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War clouds loom over UN General Assembly

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The United Nations was established in 1945 with proclamations that it would guarantee an era of peace, by serving to regulate and contain the conflicts between the major powers that had resulted in two devastating world wars in the space of a single generation.

Seventy years on, as the UN General Assembly meets this week, it is abundantly clear that the course of events is not proceeding according to the pronouncements that accompanied the organisation's founding. Rather, they are confirming the analysis of Vladimir Lenin, who insisted in the midst of World War I that it was inherently impossible under capitalism to end war. The contradictions between the major powers meant that any peace between them was but a temporary interlude and preparation for a new war.

Dominating the proceedings at this year's annual General Assembly are a series of international geo-political flashpoints, any one of which could set off a military conflict between major powers leading rapidly to a new world war, likely involving the use of nuclear weapons.

There is the ongoing and intensifying conflict between the United States and China, as American imperialism seeks to assert geo-political and military domination over East Asia under the banner of its "pivot to Asia." The US and its allies have stepped up pressure against China over its land reclamation activities in the South China Sea under the fraudulent slogan of "freedom of

navigation.” Behind this benign-sounding phrase, the US pursues military operations off the Chinese coast and refines its Air/Sea Battle Plan for massive attacks on the Chinese mainland.

Just last week, US President Obama and Chinese President Xi held a tension-filled meeting at the White House at which the American commander in chief repeated Washington’s demand that China back off from its long-standing claims to islands in the South China Sea. His Chinese counterpart balked at making any such commitment. Both leaders will address the General Assembly.

Also present will be leaders of Japan, which is rapidly moving to remilitarise and reassert its great power ambitions in East Asia and beyond, and the Philippines, which is serving as Washington’s cat’s paw against China in the South China Sea.

On the other side of the Eurasian landmass, NATO, under the leadership of the United States, is building up its forces against Russia. The forthcoming US-NATO Trident Juncture 2015, set to be the largest NATO exercises in the region since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, will prepare Western forces for war operations in the Baltic region and beyond.

For the first time since the liquidation of the USSR, the US is reported to be “reviewing and updating its contingency plans for armed conflict with Russia.”

Starting with the Gulf War in 1990–91, when it seized upon the liquidation of the Soviet Union to attack Iraq and attempted to exert its military domination over the Middle East, American imperialism has been engaged in continuous warfare in the region. Through all the twists and turns of American policy, the various military campaigns and the debacles they have produced, there has been an inherent logic at work—the prospect of a major military conflict involving Russia and possibly other great powers.

As the UN General Assembly got underway, this prospect loomed larger with France’s announcement that it had commenced bombing in Syria, potentially directed against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as well as ISIS. France’s escalation comes in the midst of Russia’s reinforcement of its military support for Assad.

Last week, the Obama administration said that in view of reports of expanded Russian military aid to the Syrian regime, it would hold talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the UN assembly to “test” Russia’s intentions in the region. The talks are to take place the same day Putin addresses the General Assembly and advances his plan for a political settlement of the devastating four-year civil war stoked by Washington.

Behind the discussion, there is a real and growing danger of military conflict, given that the aim of the US is to oust the Syrian regime, whereas Russia considers its maintenance, with or without Assad, to be vital for its own security interests in the region and beyond.

While the US is the instigator of the drive against both Russia and China, there is nothing progressive in the response of the Russian and Chinese regimes. Both are the instruments of financial oligarchs and organically incapable of making an appeal to the masses, either in their

own countries or internationally. They seek to whip up nationalism at home while vacillating between conciliation and military sabre-rattling to counter US provocations, thereby playing into the hands of the imperialist war-mongers.

More than a quarter century of direct US military intervention in the Middle East—from the first Gulf War to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the regime-change operation against Colonel Gaddafi in Libya in 2011—has created the greatest refugee crisis since the Second World War. The flood of refugees now pouring into Europe, as a result of the devastation inflicted upon their societies by the US, has exacerbated the centrifugal forces in the European Union, leading to threats and denunciations among member states and triggering the resurrection of borders across the continent, reinforced by barbed wire, troops and tanks.

The deepening geo-political tensions are being fuelled by the ongoing economic breakdown of the world capitalist economy. Seven years after the eruption of the global financial crisis, there is no recovery in sight. On the contrary, the economic outlook is dominated by growing indications of a new financial crisis set off by the consequences of rampant parasitism, in which profits are accumulated by means of speculation rather than productive activity. Far from there being any return to “normal” conditions, deflation, stagnation and outright depression hover over the world economy.

The central banks, with the US Federal Reserve in the lead role, are in a state of disarray, with no coherent policy to guide their actions, as evidenced by the fears of the Fed that even a rise of just 0.25 percent in its base interest rate risks setting off a new financial meltdown.

Around the world, governments are seeking to devalue their own currencies in order to be better placed in the struggle for global markets, recalling the currency and trade wars of the 1930s that led to the eruption of military conflict in 1939.

The United Nations was never an organisation for the establishment of world peace. It was set up under the leadership of the United States, the dominant imperialist power, as part of its drive to secure its hegemony over the post-war order. That dominance was based on the unrivalled industrial strength of the American economy. That has long since eroded, leading the American ruling class to increasingly rely on its military supremacy to topple insufficiently pliant governments and increase its economic and geo-political leverage against its rivals, including its nominal allies in Europe and Japan.

Germany insists that it can no longer operate simply as a European power, but must advance its interests globally. In Japan, the Abe government has taken major steps towards completely overturning the restrictions imposed on its military activities as it too asserts a global role.

The UN is not an instrument for peace but a “thieves’ kitchen,” as Lenin characterised its predecessor, the League of Nations. It is a body through which the contending powers seek to assert their conflicting interests by means of intrigues and conspiracies. Lenin insisted that the only means of ending war was the overthrow of the profit system that produced it, a conclusion that is once again being verified by global events.

