

One Year of War, M Rooted in Global Crisis o

Ukrainian members of the military fire an anti-aircraft weapon in the frontline city of Bakhmut, Ukraine, January 10, 2023.

● GLODAGH KILCOYNE/REUTERS



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One year on, the 'Ukraine war' – aka Russia's illegal aggression amid a strategy of US/NATO expansionism, over a state that voluntarily relinquished its weapons of mass destruction moving closer to the EU and NATO – shows few if any signs of abating. It has featured many crossed lines, incremental steps that render an all-out wider war or nuclear conflict more likely. The war is rooted in imperial power politics with three sets of elites reckless enough to risk total catastrophe. As ever, it is working people, not elites, who pay the price in bloodshed and the taxes to pay for war. Yet, the war's future probably lies more in the broad politics of power than it does on the military battlefields of Ukraine's steppes. This politics is global, embedded in states' policies in Global North and South, as well as in the hands of ordinary working people not just across Russia, Europe and the United States, but the world more broadly. In our hyper-globalised and interpenetrated world, a regional war has become a global conflict, shining a brilliant light on the changing contours of global politics and political economy. One of its main lessons, up to now, is that the West's perceived and actual relative decline vis-à-vis the rest of the world, in addition to its underlying domestic instabilities and disorders, are more visible than ever.^[1] Yet, to many 'liberal' Euro-American elites, there is a welcome ripple of muscular morality, unity of purpose, and concomitant resurgence of self-confidence. The Empire of Liberty is Back!^[2] But the "rest" are looking forward to seeing the back of it. Conversely, the confidence, status

and power of the Global South, including western partners and foes, is visibly and palpably enhanced. The world is witnessing the release and increasing assertiveness of multiple forces at the level of the West, the global North and South, and at the level of the broad mass of working peoples. The re-emergence of a demand for a new 'New International Economic Order' is symptomatic of the global disorder and crisis today.^[3] This is not quite multipolarity, nor neatly 'distributed hegemony', nor mass democracy. It is a turbulent transition, a systematic series of dynamic crises, one atop another, in practically every domain, simultaneously. It is not a 'polycrisis' as some liberals proclaim – featuring shocks external to the system as a whole^[4] It is an interregnum, an organic crisis, when the old is dying and the new is struggling to be born.^[5] As Farwa Sial argues, these are not a series of separate crises that are now converging and interacting, as it may appear, but sourced in the broader unipolar globalising system as a whole, and which has identifiable agents at its core.^[6] It signals a return to Antonio Gramsci as well as the revenge of dialectics. It signals great danger for working people.

Where's it all going?

There are simply too many inter-related moving parts to be able to predict where the conflict is headed. There are three sets of militaries and three sets of publics that are immediately impacted by the daily grind of attrition warfare, and its economic and financial effects. And there are elites around the globe and the masses of people who cannot live ordinary lives,

and are in motion against their own masters.

One year ago, Putin's Russia saw itself as a military behemoth that would roll over Ukraine. Was it not for this that NATO grew tall and spread its wings ever-eastward, far from the chilly waters of the North Atlantic? What were all those NATO defence expenditures for, especially at almost 20 times the size Russia's?^[7] The expensive deterrent failed to deter, despite spending so much on weapons of mass destruction and destitution. Yet deterrence as a doctrine – "to preserve peace, prepare for war" – marches blindly on. And the bills fall on the financially narrow shoulders of working people. Then we thought that Russia was being "cancelled", turned off – cut off from the world, sanctioned, closed down, blockaded, excluded, boycotted.^[8] The US, through a direct act of war, even destroyed Nord Stream pipelines, Russia's apparent lifelines. The West struck back with self-righteous fury. The hallowed 'Rules-Based Order' was under attack. Blond-haired and blue-eyed Europeans were being attacked and must be rescued. Solemn scholars – the secular priesthood of the Order of the Rules-Based faith – wrote eulogies. It was great while it lasted. February 24, 2022: A date which will live in infamy. RIP, but prepare for war.

Don't mention Iraq, 2003. Nor Libya, 2011. Or many others.^[9] That's 'whataboutism' or 'westsplaining'.^[10] Focus on the present. Live in the moment. History has just ended after all. Bow your heads, and listen to the masters. The masters of mendacity, manufacturers of consent,^[11] and militarism.^[12]

Americans in, Germans down, Russians out?

Lord Ismay, NATO's first secretary general, famously quipped that the purpose of NATO was to keep the "Americans in, Germans down, and Russians out".^[13] Two out of 3 aims remain. The second, i.e. the role of the Germans, has spluttered since the latter's rearmament and entry to NATO in the 1950s. But now it seems the Germans have been dragged up by their own bootstraps.

We have seen red lines being crossed as US and NATO missiles, artillery, tanks, ammunition flow into Ukraine to the tune of over \$100 billion. German tanks – last seen that far east in the Nazi era – are set to join the fray. Germany has tolerated in deferential silence and obedience US destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines, as shown by investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, originally, and loudly, blamed on Russia.^[14] Unsurprisingly, the megaphone media of the free world stay silent on this grave violation of the rule of law. Europeans are paying for the privilege of American muscularity – as US LNG replaces Russian and costs several times more. What's good for America is good for Germany and the EU.

Ukraine openly says that it's a de facto NATO member now. The US and NATO, hastily extricated from Afghanistan, with Saigon-like dignity, to concentrate on the defence of Taiwan or, rather, the containment of China, are now in it to the (Ukrainians') death in a proxy war in Europe. US forces encircle China while shooting down dangerous Chinese weather balloons and other UFOs. Always money available for military solutions.^[15] We are told to await the Russian

"spring offensive", and the effects of the next round of arms and weapons' system transfers to Kyiv, to be able to forecast the fate of the contending parties. Russia is preparing hundreds of thousands of newly-trained cannon fodder for the frontline. Putin, via vicious repression and nationalism, retains mass support for his war or, at least, for defeating Ukraine. No regime-change in sight so far for the autocrat that the West claims has no public support or legitimacy.

Yet, the real battlefield may well be political rather than military. There is a propaganda war raging for the hearts and minds of all publics, all of whom are paying the price of war. Just check your energy bills, the share price of Lockheed Martin, and the profits of Shell. In the end, which publics get exhausted first might be basis of peace moves. We have to wait and see. Thus far, the pain is largely focused on Ukrainians – 8 million people have fled their homes, many millions live in Russian-controlled territories, tens of thousands have paid the ultimate price for their oligarchs' delusions. Over a hundred thousand Russian troops – young, badly-equipped and badly-trained conscripts – have been killed in action. There is more death to come yet.

Great game, people's lives

That's because the Ukraine war is a symptom of the fundamental long-term struggle of great powers over the Eurasian landmass, including since 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet bloc and expansion of NATO into former Soviet territories; reckless expansion and security threat to Russia.^[16] Russia attacked and didn't win quick; Ukraine's resis-