Amid mounting domestic crisis, US imperialism lashes out at Russia and China

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1 September 2020

Amid a deepening domestic political crisis made all the more explosive by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the United States has over the past week carried out a simultaneous escalation of its conflicts with Russia and China.

In a dizzying array of standoffs, escalatory gestures and open clashes, the US has inflamed, on an almost daily basis, conflicts involving the world's major nuclear powers that could rapidly spiral out of control.

In the most direct clash, a vehicle forming part of a Russian convoy in Syria rammed an American armored vehicle, which the Russian military said was attempting to block the Russian patrol, leaving American personnel "injured."

The incident was the most direct acknowledged clash between US and Russian military forces in the history of the nearly decade-long Syrian war. (In 2018, US soldiers engaged in a four-hour-long firefight with Syrian government forces, including Russian military contractors, but no Russian government troops were involved.)

The clash prompted calls for retaliation from within the US political establishment, and in particular from Trump's ostensible political opponents in the Democratic Party. On Monday, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden declared that the American president should make clear that "there'd be a heavy price to pay if they dare touch an American soldier."

He added, "It's been reported that Russian forces just attacked American troops in Syria, injuring our service members. Did you hear the president say a single word? Did he lift one finger? Never before has an American president played such a subservient role to a Russian leader."

On Monday, the US military announced that over the next 10 days it will be conducting live-fire exercises just 70 miles from the Russian border.

Last Friday, the US Air Force flew six nuclear-capable B-52 bombers over 30 NATO countries in a major show of force. Two of the bombers carried out a flyover of the United States and Canada, while four more flew over the European NATO states.

While two of the bombers were flying over the Black Sea, they were intercepted by two Russian fighter jets, which crossed within 100 feet of the nose of one of the bombers, reportedly disrupting its ability to maintain its bearing.

The day before, the Russian guided missile submarine Omsk surfaced off the coast of Alaska. The Omsk had been one of 50 Russian vessels participating in live-fire exercises in the Bering Sea. On August 27, the Russian military published a video of the submarine firing one of its missiles.

Also on Thursday, NORAD sent two F-22 jets to intercept three groups of Russian military maritime patrol aircraft off the Alaskan coast.

Even as it is ramping up tensions with Russia, Washington is escalating its conflict with China. On August 24, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article by Secretary of Defense Mark Esper headlined "The Pentagon Is Prepared for China," in which he denounced the Chinese military as the instrument of the Chinese Communist Party.

Esper went on to participate in the Rim of the Pacific 2020 military exercises, which included "over 16,000 rounds of small arms munitions shot, over 1,000 large caliber weapons fired, 13 missiles expended," according to the Pentagon.

Last Wednesday, as the exercises were ongoing, China launched a series of so-called "carrier-killer" missiles into the South China Sea. These missiles are reputedly able to sink US aircraft carriers, potentially

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sending billions of dollars worth of military hardware and thousands of US sailors and airmen to the bottom of the ocean.

The missile launches were accompanied by a belligerent editorial in China's *Global Times* declaring, “We can tell the US military that the PLA [People's Liberation Army] will not fire the first shot, but the DF-21D and DF-26B may be the second.”

The next day, Esper tweeted, and then deleted without explanation, a video of himself watching a missile launch at sea. In response to the Chinese missile launches, the United States carried out yet another “freedom of navigation operation” in waters claimed by Beijing. These developments follow the assertion by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on July 14 that all of China’s claims in the South China Sea are “unlawful.”

This latest round of military brinksmanship directly targeting Russia and China, the most aggressive in recent memory, follow the US withdrawal from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty last year, setting off a major new nuclear arms race with Russia and China. The Trump administration has continued and escalated the Obama White House’s multi-trillion-dollar nuclear buildup, emphasizing the need to build “usable” small nuclear weapons.

The systematic escalation of tensions with Russia and China is in keeping with Washington’s doctrine of “great power conflict,” spelled out in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which declares that “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security.”

While the US has been preparing to fight a “hot war” with Russia and China for years, these conflicts have been dramatically intensified by the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The US ruling class, confronting a social disaster at home, with 180,000 people dead and tens of millions unemployed, is desperately lashing out. With millions of people having participated in demonstrations against police violence, and a growing mood of militant struggle in the working class, there is a very real danger that the Trump administration, acting for the ruling class as a whole, may see in war the means to divert internal social tensions outward.

As workers throughout the country enter into struggle against the ruling class’s drive to force them back on the job under unsafe conditions, they must take up political demands. Among the most critical is the fight against war through the mobilization of the global working class in a common struggle the capitalist system.

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