

Anarchist Organization in Times of War and Crisis

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On February 24, Russian Federation troops began a so-called operation in Ukraine with the officially stated goal of demilitarizing and denazifying the country and overthrowing the current president and the rest of the top brass of the current government in Ukraine. It is worth noting that the Russian Federation does not use the word war in official statements, instead using the concept of operation, while the Ukrainian authorities call it war, but nevertheless have not officially declared war on Russia. Both sides use the concepts of war, occupation, invasion, liberation, demilitarization, and others against each other for propaganda, disinformation, and to raise patriotic and nationalist sentiments. This is a modern way of falsifying concepts and engaging in false rhetoric about war. If it is an operation and not a war, the figures provided about military losses or civilian casualties may no longer sound so scary. If it is an occupation, it sounds scarier than just an attack, it means that the attack does not end in defeat, but is followed by something even more lasting. The terms fascism and nazism sound here and there, losing any of their original meaning.

The Russian armed forces' attack on Ukraine is a good example of modern unconventional warfare, where there are no clear borders and front lines, the tactics of capture and hold are not used everywhere, but mainly in strategically important places, a wide range of modern technological weapons and countermeasures to them are used. In the first days instead of a repressive policy of occupation and total destruction a more cunning tactic of dynamic passage and occupation of the most important objects in the country is used (Kherson dam, Chernobyl nuclear power plant, blocking of large cities, seizing airfields, major logistical hubs, highways, road junctions and so on) which can immediately be used for more political and economic pressure and propaganda. In the application of such intensive tactics of passage, the countryside, which covers a huge part of Ukraine, remains poorly or uncontrolled if no important, large military bases or strategic facilities are located there. Creating counterinsurgency or guerrilla-type structures in the countryside and acting proactively using hit-and-run tactics from the first days of the war could significantly alter the balance of power early on and significantly reduce the speed of Russian troop advance. However, the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian Armed Forces decided to act in the classic way, to form volunteer armed structures primarily in urban centers and concentrate most of the military forces there, perhaps because the government wanted to protect what was more valuable, closer and more understandable to them, or because it lacked understanding of military affairs. In this way in the first week of fighting, almost all large cities in eastern and central Ukraine, including Kiev, are surrounded by Russian troops and will probably experience a complete blockade in the near future.

Another distinctive feature of the events of recent weeks has been the so-called "cyber war," which for the first time is taking place on such a large scale and using many resources on both sides, aiming both to obtain compromising or intelligence data and to obstruct state and civilian resources and infrastructures. So is the intense, global information warfare coming from all directions and to all corners of the world, as is usually the case when wars are fought within Europe. While wars and conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and other regions of the so-called Third World are no longer of interest to the European media or to the media in those regions anymore.

Crisis situation

Immediately from the first days of hostilities, people all over Ukraine were able to observe all the related war factors: all the large-scale panic, lack of relevant and credible information, spontaneous population displacement from the country, the ensuing transport collapse, strikes against civilian objects and disruption of transport and logistics infrastructures, numerous civilian casualties and victims and lack of assistance and support provided to them. The Ukrainian state, like any other in such a situation, is unable to support its population and provide for its immediate needs, as all resources have been thrown into defense and the confrontation with Russia. As a consequence, the government is losing the trust of the ordinary people of the country. The situation is further aggravated by impulsive decisions of the government and the Department of Defense, such as the poorly controlled distribution of weapons and the consequent shootings of civilians and its own military, the provoked “witch-hunt” and the increase of banditry and looting in the streets, which the state security agencies are no longer able to fully control. Nor are any state initiatives involving volunteers, such as the “territorial defense,” which is part of the Ukrainian armed forces and for which decisions and orders are taken from above.

Territorial Defense is a good and telling example of how volunteer structures initiated and controlled by the state can only perform volunteer support functions within the state, by state methods and only to protect the state itself, and cannot actually help the population with security and other primary needs that arise in crisis situations, which provokes an even greater exodus of people from the country and more victims.

Assurances from Ukrainian pro-government resources that Russia cannot fight for long, that it should focus on supporting the army and engage in territorial defense, are in fact shortsighted. The Russian government has plans, ways, and has more resources to beat the crisis at home than does the Ukrainian government. The supply of weapons and finance by European countries to Ukraine does not change the fact that the strategically important military, civilian and logistical infrastructure continues to be destroyed by Russian military strikes and its restoration will require a long time and enormous resources that the Ukrainian government currently lacks. The war threatens to plunge Ukraine into a deep humanitarian crisis and make the country a wasteland, uninhabitable for years to come.

Anarchist Action

Crisis situations like the one that is currently taking place in Ukraine always contribute to a change in society’s self-esteem and self-consciousness, a loss of trust or a rethinking of power and the state system, no matter whether it is the state of Ukraine or the Russian state. When there is a loss of trust, a sense of deceit or abandonment, society is more open to self-organization, initiative and creation or participation in structures or initiatives that are an alternative to the state, created horizontally, with an open possibility to participate for all, in accordance with their desires or abilities and providing the most important aspects of life and urgent needs that society is experiencing at the moment. For example, ensuring security in one’s neighborhood, town, or village, keeping the staff and vital facilities such as power plants, water supply stations, boilers, hospitals, and fire stations, as well as supplying facilities such as grocery stores, pharmaceutical stores, and businesses. Ensuring the safety of movement in the city, in neighborhoods and on

roads, taking measures against banditry, robbery, attacks, whether by organized criminal groups or individuals, military or security forces of any states and structures presently in the territory.

The anarchist ideology that refuses to accept any form of power, authority and discrimination, and implies the creation of horizontal alternatives, self-organization, self-sufficiency and self-protection of society, in which anyone willing to participate as equals, regardless of gender or nationality, could participate and fully play their role – can be successfully put into practice in the current situation in Ukraine. As written above, many people are losing trust in a government that can't meet their safety and primary needs, and are thus much more actively seeking all sorts of alternatives to organize themselves, either on their own initiative or on the initiative of others. Anarchists can put forward such initiatives, despite the fact that for 8 years now the Ukrainian state has promoted patriotism propaganda, a military cult, supported nationalist and fascist organizations and movements, and repressed the anarchist movement.

By starting to act in an organized way, locally, starting with small neighborhoods and groups, you will already see results, acceptance and support of a self-organizing society without the government and the state. A good example that I came across was in Melitopol, local residents organized a daily gathering at the local House of Culture and signed up everyone who wished to patrol the city and monitor safety; they split into groups of 5 people based on their neighborhoods, appointed a senior for each group, chose a time of service and began patrolling the areas and streets. They made a separate 24-hour phone number for calls and emergencies and distributed it among the population. In essence, an alternative to the police, which no longer functioned in the city, was created without the involvement of any state institution.

The further the war and crisis progresses, there will be more of such examples and the anarchist movement may be in a prime position to organize such examples and experiences.

It's a good idea to walk around in your neighborhood, village, or town and ask the people there (if you don't already know) what their biggest needs are, what kind of service they need, and what kind of help they need. After that, get together with like-minded people and figure out how to work out how to solve these things together and organize with the residents. How to ensure food supplies in an organized manner, under regular shelling, to keep the risk of being killed to a minimum. How to restore water supplies, repair broken electrical wires, or find alternative sources for heating and electricity. How to collect life-saving medicines for those in need or provide medical care when medical institutions are not functioning.

We and people who live in our neighborhoods can have knowledge of such issues. We do not need the state and the power of some over others to solve such problems. By organizing ourselves in such a situation, a community of people will be able to achieve self-sufficiency in meeting its basic needs, without the involvement of any forces from outside, be it humanitarian aid from Russia or the EU, and to show an example of successful self-organization to others.

Without cooperating with any state, without falling into the patriotism and Russophobia that the Ukrainian media so easily use, by organizing ourselves on the principles and methods of anarchism, primarily among the most needy and suffering from the wars of two states, ordinary people who are abandoned by the state and left to their fate, we can set an example of anarchist practice.

Initiatives such as the Resistance Committee are formed within the military structure of the Ukrainian state. They are not anarchist initiatives, even though most of the participants are anarchists. All territorial defense structures are controlled by the Ukrainian Armed Forces, their actions and capabilities are limited by the strategy and policies of the state and the Ministry of

Defense. We can only have a dialogue or compromise with the state when we have strength and sufficient support from the people, otherwise we will end up repressed in prisons or destroyed by any of the opposing forces, whether it is the Ukrainian armed forces and the nationalist formations on their side or the Russian armed forces and the FSB. Perhaps we will see more positive examples of anarchist organizing in Ukraine, military and civilian in the future.

The goal of the Ukrainian state and their military structures in this war is to keep their power, the goal of the Russian state and their military structures is to seize power. The participation of anarchists in the structures of either of these states does not make the situation any easier for the people living in Ukraine, who are suffering from the war between two states. All the words about the army defending people, society and their land are only part of state propaganda, and history shows this. It is only possible to stop the war by opposing both states.

Once we start practicing anarchist ways of organizing and showing others how we can organize ourselves, we will see how widespread the support will be, both from the people we organize with and from foreign anarchists and others willing to support and participate in anarchist initiatives. Instead of a policy of senseless destruction and annihilation that is inherent in states, create a policy of reconstruction, self-defense, participation, and assistance. We can achieve this by believing in ourselves, organizing and acting together with others.

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