

The Key Issues within Ukraine. The Big Picture

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In 2014, the journalist and writer John Pilger wrote an article for The Guardian newspaper entitled ‘In Ukraine the US is dragging us towards war with Russia’.[i] Eight years later, in 2022, this prediction came true when Russia invaded Ukraine. Readers should be aware that I am anti-war, and therefore not in favour of any country invading any other. This article is to help readers understand why Russia invaded Ukraine.

A peaceful outcome is possible if negotiators from the US, Ukraine, Europe (particularly Germany and France) and Russia are able to sit down and agree a solution. Negotiations have to deal with two sets of connected problems. The first is about how different regions in Ukraine are governed. The second is about the role that Ukraine plays internationally.

The key issues within Ukraine

Ukraine is a patchwork of regions, whose people have very different backgrounds and loyalties. In simple terms, in the West of Ukraine, most people are pro-Europe, in the East most people are pro-Russia. The US engineered a coup in Ukraine in 2014 to overthrow the pro-Russian leader, Yanukovich, and replace him with the pro-US leader, Yatsenyuk. The current leader, Zelensky (elected in 2019) is also pro-US. During the 2014 coup, there were protests in Maidan Square which began peacefully but were hi-jacked by violent extremists,[ii] who have committed many atrocities.

There are two regions in Ukraine which are particularly relevant for understanding recent events. The first region is Crimea, in the south. This is a Russian-speaking area that contains Russia’s only warm-water port in Sevastopol. In 2014 the people of Crimea overwhelmingly voted to leave Ukraine and become part of Russia. The Ukrainian leader, Zelensky, said in March 2021, “we are taking back Crimea”. Since then, the Ukrainian army have increased the number of soldiers in the south and east of the country.

Russian would like to create a peace agreement where Ukraine has no claims on Crimea.

The second region is known as Donbas, around the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk in the east. The extremists mentioned earlier have been fighting with people in Donbas for the last eight years. The OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) have recorded approximately 15,000 deaths in the region. Residents in the region have been asking for Russian help for years.[iii] On 16 Feb 2022, there was a huge increase in the intensity of shelling against Donbas by the Ukrainians. This would normally be the beginning of a large-scale attack.[iv]

There is a concept in International Law known as 'Responsibility to Protect'. This is usually abused by the US and Britain to justify criminal invasions, but it has relevance in this case. The Russian invasion was necessary to protect the people of Donbas.[v]

The International Situation

Many US experts on International Relations, most notably John Mearsheimer, have been saying for many years that the problems in Ukraine are the US's fault.[vi] The main reason is the ongoing expansion of a military grouping known as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). It was set up in 1949 to protect European countries against a communist invasion. (The threat of such an invasion was hugely exaggerated.[vii]) When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, and the Soviet Union disintegrated, US leaders promised that NATO would not expand Eastwards towards Russia. Unfortunately, the US has broken that promise. More and more countries in Eastern Europe have joined NATO, seriously increasing the militarization of the region.[viii] NATO has ceased to be a defensive arrangement. They have actively participated in the destruction of Yugoslavia and Libya.

Whilst Ukraine is not a formal member of NATO, for all practical purposes Ukraine has become a defacto member of NATO. The US, Britain and many other countries have supplied large numbers of weapons to Ukraine, including sophisticated ones such as drones and modern anti-tank missiles. The US has biological weapons labs in Ukraine, many close to the Russian border.[ix] Approximately 260,000 Ukrainian troops have been trained to NATO standards[x] by the US military.[xi] The Russians have stated since 2008 that NATO expansion into Ukraine is an existential threat, because the US could then put nuclear missiles in Ukraine, pointing at Russia.

Russia's main goal is for Ukraine to be neutral.[xii] This means that Ukraine cannot become a member of NATO, and it cannot have US or other weapons pointing at Russia.[xiii] More generally, Russia wants the US and European countries to sign a binding East-West security agreement. This would involve NATO ending military and naval exercises in nations and seas bordering Russia, and guarantees that NATO will not deploy missiles in other nations bordering Russia.[xiv] (They are already in place from Slovenia to Romania, with Poland to follow). One of the early targets of the Russian invasion was a NATO training-base in Ukraine, which was destroyed by Russian missiles.

There have been discussions about both of these issues for years, but the US and Ukraine have been working against peaceful outcomes. The US (and Britain) has a long track record of pursuing violence, when peaceful alternatives are possible. Hillary Clinton did not want peace negotiations before the US, Britain and France destroyed Libya in 2011, and the US ensured that peace negotiations failed in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Similarly, British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, avoided peace negotiations before the Falklands War in 1982. It is the US and Ukrainian refusal to engage in genuine negotiations that forced Russia into the current situation.[xv]

Western Propaganda

There is widespread evidence that public relations companies are active in Ukraine, helping the government put out propaganda.[xvi] The mainstream media in Britain and the US are also putting out pro-Ukrainian propaganda. The general portrayal of the situation follows the pattern of Ukraine as innocent victims, Russia as the demonic invader, with little discussion of history or context.

It is difficult to know with absolute certainty about specific events during war, but there have been stories about Russian atrocities which have been contradicted by evidence and eye-witnesses. This includes an attack on a theatre in Mariupol,[xvii] a massacre in Bucha, and an attack on a hospital. The CIA have admitted that they are using fake stories about events in Ukraine.[xviii] These are all reminiscent of the fake story in 2003 about Iraqi soldiers killing Kuwaiti babies in incubators. Occasionally, even mainstream British journalists have criticized the BBC for its flagrant propaganda.[xix]

In some cities the Russians are being welcomed as liberators,[xx] and eye-witnesses report that it is the Ukrainian extremists who have been killing civilians if they try to leave certain cities, such as Mariupol.[xxi] Russia has presented evidence to the ECHR (European Court of Human Rights) about Ukrainian atrocities, where extremists have been murdering and torturing prisoners.[xxii] Zelensky has had opponents and critics tortured and assassinated,[xxiii] and Ukrainian peace negotiators have been murdered.[xxiv]

The evidence indicates that Russia's invasion has been much more careful than US and British attacks on Iraq and other countries. The US Department of Defense has leaked information indicating that Russia is trying to avoid civilian casualties and property damage.

The Big Picture - Why the US wanted Russia to attack

It is important to understand the broader context of the world we live in. The US government is the biggest criminal organization in the world, having committed the worst crimes of the 21st century in destroying Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and (with a little help from their Saudi allies) Yemen. Britain has actively participated in these war crimes. The US also overthrows governments in many other countries by funding protests, known as colour revolutions.

The US also dominates the global economy. China, Russia and many other countries are trying to find ways to change the global economic system so that it cannot be controlled and exploited by the US. This means ending the dominance of the US\$, ending US control of international institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO, and creating alternative mechanisms for international payments.

The US wants the existing system to continue. It is trying to weaken Russia, by forcing it into conflict with its neighbours. The US wants to stop Germany, and Europe more generally, from developing closer links with Russia.[xxv] The US particularly objects to the Nordstream 2 pipeline that will deliver gas from Russia to Germany. By goading Russia into attacking Ukraine, the US are creating the impression that Russia poses a military threat to Europe.[xxvi] This is intended to encourage NATO countries to have more weapons, and to encourage other European countries, such as Finland and Sweden, to join NATO.[xxvii]

A US think-tank, known as RAND, wrote a report recommending provocations of Russia to

force them to invade Ukraine. This included military exercises in Ukraine and in the Black Sea; withdrawing from weapons treaties; and putting offensive weapons in Ukraine. The US has done all of these things.[xxviii] It is quite clear that the US deliberately provoked this war.

During the 1990s, the US imposed extreme economic policies on Russia, with devastating consequences. Parts of the economy were destroyed, millions of people ended up in poverty, and life expectancy was reduced by an amount rarely seen outside of wartime. The Russian leader, Putin, rescued Russia from this situation. The former CIA analyst, Ray McGovern, has pointed out that in a US DIA (Defence Intelligence Assessment) in 2015, Russia was convinced that the US was aiming to overthrow the Russian government. Senior US commentators regularly declare that this is their goal.[xxix]

Invasion is usually, but not always, the worst course of action

There is at least one historical example where the invasion of a neighbouring country was a better course of action than not invading. This was in 1978 when Vietnam invaded Cambodia. Cambodia was ruled by a leader called Pol Pot, and his government was known as the Khmer Rouge. They were committing genocide against the population of Cambodia. The invasion by Vietnam ended the genocide, but it also ensured that the genocidal violence did not cross the border into Vietnam. It is clear when the US and Britain destroy other countries, their motivation is not to protect the people of those countries, or the people of Britain and the US. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is to protect people in Eastern Ukraine, and the people of Russia in the long term.

We must not make the situation worse

It is important that the US and Europe do not make the situation in Ukraine worse by supplying weapons, or sending soldiers to fight. Unfortunately, weapons are pouring into Ukraine. The US is even training ISIS terrorists at a base in Syria and then sending them to Ukraine.[xxx] When ordinary people call for more weapons or no-fly zones, they mistakenly assume that the US, Britain and NATO have 'good intentions'. This is contradicted by the evidence of recent years. There is clear evidence that some NATO members want the war to continue in order to weaken Russia,[xxxi] despite the fact that this will lead to the deaths of far more people.

Further Reading or Viewing

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Oliver Stone, 'Ukraine on Fire'. This documentary explains in more detail what had happened in the previous few years.

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