

War and the 2016 US elections

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Amidst the endless media commentary, debates and stump speeches by the major candidates for US president, there is virtually no discussion of the active preparations of the ruling class for an immense escalation of war following the elections in November.

The elections themselves are being held under conditions of expanding militarist violence all over the world. In the Middle East and North Africa, the Obama administration launches air strikes in Libya even as NATO-member Turkey and US-ally Saudi Arabia consider a ground invasion of Syria. A leading German newspaper recently commented that a Turkish invasion, resulting in a conflict with Russian forces backing the Syrian government, could quickly “mean ending a cold war [between the US and Russia] and starting a hot one.”

US denunciations of Russia’s role in Syria come amidst a relentless militarization of Eastern Europe in the two years since the Western-backed coup in Ukraine. The right-wing nationalist Baltic states and Poland are being armed and given a virtual blank check to stage actions against Russia with the knowledge that they will be backed by the US and NATO.

In East Asia, under the framework of the “pivot to Asia,” the Obama administration is developing a network of military bases and alliances to encircle China, while denouncing Beijing for “militarizing” the region. The *New York Times* last week called on the US and its allies to continue “to ensure the free flow of navigation and to continue sending ships and planes across the sea,” a reference to the Obama administration’s provocative policy of sailing military vessels within territorial waters claimed by China.

The US escalations point inexorably in the direction of war with Russia or China, whether as the outcome of deliberate actions by American imperialism or the unplanned result of Washington’s ceaseless bullying and saber-rattling. Behind the scenes, the strategists of American imperialism are concerned that the gargantuan US military is insufficiently massive for the tasks set before it. Vast resources are to be poured into expanding

the apparatus of destruction, and the reintroduction of the draft is being actively considered. Concrete war plans are being worked out at ruling-class think tanks and in Pentagon offices.

To prevent alerting the public to the catastrophic implications of these operations and block any public debate, the Obama administration is seeking to delay a full-scale military escalation until after Election Day.

The American ruling class has a long tradition of initiating major military operations shortly after an election. Woodrow Wilson was reelected in 1916 on the slogan “He kept us out of the war.” Only a few months after his second inauguration, the United States declared war against Germany.

Franklin Roosevelt campaigned in 1940 on the promise that he would not send American soldiers into World War II, but by December 1941, the US was at war with both Germany and Japan.

Lyndon Johnson campaigned in 1964 as the “peace candidate” before vastly escalating US military operations in Southeast Asia soon after he was inaugurated. Richard Nixon claimed in 1968 to have a plan to end the Vietnam War. He followed his election with the bombing of Cambodia.

The 2000 elections were held just before the launching of the “war on terror.” In the 2002 mid-term elections, both the Democrats and Republicans agreed to exclude the impending war with Iraq from their campaigns. Four months after the elections, in March of 2003, Bush launched the invasion.

In the current election, the political establishment and the media are collaborating even more intensely to keep the ongoing military operations and those that are to come entirely off the agenda.

On the Sunday talk shows this past weekend, which featured Republican candidates Donald Trump, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio and Democratic candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, there was hardly any reference to US foreign policy. Aside from a brief reference by Trump to the possibility of “World War III”

in Syria, none of the candidates spoke of the situation in the Middle East or the risk of a conflict with Russia or China.

In the Democratic town hall event prior to last week's Nevada caucuses, not a single question on war was asked of Sanders or Clinton.

The campaign has, of course, seen many statements from the candidates proclaiming their devotion to American imperialism. On the Republican side, Trump—the personification of all the filth and reaction built up during 15 years of the “war on terror”—has issued a series of fascistic calls for murder and aggression all over the world, and his rivals have followed suit. In his victory speech following the South Carolina primary Saturday, Trump proclaimed that under his presidency “we’re going to build our military so big, so good, so strong, so powerful that nobody is ever going to mess with us.”

On the Democratic side, to the extent that she has differentiated herself from Obama, Clinton has done so from the right, calling for a “no fly” zone in Syria that would quickly bring the US into a conflict with Russia.

As for the supposed “socialist” Bernie Sanders, he has proclaimed his support for the Obama administration’s war policy in the Middle East as well as other aggressive actions. In a Democratic Party debate earlier this month, Sanders denounced “Russia’s aggressive actions in the Crimea and in Ukraine” and declared his support for a policy of “beef[ing] up our troop level in that part of the world to tell Putin that his aggressiveness is not going to go unmatched.” To emphasize the point, he added, “We have to work with NATO to protect Eastern Europe against any kind of Russian aggression.”

In recent campaign events, Sanders has denounced “authoritarian Communist China.” Besides backing the administration’s policy in Syria and Obama’s extension of the US occupation of Afghanistan, he has endorsed the use of drones and Special Operations forces, at one point affirming that as president he would do “all of that and more.” He has insisted that the United States maintain the largest military in the world.

But on the detailed plans being worked out by the Pentagon and the CIA to massively escalate the wars in the Middle East and intensify the provocations and war preparations against Russia in Eastern Europe and against China in the South China Sea, nothing is said by any of the candidates of either party.

There is a conspiracy of silence. It includes not only the politicians of the two big business parties, but also the

middle class organizations that were involved in the antiwar protests in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq war. These groups have long since integrated themselves into the Obama administration and lent their support to the operations of American imperialism. They are doing everything they can to oppose the development of a movement against war.

The working class and youth, overwhelmingly opposed to war, must not be caught unawares. The work of developing a political movement against war must proceed with extreme urgency.

Last week, the International Committee of the Fourth International published a crucial statement, “Socialism and the Fight Against War,” which reviews in detail the expanding maelstrom of imperialist violence and elaborates the political foundations for the building of a new anti-war movement based on the following principles:

- The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.

- The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and put an end to the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.

- The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.

- The new anti-war movement must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism.

The WSWs urges all of our readers, in the United States and internationally, to carefully study this statement, discuss it with your coworkers, and contact the Socialist Equality Party today to help build a socialist, internationalist and revolutionary movement of the working class against war.



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