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Halt the drive to war!

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Peter Symonds

The accelerating drive to military conflict over the crisis in Ukraine is a stark warning to the international working class of the dangers of world war. It underlines the significance of the online May Day rally to be held Sunday by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

As the United States and its allies recklessly provoke a confrontation with Russia, the world Trotskyist movement will give its response: a call on workers and youth around the world to mount a unified struggle against war based on a revolutionary internationalist and socialist program.

Spurred on by the Obama administration, the Ukrainian military yesterday launched an assault on pro-Russian separatists in the eastern city of Slovyansk, killing at least five people, as part of broader plans to suppress opposition to the US puppet government in Kiev. In scenes that recall the Nazi storm troopers of the 1930s, pro-Kiev fascist thugs torched a trade union building in the Black Sea port of Odessa, killing 38 pro-Russian sympathisers trapped inside.

Such scenes recall Europe of the 1930s. Having backed the fascist-led coup in February that ousted the pro-Russian government of President Viktor Yanukovich, the US is pressing for

military operations to seize separatist strongholds in eastern Ukraine. The same organisations that took the lead in toppling Yanukovich—the neo-Nazi Right Sector and fascist Svoboda party—are providing the shock troops.

The assault on pro-Russian strongholds in eastern Ukraine is being accompanied by a deluge of lies and propaganda from Washington and its allies against “Russian expansionism” and “Russian aggression.” In reality, it is the Obama administration that is backing the Moscow regime into a corner and preparing for war with a build-up of US and allied military forces in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea.

Speaking yesterday at the Wilson Centre, US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel openly declared that war between major powers was back on the agenda. He complained that one of the biggest obstacles to greater military spending by NATO allies was “a sense that the end of the Cold War ushered in an end of history, an end of insecurity, at least in Europe, and an end of aggression by nation-states.” Blaming Russia for the present crisis, he continued: “Russia’s actions in Ukraine shatter the myth and usher in bracing new realities.”

The driving force behind the “bracing new reality” of war between nuclear-armed states is the global capitalist breakdown that began with the 2008 financial crisis. Obama, who came to power in 2009 posturing as an opponent of war, dramatically accelerated the drive by US imperialism to offset its historic economic decline through the use of military might.

Washington views the chief obstacles to its long-held ambitions to dominate the vast Eurasian landmass—the key to US global hegemony—to be Russia and China. US interventions in Eastern Europe under the umbrella of NATO have been paralleled by Obama’s “pivot to Asia” and the military encirclement of China.

While the Pentagon was moving troops, warships and war planes into position in Europe last week, Obama was touring military allies in Asia, assuring them of US backing in any war with China. Just as it blames Russia’s annexation of Crimea for the Ukraine crisis, Washington holds China responsible for the tense territorial disputes with its neighbours in the South China and East China seas. In fact, Obama has deliberately inflamed long-simmering but relatively minor quarrels and turned them into dangerous international flashpoints by encouraging allies such as Japan and the Philippines to take an aggressive stance against China.

The Pentagon is strengthening and restructuring American military forces throughout the Indo-Pacific and drawing up plans for war against China in the closest collaboration with its allies. The *Wall Street Journal* revealed last weekend that the US Pacific Command had drawn up military options and contingency plans that range “all the way up to full-scale combat operations.”

Having identified China as the main target, the *Journal* continued: “Current and former officials said among the more provocative options on the table to counter China would include expanded US surveillance flights and sending US aircraft carriers through disputed waters close to the Chinese coast, including the strait of Taiwan.”

Just as its calculated provocations in Ukraine have sparked a dangerous confrontation with Russia, so the Obama administration is preparing new provocations against China that run the risk of war with another nuclear-armed adversary.

As it threatens to plunge humanity into a global catastrophe, US imperialism is marshalling the media, think tanks and academia to legitimise war and glorify militarism. This is being done in a bid to overcome mass anti-war sentiment.

In a *Washington Post* comment last Friday, Stanford University classics professor Ian Morris argued that war is positively beneficial. Ten thousand years of conflict, he declared, have produced “larger, more organised societies that have greatly reduced the risk that their members will die violently” and “created the conditions for higher living standards and economic growth.”

Turning to the 20th Century, he insisted that the 100 to 200 million people killed in wars, genocide and government-sponsored famines was small price to pay for a richer, safer society.

The morbidly reactionary outlook of Morris’s comment is not simply that of an aberrant individual, but reflects the thinking of large sections of the American financial aristocracy, which, through its austerity agenda, is already shutting factories, demolishing social services and destroying the lives of millions of workers.

Now, in order to ensure its economic predominance internationally, the same ultra-wealthy elite is prepared to risk hurling humanity as a whole into a nuclear nightmare. As Morris warns, the United States could be eclipsed as Britain was last century, “unless Washington embraces its role as the only possible globocop in an increasingly unstable world—a world with far deadlier weapons that Britain could have imaged a century ago.”

The working class faces great dangers. Unless it is abolished, capitalism will plunge the world into war, as it did twice in the last century.

The only social force on the planet capable of halting the drive to war is the international working class, mobilised on the basis of a revolutionary program to replace the outmoded profit system and its division of the world into competing nation states with a worldwide planned socialist economy.

The International May Day Online Rally on Sunday will mark a critical step in the fight to build such an anti-war movement across the globe. We urge workers and youth from every country to

join in this common forum and discussion on the socialist perspective that must animate this struggle. Register today at **internationalmayday.org**.