

The social crisis and the global eruption of US imperialism

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9 May 2019

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has spent the past week staging provocations and making military threats everywhere from the Caribbean shores of Venezuela to the Persian Gulf, the South China Sea and the Arctic Circle.

Pompeo, the thuggish former Army tank captain, who claims divine inspiration for his every action, staged his latest provocation Tuesday by summarily canceling a scheduled meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and flying to Baghdad. He flew into the Iraqi capital under a cover of secrecy in an attempt to strongarm the Iraqi government into backing the US war buildup against Iran. He was also there to push for further concessions to Exxon and other US energy conglomerates in the name of “diversifying” Iraq’s supplies.

The trip to Iraq served the dual purpose of escalating the US war buildup in the Middle East and snubbing Germany, with which Washington is in conflict over a host of issues ranging from trade and Iran to the Nordstream 2 Russian gas pipeline.

Wednesday marked one year since US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal or JCPOA, which Tehran signed with the US, Russia, China, the UK, Britain and France. The agreement severely limited Iran’s nuclear program and initiated a strict inspections regime in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions imposed by Washington and its allies.

Since then, Washington has steadily tightened a regime of extra-territorial and illegal economic sanctions that are on a scale tantamount to war. They are aimed at stopping all Iranian oil exports, cutting the country off from the world financial system and reducing its economy to ruin in order to further the US goal of installing a puppet regime in Tehran.

Pompeo and other US officials have touted the dispatch of the USS Abraham Lincoln’s carrier battle group to the Persian Gulf along with a wing of nuclear-capable B-52 bombers as evidence that US imperialism is “fully prepared” to respond with overwhelming force to any perceived threat to “US interests” in the region that can be pinned on Tehran.

The US has never been closer to an all-out war with Iran, a

country four times the size and with more than twice the population of Iraq, the scene of the last major direct US military intervention in the region, which led to a million deaths and left the entire Middle East in turmoil. A new war would drag in the entire region and, inevitably, Washington’s “great power” rivals, becoming the antechamber of World War III.

Even while bringing the Middle East to the brink of a new conflagration, Washington is threatening military action against Venezuela, with Pompeo insisting on Sunday that a direct US regime-change intervention in the South American country—like Iran the target of brutal US sanctions—would be “lawful.”

Meanwhile, on the eve of his flight to Iraq, Pompeo was in Finland attending a conference of countries with territory in the Arctic in which he denounced Beijing for pursuing “national security aims” in the region and Moscow for “a pattern of aggressive behavior in the Arctic.” He even threatened Canada over control of the Northwest Passage. While hailing the thawing of ice in the polar region for opening up new sea lanes and the potential exploitation of vast mineral wealth, Pompeo refused to sign a joint statement of the Arctic countries because it included a reference to climate change.

Then there is the dangerously escalating confrontation with China, with the US set to increase tariffs on Chinese goods to 25 percent by Friday and Beijing vowing to take countermeasures. In the midst of this drive toward all-out trade war, the US sent two of its warships once again into waters adjacent to China’s Nansha Islands, a so-called “freedom of navigation” operation designed as a military provocation that could lead to armed conflict.

More and more, world politics today resemble the conditions prevailing in the run-up to the first and second world wars, a period in which Leon Trotsky warned that history was “bringing humanity face to face with the volcanic eruption of American imperialism.”

This drive to global war is a product not merely of the maniacal outlook of Trump, Pompeo, Pence and Bolton, but

rather of the fundamental contradictions of a crisis-ridden capitalist order—between world economy and the outmoded nation-state system on the one hand, and socialized production and the private ownership of the means of production on the other.

US capitalism has sought to offset its declining global hegemony by military means, engaging in unending wars over the last quarter century. In terms of its economy, the capitalist ruling class has directed all of its policies to sustaining the continuous rise of the stock market and preventing a repeat of the 2008 financial crash. The encouragement of the uninterrupted accumulation of profits by means of financial market manipulation and speculation only assures that the next financial and economic meltdown will be all the more catastrophic.

What are the social effects? Under conditions in which the majority of US workers have not seen an increase in real wages in more than three decades, the growth of financial parasitism has led to an enormous intensification of social inequality and rising social tension. This is giving rise to a growth in the class struggle, expressed in the nationwide wave of teachers strikes, the radicalization of youth and, most recently, Wednesday's globally coordinated strike of Uber drivers.

No section of the capitalist ruling elite and its political representatives, Trump and the Republicans or their ostensible opponents in the Democratic Party, have a "rational" solution to these intensifying economic and social contradictions.

They are driven to find a way out with a turn toward authoritarian methods of rule at home and by deflecting internal tensions outward by means of military violence. They are, in short, looking for a war. Exactly when and where it will come first remains to be seen.

There is in the crisis of US imperialism, its turn toward global military confrontation as well as the domestic social and political context, an echo of the way in which internal crises drove the Nazi regime that headed Germany to war in the 1930s.

The late British historian Tim Mason wrote in his *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class* the following about the turn to war by Hitler's Third Reich:

The economic, social and political tensions within the Reich became steadily more acute after the summer of 1937; while it seems safe to say that Hitler himself understood very little of their technical content, it can be proved that he was informed of their existence and was aware of their gravity. If the existence in the winter of 1937–8 of a conscious

connection in Hitler's mind between this general crisis and the need for a more dynamic foreign policy cannot yet be established, functional relationships between these two aspects may nonetheless be suggested...

The only "solution" open to this regime of the structural tensions and crises produced by dictatorship and rearmament was more dictatorship and rearmament, then expansion, then war and terror, then plunder and enslavement. The stark, ever-present alternative was collapse and chaos, and so all solutions were temporary, hectic, hand-to-mouth affairs, increasingly barbaric improvisations around a brutal theme.

Changing what needs to be changed, there is in the know-nothing Pompeo's frantic flights from South America, to the Arctic, to the Middle East, threatening war and economic destruction wherever he goes, the same "temporary, hectic, hand-to-mouth" character to the Trump administration's policies. They too are accompanied by brutal and "barbaric" improvisations, from the attempts to starve the peoples of Venezuela and Iran into submission to the near-genocidal US-backed military campaign against Yemen to the threat of a full-scale global war.

Until now, the US ruling class has been able to hatch its plans for global aggression behind the backs of the American people, relying on the absence of any organized resistance to war. But with the growth of the class struggle, popular anti-war sentiment will inevitably take on active forms and meet up with rising opposition of the working class to social inequality and the attacks on democratic rights.

The contradictions that are behind the eruption of American imperialism cannot be overcome within the framework of the Democratic Party, which is itself a willing and active protagonist in the war fever of the ruling class. The fight against war is the fight for socialism, and the fight for socialism requires the fight against war. Only through the development of a mass social movement, embedded in and led by the international working class, and directed at the overthrow of the capitalist system itself, can the drive to a new world war be stopped.



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