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Readers' Comments: Gerard Delanty

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The essays by Artemy Magun and Greg Yudin are brilliant analyses of the forces at work in Russian society today that have led to the war in Ukraine. They offer a good rebuke to an argument that one often hears among the left that relativizes Russian aggression. I am thinking here of the pointless argument, for instance, that American imperialism is no better, and that western countries should now stop supporting Ukraine, since such support translates into a pro-NATO stance. It would seem for many on the left that the USA and NATO are the real problem. As Magun suggests, it is a useless debate which imperialism is worse. The objective reality of the situation is that a sovereign nation has been invaded. Ukraine must be supported. In this case, the Ukrainian Armed Forces have a capacity to defend the autonomy of Ukrainian society and so far have delivered remarkable results.

Both authors give an additional and chilling reason why Ukraine needs to be defended: the Putin regime does not intend to stop at Ukraine and there are other rich pickings in eastern Europe and elsewhere. At the moment there can only be a military solution.

The essays also make a strong argument that the underlying logic is not Russian ultranationalism and the security of the Russian Federation etc, but the war is the outcome of the capitalist logic to extend control over territory. The war against 'the West' is a front to allow a particular model of capitalism to expand.

One minor concern I have is in the designation 'neo-liberal' for the Russian model of capitalism and its attendant oligarchic system. I agree with Magun's characterization of neo-liberalism as not being essentially about privatization, which is best seen as just one aspect of the phenomenon, but a project about creating market-like relations between individuals and other social institutions. This Foucauldian perspective also allows one to see how central the state is to the delivery of neo-liberal goals. This is amply demonstrated in Russia. But in the case of Russia, it is difficult to see how the authoritarian variant of capitalism, which Magun refers to as Bonapartist, is really neo-liberal. The oligarchic system and the extractivistic nature of its economy tend towards authoritarianism, where much of the surplus deriving from oil and gas is controlled directly by the state, a kind of extended primitive accumulation. This does not contradict the argument that this is a war unleashed by capitalism, but I wonder if the Tsarist and Soviet lineages that still persist make it inimitable to neo-liberalism, which prospers through individualism. The oligarchs are neither traditional capitalists nor neo-liberals. A feature of neo-liberalism is the co-opting of critique and the pursuit of pseudo-emancipation. The account of de-politization and atomisation in Russia today would appear to contradict such tendencies.

According to Branko Milanović in *Capitalism Alone: The Future of the System that Rules the World* (Harvard University Press 2019) there are now two types of capitalism competing with each other, liberal meritocratic capitalism and political capitalism. Examples of the latter are Russia and China. This would seem to fit better the argument.

I agree with the argument that capitalism does not necessarily lead towards peace. There is also no natural tendency for capitalism to lead towards democracy. For much of the history of capitalism, democracy was suppressed and western liberal democracies pursued colonial wars while peace reigned at home. Yet, it is also incontrovertible, as Schumpeter recognised, that capitalism at least in North America and Europe produced the conditions favourable to democracy, as in the creation of a knowledge based working class, whose interests and motivation cultivated an inclusive and democratic idea of society. The result was tendencies that resisted capitalism while at the same time facilitating its reproduction. Schumpeter was of course mistaken in thinking that the emergence of democratic currents would be detrimental to capitalism.

Then there is the erroneous argument that the war in Ukraine is an exception. It could be argued that the current situation in which the largest country in Europe has been invaded by an expansionist superpower is an exception, much like the war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. I believe this is the wrong approach to take and Magun and Yudin give good arguments to the contrary. It would be to exclude too much, and to overlook the European failure to intervene to stop the genocide in Srebrenica in 1992 and its later inadequate response to the Kosovo war in 1999. The narrative that has become a legitimating myth of European integration of progressive peace needs to be re-written to take into account not just the current situation but the structural conditions of the very possibility of peace, which after 1945 were very much based on economic and political cooperation.

Looking back over the past 70 years or so, we can see that the relative peace that was established in Europe was made possible by a framework of economic and political stability that no longer exists, having come to a slow demise over the past two decades. In many ways the fundamental aspirations of the post-war project of European integration have been realised. The current geopolitical crisis is a crisis of stability.

The post-1945 period was indeed a period of peace but it was more so a period of stability. We should not mistake stability for peace. The conditions of the post-war peace were made possible by a new kind of war, namely the Cold War and the possession of nuclear weapons by the two superpowers. The peace that was established was a phoney peace, as argued by many critics such as E.P. Thompson and Herbert Marcuse, who also pointed out that the peace the Cold War established made possible the struggle to control the 'Third World', where the real war took place. In this period, when the USA and the USSR scrambled to control the Third World, many of the European nations were actively conducting wars to retain their colonial possessions, and several of them were dictatorships in this period. The Treaty of Rome was signed in the middle of the Algerian War. It makes little sense calling Spain under the Franco dictatorship peaceful when terror and tyranny prevailed. Peace must also be just. This means that resistance is sometimes necessary to defend it.

Peace in Europe was secured at the price of major restrictions on democracy, leading to a pervasive crisis in legitimation in the 1970s. This peace was possible

only through the balance of capitalism and democracy, a balance that has now broken down amidst the crisis of neoliberalism and the rise almost everywhere of radical right-wing nationalism. I think this situation can be seen as a crisis of stability, which now also extends to a questioning of the EU itself, as reflected in the monumental catastrophe of Brexit. But the current instability goes beyond these movements to encompass the ecological crisis and let us not forget the Covid pandemic. The Ukraine war is entwined in a global energy and food crisis.

For these reasons, I think we need to rethink the idea of Europe as a peace project, not to reject this idea but to give it a different foundation. The reconciliation achieved between France and Germany and between Poland and Germany was one of the great achievements of the previous century, as was the project of European integration. But as the memory of the war recedes and the improbability of a war again between the founding nations of the EU fades, a new rationale has to be found. We cannot assume the existence of an endogenous permanence of a 'peaceful Europe'.

Immanuel Kant in *Perpetual Peace* in 1795 argued that peace needs to be perpetual, that is, eternal. Treaties between states secure a kind of peace that is conditional on a treaty. What needs to be created, he argued, is a perpetual peace that does not depend on the highly conditional nature of treaties. Creating a lasting peace requires a fundamental transformation in political community. Now, some of the answers Kant found are not very helpful for us today (he regarded democracy as despotic) but his argument for what he called the right of hospitality and a new cosmopolitan law that goes beyond international treaties continues to be relevant. For all these reasons, I believe it is essential that the left support Ukraine and that Russia is not allowed to succeed in its war aims. Ukraine is now fighting for its life, as Britain was in 1945.