# A memorandum on the radical anti-imperialist position regarding the war in Ukraine

written by Gilbert Achcar | February 27, 2022



The Russian invasion of Ukraine is the second defining moment of the New Cold War in which the world has been plunged since the turn of the century as a result of the US decision to expand NATO. The first defining moment was the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. It ended in complete failure to achieve US imperialist goals. The price that Iraq paid – and is still paying along with neighbouring countries – has been enormous, but the propensity of US imperialism to invade other countries has been severely curtailed, as confirmed by the recent US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The fate of Russia's invasion of Ukraine will determine the propensity of all other countries for aggression. If it fails in turn, the effect on all global and regional powers will be one of powerful deterrence. If it succeeds, that is if Russia manages to "pacify" Ukraine under Russian boots, the effect will be a major slide of the global situation toward unrestrained law of the jungle, emboldening US imperialism itself and its allies to resume their own aggressive stances.

For now, the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people has thrown into disarray the whole spectrum of reactionary admirers of Vladimir Putin, from the global hard right and far right to pseudo-left supporters of Russian imperialism. A victory for Putin in Ukraine would tremendously bolster this range of reactionary politics.

Beyond general condemnation of the Russian invasion, there has also been some confusion in the ranks of the true anti-imperialists about the specific position to take on issues related to the ongoing war. It is important to clarify these issues.

1. It is not enough to call for Russia to stop its attacks and to call for "an immediate ceasefire and a return to the negotiating table". We did not use such UN-like language when the United States invaded Iraq but demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the aggressors, as we have done in every instance of invasion of one country by another. Likewise, we should demand not only the cessation of the aggression but also the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine.

2. The demand of Russian withdrawal applies to every inch of Ukraine's territory – including the territory invaded by Russia in 2014. When there is a dispute on the belonging of any territory anywhere in the world – such as Crimea or provinces in Eastern Ukraine, in this instance – we never accept that it be solved by naked force and the law of might, but always only through the free exercise by the people concerned of their right to democratic self-determination.

3. We are against calls for direct military intervention of one imperial force against another, be it with boots on the ground or the imposition of a No-Fly Zone from a distance. As a matter of general principle, we are against direct military intervention by any imperialist force anywhere. Asking for one of them to clash with another is tantamount to wishing a world war between nuclear powers. Moreover, there is no way that such an intervention could be effectuated within the boundaries of international law since most major imperialist powers have a veto right at the UN Security Council. Even if one can easily understand that Ukrainian victims of the aggression may make such calls out of despair, they are nevertheless irresponsible demands.

4. We are in favour of the delivery of defensive weapons to the victims of aggression with no strings attached – in this case to the Ukrainian state fighting the Russian invasion of its territory. No responsible anti-imperialist did call for the USSR or China to enter the war in Vietnam against the US invasion, but all radical anti-imperialists were in favour of increased arms deliveries by Moscow and Beijing to the Vietnamese resistance. To give those who are fighting a just war the means to fight against a much more powerful aggressor is an elementary internationalist duty. Blank opposition to such deliveries is contradictory with basic solidarity with the victims.

5. We have no general attitude on sanctions in principle. We were in favour of sanctions targeting the South-African Apartheid state and we are in favour of sanctions targeting the Israeli settler-colonial occupation. We were against the sanctions imposed on the Iraqi state after it had been destroyed by war in 1991, for they were murderous sanctions serving no just cause but only the subjugation of a state to US imperialism at a quasi-genocidal cost for its population. Western powers have decided a whole set of new sanctions against the Russian state for its invasion of Ukraine. Some of these may indeed curtail the ability of Putin's autocratic regime to fund its war machine, others may be harmful to the Russian population without much affecting the regime or its oligarchic cronies. Our opposition to the Russian aggression combined with our mistrust of Western imperialist governments means that we should neither support the latter's sanctions, nor demand that they be lifted.

6. Finally, the most obvious and straightforward issue of all from a progressive perspective is the demand that all borders be opened to the Ukrainian refugees, as they should be for all refugees fleeing war and persecution from whichever part of the world they come. The duty of welcoming and accommodating refugees and the cost of this must be equitably shared by all rich countries. Urgent humanitarian aid should also be provided to the internally displaced persons within Ukraine's borders.

Solidarity with the Ukrainian people!

*Pictured: People look at the exterior of a damaged residential block hit by an early morning missile strike on February 25, 2022 in Kyiv, Ukraine. Chris McGrath—Getty Images*