

As Russia Stumbles in Ukraine, Confusion Is Unveiled

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There are many complicated aspects of what we are recognising as an ultra-anti-imperial logic, that twist quite quickly into pro-Putin propaganda, because after all as the ultra slogan has it, "my enemy's enemy is my friend"! As in everything in life, we have to separate wheat from chaff. So for those who don't like so-called "[Campist](#)" - or "Tankie" - reading material, do not continue reading.

But if you are still reading, consider the fascinating evolution of analysis that now suggests Putin is on the defensive, even after the recent Russian victory at the most awful battleground of the 21st century, Bakhmut - a small eastern Ukrainian city that a year ago hosted 80,000 residents, but now, instead, many tens of thousands of corpses of soldiers, about two thirds of whom are of apparently Russian origin. Thousands of the dead were prison convicts recruited to the battleground with Putin's promises of doing 6-month duty and then getting a pardon. Another 4000+ are civilians, say the Ukrainians.

Also what must be of utmost concern to Moscow is the Reuters report below - which is not yet truly confirmed as 100% accurate - that on Saturday,

"Ukrainian air defences shot down a Russian hypersonic missile for the first time during an attack on the capital, Kyiv... The Kinzhal, which means "dagger" in Russian, is one of six "next generation" weapons unveiled by President Vladimir Putin in 2018 when the Russian leader boasted that it cannot be shot down by any of the world's air defence systems."

No matter the significance of Patriot-versus-Kinzhal weaponry, what strikes me is how *confusion* reigns in the pro-Putin ultra-anti-imp 'left', what with the volume rapidly decreasing on one of the central talking points - i.e., that even in a 'proxy war' (their phrase) between Russia and NATO, the capacity of Moscow to mobilise vast numbers of occupying (or in their framing, 'liberating') troops will outweigh all the weaponry the West

provides Kyiv's army, leading to Russia's imminent consolidation of around 20% of the Ukrainian landgrab (I mean liberation).

But that stance has softened. The most regular English-language proponent of Moscow's invincibility, former U.S. soldier Scott Ritter, has been exceptionally confident, largely because of Putin's potential to draft more troops to the front, aided by monetary compensation to the families of the dead. But now Ritter seems to be backtracking rapidly, even in the course of his current Russian speaking tour:

And much more importantly, within the military itself, the St Petersburg mercenary firm Wagner's notorious leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, is even more pessimistic, according to the leading ultra-anti-imperial journalist Pepe Escobar:

Prigozhin is confident in his knowledge of where all the necessary military supplies are kept, enough to fight for another six months. Wagner needs a least 80,000 shells a day. Why they are not getting it amounts to **"political sabotage"**. **Because of Russian bureaucracy - from the MoD to the FSB, no one is spared - the Russian army "has been transformed from the world's second-best army into one of the worst - Russia cannot even deal with Ukraine. Russia's defenses won't hold if supplies are not released to the soldiers."** Prigozhin ominously states in the interview that Wagner might have to retreat unless they get their supplies. **He foresaw the Ukrainian counter-offensive as inevitable, setting a possible May 9 - Victory Day - as a starting point.** This Wednesday he doubled down: it has already started, in Artyomovsk, with "unlimited manpower and ammunition" and it's threatening to overwhelm his undersupplied troops... "I don't have the right to lie to the people who will have to live in this country in the future. Kill me if you want, that would be better than lying. I refuse to lie about this. **Russia is on the brink of a catastrophe. If we don't immediately tighten these loose bolts, this airplane will disintegrate in mid-air.**" And he makes a quite decent geoeconomic point as well: **why should Russia continue to sell oil to the West through India? He says this is "treachery. The elites in Russia are in secret negotiations with the Western elite."** That happens to be a key argument of Igor Strelkov. There's no question: if Prigozhin is essentially telling the truth, this is - literally - nuclear. Either Prigozhin knows everything nearly everyone doesn't, or this is a spectacular maskirovka. Yet **facts on the ground since February 2022 seem to support his main accusation: the Russian army can't properly fight because of a completely corrupt bureaucratic gang right at the very top of the MoD, all the way to Shoigu, all of them only interested in making a financial killing. And it gets worse: under a rigidly bureaucratized environment, commanders at the frontlines have no autonomy to take decisions** and quickly adapt, and need to wait for orders from far away. That should be the main reason for the Kiev counter-offensive standing a chance of imposing dramatic upsets.

As you see below in *The Guardian* article, Prigozhin's petulance paid off yesterday. He *won't* retreat, and *will* get more ammo - even as Ukrainian snipers still holed up in Bakhmut make it hard for Wagner to take more ground. And don't forget that Prigozhin's mercenaries *have* been defeated before, in Mozambique in late 2019 when Al Shabaab beheaded more than a dozen, forcing the Russians to retreat... instead of finishing their mission, i.e. wiping out Islamic community-based opposition, and thus defending the \$20 billion+ in gas-extraction

investments there on behalf of TotalEnergies, ExxonMobil, ENI and China National Petroleum Corporation.

Also, as you see below, the ultra-anti-imperialists are increasingly bothered by left critics of both Washington and Moscow, especially those of the Trotskyist persuasion. So at a leading Campist website, *Defend Democracy*, the writer cleverly invokes Trotsky himself: “*The character of war is determined not by the initial episode taken by itself (‘violation of neutrality,’ ‘enemy invasion,’ etc.) but by the main moving forces of war, by its whole development and by the consequences to which it finally leads.*” And any socialist analysis of the “main moving forces of war” would, naturally, entail a tough critique of NATO’s military manoeuvres, as well as Western political-economic and geopolitical fingers on all those corpses.

Who can dispute the need for a wider-framed analysis, aside from the centrist/liberal media in South Africa – especially at *Daily Maverick*, where the Brenthurst Foundation and Peter Fabricius are prolific analysts from the pro-West standpoint? More on their bias and how to counteract it – and *how not to, as is being taught by the “Pan African Institute for Socialism”* – in the next post on Campist confusion.

So what would Trotsky probably say, about Putin’s invasion? In his May 1938 “Learn to Think: A Friendly Suggestion to Certain Ultra-Leftists,” he put it like this:

In ninety cases out of a hundred **the workers actually place a minus sign where the bourgeoisie places a plus sign. In ten cases however they are forced to fix the same sign as the bourgeoisie but with their own seal, in which is expressed their mistrust of the bourgeoisie.** The policy of the proletariat is not at all automatically derived from the policy of the bourgeoisie, bearing only the opposite sign – this would make every sectarian a master strategist; no, the revolutionary party must **each time orient itself independently in the internal as well as the external situation, arriving at those decisions which correspond best to the interests of the proletariat. This rule applies just as much to the war period as to the period of peace.**

Read the full essay below or [here](#), and let’s take that spirit of Trotsky on board, not the Campist distortion. *But the question remains, even with a left critique of Western imperialism*, and in my case as well, of the fairly [consistently pro-corporate BRICS subimperialism](#) we can readily observe, *aside from the occasionally-rogue Russians*, what kind of solidaristic support should be given to beleaguered Ukrainian and anti-war Russian working-class people and movements?

Regardless of the answer, all these debates do affect *those of us in South Africa concerned not to let our historic and ongoing disgust for Pentagon militarism and broader Western imperialism cloud out the unforgivable invasion of Ukraine 54 weeks ago.* Especially as BRICS+ approaches in late August, no doubt giving Campist and especially pro-Putin forces a Durban frisson, even as their man in Moscow squirms in discomfort.

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