialism's overwhelming military force. And the USA and NATO role, whether or not backed by UN, will be to get the Ukrainian government to accept and front any inter-imperial deal, they cobble up with Putin behind the scenes. The UN can no more be relied on to help the victims of imperialist or imperialist-backed aggression than the League of Nations could be over Manchuria/China in 1931 or Abyssinia in 1935.

The key thing for Socialists is not to be dragged into one imperialist camp or the other. In extending our support to the Ukrainian people against Russian imperialism, we link this, for example, with support for Palestinians and Kurds confronting Western (US plus European) imperialism, Syrians confronting both, and Uighurs and Tibetans confronting Chinese imperialism. Our 'Internationalism from Below' solidarity is our anti-imperialist answer to their competing diplomatic 'internationalism from above' imperialist alliances.

**30.4.24 (updated 15.5.22)**

**Victory to the Ukrainian people  
Russian imperial troops out now  
Full support for the communities of resistance and their right to get arms  
For popular control of local militias  
Support for the independent trade unions**

# **Internationalism from below solidarity with Sotsialnyi Rukh and the Russian anti-war movement**

## **No dirty deals between Putin and NATO**

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