

Imperialism intensifies pressure on Russia and China

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Earlier this month, the International Committee of the Fourth International published a statement, "Socialism and the Fight Against War," which analyzed the economic and political contradictions of world imperialism that underlie the growing danger of a global conflagration.

The International Committee called attention to the mounting threat of a military confrontation between the United States and both Russia and China. It warned: "The American ruling class has drawn the conclusion that the nuclear-armed states in Beijing and Moscow must be brought to heel, sooner rather than later. Washington's objective is to reduce China and Russia to the status of semi-colonial client states..."

The statement of the International Committee was published on February 18. Exactly one week later, on February 25, General Philip Breedlove, commander of US forces in Europe, released his Command Posture Statement, which came close to an official declaration that war with Russia is now viewed as all but inevitable. He declared, "The Russian problem set is not going away, and presents a new long-term challenge... Russia poses an existential threat to the United States and to the NATO alliances as a whole."

On February 25, Admiral Harry Harris, who heads the United States Pacific Command, declared that a Chinese declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the South China Sea would be ignored by American military forces. As if to underscore the warning to both China and Russia, the US Air Force later that day test-fired a Minuteman 3 nuclear missile from California to a testing range in the Pacific—the second test in a week.

In examining imperialist efforts to weaken Russia and China, the International Committee also called attention to the promotion by imperialism of secessionist

movements, based on ethnic-religious and national-linguistic tensions, in both countries. This assessment has been confirmed in an article published in the new March-April issue of *Foreign Affairs*. In a commentary entitled "Eurasia's Coming Anarchy," Robert D. Kaplan—a leading geo-strategist for US imperialism and one of the architects of the invasion of Iraq—argues that the deepening economic crisis in both Russia and China is likely to result in deep internal tensions. These, he writes, will take the form of growing demands for national autonomy by various ethnic, religious and linguistic groups.

Russia, Kaplan states, will be thrust into "turmoil" that "could cause [it] to fragment yet again." He calls attention to "the heavily Muslim North Caucasus, along with areas of Russia's Siberian and Far Eastern districts, distant from the center and burdened by bloody politics," which "may begin loosening their ties to Moscow in the event of instability inside the Kremlin itself."

As for China, Kaplan stresses "the growing ethnic tensions in this vast country." He continues: "To some degree, the Han-dominated state of China is a prison of various nations, including the Mongols, the Tibetans, and the Uighurs, all of whom have in various degrees resisted central control." Kaplan concludes, "Today, Uighur militants represent the most immediate separatist threat."

China's Uighur minority constitutes only some 10 million of China's 1.3 billion people. But the Uighurs are the largest ethnic group in China's relatively sparsely-populated but geopolitically vital Xinjiang province, which spans some 1.6 million square kilometers and borders the strategic countries of Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

Kaplan goes on to note that Uighur separatists “have received training in Iraq and Syria, and as they link up with the global jihadist movement, the danger will grow.”

Kaplan is not alone in drawing the connection between the war in Syria and secessionist movements in Russia and China. In an article published in December 2015 in the *London Review of Books*, journalist Seymour Hersh cited one Washington official as declaring that Turkey, a key US ally in its proxy war in Syria, “has been bringing Uighurs into Syria by special transport while [the government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan] has been agitating in favour of their struggle in China.” The US official cited by Hersh said that what he called the “rat line” had led to more than 800 Uighur fighters entering Syria.

Christina Lin, a former Pentagon and State Department official, wrote in September that if the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad were to fall to the Islamist militias, “fighters from Russia’s Chechnya, China’s Xinjiang and India’s Kashmir will then turn their eyes toward the home front to continue jihad, supported by a new and well-sourced Syrian operating base in the heart of the Middle East.”

These comments throw into sharp relief the broader significance of the ongoing conflict in Syria. Just as the United States intelligence forces used their support for the Mujahedeen in the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s to organize, fund and train Islamist forces that would ultimately become Al Qaeda, the war in Syria is being used to organize and train Islamist separatist forces that will ultimately target Russia and China for destabilization.

As Kaplan puts it, “As Moscow loses control, the global jihadist movement could take advantage of the vacuum and come to Russia’s outlying regions and to Central Asia.” He adds that “having received training in Iraq in Syria,” these Islamist secessionist movements may “link up to the global jihadist movement.”

He concludes that the result could be “Yugoslavia lite: violence and separatism that begin in one place and spread elsewhere.” In other words, China and Russia could face a repeat of the tactics used by the United States and Western powers to break up Yugoslavia: the fomenting of national-sectarian divisions, which are then packaged as a *casus belli* in the media and made a pretense for military intervention.

Beginning with US recognition of the independence of Croatia and Slovenia in 1991 and approval for the secession of Bosnia in 1992, the breakup of Yugoslavia was guaranteed by the political intervention of the major powers, which culminated in the 1999 bombing of Serbia.

The ethnic partition of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, which led to the deaths of over a million people, helped create the conditions for the encirclement of Russia and the continuous eastward expansion of NATO. In 1999, NATO added the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, followed in 2004 by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and finally Albania and Croatia in 2009. As a result, the frontier of NATO has been moved eastward by over 600 miles.

In the final analysis, the desperate geo-political situation confronting both China and Russia is the outcome of the restoration of capitalism. The measures employed by the capitalist regimes in both countries to counter the threats from US, Japanese and European imperialism—the incitement of national chauvinism, the intensification of state repression and the massive expenditures on military armaments—provide no way out of the crisis.

The working class of Russia and China must recover its revolutionary socialist heritage. It must once again, as it did in the past century, return to the road of revolutionary struggle and overthrow the existing national capitalist regimes. Only on this basis—allied with the international working class—can the masses of Russia and China prevent both imperialist subjugation and the horrors of nuclear war.



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