

## The Cost of Freedom in the Neoliberal World of Blood and Oil

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### The False Dichotomy of Imperialism vs. Imperialism

Once more, atrocities committed against a marginalized population are used to validate the collective punishment of another silenced population. The sanctions on people in Russia have been justified in the name of defending Ukrainians—as if the Western governments’ record in manipulating economies is spotless and their mandate to defend others’ freedoms is utterly unquestionable. This is another war that is about to force us to choose between two wrongs within a false duality. Put plainly, Putin’s regime and the NATO bloc do not represent two opposing ideological poles. To the contrary, they represent the same species. Both sides are anti-egalitarian, racist, and, of course, above all, capitalist. Nation-states within the capitalist world order clash, and this is neither the first nor will it be the last such war. By the same token, we should not be allured to commit the nationalist mistake of equating a state and the population who happen to be under the rule of that state. This is a common, but rudimentary, mistake regardless of whether we speak of democracies, autocracies, or so-called theocracies. The ruling groups in Russia and the NATO countries are guilty of many things, one of which is this war. Similarly, the plights of the defenseless Ukrainians and the oppressed Russians should not be subject to compromises. The question that should become the subject of wide public discussion and motivate internationalist mobilization is the same old-new one: How can we, the oppressed, join forces against the ruling groups, including our elites and our colonizers? Obviously, that entails an-

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other question. Namely, how can we, the oppressed of all countries and regions in the world, stop being used in the ruling groups' wars? The fundamental step toward such a goal is to expose the irrationality of the dominant discourses and, thus, ideologies. These nationalist and capitalist discourses are totalitarian in their influence, but exposing their absurdities could also have a universal effect on their global hegemony.

In this war, we can and should be able to take the side of both the Ukrainian and Russian oppressed. We should be able to recognize that their plights are in many ways similar even though they might be suffering in different ways at this particular moment. Victims should not compare their right to victimhood but rather claim their uncompromisable equality in the face of their rulers, oppressors, and colonizers. Indeed, there are many Russian citizens, like many Ukrainians, who know for a fact that Putin's regime cannot be a force of liberation in any sense whatsoever. There are also many Ukrainians who realize that the NATO states are concerned about neither Ukrainians' lives nor the Ukrainians' freedom. We do not know about them because they are silenced. When and where they are allowed to speak up, their voices are drowned in the frenzy created by the established order, the dominant mode of perception, and the armies of opinion makers whose sole concern is to take one of the two sides in the false duality (of Putin's regime versus NATO). Both sides speak the same language, belong to the same anti-egalitarian type of ideology, and use the peoples they claim to protect as disposable war materials. Both sides have been imposing the maximum exploitation of people and the environment. Both sides have been manufacturing, selling, purchasing, and deploying various means of mass murder. Both sides use the victims to create more victims.

This is precisely why a different hegemony must take place, and its pioneers can only be internationalists from all parts of the world, especially those in the margins of all margins. The only meaningful position to take is the side of the silenced whose voice is the voice of reason and, therefore, whose voice must be echoed loudly in the face of the prevalent barbarism represented by the capitalist ruling groups who have brought the world to the edge of yet another abyss. Once more, this barbaric regime of a few capitalists is pushing the world toward total or near-total destruction. The existing order has once more proved to be death driven, absurd, and unsustainable. It must be stopped. All its fronts and blocs must be denounced. As always, there is another option. That option is the negation

of the existing irrationality. Out of such a revolutionary negation, a new world can crystalize step by step.

The discriminatory nature of the international regime has been so normalized, that Western politicians do not even bother to clarify the basis on which they assume a policing role in world politics. Even when addressing ordinary people in the West, they do not bother providing any legal or semi-legitimate ground for their actions in the international arena. All they need to explain is the potential consequences of their policies at home. Western governments have been somewhat careful not to cause direct financial harm to their constituencies (such as a steep rise in energy prices) without providing some sort of justification. For instance, on March 8, 2022, justifying the imposition of further economic sanctions on Russia, Joe Biden said, “Defending Freedom is going to cost. It is going to cost us as well in the United State” (cited in Bade, Okun, and Ross 2022). He was addressing Americans, and the cost he had in mind was the cost of, for example, fuel in the US. British and EU leaders have been using a similar discourse regarding the cost of freedom in relation to energy prices. For the rest of the world, including Ukrainians and Russians, such a “cost” has implications that go far beyond commodity prices.

Indeed, when it comes to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, the common Western discursive strategy is war propaganda, openly encouraging Ukrainians to shed their blood without any guarantee of victory, whatever such a promised victory may mean for millions of brutalized Ukrainian children. In the meantime, the Western governments’ have been pouring weapons into Ukraine (imagine if these governments had been so quick and efficient in transferring Covid-19 vaccines or basic personal protective equipment to impoverished regions). The same discursive machine that poetically glorifies Ukrainian death deliberately imposes more suffering on Russians who have already been suffering at the hand of Putin’s autocratic and oligarchic regime. It is a discourse that uses the word “Russia” to refer to the country, or the state, or the government, or the population interchangeably. As for the sanctions, it does not take a genius to realize that they most severely affect the poor. We all know that those who will suffer severely due to the sanctions are the poor, not Putin or the Russian oligarchy and their thugs.

Thanks to the white sense of entitlement, a global apartheid regime has been normalized. The apartheid regime is legitimized in the name of liberal democracy, but it is totalitarian in every sense. Imagine if, in response to the American invasion of Iraq, the Chinese government had organized in-

ternational sanctions to starve Americans while threatening to punish Europeans for any attempt to ease the effect of the sanctions on Americans. Imagine then if Chinese politicians had told the Chinese people that it is alright to pay a little more for certain commodities because “defending freedom is going to cost. It is going to cost us as well, in China.”

The sense of white entitlement has not changed since the colonial era, and as always, the supremacist exercise of power is masked with some meaningless phraseology about freedom and civilization. The dichotomy of Putin versus Western elites is a false one. Ideologically, politically, and historically, they belong to the same thing, which is the anti-egalitarian, racist, and imperialist bourgeoisie that has been responsible for most of the atrocities and destruction since the colonial era. Whether when they committed genocide in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, or when they fought each other, they did so in the name of freedom and civilization. This is a class that has never stopped employing every idea and ideal, including God and freedom, to recruit the miserable and hopeless ones in their campaigns for total hegemony. It is a class that in the course of its unlimited exploitation creates tragic situations for certain populations, only to exploit that very situation to further totalize its hegemony, thereby creating more tragic situations for other populations, and so on. Therefore, especially since the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie has never run out of discursive means of moral distortion. While until the nineteenth century most individual and mass murders were committed in the name of God, since then, most of the murders have been committed in the name of freedom.

What freedom are Biden and his friends in the UK and EU talking about? Whose freedom is so gruesome that it comes at the cost of the collective suffering of entire populations? Why is it that this freedom must always involve punishing the most vulnerable, who are the least responsible for whatever it is that supposedly justifies sanctions, whether the invasion of a neighboring country, persecution of political opposition, or potential manufacturing of “weapons of mass destruction?”

### **The International Apartheid Regime and Sanctions**

Economic sanctions are typically presented as a means to disempower the ruling regimes in the sanctioned countries, or to pressure the populations of those countries to bring down their respective regimes. And because the ruling groups in the West have appointed themselves as the global moral authority, they believe it is up to them to decide where and when this

method—among others—should be applied. These days, hundreds of opinion makers shamelessly keep repeating the absurd sanctionist argument. We are supposed to believe that punishing 146 million Russians is somehow in the interest of Ukrainians. Opinion and policymakers who justify the imposition of “crippling” economic sanctions seem to be obsessed with a sadistic desire to inflict endless suffering on millions of already marginalized people.

There is simply no sound reasoning behind the doctrine of sanctions. We have plenty of rational proof and empirical evidence to assert that sanctions have the exact opposite effect of their proclaimed objectives. Namely, they intensify governments’ exercise of power, militarize societies, and destroy the prospect of social peace and political freedoms. By decimating conditions of wellbeing, economic sanctions politically disempower the population in question. Any population that lives under the constant threat of poverty will inevitably become more, not less, prone to democratic underdevelopment, institutional corruption, and subjugation by means of violence. This is a global regime of segregation that uses economic sanctions to collectively cut off entire populations from the rest of the world, which can only make those populations more dependent on their ruling groups.

Only the capitalist logic can rationalize human-made famine in the name of freedom. Only in a totalitarian capitalist world can committing mass murder be morally legitimized through a few meaningless phrases and armies of opinion makers. Only in such a world can the lives of hundreds of millions of human beings be rendered completely faceless, nameless, and worthless. These lives are used in the same way weapons are used, that is, purely for militaristic ends.

The assumption that starving a population severely enough and for long enough would force them to rise up and bring down their ruling regime is utterly barbaric in its indiscriminate cruelty. Policies that are based on such an assumption are also strategically irrational. Civilians who are deprived of both basic needs and political freedoms cannot change undemocratic governments. At the bare minimum, democracy itself must be available and well established for civilians to be able to exercise this kind of political power. Moreover, even in a country where democratic institutions and practices are well established, if the majority of the population experience economic hardships, the collapse of democracy, whether through free elections or armed insurrections, is a likely outcome. The imposition of collective isolation, starvation, and brutalization does indeed drastically change political activities within the population in question, but that change cer-

tainly will not amount to a move toward peaceful coexistence or the recognition of political freedoms.

Empirically, the senselessness of economic sanctions is equally evident. The first contemporary cases of severe economic sanctions are those imposed on North Korea, which started in 1950, and on Cuba, which started in 1962, and both increased in the following years and decades. Four decades after the fall of the USSR, both systems are still alive and well. Generations of North Koreans have lived and died under conditions that resemble medieval collective starvation, and today the North Korean regime is more powerful than ever. Yet the sanctionists shamelessly continue their policies of the collective punishment of the North Korean population in the name of peace and freedom. According to the normalized ideology of the prevalent international order, starving 26 million people, who happened to be born in North Korea and have already been brutally oppressed, is somehow supposed to serve the cause of democracy and world peace.

Due to endless sanctions, Cubans have been forced to create a self-sufficient economy while constantly fending off American interventions to destabilize the island. Regardless of one's position on Cuban politics, the Cuban case has proven that sanctionism does not have any justification whatsoever, whether politically, ideologically, strategically, or pragmatically. Of course, there are other sanctioned countries, but there is not a single case where the imposition of economic sanctions on a country actually proved effective in terms of what the self-appointed global punishers allegedly wanted to achieve.

A well-known case is the UN sanctions that were imposed on Iraqis for more than a decade. Between August 1990 and February 1991, the American-led coalition destroyed the infrastructure of the entire country, dropping 88,500 tons of bombs on the country in the first six weeks alone (Allen, Berry, and Polmar 1991, 147). Yet not only did they leave Saddam Hussein's regime in power, but they also made sure the regime had enough air force at its disposal to crush the anti-government popular uprisings across the country. As if living under Saddam's regime had not been bad enough, Iraqis were now further punished through a strict embargo on everything, including medicine and food. For thirteen long years, from 1990 to 2003, this same international regime imposed a set of sanctions that were described as "a policy that satisfies the definition of genocide" (cited in Pilger 2000). Those are the words of none other than the well-known UN official in Iraq from 1996 to 1998, Denis Halliday, who resigned in protest of the sanctions. In 1996, when asked about the rationale of the

sanctions and about the death of half a million children that had already been reported, Madeleine Albright's response was unambiguous: "the price is worth it."<sup>1</sup>

The number of direct casualties is in the hundreds of thousands. The fact that there is nothing close to an accurate estimate of the number of victims of the imposed starvation and the two invasions speaks to the worthlessness of those lives from the perspective of the prevalent international order. There is also the uncalculatable damage caused by the sanctions, including the near-total destruction of the education, industry, and agriculture sectors.

Yet, as if the 1990–91 war and the imposed famine were not painful enough when the sanctions proved ineffective in bringing about a "regime change," in 2003 the country was invaded once more. In the 1991 and 2003 invasions of Iraq, the American forces alone fired more than one million tons of depleted uranium weapons (Edwards 2014), which continue to have devastating health ramifications for the population ("US Broke Its Own Rules," Pax for Peace, 2016). Divided among the population today, each Iraqi child, woman, and man gets a share of 27 kilograms (about 60 pounds) of the fatal material. This is part of the neoliberal package of freedom. The cost of the neoliberal gifts was the starvation of the vast majority of the population for more than a decade, hundreds of thousands of deaths, and the destruction of public institutions, and this cost continues to be paid by surviving Iraqis every day.

In the case of Iran, all Iranians have been paying the price of someone's freedom, except nobody knows whose freedom (Ahmed 2021b). While the regime in Tehran has been brutally oppressing Iranians for more than four decades, Western governments decided that further intensifying the suffering of the majority of Iranians would somehow hurt the regime in Tehran. Not surprisingly, the most marginalized, impoverished, and silenced have been suffering the most because of the economic sanctions.

Whatever this mysterious freedom may be, it cannot come at the cost of the suffering of impoverished Russians, Cubans, Koreans, Venezuelans, Iranians, Syrians, or any other population. Sanctions that hurt the wellbeing of entire populations are one of the most barbaric forms of inflicting collective suffering. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict does not change any-

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1. This was from an interview she gave to *60 Minutes*, "Punishing Saddam," that aired on May 12, 1996. A clip of her making this statement in the interview can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iFYaE3n4> (accessed March 31, 2022).

thing about this basic truth. No amount of suffering inflicted on Russians will make any Ukrainian freer, and vice versa.

### **The Neoliberal Version of Freedom in the Post-Soviet World**

Not long ago we were told that communism was the last obstacle to the triumph of democratic liberalism crowned by the sanctity of the free market. Welcome to the post-Soviet world where nationalism has been spreading like a virus, and its fascist variations are gaining more power by the day. Every nationalist group has its own myths and territorial claims, and different nationalist myths and claims inevitably collide with each other. Nationalists fail to see people as concrete human beings. To them, the world is composed of entities called “nations.” The nation is the shadow of the people. The nation is personified precisely in order to de-personify the actual human beings it supposedly embodies; it fictionally includes all in order to actually exclude everyone.

The ruling groups have adopted a mindset that disturbingly resembles the racist/nationalist language of WWI, which reached its fascist phase during the interwar period. On one side, there is Euro-nationalism/racism that is quite similar in its discourses and sentiments to those adopted by the nationalists during the first half of the twentieth century. Of course, most European elites have made cosmetic adjustments to their exclusionary discourses, replacing race talk with culture talk, and “traits” with “values,” etc. (Ahmed 2021a). On the opposing side, there is a despotic regime led by Putin who, like many Russian nationalists, wants to revive the Russian imperialist hegemony that was terminated by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

One of Putin’s heroes is General Anton Denikin, the fanatic anti-Bolshevik commander of the White army in southern Russia from 1918 to 1920. Denikin was a sworn enemy of the Bolsheviks and a fervent opponent of Ukrainians’ right to self-determination. Also, Putin’s speech before his invasion of Ukraine is quite comparable to Nicholas II’s declaration of war in 1914 in terms of the appeal to Russophile tendencies (“Imperial Manifesto” 1914). In fact, Putin barely hides his Tzarist inclinations, and practically, he seems to be attempting to establish a tripartite Russian nation—of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians (or Great Russians, White Russians, and Little Russians, in the Russophile terminology of the nine-

teenth century).<sup>2</sup> He is especially influenced by Ivan Ilyin, a Russian anti-communist, nationalist, and fascist philosopher who died in Nazi Germany in 1938. In terms of political economy, Putin's regime wants a capitalist Russian empire as prescribed by neoliberals such as Anatoly Chubais.<sup>3</sup>

Gorbachev brought the USSR to its ultimate death, and the media in the West turned him into an adorable figure for that. Yeltsin went further than his former boss and threw the Soviet project into its grave, and he quickly became the new anti-communist hero in Western media. Then, it was Putin's turn to go even further to the right than his former boss, Yeltsin. If Yeltsin was admired by Western liberals, Putin's admirers were further to the right. The trajectory during the first post-Soviet decade steeply moved toward the far-right. During the second decade of the post-Soviet era, Putin's star among Russian nationalists and Western fascists started to rise.

Until very recently the far right in the West admired Putin for his conservative values and vulgar exhibition of power. As a matter of fact, Putin was well on his way to becoming an inspiration for more and more Western fascist leaders whose followers long for a father figure, or the "great little man," the leader who is invincible but at the same time feels the ordinary people's grievances and speaks like them (Löwenthal and Guterman 2021, 134, 149; Adorno 2001, 142; Adorno 2004, 226). The privileged are often fearful of losing their privileges, so the persecution complex is not uncommon, especially during times of economic uncertainty. Fascist ideologues play an essential role in intensifying and politicizing the persecution complex among the lower middle class and the poor within the majority in order to further racialize all class problems. There is nothing more characteristic of the rise of fascism than the racialization of class politics, which transforms every potentiality for a socialist revolution into a race war, which is of course led by fascists. It is no wonder that even the liberals in the capitalist class always prefer fascists over communists. During severe crises, capitalist elites must allow fascists to assume the position of political leadership; without fascist politics, the social unrest will most likely take the shape of a class revolution. Fascists, in turn, feed into the persecution complex and try everything to spread the belief that the world is fundamentally and eternally structured on the basis of nations and that

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2. For more on this see, for instance, Plokhly 2018.

3. Chubais reportedly left his position as Putin's adviser in late March 2022, but he had been among Putin's supporters since the early days the latter's rise to power in the end of the 1990s.

great nations could become miserable in the absence of a wise, fearless, and honest patriotic leadership.

The revival of the volkish anxieties, such as the sense of being threatened by the outside world and betrayed by state politicians and elites, gave rise to a desperate search for a new savior, a father figure who does not hold back from saying it as it is, a leader who does not shy away from standing for family values and national/racial interests, etc. Putin became a role model for a leader who presents himself as the ultimate guardian who protects the great nation that is about to lose its greatness forever because of the threats of elimination from without and decay from within.

The nationalist father figure is mandated with one semi-sacred task: to make it great again, and the rest of the story is fascism unfolding. The following fascist pattern is universal from the beginning to the last stages. First, during the first years of the savior's reign, some economic points are scored. In this stage, there is also a substantial increase in the exhibition of national strength, often through deploying forms of bullying and intimidation, directly reflecting the leader's own personality, against the most disempowered both within the country and regionally. These perceived victories result in the second stage: more popularity for the leader, who in turn gains more confidence in his own wisdom and way of governance. Within a few years, the father figure becomes certain that his historical role had been determined metaphysically. In the third stage, the absolutism reaches its ultimate peak, whereby the leader becomes the nation, and the nation becomes the leader. He treats his hallucinations as pure visions freshly revealed to him by the divine power, the fascist ingratulators who surround him act as if that is the case. If the leader has a bad dream due to, say, overindulging, the following day the visionary dream could be interpreted into an executive order of some sort.

Once the nationalist mission that is executed under the leadership of the savior becomes a divine plan, no amount of failure will deter him from going ahead with his plan all the way to the end to make the nation great again. In the fourth and last stage, the destruction has already begun and will not stop until the savior is physically removed from the scene. Every single time, the one who is mandated to make it great again will only succeed in destroying it again.

## NATO, the EU, and Racial Demarcations

There is a famous Chekhovian rule according to which every item on the stage must be used at some point in the play. This has become known as “Chekhov’s gun.” The common interpretation of this principle is that if there is a gun in act one, you can anticipate what will happen in a later act.<sup>4</sup> In the first chapter of the post-Soviet era, NATO not only persisted but also kept expanding. Of course, the pretext is that the new members demanded membership in the pact. However, NATO neither admitted Ukraine nor explicitly rejected its request. Today, NATO’s ambiguous policies and politics suggest that NATO members want to fight a war against Russia in Ukraine using Ukrainians. Unfortunately for Ukrainians, Zelenskyy and his allies have accepted the sacrifice of Ukrainians in an imperialist clash between the two parties. Western governments explicitly declare that they will not provide protection for Ukraine, but at the same time, they exploit the hopeless situation of the Ukrainians by playing the Pan-European card. NATO might have been able to prevent the war if it had either accepted or rejected the Ukrainian government’s repeated membership requests.

What is certain is that no population will become freer, no matter the cost they are asked to pay in order to be admitted into an imperialist camp. On the contrary, all these imperialist recipes, including Putin’s Russia, NATO, Erdogan’s Turkey, and Khamenei’s Iran, only generate unfreedom and suffering for those who have already been marginalized. Incidentally, in the name of protecting Syrians, all these parties, in various degrees and forms, have been engaged in the Syrian bloodbath. There has not been a shortage of weapons and fighters, yet al-Assad is still in power, and the Syrian society and individual is more damaged than ever. The Syrian case is indicative of the irrational violence at the heart of the existing order. Of course, there are other cases of damaged societies and lives in the neoliberal world, where every form of mass murder can be normalized after a while, and where the most privileged are entitled to ask the most marginalized to sacrifice the most. In the neoliberal world, the more we are asked to pay for freedom, the less free we become. Capitalism in all its phases, including the neoliberal one, has never failed to demark new regions to pay

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4. This principle is interpreted and used in many different ways. Plokhy (2015, 5) refers to it in relation to the threat of nuclear weapons in the beginning of his book, *The Last Empire*. In this book Plokhy shows that there were many reasons behind the collapse of the USSR, but it was not an American accomplishment as the American politicians claimed immediately after the regime in Moscow crumbled.

the ultimate cost. Every time, the doomed population ends up being further slaughtered at the hands of the capitalist class's own creatures, the sung heroes of anti-communism, the likes of Yeltsin, Putin, and other nationalists, conservatives, and fundamentalist thugs.

Recall the liberation scenario of Afghans that turned Afghanistan into the first locus of jihad in the world. The jihadis were handsomely funded and armed by the governments of Pakistan, the Gulf countries, and the US in the 1980s in the name of liberation. Since the day the jihadis took power, Afghans have been paying the price for a freedom they have never tasted. In 2001, freedom, as prescribed by the White House, had an added cost. Now the jihadis were the problem. Yesterday's "freedom-fighters" were suddenly labeled terrorists. Suddenly, white elites started caring about Afghan women, as if in the 1980s, when the jihadis were fully supported, there had been no women in Afghanistan.

Still, the relabeling of the mujahideen and the repricing of the imaginary commodity, freedom, could have been a fortunate turn of events for Afghans, but alas it was just an indication of another long and deadly chapter of occupation.<sup>5</sup> After 20 years of humiliating occupation, the liberators made a hasty deal with none other than the Taliban and handed them back Afghanistan and its people. Most recently, as Americans were being lectured about the cost of freedom, the Taliban rulers, Qatar's foreign minister, and an American delegation were enjoying Turkish baklava in a special reunion in Antalya (The Associated Press 2022). Such is the freedom obtained from buying and selling peoples, countries, and dignities in capitalism's neoliberal world.

Today, it is the Ukrainians' and the Russians' turn to be demarked, to enter the deadly phase of neoliberalism, where the promised freedom might cost millions of lives, and the resulting unfreedom might cost even more. This is another war the victims are forced to fight and forced to lose. While Putin, just like Erdogan, follows a regressive path to revive yet another long-dead empire, the opposing bloc follows its own traditional measures whereby blood becomes just another cost calculated into the price of raw materials and energy.

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5. The Concurrent Senate Resolution number 74 in 1984 stated, "the freedom fighters of Afghanistan have withstood the might of the Soviet Army for over four years and gained the admiration of free men and women the world over with their courageous sacrifice, bravery, and determination," adding that "it would be indefensible to provide the freedom fighters with only enough aid to fight and die, but not enough to advance their cause of freedom" (US Congress Committee on Foreign Affairs 1985, 352).

This time around, however, the EU and American leaders are prepared to pay some of the cost because Putin committed a different kind of crime, which is not killing civilians per se, something he had already been committing for a long time. In fact, NATO's Turkey under Erdogan has been doing the same thing for a long time. Here is where European capitalist elites expose their deep racist prejudices: It was only when Putin committed the crime against Europeans that he became a war criminal. Keep in mind Ukrainians have never been quite included as members of the European family even though they have not been quite Othered as the Russ. To the European tribalist mindset, Turkey is a fence to insulate the European clan from Arabs and Asians. It seems Ukraine's new role is to be another gatekeeper to keep the Russ, Europe's unwanted children, at a safe distance from the clan. However, the European leadership clearly considers Ukrainians more admissible, than Turks, into the Euroclan, which is something Erdogan was sensitive enough to sense and insensitive enough to comment on (TRT 2022). Also, notice how Turkey has been a long-time member of NATO but the European states have resisted admitting the Turks into the EU. On the other hand, there is not much European resistance against admitting Ukrainians into the EU while NATO membership has not been an option for Ukraine.

Only when he started murdering Ukrainians, did Putin become a war criminal for Western elites. Of course, it still took these elites some time to take such a sharp stance, which is not surprising given that Ukrainians have not been considered fully European. Let us face it, what brought the European curse on the Nazis was not mass murder, of which every colonial power—including Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, Dutch, Belgian, Italian, and Turkish colonialism—had been guilty for a long time. Even Hitler's violation of the territorial integrity of other European states was tolerated. And the ultimate red line was certainly not the genocide of the European Jews, which Hitler planned and started executing while he was still considered a legitimate member of the European family. Rather, what brought the Western elites' eternal condemnation upon Hitler without any hope for redemption, as Aimé Césaire argued, was the killing of white Christian Europeans using means that were only meant to be used against non-Europeans. The following passage by Césaire is worth quoting:

Yes, it would be worthwhile to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by Hitler and Hitlerism and to reveal to the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler inhabits him, that Hitler is his de-

mon, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom, what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa. (Césaire 2001, 3)

Putin, like Erdogan, could have gone on bombing cities and killing defenseless civilians as long as the victims had not been white Christians. The Ukrainian crisis is the continuation of many similar crises, some of which NATO has had a direct role in creating. The Yezidis, who were starved under the embargo like other Iraqis, suffered a genocide on the hands of Islamists, who have been openly supported by Turkey, a major NATO member. In fact, Al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS until he was killed in an American raid in October 2019, turned out to be housed and cared for in a territory that is under the direct control of Turkey and its Islamist proxy groups. His successor, Al-Quraishi, was also living in the same area when he was killed in February 2022, also in an American raid. It is therefore reasonable to assume that NATO members have been well aware of the Turkish state's ties with ISIS and similar groups in Syria.

Putin and his philosopher-teachers, Dmitry Galkovsky and Aleksandr Dugin, may have mastered racism and nationalism, but they missed the crucial point regarding European nationalism's criteria for blood kinship. Those who liken Putin to Hitler make a good point, albeit unconsciously: like Hitler, Putin dared to kill and force the migration of white Christians. This is also the same reason Putin lost his European and American far-right allies. This is not Putin's first war, but it might be his last because he breached the sacred code of white tribalism. That said, the sympathy for Ukrainians is both temporary and limited. Only after they started to be killed in large numbers did privileged Europeans consider them European, but still not European enough to deserve living in peace, rather, just European enough to die for the privileged Europe. Today, Ukraine is demarked, and its inhabitants are asked to pay the highest price for a freedom in Europe only they cannot enjoy.

Conveniently, Zelenskyy does not miss a chance to further market Ukrainian blood as purely European, and thus as deserving a higher price tag. His soldiers, too, have learned to speak of defending Europe and European values while Ukrainians are being sieged by enough weapons to eradicate Ukraine's inhabitants many times over. In the meantime, the tribalists in the EU are convinced that when the cold season passes, they

will partake in the sacrifice: cutting down on Russian natural gas. Until then, from their point of view, all Ukrainians need to do is die. After all, membership in the European club, like freedom, is going to cost. Those who have full membership, those whose white clanship is not questionable, pay the regular fee, but those who are not fully admitted must pay with their (or others') lives.

Ultimately, it is the majority of the silenced Russians and brutalized Ukrainians who are pushed into war and poverty while, as in all other imperialist wars, the elites continue to glorify a disaster and endless death of the miserable in the name of freedom and dignity, both of which, to them, mean consolidating more power and accumulating more capital. In this imperialist war, the silenced majority of Russians and Ukrainians will inevitably lose simply because they are being used as the cheapest war materials by Russian nationalist elites, whose conception of a great Russia is not concerned with actual human beings, and by Western elites who proudly push Ukrainians to die for a free Ukraine that is already transforming into a mass graveyard.

Yet, we should ask what this gloomy moment that is caused by capitalism's savagery could bring about. Millions of Russians, Ukrainians, and others who are suffering because of the war and its impact on their livelihoods will reflect on this savagery; they must be asking questions to which the ruling groups have no answers, as Lenin would say (more on this below). Like the anti-war internationalists who opposed WWI, today's anti-war internationalists should be the voice of the silenced reason and the rational hope, only this time they should be better prepared.

### **Despair and the Coming Revolution**

When WWI started, the socialists were adamantly against it. In 1915, Eugene Debs, the popular American socialist leader, stated, "When I say I am opposed to war I mean ruling class war, for the ruling class is the only class that makes war. It matters not to me whether this war be offensive or defensive, or what other lying excuse may be invented for it, I am opposed to it, and I would be shot for treason before I would enter such a war." Then he added, "I have no country to fight for; my country is the earth; and I am a citizen of the world" (Debs 1939, 4). On February 8, 1916, in a speech addressing anti-war socialist delegations in Berne, strongly agreeing with Eugene Debs, Lenin said:

Neither Russia, nor Germany, nor any other Great Power has the right to claim that it is waging a “war of defence;” all the Great Powers are waging an imperialist, capitalist war, a predatory war, a war for the oppression of small and foreign nations, a war for the sake of the profits of the capitalists, who are coining golden profits amounting to billions out of the appalling sufferings of the masses, out of the blood of the proletariat. (Lenin 2005, italics from original)

He argued that the millions of the oppressed and brutalized, “are pondering over the real cause of the war, are becoming more determined and are acquiring a clearer revolutionary understanding” (Lenin 2005). Lenin insisted, “we must not, and we have no reason whatever, to view the future with despair,” asserting that “the European War will be followed by the proletarian revolution against capitalism” (ibid. 2005, italics from original). In a piece originally published in 1918, he makes a similar point:

Because capitalism has concentrated the earth’s wealth in the hands of a few states and divided the world up to the last little bit. Any further division, any further enrichment could take place only at the expense of others, as the enrichment of one state at the expense of another. The issue could only be settled by force and, accordingly, war between the world marauders became inevitable. (Lenin 1965)

Socialists, including American and Russian internationalists, opposed WWII as well. Trotsky (1939) thought Western democracies both fear and admire Hitler, and he warned that if the fascists are not stopped, they will take over more regions. Anticipating the war, Trotsky added:

It will be a war of slave owners who cover themselves with various masks: “democracy,” civilization,” on the one hand, “race,” honor,” on the other. Only the overthrow of all slave-owners can once for all put an end to war and open an epoch of true civilization. (Lenin 1965, 3)

Fascism, Trotsky (1939, 3) argued, “does not come at all ‘from without.’ In Italy and Germany fascism conquered without foreign intervention.” Like both Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg in 1918 (Lenin 1965; Luxemburg 2004, 364), in 1939 Trotsky (1939, 3) insisted that the only possible way to stop the disastrous capitalist wars was a socialist revolution. Much of what was said by these socialists about imperialist and fascist wars in the first half of the twentieth century remains to be true today. Also, whether a revolution is already taking shape or not, as Lenin (1965) said, “revolution can never be forecast; it cannot be foretold; it comes of itself.”

Each failed revolution is a foundational step toward the ultimate liberation of human society. Revolutions fail in the short run, but they will in-

evitably be victorious in terms of the long march toward cosmopolitan emancipation. The cosmopolitan project will continue reviving, each time leaping progressively toward its emancipatory end. As long as inequality exists, there will be revolutions. The more severe the inequality, the more powerful the coming socialist revolution will be. The impoverished may not know what capitalists know about monopolies, but they understand something capitalists cannot grasp. Namely, they understand that certain truths are never outdated or ignorable. These truths concern life itself in its most tangible and real sense. In fact, they live these concrete truths. It is the privileged who need to grasp such truths, including the fact that food, shelter, peace, and dignity are essential needs of all human beings, and those who are deprived of these needs will continue to make new revolutions. This truth will never become outdated. And it is a communist premise.

The communism of bourgeois bohemians fell out of fashion everywhere, and communism as such fell out of fashion for bourgeois intellectuals. However, as long as there are people who are deprived of food, shelter, peace, and dignified life, the communist question will continue to haunt capitalist elites.

As long as capitalism remains prevalent, communism will continue to be present in multiple revolutionary forms. Every project that aims to challenge capitalism's monopoly on life and negate capitalist hegemonic ideologies of regression is a communist project. The truth of communism, like all basic truths, is simple: when large numbers of people are deprived of their basic needs, large revolutions will take place.

No amount of virtual entertainment, idealist education, subservient spiritualism, rationalized superstitions, sanctified deprivations, mystified subjugations, or celebrated symbolisms will change this basic truth. The revolution is as certain as it was 100 years ago. In fact, over the centuries, the revolution against enslavement has only become more powerful. Capitalism has proven more boldly than ever that it is a force for destructive irrationality and sadistic destruction. While every communist in the world has been told that communism does not work because it is utopian, what is truly illusional and bizarre is the belief that capitalism is actually working. Merely counting the ecological disasters caused by capitalism should suffice to make this point. By the hour, capitalism is failing and fails those who once believed in its promised land. By the hour, the little fascists that were planted inside those believers are coming out, betraying the real face

of the prophets of the post-Soviet world. They actively plan and call for cross-continental wars and collective starvation.

The marginalized do not want a world ruled by racist warlords and sadist imperialists. Today's world rulers deploy nuclear weapons on every continent, bomb cities and pour weapons into the destroyed regions, and impose collective starvation on entire populations. This has been the case since the 1950s. The Koreans, Vietnam, Colombia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, Venezuela, and Ukraine are just a few obvious examples of what liberty amounts to in the capitalist world's imperialist order. Rejecting every morality, religion, nationalism, and patriotism that justifies these massive crimes of violence, communist movements plead guilty to inciting peace forcefully and unapologetically.

The marginalized may not have any assurances of a communist future, but they reject the ongoing misery and endless violence imposed on them. They might not have a clear plan for socialism, but the capitalist nightmare leaves them with no option but to reject it. We have no other choice but to stand with those who have never had the privilege of dreaming of a different world in the first place due to the suffering and hunger imposed on them by the international apartheid regime. We have no other choice but to stop this train on which human society is kept captive as the operator speeds up toward the abyss. While the fascist opinion makers once again glorify war, one should not be under the impression that the fascists from one's own country is somehow better than fascists from elsewhere. If fascists are disempowered locally, those who have been pitted against each other on nationalist bases will inevitably turn against their ruling groups, and that will be a world revolution.

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