

Amid escalating militarism

Poll shows 76 percent of Americans fear a major war

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The widening chasm that separates the US ruling establishment—including its two major parties and the corporate-controlled media—from the masses of American working people is finding a particularly sharp expression over the threat of war.

An NBC poll released Tuesday found that fully 76 percent of the US population fears that the country will be dragged into a major war within the next four years. The data indicated that the share of Americans who are worried about the growing war danger has risen by 10 percent just since February.

These fears are well-founded. Since February, the American population has been subjected to an unrelenting campaign of anti-Russian hysteria centered on supposed collusion by the Trump camp with alleged Moscow interference in the US elections. The driving force for this political and media campaign is the determination within the military and intelligence apparatus to continue and intensify the US military confrontation with Russia, the world's second largest nuclear power. The Pentagon and CIA see Russia as an obstacle to US imperialism's attempt to assert its hegemony in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and around the world.

Simultaneously, the Pentagon has engaged in continuous provocations against China, including violations by US warships of Chinese-claimed territory in the South China Sea, encouragement of an Indian-Chinese border dispute, and support for military buildups in both Japan and Taiwan.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration has repeatedly threatened military action against North Korea, most recently in response to its test of a purported intercontinental ballistic missile.

The sharp increase since February of those fearing

the outbreak of a major war has no doubt been fueled by a further series of events, including the US cruise missile attack on Syria in April, the subsequent downing of a Syrian fighter jet by a US warplane and the unleashing against Afghanistan of the so-called MOAB bomb, the largest weapon employed by the US military since the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

While largely concealed from the American public by the craven corporate media, the United States is perpetually involved in war crimes across the planet. Within the last week, the scale of the slaughter of civilians in the US-led siege of Mosul—with at least 7,000 believed buried in the rubble—has begun to emerge.

In Afghanistan, the number of civilians killed in the first half of 2017 has reached a record high for the 16-year US war, with 1,662 slaughtered in just six months. The death toll among women rose 23 percent and among children 9 percent compared to the same period last year, as the number of US air strikes returned to the level that prevailed when Obama's "surge" sent over 100,000 US troops into the country.

At the same time, Washington has stepped up its support for the near-genocidal Saudi-led war of aggression against Yemen, where massive bombing has killed over 12,000 and destroyed basic infrastructure, creating the conditions for famine and a mass cholera epidemic.

The newly released poll has exposed two diametrically opposed processes unfolding within the US. On the one hand, the vast majority of the American population is growing increasingly fearful of and opposed to war. On the other, the US government and the ruling oligarchy it represents are ever more bent on

provoking a major military confrontation.

Just four days before the NBC poll was released, the US House of Representatives approved by an overwhelming bipartisan majority a Pentagon budget of nearly \$700 billion—more than the amount requested by the Trump White House—to fund the ongoing US wars and the preparation of new ones.

A recently released study prepared by the US Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute on "risk assessment in a post-primacy world" offers a glimpse into the thinking of those directing the escalating buildup to war. It cites two "adverse realities confronting the United States" and its military: "The first is the increasing vulnerability, erosion and, in some cases, the loss of an assumed US military advantage vis-à-vis many of its most consequential defense-relevant challenges. The second concerns the volatile and uncertain restructuring of international security affairs in ways that appear to be increasingly hostile to unchallenged US leadership."

The US military study defines Washington's strategic objectives during a period of "post-US primacy" to include securing US access to "strategic regions, markets and resources" and extending "US military advantage and options." In other words, the relative decline of US imperialism's worldwide dominance is to be countered by means of military force.

It admits that this strategy "will expose substantial US military capability to serial 'capacity tests' that are bound to either fail or result in substantial losses or costs." In other words, the wars being prepared will entail American casualties on a scale not seen since the end of the Second World War.

The document also implicitly acknowledges the need to counter the overwhelming popular hostility to war. "At the same time," it states, "the US homeland, individual American citizens, and US public opinion and perceptions will increasingly become battlefields."

Until now, this battle has been largely one-sided. The drive to war enjoys the overwhelming support of both the Democratic and Republican parties. The mass media has been reduced to a propaganda arm of the Pentagon and the CIA.

And a new constituency for imperialist war, a layer of nominally "left" political organizations and publications that in a previous period worked to

channel antiwar sentiment behind the Democratic Party, has played a politically vital role in this battle. Today, these elements not only are hostile to any form of protest against the crimes being carried out by the US military, they have become vocal advocates of US imperialist regime-change operations, from Libya to Syria, Ukraine and beyond.

These groups, such as the International Socialist Organization in the US, the New Anti-capitalist Party in France and the Left Party in Germany, are helping to pave the way for the far bloodier conflicts to come, turning to obsessive denunciations of Russia, China and Iran as "imperialist," even as they justify the crimes of US imperialism under the disreputable banner of "human rights" and support CIA destabilization operations in Syria and elsewhere as "revolutions."

Their politics are firmly rooted in the interests of affluent sections of the middle class, whose personal fortunes have risen along with stock and real estate prices, underwritten by the global eruption of American militarism.

The broad and deep-rooted popular hostility to war, in the US and around the world, can find no expression within the existing political setup. The Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting to give this sentiment a conscious and organized form through the building of a mass antiwar movement based on the working class and guided by an internationalist and socialist perspective.

Bill Van Auken

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