

**“Cuts Through All the Propaganda”**

a review from Dick Burkhardt of

# **“War in Ukraine – Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict”**

By Medea Benjamin & Nicolas Davies (2022)



I’ve been aware for some time of the warmongering of the mainstream media – the false claim that the Ukraine War was “unprovoked”. But knowing that there are always two sides (at least) to modern wars, I wanted a succinct and reliable account of that provocation. That’s exactly what this short and very readable book gives.

Right up front we learn that “the US and NATO are in a proxy war with Russia” (p 5). Then a far different strategy is proposed: “Rather than building up weaponry in Europe, could the US initiate negotiations about shared security, disarmament, and a military stand-down?” (p 7).

The basic story is that “the ‘peace dividend’ that most of the world hoped for was trumped by a ‘power dividend’” (p 15) after the collapse of the Soviet Union. “From Gorbachev to Putin, Russian leaders hoped to be accepted by the West as economic and security partners” but they were quickly rebuffed by the US, NATO, and the European Union, despite early promises.

Meanwhile Putin led the rebuilding of Russia as the 21<sup>st</sup> century began and became “hugely popular”. Even then it was “not until 2007, at the Munich Security Conference, did Putin begin to publicly challenge

NATO expansion” (p 16). The backdrop here is historical: “Kyiv, along with Eastern and Southern Ukraine, were part of Russia and the Russian empire for centuries” (p 17). And, of course, Russia had suffered from brutal invasions from the West, from Napoleon through Hitler, and wanted a buffer.

In World War II, “Ukrainian nationalist militias fought on the German side and took part in the mass killings of Jews and ethnic cleansing of Poles”. Then “neo-nazi groups experienced a revival in the Ukraine in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and played important roles in both the 2014 coup and in the civil war in the Eastern Ukraine that followed it”.

The authors conclude that we “believe the western nations treatment of Russia in the decades following the demise of the Soviet Union was a policy mistake of epic proportions” (p 18). One can only compare this miserable state of affair to the spectacular success of the generosity toward Japan and Germany following their defeat in World War II.

So most of this book is just fleshing out the details. For example, Crimea had been part of Russia since 1783 but was transferred to Ukrainian administration by Khrushchev, who was from the Ukraine. Thus it’s not surprising that when Ukraine voted for independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, Crimea voted for independence from the Ukraine by 94%. Also the Western “shock therapy” that was applied to Russia in the 1990s was equally disastrous for the Ukraine, losing half of its GDP. Then when the economy began to improve after 2000 all governments were mired in corruption and scandal generated by the new oligarchs.

Politically, the authors detail all the key elections and maneuvers from 2004 to the present, from Yanukovich to Zelensky, the “Maiden” protests, Victoria Nuland, the 2014 coup, the Azov Battalion, and much

more. Then came the Minsk Accords, which finally led to a solid ceasefire in 2015, but whose political provisions were never fulfilled by the Ukrainian government. These would have given some autonomy to the Russian-dominated Donbas region but were undermined by right wing nationalists at every turn, with the acquiescence of the US.

You may be surprised to learn that “In his campaign for President, Zelensky promised to make peace with Donbas and reunify the country” (p 61). And when he won, he actually tried to do so. But all this was blocked in 2019 by powerful right wing forces, enabled by the anti-Russian agenda of the US. In other words, there was already a proxy cold war well before it turned hot.

Finally, Putin badly miscalculated the will of the Ukrainians by trying to take over the whole country in one fell swoop. But the US neo-cons got exactly what they wanted – a clear excuse, not just for a new cold war, but a hot one, where the US could demonstrate its military might and bring Russia to heel. Of course, that was also a bad miscalculation, as it is clear that Russia is determined to make US warmongering a very costly endeavor, not just for the US, but Europe too, sacrificing much of the Ukraine in the process.

As of this writing, new peace talks may be in the offing, but the biggest damage has already been done: At a time when the world desperately needs more international cooperation to tackle existential crises like climate change and limits to growth, geopolitics is reverting to the old order of great power maneuvers, based on both economic and military force. The hurricanes of collapse are swirling ever closer.