

The imperialist war drive against Iran, its people and its government

By Roger Annis, [published in A Socialist In Canada, Feb 4, 2020](#)

On January 3, 2020, the Trump-led U.S. government carried out the assassinations of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi military commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. Both men had played key leading roles for years in the war against the right-wing paramilitaries of ISIS.[1]

The assassinations were the latest act of aggression by the U.S. against the Iranian people and government. Washington escalated harsh economic sanctions against Iran beginning in May 2018 after it pulled out of the 2015 international agreement by which Iran could proceed with development of a nuclear energy industry without suffering Western sanctions. (See 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), 2015', in [Wikipedia](#)).

Iran had every reason to believe that further U.S. aggression was imminent in the days following the assassinations. In this context, a ground-to-air missile defense unit of the Iranian military mistakenly and tragically shot down a Ukrainian International Airlines flight on January 8, killing all 176 people on board.

This article examines the 'regime-change' war drive being waged by Washington with the support of its imperialist allies in Europe, Canada and Australasia. And it analyzes the disturbing trend among some liberals and leftists in the West who continue to voice calls for the violent overthrow of the Iranian government. This trend, in turn, reveals a great deal about the difficult and flawed legacy of left wing thought and theory, including Marxism, bequeathed to us today from experiences of the 20th century.

How anti-government protests in Iran are reported and distorted

A recent issue of *Green Left Weekly* in Australia dated January 17, 2020 contains two items reporting on the relatively small, anti-government protests by students that took place in Tehran and a few other cities in the weeks following the assassination of General Soleimani.

One item is a [news article](#) reprinted from *The Morning Star*, the daily newspaper of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The article reports favorably on the students protests: "In a defiant moment, [protesters] pressed demands for regime change and the overthrow of the Iranian theocracy. 'From Iran to Baghdad: poverty, cruelty and tyranny. From Tehran to Baghdad: we want revolution.' They chanted, 'Whether November or January, the message is 'revolution'. Whether November or January, we will fight on the streets.' "

The second item in *Green Left Weekly* is a [statement that was issued](#) by student protesters at Amirkabir University of Technology in Tehran on January 12. It reads, "The only way to reject and escape the current situation is to equally reject both despotism [of the Iranian government] and imperialism [as led by the United States]."

The statement says that the economic and political situation in Iran is dire. Indeed, the United States and its imperialist allies have waged a crushing economic embargo for decades against the people of Iran and this only deepened after the U.S. abrogation of the JCPO in May 2018. A [recent article in *The Nation*](#) provides valuable insight into the harsh consequences of the embargo for working class Iranians. Yet the student statement says *not a word* about the embargo being waged. Instead, the statement faults the Iranian government exclusively for the economic difficulties. "Today, we are surrounded by 'evil' from every quarter," it says. And, "While the government's economic policies and political suppression have brought the people to the end of their tether, the shadow of war has also appeared above our heads."

The statement argues, "The only way to escape the current crisis is to return to a policy based on people's democratic rights..." But this begs the question of what would the people do with expanded democratic rights (or the fight for same)? Would they use these rights to redouble a fight against the imperialist countries that are imposing embargos and otherwise threatening the country and people? Or is a less aggressive stance by the government called for, including abandoning the development of nuclear energy in order to appease hostile imperialist powers?

The statement continues, "During the past few years, America's presence in the Middle East has produced nothing but increasing insecurity and chaos. Our approach towards that aggressive power is quite clear." Actually, the approach is not at all clear.

Firstly, as already noted, the statement is silent about the embargo being waged by the U.S. and its allies. Secondly, it warns of a 'shadow of war' hanging over Iran, but who is responsible for that shadow? The statement condemns in equal terms the aggressor (the U.S.) and its target (the government).

Reports by corporate media in the West give outsized prominence to the student protests. The reports do not explain that relatively small numbers of people are involved, perhaps one thousand protesters in some cases. Photos and video which are often part of the reporting provide the evidence. Meanwhile, the *millions upon millions* of Iranians who repeatedly came into the streets to condemn U.S. aggression get short shrift.

Successive Iranian governments have waged an effective fight to defend the national sovereignty of Iran and its people, ever since the 1979 revolution that overthrew the tyrannical regime of 'Shah' Mohammad Reza Pahlavi ([Wikipedia](#)). The student statement, on the other hand, says nothing about fighting imperialism, apart from a few rhetorical phrases.

Perhaps the harshest criticism of the student statement is its *silence* about the heinous and cowardly assassination of General Soleimani on January 3, even though it is difficult to imagine a more brazen violation of the sovereignty of the Iranian people. The statement is also *silent* about the central responsibility for the U.S. in fomenting the hyper-tense conditions in which the Ukrainian International Airlines plane was shot down.

Outpouring of left-wing condemnations against the Iranian government

Anti-Iranian government views and reporting such as the above are, unfortunately, all-too common among progressive outlets in the West.

Several weeks ago, the 'Socialist Project' in Toronto, a left-wing, academic think tank, published two statements, three days apart, that were authored by Iranian exiles and which dismissed the righteous indignation of the Iranian people following the assassination of General Soleimani. The statements can be read [here](#) (Jan 7, 2020) and [here](#) (Jan 5, 2020).

The statement published on January 7 says, "The U.S. military's assassination of Qassem Soleimani, one of the top military commanders of the Islamic Republic of Iran's expansionist regional policies and its proxy wars in the Middle East, can lead to retaliation by the Islamic regime. Such retaliation, the threat of further U.S. retaliation and a chain reaction could further destabilize the region and endanger the lives of thousands of Iraqis, Iranians and other ordinary people in the Middle East." Thusly is the assassination of General Soleimani—an outright act of war—downplayed. The Iranian government is accused of committing equally heinous acts.

The statement is full of violent rhetoric and scaremongering, calling for 'class war' internationally. It says not a word about the decades of violence and regime-change sabotage directed by Washington and its allies against the people of Iran.

The [January 5 statement](#) is authored by a group called 'The Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists'. They write, "The joy expressed by some at the death of the criminal reactionary Qassem Soleimani is understandable." They conclude with what has become a rote and meaningless phrase in the writings of 'regime-change socialists': "We oppose all global and regional imperialists and authoritarians."

The same group is cited favorably by U.S. writer Dan La Botz in a commentary [published on January 11, 2020](#) in *International Viewpoint*, the magazine and online publication of 'Fourth International' Trotskyist groups in Europe and in some countries farther afield. His article quotes extensively from the aforementioned statement by the Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists, including this revealing sentence: "We oppose U.S. imperialism but also support the democratic forces in Iran, knowing that in the short run, Trump's attack on their [Iranian] government will make their tasks more difficult, but that in the long run *the [sic] war could undermine the Iran government's credibility and support* [emphasis added]." Yes, you read that correctly: a war by the U.S. against Iran would be positive because it "could undermine the Iran government's credibility and support".

La Botz, writing in the name of 'international socialists, throws into his commentary: "We oppose Russia's authoritarian ruler Vladimir Putin and his aid to Syrian dictator Bashir al-Assad."

Typically, the people advocating the overthrow of the Iranian government also argue for the overthrow of Syria's government. Groups and prominent individuals of Trotskyist origin are particularly outspoken (see [here](#) and [here](#)). For years, they have supported an undefined 'revolution' against the Syrian government led by Bashar Al-Assad. Their 'revolution' has consisted of violent, regime-change war being waged by right-wing paramilitaries with support from NATO powers U.S. and Turkey and from Saudi Arabia and other pro-imperialist regimes in the Middle East. In such a context, any withdrawal from Syria by Russian military forces or by forces from Iran and Lebanon assisting the Syrian military would be a disaster for the Syrian

people, opening their country to the kind of violence and mayhem which engulfed Libya following the overthrow and murder of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

As the Russian government has argued, withdrawal of foreign forces from Syria should, indeed, be a key objective. But this must go hand-in-hand with *an accompanying political settlement among Syrians* that guarantees peace for the country and which the countries waging the regime-change war must respect accept.

'We defend Iran, but...'

Even seemingly 'balanced' writing on Iran nonetheless succumb to the pressures to condemn the Iranian government and blame it for the escalation of tensions with the U.S.

The Trotskyist online publication *Left Voice* provided a typical example in a [January 5 statement](#). The statement says, "Workers, socialists, young people, and all the exploited and oppressed around the world, but especially in the United States, must come together to unequivocally condemn the U.S.'s imperialist aggression against Iran and demand a full withdrawal of all U.S. forces from the region." But this is immediately followed by this qualifier: "Such condemnations, however, must not include or imply any political support for the reactionary Iranian regime..."

Jeff Mackler, writing on behalf of the Socialist Action group in the U.S., penned a commentary in the online journal [CounterPunch on January 24](#). It sounds all the right notes for an anti-imperialist analysis... excepting two. The commentary says nothing of the obligation for antiwar forces to campaign against economic sanctions against Iran. And it dismisses the obligation to defend the Iranian *government* against U.S.-led intervention. "Our unconditional support to self-determination for Iran, Syria, Iraq and all other poor and oppressed nations is not at all synonymous with our political support to the governments or regimes of these oppressed nations. We have no illusions that any capitalist government on Earth can be the vehicle to achieve an egalitarian society..."

It's a mystery how antiwar forces could 'support' the people of Iran without opposing the violent overthrow of the country's government by imperialism.

In its only statement on the recent events in Iran, the Socialist Alternative group in Australia voices a similar, reckless prescription for the Middle East in a [January 7 commentary](#) published in its online *Red Flag*, saying that "All foreign troops should be withdrawn from the [Middle East] region immediately..." It goes on in a flourish to argue, "the entire ruling class – be they monarchs or presidents, secular or religious, Sunni or Shia, pro or anti-Western – are scoundrels." This is hardly a guide for defending the Iranian people. Worse, it's a recipe for indifference to the bloodbath that would accompany any violent overthrow by imperialism of the 'scoundrels' in Iran.

Iran and alternative media in the West

Meanwhile, two important alternative media outlets in the U.S. have for some years given themselves over to anti-Iran propaganda—*Democracy Now!* and *CounterPunch*. It's true that each one publishes the occasional informed report on Iran. But these are the exceptions.

Professor Ali Kadivar of Boston College was [interviewed](#) by *Democracy Now!* host Amy Goodman on January 13. He says the shooting down of the airline over Tehran on January 8 was "beyond human error. This is a symptom of system failure." By this, he means the governmental system of *Iran*, not that of the U.S. aggressor. He says that Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei "has been responsible" for the airline tragedy.

Discussing the recent social protests in Iran in late 2019, Kadivar charged that "hundreds of people, perhaps even more than 1,000" were killed by government forces. But those figures were dismissed by Professor Mohammad Marandi from the University of Tehran in an [interview broadcast](#), on January 8, coincidentally, on *Democracy Now!*. Here is an excerpt from that interview:

Amy Goodman: Let me ask you just on that issue of the protesters killed, the U.S.'s special representative for Iran, Brian Hook, said more than a thousand Iranian citizens may have been killed in that uprising, what you called the riots. Do you think that's possible, Professor Marandi?

Mohammad Marandi: No, that's completely nonsense. Those are numbers made up by the United States, they are fabrications. We don't take seriously anything that the Americans, the American government says. Just like the American government claimed that General Suleimani went to Iraq to carry out attacks on Americans... If this general was not popular, if the Islamic Republic of Iran did not have a high degree of legitimacy, again, I repeat, you would not have seen such crowds (millions of Iranians who came into the streets to commemorate General Suleimani). Iran is an educated society. So, you cannot — one cannot say that they're stupid, that they're backward, that they're fools. No, I think it shows that the narratives on Iran, whether it's about riots, whether it's about oppression, those narratives in the West are not completely accurate. [End excerpt]

Kadivar told *Democracy Now!*, "In the last 40 years, the Islamic republic has not held one fair and free election that allows the Iranian opposition to have their own candidates." Leaving aside the dubiousness of that claim, whose 'free and fair' elections is he comparing to Iran's elections? The ones that gave the world a President Donald Trump, a Prime Minister Boris Johnson, or a military-fascist president in Egypt?

Kadivar went on to defend the UK ambassador to Iran who was detained by police for one hour on January 11 after attending an anti-government rally in Tehran called in the name of protesting the shooting down of the airline three days earlier. Kadivar offered, "The ambassador said he was there for a vigil. Iranian officials, again, used this as evidence that foreigners perhaps are behind protest. But this is also an old propaganda."

A [January 25 article in Truthout.org](#) claims that "1,500" protesters have been killed. The article's source? The Western news agency *Reuters*.

The article makes the novel argument that the heightened cycle of U.S. aggression against Iran was the fault of the Iranian government after an "Iranian-backed" militia group killed a "U.S. military contractor" (code word for 'mercenary') in Iraq on December 27. (The article also makes the novel argument that Iran is a "regional imperialist" country.)

CounterPunch relies on UK journalist Patrick Cockburn for much of its news and analysis of Iran, routinely reprinting his columns from the UK online daily *The Independent*.

Cockburn's style is to voice misgivings, if not occasional opposition, to U.S. policy against Iran while simultaneously accusing Iran of sharing blame for the escalating conflict. A column by Cockburn [appearing in *CounterPunch* on January 21](#) opens with the news of the sermon delivered by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to an audience of thousands in Tehran on January 17. Cockburn writes, "Khomeini spoke of the 'cowardly' killing of General Qassem Soleimani by the U.S., of President Trump using the destruction of the plane to 'push a poison dagger' into the backs of the Iranian people." Cockburn calls these accusations "rhetorical flourishes" (inserting single quotation marks to underline the point). His column is peppered with his typical dismissals of Iran's grievances against U.S. policy, saying that Iran is as much responsible as the U.S. for the deterioration in relations between the two countries.

He then makes the naïve argument that "Neither side wants a war." That is certainly true of the Iranian side, but what are punishing sanctions, the assassination of General Soleimani and the goading of Iran into mistakenly shooting down a passenger aircraft by the United States, if not actions intended to provoke war?

The same 'U.S. doesn't seek war against Iran' assertion is made in a [January 20 article](#) in *CounterPunch* by Iranian-American writer Reza Fiyouzat. She writes, "Be assured that nobody is going to start a war on Iran. The assassination of Soleimani was akin to a top dog marking his turf. And the other side understood this..."

Having dismissed the gravity of the assassination (in disparaging language, no less), the writer constructs a conspiracy theory to explain it: maybe the Syrians and Russians did it! Citing as her source the Zionist and anti-Iran *Jerusalem Post*, she writes, "Here is another angle to the Soleimani assassination. Some reports indicate the intelligence for the whereabouts of Soleimani came from Syrian security officials (see: <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Syrian-official-gave-U.S.-intel-on-Soleimani-whereabouts-report-614143>). It seems that having used Iranian foot soldiers (and their associated militias) to defeat the revolution [sic] that was snuffed out by an international alliance of counterrevolutionary forces, Syrian regime leaders and their Russian backers have been keen on pushing out the Iranians from Syria. And to have the chief strategist of those forces out of the way is a logical step in that effort."

The writer then dismisses the colossal achievement of the 1979 revolution that overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty. "...I grew up under [the] Shah's dictatorship, and like millions of people my age, and along with my high school classmates, I participated in the overthrow of that dictatorship. However, this theocratic dictatorship is *far more* [emphasis added] violent and totalitarian than anything the Shah had to unleash on us."

Why does the U.S. target Iran so harshly?

An important political issue is presented in [an article by Chris Nineham](#) published on January 13 on the website of the 'Stop The War' coalition in Britain (re-published on the website of the left-wing group Counterfire). For many years, Stop The War has played an important role in opposing the efforts of the British ruling class to join the U.S. more fully in overthrowing the

Syrian government. Concerning Iran, the broad-based coalition (once headed by Jeremy Corbyn and still benefitting from his participation) issued an unqualified condemnation of U.S. aggression in a [statement on January 4, 2020](#). "There can be no doubting that these U.S. actions – extrajudicial assassination on foreign soil – amount to an act of war. It is a violation of Iraq's sovereignty, which has been widely condemned in the country, and an act of aggression against Iran that has significantly raised the chances of major conflict across the region."

Nineham's article attempts to analyze why the Trump-led U.S. is on the warpath (with its allies along for the ride). It's an important line of inquiry because Trump's erratic statements and actions since his election in 2016 have confounded many analysts and even left-wing thinkers. The article headline reads, 'The Price of unpredictability: Trump, Iran and U.S. decline'. The article begins, "U.S. foreign policy has become so erratic that some Trump loyalists are quoting favourably from Stanley Kubrick's surreal anti-war satire 'Dr Strangelove'. Apparently, Trump's impulsive behaviour makes war less likely because in Dr Strangelove's words 'Deterrence is the art of producing in the mind of the enemy...the fear of aggression'." Nineham cites favorably former U.S. diplomat William Burns saying "Trump's pattern of non-reaction followed by extreme overreaction has destroyed regional trust in him."

Nineham writes further, "Despite Trump's desire to draw down troop presence where he can [in the Middle East], the logic of a threatened empire pushes him in the opposite direction. If soft power is challenged, the temptation to use firepower grows. So, for all the talk of disengagement there are 14,000 more U.S. troops in the Middle East than ten months ago, and Trump has just ordered the deployment of 3,500 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to Kuwait."

The claims that the Trump regime's actions in the Middle East are unpredictable and that he wants a drawdown of U.S. military presence are a serious misread. At the time of the 2016 election, Trump cast around phrases supposedly doubting the value of U.S.-led foreign wars and favouring a U.S. drawdown from the NATO military alliance. He mused that he wants improved relations with Russia and its president, Vladimir Putin. He spoke of lessening the danger of nuclear weapons in the world. It was all lies and deception, soon belied by the Trump regime's actual record in office. But much of liberal and left-wing opinion in the West and elsewhere in the world have fallen for the ruses. The result has been a weakening of antiwar forces.

Also weakening antiwar forces has been the acceptance by many liberals and leftists of 'Russiagate' conspiracy. Thanks to an intense private and state media campaign, Russiagate has become embedded in public opinion in the West even though the inquiry by U.S. police and spy agencies, conducted by former FBI director Robert Mueller, concluded that 'Russian interference' played *no role* in the outcome of the 2016 election. (The inquiry did keep the Russiagate embers burning by claiming there were *attempts* by the Russia government and state agencies to interfere in the election, but they were not successful). To this day, Western media continue to slip into their reporting Russiagate lies as fact. One consequence of the widespread public acceptance of the conspiracy theory has been improved public perceptions of the repressive forces of the imperialist states. They are portrayed by corporate media as heroically fending off a 'Russian threat' (and more recently, Chinese 'threats') to their countries' supposedly democratic political institutions.

Yes, there is an *appearance* of erratic behaviour emanating from the Trump White House. Nineham notes correctly in his article, "Being unpredictable may have marginal benefits to an imperial power, but Trump's behaviour is both a product of the U.S.'s relative decline and is likely to accelerate it. As U.S. soft power wanes, the worry is it makes unilateral, aggressive acts more likely." But he confuses matters in writing that "Trump's policy combines *attempting to disengage* [emphasis added] and encouraging proxies to step up, on the one hand, with a tendency for sudden unexpected and often provocative acts on the other." I've already cited earlier Nineham's claim that Trump wishes "to draw down troop presence where he can".

There is nothing to the claims of desired 'disengagement' or 'withdrawal' by the Trump regime from the Middle East. The *opposite* is actually taking place, as the U.S. refusal to heed the vote of the Iraqi legislature on January 5 for a U.S. troop withdrawal shows so clearly. Washington's unbending support to the apartheid state of Israel further underlines this point.

Rather, as Nineham correctly notes, the seeming disarray and contradictions in the Trump regime's pronouncements reflect the relative decline of U.S. power in the Middle East as it casts around to stem the decline.

Nineham also misreads the reactions of the U.S.' allies in response to the arrival of the Trump regime. He writes, "In Europe, too, there is an increasing inclination to strategise independently of the U.S." But European countries are dutifully following the U.S. lead in further tightening of sanctions against Iran. Together with Canada, they are cynically using the January 8 airline tragedy against Iran, aiming to take full control of an official investigation while absolving the U.S. of all responsibility for the disaster.

In reality, there is nothing to signal any significant political break from the Trump regime and its policies by governing parties in Europe. (That's also true of the Democratic Party apparatus in the U.S.)[2]

What explains U.S. decline?

What explains the relative U.S. decline? Several large factors are at work.

One is the economic stagnation of the economies of the imperialist countries. Obscene disparities in personal wealth are increasing while economic 'growth' is only possible thanks to the shaky mechanisms of globalized and financialized capitalism.

Two is moral/political decline. Growing numbers of the world's population are realizing that the leaders of imperialist countries are pathological liars by vocation and that nothing good ever comes from military, economic and political intervention by the Western imperialist countries. That includes the UN Security Council, in which three of the top imperialist countries each hold veto power.

Three is the global re-alignment of economic, political and military forces that sees two rising state capitalist powers—Russia and China. Three is the global re-alignment of economic, political and military forces that sees two rising state capitalist powers—Russia and China (hybrid states comprised of planned economy and capitalist market production)—increasingly able and willing to challenge imperialist *diktats*.

This realignment has been taking place during the past 20 years or so. It coincides, roughly, with the first presidency of Vladimir Putin in Russia, beginning in 2000. It accelerated greatly following the extreme-right coup d'etat in Ukraine in February 2014. The 'Maidan' coup was backed to the hilt by the NATO powers. The Russian government, on the other hand, condemned it. The government decided to defend the people of Crimea and then eastern Ukraine (Donbass region) after they rose up in rebellion against the coup.[3] Russia's actions became the lightning rod of imperialism's new cold war against Russia (and increasingly against China).

Russia's decision in 2015 to agree to the Syrian government's request for military support further accelerated NATO's new cold war aggression. The new cold war has seen the U.S. further escalate the new nuclear arms race which began in the years of the Obama (Democratic Party) presidency.

Failed legacy of 20th century Marxism and other radical thought

Chris Nineham's article does not address Russia's role in the Middle East and there is a reason for that. Russia is a 'taboo' subject which the political left in the West has shown great reluctance to broach because doing so would raise uncomfortable questions about the left's 'received wisdom' and failed record on the subject, namely, the inattention and false analyses that have prevailed in the Western left for many decades as concerns Russia (and the Soviet Union before it).

Analysis of modern-day China fares scarcely any better. There, too, a skewed and failed legacy from 20th century Marxism continues to hobble Marxism and other forms of anti-imperialist analysis in the 21st century.

The first, large issue to examine in probing Russia's (and China's) role in the present world is the exact character of their social formations. 'Is Russia (or China) imperialist'? The evidence is overwhelmingly 'no'. [4]

This, in turn, helps to recognize and appreciate the political space that has opened up for peoples and countries fighting for liberation as these two, rising state-capitalist powers refuse to bow down and accept imperial *diktats*. This is previously unknown in modern history. In the past two decades, this new world political situation has created space for the economic survival of countries and peoples rebelling against imperialism and regime-change wars. Thanks to military and/or political support from Russia and China combined with economic ties, countries including Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Syria, and Crimea (a Russian people) have a much greater chance of surviving and developing. A recent essay on China by the newly founded Qiao Collective of Chinese leftists living in the diaspora [makes this point convincingly](#).

A vital acquisition dating all the way back to the Russian Revolution of 1917 is the right of nations to self-determination. This right became formally enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 ([Wikipedia](#)).

Following the 1917 revolution, Russia, soon to become a constituent of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (founded in 1922), implemented a vast program of national self-determination to the benefit of the scores of oppressed nations and peoples held prisoner by the ruthless and autocratic empire of the Russian Tsars.[5] Today, this historic experience teaches that the first and foremost responsibility for left-wing and antiwar activists with respect to Iran is

the obligation to defend the national sovereignty of the Iranian people without condition. That means building the broadest political and social alliances internationally as well as in Iran itself to defend the people and opposing any measures by imperialism to overthrow the Iranian government.

For those outside Iran, the two key tasks are opposing military threats or intervention by imperialism and *opposing any and all economic sanctions*. One left-wing political organization in the U.S. that stands out on these two tasks is the Democratic Socialists of America. (See its January 3, 2020 statement [here](#) and a June 2019 statement [here](#) headlined 'No to U.S. War with Iran! End the Sanctions Now! Solidarity with Iranian Workers!')

If much of the Western left has failed in these two elementary tasks, it's because left-wing thought and political strategizing has been deeply compromised by *ultraleft distortions* whose origins date all the way back to false interpretations of the 1917 Russian Revolution and its degeneration into authoritarian rule during the mid-to-late 1920s, following the death of V.I. Lenin in 1924. The decline and degeneration of the Soviet Union was fundamentally due to the havoc and destruction caused by the military interventions and economic embargo by world imperialism.[6] These greatly weakened the material as well as cultural foundations needed to build a new society in transition to socialism. The ultraleft distortions which arose in the 1920s and 1930s took on a life of their own in the decades following, mutating into today's new forms of 'right-wing socialism', one of whose political expressions is advocacy of the overthrow of the Iranian government.

Today's world faces three grave threats which threaten its future: rising imperialist war and militarism, global warming caused by expansionist capitalism, and rising social inequities. For Marxists and other social and antiwar voices, an entire rethinking of political strategy is needed which synthesizes the fight against all three threats into a comprehensive whole. A second part of this essay will explore this theoretical and practical challenge.

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Notes:

[1] For a description of the role which the two military leaders played in the war against ISIS, see the interview by Aaron Maté with former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter [broadcast on The Grayzone on January 12](#).

[2] I leave aside the 'normal' disagreements that arise amongst imperialist thieves from time to time; for example, the decision by countries such as Canada, France and Germany to play only secondary roles during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 or different approaches concerning economic restrictions against Cuba.

[3] The Crimean people voted on March 16, 2014 to secede from the new, right-wing Ukraine and affiliate to the Russian Federation. Theirs was the only part of Ukraine with its own representative political institution, that being the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The autonomous republic was an important vestige of the Russian Revolution of 1917. It moved quickly to condemn the coup and then organize the referendum to allow the Crimean people to have a voice. Crimea is today the fastest growing region economically in Russia. Tragically, there was a critical delay of three months or so in Donbass in reacting to the Maidan coup. That's

because there were no political parties or institutions comparable to those in Crimea that could take quick initiatives to defend the population. By the time the people of Donbass began to organize military self-defense, right-wing paramilitaries from Ukraine had occupied half the territory of Donbass. Today, the people of Donbass continue to suffer military attacks by right-wing and neo-Nazi paramilitary forces from Ukraine who are trained and armed by NATO.

[4] See my co-authored analysis published in February 2016: [The myth of 'Russian imperialism': In defense of Lenin's analyses](#). See also the 2014 essay analyzing China by Australian researcher Sam King: [Lenin's theory of imperialism: A defence of its relevance in the 21st century](#).

[5] The experiences and lessons of the Bolshevik Party-led Russian government founded in November 1917 and the Communist International founded in 1919 are documented in the book series edited by Canadian Marxist John Riddell. One of the published books in that series ([series listed here](#)) speaks directly to the right of nations to self-determination: *To See the Dawn! First Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku, 1920*, Pathfinder Press, 1993, 368 pages.

[6] An important chapter in the story of the degeneration of the early Soviet Union is told in a recent essay by researcher John Marot: 'The New Economic Policy was the alternative to Stalinism'. The essay was [published in Jacobin Magazine, Dec 8, 2019](#). My own writings ([here in February 2016](#) and [here in August 2018](#)) have explored the ultraleft origins and degeneration of the left-wing current known as Trotskyism. I place much emphasis on how the lessons of the New Economic Policy of the early Soviet Union (from 1921 to its forced ending in 1928) have been neglected and forgotten by Trotskyist doctrine. As well, I cite the resurrection in 1929 by the nascent Trotskyist movement of the flawed and ultraleft 'theory of permanent revolution', first introduced by Leon Trotsky in 1905-06, as the main reason for the decline of Trotskyism and its degeneration in recent decades into new forms of right-wing socialism.