

Global pandemic heightens danger of another world war

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The coronavirus pandemic has not only brought immense social distress to working people around the world, but it has dramatically intensified the danger of a catastrophic world war, driven above all by the determination of American imperialism to arrest its historic decline at any cost.

While the Stalinist Chinese Communist Party is certainly guilty of the abuse of democratic rights, particularly of the working class, the American posturing on “human rights” is completely hypocritical. It condemns China over the Uyghurs, but, to cite just one example of many, it defends Israel’s decades-long abuse of the democratic rights of the Palestinians.

The US accuses China of “aggression” and “expansionism,” but it has engaged in three decades of illegal wars in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa on the basis of lies and fabrications. The bombing of Serbia in 1999 was justified as necessary to stop the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Kosovars, which proved completely false. It invaded and laid waste to Iraq on the basis of lies about weapons of mass destruction.

Now the criminals in the White House are demonising China. Biden, following Trump, has taken the Big Lie to a new level, blaming China for the pandemic, despite all scientific evidence to the contrary. Whatever the limitations of Beijing’s

response, they pale into insignificance in comparison to the criminally irresponsible policies of governments in the US, Europe, Brazil, India and elsewhere. After all, China has, in its own bureaucratic fashion, largely contained the virus for now.

Unlike Trump who alienated US allies, Biden is strengthening alliances, holding the first summit of the Quad, a quasimilitary alliance, with the leaders of Japan, India and Australia. The Australian government is now openly discussing the prospect of an American conflict with China and is further strengthening the integration of the Australian military into the Pentagon’s war plans, putting the country’s population on the frontlines.

There is, however, nothing progressive about Beijing’s response to Washington’s warmongering. On the one hand, it is engaged in a desperate arms race with American imperialism, which spends three times what Beijing spends and has a host of military bases and allies encircling China. On the other, the Chinese Communist Party is still holding out the vain hope of a compromise. But Washington wants nothing less than the complete subordination of China to what it calls the “international rules-based order”—that is, the post-World War II structures, which it dominates and where it sets the rules.

A war between the US and China—the world’s two largest economies—would inevitably involve the use of nuclear weapons and draw in the rest of the world. It is a false hope to imagine that the ruling classes would pull back from nuclear war because the consequences for humanity would be too terrible. Already the Pentagon’s thinktanks are again “thinking the unthinkable”—the phrase used by the nuclear strategists of the Cold War. The pandemic has already demonstrated that governments are willing to sacrifice

millions of lives to boost corporate profits. American imperialism, which dropped two atomic bombs on Japan's civilian population in 1945, will not hesitate to wage nuclear war if that is the only means to maintain its global dominance.

The Pentagon is preparing for war with a timeframe of years, not decades. The outgoing head of the Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Phil Davidson, warned of war with China over Taiwan within five years. Military planning is proceeding accordingly.

The international working class alone is capable of halting the drive to war, as it is the only social force able to overthrow capitalism and its outmoded system of rival nation-states. To do so, it needs to unify and build an international antiwar movement independently of the establishment parties and trade unions that are all lining up for war.

It is essential for workers to reject the poisonous nationalism that is being whipped up around the world as the ruling classes seek to divide the working class and turn the immense social tensions generated by the pandemic outwards against an external enemy. The Chinese Communist Party, which rules on behalf of the superrich elite created by decades of capitalist restoration, is no exception. Having largely abandoned its socialist phrase-mongering, the Stalinist regime is incapable of making any appeal to the working class and seeks to counter Washington's propaganda with the reactionary nationalism of its own.

A terrible nuclear conflagration is not inevitable. The same crisis of capitalism that is generating immense geopolitical tensions is accelerating the resurgence of the class struggle. Just as workers are starting to stand up against governments determined to drive them back into unsafe factories and workplaces, so workers and youth will oppose the descent into a nuclear nightmare.

In 2003, the largest international antiwar protests in history took place against the criminal US-led invasion of Iraq. Yet the war went ahead anyway. The critical lesson from that experience is not that it is impossible to halt war, but rather that it is impossible to stop war with impotent pacifist appeals to the United Nations and capitalist governments. What is necessary is nothing less than the revolutionary struggle to abolish capitalism. In 1917, after three years of terrible trench warfare in World War I, it was the Russian Revolution and the creation of the first workers' state that brought

an end to the conflict. The workers of the world today can and must put an end to capitalism before nuclear weapons are unleashed.

On this May Day, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has issued a call for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to develop a global counteroffensive against the homicidal policies of governments in response to the pandemic. Likewise, the international working class can only oppose the war drive by unifying and mobilising its independent political strength.

The ICFI's call in 2016 for the formation of an international antiwar movement of the working class based on the fight for a socialist future takes on a burning urgency today. We appeal to workers in every country to take up these tasks, to contact the ICFI, and to join and build it as the political leadership necessary to lead the revolutionary struggles ahead.



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