

Understanding the Conflict in the Ukraine:

Imperialist Rivals Out for Blood

“...the only conceivable basis under capitalism for the division of spheres of influence, interests, colonies, etc., is a calculation of the *strength* of those participating, their general economic, financial, military strength, etc. And the strength of these participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for the *even* development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries is impossible under capitalism... Therefore, in the realities of the capitalist system, and not in the banal philistine fantasies of English parsons, or of the German ‘Marxist’, Kautsky, ‘inter-imperialist’ or ‘ultra-imperialist’ alliances, no matter what form they may assume, whether of one imperialist coalition against another, or of a general alliance embracing *all* the imperialist powers, are *inevitably nothing* more than a ‘truce’ in periods between wars. Peaceful alliances prepare the ground for wars, and in their turn grow out of wars; the one conditions the other, producing alternating forms of peaceful and non-peaceful struggle on *one and the same* basis of imperialist connections and relations within world economics and world politics.”

Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Chapter IX, “Critique of Imperialism”)

Since it declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Ukraine has been a focus of intense big power rivalry in Eastern Europe. On the one hand the US-imperialists have sought to strip the Ukraine (and the other former Soviet republics) from the Russian sphere of influence in order to geo-politically constrain – and even to an extent, isolate – Russia and prevent its re-emergence as a major world power for the foreseeable future. While *not* sharing the US’s view that Russia is a strategic rival, the major West European continental powers – in particular Germany and France – *have* shared the goal of limiting the potential power of a re-emergent Russia in order to ensure a balance of power on the European continent (and globally) that is more favorable to their interests and offers them a maximum of influence and maneuvering room vis a vis their rivals.

On the other hand, following the period of decline in the 1990’s and fueled by an energy-based economic recovery the Russian imperialists have sought to re-establish as much of their former power and corresponding sphere of influence (especially in Europe and Central Asia, but in other regions as well) as possible¹. They have taken a number of initiatives in an attempt to re-group the former Soviet republics under Russian leadership and influence. The Ukraine plays a central role in these efforts.

At its heart, the current struggle over dominance in the Ukraine is a geo-political and geo-strategic battle over the division and balance of imperialist power in Europe and – ultimately – in the world. This is the essential element that needs to be analyzed and understood.

All of this is taking place in the context of, and is conditioned by, major shifts in the relative strength of the contending powers. As Lenin pointed out above: “...the strength of these participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for the *even* development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries is impossible under capitalism.”

The world is transitioning from what has been described as a “unipolar world”, one in which the US was not only the strongest single imperialist power, but – in the wake of the collapse of the social-imperialist Soviet Union and its bloc – could, in many respects (but never unconditionally), dictate to the other major powers on questions in which it considered its vital interests to be at stake; to a “multipolar world”, one in which the US clearly remains the single most powerful imperialist country, but in which its major rivals – especially China and Russia, but also Germany – have gained relative power in relation to the US. As has been demonstrated in Europe (in particular in Georgia and most recently in the Ukraine) and in the

Middle East (in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan) as well as in East Asia (Korea and the South China Sea), the US cannot – in most cases and short of all-out war – unilaterally dictate the outcome of local and regional conflicts and arbitrarily impose its will without taking into consideration the interests and actions of its principle rivals.

This has led to a very complex and contradictory multi-layered situation in which the competing powers simultaneously contend and collude, alliances shift and the kind of more clearly defined imperialist blocs – such as those that existed during the Cold War period – are not currently a major defining characteristic.² Added to this is the fact that imperialist globalization has drawn the entire world and all the major powers even more tightly together in the worldwide process of capital accumulation.

International economic interdependence has never been greater, but this has not, and cannot, lead to an abolition of the antagonistic contradictions that exist between competing capitals—and most especially – between competing national capital formations and the state structures that represent them. So long as the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist/imperialist epoch remains unresolved – the contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation – and along with it all the other contradictions it gives rise to, as long as commodity production and exploitative class society dominate the world and human society, these contradictions will continually give rise to antagonistic imperialist competition.

The result is that today the imperialist world system is highly unstable, fraught with insurmountable internal contradictions whose potential for explosive crisis and conflict has increased enormously. The speed with which the destructive force of the economic crisis of 2008-9 spread around the world is a concrete example of this. In terms of material conditions for revolutionary struggle: on the one hand, it has meant continued and intensified suffering for the masses of people around the world; on the other hand, the repeated outbreak of more profound crisis has and will strengthen both the need for, as well as the possibility of, revolutionary transformation.

A Point of Clarification

There has been a great effort to characterize the battle over the Ukraine as one between the Ukraine “joining Europe” or “falling back” under the domination of Russia and “leaving Europe”. This positing of the question is a construct. Russia, while neither a member of the EU nor NATO, is nevertheless itself a major European power. Its western region, the place where most of Russia’s major cities and industrial centers are located, is not only geographically a part of Europe, but economically, politically, strategically and militarily Russia is a major factor on the European continent.³ In terms of size and population, it is the largest country in Europe by far. Economically, it has one of the continent’s largest economies (the second largest after Germany based on PPPⁱ valuations) and supplies the rest of Europe with over 30% of its energy needs. In regard to military strength, Russia is the most powerful country in Europe by a wide margin. It is impossible to talk about the balance of power in Europe without Russia being a key component in such calculations: and this has been true for more than 300 years.⁴

The Strategic Aims of US-Imperialism vis a vis Russia and the Ukraine

As mentioned above, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and its block, the US-ruling class has sought to somehow cement a hegemonic position in the imperialist world order for decades to come. This was the overall goal of what can now be described as the failed offensive launched by the Bush regime following the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.⁵ Although the immediate aim of that particular offensive was to

ⁱ PPP is purchasing power parity and for purposes of comparison tries to take into account the actual cost of defined market basket of goods in countries being compared.

re-organize the so-called Greater Middle East more firmly under US-control, this was seen as a major step in obtaining the overall strategic goal of solidifying world hegemony for US-imperialism.

The analysis provided in 1997 by Zbigniew Brzezinski – an authoritative strategist for US-imperialism – in his book *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* puts this in more concrete global terms:

“...the scope and pervasiveness of American global power today are unique. Not only does the United States control all of the world's oceans and seas, but it has developed an assertive military capability for amphibious shore control that enables it to project its power inland in politically significant ways. Its military legions are firmly perched on the western and eastern extremities of Eurasia, and they also control the Persian Gulf. American vassals and tributaries, some yearning to be embraced by even more formal ties to Washington, dot the entire Eurasian continent...”

In brief, America stands supreme in the four decisive domains of global power, militarily, it has an unmatched global reach; economically, it remains the main locomotive of global growth, even if challenged in some aspects by Japan and Germany (neither of which enjoys the other attributes of global might); technologically, it retains the overall lead in the cutting-edge areas of innovation; and culturally, despite some crassness, it enjoys an appeal that is unrivaled, especially among the world's youth—all of which gives the United States a political clout that no other state comes close to matching. It is the combination of all four that makes America the only comprehensive global superpower [sic].”

Obviously things have changed since then, especially in the sphere of economics, but this makes the standpoint of the US-ruling class very clear. Brzezinski goes on to explain:

“For America, *the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia*. For half a millennium, world affairs were dominated by Eurasian powers and peoples who fought with one another for regional domination and reached out for global power. Now a non-Eurasian power is preeminent in Eurasia—and America's global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained...”

In that context, how America ‘manages’ Eurasia is critical. Eurasia is the globe's largest continent and is geopolitically axial. A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions. A mere glance at the map also suggests that control over Eurasia would almost automatically entail Africa's subordination, rendering the Western Hemisphere and Oceania geopolitically peripheral to the world's central continent. About 75 percent of the world's people live in Eurasia, and most of the world's physical wealth is there as well, both in its enterprises and underneath its soil. Eurasia accounts for about 60 percent of the world's GNP and about three-fourths of the world's known energy resources.” (emphasis added)

And this, according to Brzezinski, is why the Ukraine plays a potentially key role in – as the imperialists call it – “the Great Game”:

“Ukraine, a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard, is a geopolitical pivot because its very existence as an independent country helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. Russia without Ukraine can still strive for imperial status, but it would then become a predominantly Asian imperial state, more likely to be drawn into debilitating conflicts with aroused Central Asians, who would then be resentful of the loss of their recent independence and would be supported by their fellow Islamic states to the south. China would also be likely to oppose any restoration of Russian domination over Central Asia, given its increasing interest in the newly independent states there. However, *if Moscow regains control over Ukraine, with its 52 million people and major resources as well as its access to the Black Sea, Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia*. Ukraine's loss of independence would have immediate consequences for Central Europe, transforming Poland into the geopolitical pivot on the eastern frontier of a united Europe.” (emphasis added)

This is the geo-political and geo-strategic view that is driving US policy and actions in regards to the Ukraine.⁶ This is why, as Victoria Nuland (US Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs) stated at a conference in Washington on December 13, 2013 that the US had “invested over \$5 billion” to build up pro-US and anti-Russian forces within the Ukraine (see, US Department of State, *Remarks at the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation Conference*). And this is why, as we will explain in more depth below, that when push came to shove at the beginning of 2014, and Russia was about to make decisive gains in the battle over Ukraine, that the US organized a coup to topple the Yanukovych regime in February 2014 and unleashed the conflict that has followed.

The Role of the EU and the European Powers

It is very important to understand what the points of unity and disunity there are between the US and major European powers and among the European powers themselves. That is to say, to what extent their interests (and policy preferences) coincide and how they conflict. The reader should think back to the run-up to the US-led invasion of Iraq when the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Russia held a joint news conference in Paris at which they declared that they would “not allow” passage of a UN resolution authorising war against Iraq.” (*Guardian*, March 5, 2003) The US responded by holding its own summit and press conference on the Azores on March 16, 2003 at which George Bush together with British prime minister Tony Blair, Spanish prime minister Jose Maria Aznar and Portugal's prime minister Jose Durao Barroso declared they were united in their determination to invade Iraq. The supposed “unity” of the NATO member nations was openly shattered and the dream of a joint EU foreign and defense policy lay in tatters. Why?

The basic reason lies in the fact that although the EU has achieved integration on a number of levels – including establishing a joint market, a number of important joint institutions as well as a joint currency and central bank among a number of its members – the fundamental reality remains that the European states still represent discrete national capital formations which are distinct centers of capital accumulation, have differing relative strengths and structures and, while cooperating on an unprecedented level, are nevertheless in competition with one another. As Lenin stated, all imperialist undertakings are a “calculation of the strength of those participating”.

Raymond Lotta spoke to this aspect of imperialist relations when he wrote:

“The internationalization of capital is a complex phenomenon. Imperialist capital has a global reach--but it remains rooted in national markets (U.S., Japan, Germany, etc.). The ‘home market’ is the ‘strategic base of operations’ for imperialist capital. This is where the largest share of output is produced, where research and development is concentrated, where control and ownership are centered. And to carry out global investment and expansion, transnational capitals cannot do without the economic-political-military support and protection of their national imperialist states. This contradiction--between capital which is highly internationalized but which has a national foundation--gives rise to rivalry, to conflict, and to war between the imperialist powers.” (Lotta, *Imperialist Globalization and the Fight for a Different Future*, *Revolutionary Worker* #933, November 23, 1997)

Times and situations – the “calculation of the strength of those participating” – change and in present circumstances the Western imperialists have much greater unity with each other vis a vis Russia and the Ukraine than at the time of the Iraq war in 2003. In those circumstances Russia, together with France and Germany, opposed the US because they saw the US-led offensive as being aimed at cementing US world hegemony – something they did not accept and, given the “calculation of strength” at the time – did not feel compelled to accept. In regards to the Ukraine and Russia there is relative unity among the major Western European powers (especially France and Germany) and between them and the US that Russia

should be prevented from becoming the dominant power in Europe and the leading imperialist power in Eurasia.

However, as stated above, the Western European continental powers – and especially Germany and France – do not share, and in fact they oppose, the US aim of it solidifying itself as a kind of world hegemon. They are in favor of a multipolar world, *in opposition* to the US's goal of a unipolar one⁷. In order to prevent the US's from attaining its aim of world domination and given their geo-political and geo-strategic position in Europe, they do not share the US's view that Russia is a strategic rival, but rather view Russia as a strategic partner: albeit, one that must be held to within certain limits. This can at times – as the current situation shows – be a very difficult fence to straddle.

In 2009, the German foreign policy expert Gernot Erler summed up Germany's view toward Russia as follows:

“If one adds up all the joint efforts in the realm of economics, society, science and culture, then based alone on the scope of these activities it is possible to justify the use of the term ‘strategic partnership’ to define the sum of German-Russian cooperation.” (Erler, *Mission Weltfrieden: Deutschlands neue Rolle in der Weltpolitik*, pg. 135, our translation)

France, for the most part, shares Germany's position on this question. The countries between Germany and Russia, most especially Poland and the Baltic countries have a very different geo-strategic position and fear being eaten up by any kind of close alignment between Russia and Germany. For that reason, they look to the US to provide them with strategic security guarantees and are extremely wary of any kind of deep-going Russian-German rapprochement. This explains their words and actions in relation to the Ukraine crisis – as well as more generally.

In questions of war and peace, the UK is generally a loyal ally (follower) of the US, even if doing so means acting contrary to its short-term, or at times medium-term, interests. This is because the UK is currently strategically dependent on US aid and support in order to be able to maintain its overall position in Europe and the world. With regard to the Ukraine and Russia, Italy and Spain are much more in line with the German/French position than opposed to it.

When the US talks about being in favor of “European unity”, it means a united Europe under US leadership and in line with US strategic interests. A Europe united in opposition to US aims is something that the US is constantly working to prevent and/or undermine if it does come into being. For that reason, and depending on the circumstances, the US will work to divide the major European powers and, based on their differing interests and strengths, play them off against one another when this serves US goals. This dynamic, as already mentioned, came very much into the open during the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. And as we will see, this dynamic has very much been in play in relation to the Ukraine.

Russia's Standpoint and Role

Russia is a major imperialist power – in some respects the most powerful in Europe – which spans the Eurasian land mass like no other country, putting it in a position to exercise influence across two continents and in the numerous countries with which it shares a common border. As the core country of the former social-imperialist Soviet Union (social-imperialist: socialist in words, imperialist in fact) and the leader of its own imperialist bloc at that time, it is very much accustomed to having a major role in world affairs. Although economically weakened by the collapse of the Soviet Union and its bloc, it nevertheless maintains a military potential second only to that of the US. And it is carrying out a seemingly successful modernization program for both its nuclear and conventional forces.

Based on its tremendous energy resources, Russia has been able to carry through a rather robust economic recovery which has provided the material basis for its resurgent military strength as well as its increased role around the world. It is determined to do all it can to reestablish its influence over as much of its former empire as possible, and especially what it calls its “near abroad” – the former Soviet republics, of which the Ukraine is the most important (central to these efforts is the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union established in 2014 – and which Russia has been trying to get the Ukraine to join). As cited above, this is something which the US is working very hard to prevent and has a commonality of interests with the Western European imperialists around. Beyond that, and given its renewed strength, Russia is determined *not* to accept a unipolar imperialist world order dominated by US-imperialism: a goal that the most important Western European imperialists (as well as China for that matter) currently share.⁸

In particular, in a speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin shocked many of those in attendance when he forcefully spoke out against US efforts to cement world hegemony and made clear that Russia was prepared to actively oppose this, as well as to stand up to US and Western efforts to limit its sphere of influence in its “near abroad”.

Putin asked, “...what is a unipolar world?” And then answered this question as follows: “However one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely one centre of authority, one centre of force, one centre of decision-making... I consider that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world.”

And to make explicitly clear what he was referring to he added, “We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law. And independent legal norms are, as a matter of fact, coming increasingly closer to one state's legal system. One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this?”

This type of public dressing down and challenge was something that the US had not seen since the days of the Cold War. But Putin was not finished. He then went on to cite the changes in the “calculation of the strength of those participating” and asserted:

“I am convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security.

And we must proceed by searching for a reasonable balance between the interests of all participants in the international dialogue. Especially since the international landscape is so varied and changes so quickly - changes in light of the dynamic development in a whole number of countries and regions...”

Finally, Putin addressed the issue of NATO expansion:

“It turns out that NATO has put its frontline forces on our borders, and we continue to strictly fulfill the treaty obligations and do not react to these actions at all... I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? ...I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr Woerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: ‘the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee’. Where are these guarantees?”

In essence, Putin was making clear that Russia would not accept US world hegemony and it was no longer forced to passively accept the actions aimed at limiting the reassertion of its power and influence

in its “near abroad”. He was opposing not only NATO expansion, but also the so-called “colored revolutions” in the Ukraine and Georgia which were essentially US-sponsored initiatives which aimed at mobilizing a social base for those sections of the ruling classes in those countries who saw their interests as best served by moving into the orbit of the US and Western European imperialists. In the case of Georgia, this took the form of what was essentially a pro-US coup.

Perhaps the most immediate and open expression of Russian determination in this regard, was the Russian response when “[o]n the night of August 7/8 [2008] Georgian forces initiated a massive artillery barrage aimed at Tskhinvali the capital of South Ossetia. Georgian forces backed up by tanks and planes stormed into the province and attempted to occupy the city. In doing so they, according to Russian sources, attacked a base of the Russian peace-keeping forces killing around a dozen soldiers and wounding many more... The Russians struck back quickly and decisively. The stunned Georgian forces seemed to have fallen into panic and fled southward toward Tbilisi leaving huge quantities of arms and ammunition behind (according to Russian sources, including at least 65 tanks).” (*The War in the Caucasus and the Strategic World Situation*) The outcome of that encounter is well known. The conflict in Georgia became a so-called “frozen conflict”, i.e. one with no final resolution: South Ossetia remains an separate enclave dependent on Russia; Russian troops remain in South Ossetia as OSCE “peacekeepers”; Georgia has not (and for the foreseeable future, will not) become a member of NATO and it has so far at least, not joined the EU either.

Similarly, in 2011, and reaching beyond its “near abroad”, Russia again asserted itself to thwart the efforts of the US and other imperialist powers. At that time the US and other Western countries announced that the Assad regime was no longer the legitimate government in Syria and began supporting various armed groups (including Islamic fundamentalists) against him. From Washington to Berlin they predicted that he would be gone from power in a matter of “days” or “weeks”. Those predictions turned out to be wrong mainly because Russia, along with Iran, decided to support their long-time ally: diplomatically, politically, economically and militarily. The resulting proxy war has led to the destruction of Syria (with tens of thousands killed and millions displaced) and the rise of ISIL, but the Assad regime remains in power in Damascus and the northeastern region of the country. Russia was once again demonstrating to the world the limits of US power. In a truly unipolar world, this would not have happened.

Those who doubted Russia’s resolve and ability to defend its imperialist interests should have taken note.

The Ukraine: A Fragile Creation

It is important to note, that in all of modern history, and aside from a brief period following the Bolshevik insurrection in 1917, there had never been an independent country called “Ukraine” until it declared its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991. The largest portion of what is today the Ukraine was actually a part of Russia (or, following the revolution in 1917, a Soviet Republic) for over 300 years (as a comparison: the USA declared its independence from Great Britain 239 years ago; modern Germany was founded in 1871, 144 years ago). Both historically and culturally the largest portion of what is today the Ukraine has deep bonds with Russia. Estimates usually put the percentage of the population which is ethnically Russian at between 17% and 20%. The portion of the population which has Russian as its native language (mother tongue) is often put at around 25% (in the last official census in 2001 the figure was almost 30%). Economically, the Ukrainian economy is also closely linked to Russia. Up until the outbreak of fighting, Russia was the Ukraine’s chief single trading partner (although in the last few years total trade with the EU has grown to exceed trade with Russia) and its main supplier of energy.⁹ For certain major industries, such as aerospace and armaments, the vast majority of all exports go (or went) to

Russia. Finally, the territory of the Ukraine acts as a buffer zone to any enemy advancing from the West providing European Russia with substantial strategic depth.¹⁰

At the end of 1991, in the midst of a deep economic and political crisis, the Soviet Union collapsed. An important feature of this process was the efforts of important sections of the capitalist class in the various republics that made up the Soviet Union to seize the opportunity in which the central state power was severely weakened to break away from the Soviet Union and establish themselves as the ruling class in the separate republics. This was part of an overall more complex process in which Yeltsin, at the time president of Russia, forced out Gorbachev (who at the time was the leader of the Soviet Union) as the overall head of state. Gorbachev was trying to hold the Soviet Union together, and Yeltsin used his support for the various republics breaking away as a lever to depose Gorbachev.

The core of the ruling class that gained power in the Ukraine is characterized by oligarch monopoly capitalists, people who became overnight billionaires by gaining control of previously state owned assets at bargain basement prices. They often sponsor their own political parties, occupying high offices themselves, and turning the state into a kind of self-service feeding trough where they continue to gorge themselves at the expense of the masses. Since becoming independent Ukraine has been ruled over by a series of some of the most openly corrupt heads of government and state in modern European history (perhaps second only to Berlusconi himself).

The combination of the collapse of the Soviet model state capitalist economy, the introduction of “free market” principles, crony capitalism on a massive scale and the series of shock treatments (ie. cuts in wages, pensions and public services) demanded by the IMF and other Western creditors has resulted in a disaster for the masses of people in the Ukraine.

As one World Bank publication described it in 1999:

“[The]...Ukraine endured one of the world's worst depressions in modern history. Even among the struggling countries of the former Soviet Union, Ukraine stands out as having one of the longest and deepest periods of economic decline -- one lasting for nearly nine years and with a contraction in GDP of more than 60 percent.

The effect of this economic downturn on the people has been severe. Most Ukrainians live on less than half the income of a few years ago. At least 30 percent -- and perhaps up to 75 percent -- of families now live below the poverty line. Sickness from preventable causes is rising, death rates are climbing, life expectancy is falling, and the population is shrinking.” (Nanivska, “What Went Wrong with Foreign Advice in Ukraine?”, *Transition*, August 1999.)ⁱⁱ

The existence of weak and dysfunctional state apparatus has been due mainly to the lack of a united solid core within the ruling class. The capitalist forces which grabbed for power and riches in the early 1990's, faced a number of key obstacles in establishing a unified state. First of all, and most importantly, there were (and are) deep divisions in their ranks based on their competing material interests. One section is economically (and politically) more closely linked to Russia (and the former Soviet economy). A competing section sees its interests tied to Western capital and markets. And especially given the geo-strategic importance of the Ukraine as discussed above, both the Western and Russian imperialists have been extremely active in supporting those bourgeois forces in the Ukraine which are linked to their respective (and competing) strategic goals.

ⁱⁱ Between 1991 and 2014 the population fell 17%, from 52 million to an estimated 43 million, with over 3 million Ukrainian citizens working in Russia. In the modern era in Europe, such a drop is unprecedented absent an all-out war.

This has also resulted in two competing national narratives. The most fervent pro-western forces promote an ultra-nationalist concept of the Ukraine: a kind of “racially pure” Ukraine for the Ukrainians approach with other nationalities and ethnic groups having no place in society. Thus, for example, they not only demand that Ukrainian be the only official language, both at the national as well as the regional level (even though there are important regions of the Ukraine where Russian is the majority language), but they openly talk of purging the country of national and ethnic minorities. This narrative includes embracing as “national heroes” not only those forces who fought against the Bolshevik revolution, but those who united with the German invaders (i.e. the Nazis) during WWII (including those who swore allegiance to Hitler and carried out massacres of communists, Jews and Poles). These are the forces being promoted by the West as “fighters for Western democracy” and are generally based in the western part of the country with the city of Lviv being an important center of their activities.

Recently the Ukrainian parliament passed a package of new laws making it a crime to display communist symbols or to publicly criticize reactionary and fascist historical figures and organizations like Bandera or the OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists).¹¹

The current Ukrainian prime minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk (or as US Assistant Secretary of State Nuland affectionately calls him “Yats”), the person who the US selected to replace the elected Ukrainian president Yanukovich through a coup in Feb. 2014, is a leading proponent of this approach. Just how openly reactionary the political discourse within the Ukraine today actually is, can be seen in the remarks that he made about WWII during an interview with the semi-official German television station ARD on Jan. 7, 2015:

“We can all remember very well the Soviet invasion of the Ukraine and Germany. This kind of thing must be avoided and no one has the right to re-write the outcome of the Second World War. And that is what the Russian president Mr. Putin is attempting.” (*Freitag*, 11.1.2015, our translation)

With these comments, which essentially claim that the lesson of WWII is that the Soviet Union invaded Ukraine and Germany, “Yats” is openly taking the side of Nazi Germany in the war. These are the views which in the eyes of the US and other Western imperialists qualify him to be prime minister of the Ukraine.¹²

The rival national narrative and the one the more pro-Russian forces tend to propagate is a kind of multi-cultural Ukraine that looks more like the Ukraine of the later Soviet period. These forces promote a vision of “the unity of Slavic peoples” with, for example, language rights for minorities and close relations with Russia, and they uphold the Great Patriotic War and the defense of the Soviet Union against the German invasion and occupation. They consider those who collaborated with the Nazis to be national traitors.

The Guardian reported on how one bourgeois observer described the problem these so radically opposed views create when trying to forge some kind of unified national narrative and public opinion:

“Of course we need history to form a contemporary national identity,’ said Vasyl Rasevych, senior researcher at the Institute of Ukrainian Studies in Lviv and editor of the internet journal zaxid.net, in a recent interview. ‘But unfortunately Ukrainian history is so antagonistic and confrontational, it can’t perform a consolidating function. It doesn’t unite, it divides.’” (*Guardian*, 24.4.2015)

Given all this history and the current material reality, it is not hard to understand that there is a significant social basis within the Ukraine (especially in Southern and Eastern Ukraine) for maintaining close relations with Russia. And again in terms of material interests, an important section of the Ukrainian ruling class sees its interests as being more aligned with Russia than the US or the major Western

European powers. Finally, as stated above, Russia's relationship to Ukraine is a matter of the utmost geo-strategic importance to the Russian imperialist ruling class.

Imperialist Rivalry, Strategic Miscalculation, the Current Conflict and Possible Outcomes

The EU launched its Eastern Partnership program (EaP) in May of 2009. This was widely seen as an immediate response to the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute of Jan. 2008 and the war in Georgia in August 2008. *The Guardian* wrote the following description:

“The contest between the Kremlin and the west for influence in the volatile space between Russia and the European Union stepped up a gear yesterday when the EU launched a new effort to draw half a dozen countries away from Moscow's orbit... The attempt to ringfence Russia's clout in a region that Moscow views proprietorially as its ‘near abroad’ has been triggered by the destabilising events of the past nine months, notably Russia's invasion [sic] of Georgia last August and its gas war with Ukraine in January.” (*Guardian*, May 7 2009)

But, as we have explained, while these events might have been the direct trigger for this initiative, the broader geo-strategic struggle we outlined above was the underlying and fundamental motive. This initiative showed the level of unity that the major Western European powers had around limiting the Russian sphere of influence and Russia's potential for exerting power on the European continent. And it was in line with the strategic goals that the US-imperialists have formulated vis a vis Russia.

While a number of prominent EU figures have claimed that Russia never made any criticism of this initiative until late 2013, the opposite is true. In March 2009 the Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov was quoted as follows:

“‘What is the Eastern Partnership if not an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence?’ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov asked in March, according to the news Web site euobserver.com. ‘Is this promoting democracy, or is it blackmail?’” (Spiegel Online, 5.6.2009)

In relation to the Ukraine, the EU's EaP was essentially an “either/or” proposal: either the Ukraine would join the EU sphere of influence, or, it would join the Russian sphere, but it could not be part of both. Some EU officials and politicians in Europe claim this was not the case and that the actual terms of the Association Agreement between the EU and the Ukraine were not so strict. But this is just after the fact dissembling. “Either/or” correctly describes this agreement.

According to *Der Spiegel*, at the beginning of 2013:

“The Kremlin then proposed to Brussels that negotiations be conducted between the EU and the Eurasian Union directly,”(11.24.214) in order to work out a mutually acceptable modus operandi regarding the Ukraine, “[b]ut European Commission President José Manuel Barroso refused to meet with the leaders of the Eurasian Union, a bloc he considered to be an EU competitor... ‘One country cannot at the same time be a member of a customs union and be in a deep common freetrade area with the European Union,’ the commission president said on February 25. He said that Kiev had to decide which path it wanted to take. The message was clear: Kiev had to choose either Brussels or Moscow.”(ibid)

This is the policy that the EU followed all the way through 2013 and the coup in 2014. The Commission President, at that time Barroso, is not a head of state or government. He or she cannot operate independently of the will of the major EU powers. In other words, there can be no doubt that the major powers, and especially Germany, supported this approach at the time. In retrospect and in light of what has happened since the coup, the majority view within the German ruling class (and in France as well) is that this was a major miscalculation.

“The EU was wrong not to have analysed possible conflicts with Russia before offering the so-called Eastern Partnership to countries like Ukraine, Gernot Erler, Germany’s new chief of relations with Russia and the eastern neighbourhood told journalists in Berlin on Thursday (30 January).” (*EUobserver*, 31.1.2014)

And as we will explain below, this miscalculation (especially by Merkel and Steinmeier – the German foreign minister) has maneuvered Germany (and France) into a geo-political dilemma that they will have an extremely difficult time extracting themselves from.

As the EU pushed ahead with preparations to sign the Association Agreement with the Ukraine at the EU-EaP summit planned for November 2013 in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, Putin and Russia began to push back. In short, what the EU (and with it the IMF) demanded from the Ukraine in terms of what are called “structural reforms” in connection with the agreement would have pushed the Ukraine, which was already tottering on the brink of economic collapse and state bankruptcy, even further toward the edge.

Putin for his part made Yanukovich “an offer he couldn’t refuse”. Yanukovich should turn down the EU-Partnership Agreement and join the Russian sponsored Eurasian Economic Union and Russia would provide the Ukraine gas at prices 30% below what it was currently paying and an aid package totaling \$15 billion, with no strings (i.e. conditions) attached. If Yanukovich went ahead and signed with the EU, Russia would retaliate by raising gas prices and cutting off most economic exchange with the Ukraine, throwing its economy into an even deeper depression.

Yanukovich had tried to play the EU off against Russia in order to get the best deal for the Ukraine. His decision to accept Putin’s offer was, from the point of view of bourgeois *realpolitik* a very rational one and a major geo-political victory for Putin and Russia, or as *Der Spiegel* wrote:

“The EU wanted to usher in a more modern policy toward Eastern Europe through the proposed association agreement with Ukraine. Instead, in the wake of Kiev’s change of heart, it faces a diplomatic shambles.” (29.11.2013)

But it was a very short-lived victory. Yanukovich’s change of heart opened up a major split within the ruling class (and state structures) in the Ukraine and it provoked a counter-response by the Western imperialists and especially the US: the so-called Euromaidan movement. To counter Yanukovich and Putin, the Western imperialists, together with the sections of the Ukrainian ruling class aligned with them, mobilized the pro-Western forces that they had built up over the years to protest Yanukovich’s change of course and demand that the EU-Association Agreement be signed. On the night of November 21, 2013 the protests on the Maidan Square in Kiev began. This led to the occupation of the square, the blockading of government buildings and demands that Yanukovich resign.

Despite the portrayals in the Western press of these protests being carried out by peaceful, pluralistic western sounding liberals, as time went on the hard core of this movement was increasingly composed of ultra-nationalist and neo-fascist forces like the Right Sector. They were anything other than non-violent, in reality being organized into military style squads armed with knives, clubs, pistols and rifles.

Although all the Western imperialist governments repeatedly expressed support for this movement – and demanded that no police force be used against it – and a steady stream of Western political figures and government ministers even appeared at Maidan to encourage the protests (at times even sharing the stage with neo-fascists), this protest would have been declared illegal and disbursed by force in every Western country without exception.

The reason the occupation of Maidan could continue for so long and have such an effect was not because it was some kind of overwhelming expression of popular opinion, but because it had such international

imperialist support and it reflected the antagonistic rupture within the Ukrainian ruling class, state institutions and security forces. As time went on, Yanukovich could rely on fewer and fewer elements within the security forces (police and army) and his position became more tenuous.

At the same time, with the Ukraine on the brink of civil war and the growing danger of an armed intervention by Russia, the Western European imperialists (and especially Germany and France) seemed to have realized that they had better do something to calm the situation, before things got totally out of hand: they were not then, and are not today, prepared to go to war with Russia over the Ukraine. An EU-delegation rushed to Kiev to try to mediate a solution.

The result was the so-called “Agreement on Settlement of the Political Crisis in Ukraine” that was signed on 21.2.2014 by Yanukovich and the main opposition figures Vitaly Klitschko, Arseny Yatsenyuk and Oleg Tyagnibok. It was witnessed by the foreign Ministers of Germany and Poland, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Radosław Sikorski and by the head of the Department for Continental Europe of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France, Eric Fournier. The Russian representative, Vladimir Lukin, refused to sign. This “Agreement” was supposed to result in an end to the protests and occupations, a return to the constitution of 2004, early elections and the formation of a transitional unity government, still headed by Yanukovich.

But the US was having none of it. Even at the risk of armed conflict, the US saw an opportunity to push Yanukovich out the door – reversing the strategic reversal, so-to-speak – and it took that opportunity: or as the US State Department official Victoria Nuland was caught saying in a bugged phone conversation with the US ambassador to the Ukraine, “Fuck the EU”. With US support, if not at US direction, the forces opposed to Yanukovich (who no longer could rely on any significant section of the security forces) essentially staged a coup driving him out of Kiev and a day or two later, out of the Ukraine to Russia.¹³

The US along with the Western European countries, including those which had signed the compromise “Agreement”, immediately recognized the new government as the Western press hailed the coup as a “democratic revolution”.¹⁴ This move was a game changer and Putin drew the consequences. The West had changed the rules in the middle of the game. Putin was supposed to respect the outcome of elections in the former Soviet Republics, but when things took an unfavorable turn for them, the Western imperialists refused to do so and were allowed to openly destabilize and ultimately overthrow such a government through a blatant coup. Putin drew the necessary imperialist consequences and annexed the Crimea.¹⁵ This assured Russia the control over the strategically important port of Sevastopol, where its Black Sea fleet is based. And, it essentially means that for the foreseeable future the Ukraine cannot become a member of NATO.

A few months later pro-Russian forces began occupying government buildings in the Donbas and other regions of eastern Ukraine. Within a short period the confrontation with pro-government forces escalated into armed conflict. From the start Russia has made clear that it will provide enough support to these forces (political and material support along with Russian military forces) to prevent them from being defeated. On the other hand, the Ukrainian army seems to have basically collapsed and what is left does not generally take part in the actual fighting. Almost all of the pro-government forces engaged in combat operations were – although they had been formally legalized – actually private battalions sponsored by various oligarchs and taking orders from them and not Poroshenko and the central government. The hard core of these forces is made up of the ultra-nationalists and neo-fascists like the national-socialist Azov Regiment which has a fascist symbol in its insignia.¹⁶

Russia does not currently aim to openly occupy all or part of the Ukraine, nor is its best case scenario some kind of splinter republic in Eastern Ukraine that is essentially a Russian client state (though it could come to that). At this point, Moscow would like to see a compromise settlement that maintains the Ukraine as a whole (minus Crimea of course) with Eastern Ukraine becoming a kind of autonomous region and by which Russia's key interests are respected.

As the conflict threatened to escalate completely out of control – or perhaps lead to the collapse of the regime in Kiev and ensuing chaos – Merkel and Hollande engaged in frantic shuttle diplomacy that led to the Minsk ceasefire agreement on Feb. 11, 2015, or Minsk II as it is called. At the same time the US was threatening to begin arms shipments to Kiev regime, something Germany and France desperately want to prevent since it would almost inevitably result in a Russian counter-escalation. On Feb. 5, 2015 Merkel and Hollande arrived in Kiev to meet with Poroshenko and planned to meet Putin in Moscow the following day. It is important to note, that the US Secretary of State Kerry was in Kiev on the same day, but met *separately* with Poroshenko. And the US did *not* sign the Minsk II agreement. This is an expression of the differing agendas, i.e. imperialist interests at work.

Here the geo-strategic differences – and opposing interests – between especially Germany and France (together with Italy and Spain) on the one hand and the US on the other hand come to light. For Germany and France, the prospect of a protracted armed conflict in the Ukraine is a geo-strategic/geo-political nightmare.¹⁷ Instead of the Ukraine – and, even more importantly, Russia – being potential areas for profitable investment and the export of goods and an important part of a worldwide multipolar imperialist architecture preventing US world hegemony; the Ukraine is rapidly becoming a failed – and demolished – state and relations with Russia have suffered a disastrous set-back. That is why Merkel repeats at every opportunity that from Germany's perspective “there is no military solution” to the crisis in the Ukraine and “no alternative” to maintaining relations with Russia. This is also why Germany has resolutely opposed any arms being supplied to the present regime in Kiev and has repeatedly stated that it does not see the Ukraine becoming part of NATO (which is essentially a veto of that prospect, since unanimous consent among the member nations is required for any new member to join).

While the US currently has neither the means nor the intention of itself directly engaging in a military conflict with Russia over the Ukraine, it is more than willing to conduct a proxy war there: supplying money, arms, advisors, logistical and political support to pro-US forces. The US does not give a shit if the population in the Ukraine suffers immeasurably, if any hope of economic recovery in the Ukraine is destroyed for decades or, for that matter, if the economy of Russia is pushed into recession and even depression (which hasn't actually happened yet) and along with it, the continuing economic crisis in Europe as a whole is severely exacerbated. On the contrary, all this is, in the eyes of the US-imperialists, just the necessary price that (mainly others) have to pay in order for the US to achieve its strategic aims.

The current situation offers the following advantages for the US: 1. Russia has not succeeded in drawing the Ukraine back into its sphere of influence; 2. This crisis has provided the US with an opportunity to maneuver the main Western imperialists, and especially Germany and France, into a situation where they had to agree to economic sanctions against Russia (something which hurts them much more than it does the US); 3. The damage the sanctions are doing, and the other forms of political isolation of Russia that the US has achieved, is US-payback (and punishment) for Russia's actions in regard to Syria, Georgia, and Iran; 4. This situation has allowed the US to, for now, drive a major wedge between the Western European imperialists (again, especially Germany and France) and Russia. This strengthens the US's position in the world as a whole and, from the US perspective, overall improves its position in confronting the rising challenge that China poses to US hegemony in Asia.

On the other hand, as we talked about at the beginning of this article, this a highly volatile and contradictory situation and the US's gains could quickly turn into their opposite. First of all, Russia has made some gains as well: it has successfully annexed the Crimea (a very important strategic goal); it has established a pro-Russian enclave in Eastern Ukraine and prevented the Kiev regime from consolidating its hold on the country as a whole; to all its rivals internationally, it has demonstrated a very significant degree of imperialist resolve and, interestingly, despite all the Western predictions to the contrary (and to the surprise of almost all the "experts"), the sanctions did not force its economy into recession in 2014 and Russia thereby demonstrated a degree of resiliency that all of its rivals need to take into consideration in the "calculation of strength". In addition, Russia has forged closer economic ties to China and has taken important steps eliminate by 2020 the Ukraine as a transit corridor for Russian energy deliveries to the rest of Europe (in particular, by re-routing of South Stream pipeline through Turkey and Greece). The re-configuration of South Stream (if it is successful) will not only increase Russia's leverage over the Ukraine, but will also serve to increase Russian influence in Southern Europe and the EU as a whole.

Finally, if the US pushes things to far, there is the danger of an open break emerging between it and Germany and France. While the later are trying hard to avoid such a development, it could happen. Germany wants to consolidate a leading role in Europe and play a bigger role on the world stage. For that reason it pushed the EaP program to the breaking point. And for that reason, it felt it could not back down and had to support the coup and the subsequent signing of the EU-Association agreement with the Ukraine without significant changes. But the German imperialists have clearly summed up that they made a serious miscalculation and they will seek to repair the damage this has done.

In sum, this whole situation is currently nothing more than a struggle between slave masters over the division of the slaves. At the same time it points to the further development of the fundamental contradiction of the imperialist world system and related heightening of the major contradictions it gives rise to. In short, a highly contradictory and increasingly unstable world situation has emerged; one that is full of danger, but also rife with opportunity. While on the one hand, the suffering of the masses is increasing, on the other hand the material basis for and possibility of revolutionary transformations is increasing.

For the later to become a reality, there must be a communist vanguard firmly based upon and capable of concretely applying the new synthesis of communism to change the world. Establishing such a vanguard – such a solid core – is presently a pressing task in every country on all continents. That is the prerequisite and overall decisive factor for advancing the communist world revolution in the turbulent and stormy period that lies ahead.

Revolutionary Communists (FRG), May 1, 2015

¹ It should be noted here that the Russian-imperialists seem, at least for now, to have come to terms with having lost the Baltic countries (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) which are now members of both the EU and NATO. However, the loss of these countries, whose combined population numbers only around 6.2 million people and whose combined size – around 175,000 sq. km. – is less than half the size of the US state of California, is not – in the overall sense – a major strategic loss for Russia.

² In 2009 we wrote: "NATO as a cohesive military alliance with a unified aim and agreed common enemy no longer exists. On one level this seems obvious since the common enemy – the Warsaw Treaty countries led by the Soviet Union – was officially dissolved in a meeting in Prague on July 1, 1991. Indeed, the Soviet Union itself has exited history's stage. Thus, over the last 15 years or so there has been a struggle within NATO about its role and future." (see; *The War in the Caucasus and the Strategic World Situation*)

³ The population of Russia is not evenly divided between its smaller western portion, which is part of Europe, and the larger eastern portion that is part of Asia. The European region of Russia contains about 77% of the country's population (110,000,000 people out of a circa 143,000,000) in an area comprising roughly 3,960,000 square kilometers. This territory makes up 38% of Europe as a whole. The eastern border of European Russia is marked by the Ural Mountains and in the South, by the border with Kazakhstan. This area includes Moscow and Saint Petersburg, the two largest cities in Russia.

⁴ As Günter Verheugen, the German politician and political operative for German-imperialism who was the EU Commissioner for Enlargement from 1999 to 2004 and EU Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry from 2004 to 2010, put it: "Pro-Russian and pro-European are not in contradiction, because Russia is part of Europe." (*Spiegel Online*, May, 19 2014)

⁵ See, for example, the "Statement of Principles" of the Project for a New American Century which was signed by, among others, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Jeb Bush.

⁶ It should be added here, that the Ukraine's role as a transport corridor for oil and gas from Russia and especially the Caspian Basin is also a very important specific strategic factor. In this role, the Ukraine is a vital potential choke-point for both Russian as well as Central Asian energy supplies. The US is very eager to have control over such a choke-point since that would provide it with important leverage vis a vis Russia *and* Western Europe. *The Guardian* reported the following US assessment of this:

"Professor R. Craig Nation, Director of Russian and Eurasian Studies at the US Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute, in a NATO publication: 'Ukraine is increasingly perceived to be critically situated in the emerging battle to dominate energy transport corridors linking the oil and natural gas reserves of the Caspian basin to European markets... Considerable competition has already emerged over the construction of pipelines. Whether Ukraine will provide alternative routes helping to diversify access, as the West would prefer, or 'find itself forced to play the role of a Russian subsidiary,' remains to be seen." *The Guardian* went on to quote a more recent US State Department report: "'Ukraine's strategic location between the main energy producers (Russia and the Caspian Sea area) and consumers in the Eurasian region, its large transit network, and its available underground gas storage capacities', make the country 'a potentially crucial player in European energy transit' - a position that will 'grow as Western European demands for Russian and Caspian gas and oil continue to increase.'" (*The Guardian*, March 6, 2014)

⁷ There is currently a major debate and controversy within the US-ruling class about whether the US should continue to pursue world domination (a unipolar world order under US-hegemony) or should modify its approach, and while seeking to remain the leading imperialist power, and allow more room for the other imperialists to pursue their interests, even if they are not completely aligned with US goals – or to a certain extent, opposed to those goals. This is often referred to as a more "realistic" and "multilateral" approach. This debate – and struggle – can at times be very sharp indeed and even threatens to create deep splits and chasms within the US-ruling class. In a speech at West Point in 2014 Obama stated: "Here's my bottom line: America must always lead on the world stage." (*Guardian*, 28.5.2014)

⁸ This can be complicated. For example, France is in basic agreement with Germany on this question. At the same time, especially as a result of the financial crisis that erupted in 2008/9 and which has still not been resolved in Europe, France has lost strength relative to Germany. For that reason it fears a shift in the balance of power in continental Europe that would essentially turn France in to a kind of junior partner to Germany. Thus, it will at times take actions which it sees as counter-acting the rise of German power, while at the same time uniting with Germany in other situations. The German-French axis in Europe, which has been at the core of the EU, EU stability and the ability of the EU to expand, is in flux and becoming less stable.

⁹ Here is how one study from 2008 described Russian/Ukraine trade relations:
"The structure of trade exchange between Ukraine and Russia is largely shaped by the USSR legacy. Ukraine's primary exports to Russia are machinery, in particular locomotives and rail cars as well as other vehicles, turbines, cranes and other electrically powered machinery, metal industry products, both ferrous and non-ferrous (iron and iron alloys, aluminium, copper, nickel, zinc and lead), and their products, notably pipes; agricultural products and foodstuffs, such as meat, dairy products, sugar, alcohol beverages, canned food; chemical products, notably ammonia and other nitric products; plastics, tyres and cleaning agents. Some branches of the Ukrainian industry are markedly dependent on their supply markets in Russia. This applies in particular to the machinery and transportation, wood processing and paper as well as agricultural and foodstuff industries. This is most acutely felt in the latter sector as Russia is the receiver of 99.9% of Ukraine-exported meat and its intermediates, 74.9% of milk

and milk products volume and 73.9% of alcohol and soft beverages volume. The dependence of some industries on exports to Russia is relatively lasting and primarily exists in the machinery and electrical machinery industries (48.2% of its exports went to Russia in 2005) and wood and paper industry (33%). The remaining branches of the Ukrainian economy (agriculture and food industry, chemical industry) have managed to find receivers from other markets. The permanence of trade links in some areas results from the fact that Ukrainian goods are not too popular in other markets (primarily the EU) owing to their poor quality as well as the presence of customs barriers that act as effective guardians for those markets.

The structure of Russian exports to Ukraine is relatively stable. It primarily comprises energy resources, in particular gas, oil and oil-based products as well as fuel for nuclear power plants. In 2005, they accounted for 56.8% of Russian exports to Ukraine. In addition, Russia sells to its Ukrainian neighbour's boilers, machinery and mechanical devices as well as means of transportation, in particular passenger cars as well as locomotives and rail cars, metal industry products, notably ferrous metals and their products, chemical products, in particular plastics, rubber and its products.

Ukraine's dependence on energy resources imported from Russia (in 2005, it represented 68.4% of total fuel imports) is one of the key problems in Ukraine-Russia relations, the significance of which reaches far beyond trade relations. Although not the specific subject of this paper, it is argued that a more detailed look at this issue here is entirely relevant. The economy of Ukraine is very energy-consuming. In addition, Ukraine imports a sizeable portion of its total energy resources requirement, mostly from Russia or from Central Asia through the Russian territory. In 2005, Ukraine's imports of natural gas totaled approx. 54 bn m³ (74% of the requirement) and of oil at 14.6 million tons (85%). Finally, Ukraine imports the Russian and Central Asian gas at prices that are well below the price that European countries pay, which makes the country even more dependent on Russia." (Andrzej Szeptycki, "Trade Relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine", Polish Institute of International Affairs, Jan. 2008)

¹⁰ As we wrote in 2009: "Beyond this, losing the Ukraine to NATO would mean that Russia's strategic depth – the amount of territory an invading force must cross to reach Moscow and the other major cities of the European part of Russia – would be greatly reduced. This strategic depth played a key role in the defeat of the invasions of Russia/the Soviet Union led by Napoleon in the 19th century and Hitler in the 20th. An entry by the Ukraine into NATO, as it is currently structured, would almost certainly result in a major international crisis, if not war." (*The War in the Caucasus and the Strategic World Situation*)

¹¹ See for example, Cohen, "Dear Ukraine: Please Don't Shoot Yourself in the Foot", *Foreign Policy*, 28.4.2015.

¹² Some might wonder how Jats can be so openly reactionary on German television. He surely has had extensive training and counseling from Western media experts who have certainly tried to make him understand that these types of comments are fine for domestic consumption, but should be avoided when speaking with the press in the West. Jats' problem is that these views are so imbedded in the mainstream bourgeois political discourse in the Ukraine toady, that it is hard from him to separate these things out in his thinking. He does not think he is saying anything unusual or potentially controversial.

¹³ The *New York Times* reported that on Friday, Feb. 21, the police guarding government buildings in Kiev were seen "laying down their shields and getting on buses" and withdrawing. (*NYT*, 23.1.2015) "With the presidential administration building and also his home unguarded from the afternoon of Friday, Feb. 21, Mr. Yanukovich judged that it was time for him, too, to leave Kiev..." (ibid)

¹⁴ Here we will not go into all the western hypocrisy regarding the coup. Yanukovich was the elected president of the Ukraine... in an election that the West had declared to be "an 'impressive display' of democracy". (*Guardian*, 8.2.2010) The fact that his regime was corrupt and authoritarian would, in the eyes of Western governments, not usually qualify him to be unconstitutionally overthrown. After all, if that were the criteria, wouldn't that mean that any Western government could be similarly brought down? Here the essence of bourgeois democracy reveals itself: bourgeois dictatorship and the rule by force of the minority over the majority, in the interests of the minority. To paraphrase Victoria Nuland here; "Fuck all that 'will-of-the-people' shit." To debate whether the coup was really a coup is almost ridiculous; or in the words of George Friedman the founder of Stratfor (a US security consulting firm with close ties to the CIA): "Russia calls the events that took place at the beginning of this year a coup d'etat organized by the United States. And it truly was the most blatant coup in history." (*Komersant*, Feb. 2015)

¹⁵ Again, there is no point in trying to refute all the Western imperialist bullshit about Putin violating the norms of international relations through these actions. Of course he did, but he did not do anything different from what the

Western imperialists are themselves constantly doing as in Kosovo, Iraq, Syria, etc., etc. At least Putin held a vote to “express the will of the people”. The Western imperialists claimed this referendum was “illegal”, but does anyone seriously doubt that at the time the majority of the population in the Crimea wanted to join Russia? Interestingly, while officially refusing to recognize this action, the Western imperialists have in fact, de facto, accepted this as a done deal.

¹⁶ These are the forces that are currently being trained at a base in Western Ukraine by a contingent of several hundred US Army soldiers. For more on this aspect, see for example, “ISA MUNAYEV’S WAR: THE FINAL DAYS OF A CHECHEN COMMANDER FIGHTING IN UKRAINE” at *The Intercept* (firstlook.org/theintercept).

¹⁷ In the period since the signing of Minsk II the NATO military commander, US general General Philip Breedlove was continually making statements claiming the Russia was not implementing the Minsk II agreement and that an pro-Russian offensive to take Mariopol would be launched any day. According to Der SPIEGEL the German government complained directly to NATO headquarters demanding that such statements stop and calling them “dangerous propaganda”. (*Spiegel*, 7.3.2015, our translation)