

Stop the US-NATO escalation toward nuclear war! Unite the international working class against imperialist war and genocide!

Statement of the International Committee of the Fourth International
2 June 2024

1. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) condemns the latest escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia, which is rapidly spiraling into full-scale war between nuclear-armed states. This is the most reckless decision ever taken by any American government. As for its European allies, their collaboration in this escalation is rivaled in its recklessness only by their catastrophic launching of World War I in 1914 and World War II in 1939. There are no “red lines” that the US ruling class and its imperialist allies will not cross. Even as they politically support and provide weaponry for the Israeli state’s genocide of more than 35,000 Gazans, they are taking actions in Ukraine that could result in a nuclear catastrophe that could destroy all life on the planet. The global capitalist system, whose insoluble global crisis is the underlying cause of genocide and war, is descending into barbarism.

2. On Friday, US President Joe Biden secretly authorized Ukraine, without even a public statement explaining the reasons for his actions, to carry out strikes using American long-range weapons on Russian territory near the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. This was followed immediately by the announcement by Germany that it will do the same. Within 24 hours, Ukraine has already launched strikes on Russia using US-provided weapons. The decision has been taken in response to the military collapse of its Ukrainian proxy force, including in and around Kharkiv.

3. The United States, Germany and the United Kingdom have provided Ukraine with cruise and ballistic missiles with ranges of more than 300 miles. When fired from Ukrainian territory, these weapons are capable of hitting some of the largest cities in Russia, including Kursk, Belgorod, Voronezh, Rostov and Volgograd.

4. Not since the Nazis’ “War of Annihilation” against the Soviet Union during the Second World War and, in the case of the US, the post-1917 Revolution Civil War, have the imperialist powers directly targeted Russian territory. Such actions were not taken even at the height of the Cold War, as it was assumed that they would trigger full-scale nuclear war.

5. The US media is full of declarations that Russia’s publicly stated, official military doctrine of using nuclear weapons to respond to attacks on its territory is a bluff. The argument is that since Russia has not responded to US provocations in the past, NATO can keep crossing Russia’s “red lines” without consequences. “Time to call Putin’s bluff,” declared former Republican Congressman Adam Kinzinger in an article in CNN last week. Retired General Philip Breedlove, former Ambassador Michael McFaul, Stanford Professor Francis Fukuyama and dozens of former US officials wrote in a letter to the White House, “Russia’s demonstrably empty threats are successfully deterring the United States.”

6. The claim that Russia’s military doctrine is a “bluff” does not stand up to the most basic scrutiny. Just because the Russian government has not responded to NATO provocations in the past does not mean that it will

not do so in the future. Could anyone doubt, for example, that if Russia or China decided to launch attacks on US territory and assert that the American government “wouldn’t dare” to respond, it would be inevitable that the US would counterattack with overwhelming force?

7. There are very real reasons, from a military standpoint, why the Russian military would feel compelled to respond in kind to NATO attacks on its territory. Moreover, who is to say that Putin, in the midst of the crisis triggered by the NATO escalation, would not be replaced by a faction that is even more prepared to use military measures to retaliate against NATO?

8. Assertions by US officials that the Russian military will not retaliate if attacked are so flimsy that it is likely that these claims are not believed by those making them, and the actual goal is to provoke some form of drastic military action by the Russian government, which will in turn be used to justify a nuclear retaliation by the US.

9. In his 2021 book, *The Strategy of Denial*, Elbridge Colby, author of the 2018 US National Security Strategy, explains how vital it is for US propaganda to force the targets of the US military to “fire the first shot” and thereby be seen as the aggressors:

Perhaps the clearest and sometimes the most important way of making sure [an adversary] 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.

10. The Biden administration has taken this action without even bothering to make a public statement announcing it. The *New York Times* wrote on May 29: “Officials concede [Biden] most likely will never announce [the move]: Instead, American artillery shells and missiles will just start landing on Russian military targets.” An earlier article in the *Times* stated that the US had not allowed the strikes because of “Mr. Biden’s mandate to ‘avoid World War III.’ But the consensus around that policy is fraying.” At no point has the Biden administration explained why what is involved in Ukraine is of such monumental significance that it is prepared to risk a potentially civilization-ending nuclear war.

11. The NATO powers are playing Russian roulette with nuclear weapons. They are plunging headlong into war, without even suggesting the possibility of a negotiated settlement or an “off-ramp” to their brinkmanship.

12. The latest actions follow a definite pattern. Again and again, the Biden administration has crossed every “red line” it set out to limit US

involvement in the war. In March 2022, Biden asserted, “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” would mean “World War Three.” In May 2022, Biden stated in an op-ed in the *New York Times*, “We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders.” In June 2022, French President Emmanuel Macron declared, “We will not go to war with Russia, therefore it was agreed not to supply certain weapons—in particular, attack aircraft or tanks.”

13. All of these “red lines” have been crossed by NATO. First, NATO sent armored vehicles, then main battle tanks, and then long-range missiles. NATO members then secretly deployed hundreds of troops inside Ukraine, all without informing their own citizens. After having declared that direct US involvement in the war in Ukraine would lead to “World War III” and “Armageddon,” Biden appears to have changed his mind, without ever having explained what led him to do so.

14. There is no question that the next step in the intensification of the war against Russia will be the introduction of tens of thousands of NATO forces into Ukraine. This further escalation will certainly be the subject of secret discussions at the upcoming NATO summit in Washington, D.C. in July. Snap elections in the UK have been called for July 4, in advance of the summit, to preempt growing opposition to war and create the political framework for a new stage in a European-wide war.

15. The escalation of the war in Ukraine, spearheaded by the Biden administration, is the most extreme manifestation of the decades-long global eruption of US imperialism in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In pursuit of their interests, the ruling elites are prepared to accept death and destruction on a massive scale. The same governments are funding, arming and politically supporting the Gaza genocide, which has already killed tens of thousands and is subjecting an entire population of over 2 million to starvation.

16. The subjugation of Russia is part of a broader global agenda aiming for not only the carve-up and subjugation of the former Soviet Union but ultimately China. The punitive sanctions that were meant to cripple Russia economically have failed to bring it to its knees largely because of large increases in trade with China and to a lesser extent arms from Iran and North Korea. The escalation against Russia therefore will entail a morphing of the conflict in Ukraine into a truly global war.

17. In addition to the geopolitical imperatives of imperialism, the Biden administration is driven by a far-reaching social, economic and political crisis for which the American ruling class has no answer. The US economy is sustained through rampant government spending on military rearmament and continuous bailouts of major corporations. The federal debt is doubling every decade and is being financed through currency debasement and debt monetization.

18. This is taking place in the context of a staggering political crisis and factional warfare in advance of the 2024 presidential elections. Donald Trump, the presumptive candidate for the Republican Party who is currently leading in polls, attempted to overturn the election in a fascistic coup three and a half years ago. There is broad popular opposition to both capitalist parties, amidst a deep social crisis and growing anger and outrage over the US-backing of Israel’s genocide in Gaza.

19. Similar conditions prevail in all the major capitalist countries. The ruling elites hope that war abroad will create conditions for the suppression of democratic rights in the name of war-time “national unity”. This atmosphere of crisis is breeding the resurgence of vile militarism and a type of internal violence that was previously associated only with fascistic regimes and military-police dictatorships.

20. For its part, the Putin regime has made miscalculation after miscalculation. There has never been anything remotely progressive in the “Special Military Operation” launched by the Kremlin in the interests of the venal Russian capitalist oligarchs who rose to power on the basis of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the privatization and

plundering of the state assets nationalized in the aftermath of the 1917 October Revolution.

21. Putin launched the reactionary invasion of Ukraine in 2022 hoping to negotiate with his Western “partners” from a position of strength. But NATO has shown that it is completely uninterested in negotiation: The only outcome of the war acceptable to NATO is the military defeat of Russia and the carve-up of the Russian landmass in the manner of Yugoslavia. Based on its bankrupt nationalist perspective, the Putin government and the faction of the Russian oligarchy it represents are driven to ever more reckless and provocative military escalation of its own.

22. The global escalation of imperialist war is coupled with mass repression. In the United States, the government has criminalized protests against the Gaza genocide and carried out mass arrests of thousands of students and young people. The violence inflicted on the protests reflects the fear of the ruling elites of a broader movement in the working class, which will be forced to pay for the war in lives and the destruction of social programs.

23. In Ukraine, amid mounting opposition to the war and resistance to the draft, the Zelensky government has arrested the Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk on fraudulent charges of serving the interests of Russia. In fact, Bogdan is an intransigent opponent of the capitalist Putin regime and its invasion of Ukraine. The arrest of Bogdan reveals the extreme nervousness within the Zelensky regime and its NATO allies that opposition to the war is finding a growing response within the Ukrainian working class.

24. Ten years ago, in its statement, “Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War,” the ICFI warned:

The danger of a new world war arises out of the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system—between the development of a global economy and its division into antagonistic nation states, in which the private ownership of the means of production is rooted. This finds its most acute expression in the drive of US imperialism to dominate the Eurasian landmass, above all those areas from which it was excluded for decades by the Russian and Chinese revolutions. In the west, the US, in league with Germany, has orchestrated a fascist-led coup to bring Ukraine under its control. But its ambitions do not stop there. The ultimate objective is to dismember the Russian Federation, reducing it to a series of semi-colonies to open the way for the plunder of its vast natural resources. In the east, the Obama administration’s pivot to Asia is aimed at encircling China and transforming it into a semi-colony. Here, the objective is to ensure domination of the cheap labour that is one of the key global sources of the surplus value extracted from the working class and the life-blood of the capitalist economy.

25. The past decade has confirmed this warning. Amidst the escalating open US-NATO war against Russia and the developing conflict with China, it is impossible to see world war as an exceptional event, but rather the expression of the basic driving forces of capitalism.

26. The same contradictions driving imperialism to the brink of nuclear war provide the objective basis for social revolution. The international working class is a massive social force, whose interests collide with capitalist exploitation and imperialist barbarism. The conspiratorial character of imperialist war planning reflects the fact that the ruling class itself is well aware that its policies do not have mass support.

27. Despite mass protests against the Gaza genocide, broader sections of the population are unaware of the rapidly escalating war with Russia. The ruling elites and their political affiliates, including the apparatus of the

trade unions, are engaged in a systematic effort to prevent workers from understanding the gravity of the danger while subordinating the working class to imperialist war policy.

28. There is only one way that the spiral toward disaster can be avoided, and that is through the intervention of the working class to force an end to this war. This demand must be combined with a struggle to end Israel's genocidal onslaught against Gaza. Workers must demand the immediate withdrawal of all US and NATO forces and weapons from Ukraine. It must likewise refuse all support for the reactionary nationalist policies of the Putin regime, which in no way represents a progressive alternative to the war policies of the imperialist powers.

29. The working class must use its power to stop this war, which is plummeting toward disaster. The mobilization of this power requires overcoming the gap between the advanced stage of the global political crisis and the present level of mass political consciousness. The solving of this historic problem requires the development of a Marxist-Trotskyist leadership and the revolutionary renewal of the international workers' movement on the basis of socialist policies.

30. The International Committee of the Fourth International calls for the unity of workers in Russia, Ukraine, and all of the former Soviet Union with their brothers and sisters in Europe, Asia, and America in opposition to the capitalist system that is the root cause of war. The only way out of the unfolding disaster is through the struggle against capitalism and the victory of world socialist revolution.



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