

# America's "New World Order"—The historical and social roots of US plans for war with Russia and China

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*The following is a report given by Andre Damon to the Seventh Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US) in support of the resolution titled "Mobilize the working class against imperialist war!"*

*Damon is a member of the national committee of the SEP. Read the full report on the Congress and the resolutions adopted at it.*

There is a peculiar correspondence between congresses of the Socialist Equality Party and turning points in world history. The Founding Congress of the SEP, held in August 2008, took place just two months before the collapse of Lehman brothers during the 2008 financial crash.

Now, as the party holds its Seventh National Congress, and we turn to the discussion of the US war against Russia in Ukraine and its preparations for war with China, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has at this very moment touched down in Taiwan, in a deliberate provocation intended to precipitate a military conflict between the United States and China.

To understand the significance of this event, it is necessary to review the historical context within which the current eruption of US militarism is taking place. This entails an appraisal of the International Committee's analysis of world history over the past half century.

It's precisely in times when the tempo of events seems overwhelming that we must rely on a historically grounded perspective all the more. Navigation is never so important as during a storm.

August will mark six months since the beginning of the war between the US and NATO and Russia over Ukraine, the largest land war in Europe since the Second World War.

The eruption of this war did not come as a surprise to the International Committee of the Fourth International. The IC had been warning since the early 1980s that the United States was preparing a global war to reconquer the territories lost to imperialist exploitation as a result of the Russian and Chinese revolutions and the anti-colonial uprisings of the 20th century.

As one reviews the writings of the International Committee on geopolitical events, one is struck by how rapidly the IC was able to produce accurate and detailed analyses of contemporary events that have stood the test of time.

That is because, with every new development, the IC was not "winging it." We were able to rapidly and accurately analyze contemporary events because we work on the basis of a historically grounded analysis of the 20th century and the 21st. We have a theory of contemporary history and contemporary geopolitics.

The daily analysis of the WSWS derives from and extends this historical analysis, which is rooted in the theories of imperialism of the great Marxists of the 20th century: Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky, and numerous of their comrades and co-thinkers.

In the daily work of the WSWS, we seek to extend and deepen this theoretical tradition, to view contemporary developments through the lens

of a historically grounded perspective and at the same time to constantly develop and extend this perspective in light of new events.

This report will seek to concisely present the IC's analysis of the eruption of US militarism, as articulated in reports, lectures, speeches and resolutions over the past half century and to frame the United States' current war with Russia and conflict with China within this analysis. Many of the documents to which this report refers are available in the book *A Quarter Century of War*.

The resolution "Mobilize the Working Class against Imperialist War!" presented for adoption at this Congress, characterizes the escalating US conflict with Russia and China as follows:

With extreme recklessness, American imperialism is risking a nuclear war that could result in the extinction of human life on the planet. The destruction of Russia and control of the Eurasian landmass, a longstanding geo-strategic goal of US imperialism, is viewed by the Pentagon and CIA as essential preparation for and part of an onslaught against China. What was referred to by Lenin during World War I as a "redivision of the world" is now underway. US imperialism intends to redraw the map of the globe...

The real driving forces behind the war are: 1) The geopolitical interests of American imperialism and its drive for global hegemony; 2) The effort by US and European imperialism to gain direct access to Russia's immensely valuable and strategically critical raw materials; and 3) The attempt by the ruling class to resolve its intractable domestic crisis through war abroad.<sup>[1]</sup>

In the course of this report, we will review the historical antecedents of this analysis, as articulated by the IC over the past half century.

## The IC's analysis of the eruption of US imperialism

In 1990, responding to the eruption of the Gulf War, the Workers League, the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, published a resolution describing the essential characteristics of a revolutionary period:

World events are once again moving at a blinding speed, and the

vastly accelerated tempo is itself the mark of a revolutionary period. The extended time span in which molecular changes in the economic base of society accumulated, and politics appeared to move at a glacial pace, has given way to an era characterized by frenetic changes and upheavals, in which the profound subterranean shifts have broken through the surface of political life. Fundamental class antagonisms, contained for decades beneath various political and state structures, have exploded into the open, and all of the contending social forces entering into battle have begun to advance openly the programs that correspond to their economic interests. This open clash of antagonistic class forces is the essential characteristic of a revolutionary period.<sup>[2]</sup>

In many cases, the great works of Marxism reveal essential characteristics of the historical epoch that become only truer as time goes on. This is certainly the case with this resolution.

In order to make sense of this open clash of class forces now bursting to the surface, it is necessary to examine the very “molecular” changes, taking place over decades.

On October 4, 2002, Comrade David North delivered a report entitled, “The war against Iraq and America’s drive for world domination.” This report summarized the entire arc of American imperialism in the 20th century:

For nearly three-quarters of a century, the fate of American imperialism and the Soviet Union were inextricably linked. The October Revolution that brought the Bolshevik Party to power followed by only a few months the April 1917 entry of the United States into World War I. Thus, from the earliest days of its emergence as the principal imperialist power, the United States confronted the reality of a worker’s state that proclaimed the advent of a new historical epoch of world socialist revolution. Despite the Stalinist bureaucracy’s subsequent betrayal of the revolutionary internationalist ideals initially proclaimed by Lenin and Trotsky, the political aftershocks produced by the overthrow of capitalism in Russia continued to reverberate for decades—in the growth of the social consciousness and political militancy of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries, including the United States, and in the wave of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles that swept across the globe, especially in the aftermath of World War II.

Though it emerged from World War II as the leader of world capitalism, the United States was not in a position to organize the world as it saw fit. The initial expectation that the possession of the atomic bomb would enable the United States to intimidate and, if need be, destroy the Soviet Union was shattered by the Soviet production of a nuclear device in 1949. The victory of the Chinese Revolution that same year represented a devastating blow to America’s expectation that it would exercise unchallenged sway over Asia.

Throughout the early years of the Cold War a bitter battle raged within the ruling circles of the US government over how to deal with the Soviet Union. ... A substantial faction of the ruling elite advocated a “rollback” strategy—that is, the destruction of the Soviet Union and the Maoist regime in China, even if this entailed the use of nuclear weapons. Another faction, associated with the State Department theorist George F. Kennan, advocated “containment.”

...During the remaining decades of the Cold War, the real meaning of “deterrence” was not what the United States prevented

the USSR from doing, but what the possibility of Soviet retaliation prevented the United States from doing.<sup>[3]</sup>

In March 2003, two days after the start of the US attack on Iraq, Comrade North published an essay entitled, “The crisis of American capitalism and the war against Iraq,” which continued and developed this analysis:

[The years 1945-2003] can be bisected into two eras. During the first 30 years, between 1945 and 1975, the predominant tendency in American domestic policy was that of liberal social reform. In its foreign policy, the American bourgeoisie championed a version of liberal internationalism, rooted in various multilateral institutions....

But under conditions of the immense expansion of the post-World War II economy, American capitalism considered social liberalism at home and liberal (and anti-communist) internationalism to be the most advisable policy.

The end of this liberal era was foreshadowed in the weakening of the world economic order that had been established in 1944 (the Bretton Woods system). Its collapse in 1971 with the end of dollar-gold convertibility ushered in a period of mounting international economic instability—manifested especially in unprecedented price inflation—and a protracted decline within the United States of corporate profitability.

The deterioration in the general world economic climate provoked a fundamental change in the domestic and foreign policy of the American ruling class. Within the United States, social policies that had been oriented toward limited wealth redistribution and somewhat reduced levels of social inequality were thrown into reverse. The election of Reagan to the presidency in 1980 was followed by major reductions in tax rates for the wealthiest Americans, massive cuts in social spending to alleviate the plight of the poorest Americans, and a general assault on the trade unions.

The international component of this policy was the repudiation of “detente” with the Soviet Union and the general intensification of military pressure against national movements in the “Third World” that were seen as harmful to America’s global interests.<sup>[4]</sup>

These developments form the context of the letter sent by Comrade North to Michael Banda, the former general secretary of the British Workers Revolutionary Party, in 1981, on the development of a global perspectives document for the International Committee.

This letter gained renewed significance following the ICFI’s 1985 split with the Workers Revolutionary Party and the development of the 1988 perspectives resolution.

Comrade North’s letter is striking in the clarity with which it stated fundamental processes that would be at work over the coming decades and which are now bursting to the surface. It began by noting:

The insoluble economic crisis of world capitalism is driving the ruling class of North America, Europe and Japan irresistibly toward the launching of a nuclear Third World War. The essence of such a war would be an attempt by world imperialism, spearheaded by the United States, to restore the world position lost through the October Revolution of 1917 and the titanic struggles of national liberation throughout Asia, the Middle East, Africa,

and to maintain, at all cost, the enslavement of Latin America. This would be a global war in the truest sense: A struggle by the oppressor nations against the Soviet Union and the oppressed nations...<sup>[5]</sup>

It continued:

The conception that the existence of nuclear weapons has made war unthinkable or impossible is a pacifist delusion. Imperialist war is a product of imperialist economics. Every imperialist power has arrived at a complete economic and political impasse.

The spearhead of imperialist war preparations, and the center of all the world economic and political contradictions, is the United States. ...

Imperialism sees no way out of the crisis except through the violent redivision of the world; But this redivision assumes a different form from that of the previous world wars. It is not a matter of imperialist states attempting to seize each other's colonies. But of regaining lost positions through the destruction of national revolutionary movements, the reestablishment, in one form or another, of colonial slavery, and the destruction of the workers states—above all, the USSR.<sup>[6]</sup>

The US's efforts to destabilize the Soviet Union led to the massive military buildup of the 1980s, including the Star Wars program and the fomenting of the US-backed Islamist insurgency in Afghanistan.

But with the dissolution of the USSR, US imperialism erupted in the form of a series of global wars, beginning with the Gulf War of 1990-91, aimed at securing US hegemony through military force. The Defense Planning Guidance, drafted by the Department of Defense in February 1992, asserted the willingness of the United States to use military force to secure global economic hegemony:

There are other potential nations or coalitions that could, in the further future, develop strategic aims and a defense posture of region-wide or global domination. Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor.<sup>[7]</sup>

The 11th Plenum of the International Committee, held on March 5, 1991, warned:

For all the problems of American capitalism—the decay of its industrial base, the loss of its overseas markets, the massive trade deficits and budget deficits, the collapse of its banking system, the gangrenous growth of social ills—the bourgeoisie believes it has found an answer: Force!

In January of 1991, President George H.W. Bush announced the launching of a “new world order” with the initiation of the Gulf War. Announcing the war, Bush declared, “Five months ago, Saddam Hussein started this cruel war against Kuwait. Tonight, the battle has been joined. We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order.”<sup>[8]</sup>

In a report to the Special National Congress of the Workers League,

convened to discuss the Gulf War, Comrade North concluded:

[The Gulf War] marks the beginning of a new imperialist redivision of the world. The end of the postwar era means the end of the postcolonial era as well. As it proclaims the “failure of socialism,” the imperialist bourgeoisie is, in deeds if not yet in words, proclaiming the “failure of independence” as well. The deepening crisis confronting all the major imperialist powers compels them to secure control over strategic resources and markets. Former colonies which had achieved a degree of political independence must be re-subjugated. In its brutal assault against Iraq, imperialism is giving notice that it intends to restore the type of unrestrained domination of the backward countries that existed prior to World War II.<sup>[9]</sup>

The eruption of American imperialism following the dissolution of the USSR had fundamentally economic aims, both internationally and within the United States. The United States sought through war to secure cheap sources of raw materials, accompanied by a supply of low-wage labor internationally that would serve to depress wages domestically, creating a low-inflation economic environment in which stock values and corporate profitability soared.

In the 2002 lecture, “The war against Iraq and America’s drive for world domination,” Comrade North described the economic goals of America’s global military offensive:

The aggressive policies of American imperialism produced the desired consequences: within the United States the living standards of the working class either stagnated or declined; within the so-called “Third World” there occurred a horrifying deterioration in the conditions of hundreds of millions of people. For the ruling class and the wealthiest sections of the upper-middle class, these policies produced benefits of which they could have only dreamed. Depressed wage levels within the United States, an inexhaustible supply of low-cost labor overseas, and the availability of cheap commodity prices, produced the ideal environment for the massive stock market boom of the 1990s (which, it should be recalled, began in the aftermath of the first Gulf War of 1991).

The economic stability of American capitalism and, with it, the vast fortunes accumulated by its ruling elite in the course of the speculative boom on Wall Street became dependent, or, one might say, addicted, to depressed wage levels in the United States and the continuing supply from overseas of cheap raw materials (especially oil) and low-cost labor.<sup>[10]</sup>

Comrade North developed these themes in his analysis of the US-NATO war in Yugoslavia:

The stock market boom has been fueled and sustained, above all, by the deflationary (or disinflationary) environment that has depended on the protracted decline of commodity prices for raw materials. The decline has not been simply the product of objective economic processes, but of ruthless policies pursued by the major imperialist powers to undermine the ability of 'third world' producers to raise commodity prices. The successful destruction of the pricing power of the OPEC oil cartel—in which the Gulf War of 1990-91 played a major role—is the most significant example of the

relationship between the accumulation of wealth in the imperialist countries and the intensifying exploitation of the less-developed countries. Those in the advanced countries whose wealth is based on rising share values have benefited directly from this process.<sup>[11]</sup>

The report continued:

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. ...

The reactionary, conformist and cynical intellectual climate that prevails in the United States and Europe—promoted by the media and adapted to by a largely servile and corrupted academic community—reflects the social outlook of a highly privileged stratum of the population that is not in the least interested in encouraging a critical examination of the economic and political bases of its newly-acquired riches.<sup>[12]</sup>

But while the eruption of American militarism proved to be a bonanza for America's financial oligarchy and affluent sections of the upper-middle class, these wars have been a disaster not only for the countries subjected to US invasion, but for broad sections of the American population.

They have killed millions of people all over the world, destroyed entire societies, and involved the most horrific war crimes since the second world war. These wars led the institutionalization of torture, kidnapping, and illegal warrantless government spying.

In its report exposing the US torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, "60 Minutes" described the evidence of US war crimes:

Some pictures show Americans, men and women in military uniforms, posing with naked Iraqi prisoners. There are shots of the prisoners stacked in a pyramid, one with a slur written on his skin in English. In some, the male prisoners are positioned to simulate sex with each other... In most of the pictures, the Americans are laughing, posing, pointing, or giving the camera a thumbs-up.<sup>[13]</sup>

That video is just one piece of documentary evidence showing the criminality of and brutality of the wars launched by the United States in the name of the so-called "war on terror" and the eruption of US imperialism over the course of the past 40 years.

But whatever the horrific cruelty and barbarity of these wars, they did not and could not have their intended effect of reversing the protracted economic decline of the United States. In the essay, "The Crisis of American Capitalism and the War Against Iraq," Comrade North wrote:

Whatever the outcome of the initial stages of the conflict that has begun, American imperialism has a rendezvous with disaster. It cannot conquer the world. It cannot reimpose colonial shackles upon the masses of the Middle East. ... It will not find, through the medium of war, a viable solution to its internal maladies. Rather, the unforeseen difficulties and mounting resistance engendered by

war will intensify all of the internal contradictions of American society.<sup>[14]</sup>

A decade and a half after the start of the "war on terror," the International Committee developed this point in the 2014 statement, "Socialism and the Fight Against War":

13. Twenty-five years of unending war, however, have failed either to counter the decline of American capitalism or create a new stable foundation for global relations. Rather, the United States—riven by intractable internal crises and armed to the teeth—has been transformed into the greatest source of international instability. The drive to create a "New World Order" has succeeded only in fomenting global disorder. Every war launched by the United States has resulted in unforeseen and disastrous complications.<sup>[15]</sup>

Through the betrayals of the Stalinist bureaucracy, US imperialism succeeded in its goal of reestablishing capitalism in the Soviet Union. But the restoration of capitalism did not end the insatiable appetites of US and world imperialism for the exploitation of portions of the globe that were left inaccessible by the Russian and Chinese revolutions, as well as the anti-colonial revolutions of the 20th century.

In the aftermath of the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and the wars against Libya and Syria, the United States prepared a significant military escalation against Russia and China, which erupted to the surface after the US-backed coup in Ukraine in 2014 through the military standoff over Crimea and the Donbas.

That year, the ICFI sought to warn the international working class about the danger of world war with the publication of the resolution, "Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War."

This resolution stated, "One hundred years after the outbreak of World War I and 75 years after the start of World War II, the imperialist system is once again threatening humanity with a catastrophe."<sup>[16]</sup>

Criticizing this resolution and a subsequent resolution by the SEP, "The Fight Against War and the Political Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party," Alex Steiner, a former member of the Workers League and advocate of pseudo-left politics, wrote that the warnings of the ICFI and SEP were inappropriate, claiming the operations of imperialism in the 21st century were fundamentally different than in the 20th.

The SEP sees imperialism in 2014 as a return to 1914 and are convinced that history is repeating itself complete with a tense summer of international incidents reprising the tension of the summer of 1914. But imperialism while it continues to plague the planet is very different today than it was 100 years ago. For one thing, the use of military power to back up economic interests, while certainly still in play, is embarked upon with much greater reluctance today.<sup>[17]</sup>

The ICFI's thesis of the "unfinished 20th century," Steiner claimed, was fundamentally false.

Everything that has happened since, and especially the eruption of war between the United States and Russia in Ukraine have demonstrated the fundamental falsehood of this analysis. Imperialism, far from having become more restrained in the 21st century, has retained all of the criminal recklessness that characterized the first and second world wars.

The pronouncement by Steiner that imperialism had defanged itself brings to mind the observation by Rosa Luxemburg that

World politics and militarism... are nothing other than capitalism's specific method for both developing and resolving international contradictions. ... Only those who believe that class antagonisms can be softened and be blunted, and that capitalist economic anarchy can be contained, can think it possible that these international conflicts can subside, ease, or dissolve. For the international antagonisms of the capitalist states are only the complement of class antagonisms, and the world political anarchy is but the reverse side of the anarchic system of capitalist production.<sup>[18]</sup>

Contrary to the self-assuring and complacent declarations that global tensions would subside, the eight years that have elapsed since Steiner wrote these lines saw the massive expansion of US preparations for what it called "great power conflict" with Russia and China. The 2018 National Defense Strategy declared that "inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security."

It added, "A long-term strategic competition requires the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military."<sup>[19]</sup>

This document made clear that the war drive would be used as the occasion to subordinate all aspects of society to the war effort, including the criminalization of strikes and social opposition.

Several months after the publication of the National Defense Strategy document, the *World Socialist Web Site* published an article entitled, "Pentagon report points to US preparations for total war," describing a US government publication, "Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the United States," which called for a reorganization of the US economy in preparation for military conflict. We wrote at the time:

The central target of such measures will be the forcible suppression of the class struggle in the name of promoting "national security."<sup>[20]</sup>

The French daily newspaper *Libération* published a fact check of this article, alleging that the *World Socialist Web Site* was exaggerating the United States' preparations for total war.

In reply, the WSWS wrote, "The report advocates changes to the totality of American society with the aim of fighting war. If *Libération* does not see this as preparation for 'total war,' this is only a confirmation of the old adage that 'you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink.'"<sup>[21]</sup>

We now see with the eruption of the US-NATO war against Russia, and the declaration by Emmanuel Macron that France must build a "wartime economy," that the analysis and the warnings of the *World Socialist Web Site* were correct—both with regard to the United States as well as France and other NATO countries.

The systematic preparations for military conflict against Russia and China were accompanied by a major escalation of US plans for nuclear war. In 2016, the Obama administration launched a multi-trillion-dollar buildup of the US nuclear forces which was accompanied in 2018 by the US withdrawal from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

In a process initiated under the Trump administration and continued

under Biden, the US has sought to ring Russia and China with offensive weapons previously banned under the INF Treaty.

This was accompanied by declarations that the United States must "rethink Armageddon"—that is, it must be prepared to launch and win a so-called limited nuclear war that does not necessarily escalate into a full-scale strategic nuclear exchange.

## The background of the US-NATO war against Russia

The conflict that erupted between the United States and NATO against Russia in February 2022 was years in the making.

It is the outcome of a strategy articulated by the theorists of US imperialism such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, to expand NATO hundreds of miles East to Russia's doorstep, then draw it into border wars with the aim of "bleeding Russia white."

Brzezinski saw the conflict in Ukraine, with its "bloody house-to-house fighting," as a reboot of the US strategy in Afghanistan during the late 1970s and early 1980s that aimed to fund Islamist fighters, many of whom would go on to found Al Qaeda and the Taliban, to fight against the Soviet Union.

In 1979, Brzezinski, then National Security Advisor under US President Jimmy Carter, visited Afghanistan to speak to US-funded Islamist militia, of whom Osama bin Laden was a leading organizer. Brzezinski told the Mujahedeen:

This is your land ... You'll go back to it one day because your fight will prevail and you'll have your homes and your mosques back again because your cause is right and god is on your side.<sup>[22]</sup>

In a 1998 interview with a French newspaper, Brzezinski was asked whether, given the fact that bin Laden would go on to form Al Qaeda from the forces the US funded, he regretted his actions in Afghanistan. Brzezinski replied:

Regret what? That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of *drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap* and you want me to regret it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, *I wrote to President Carter, essentially: "We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam war."* Indeed, for almost 10 years, Moscow had to carry on a war that was unsustainable for the regime, a conflict that bought [sic] about the demoralization and finally the breakup of the Soviet empire.<sup>[23]</sup>

The French interviewer continued, "And neither do you regret having supported Islamic fundamentalism, which has given arms and advice to future terrorists?" Brzezinski doubled down:

What is more important in world history? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some agitated Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?<sup>[24]</sup>

Indeed, with the arming of far-right forces in Ukraine, the United States has sought to repeat what it deemed as its success in arming Islamist

fighters in Afghanistan.

In February of 2022, former Secretary of State Madeline Albright called for the US to seek to turn the Ukraine crisis into “a scenario reminiscent of the Soviet Union’s ill-fated occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.”<sup>[25]</sup>

This theme was repeated again and again by US imperialist strategists. Former lieutenant general and American ambassador to NATO Douglas Lute told the *New York Times*:

“On NATO territory, we should be the Pakistan,” he said, stockpiling matériel in Poland and organizing supply lines to the Ukrainians as Pakistan supplied the Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>[26]</sup>

In 2019, the United States’ far-reaching plans to instigate a war with Russia in Ukraine triggered a domestic political crisis, taking the form of the third impeachment of a US president in American history, centered around claims that Donald Trump delayed a weapons shipment to Ukraine. The *World Socialist Web Site* asked at the time, “Is there a timetable for using these weapons in combat? Is the United States planning a provocation that would thrust Ukraine into a major new military offensive?”<sup>[27]</sup>

We now know that the answer to that question is: Yes, and the timetable was early 2022. The central role of Ukraine in US war planning was clearly explained by Marie Yovanovitch, the former United States Ambassador to Kiev, who said during the 2019 impeachment, that Ukraine,

with an enormous land mass and a large population, has the potential to be a significant ... force multiplier on the security side ... And now Ukraine is a battleground for great power competition, with a hot war for the control of territory and a hybrid war to control Ukraine’s leadership.<sup>[28]</sup>

The domestic political crisis created by the US preparations for war in Ukraine strengthened the most reactionary and anti-democratic tendencies within the American state. Trump’s first impeachment, in the words of Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Joseph Kishore, concluded with “a political debacle for the Democratic Party that has only strengthened Trump.”

During the impeachment trial, Trump’s lawyers made sweeping and unprecedented claims of presidential authority, which Trump would later put into practice in attempting to invoke martial law in response to mass protests against police violence, and in his attempt to create a presidential dictatorship on January 6.

Trump lost the presidential election on the basis of popular opposition not only to his disastrous “herd immunity” approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, but his thuggish warmongering, his threats to rain “fire and fury” down on North Korea, his pledge to “take the oil” from the Middle East, and his open advocacy of torture and other war crimes.

The *World Socialist Web Site* warned, however, that the Biden administration would only intensify the US war drive against Russia and China:

A Biden/Harris administration will not inaugurate a new dawn of American hegemony. Rather, the attempt to assert this hegemony will be through unprecedented violence. If it is brought to power—with the support of the assemblage of reactionaries

responsible for the worst crimes of the 21st century—it will be committed to a vast expansion of war.<sup>[29]</sup>

Within months of taking office, the Biden administration sharply escalated US preparations for military conflict with Russia and China, immediately increasing arms shipments to both Ukraine and Taiwan.

In March of 2021, Kiev adopted an official state document explaining that its goal was to “recover” Crimea by military means. This was followed later in the year with the publication of the joint US-Ukrainian strategic partnership document, which “creates a foundation for the enhancement of U.S.-Ukraine strategic defense and security cooperation...” aimed at “countering Russian aggression.”<sup>[30]</sup>

These developments, coupled with the acceleration of moves by Ukraine to join NATO, created a situation in which the Russian government, operating within the bankrupt framework of bourgeois nationalism, saw a military response as its only option.

Just three weeks before the outbreak of the war, in a remarkably frank exchange with French President Emmanuel Macron, Putin warned that the policies of the United States and NATO were leading to war:

European countries, including France, believe that Crimea is part of Ukraine, but we think that it is part of the Russian Federation. And what happens if attempts are made to change this situation by military means? Bear in mind that Ukraine’s doctrines declare Russia an adversary and state the possibility of regaining Crimea, even using military force.

If there are any attempts to change the situation using military means and Ukrainian doctrine says that Russia is an adversary and that Crimea may be returned by military means this means there’ll be a military confrontation between Russia and NATO.

Do you want this war? Do your readers to your audience want this war a war between Russia and NATO? There will be no winners and you will be drawn into this conflict against your own will.<sup>[31]</sup>

The United States and NATO clearly did “want this war.” Declaring, “I don’t accept anybody’s red lines,” Biden and his administration did everything possible to goad Russia into invading Ukraine, sparking a war that has already killed tens of thousands of people.

To date, the United States has committed over \$50 billion in military and economic assistance to Ukraine, with the war costing the US more than \$500 million per day.

In July, Biden declared:

The idea that we’re going to send in offensive equipment and have planes and tanks and trains going in with American pilots and American crews, just understand—and don’t kid yourself, no matter what you all say—that’s called “World War Three.”<sup>[32]</sup>

Despite this warning, the White House has massively escalated US involvement in the conflict day after day, week after week, and month after month. Every time the Biden administration has said the US would not do something in Ukraine, within a matter of weeks it has gone ahead and done it.

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Despite Biden’s declaration that “we’re not going to send to Ukraine

rocket systems that strike into Russia,” the US has done not only that, but encouraged Ukraine to carry out attacks on Crimea, which Russia sees as its own territory.

Finally, it remains an open secret that US assets are operating on the ground in Ukraine. The *New York Times* has reported:

Americans are in Ukraine. An unknown number are fighting on the front lines. Others volunteer to be members of casualty evacuation teams, bomb disposal specialists, logistics experts and trainers. At least 21 Americans have been wounded in combat since the war started...<sup>[33]</sup>

The article notes the role of ex-military forces and paramilitary forces in directly coordinating the war. In in the latest escalation, US military figures have made clear that the US is actively considering sending fighter jets to Ukraine.

Despite Biden’s declarations that a war between Russia and the United States would be an unthinkable “World War Three,” leading US political figures have categorically declared that a war between the United States and Russia has already begun.

“Very frankly we’re at war. A dictator has invaded without justification, a friendly country, Ukraine,” said House Majority leader Steny Hoyer. “I wish we’d get off this and really focus on the enemy. I know there’s a lot of politics here but we’re at war. We need to produce energy.”<sup>[34]</sup>

In an instance of history repeating itself, Biden declared that the US involvement in the conflict in Ukraine would mark the start of a “new world order”:

You know, we are at an inflection point, I believe, in the world economy—not just the world economy, in the world. It occurs every three or four generations.

As one of—as one of the top military people said to me in a secure meeting the other day, 60—60 million people died between 1900 and 1946. And since then, we’ve established a liberal world order, and that hadn’t happened in a long while...

And now is a time when things are shifting. We’re going to—there’s going to be a new world order out there, and we’ve got to lead it. And we’ve got to unite the rest of the free world in doing it.<sup>[35]</sup>

One might think that the phrase “new world order,” evoking a series of disastrous wars that killed millions and devastated large portions of the world, would be retired from the lexicon of US foreign policy.

However, if we look at things from the perspective of the ruling class, was there really anything so bad about the period from 1990 through 2020? There were only four years, 2001, 2002, 2008 and 2009, in which the stock market was down for the year, in this entire three-decade period. The NASDAQ started at 415 and is now at 12,639, a 30-fold increase, or nearly 15 times faster than the rate of inflation.

America’s wars may have killed and maimed millions, permanently scarred American society, and undermined democratic forms of government in the US, but they have been good for business. Is there anything irrational, from the standpoint of America’s financial oligarchy, to see in an even bigger war the potential for bigger benefits?

On March 26, Biden pledged the United States to a new “forever war,” declaring, “We must commit now to be in this fight for the long haul. We must remain unified today and tomorrow and the day after and for the years and decades to come.”<sup>[36]</sup>

## US plans for war with China

Even as it escalates its war with Russia, the US is working to provoke a war with China, which the Trump and Biden administrations named the principal strategic target of the US military.

In 2018, Vice President Mike Pence delivered a speech on the US conflict with China that marked a reversal of decades of previous policy going back to Nixon’s 1971 trip to China. Pence condemned the policies of previous administrations of economic engagement with China:

Heady with optimism, at the turn of the 21st Century, America agreed to give Beijing open access to our economy, and bring China into the World Trade Organization. ...

Over the past 17 years, China’s GDP has grown 9-fold; it has become the second-largest economy in the world. Much of this success was driven by American investment in China. ... These policies have built Beijing’s manufacturing base, at the expense of its competitors—especially America...

Now, through the “Made in China 2025” plan, the Communist Party has set its sights on controlling 90% of the world’s most advanced industries, including robotics, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence.<sup>[37]</sup>

China, Pence said, is seeking “to win the commanding heights of the 21st Century economy,” and was pursuing “economic aggression.”

The essential content of this militarist rant, bringing to mind the nationalist demagoguery of Kaiser Wilhelm’s II Germany, was embraced in all fundamental aspects by the Biden administration. In October 2021, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai declared that the Biden administration would defend the United States’ “economic interests” against China “to the hilt.”

In what was billed as the successor speech to Pence’s 2018 anti-China speech, Secretary of State Antony Blinken reasserted its essential content in a major policy statement in May 2022, declaring:

Even as President Putin’s war continues, we will remain focused on the most serious long-term challenge to the international order—and that’s posed by the People’s Republic of China.

China is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order, and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.<sup>[38]</sup>

By the time Blinken had made this speech, a concrete plan of action had crystallized by means of which the United States would seek to instigate a war with China. By systematically violating its assurances not to promote Taiwanese independence and ending the one China principle, the US would compel China to seek to reunify Taiwan with the mainland by force.

This strategy was most clearly articulated by Elbridge Colby, one of the principal authors of the 2018 National Defense Strategy, in his book, *The Strategy of Denial*, which argued the United States should seek to paint China as the aggressor in a conflict with the United States.

Perhaps the clearest and sometimes the most important way of making sure China is seen this way is simply by ensuring that it is the one to strike first. Few human moral intuitions are more deeply rooted than that the one who started it is the aggressor and accordingly the one who presumptively owns a greater share of moral responsibility.<sup>[39]</sup>

True to Colby's plan, the narrative presented for public consumption by the United States is that the crisis in the Taiwan Strait is the result of "unprovoked aggression" by China. But US think tanks, writing for the audience within the US foreign policy establishment, are remarkably blunt that it is the United States, not China that is seeking to change the status quo in Taiwan.

In an essay titled "The Collapse of One China," the Center for Strategic and International Studies extensively details the means by which the United States is systematically dismantling the one-China policy:

- "Washington has openly crossed some of Beijing's long-perceived security-related redlines—with no direct consequences—including the permanent deployment of U.S. Marine Security Guards in Taipei, the export of advanced fighter jets and offensive weapons, and the revelation of U.S. special operators training counterparts in Taiwan."

- "During the Trump administration, the vice president and cabinet secretaries routinely and openly voiced support for Taiwan and condemned China's aggression—a practice that the Biden administration has sustained."

- "Despite a long-standing policy of ambiguity regarding U.S. intervention, Biden has indicated at least three times that the United States is committed to militarily defending Taiwan, revealing his own instincts as commander in chief."

- "By inviting Taiwan to participate in his December 2021 inaugural Summit for Democracy, Biden sent a signal to China and the world: the Taiwanese people must be allowed to choose their own path."

The report concludes: "Barring a major policy shift in one of the three capitals, their respective policies and politics are crowding out mutually acceptable alternatives or concessions—potentially leaving open only one path to resolution for Beijing: the use of force."<sup>[40]</sup>

## The domestic component of the US war drive

The aims of the US war drive are fundamentally economic, and aims are to be gained not only through what the US ruling class sees as the external benefits of war, but the impact on domestic social relations as well.

The six months since the eruption of the US-NATO war in Ukraine have seen the greatest decline in real wages, at an annual rate of nearly 3 percent since the 2008 financial crash. But this has been accompanied by a historic increase in corporate profits.

As with the 2008 financial crash, the ruling class's response to the crisis triggered by the war has aimed to place the entire burden onto the working class.

This policy was outlined by Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell on June 15, the day the Federal Reserve announced an unexpected 75-basis-point increase in the federal funds rate. Powell stated:

For decades before the pandemic and the reopening, you had a world where inflation was dominated by disinflationary forces such as ... globalization enabled by technology. ... we have now experienced an extraordinary series of shocks, if you think about

it: the pandemic ... [Y]ou couldn't get this kind of inflation without a change on the supply side ... you have a lot of surplus demand ... Take for example in the labor market ... you have two job vacancies, essentially, for every person actively seeking a job, and that has led to a real imbalance in wage negotiating.<sup>[41]</sup>

The claim that the economic problems of the United States are caused by rising wages is a fraud. Wages have fallen in real terms by more than 3 percent over the past year amid the extraordinary run-up in prices. At the same time, corporate profits, the leading component of rising prices, have hit record after record.

When Powell talks about inflationary pressures, he is speaking about the scarring of economic life in the US by the deaths of a million people and the crippling of millions more, combined with the inflationary effects of the US's global trade wars and the surge in food and energy prices triggered by the war with Russia.

To all of these objective economic problems, the American ruling class has one solution: increasing the exploitation of the working class. At the same time, the resistance of workers must be crushed. As made clear by the 2018 US National Defense Strategy document, the war provides the rationale for suppressing the class struggle in the name of the "national interest."

In 2019, Democratic Party presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg made clear the domestic component of the US conflict with China, saying:

The new China challenge provides us with an opportunity to come together across the political divide. At least half the battle is at home...<sup>[42]</sup>

Buttigieg has now been appointed as Biden's secretary of transportation, charged with keeping the trains running on time and ensuring that the growing opposition within the working class does not break out into a series of struggles that could disrupt the profit making of major US corporations and the war effort.

As has already been seen in the series of strikes among train workers and other logistics workers, the Biden administration has sought injunctions and other court actions to stop strikes and shut down the emergence of working class opposition in the name of national security.

## Conclusion

In July 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, Leon Trotsky made the following prognosis:

I do not see any normal, legal, peaceful outcome from this impasse. The outcome can only be created by a tremendous historic explosion. Historic explosions are of two kinds—wars and revolutions. I believe we will have both. The programs of the present governments, the good ones as well as the bad ones—if we suppose that there are good governments also—the programs of different parties, pacifist programs and reformist programs, seem now, at least to a man who observes them from the side, as child's play on the sloping side of a volcano before an eruption. This is the general picture of the world today.<sup>[43]</sup>



The report to the 1990 Special National Congress of the Workers League developed this analysis:

The political map is being redrawn as dramatically as it was in the period after 1914. The question is: how is it going to be redrawn and who's going to do the redrawing? Is it going to be redrawn on a capitalist basis, that is, through wars and bloody annexations, which is what the future will hold, or is it going to be redrawn by the working class through the abolition of national boundaries and the establishment of a worldwide socialist federation?<sup>[44]</sup>

This Congress, and the party that is holding it, are the only consciously-articulated political opposition to the eruption of US imperialism. This is because only the SEP speaks for mass opposition to the ruling class's policies of war, austerity and mass infection within the working class.

The founding Congress of the Fourth International took place ahead of the greatest eruption of imperialist barbarism in history: the Second World War. In light of the horrors inflicted upon mankind in subsequent years, the founding manifesto seems like a prophetic warning:

The capitalist world has no way out, unless a prolonged death agony is so considered. It is necessary to prepare for long years, if not decades, of wars, uprisings, brief interludes of truce, new wars, and new uprisings. A young revolutionary party must base itself on this perspective. History will provide it with enough opportunities and possibilities to test itself, to accumulate experience, and to mature. The swifter the ranks of the vanguard are fused the more the epoch of bloody convulsions will be shortened, the less destruction will our planet suffer. But the great historical problem will not be solved in any case until the revolutionary party stands at the head of the proletariat.<sup>[45]</sup>

This is the task of this Congress of the Socialist Equality Party, to fuse the ranks of this vanguard. I strongly urge the adoption of the resolution against war. It is the programmatic foundation upon which the growing movement of the working class from the United States to Sri Lanka to the Middle East and Asia, will be armed with the socialist perspective of opposing the eruption of us imperialism.

We should be under no illusions: The reckless actions of US imperialism threaten the destruction of human civilization. But this does not mean that we are in any way fatalists who believe that catastrophe is inevitable.

The outcome of this crisis will be decided in struggle. Epochs of war are epochs of revolution. The central question is the building of a socialist leadership in the working class, and this is the task of this Congress.



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