

Report to the Eighth National Congress of the SEP (US)

2014-2024: The ICFI's response to a decade of global war

Andre Damon
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We are publishing here the report to the Eighth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US) given by Andre Damon, US national co-editor of the World Socialist Web Site. The congress was held from August 4 to August 9, 2024. It unanimously adopted two resolutions, "The 2024 US elections and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party" and "Free Bogdan Syrotiuk!"

Next month, Mehring Books will publish a new volume consisting of speeches delivered by David North at the annual May Day rallies initiated by the International Committee of the Fourth International in 2014.

The book is titled *Sounding the Alarm: Socialism against War*, and rightly so. It documents how the ICFI worked systematically over the course of an entire decade to warn the working class of the United States and the world of the extent to which the ruling classes are preparing for a new world war.

In his remarks to the first ICFI May Day rally in 2014, David North warned:

Those who believe that war with China and Russia is an impossibility—that the major imperialist powers would not risk war with nuclear powers—are deluding themselves. The history of the 20th century, with its two devastating world wars and its innumerable and very bloody localized conflicts, has provided sufficient evidence of the risks the imperialist ruling classes are prepared to take. Indeed, they are prepared to risk the fate of all humanity and the planet itself. One hundred years after the outbreak of World War I and 75 years after the start of World War II, the struggle against the danger of a third imperialist cataclysm confronts the international working class.

The aim of the ICFI in making these warnings was not to foretell imminent doom but to alert the working class of the immense dangers that exist in order to, on the basis of a sober assessment, mobilize opposition to imperialist war.

The warnings of the ICFI since the first International May Day rally have been confirmed by the eruption of the US war with Russia in Ukraine, the escalation of the conflict with China and the Gaza genocide. This report will seek to present a history of the eruption of global war over this period, through a review of the writings and statements published in the WSWWS.

This period has spanned three administrations—Obama, Trump and Biden—and requires a preparatory review of the policies of the Bush administration. While all of these administrations have been characterized by bitter divisions over the emphasis of US foreign policy, primarily over

the primacy of the Pacific vs. the European theaters, there has been a remarkable continuity in the aim of global domination through war.

That is because all of these administrations express the fundamental tendencies of American capitalism, and the drive by American finance capital for global domination, arising out of the evermore desperate crisis of American capitalism, and more fundamentally, the contradiction between the nation-state and the globalized economy.

In the period following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the ICFI placed primary emphasis on the deepening crisis of American capitalism as the driving force of decades of US military aggression throughout the world.

In the 2009 essay, "The capitalist crisis and the return of history," David North observed:

Up until now, the global role of the dollar provided the United States with a unique financial advantage. The United States controlled the printing of a currency that functioned as the world reserve currency.

He noted:

Were the dollar to lose its unique global status, this would have immediate consequences not only for the global position of American capitalism but also for the conduct of its domestic economic policies. It needs only to be pointed out that the entire stimulus package of the Obama administration, which entails running multitrillion-dollar deficits, depends upon the willingness of foreign creditors to hold US dollars.

When Comrade North wrote those lines, the balance sheet of the Federal Reserve stood at \$2 trillion, and the US federal debt stood at \$12 trillion. Now, the balance sheet of the Federal Reserve has quadrupled to \$8 trillion, and the federal debt has tripled to \$36 trillion.

In other words, acute as the crisis was in 2008-2009, it is far sharper now. The American ruling class has stretched the "exorbitant privilege" exercised by the US dollar to the limit. Its desperate economic situation is a major driving force for its increasingly reckless and violent actions on the global stage.

The most visible expression of the relative decline and crisis of the US economy has been expressed in the collapse in net exports, reflected by the current account balance. In 1990, the US current account deficit stood

at \$79 billion. By 2000, the current account deficit had increased significantly to \$416 billion. In 2008, during the global financial crisis, the deficit reached \$676 billion. By 2022, the current account deficit had grown to \$943 billion.

Beginning in the late 1980s, American economic policy had been characterized by the creation and collapse of a series of speculative economic bubbles, each followed by a bank bailout on a greater and greater scale.

While the response to the Black Friday crash of 1987 and the savings and loan crisis of the late 1980's was a protracted period of ultra-low interest rates, by the time of the 2008 crash even near-zero interest rates were not sufficient, and the Federal Reserve launched a policy of "quantitative easing" that massively expanded the Federal Reserve's balance sheet. This enormous money-printing operation was reproduced on an even greater scale in response to the financial crisis sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic, in an expansion of the money supply without precedent in American history.

According to a breakdown by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, the \$2.3 trillion CARES Act contained \$1.4 billion in direct government support to businesses, with the vast majority going to large and well-connected enterprises.

But that was only the down payment. The CARES Act was the fiscal component of a massive monetary intervention by the Federal Reserve that the Trump administration bragged came to an additional \$4 trillion.

In February 2020, the Federal Reserve's balance sheet stood at \$4.1 trillion. Today, it has more than doubled, to nearly \$8.5 trillion.

Thus, out of a federal intervention in 2020 totaling over \$6.7 trillion, direct payment to households and unemployment benefits amounted to less than 10 percent of the total. As a result, American billionaires became \$2.1 trillion wealthier since the start of the pandemic.

These decades of bank bailouts have led to a massive increase in US government debt. In 2000, following the dot-com bubble, the federal debt grew to \$5.7 trillion. Then by 2010, it doubled to \$12.1 trillion. By the end of 2020, it doubled again, to \$26 trillion, and now stands at \$34 trillion. In real terms, the US federal debt has increased 358.9 percent over this period.

At the 2024 May Day event, Comrade North noted:

Undermining the drive to global hegemony is the reality of the deterioration of the economic foundations of American capitalism. To put the matter bluntly, it faces the basic problem that has inevitably confronted a degenerate economic system: state bankruptcy.

If any other country had carried out money printing on this scale, it would have led to hyperinflation and a precipitous collapse of the value of the dollar. The United States was only enabled to carry out this policy by the "exorbitant privilege" of the US dollar.

But the underlying weakening of the US economy has been expressed in the increasing price of gold. At the height of the 2020 crisis, the price of gold briefly reached \$2,000 per ounce. It breached this high in November and has since only continued to rise, hitting its current peak of \$2,442.

In the opening report to the 2023 Socialist Equality Party Summer School, David North noted:

[The] relationship between economic deterioration and the resort to military solutions has acquired something of the character of a law of contemporary geopolitics. The preservation of the central role of the United States in global geopolitics, let alone its striving

to achieve hegemony, is entirely bound up with maintaining the US dollar as the indisputable world reserve currency. This is the central foundation for not only America's dominance in world affairs but, and no less critically, the staving off of domestic financial bankruptcy.

The most acute expression of the violent eruption of American imperialism over the past decade is the war with Russia in Ukraine. But this war cannot be understood outside of the decades-long effort by US imperialism to expand the NATO alliance and dominate the countries of Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union.

In 1998, the Senate voted in favor of expanding NATO to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

"The United States is a European power," testified Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 1997 to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "We have an interest not only in the lands west of the Oder River, but in the fate of the 200 million people who live in the nations between the Baltic and Black Seas."

On June 15, 2001, in a speech in Warsaw, Poland, US President George W. Bush declared his "plan to enlarge NATO" in order to create a ring of countries that would stretch "from the Baltic to the Black Sea."

Biden supported the 2004 expansion of NATO with the inclusion of Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The strategy underlying the eastward expansion of NATO has drawn heavily from the conceptions of the right-wing dictator Józef Piłsudski, who ruled Poland for much of the interwar period.

US geostrategist Robert Kaplan stressed, in a piece from August 2014 titled "Piłsudski's Europe," that "it is Poland and Romania, the two largest NATO states in northeastern and southeastern Europe respectively, that are crucial to the emergence of an effective Intermarium to counter Russia. Together they practically link the Baltic with the Black Sea."

But the linchpin of this new "Intermarium" was to be Ukraine.

In 2008, when Bush declared that having Ukraine join NATO is in the "interests" of the United States, he had the enthusiastic support of Biden and other leading members of the Democratic Party. Under Bush's guidance NATO declared that Ukraine alongside Georgia "will become members of NATO."

The Obama administration vociferously defended Bush's call for Ukraine to become a member of NATO.

In pursuit of this aim, then-Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland reported in 2013 that the United States had spent \$5 billion to help Ukraine "achieve its European aspirations."

The overthrow in February 2014 of the government led by Viktor Yanukovich, in a coup organized and financed by the United States and Germany, was an undisguised attempt to bring Ukraine into the orbit of NATO and convert it into a launching pad for a future war against Russia.

Within months, the Ukrainian parliament renounced its country's non-aligned status and announced plans to deepen its cooperation with NATO "in order to achieve the criteria which are required for membership in the alliance."

The 2014 coup triggered the secession of Donetsk and Lugansk in Eastern Ukraine, as well as Russia's annexation of Crimea, a mostly Russian-speaking region, following a referendum.

At its first international May Day rally in 2014, David North warned:

The Ukrainian crisis was instigated deliberately by the United States and Germany through the orchestration of a coup in Kiev. The purpose of this coup was to bring to power a regime that would place Ukraine under the direct control of US and German imperialism. The plotters in Washington and Berlin understood

that this coup would lead to a confrontation with Russia. Indeed, far from seeking to avoid a confrontation, both Germany and the United States believe that a clash with Russia is required for the realization of their far-reaching geopolitical interests.

This assessment was in fact confirmed almost 10 years later, when, in February 2023, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg acknowledged the extent to which the NATO powers had militarily rearmed for years in preparation for the present conflict. He declared:

The war didn't start in February last year, it started in 2014. And since 2014, we have implemented the biggest reinforcement of our collective defense, with more troops, higher readiness, presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, new defense plans, and also increased defense spending.

Following the Maidan coup and the secession of Donetsk and Lugansk, the European powers set up the Minsk agreements in an effort to buy time to rearm Ukraine as a battlefield against Russia. The agreement included a cease-fire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, and the establishment of a security zone, monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Ukrainian government pledged to amend the constitution to allow special status for Donetsk and Lugansk and grant them greater autonomy.

All of this, however, was simply a ruse on the part of the imperialist powers. According to former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the Minsk agreement served to buy time to rearm Ukraine. "The 2014 Minsk agreement was an attempt to give Ukraine time," Merkel told the weekly *Die Zeit*. "It also used this time to become stronger, as you can see today... It was clear to all of us that this was a frozen conflict, that the problem had not been solved, but that is precisely what gave Ukraine valuable time."

In a 2018 report, the Atlantic Council bluntly characterized the flooding of Ukraine with weapons after the 2014 coup:

In 2014, the US Congress passed the Ukraine Freedom Support Act, which appropriated \$350 million in security assistance, including anti-tank and anti-armor weapons, to the government of Ukraine to defend its territorial integrity. Despite strong congressional backing, President Barack Obama decided not to authorize the US government sale or financing of lethal weapons to Ukraine. However, this policy did not prevent the private export of US-made lethal weapons to Ukraine.

During the Obama administration, direct commercial sales of small shipments of lethal arms to Ukraine were reviewed, approved, and licensed on a case-by-case basis by the Department of State in consultation with the Department of Defense. The US government authorized nearly \$27 million of commercial defense articles and services to Ukraine in 2016 and about \$68 million in 2015, portions of which are classified as lethal weaponry.

On December 22, 2017, the Trump administration approved supplying Javelin anti-tank missiles to Ukraine, capping a nearly three-year debate in Washington over whether the United States should provide lethal defensive weapons to counter further Russian aggression in Europe.

...The US government is directly supplying lethal defense hardware to the Ukrainian military for the first time, although US-made lethal weapons have been in Ukraine since 2015.

Throughout this period the ICFI warned repeatedly that the imperialist powers were rearming for a new world war, targeting Russia and China. In the preface to *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990–2016*, David North wrote:

The last quarter century of US-instigated wars must be studied as a chain of interconnected events. The strategic logic of the US drive for global hegemony extends beyond the neocolonial operations in the Middle East and Africa. The ongoing regional wars are component elements of the rapidly escalating confrontation of the United States with Russia and China.

It is through the prism of America's efforts to assert control of the strategically critical Eurasian landmass, that the essential significance of the events of 1990–91 is being revealed. But this latest stage in the ongoing struggle for world hegemony, which lies at the heart of the conflict with Russia and China...

One parallel between today and 1914 is the growing sense among political and military strategists that war between the United States and China and/or Russia may be inevitable. As this fatalistic premise increasingly informs the judgments and actions of the key decision makers at the highest level of the state, it becomes a dynamic factor that makes the actual outbreak of war more likely. ... Not since the end of World War II has there existed so great a danger of world war.

A key component of the US response to the events of 2014 was a program of nuclear rearmament initiated under the Obama administration.

In 2016, President Barack Obama initiated the most dramatic expansion and modernization of America's nuclear forces since the end of the Cold War, at a projected cost of \$1.2 trillion.

Obama's nuclear arms race sparked what commentators at the time called the "second nuclear age." In contrast to the Cold War's doctrine of "mutually assured destruction," this "second nuclear age" would, in the words of a 2016 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, involve combatants "thinking through how they might actually employ a nuclear weapon, both early in a conflict and in a discriminate manner."

In addition to making nuclear weapons smaller, lighter, less destructive and more portable, the corollary of making "usable" nuclear weapons was the scrapping of restrictions on shorter-range weapons.

In January 2019, the Trump administration published its 2018 National Defense Strategy, which declared that "inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security."

Since "America's military has no preordained right to victory on the battlefield," the only way the US can prevail in this conflict is through the "seamless integration of multiple elements of national power," including "information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement and military."

Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, the historian Arthur L. Herman declared Trump's National Security Strategy heralds a "profound shift back to the world before 1917: an anarchic international arena in which every sovereign state, large or small, has to rely on armed strength" for its security.

"In this new era" Herman writes, "might inevitably makes right." Only power matters, and "the big powers inevitably dominate the small." Herman adds, "This is the world of Otto von Bismarck, who said in 1862: 'The great questions of the time are not decided by speeches and majority decisions ... but by iron and blood.'"

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.

China, Pence said, is seeking "to win the commanding heights of the 21st century economy":

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.

Pence's speech introduced the concept of economic "decoupling" and "de-globalization," effectively declaring the era in which capitalism promoted "free trade" to be over. Instead, state policy was to be openly aimed at protecting national industry in the struggle for the "commanding heights" of the 21st century.

The trade war launched by Trump, and subsequently continued under Biden, was to be the antechamber of a military conflict over global economic dominance.

In 2019, the Trump administration intensified the nuclear arms race initiated under Obama by unilaterally withdrawing from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, freeing the United States to ring Russia and China with short-range nuclear weapons capable of hitting major cities in a matter of minutes. This was accompanied by the systematic expansion of the US nuclear modernization program, the cost of which subsequently ballooned to nearly \$2 trillion.

What American think tanks proclaimed as the "second nuclear age" just two years earlier was leading to a world in which there were no limits and no controls on the deployment—or use—of nuclear weapons.

Trump's presidency was characterized by a persistent conflict within the state over the pace of US arms shipments to Ukraine.

The first impeachment of Donald Trump centered around allegations that Trump predicated the disbursement of US weapons to Ukraine on Zelensky ordering an investigation of Biden's son, Hunter, who received approximately \$1 million per year for sitting on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian energy company.

The WSWS wrote in December 2019:

The conflict raging within the state centers on Trump's decision to temporarily delay a massive weapons shipment to Ukraine. The ferocity with which the entire US national security apparatus responded to the delay raises the question: Is there a timetable for using these weapons in combat to fight a war against Russia?

Before the US's far-reaching plans for war with Russia could be brought into effect, humanity collided with the first global pandemic of the 21st century. We are now a mere few months from the five-year anniversary of the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Five years ago this month, the virus that ultimately jumped to humans in December of 2019 was spreading in the wild animal populations that would be, over the subsequent months, collected and taken to the wet market in Wuhan, China, where they would subsequently make the leap to human beings.

In the 2020 May Day rally, David North a "trigger event in world history:"

In its analysis of the present global crisis, the *World Socialist Web Site* has defined the pandemic as a "trigger event." It can be compared to the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand and his wife on June 28, 1914. This incident led rapidly to the outbreak of World War I little more than five weeks later, in early August 1914. Had the assassination not taken place, it is doubtful that war would have come in August. But sooner or later, perhaps in the winter of 1914 or in the following year, the economic and geopolitical contradictions of European and global capitalism and imperialism would have led to a military conflagration. The assassination accelerated the historical process, but it acted upon preexisting and highly inflammable socioeconomic and political conditions. The same can be said of the pandemic.

Indeed, one of the greatest legacies of this "trigger event" has been the global eruption of imperialist war. This "trigger event" precipitated the eruption of war all over the world, from the Ukraine War—the largest land war in Europe since World War II, to the Gaza genocide—the systematic extermination of the Palestinian people, which is now spilling over into war throughout the Middle East.

The response to the pandemic was to "normalize" various forms of social barbarism, from mass, preventable death from the COVID-19 pandemic to genocide and nuclear war. The WSWS drew the connection between the pandemic and war in the statement "Capitalism normalizes death: From COVID-19 to the threat of nuclear war."

The WSWS wrote:

In 1963, Barry Goldwater, the future Republican Party nominee for President of the United States, published a book titled *Why Not Victory?* In it, he argued that the United States was insufficiently aggressive in confronting the Soviet Union because the American population was too fearful of nuclear war.

"A craven fear of death is entering the American consciousness," Goldwater wrote. "We want to stay alive, of course; but more than that we want to be free."

Echoing the 1963 declaration by Barry Goldwater, Philip Breedlove, NATO's former supreme allied commander in Europe, told Voice of America this week: "We have been so worried about nuclear weapons and World War III that we have allowed ourselves to be fully deterred. And [Putin] frankly, is completely undeterred."

The inevitable conclusion is that the population must accept the threat of nuclear war and overcome its "craven fear of death." The utter casualness and total recklessness with which the US political establishment is treating the prospect of a war that threatens to escalate into a full-scale nuclear exchange is of a piece with the ruling class's indifference to mass death in the pandemic.

A significant attribute of media commentary on the pandemic in the United States was the claim that the struggle to preserve life, the first right enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, is synonymous with "fear."

In hindsight, it is possible to add to this commentary that the tagline of Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, "How I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb" could just as easily be applied to the Biden

administration's COVID-19 policy: "How I learned to stop worrying and love the virus."

When future generations look back upon the COVID-19 pandemic, they will struggle to comprehend how the ruling class worked to promote two seemingly irreconcilable narratives almost in the same breath. While the Trump administration was busy dismissing COVID-19 as "just the flu" and declaring that repeated infections have positive health benefits by conferring a mythical protective "herd immunity," it was simultaneously claiming that COVID-19 was a man-made bio-weapon created by the Chinese Communist Party as the greatest attack on America since the September 11, 2001 terror attack.

By May, the Trump administration had taken to publicly promoting this conspiracy theory. That month, the WSWS wrote:

The Trump administration is seeking to provide itself with an escape hatch. Whatever happens, it is China's fault. Knowing that its program will lead to a rapid and substantial growth of fatalities, the White House is hoping that when the butcher's bill of its disastrous policies comes due, it will be able to direct social tensions outward against China.

By the end of the year, this pseudoscientific conspiracy theory was being promoted not just by Trump but by the entire US political establishment. Commenting on the promotion of the conspiracy theory by the *Washington Post*, the WSWS wrote:

The aim of the *Post* is to corrupt public opinion, to make the people hate, through the promotion of a lie that can be used to justify a war.

Trump's term in office concluded with hundreds of thousands dead from a preventable pandemic, and mass protests by millions of people against police violence, to which Trump responded with a dictatorial police rampage with tens of thousands of arrests.

But in the face of claims by the pseudo-left that the election of Biden would represent the triumph of peace and democracy, the WSWS warned that an incoming Biden administration would be devoted to an escalation of global war.

In his 2019 May Day report, Comrade North warned:

The anti-Russia hysteria that has gripped the Democratic Party makes it reasonable to suspect that, were it to regain the White House, the danger of a world war will be even greater.

The WSWS developed these warnings in a perspective published on August 22, 2020, titled "The Biden campaign and the attempt to 'rescue' American hegemony."

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. Trump and Pompeo are barreling headlong toward a conflict with China. Biden's critique

of this disastrous course is that the United States needs to get "tough," whether against Russia, China, Afghanistan, Syria, or everywhere in between.

In December 2020, the WSWS explained the foreign policy of the incoming Biden administration:

The underlying theme is that, for the last four years under Trump, Moscow has been allowed to get away with murder, and that an incoming Biden administration will make up for lost time with a massive escalation of US militarism against Russia, up to and potentially beyond the brink of war.

And this is precisely what happened. Biden declared in 2022:

We sent Ukraine more security assistance last year [that is, 2021]—\$650 million in weapons, including anti-air and anti-armor equipment before the invasion—more than we had ever provided before. So when the invasion began, they already had in their hands the kinds of weapons they needed to counter Russian advances.

In its January 17, 2022 statement, titled "US and NATO escalation of conflict with Russia is leading to war," the WSWS warned:

The US and its European allies, using Ukraine as a pretext, are deliberately and recklessly escalating their confrontation with Russia. Everything they are saying and doing leads to the conclusion that war, whether declared or undeclared, is their goal.

It developed these themes in the statement, "Why the US and NATO want war with Russia," published on January 25, 2022:

The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the escalating provocations by the United States and NATO against Russia. Their aim is to manufacture a pretext for war....

US and European imperialism view Russia, as Hitler did in 1941, as a vast arena for plunder. Through a combination of war and internal destabilization, imperialism seeks to instigate the breakup of Russia. Their aim is to carve up Russia into numerous puppet states that would exist as colonies of the major imperialist powers.

Further, the United States views the integration of Russia into its sphere of influence as essential to preparations for war with China.

The WSWS returned to these themes in a statement dated February 14, 2022 titled "Oppose the US-NATO drive to war with Russia in Ukraine!"

There is a frenetic urgency to Washington's war drive. It appears to be working based on a timetable that does not allow it to weigh the consequences or to openly discuss worst case scenarios. Biden told the press on February 10 that if Americans and Russians start shooting at one another, "that's a world war."

Yet rather than taking any steps to de-escalate and prevent such a cataclysm, the United States presses ahead with its provocations and allegations. ... Powerful sections of the corporate-financial elite and intelligence agencies have decided that the long-planned confrontation with Russia can be delayed no longer.

Now that the Biden administration is in power, it is trying to make up for lost time. The US-NATO stratagem is as crude as it is obvious. Ukraine is being used as bait to lure Russia into war.

On February 22, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Despite our explanation of the role of NATO in provoking the Russia, the WSWS published a statement by the ICFI condemning the invasion, titled "Oppose the Putin government's invasion of Ukraine and US-NATO warmongering! For the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers!"

The International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* denounce the Russian military intervention in Ukraine. Despite the provocations and threats by the US and NATO powers, Russia's invasion of Ukraine must be opposed by socialists and class-conscious workers. The catastrophe that was set in motion by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 cannot be averted on the basis of Russian nationalism, a thoroughly reactionary ideology that serves the interests of the capitalist ruling class represented by Vladimir Putin.

What is required is not a return to the pre-1917 foreign policy of Tsarism but, rather, a revival in Russia and throughout the world of the socialist internationalism that inspired the October Revolution of 1917 and led to the creation of the Soviet Union as a workers' state. The invasion of Ukraine, whatever the justifications given by the Putin regime, will serve only to divide the Russian and Ukrainian working class and, moreover, serve the interests of US and European imperialism.

The United States responded to the invasion of Ukraine by flooding Ukraine with weapons to an extent without precedent. In a statement titled "NATO goes to war against Russia," published on February 28, 2022, the WSWS wrote:

The essential causes and interests of wars are often not at first apparent. They are concealed by an avalanche of propaganda. However, sooner or later, the real and more profound driving forces and significance of the conflict emerge.

In the case of the conflict in Ukraine, the nature of the war is being revealed with considerable speed. Ukraine is only the initial physical battleground in what is, in essence and fact, a war between NATO and Russia.

The non-membership of Ukraine in NATO is, and has been for several years, largely a fiction. Already substantially armed and with weapons pouring in, Ukraine is the front line in a war aimed at regime change in Moscow and the complete subordination of Russia to NATO.

The next month, the WSWS pointed to the significance of Biden's declaration that the Ukraine war would lead to the creation of a "new world order," ahead of the 2022 NATO summit:

"You know, we are at an inflection point," Biden said. "It occurs every three or four generations. As one of the top military people said to me in a secure meeting the other day, 60 million people died between 1900 and 1946." He added that "now is a time when things are shifting. ... There's going to be a new world order out there, and we've got to lead it." The phrase "New World Order" has a long and bloody provenance.

Biden's "New World Order" involves the transition from 30 years of wars and interventions in the Middle East and Central Asia, which have killed more than 1 million people, into a conflict targeting Russia and China, which raises the specter of a Third World War waged with nuclear weapons.

The WSWS developed these themes in a perspective titled "The Guns of April":

The aims of the war are now clear. The bloodshed in Ukraine was not provoked to defend its technical right to join NATO but rather was prepared, instigated and massively escalated in order to destroy Russia as a significant military force and to overthrow its government. Ukraine is a pawn in this conflict, and its population is cannon fodder.

In the article "Critical resources, imperialism and the war against Russia," Comrade Gabriel Black examined the key role played in the US quest to dominate the world supply of critical minerals in the war:

The deep need of American finance capital to dominate current and future sources of critical minerals, as well as the disproportionate control of China over them, forms an important part of the backdrop to the drive to war against Russia.

While Russia is not the exclusive provider of any major critical mineral, the analysis below details how it plays a leading role in the production of a variety of key minerals, holding an important piece of global reserves. In understanding the broader drive of the United States to dominate Eurasia and subjugate Russia, the role of these key resources cannot be overlooked.

The ICFI responded to the eruption of the Ukraine war with a renewed call for the building of a socialist anti-war movement. In his opening report to May Day 2022, titled "The NATO-Russia war and the tasks of the international working class," Comrade David North asserted:

The challenge of May Day 2022 is to make this celebration of the international unity of the working class the beginning of a global movement of the broad mass of the world's population to stop the criminal and reckless escalation of the NATO-Russia war toward nuclear conflict and force its end.

Events have confirmed our warnings. Nothing can stop the unfolding of the terrible logic of imperialist war and its consequences except the revolutionary movement of the working class against capitalism. This perspective underlies not only our denunciation of US-NATO imperialism but also our attitude to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Putin, a bitter enemy of socialism and the heritage of the October Revolution, is incapable of making any genuinely democratic and

progressive appeal to the Ukrainian working class. Instead, he invokes the reactionary legacy of Tsarist and Stalinist Great Russian chauvinism.

The Seventh National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, held from July 31 to August 5, 2022, adopted the resolution, “Mobilize the working class against imperialist war!” It declared that:

The SEP resolves to fight to build a powerful anti-imperialist movement in the United States, as a critical component of an international movement of the working class against war. The fact that the United States is the center of world imperialism and the cockpit of the developing global conflict imposes immense political responsibilities on the SEP in the US.

While there is enormous opposition to war in the American population, this opposition lacks a program, perspective and leadership. The task of the Socialist Equality Party is to develop within the working class and its vanguard an understanding of the inextricable connection between war abroad and exploitation at home, and in this process build a revolutionary leadership in the working class that has as its aim the conquering of state power and the socialist reorganization of the American economy, as a component part of the world socialist revolution.

At the June 2022 NATO summit in Madrid, the members of NATO adopted a strategy document outlining plans to militarize the European continent, massively escalate the war with Russia, and prepare for war with China.

The document pledges to “deliver the full range of forces” needed “for high-intensity, multi-domain warfighting against nuclear-armed peer-competitors.”

Responding to the NATO summit and Biden’s declaration of a new “forever war,” the WSWS explained that the costs of this global war would be borne by the working class:

Can anyone imagine, moreover, that a war against Russia, the aim of which is to overthrow the government of the world’s largest country, coupled with a war against China, the world’s second-largest economy, can be achieved without totally impoverishing the American population?

The social and economic consequences of the militarization of society pledged by the US and its allies at the NATO summit are incalculable. In every country, government spending on public health and social infrastructure is to be gutted to free up resources for the war effort.

The costs of the war are to be imposed onto the working class through the dismantling of social programs and the demand that workers accept a reduction in real wages in the name of the “national interest.”

In his earlier report, Comrade David North read extensively from the report published by the RAND corporation and the Congress’s Commission on the National Defense Strategy, which provided an assessment of the Biden administration’s 2022 National Defense Strategy and National Security Strategy document.

In October 2022, the *World Socialist Web Site* published its own

analysis of Biden’s National Security Strategy, in which we highlighted the following passages:

“We are now in the early years of a decisive decade for America and the world,” declares Biden’s personal introduction to the document. “The terms of geopolitical competition between the major powers will be set.”

The document sets forth the concept of “integrated deterrence,” declaring, “We will leverage all elements of our national power to outcompete our strategic competitors.”

It adds, “Our National Defense Strategy relies on integrated deterrence: the seamless combination of capabilities to convince potential adversaries that the costs of their hostile activities outweigh their benefits. It entails: Integration across domains, recognizing that our competitors’ strategies operate across military... and non-military (economic, technological, and information) domains—and we must too.”

In perhaps its most chilling passage, the White House’s fact sheet on the document declares that “The Biden-Harris Administration has broken down the dividing line between domestic and foreign policy.”

These concepts, pioneered under the Trump administration, which openly drew inspiration from the Third Reich, echo the infamous “total war” manifesto of Alfred Jodl, chief of the German High Command during World War II, which declared that “Only the singleness and unity of state, armed forces, and people can assure success in war.”

Twenty-two months have passed since these words were written, the Rand Corporation and Congress’s Commission on the National Defense Strategy have confirmed all of these warnings, declaring:

The 2022 NDS, intended to guide DoD through what it and the 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS) call the “decisive decade,” is largely a continuation of the priorities, approach, and force structure described by the 2018 NDS. Both strategies emphasize planning and resources for great power competition, specifically naming China and then Russia as the lead competitors.

The start of 2023 marked a new stage in US involvement in the Ukraine war. Meeting at the Ramstein Air Base, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley pledged the United States to the military defeat of Russia. On January 20, the WSWS wrote:

Milley announced the commitment of the United States and NATO to “go on the offensive to liberate Russian-occupied Ukraine.” He repeated that Ukraine would use NATO armored vehicles and tanks to go on the “tactical and operational offensive to liberate the occupied areas.”

With this declaration, the entire prestige of the NATO alliance has been staked on the reconquest of all Ukrainian territory, which, according to the United States, includes both the entire Donbas and the Crimean Peninsula.

These statements announced what the US media declared would be the

great “spring offensive,” which would turn the tide of the war.

“An Endgame for Ukraine,” proclaimed Bret Stephens in the *New York Times*, would produce a “crushing and unmistakable defeat” for Russia. *Washington Post* columnist Max Boot quoted General David Petraeus as stating that he expects “the Ukrainians to achieve significant breakthroughs and accomplish much more than most analysts are predicting.”

All of these statements have proven both delusional and self-deluded. In fact, by April, leaked Pentagon documents made clear that despite the triumphant proclamations by the US media, Ukraine lacked the forces to make any serious advances. At the same time, these documents showed the massive extent of direct US-NATO involvement in the war, including hundreds of troops on the ground and the daily integration of NATO warfighting both inside and outside of Ukraine.

Within days of the official launch of the offensive in June, the extent of the disaster became clear. The WSWS wrote:

Ten days in, the offensive has turned into a bloodbath for Ukrainian soldiers, many of them new recruits with little or no training. The Ukrainian government claims to have captured a mere 40 square miles of territory over the past week, at the cost of thousands of lives. It has gotten to the point where the US media describes as a massive triumph the ability of Ukrainian forces to capture, and hold for a few hours, a tiny nondescript village.

The launch of the “spring offensive” was timed to precede the 2023 NATO summit in Vilnius, which was intended as a “victors’ summit” to celebrate the triumphant “spring offensive” launched by Ukraine just weeks beforehand. But the offensive turned into a bloody debacle, with Ukrainian troops thrown against Russian lines without air cover and slaughtered by the thousands.

In the perspective, “The Biden doctrine: “As long as it takes, or No matter how many die,” the WSWS wrote,

When Biden proclaims once again that his administration and NATO will supply money and arms “as long as it takes” to bring about the defeat of Russia, what he is really saying is that the war will continue regardless of the cost in human lives. This is the barbaric essence of what can be called the Biden Doctrine: “No matter how long it takes or how many die.”

On September 20, 2023, Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Zelensky, speaking for the imperialist powers, gave a series of remarks to the UN General Assembly in which he condemned the UN for its “fear” of war. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to this session of the United Nations, and had a high-profile meeting with US President Joe Biden.

By this point, it was clear that the Israeli government, and likely the US government, had knowledge of plans by Hamas to launch a raid across the Israeli border. Within weeks, Israel, with the full support of the United States, would launch the Gaza genocide that, in less than a year, led to the deaths of 200,000 people or more.

On October 7, Hamas launched Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, meeting no meaningful resistance on the Gaza border. As we explained in the perspective, “Documents expose Israeli conspiracy to facilitate October 7 attack”:

Israeli officials, knowing full well where and how Hamas would strike, made a deliberate decision to stand down in order to facilitate the attack.

The Israeli government allowed and abetted the killing of their own citizens and that the Israeli government is responsible for the deaths that took place that day. This criminal conspiracy was aimed at establishing a pretext for a long-planned genocide against the people of Gaza.

The *Times*’ claim that Israel’s stand-down was an “intelligence failure” makes no sense because it is a lie from beginning to end. No, the events of October 7 were not an intelligence failure: Israel was remarkably successful in exactly predicting Hamas’s military operation. Instead of acting on this intelligence, Israel orchestrated a stand-down of troops and intelligence-gathering at the precise moment when the attack took place.

These revelations expose the Gaza genocide to be a criminal conspiracy by the Netanyahu regime and its imperialist backers, whose victims include not only 20,000 slaughtered Palestinians but the Israeli population itself.

The WSWS responded to the Israeli onslaught on Gaza with the October 9, 2023 statement, “Down with Netanyahu’s government! Stop the imperialist-backed Zionist onslaught against Gaza!”

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) unequivocally denounces the Netanyahu government’s declaration of war on the Palestinian people following the uprising in Gaza against the Israeli occupation. The hysterical frothing of the Israeli regime, reminiscent of the Nazis, can be interpreted as nothing less than a call for the extermination of a large portion of the population of Gaza.

We continued:

The ICFI denounces no less emphatically the declarations of total support given by the Biden administration and the governments of the European Union to the genocidal campaign that is now being planned and implemented by the Israeli armed forces. The dispatch of an American aircraft carrier to the region is a vile display of imperialist solidarity with the massive attack on the Palestinian people.

Within 10 days, the WSWS explained that the imperialist powers are using the Gaza genocide to prepare for an escalating war throughout the Middle East:

Amid a genocide against the people of Gaza by the Israeli military, the United States is threatening to unleash a war throughout the Middle East targeting Iran.

Israel’s war on Gaza has been accompanied by a massive expansion of the US military presence in the region, led by the deployment of two aircraft carriers and their associated battle groups. The dispatch of an armada of over a dozen warships to the Middle East is not simply to threaten Hamas, which has no navy. The United States is preparing for a much broader conflict in the Middle East, including war with Iran.

The US is using the present crisis to put into effect long-standing plans for a war with Iran, as the Middle Eastern front of the US war with Russia and war plans against China.

The United States has planned for a war against Iran for decades. In January 2002, following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, then-President George W. Bush called Iran part of an “Axis of Evil” that included Iraq, which the United States invaded and occupied the next year. Inside the White House, Bush administration officials were fond of the saying, “Boys go to Baghdad, but real men go to Tehran.”

In the 2024 New Year’s statement, “The working class, the fight against capitalist barbarism, and the building of the World Party of Socialist Revolution,” the WSWs declared:

All the “red lines” that demarcate civilization from barbarism are being effaced. The motto of capitalist governments is: “Nothing that is criminal is alien to us.” Nuclear war is being “normalized”; genocide is being “normalized”; pandemics and the deliberate culling of the infirm and elderly have been “normalized”; unfathomable levels of wealth concentration and social inequality have been “normalized”; the suppression of democracy and the resort to authoritarianism and fascism are being “normalized.”

Taken as a whole, the normalization of different forms of social barbarism signifies that the capitalist class has arrived at a dead end. A class whose policies consist of different forms of sociocide has clearly exhausted its historical, economic, social and political legitimacy.

This is the central conclusion that must be drawn from a review of this decade of global war. The period began with the US openly allying with fascist forces in Ukraine in an effort to provoke war with Russia. It ends with the death of 200,000 people in the Gaza genocide, and the preparations by US imperialism for an ever greater and more reckless escalation targeting both Russia and China.

Trump, the Republican candidate, has pledged to place a 100 percent tariff on Chinese goods, bringing the US conflict with China to a new fever pitch. A Democratic administration headed by Kamala Harris would massively escalate war with Russia, and an effort to complete the unfinished business of the Gaza genocide. And both potential regimes are fully committed to war throughout the Middle East and support of the Gaza genocide.

But this decade of war has not passed in vain. It has seen the development of and strengthening of the International Committee of the Fourth International as the conscious vanguard of the struggle of the working class against war and all forms of capitalist barbarism and reaction.

I will add one final note of conclusion. We are accused by Professor Kelly of being “immodest and arrogant.”

In this, Kelly is expressing the worldview of the petty-bourgeois solipsist. In a world where there is no objective truth, no reality against which to judge fact or fiction, in the dark, in which all cats are grey, to claim that “Trotskyism is the Marxism of the 21st century” is, in fact, nothing but an exercise in arrogance.

But as materialists, and not solipsists and subjective rationalists, we are capable of asking questions and making conclusions.

And I would ask: Where is there a record like the one presented by Comrade Kishore in his report, or in this report? Who, or what, is the

competition? Who is our rival to represent “the Marxism of the 21st century,” let alone one who could substantiate that claim with a record of political analysis and perspective comparable to the one presented today?

To ask the question is to answer it. There exists no record like that of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the ICFI, and this record, together with the entire history of the Trotskyist movement, is what makes the International Committee of the Fourth International “the Marxism of the 21st century.”

The International Committee has assessed that this is the decade of socialist revolution, and that profound changes in the structure of social, economic and political life will lead to profound changes in the consciousness of the working class. In the coming period, millions of workers and young people will review this record of the International Committee of the Fourth International and draw their own conclusions to join and build this movement.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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