

Speech to the December 10 IYSSE anti-war rally

# The historical background to the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine

**Andre Damon**  
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*The following are the remarks by Andre Damon to the December 10 rally, “For a Mass Movement of Students and Youth to Stop the War in Ukraine!” organized by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.*

*Damon is a member of the Socialist Equality Party (US) National Committee. For more information on joining the IYSSE, visit [iysse.com](http://iysse.com).*

The war in Ukraine has brought the world closer to nuclear annihilation than at any point since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

Just two months ago, US president Joe Biden warned that the war could trigger “Armageddon”—a full-scale nuclear exchange between the United States and Russia.

The conflict in Ukraine has already killed or maimed 200,000 people. But even as the war grows more violent and brutal, as the toll on civilians and soldiers, Ukrainians and Russians, grows, the US is relentlessly escalating its involvement in the conflict, disregarding the potentially catastrophic consequences.

American imperialism, which has provoked, instigated, and prolonged this war, has deemed “Armageddon” an acceptable risk, gambling with the very existence of human civilization.

Every time the United States has claimed it would not do something in Ukraine, it has then gone ahead and done it.

In May, Biden said, “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, that’s called World War III.”

But the US has not only sent armored vehicles, drones, and long-range missiles to Ukraine, it has trained the crews who operate them and directed their targeting. In November, the Pentagon confirmed that active-duty US military personnel are deployed in Ukraine, traveling throughout the country to oversee the distribution and use of weapons provided by the United States.

In an editorial entitled, “What America Will and Will Not Do in Ukraine,” Biden said, “We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders.”

But Washington has done precisely that, giving targeting information, weapons, and logistics support that have allowed

the Ukrainian military to attack Russian military installations, first in Crimea, then on the Russian mainland.

Every statement made by the White House about the war is mired in self-contradiction.

US officials tell the public that Russia’s “unprovoked” invasion marks an irrevocable break with a world before 2022. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, Biden declared in March, sparked a “battle... between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force.”

What ridiculous hypocrisy!

The cheerleaders of American capitalism declared that the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the introduction of market reforms in China would bring perpetual peace, the so-called “peace dividend” and the “end of history.”

But US imperialism responded to the dissolution of the USSR with a worldwide military bloodbath, seeking to achieve global hegemony by dominating the former colonial world.

The United States invaded Iraq in 1991, bombed Yugoslavia in 1999, invaded Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, destroyed Libya in 2011 and instigated the Syrian war that same year. The motto of these wars, as expressed in a 2003 editorial by the *Wall Street Journal*, was: “Force works.”

Since the start of the Cold War, the United States has invaded, housed troops in, or carried out coups or destabilization operations in the vast majority of the world’s countries.

The criminality of US imperialism was embodied in the Vietnam War, which killed over one million people, and in which US troops engaged in the systematic mass murder of civilians, such as in the infamous My Lai massacre, where as many as 504 unarmed men, women, children, and infants, were killed.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq, launched on the basis of lies, destroyed an entire society and led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. The criminality of the US occupation was exposed in the Abu Ghraib torture photos, which revealed the horrific reality of the US military’s systematic use of torture as state policy.

The war in Ukraine does not mark the negation of American

crimes in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, but their continuation.

After all, it was the war criminal George W. Bush, the author of the Iraq War, who welcomed Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia into NATO in 2004, and declared in 2008, “It’s in our interest for Ukraine to join” NATO.

Since then, the United States has worked to make Bush’s goal a reality, orchestrating the overthrow of the Ukrainian government in 2014, then funneling billions of dollars of weapons into Ukraine, training its military to NATO standards, and de facto endorsing the Zelensky government’s stated goal of retaking Crimea through military force.

The war in Ukraine is the outcome of the systematic effort by the United States to militarily encircle Russia and draw it into proxy wars on its borders. Putin responded to the provocations of US imperialism by launching a reactionary invasion of Ukraine, doing exactly what the imperialists hoped he would do, falling into a trap that the US had openly prepared for years.

None of this antecedent history is ever referenced in media presentations of the war. The script used after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks has been trotted out once again: Historical analysis, reason and thought are to be abandoned in responding decisively to an unimaginable atrocity. The actions of the villain of the hour justify any US response.

But as with the wars that followed 9/11, cynically prepared with lies and media propaganda, the escalation of the US war with Russia and war plans with China have been years in the making.

US military documents, never discussed in public, justify war as a means to advance America’s “interests” in an increasingly competitive global environment, in which US hegemony is threatened by the economic growth of China.

War, the Pentagon explains, is essential to defend the interests of American capitalism.

The 2020s, the US National Security Strategy document declared, are a “decisive decade for America and the world,” in which “The terms of geopolitical competition between the major powers will be set.”

We have entered an age of “great power conflict,” US military strategists declare, a period characterized by, in the words of NATO, “high-intensity, multi-domain warfighting against nuclear-armed peer-competitors.”

For years, US military strategists have been “Rethinking Armageddon,” aiming to develop scenarios in which nuclear weapons would actually be used. The world has entered the “Second Nuclear Age,” they declare, in which the use of nuclear weapons is no longer unthinkable.

To fight these wars, the United States is modernizing every single component of its nuclear weapons systems, of which the B21 bomber, released this month with media fanfare, is just one component.

Speaking amid the wreckage of the historic German city of Nuremberg after World War II, Supreme Court Justice Robert

Jackson, in his opening speech to the trial of Nazi leaders, excoriated “the greatest menace of our times—aggressive war.”

Condemning the Nazi leaders, business officials, and generals that plotted Germany’s effort to conquer Europe, Jackson denounced the “fierce nationalisms and of militarism, of intrigue and war-making which have embroiled Europe generation after generation.” Jackson declared that “Civilization can afford no compromise with” these “social forces.”

The experience of the 20th and 21st century shows that the “social forces” that give rise to war can only be opposed by the mobilization of opposing “social forces.”

The great Marxists of the 20th century, foremost among whom were Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, understood imperialist war to be the expression of the domination over society by predatory finance capital; that is, that war and capitalism are inextricably linked.

The war drive of American imperialism is accompanied by a ferocious assault on the social position of workers in the United States and internationally. The world’s workers are responding to the global wave of austerity and social counterrevolution with a global strike wave.

It is to this mass movement of the working class that young people must orient and appeal to in their fight for the future.

The warmongers at the Pentagon claim this will be the “decisive decade” in ensuring the domination of American capitalism, at home and abroad.

But for workers, this decade will be decisive for another reason. “This young decade,” the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in January of 2020, will be the “decade of socialist revolution.”

The same conditions that produce imperialist war produce the conditions for its abolition through the socialist transformation of society. And the final abolition of war means the final abolition of capitalism. It is to our generation that this momentous task falls.

We must all take to heart Albert Einstein’s warning: “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.”

He was right. The survival of human civilization is not guaranteed. If young people are to have a future, they must fight for it.



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