

War Threats Against Russia and the Social Crisis in the United States

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Once again, the American people are faced with a full-scale propaganda drive for war. The crisis in Ukraine, set off by a US- and European-backed putsch one month ago, has been followed by a campaign against Russia over the referendum in Crimea that includes economic sanctions and a threatened military response by NATO.

The present crisis is the latest iteration of what has become a permanent feature of life in the United States. Just last summer the American people were subjected to a manufactured war fever that nearly led to a bombing campaign against Syria. Before that it was Libya, with the people being told that immediate military action was required to prevent a “human rights” catastrophe. Threats against Iran and China are permanent, with the possibility of military action always “on the table.”

Over the past 25 years, the United States has been engaged in a campaign of global militarist violence that has taken on an increasingly reckless and unrestrained character. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, accompanied by proclamations of the “end of history,” has been followed by a string of military interventions, from bombings and drone attacks to outright invasions: Panama, Iraq, Haiti, Somalia, Sudan, Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq again, Yemen, Pakistan and Libya.

An unending “war on terror” proclaimed after the 9/11 attacks has been used to justify constant scare-mongering and the erection of the framework of a police state.

The scenario, with minor variations, has been repeated again and again: A hyperventilating media demonizes the latest incarnation of Hitler; there are manufactured pretexts and hypocritical denunciations from the president; a string of congressmen demand more aggressive measures. Any sliver of information that calls into question the official narrative—such as the fact that the US is working with fascistic and anti-Semitic forces in Ukraine—is ignored.

By now, the population has become somewhat inured to the process, yet the war hysteria emanating from the political establishment only intensifies.

The fact that the country is always at war or on the verge of going to war is a political and sociological phenomenon that requires explanation.

There are, first of all, the geopolitical and financial imperatives of American capitalism. The American ruling class saw in the collapse of the Soviet Union an opportunity to exercise

unrestricted control over the entire world. In foreign policy, it conducts itself as though it is inconceivable that a country could have interests that do not perfectly align with those of the United States. Any government that thwarts its ambitions, including control over the most important markets and resources, is a potential target for attack, subversion or regime-change.

However, a central factor in the perpetual drive for war is the social situation within the United States itself. The atmosphere of war crisis serves a definite function—to direct the social pressure within the country outward against the latest proclaimed enemy.

Certain indices give a picture of the state of social relations in America, five-and-a-half years after the crash of 2008:

* Officially, 10.5 million people in the United States are unemployed, but these official figures vastly understate the extent of the jobs crisis. Over the past five years, another 5.5 million people have dropped out of the labor force for economic reasons (and are not counted as unemployed). The percentage of the population that has a job has remained essentially flat since the depths of the 2008-2009 economic collapse, while already meager jobless benefits have been slashed or eliminated.

* Poverty is epidemic, in recent years affecting 15 percent of the population—a level last seen in the 1960s. One in seven US children is living in poverty, ranking the United States 26th out of 29 developed countries, according to the United Nations. A greater percentage of children live in poverty in the US than in crisis-stricken Greece. Some 1.65 million households (including 3.55 million children) live on less than \$2 a day per person.

* The response of the ruling class to every social problem has been to lock people behind bars. The United States imprisons a higher percentage of its population, by far, than any other country in the world—743 out of 100,000, or more than 2.3 million people. About one quarter of the world's prisoners are in the United States, which has only 5 percent of the world's population.

* Wages of American workers have been under sustained attack for decades, and the share of the national income going to labor has declined steadily. Consumers confront surging prices for basic commodities. Families are saddled with unsustainable levels of debt from credit cards (averaging \$15,252 per indebted household), student loans (\$32,986) and mortgages (\$152,209).

The ruling class has exploited the economic crisis to carry out a vast redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top. Corporate profits are at record highs, as is the stock market. The richest 400 individuals now possess \$2.2 trillion in wealth, an increase of \$500 billion from 2012 to 2013 alone. The top one percent has received 95 percent of all income gains since 2009.

In domestic policy as in foreign policy, the past five years represent an escalation of processes that have deeper roots. For four decades the ruling class has been engaged in a systematic effort to reverse all previous social reforms and regulatory restrictions on business, engineering a historic retrogression in the living standards of the majority of the population.

The ruling class itself has taken on an increasingly criminal character, amassing its fortune

through fraud, speculation and theft. The depraved social physiognomy of the corporate-financial elite finds expression in both foreign and domestic policy—in war, social counterrevolution and the dismantling of democratic rights.

The tremendous social tensions built up through this restructuring of class relations find no political expression, let alone progressive outlet. The state and its auxiliary organizations, including the media, function as wholly-owned subsidiaries of a ruthless and increasingly criminal financial oligarchy.

Military actions, whatever their geopolitical aims, serve to divert and regulate class antagonisms. The ferocity of American militarism is an expression of the depth and insoluble character of the crisis of American capitalism. It points to the inevitability and necessity of its opposite—social revolution.

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