The U.S. & Russia, faded relics of the Cold War, unable to accept their terminal decline, launch futile & self-defeating wars to reclaim their lost imperial power.

By Chris Hedges

Blinded by what Barbara Tuchman calls “the bellissimo frivolity of senile empires,” we are marching ominously toward war with Russia. How do we know? Last week we heard Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin’s public declaration that the U.S. goal is to “weaken Russia” and Joe Biden’s request for another $33 billion in “emergency” military and economic aid (billions of what Russia spent on its military in 2021) for Ukraine?

The same cabal of generals and politicians that drained the state of trillions of dollars in the debacles in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Somalia and learned nothing from the nightmare of Vietnam, revel in the illusion of their omnipotence. They have no interest in a diplomatic solution. There are billions in profits to be made in arms sales. There is political power to be gained. It is all done. There are generals itching to pull the trigger. Why have all these high-priced and technologically advanced weapons systems if you can’t use them? Why not show the world this time around that you, rather than China, will dominate the globe?

The masters of war require an enemy. When an enemy cannot be found, as George Orwell understood in Nineteen Eighty-Four, an enemy is manufactured. That enemy can become an ally overnight. We allied ourselves with Iran in the Middle East to fight the Taliban and later the Caliphate, before instantly reinstating Iran as the incarnation of evil. The enemy is not about logic or geopolitical necessity. It is about stoking the fear and hatred that fuel perpetual war.

In 1989, I covered the revolutions that toppled the communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe. President Mikhail Gorbachev, like his successor Boris Yeltsin and like Vladimir Putin in the early stages of his rule, hoped to integrate Russia into the western alliance. But the war industry places profits before national defense. It needed an antagonistic Russia to push the expansion of NATO beyond the borders of a unified Germany in violation of a promise made to Moscow. There were billions of dollars to be made from a Russian enemy, as there are billions more to be made from the proxy war in Ukraine. There would be no “peace dividend” or “emergency” military and economic aid (half of what Russia spent on its military in 2021) for Ukraine?

The disorganization, ineptitude, and low morale of the Russian army’s conscripts, along with the repeated intelligence failures by the Russian high command — apparently convinced Russia would roll over Ukraine in a few days — exposes the lie that Russia is a global menace. Russia’s forty-mile long convoy of tanks and trucks, broke down and out of fuel, on the muddy road to Kyiv was not an image of cutting-edge military prowess. Russia has been unable to overwhelm a poorly equipped and numerically inferior force in Ukraine, many of whose troops have little or no military training. Russia poses no threat to the NATO alliance or the United States, barring a nuclear attack.

“Defanged” Russia’s Floundering Invasion

“The Russian bear has effectively defanged itself,” historian Andrew Bacevich writes in The Nation. “Most embarrassingly for American policy-makers, the failure of Putin’s ‘special operation’ exposes the overall Russian ‘threat’ as essentially fraudulent.”

But this is not a truth the war makers impart to the public. Russia must be inflated to become a global menace, despite nine weeks of humiliating military failures. A Russian mower is the key to integrate Russia into the western alliance. But the war industry places profits before national defense. It needed an antagonistic Russia to push the expansion of NATO beyond the borders of a unified Germany in violation of a promise made to Moscow. There were billions of dollars to be made from a Russian enemy, as there are billions more to be made from the proxy war in Ukraine. There would be no “peace dividend” or “emergency” military and economic aid (half of what Russia spent on its military in 2021) for Ukraine?

The war in Ukraine is intimately linked to the real existential crisis we face — the climate crisis. The latest UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report warns that greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2025, and be nearly halved this decade, to thwart global catastrophe. UN Secretary General António Guterres characterized the report as “an atlas of human suffering and a damning indictment of failed climate leadership.”

Triggered by war in Ukraine, soaring energy prices have pushed the U.S. and other countries to call on domestic oil producers to increase fossil fuel extraction and exacerbate the climate crisis. Oil and gas lobbyists are demanding the Biden administration lift prohibitions on offshore drilling and on federal lands.

Black and brown people, who suffered in the brutal wars in Yemen, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Syria, without the western support and sympathy shown to Ukraine, will again be targeted. The Indian subcontinent is currently plagued with temperatures as high as 116.6 degrees Fahrenheit, power outages of 10-14 hours a day, and dying fields of crops. An estimated 143 million people will be displaced over the next thirty years, nearly all from Africa, South Asia and Latin America, the IPCC writes.

These endless conflicts will inevitably militarize our response to the climate breakdown. Absent measures and resources to halt the rise in global temperatures, countries reliant on fossil fuels, foster a plant-based diet, and curb profligate consumption, nations will increasingly use their militaries to hoard diminishing natural resources, including food and water. Russia and Ukraine account for 30 percent of all wheat traded on world markets. Since the invasion, the price of wheat has gone up by between 50 and 65 percent in commoditites exchanges. This is a hint of what is to come.

The Ukraine war is part of a world order where the rule of law has been jettisoned for aggressive, preemptive war, a criminal act of aggression. These wars bring with them black sites, kidnapping, torture, war crimes, and the destruction of the liberal democratic order.

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War is a spectacular form of social control. It secures a blind, unquestioning mass consent propped up by what Pankaj Mishra calls an “infotainment media” that “works up citizens into a state of paralyzing virtue.” Triggered by war in Ukraine, soaring energy prices have pushed the U.S. and other countries to call on domestic oil producers to increase fossil fuel extraction and exacerbate the climate crisis. Oil and gas lobbyists are demanding the Biden administration lift prohibitions on offshore drilling and on federal lands.

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