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US imperialism, Ukraine and the danger of World War III

Barry Grey and David North

5 March 2014

Are we standing on the brink of a nuclear war? That is the question that everyone should be asking.

The US-backed coup in Ukraine has triggered the most dangerous international crisis since the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. American and European officials are denouncing Russia for sending troops into Crimea in response to the installation of an anti-Russian regime in Ukraine that has seized power through a coup d'état staged by fascist militia.

The Obama administration appears determined to escalate the confrontation with Moscow. Demanding a withdrawal of all Russian forces from Crimea and the Kremlin's total acceptance of the new US-NATO puppet regime in Kiev, the US is calling for sanctions aimed at the complete economic isolation of Russia.

On Tuesday, Secretary of State John Kerry threatened at a press conference in Kiev that the US is seeking to "isolate Russia politically, diplomatically and economically." His statements were echoed by bellicose threats from leading American politicians.

Senator John McCain delivered an anti-Russian rant from the well of the Senate in which he again expressed regret that the United States had not intervened in the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia. He accused Putin of engaging in “the old Russian, Soviet doublespeak” and called for a “quick path for Moldova and Georgia to move into NATO.”

The Obama administration feigns shock and horror over the Russian response to the Ukrainian coup. This is nothing but deceitful and cynical posturing. It knew full well that the imposition of an anti-Russian puppet regime in Kiev, controlled by the US and NATO, would be viewed by Putin and the Russian military as a massive change in the geo-strategic environment in Eastern Europe and an existential threat to Russia.

It is inconceivable that the White House, the Pentagon and the CIA did not foresee that Putin would respond to the coup in Kiev. Can anyone seriously believe that Washington did not expect that Russia, at the very minimum, would deploy military forces to secure control of Crimea—a part of Russia until 1954, the home of Russia’s Black Sea fleet and its sole access point into the Mediterranean? Or that Washington knew Russia would not simply turn the other cheek as the installation of an extreme rightwing government in Ukraine, in which xenophobic nationalists exert immense influence, transformed the country into the new forward base for NATO forces, armed with missiles, on the very border of Russia?

The real reasons for the current drive against Russia have nothing to do with the “national sovereignty” of Ukraine or the sanctity of international law. US-Russian tensions have grown more intense in recent years as American efforts to expand Washington’s control over the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Asia have met with limited resistance from Moscow.

In Syria, Russian support for the Assad regime forced the United States to carry out a temporary retreat last September and put on hold its plans for direct military intervention. The American ruling class cannot abide any interference with its imperialist operations. US imperialism’s plans for the restructuring of the entire world in its interests include the carving up of Russia into smaller and more easily digestible pieces.

US foreign policy concerns not only external aims, but also internal pressures. The social and political structure of the country is so fragile and so loaded with explosive contradictions that the ruling class requires endless military interventions and wars to distract and disorient the American people.

More than five years into a massive economic crisis, the US ruling elite is well aware of widespread restlessness and discontent within the country. There is growing popular recognition of and anger over the staggering level of social inequality. The unending series of wars are aimed at providing an external release of internal social pressures.

Has the toxic interaction of unrestrained imperialist ambitions and fear of domestic unrest produced a situation where the US ruling elite is prepared to risk nuclear war? The actions of the United States government provide the answer.

But whatever the immediate intentions of the Obama administration, the dynamic of imperialism has a logic of its own. The US has provoked a situation in Ukraine in which any one of countless actions on the ground could, whether intentionally or not, trigger a chain of events that spiral out of control.

Even if this particular crisis is resolved, it will not take long before another one emerges. Sooner or later, one of these crises will trigger a nuclear catastrophe.

The voice of the workers, youth, and all those opposed to war must be heard! The history of the twentieth century, whose lessons are so profoundly relevant to the conditions that exist in the twenty-first, proves that war can only be stopped through the unified action of the international working class, based on a program of international socialism.