

# Putin points to growing war dangers

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has bluntly warned that actions by the United States, violating norms that have governed international relations since the end of World War II, could lead to war.

His declaration came in an October 24 speech delivered at a meeting organised by the Valdai International Discussion Club in the Russian winter resort of Sochi. The theme for the discussions, attended by journalists, foreign policy experts and academics from Russia and internationally, was *World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules*.

Putin began, “this formula accurately describes the historic turning point we have reached today and the choice we all face ... [C]hanges in the world order—and what we are seeing today are events on this scale—have usually been accompanied by, if not global war and conflict, then by chains of intensive local-level conflicts.”

Putin’s speech comprised a series of indictments of US foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. The US, he said, having declared itself the victor, saw no need to establish “a new balance of power, essential for maintaining order and stability” but instead “took steps that threw the system into sharp and deep imbalance.”

Putin’s remarks constitute a condemnation not only of Washington, however, but also of the consequences of the Kremlin’s dissolution of the USSR in 1991 in order to restore capitalism. At the time, Stalinist bureaucrats all unanimously dismissed the concept of imperialism as a political fiction invented by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party.

Since then, the formation of unpopular, super-rich business oligarchies, ruling a collection of ex-Soviet republics on the basis of ethnic nationalism, has provided the NATO imperialist powers with fertile ground to back “color revolutions” and ethnic civil wars. This led to a US- and German-backed putsch in Ukraine this year, bringing Russia and NATO to the

brink of war.

Putin likened the actions of the US to the behaviour of *nouveaux riches*, “when they suddenly end up with a great fortune, in this case in the shape of world leadership and domination. Instead of managing their wealth wisely, for their own benefit too of course, I think they have committed many follies.”

Over the past period, Putin said, international law had been forced to retreat in the face of “legal nihilism.” Legal norms had been replaced by “arbitrary interpretations and biased assessments.” At the same time, “total control of the global mass media has made it possible, when desired, to portray white as black and black as white.”

Referring to the revelations of the operations of US spy agencies, the Russian president said “big brother” was spending “billions of dollars on keeping the whole world, including its closest allies, under surveillance.”

Criticizing US actions in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Ukraine, Putin said the imposition of a unilateral diktat, instead of leading to peace and prosperity, was producing the opposite result. “Instead of settling conflicts it leads to their escalation, instead of sovereign and stable states we see the growing spread of chaos, and instead of democracy there is support for a very dubious public, ranging from open neo-fascists to Islamic radicals.”

In Syria, the United States and its allies had armed and financed rebels and allowed them to fill their ranks with mercenaries from various countries. “Let me ask where do these rebels get their money, arms and military specialists? Where does all this come from? How did the notorious ISIL manage to become such a powerful group, essentially an armed force?”

It is unquestionably the case that Washington and its European allies have brought the world to the brink of war by backing Al Qaeda-linked Sunni fundamentalist proxies in the Middle East, and fascist forces such as

the Right Sector militia in Ukraine.

Nonetheless, Putin's criticisms are politically hollow and impotent. His own regime relies on nationalist thugs and gangsters to control areas of Russia torn by ethnic war, such as Chechnya and the North Caucasus, and supports reactionary Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Iraq and across the Middle East. Putin's comments represent ultimately an attempt to work out a deal with sections of the ruling elite in America and Europe who are concerned that US reliance on Al Qaeda and the Ukrainian fascists might be too risky a policy.

Putin pressed for greater recognition of the Kremlin's interests, noting that the period of unipolar domination by the United States had demonstrated that having only one power centre did not make global politics more manageable. It had opened the way for inflated national pride, the manipulation of public opinion and "letting the strong bully and suppress the weak. Essentially, the unipolar world is simply a means of justifying dictatorship over people and countries."

Putin warned that unless there was a clear system of agreements and commitments governing international relations, together with mechanisms for managing and resolving crisis situations, "the symptoms of global anarchy will inevitably grow."

"Many states do not see other ways of ensuring their sovereignty but to obtain their own bombs. This is extremely dangerous," he added.

These blunt comments from the head of state of a major nuclear-armed state are a sharp warning to the working class.

In this military escalation, however, one major danger facing the international working class is the reactionary Russian chauvinism of the Putin regime. Hostile to any appeal to anti-war sentiment in the international working class, which it fears as a danger to its own ill-gotten wealth, the Putin regime has reacted to the Ukraine crisis by promoting Russian militarism and hailing the czarist regime.

In an August 1 speech at Moscow's Poklonnaya Hill military memorial marking the centenary of World War I, Putin praised the "legendary" offensive of the czarist general Aleksei Brusilov and denounced the Bolsheviks and the October Revolution. "Victory was stolen from the country," he said. "It was stolen by those who called for the defeat of their own fatherland and its army, sowed discord within Russia, and lunged to grab

power, betraying the national interests."

This counterrevolutionary Russian nationalism is utterly bankrupt in the face of a new explosion of imperialist provocations and wars.

Putin's latest remarks appear to be motivated, at least in part, by fear that rapidly falling global oil prices, combined with sanctions imposed at the insistence of the US, will undermine the Russian economy.

The fall in the oil price, from around \$100 to \$80 per barrel, could slice as much as 2 percentage points from Russia's gross domestic product and seriously impact the government's budget, thereby destabilising the Putin regime, which rests on a network of powerful oligarchs.

Whatever the motivations of the speech, the dangers of war to which it points are real and growing. The issues raised publicly by Putin over the role of the US are no doubt being discussed behind closed doors in political circles in other major countries.

As the impact of falling oil prices on Russia demonstrates, these geo-political tensions will be fuelled by the deepening economic crisis and the tendencies driving to deflation and stagnation throughout the world economy.

The dangers of war to which Putin alluded were underscored in remarks to the conference by an American expert on Russia, Christopher Gaddy of the Brookings Institution. Two days before Putin's speech, Gaddy evoked *The Sleepwalkers*, the recent book on the origins of World War I by historian Christopher Clark, and drew parallels with the present situation.

"I fear very much that ... there is an element of sleepwalking in the policies of key players in the world today," Gaddy said, indicating that sanctions against Russia had been designed by the United States and drawn up by a small group with unclear aims and questionable results.



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