

Washington invokes the language of war against Russia

Joseph Kishore
14 January 2017

Significant sections of the American political establishment are actively preparing for war against Russia. This is the only conclusion that can be drawn from the language used to describe Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin by top Republicans and Democrats in recent weeks.

“Is Vladimir Putin a war criminal?” Senator Marco Rubio (Republican from Florida) demanded of President-elect Donald Trump’s nominee for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, at a hearing on Wednesday. “Do you believe that Vladimir Putin and his cronies are responsible for ordering the murder of countless dissidents, journalists and political opponents?”

While replying that Russia is a significant threat to US interests, Tillerson refrained from repeating Rubio’s language. This prompted Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen to express her dismay that Tillerson was “unwilling to agree with Senator Rubio’s characterization of Vladimir Putin as a war criminal.”

The performance was repeated at a Senate hearing on Thursday for the secretary of defense nominee, General James Mattis. Republican Senator John McCain, who last month denounced Putin as a “thug and murderer” and called the alleged hacking of Democratic Party emails an “act of war,” declared that the US will be “engaged in global conflict for the foreseeable future... Hard power [that is, the military] matters, having it, threatening it, leveraging it for diplomacy and at times using it.”

For decades, and in particular in the quarter century since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the American media and political establishment have followed a well-worn script in advance of every war of aggression. In the run-up to the bombing of Serbia in 1999, Slobodan Milosevic, a one-time US ally, was rebranded as the reincarnation of Adolf Hitler. As the US prepared to invade and occupy Iraq, Saddam Hussein, another former US ally, became the “Butcher of Baghdad.” In 2011,

countless politicians and columnists in the American and European press fulminated against Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, who was murdered before he could stand trial for war crimes filed at the International Criminal Court.

The script always has the same ending. The US does not negotiate with “war criminals,” “butchers” and “thugs,” it organizes regime-change operations, wages war and, in the end, generally kills them. In this case, the target of the propaganda offensive is the president of a country with the second largest nuclear-weapons stockpile in the world. The next stage in the orchestrated offensive threatens to have catastrophic consequences for the entire world.

And what of the content of the charges? Russia is a capitalist state, and Putin is the representative of the oligarchy that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy. Moscow’s foreign policy reflects the interests of this class, including in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, where it is seeking to maintain its allies and military bases in the face of an unrelenting expansion of American and European imperialism.

No political support can be given by Marxists and class-conscious workers to the Kremlin’s actions in Ukraine and Syria, which are driven by the reactionary interests of the Russian oligarchy. But they are essentially a defensive response to the aggressive drive by the United States to remove regimes friendly to Russia, such as the former government in Kiev and the current one in Syria, in order to isolate, weaken and ultimately dismember Russia, removing it as an obstacle to the establishment of American hegemony over the Eurasian continent.

The declarations of politicians in Washington, both Democratic and Republican, are the height of hypocrisy. In Syria, where Russia is backing its ally, Bashar al-Assad, the US has stoked civil war for more than five years, funneling arms and money to Islamic fundamentalist organizations hostile to the Syrian

government. In Ukraine, where Russia is denounced for having annexed Crimea (following a referendum in which 96 percent voted to secede from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation), the US organized a coup led by far-right fascistic forces to oust a pro-Russian government in 2014.

As for the completely unsubstantiated claims of Russian “interference” in the US elections, they are made by a government that has its hands in the political affairs of every country in the world. (In February 2014, it should be recalled, US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland boasted that Washington had “invested” \$5 billion since the fall of the Soviet Union to build up pro-US forces in Ukraine.)

The various officials leading the campaign against Russia, including outgoing US President Barack Obama, are all war criminals many times over.

They all voted for and supported the US invasion of Afghanistan. For more than 15 years, US occupation forces have carried out atrocities against the civilian population of that tortured country, dropping bombs and firing drone missiles on wedding parties, schools and hospitals.

On Thursday, buried in the inside pages of papers such as the *New York Times*, if reported at all, was news that the US military in Afghanistan had released its whitewash report on a bombing in November that killed 33 civilians in Kunduz Province. The military claimed that the war crime was justified because the Taliban were “using civilian houses as firing positions.” Just over a year ago, in October 2015, the US Air Force used AC-130 gunships to attack a Doctors Without Borders Hospital in the same province, killing 42 people, including medical personnel and patients. At the start of the war in Afghanistan, the United States announced that it would not abide by the Geneva Conventions, a position it has never reversed.

Mattis, who won praise from both Democrats and Republicans at his confirmation hearing for his willingness to aggressively threaten Russia, oversaw the 2004 onslaught against Fallujah, one of the bloodiest episodes of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. A few weeks after the offensive, Mattis ordered the bombing of a wedding party in Mukaradeeb, which killed 42 civilians, many of them children.

During the fifteen years of the “war on terror,” hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Palestine, Afghanistan and Pakistan by bombs dropped by the US military or made in the United States. The United States has operated torture

centers in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries.

Now the target is Russia, not because of human rights violations or war crimes, but because Russia is a hindrance to US operations in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. The American intelligence and military agencies, to which Congress and, for that matter, the White House are subordinated, are dissatisfied with the results of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The fall of the USSR was supposed to mark the “end of history” and initiate a “new world order” in which American imperialism would have free rein to pursue its aggressive interests all over the world, with no significant regional, let alone global, competitors.

Every war the United States has launched, however, has ended in disaster. Today, it looks out and sees threats everywhere.

This includes not only Russia, but China as well. Even as Tillerson and Mattis assured senators of their hostility to Russia, they doubled down on threats against China. Tillerson declared that the incoming administration would seek to deny China access to islands in the South China Sea, which Chinese media said Friday would amount to an act of war.

How many millions of people is the American ruling class prepared to sacrifice in pursuit of its manic drive to dominate the world? How many trillions of dollars will be spent, and which social programs will be eliminated, to pay for it? What will be the consequences of a war fought between nuclear-armed powers? These questions are never asked, let alone answered, by the media and the capitalist politicians.

Everything is being carried out behind the backs of the American and international working class by a military-intelligence clique and the corporate-financial oligarchy, along with a corrupted right-wing media. Throughout the 2016 US presidential elections, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party warned that the most burning issue facing the population of the world—war—was not being discussed. The aftermath of the election confirms this. The building of an international movement of the working class against imperialist war and the capitalist system that breeds war is the urgent political task.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact