

Consistent Anti-Imperialism

Monday 13 November 2023, by [Against the Current](#) (Date first published: 5 November 2023).

[Solidarity](#)

Socialists, and revolutionary Marxists especially, support oppressed peoples' and nations' struggles for liberation and self-determination. It's important from the outset to clarify that our support is based on the fundamental democratic legitimacy of these struggles in their own right, and on the broader liberating possibilities that they may open up. Our support is not dependent on which imperialist power or "camp" is the specific oppressor.

It's a basic principle of anti-imperialist politics that "our main enemy is at home," meaning in our case of course United States imperialism and its allies, with all the monstrous crimes against humanity perpetrated by U.S. policies, in our name. That has never meant seeing "the other side," e.g. today's powers of China or Russia as the United States' main imperial rivals, as "progressive" in any sense or viewing their crimes as a lesser evil or simply a response to U.S. "provocation."

It should be unnecessary to repeat this basic principle. The need to do so is symptomatic of the regrettable condition of much of the left. Since Barack Obama replaced George W. Bush, the biggest problem in the broad left has been the tacit or overt support of many liberals and social-democrats for the imperialist policies championed by the Democratic Party. This continues even as parts of the Democrats' voter base, particularly among young people, are increasingly angered by U.S. support for Israel's brutal war against the Palestinian people.

Further left an inverted problem has arisen — tacit or overt support for the actions of Russian imperialism, in the name of opposition to U.S. imperialism. We began to observe this problem acutely in the tragic course of the Syrian people's uprising, when parts of the U.S. left covered up for the Assad regime's poison gas and terror bombing of the population and the pivotal role of Russia and Iran in keeping that regime in power.

The crisis for the anti-imperialist left has exploded in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, unleashing a war that continues with no short-term end in sight. This is an openly annexationist invasion with a genocidal trajectory, which the Ukrainian people are resisting for the survival of their nation. Some elements on the left — although small — openly side with Russia on the absurd pretext that Ukraine is "fascist" or "provoked" the war (the element of truth here is that Ukraine "provoked" the conflict by refusing to join Vladimir Putin's "Novorossiia" project). Such "campist" leftists increasingly converge with (much larger) far-right forces in opposing support for Ukraine's war of national defense.

A larger portion of the peace movement, horrified by the destruction, loss of life, ecocidal damage and the dire consequences for Global South food supplies — even a supposed imminent danger of escalation to nuclear war — oppose military aid to Ukraine in the name of calling for "immediate cease-fire and negotiations" to end the war. In this "peace" appeal, the desires of the Ukrainian people count for little or nothing. Their struggle is dismissed as a "proxy war" waged by the United States and NATO.

Still others on the left do understand the imperialist character of Russia's invasion, and support Ukraine's right to defend itself, but oppose actual western military aid — on the grounds that it makes the war an “inter-imperialist conflict,” even though U.S./NATO powers and Russia are carefully avoiding direct confrontation. This reduces Ukraine's right of self-defense to an other-worldly abstraction. (Within the U.S. left we're referring here, for example, to the Reform and Revolution DSA caucus.)

As consistent rather than selective anti-imperialists, we fully understand that U.S./NATO military aid to Ukraine is based on the interests of the western powers, not on supporting “democracy against authoritarianism” or other pretenses. The crimes of U.S. imperialism, the dominant global power — in Latin America, in full support of Israel's war on the Palestinian people and complicity with the most brutal Middle Eastern dictatorships like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and so much more — continue unabated. None of this negates Ukraine's right to receive military aid from anywhere it can.

As the war's horrific costs and catastrophic global effects become worse by the week, and its length and outcome more uncertain, the debates within the left and peace movements will become more intense.

Solidarity supports the Ukraine Solidarity Network (U.S.) in building support for Ukraine's legitimate war against Russia's invasion; in demanding both the immediate withdrawal of Russian occupation forces and the cancellation of Ukraine's crippling and unpayable foreign debt; and most important, supporting and magnifying the voices of progressive and left Ukrainian forces in resisting their own government's anti-labor and neoliberal policies while actively participating in the war effort. These solidarity efforts will remain necessary after the war ends. Building solidarity with the Ukrainian Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement) is particularly vital.

Nothing can better illustrate the hypocritical double standards of U.S. imperialism than its continued funding and diplomatic support of the Israeli state's ethnic-cleansing and annexationist assaults on the population of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and, increasingly, within Israel's borders as well. The State Department's feeble bleats of “disapproval” of the most visible Israeli settler violence, as well as the deliberate sniper murder of Palestinian-American reporter Shireen Abu Akleh, only serve to cover up daily abuses and atrocities that aren't caught on camera.

That's why it's all the more important for us now, as part of the pro-Palestine solidarity movement, to support the BDS campaign; to oppose all U.S. military aid to Israel; to condemn and resist the attempts to criminalize as “antisemitic” Palestinian voices speaking out on Israeli settler colonialism; and to support all progressive initiatives in Congress around Israel's incarceration of Palestinian children and its use of U.S.-supplied weapons in committing violations of humanitarian and international law.

The hypocrisy of imperialism and colonialism may have been an important new discovery when it was first said, a couple centuries ago, that the British empire had “no permanent friends, only permanent interests.” That is as true now as it ever was, and it's no more an excuse for opposing Ukrainian self-determination today than it was for dismissing any other oppressed nation's resistance to colonial subjugation — whether by Britain, France or other European powers historically, the present U.S. “superpower,” or any aspiring imperial rival now.

We need to develop a much deeper understanding of very real and growing new imperialist rivalries, especially between the United States and China, both in the military buildup in the Asia-Pacific region and the neo-imperial scrambles for Africa and Latin America. We also need to recognize, among other factors, the critical importance of Indigenous peoples' resistance to colonialism and extractivist governments, and the deepening menace of climate change and environmental collapse

to the survival of vulnerable populations and of human civilization itself.

Our analysis must seek to be both global and, at the same time, specific and concrete in regard to specific struggles whether in Ukraine, or Palestine, or anywhere else including in our own society.

Against the Current

[Click here](#) to subscribe to *ESSF* newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

Against the Current

<https://againstthecurrent.org/atc227/consistent-anti-imperialism/>