

Biden on “60 Minutes”: American capitalism is at war with the world, at war with reality

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On Sunday evening, CBS aired an episode of “60 Minutes,” featuring an extended interview by Scott Pelley with US President Joe Biden.

In the space of 25 minutes, Biden made a series of extraordinary statements. He declared that the COVID-19 pandemic was “over”; announced his “ironclad commitment” to backing war against Russia, while acknowledging this contained the possibility of nuclear war; and pledged US forces to a possible war with China.

It has been over 200 days since Biden last sat down for an interview with a television journalist. Much has changed. The US and NATO provoked war with Russia in Ukraine and have escalated the conflict with massive tranches of military aid and direct involvement, overseeing and planning the movement of troops and the targeting of missiles. The eastern and southern portions of Ukraine invaded by Russia have become the concentrated site of an expanding third world war.

Mass inflation has gripped the globe. The prices of basic necessities have soared beyond the reach of the working class. Workers in Europe face the prospect of a freezing winter, unable to afford heat; workers in the United States struggle to pay rent. The stock market is turbulent, and its future looks grim. Most significantly, the struggles of the working class against capitalism are coming into the open, are growing rapidly and are taking an increasingly political form.

American capitalism is at war with reality, and nowhere is this more openly embodied than in its President Joe Biden. He acknowledged the gravity of the situation declaring, “This is a really difficult time. We’re at an inflection point in the history of this country.” At the same time, and without any justification, Biden announced, “I’m more optimistic than I’ve been in a long time.”

The American ruling class’s delusions and its grotesque indifference to the lives of workers was summed up in Biden’s statement on the pandemic. One million Americans had died. Biden pulled a long face at this but declared, “The pandemic is over ... the pandemic is over. If you notice, no

one’s wearing masks. Everybody seems to be in pretty good shape.”

The 1 million COVID-19 deaths in the United States were, in their overwhelming majority, preventable. Biden, like his predecessor Trump, would take none of the necessary public health measures to isolate the virus and prevent its spread. Such measures threatened the profits of American businesses. America led the ruling classes of the world in embracing the pandemic and accepting mass death.

Now, as 3,000 Americans die of COVID-19 every week, Biden declares the pandemic is over. He celebrates the fact, the direct result of his own criminal policies, that people are not wearing masks. The death and infection rate data can no longer be considered reliable. The dead and infected, those suffering the terrible consequences of Long COVID, are being shoved into the ranks of the countless uncounted, and the pandemic declared to be at an end.

Biden’s statement, “Everybody seems to be in pretty good shape,” erases the experience of millions of people with Long COVID. According to a recent report from the Brookings Institution, roughly 4 million people suffering from Long COVID have left the workforce.

The extraordinary statement that “the pandemic is over”—which can be compared to George W. Bush’s infamous “mission accomplished” speech in the initial phases of the Iraq war—also ignores the ongoing and persistent danger of viral evolution. Recent studies indicate that new, highly mutated variants of COVID-19 appear almost every week, with increasing immune-escape potential.

The American ruling class is inured to mass death. They have learned, with alarming speed, that widespread preventable death is something with which they are prepared to live. This sharpens the teeth of their militarist threats and brinkmanship.

Biden’s paramount concern in the interview was to make clear his unwavering determination to wage war. He announced Washington’s “ironclad commitment” to take the war against Russia “as far as it takes.” The goal, which

he termed “winning in Ukraine,” was “to get Russia out of Ukraine completely.”

This formulation implies a commitment by the United States to arming the Ukrainians and orchestrating the conduct of the conflict until Russian forces are removed not only from eastern and southern Ukraine, but also from Crimea. The Crimean Peninsula is claimed by both Kiev and Moscow and is a critical military position for Russia, securing as it does access to the Black Sea.

Pelley pointed out that Putin was being “pushed into a corner” and asked Biden what the American president would say if Putin considered “using chemical or tactical nuclear weapons.” Biden responded, “Don’t. Don’t. Don’t. You will change the face of war unlike anything since World War II.”

Washington’s entire geopolitical strategy is one of unrelenting recklessness. Biden told Putin before the entire world that he was committing the US to the defeat of Russian forces in Ukraine, recognizing that this pushed him into a corner. The use of nuclear weapons is being openly discussed as a real possibility, and yet Washington refuses to take a single step backwards.

Not content to wage world war in a single theater, Biden turned his attention to China, and here too his statements were of unmitigated recklessness. Taiwan, he declared, would “make their own judgments about their independence ... that’s their decision.” This statement directly calls into question what has been a mainstay of global stability for nearly a half-century: the One China policy.

By declaring Taiwanese sovereign independence to be a matter for Taiwan itself to decide, Biden threw out the principle that Taiwan is part of China. The statement is an open and deliberate encouragement of pro-independence forces in Taiwan. Beijing has been clear for decades that the One China policy, more than almost anything else, is a red line that cannot be crossed without severe consequences. Attempts to secure Taiwanese independence would be met, it has declared, with forcible reunification.

The war-mongering continued. In what may be the most rash statement of the entire interview, Biden declared that US forces would defend Taiwan against an attack by China. Pelley followed up with the question, “US forces, men and women, would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion?” “Yes,” Biden coldly replied.

Gone is any claim to strategic ambiguity—the idea that by not declaring if US forces would defend Taiwan they left both pro-independence elements in Taiwan and pro-reunification forces in Beijing uncertain of what Washington would do in the event of conflict. Biden pledged that the US will go to war with China.

Afterwards, the White House issued a statement that US

policy had not changed and that the United States still holds a position of strategic ambiguity. This is a pattern of the Biden administration, using the president’s tendency to “gaffe” as an excuse to deliberately state and then claim to retract the most provocative possible statements.

The only thing that Biden presented as an unacceptable calamity was when he spoke not about perpetual mass infection or the possibility of nuclear annihilation, but when he addressed the possibility of a railway strike, which he claimed to have narrowly averted. “If in fact they’d gone on strike,” he stated, “the supply chains in this country would have come to a screeching halt, and we would’ve seen a real economic crisis.”

This crisis for the ruling class—the growing upsurge of working class militancy—has not been averted. Despite the aid of the unions, who jumped to assist the president in shutting down the strike, holding extended negotiations in the White House to broker a sellout deal, Biden has not reached a settlement that will in any way address the demands of the railway workers. Workers are furious and are determined to fight.

When it came to the soaring cost of goods, a driving factor in the class struggle, Biden brushed it off. “We’re going to get control of inflation,” he pledged—without explaining that the main way the ruling class is seeking to “control” inflation is by instigating a recession and driving up unemployment in order to undercut workers’ demands for higher wages.

Biden articulates the crisis-driven desperation of the American ruling class—at war with Russia, at war with China, at war with the working class, at war with reality.

It does not speak well for either the president or American capitalism that the question, posed in the interview, of his mental fitness has now become obligatory.

Washington will not prevent mass death, nor will it step back from nuclear war; US capitalism is driven to these ends by crises from which it cannot escape.

The policies and strategies of Washington are insane—in the most real meaning of the word—but it is an intelligible madness, an insanity with objective causes. Capitalism has nothing to offer humanity but war and poverty and death. It has no solution to the pandemic but to deny its existence, no solution to war but escalation.



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