

A reply to French daily *Libération*

Is the WSWS exaggerating the threat of war?

By Alex Lantier
17 October 2018

On Monday, the French daily *Libération* published an article in its “CheckNews” section claiming that the *World Socialist Web Site* is exaggerating US preparations for “total war.” Replying to a question from a reader, journalist Pauline Moullot writes: “Indeed, many web sites have re-posted this article from the *World Socialist Web Site* titled ‘Pentagon report points to US preparations for total war.’ The article mixes up several correct reports in order to arrive at a misleading title.”

Libération admits that the WSWS correctly reports the military threats and incidents between US forces and their Russian and Chinese counterparts. It notes that Chinese warships nearly collided with US Navy vessels in the South China Sea, an event *Le Monde* called “dangerous.” It notes that US Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison threatened to “take out” Russian missiles in Europe and produced what the *Washington Post* called a “diplomatic incident.”

Nonetheless, *Libération* insists that the WSWS is overestimating the war danger and, in particular, the significance of the Pentagon report upon which it based its article.

It writes, “Does the Pentagon report actually foresee ‘total war’? In fact, the report cited in the article deals with the US defense industry.”

Since what is occurring is trade war between America and China, *Libération* concludes, the WSWS article is an exaggeration; everyone can go to sleep easy. “So it is true that the United States are particularly targeting China,” it writes, “but the report being cited deals with the US defense industry’s strategy and China’s weight in this industry. It backs up the US case for trade war against China, but it is not a warning sign of ‘total war.’”

In fact, the WSWS analysis of the war danger is correct. The primary concern of the Pentagon report is ensuring the capacity of the United States military to “surge” its activities under conditions in which the countries on

which it is economically dependent “may cut off US access.” To most people (but apparently not to the *Libération* editorial board) a “surge” in military activity is referred to as a war. To sustain such a “surge,” the report advocates radical changes in the American economy, the educational system, and government spending priorities.

That is, the report advocates changes to the totality of American society with the aim of fighting war. If *Libération* does not see this as preparation for “total war,” this is only a confirmation of the old adage that “you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink.”

The Pentagon report, titled “Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the United States,” calls for the United States to “retool” for “great power competition.” It cites last year’s US National Security Strategy, which denounces “revisionist powers” like China and Russia as the “central challenge” to the United States.

Preparing for military confrontation and conflict with other major nuclear-armed powers, the US National Security Strategy insists, requires “the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement and military.”

That is to say, the national security strategy of the United States must be to prepare the integration of all elements of American society into plans for total war.

This, as the WSWS article explains, is what the recent Pentagon report concretely proposes. It calls not only for economic policies to build “a vibrant domestic manufacturing sector, a solid defense industrial base, and resilient supply chains,” but broad changes to US research and academic facilities, including measures targeting Chinese students. It warns that with one quarter

of “STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics] graduates in the US being Chinese nationals ... American universities are major enablers of China’s economic and military rise.”

The adoption of total war plans in the United States has pushed other major powers, both allied to and targeted by Washington, to prepare similar measures. Last year, as Sweden reintroduced the draft, after Germany announced the re-militarization of its foreign policy, and as the final touches on the US National Security Strategy were being made, Moscow announced its own plans for the total mobilization of Russia’s economy for war.

Amid a wave of Russian military exercises aiming to counterbalance growing US and NATO troop deployments on Russia’s borders in Eastern Europe, President Vladimir Putin declared: “The ability of our economy to increase military production and services at a given time is one of the most important aspects of military security. To this end, all strategic and simply large-scale enterprise should be ready, regardless of ownership.”

What these events show is that escalating US-NATO neo-colonial wars over the last quarter century are reaching a new, dangerous stage. The conflicts between the major capitalist powers—which underlay US imperialism’s attempts to militarily dominate Eurasia starting in the 1990s via wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Syria, Ukraine and beyond—are erupting to the surface. A new global capitalist breakdown is being set in motion. As in 1914 or 1939, Washington, Moscow and the other major capitals are preparing for all-out war against each other.

Libération, it seems, would contest this analysis. Yet what was the analysis in 2015—as Washington threatened to arm Ukrainian militias fighting in Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine against Russia, and Russia threatened to retaliate militarily—of the man whose election as French president *Libération* hailed as a triumph?

As he jumped onto a plane taking him from Paris to Minsk, in a desperate attempt to negotiate what became the Minsk peace treaty on Ukraine, French President François Hollande said: “We have gone in the space of a few months from having differences, to conflict, to war ... We are in a state of war, and a war that could be total.”

Naturally, Hollande returned from Minsk and continued to stoke French imperialism’s neo-colonial wars in Syria and Mali, receiving *Libération*’s backing on this basis.

Libération’s criticisms of the WSWS for fighting to alert workers internationally to the war danger and

mobilize them in struggle against imperialist war are shot through with bad faith. Like the rest of the official media in France and beyond, it is aware that the WSWS is widely read and followed, including by its own readers. Like other pro-imperialist publications and organizations that emerged out of the post-1968 petty-bourgeois student movement, such as the Pabloite New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), it has up until now maintained a hostile silence on the WSWS.

The career of the author of *Libération*’s “fact-check” of the WSWS, Pauline Moullet, faithfully reflects the rightward evolution of the petty-bourgeois layers who influence the editorial line and outlook of *Libération*. The Maoist youth who founded the paper in 1973, under the protection of Jean-Paul Sartre, during the anti-Vietnam war movement, have come a long way. Moullet writes also for *Slate* and *World Policy Journal*, a publication linked to France’s imperialist foreign policy magazine *Politique internationale*.

This layer of what is called the “foreign policy community” has prospered over decades, as bloody wars have claimed millions of lives—providing commentary that justified and prettied up various acts of imperialist plunder. Their salaries, their stock portfolios and their broader social privileges became bound up with the profits derived from war and the marketing of war to the public. They have a financial interest in not telling the truth about the implications of plans for total war, despite rising concern among masses of people.

This is why *Libération* contests, in the face of all evidence, the fact that total war is being prepared, and willfully chooses not to connect the dots lying in plain sight in front of its nose.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>