

Capitalism, war and the collapse of democracy

By Tom Carter
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The first decade and a half of the 21st century confirms that militarism and warmongering go hand in hand with attacks on democratic rights and the buildup of a police state. This same period has witnessed a relentless offensive against the working class, resulting in the enrichment of a narrow stratum of the world's super-rich with mind-boggling sums of money.

The experiences of this period underscore the fact that the struggle to defend democratic rights and improve the material and social conditions of the working class is inseparably bound up with the struggle against imperialist war.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the United States, the center of world imperialism. With its democratic veneer in tatters and its economic and social infrastructure in a state of advanced decay, the United States increasingly resembles a garrison state, marked by mass imprisonment, endemic police brutality, ubiquitous surveillance and an ever more massive and dominant military-intelligence apparatus.

The collapse of democracy

The 21st century opened with a decisive break by the American ruling class with what remained of its democratic traditions. In 2000, the Supreme Court ordered the state of Florida to stop counting votes and installed George W. Bush as president. There was no challenge to this naked repudiation of the right to vote and democratic rights in general from the Democratic Party or any other section of the political and media establishment. That the theft of the 2000 election was a milestone in the disintegration of American democracy was indicated by the individuals whom the American ruling class selected to staff its new government--a roll call of arch-reactionaries including Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld and John Bolton.

The following year, the Bush administration inaugurated the so-called "war on terror," establishing a new "state of emergency" political framework that has remained in place to this day. From the start, the war on terror was nothing but a phony pretext for the implementation of an anti-democratic domestic agenda and a militarist foreign policy. From its inception, it has had the full support of both the Democratic and Republican parties.

The launch of the war on terror was followed by a barrage of anti-democratic legislation that included the PATRIOT Act. Meanwhile, the Bush administration expressly repudiated international law, including the Geneva Conventions, and secretly authorized the kidnapping, detention and torture of targeted

individuals without charges or trial. Words and phrases like "rendition," "enhanced interrogation," "Guantanamo," "Abu Ghraib" and "waterboarding," among others, entered the official lexicon.

The war on terror coincided with a massive buildup of the state's repressive apparatus within the US. The Department of Homeland Security was established in 2002 and it has served ever since as a conduit through which billions of dollars are siphoned into local police departments, transforming them into paramilitary occupying forces bristling with military weaponry.

In the aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, these paramilitary forces participated in a trial run of a police-state "lockdown" of an entire city, with the rule of law effectively suspended while heavily armed police conducted warrantless searches of homes across entire neighborhoods.

The militarization of the police is reflected in the epidemic of police killings. The police currently kill an average of around three people per day, and the death toll continues to mount. So far this year, the police have killed more than 300 people. At the present rate, the toll will reach 1,100 by the end of the year.

The US government--in flagrant violation of the US constitution--has built up a historically unprecedented surveillance state. The unlimited scope of America's domestic spying operations was summed up in one internal presentation slide disclosed by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. The slide bore the headline: "Collect it all, process it all, exploit it all, partner it all, sniff it all, know it all."

The collapse of bourgeois democracy in the US accelerated with the inauguration of Barack Obama in 2008. The Obama administration will perhaps be best remembered for its unashamed "targeted killing" program.

In secret proceedings known as "Terror Tuesdays," based on secret charges and secret evidence, the president orders extrajudicial drone killings without charges or trial. At least four US citizens have already been assassinated in this program, and Obama's attorney general, Eric Holder, has expressly refused to rule out assassinations on US soil.

According to the Obama administration's lawyers, the president has the authority to sign the death warrant of any person, anywhere in the world, on the unreviewable say-so of the president himself. One cannot imagine a clearer violation of both the letter and spirit of the Bill of Rights, which provides in the Fifth Amendment that no person "shall be deprived of life...

without due process of law.”

Democratic rights, due process, the Bill of Rights, the rule of law--it is difficult to utter such phrases with a straight face in reference to 21st century America.

More than 2.3 million individuals are behind bars in the US, at a cost of more than \$60 billion each year. Meanwhile, America's political establishment is permeated with corruption and criminality. War criminals and their accomplices, torturers, assassins, Wall Street criminals, and uniformed, badge-wearing killers operate with impunity outside the law.

War

The collapse of bourgeois democracy has proceeded alongside a parallel explosion of American militarism.

The launch of the war on terror coincided with the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, an occupation that has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and which continues to this day. In March 2003, the United States invaded Iraq based on lies about “weapons of mass destruction.” After a dozen years of occupation, the country has been utterly devastated, with the death toll possibly exceeding one million.

With the inauguration of Obama in 2008 came the “pivot to Asia,” an aggressive diplomatic and military policy that seeks to encircle China with military bases and alliances, inflame regional tensions, and ultimately to provoke a major war.

With progressively less public discussion, America's campaign for world domination has expanded to include military interventions in Libya, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and elsewhere. By one count, American forces were deployed in 133 countries last year, 70 percent of the world's nations.

America is permanently at war. There is hardly a conflict anywhere in the world that cannot be traced, in whole or in part, back to American imperialism.

In February 2014, international tensions were inflamed still further by an American- and European-backed backed coup in Ukraine, which was led by ultra-right and fascistic elements, plunging the country into civil war. The coup was accompanied by sabre-rattling in the American and European press directed against Russia.

The US political establishment mouths phrases about “liberty” and “democracy,” but if one wants to know where America really stands, one only has to examine its support for openly pro-Nazi tendencies in the Ukraine, as well as its backing of the military dictatorship in Egypt and the absolutist monarchy in Saudi Arabia.

America's drive for world domination brings it inevitably into conflict with rivals such as Russia and China, and poses the clear danger of a Third World War involving nuclear-armed states. The US is carrying out war games on Russia's borders and it has provided guarantees of military support to Eastern European states in the event of a military conflict with Russia. To borrow a warning that Trotsky issued on the eve of the Second World War, “a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind.”

Capitalism

The drive to war and towards a police state coincides with a dramatic increase in social inequality in the US and throughout the

world. According to a January report by the Oxfam charity, the richest 1 percent of people in the world now own 48 percent of global wealth, leaving just 52 percent to be shared among the other 99 percent of the world's population. The share of the richest 1 percent is expected to reach more than 50 percent next year.

The wealth of the world's 80 richest people equals the wealth of the poorest half of the world's population, or 3.5 billion people. These richest 80 individuals doubled their wealth between 2009 and 2014, while the wealth of the poorest half was lower in 2014 than it was in 2009.

In the US, the top one percent of the population has accumulated 95 percent of all income gains since 2009.

Democracy is incompatible with such levels of inequality. The interests of the super-rich dominate all of official life in United States, including both political parties and the media. The interests of the vast majority of the population are systematically excluded.

The history of the past fifteen years is not a string of random accidents. The correlation between war, the collapse of democracy, and expanding social inequality is not merely coincidental. Instead, these interrelated phenomena have their roots in objective conditions and can be traced to the divergent interests of different social classes and between imperialist rivals.

Militarism, warmongering and political and social reaction are the policies of the *capitalist class*, which seeks to secure and enrich itself through violence abroad and to suppress and divide opposition to its unpopular policies at home. The objective interests of the international *working class* are the opposite: the defense and expansion of democracy, peace, progress, the elimination of national borders and the socialist reorganization of society.

A permanent solution addresses the problem at the roots. The struggle against war, to defend democratic rights, and for social equality requires a struggle to replace *capitalism* with *socialism*, that is, to replace a society based on the profits and interests of a tiny few with a global society based on the needs and aspirations of all. This struggle, in turn, requires the mobilization and conscious participation of the working class internationally, as well as a leadership steeped in the traditions and experiences of the past century and a half of the workers' movement.

On May 3, the International Committee of the Fourth International, which represents the world movement founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, is holding an online May Day rally. Workers, students, young people and all those who are interested in this perspective should make plans to attend.

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