

The Iraq war and the eruption of American imperialism

Part Two

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14 April 2006

The following is the second and concluding part of a speech delivered by Nick Beams to public meetings in Sydney on April 4 and Melbourne on April 11 to mark three years since the US-led invasion of Iraq. Beams is the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) and a member of the International Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site. The first part was published yesterday.

It would be a big mistake to believe that the danger of the deployment of nuclear weapons has passed with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War confrontation. On the contrary, the risk is increasing.

The implications of the references in the Bush administration's 2005 National Security Strategy document to "overwhelming force" and the development of "offensive strike systems" involving "safe, credible and reliable nuclear forces" were spelled out in an article in the March-April edition of the journal *Foreign Affairs*.

The authors of the article conclude that since the end of the Cold War, the Russian strategic nuclear arsenal has sharply deteriorated, while the US nuclear arsenal has "significantly improved" and that the world will "live in the shadow of US nuclear primacy for many years to come."

In the Cold War, the relations between the nuclear powers were regulated by the doctrine of MAD—mutually assured destruction. No power could launch a first strike because, even if it were successful, the other power would still have enough weapons left to destroy its opponent. That doctrine no longer applies, such is the superiority enjoyed by the US.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the authors summed up as follows:

"Some may wonder whether US nuclear modernisation efforts are actually designed with terrorists or rogue states in mind. Given the United States' ongoing war on terror, and the continuing US interest in destroying deeply buried bunkers (reflected in the Bush administration's efforts to develop new nuclear weapons to destroy underground targets), one might assume that the W-76 [nuclear warhead] upgrades are designed to be used against targets such as rogue states' arsenals of weapons of mass destruction or terrorists holed up in caves. But this explanation does not add up. The United States already has more than a thousand nuclear warheads capable of attacking bunkers or caves. If the United States' nuclear modernisation were really aimed at rogue states or terrorists, the country's nuclear force would not need the additional thousand ground-burst warheads it will gain from the W-76 modernisation program. The current and future US nuclear force, in other words, seems designed to carry out a preemptive disarming strike against Russia or China.

"The intentional pursuit of nuclear primacy is, moreover, entirely consistent with the United States' declared policy of expanding its global dominance. The Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy explicitly states that the United States aims to establish military primacy: 'Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from

pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.' To this end, the United States is openly seeking primacy in every dimension of modern military technology, both in its conventional arsenal and in its nuclear forces."

In other words, this article, in the leading publication of the American foreign policy establishment, concludes, on the basis of a sober examination of the facts, that the US is pursuing an aggressive foreign policy and is quite prepared to use nuclear weapons in an offensive capacity to achieve its objectives.

These warnings have been underscored by this week's article by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* magazine. According to Hersh, there is a detailed discussion taking place within the Bush administration for an air attack on Iran, possibly using nuclear weapons in order to destroy Iranian underground facilities.

Hersh cited a former intelligence officer who made clear that the elimination of Iranian nuclear facilities would require the use of nuclear weapons. "Every other option, in the view of the nuclear weaponeers, would leave a gap. 'Decisive' is the key word of the Air Force's planning. It's a tough decision. But we made it in Japan," he said.

In other words, 15 years after the end of the Cold War, the danger of the deployment of nuclear weapons is now as great as at any time in the 61 years since the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

How have we arrived at this situation and what is to be done about it? These are the two burning questions of the day.

To address the first question. The present situation cannot even be understood if it is seen as simply the outcome of policies of the Bush administration—as if a change of administration would bring about a change of course. Nor can it be seen as the result of the undue influence of the so-called neo-conservatives. If that were the case, then why is it that the Democrats offer no opposition to the Bush administration and only criticise it from the right.

Moreover, how is one to account for the fact that, in the international arena, the leading ideological proponent for the aggressive role of US imperialism is the leader of the British Labour Party, Tony Blair. And if it is just a matter of the Bush regime then why, when Blair addressed the Australian parliament last week, was this liar and war criminal hailed by the entire political and media establishment.

A profound turn in world politics such as we are now passing through cannot be ascribed merely to personal or accidental factors but must have deep historical roots. Let us try to examine them.

Some 80 years ago, as he was analysing the significance of the rise of American imperialism over its European rivals in the aftermath of World War I, Leon Trotsky explained that it would be a grave mistake to believe that American dominance would somehow weaken in the face of economic problems. Quite the contrary would take place.

“In the period of crisis the hegemony of the United States will operate more completely, more openly, and more ruthlessly than in the period of boom. The United States will seek to overcome and extricate herself from her difficulties primarily at the expense of Europe, regardless of whether this occurs in Asia, Canada, South America, Australia, or Europe itself, or whether this takes place peacefully or through war” (Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, p. 8).

The present period, as we have noted, bears many similarities to that which preceded World War I. With the rise of Germany, the old balance of power in Europe broke down and the conflicting interests of the capitalist great powers could not be peacefully reconciled. Moreover, these conflicting interests extended well beyond Europe.

The stupendous economic growth at the end of the nineteenth century coupled with the development of global economic integration meant that the world economy was coming into conflict with the old nation-state system. The capitalist great powers, each of them concerned with the struggle for their own profits, resources and spheres of influence, were organically incapable of resolving that contradiction in a harmonious manner. War was the inevitable outcome.

The outcome of the war was the passing of economic hegemony to the United States. But the US could not refashion the world to meet its needs. It was confronted on the one hand by the continued economic and military power of its rivals in Europe and on the other by a still more dangerous foe, the socialist revolution, which had erupted in the form of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

No new equilibrium could be established, and barely two decades after the end of the First World War, the Second World War began. The US emerged from that war as the unchallenged hegemon of world capitalism. Resting on the betrayals of the Stalinist and social democratic leaderships of the working class, which insisted that capitalist democracy not socialism had to be established in Europe, the US was able, on the basis of its vast economic power, to establish a new capitalist equilibrium.

However, the very economic expansion that the post-war settlement engendered undermined one of the central pillars on which it rested—the absolute economic dominance of the US over its rivals.

Furthermore, the vast processes of economic globalisation over the past 20 years have raised the contradiction between the world economy and the capitalist nation-state system to a new peak of intensity. Once again this contradiction is expressed in the intense rivalry between the major capitalist powers for markets, resources and spheres of influence.

In the Middle East, the US aggression towards Iraq and now Iran—respectively number three and number two in the world for untapped oil reserves—is motivated by the drive to ensure that these reserves and resources are developed by American, rather than French, Japanese, Chinese, Russian or Indian companies. It is not just a matter of securing oil resources per se, but the vast profits that flow from their development. So far, the other major powers have tried to accommodate themselves to US demands. But, at a certain point, these demands, which increasingly freeze out US rivals, will become intolerable and we will begin to see the emergence of new blocs and alliances.

The US is still the dominant military power—its expenditure on arms is equivalent to the spending of all the other capitalist powers combined. But its economic supremacy has been severely undermined. With a balance of payments deficit of around \$800 billion, and rapidly heading towards \$1 trillion per year, it is dependent on an inflow of capital of \$3 billion a day from the rest of the world, much of it coming from the central banks of China and East Asia. At the same time General Motors, at one time the largest industrial corporation in the world, is being superseded by Toyota.

At the end of the Second World War, the US was responsible for about 50 percent of the world’s industrial output. Now it finds itself increasingly eclipsed in the struggle for world markets. Herein lies one of the driving forces for militarism. US imperialism is seeking to overcome

the decline of its economic position through the use of its military power. Such a strategy, by its very nature, cannot lead to a new equilibrium for world capitalism but must, sooner or later, create the conditions for imperialist war. This is the meaning of the invasion of Iraq, the threats against Iran and the open declaration that world domination is the central strategy of US imperialism.

This brings us to the second of the two questions posed earlier: how are these dangers to be confronted?

The answer to that question must be based on a sober, thought-out, that is scientific, evaluation of what is taking place.

The world is being plunged into new forms of barbarism by the eruption of deep-going and irresolvable contradictions within the very structure of world capitalism. The politics of imperialism—the subjugation of the resources and the peoples of the earth to the profit needs and interests of vast privately owned corporations—is quite literally incompatible with the objective needs and requirements of humanity.

In opposition to the program of imperialism and all its complexities, the international working class must advance its own independent perspective. There is no way out of the impasse other than the remaking of the world on the basis of the program of international socialism—that is, the overturn of the private profit and nation-state system and the utilisation of the resources of the earth and the vast wealth created by the labour of millions for the benefit of humanity as a whole. This is the perspective that must be consciously revived, developed and fought for.

To the extent that this perspective is taken up and begins to guide the struggles against war and the free market agenda of social inequality, the existing balance of forces will begin to shift, and shift quite dramatically.

The present situation is marked by a profound contradiction. There is mass opposition to war and the programs being implemented in all the major capitalist countries, yet they continue without hindrance.

Consider the experience of the invasion of Iraq. Millions opposed the war at the outset and held the largest demonstrations seen in history to voice their opposition. That opposition has not dissipated. But to the extent that it remains within the confines of protest, of seeking to pressure the imperialist powers, it remains impotent.

Facts must be squarely faced: the problem is one of perspective. No amount of pressure can divert American imperialism from the path of military aggression because its entire future is at stake. It is not going to fade from the scene and shuffle off into the good night.

Likewise, none of the major capitalist powers, whatever the political colouration of their governments, can abandon their own colonial ambitions. Nor can they back down on the free market agenda that requires the destruction of social services and working conditions as they compete for global markets and investment funds.

This is the issue now being fought out by the movement in France. Under conditions where the Chirac-Villepin government’s new labour laws against the youth are the part of an ongoing and intensifying war against the entire working class to make French capital competitive, no amount of protest can force a retreat. Either the movement goes forward by consciously fighting to force the government out, opening the way for a struggle for political power not only in France but throughout Europe where the same issues arise, or it is subordinated to the dictates of French capital.

This perspective, which arises from the objective conditions of the conflict itself, poses directly the necessity for the construction of a new revolutionary leadership of the working class. This is because all the existing organisations and parties—from the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the trade unions right through to the so-called “extreme left” parties—are opposed to a direct political struggle against the government. Their perspective is that the government must end the crisis. Our perspective is that the crisis must result in the end of the government.

Likewise, in this country, the issues are no less sharply posed. The

opposition to imperialist war and the deepening social inequality resulting from the depredations of the “free market” can find no outlet within the framework of official politics. It is necessary to construct a new revolutionary leadership of the working class based on the program of socialist internationalism and the historical struggle waged by the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International. This is the task to which the SEP and the WSWs are dedicated. We urge that you give it urgent consideration and join our party.

Concluded



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