

# At “Socialism 2017” conference, International Socialist Organization shows its pro-war colors

Jerry White, Josh Varlin  
21 July 2017

The International Socialist Organization (ISO) held its “Socialism 2017” conference in Chicago on July 6-9. What was most striking about the event was the virulence of the pro-war policy of the ISO.

At several sessions dedicated to geo-political developments, ISO speakers presented positions that differed little, if any, from those of the US State Department. They denounced Chinese and Russian “imperialism” and presented the reactionary forces in Syria, armed and funded by the US, Turkey and the Gulf States, as “revolutionaries.”

A central role was played by Ashley Smith, an editorial board member on the ISO’s *International Socialist Review* magazine and the organization’s principal proponent of regime-change in Syria. While Smith usually remains in the background, during these sessions he intervened aggressively, in some cases from the back of the room, to shout down anyone who questioned the ISO’s international policies and affiliations.

At one session, titled, “A Newer World Order? Imperialism and the Rise of China,” Smith spoke from the panel and began by declaring that “China’s rise as a new imperialist power is the most significant development since the US rise to world power.”

China was challenging the US economically and militarily throughout the world, Smith asserted. It was determined to reestablish its “ancient empire by overrunning Taiwan and seizing islands in the South and East China Seas,” he said, giving it control over sea lanes and undersea gas deposits. The Asian country was also engaged in a new form of colonial subjugation of Africa and Latin America, Smith claimed, which was “not that different from American and European

imperialism.”

Smith and other ISO speakers threw the epithet “imperialism,” without the slightest historical or scientific content, at any potential regional rival that obstructed America’s drive for global hegemony, with one ISO supporter referring to Iran as an “imperialist” power, and then, after being challenged, saying it was “sub-imperialist power.”

After several audience members expressed concern that the military aggressiveness of the US could lead to a clash with China or Russia and the danger of nuclear war, Smith did everything to downplay the danger and sow complacency. “The inter-imperial rivalry with China could trigger a much larger confrontation, including militarily,” Smith said, “But there are factors that mitigate against that. The two powers are utterly tied together. Apple does not want the US to bomb its iPhone factories in China.” The other supposedly mitigating factor was that both the US and China have nuclear arsenals and the danger of mutually assured destruction would stop war.

Only the “so-called anti-imperialist left says we’re on the brink of war,” Smith declared in another session, titled, “The Russian Menace? Putin’s Foreign Policy.” The risk of such a war, he insisted, was “completely unlikely, next to zero.”

This was because the US “was not really in the business of regime change in Syria,” Smith asserted. Instead the US and Russia were both intervening to prop up Assad, with Russia bombing “genuine revolutionaries” and the US bombing ISIS.

The real character of these so-called revolutionaries was revealed at the session “Revolution and Counter-Revolution in the Middle East” delivered by Anand

Gopal, a journalist and fellow with the International Security Program at the Washington, DC think tank New America. New America is run by Anne-Marie Slaughter, the former Director of Policy Planning for the US State Department from January 2009 until February 2011 under then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Gopal, who has reported for the *Wall Street Journal* and *Foreign Policy*, has slipped in and out of areas in Syria controlled by al Qaeda-backed “rebel” forces, which would be impossible without the support of US and foreign intelligence services. He boasted that he has visited a Syrian town near Aleppo a dozen times since 2011.

Gopal blamed the poor organizational abilities of the Free Syrian Army and the “destructive influence of Ba’athism on the country’s democratic and leftist traditions” for the fact that the anti-Assad struggle is under the leadership of al Qaeda, which, he said, was “independently funded and better organized.”

“My friends couldn’t get weapons, so they went over to Turkey to talk with the MCM, the CIA-led intelligence there, who said they would arm them, on the condition they fight ISIS and not Assad.” They refused, he said, and “By 2013-2014, all my friends had joined al Qaeda.”

Gopal reacted with hostility when a *World Socialist Web Site* reporter asked him about Seymour Hersh’s recent article, which debunked US government and media claims that the Syrian government had conducted a gas attack on the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhoun in April. The attack was used by the Trump administration, with the support of the Democratic Party, as a pretext for its cruise missile attack on Syria.

Without providing the slightest evidence against Hersh, Gopal crudely declared, “That was complete bullshit.”

From the back of the room Smith thanked Gopal for his “brilliant” remarks. When one attendee at Gopal’s panel asked if there were “two sides” to the Western-backed “White Helmets” in Syria, Smith and others shouted, “There’s just one side!”

Summing up, Smith declared, “The left internationally has betrayed the Syrian Revolution... We have to build a new left, a revolutionary left, built on solidarity, not campism.”

The implication here is that anyone who opposes the

plundering of Syria by US imperialism and a bloody invasion to install a US-backed puppet in Damascus is really in the “camp” of Assad or Putin.

The ISO is not a “left” or anti-war organization. Functioning as an external faction of the Democratic Party, the ISO is chiefly concerned with overcoming the deep hostility to war among millions of workers and young people. Aware that some people they have brought into their movement mistakenly think the ISO is opposed to the operations of American imperialism, they used the conference in Chicago to set them straight.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**