Stop the reckless spiral toward nuclear war!

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7 March 2022

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls for the mobilization of workers in the United States, Europe, Russia and internationally to intervene to stop the drive to world war that threatens the entire globe with catastrophe.

The risk of nuclear war is greater than at any time since 1945. Not even during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962—which, it should be recalled, was triggered by US President John F. Kennedy's refusal to allow Soviet missiles in the Western Hemisphere—was the danger as great as it is today.

Sixty years ago, even in the midst of a major confrontation, both the US and Soviet governments were seeking to negotiate a way out of the crisis and avoid war. Not so today: Both the US-NATO and the Putin government are acting with incredible and potentially fatal recklessness.

Having been backed into a corner by the relentless expansion of NATO, Putin's desperate invasion of Ukraine has played into the hands of US and European imperialism. But Putin believes, even as protests within Russia against the war grow, that he can compel NATO to negotiate and make concessions, through threats and nuclear brinkmanship. This strategy is based on a self-deluding underestimation of the Biden administration's determination to escalate the conflict.

The imperialist powers, driven by geopolitical interests and domestic crises, have no intention of backing down. They feel that they have caught Putin in a trap, and they plan to exploit it to the full. Rather than seeking some sort of diplomatic solution to the crisis, their theory is that they can bring such a level of economic pressure, combined with ever more direct military intervention, to achieve their goal of regime change in Russia itself.

NATO's supposed non-involvement in the conflict is already a fiction. More than 20 countries, including most of the members of NATO and the European Union, are flooding Ukraine with weapons, including anti-tank missiles, anti-aircraft systems, and fighter jets.

On Sunday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he had given a "green light" to Poland, a NATO member, to send aircraft to Ukraine, which will be replaced by US fighters sent to Poland. There have also been proposals to use NATO airfields as staging grounds for Ukrainian aircraft. The distinction between Ukraine and the NATO powers is being completely obliterated.

This only further demonstrates that Ukraine was conceived of as an ideal venue for a US-NATO conflict with Russia. US strategists have often boasted about plans to turn Ukraine into "Russia's Afghanistan," that is, to orchestrate a protracted war that would create the political conditions for the overthrow of the Russian government. In reality, for all the proclamations of sympathy for the Ukrainians caught up in the war, they are being cynically used as pawns in this broader imperialist geostrategy.

As the conflict over Ukraine escalated in February, the Biden administration made a decision not to seek a peaceful way out, pointedly refusing to negotiate over Russia's demand that Ukraine not be admitted into NATO. In the months prior to the Russian invasion, the US was already flooding Ukraine with weaponry to be used in a war that the US intended to provoke.

The *Washington Post* reported Saturday on declassified documents that show that "as early as December, the Pentagon was equipping Ukrainian fighters with arms and equipment useful for fighting in urban areas, including shotguns and specialized suits to safeguard soldiers handling unexploded ordnance… Taken together, the variety, volume and potency of firepower being rushed into the war zone illustrate the extent to which the United States sought to prepare the Ukrainian military to wage a hybrid war against Russia…"

Since the 2014 US-backed coup overthrew a pro-Russian government, Ukraine has essentially been transformed into a military outpost for the US and NATO, a process accelerated over the past year and enormously intensified over the past week. The *Post* notes:

> In the last year, the United States has committed more than $1 billion in military assistance to Ukraine, the senior defense official said. That includes counter-mortar radars, secure radios, electronic equipment, medical equipment, vehicles and a steady supply of Javelin missile systems, according to the list The Post reviewed. At least nine Island-class patrol boats and five Mi-17 transport helicopters have also been provided to Ukraine from the U.S. reserve of excess defense articles.

The anti-Russia propaganda in the media is itself playing an

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increasingly significant role in the escalation of the crisis, in both generating pressure and providing legitimacy for more aggressive measures. Extreme actions are proposed, which are first rejected, then become a "talking point," and then are actively debated and considered.

On Thursday, Republican Lindsey Graham called for Russian President Vladimir Putin to be assassinated. "The only way this ends is for somebody in Russia to take this guy out," Graham tweeted. On Sunday, Democratic Senator Joe Manchin declared a no-fly zone should be considered, joining other prominent Republicans and Democrats in proposing an action that Republican Senator Marco Rubio acknowledged would mean "basically the beginning of World War III."

War propaganda has been a major element in every imperialist war, but the scale has reached a new level. Moreover, it has clearly struck a chord among significant sections of the upper-middle class.

The protests that have developed in response to the invasion of Ukraine are anti-Russian, not anti-war. Genuine anti-war protests do not call for no-fly zones that could trigger a nuclear confrontation—a dominant slogan in demonstrations in Europe last week and in Chicago, Illinois yesterday. They do not applaud and call for massive increases in military budgets. They do not forget the war crimes committed by the governments of their own countries.

Opposition to war does not consist in calling for assassinations of the leaders of the "enemy" country, nor with hailing the military exploits of fascistic forces with a long history of genocidal crimes, as is the case with the paramilitary groups that have been integrated into the Ukrainian armed forces.

The only demonstrations that have an element of genuine opposition to war are those that have erupted in Russia. However great the confusion in Russia, these protests are at least directed at their own government, demanding an end to the invasion of Ukraine and not demanding the intensification of military operations.

There is no sign, however, that the war frenzy in the ruling class and the upper middle class is being met with enthusiasm in the working class.

A Rassmussen Poll released yesterday confirms that the most aggressively pro-war segment of the population is the extremely affluent. Asked, "If a wider war breaks out in Europe, should the US military be involved?" 66 percent of those with incomes over $200,000 said "yes." Only 37 percent of those with incomes under $30,000 said they supported US involvement.

While the pro-war propaganda has an influence in all sections of the population, the working class is by and large anti-war. The sentiment that dominates among workers is growing concern over the consequences of the war drive. It is workers who will have to fight in any major war, and it is they who will bear the brunt of the economic consequences.

Moreover, the drive for war against Russia comes in the context of a pandemic that continues to have a staggering impact on the entire population. The official death toll from COVID-19 surpassed six million yesterday, according to the Johns Hopkins COVID tracker. The real toll, based on "excess deaths," is estimated at 20 million.

In the United States, the number of deaths from COVID-19 is approaching one million. Tens of millions of people have experienced the death of a family member, friend or coworker. Millions of people confront the debilitating impact of Long COVID.

The pro-war hysteria in the upper middle class is the outcome of a process that has developed over an extended period of time. The mass demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in 2003 were the last gasp of an anti-war movement politically dominated by sections of the middle class. The opposition to the criminal invasion among layers in and around the Democratic Party, however, was not of a principled character. Already in 1999, upper middle-class professionals and academics supported the bombing of Serbia under the fraudulent pretext of "humanitarianism."

The Iraq war protests were nearly 20 years ago. Through the mechanism of the Democratic Party and identity politics, sections of the upper middle class and academia have not only reconciled themselves to imperialism, but they have become the most fervent advocates of ever more extreme actions against Russia.

This is, moreover, an international process. In Germany, the Green Party, which is part of the governing coalition, has stood at the forefront in demands for a massive expansion of military spending.

This underscores the fact that the fight against war must be rooted, theoretically, politically and organizationally, in the working class.

The pandemic has enormously intensified class antagonisms in all the capitalist countries. Prior to the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine, there were growing expressions of working-class struggle—over the pandemic policy, over the enormous increase in exploitation and inequality, and over the surging cost of basic goods.

An effort to enforce a fictional "national unity," accompanied by domestic repression, is a major factor in the ruling class's war hysteria. At the same time, the working class struggle, politically armed with an international, socialist and revolutionary perspective, is the objective basis for a movement to stop the drive to World War III.

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