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# **‘We focus on the liberation movement of Donbass and Ukrainian exiles’**

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The U.S.-Ukraine terrorist war on Donbass civilians began nearly a decade ago. Here, Donbass residents surround an invading Ukrainian tank in April 2014.

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As we approach the two-year anniversary of the open military conflict between the U.S./NATO/Ukraine and Russia, it's clear that the war is at an impasse. Ukraine's much-hyped offensive has foundered. The regime's internal contradictions are multiplying as it becomes apparent that no victory is in the making despite the influx of billions of dollars of Western weapons and trainers, while Washington is rapidly shifting weapons, money, and attention toward Israel. A substantial part of the U.S.

ruling class, frustrated by the lack of progress, is also eager to refocus on preparing for war against China.

This week, Ukrainian President Zelensky came home empty-handed from the latest of his many funding tours with only the consolation prize of an EU promise to consider membership. Last year, Ukraine received the largest amount of military aid in history; now Congress is attempting to put major strings on Biden's efforts to continue exorbitant levels of funding, even though, as the [Washington Post admitted](#) at the end of November, almost 90% of so-called aid money for Ukraine stays in the U.S. It's not because Republicans are against war, but because they see bigger fish elsewhere. Imperialism's priorities, frustrated, are shifting elsewhere.

This is reflected increasingly in the capitalist media, such as the Dec. 15 [New York Times "exposé"](#) about the extreme tactics the Ukrainian military uses to force people into military service. This isn't new – Ukraine has been using the same tactics not only since last year but since the beginning of the war on Donbass almost a decade ago. In 2015 and 2016, there were women's demonstrations that blocked highways across Western and Central Ukraine to protest the kidnapping of sons and husbands. But now it's suddenly become acceptable for Western media to make some digs at their erstwhile ally.

But it's important for us to recognize that Russia has not been able to make significant progress either. The capitalist oligarchy represented by the Putin administration is unable and unwilling to elevate working-class forces and an anti-fascist perspective that would make it possible to transform the military conflict into a people's war.

To the extent there is momentum, it continues to center on the forces of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, who are motivated by the defense of their homes and communities from the Ukrainian neo-Nazi battalions that target civilians daily. Attacks on Donbass civilians have continued unabated after nine-and-a-half years.

## Capitalist Russia's contradictions

We have long argued that for Russia to maintain its independence and overcome the threat of dismemberment by the U.S. and NATO, ultimately, the workers and oppressed must surge to the fore and overcome the domination of the reactionary capitalist oligarchy born of the anti-Soviet capitalist counter-revolution.

Starting in 2014, the Donbass liberation struggle fueled an upsurge in internationalist and anti-fascist sentiments in Russia and the other former Soviet Republics. Ultimately, it was this pressure from below that prevented the Russian government from settling for a rotten compromise with the West, as it repeatedly attempted to do, and helped to force Moscow to intervene militarily in February 2022 to prevent a genocidal massacre in Donbass.

But thus far, these mass sentiments have been unable to transcend the control of the Russian oligarchs. Instead, the response of the government is to pile on more internal divisions in response to Western sanctions and pressure – a losing strategy.

The left, though not outright banned like it is in Ukraine, has been unable to hold street protests in Russia since the start of the pandemic. Earlier this year, trans lives were essentially outlawed, including all forms of medical transition. Earlier this month, the Supreme Court declared the LGBTQ+ movement a terrorist movement, giving it the same designation as neo-Nazi groups like Ukraine's Azov Battalion. And there are rumblings that a ban on abortion rights could be next.

The contradictions of the Russian state stand out in ever bolder relief. To survive and maintain independence, Moscow has been put into a position of conflict with world imperialism and alliance with the socialist countries, the Axis of Resistance, and other generally popular forces. But internally, and in the face it presents to the West, the Russian government has doubled down on aligning itself with the views and priorities of Trump and the U.S. far right. We can anticipate this will continue

and intensify during the coming U.S. election year.

These contradictions make it extremely difficult to make a winning argument in support of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine to anyone in the U.S. who does not already share our views on imperialism and the global class struggle. This reality doesn't absolve us of making the arguments, of patiently explaining. But it should also inform our approach – the one our tendency alone in the U.S. has championed for the last decade – to focus on the liberation struggle of the Donbass people and Ukrainian anti-fascists.

### **Palestine parallels**

Parallels of Donbass with Palestine's struggle are inescapable. It took years for the broad progressive movement in the U.S. to even recognize the existence of the Palestinians and even longer to embrace the legitimacy of their right to live and defend their homeland from Zionist occupation and expulsion. It took decades for the Palestine solidarity movement to reach the level we see today.

In the last few months, we've witnessed the impressive growth of a militant Queers for Palestine wing of the solidarity movement – embracing the call of LGBTQ+ Palestinians that “for queer liberation, we need Palestinian liberation.” This powerful solidarity exists despite the presence of forces that are anti-LGBTQ+ (or perceived as such) in the Palestinian struggle and shows it is possible for the solidarity movement here to transcend the liberal arguments against liberation movements. Young activists especially seem to grasp the idea that we have always championed – that to build solidarity between movements, you start by offering solidarity.

The struggle in Donbass and Ukraine seems far away, but it really isn't. So much of the fascist, white supremacist violence we see aimed at communities of color, immigrants, and queer people in this country can be traced back to the U.S.

promotion of fascist forces abroad, often with direct or indirect ties to the neo-Nazi hub that Ukraine has become since 2014, including training with NATO-supplied weapons, social media influence, rhetoric, and symbolism.

The war against Donbass is still raging; the protections the population has won by Russian intervention are imperfect and tenuous. However, U.S. military priorities may shift in the coming year. We must continue to champion, educate, and protest in support of the Donbass people's cause and the anti-fascist liberation of Ukraine.

