

Foreword to *30 Years of War*, the German edition of David North's *A Quarter Century of War*

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4 October 2020

A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony (1990-2016) is available for purchase from Mehring Books [here](#).

The relevance and urgency of this volume emerge from its title. After three decades of US-led wars, the outbreak of a third world war, which would be fought with nuclear weapons, is an imminent and concrete danger. Under the presidency of Donald Trump, US preparations for war against Iran, Russia and China have accelerated dramatically. This development has been further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. All of the other imperialist powers, above all, Germany, are rearming and preparing for a new military redivision of the world.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), in which David North has played a leading role for over four decades, foresaw this development. The dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy did not result in the end of history, but a period of new military conflicts. Anyone who wants to prevent a relapse into world war and barbarism as occurred during the 20th century will find the necessary orientation in this book. Based on a thorough understanding of the wars of the past three decades and the socioeconomic and political processes in which they were rooted, it develops a socialist perspective for the struggle against war.

Already prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US organised its first invasion of Iraq in the winter of 1990-91. The next step was to push ahead, with Germany's fulsome support, with the dismemberment of Yugoslavia. The result was the bloody civil war in the Balkans, which culminated in NATO's bombardment of Serbia in 1999. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks then provided the pretext for the launching of the "war on terror" and the illegal invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Under the presidency of Barack Obama, there followed NATO's bombardment of Libya and the brutal regime-change war in Syria, which claimed hundreds of thousands more lives.

It is now clear that the "war on terror," the destruction of "weapons of mass destruction," "humanitarian intervention" and similar propaganda phrases were used by the US to justify neocolonial wars of conquest and a grab for world domination. The current US National Defence Strategy from 2018 declares that Washington's focus on the global war on terror for two decades has come to an end. In its place is a strategic orientation based on "competition between the major powers." The new doctrine explicitly states the goal of the US-led wars: the defence of the hegemonic position of American imperialism.

This German edition is an expanded version of the 2016 English edition published under the title *A Quarter Century of War*. It contains an additional chapter, titled "US Militarism in the Era of Trump." David North deals in this chapter not only with US imperialist provocations against and preparations for war with China, Russia and Iran, but also explains that the gangster in the White House is not the incarnation of evil

who has snuck into the proverbial Garden of Eden. He in fact embodies a decayed and brutalized ruling class, whose degeneration is symptomatic of the historical crisis of the capitalist system. Trump's policies are more a continuation than a break with those of his Republican and Democratic predecessors.

The concluding text in the fifth part of the new volume, which is a speech delivered to an online May Day rally held by the ICFI, focuses on the world historic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. The author describes it as a "trigger event," and compares it to the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand on the eve of World War I:

The assassination accelerated the historical process, but it acted upon preexisting and highly inflammable socioeconomic and political conditions. The same can be said of the pandemic. [1]

The ruling class has responded to the pandemic with an intensification of the social counterrevolution, the strengthening of the apparatus of state repression, and the rearmament of the military—policies that have been pursued over the past three decades. Under the cover of so-called coronavirus bailout packages, it has organised the largest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top of society in history. Virtually overnight, trillions of euros were transferred to the banks, the major corporations and the super-rich, who now want to back up the resulting debt by intensifying the exploitation of the working class. This is the reason for the reckless back-to-work drive and the deadly "herd immunity" policy, which have already claimed more than a million lives around the world, including over 200,000 in the United States.

The ruling elite is responding to mounting opposition to the deadly reopening of the economy, growing social inequality and militarism as it did during the 1930s—with a turn to authoritarianism and fascism. Unlike Hitler, it does not control a mass movement, but it is systematically seeking to establish one. This can be seen most clearly in the United States. Trump is deliberately mobilising fascist forces and has threatened to carry out a coup if he loses the election.

The strength of this book is its historical Marxist approach. It presents "events not as a series of isolated episodes, but as the unfolding of a broader historical process," as the author writes in his preface to the English edition:

The last quarter century of US-instigated wars must be studied as a chain of interconnected events. The strategic logic of the US drive for global hegemony extends beyond the neocolonial

operations in the Middle East and Africa. The ongoing regional wars are component elements of the rapidly escalating confrontation of the United States with Russia and China. [2]

The analyses, comments, statements and lectures collected in this book were not written from the standpoint of a passive observer. They are the product of the active struggle waged by the Trotskyist movement against imperialism and war over the last three decades. The contribution “Marxism and the Science of Historical Perspective,” in particular, explains and develops the Marxist method that is the basis for this book and the struggle waged by all of the great Marxists of the 20th century, above all Lenin and Trotsky, against capitalism and war. The author stresses that the activity of the revolutionary party must be determined not simply by subjective knowledge, but by a “correct evaluation of the fundamental social and economic tendencies of development on a world scale.” North writes:

The political perspective of our party does not proceed from subjectively motivated hopes and desires. Marxists conceive of revolution neither as punishment for the evil-doings of capitalists, nor as reward for their own altruistic efforts to abolish poverty. The perspectives of the revolutionary party must develop out of an analysis of the objectively real contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. [3]

Especially remarkable in this regard is the *Manifesto Against Imperialist War and Colonialism*, which appeared on 1 May, 1991, just a few months prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It stressed that the collapse of the Stalinist regime did not mean the failure of Marxism, but its great confirmation. The collaboration of the Kremlin regime in the attack on Iraq was “the historical high-point of the counterrevolutionary role played by Stalinism, both within the Soviet Union and internationally for more than half a century.”

The manifesto outlined how the Soviet bureaucracy, based on Stalin’s reactionary theory of socialism in one country, increasingly emerged as an agency of imperialism, which first inflicted bitter defeats on the working class, such as in Germany in 1933, and then adopted methods of open terror against the working class during the Moscow trials, including the liquidation of its revolutionary vanguard and an entire generation of the Marxist intelligentsia. The Kremlin continued its counterrevolutionary course in the post-war period under the cover of its programme of “peaceful coexistence” and Gorbachev’s “glasnost” and “perestroika,” culminating in its restoration of capitalism. This was a confirmation of the warning made by Trotsky in the mid-1930s: That the working class would either overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy, or the bureaucracy would restore capitalism.

The manifesto anticipated the developments of the past 30 years. It predicted that the introduction of the “market economy” would lead not only to a dramatic lowering of social and cultural life in the former Soviet Union, but also to an intensification of the exploitation and carve-up of the vast country by the imperialist powers. It stated:

With the connivance of the Kremlin, imperialism is asserting, with increasing brazenness, its right to assume control of the vast territories of the USSR. It is impossible for the imperialists to ignore the economic significance of the Soviet Union’s raw materials, vast productive potential and huge market. Indeed, the fate of the USSR, as well as that of Eastern Europe, is already

assuming a prominent place in the calculations and rivalries of the imperialist powers. [4]

Even at that time, the historical conflict between Germany and the United States, which led to two world wars in the last century, had broken through to the surface:

The European ... imperialists do not intend to leave their fate in the hands of the United States. In the aftermath of the war [against Iraq], the Europeans have taken steps to establish their own “rapid deployment force” independently of the NATO structure, in which the United States still plays the leading role. The German ruling class has made it clear that it cannot accept that its position in world affairs in the twenty-first century should be determined by the military defeat it suffered in the middle of the twentieth. [5]

Thirty years after the reunification of Germany on a capitalist basis, the propaganda about a new, democratic and peaceful Germany has evaporated. In the context of the deepest social and economic crisis since the 1930s and mounting tensions between the major powers, the ruling class is resorting, as it did on the eve of the First and Second World Wars, to militarism and war. With the Alternative for Germany (AfD), it has established a fascist party to impose its reactionary policies against widespread opposition from the population.

The grand coalition’s plans to develop Europe into a foreign policy and military great power recall nothing so much as the hubris of the Nazis. In September, the Foreign Ministry published a “doctrine for the Indo-Pacific,” which declared, “The Himalayas and Straits of Malacca may seem far off. But our prosperity and geopolitical influence in the coming decades will depend precisely on how we cooperate with the states of the Indo-Pacific.” The statement added that, as a globally active trading nation, Germany cannot “afford to content itself with a spectator’s role.”

The mad programme of German world power, which is directed not only against Russia and China, but also against the United States, is supported by all of the parliamentary parties—including the nominal lefts. “The EU must be made fit for world politics,” write the Greens in their new party programme. The Left Party is also agitating for a European-German imperialist policy. “The United States must get used to the fact that through the EU, the small and mid-sized states in Europe will become a world political factor,” stated the party’s foreign affairs spokesman, Gregor Gysi. Under the “new and future world order,” he added, “Europe will act more independently. And Washington will have to accept that.”

An important part of the book is its sharp polemic against petty-bourgeois academics, politicians and organisations that once participated in anti-imperialist protests, but now play a leading role in pro-war policies. The statement titled “After the Slaughter: Political Lessons of the Balkan War” explains the social background to this development:

The social structure and class relations of all the major capitalist countries have been deeply affected by the stock market boom that began in the early 1980s. Perpetually rising share values, especially the explosion in market valuations since 1995, have given a significant section of the middle class—especially among the professional elite—access to a degree of wealth they could not have imagined at the outset of their careers. [6]

This was a reference to figures like Joschka Fischer. The one-time

anarchist street fighter led Germany into its first military intervention since the Second World War as Green foreign minister in 1998. Today, like so many other former pacifists, Stalinists and “left” social democrats, he is a multi-millionaire and lives in a villa in the exclusive Dahlem neighbourhood in Berlin. He makes a living as a lobbyist for large corporations and cashes in with speaking fees of tens of thousands of euros. The privileged sections of the middle class that form the social basis for the Greens are responding to the extreme polarisation of social relations and the growth of tensions between the imperialist powers by shifting sharply to the right and emerging as a new base of support for militarism and dictatorship.

North also thoroughly exposes the anti-Marxist theories relied upon by the Greens and various pseudo-left tendencies, including the Left Party, Syriza in Greece, and Podemos in Spain, which have all become a critical base of support for imperialism. The lecture “Philosophy and politics in an age of war and revolution,” which David North delivered at Goethe University in Frankfurt on October 22, 2016, is a devastating critique of the Frankfurt School and postmodernism. The defence of historical materialism against all varieties of subjective idealism and irrationalism was the essential precondition for the ICFI to so accurately understand and predict the political situation, as shown in this volume.

The most significant factor in the Trump era has been the resurgence of the class struggle. Strikes and mass protests broke out in numerous countries during 2019, including Mexico, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, France, Spain, Algeria, Britain, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Kenya, South Africa, India and Hong Kong. The first national strike by autoworkers in over 40 years took place in the United States. In response to brutal police murders, the largest protests in American history occurred in 2020. They coincided with strikes and protests by workers and students in opposition to the ruling elite’s murderous campaign to force them back to their workplaces, schools and universities.

The most significant feature of these struggles is their international character. They are increasingly developing independently of and in opposition to the parties and trade unions that once claimed to represent the workers.

The struggle against war must base itself on this powerful social force. The contributions in the fifth section of the book focus on this question and develop the political, theoretical and historical basis upon which a global working class-led anti-war movement must be built. They demonstrate that the anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, because it is impossible to fight war without combatting its source, putting an end to the capitalist profit system and the domination of finance capital over social life.

The appendix of the German edition is composed of the statement “Socialism and the Fight Against War,” which the ICFI published in German on February 27, 2016. The ICFI and its sections—including the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party-SGP) in Germany—are fighting to arm the working class with an international socialist programme. The threat of a catastrophic third world war can be overcome only through an independent, mass anti-capitalist movement and the global struggle to establish workers’ governments. It must be based on the historical principles and perspectives of the Marxist movement defended and developed in this book.

Johannes Stern,
Berlin, 25 September 2020

[1] David North, The COVID-19 pandemic: A trigger event in world history, *World Socialist Web Site*, May 4, 2020.

[2] David North, *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony*, (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2016), p. xix.

[3] Ibid, p. 314.

[4] Ibid, p. 85.

[5] Ibid, p. 77.

[6] Ibid, p. 184.



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