

Trump's UN tirade and the logic of imperialism

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In 1938 Leon Trotsky warned that imperialism “toboggans with closed eyes toward an economic and military catastrophe.” Within just a year of these remarks, Hitler unleashed his army against a largely defenseless Poland and set into motion the cataclysm of the second imperialist world war.

Trotsky's words acquire renewed relevance in the aftermath of Donald Trump's tirade at the United Nations, where the US president openly threatened the launching of a genocidal war, using language that has not been heard since the days of the Third Reich.

If nothing more was involved than the ranting of a madman, Trump's threat to “totally destroy” North Korea would have been met with a chorus of denunciations in the mass media and throughout the political establishment. But nothing of the sort has taken place. What is most striking is the mildness of the response, particularly within the American political establishment and its major media outlets. To the extent that the speech has encountered criticism, it has taken the form of quibbling with some of Trump's more grotesque rhetorical excesses or questioning the tactical expediency of his intervention.

The US threats against North Korea have been escalating relentlessly throughout the year. But so far there has been no serious official and public discussion as to the consequences of a war. There has been no Congressional debate on the issue, no call for open and publicly-streamed Senate hearings, and, above all, no explicit and unequivocal condemnation of US government war-mongering.

There have been studies done by the American military and its associated think tanks which provide chilling indications of the horror that would ensue from a US-North Korean war. The British daily *Telegraph* cites estimates that “conventional war could cost the

lives of one million people,” while any use of nuclear weapons would elevate the death toll by orders of magnitude.

Rob Givens, a retired general who served as the deputy assistant chief of staff for operations of US Forces Korea, has written that “we would inflict 20,000 casualties on the North each day of combat,” and that North Korea would “inflict 20,000 casualties a day just in Seoul during the first few days.” The death toll, he warns, would make the millions killed and maimed during “our last 16 years of active combat in the Middle East pale in comparison.”

The *New Yorker* magazine carried an article including projections of 10,000 deaths in Seoul and one million in South Korea in the first stage of the war alone, quoting a retired US Army general as warning, “The devastation to the peninsula would be disastrous, just disastrous ... And if the United States and China are belligerents, everything is up for grabs.”

The article goes on to quote Mark Fitzpatrick, the executive director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies office in Washington, as warning that even a defeat of the North Korean regime would only create the conditions for a protracted insurgency against the US military that would eclipse anything seen in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The whirlwind unleashed by a war against North Korea would make the United States a global pariah. It would unleash a wave of popular revulsion within the country and around the world. But the financial-corporate oligarchy and its political representatives pursue their militarist agenda with a combination of recklessness and blindness.

Trump's speech, which included wild threats against Iran and Venezuela, came in the context of the most provocative military exercises yet on the Korean

Peninsula, with US B-1B nuclear bombers and F-35 fighter jets dropping bombs close to the demilitarized zone. In Europe, NATO and Russia are staging simultaneous and mutually hostile war games, while in Syria, Washington's proxy forces and their American special operations handlers are on the brink of an armed confrontation with the Syrian army backed by Russian special forces in the eastern desert region of Deir Ezzor.

It is no longer a question of whether a new world war and the use of nuclear weapons are possible, but rather which of the myriad global conflicts is most likely to serve as its trigger.

The danger of war arises not out of the diseased brain of Donald Trump, but out of the logic of the crisis of US and world capitalism, a crisis-ridden system based upon the private ownership of the means of production and the division of the world into rival nation-states.

Trump's threats of genocide are the end product of a protracted evolution of US imperialism, which announced itself in 1945 as the dominant imperialist power by incinerating the populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with nuclear weapons. It subsequently waged wars of staggering violence in North Korea and Vietnam, killing millions.

In the last quarter of a century since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States has been engaged in virtually perpetual war, as the American ruling class, represented by Democratic and Republican administrations alike, has sought to offset its declining economic position in the affairs of world capitalism by force of arms. This strategy has produced a string of abject failures, from Afghanistan and Iraq to Libya and Syria.

The successive debacles for American militarism have only made the impulse to war even more frenetic, with the Pentagon more and more turning its sights from impoverished and largely defenseless countries to Washington's principal regional and global rivals. This includes long-time post-World War II allies such as Germany, whose relations with the United States are becoming increasingly frayed.

The decisive question today is the intervention of the working class in the development of a movement against war.

The ominous developments of the past week have provided stark confirmation of the February 2016 statement issued by the International Committee of the

Fourth International, Socialism and the Fight Against War, which warned that "the entire world is being dragged into an ever-expanding maelstrom of imperialist violence" and elaborated the principled political foundations for the building of a new mass antiwar movement.

The movement to prevent war requires the political mobilization of the American and international working class, uniting behind it all the progressive elements in society on the basis of a socialist program, directed against the capitalist system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.



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