

War Within the War: The Fight Over Land and Genetically Engineered Agriculture

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*Soon we shall be covered by wheat.
Did you say, wheat?*

Wheat, wheat.

– from Woody Allen’s “Love and Death”^[1]

Ten months before Russian troops poured into Ukraine, that country’s **President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a bill into law authorizing the private sale of farmland, reversing a moratorium that had been in place since 2001.**

An earlier administration in Ukraine **had instituted the moratorium in order to halt further privatization of The Commons and small farms, which were being bought up by oligarchs and concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.** As documented in a series of critical reports over ten years by the *Oakland Institute* based in California, the moratorium on land sales in Ukraine aimed to prevent the acquisition and consolidation of farmland in the hands of the domestic oligarch class and foreign corporations.

The marketization of farmland is part of a series of policy “reforms” that the International Monetary Fund stipulated as a precondition enabling Ukraine to receive \$8 billion in loans from the IMF.^[2]



Ukrainians protest privatization of land in December 2020. [Source: oaklandinstitute.org]

Even amid the pandemic there has been “wide-ranging opposition from the Ukrainian public to reversing that ban, with over 64 percent of the people opposed to the creation of a land market, according to an April 2021 poll.”^[3]

Additionally, the IMF loan conditions required that Ukraine must also reverse its ban on genetically engineered crops, and enable private corporations like Monsanto to plant its GMO seeds and spray the fields with Monsanto’s Roundup. In that way, Monsanto hopes to break the boycott by a number of countries in Europe of its genetically engineered corn and soy.

It is the thesis of this essay that agricultural competition over land use between the U.S. and Russia—two gigantic capitalist countries with the most powerful nuclear arsenals in the world—is a neglected but important force driving the war in Ukraine.

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The U.S. government has for the last decade wrestled with Russia over who controls the energy pipelines through Ukraine into Europe, and in what currency costs for that so-called “natural” gas and oil are to be paid. At the same time, the war’s disruption of Ukraine’s wheat harvest and the historic droughts hitting the U.S.’s “wheat belt” have driven the cost of bread around the world through the roof. United Nations officials are making dire predictions concerning the world’s supply of grain.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, world food commodity prices made a significant leap in March 2022 to reach their highest levels ever, rising 12.6% in that month alone as war in the Black Sea region shocked the markets dependent on staple grains and vegetable oils.^[4] Global wheat prices rose by 19.7%, vegetable oil by 23.2%, and grains 20.4%. In Tunisia and in other countries, cooking oil, semolina, and rice have all but disappeared from grocery stores, and flour shortages have led to a run on bakeries.^[5]

In the Middle East, millions who already spend more than a third of their income on food, are

being hit hardest by the war's impact on the global food supply. Yet UN agencies have begun to divert sacks of grain that had been earmarked for other war zones to the Ukraine, leaving the people of Yemen and refugees from many areas in desperation.^[6]

In peaceful times Ukraine harvests 80 million metric tons (MMT) of grain—a category that includes wheat, corn, barley, rice and millet. Between them Russia and Ukraine supply more than 25% of the world's wheat. Russia recently overtook the U.S. and Canada to become the leading wheat-exporting country in the world; Ukraine is the world's 6th largest exporter of wheat.

But this year, Ukraine's harvest will likely reach less than half the norm. "A single MMT of wheat...is enough to feed every person in Europe for about two days, or the entire population of Africa for about a day and a half....A country like the UK could only make it up by having everyone stop eating for three years. That's the thing about tonnes of grain: a million here and a million there and pretty soon you've got a real issue on your plate."^[7]

People in France or Italy were never expecting to have any Ukrainian wheat shipped to them at all; but they are now competing against Egyptians and Moroccans, who are now suddenly looking for new sources of bread.^[8]

The grains are not only used for bread and flour, but also for alcohol, fuel, and for feeding animals.^[9] With more than half the tonnage grown in Ukraine last year never intended to be used for direct human consumption, shortages will impact other parts of the economy too.^[10]

The Communist Party of Greece points out that "the military conflict in Ukraine is the result of the sharpening of competition between the two warring camps, primarily focused on spheres of influence, market shares, raw materials, energy plans and transport routes; competition which can no longer be resolved by diplomatic-political means and fragile compromises."^[11]

How much of the predicted food system collapse is a result of the war's disruption of grain harvests, and—a question few in the U.S. mainstream media are asking—how much are skyrocketing food prices caused by plain old capitalist rivalry between two of the main grain-exporting countries of the world?

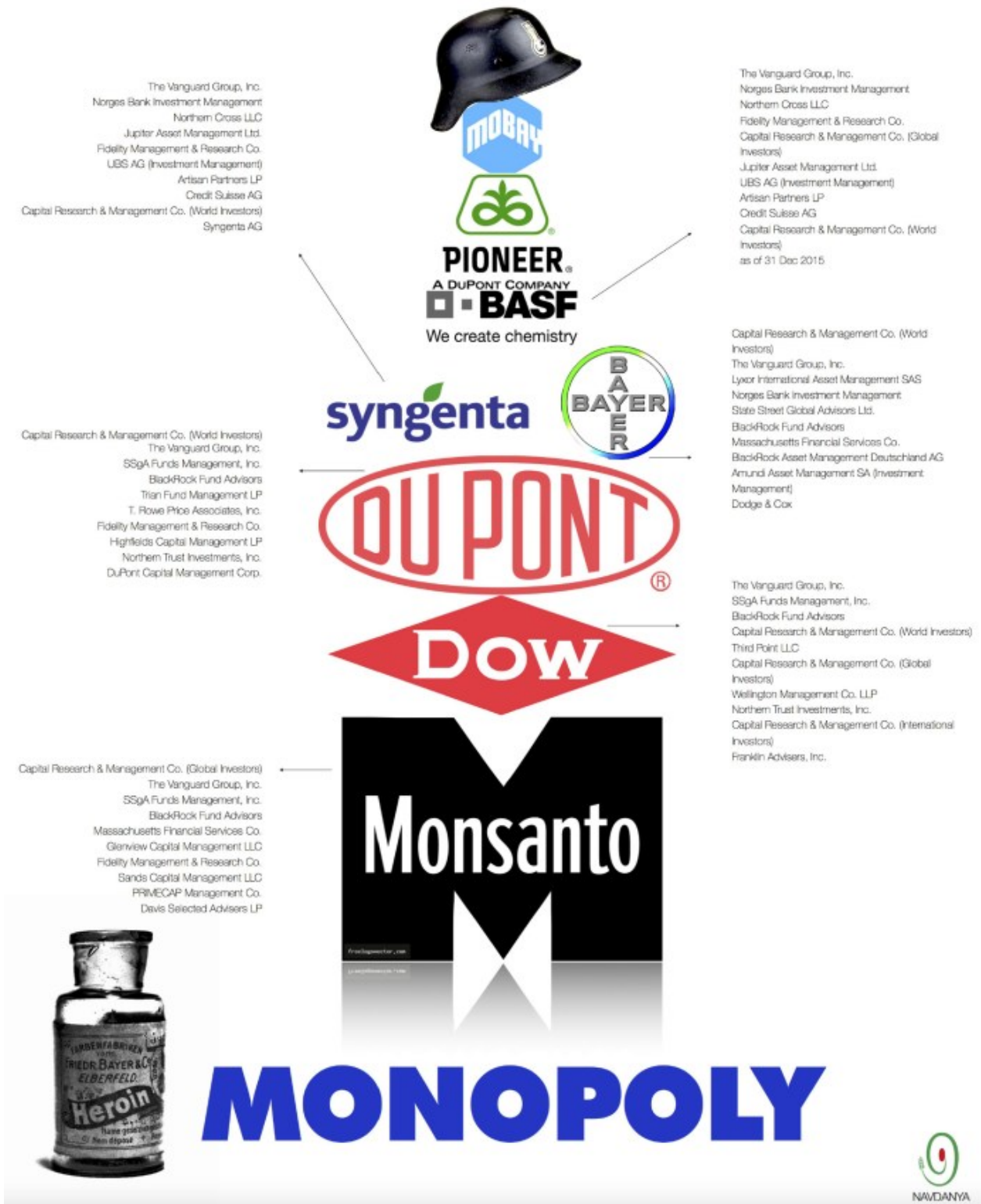
Competing systems for growing crops

U.S. agriculture relies on two main inputs: migrant farm labor and the monocropping of genetically engineered corn, soy, and other crops designed to tolerate—and thus be saturated with—Monsanto's cancer-causing herbicide Roundup. The government's regulatory process is broken, if it ever worked properly at all: Corporations such as Monsanto, Bayer, Dow, DuPont, Syngenta, Novartis, BASF and the other pesticide and pharmaceutical manufacturers are allowed to mask the truth about the dangers of their products.

They are facilitated in this by the complicity of federal (and global) regulatory agencies, allowing them to intentionally thwart the Precautionary Principle. Where the introduction of a new product or process whose ultimate effects are disputed or unknown, that product or process should be rejected. We need to support the development of international

movements opposing the subservience of government agencies to the giant corporations.^[12]

Poison Cartel.Toxic Capital.



Source: transcend.org

Six years ago, Russian **President Vladimir Putin** sought to seize economic opportunities

around the growing of food by opposing genetically engineered agriculture and Monsanto's Roundup, the world's most widely used herbicide; he initiated a program to eliminate pesticides and genetically engineered crops from Russia's fields. The goal was to out-compete the U.S. and Canada as the world's number one and two grain exporters by going organic, which mattered especially in Europe with its stricter laws regarding the import and planting of GMOs.

Monsanto had planned to open its first plant in Russia,^[13] but in June 2016 Russia's State Duma adopted a government bill banning the cultivation and breeding of genetically modified plants and animals, except as used for scientific research purposes.^[14] A few weeks later, Putin signed federal law No. 358 prohibiting cultivation of genetically engineered crops. The law also made it illegal to breed genetically engineered animals on the territory of the Russian Federation.^[15]

Putin had said he envisioned a future in which Russia would become "the world's largest supplier of ecologically clean and high-quality organic food."^[16] He called on the country to become completely self-sufficient in food production: "We are not only able to feed ourselves taking into account our lands, water resources; Russia is able to become the largest world supplier of healthful, ecologically clean and high-quality food which the Western producers have long lost, especially given the fact that demand for such products in the world market is steadily growing."^[17]

The 2016 laws were designed to implement Putin's earlier proposals "to protect the Russian market and consumers from GMO products, as their use could have unforeseen consequences."^[18]

As reported in *Farmers Weekly* in June 2015, Russian **Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich** announced that Russia would not use GM technology to increase productivity in agriculture. "Russia has chosen a different path. We will not use these technologies," Dvorkovich said.

As a result of this decision, Russian products will be "some of the cleanest in the world in terms of technology use," Dvorkovich continued. A bill for a full ban on the cultivation of GM crops is currently making its way through the Duma.^[19]

Farmers Weekly continues: "Russian agriculture minister Nikolai Fyodorov also believes Russia must remain a GM-free country. At a meeting of deputies representing rural areas organized by United Russia, he said the government will not 'poison their citizens.'"^[20] United Russia is Russia's largest political party, holding 2/3 of the seats in the state Dumas.

This was a far different response than provided by the government of Ukraine. Despite large protests against GMOs and the foreign corporate land grab, and despite the fact that Ukrainian law had prohibited private sector farmland ownership, **Ukraine's government negotiated a multi-billion dollar loan from the International Monetary Fund that stipulated a removal of the blocks to GMO production that was "transforming millions of pristine acres into [a] poisoned wasteland. Eco-genocide for profit. Monsanto's dirty hands are hugely involved."**^[21]

Ukraine's agricultural success is crucial for its economy and ability to reduce its dependence on Russia, the *New York Times* explained in May 2014. The *Times* continued:

““Western interests are pressing for change... As part of (an IMF loan agreement), the country's government must push through business reforms that” let agribusiness and other corporate sectors operate freely.

In a recent article for *The Real Agenda News*, Luis R. Miranda takes it a step further: “Big multinationals want to exploit Ukraine's potential. Especially Europe's richest farmland.”

In retaliation for Western sanctions over the Ukraine crisis back in August 2015, Russia extended its list of countries that it would subject to a food import ban.^[23] Far from the sanctions hurting Russia's economy, as Monsanto and other pesticide-producing corporations expected (and hoped), over the decade Russia succeeded in *its* plan to become the world's number one exporter of wheat and other grains. Putin claimed that Russia's success in that regard was due in part to the preference of much of the world for non-GMO food.^[24]



Russia emerged as a top grain exporter because of the world's preference for non-GMO food. [Source: youtube.com]

The United States, on the other hand, uses genetically engineered crops (and now trees), and the pesticides and fertilizer they require, as *weapons*, breaking up the indigenous communities in Mexico, for example, disrupting the economies of other countries and forcing them into dependency.^[25] Even U.S. food aid to the victims of the tsunamis in the South Pacific and to earthquake victims in Pakistan and Haiti was genetically engineered and saturated with pesticides. One result of the U.S. “police action” in Somalia in 1992 was the imposition of thousands of acres of genetically modified cassava, uprooting local communities.^[26]

In the last 30 years, the takeover of domestic agriculture by GMO crops has been part of

U.S. war efforts. Following the U.S. “shock-and-awe” bombing of Iraq in 2003, L. Paul Bremer—the U.S.-appointed administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq—issued Order 81. Officially titled “Amendments to Patent, Industrial Design, Undisclosed Information, Integrated Circuits and Plant Variety Law,” the edict prohibited farmers from saving seeds from genetically engineered crops, and made it illegal for them to replant those seeds, thereby serving as enforcer of Monsanto’s patents.

Bremer’s edict was part and parcel of the IMF’s “structural adjustment program” (SAP)—the subject of major protests in Ukraine 11 years later in 2014. The IMF’s SAPs mandated the purchase and planting of Monsanto’s genetically engineered seeds as part of its requirement before allowing for the ending of military hostilities, opening up Iraqi agriculture to the cultivation of GMO crops.^[27]

Former Secretary of State **Henry Kissinger**, the author of much of U.S. foreign policy, portrayed American aid this way: “To give food aid to a country just because they are starving is a pretty weak reason.”^[28] For Kissinger, the withholding of food as well as its selective distribution is to be used as a weapon in the achievement of U.S. foreign policy objectives.

And so, the United States systematically dumps cheap genetically engineered products saturated with pesticides on foreign markets, undermining local producers and forcing them to purchase the patented seeds from the company manufacturing them, along with the pesticides needed to kill off the plants’ weedy competitors.^[29] Uprooted from their lands, local producers become dependent on the United States and its corporations, and many try to flee across the border to the United States.

In his 2001 book, *A Cook’s Tour*, chef Anthony Bourdain presented a very unexpected take on Kissinger, one worth savoring:

“Once you’ve been to Cambodia, you’ll never stop wanting to beat Henry Kissinger to death with your bare hands. You will never again be able to open a newspaper and read about that treacherous, prevaricating, murderous scumbag sitting down for a nice chat with Charlie Rose or attending some black-tie affair for a new glossy magazine without choking. Witness what Henry did in Cambodia—the fruits of his genius for statesmanship—and you will never understand why he’s not sitting in the dock at The Hague next to Milošević.”^[30]

One note on Milošević and Kissinger: As brilliant a quote as this is by Anthony Bourdain, to compare Milošević with mass-murderer Henry Kissinger is an error. Milošević was posthumously *cleared of all crimes* by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, which after his death ruled in 2016—contrary to years of U.S. and particularly Germany’s denunciations—that there was *no evidence* that Milošević had “participated in the realization of the common criminal objective” and that he “and other Serbian leaders openly criticized Bosnian Serb leaders of committing crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing and the war for their own purposes” during the Bosnian War.^[31]

With the advent and proliferation of genetically modified crops in the 1980s—a technology intimately tied to the widespread application of pesticides and in particular Monsanto’s Roundup—the tentacles of globalization expanded outward into control of the world’s food

supply. Those private commercial patents were (and continue to be) enforced by U.S. military power.

And so, **Leticia Gonçalves**, for ten years the head of Monsanto's operations in Europe and the Middle East, was not worrying over the new Russian anti-GMO and pesticides laws. "We still believe that Ukraine and Russia both are long-term opportunities for our business and we want to make sure we are in a position to accelerate our business growth despite the short-term geopolitical and macroeconomic challenges," she said.^[32]

Such longer term strategic views are not usually part of U.S. thinking; they might more readily be associated with China's command-economy strategists, who plan ahead for 20, 50, and even 100 years. And yet, here we see a shift within capitalist planning. Today, Gonçalves oversees leading GMO exporter Archer Daniels Midland's ancient grains, seeds and edible beans, and is a member of ADM's Executive Council.

Monsanto Is the Devil and the Devil Must Be Slain. But It's Not the Only One

In the U.S., powerful figures such as **Hillary Clinton**, **Bill Gates**, former President **Barack Obama**, and current **President Joe Biden** have rejected the demands of the anti-GMO coalitions.



Reverend Billy Talen, Savitri B. and the Church of Stop Shopping Choir. [Source: Photo courtesy of Mitchel Cohen]

Fed up with the pharmaceutical/agribusiness company lies, movements like "Millions Against Monsanto," networks like the "Organic Consumers Association," dynamic "artists" such as Rev. Billy and his "Church of Stop Shopping Choir" (whose performances of "Monsanto Is the Devil" galvanized New York audiences for weeks on end), and the movement for community-supported agriculture coalesced family farmers and anti-corporate activists.

They exposed the government agencies' revolving door—an arrangement whereby the giant agriculture and pharmaceutical corporations place their hirelings onto U.S. regulatory boards such as the Food and Drug Administration. Monsanto's lackeys in government write their own laws and block even tepid demands for labeling of GMO products, at Monsanto's behest.^[33]



March against Monsanto in Vancouver in 2013. [Source: wikipedia.org]

Billionaire Bill Gates—a major investor in Monsanto and proponent of genetic engineering (as well as experimental vaccines in the so-called “Third World”)—seized the opportunities he envisioned (and created) regarding a future of massive food shortages in global grain production, that we are seeing today; Gates began buying up acre after acre of farmland on which to grow GM crops.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used taxpayer money to stomp all over the world promoting Monsanto's controversial GM seeds; she mouthed the industry's talking points as though they were gospel.^[34] The Clinton State Department intervened at Monsanto's request “to undermine legislation that might restrict sales of genetically engineered seeds.”^[35]



Source: snopes.com

Clinton was so gung-ho in promoting GMOs that *Mother Jones* writer Tom Philpott called her department “the de facto global-marketing arm of the ag-biotech industry.” Meanwhile, Gates has become the largest private individual owner of farmland in the U.S. and Clinton, while losing her campaign for the U.S. presidency to Donald Trump in 2016, received hundreds of thousands of dollars from GMO manufacturers for speeches she delivered.^[36]

Key pieces of information regarding the U.S. government’s worldwide pressure tactics (including the use of its military) on behalf of Monsanto’s patented seeds exploded onto the internet via thousands of cables “liberated” by current political prisoner Julian Assange. The cables Assange published—some of which I have described in more detail in “[‘The World’s Most Evil Company’ May Lose a Few Court Fights—But Will Keep On Poisoning and Killing Millions of People with Its Carcinogenic Pesticide ‘Roundup,’](#)”^[37]—revealed massive U.S. government attempts on behalf of Monsanto and the other biotech corporations, twisting arms of government regulatory bodies throughout the world, along with planting its agents in movements to squelch opposition to GMOs.

The cables showed U.S. diplomats bringing financial, diplomatic, and even military pressure on behalf of Monsanto and other biotech corporations.



Source: Courtesy of John Jonik

Where Is Nestor Makhno Now That We Really Need Him?

Back in Europe, Monsanto's Leticia Gonçalves was counting on Russia being forced to yield its opposition to Monsanto and support for organic agriculture; inter-capitalist rivalries and the U.S. military (and its control of NATO) would put the squeeze on Putin's anti-Monsanto bluster, and make the world—or at least Russia—safe for Monsanto's Democracy. And it appears she was right. By the end of February 2017, less than two years after Russia banned the cultivation of genetically engineered plants and animals, the first Monsanto factory was nevertheless allowed to open in the Kirov region near the village of October (Zuyevsky District).

"We have been waiting for Monsanto on the Kirov lands for a long time and have been working systematically for several years," said marketing expert Igor Vasilyev, who now serves as the Governor of the region. Its former governor, Nikita Belykh, is a "liberal" in the Russian context—a long-time critic of Vladimir Putin and at least in theory a supporter of more human rights in Russia.

But Belykh allowed himself to be appointed by Putin to government office in the Kirov area 500 miles away from his home in Moscow where, according to Russian scientist Boris Ikhlov,

writing from the State University of Perm, Belykh brokered the deal allowing Monsanto to set up shop in Russia.^[38] Belykh was arrested in 2016 and has been serving an eight-year prison sentence for accepting a large cash bribe.

A number of Russian intellectuals understandably merge their opposition to Putin's rule with involvement in "human rights" groups, but they do not stop there. They also bring into the ideological mix ardent support for neoliberal "progress," as exemplified by their applause for Monsanto and the genetic engineering of agriculture.

According to Ikhlov, the liberal intelligentsia "sought to re-assure the Russian people that GMOs are safe and challenged the government's anti-GMO policies....Russian supporters of GMOs cite a list of hundreds of works in which the harmlessness of GMOs is allegedly proved. The list is on the Internet, but there is no text of any of these works. I wrote a letter to the Italian authors of this list, asking them to give me a link where I could find out more about each scientific article from the list. The Italians gave me a link, and it turned out that in this list there is not a single work dedicated to proving the harmlessness of GMOs."^[39]

Ikhlov illustrates the case of a member of the board of a main "human rights" organization funded by U.S. "donations," who was a proponent of expanded civil liberties in Russia and who at the same time tied his critique of Putin's human rights policies to supporting Monsanto's biotechnologically engineered seeds and privatization of agriculture. (I have removed his name and affiliation, as well as other examples that Ikhlov provided, awaiting independent confirmation.) Many liberal Russian intellectuals, Ikhlov says, ended up supporting the Zelensky government in Kyiv, which today has strong ties to Monsanto despite public protests for many years against it.

Convoluting? Yes. Especially as the politics of neoliberalism express themselves through what at first may seem to be "human and scientific progress" in biotechnology and opposition to centralized political rule. So how can we disentangle these threads? Looking at the reality of the institutions of global capitalist domination—imperialism—should help.

"The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) is [sic] helping biotech run the latest war in Ukraine," writes Christina Sarich in *Natural Society*. "Make no mistake that what is happening in the Ukraine now is deeply tied to the interests of Monsanto, Dow, Bayer, and other big players in the poison food game."^[40]

Exposed by the California-based *Oakland Institute* in 2014, the World Bank and IMF provided a loan of \$17 billion to Ukraine.^[41]

Hidden from mainstream media exposure in the U.S., the World Bank and IMF loan "has opened up Ukraine to major corporate inroads," writes Joyce Nelson in *The Ecologist*. "Loan conditions are forcing the deeply indebted country to open up to GMO crops, and lift the ban on private sector land ownership. U.S. corporations are jubilant at the 'goldmine' that awaits them."^[42]

It is worth reading more from this 2014 report in *The Ecologist*—years before Russia sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022. The information provided is shocking—and unreported here in the U.S. While some in the U.S. understand that the 2014 political battles in Ukraine were over the expansion of NATO and control over energy pipelines to Europe,^[43] there was,

and still is, an equally large but hidden global battle over GM grains, land ownership and usage, and “food pipelines.”

In late 2013, the then president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, rejected a European Union association agreement tied to the \$17 billion IMF loan, whose terms are only now being revealed.

Writing in *The Ecologist* in September 2014, Joyce Nelson examines the IMF-Ukraine loan packages in great detail. The next few paragraphs below are taken directly from that report:

Instead, Yanukovich chose a Russian aid package worth \$15 billion plus a discount on Russian natural gas. His decision was a major factor in the ensuing deadly protests that led to his ouster from office in February 2014 and the ongoing crisis.

According to the Oakland Institute,

“Whereas Ukraine does not allow the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture, Article 404 of the EU agreement, which relates to agriculture, includes a clause that has generally gone unnoticed: it indicates, among other things, that both parties will cooperate to extend the use of biotechnologies.

“There is no doubt that this provision meets the expectations of the agribusiness industry. As observed by Michael Cox, research director at the investment bank Piper Jaffray, ‘Ukraine and, to a wider extent, Eastern Europe, are among the most promising growth markets for farm-equipment giant Deere, as well as seed producers Monsanto and DuPont.’”

Ukrainian law bars farmers from growing GM crops. Long considered “the bread basket of Europe,” Ukraine’s rich black soil is ideal for growing grains, and in 2012 Ukrainian farmers harvested more than 20 million tons of corn.”

Monsanto’s “non-GMO” \$140m investment

The excerpt here from Joyce Nelson’s *Ecologist* article, concludes with: In May 2013, Monsanto announced plans to invest \$140 million in a non-GMO corn seed plant in Ukraine, with Monsanto Ukraine spokesman Vitaliy Feschuk confirming that “*We will be working with conventional seeds only*” because “*in Ukraine only conventional seeds are allowed for production and importation.*”

But by November 2013, six large Ukrainian agriculture associations had prepared draft amendments to the law, pushing for “*creating, testing, transportation and use of GMOs regarding the legalization of GM seeds.*”^[44]

The Oakland Institute report and Nelson’s story in *The Ecologist* are devastating, and reveal what (to us) are the intense intra-capitalist rivalries that have exploded into open warfare in Ukraine.

Nor does it end there. The U.S. non-profit Food & Water Watch combed through five years of cables from 2005 to 2009 released by WikiLeaks revealing U.S. State Department pressuring governments worldwide on behalf of Monsanto and other biotechnology corporations like DuPont, Syngenta, Bayer and Dow. On May 14, 2013, it [released its report](#), “Biotech

Ambassadors: How the U.S. State Department Promotes the Seed Industry's Global Agenda."^[45]:

"The U.S. State Department has lobbied foreign governments to adopt pro-agricultural biotechnology policies and laws, operated a rigorous public relations campaign to improve the image of biotechnology, and challenged commonsense biotechnology safeguards and rules - even including opposing laws requiring the labeling of genetically-engineered (GE) foods."

According to *consortiumnews.com* (March 16, 2014), Morgan Williams is at "the nexus of Big Ag's alliance with U.S. foreign policy."^[46]

Besides being president and CEO of the U.S.-Ukraine Business Council, Williams is Director of Government Affairs at private equity firm SigmaBleyzer, which touts Williams' work with "various agencies of the U.S. government, members of Congress, congressional committees, the Embassy of Ukraine to the U.S., international financial institutions, think tanks and other organizations on U.S.-Ukraine business, trade, investment and economic development issues."

The U.S.-Ukraine Business Council's 16-member Executive Committee is [packed with U.S. agribusiness companies](#), including representatives from Monsanto, John Deere, DuPont Pioneer, Eli Lilly, and Cargill.

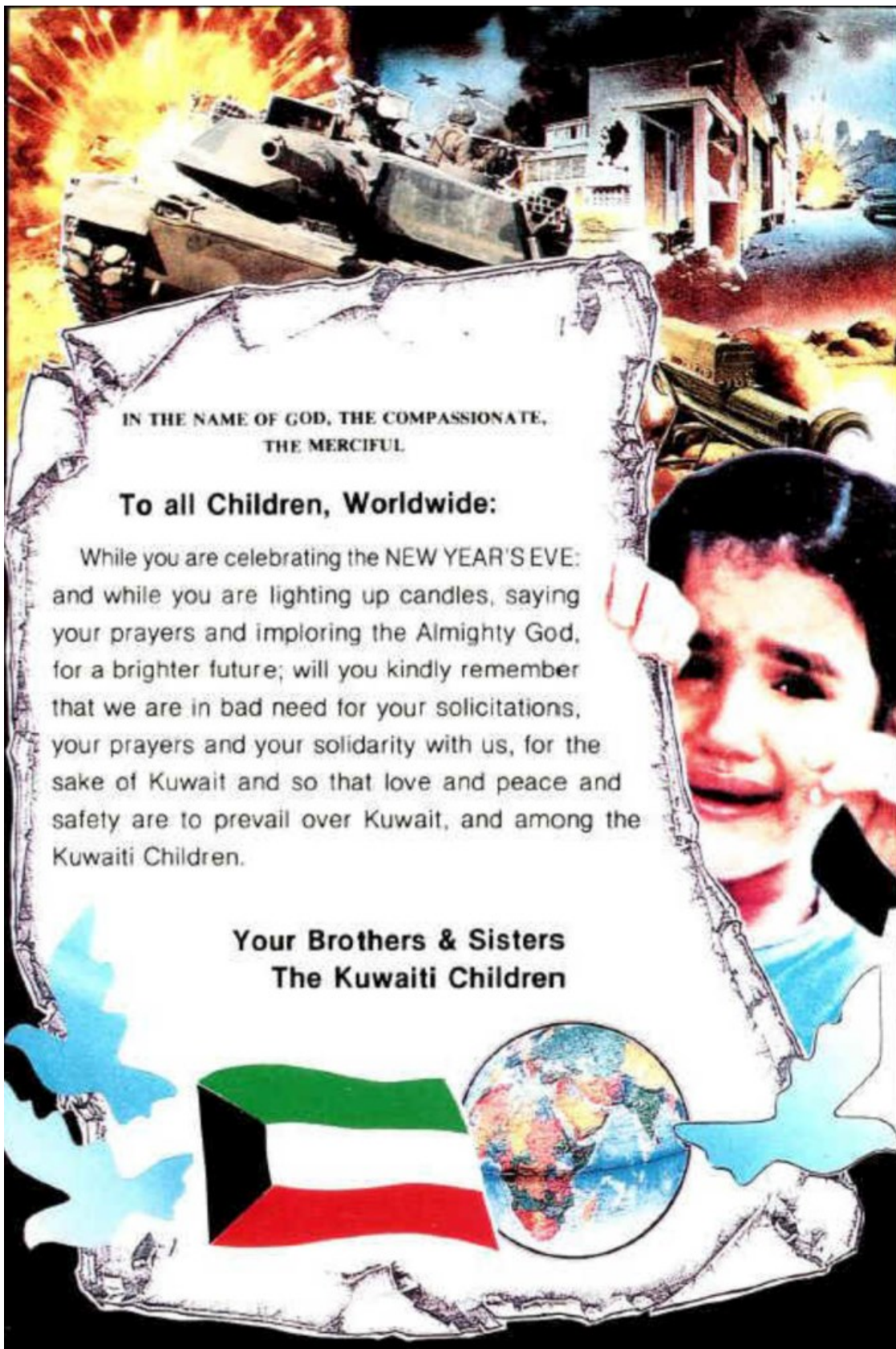
The Council's 20 "senior Advisers include James Greene (former head of NATO Liaison Office Ukraine); Ariel Cohen (Senior Research Fellow for The Heritage Foundation); Leonid Kozachenko (President of the Ukrainian Agrarian Confederation); six former U.S. ambassadors to Ukraine, and the former ambassador of Ukraine to the U.S., Oleh Shamshur.

Shamshur is now a senior adviser to PBN Hill + Knowlton Strategies—a unit of PR giant Hill + Knowlton Strategies (H+K). H + K is a subsidiary of the gargantuan London-based WPP Group, which owns some dozen big PR firms, including Burson-Marsteller (a long-time Monsanto adviser).^[47]

Hill + Knowlton, one might recall, orchestrated the phony "incubator" testimony to Congress in 1990, which became the pretext for sending thousands of U.S. soldiers into battle and bombing the hell out of Iraq. The PR firm invented the infamous yellow ribbon campaign, to whip up support for "our" troops. In pure advertising terms, the war campaign was a public relations masterpiece. First 15-year-old Nayirah's unchallenged testimony about having witnessed babies pulled from incubators and left on the floor, then the yellow ribbon campaign, and then the claim that satellite photos revealed that Iraq had troops poised to strike Saudi Arabia—all fabricated by the PR firm, with the support of the U.S. government.^[48]

As I wrote at that time in *HOW PROPAGANDA WORKS, 101: Yellow-Ribboning the Lies: How George Bush Sold the 1991 Bombing of Iraq to America*,^[49] Hill + Knowlton was paid between \$12 million (as reported two years later on *60 Minutes*) and \$20 million (as reported on *20/20*) for "services rendered" for its Iraq fictions. The group fronting the money? Citizens for a Free Kuwait, a phony "human rights agency" set up and funded entirely by Kuwait's emirocracy to promote the war to a gullible U.S. population.

Yet, even though these facts are now well known, the myths persist, and are reinforced in order to continue the perpetual drumbeat of war against Iraq, and now against Russia and Ukraine. ("Oh, but this time it's different," we're told.) A 2003 HBO "behind-the-scenes true story" of the Gulf War never makes clear that the incubator story was fraudulent, and in fact had been managed by an American PR firm, not Iraq.



Poster promoting "Free Kuwait" movement. [Source: psywarrior.com]

“Curiously, however, the truth seems to have been clear to Robert Wiener, the former CNN producer who co-wrote *Live from Baghdad*. As he explained to CNN’s Wolf Blitzer (11/21/02), ‘That story turned out to be false because those accusations were made by the daughter of the Kuwaiti minister of information and were never proven.’ Unfortunately, HBO viewers won’t know that when they see the film.”^[50]

“[W]hen Hill + Knowlton masterminded the Kuwaiti campaign to sell the Gulf War to the American public, the owners of this highly effective propaganda machine were residing in another country,” the United Kingdom, writes Sharon Beder and Richard Gosden in *PR Watch*. “Should this give some pause for thought? Does it demonstrate a certain potential for the future exercise of global political power.... the power to manipulate democratic political processes through managing public opinion”?^[51]

Hill + Knowlton demonstrated 31 years ago that, when it comes to facts, the truth can be bought and sold to the highest bidder regardless of the consequences for U.S. soldiers, Iraqi civilians and indeed the idea of whether real democracy could exist under such manipulative circumstances.^[52]

Hill + Knowlton Strategies

Joyce Nelson continues in *The Ecologist*, noting that on April 15, 2014, Toronto’s *Globe and Mail* newspaper [published an op-ed piece](#) by H+K assistant consultant Olga Radchenko. The piece railed against Russian President Vladimir Putin and “Mr. Putin’s PR machine” and stated that

“Last month [March 2014—a month after the coup], a group of Kiev-based PR professionals formed the Ukraine Crisis Media Centre, a voluntary operation aimed at helping to communicate Ukraine’s image and manage its messaging on the global stage.”

The PBN Hill + Knowlton Strategies website states that company CEO Myron Wasyluk is “a Board member of the U.S.-Ukraine Business Council,” and the company’s Managing Director/Ukraine, Oksana Monastyrska, “leads the firm’s work for Monsanto.” Monastyrska also formerly worked for the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation.

[According to the Oakland Institute](#), the terms of the World Bank/IMF loan to Ukraine have already led to “an increase in foreign investment, which is likely to result in further expansion of large-scale acquisitions of agricultural land by foreign companies and further corporatization of agriculture in the country.”

Nelson concludes her absolutely crucial 2014 investigative report in *The Ecologist* with the following prescient warning:

“Now the company is involved in fomenting a Cold War 2 or worse, and on behalf of Monsanto—recently voted the ‘most evil’ corporation on the planet. That’s something to recall in the midst of the extensive mainstream media demonizing of Putin.”^[53]

War

Russia’s military incursion into Ukraine has both obscured and heightened the competition

between the GMO/non-GMO modalities for the export of grains and the use of vast acreage of land for GMO cultivation, just as it is a direct outgrowth of the more obvious fight between the U.S. and Russia over who controls the energy pipelines to Europe.^[54]

One important consequence of the U.S.'s response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine—the administration of sanctions on Russia accepted by many countries in Europe, but not in Asia or South America—is the driving up of the costs of fuel, fertilizer, pasta and bread throughout the world, as well as increasing farmers' economic insecurities which threaten consistent and dependable food production. Add to that, perhaps, the recent explosions, fires, and plane crashes at nearly two dozen food processing facilities across Canada and the U.S.^[55]



Source: [bnnbloomberg.ca](https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca)

Also driving up prices in the U.S. are large, sudden and unexpected mandates reducing available railroad transport of nitrogen fertilizers, diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) and other farm-related material, just in time for spring planting season.^[56]

Russia, which manufactures much of the world's fertilizer (estimated at 25%), derives it—along with the energy pipelined to Europe—from fracked “natural” gas. Fracking—banned now in New York State, but not in Pennsylvania or in other states—is as environmentally destructive in Russia as it is everywhere else.^[57]

There was a moment a few years ago when things might have gone differently when, along with the marketing of organic foods, came opposition to the use of synthetic fertilizer and pesticides (part of the definition of what in Europe is meant by what it means to be “organic”). But with Russia now as fully invested in “mainstream” corporate agricultural technology as the U.S., that hope is greatly diminished.

Sanctions' Unexpected Consequences

On March 27, 2020, Russia's Minister of Agriculture signed Order #160 that establishes a process for registering genetically engineered (GE) events for feed use "making it possible for those events to be imported after registration."

However, the existing mechanism for registration of GE products for food use is still in effect. As of October, 2020 Russia continues to ban cultivating and breeding GE plants and animals.^[58]

Still, in Russia, just as it is in the U.S., the ideology of industrial modernization is disguised as "progress." Individuals and social movements are portrayed as "anti-progress," which trivializes opposition to the imposition of the IMF's neoliberal structural adjustment programs. Today in Russia food regulation is virtually non-existent. Sausages, fish, mineral water, wines, chocolate and even bread are adulterated.^[59] Diabetes is rampant. And the liberal intelligentsia use the cover of "scientific progress" to dispense support for Monsanto and its genetically modified agriculture—a hallmark of the IMF's structural adjustment programs.

United Nations World Food Program Executive Director David Beasley, who oversees international aid to refugees, warns that his agency is out of money. "We need a billion dollars for the next six months and we have just a little over 10 percent of that," he warns.^[60]

That is an amount that the wealthier countries of the world could make up in a heartbeat ... if they really cared about the suffering of people in Ukraine, Yemen, Libya and elsewhere. It is chicken feed compared to the amounts President Biden has asked Congress to provide. They could end this war (and most wars, such as the bombing of Yemen) on the spin of a dime, instead of perpetuating it.

But they would rather keep the fight going over who controls the energy pipelines to Europe, as well as whether to allow genetically engineered crops in Ukraine—among other decisions and actions that Russia, Ukraine, Europe, and the U.S. have been dancing to.

In June 2020, "the IMF approved an 18-month, \$5 billion loan program with Ukraine," writes the Bretton Woods Project. The Ukraine government lift[ed] the 19-year moratorium on the sale of state-owned agricultural lands, after sustained pressure from international finance institutions (see Observer [Winter 2019](#)). Olena Borodina with the Ukrainian Rural Development Network [commented](#) that, "the agribusiness interests and oligarchs will be the primary beneficiaries of such reform...[This] will only further marginalize smallholder farmers and risks severing them from their most valuable resource."^[61]

Ukraine saw several large protests against the privatization of its land and agriculture.

A bill lifting the moratorium was passed in an emergency Parliamentary session in March. According to a May [press release](#) by U.S.-based think-tank the Oakland Institute, this coincided with mandatory Covid-19 stay-at-home orders in place across the country, "effectively quelling potential protests or demonstrations."

U.S. sanctions imposed on Russia reflect the return of U.S. National Security Adviser

Zbigniew Brzezinski's geo-political Cold War strategems—what he termed the “Grand Chessboard.”^[62] While Ukraine's Zelensky government welcomed the IMF and World Bank's stipulations insisting on the growing of Monsanto's GM crops, it is not clear at the time of this writing how tightly Putin and the Russian Duma are willing to chain Russia to existing relations with Monsanto/Bayer and the technologies of the genetic engineering of agriculture.

On the one hand, the war has driven Russia further away from its prior anti-GMO policies, even though one could surmise that its new relationship with Monsanto would be negated by the sanctions and push Russia back into the “organic food” direction. But the Russian government seems now willing to forego its potential market for organic crops *and* energy in Europe, blocked by the sanctions, and pivot to China.

China has been driven closer to Russia as a result of the war in Ukraine—especially as the potentially huge market opens for Russia's products there and in other Asian countries which do not claim the same strictures on how food is grown.

As I had written earlier, it is complicated, with several different forces at play. We never hear about the Oakland Institute's May 2020 analysis^[63] in U.S. mainstream corporate media, nor even on some erstwhile “Left” media like *Democracy Now*. Who would know, in the U.S., that “on April 28, 2020, President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a bill into law authorizing the sale of farmland in Ukraine, lifting a moratorium that has been in place since 2001. This bill is part of a series of policy reforms upon which the IMF conditioned its \$8 billion loan package.

“Amidst an ongoing economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented street protests against the lifting of the moratorium by Ukrainians who are overwhelmingly opposed to the law.”^[64]

The Oakland Institute concludes that “opening the sale of land will benefit Western agribusiness interests and oligarchs who will now further consolidate ownership of land and intensify large-scale, industrial agriculture in ‘Europe's Breadbasket,’ at the expense of Ukrainian farmers. While conditionalities accompanying Western foreign assistance are common practice, the way Ukraine has been forced to put its land for sale has no precedent in modern history.”^[65]

Meanwhile, the World Food Program's David Beasley's appeal to push the politics aside to help the world's children is especially gut-wrenching...and ignored, unless it serves some immediate ideological purpose: “Don't make us make decisions between taking food from the children in Ukraine to the children in Yemen,” Beasley pleads.^[66] But that is exactly what the U.S., Russia, and Ukraine sectors of the world's capitalist class are doing.

*

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Mitchel Cohen coordinates the *No Spray Coalition* in New York City, which successfully sued the City government over its indiscriminate spraying of toxic pesticides. Mitchel's latest book, *The Fight Against Monsanto's Roundup: The Politics of Pesticides* (SkyHorse) is

being published as a softcover book this month with a Forward by Vandana Shiva and a new Preface and Introduction by Mitchel Cohen. For more information, go to <https://ThePoliticsofPesticides.com>. Mitchel can be reached at: mitchelcohen@mindspring.com.

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