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A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings (Part 2)

Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives
for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries

by Michael Pröbsting

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World Perspectives 2018 (Part 2): A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries

By Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT)

IV. ACCELERATING RIVALRY BETWEEN THE IMPERIALIST GREAT POWERS

46. We have elaborated in previous works with much factual evidence that the past decade has been characterized by the decline of the U.S. as the absolute hegemonic imperialist Global Powers and the emergence of Russia and China as global rivals. We have explained that in the context of a historic revolutionary period opening in 2008 in which the productive forces are in decline, the rivalry between the imperialist monopolies and the Great Powers inevitable accelerates and provokes a crisis of the global political order.

47. We have predicted in our last World Perspective document that this tendency, with Trump becoming US President, will intensify. *“Trump’s victory also represents a watershed in the rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers. As we have stated in our pamphlet on the outcome of the US presidential election, the rise of this politician with a protectionist and unilateralist platform calling for an end of “unlimited humanitarian interventions around the globe” – in contrast to Hillary Clinton who stood for a continuation of Obama’s foreign policy – was an implicit recognition of the US’s inability to continue its role as the “world’s policeman.” At the same time, Trumpism expresses the will of the ruling class to reverse this trend.”* In this document we will not repeat our analysis of the present historic period and its central contradictions and refer readers to our past works on this issue which are mentioned in footnotes above. At this place we will only give an update of the most important factors reflecting the relation of forces between the Great Powers and deal with the most important political developments of the recent past.

The Decline of the U.S. and the Rise of China in Numbers

48. The trend of the decline of the old imperialist powers (US, EU and Japan) and the rise of new imperialist powers (China and Russia) is continuing. A reflection of the change in the relation of forces is the share of the Great Powers in global capitalist value production and trade. In Figure 15 we can see the development of industrial production between the years 1970 and 2015 and the dramatic rise of China’s share in this period. In Figure 16 we see the turn-around of the relation of force between the US and China in the past decades. While the US’s share in global industrial production decreased from 25.1% (2000) to 17.7% (2015) and Western Europe’s share declined from

12.1% to 9.2%, China’s share grew from 6.5% (2000) to 23.6% (2015)! A similar transformation took place in world trade. While the U.S.’s share declined from 15.1 (2001) to 11.4% (2016), China’s share rose in this period from 4.0% to 11.5%. (See Figure 17)

49. Let us look now to the national composition of the world’s biggest corporations – another important indicator for the relation of forces between the monopoly capitalists of different Great Powers. A comparison of the *Forbes Global 2000* list – a list the world’s 2000 largest corporations – of the year 2003 and the year 2017 reveals dramatic changes. (See Table 3) While the US remains the strongest power, its share has declined substantially from 776 corporations (38.8%) to 565 (28.2%). A similar development took place in other old imperialist countries like Japan (from 16.5% to 11.4%), Britain (from 6,6% to 4,5%), France (from 3,3% to 2,9%), and Germany (from 3,2% to 2,5%). On the other hand, China was hardly represented at all in the list for 2003 (0.6%). However, by 2017 China had 263 corporations on this list and became the second ranking power (13.1%). The same dynamic is reflected in another widely-used list of the largest capitalist monopolies – the so-called *Fortune Global 500*. While in 2001, 197 corporations among the *Fortune Global 500* had their headquarters in the US, this number decreased to 132 by 2017. China, on the other hand, was able to dramatically increase the number of its corporations from 12 (2001) to 115 (2017), becoming the second-ranking power closely behind the U.S. (See Table 4)

50. Likewise, China remains the country with the largest number of billionaires, or the second largest – according to which list you take – in the world. According to the 2017 issue of the *Hurun Global Rich List*, 609 billionaires are Chinese and 552 are US citizens. Together they account for half of the billionaires worldwide.⁸² The *Forbes Billionaire List*, which is US-based while *Hurun* is China-based, sees the U.S. still ahead. However, the trend is the same: the weight of China’s monopoly capitalists is increasing. According to Forbes: *“The U.S. continues to have more billionaires than any other nation, with a record 565, up from 540 a year ago. China is catching up with 319. (Hong Kong has another 67, and Macau 1.) Germany has the third most with 114 and India, with 101, the first time it has had more than 100, is fourth.”*⁸³

51. Finally, China’s rise as an imperialist power relative to its rivals is also reflected in its massive increase

in capital export. As Table 5 shows, China's capital export (without the figures for Hong Kong) grew dramatically since the year 2000, and has come close to reaching the volume of capital export of all imperialist rivals except the U.S.!

52. As a result, Chinese monopolies have become major players in the world market. As we have already pointed out in other works, China became the third-largest investor in Latin America in 2010.⁸⁵ China is also Africa's biggest trading partner and buys more than one-third of its oil from that continent.⁸⁶ According to a recently published study from McKinsey, Chinese corporations already play a dominant role in Africa. About 10,000 Chinese corporations (90% of which are private capitalist firms) operate in Africa. They control about 12% of the continent's total industrial production and about half of Africa's internationally contracted construction market. In Africa, China is also a leader in "green field investment" (i.e., when a parent company begins a new venture by constructing new facilities outside of its home country); in 2015-16, China invested USD 38.4 billion (24% of total green field investment in Africa).⁸⁷

53. However, China's capital export is not only growing to countries of the South but also to the old imperialist economies. Foreign direct investment in the European Union traced back to mainland China hit a record €35 billion in 2016, compared with only €1.6 billion in 2010. In a historic shift, the flow of Chinese direct investment into Europe has surpassed the declining flows of annual European direct investments into China.⁸⁸ As a result, a growing number of bourgeois figures become nervous about China's increasing political and economic influence in Europe.⁸⁹

54. Another indication for China's rise as a Great Power is the growing use of its currency, the *yuan*, as foreign exchange reserves. For the past seven decades, the US dollar has been the world's dominant currency. Two-thirds of the world's \$6.9 trillion allocated foreign exchange reserves are held in US dollars. However, the yuan took a major step towards broader international adoption in 2016 when the IMF decided to include it in the basket of currencies that make up the Special Drawing Right, an alternative reserve asset to the dollar. While the yuan's share is still small with just over 1% of foreign exchange reserves there are signs that this is about to increase. The German Bundesbank already announced that it would include the yuan in its reserves for the first time. Likewise, the French Central Bank revealed that it already holds some reserves in yuan. And in June 2017, the European Central Bank announced that it had exchanged €500 million (\$611 million) worth of US dollar reserves into yuan securities. This was a small shift—the ECB has €44 billion in foreign exchange reserves—but nonetheless it reflects China's growing prominence in the global financial system.⁹⁰

55. China's and Russia's position as main rivals for the U.S. and other old imperialist powers is also reflected in their military strength. For example China and Russia are ranked as second respectively third, only behind the U.S., in export of weapons as well as nuclear weapons. Here, too, the US remains No. 1, but Russia and China are ranked right behind it and in front of all other imperialist powers (with the exception of France with regard to nuclear

weapons; see Tables 6 and 7) It is however noteworthy that the Trump Administration tries to counteract against its decline by increasing its military spending. Last year, Trump boosted the Pentagon's budget by 10%.

56. The U.S.'s decline and China's and Russia's rise has also been reflected in the global political developments. One of the most important developments has been the decision of US President Trump to withdraw from the negotiations process over the *Trans-Pacific Partnership* (TPP). At the same time, China is advancing the alternative *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership* (RCEP) and hopes to conclude the negotiations in 2018.⁹³

Russia Expanding its Influence

57. As we have pointed out in past documents Russia is economically weaker than China but stronger as a military power. While their interests are certainly not identical, they have intensified their cooperation given the aggressive efforts to keep their economic and political domination. STRATFOR, an US imperialist think tank, observes in its forecast for 2018: "In fact, lately Russia and China have found more reason to cooperate than compete with each other. Both countries are working to insulate themselves from U.S. pressure and reduce Washington's influence in strategic theaters around the globe. To that end, they have hashed out a division of labor of sorts: Where both states share interests, Russia addresses security issues as it deems fit while China takes the lead on economic matters. Moscow and Beijing also have deepened their cooperation in finance, trade, energy, cybersecurity and defense."⁹⁴

58. Russia was also able to expand its influence, in particular in the Middle East. This has not only been reflected in its dominating position in Syria and the expansion of its military bases – both its naval bases in Tartus as well as its air base in Hmeimim. Its expansion has also resulted in intensifying relations with various states in the Middle East like Israel, Egypt and even Saudi Arabia. It has also built closer relations with the ex-Gaddafi general and arch-reactionary militia leader in Eastern Libya, General Haftar.

"Make China Great Again"

59. The political leadership of China is fully aware of its increasing global role. China's strong man, Xi Jinping, explicitly spoke about China's global leading role. He said: "It is time for us to take centre stage in the world and to make a greater contribution to humankind."⁹⁵ The Chinese patriotic ideologists link to the old Chinese concept of *Tianxia*, an ancient Chinese concept that views the country as the center of the world and of civilization. Recently, *People's Daily*, the Chinese Communist Party's flagship newspaper, published a 5,500 word long editorial – a kind of manifesto. This document expresses without disguise China's imperialist ambition to become the world dominating power. It states, referring to China's past empire which considered itself as the center of the world, that China faces an "historic opportunity" to "restore itself to greatness and return to its rightful position in the world." It emphasizes: "The world has never focused on China so much and needed China so much as it does now". It states: "The historic opportunity is an all-round one, which refers to not

Figure 15. Global Industrial Production, US, Western Europe and China 1970-2015 (in Current Prices)⁷⁷

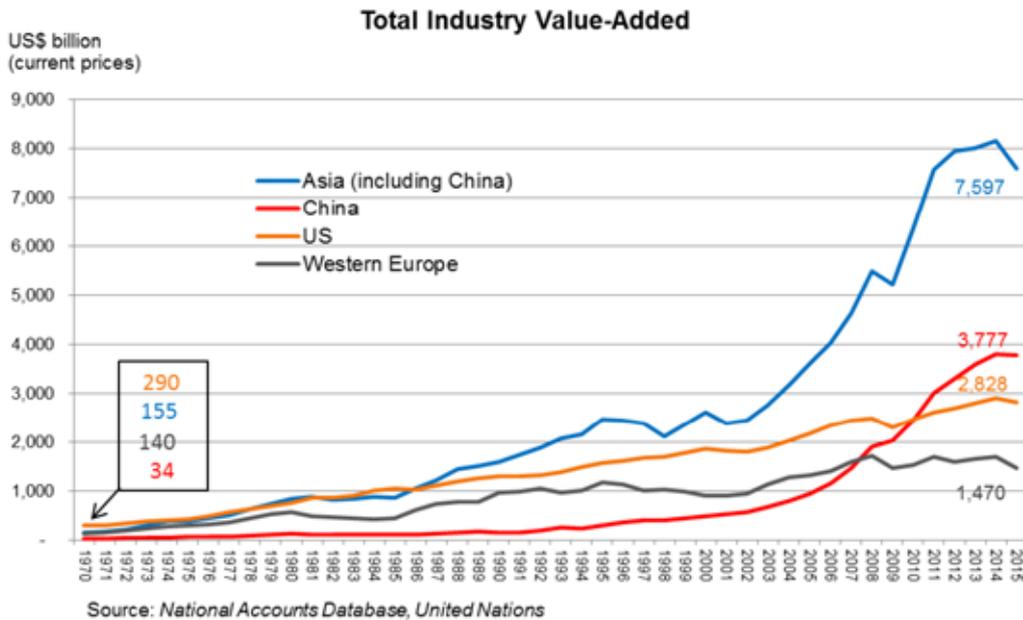


Figure 16. Share of the US and China in Global Industrial Production, 1970-2015 (in Current Prices)⁷⁸

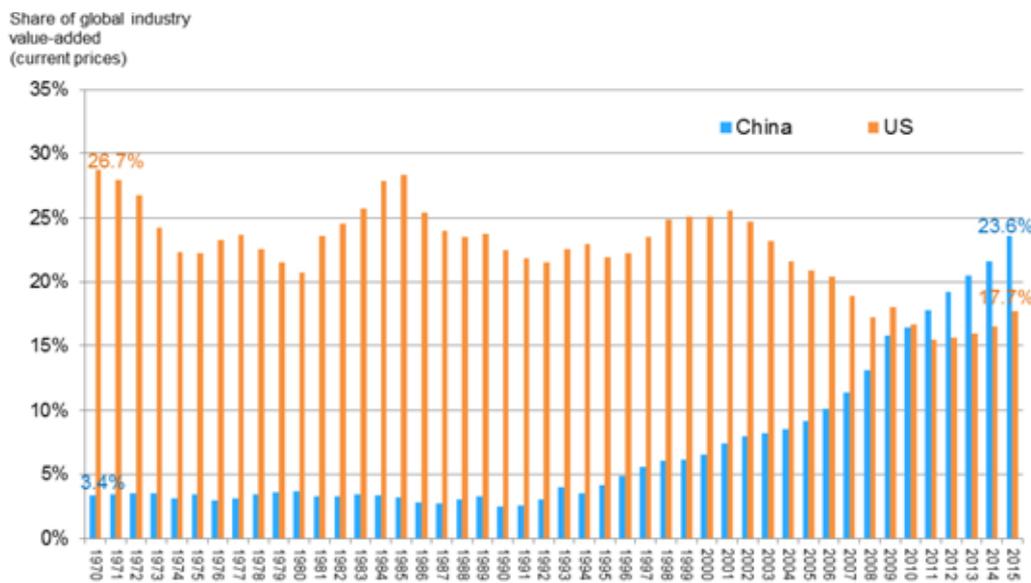
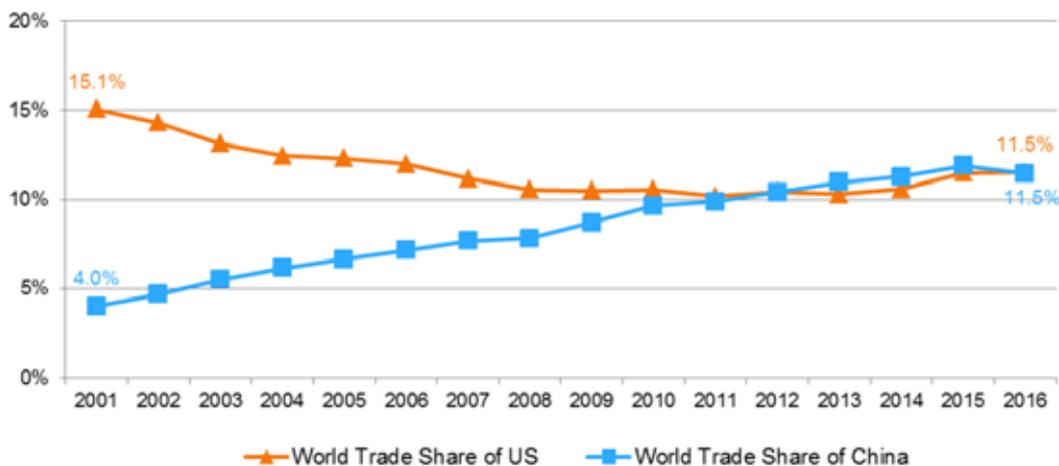


Figure 17. Share of the US and China in World Trade, 2001-2016⁷⁹



only economic development but also the speeding up of science, technology and industrial revolution, the growing influence of Chinese culture and the increasing acknowledgement to the Chinese wisdom and Chinese approach (...) We are more confident, and more competent, than any time in history to grasp this opportunity." Furthermore, the editorial points out that "the global governance system is undergoing profound changes; and a new international order is taking shape." Fittingly, *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong's biggest daily newspaper, titled a report about this manifesto "Make China great again"! ⁹⁶

60. An increasing number of Western ideologists become aware that the old imperialist states are losing geopolitical influence and that Chinese imperialism is seen by a growing number of states as an alternative leading global power. The *Eurasia Group* writes in its latest report: "Still, since 2008, we've seen a gradual erosion in global perceptions of the attractiveness of Western liberal democracies. There is now a viable alternative. For most of the West, China is not an appealing substitute. But for most everybody else, it is a plausible alternative. And with Xi ready and willing to offer that alternative and extend China's influence, that's the world's biggest risk this year." ⁹⁷ Edward Wong, the *New York Times'* former Beijing bureau chief, warns: "China is shaping the world in ways that people have only begun to grasp. Yet the emerging imperium is more a result of the Communist Party's exercise of hard power, including economic coercion, than the product of a gravitational pull of Chinese ideas or contemporary culture. Of the global powers that dominated the 19th century, China alone is a rejuvenated empire." ⁹⁸

61. While various reformists and centrists continue to deny the imperialist character of Russia and China and rather believe that Russia and China are weak, non-imperialist states (and some muddle-heads like the Spartacist school of ICL, IG/LFI and IBT even claim that China is still a "deformed workers state"! ⁹⁹), the imperialist bourgeoisie knows better. As they recognize people of their ilk, they are aware that the US, EU, Japan, China and Russia are imperialist Great Powers which are rivaling against each other for world domination. This is why various strategy papers and forecasts by imperialist think tanks express pessimism about the decline of the US, the crisis of the global order and the increasing tensions between the Great Powers. The WEF, for example, warns in its recently published annual report: "The intensification of strong-state politics has the greatest disruptive potential among the world's major powers: relations between them are changing, mostly for the worse. As each of these states becomes increasingly assertive of its own interests, consensus is fraying on the rules that govern their interactions and the directions in which the world might converge. As a result, there is evidence of a general breakdown in trust and an erosion of respect

for global norms designed to govern peaceful international interactions." ¹⁰⁰ Another imperialist think tank, the *Eurasia Group*, is even more explicit in its worries for an end of the Western-dominated global order as a result of the US's decline and China's surge: "Last year, we wrote that the world was entering a period of geopolitical recession. After nearly a decade of a slowly destabilizing G-Zero framework, the election of Donald Trump as US president has accelerated the descent into a Hobbesian state of international politics. The world is now closer to geopolitical depression than to a reversion to past stability. (...) The decline of US influence in the world will accelerate in 2018. The mix of soft power and economic and political liberalism faces a crisis of credibility. With little sense of strategic direction from the Trump White House, US global power, used too aggressively by George W. Bush, then too timidly by Barack Obama, is sputtering to a stall. (...) For decades, many in the West have assumed that the emergence of a Chinese middle class would force China's leaders to liberalize the country's politics in order to survive. Instead, China's political model, despite its domestic challenges, is now perceived as stronger than it has ever been—and at a moment when the US political model is weakened. Today, in terms of the legitimacy of government in the eyes of its citizens, the US may be in at least as great a need of structural political reform as China. It's a shocking statement; all the more for its obviousness once you think about it. It's also one we've not once heard uttered in Washington, from either side of the aisle. Combine that with the strongest Chinese president since Mao Zedong and one of the weakest US presidents in modern history, and you end up with a moment of global reordering." ¹⁰¹

The Aggressive Strategy of the Trump Administration

62. Russia's and China's rise as imperialist rivals is also reflected in the latest strategy documents of the White House and the Pentagon. While in the past 15 years, the U.S. has emphasized the struggle "against terrorism" as the main priority of its military policy, this has shifted now to the struggle against China and Russia. Naturally, this does not mean that the "traditional" enemies of US imperialism have disappeared as the recent *National Security Strategy* document of the White House makes it clear: "A central continuity in history is the contest for power. The present time period is no different. Three main sets of challengers—the revisionist powers of China and Russia, the rogue states of Iran and North Korea, and transnational threat organizations, particularly jihadist terrorist groups—are actively competing against the United States and our allies and partners." ¹⁰² However, the inter-imperialist rivalry is now the priority number one as U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis summarized in a speech on 19 January 2018: "Great-power competition - not terrorism - is now the primary focus

Table 5. US and China: Their Share among the World's 500 Largest Corporations, 2001 and 2017 (Fortune Global 500 List) ⁸¹

	USA		China	
	Number	Share	Number	Share
2001	197	39.4%	12	2.4%
2017	132	26.4%	115	23.0%

Table 4. National Composition of the World's 2000 Largest Corporations, 2003 and 2017 (*Forbes Global 2000 List*)⁸⁰

	2003		2017	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Share</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Share</i>
USA	776	38.8%	565	28.2%
China	13	0.6%	263	13.1%
Japan	331	16.5%	229	11.4%
United Kingdom	132	6.6%	91	4.5%
France	67	3.3%	59	2.9%
Canada	50	2.5%	58	2.9%
Germany	64	3.2%	51	2.5%
South Korea	55	2.7%	64	3.2%
India	20	1.0%	58	2.9%

Table 6. Foreign Direct Investment Stock of Great Imperialist Powers, 1990, 2000, 2016 (Millions of \$US)⁸⁴

Country	FDI inward stock			FDI outward stock		
	1990	2000	2016	1990	2000	2016
USA	539,601	2,783,235	6,391,293	731,762	2,694,014	6,383,751
Japan	9,850	50,322	186,714	201,441	278,442	1,400,694
Britain	203,905	63,134	1,196,520	229,307	923,367	1,443,936
Germany	111,231	271,613	771,010	151,581	541,866	1,365,375
France	97,814	390,953	697,579	112,441	925,925	1,259,385
China	20,691	193,348	1,354,404	4,455	27,768	1,280,975
Russia	-	32,204	379,035	-	20,141	335,791

Table 7. The World's 10 Top Exporters of Weapons, 2012–16⁹¹

<i>Exporter</i>	<i>Global Share (%)</i>
1 USA	33
2 Russia	23
3 China	6.2
4 France	6.0
5 Germany	5.6
6 UK	4.6
7 Spain	2.8
8 Italy	2.7
9 Ukraine	2.6
10 Israel	2.3

Table 8. World Nuclear Forces, 2016⁹²

<i>Country</i>	<i>Deployed Warheads</i>	<i>Other Warheads</i>	<i>Total Inventory</i>
USA	1,800	5,000	6,800
Russia	1,950	5,050	7,000
UK	120	95	215
France	280	20	300
China	-	270	270

of U.S. national security.”¹⁰³ The *National Security Strategy* document states: “The United States will respond to the growing political, economic, and military competitions we face around the world. China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity.”¹⁰⁴ And: “China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests.”¹⁰⁵ Likewise, the Pentagon’s *National Defense Report* makes clear what the number one priority for the U.S. is: “Long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department, and require both increased and sustained investment, because of the magnitude of the threats they pose to U.S. security and prosperity today, and the potential for those threats to increase in the future.”¹⁰⁶ It accuses its rivals: “China and Russia are now undermining the international order from within the system by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously undercutting its principles and ‘rules of the road.’”¹⁰⁷ Consistent with our view of the world political situation as one which is marked by acceleration of inter-imperialist rivalry, the U.S. Defense Secretary warns of increased “global volatility and uncertainty, with great power competition between nations a reality once again.”¹⁰⁸ Another example of the growing aggressiveness of U.S. imperialism is the new *Nuclear Posture Review*. It expands the circumstances in which the US might use its nuclear arsenal, to include a response to a non-nuclear attack that caused mass casualties, or was aimed at critical infrastructure or nuclear command and control sites.¹⁰⁹

63. US imperialism also tries to halt the advance of China and Russia in its traditional spheres of influence. Before starting a tour of the region, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in early February that Russia’s growing presence in Latin America was “alarming.” He also said the region did not need “new imperial powers,” in reference to its fluid commercial relations with both Russia and China.¹¹⁰ Expressing the imperialist arrogance of Washington, he even went so far to praise the old *Monroe doctrine* which originated in 1823 and which declares that Latin America is a U.S. sphere of influence where other Great Powers must not interfere. In a speech in Austin (Texas), Tillerson emphasized the “importance of the *Monroe Doctrine* and what it meant to this hemisphere and maintaining those shared values. So I think it’s as relevant today as it was the day it was written.”¹¹¹

64. The ruptures in the global order and the lack of a dominating Great Power makes it urgent for the capitalist states, on one hand, to look for geopolitical alliances but, on the other hand, it also makes such alliances more instable. Capitalist states, which are strong enough so that they don’t have to subjugate themselves completely to one Great Power but which are too weak to dominate an alliance themselves, are sometimes in a position to shift or to split their loyalty. Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, for example, are long standing allies of the U.S. But the later decline and Russia’s rise as an important power in the Middle East have led to the situation that these countries are also looking for collaboration with Putin. Turkey’s shift from Washington to Moscow, while remaining a member of NATO, is another case in point.

65. Another important example is India. While it has close political relations with Moscow for many years and it has been a member of the China-Russia dominated BRICS alliance, it is increasingly turning to Washington

and Tokyo since Modi and his Hindu-chauvinist BJP came to power in 2014. While South Korea remains an ally of US imperialism, it is increasingly worried about Washington pressure to renegotiate a trade agreement as well as Trump’s war threats against North Korea since it would be the Southern neighbor, and not the US, which would bear the brunt of such a devastating confrontation. Furthermore, China is becoming a crucial country in terms of foreign investment and trade, so that Seoul might also look for accommodation, instead of confrontation, with Beijing.

66. However, for the time being there seems to be some axes which will determine the geopolitical developments in the next phase. As mentioned before, these alliances are not set in stone and new developments can, and in one way or another will, alter them. Having said this we can recognize, on one hand, an alliance centered on China and Russia. These two powers are bound together by their opposition against the US hegemony. They can only increase their sphere of influence at the cost of Washington. In their camp, to name the more important states, are Iran, Venezuela, South Africa and, to a certain degree, North Korea (see more on this below in the chapter on Asia). Increasingly, Erdoğan’s Turkey is also moving closer to this camp.

67. On the other hand, there is an alliance centered on the United States. Japan is aligned with the US as it faces the same rival – China – and because it remains for the time being militarily relatively weak. Other important states in this alliance are Israel, Saudi-Arabia, Australia and, increasingly, India.

68. The European imperialist powers are also in motion. The EU has faced a number of difficulties as has been seen with London’s Brexit or the opposition of several states against an increasing political and institutional cohesion. As we have dealt with this issue in past documents, we want to remark at this point only the following notes:¹¹² It is without doubt true that centrifugal forces could bring the EU to a collapse. In such a case its individual states have to look for an alliance, as a subordinated state, with stronger Great Powers. It is however clear, that the only chance for European imperialism to play any independent role in the global economic and political developments is a deepening of the EU integration process and steps towards the creation of pan-European political and military institutions. Contrary to our viewpoint, various centrist opponents (e.g. the CWI, IMT, etc.) have always stubbornly emphasized that the EU will unavoidable collapse. In fact, they have been predicting a collapse of the EU since several decades (only to be disappointed every year). And when Brexit won in the referendum in summer 2016, they felt confident to make again such predications. However, the developments of the past 18 months have again demonstrated, once more, that the majority of the monopoly bourgeoisie of the main European powers is determined to deepen the EU integration. Macron is certainly pushing the EU integration forward. And even if the EU in its present forms collapses, it is likely that it would be replaced by a smaller version which would probably include Germany, the Benelux countries and some other European states.

V. MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: REACTIONARY OFFENSIVE, WARS AND POPULAR UPRISINGS

69. As we stated above, the RCIT considers the Middle East and North Africa as a powder-keg.¹¹³ It is one of the two most crucial regions where the global contradictions between the imperialist powers clash and where wars and revolutions are a central characteristic. As we have dealt with many of these issues in numerous separate pamphlets, statements and articles, we will focus at this point only on the most important developments and conclusions for the liberation struggle. The Middle East and North Africa are characterized by three, inter-connected, features:

i. *An ongoing reactionary offensive of the imperialist powers and local bourgeois regimes in the whole region against the democratic and social rights of the working class and the popular masses.* This includes plans of a new Sykes-Picot Agreement to “solve” the Palestinian issue by a new *Nakba*. Furthermore, there exists the imminent danger of the final annihilation of the Syrian Revolution by an unholy alliance of the Assad regime, its Russian and Iranian masters, Turkey and the Western powers.

ii. *An increasing number of wars and potential wars.* Currently there are ongoing just wars of oppressed people (Syria and Yemen) against reactionary dictatorships and regional or great powers standing behind them. In addition, there are several potential wars (Israel against the Palestinians in Gaza; US and/or Israel against Iran; wars involving Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Sudan and other states; Saudi Arabia against Qatar). The Middle East currently strongly resembles the Balkans shortly before 1912/13 with a series of wars looming.

iii. *Most importantly, a new wave of popular uprisings against austerity programs, national oppression and reactionary regimes* (Palestine, Tunisia, Iran, Morocco, and Sudan).

70. The Middle East and North Africa remains marked by the counterrevolutionary offensive of the ruling class. The imperialist Great Powers – in particular the U.S. and Russia – as well as the local reactionary regimes try to crush the remnants of the Arab Revolution and the new uprisings. They strive to reorder the region in their respective interests. However, these efforts of the U.S., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Egypt inevitable clash with each other.

71. Related to this are the efforts of the imperialist monopolies as well as all local regimes to impose harsh austerity packages on the working class and the poor resulting in dramatic price hikes and social cuts. At a recent conference in Dubai, IMF chief Christine Lagarde called on Arab states to slash public sector wages and subsidies to offset the effects of low oil prices on state budgets. She welcomed the “promising reforms” of some Arab states, but said “more sweeping changes were needed”.¹¹⁴ In fact, the Arab capitalist governments did already implement a number of austerity measures. According to the chairman of the *Arab Monetary Fund*, Abdulrahman al-Hamid, the value of Arab energy subsidies already dropped from \$117 billion in 2015 to \$98 billion last year.¹¹⁵

72. Hence, all these efforts provoke domestic and foreign policy crisis including revolutionary upsurges and the danger of new wars. It resembles Marx’s description of the situation where the whip of the counter-revolution provokes the revolution.¹¹⁶

A new Sykes-Picot Agreement?

73. Until a few years, U.S. imperialism was the undisputed hegemonial power in the Middle East. With the global decline of the American hegemony and the emergence of new imperialist powers, Washington’s sole domination of the Middle East and North Africa is a thing of the past. The Trump Administration hopes to counteract this trend as the region is of strategic importance for U.S. imperialism. Or to put it in the words of the conservative *Heritage Foundation*, a leading American conservative think tank: “Strategically situated at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the Middle East has long been an important focus of United States foreign policy. (...) The U.S. also maintains a long-term interest in the Middle East that is related to the region’s economic importance as the world’s primary source of oil and gas.”¹¹⁷ According to a report of the *Newsweek Magazine*, President Trump has increased the number of U.S. troops and civilians working for the Pentagon in the Middle East to 54,180 from 40,517 in the second half of 2017, representing a 33-percent rise.¹¹⁸

74. Furthermore the Trump Administration tries to create a major Sunni-Israel alliance. It shall serve as a counterbalance to the victorious “Shiite” axis (Iran, Syria, Iraq, Hezbollah-Lebanon) which is part of the camp led by imperialist Russia and China. Hence its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital was not only a concession to the Evangelic-fundamentalist-Zionist lobby in order to reestablish some domestic support. It was also part of a comprehensive plan which Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law and “special advisor”, has negotiated with Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt and tried to impose on the Palestinian people. While not all aspects of this evil plan – which Kushner seem to have elaborated in consultation with the extreme right-wing Zionist billionaire Sheldon Adelson (according to Wolff’s “*Fire and Fury*”) – are known, several details of it have seen public light. One of these is the idea that the Palestinians should accept Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and take instead the Jerusalem-adjacent village of Abu Dis as an alternative capital in their future state! But this is not the only provocation. Another crucial aspect of this plan is the idea of extensive territorial exchanges. For example, Egypt would cede a piece of the Sinai Peninsula to the Gaza Strip. With this, Gaza’s territory would extend southward along the seashore, making it three or four times larger than it currently is. In exchange, the Palestinians would give up territories in the West Bank, allowing Israel to annex the settlement blocs along with a generous amount of land around them,

thereby maintaining some degree of territorial integrity between the various blocs. At the same time, Israel would give Egypt a narrow strip of territory along the lengthy southern border between the two countries. There is also the possibility that Saudi Arabia and Jordan would also participate in these territorial exchanges, with various ideas proposed.¹¹⁹ In short, such a “peace” plan (what an Orwellian language!) would represent a new Sykes-Picot Agreement – similar to the agreement between British and French imperialism in 1916 dividing the Middle East among themselves.

75. It is not difficult to understand that such a plan is a pure provocation not only for the Palestinians, but for all Arabs and Muslims outside the corrupt elite. Any Palestinian leader would find it hardly possible to explain to his people that they should accept Abu Dis (of which the world has not heard before!) instead of Jerusalem as their capital or the loss of parts of the West Bank (in exchange for some square kilometers of sand in Sinai!). It would be also a very difficult challenge for the Egypt regime to justify another give-away after General Sisi already faced massive domestic criticism for selling two islands to Saudi Arabia.

76. The whole plan sounds completely bizarre and adventurist. It is however an unmistakable roadmap to a region-wide mass popular intifada and a great war in the Middle East! Because such a plan will certainly provoke an uprising of the workers and oppressed in Palestine and other countries. Furthermore the only possible condition were one could imagine the realization of such a counterrevolutionary re-ordering of the Middle East would be the aftermath of a catastrophic war resulting in an Israeli victory (with Saudi/Egypt compliance) and a historic defeat of the Palestinian and other resisting people. If, let us say, Israel conquers Gaza and annihilates the resistance forces and does the same in the West Bank, provoking a new *Nakba* creating more millions of Palestinian refugees, these arch-reactionary forces could succeed in imposing such a new Sykes-Picot Agreement. However, even in such a scenario it is difficult to imagine that such a “solution” could lead to stability in the region. The reason for this is that given the fundamental rivalry between the Great Powers – and, related to this, between various regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, and Israel – any victory of Israel (with Saudi support) would provoke Iran or other rivals to increase their support for the Palestinians and other anti-Israeli forces. In short, no stability in the Middle East as a result of a counter-revolutionary “peace” plan is possible. This is also true in a more general sense: as long as an accelerating rivalry exists between the imperialist Great Powers, i.e. as long as we are living in the current historic period, there will be an accelerating rivalry between the regional powers in the Middle East.

Wars with different characters

77. While Russia and China do not push for such a new Sykes-Picot Agreement, they are intervening to radically change the regional order of the Middle East by other means. Russia’s massive military intervention in Syria since 2015 has dramatically increased Moscow’s influence in the region. According to Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu, Russia has deployed a total of 48,000 troops in Syria since it began its military operation in September 2015.¹²⁰ Russian imperialism was able to consolidate its alliance with Iran, the Assad regime and Hezbollah, it succeeded in drawing Turkey closer and it has become accepted as a Great Power by Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Likewise, this bloc made also huge advances by Iran’s expansion of influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon – the so-called *Shia Crescent*. Furthermore, the growing division between the “Sunni” powers Saudi Arabia and Egypt, on one hand, and Turkey and Qatar, on one other hand, has also massive influence for the increasing political instability of the region. While Turkey and Qatar are not in Russian camp, they are clearly open for collaboration with them given the increasing hostility they face from the US/Saudi/Israeli bloc.

78. The global decline of capitalism and the accelerating rivalry between the Great Powers constitute the basis for the acceleration of the contradictions between the regional powers in the Middle East as well as for the intensified efforts of the capitalist class to increase the exploitation and oppression. These tensions undermine the regional order and push states to look for adventures. Hence, we observe a steadily rising bellicosity of the U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia against Iran and its allies (e.g. Hezbollah, Houthis) or potential allies (e.g. Qatar). Likewise, we have seen a massive increase of Iran’s foreign operations – in particular in Syria where it operates about 125,000 fighters and is establishing a number of military bases.¹²¹ In fact, here we have an intermix of different lines of confrontations which have different characters and which, hence, require different tactics from Marxists:

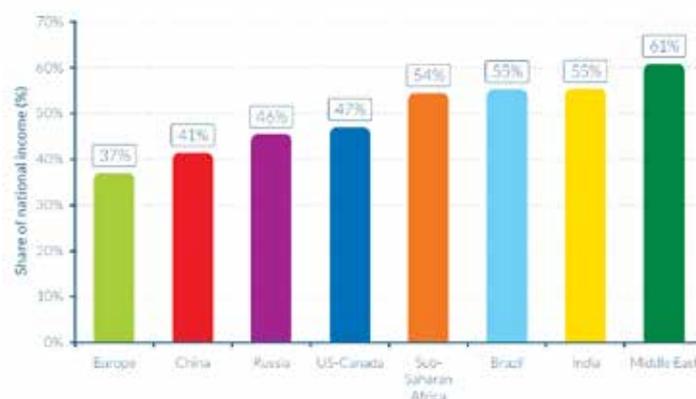
- i. The rivalry between Great Powers (U.S. vs. Russia);
- ii. The rivalry between regional non-imperialist powers (Saudi Arabia vs. Iran);
- iii. The aggression of imperialist powers (U.S., Israel) against semi-colonial countries (Iran);
- iv. Civil wars and national liberation wars against foreign occupation (Syria, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon)

Finally, to take an example, an attack on Iran can also be combined with an aggression against Gaza and/or Hezbollah.

79. Marxists have to make a concrete analysis on which basis they should apply the revolutionary military program.

i. An open war between the Great Powers U.S. and Russia in the Middle East, i.e. a kind of world war focused in one region, would constitute a reactionary war on both sides and Marxists couldn’t support any side. In such a scenario, other conflicts would become subordinated to this inter-imperialist war. However, such an open confrontation between the Great Powers is rather unlikely in the near future.

ii. A war by US or Israeli imperialism against Iran

Figure 18. Real Oil Prices 1970-2017 ¹²³Figure 19. Top 10% income shares across the world, 2016 ¹²⁷Table 9. Gross oil export revenues in the Arab region, 2013-2018 (billions of US dollars) ¹²⁴

Country/subregion	2013	2014	2015	2016a	2017b	2018b
Bahrain	15.1	14.3	7.7	6.1	8.2	8.7
Kuwait	108.5	97.6	48.9	39.9	49.7	55.4
Oman	32.5	30.5	17.6	14.8	20.0	21.1
Qatar	32.4	28.8	13.2	10.9	13.9	14.8
Saudi Arabia	321.9	284.6	152.9	129.0	167.5	177.5
United Arab Emirates	116.5	99.0	55.0	46.3	54.8	59.0
GCC countries	627.0	554.8	295.4	246.9	314.0	336.3
Egypt	13.1	10.9	6.7	5.7	7.8	8.3
Iraq	89.6	83.8	43.2	47.0	60.9	67.3
Syrian Arab Republic	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mashreq	102.6	94.7	49.9	52.7	68.7	75.6
Algeria	40.1	35.4	19.1	15.5	18.9	21.0
Libya	33.8	11.3	5.9	4.5	9.7	11.8
Morocco	1.1	0.8	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4
Tunisia	2.6	2.2	1.0	0.8	1.0	1.1
Maghreb	77.6	49.7	26.3	21.0	30.1	34.2
Mauritania	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Sudan	1.7	1.4	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.6
Yemen	6.5	4.5	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Arab LDCs	8.5	6.1	3.0	0.4	0.6	0.7
Arab region total	815.7	705.3	374.6	321.0	413.4	446.9

(without the open involvement of imperialist Russia) would constitute a reactionary war of the US resp. Israel and a just war of Iran. Hence, Marxists would support the later.

iii. A war between regional non-imperialist powers (e.g. Saudi Arabia vs. Iran), in which the ruling class on both sides struggle for the expansion of their sphere of influence, would also constitute a reactionary on both sides. However, as we said above, there can be various factors – the role of imperialist powers, liberation struggles of oppressed people, etc. – which could complicate the character of such a war and hence give it a different or combined character, requiring revolutionaries to employ different tactics.

iv. A reactionary war of aggression of a non-imperialist power against an oppressed people like the current war of Saudi Arabia against Yemen or of Iran against the Syrian people. In such a case, Marxists unconditionally defend the oppressed people.

The Middle East as a powder keg of social-economic contradictions

80. As already mentioned, there has been a massive rise of tensions between the regional powers in the Middle East in the last years. The basic reasons for this are a) the domestic political and economic crisis of regimes in the region and b) the increasing rivalry between the imperialist powers. The general stagnation of the capitalist world economy and, in particular, the decline of prices for raw materials like oil and gas as well as the slump in the tourism sector, all these have put enormous pressure on the capitalist class in the region. Likewise, they face massive political pressure since the beginning of the Arab Revolution in 2011.¹²²

81. The region is characterized by an economy distorted by the Great Powers. The imperialists manipulated, first directly as colonial powers and later indirectly, when the countries had become formally “independent”, the development of the whole region. As a result the countries of the Middle East and North Africa were obstructed in having an organic industrial development and developed a strong reliance of raw materials exports. Associated with this the imperialists helped to conserve various reactionary structures (kingdom, etc.) and helped to keep an extraordinary inflated state apparatus with massive repression forces.

82. The decline of raw material prices had dramatic effects particularly for the Middle East as many of these countries are highly dependent on the export of oil and gas. In Figure 18 we can see that the oil price in fact collapsed since the last recession in 2008/09. Between 2010 and 2017, the oil price in fact halved from about 130US\$ per barrel to 60US\$. This had unavoidable dramatic consequences for the countries of the Middle East as it substantially reduced the state revenue. As we see in Table 6 below, gross oil export revenues in the Arab region nearly halved from \$815.7 billion (2013) to \$413.4 billion (2016).

83. Against this background, it is not surprising that the Middle East and North Africa is the region where the social contradictions are particularly sharp. A recently published study which compared inequality in the different regions of the world demonstrated that

the Middle East and North Africa is the one with the highest inequality. (See Figure 19) It is likewise one of the regions with the highest rates of youth unemployment. In 2016, unemployment among youth in North Africa was 29.3%.¹²⁵ According to official statistics, which certainly underestimate the real situation, 30.4% of all workers in North Africa and 17.8% in the Middle East are working in vulnerable employment.¹²⁶ It is therefore only logical that the region’s ruling class has to rely on open dictatorships and an inflated repression apparatus in order to suppress the explosions of these social contradictions.

84. Egypt’s President Sisi is in power since 2013 and rules with iron fist. But his regime hasn’t been able to improve the living standard at all. It is so discredited and lacks any popular support, that it survives only by throwing nearly 80,000 people into prison and disallows any meaningful alternative candidate, like e.g. the former General Sami Anan¹²⁸, at the upcoming presidential election in March this year. Even the “moderate” opposition parties, i.e. those who are allowed by the regime, have now withdrawn their candidates from the election and call for the boycott.¹²⁹ It is hardly surprising that there are constant conflicts between different sectors of the state apparatus and that Sisi can only continue to rule with massive repression. In order to finance his arch-reactionary regime, General Sisi has been forced to massively increase public debt. Today, Egypt’s Total Government Gross Debt is one of the highest in the whole region with 101.2% of GDP.¹³⁰ While the government’s fiscal deficit has slightly declined since 2013, it is still very high with nearly 10% of GDP (2016).¹³¹ Despite the massive repression, there is a powerful local insurrection taking place in the Sinai which already cost the lives of 1,000 people. As became known recently, the Sisi regime is secretly collaborating with Israel in military crushing this insurrection.¹³² This demonstrates once more the reactionary character of the bourgeois Arab regimes which collaborate with the Zionist Apartheid state. Furthermore the regime has been discredited because it sold two islands in the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia. While there are no indications for a collapse of the regime in the near future, it is certainly casting the seeds for another popular uprising.

85. The arch-reactionary character of the Sisi regime as an enemy of the Egypt people as well as of all oppressed people was revealed, once more, by the publication of audio tapes by the *New York Times*. These tapes demonstrate how the Egyptian secret service attempted to shape public opinion in the wake of US President Donald Trumps’ controversial decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. An intelligence officer secretly called a number of influential Egyptian television hosts and informed them of both Cairo’s public and private stance on the controversial decision - which they were to convey to viewers. We will quote from the audio recordings as they speak for themselves:

“Captain Ashraf al-Kholi “I was just calling to tell you what our public stance is, so if you go on TV or speak in an interview, I am telling you what is the stance of Egypt’s national security apparatus and what it stands to benefit from in this matter of announcing Jerusalem to be the capital of Israel, O.K.?” the officer told one of the hosts, according to recordings obtained by NYT.

“Give me orders, sir,” the host, Saeed Hassaseen replied. “I am

at your command.”

“We, like all our Arab brothers, are denouncing this matter,” Captain Kholi continued. But “after that, this thing will become a reality. Palestinians can’t resist and we don’t want to go to war. We have enough on our plate as you know.”

“The point that is dangerous for us is the intifada issue,” Captain Kholi explained. “An intifada would not serve Egypt’s national security interests because an intifada would revive the Islamists and Hamas. Hamas would be reborn once more.”¹³³

This excerpt demonstrates very clearly how much the ruling class of the Arab states fear a new surge of the Intifada of the Palestinian people. Clearly, the struggle for the liberation of Palestine is a struggle which must be waged not only against the Zionist state but also against the reactionary ruling class in the Arab world!

86. Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman understands that he has to overcome his country’s total reliance on oil production and export. According to the *CIA World Factbook*, the petroleum sector accounts for roughly 87% of the country’s budget revenues, 42% of GDP, and 90% of export earnings.¹³⁴ However, in order to modernize the economy and to overcome the total reliance on oil export, he has to break-up the traditional social contract in the country, to attack social benefits for the ordinary population and to deprive a whole sector of the traditional political and religious establishment of its power. The degree of the growing socio-economic tensions can be seen by the fact that the unemployment rate for Saudi nationals has already increased to more than 12%.¹³⁵ At the same time, Saudi Arabia constantly loses influence in the region as Iran is expanding. This creates enormous domestic tensions and pushed Prince Salman to start various foreign policy adventures of which none has resulted in success until now. (Yemen war, boycott of Qatar, pressure on Lebanon via the temporary arrest of Prime Minister Hariri, collaboration in Trump’s arch-reactionary Middle East “Peace” Plan, etc.)

87. Likewise, Iran’s ruling capitalist class faces enormous economic and social contradictions. Its capitalist regime, colored with religious rhetoric, strongly relies on the revenue from the petroleum sector. Before the introduction of the sanctions by the US and the EU, oil accounted for 80% of the Iranian exports and up to 60% of fiscal revenues. The figures for today are similar.¹³⁶ Oil accounted for 67% of all export revenues in 2014.¹³⁷ Despite its wealth in oil and gas, the mass of the workers and peasants are living in poverty. While official estimates of poverty levels in Iran range from 30% to 40% percent, experts believe that close to two-thirds of the Iranian population lives below the poverty line. According to some reports, between 11 million and 25 million people in Iran live in slums.¹³⁸ While official unemployment has risen to over 12% today, youth unemployment rate hovers around 30%!¹³⁹ Hence, we see the bourgeois-theocratic regime sitting on a social powder keg.

88. Turkey is the industrially most advanced of the regional powers in the Middle East. However, it also can not escape the iron laws of the capitalist world economy. Its economic growth has slowed in the past decade (see Figure 20). Turkey’s current account balance has dramatically worsened since the early 2000s – the time when Erdoğan’s AKP took power. As foreign investment is declining, the government as well as the business

sector have to massively increase their debts in order to avoid a slump. (See Figure 21) Consequently, Turkey’s gross external debt, measured as a share of GDP, has substantially grown in the past years – from about 38% in 2007 to about 57% in 2016. (See Figure 22) The capitalists’ debts – measured by the non-financial corporations’ debt as a share of GDP – grew even more dramatic: from about 40% in 2010 to about 74% in 2015, i.e. it nearly doubled in five years! (See Figure 23) At the same time, youth unemployment has reached 25% and the severe material deprivation rate – a statistic similar to the monthly poverty threshold that tracks families’ abilities to afford at least several basic material essentials such as food and heating – was 30.3% in 2015.¹⁴⁰ Inflation is also on the rise with currently 12%. In such a situation, Erdoğan’s rule has a fragile basis. This is why he is pushing so hard to build a Bonapartist regime and this is why he needs to wipe up Turkish chauvinism and militarism with his anti-Kurdish rhetoric and his invasion in Northern Syria.

Wars and Rivalry in the Middle East

89. In summary, the Middle East is a region where the interests of several imperialist Great Powers as well as regional powers clash, where social-economic contradictions are accelerating and repeatedly erupt in revolutionary explosions and where the ruling class looks for salvation in foreign policy adventures. All these are the prescript of major wars and diplomatic crisis – events which, in turn, can provoke new revolutionary crisis. Friedrich Engels once observed about the Russia Tsarist regime that because of its fragile domestic social base it was always forced to appear as very strong through foreign policy adventures. When it suffered a defeat, this has disastrous domestic consequences. “To rule absolutely at home the Tsar must be more than unconquerable abroad; he must be uninterruptedly victorious, must be in a position to reward unconditional obedience by the intoxication of Chauvinist triumph, by conquests following upon conquests. And new Tsardom had miserably broken down, and that too in its outwardly most imposing representative; it had laid bare the weakness of Russia to the world, and thus its own weakness to Russia. An immense sobering down followed. The Russian people had been too deeply stirred by the colossal sacrifices of the war, their devotion had been appealed to far too unsparingly by the Tsar, for them to return there and then to the old passive state of unthinking obedience.”¹⁴⁵ To a certain degree the ruling classes in the Middle East are in a similar situation like Tsarism in the 19th century.

90. Two major wars have been already waged since years: the war in Syria and in Yemen. The war in Syria started as a popular democratic uprising in 2011 which soon was transformed into a civil war because Assad opened the gates of hell against his own people. While the liberation struggle against the dictatorship is continuing until today, the character of the civil war has been complicated by the military intervention of imperialist powers as well as regional powers. Russian imperialism as well as the Iranian regime saved Assad from defeat and today these two powers are the dominant forces. Russia in fact controls the air space and Iran controls militias with about 125,000 troops. In addition, US imperialism also tries to get a foothold in Syria and uses the YPG/SDF as its

proxy. Finally, Turkey is increasingly collaborating with Russia and Iran (Astana negotiations, Sochi conference) and also launched its own military intervention in the north of Syria. All these forces share an interest in liquidating the revolution and, in order to achieve this, they have joined forces to smash those resistance forces (denounced as “terrorists” and “extremists”) which reject the Astana betrayal and vow to continue the struggle against Assad and his foreign masters. In addition, these powers strive to grab a share of the country. This is reflected by the energetic efforts of Russia, the U.S., Turkey and Iran to establish military bases in Syria. In Map 1 we can see how many foreign military bases these powers have already created in North Syria.

91. The war against the Yemeni people which the Saudi-led coalition waged in March 2015 is still continuing. The Saudi-led forces were able to push the Houthis, a petty-bourgeois Islamist forces at the top of the popular insurrection which drove out the pro-IMF President Hadi in spring 2015, back. However, despite massive military superiority – particularly concerning air force and navy – and a nearly total blockade resulting in hunger and cholera epidemic, the Saudis have failed to defeat the Houthis. Their hope to split the resistance when ex-President Saleh switched sides and betrayed his Houthi allies were in vain when the later succeeded in smashing Saleh’s rebellion in a few days and get him killed. Furthermore, the Saudi-led camp is increasingly divided itself between the Hadi government, backed by Riyadh, and the Southern separatists, backed by Abu Dhabi. This conflict recently resulted in armed clashes in Aden with a number of dead. While Iran supports the Houthis, the character of the war can not be reduced to a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It remains primarily a national liberation war against the Saudi-led invasion which socialists must continue to support.¹⁴⁷

92. Add to this the ongoing insurrection of the Afghan people against the more than 16-year long occupation by U.S. imperialism and its allies. In August 2017, the Trump Administration announced to send additional 4,000 troops to aid the occupation forces (nearly 13,500 NATO troops plus 25,000 contractors). This is only the latest attempt to avoid the defeat of the pro-imperialist puppet government of Ashraf Ghani and its foreign backers by the hand of the resistance forces which have constantly gained strength in the past years. Despite the huge costs of the war – the US pays currently \$45 billion per year for its military intervention in Afghanistan – the Trump Administration is determined to do whatever possible in order to avoid defeat.¹⁴⁸ Even bourgeois analysts like Robert Malley, President of the International Crisis Group, are highly skeptical about Trump’s strategy: *“This strategy faces serious obstacles. While hitting the Taliban harder might bring tactical gains, it is unlikely to change the war’s course or the incentives of a locally rooted and potent insurgency. The Taliban currently controls or is contesting more territory than at any time since 2001; it is better equipped and, even if pressured through conventional fighting, it would retain the ability to mount spectacular urban attacks that erode confidence in the government. Besides, between 2009 and 2012, the Taliban withstood more than 100,000 U.S. troops.”*¹⁴⁹ As Marxists and anti-imperialists, we have always unambiguously denounced the US occupation as a reactionary war of

aggression. Therefore the RCIT has supported the Afghan resistance against the imperialist aggression from the very beginning when the first US bombs were dropped on Kabul on 7 October 2001. While supporting the resistance struggle, socialists in Afghanistan have to build, under the most difficult circumstances, a progressive alternative to the petty-bourgeois Islamist Taliban who is the dominant force among the resistance movement.¹⁵⁰

93. As mentioned above, there are a number of additional wars in the pipeline. In January US President Trump set an ultimatum to fix the so-called “disastrous flaws” in the deal on Tehran’s nuclear program. He said he would waive sanctions against Iran that were lifted as part of the international deal in 2015 for the last time and demanded that the pact should be “strengthened” with a separate agreement within 120 days. However, Iran as well as all other backers of the treaty – the European powers as well as Russia – oppose Trump’s ultimatum. Furthermore, the U.S Administration announced new sanctions against 14 entities and people, including the head of Iran’s judiciary, Sadeq Amoli Larijani, a close ally of Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Likewise, Israel as well as Saudi Arabia are eager to launch a major war against Iran as it is a chief rival in the region which has been able to expand, as an ally of Russian imperialism, his influence in the region. There is no doubt that a major war of the US, and/or Israel and/or Saudi Arabia against Iran and its allies is a realistic possibility in the near future.¹⁵¹

94. However, given Iran’s military strength it is difficult to imagine an attack by Saudi Arabia and even by Israel without the military support of the U.S. As we see in Yemen, Saudi Arabia is not even capable to defeat the Houthis in Yemen so they should be no match for the battle-hardened Iranian army. Israel, of course, is militarily much stronger than Saudi Arabia. However, if it launches limited air strikes against Iran, this would hardly deter Teheran and risks a prolonged period of war against a formidable enemy which is backed by Russia and China. If it begins a full war, it could not sustain it for long given the burden of such a war for a small country. For all these reasons, it seems unlikely to us that a war against Iran can be launched without the active participation of US imperialism.

95. The blockade of Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain against Qatar – a kind of economic warfare – is also continuing. In the initial phase of the aggression, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi even considered a military invasion which was only stopped when Turkey sent troops and Trump warned them to back off.¹⁵² While it does not look likely at the moment that this conflict might be transformed into an open war, it is difficult to imagine an end as both sides have to lose a lot of prestige.

96. Israel, a small imperialist power in the Middle, is eager to wage war against the Palestinians in Gaza, against Hezbollah in Lebanon as well as Iran. Israel’s geostrategic position has developed in an ambivalent way. On one hand, it has been strengthened by the inauguration of the strongest pro-Israeli Administration in modern U.S. history as well as by the current extremely reactionary regimes in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. On the other hand, domestically the ruling class faces huge internal divisions given the extremely corrupt and discredited character of the Netanyahu government. Furthermore, the Palestinian

Figure 20. Turkey Real GDP Growth 1985-2015 ¹⁴¹

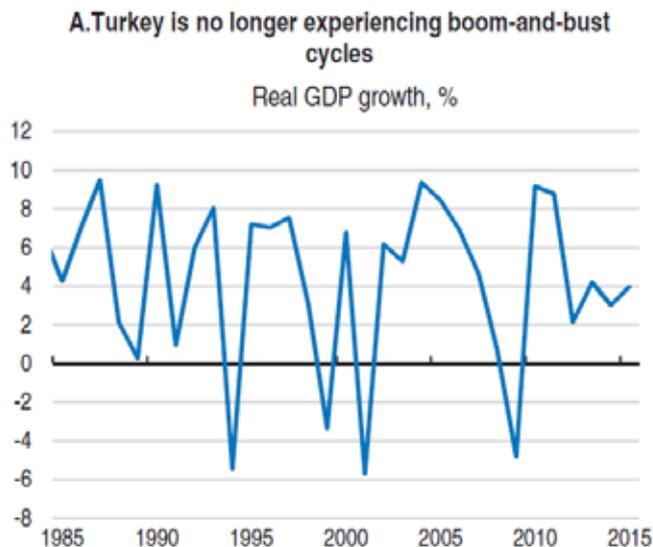


Figure 21. Turkey Current Account Balance as % of GDP, 1985-2015 ¹⁴²

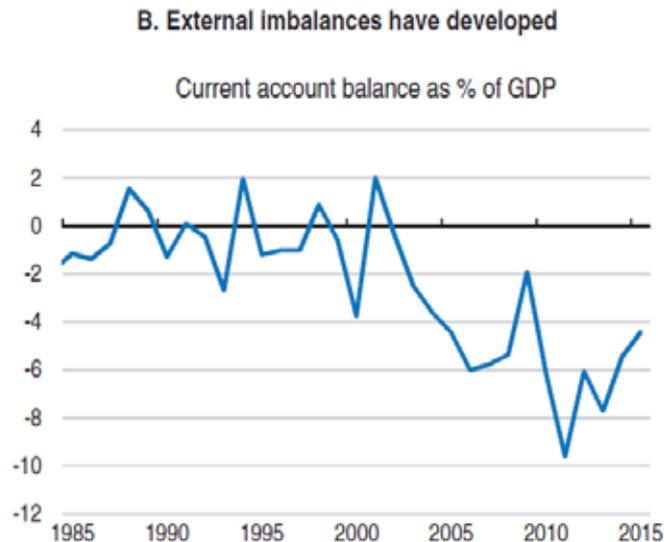


Figure 22. Turkey's Gross External Debt as % of GDP, 2007-2016 ¹⁴³

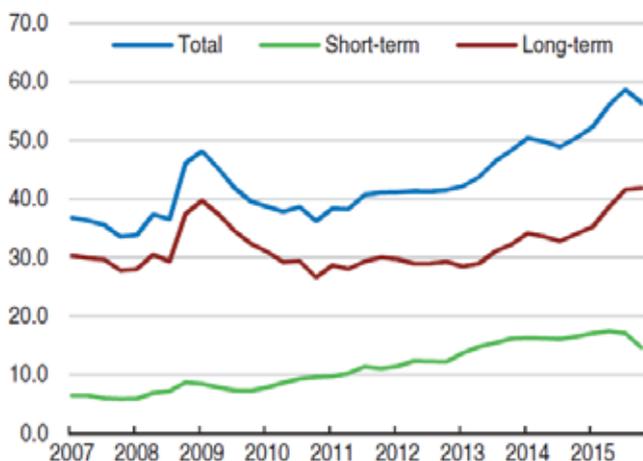
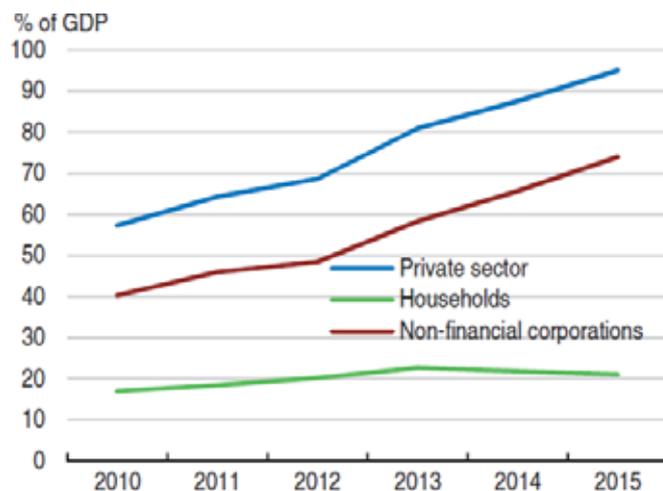
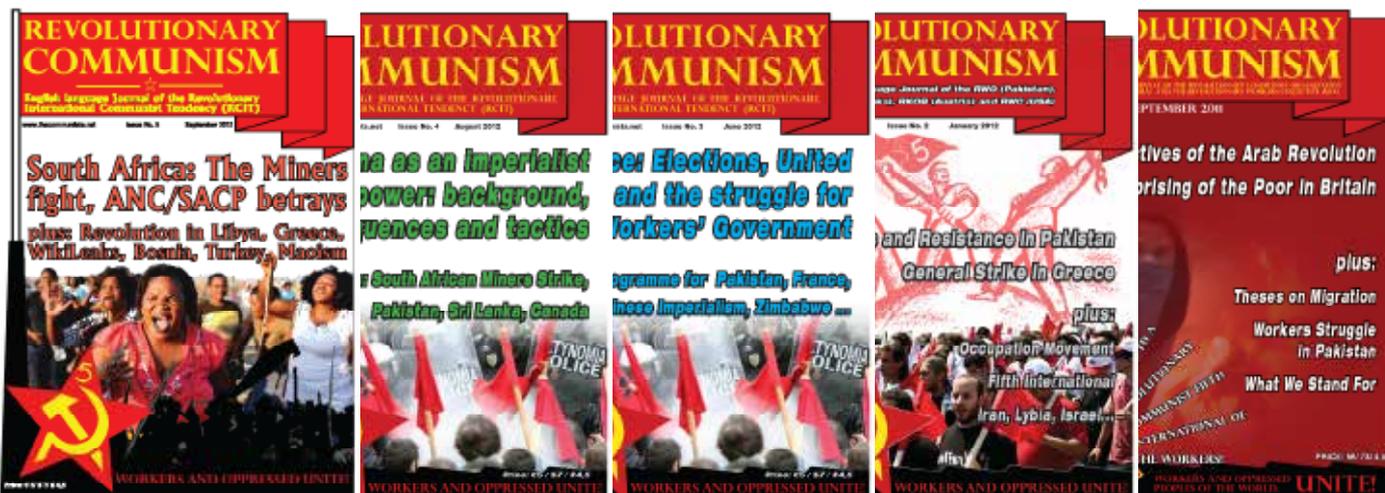


Figure 23. Turkey's Private Sector Debt as % of GDP, 2007-2016 ¹⁴⁴



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resistance is unbroken – despite three wars against Gaza. And, finally, Iran and Hezbollah could substantially strengthen their position in Syria close to the border with Israel. Another war against Hezbollah would become much more challenging for the Israeli army than the one in 2006 (and even this war it failed to win). While an Israeli war against the Palestinian people in Gaza or against Hezbollah could contain elements of a proxy war, as the later would be supported by Iran and others, such wars would nevertheless be national liberation wars on the side of the Palestinian or the Lebanese people. Socialists would stand for their military victory and for the defeat of the Zionist enemy. The shot down of an Israeli warplane – the first time such a thing happened since 1982 – during an attack in Syria on 10 February demonstrates how explosive the situation has become.¹⁵³ The *International Crisis Group* warned in a recent study of the growing danger of a war between Israel and Iran and/or Hezbollah: “A broader war could be only a miscalculation away.”¹⁵⁴

97. Against the background of domestically embattled regimes, the region-wide acceleration of tensions and power rivalry, new fronts of conflicts have opened up in addition to those mentioned above. An important conflict is currently building up in the Red Sea region which involves Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Eritrea on one hand and Sudan, Turkey, and Ethiopia on the other hand. It results both from domestic reasons as well as regional power rivalry. Recently a conflict has escalated between Egypt vs. Sudan and Ethiopia. The trigger has been the project of the regime in Addis Ababa to build the so-called *Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam* which should become the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa when completed, as well as the 7th largest in the world. This dam, to be built close to the border with Sudan, should help Ethiopia not only to satisfy its need for electricity but also to become Africa’s biggest power exporter. While Sudan stands to benefit from the dam and has sided with Ethiopia on most issues, Egypt is strongly opposed as it fears that the upstream dam at the head of the Blue Nile will interfere with its critical water supply from the Nile River. The negotiations between the three countries have stalled as Egypt pulled out of the tripartite negotiations in November 2017.

98. In addition, this conflict has been accelerated by rising tensions about the long-running land dispute between Egypt and Sudan about control of the the *Halayeb triangle*, an area that encompasses the cities of Halayeb, Abu Ramad and Shalateen. It is situated at the official border between the two countries on 20,000 square kilometers on the Red Sea coast. In addition, Egypt accuses Sudan of harboring supporters of former Egypt President Morsi who was overthrown by a military coup in July 2013. Recently, Sudan withdrew its ambassador from Egypt and reiterated its complaint against Egypt to the United Nations Security Council in early January 2018.

99. This conflict has been accelerated by the growing interference of other regional powers. In order to get support against the powerful Egyptian army, Sudan has intensified its cooperation with Turkey. In December 2017, Khartoum and Ankara agreed last month that Turkey would get temporary control of Suakin Island in the Red Sea. In return, Sudan will enjoy Ankara’s military, economic and political support. Turkey plans to rebuild

a ruined Ottoman port city, to develop shipyards for both civilian and military ships in the Red Sea and to build a hospital, a university, a free-trade zone in Port Sudan, power stations and a new airport.

100. Furthermore, there are long-standing tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea which already resulted in a major war in 1998 to 2000 with about 80,000 people killed. Since Ethiopia is its historic arch-enemy, the Eritrean regime immediately sided in this conflict with Egypt. Egypt already sent troops to its military basis in Eritrea a few weeks ago. As a result of this escalation between the ruling classes of all these states, they all sent troops to the borders of their enemies in recent weeks. The region is close to military provocations resulting in major a war.

101. These developments have to be understood as part of a massive militarization of the whole Red Sea zone. There are a number of countries seeking to establish a significant military presence around the Red Sea. The UAE currently has a presence in the greatest number of Red Sea neighboring countries. It has military bases in Yemen (Aden, Mokha and Mukalla and the Red Sea island of Perim), in Assab in Eritrea as well as in the autonomous northern Somali region of Somaliland. As a result, the UAE surrounds every side of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait – through which all traffic between the Suez Canal and Asia and Africa must pass – with military bases.¹⁵⁵

102. As mentioned above, Turkey is building now a military basis in Sudan. This is in addition to its military basis in Somalia with 3,000 troops. Furthermore, 200 Turkish soldiers have been deployed in Somalia since October 2017, training Somalia’s military. In addition, Turkey has currently based some hundred soldiers in Qatar’s Al-Udeid military base since the beginning of the Saudi blockade on Qatar. This is part of a long-term plan. In January 2018, the Turkey’s National Security Council adopted a plan to deploy 60,000 armed soldiers in four military bases abroad until the year 2022.¹⁵⁶ This does not mean that Turkey would be an imperialist power. As we have explained somewhere else, it is an advanced semi-colonial country.¹⁵⁷ However, it is obvious he case that Turkey’s ruling class does attempt to increase its influence in the region and to become a regional power.

103. Add to this, the military bases of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Eritrea as well as the military bases of several imperialist Great Powers (U.S., China, and France) in Djibouti. Given the steps of more and more countries to bolster their military presence around the Red Sea, the threat of a regional conflict that could draw in at least seven countries continues to grow. If a war around the Red Sea would break out, it would have disastrous consequences not just for the actors directly involved, but for the global economy. It would shut down the most important shipping line and provoke a sharp recession.

The Syrian Revolution: In danger of annihilation

104. While the RCIT has always opposed those defeatist centrists who deserted the Syrian Revolution in the past years and called it as finished, we also warned many times about the growing danger of a final defeat. The recent developments unfortunately have brought us closer to such a scenario. The Syrian Army, with the massive and devastating aid of the Iranian militias and the Russian Air Force, was able to conquer important parts of the last significant liberated pocket of resistance in the province Idlib in the north of the country (including the strategically important military airport Abu Duhur). Furthermore, another liberated pocket East Ghouta is close to collapse as the population is systematically bombed and starved by the regime.¹⁵⁸

105. Furthermore, all Great Powers and regional powers agree now that Assad should stay in power and that the rebels should lay down their arms. This is the real substance of what they call a “political solution”. At the various conferences in Astana, Sochi, or Geneva the ruling class of Russia, Iran and Turkey, sometimes with UN and U.S. and European participation, negotiate about the details of such a “political solution”. Worse, a sector of the opposition is allied to Turkey’s Erdoğan regime and hence supports the Astana negotiations. As they are under considerable pressure from the popular forces, these opposition factions can not openly accept all dictates from those powers respectively. However, the truth is that a considerable sector of the opposition leadership is prepared to accept a sell-out on the negotiations table. Even worse, they agree to an important clause of the Astana agreement which calls to hunt down and smash those forces which are determined to continue the struggle against Assad and his backers (these forces are denounced in this document as “Al-Qaida”, “terrorists”, etc.) It is part of the Astana plan that Turkey invades Idlib and takes over control so that the liberation forces there are disarmed and can’t continue the resistance against the Assad regime.

106. This does not mean that the imperialist and regional powers have unanimous agreement among each other. Quite the opposite. In fact, the differences among them open a certain space for the resistance struggle and are, in addition to the stubborn resistance struggle of the liberation forces in the remaining pockets, an important reason for the ongoing war in Syria. The Assad regime wants to utilize the advances it made in the recent past in order to militarily smash the popular uprising. Their problem is that they simply are not capable to achieve a military victory by their own forces. They are completely dependent on the Iranian-led forces – about 125.000 soldiers with a much higher discipline than Assad’s thugs – as well as the Russian air force and mercenaries (the notorious PMC Wagner group, a kind of Russian equivalent to the American Blackwater killers). The Iranian regime largely agree with Assad’s goal as they want to establish a strong presence in Syria so that they can create the so-called *Shia Crescent* via Iraq, Syria to Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea. However, the Putin regime, which is the most important power in this alliance, is more open for a “political solution”, i.e. one which integrates sectors of the rebel’s leadership and which brings Turkey and possibly the YPG leadership on board. The reason for this

is that Putin wants to bring the war rather sooner than later to an end as he fears the political and economic costs at home of an ongoing and increasing involvement of Russia in a foreign war (the memory of the lost Afghanistan war in 1980-88 is still fresh in Russian people’s mind). This is even truer after the liberation fighters in Idlib recently succeeded to shot down the first Russia warplane and the mysterious killing of 100 pro-Assad fighters by the US military in Syrian Deir-ez-Zor which allegedly included Russian Wagner mercenaries.¹⁵⁹

107. In the first years of the Syrian Revolution, Turkey verbally, and also with some material aid, supported the resistance forces and called for the overthrow of the Assad regime. Its air force even shot down a Russian Sukhoi Su-24M in November 2015. But the deterioration of its relations with Washington – in particular after the failed military coup in July 2016 and the ongoing U.S. collaboration with the Kurdish YPG – as well as the military victories of the Assad/Iran/Russia bloc in the civil war have forced Ankara to switch camps. Since one year, the Erdoğan regime is part of the so-called Astana negotiations and aims to liquidate the Syrian Revolution. Erdoğan is under increasing pressure to sell some successes to his domestic audience in order not to undermine the popular support for his increasingly Bonapartist regime. Furthermore, the regime is determined to smash the Kurdish forces as it faces an uprising of the Kurdish minority in the south-east of its own country. This is the background why the Turkish army has invaded Afrin and threatens to attack the YPG also in other sectors of north Syria. The Erdoğan regime sees anti-Kurdish chauvinist militarism as the most promising instrument to gain popular support at home. All this constitutes the background for Ankara’s threats against the US which has been the strongest supporter of the YPG in the past years. As we have stated in our statement, the RCIT opposes the Turkish invasion in Afrin. We sharply denounce those Syrian rebel forces that join the Turkish army as foot soldiers against the Kurds instead of defending Idlib against Assad’s killing machinery. However, we also support the resistance of the Arab population against the occupation of their land by the YPG militias. Currently about one million Arabs are living in YPG-occupied land and they have launched protests against the occupation numerous times.¹⁶⁰

108. The U.S. is certainly in a very difficult position. While it has accepted the Assad regime and shares the Russian/Iranian/Assadist desire to smash the radical Islamist forces, it views the northern and eastern part of Syria as a territory it wants to keep occupied with its officially 2,000 soldiers as well as the YPG foot soldiers.¹⁶¹ Its goal is to obstruct the Teheran’s efforts to create a *Shia Crescent* and to utilize this part of Syria as a springboard for an attack against Iran. Furthermore it controls important economic resources of the country. Joshua Landis, one of the leading US analysts on Syria, remarks: “By controlling half of Syria’s energy resources, the Euphrates dam at Tabqa, as well as much of Syria’s best agricultural land, the US will be able to keep Syria poor and under-resourced. Keeping Syria poor and unable to finance reconstruction suits short-term US objectives because it protects Israel and will serve as a drain on Iranian resources, on which Syria must rely as it struggles to reestablish state services and rebuild as the war winds down.”¹⁶² However, the recent developments have put Washington

in a cul-de-sac. If it keeps its alliance with the YPG it will drive Ankara even more in the Russian camp. Furthermore, the relation of forces for the U.S. and the YPG are less and less favorable in Syria. On the other hand, dropping the Kurdish allies – the only reliable force in the past years – and gaining a very unreliable ally in Ankara is also a bad option. Washington can only lose in the current situation. Furthermore, the U.S. occupation is vulnerable to guerilla resistance. STRATFOR warns: *“In the absence of U.S.-Russian-Syrian cooperation to end the war in Syria, U.S. troops on the ground will be hostages to guerrilla warfare against them. There is a precedent for successful Syrian covert action against the United States and Israel. It was set in Lebanon after Israel’s 1982 invasion when assassination, suicide bombings and direct attacks drove the United States out in 1984 and forced a total Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon 16 years later.”*¹⁶³

109. In summary, we see that the civil war in Syria contains both the ongoing popular liberation struggle against the Assad regime and its backers as well as a competition between different imperialist and non-imperialist powers to divide the country and to get an as big as possible share of it. The RCIT calls Syrian revolutionaries to combine the struggle against the Assad dictatorship with the struggle to drive all foreign powers – Russia, Iran, Turkey and the U.S. – from Syrian soil. The struggle is both a democratic as well as a national liberation struggle and has to be combined with the strategic goal to create a workers and peasant government.¹⁶⁴

110. The fate of the Syrian Revolution will be decided in Idlib – the last big bastion of the Syrian Revolution. While the Astana deal intended to put Idlib under the control of Turkey, the triumphant Assad regime would also like to take over the region. Given the current focus of Turkey on Afrin and the YPG-controlled areas in the north, it is unclear if Ankara will follow the Astana plan. However, a combination of both is also possible: for example there exists the idea that the Assadists take the part of Idlib east of the railway line and Turkey the area to the west of it. (See Map 2) Either scenario would represent the final liquidation of the main part of the remaining liberated areas and, hence, the end of the Syrian Revolution. This does not mean that the struggle would be over. It is quite possible, even likely, that an underground and guerilla campaign would continue. However, in such a scenario the popular liberation struggle would face a severe defeat and revolutionaries have to continue the struggle under different conditions.

111. Anyway, the Syrian Revolution is not over yet – contrary to the wishes of the centrist doomsayers. While the relation of forces in Syria itself is very disadvantageous, it is important to point out to the international dimension. The RCIT has always emphasized that the ongoing liberation struggle in Syria is part of the revolutionary process in the whole Middle East. This revolutionary wave started in 2011. It suffered numerous setbacks, starting with the reactionary military coup of General Sisi in Egypt in 2013. However, we currently see an important revival of the revolutionary struggle in the Middle East with new popular uprisings in Palestine, Iran, Tunisia as well as Sudan in addition to the ongoing national liberation struggles in Yemen and Afghanistan. A significant victory in one of these struggles can have positive repercussions on the relation of forces in Syria itself and strengthen

the liberation struggle in Idlib and the other remaining liberated pockets which is currently in the defensive. For example an ongoing wave of mass protests in Iran could force the regime to substantially reduce its military intervention in Syria and hence weaken the Assadist camp (which indeed has been one of the demands of the protests).

112. Since some time Ankara is working hard to buy and pressurize, with significant success, the leadership of the rebel factions. Most FSA factions, Ahrar al-Sham, etc are now allied with the Turkish regime. They have now formed a so-called *“National Army”* and a *“Syrian Interim Government”*. However, these forces have massively lost ground and popular support. Without the aid of Turkey they would have no relevance. It is characteristic for their treacherous character that thousands of their fighters have left the front in Idlib and currently serve in Afrin as Turkey’s foot soldiers against the YPG. It is the more consistent sector of the resistance forces – in particular the *“Syrian Salvation Government”* and its backers, the petty-bourgeois Islamist *Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS) led by Abu Mohammad al-Julani, the *Turkistan Islamic Party*, as well as others – who have become the strongest force in the liberated areas in the north. They have become the hegemonial force because, until now, they have rejected the Astana betrayal and continue the liberation struggle against Assad as well as the imperialist powers. It is no accident that they are so hated by all reactionary powers!

113. However, the massive pressure from the difficult military situation, a series of assassination attempts against HTS leaders (most likely organized by the Turkish secret service MIT and their treacherous FSA lackeys) as well as the political limitations given the petty-bourgeois Islamist nature of HTS have led to important divisions inside the movement. While HTS is a broader movement of Islamists, its core force is the al-Nusra Front which originated from al-Qaida cadre in January 2012. These Islamist cadre adhered to the strategy of the so-called *“popular Jihad”*, a concept which opposes the *“old”* al-Qaida elitist conception. The later strategy, developed and implemented by Osama bin-Laden, focuses on individual terrorist attacks around the world. The *“popular Jihad”* concept, on the other hand, focuses on building roots among the population of a given country by orientating towards the struggle there and by combining the military struggle with efforts to build civil and social structures led by a Shura Council. These differences unavoidable led to tensions inside al-Qaida, since the *“popular Jihad”* concept undermines the international centralist structure and puts the forces on the ground primarily under national, local and popular pressure. In the end, this conflict led to a formal split of al-Nusra with the central al-Qaida leadership of Aiman az-Zawahiri in 2016. While contacts of sectors of al-Nusra with al-Qaida remained, the conflict recently escalated when the al-Julani leadership arrested several pro-al-Qaida cadres in the last months. The looming invasion of the Turkish army in Idlib has also accelerated the tensions inside HTS. The Julani leadership attempts to pragmatically avoid an open clash as their forces are already stretched by the offensive of the Assadists in the south of Idlib. The more radical, pro-al-Qaida, wing rejects compromises and favors open attacks on the Turkish army. Some of them have constituted themselves now as a

new faction called *Ansar Al-Furqan Fi Bilad Al-Sham*. If the Assadist forces and/or the Turkish army will occupy Idlib, the HTS will either be driven underground as a whole and continue a guerilla campaign (as the Taliban have done successfully in Afghanistan since 2001) or it will split and a sector of the leadership will capitulate and join the Turkish camp.¹⁶⁶

114. The whole tragic development of the Syrian Revolution demonstrates once more the profound crisis of leadership given the lack of authentic revolutionaries. However, this does not relieve revolutionaries from their duties. Only those who are conscious or unconscious lackeys of the imperialist powers will cynically stand aside or even join the traitors. All honest fighters for freedom will continue to support the ongoing liberation struggle! The RCIT calls all forces to continue supporting the liberation struggle against the Assad regime and its imperialist backers. We call all resistance forces to boycott the charade conferences in Sochi, Astana and Geneva. There can be no solution under the bayonets of the Great Powers. We say: Down with any "solution" imposed by the imperialist

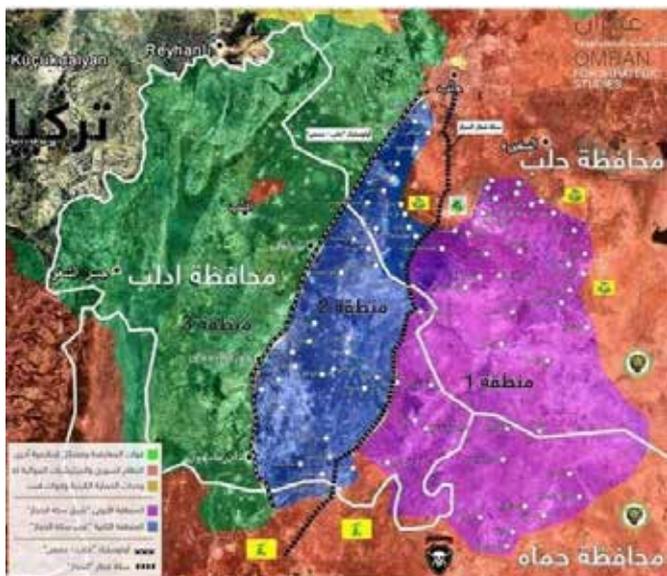
Great Powers Russia and US, by Iran and Turkey and the Assad regime! Continue the liberation struggle against the butcher Assad, against Russian and US Imperialism and the local Allies!

115. Most crucially, all Syrian revolutionaries should learn the lessons of the defeats which the liberation struggle experienced in the past years. The way forward is not submission and capitulation to the Great Powers and their regional allies. Instead of hoping for support by this or that foreign power or by focusing on a militarist guerilla strategy, revolutionaries should fight for the organization of the popular masses in independent councils and armed militias. The goal of the liberation struggle must be the creation of a multinational, independent workers' and peasants republic in Syria as part of a socialist federation of the Middle East! We call for an international workers and popular solidarity movement in support of the Syrian Revolution. Most importantly, the most advanced workers and youth in Syria need to unite into a revolutionary party based on a program for socialist liberation.

Map 1. Foreign Military Bases in North Syria, November 2017¹⁴⁶



Map 2. Plan for the Division of Idlib¹⁶⁵



A new revolutionary upsurge of popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa

116. As mentioned above, we have seen a *new upsurge of class struggles* on a global scale in the last few months. The most important region of this wave has been the Middle East and North Africa which has seen several popular uprisings, some of them coming close to pre-revolutionary situations. There has been a surge of the Palestinian liberation struggle against the Zionist state (first, the Al-Aqsa protests in summer 2017 and, more recently, the regular mass demonstration for Jerusalem since Trump's announcement on Jerusalem). There have been important popular uprisings in Tunisia as well as in Iran (where people also protested against the regime's support for Assad). In addition, in the past weeks there have been militant mass demonstrations against price hikes on food in Sudan as well as against unemployment and poverty in Morocco. Add to this the ongoing democratic and national liberation wars in Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan. This new wave of revolutionary mass struggles, if it continues, could turn around the counter-revolutionary trend which has swept the region since the strategic defeat of the Egyptian masses in 2013.

117. The strategic task of revolutionaries in the Middle East and North Africa is to unite these struggles into a single Intifada in the whole region and to fight for a socialist program of permanent revolution and working class power directed against *all* imperialist Great Powers (U.S., EU, Russia, China, Japan) as well as the local bourgeois regimes! Revolutionaries have to explain to the activists in each country that they must view their struggles not in national isolation but as part of an international struggle. The RCIT emphasizes that this demonstrates the actuality of the international, permanent revolution – not only a correct theoretical conception but a very practical concrete strategy for the struggles today!

118. The surge of the mass struggle in *Palestine* is of particular importance not only for the people itself but, given the significance of Palestine for the whole Arab and Muslim world, also globally. The massive character of the protests has forced the official leaderships – even the treacherous Palestinian Administration of Abbas – to halt negotiations on a “peace process” and to call for mass protests. Hamas already talks about a “*Third Intifada*”. While both Fatah as well as Hamas are calling for protests, the movement has a significant spontaneous character as the main burden of the fighting is done by youth who are not aligned with any faction. More than two dozen demonstrators have already been killed and nearly 1,000 people arrested.

119. It is urgent to avoid the mistakes of the past. The mass struggle must not become focused on individual terrorist acts as this would be a self-defeating strategy inviting massive repression by the Zionist state without mobilizing the masses and international solidarity. It is crucial to build popular committees and self-defense committees composed of Palestinian workers, poor peasants, and youth in places of work, towns, and villages. The masses must force the Palestinian Authority to immediately stop to all forms of collaboration of the Palestinian Authority with the Israeli state! Furthermore it is of utmost importance to build a massive international

solidarity movement in order to pressurize Israel and the U.S. The RCIT calls for an international popular boycott campaign against the Israeli state and its economy. Such a campaign must also strive to force the governments around the world to stop their open and hidden economic, political and military aid for the Zionist state! Such a popular mass campaign must also pressurize the Arab states to break all forms of collaboration with Israel and to reject any negotiations about a “peace plan” with the Zionist state. Furthermore they must demand from them – in particular Egypt – to break the disgraceful blockade against Gaza which is starving the Palestinian people since 2007.¹⁶⁷

120. The popular uprising in *Iran* has provoked the most serious crisis the capitalist-theocratic regime since the “*Green Revolution*” in 2009. In fact, the recent protests have been much more important than those nine years ago because they are much more widespread (reaching 80-100 cities and towns across the country). Furthermore they are much more proletarian in its composition. Finally, they are also more radical. While they started as protests against the high cost of living, poverty, unemployment and graft, they soon added political demands which were directed against all factions of the regime and its foreign policy. They raised slogans like: “*Death to Rouhani*”, “*Death to the dictator*” (i.e. Khamenei), “*Not Gaza, not Lebanon, my soul is the redemption of Iran*”, “*Leave Syria and think about us*”, “*You have used religion and humiliated the people*”, “*The government is lying and its promises are not implemented*” and “*Unity Unity, No Fear, No fear of the police*”. The demonstrators burned pictures of Khomeini and Khamenei, overturned police cars and set police motorcycles ablaze. According to official reports, at least 22 protesters and two security force members had been killed. Additionally, 3,700 demonstrators were arrested. While the regime was able to suppress the protests in early January, it is quite possible that the movement will experience a new upsurge in the next months. In any case, it has sent a warning to all faction of the ruling class that it sits on a powder keg and must be cautious in implementing of its austerity policy as well as its reactionary foreign policy adventures like in Syria. There is no organized political force of any significance which has played a role in this movement.

121. As we have stated in the RCIT statement on the popular uprising in Iran, socialists should call for the formation of action committees in the workplaces, neighborhoods, schools and universities in order to organize the workers and oppressed. Such committees should organize the struggle and decide about the main demands, the forms of protests, the perspectives etc. They should also organize self-defense units in order to defend the demonstrations against the regime's repression apparatus. Furthermore, socialists must explain that the solution is not national isolation but extending the struggle for liberation internationally which includes support for the Syrian Revolution as well as the Palestinian struggle against the Zionist enemy. Finally, socialists should explain that the liberation struggle must be directed against all factions of the ruling class and against all imperialist powers. They should combine such demands with the perspective of a workers and poor peasants government based on popular councils and militias.¹⁶⁸

122. The uprising in *Tunisia*, starting on 7 January,

has been another spontaneous mass protest. Like in other countries it started as a response to the government's new budget, which raised the prices of numerous goods. Beginning spontaneously after activists tagged the phrase #Fech_Nestannew ("What are we waiting for?") on walls and on social media, demonstrations spread to more than 20 cities and towns. In Tunis, a crowd stormed a Carrefour market. In Nefza, demonstrators stormed a police station. The brutal repression of the state resulted in the killing of a 55-year old man in Tebourba and the arrest of nearly 1,000 people. About 50 police were wounded in clashes. While the protests have subsided in past weeks, the mood for a new upsurge still exists. The movement was supported by *Ej-Jabha* (Popular Front, short for "The Popular Front for the Realization of the Objectives of the Revolution"), a left-wing petty-bourgeois opposition alliance representing a coalition of parties mostly coming from a Stalinist/Hoxhaist as well as Nasserist/Baathist tradition. Some protests were also supported by the trade union federation UGTT.

123. In Tunisia too, it is a crucial task of socialists to call these parties and unions to fully support the movement, to create a united front and to transform the protests into a general strike. Furthermore the masses should form *action committees in the workplaces, neighborhoods, schools and universities* in order to organize the struggle democratically. Furthermore, the movement needs to create *self-defense units* so that it can defend itself against the attacks of the repression apparatus. In addition, such committees should organize self-defense units to fight against state repression. For now, the central demands should be the withdrawal of all austerity measures. In order to fight unemployment and poverty, activists should call to establish a *public employment program under the control of the UGTT and other mass organizations, financed by the expropriation of Tunisia's super-rich*, many of whom are close to the Ben Ali clan. Revolutionaries should combine such demands with the perspective of fighting for an authentic *workers and popular government*. Such a government would *exclusively* serve the interests of the popular masses and would remove power and wealth from the hands of the small corrupt elite of super-rich politicians and army generals. It would also expropriate the foreign imperialist corporations which are exploiting semi-colonial Tunisia.¹⁶⁹

124. Sudan has also experienced a wave of mass protests after the government's devaluation of the local currency which resulted in rising bread prices. This move by the government has been one of the requests of the International Monetary Fund. A number of protesters have been arrested, including opposition politicians like Siddig Youssef, a leader of the Sudanese Communist Party. The protests are supported by the Communist Party, the National Umma Party, as well as forces like the "No violence against women" organization. Here too, revolutionaries should call for the creation of popular action committees as well as an emergency action program to solve the social economic crisis. They combine such a perspective with the struggle for a *workers and popular government*.

125. In Morocco we see upsurge of mass protests too. They were first directed against high electricity bills. However, after the deaths of two miners (and later a third) in December last year in Jerada the protests have transformed into regular demonstrations of miners and

their families. In this region, people are risking their lives scraping coal from abandoned mines.¹⁷⁰ These protests could and should link with the movement of the Amazighs ("Berber") living in the Rif in the north of the country where regular protests have taken place since 2016. Revolutionaries should support the demands for an end of the austerity measures and the restoration of the public subsidies. They should combine this with the demand for a *public employment program under the control of the workers and popular mass organizations, financed by the super-rich*. Likewise, revolutionaries should combine such demands with democratic demands for the *release of all political prisoners*, in particular those who have been arrested in the past year when the Amazighs in the Rif rose up. Such a perspective should be combined with the slogan of *national self-determination of the Amazighs* as well as for a *workers and popular government*.¹⁷¹

126. All these uprisings have in common that they have a strongly spontaneous character. This is, on one hand, their strength as it reflects that they are truly popular mass movements. On the other hand, we know from experience, both in history as well as actually from the Arab Revolution since 2011, that such protests can not last for long on a spontaneous basis. Sooner or later they will either be smashed or they will be led by organized forces. The question is only, which force will take over a leadership role. This is why the RCIT has always stressed the importance of revolutionaries to unite and to fight together for the formation of a revolutionary party based on an action program for the current situation. Such a party must help the working class and the oppressed to organize and fight independently of *all* imperialist powers and local bourgeoisie. They must explain that all imperialist Great Powers (U.S., EU, Russia, China, and Japan) as well as the local bourgeois regimes are the enemies of the working class. Hence it must not align itself with any of them but organize in an independent way. Such a party must combine the ongoing mass struggles with the perspective of a socialist revolution and its internationalization towards the creation of a socialist federation of the people of the Middle East and North Africa.

VI. THE KOREAN PENINSULA: IMPERIALIST AGGRESSION, CAPITALIST RESTORATION AND REVOLUTIONARY DEFENSISM

127. As we stated above, the Korean peninsula constitutes the second focus of the present world situation. The reasons for this are:

The central position of the Asia-Pacific region¹⁷² as the most populous continent and a key region for the world economy;

It's geographical position as a direct neighboring country to all four imperialist states in Asia (China, Russia, South Korea and Japan);

For this reason US imperialism tries to utilize the conflict with North Korea in order to threaten the latter's allies (China and Russia) and to subjugate its own, militarily relative weak, allies South Korean and Japan;

Long standing historical tensions stemming from the Korea War in 1950-53 and the division of the country which emerged from it.

128. The main reason for the recent escalation of the North Korea conflict is the aggressive determination of US imperialism to utilize this issue in order to re-establish its dominance in East-Asia. Of course, it has nothing to do with any real threat emerging from the small Asian country. Even if North Korea would have already succeeded to possess nuclear weapons, their number would not exceed 10-20, according to the latest SIPRI report. Compare this to this 6,800 nuclear heads owned by US imperialism!¹⁷³ The hysterical U.S. campaign about the North Korean threat is a mockery of history! While North Korea never attacked the USA, this biggest imperialist power indeed waged war against North Korea in 1950-53 in which one million people died. Since then the USA has built numerous military bases in South Korea and currently stations there 28,500 soldiers. It is US imperialism and its allies who pose a threat to North Korea and not the other way round!

129. The Trump Administration is seriously considering a military attack on North Korea and one wing is actually advocating it strongly. According to a report of the Reuters news agency, "*National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster has been the most vocal of Trump's aides arguing for a more active military approach, while Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and the military leadership have urged caution, stressing the need to exhaust diplomatic options, according to five officials who spoke on condition of anonymity.*"¹⁷⁴ Various neo-conservative ideologists are already beating the war drum. Edward Luttwak, one of their leading figures, recently published an article with the self-explaining title: "*It's Time to Bomb North Korea. Destroying Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal is still in America's national interest*".¹⁷⁵ During an interview with ABC News on the last day of 2017, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen claimed that Trump was willing to launch an attack and concluded: "*We're actually closer to nuclear war with North Korea and in that region than we've ever been.*"¹⁷⁶ And another expert reported: "*At a conference on international security last month in the US, I was privately told by a number of US experts*

with links to Washington that the Trump administration is determined to attack North Korea. The question was of when, not if."¹⁷⁷

130. One option discussed by the Pentagon, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, "*is known as the "bloody nose" strategy: React to some nuclear or missile test with a targeted strike against a North Korean facility to bloody Pyongyang's nose and illustrate the high price the regime could pay for its behavior. The hope would be to make that point without inciting a full-bore reprisal by North Korea.*"¹⁷⁸ However, even the military die-hards are aware that such a strike bears an enormous risk of escalating into a full-blown war. As we mentioned above, a research institute of the U.S. Congress calculates that even a war with conventional weapons "only" could result in up to 300,000 dead in the first few days. Another, older study from the Pentagon arrives to the estimation that "*a conflict on the peninsula would lead to at least 52,000 American and 490,000 South Korean casualties within the first ninety days. Former CIA chief James Woolsey has argued that 4,000 daily air strikes over a period of thirty to sixty days would be required to demolish North Korea's nuclear programme as the US believes it exists, and to blunt its capacity to retaliate.*"¹⁷⁹

131. Naturally, all these estimations are speculations to a certain degree. However, there can be not the slightest doubt that a war on the Korean peninsula would have devastating consequences. It would be a catastrophe, first and foremost, for the Korean people who would have to bear the brunt of the American aggression. Secondly for the whole region in East Asia. And thirdly, it would certainly provoke a crash of the world economy as the peninsula is close to one of the, if not the, most important routes of shipping traffic for world trade. We emphasize once again our thesis that this lunatic war-mongering is another example of how desperate and aggressive U.S. imperialism is becoming when faced with its decay. It shows once more that the Armageddon faction of the American bourgeoisie has taken over the command in Washington.

132. As China and Russia are neighboring countries and strongly opposed to a US war against North Korea, it is unlikely that they would stand idle in such a case. While we do not consider a World War III as likely in the near future, such a scenario can not be excluded. In any way, a military conflict on the Korean peninsula would have massive repercussions for the world political situation. It would not only escalate the tensions between the U.S. and China and Russia. It would likely provoke mass protests in Asia and around the world. Such an attack against the Korean people could provoke the emergence of a global mass anti-imperialist movement and result in an abrupt change of the world situation.

133. U.S. imperialism is beating the war drums against North Korea for several reasons.

First, it wants to subjugate a nation which is a historic

enemy since the Korean War in 1950-53 and which has since then refused to subordinate to Washington. Dealing a “bloody nose” to Korea would also send a message to other people in the South that Washington knows no mercy with people resisting its dictates.

Secondly, waging a war at their borders could serve as deterrence against Moscow and Beijing.

Thirdly, it could strengthen the U.S. political and military hegemony over its imperialist allies – first and foremost South Korea and Japan. For all these reasons, the Trump Administration is looking very favorable to launching a war against North Korea.

Fourthly, it could rally some patriotic support for the battered Trump Administration.

134. China’s and Russia’s main interests in this conflict are that they want to stop the U.S. waging war in front of their borders. They want to keep North Korea as a buffer state to South Korea, i.e. a state which is allied to Washington and which is home to a number of U.S. military bases. In order to defuse the tensions, they have agreed several times to vote for economic sanctions against North Korea at the U.N. Security Council. While they have links with the North Korean regime it would be wrong to see the latter simply as their proxy. In fact, Moscow and Beijing consider Kim Jong-un as unreliable. According to reports, China backed a plot by Kim Jong Un’s half-brother and uncle who, however, were both killed after the North Korean ruler uncovered it in 2013.¹⁸⁰ Currently, both China and Russia try to defuse the situation by, on one hand, appeasing the U.S. by agreeing to economic sanctions and, on the other hand, by opposing Washington’s saber-rattle and secretly supporting North Korea’s trade.

Capitalist Restoration in North Korea and the ruling Stalinist-Donju Class

135. In past statements, the RCIT has characterized North Korea as a *Degenerated Workers State*. By this we meant that the political regime represents a counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy ruling over the working class. However, in contrast to capitalist states, its economic basis was a planned economy. We do not longer consider such a characterization as accurate. In fact, in the past years – in particular with Kim Jong-un coming to power in 2011 – the North Korean bureaucracy has made a decisive turn towards capitalism. Since then, the ruling elite attempts to copy the Chinese model, i.e. to combine the preservation of the one-party regime with the introduction of market reforms.

136. In the early 1990s North Korea suffered a dramatic social and economic crisis when Soviet and Chinese aid was suddenly withdrawn. Being deprived of subsidized fuel, electricity and spare parts, the economy collapsed, with many factories coming to a complete halt. Things were ultimately exacerbated by a series of devastating floods in 1994 and 1995, which destroyed around 1.5 million tons of grain and ruined much of the nation’s infrastructure. Around 85% of North Korea’s power generation capacity was lost as a result. Harvests plunged and hence the government soon had no food to feed much of its population. The result was a serious famine between 1994 and 1998 that claimed the lives of between 200,000 and three million North Koreans.¹⁸¹ As a result, the regime allowed a number of market reforms which

resulted in the emergence of numerous official or hidden private enterprises in the 2000s. Hence in many places markets – called *jangmadang* (“marketplace”) – emerged illegal, yet tolerated. “A 2009 study came to the conclusion that some 58.5 percent of all restaurants in North Korea are *de facto* privately owned. Similar trends exist in the retail industry. While the fiction of state ownership is maintained, many shops are, essentially, private. The managercum-owner buys merchandise from wholesalers as well as (technically) state-owned suppliers, and then sells it at a profit. The earnings are partially transferred to the state, but largely pocketed by the owner himself (or rather, herself). The above-mentioned study estimated that in 2009 some 51.3 percent of shops were actually private retail operations. Transportation underwent similar changes.”¹⁸² According to a 2008 estimate, by that time the average North Korean family drew some 80% of its income from the private economy, not from salaries and rations from the state.¹⁸³

137. However, at that time the ruling Stalinist caste had not definitely decided about its economic policy and a strong faction still existed which opposed the market-reforms. In the second half of the 2000s, various counter-reforms were undertaken and pro-market politicians were purged.¹⁸⁴ Andrei Lankov, an expert on North Korea, describes the situation as follows: “However, the North Korean state looked upon these developments with great unease, and never explicitly approved market activities. Between 2004 and 2009, the North Korean government even tried to push the genie back into the bottle by getting rid of the private economy and returning to the old Leninist economic model. These efforts ended in failure, and after 2010, the government decided to leave the economy alone.”¹⁸⁵

138. Since then, i.e. effectively with Kim Jong-un coming to power in 2011, the restorationist faction clearly got the upper hand and has since then advanced the introduction of capitalism. Obviously, they face various difficulties, in particular as North Korea suffers from international sanctions, the country receives only few foreign investment. Hence, the process of capitalist restoration is rather characterized by primitive accumulation and semi-legal profiteering. Nevertheless, a combination of state-capitalist, private market and grey-market sector is becoming the dominant characteristic of North Korean capitalist economy.¹⁸⁶ According to a recent assessment of Lee Byung-ho, director of South Korea’s intelligence service, at least 40% percent of the population in North Korea is now engaged in some form of private enterprise. Today the rising class is the so-called *Donju*, the word North Koreans use to describe the new class of traders and businessmen that has emerged. These “red capitalists” have close relations with the regime and often receive medals and certificates in return for their donations. A North Korean defector appropriately observed: “*Donju* wear the socialist hide, operating as part of state-run companies. But inside, they are thoroughly capitalist.” A Korean journalist reports: “A growing class of merchants and entrepreneurs is thriving under the protection of ruling party officials. Pyongyang, the capital, has seen a construction boom, and there are now enough cars on its once-empty streets for some residents to make a living washing them. (...) Since 2010, the number of government-approved markets in North Korea has doubled to 440, and satellite images show them growing in size in most cities. In a country with a population of 25 million, about 1.1 million people are now employed as retailers

or managers in these markets, according to a study by the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul. 'Competition is everywhere, including between travel agencies, taxi companies and restaurants,' Rüdiger Frank, an economist at the University of Vienna who studies the North, wrote recently after visiting a shopping center there."¹⁸⁷ Another journalist who interviewed many North Korean defectors concludes: "In theory, North Korea is a bastion of socialism, a country where the state provides everything, including housing, health care, education and jobs. In reality, the state economy barely operates anymore. People work in factories and fields, but there is little for them to do, and they are paid almost nothing. A vibrant private economy has sprung up out of necessity, one where people find ways to make money on their own, whether through selling homemade tofu or dealing drugs, through smuggling small DVD players with screens called "notels" over the border or extracting bribes. (...) North Korea technically has a centrally planned economy, but now people's lives revolve around the market. No one expects the government to provide things anymore. Everyone has to find their own way to survive. (...) The ability to make money, sometimes lots of money, through means both legal and illegal has led to visible inequality in a country that has long touted itself as an egalitarian socialist paradise. This could be a potential source of disruption. Bean traders and drug dealers and everyone in between have the prospect of making a decent living. Those working only in official jobs, whether they be on a state-owned ostrich farm or in a government ministry in Pyongyang, earn only a few dollars a month and get little in the way of rations to supplement their meager salaries."¹⁸⁸

139. In our book on the capitalist restoration in Cuba, as well as in other works, we have discussed in detail the complex nature of the process of social transformation from a workers state towards capitalism. It would go beyond the scope of this document to reproduce the Marxist discussion on this issue and on our own experience given the process of capitalist restoration in the former Stalinist countries after 1989-91. At this place, we limit ourselves to quote the conclusion of the RCIT's analysis: "When can we state that such a capitalist restoration has taken place? The answer is: when a Stalinist bureaucratic workers' government is replaced by or transforms itself into a bourgeois restorationist government. Such a bourgeois restorationist government is one which is firmly resolved, both in words and deeds, to reestablish a capitalist mode of production, i.e., to move decisively against planned property relations in favor of creating a capitalist economy based on the law of value."¹⁸⁹ Such an approach is in accordance with Trotsky's method when he discussed the possibility of capitalist restoration in the USSR in the later 1930s. He also insisted that the decisive criterion is not the exact degree of privatization of the economy: "Should a bourgeois counterrevolution succeed in the USSR, the new government for a lengthy period would have to base itself upon the nationalized economy."¹⁹⁰ It is rather the class character of property relations which the regime is defending: "The class nature of the state is, consequently, determined not only by its political forms but by its social content; i.e., by the character of the forms of property and productive relations which the given state guards and defends."¹⁹¹ As we saw the transformation of the old Stalinist regimes into Stalinist/Capitalist regimes in China, Vietnam, Laos or some Central Asian countries, we see a similar development taking place in North Korea.

140. It seems to us that such a restoration of capitalism has taken place in North Korea in the last years, effectively

with Kim Jong-Un coming to power. With some differences but essentially similar, the North Korean bureaucracy has gone along the Chinese road and has transformed itself into a new ruling class. This means that the ruling elite keep the political superstructure with its one-party dictatorship intact but today this regime serves the restoration of the capitalist mode of production.

141. In the case of North Korea the regime is even more grotesque as it represents a dictatorship in the form of a monarchy where only one and the same family rules the state since its foundation in 1945 respectively 1948. Such a development is not without historic precedent as the French House of Bourbon comes into one's mind: it first ruled the feudalistic monarchy before the revolution in 1789 and later, after the restoration in 1815, the same family – actually the brothers of the executed King Louis XVI – ruled the capitalist state for another 15 years.

142. In summary, the Stalinist regime transformed from a bureaucratic caste into a ruling class. Naturally, this class is certainly not without inner contradictions as it combines – as it has been the case in China and Vietnam – both party functionaries related to the "old" sectors of the planned economy as well as those who are closely connected or partly even identical with the new layer of *Donju*, i.e. "red capitalists". As a result of this process the task of the North Korean working class has changed – similar to China and Vietnam: on the table is no longer a political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy but a social revolution against the ruling Stalinist-*Donju* Class.

143. This does not mean that the process of capitalist restoration has been completed. In fact, such a process usually takes a number of years. We have seen this is in Russia and even more so in China and Vietnam that it can take many years until all enterprises in the industrial and banking sector are subjugated to the capitalist law of value and until the whole working class is transformed into labor commodities. Likewise there are still many tasks for the restorationists in North Korea to complete. But the Rubicon has definitely been crossed and North Korea has to be characterized as a capitalist semi-colonial state.

South Korea: an Imperialist State

144. In a comprehensive study about the development of capitalism in South Korea (and Taiwan) in the post-war period, published in 1996, we have elaborated how – due to specific historic circumstances related to the Cold War¹⁹² – South Korea has been able to become a relatively advanced capitalist economy.¹⁹³ Since then we have recognized that South Korea has become an imperialist state given the dominance of the *chaebols* (as the country's monopolies are called) as well as their global role. This analysis has been confirmed as we saw that South Korea, a country with a population of 51 million, has become one of the top economies in the world behind the leading states like the U.S. and China. Today, South Korea's economy is the fourth-largest in Asia and the 11th largest in the world. Its Per Capita Gross Domestic Product is expected to edge past Italy's in 2018.¹⁹⁴ In the ranking of the biggest monopolies in the world, South Korea is number 5 (Forbes Global 2000) respectively number 7 (Fortune Global 500). There can be no doubt that South Korea has become an imperialist nation.

145. However, while South Korea has become an advanced capitalist country due to the specific conditions of the Cold War, its political characteristics are also peculiar for the same reasons. Given the history of the Cold War and the ongoing tensions with Pyongyang, South Korea has been always strongly subordinated to Washington's foreign policy interests. The U.S. military has 28,500 troops, hundreds of tanks and air forces stationed in dozens of bases. Recently, Washington deployed the so-called THAAD Missile Battery in South Korea. In short, South Korea faces a strong political dominance by Washington.

146. The South Korean bourgeoisie itself is divided about the approach to the northern neighbor. A traditional right-wing conservative faction, closely linked to several influential *chaebols* families, still looks favorable to the "good old days" of the military dictatorship (1950-1987) when the ruler did not have to worry about elections but only about a coup by another general. These conservatives are strongly anti-communist and support the American war-mongering. However, another sector of the bourgeoisie considers these military tensions as an unnecessary obstacle for doing business. The background for this is, first, that China has become South Korea's biggest trade partner (both export as well as import) and, second, that these capitalists would like to use the Northern neighbor as a place for super-exploitation of its cheap labor. Between 2003 and the recent escalation in 2016, North Korea ran the so-called "*Kaesŏng Industrial Park*" at the border to South Korea in which 123 South Korean corporations operated. The South Korean capitalists made huge profits from the super-exploitation of 53,500 North Korean workers employed at the industrial park who received wages of only about \$160 per month. This is one-fifth of the South Korean minimum wage, and about a quarter of an average Chinese wage.

147. Last year, the right-wing President Park Geun-hye was forced to resign after a huge corruption scandal provoked a wave of mass protests. In the subsequent election, the liberal candidate Moon Jae-in was elected as new President. He tries to improve the relations with China. Beijing imposed unofficial economic sanctions against South Korea after the U.S. deployed the THAAD system. However, Moon Jae-in could improve relations with Beijing at a recent visit in China, despite the massive pressure by Washington. Beijing lifted the sanctions after Moon Jae-in accepted several military constraints known as the "*three No's*". Concretely, Seoul agreed "*there will be no further anti-ballistic missile systems in Korea, no joining of a region-wide US missile defence system and no military alliance involving Korea, the US and Japan.*"¹⁹⁵ Likewise, Seoul improved relations with Pyongyang resulting in collaboration around the upcoming Winter Olympics. Hence, we see that Washington saber-rattle also serves the purpose to stop this accommodation and to bring Seoul back into line.

148. Finally, it is important to bear in mind that South Korea's working class and student movement have a proud tradition of militant struggle for their social and democratic rights. Take for example the famous *Kwangju Uprising* in 1980, when the people in this southern city took over local control for ten days in May 1980 in protest against the dictatorship of General Chun Doo-hwan. The regime finally succeeded to smash the insurrection and

to kill up to 600 people. However, later the dictatorship was brought down by mass protests and since then South Korea has experienced a series of militant class struggles, resulting in the formation of the militant KCTU trade union federation and a left-wing student movement. A military attack of U.S. imperialism against North Korea could provoke a revolutionary upsurge of the South Korean working class and youth.

Amid Sanctions and War Threats: Defend North Korea! Defeat U.S. Imperialism!

149. The RCIT has put forward its position on the North Korean crisis in several statements. We unreservedly oppose all attempt of the imperialist Great Powers – first and foremost the USA – to pressurize and subjugate North Korea. We call for an end of all sanctions and for mass protests against the military provocations by the U.S. and its allies. In case of a military conflict the RCIT calls for the defeat of the imperialist forces and their allies and for the defense of North Korea. A successful defense of North Korea against US imperialism would weaken the biggest power and hence the biggest enemy of the world's working class and oppressed people. It would encourage the anti-imperialist liberation struggle all over the world. This is why the international workers movement – including the social democratic, Stalinist, Maoist and centrist parties and trade unions – must unite in waging all forms of class struggle resistance. *For demonstrations, strikes, sabotage etc. in order to stop such a reactionary imperialist war!* They must strive to turn such a war into a defeat for the imperialist rulers.¹⁹⁶

150. The international workers movement – in Asia and around the world – must respond to a looming imperialist war against North Korea with global mass protests. The war-mongers must be attacked wherever possible. The Leninist maxim "*Turning the imperialist war into a civil war against the ruling class*" must be followed wherever possible. Naturally, South Korea and Japan are the places where such a strategy is most appropriate given the fact that these countries are allied with Washington and, at the same time, they are directly affected by such a war.

151. We reject all those reformist and pacifist strategies which appeal to the UN to solve any of the world's conflicts. It is only the consistent proletarian class struggle against imperialism and against reactionary ruling regimes leading to the international socialist revolution which can remove these threats to peace for once and all.

152. Our defense of North Korea against any imperialist aggression must not be confused with any political support for the regime of Kim Jong-Un that rules the country. This grotesque form of monarchic dictatorship only serves to defend the interests of the Stalinist-Capitalist bureaucracy. The North Korean working class, while defending its country against imperialism and its allies, must aim to prepare for a social revolution with the goal to overthrow this regime and to create a healthy workers state based on workers and peasant councils and militias. Part of such a revolution must be its extension to South Korea whose proletariat has demonstrated a proud tradition of class struggle in the past decades. The rallying cry must be: "*For the revolutionary unification of the Korean peninsula!*" and "*For a Korean Workers and Peasant Republic!*"

VII. BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY WORLD PARTY IN THE PRESENT PERIOD

153. The RCIT has pointed out many times that – contrary to the cries of the reformist and centrist naysayers – the central problem of the present period is not a so-called “*crisis of struggle*” or a “*lack of confidence in socialism*” of the working class. The central problem is rather the crisis of proletarian leadership. The working class and the oppressed have given proof in the past years in numerous uprisings, general strikes and militant class struggles – from India, Iran, the Arab world, South Africa, Brazil, Argentina to Catalonia – that they are willing to fight. However, what they are lacking is a revolutionary party with a program and cadres able to fight and lead them to victory. Building such a revolutionary party – nationally and internationally – is therefore the most important task for all authentic liberation fighters in the present period.¹⁹⁷

154. If there exists any temporary “*crisis of struggle*” or “*lack of confidence in socialism*”, it is rather the result of the crisis of proletarian leadership and not the other way around. Wherever the working class brings its official leaderships to power they get nearly immediately betrayed by the reformist and populist bureaucrats. SYRIZA, the Greek flagship of the former Stalinist and now social-democratized *Party of the European Left* (which has also the Communist Party in France, the German Linkspartei and others among its members), is a prime example. Since it came to power in January 2015 it created an unprecedented record in neoliberal “*successes*”! The SYRIZA government, in coalition with the right-wing ANEL party, implemented more privatization projects than all the other, open bourgeois, governments before. It paid the imperialist banks more interest rates than its predecessor governments. And, recently, it even attacked the workers’ constitutional right to strike! With “*friends*” like this, the Greek workers hardly need any enemies! And the SYRIZA leadership is no exception! Just think about Zyuganov’s Communist Party in Russia who flatters the arch-reactionary Orthodox Church or Viktor Tyulkin’s RKR-PPK which supports Russian imperialism in Syria and the Ukraine. The same is true for India’s CPI(M) which implemented the IMF program when it was in power in West-Bengal. And let us not forget the “*Communist*” Party of Egypt which hailed General Sisi’s coup and their Syrian “*comrades*” who lick Assad’s boots until today.

155. All these are powerful demonstrations that not everyone who swears to God in words also serves his goals in deeds. It is a widespread misunderstanding of people to imagine that an “*agreement in principle*” on the ideas of Marxism, Leninism or even Trotskyism would be sufficient. In fact, the experience of the big social liberation movements in history serves very well today. Take the different wings among the Jews during the time of the Roman occupation. They all praised *Yahweh* but the *Pharisees* collaborated with the Empire while the rivaling *Zealots* fought heroically against them. Or take the two opposing wing in the early Christian church: Their joint reference to Jesus’ teachings didn’t stop them that the official representatives prostituted themselves and

served the Emperor while the *Donatists*, rooted among the poorer classes (particularly in North Africa) renounced any collaboration with Rome and one sector of them, the “*extremist*” *Agonistici* (also called “*Circumcellions*” by their enemies), led an armed struggle against the slave holders, big land owners and treacherous bishops in the name of God. The same has been the case with Taosim in China in the epoch of the Han Dynasty when is served both as a state religion as well as a spiritual inspiration for the major peasant uprising of the *Yellow Turbans* led by Zhang Jue and his brothers who were fighting for social equality. Or compare *Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī*, the loyal and dedicated companion of the Prophet Muhammad with the corrupt caliph *‘Uthmān*; or take *‘Ali ibn Muhammad* and the social revolutionary *Zanj Rebellion* of the slaves and poor against the corrupt *Abbasid* Caliphate. Both sides praised Allah in words, but, in fact, they served completely opposite causes. Later we saw *Thomas Münzer* leading the revolutionary uprising of the poor peasants against the ruling feudal class in Germany and *Martin Luther*, compromising with the same class. The same with the “*moderate*” Hussites and the Taborites in Bohemia. Both sides did so in the name of Christianity and the struggle against the corrupt Catholic Church. All this is the result that different classes and factions of classes pursued their goals in the name of the same ideology.

156. This is no different in the history of Marxism. Both the Mensheviks as well as the Bolsheviks praised Marx and Engels as well as the early works of Plekhanov. Similarly, both Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht as well as Karl Kautsky publicly esteemed the works of the founders of scientific socialism. But when they were tested by war and revolution, they found themselves on opposite sides of the barricades serving the revolution respectively the counterrevolution! Likewise, let’s remember how much the banner of communism has been misused by the Stalinist bureaucracy who brutally suppressed the working class and slaughtered hundreds of thousands of honest communists. Today they continue to mock the ideas of Marx and Lenin by their deeds. Things are no better among the so-called “*Trotskyists*”. As we have mentioned before, such so-called “*Trotskyists*” are dragging the name of the founder of the Red Army through the mire when they combine their praises for the Fourth International’s foundation program of 1938 with practical support for the military putschists in Egypt or with cowardly “*Third Campism*” in face of the coup in Brazil 2016 or the Syrian Revolution. All these pseudo-socialist forces are a modern version of the mendicant orders in the Middle Ages. The mendicant orders, like the Franciscans or the Dominicans, emerged in a time when the Catholic Church was totally discredited in the eyes of the popular masses. They were crucial to regain the influence of the papacy as the monks lived among the masses under modest circumstances and hence were able to win the trust of the people. While the fat and openly corrupt bishops were despised by the people, the monks were able to win respect and

confidence as they appeared as coming from the mid of the people. The mendicant orders acted as pro-Papacy forces pacifying the popular masses and fighting against the social revolutionary Christian heretical movements which at that time gained strong influence. Like the mendicant orders in the Middle Ages, the so-called "left" today uses radical phrases so that it appears as serving the interest of the oppressed. But in fact, they are spreading confusion and serving the ruling class. No, we repeat: praying to the same God does in no way mean serving the same goals!

157. This is why the RCIT insists that an abstract agreement on the principles of "Trotskyism" is in no way sufficient to unite the forces of revolutionaries. What is at least as important, if not even more important, is agreement on the tasks in the class struggle today. Agreement on the principles of the Transitional Program of 1938 is worthless if one stands on different sides of the barricades in the class struggle today! Agreement on Lenin's theory of imperialism is meaningless if one isn't capable to recognize the new imperialist Great Powers China and Russia as such! Praising the "Communist Manifesto" is useless if one does not divide the world in classes but rather shares the approach of bourgeois geopoliticism and divides the world, and corresponding tactics, in the main enemy, U.S. imperialism, and all its opponents in order to support the latter.

158. This is why the RCIT considers it as crucial to conduct the struggle for a new Revolutionary World Party in combination with the fight against all revisionist deviations of the reformists and centrists in the name of "Marxism". Trotsky's statement in the Fourth International's *Transitional Program* is fully valid today:

"The Fourth International declares uncompromising war on the bureaucracies of the Second, Third, Amsterdam and Anarcho-syndicalist Internationals, as on their centrist satellites; on reformism without reforms; democracy in alliance with the GPU; pacifism without peace; anarchism in the service of the bourgeoisie; on "revolutionists" who live in deathly fear of revolution. All of these organizations are not pledges for the future, but decayed survivals of the past. The epoch of wars and revolutions will raze them to the ground." ¹⁹⁸

159. The RCIT calls revolutionaries around the world to unite in a single international organization in order to advance the struggle to build a Revolutionary World Party as soon as possible. Such a party is highly needed for the working class to march forward in its struggle for liberation. It must have a common approach to the all major issues of the class struggle in the three axes of the world situation in the epoch of imperialism: the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the struggle between the imperialist states and the oppressed people, and the rivalry between the Great Powers. The RCIT has elaborated its program and its method in numerous Manifests and documents. ¹⁹⁹ We are not ultimatists. We consider every concrete step of joint struggle on a clear foundation and every rapprochement on the basis of agreement on the present tasks as highly valuable. For this reason we have elaborated a document which summarizes our positions on the major issues of the world class struggle today. We present these "*6 Points for a Platform of Revolutionary Unity Today*" to all liberation fighters around the world as a proposal for discussion and, hopefully, basis for joint activities. Forward in building the Revolutionary World Party!

Books of the RCIT

Michael Pröbsting: Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice

Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE*. The book's subtitle is: *Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of organized Struggle for Bolshevism*. The book is in English-language. It contains four chapters on 148 pages and includes 42 pictures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

The following paragraphs are the back cover text of the book which give an overview of its content.

A few months ago, our movement commemorated its 25th anniversary. In the summer of 1989 our predecessor organization, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) was founded as a democratic-centralist international tendency based on an elaborated program. The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) continues the revolutionary tradition of the LRCI. Below we give an overview of our history, an evaluation of its achievements as well as mistakes, and a summary of the lessons for the struggles ahead. This book summarizes our theoretical and practical experience of the past

25 years.

In Chapter I we outline a summary of the Bolshevik-Communists' theoretical conception of the role of the revolutionary party and its relation to the working class. In Chapter II we elaborate on the essential characteristics of revolutionary party respective of the pre-party organization. In Chapter III we deal with the history of our movement – the RCIT and its predecessor organization. Finally, in Chapter IV we outline the main lessons of our 25 years of organized struggle for building a Bolshevik party and their meaning for our future work.

You can find the contents and download the book for free at <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/rcit-party-building/> ■

Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice

Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of organized Struggle for Bolshevism



By Michael Pröbsting

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APPENDIX: 6 POINTS FOR A PLATFORM OF REVOLUTIONARY UNITY TODAY

A *Proposal from the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), February 2018*

We are living in a world of rapidly accelerating contradictions and sudden turns. As capitalism is decaying, the capitalist robbers try to raise their wealth by aggressively attacking the working class and the oppressed, by increasingly destroying the environment and, at the same time, by aggravating their rivalry against each other. The survival of humanity is endangered with the uncontrolled climate change and the accelerating rivalry between the Great Powers which creates the danger of an imperialist World War III. This is why we say that the alternative is "*Socialism or Stone Age!*"

This dramatic situation makes the organized struggle for socialism more necessary than ever. This means that the working class and the oppressed must have a party dedicated to the international struggle for a socialist future!

In our opinion, it is highly urgent that revolutionaries all over the world immediately start collaborating in laying the foundations for a principled unification, so that we drive forward the process of creating a new Revolutionary World Party with stronger forces. The starting point for the creation of such a party has to be agreement on the most important issues of the global class struggle. The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT)* considers the following issues as such programmatic keystones in the present political phase:

1) Recognition of the Accelerating Rivalry between the Imperialist Great Powers – the US, EU, Japan, Russia and China

It is *only* possible to understand the driving dynamic of the present period of capitalist crisis and to take a correct position if one recognizes the imperialist character not only of the US, EU and Japan but also of the new emerging powers, Russia and China. Only on such a basis is it possible to arrive at the only correct, anti-imperialist program on this issue – *proletarian internationalism* and *revolutionary defeatism*, i.e., the perspective of consistent struggle of the working class independent of and against *all* imperialist powers. This means that revolutionaries refuse to lend support to *any* Great Power in inter-imperialist conflicts under the slogan "*The main enemy is at home!*"

A similar approach is necessary when India enters into a conflict with imperialist China, as India – a non-imperialist regional power – acts under such circumstances as a proxy for US imperialism.

Those who fail to recognize the reactionary and imperialist character of these Great Powers will inevitable fail to take a consistent anti-imperialist, i.e. Marxist, line and will end up, consciously or unconsciously, supporting one or the other imperialist camp as a "lesser evil".

2) Consistent Struggle against Imperialism and for the Liberation of the Oppressed People

Revolutionaries stand for the *defeat* of imperialist states and their proxies in any conflict with forces representing oppressed people and for the *military victory* of the latter without, at the same time, giving any *political* support to the non-revolutionary leadership of the oppressed (e.g., petty-bourgeois Islamists, nationalists). This is true both in domestic conflicts (e.g., against an oppressed nation like the Chechen people in Russia or the East Turkestanis/Uyghurs in China) as well as in wars abroad (e.g., North Korea, Afghanistan, Syria, Mali, Somalia). Such an approach is not only valid in the countries of the South but also in cases of national oppression and discrimination inside the old imperialist states (e.g. Blacks and Native Americans in the U.S.; Catalonia's struggle for independence against the imperialist Spanish State.)

Likewise, revolutionaries have to fight for *Open Borders* in the imperialist countries and for *full equality for national minorities and for migrants* (e.g. citizenship rights, language, equal wages).

Furthermore, revolutionaries refuse to lend support to one imperialist camp against another in any given conflict (e.g., Brexit vs. EU; Clinton vs. Trump).

Those who fail to support the popular struggles against oppression, referring to their bad leaderships as an excuse, desert the class struggle as it concretely takes place today and hence leave the camp of the working class and oppressed.

3) Continuing the Revolutionary Struggle in the Middle East and North Africa against Reactionary Dictatorships, Imperialism and Zionism

The mass popular uprisings in Palestine, Tunisia, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Sudan and other countries have been the most important and progressive class struggle development so far since the beginning of the new historic period in 2008. True, given the lack of a revolutionary leadership, the masses have suffered a number of terrible defeats – like the coup d'état of General al-Sisi in Egypt in July 2013, or the ongoing slaughter of the Syrian people at the hands of Assad and his foreign backers. However, the revolutionary process is continuing. This is reflected in the ongoing popular resistance in Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, etc as well as its spreading to new countries like Tunisia, Iran, Sudan and Morocco. The Palestinian and international mass movement provoked by Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital opens a new chapter of the revolutionary struggle against the imperialist powers and against the Zionist Apartheid state and for the creation of a single Palestinian state from the river to the sea (a "*Free, Red Palestine*"). The spontaneous popular uprisings in Tunisia as well as in Iran against the capitalist regime show that the revolutionary wave in the Middle East might be revived and spreads even to non-Arab countries. Authentic revolutionary forces must give unconditional support to these popular struggles against

dictatorships and reactionary forces, without giving any political support to their non-revolutionary leaderships (e.g., petty-bourgeois Islamists and nationalists).

Those “socialists” who have failed to support the Arab Revolution since 2011 or who declare it as already finished and defeated, prove to be socialists and democrats only in words but not in deeds.

Revolutionaries oppose any reactionary war between regional power (e.g. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, etc.). They will determine their revolutionary tactics in any given war by analyzing the concrete character of the war and its political background as well as the role of imperialist powers (in particular the U.S., Russia, China) in it.

4) Revolutionary Struggle against Reactionary Attacks on Democratic Rights

Revolutionaries can only serve the interests of the working class and the oppressed if they are able to recognize the class enemy and to mobilize against it. Thus they must consistently fight against all reactionary dictatorships and corrupt and authoritarian pseudo-democracies (e.g. Syria, Togo, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe), against all forms of national and racial oppression (e.g. indigenous people in Latin America, Rohingya in Myanmar, African slaves in Libya), against all coup d'états (e.g. Egypt 2013, Thailand 2014, Brazil 2016) and against all authoritarian attacks (e.g. state of emergency in France since 2015).

All those who fail to recognize and to fight against these reactionary attacks but rather support them or take a neutral position, are traitors of the working class. Between them and us is a line of blood!

5) Application of the United Front Tactic in all Mass Struggles

Revolutionaries oppose *all* forms of sectarianism which refuses participation in mass struggles under the pretext of their non-revolutionary leaderships. Instead they apply the united front tactic in the struggles of the workers and peasants led by reformist or populist forces (e.g., trade unions, mass organizations of the peasants and the urban

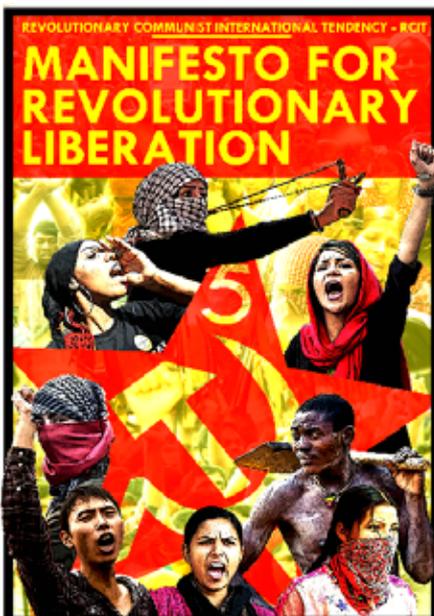
poor, but also political parties like PT, CUT, MST in Brazil; CGT, CTA, FIT in Argentina; MORENA in Mexico; Islamists in Egypt; rebels in Syria; EFF in South Africa; SYRIZA in Greece before 2015, PODEMOS, Basque and Catalan nationalists in the Spanish State). Such an orientation must be combined with a consistent struggle against all forms of popular-frontism and petty-bourgeois populism, and for the breaking of workers and peasants away from these non-revolutionary leaderships and to advance the formation of an independent and revolutionary Workers' Party.

Those who fail to apply the united front tactic in such mass struggles, render their support for these struggles to an abstract statement without any concrete meaning.

6) Start Building a Revolutionary World Party Now!

The struggle for repelling the reactionary offensive of the ruling class and for the liberation of the working class and the oppressed can only succeed if it is combined with the struggle for the socialist revolution. This means nothing less than taking power by the working class and the oppressed and the overthrow and expropriation of the capitalist class so that the road towards socialism will be opened. History teaches us that all struggles of the masses for liberation will ultimately end in failure if they are not led by a revolutionary party. Such a party should organize the most politically conscious and dedicated fighters of the working class and oppressed, it must be free of any bureaucratic degeneration; and it must exist as an international party in order to avoid the dangers of national-centeredness.

Hence we call upon all organizations and activists which honestly strive towards the creation of a new Revolutionary World Party to join forces on the basis of these programmatic keystones. Concretely, the RCIT proposes that revolutionaries constitute a *Joint Contact Committee* in order to politically prepare and organize an *International Conference* which will discuss concrete steps to advance the formation of a Revolutionary World Party. The RCIT is committed to serious discussions and the closest possible collaboration with all forces who share such an outlook.



NEW RCIT PROGRAM!

Manifesto for Revolutionary Liberation

Adopted at the 1st World Congress of the RCIT in October 2016

Introduction * I. Decaying Capitalism * II. Today's Worldwide Historic Revolutionary Period * III. The Reactionary Offensive of the Ruling Class * IV. A Program for Socialist Revolution to Halt Humanity's Collapse into Barbarism * V. The Crisis of Leadership and the Construction of a Revolutionary World Party * VI. Work in Mass Organizations and the United Front Tactic * VII. The Semi-Colonial South * VIII. The Emerging Imperialist Great Powers of the East: China and Russia * IX. The Old Imperialist Great Powers: The EU, North America and Japan * X. Conclusion

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and articles on the Palestinian liberation struggle can be read at the Africa and Middle East section of our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/> as well at <http://the-isleague.com/>. Furthermore we refer readers to the following theoretical and programmatic documents on Palestine: Yossi Schwartz: Israel's War of 1948 and the Degeneration of the Fourth International, in: Revolutionary Communism, Special Issue on Palestine, No. 10, June 2013, www.thecommunists.net/theory/israel-s-war-of-1948-1; Yossi Schwartz: Israel's Six-Day War of 1967. On the Character of the War, the Marxist Analysis and the Position of the Israeli Left, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 12, July/August 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/israel-s-war-of-1967/>; Summary of the Program of the Internationalist Socialist League, February 2014, <http://www.the-isleague.com/our-platform/>; Michael Pröbsting: On some Questions of the Zionist Oppression and the Permanent Revolution in Palestine, in: Revolutionary Communism, Special Issue on Palestine, No. 10, June 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/permanent-revolution-in-palestine>.

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What the RCIT Stands for

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) is a fighting organisation for the liberation of the working class and all oppressed. It has national sections in various countries. The working class is the class of all those (and their families) who are forced to sell their labour power as wage earners to the capitalists. The RCIT stands on the theory and practice of the revolutionary workers' movement associated with the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Capitalism endangers our lives and the future of humanity. Unemployment, war, environmental disasters, hunger, exploitation, are part of everyday life under capitalism as are the national oppression of migrants and nations and the oppression of women, young people and homosexuals. Therefore, we want to eliminate capitalism.

The liberation of the working class and all oppressed is possible only in a classless society without exploitation and oppression. Such a society can only be established internationally.

Therefore, the RCIT is fighting for a socialist revolution at home and around the world.

This revolution must be carried out and led by the working class, for she is the only class that has nothing to lose but their chains.

The revolution can not proceed peacefully because never before has a ruling class voluntarily surrendered their power. The road to liberation includes necessarily the armed rebellion and civil war against the capitalists.

The RCIT is fighting for the establishment of workers' and peasant republics, where the oppressed organize themselves in rank and file meetings in factories, neighbourhoods and schools – in councils. These councils elect and control the government and all other authorities and can always replace them.

Real socialism and communism has nothing to do with the so-called "real existing socialism" in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba or Eastern Europe. In these countries, a bureaucracy dominated and oppressed the proletariat.

The RCIT supports all efforts to improve the living conditions of workers and the oppressed. We combine this with a perspective of the overthrow of capitalism.

We work inside the trade unions and advocate class struggle, socialism and workers' democracy. But trade unions and social democracy are controlled by a bureaucracy. This bureaucracy is a layer which is connected with the state and capital via jobs and privileges. It is far from the interests and

living circumstances of the members. This bureaucracy's basis rests mainly on the top, privileged layers of the working class - the workers' aristocracy. The struggle for the liberation of the working class must be based on the broad mass of the proletariat rather than their upper strata.

The RCIT strives for unity in action with other organizations. However, we are aware that the policy of social democracy and the pseudo-revolutionary groups is dangerous and they ultimately represent an obstacle to the emancipation of the working class.

We fight for the expropriation of the big land owners as well as for the nationalisation of the land and its distribution to the poor and landless peasants. We fight for the independent organisation of the rural workers.

We support national liberation movements against oppression. We also support the anti-imperialist struggles of oppressed peoples against the great powers. Within these movements we advocate a revolutionary leadership as an alternative to nationalist or reformist forces.

In a war between imperialist states (e.g. U.S., China, EU, Russia, Japan) we take a revolutionary defeatist position, i.e. we don't support neither side and advocate the transformation of the war into a civil war against the ruling class. In a war between an imperialist power (or its stooge) and a semi-colonial country we stand for the defeat of the former and the victory of the oppressed country.

The struggle against national and social oppression (women, youth, sexual minorities etc.) must be led by the working class. We fight for revolutionary movements of the oppressed (women, youth, migrants etc.) based on the working class. We oppose the leadership of petty-bourgeois forces (feminism, nationalism, Islamism etc.) and strive to replace them by a revolutionary communist leadership.

Only with a revolutionary party fighting as its leadership can the working class win. The construction of such a party and the conduct of a successful revolution as it was demonstrated by the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky in Russia are a model for the revolutionary parties and revolutions also in the 21 Century.

For new, revolutionary workers' parties in all countries! For a 5th Workers International on a revolutionary program! Join the RCIT!

No future without socialism!

No socialism without a revolution!

No revolution without a revolutionary party!

