

Oppose the US-NATO drive to war with Russia in Ukraine!

Statement of the International Committee of the Fourth International
14 February 2022

1. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site* unequivocally oppose the reckless drive of Washington and its NATO allies to instigate a war with Russia, using the fraudulent claim of an imminent invasion of Ukraine as a pretext. The Biden administration has concocted a transparently absurd “the Russians are coming” narrative that is devoid of credible facts and defies all political logic.

2. The claims of imminent war come exclusively from the United States and NATO. Russian President Vladimir Putin has made no statement that even hints that these are his intentions. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denies that a Russian invasion is “imminent” and has repeatedly urged the US and NATO to stop inciting panic.

3. The US government’s mind-numbing propaganda is dished out to the public by a spineless media whose brainless talking heads ask no questions and present as absolute truth the daily scripts prepared for them by the US military and intelligence agencies. The “weapons of mass destruction” lie that justified the disastrous 2003 invasion of Iraq has been forgotten. Not a single critical question or voice of anti-war opposition is allowed access to the mass media. Mere allegations are presented as proof of what is alleged. As one Biden administration spokesman declared at a recent press briefing, a government statement does not require corroborating evidence. The statement is, by itself, sufficient evidence because it has been made by the government.

4. According to the CIA-scripted media fairytale, peace-loving America and NATO are reacting to the sudden threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine. But the escalating confrontation is the outcome of months of intense preparations by the United States and NATO. Within the last eight months, Washington deployed 10,000 US troops to its base in Alexandroupolis in Greece, conducted DEFENDER-Europe 21 in preparation for combat in the Balkan and Black Sea regions, and held the largest Sea Breeze operation ever conducted in the Black Sea.

5. As with all US and NATO wars, the conflict over Ukraine is being readied with hypocritical posturing. In this case, the Russian annexation of Crimea and its support of separatist forces in eastern Ukraine—both of which developed in response to the 2014 regime-change putsch organized by the United States and Germany—are presented as gross violations of Ukrainian sovereignty.

6. The US and NATO proclaim the sanctity of state borders. But their professed devotion to this principle flies in the face of their repeated violation and rearrangement of state borders during the past 30 years. The United States and NATO had no respect for self-determination in Yugoslavia, which was destroyed in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The recognition of Croatian independence by the US and Germany set the stage for a decade of ethnic conflict that cost tens of thousands of lives. In 1999, the US-led NATO coalition bombed Serbia for 78 consecutive days in support of the secession of Kosovo province, whose independence was established under the control of a government consisting of drug lords.

7. The United States invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 and overthrew its government. This was followed in March 2003 with an even more flagrant violation of international law: The invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of its government. During the bloody US occupation of Iraq, Antony Blinken, now secretary of state, proposed a tripartite division of the country. Similar plans were drawn up for Libya for the US-NATO assault in 2011, which resulted in the overthrow of its government and the murder of its president—a bloody crime that was greeted by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as an occasion for jokes and laughter. This intervention was followed by the US bombing of Syria, which continues to this day.

8. Washington’s professed concern for Ukrainian democracy is no less deceitful and hypocritical than its devotion to Ukrainian self-determination. The government in Kiev, which derives its existence from the US-backed overthrow of an elected government, rules on behalf of an oligarchic kleptocracy responsible for suppressing the Ukrainian working class. The social forces on which Zelensky relies, including various paramilitary organizations and far-right groupings, bear the historical stench of fascism.

9. There is a frenetic urgency to Washington’s war drive. It appears to be working based on a timetable that does not allow it to weigh the consequences or to openly discuss worst case scenarios. Biden told the press on February 10 that if Americans and Russians start shooting at one another, “that’s a world war.” Yet rather than taking any steps to de-escalate and prevent such a cataclysm, the United States presses ahead with its provocations and allegations, announcing that it knows the precise date Russia intends to invade: February 16.

10. The United States is engaged in a one-sided brinkmanship in pursuit of its interests. The war-madness of Washington and its NATO allies obeys an objective logic driven by two fundamental factors.

11. First, the United States has since 1991 engaged in a relentless drive to exploit the possibilities for plunder and imperialist expansion opened up by the dissolution of the USSR. The Pentagon’s Strategic Plan drawn up in 1992 declared that the United States would not allow the emergence of a new challenger to its world hegemony. Over the past three decades, Washington has waged war relentlessly to this end, reducing countries and entire civilizations in the Balkans, the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia to rubble. The more pronounced the decline of American economic hegemony, the more world-encompassing became its war aims. Its sights are now fixed on Russia and China.

12. In its statement of February 18, 2016, “Socialism and the Fight Against War,” the International Committee of the Fourth International presented a comprehensive analysis of the global strategy of American imperialism and its NATO allies. It stressed that underlying the drive to war were “the deep-seated contradictions of the world capitalist system: (1) between a globally integrated and interdependent economy and its division into antagonistic national states; and (2) between the socialized character of global production and its subordination, through the private

ownership of the means of production, to the accumulation of private profit by the ruling capitalist class.”

13. Within the context of these fundamental contradictions, the ICFI explained:

The drive to war is centered in the efforts of the United States to maintain its position as the global hegemonic power. The dissolution in 1991 of the Soviet Union was seen as an opportunity to assert unrivaled US domination throughout the world. It was glorified by imperialist propagandists as the “end of history,” creating a “unipolar moment” in which the unchallengeable power of the United States would dictate a “New World Order” in the interests of Wall Street. The Soviet Union had encompassed a vast expanse of the globe, stretching from the eastern boundaries of Europe all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Thus, the vast regions of Eurasia, occupied by a debilitated Russia and newly independent Central Asian states, were again “in play,” open for corporate exploitation and plunder. The Stalinist restoration of capitalism in China, its police-state repression of working class resistance in 1989 and the opening up of “free trade zones” to transnational investment made available a vast reservoir of cheap labor.

14. The claims of an imminent Russian invasion and the deployment of US forces to the region signify that powerful sections of the corporate-financial elite and intelligence agencies have decided that the long-planned confrontation with Russia can be delayed no longer. Between 2017 and 2020, the principal complaint of the Democratic Party against Trump was not his assault on the Constitution and preparations for dictatorship, but, rather, his failure to oppose Russia with sufficient force. The proceedings of the first impeachment of Trump, between December 2019 and February 2020, were dominated by the allegation that he had withheld military aid to Ukraine. The standard Democratic Party denunciation of Trump was not that he was a would-be fascist dictator, but that he was “Putin’s puppet.”

15. Now that the Biden administration is in power, it is trying to make up for lost time. The US-NATO stratagem is as crude as it is obvious. Ukraine is being used as bait to lure Russia into war. Biden’s repeated references to a Russian “false flag” operation recalls the well-known tactic of the pickpocket who deflects the attention of potential pursuers by shouting “Stop thief!” If any country is planning a “false flag” operation, it is the United States.

16. Any incident in Ukraine, however dubious its origins, will be used to activate NATO forces and create, either *de jure* or *de facto*, a state of war. The Nord Stream II pipeline project, through which Russia was to supply natural gas to Germany, will be ended. Encircled by NATO, Russia will be confronted with a never-ending and constantly expanding list of demands, beginning with the unconditional return of Crimea to Ukraine. Russian influence in Belarus will be brought to an end. Secessionist movements in Russia, from Chechnya to Siberia, will obtain undisguised imperialist support. The end goal is regime change in Moscow and the carve up of Russia.

17. The Biden administration’s insistence on Ukraine’s “right” to become a member of NATO is an essential element of a strategy directed toward the reduction of Russia into a state of utter impotence. The late imperialist strategist and warmonger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in his book *The Grand Chessboard* (1997), wrote that Ukraine is “geopolitically pivotal” for Russia, determining the security of its southern borders and its access to warm seas. The region consisting of Ukraine, the Black Sea, and the Caspian is of incalculable geostrategic significance and is the central axis of Washington’s plans for global domination. It is through

this region that Russia accesses the Mediterranean and China extends the land route of its Belt and Road Initiative to Europe. Washington’s war aim is to destroy Russia as an obstacle to US hegemony over the Black Sea and Caspian regions and eventually all of Eurasia, reducing the resource-rich country to semi-colonial status. This is seen as a necessary step in preparation for war with China.

18. Second, the drive to war has been brought to a fever pitch by insoluble domestic crisis. The escalation of the drive to war, in the immediate aftermath of the debacle in Afghanistan, is rooted in conjoined social, financial and political crises of unprecedented proportions.

19. As the International Committee has stressed since its outbreak in January 2020, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the course of the twenty-first century will prove as great as that of World War I and World War II on that of the twentieth century. The pandemic is a “trigger event” that has brought to the point of explosion the already far advanced contradictions of the world capitalist system.

20. The global cost in lives since the outbreak of the pandemic is staggering. The most conservative estimates place the worldwide death toll at close to six million. Estimates based on the calculation of excess deaths place the loss of life as high as 20 million. In the United States, the wealthiest and most powerful capitalist country, the death toll is approaching one million.

21. This devastating toll is the outcome of policies that subordinate the saving of lives to the protection and increase of the wealth of the oligarchic capitalist ruling class. Even as the pandemic continues to claim tens of thousands of lives each week, efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 have been explicitly repudiated. Governments around the globe, with Washington in the lead, now treat thousands of daily deaths as normal and move to end all reporting of infection and mortality.

22. The pandemic has intensified the internal financial, political and social crises of all capitalist countries. In fact, it is in the most advanced capitalist countries, and especially in the United States, that the crisis finds its most toxic character.

23. The United States is rapidly approaching complete economic, social and political dysfunctionality. Inflation is skyrocketing, and America’s debt, largely incurred through funneling money to the banks and Wall Street, has reached a staggering \$30 trillion. The working class is coming into open and potentially explosive struggle. It is but a year since the US came within minutes of the overthrow of its constitutional government in the attempted coup d’état of January 6, 2021.

24. At a press conference last month, Biden remarked that it was questionable if US democracy would survive the decade. No other country has such levels of social inequality, or a ruling class so indifferent to the most basic needs of the population. The United States is a social powder keg. War is a means to artificially unify and redirect crises outward.

25. In the study of the causes of war, many serious historians have stressed the primacy of domestic contradictions. The well-known American historian, Arno Mayer, noted a half-century ago in a study of the *Dynamics of Counterrevolution* that

strained and unstable internal conditions tend to make elites markedly intransigent and disposed to exceptionally drastic, not to say extravagantly hazardous, preemptive solutions. Beleaguered and vulnerable governments and political classes are more likely to be disposed for than against recourse to mounting external conflict or war. By both reflex and calculation they assume that the members of a seriously torn polity and society will pull together once they are confronted with a common and imminent external threat and foe. Such governments incline to use heightened external conflict or war as an instrument of internal social cohesion, as an antidote to insurrection, revolution, civil war, or

secession that they claim to be imminent. The ultimate objective is to monetize a striking diplomatic or military victory to restore, preferably to enhance, the waning power and prestige of internally enfeebled regimes, governments and elites.

26. The European bourgeoisie, having barely survived the catastrophe of the two world wars, are inclined to greater caution. However, they go along with Washington's war drive, despite the fact that war over Ukraine could be catastrophic to their own interests, reliant as they are on Russia for natural gas and other resources. They face massive internal crises that propel them along the same disastrous path. Moreover, they know that a direct challenge to the American agenda would bring about devastating retribution. In 2003, Germany and France expressed official reluctance to support the US invasion of Iraq. Washington openly attacked its long-time allies and threatened to reorient its relations in Europe to the Eastern European states, recently admitted to NATO, in opposition to the central countries of "Old Europe." The European bourgeoisie also fear that resisting the United States will result in exclusion from the spoils to be secured in the potential reorganization of Russia. Duly disciplined, they join in the drive to war.

27. But whatever the strategists in Washington and European capitals may imagine, the recourse to war will solve none of their problems. The criminals who set such cataclysms into motion will discover to their discomfiture the truth of the adage that those who sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind.

28. War with Russia in Ukraine, however it begins or whatever the course of its initial stages, will not be contained. It will follow an uncontrollably expansive logic. Every state in the region will be drawn into the conflict. The Black Sea, which laps across the shoreline of seven countries, will be transformed into a cauldron of escalating conflict, sweeping across Transcaucasia, the Caspian Sea region, Central Asia and beyond.

29. China would see its own interests directly threatened and would be dragged into the war. Conflict would ensue over Taiwan. Iran and Israel would be caught up in the warfare. Japan and Australia would rapidly follow. At some point the use of nuclear weapons would be seen as a way out. And in every theater of this conflict, the United States would be centrally involved, with a devastating loss of life and massive levels of social dislocation.

30. Just over 30 years have passed since the dissolution of the USSR. Back in 1992, the Stalinist bureaucrats in Moscow as well as Kiev claimed that the restoration of capitalism would inaugurate a new era of unprecedented prosperity. Both Russia and Ukraine, they claimed, having abandoned the shibboleths of Marxism, would enjoy unprecedented prosperity as they were welcomed into the happy family of peace-loving capitalist nations.

31. This ahistorical and utopian fantasy—rooted in the pre-1991 Stalinist panaceas of "socialism in one country" and "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism—has been totally shattered. The Russian government, the most bitter enemy of Marxism and all that is associated with the 1917 October Revolution, is now confronted with the reality of imperialist subjugation.

32. The Putin regime, which rules on behalf of a corrupt capitalist oligarchy, has no viable, let alone progressive, response to this threat. The possibility of Russia's peaceful integration into the structures of world capitalism, dominated by the United States and the major imperialist powers, has been shown to be a delusion. A negligible factor in world finance, the Russian economy is under perpetual pressure from sanctions imposed by the United States.

33. The invocation of reactionary nationalism is incapable of appealing to the populations on its borders and deepens Russia's isolation. Moreover, Putin's resort to nuclear saber rattling offers nothing but the

prospect of global Armageddon. He rules precariously over a country wracked by the pandemic, which has intensified all the contradictions of the crippled post-Soviet society. Putin is compelled to balance between conflicting factions of the capitalist elite, i.e., between those who would accept their status as comprador capitalists under the domination of US and European imperialism, and those who fear capitulation will jeopardize their interests. Among the latter elements are gathered ultranationalist and far-right forces, whose concept of national defense ultimately rests on a suicidal policy involving the use of nuclear weapons.

34. The International Committee bases its opposition to imperialist war not on support for any form of nationalism, but on the struggle to unify the working class of all countries to overthrow capitalism and establish world socialism. This essential principle applies with exceptional force in the present situation.

35. The Ukrainian and Russian working class share a common history. They have no desire for a fratricidal war. The revolutionary movement in Ukraine produced many of the greatest leaders of the fight for socialism, including Leon Trotsky. The workers of Ukraine and Russia struggled as comrades for the overthrow of tsarism and the victory of the October Revolution. They fought together against German imperialism. The workers of Russia and Ukraine were both victimized by the crimes of the Stalinist regime, and they have both suffered the consequences of the restoration of capitalism. The fascistic nationalists present in both countries do not represent or speak for the interests of the working class.

36. The way forward for the Russian and Ukrainian working class requires a global perspective. It must be stressed that opposition to Putin does not involve aligning with imperialism. Pseudo-left denunciations of Russian and Chinese "imperialism" have no relation to the historical development of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Rather, they express the alignment of petty-bourgeois forces with Washington. It is necessary to oppose imperialism without adapting to Russian nationalism, and to oppose Russian nationalism without adapting to imperialism.

37. Whatever the immediate outcome of the current tensions, there is no peaceful resolution to this crisis. The period before the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and World War II in 1939 saw many "war scares." But the resolution of one crisis soon gave way to another, and war finally came.

38. The present crisis is a grave warning. Imperialism is tobogganing toward disaster. The social force that must be mobilized to stop the catastrophe being prepared in Ukraine is the international working class. The fight against war is directly connected with the fight against exploitation and the murderous herd immunity policies of the capitalist governments. Imperialism and finance capital will tolerate as many deaths as it takes to secure their plunder and profits. Millions of war dead must not be added to the millions dead from the pandemic. It is of the utmost urgency that workers build an independent anti-war movement on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective.

39. The principles that must guide the fight against imperialism and the drive to world war, enumerated by the International Committee in its statement of 2016, assume in the present crisis the greatest urgency:

- The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.
- The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and put an end to the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.
- The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.
- The new anti-war movement must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism.

40. We appeal to all sections of the working class and youth, as well as the most principled and courageous sections of the middle class, to fight on the basis of these principles against the drive to war.

41. The International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections welcome fraternal discussion, on the basis of the principles advanced in this statement, with political tendencies and individuals around the world who recognize the urgent need for the building of an international mass movement against war.



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