

THE USA IS PREPARING FOR NUCLEAR WAR.

Bullies are at their most depraved when they claim to be the victim. The global bully, the land of the free to attack the world, USA, has never tired of portraying itself as the victim in all cases. For these American (North) imperialists, the alphabet begins with b and numerals with 2. The a and the 1 is hidden behind a smokescreen prepared by its vile media, because a and 1, the initiating steps has always been prepared or carried out by the US itself. For close on a hundred years the US has been the home of reaction, intent on crushing progressive and exciting forces throughout the world, anything daring to challenge its hegemonic grip on this planet.

On the 1st February the US administration said it was withdrawing from the INF Treaty (The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty) signed in 1987. The United States had already withdrawn from the landmark 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty as long ago as 2002. The US is also considering not extending, perhaps even withdrawing from the overall strategic treaty "New Start". According to Reuters, during Trump's first 60-minute telephone call with Putin on the 9th February 2017, he attacked the Start treaty by saying it favoured Russia and was "one of several bad deals negotiated by the Obama administration.

The reason given by the US for suspending its participation in the INF treaty was predictable. Once again the US was the victim of Russian moves to gain the upper hand. *In the words of Mike Pompeo "Countries must be held accountable when they break the rules. Russia has jeopardized the United States' security interests, and we can no longer be restricted by the treaty while Russia shamelessly violates it."* So according to Pompeo it was Russia that forced its reluctant hand, a lie dutifully repeated by the putrid western press. This was the same worn out lie told during the time of the USSR; that America (North) was falling behind, when history has shown conclusively that the USA was always in the lead both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The facts on the ground demonstrate that far from being the victim, it is the USA that is the bully. On the 12th December 2017, declassified US, Soviet, German, British and French documents held by the National Security Archive at George Washington University, finally put an end to the controversy over whether the West had agreed not to advance NATO into Eastern Europe. It confirmed the pledge given by James Baker, the then US Secretary of State, that NATO would advance "not one inch eastward". This assurance given by a US at the height of its power, was intended to hoodwink the desperate and gullible Gorbachev. It did not stop NATO relentlessly advancing eastwards, not by inches but by hundreds of kilometres as each and every former member of Comecon joined NATO.

After the US sponsored coup in the Ukraine, which turned that country into an indebted US ally, NATO was literally lapping at the shores of Russia. From the Arctic Circle to the Black Sea, Russia is now hemmed in by pro-western countries, and behind them are the former East European countries who again are beholden to the US. If Russia even wanted to invade the West, it would have to penetrate two layers of countries before it even reached Germany or Austria. Many of these countries are now part of the ring of steel.

For decades the US has deployed nuclear weapons in a number of European countries and Turkey. (The so called Cuban missile crisis was really a crisis of the US parking nuclear missiles on the borders of the USSR.) The USA currently maintains squadrons of cruise missiles within range of the Russian Federation. The US Tomahawk missile produced in their thousands, has a range of up to 2500 kilometres, exceeding the 500-kilometre range designated by the INF treaty, and is both conventional and nuclear capable. For decades the US got around the INF treaty by claiming the missile was not

land capable. In 2017 the US showed how easy it was to transfer launchers from ships to the land when it deployed MK41 silos to Romania. These same launchers will be located soon in Poland.

It is a shamefaced lie that air-launched or sea-launched cruise missiles cannot be repositioned on land. From its inception the Tomahawk missile was platform based. The Aegis Ashore missile defence system is literally a repurposed naval platform, and, as it can fire and control cruise missiles it is clearly in breach of the INF treaty. To use the new Russian 9M729 as a pretext to break the INF Treaty shows the US was not serious about maintaining it. This shorter range missile cannot even reach Germany never mind the USA, whereas the Tomahawk fired from a compliant NATO country can loiter and range over much of the Russian Federation.

The US has 800 foreign military bases around the world spanning every continent and ocean. Of these 800 bases, 400 are now concentrated around China. In 2017 the US accounted for 35% of the \$1.74 trillion wasted globally on the military. The US figure however does not include the money spent on actual wars which falls under a different heading. <https://www.thebalance.com/u-s-military-budget-components-challenges-growth-3306320> Talk about the US accusing China of understating its defence spending. When these additional expenditures are added to the Pentagon's budget, military spending increases by at least 20%. On this basis, the actual US military spending is anywhere between 40 and 45% of the global total. Little wonder the US government has no money left over to spend on roads, metros and bridges within the USA. On the other hand, China and Russia together account for only 16% of global military spending (2017 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Data) or less than half that of the USA.

The pivot to China.

A number of years ago, John Pilger, one of the dying breed of investigative journalists, produced a perceptive film *"The Coming War in China"* to highlight Obama's 2011 pivot to China. The Pivot saw two-thirds of the US navy being redeployed to Asia and the Pacific to counter the rise of China. In 2015 Pilger reported how the US Navy, together with allies like Australia, rehearsed a blockade of the maritime routes feeding China. *"There is no reason the United States should continue to cede this crucial military advantage to revisionist powers like China,"* (Pompeo, Washington Post, 4 December 2018.) The last time the US conducted an actual blockade to starve a rising competitor, Japan, it led directly to Pearl Harbour.

Of course, it is interesting that Australia would embark on such an exercise. Perhaps that country shares the same special (masochistic) relation that Britain has with the US. The fortunes and future of the Australian economy depends not on the USA but on China. And just as the special relationship Britain had with the US bankrupted it, so in time the same will happen to Australia if China fails. Perhaps the current spectacular housing crash in Australia, caused in part by the absence of Chinese speculative investment, will act as a wake-up call.

In response to this 2011 Pivot by the US Navy, the Chinese began fortifying islands in the South China Sea from 2014. No doubt the US will invent Chinese provocations especially around these unsinkable aircraft carriers which form a defensive ring around China. The US will turn these islands into their opposite, portraying them as aggressive and threatening, as though the South China Sea was the Gulf of Mexico. But then the US really does believe it owns the world

Similarly, China's Belt and Braces strategy has an economic and political logic to it. Firstly, to absorb excess capital which can no longer be invested in China. Secondly, to break out of the circle of steel imposed on China by the USA, through drawing neighbouring countries into China's financial orbit.

What the Belt and Braces initiative represents is the escalating battle to re-divide a world economy whose parameters were originally set by the USA.

It is in this light that the events in Venezuela have to be located. The US is organising a Ukraine type coup in order to establish a pro-US regime there. It seeks to sew up any Russian and Chinese influence in Latin America. If the US is to confront China and Russia it must first secure its backyard. This is more important than Venezuela's oil riches, even at a time when fracking within the US has peaked, but not before ruining thousands of square miles of land and its associated water table.

Reconfiguring nuclear weapons

Taken on its own, the abandonment of treaties is serious, but when taken together with the reconfiguring of strategic nuclear weapons it becomes critical. To understand this reconfiguration, it is necessary to first understand the nature of modern nuclear weapons.

A thermonuclear bomb is a two-stage bomb. The first, the fission bomb triggers a second bomb, a fusion bomb through lensing the release of heat, pressure and x-rays from the fission stage. (It was the understanding of the need to lens x-rays by Edward Teller and later Andrei Sakharov that made the hydrogen bomb possible.) A fission bomb works by splitting heavy atoms like plutonium while a fusion bomb works by joining up light atoms such as hydrogen.

A fission bomb, the kind barbarically dropped on Japan by President Truman, has a maximum yield of around 100 kilotons. A fusion bomb on the other hand is hundreds of times more powerful, with the largest one, the "Tsar bomb" detonated by the USSR, being equal to 50,000 kilotons. (It could have been equal to 100,000 kilotons but its yield was capped with a lead tamper rather than a U238 tamper thus minimising radioactive fall-out.) In any case Sakharov was of the opinion that anything over 9,000 kilotons (9 megatons) was inefficient because yields above 9 megatons resulted in much of the additional blast being vented into space because of air pressure.

It is also important to note how the miniaturisation of nuclear bombs has dramatically reduced their weight and size. Nuclear weapons generally weigh between 100 and 1000 kilograms. They are thus no heavier and sometimes lighter than conventional bombs. The Tomahawk and more modern cruise missiles can easily carry a nuclear warhead to a distance of 2500 km.

Reports are now coming in that the US is reconfiguring its strategic missiles such as Trident and presumable cruise. They are doing this by removing the fusion component of the warhead while retaining the 5-kiloton fission bomb. It is necessary to put a 5-kiloton explosion in perspective. It is equivalent to the destructive power of a 500-bomber raid during the Second World War. In March 1945, the RAF alone launched the equivalent of 40 such raids against Germany. Add in the larger USAF and the figure rises to over 100. It must also be remembered that the year-long bombing of Tokyo by the USAF killed over 100,000 and injured more than 1,000,000, a figure comparable to the deaths and injuries from the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

During the cold war, the phenomenal yield from fusion bombs acted as a deterrent. The acronym, MAD or "Mutually Assured Destruction" was coined to underline the fact the exchange of nuclear weapons would obliterate both the USA and the USSR and with them the world. But if high yield weapons make them "unusable" then resorting to low yield weapons makes them "usable. A 5-kiloton bomb will not take out a city, but it will take out a strategic target such as an airfield or a bunker or a fortified island.

For the USA stealth is more important as a first strike element, because most of their missiles are deployed adjacent to the land or sea borders of Russia and China. For China and Russia their lack of

launch sites close to the US makes hypersonic vehicles more important because of the distances involved. Thus, it is misleading to focus on hypersonic vehicles where Russia may or may not have the advantage. Russian missiles may be able to fly 8 times faster, but US missiles only have to cover one tenth the distance and there are more of them and they are cheaper. The advantage lies with the USA including a submarine launch capacity double that of Russia.

A shrinking world market.

Low yield nuclear missiles and a shrinking world market forms a lethal combination. The Netherlands Bureau for Economic Analysis, (CPB) World Trade Monitor released in January covering 2018 up to November, puts world trade momentum at 0% and world production momentum at 0.4%. These momentum figures are lower than those obtained for the eleven months ended November 2015 when the world economy slowed down abruptly. (<https://www.cpb.nl/en/worldtrademonitor>)

Sharing profits brings capitalists together whereas avoiding losses drives them apart. And losses are now beginning to replace profits. This is as true for China (see my previous article on China) as it is for the USA. According to the latest FactSet release *"...earnings estimates for the first quarter have been falling for the past few months. On September 30, the estimated earnings growth rate for Q1 2019 was 6.7%. On December 31, the estimated earnings growth rate for Q1 2019 was 3.3%...the S&P 500 is now projected to report a small year-over-year decline in earnings (-0.8%)"* https://www.factset.com/hubfs/Resources%20Section/Research%20Desk/Earnings%20Insight/EarningsInsight_020119.pdf Hence from the first projection to the current projection, profits have been revised down by 7.5%. In terms of forward guidance, 79% have been negative. FactSet covers the S&P 500 which is home to most of the largest global monopolies. If their profits are now beginning to contract, then to be sure, global profits are beginning to fall.

Trade wars turn into shooting wars when capitalists seek to offload their losses on to others or when they seek to preserve their monopoly profits. What is developing now is more serious than the cold war. In the 1960s the US Empire was still basking in its summer. Now it confronts China in its winter. China is not the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union may have challenged the US ideologically, but it did not challenge it economically.

China does. For the first time in over 140 years, the US is not the biggest industrial power in the world. It has been overtaken by China. In terms of quantity China is significantly larger. When considering strategic sectors such as steel, cement, truck making and ship building, all of which feature prominently in war-time, China's capacity is five times larger than the US's, or, about the same as the gap that existed between the US and Japan at the time of Pearl Harbour.

Where the US leads China, and which constitutes a unique historical anomaly, is in technology.. Although its technological lead has shrunk from a generation to half-a-generation, it is still decisive. Time may be on the side of China, but it is running out on the US's side. This is the substance of the current trade war initiated by the US. Its underlying purpose: to strangle Chinese technological development while it can.

It is of course interesting how the trade war is being blamed on Trump. The fact that he bangs noisily around in the kitchen, whereas the slippery Obama wore socks, does not alter the fact that the US has been preparing for this conflict for years. After all, the military pivot to China took place seven years ago, in 2011. During the second world war, the US state department evolved into a global department, taking into account and preparing for all international "known unknowns".

Again, what is different currently is the element of mass protest. In the late nineteen fifties a mass peace movement emerged. This was followed by a mass movement against the Vietnam war. Today, despite the objective threat being more advanced, no mass peace movement or resistance to war has emerged since the invasion of Iraq, and that movement was notable for how quickly it dispersed.

What makes the world truly dangerous, is not the impending change in the world order nor nuclear weapons rendered usable, it is the passivity of the international working class in the face of these developments. Objectively, inter-imperialist rivalries and global tensions are more acute than they were in the 1950s and 1960s. The world economy is also more brittle and the planet more fragile.

It is unlikely the capitalists can manage the challenges before them. They also face the Crash of 2019 which will add to the pressure sores prepared by the Crash of 2008. Despite today's starting point, it could turn out that the real explosion will not be nuclear but social. Our task is to ensure that the mid-wife of history does not have radioactive hands, by demonstrating that a different world is possible, one where war is impossible.

Brian Green, January 2019.