

Against the slide into war, international class struggle is the only answer

Once again the Middle East is in flames. Israeli planes and warships are systematically bombing Beirut and other targets in southern and northern Lebanon. Hundreds of civilians have been killed or maimed and vital infrastructure destroyed. Refugees are fleeing the bombed areas in growing numbers. At the time of writing there are preparations for some kind of ground invasion by the Israeli army. To the south, in Gaza, only a few months after the withdrawal of Israeli forces, the entire area has again become a battleground between Israeli troops and armed Palestinian organisations. The Israeli military blockade of both regions is strangling the economy and causing untold hardship to the local populations. But the Israeli population is also becoming increasingly fearful: Hizbollah rockets had already claimed several lives further north when 8 people were killed by a missile landing on a railway depot in Haifa.

The stated reason for this major offensive by the Israeli state is the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers by Hamas in the south and Hizbollah in the north. But this is just a pretext: Israel has used the crisis as an opportunity for trying to cripple or liquidate the Hamas regime in the occupied territories, and for demanding that the Lebanese state disarm Hizbollah (something which is completely beyond its means). It is also trying to draw Syria and Iran into the conflict, making threatening noises towards Syria, while claiming that one of the aims of the bombardment of Lebanon is to prevent the kidnapped Israeli soldiers being transferred to Iran, which arms and supports Hizbollah.

Threat of regional war

The present conflict thus contains the threat of escalating into a regional war. And because the Middle East is such a vital strategic region, every war there involves conflict not just between Israel and the Palestinians or its Arab neighbours, but between the great world powers. In 1948, the Russians and the Americans supported the formation of the State of Israel as a means of breaking the grip of the old colonial powers, Britain and France, which had previously controlled the region. The Suez war of 1956 confirmed that America was now top dog in the region: it humiliated the French and the British by demanding that they end their incursion against Nasser's Egypt. The wars of 1967, 1973 and 1982 were integrated into the global conflict between the American and the Russian

blocs, with the US backing Israel and Russia supporting the PLO and the Arab regimes.

With the collapse of the Russian bloc in 1989, the stage was set for a 'Pax Americana' in Israel/Palestine. The United States became the broker of the Oslo accords in 1993. It hoped that settling the Israel/Palestine conflict would allow it to become undisputed master of the region. The huge show of US firepower in Iraq in 1991 had the same aim.

But all the efforts of American imperialism to impose a 'new order' in the Middle East have come to nothing. Ever since the Oslo 'peace' accords, but especially since the 'Second Intifada' of 2000, there has been constant conflict in Israel/Palestine – a never-ending round of murderous suicide bombings, followed by brutal Israeli reprisals, followed by more suicide bombings, and more reprisals. Parallel to this, US efforts to assert its mastery in Afghanistan and Iraq – the 'War on Terror' - have blown up in its face, creating two new Vietnams and plunging both countries into total chaos. As the situation escalates in Lebanon, the Iraqi population is being tormented daily by horrific sectarian massacres, while in Afghanistan the US/British-backed government has lost its hold over the majority of the country. Furthermore, the effects of the military quagmire in Iraq and Afghanistan are reverberating back to the Israel/Palestine conflict and vice versa. Israel's provocative stance towards Iran echoes America's stand-off with Tehran over its nuclear programme, while the 'progress' made by Islamic terrorism in Iraq influences the actions of Hamas and Hizbollah. And the ruthless slaughter by terrorist gangs of civilians in New York, Madrid and London confirms that war in the Middle East has already rebounded to the very centres of the system. The headlong rush into military adventurism is the only means at the disposal of every power or clique, from the greatest to the most insignificant, to defend their imperialist interests against their rivals.

In short, the situation throughout the Middle East is demonstrating not America's control of the situation, but the spread of uncontrollable chaos. This is shown graphically by Israel's ultra-aggressive attitude.¹

¹ The Israeli state's barbaric war policy is under the direct responsibility of Amir Peretz, the left-wing leader of the Labour Party, a long time trade

The rivals of the US prepare to take advantage

As for the other great powers, they are waving peace placards as they did prior to the invasion of Iraq. France and Russia have clearly condemned Israel's "disproportionate" military operation in Lebanon. Britain is also adopting a more independent line: it has issued sharp criticisms of Israel's "collective punishment" of the Palestinians in Gaza and it has made a great show of sending in the warships to evacuate British nationals from Lebanon. These powers, however, are not interested in peace but in maintaining their own spheres of influence in the region. They will certainly try to profit from America's weakness, but none of them are in a position to take on its role as the world's policeman, and their conflicting imperialist interests make it impossible for them to evolve any coherent common policies. This is why at the recent G8 summit, the great powers took a 'united' stance on the Lebanon crisis which immediately gave way to mutual recrimination and disagreement.

All the states and forces involved in this conflict are busy drawing up military and diplomatic plans that correspond to their own interests. They certainly use the most 'rational' methods of calculation to arrive at these plans, but all of them are caught up in a fundamentally irrational process: the inexorable slide of the capitalist system into imperialist war, which today is increasingly taking on the character of a war of each against all. Even the mighty US is being dragged into this abyss. In the past, when civilizations were on their last legs, they became embroiled in endless war. The fact that capitalism has become a system of permanent war is the clearest proof that it too is in a state of profound decay and that its very continuation has become a deadly danger for humanity.

Class struggle is the only way out

If all of capitalism's peace plans are doomed to fail, what alternative is there to the imperialist disorder that dooms them? Certainly not the various nationalist/religious gangs which claim to be 'resisting' imperialism in Palestine, Iraq or Afghanistan – Hamas, the PLO, Hizbollah, al Qaida... They too are entirely caught up in the logic of imperialism, whether striking out on their own or lining up directly with existing capitalist states. Their aims – whether the establishment of new national states or the dream of a pan-Middle East Islamic Caliphate – can only come about through imperialist war; and their methods – which always involve the indiscriminate massacre of the civilian

union boss and ex-militant of the pacifist movement "Peace Now". One might have imagined that it is a sort of "Israeli speciality" for a "man of the left" to play the unbending butcher - but it would be a mistake. A year ago, when the London police assassinated a young Brazilian worker in the Underground, one of the firmest justifications for the policy of "shoot to kill" anybody suspected of being a "terrorist" was none other than "Red Ken" Livingstone, the thoroughly "left wing" mayor of London. In its bloody military defence of the national capital, the "left" has always demonstrated an unscrupulous determination no matter what the country.

population – are precisely those of the states they claim to be opposing.

The only opposition to imperialism is the resistance of the working class against exploitation, because this alone can grow into an open struggle against the capitalist system, a struggle to replace this dying system of profit and war with a society geared towards human need. Because the exploited everywhere have the same interests, the class struggle is international and has no interest in allying with one state against another. Its methods are directly opposed to the aggravation of hatred between ethnic or national groups, because it needs to rally together the proletarians of all nations in a common fight against capital and the state.

In the Middle East the spiral of nationalist conflicts has made class struggle very difficult, but it still exists – in demonstrations of unemployed Palestinian workers against the Palestinian authorities, in strikes by Israeli public sector workers against the government's austerity budgets. But the most likely source of a breach in the wall of war and hatred in the Middle East lies outside the region – in the growing struggle of the workers in the central capitalist countries. The best example of class solidarity we can give to the populations suffering the direct horrors of imperialist war in the Middle East is to develop the struggle that has already been launched by the workers-to-be in the French schools and universities, by the metal workers of Vigo in Spain, the postal workers of Belfast or the airport workers of London.

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