

The “major and deadly” wars to come

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The Atlantic Council, a leading US geopolitical strategy think tank, published a report on September 20 titled *The Future of the Army*. The document outlines the far-reaching preparations that are underway for the United States, in the report’s own words, to fight “major and deadly” wars between “great powers,” which will entail “heavy casualties” and “high levels of death and destruction.”

The report confirms the warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the candidates of the Socialist Equality Party in the 2016 US elections that the world stands closer to war than at any time since 1939.

The document was co-authored by Lt. General David Barno, who commanded the US-led force in Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005, having previously taken part in the US invasions of Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989. It was published by the Atlantic Council’s Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, named after a leading military adviser to the Ford, Nixon, George H. W. Bush and Obama administrations.

It presents a picture of the near future (2020-2025) as a horrifying dystopia, characterized by spiraling inequality, economic insecurity and perpetual war. “Today’s world of haves and have-nots will be greatly magnified,” it states, “with those fortunate enough to have employment and access to stunning technology living in stark contrast to the hundreds of millions struggling to survive in disrupted environments.”

This world “will be marked by the breakdown of order, widespread violent extremism and aggressive large states.” The world situation will be driven by “unpredicted and unpredictable events,” including the possibility of “a nuclear exchange.” Noting that “urban operations will increasingly dominate land warfare,” the Atlantic Council predicts that armies will operate “in densely packed metropolitan areas where civilian populations are a part of the battlefield.”

Speaking of the present situation, the report declares that “the United States has entered an era of perpetual war.” It notes, “After fifteen years, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are still continuing.” There is, additionally, “an increasing number of conflicts in the gray zone, whose primary characteristic is ambiguity—about their objectives, participants, and even outcomes, since they clearly lack defined end points.”

But, as the document cautions, “The Army cannot focus solely on these types of conflicts.” It must prepare for what “we’ve called ‘the next big war’—involving very capable adversaries, high levels of death and destruction, and perhaps hundreds of thousands of US troops.”

The Atlantic Council roots the likelihood of such a war in what it calls “Russia’s resurgence,” which requires NATO to “seriously prepare for the possibility of a Russian attack on one or more of its members for the first time since the end of the Cold War.” China, likewise, has “become increasingly aggressive.”

Noting that 5,366 US soldiers died during the Iraq war, the report declares that “the next big war” will see levels of violence and death far beyond what has been seen in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. It bemoans the fact that Army “personnel have not been psychologically hardened by personal experience for the grim task of fighting through heavy losses to battlefield victory.” It warns that “current Army leaders have little if any experience with the extreme battlefield stresses caused by overrun units and heavy casualties,” adding, “These stresses were common during past US conflicts and could likely be so again during a future big war.”

“A future major war against a great power competitor might,” according to the report, “require the Army to grow by several orders of magnitude in order to prevail.” To make this possible, the Army must begin making plans for a “mass mobilization.” As the Atlantic Council explains, “The growing threats in

today's world" mean that the Army "must once again build a mobilization plan to rapidly grow the size of the Army to meet a national crisis of existential danger." In other words, it must prepare to institute a draft.

Finally, there must be active preparations for an intervention—or even takeover—by the military in the event of what the report calls a "breakdown of civil order"—a euphemism for the emergence of a political challenge from below to the domination of the ruling class. The Atlantic Council notes that "the large-scale disruption of civil order... would almost certainly engage much of the Army in providing extensive support to civil authorities throughout the country."

Totally left out of this analysis, except as the object of military repression, are the American people. It never occurs to those engaged in the preparation of these policies to consult the population. It is taken for granted that it must acquiesce to a course of action that will result in death and destruction on a horrific scale.

None of this is being discussed or even hinted at in the US elections. The media and the establishment candidates are seeking to bury the real issues at stake. The questions of life and death are deliberated away from the cameras. They are the purview of the "deep state"—the Pentagon, the intelligence agencies and their associated think tanks.

One can be certain that in the second mud-slinging match between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, scheduled for October 9, none of the issues raised in the Atlantic Council report will be addressed. Regardless of whether Trump or Clinton wins next month's election, the war preparations will go ahead. In the United States, dominated by an immensely powerful financial oligarchy and the vast national security apparatus in its employ, elections serve as little more than a façade for policies determined behind the scenes and kept out of public view.

There is no way for workers to oppose the drive to war by voting for either Clinton or Trump, or, for that matter, the candidates put forward by the third-rate capitalist parties, the Greens and the Libertarians.

Nothing can stop the drive to war except the mobilization of the international working class. Workers and young people seeking a genuine alternative to war should support the campaign of Jerry White and Niles Niemuth, the Socialist Equality Party's candidates for president and vice president in

the 2016 elections, and make plans to attend the SEP's November 5 conference in Detroit, *Socialism vs. Capitalism and War*.



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