

# **Carter's Phony War Crisis**

## **Cold War II Hides Nuclear Danger**

Fifth Estate Collective

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"I don't want to startle you, but they mean to kill us all."

—e.e. cummings

War—the word on everyone's lips—the deadly end of the capitalist cycle of prosperity and economic collapse, appears close at hand as the major world empires and their vassals play out the world-wide "Great Game" of inter-capitalist rivalries. In this country, President Carter has posed the situation in the Persian Gulf region as a new period of confrontation with the Soviet Union and a return to the Cold War, complete with renewed fears of nuclear conflict.

However, to have a clear understanding of the U.S. response to recent Soviet moves in that part of the globe, events must be viewed against a larger backdrop of American global and domestic needs.

## **The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan**

Carter's recent hardline foreign policy stance is based on the assumption that the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan transcends the unspoken limits of what is permissible by the big powers and constitutes a new phase of Soviet "aggression." This contention, though, just doesn't hold up under scrutiny.

The invasion by 95,000 Russian troops of a small, economically underdeveloped isolated nation should not be seen as a precipitous act undertaken lightly by the Soviets. Rather, it is consistent with their long held policy of moving swiftly against either the prospect of being surrounded by nations who they deem hostile to them or interference with its already established network of buffer states (as evidenced by their earlier invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia). Moscow apparently viewed the Western instigation and financing of rebel forces in Afghanistan as being part of a campaign to dislodge their Kabul puppet government and to them, this was intolerable.

With Iran having just slipped out of the U.S. orbit after having served for 25 years as a base for anti-Soviet activity, the Kremlin leaders had no intention of letting Afghanistan become a substitute for what Washington has lost. Apparently, Moscow lost confidence in its vassal state's ability to suppress the CIA-financed Moslem rebels and decided to move forthrightly on its own to remove the threat to their border security.

It should be noted at this point, however, that these concerns of a totalitarian regime should in no way act as a justification for the extension of the Soviet police state into yet another area. The security of borders is a meaningless concept to those of us who desire the abolition of all nation states but it should be recognized as being paramount to those politicians who owe their existence to the present artificial division of the planet.

Also, the temptation to line up in support of the Afghan rebels—those "heroic tribesmen", as the media portrays them—should be resisted. Certainly, there is an heroic element in the resistance of these guerrilla bands to the

conquering Red Army, but the fight of these traditional Moslem cultures has been elevated to that of pawns in struggles far grander than theirs. The rebels desire only to preserve a reactionary, theocratic society which exhibits the same repressive features advocated by the Iranian ayatollahs—including the total subjugation of women and the political dominance of the mullah priest caste. In the battle between a modern state-capitalist police state and a reactionary priest-ridden feudalism, it is only a desire to root for the underdog that stops us from being totally neutral in the affair.

## Enter “Realpolitik”

It is the realpolitik which is at work and not the pseudo-nightmares of the State Department which has elevated a series of unlikely scenarios to the realm of reality: 1) that the invasion of Afghanistan is but the opening step in the “Russian Bear’s” march to the Arabian Sea to realize its centuries-old czarist dream of a “warm-water port”; 2) that the Soviets desire, or are actually fomenting the de-stabilization of the region through encouragement of Pushstani and Baluchi rebellions which would lead to the eventual dismemberment of Iran and Pakistan; or 3) that Russia would undertake an invasion of Iran’s oil fields. All of this is as unlikely as a Soviet incursion into Western Europe, but that mythical threat has worked for a generation as the rationalization for a whole range of reactionary political, military and economic policies in that region.

Although most certainly a competing imperialism, the Soviet Union has generally preferred a world of political stability, moving to activism only in the breach of an already existing conflict such as Vietnam or Angola (and in neither case with particular enthusiasm). Soviet strategy since the Second World War has been based on maintaining its existing sphere of influence comprising the nations it needs for economic exploitation and as a military buffer from Germany who it views as its traditional enemy in Europe.

Attempting to impose the Nazi model on Russia as desiring “world conquest” should be left to the John Birch Society. Even when confronted with the real prospect of the seizure of state power in Europe after World War II, the communist parties of France and Italy spurned the opportunity on direct orders from Stalin who was anxious at that time not to offend the West. Their ambitions are no greater today, but Carter hopes that his new phony threat of Soviet expansion in the Persian Gulf will serve him as well as the European fiction served his predecessors.

Soviet adventures are not forthcoming and Carter knows this, so all of his tough talk about being “closer to war with Russia than any time since World War II” and his imperially phrased “Doctrine” should not be viewed as what is actually on the immediate agenda. Carter’s rhetoric of repelling “by...military force” any attempt “to gain control of the Persian Gulf region” is in the best tradition of President Monroe, but realistically no one thinks the U.S. would launch, let alone win, an expedition into that area for a direct confrontation with Soviet troops.

This is not to diminish the concerns that Washington would have about a real threat to its oil supplies or to an actual Soviet attempt to dominate the region, but what all the talk about war is really concerned with is a justification for an economy of austerity, a new arms race, the draft and, of course, Carter’s re-election.

## Stagnation in East and West

“War! What is it good for? Absolutely nothing!”

—Edwin Starr

Edwin’s old R&B tune hit it right on the nose, but only if you are an ordinary person with small dreams and plans and desire to live a life of peace. However, this same perception of what a full life consists of is not shared by the politicians and corporate heads in the U.S. nor the commissars and generals who inhabit the Kremlin. To them, as well as in the majority of the world’s other nations, war, or more accurately, preparation for war, plays a crucial and fundamental role in the economies they manage.

As the economic stagnation prevalent in both East and West increases, all nations are forced to rely on the military sector of their nation to become a larger and larger consumer of goods as a prop against the faltering

private sector (or in the case of Russia, the non-military sector). This is not a new process, of course, but one whose acceleration has increased rapidly since capital began to take on an increased state form beginning with World War I. It took on its greatest expression as preparation for World War II during the 1930s in its national variants of Stalinism, Nazism or in this country as the New Deal. In the U.S., Roosevelt's war mobilization and the war itself were the sole factors which ended the Great Depression and could not be relinquished with the war's end in 1945.

Understanding that the reconstruction of the war-devastated areas in Western Europe would not provide a long-term solution to capitalist problems, Western leaders had to create a new enemy to replace the Nazis which would function as the justification for continued military expenditures. The Soviet Union was there to fit the bill and the Cold War commenced. This "conflict" with "godless communism" was and remains almost entirely a national fiction, but one that has allowed the state to spend trillions of dollars in preparation for a war the other side had, at least originally, never any intention of fighting.

If the centrality of war expenditures needs amplification simply take a yearly arms budget and compute the impact removing it would have on the basic industries of steel, auto, aerospace, rubber, glass, the thousands of suppliers in related industries and the millions of jobs involved. We are in a permanent war economy. However, the problem for American capital at this point is that the current economic crunch which has caused the unprofitability of the private sector is continuing unabated and has demanded a further statification of capital, (the \$1 billion yearly loss by the Chrysler Corp. and its government bail-out being a recent prime example). The ailing dollar, the falling rate of productivity, skyrocketing unemployment and inflation and a deterioration of the standard of living for millions is announcing a crisis of major proportions—one that has already hit Italy and Great Britain with unusual severity.

Since President Coolidge was correct in stating that, "The business of America is business," none of this bodes well for Carter, either as steward of the capitalist state or as Jimmy the Politician. With the profitability of the major corporations being threatened by domestic losses in recent years led by auto and the antiquated steel industry—the inconceivable has appeared as a possibility on the horizon—a complete economic collapse.

The bankruptcy of several major industrial corporations such as Chrysler with a loss of assets by the banks which are major stockholders, (the FDIC has nowhere the capacity to guarantee all the savings banked in the U.S.) and the slide begins, a process capital thought it had left behind in the 1930s. Carter is acutely aware of this trend and; of its affect on his popularity that had hit the skids along with the economy. After all, if the citizens cannot be sold on the "benefits" this system provides, why should they tolerate its miseries? The Iran and Afghanistan "crises" (they weren't crises for us, were they for you?) then appeared as magical opportunities to solve both problems—a strong president would take bold actions that would solve both the problems of the economy and see him through to re-election.

Of course, the manipulation of reality or the creation of totally spurious events is nothing new on the American political scene and Presidents have lied and exaggerated situations in such incidents as the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine, the Tonkin Bay incident, the capture of the U.S.S. Mayaguez or whatever was necessary to give justification to some war scheme and to bolster their own political fortunes at the same time.

## **Carter's Message Clear**

In Carter's written section of his State of the Union address delivered in January, his message was clear: -the American people must show "toughness and willingness to sacrifice" to meet the Soviet "threat to global peace." And, "the dangers of disunity are self-evident in a world of major power. confrontation." If you strip his words of their demagogic content, you are left with two central concepts: austerity for the general public and massive arms spending by the government masked behind a patriotic call for an end to dissent and unquestioning loyalty to the state.

The message is abundantly clear to the corporations and the banks. In a special report appearing in the January 21 *Business Week*, entitled "The New Cold War Economy: A Strategy to Answer the Soviets," leaves no room for doubt as to who is going to benefit from this new trajectory of the economy: "From the Pentagon to corporate boardrooms

and the trading rooms of financial and commodity markets, forecasts for the 1980s are being hastily rewritten to accommodate the end of detente and the beginnings of a new cold war.”

And it's clear that these masters of war do have something to be optimistic about: a staggering \$148.2 billion defense (sic) budget that the corporate giants are confident will reverse the dismal picture of a slowly stagnating economy. However, this immense bailout through the ever-increasing statification of capital should not be viewed as a viable solution for the vast majority of Americans who have come to expect a certain standard of living based on the hegemony of U.S. capital world-wide. Rather, it may very well function as an answer to corporate woes but could very well simultaneously produce an entirely new face to life in this country. If the private sector of domestic capital continues its contraction with the economy eventually sustained by increasing state spending on armaments, we may reach a stage similar to that which prevails in the Soviet Union. That is, a military, corporate and government bureaucracy of tremendous proportions, made up of functionaries living in traditional comfort, but surrounded by a relatively impoverished mass kept in check by an immense police apparatus. This view presupposes a process already in motion—that foreign profitability will continue unabated with the dynamic sector of private capital switching to Third World countries such as Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia and those other nations whose names decorate our stereos and sports gear, becoming the super-consumers of tomorrow.

All that is really needed is to provide these super-exploited workers with a slightly higher wage (easily granted) and they will quickly be on their way to a consumerism that will rival any U.S. suburb. That this situation would leave the majority of U.S. residents in an economic position similar to the one foisted onto the rest of the world to our relative advantage in the past matters little as it regards the circulation of capital at a high rate of profit. If sales of General Motors drop off in Detroit and Chicago, corporate stockholders can't tell the difference in their dividend check if the slack is made up in Seoul and Taipei. What will be an obvious difference is the reduced standard of living in America which suddenly becomes an “underdeveloped region” of capital relative to its former position.

This posing of a strategy for salvaging U.S. capital through transferring the centers of commodity consumption to the Third World, coupled with an always expanding war economy is at best a conjecture at this point, but one that is not without features that already point to its probability of occurrence. These include the shift from domestic to foreign profitability of U.S. corporations, the emergence of a high Third World economic growth rate coupled with the slowing of the West's (the “crisis of productivity,” etc.), the continued multi-nationalization of corporations and subtle cultural changes at home.

The latter include the growing trends of “voluntary poverty” (such as many of us have adopted), “doing more with less,” alternativism, etc. These “hip” new modes may actually make more sense than the mindless consumerism most Americans partake in, but it should also be recognized as the precursor of the style most Americans would be forced to adopt if the current economic trajectory continues. This may not appear as particularly threatening to many of us willingly living on the margins of the economy (in fact, it may be welcomed), but to the millions addicted to the American Dream lifestyle, it will mean social and personal catastrophe. To those steadily increasing millions already below the poverty level, only visions of a generalized South Bronx comes to mind as the future for the industrial cities.

The creation of an entirely new social picture with millions being unlocked from the compulsions of wage work and commodity consumption could have the effect of driving previously model citizens to thoughts of, dare we say it? revolution. A restive, combatative population will set in motion both the possibility of a real assault on this system but will simultaneously assure that the cops and generals move to the fore as the centerpiece administrators of this next phase of capitalism in the U.S. If law, order and austerity at home and vigilance against “aggression” abroad become the watch words of the '80s, one can expect the state mechanisms of repression to grow not only in size, but similarly in political importance to the point of eventually eclipsing the formal democracy we retain from an era long since past.

## **Realpolitik Not Shared**

There are, of course, always flaws in grand strategies, even those of the “brightest and the best.” Where domestically Carter's policies of austerity may, instead of acquiescence, bring about an opening for that “radical break” we

all dream of; similarly the scheme that prepares for war without actually going to war might not work out exactly as the masters intend. To opportunistic politicians and corporate boards, it may be perfectly reasonable to concoct international “confrontations” which don’t really exist to justify economic and political policies but the generals on both sides take war threats more seriously than the wheeler-dealers of the economy and the government. The realpolitik of the State Department and Soviet Foreign Ministry is seen by both sides as a delicate set of signals and-responses which reflect the internal and international strains each must function under and is appreciated as such. However, the military often stands in aloof contempt from this chummy club of politicians; thus the Kremlin generals think only in military terms when detente and SALT are scrapped, when the U.S. deploys warheads in Western Europe, increases its arms budget, develops the MX mobile missile system, and creates a quick-strike rapid deployment force, as do the generals of the Pentagon when faced with Soviet troops in Cuba, Russian meddling in Africa and the invasion of Afghanistan.

While the intent of the politicians may only be the manipulation of foreign affairs to assure success in an election, or to strengthen the dollar or to bolster profitability, all of this sets in motion an insane logic based on misperceived signals which then begins to propel us toward a real confrontation.

## The Factors of Confrontation

The authentic confrontational factors are two-fold: 1) the weaponry technology itself; and 2) the politics which stem from Carter’s new foreign policy, with the two facets linked inextricably together. Ban the Bomb groups as far back as the 1950s pointed to the danger of the accidental triggering of a nuclear war with that possibility looming even larger now since our “counterforce” systems are close to being fully automated.

A nuclear attack could be launched by a computer error similar to the one which occurred on November 9, 1979 when just such a mistake at the NORAD Command computer in Colorado Springs sent out a false attack alert and a number of planes bearing atomic warheads were sent Eastward before the error was discovered. With Carter bringing us ever closer to the edge, this margin for error is shrinking at a rapid rate. For instance, the deployment of Pershing-2 and Cruise medium-range missiles in Europe reduces the strike time against the Soviets from thirty minutes to six, leaving that much less time for the Dr. Strangeloves on the other side to decide whether or not it’s a flock of geese or a cruise missile coming in from West Germany which they’ve picked up on their computer.

Perhaps, though, there is too much emphasis on the accidental launching of a nuclear exchange when there are advocates in both the Kremlin and the Pentagon who favor a purposeful strike against their adversary. Until recently both nuclear giants operated under the policy designated by the appropriate acronym, MAD, an abbreviation for Mutually Assured Destruction which assumed neither power would begin an exchange which would end in the result indicated. This has been changing lately in both camps.

A “New Right” in the Soviet government demands a harder line against the Americans and contemplates a preemptory first strike against the U.S., arguing that if nuclear conflict is inevitable, why wait to be hit first? In the U.S., there is the Kissingerian approach which views MAD as ineffective, since your opponent knows you will never employ it. Thus, the hardline advocates on the National Security Council advise moving to a policy where nuclear war is an option. Kissinger’s disciples in the War Room are advocates of a foreign policy stance (one that when at Harvard their mentor attributed to Hitler) of convincing your opponent that you are capable of any act if your demands are not met. This policy is increasing in popularity within the U.S. policy circles as a reading of ruling class strategy journals will quickly indicate. (See *Foreign Affairs*, Winter ’80, “Rumors of War: The 1914 Analogy”).

In the area of armaments technology, this leads to an ever-increasing development of doomsday weaponry such as the MX missile system and space satellites armed with warheads and charged-particle beams which further convinces the other side all the more that the conflict is irrepressible.

Policy-wise, the shift from a world of bi-polarity—two superpowers faced off—to one of multipolarity provides even more danger than the previous state of affairs. The elevation of vassal states such as Israel, India and Pakistan to nuclear status, and the emergence of China as a superpower now checkers the globe with a multitude of countries capable of sparking a war which will produce a confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. It’s chilling

to remember that every major novel about World War III, from *On the Beach* in the '50s to the current *The Third World War*, all began with a scenario originating with conflicts among surrogates for the Big Powers.

## **Playing the China Card**

Another part of Carter's dangerous game is finally playing the "China Card." In true Orwellian fashion, straight out of 1984, we have ceased our war with Eastasia, who now has become our ally, against our ex-ally, Eurasia. All State Department protests aside, it appears as though the U.S. will expand its assistance in helping China to achieve its highly-vaunted "Four Modernizations" which includes upgrading its antiquated military to superpower rank. This, combined with Carter's promised arms shipments to Pakistan's President Zia, will create record profits for the arms manufacturers in the U.S., but will also have the effect of making the border regions of the USSR, China and India that much more volatile.

The Soviet Union, as indicated above, fears few things more than encirclement. It was destroyed by Germany twice in 30 years and its border security is of the utmost concern to both the generals and the politicians who rule there. If the mere threat of a hostile government coming to power in a small, mountainous country on their perimeter compelled them to undertake a major military move, their reaction to the emergence of China as a modern, military nation with perhaps even nuclear capabilities is incalculable.

## **The Bridge is Out**

Camus once used the imagery of a train careening along at breakneck speed, with passengers supping in the dining car enjoying the food and congenial conversation, unaware that a bridge has collapsed around the next bend. And, it is exactly on the same train all of civilization—that "bloody sword"—finds itself riding at this moment. After the millennia of fighting wars for empires, ideologies, religions, wealth and territory, with its millions of dead throughout the ages, we may see its final expression of insanity in a ten-minute battle which could incinerate the earth and all its population—and for what? Not for any of our dreams, our hopes, our families, our loves or our needs—but for the vicious schemes of power and domination, profit and control which these human monsters who rule the world place above the interests of billions. These men who control our destiny—these masters of war—inhabit every government building in every capital in every country in the world—socialist or capitalist—administering their world of things with humans only as afterthoughts.

When considering the horrible possibilities of slaughter and destruction these creatures have foisted upon us, one cannot help but be overcome by a paralyzing terror. But this can only give way to a cold hatred and the determination to dispatch them and their monstrous schemes once and for all before they incinerate us and our dreams. Their forces are great and ours small, but to not pledge ourselves to their destruction is to cooperate in our own annihilation.

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