

The new decade begins

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The new decade has begun with a series of events signaling that the United States will intensify its aggressive and militarist policies in Central Asia, East Africa, the Middle East and beyond. These actions indicate that international tensions, fueled over the previous decade by the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and military interventions in a number of other countries, will grow even more embittered and explosive.

* On Saturday, January 2, President Obama in his weekly radio and Internet address officially claimed for the first time that Al Qaeda in Yemen was responsible for the abortive Christmas Day attempt to blow up Northwest Flight 253 over Detroit. Setting the stage for a major escalation of US military violence in Yemen and Somalia, Obama revived the rhetoric of the “war on terror,” declaring that “our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred, and... we will do whatever it takes to defeat them and defend our country...”

He went on to say that the US would “put unrelenting pressure on these extremists wherever they plot and train—from East Africa to Southeast Asia, from Europe to the Persian Gulf,” a formulation that justifies preemptive US military action in virtually any part of the world.

The imminence of a major military strike on Yemen was indicated by the announcement that the US and Britain were closing their embassies in the country.

* On Sunday, January 3, the *New York Times* published an article citing unnamed US officials who are calling for “strong and immediate new sanctions” against Iran. The *Times* reported that the new sanctions will be directed against businesses linked to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

The administration, the newspaper wrote, “aims to get Arab and Asian nations to join Europe in cutting off financial transactions with front companies for the

Revolutionary Guards.”

The *Times* went on to state categorically that the Obama administration had rejected the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate which said that Iranian scientists had ended work on designing a nuclear warhead in 2003. This marks a clear escalation of US efforts to isolate and cripple Iran and achieve “regime change” in Tehran.

* The new year brought further signs that the US will step up its military violence in the expanding war in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Over a 72-hour period beginning on New Year’s Eve, the US launched three separate drone missile attacks on Pakistani territory in North Waziristan, a tribal region that borders Afghanistan. According to press reports, the attacks killed 7 people. As is the case in all such strikes, the victims were described as Taliban militants.

The destabilization of Pakistan resulting from intensifying US military and political pressure found violent and bloody expression in a Christmas Day suicide bombing in a village in South Waziristan, which killed up to 75 civilians and wounded scores more. It was the latest in a string of suicide bombings that have killed more than 500 Pakistanis since October.

In Afghanistan, a December 30 NATO missile strike killed up to seven civilians on the outskirts of the capital of Helmand Province, a center of the US-led offensive ordered by the Obama administration. It followed a NATO raid the previous weekend in Kunar Province that killed 10 civilians, 8 of them school-age boys.

At the same time, Washington began the new year with a series of provocative moves directed against China, indicating a more aggressive posture toward what is deemed to be American imperialism’s chief long-term rival for dominance in Asia.

On December 30, the US International Trade

Commission approved duties of between 10 percent and 15 percent on Chinese exports of steel pipes used to extract natural gas and oil. The previous day, the US imposed preliminary anti-dumping duties against steel-grate products from China. Earlier in the year, the US had imposed tariffs of 35 percent on consumer tires from China.

Beijing bitterly denounced the latest protectionist moves, which are part of an intensifying campaign to force the Chinese to upwardly revalue their currency, the yuan, so as to curb Chinese imports into the US and increase US exports to China and other countries.

The new US moves coincided with the formal launch on January 1 of a new free trade area between the 10 countries that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The new trade bloc, led by Beijing, is the third largest in the world, and is seen by Washington as a threat to US economic dominance in the region. In recent years, China has overtaken the US to become ASEAN's third-largest trading partner after Japan and the European Union.

In addition, the *Washington Post* reported Sunday that the Obama administration is preparing over the next several months to announce the sale of a new package of arms to Taiwan, including Black Hawk helicopters and anti-missile batteries. Obama also plans to meet with the Dalai Lama.

The rise of anti-Chinese protectionist sentiment in the American ruling elite was expressed in a bellicose commentary published on New Year's Day by liberal economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman. Describing China's currency and trade policies as "predatory," Krugman defended protectionist measures by the US and the European Union, saying they have been taken "precisely because China refuses to let its currency rise."

"More such measures," he added, "are entirely appropriate." He concluded by warning the Chinese to "reconsider" their "stubbornness," or face "the start of something much bigger."

Toward the beginning of the last decade, President George W. Bush used 9/11 as the pretext to declare that the people of the United States and the world were entering the "wars of the 21st Century." In violation of international law, the US in 2002 adopted the policy of preventive war, asserting the right of Washington to attack any country it deemed a present or future threat

to America's global interests.

At the start of the new decade, this policy is being reinforced and expanded. The replacement of a Republican president and Republican Congress by the Democrats, largely on the basis of appeals to popular opposition to war, has had no effect on the basic policy of American imperialism.

The world is threatened by even greater catastrophes than those not only of the last decade, but of the last century. The central lessons must be drawn, as the working class enters into a new period of social and political upheaval. Imperialist war can be ended only through the international mobilization of the working class against the Obama administration and all of the bourgeois parties, and against capitalism, the root cause of war.

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