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US imperialism is driving millions of people to flee their homes across the world

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#Anti-Imperialism

*By Stephanie Weatherbee Brito, Coordinator of the Operative International Secretariat of the International Peoples' Assembly (IPA).**

On this year's World Refugee Day – June 20 – we must collectively reckon with the fact that more than **117 million people are victims of forced displacement**. From Palestine to Sudan, Yemen to Ukraine, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to Myanmar, the specter of violence casts its long shadow across the world and results in the tragedy of death and displacement that we have become all too familiar with. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Events Data (ACLED) **Conflict Index**, the world is becoming more violent, as is synthesized by the fact that one in six people are estimated to have been exposed to conflict in 2024. This marks, according to ACLED, a 22% increase in political violence incidents in the past five years and begs the question, “Why is war becoming the norm around the world?”

To understand the expansion of war and violent conflict in recent years, it is necessary to look at global factors rather than focus exclusively on the causes of each conflict. When we look at the bigger picture, we find an increasingly unequal world with a burgeoning arms market and failing

global governance structures. These factors are all connected to the structural crisis of capitalism and the US imperialist project which has reacted to its decline with increased aggression.

Over several decades, US actions have contributed to a state of global disorder, linked to a broader agenda aimed at establishing and maintaining unipolarity. Since the 1970s, the United States has increasingly pursued a foreign policy marked by unilateral actions and strategies designed to further its interests, often without regard for their impact on other actors, including some of its allies.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the US ruling class became convinced it had established a new unipolar order destined to endure indefinitely. Since then, the number of violent conflicts with US participation has increased and include: Panama (1989), Iraq (1990), Yugoslavia (1995), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), Libya (2011), Syria (2014), Ukraine (2022), Palestine (2023). In some of these instances, the conflicts instigated by the United States have overflowed beyond borders, grown through the involvement of unpredictable militias, and resulted in chaos, violence, and a breakdown of state authority. This has often only led to further escalation of violence. In this way, the US effort to maintain unipolarity has heightened global conflict.

The United States has also dismantled any semblance of global governance aimed at preventing and resolving conflicts. The League of Nations (1919) and later the United Nations (1945) were established to foster peace and security by implementing a framework of international law to govern nations' behavior. However, the US has consistently flouted these multilateral structures and international laws while shielding its close allies from repercussions for their transgressions. A significant example of this, marking a pivotal moment in undermining the rules-based order, is the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. This invasion, purportedly launched as a "preemptive" strike, lacked evidence of provocation and was based on false claims regarding Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction.

By initiating a war that failed to meet internationally accepted justifications for conflict, the US set a precedent wherein the ability to wage war—coupled with control over media narratives to justify military actions—supersedes the obligation to justify military intervention under international law. This action by the United States undermined any notion of peace and security within a rules-based system. Following the largely unchallenged war in Iraq, the US proceeded to wage wars explicitly aimed at asserting its dominance and control. The 2011 NATO-led invasion of Libya epitomizes these overt attempts to dismantle and intimidate those who defy or oppose US hegemony.

Producers of weapons and war

US imperialism relies heavily on the unparalleled military dominance it has built and maintained

over decades. To this end, military spending by the United States has steadily increased. Currently, the gigantic military machine commanded by the US is funded by USD 1.537 trillion (counting only US spending) and USD 2.13 trillion (including the expenditure by US allies). In percentages, the US-led military bloc is responsible for [74.3% of military spending globally](#). According to the [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute \(SIPRI\)](#), the world's five top arms-producing and military service companies, Lockheed Martin Corp., Raytheon Technologies, Northrop Grumman Corp., Boeing and General Dynamics Corp, are of US origin.

The US is both indirectly – by building its incredible stockpile of weapons – and directly – by producing a significant amount of the arms circling the world today – responsible for the vast amount of weapons in the world today – weapons which are instrumental to perpetuating and escalating conflicts.

The existence of readily available arms has the effect of fueling disputes that may not have escalated were weapons unavailable. This was seen in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq, where age-old differences between groups that had co-existed in relative peace for decades became bloody conflicts between tribal leaders and religious groups, due to the availability of guns and the use of these distinct groups as proxies by the US and its rivals.

As one conflict ends, its weapons quickly travel to neighboring countries, opening up new war fronts. According to the [United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs \(UNODA\)](#), the “excessive accumulation and wide availability [of small arms] may aggravate political tension, often leading to more lethal and longer-lasting violence”.

Since the US project for global hegemony was inaugurated in 1945, the US has staged military interventions in over a dozen countries. Afghanistan alone was [targeted by 81,638 bombs or missiles by the US](#) and its allies between 2001 and 2021. Other countries such as Vietnam, Somalia, Laos, Kuwait, Grenada, Yemen, and [dozens of others](#) have also suffered mass destruction and devastation under US-led military interventions.

According to the [global trends report of the UN Refugee Agency \(UNHCR\)](#) there has been a steady increase in the number of forcibly displaced persons yearly. In 2023 at least 27.2 million people were forced to flee, amounting to a total of 117.3 million which remain displaced, and constituting an 8% increase from the previous year. The UNHCR reports that the numbers of conflict-related fatalities are closely correlated with the number of people displaced each year. The three countries with the largest numbers of forced displacement are all currently embroiled in armed conflict: Sudan, Palestine, and Myanmar.

Economic siege as war

But bombs are not the only means the US has to advance its agenda; it has also taken advantage of its power over the global economic system to coerce unruly nations into towing the Washington line.

Coercive and unilateral measures, or sanctions, are widely used by the US to impoverish, starve, and weaken its enemies. Currently, the US has unilaterally imposed these measures on [approximately 39 nations and territories](#). Sanctions are war by another name, as the outcomes of these result in civilian loss of life at a scale comparable to war.

Through both military interventions and economic sanctions, the United States has shown its willingness to coerce any nation deviating from its interests. This has fostered a global environment where nations vie for power and influence. The US's propensity to invade and punish perceived adversaries has spurred countries to bolster their military and geopolitical capabilities to safeguard their sovereignty in a world marked by violence and conflict, saturated with weaponry and lacking effective mechanisms to ensure peace.

The outcome of the US hegemonic project has been a world of constant and endless wars, whether these involve the US directly or not. Struggles for control of land and resources by diverging factions quickly escalate to armed conflict due to the readily available weapons and the willing funding of regional powers looking to build their geopolitical force. This is essentially what is happening in Sudan today, where the conflict has resulted in more than ten million displaced persons. The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces serves to thwart the democratic process the people have been struggling for since 2018, as rival military groups struggle to control the country and its resources.

Furthermore, the proliferation of conflicts contributes to the normalization of violent conflict itself. As we are exposed to ever-increasing numbers of civilian casualties, refugee camps, and the widespread devastation of cities, our response to warfare becomes passive and minimal.

Instead, our response must be expressed in political action that addresses the root causes of the permanent state of war in which we live. Only by countering US imperialism, its disregard for international institutions, and its enormous military machine can we end the state of widespread violence and conflict that haunts humanity – and address the root of the refugee crisis that is felt around the world.

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