

Stop the war in Ukraine!

Statement of the WSWS Editorial Board
3 October 2022

Not since October 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, has the world come so close to nuclear war as today.

It is not necessary to glorify the Stalinist leader Nikita Khrushchev, let alone the imperialist president of the United States, John F. Kennedy, to recognize that there is a glaring difference between the reaction to that crisis and the one gripping the world today.

In a recently published book on the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Nuclear Folly*, historian Serhii Plokhyy writes that, despite enormous miscalculations and misjudgments on both sides, “The crisis did not develop into a shooting war because Kennedy and Khrushchev both feared nuclear weapons and dreaded the very idea of their use.”

Plokhyy adds that Kennedy and Khrushchev “did not step into the traps so masterfully created by themselves because they did not believe they could win a nuclear war, nor were they prepared to pay a price for such a victory. It is hard to imagine what the outcome of the Cuban crisis might have been if the two leaders had a more cavalier attitude toward the use of nuclear arms.”

In the midst of a new global nuclear crisis, the United States/NATO and Russia seem to be proceeding in a manner aimed at demonstrating what this unimaginable outcome would actually be. There is a staggering indifference to the consequences of nuclear war.

Having launched the invasion of Ukraine with the naïve and desperate assumption that he could compel his Western “partners” to negotiate, Russian President Vladimir Putin confronts the staggering failure of his bankrupt and reactionary strategy in Ukraine. The Russian military has suffered a series of defeats in recent weeks, including the debacle in Kharkiv followed by further advances of the Ukrainian military into territory that Russia now claims as its own.

Russia was goaded by the United States into a war for which it was entirely unprepared, underestimating the agenda of the United States and NATO. In the wake of humiliating defeats and facing internal crisis and recriminations within the Russian oligarchy, the Putin

regime is responding with unmistakable threats to use nuclear weapons.

On the other hand, the United States and NATO, determined to press their advantage in pursuit of their global geopolitical objectives, are making statements that they will not be “deterred” by the threat of nuclear war.

In American newspapers and on television programs, there is open discussion about the possibility of nuclear war. The *New York Times* wrote on Sunday: “Officials in Washington are gaming out scenarios should President Vladimir V. Putin decide to use a tactical nuclear weapon to make up for the failings of Russian troops in Ukraine... A range of officials suggested that if Russia detonated a tactical nuclear weapon on Ukrainian soil, the options included ... some kind of military response.”

Asked by ABC’s “Face the Nation” what the United States would do if Russia used a nuclear weapon, former CIA Director David Petraeus replied, “We would respond by leading a NATO, a collective effort, that would take out every Russian conventional force that we can see and identify on the battlefield in Ukraine and also in Crimea and every ship in the Black Sea.”

General Petraeus, who led US forces in genocidal rampages in Iraq and Afghanistan, seems to believe that the United States and NATO can wipe out Russian military forces, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths, without retaliation. One must be borderline insane not to understand that such an attack by NATO on the Russian military forces would provoke a thermonuclear response by the Kremlin that would result in the utter destruction, with a horrific loss of life, of every major capital in Western Europe and North America.

The level of recklessness was summed up by an unnamed European official quoted in the *Washington Post* in an article headlined, “Russia’s annexation puts world ‘two or three steps away’ from nuclear war”: “No one knows what Putin will decide to do. But he’s totally in a corner, he’s crazy ... and for him there is no way out. The only way out for him is total victory or total defeat and we are working on the latter one. We need Ukraine to win

and so we are working to prevent worst case scenarios by helping Ukraine win.”

Have the Dr. Strangeloves who are making these statements even thought through the implications of their own policies? They are insisting that, whatever the consequences, the US and NATO powers must pursue a course that leads to the “total defeat” of Russia. Far from preventing the “worst case scenario,” their words and actions are fueling the fire that is leading to a “worst case” outcome. On the edge of the abyss, the position of the imperialist powers is: “Forward until complete victory.”

As always, the imperialist warmongers who are denouncing Putin’s threats to use nuclear weapons as an unprecedented breach of Great Power morality exhibit an astonishing forgetfulness about their own past actions. But it is a matter of historical fact that the United States has not only used nuclear weapons (against the defenseless populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), but it and other imperialist powers came close to using nuclear weapons when threatened with military defeat.

In 1950, General Douglas MacArthur sought authorization to use as many as 30 atomic bombs against Chinese troops crossing the border into Korea. In 1954, France pleaded with US President Eisenhower to use nuclear bombs to save its encircled troops at Dien Bien Phu. In 1962, Kennedy himself threatened to use nuclear weapons during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In 1973, Israel, facing defeat during the initial days of the Yom Kippur War, came close to using nuclear weapons against Egypt.

Desperation and recklessness may describe the moods gripping Washington and Moscow, but not their source. A political explanation must be found for this behavior.

The desperation of the Putin regime arises from the fact that it is confronted with the consequences of the dissolution of the USSR, a historic betrayal that set into motion all the subsequent socioeconomic and political disasters. In dissolving the Soviet Union, the Stalinist bureaucracy deluded itself into believing that Lenin’s analysis of imperialism was nothing more than a Marxian myth. But this “myth” has proven to be true. Thirty years after the collapse of the USSR, Russia is confronted with a war by the imperialist powers aimed at dismembering it.

Despite the disasters created by the invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria, the American ruling class believes that through war it can somehow stave off the growth of working-class opposition that haunts them.

Amidst all of this, there is no frank statement of the

implications of the likely consequences of nuclear war. Politicians, high-ranking military personnel, and the media are talking nonchalantly about an event that could lead to the annihilation of hundreds of millions, even billions, of people.

What accounts for the difference between the response to the Cuban Missile Crisis and the situation today? Ultimately, the fact that the Cuban Missile Crisis did not lead to nuclear war can be attributed to the character of the political period. In the 1960s American imperialism was passing through the era of the postwar capitalist boom. The Soviet Union, encompassing one-sixth of the world’s land mass, was in an immeasurably stronger position than the desperate and encircled Russian state.

Putin’s national chauvinism and xenophobia offer no alternative to the crisis created by US imperialism. Putin, speaking for a parasitic Russian oligarchy, fears the Russian working class even more than he does the US and the West. His response to the disaster created by the dissolution of the USSR blends the medieval obscurantism of Tsarist Russia with the counterrevolutionary nationalist politics of Stalinism.

No faith can be placed on the “reasonableness” of the American or Russian oligarchies. The pandemic has already revealed the utter indifference to human life, both of the Kremlin regime, which has accepted the death of 400,000 people in Russia, and the imperialist ruling class in the US and Europe, whose “herd immunity” policies have led to millions of deaths worldwide.

The reckless actions of governments that are leading the world to disaster must be countered by a global mass anti-war movement of the working class and youth.

The working class must demand the immediate end to this reactionary war. It is necessary to unify the struggle by workers in defense of their social and democratic rights with the struggle against war.

The building of a new anti-war movement must be based on the perspective of international socialism, rejecting all forms of nationalism and xenophobia and fighting for the unity of workers in every country.



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