

WAR, IMPERIALISM AND RESISTANCE FROM BELOW

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Dear Colleagues,

Let me thank the Global Studies Association for inviting me to speak on the occasion of its Third Annual Conference. It is an honor to speak before a distinguished assembly of scholars.

It is a pleasure and privilege to speak on a topic as urgent and highly important as “War, Imperialism and Resistance from Below” in line with the conference theme: “Globalization, Empire and Resistance.”

I shall discuss the phenomenon of war as a concomitant of modern imperialism, imperialism in the current period of so-called neoliberal economics and neo-conservative politics and the resistance of the people and some states assertive of national independence.

I. The Phenomenon of War as Concomitant of Imperialism

Free competition capitalism reached the apex of its development in several industrial capitalist countries from 1860 to 1870. Monopoly capitalism appeared in an embryonic stage in the same decade. After the crisis of 1873, cartels emerged on a wider scale but were not yet dominant. The boom at the end of the 19th century and the economic crisis of 1900-03 made the cartels one of the foundations of economic life.

Monopoly capitalism or modern imperialism became dominant in the leading industrial capitalist countries. Industrial capital had merged with bank capital to form the finance oligarchy. The export of surplus capital began to gain importance over the export of surplus goods. The imperialist countries and their monopoly firms formed international combinations (such as cartels, syndicates, trusts and so on) against the people and against each other.

Beyond the imperialist and colonial countries, the economic hinterland of the world was divided into colonies, semi-colonies and dependent countries. These were coveted by the imperialist powers as markets, sources of cheap raw materials, fields of investment and spheres of influence.

After the frenzied acquisition of colonies by the chief European states in the years 1884-1900, the division of the world among imperialist and colonial powers became complete. No country could be found outside the clutches of modern imperialism and colonialism. Any newly-risen imperialist power like the United States, Germany and Japan could generate a struggle for a redivision of the world by striving to increase its share of the global economic territory and disturbing the balance of power.

The manufacturing surpluses and the ensuing crisis of overproduction in imperialist countries impelled them to compete bitterly with each other, expand economic territory

and come into violent collisions that culminated in wars. Chauvinist calls and war hysteria became convenient for drawing away the consciousness of the working class, particularly the unemployed, from class struggle against the monopoly bourgeoisie.

Imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism in America and Europe, and later in Asia, became conspicuous through wars and the economic crisis in the period 1898-1914. The Spanish-American War (1898), the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) and the economic crisis of 1900 in Europe were the signal events in the appearance of modern imperialism on the stage of world history.

British imperialism, the No. 1 imperialist and colonial power then, continued to wave the anachronistic flag of "free trade" in order to take advantage of its well-established lead in manufacturing, engage in global capital expansion and obscure the high war potential of macro-competition among the imperialist powers in an increasingly limited global market.

The global expansion of capital was so pronounced that it gave an illusion of a unilinear spread of industrial capitalism on a global scale, which induced a split in the socialist movement in Europe. Kautsky preached the theory of ultra-imperialism to mean that the imperialist powers were out to break down all pre-capitalist barriers, industrialize the world and bring about all-round progress. But Lenin pointed out the moribund character of imperialism, the grossly uneven development under imperialism, the spasmodic character of capital flows, the tendency of imperialism to use the most reactionary forms of puppet rule and the destructiveness of economic crisis and war.

The competing protectionist drives of the imperialist powers in fact prevailed over the pretenses at free trade. The crisis of overproduction sharpened the political and economic conflicts within each imperialist state and among the imperialist powers and led to the first global inter-imperialist war from 1914 to 1918. The war claimed millions of lives and destroyed huge amounts of assets on an unprecedented scale. However, it also provided the conditions for the rise of the first socialist country and encouraged the anti-colonial struggles of the people in many countries.

After an alternation of crisis and boom in the aftermath of World War I, the Great Depression came upon the world capitalist system after the Crash of 1929. It was a prolonged crisis of overproduction and financial collapse. It exacerbated the contradictions among the imperialist powers and caused the second inter-imperialist war to break out. World War II was even more destructive than World War I, killing 60 million people and destroying a huge amount of property. But it also resulted in the rise of several more socialist countries and a great wave of national liberation movements.

It seemed as if imperialism and colonialism were already encircled by socialism and the national liberation movements. A majority of the people of the world, including a full third of humanity in socialist countries, confronted imperialism and colonialism. But the US had also come out from the war as the strongest imperialist power in economic and military terms. As soon as the war ended, the US engineered the establishment of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods agreements to reflect its ascendancy and a new balance of power.

In 1948 the US launched the Cold War in order to contain and combat the challenge of socialism and the national liberation movements and to counter the tendency of the US economy to slide into a crisis of overproduction. The Cold War was actually a series of hot localized wars, which included the big US wars of aggression in Korea and Indochina, the US-supported Israeli wars on Palestine and the anti-Soviet wars in

Angola, Ethiopia, Nicaragua and Afghanistan. These wars caused the death of millions of people, far exceeding the number of those killed in World War I.

During the Cold War, the US instigated the overthrow of independent governments and propped up repressive puppet regimes, which unceremoniously killed people in great numbers. The massacre of at least 1.5 million Indonesians was a major campaign of repression intended to secure US, British and Dutch oil interests and counteract the losing position of the US in Indochina. The death toll as a consequence of the daily violence of exploitation and the intolerable burden of foreign debt should also be taken into account in a complete reckoning.

In 1975, it seemed that the victorious wars of national liberation in Indochina and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China had put the imperialist powers in dire straits. The US was clearly on the decline as a consequence of the pressures of the growing economies of Japan and Germany and because of the high costs of the Cold War, including the costs of military spending and unsustainable trade accommodations to its imperialist and newly-industrializing allies in the anti-communist crusade.

The US could not solve the problem of stagflation within the framework of Keynesianism for several reasons. It served the interests of the military-industrial complex and thus obscured the cost-push effect and limited job growth in high military spending, especially for high tech weaponry and space research and development. It wanted to wreak vengeance on the working class and pointed to wage inflation and state social spending as the cause of stagflation. Thus, the neoliberals and monetarists of the Chicago School went to town to replace the Keynesians.

Running parallel to the economic decline of the US, the phenomenon of modern revisionism and monopoly bureaucrat capitalism was undermining and degrading the socialist-labeled countries and pushing them towards open and unabashed adoption of capitalism. Afflicted by its own stagnation, corruption and military overspending, the Soviet Union was outplayed by the US in the contest of neocolonialism for hegemony over the newly-independent countries.

From 1979 onwards, it was clear that the US continued on a path of economic decline and attracted to the policy of neoliberalism even before the Reagan regime. Under the Volcker plan, the US raised interest rates in order to attract funds from abroad. Subsequently, Reagan used the flow of foreign funds to engage in high-speed production of high-tech weaponry and maintain the US as the biggest consumer market in the world. The trade and budgetary deficits made the US the biggest debtor country in the world.

II. Imperialism: Neoliberalism and Neo-Conservatism

In the period of 1989-91, all the revisionist-ruled and pseudo-socialist countries were in turmoil. The big bourgeoisie proceeded to legalize all previous ill-gotten private assets and accelerated the open privatization of the most important and largest public assets. The Soviet Union collapsed. The bipolar world of the Cold War ended. The US emerged as the sole superpower.

There was the widespread notion that the end of the Cold War would result in "peace dividends" for humanity, especially in terms of more funds for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. But subsequent developments showed that the US became more rapacious and aggressive. The consensus in Washington to this day is to

let the phoney free market of monopoly capitalism solve the problems of the world and to let high tech weaponry take out any "rogue state" or unwieldy client regime.

There is the strong bipartisan presumption in US officialdom that the US stockpile of weapons of mass destruction rather than the internal rottenness of the Soviet Union that caused the so-called evil empire to crumble. And more funds for the instruments of war are to be appropriated in order to perpetuate and expand US global hegemony.

After inveigling Iraq to attack Kuwait, the US under the aegis of the UN Security Council was able to muster multilateral support for driving Iraq out of Kuwait and subsequently imposing sanctions on Iraq for twelve years. The studies and plans in the Pentagon and in related think tanks for the eventual total US control of Iraq and the entire Middle East go as far as the early 1980s. They are couched in terms of protecting and securing the oil resources for the US and the world.

The disintegration of the Warsaw Pact provided the opportunity for the US and NATO to expand to Eastern Europe and to some former Soviet republics. Subsequently, the US and NATO would be able to wage war on the former Yugoslavia and build positions of strength on the southern flanks of Russia. Further, the US gained foothold in the Caucasus, Caspian sea region and Central Asia, all regions related to the overweening desire of the US to control the sources and routes of energy supply.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became fashionable for some bourgeois propagandists to proclaim the end of history with capitalism and liberal democracy. This is supposed to be a conclusion to be drawn from the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and the open regression of revisionist-ruled countries to capitalism. In fact, the crisis of the world capitalist system was conspicuously worsening in the 1989-1991 period, as manifested by the bursting of the Japanese bubble economy, the stagnation of the German economy, the weakening of so-called the newly-industrializing economies and of course by the devastation of the economies of the third world and former Soviet bloc countries.

The crisis of overproduction and financial collapses persisted in the world capitalist system throughout the 1990s. The US economy could shine only at the expense of its imperialist allies and the newly-industrializing economies. It continued to attract heavy doses of funds from abroad, especially from Europe, Japan and the oil-producing countries, due to high US interest rates and favorable rates of return on capital. It took the lead in the commercialization of high technology. It kept the US consumer market as "the market of last resort" of the entire world.

In the second half of the 1990s, the US boasted of a "new economy" ceaselessly growing without inflation, generating full employment mainly through part-time jobs and being brought forward by high technology. The US economy was touted as the high point of "free market" globalization, with capital and goods moving freely and with the state maximizing the capital available to the multinational corporations, privatizing profitable public assets and deregulating at the expense of labor, society at large and the environment.

The moment of truth came for the US and entire world capitalist system in 2000. The high tech bubble burst due to the global crisis of overproduction in high tech goods. US industrial production plummeted. The financial meltdowns spread to the stock market and to the banks in the US and throughout the world. Until now, both the US and global economy are in a protracted state of stagnation and decline. Bankruptcies, production cutbacks and high unemployment rates continue to constrict the global market.

Neoliberalism has proven to be a futile policy for fixing the problems of the world capitalist economy. It has accelerated the concentration and centralization of capital in the imperialist countries, chiefly the US. And it has whipped up financial speculation far beyond the real economy in the imperialist countries and in so-called emerging markets or transition economies. Financial collapses have been terribly devastating.

The overwhelming majority of countries that produce raw materials for export and some countries that produce for export low value-added semimanufactures and a few basic manufactures are in a state of unrelieved depression. These deficit-ridden and heavily indebted countries are targets of takeover by US and other imperialist powers, which use the trick of converting loans to equity and to control of natural resources.

In connection with the invasion and occupation of Iraq and other aggressive actions elsewhere, neoconservatism as a policy direction in Washington has gained global notoriety. It projects a new American century, in which the US as sole superpower develops full-spectrum power, uses this to impose a Pax Americana on the world and launches preemptive war in order to take out a recalcitrant regime and prevent any power from being able to rival and challenge the US.

The 9/11 attacks have given the so-called neoconservatives the pretext for claiming to wage a permanent war on terrorism and for seeking to deprive opponents of the US weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, the US went to war against Iraq in violation of the UN charter and UN Security Council resolutions by dishing out lies that Iraq had conspiratorial links with Al Qaida and had weapons of mass destruction.

The real motives of the Bush regime and the so-called neoconservatives are to take over the second largest oil resources of the world in Iraq, keep secure the US dollar as the currency of oil transactions, increase US control over Saudi Arabia and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), use US military bases in centrally located Iraq to control the entire Middle East and remove Iraq as a threat to the US-Israeli collaboration.

Neoconservatism is apparently the unabashedly violent complement of neoliberalism. It adds the force of war to the myth of "free market" under modern imperialism. Both neoliberalism and neoconservatism are intended to expand US economic territory and to make the pretense at building a market economy and democracy.

But I can confidently say that modern imperialism continues its rapacious and aggressive character and conduct no matter what new jargon it uses to misrepresent these. This long-running scourge to humanity has always somehow misrepresented itself as a civilizing force, its acts of aggression as the promotion of peace and human rights and its acts of plunder as the boon of "development" or the fair result of the "free market".

III. Resistance from Below

The crisis of the world capitalist system has gone so far that contradictions keep on arising among the imperialist powers over questions of trade and war. In the World Trade Organization, the European Union and Japan have increasingly exposed the US as being hypocritical about "free trade" for using direct and indirect subsidies and tariffs in order to favor US exporters. But for the first time, after so long, France, Germany and Russia (plus China) have opposed something as large as the US-British invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Major powers have stood up against the US war of aggression against Iraq not only because of the patent violations of the UN charter but also because the US is determined to disregard the production and loan contracts between Iraq and said powers and to take over the Iraqi oil resources by encumbering these with onerous contracts and securitizing them eventually. Russia and China are also increasingly worried by US incursions in Central Asia and by the conspicuous drive of the US to tighten controls over sources and routes of energy supply.

If imperialist powers allied against the oppressed nations and people can become involved in serious contradictions among themselves, nonimperialist states that justify their existence with assertions of national independence, concern for public wellbeing and even socialism quickly find themselves at odds with an US imperialist power that is increasingly rapacious and aggressive.

Long targeted by US aggressive and interventionist policy are countries like Cuba and People's Democratic Republic of Korea. They express not only the national independence but also the socialist aspirations of their respective peoples in opposing US acts of aggression and intervention, military encirclement, economic blockade and all sorts of threats and pressures. There are also countries like Palestine, Syria, Iran, Venezuela and many others that invoke national independence in order to resist excessive political, economic and other demands and impositions of the US.

China continues to show that it is friendly to the US but still has many unresolved problems with US imperialism. The US carries out a dual policy of engagement and containment towards China, engaging it on the road of capitalism and containing it as a potential enemy. China has taken a clear position against the US on the questions of Iraq, Taiwan, US surveillance over China, relations with neighboring countries and the imperialist use of the WTO against the developing countries. It was among the 22 countries that stood up against the US position in Cancun.

We may count as forces of resistance from below those nonimperialist states that stand up to defend their national independence against imperialism. In fact the US has launched the most violent wars of aggression against such states, which have included Iraq, former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan in recent times. It has also emboldened and supported the Israeli Zionists to occupy Palestine and suppress the Palestinian resistance. As a consequence, we see the steady growth of armed and other forms of resistance in countries directly or indirectly attacked by the US.

During the first quarter of 2003, we saw the rising of millions of people in hundreds of cities all over the world. The biggest was on February 15, when 30 million people rose up. The protest marches and rallies were reminiscent of those held at the peak of the people's resistance to the Vietnam war in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The resurgence of mass protest actions against war and against imperialism in the imperialist countries reflects not only a high sense of solidarity of the people in such countries for other peoples but also the growing discontent over the crisis of the world capitalist system. The people are restive over high rates of unemployment, the reduction of social benefits, the deterioration of social services and the highest priority given to corporate benefits and to military spending.

The Iraqi people are now waging a broad-based armed resistance against the US occupation and the puppets. The united front includes the bourgeois nationalists, communists, the Baathists, the Sunnis, Shiittes and other religious believers and the Arab, Kurdish, Turkomen and other ethnic communities. The tempo and scope of the

revolutionary war for national liberation are increasing. The successful offensives of the Iraqi people are bound to inspire bigger protest actions in the US and in the world.

The American and other peoples of the world are now demanding the withdrawal of US troops and bases from Iraq. The peaceful mass actions alone cannot compel the US to withdraw from Iraq. But as in the US war of aggression in Vietnam, the mounting US casualties in the Iraqi battlefield and the gigantic mass actions of the American and other peoples of the world can persuade the US to withdraw from Iraq.

Throughout the world, the broad masses of the people have been roused by the exploitative character of "free market" globalization and by the oppressive character of "the new world order." They detest and resist the ugly character and consequences of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. They are carrying out various forms of resistance, which are spreading and intensifying.

The most effective and most promising kind of resistance are the revolutionary armed struggles being carried out in such countries as the Philippines, Turkey, Palestine, Iraq, Nepal, India and Colombia. There are also reemerging revolutionary forces of the oppressed nations and peoples that wish to wage armed revolution. The US is becoming more and more vulnerable as it is stricken by crisis and further strains itself through imperial overstretch. Thus, the number of people determined to wage armed revolution is rapidly increasing.

It is self-defeating for the US to have used cruise missiles and other weapons of mass destruction to take out regimes that are opposed to it and also for it to have provocatively shown off its military presence in so many countries. The US has nearly exhausted its deployable military forces by being absorbed even only in the two countries of Iraq and Afghanistan. It has also become clear that hightech weapons are ineffective against people's revolutionary forces that wage an armed resistance of fluid movement and offer no fixed targets to their enemy.

The resistance from below from the toiling masses of workers and peasants is the strongest, most inexhaustible and most important kind of resistance. The toiling masses are ever willing and eager to resist the most intolerable forms of oppression and exploitation, now surfacing under the current crisis conditions. It can become sustained and well-directed and can advance from one stage to another only if there is a truly revolutionary party of the proletariat. The working class is still the principal agent for revolutionary change in the epochal struggle against imperialism in both the imperialist and dominated countries.

So long as imperialism persists in oppressing and exploiting the people, the people's struggle for national liberation, democracy and socialism will continue. US imperialism and the local exploiting classes themselves create the crisis conditions which generate the people's resistance and pave the way for the revolutionary class and party leadership to arise. There is no stopping the wheels of history from moving, despite any curve, bumps or zigzags along the way. ###

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