

2015 and the rising tide of war

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In his State of the Union Address Tuesday night, President Barack Obama claimed that a decade and a half into the new century, the US has “turned the page” on more than 13 years of uninterrupted war and learned the “costly lessons” of its interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This assertion has about as much to do with reality as the president’s delusional—and lying—claims that the “shadow of crisis has passed” for the US economy and that thanks to its “bustling industry,” America has “risen from recession,” with the “recovery” touching “more and more lives” and wages “finally starting to rise again.”

Obama’s shop-worn claims about the tide of war receding were belied by what followed in his own speech, which included the call for Congress to pass an open-ended Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) covering the new war the White House launched five months ago in Iraq and Syria.

The American president made the dubious claim that the US intelligence agencies no longer torture—even as those who carried out the torture program during the Bush administration have secured for themselves full impunity. In the same breath, he touted his “properly constrained” use of drone missile strikes organized by means of “kill lists” in White House sessions known as “terror Tuesdays.” One recent analysis of these targeted assassinations showed that in the course of attempts to murder 41 individuals in Pakistan, US drones slaughtered 1,147 people.

Echoing the rhetoric of his predecessor, George W. Bush, the erstwhile champion of “hope and change” declared: “We will continue to hunt down terrorists and dismantle their networks, and we reserve the right to act unilaterally, as we have done relentlessly since I took office to take out terrorists who pose a direct threat to us and our allies.” In other words, US imperialism continues to assert the right to launch attacks on

anyone, anywhere on the planet, international law be damned!

Even one of Obama’s opening applause lines—that “for the first time since 9/11, our combat mission in Afghanistan is over”—was a patent lie. With nearly 15,000 troops still in the country, special operations forces are continuing to carry out search and destroy missions against opponents of the US-backed regime in Kabul, while the senior US commander in Afghanistan announced that he reserved the option of “extending the mission” of the US occupation forces.

In the context of the unfolding world situation, Obama’s claim about turning the page suggests not turning forward to a new era of peace, but rather backward to the kind of deepening global tensions that plunged mankind into a cataclysmic world war a century ago.

On virtually every continent, US imperialism is engaged in reckless militarist interventions that threaten to provoke a new world war. The first three weeks of 2015 have only witnessed an intensification of these threats.

Under conditions in which deadly fighting has resumed between the forces of the US-backed regime in Kiev and its opponents in the east of Ukraine, the Pentagon has announced that it is sending US troops to the country to train and advise the new National Guard, a force dominated by fascistic militias. The Obama administration has rejected Russia’s proposal for a peaceful settlement of the conflict, which has claimed nearly 5,000 lives since April, calling it a “Russian occupation plan.”

In his speech, Obama gloated over the devastation produced by sanctions imposed on Russia by the US, the European Union and NATO, boasting that, “Russia is isolated, with its economy in tatters.”

Washington is determined to keep the war in Ukraine going in order to inflict a decisive geopolitical defeat

on Russia. It sees this as a key step in asserting its hegemony over the Eurasian landmass—even at the risk of nuclear war.

In Asia, US imperialism is deliberately stoking tensions with North Korea with its unsubstantiated charges of North Korean hacking of Sony, while seeking a confrontation with China. The US State Department has rebuffed North Korea's call for dialogue and is ratcheting up tensions on the Korean peninsula by going forward with joint military exercises with South Korea in the spring. It is simultaneously fueling conflicts with China in the South China Sea.

While leading the drive to war, US imperialism is not alone. Lesser imperialist powers are asserting their own interests. Germany and Japan are both shedding their post-World War II pacifist pretensions in favor of an open revival of militarism. France is seizing on the recent terrorist attacks in Paris to justify an escalation of imperialist interventions in the Middle East, Africa and beyond. Canadian troops are engaged in firefights in Iraq, while Australia has offered itself as an aggressive partner in Washington's "pivot to Asia."

And while Obama claims to be waging a struggle against "terrorism" in Syria and Iraq, the principal US ally in the Middle East, Israel, is arming and aiding the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria—just as Washington itself did previously—while staging provocative attacks aimed at triggering a region-wide war.

As in 1914 and 1939, driving this worldwide eruption of militarism is the deep, protracted and systemic crisis of world capitalism, in which each imperialist power is driven to save itself at the expense of its rivals.

As Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the Russian Revolution, explained in his imperishable pamphlet *War and the International*, written a century ago, the fundamental cause of war lay in the contradictions of the global capitalist system, above all between the global character of capitalist production and the nation-state system in which capitalism and the private ownership of the means of production are rooted.

The World War that erupted in 1914, wrote Trotsky, was "the most colossal breakdown in history of an economic system destroyed by its own inherent contradictions." It had demonstrated the "historical bankruptcy" of all those "whose task it has been to guide the bourgeois society, to speak in its name and to

exploit it."

While war was "the method by which capitalism, at the climax of its development, seeks to solve its insoluble contradictions," Trotsky continued the working class had to oppose it with "its *own* method, the method of the socialist revolution."

One hundred years after these lines were written, the capitalist system confronts humanity with the threat of the even greater catastrophe of a nuclear Third World War, investing the alternatives laid out by Trotsky in 1914 with even greater power and urgency. The only way out of the catastrophe being prepared by global capitalism is for the international working class to build a mass antiwar movement based on the program of socialist internationalism.



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