

Editorial: Nato summit lays plans for new cold war

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The decision of the 2014 Nato Summit in Wales to station permanent military forces along the Russian border marks the end of the post-Cold War 'phony peace' and the opening of a pre-war period. The rhetoric of impending conflict has taken a step towards real conflict with the creation of a Nato strike force explicitly aimed at countering a supposed threat of a Russian invasion of Eastern Europe.

This bogus threat has been conjured up with an unprecedented barrage of propaganda from western politicians and their tame media. The barrage of lies has focused on an imaginary Russian invasion of Ukraine, and lays the ideological basis for a new period of wars and inter-imperialist conflict.

The potential for real clashes between the rival blocs can be seen all the way from the bombed buildings of Aleppo, in Syria, to those in Donetsk, in Ukraine.

The response of the Nato alliance, determined, as always, by the strategic goals of the United States, is to impose a new Cold War against Russia in Europe and a new round of intervention under the guise of 'humanitarianism' in the Middle East.

Devastating as the conflicts in Syria and the Middle East are, they could be overshadowed by a civil war in Ukraine, which would threaten to involve the imperialist powers directly. As we go to press, a ceasefire has been announced but, even if it holds, it is likely only to be a truce that allows the reeling forces of the Kiev regime to regroup.

The strategic importance of Ukraine as the last, constitutionally non-aligned, state between Russia and Nato, has made this the most dangerous conflict in Europe since the opening moves of the First Cold War. The fact that Ukraine's president, Petro Poroshenko, was the only non-Nato head of state invited to the Summit is an indication of the West's backing for the Kiev junta.

Nato's transformation, from an ostensibly 'defensive' alliance into an aggressive tool of US foreign policy, started as early as the Balkan wars of the 1990s and was cemented in its still ongoing occupation of Afghanistan. Whatever the rhetoric about 'mutual defence', the decisions of the Nato Summit expose it for a gathering of warmongers.

Peacemakers?

In early September, the German president, Joachim Gauck, told an appreciative Polish audience that Russia's disregard for the rights of nations 'effectively severed its partnership' with Europe. In Brussels, a day or so later, David Cameron likened Putin to Hitler, saying 'we run the risk of repeating the mistakes made in Munich in '38.'

At the Brussels EU summit, they seem to have worked themselves into a frenzy, led by the self-interested leaders of the Baltic states and Poland, eager to shake down the western Europeans for more arms and supplies. Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė claimed Russia was "at war with Europe". Right on cue, Angela Merkel said that Estonia and Latvia would be Putin's next targets.

The Nato Secretary-General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, boasted that Nato's new 4,000-strong rapid reaction force, agreed at Newport, will "travel light but strike hard". Moreover, it is only "what I would call a spearhead". Not to be outdone, David Cameron proposed a 1914-1939 style 10,000-strong, British-led, joint "expeditionary force".

Naturally, commitments to rearmament and militarisation of the European border with Russia will not prevent the media casting these wolves in the role of lambs, but this will only deceive those who wish to be deceived.

Unfortunately, the size of the demonstrations outside the Nato summit (1,500 maximum at the weekend and around 500 on the day the summit opened) revealed that this includes the British labour movement and most of the far left.

At the poorly attended "counter-summit", Counterfire members claimed that the "argument" against imperialist wars has "been won", this is, frankly, delusional. Our rulers have only had to play the tired old tunes of Russia as the aggressive Bear and Putin as Hitler or Stalin, to have much of the left dancing to their tune whilst others decide to sit this one out.

This journal hopes to make a contribution to warning of the dangers inherent in the present situation and to preparing an anti-imperialist war movement that is not afraid to say, "the main enemy is at home". Though Putin pursues imperialist objectives in Ukraine and Syria, the main aggressors, pushing forward and threatening a new epoch of wars, are in Washington, London, Paris and Berlin.

The facts are these; Nato is an aggressive, first strike alliance whose dual purpose is to prevent Russia consolidating its own Eurasian imperialist bloc while, at the same time, ensuring that a European Union under German hegemony cannot extricate itself from subordination to the United States.

Should the crimes of the Kiev forces and Nato's provocations provide Putin with a pretext for a qualitative increase in intervention by the Russian armed forces, effectively an invasion and occupation irrespective of the wishes of the population, we would oppose this and would urge the resistance forces in East Ukraine to give it no support but, on the contrary, to fraternise with Russian troops, urging them either to join and accept the discipline of the resistance battalions or to agitate for their own withdrawal. We remain completely opposed to any annexation of the Eastern regions without the prior, freely expressed, agreement of their people. The wishes of the people of the region are paramount, not the claims of Ukrainian or Russian nationalists. A forcible annexation would simply result in national oppression for all Ukrainian and Russian speakers who wish to be citizens of a democratic Ukraine.

Maidan Left segues into Nato Left

For much of the far left, the mass media's monolithic unanimity in laying the blame at Putin's feet has, to use a phrase currently fashionable in certain quarters, "hegemonised the narrative" surrounding the conflict.

They repeat the propaganda that Putin is the aggressor and those resisting the attacks of Kiev's storm troopers are "Russian troops" or "pro-Russian separatists". The most shameless dovetailing with bourgeois consensus, and dumping of socialist principle, can be found amongst certain sections of the

Fourth International, notably its leadership.

In their schema, the Kiev regime draws its legitimacy from the Maidan movement, which they claim was a popular movement for democracy, an end to corruption and the rule of the oligarchs. As the product of an Occupy/Tahrir Square type movement, they see the present regime as a legitimate expression of Ukraine's struggle for independence and national renaissance.

The AWL is at least frank in its support for western imperialism's champion when it openly proclaims that 'socialists should support Ukraine against Russia'. This is supported by their rejection of Lenin's theory of imperialism as outmoded and its replacement by a 'theory' in which the world is divided into two categories; 'big states' and the 'little states' that they oppress. From this 'analysis' they see the present conflict simply as 'big' Russia against 'little' Ukraine and draw a simple conclusion. Simple, but wrong. Thank you, we'll stick with Lenin.

Recoiling from the conclusions that flow from such clarity, are the groups that retreat into a comfortable, if imaginary, Third Camp under the slogan neither Washington nor Moscow but International Socialism. This neutrality gives them an excuse for not supporting the antifascist resistance in Ukraine, or naming the aggressors in the civil war raging there, and for not concentrating their fire on Nato and, especially, the United States and Britain, for launching a new Cold War. That is why, despite the gathering of the Cold War mongers in Wales, the British left was still on a political holiday!

The 'Camp of Resistance'?

Some of those who are our allies in the defence of the anti-fascist resistance in Ukraine are sharply opposed to us on the question of defence of the beleaguered Syrian resistance to the fascistic repression of Bashar al-Assad. This is because they think there are two camps in global politics; one is Imperialism, headed by the US and Nato; the other is what they call, 'the Camp of Resistance', headed by Russia and including China, Cuba, Syria, Iran and Venezuela. Many who hold to this approach stem from the Stalinist 'family', that is, the former pro-Moscow, pro-Peking, third worldist groups and parties.

Their worldview goes back to the post-1945 Communist Parties. Then, it was the Soviet Union, and the world's Communist Parties, versus the Western Imperialists. Today, most of the political descendants of those parties recognise that Russia and China are capitalist. Only a few deny the obvious and believe that Beijing and/or Moscow are playing a cunning game and making use of capitalism to build socialism, a belief they share with a handful of US right wing conspiracy theorists. Nonetheless, even the majority do not accept the logic of this recognition, that Russia and China, as capitalist 'Great Powers', are also imperialist powers. They are indeed 'resisting' US imperialism, but certainly not on behalf of the peoples of the world or of peace, democracy and all things bright and beautiful.

The failure to recognise this new reality leads them to minimise the crimes of the totalitarian regimes in Iran and Syria and to pretend that all oppositionists within these states are simply tools of US imperialism. Thus, all the Arab Spring revolutions that erupted against supposedly 'anti-imperialist' dictatorships, including Libya as well as Syria, were, from the beginning, both suspect and unwelcome. They express malicious satisfaction at the rise of organisations like ISIS in Syria, or the Islamist militias in Libya, on an 'I told you so basis'. This, they think, is what comes of rising up against 'progressive dictators'. Likewise, they are sceptical, at best, and hostile, at worst, towards movements demanding democratic rights in Russia or China.

Of course, the Western imperialists, with the soft power of their bourgeois democratic regimes, their well-funded NGOs and Foundations, allied to their main capitalist parties, do intervene in these countries to

foment rebellion and even revolution. Equally, they do intervene to mould, pressure and corrupt genuine revolutions, as do their malevolent allies like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. Nonetheless, it is not impossible to tell the difference between a 'colour' or 'flower' revolution and genuinely revolutionary upheavals, like those of the Arab Spring.

If socialists and communists do not support revolutions like that in, for example, Syria, is it any wonder that their beleaguered fighters turn first to the apparently friendly and democratic USA and the EU and, when these prove to be broken reeds, are obliged to resort to the funders of reactionary Islamism from the Gulf.

Although the adherents of these unhappy theories; the third campists and the two campists, take opposite sides in the two main conflicts today, Ukraine and Syria, they actually share a common methodology. They condemn, or support, a given struggle according to where they judge its main external support comes from, rather than analysing the movement itself, its goals, and its class basis.

In a world of competing imperialist blocs, it is the height of folly to try to read off the character of a movement by reference to the camp it seeks support from or which supports it. Nor will it be easy to find movements that are pure and independent of all imperialisms, forming a sort of ready-made third camp.

We have to solidarise with all working class and progressive struggles against national oppression, for women's and gay rights, against racism and fascism and, by our support, try to develop and encourage their independence from those great powers who will corrupt and disfigure their struggles and, sooner or later, betray them. That is why we need to say to the resistance fighters in Ukraine and in Syria, 'Take their weapons (if you have no choice) but strengthen the democratic roots and leadership of your own movement.'

The USA's 'overall strategic concept'?

In the few months since the previous issue of Fifth International, we have seen a dramatic confirmation of the developments to which we drew attention; the sharpening inter-imperialist rivalry between the US-led Nato bloc and Russia and its few allies. It has progressed from a war of words, through economic sanctions, to the forward deployment of troops in Eastern Europe, with threats to use these forces.

Against a background of the continuing tremors of the 2008 economic crisis, the expansion of Nato has reached its intended conclusion; open military confrontation on the borders with Russia. This situation now has all the hallmarks of a new Cold War, whether or not the ceasefire holds and there is disengagement in Eastern Ukraine. All the pretexts have been put in place for justifying the remorseless isolation of Russia. The US and its Nato allies are laying the explosive charges of a new world conflagration. The detonation of these charges, once laid, cannot be controlled or foreseen by any one imperialist power or bloc.

What we are seeing is the development of a pre-war period in Europe more dangerous than the 40 year Nato versus Warsaw Pact standoff. It is beyond irony that our rulers should embark on this strategy as they mark the centenary of the First World War. That first imperialist war marked the culmination of a period as important for working class strategy and tactics as the long recession and grinding stagnation which global capitalism entered in 2007-08.

Rearmament, increased military spending, more proxy wars between clients of the major imperialist blocs in Europe, as well as in the Middle and Far East, open the prospect, ultimately, of a military clash/war between the major imperialist powers, even if this is avoided in Ukraine. Giving promises of intervention, under Article 5 of Nato's charter, to highly unstable states, where Russophobia is a keystone national ideology and where extreme rightists, if not fascists, can come to power, is playing with fire.

The aims of US and British imperialism and their European Allies (some of them in an alliance of the unwilling!) are threefold:

- ? Preventing the resurgence of Russia in a Eurasian geopolitical bloc
- ? Preventing a German-led EU establishing itself as a rival to the USA
- ? Preventing the rise of China as a world power

This requires economic, political and military measures to contain and control the US's rivals

The economic measures are spearheaded today by the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) which is itself to be supplemented by a Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal with twelve countries including Japan, South Korea and Malaysia. The TTIP contains an Investor State Dispute Settlement, ISDS, that would enable US corporations and finance houses to override national states, and the EU, in the name of free trade. The whole project is aimed at a further wave of neoliberal destruction of the weakened European model of regulation, human and environmental protective legislation and welfarism.

The political measures are designed to prevent the German-led creation of a European super state. The US and Britain (Washington's Trojan Horse within the European project) promoted the entry of as many East European states into the EU as possible as a counterweight to German and French hegemony. The Anglo-Saxon aim is to 'reform' the EU by weakening its central institutions, whilst pushing harder for anti-social/pro-liberalisation measures.

The third, military, dimension is a renewed forward thrust by Nato into the Black Sea and Caucasus region, creating the conditions for a series of standoffs with Russia that will be the excuse for restoring pre-1990 US military hegemony over the continent and, therefore, the ability to police its economic hegemony.

Political methodology in the new period

There is no need for the left to invent an entire new strategy for this new period for the simple reason that, in a historic sense, it is not new at all. For over a hundred years, we have had to face the same enemy; imperialism or, as Lenin described it, 'capitalism in the epoch of its decline' parasitic or decaying capitalism?. We should also remember his observation in *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* (1916) that 'Political reaction all along the line is a characteristic feature of imperialism?.'

The disappearance of the bureaucratically degenerated workers' states, especially the Soviet Union and China, and their replacement by Russian and Chinese imperialism, whilst a historic defeat for the workers and poor of the world, nevertheless virtually restores the conditions that Lenin faced in the early 20th century.

Once again, several imperialist great powers confront one another. They organise blocs and alliances whose final shape and composition are not yet clear, but the deadly threat they pose to the working class and oppressed nations is clear enough.

We believe that Lenin's analysis and the corresponding tactics to be applied to imperialist powers, to countries they control (if no longer by direct occupation as colonies as in Lenin's day) and to uprisings against either the imperialist powers or the dictatorial regimes in the subordinated capitalist states, can serve revolutionaries as a guide to action today.

Firstly, Lenin held (as even the Second International recognised in 1907) that all wars between the capitalist great powers would be imperialist wars, not wars of national defence. Whatever the pretexts, they

would be wars to seize the markets and assets of rivals or to defend the plunder already accumulated; wars between the lean and hungry robbers and the fat and over stuffed ones. Today, Russia and China represent the former and North America and Western Europe the latter.

In such wars, the working class must desire the defeat of both sides. ?The main enemy is in our own land?; defeat is a lesser evil than victory.

Basing revolutionary policy on making a distinction between aggressors and victims of aggression between these states leads straight to social chauvinism and social imperialism.

However, except where it is an element within a more general inter-imperialist conflict, any attack by an imperialist state on a state which is not imperialist requires socialists in both to do all in their power to support the resistance to that attack and aid the defeat of the imperialist power.

Equally, in Lenin?s methodology, during an imperialist war, defence of the smaller imperialist powers, which were allies of one or other imperialist bloc headed by the main combatants was not justified because these states were, for all intents and purposes, outliers of the main blocks, pawns in their game.

Nevertheless, he resisted the argument by Bolsheviks like Bukharin and Pyatakov that all struggles by oppressed or colonised peoples against their imperialist masters could simply be reduced to the clash of imperialisms. (An argument that Alex Callinicos makes today in relation to Ukraine) Their rebellions and uprisings, like that of the Irish in 1916, were, in Lenin?s judgment, totally justified and to be supported in all possible ways. It was equally justified for them to take aid from their own oppressors? enemies. Of course, they should do all they all they could to avoid immediate domination by such ?allies?.

How does Lenin?s method help us today? We are in a situation before any direct clashes between the imperialist powers (how long this may last is impossible to say) but one in which the imperialist powers are tolerating clashes between various surrogates and fomenting bogus revolutions within their opponents? states or amongst their allies.

The principled Leninist approach is to support the class struggle, to support genuine struggles for democracy (as in Syria) and to distinguish them from bogus ones (like the Maidan coup); that is, to support the struggle whose victory would be progressive from the standpoint of the international working class, in every state and country. The USA-EU-Nato do not represent democracy or human rights, just as Russia and its allies, like the butcher Assad, Iran or China, do not represent anti-imperialism.

A revolutionary position therefore requires:

? Support for the Syrian resistance against the murderous Assad regime whilst urging distrust and independence from western imperialism or its regional allies.

? Support for the antifascist resistance in Ukraine whilst urging complete political independence from Russia and the rejection of Russian nationalism and fascism quite as much as Ukrainian nationalism and fascism.

? In the Russian and Chinese proto-bloc, and in the Western Alliance ?the main enemy is at home?. We need to create a powerful movement warning of the mounting war danger, identifying the fire raisers who would plunge the world into a disastrous war where the very future of humanity is in question.

? Wage the class struggle against neoliberalism in all its aspects, but in all of them show that the only solution is the outright liquidation of capitalism itself, not just neoliberalism.

? Create parties in every country, combined into a Fifth International, fighting against economic immiseration, social degradation, environmental catastrophe and world war and for a worldwide socialist revolution.

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