

For an international mobilization of workers and youth against the war in Iraq

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The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International call on all socially conscious workers, students and youth throughout the world to dedicate 2007 to the development of an international mass working class movement against the American-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Bush administration has ordered 21,500 more combat troops to Iraq to suppress opposition to the US occupation, signaling a major escalation of a war that has already claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and killed more than 3,000 American troops and several hundred from Britain, Italy, Poland, Spain, Ukraine and other “coalition” countries.

Bush has made clear he not only intends to turn American firepower against the teeming neighborhoods of Baghdad and the population centers of the rebellious Anbar Province, he is also preparing new wars of aggression, as demonstrated by the US naval buildup in the Persian Gulf and Washington’s diplomatic offensive to line up allies in the Middle East against Iran and Syria.

Bush’s order to “seek out and destroy” alleged support networks in Iraq for “insurgents and terrorists” sets the stage for stepped-up provocations and military incursions into the two countries.

Last July’s Israeli war in Lebanon to eliminate Hezbollah was backed by the US as the first step in moves against Iran and Syria. Israel’s setback, far from ending the danger of a wider war, has only heightened it. Media reports have leaked details of advanced plans by both the Israeli and US military for a strike on Iran that would include the use of nuclear weapons for the first time since 1945.

US overtures to predominantly Sunni states like Saudi Arabia and Egypt for support against Shiite Iran threaten to turn the civil war in Iraq into a sectarian conflict that engulfs the entire region.

These actions are being carried out in direct defiance of the sentiments of the vast majority of the world’s population. In country after country, opinion polls have repeatedly registered overwhelming opposition to the war.

The White House has ignored the express wishes of the American people, who went to the polls last November to vote against the war and ended Republican control of both houses of the US Congress. In Iraq itself, most people not only want an end to the military occupation, but support armed attacks against the foreign occupiers.

The US invaded Iraq in order to establish exclusive control over the country’s massive oil reserves and create a base to pursue its wider ambitions for domination throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. In every part of the globe—from the Middle East to Latin America to the South Pacific—the competition between the great powers for resources, cheap labor and markets is intensifying. A new scramble for Africa is underway. In Somalia, the American military machine has begun the slaughter of Africans, sending in its warplanes and special operations killing squads while fomenting a regional war.

Washington has unveiled plans for a permanent increase in the size of

the US Army and Marines to prepare future interventions. In response, all the major powers, including newly emerging ones like India and China, are boosting their military capacity and bracing themselves for war to defend their interests. The violent eruption of American militarism threatens all of humanity, posing the danger of a worldwide conflagration.

More and more, the global role being played by US imperialism, in its lawlessness, rapacity and recklessness, resembles that of German and Japanese imperialism in the period preceding the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. As in the 1930s, it increasingly appears that the direction of world politics is being determined by madmen.

What appears to be madness, however, is actually the product of the economic structure of world capitalism and the material interests of its ruling classes. The fundamental causes of the eruption of imperialist militarism are to be found in the contradictions of world capitalism—between a globally integrated economy and the capitalist nation-state system, and between the social production processes of mass society and the anarchic character of a market economy based on private ownership.

These contradictions have vastly intensified in the past half-century as a result of the ever closer integration of the global economy. They find their most concentrated expression in US imperialism itself, which seeks to maintain its faltering position as the world’s hegemon and sole “superpower” by utilizing its military superiority to offset its protracted decline as an economic power. This colonialist policy requires escalating military violence abroad and ever greater attacks on the social conditions and democratic rights of the population at home.

The US war has turned Iraq into a nightmare of death and destruction, with at least 100 people killed daily, hundreds of thousands made victims of “ethnic cleansing,” and millions forced to flee into exile. It is part of a brutal offensive against the international working class.

Not only in the US, but in Europe, Japan, the former colonial countries and throughout the world, the corporate-financial elites and the governments that serve their interests are attacking the jobs, living standards and democratic rights of ordinary working people. Transnational corporations that dominate the world economy are scouring the globe for the cheapest possible labor. Social gains won over previous generations of struggle are being systematically eradicated.

Revive the antiwar movement

Hundreds of millions of people across the globe oppose US militarism. But their efforts so far have come to nothing because the perspective of the antiwar movement has not gone beyond impotent protests to the powers-that-be. What is needed is a new revolutionary political perspective to guide a unified international struggle of the working class

against imperialist war.

In February of 2003, on the eve of the US invasion of Iraq, the potential for such an international struggle was demonstrated in the largest antiwar protests the world has ever seen. More than 10 million people poured onto the streets, with simultaneous demonstrations on every continent.

The political conceptions that accompanied these protests—that war could be prevented through the force of public opinion, either by dissuading Washington or by rallying the European powers and the United Nations to curb the excesses of US imperialism—have been thoroughly refuted by the course of events.

Within six months of the illegal invasion in March 2003, the United Nations passed a resolution sanctioning the US occupation of Iraq. Far from being a neutral body dedicated to peace, the UN has been exposed as a den of thieves where neo-colonial wars are prepared. Since Bush's announcement of the latest escalation in Iraq, the UN Security Council has maintained a deafening silence on the subject, even as it rubberstamped the US-backed intervention in Somalia.

All of the imperialist powers, major and minor, are implicated in the Iraq war. Britain, Australia and Poland were founder members of the notorious “coalition of the willing” and deployed troops to participate in the US-led invasion. Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Spain and Norway sent forces as well, while South Korea still maintains 2,300 troops in the country and Denmark a few hundred.

Germany's government gave a green light for the US invasion, allowing Washington to utilize its territory to launch the attack and providing the Pentagon with military intelligence. Both Germany and France, which postured in 2003 as opponents of the US-led invasion, have joined the NATO force in Afghanistan, fighting to suppress the resistance of the Afghan people and thereby freeing up American troops for the war in Iraq.

Russia and China have repeatedly caved in to Washington's threats and pressure. In the wake of the US invasion, they joined the European “opponents” of the war in affixing the UN seal of approval on the US occupation. Both countries have backed UN resolutions condemning Iran and North Korea that the US will inevitably exploit to legitimize future attacks.

The ruling elites of countries that have been historically oppressed by imperialism have responded to the US-led wars of aggression by attempting to utilize them to promote their own regional ambitions. The government of Iran collaborated directly in facilitating the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and has since sought to use the crisis confronting the US interventions to expand Iranian influence in both countries.

The Brazilian government of Workers Party President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, which has its own designs in Latin America, aligned itself in 2003 with Germany, France and Russia in opposing the US invasion. It then sent troops into Haiti, relieving the American Marines—badly needed in Iraq—who had invaded the impoverished island nation after the US-orchestrated overthrow of the elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide.

In country after country, the so-called “global war on terror” initiated by Washington as the pretext to justify its wars of aggression has been utilized as a political alibi for unspeakable crimes. This phony war has served as a cover for the wholesale repression of every opposition—including reformist and nationalist movements—to the imperialist-dominated status quo. In Sri Lanka, for example, the government in Colombo has proclaimed its military aggression against the island's Tamil minority as part of this “war,” and has received direct political and military support from Washington to carry out its atrocities.

To the extent that bourgeois regimes—in Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere—have verbally opposed the war, their differences with Washington have been of a purely tactical nature, stemming from the fear that their own interests in the region will suffer. In the final analysis, all of them depend upon US imperialism as a guarantor of capitalist stability and a bulwark against revolution.

The past four years have furnished critical political lessons. Neither the war in Iraq nor future imperialist aggression can be halted through appeals to the official political establishments, in the US or anywhere else in the world.

The struggle against war is today—as it was in World War I and World War II—an international class question. Calls for peace can achieve nothing unless they are directed toward the independent political mobilization of working people, who have no interest in imperialist plunder. The fight against war must be waged on the basis of an international socialist strategy.

US militarism and the breakdown of American democracy

While the Bush administration claims that the war in Iraq is being waged for democracy, its escalation has served to expose the breakdown of democratic processes within the US itself. The mass opposition to the war articulated at the polls last November, and supported by millions around the world, finds no genuine expression within the US political establishment or its two major parties.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned on election day itself, “Whatever the outcome of today's congressional and gubernatorial elections, after November 7 working people in the United States will confront a political regime in Washington that remains committed to imperialist war in Iraq and attacks on democratic rights and living standards at home.” This warning has been fully vindicated.

The differences between Bush and his critics within the political establishment are over tactics and means, not principles or ends. Whatever the complaints over the conduct of the war, all agree that immediate withdrawal from Iraq is unthinkable, and that crucial American financial and geo-strategic interests are at stake.

Even though the Democrats owed their November victory to widespread antiwar sentiment, the party's leaders have already made clear they will not stand in the way of Bush's escalation plans, ruling out the only means at their disposal to end the war: impeachment of the president or a vote to cut off military funding.

Brent Scowcroft, the national security advisor in the administration of Bush senior and a principal architect of the plan drafted by the Iraq Study Group, recently spelled out the basis of this ruthless policy. Writing in the January 4 *New York Times*, Scowcroft stressed that, while the Iraq Study Group report acknowledged the “grave and deteriorating” situation in Iraq, withdrawal of US troops without an American victory “would be a strategic defeat for American interests, with potentially catastrophic consequences both in the region and beyond.”

Scowcroft continued, “The effects would not be confined to Iraq and the Middle East. Energy resources and transit choke points vital to the global economy would be subjected to greatly increased risk. Terrorists and extremists elsewhere would be emboldened. And the perception, worldwide, would be that the American colossus had stumbled, was losing its resolve and could no longer be considered a reliable ally or friend—or the guarantor of peace and stability in this critical region.”

Here the war aims of US imperialism are spelled out clearly. The financial oligarchy that rules America is determined to seize control of the “energy resources and transit choke points vital to the global economy” in order to establish its own global hegemony and place itself in a position to dictate terms to its principal capitalist rivals in Europe and Asia.

It fears that with acknowledgement of defeat in Iraq, millions of people across the globe—and in America itself—will conclude that “the American colossus had stumbled,” thereby creating conditions for revolutionary upheavals internationally.

While the majority of the world's population want the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US and "coalition" troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, this simple and humane demand cannot be achieved through the political institutions controlled by the corporate and financial elites. Their global interests can be achieved only through violence, and that is why the war continues.

The political lessons of the US elections

The November elections in the US raise vital political issues for workers in every country.

The political experiences through which masses of Americans have passed during the past four years have demonstrated the dead-end of any orientation based on working within the two-party system and pressuring the Democrats.

In the 2002 congressional elections, the Democratic leadership refused to raise the issue of the looming invasion of Iraq, ignoring mass antiwar sentiment among Democratic voters and enabling the government to carry out its conspiracy to drag the country into a war based on lies. The Democrats' spineless acquiescence culminated in the October 2002 vote by Congress to provide the White House with a blank check to initiate military action.

By the time of the 2004 presidential campaign, popular opposition to the war had intensified. The Democratic presidential primaries registered this rising mass opposition in the emergence of "antiwar" candidate Howard Dean as the front-runner. The party leadership summarily sidelined Dean's campaign, determined to prevent the election from becoming a referendum on the war.

When John Kerry won the nomination, Dean and other supposedly antiwar Democrats lined up behind his pro-war campaign. Bush was reelected and the war continued.

The Democrats neither encouraged nor welcomed the 2006 midterm election result. Prior to the November 7 vote, in an attempt to salvage the failing US operation in Iraq and divert growing antiwar sentiment, prominent Democrats and Republicans urged the people to look to the bipartisan Iraq Study Group to come up with a new strategy for "success" in Iraq.

Within hours of the issuance of the panel's report, which ruled out an early withdrawal of US troops while declaring Bush's strategy for military victory a failure, the White House rejected its proposals and the Iraq Study Group quickly become a dead letter.

The American people want peace, but they are getting intensified war. The mass media have lined up behind the administration's military escalation in Iraq and its stepped up saber-rattling against Iran.

The attitude of the American ruling elite to mass antiwar sentiment within its own country is replicated throughout the world. Britain's Labour Party prime minister, Tony Blair, and Australia's conservative prime minister, John Howard, have been able to ignore majority opposition and continue their participation in the Iraq war only because of the complicity of the entire political establishment in both countries. Everywhere, the vast majority of people have been effectively disenfranchised.

The only solution is for the working people on every continent to take action independently of and against the governments and establishment parties and build a new international socialist political movement. All forms of popular mobilizations against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—educational campaigns, rallies and demonstrations, industrial action, electoral initiatives—must be conceived of, developed and implemented on the basis of this independent political strategy.

War and social inequality

The chasm between the world's governments and the broad mass of the people regarding the war in Iraq reflects the underlying social and economic reality of world capitalism. The past quarter century has witnessed an unprecedented growth of social inequality.

At the end of last year, a United Nations-affiliated research organization released a report documenting the staggering monopolization of wealth by a financial aristocracy at the expense of the vast majority of the world's people.

According to the World Institute for Development Economics Research, the top 1 percent of the world's adult population (about 37 million people) owns 40 percent of the world's wealth. The top 2 percent owns over half and the top 10 percent owns 85 percent.

In contrast, the bottom half of the world's adult population—about 1.85 billion people—owns collectively only one percent of the world's assets, with masses of people condemned to lives of abject poverty, hunger and disease.

In the US, Europe, Russia and throughout Latin America, Africa and Asia, a vast social transformation has taken place as the result of governments of every political stripe funneling an ever greater share of social wealth from the working masses to a wealth-besotted elite at the summit of society.

The results have everywhere been essentially the same: the consolidation of a financial oligarchy that denies the working class, the vast majority of the population, the means to make its needs, views and interests felt.

The attack on democratic rights

The prosecution of policies directly in the interests of the rich and the super-rich cannot, in the end, be carried through by traditional democratic methods. The real reason for the unprecedented assault on democratic rights is the need to expand the repressive powers of the state against an eruption of popular opposition, not to protect the people from external terrorist threats.

In the United States, the Bush administration has implemented, with the support of the Democratic Party and the mass media, anti-democratic measures that in their totality have created the legal and institutional framework for a police state.

Government spying on the people has rendered the right to privacy a dead letter. The right to a trial and legal counsel and the centuries-old principle of habeas corpus have been undermined. Secret prisons and torture have been sanctioned by laws passed with bipartisan support. Appeals to the protections laid down by the Geneva Conventions and other international laws have been banished from US courts.

These repressive actions have been emulated all over the world. In Britain, the Prevention of Terrorism Act was passed in 2005, abolishing the bedrock principle of presumption of innocence and freeing the government to impose lengthy detentions without charges. In Australia, the five years since the September 11, 2001 attacks have seen the Howard government implement more than 40 separate counter-terrorism laws. Never have the rights of the world's people been so threatened as they are today.

Break with the parties of war and reaction! For an independent mass international movement against the war!

The key to ending the war in Iraq is the independent social and political intervention of working people and youth against the entire political establishment and the financial oligarchy that it serves.

War is the inevitable product of a society in which all social needs are subordinated to the accumulation of corporate profit and the personal wealth of a tiny elite. The growth of militarism and the prosecution of imperialist wars cannot be separated from the issue of who benefits and profits.

The movement against war must adopt a program that links the struggle against militarism and war to the struggle against social inequality and the attacks on democratic rights. It must directly challenge the existing capitalist setup, fighting for the reorganization of economic life internationally on the basis of social need and the common good, that is, on socialist foundations.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on workers, students and youth to build a popular campaign against the war on the basis of the following policies:

- * The immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US, British and other “coalition” troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

No end to the bloodshed in Iraq is possible as long as American troops remain in that country. The catastrophe that has overtaken the Iraqi people is the result of their country’s tragic encounter with the United States over the last quarter century: the American encouragement of Iraq’s disastrous invasion of Iran in the 1980s, the US invasion of Iraq in 1991, twelve years of economic sanctions, and finally the 2003 invasion and occupation. These are the events that have led to the virtual disintegration of Iraqi society. Given this history, immediate and total American withdrawal from Iraq is the absolute precondition for stopping the violence that is consuming the country.

- * Hold legally accountable those responsible for the war.

It is crucial that all those who plotted and implemented the illegal and unprovoked aggression against Iraq be brought to justice. This includes Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice and other top civilian and military officials, as well as their criminal accomplices such as Blair in Britain and Howard in Australia. The United States has made a point of jailing those it labels war criminals, such as Panama’s Noriega, Serbia’s Milosevic and Iraq’s Saddam Hussein. The same standard must be applied to the war criminals in Washington, whose crimes far exceed those of the above-mentioned leaders.

Like the Nazis in the Second World War, the Bush White House has adopted so-called “preventive war,” i.e., war of aggression—the main charge brought by the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal—as a policy for achieving its global aims.

Holding Bush and other top officials accountable is not a matter of revenge, but of the political education of the population as a whole. It is necessary to put an end to the war-mongering culture that has been cultivated by the US ruling elite and its servants in the media to justify major American military interventions every four or five years. It is necessary to expose how these bloody crimes were set into motion by means of criminal conspiracies.

- * Oppose all forms of racism, nationalism and sectarianism.

An essential precondition for the building of a unified international movement against war is the rejection of all forms of racism, nationalism and communalism.

The war in Iraq has been accompanied by the whipping up of racism to justify imperialist aggression and neo-colonial rule. In Europe and elsewhere, Muslims have become the target of racial bigotry and abuse. In country after country, the ruling elites are promoting “national values” to

divide working people and corral support for future wars.

Working people in the Middle East must reject the fomenting of ethnic and religious differences, which has already produced a sectarian bloodbath in Iraq and threatens to plunge the entire region into conflict. The answer to imperialist aggression and anti-Muslim racism is not a retreat into Islamic fundamentalism, which invariably serves the interests of one or other faction of the ruling elite, but the unification of the working class throughout the Middle East with its class brothers and sisters around the world on the basis of socialist internationalism.

- * Revoke all laws and policies directed against the democratic rights of the people and dismantle the networks of government spying and political repression. Defend the rights of immigrant workers to live and work in the country of their choice with full citizenship rights and without fear of repression, imprisonment or deportation.

- * Reject and oppose the imposition of military conscription for imperialist war.

- * Reconstruct economic life along socialist lines to end the gross disparities of wealth, promote social equality and provide for the needs of the people.

The present capitalist setup, in which all of the forces of industry and finance are privately owned and controlled, must be replaced by a socialist system of public ownership and democratic control of the economy. The anarchic workings of the capitalist market must be superseded by rational planning, utilizing the revolutionary advances in science and technology on an international scale to develop an economic system whose organizing principle is the satisfaction of human needs, not the creation of profit and the accumulation of vast personal wealth.

- * Against the policy of imperialist militarism, fight for a policy of socialist internationalism based on the international solidarity of all working people and the development of the world’s resources to eliminate the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance and raise the living standards and cultural level of all humankind.

The only progressive alternative to militarism, nationalism, sectarianism and racism is internationalism—the struggle to unite the working class internationally in the fight for a socialist future.

Uniting and coordinating the struggles of working people internationally against war, repression and social inequality is the historic task being undertaken by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the leadership of the world socialist movement.

This struggle must be carried forward through the building and expansion of the sections of the ICFI, the Socialist Equality Parties, in those countries where they exist, and the founding of such parties in countries where they do not. In every country, the SEP fights to unite workers internationally in a worldwide struggle against war and for socialism against the economic tyranny of the international banks and transnational corporations.

We make a special appeal to the youth—those who will, in the first instance, bear the terrible cost of war—to fight for this perspective. We call for the building of the International Students for Social Equality in the universities and secondary schools in every country in order to turn young people to the working class as a whole in the struggle to build a mass socialist movement capable of ending war and the profit system that creates it.



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