

Stop the War Coalition hypocrisy on Ukraine & Syria

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Two weeks before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as President Putin massed over 130,000 troops on the country's borders, Stop the War Coalition (StWC) convened an emergency public meeting "No war in Ukraine: Stop NATO expansion." The advance publicity condemned "NATO's nuclear warmongering and interventionist agenda." It accused the British and US governments - but not Russia - of "ramping up the threat of war." There was not a single word of criticism of Putin's military intimidation and no expression of solidarity with the Ukrainian people and their right to self-determination.

Left-wingers like me who criticised StWC's silence about Russia's belligerent stance were denounced as warmongers and apologists for western imperialism. When we warned that Russia was preparing to invade, we were accused of fake news, scare tactics and stoking a new Cold War.

Since Russia's invasion and its bombing of civilian areas, StWC has been hit by barrage of criticism, much of it from the left. Squirring with embarrassment, the convenor of StWC, Lindsey German, did a volte face: "We feel horror and sickness when we see Putin's invasion, his attacks on civilian populations...we are consistent in opposing the misery, death, displacement and disruption that affects any country consumed by war."

Not true! StWC never condemned Russia's bombing of Syrian homes, schools and hospitals, killing thousands of civilians, from 2015 to the present. It remains silent, even now, about Russian war crimes in Syria and has smeared as jihadi extremists and US stooges Syrian democrats who oppose President Assad's dictatorship. StWC refused to allow them to speak at its public meeting on Syria in parliament in 2015, and called the police to have them removed.

The same year, StWC stewards manhandled anti-Assad Syrians and attempted to eject them from the "Stop Bombing Syria" march, where StWC commendably, but one-sidedly, opposed US and UK bombing, while saying nothing about the bombing of civilians by the Syrian regime and Russia. This silence was interpreted by many Syrians as de facto collusion with tyranny and mass murder.

StWC was right on Iraq and Afghanistan but wrong on Syria. It has consistently excluded the voices of the Syrian democrats and given a free pass to the war criminals, Assad and Putin. Appeals for StWC to show solidarity with the non-violent Syrian civil society movements for democracy and human rights have been rebuffed. StWC has never rallied against Assad's barrel bombs, chemical weapons and torture chambers, nor against the foreign military intervention of Russia - and Iran and Hezbollah.

Given its failure to condemn Russian imperialism in Syria, StWC's sudden conversion to oppose Russian imperialism in Ukraine smacks of opportunism and reeks of hypocrisy.

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