

On the recent Senate vote on Yemen

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The U.S. Senate recently voted 56-41 to withdraw U.S. military assistance for the war in Yemen. This war is nominally led by a coalition directed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), but in reality it is mainly directed by the U.S. government. On the one hand this vote is significant; it represents the first time since 1973—at the height of domestic opposition to the Vietnam War—that the legislative branch of the government has seriously attempted to follow the Constitution and assert its control over war powers. On the other hand, it is mainly a symbolic gesture, since the decision itself will, for various reasons, do very little to stop the war. This decision is reflective of growing domestic and international opposition to the Yemen War, as well as sharpening contradictions internal to the U.S. ruling class and between imperialist powers.

While the vote is significant, it will not actually stop the war in Yemen and provide the Yemeni people with the respite they so desperately need. The House of Representatives decided not to vote on the matter before the new Representatives took their place in the Congress. Therefore, the recent vote in the Senate signals that there will be more debate now that the new Congress has convened. In the mean time the war in Yemen rages on and more and more Yemenis are pushed to the brink of famine while American politicians play games to appease the public and win support for their electoral schemes.

What's more, even if the bill did pass both Houses of Congress and manage to become law—despite the possibility of Presidential veto—it would do very little to stop the war in Yemen. It would not limit or stop U.S. arms sales to any of the countries involved in the war, and it would not limit various forms of logistical support, including intelligence sharing that provides the targeting information for bombing runs. Further, it would do nothing to limit the power of the Authorization for Use of Military Force Act (AUMF). This broad and vague law was passed on September 14, 2001, just after 9/11, and provides the president with a blank check “to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001.”

This effectively allows the president and military to label any group or target

as al-Qaeda or an affiliate and thereby legally bypass seeking approval from Congress for war. It has been used already to justify interventions in Yemen, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Georgia, Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iraq, and Somalia. Even before this law was passed there were many wars which were waged by the Executive branch that were not approved by Congress, such as the initial involvement of the U.S. in Vietnam. The AUMF legalized what had already become a matter of course, that the President and the Executive branch hold the real power to make war. This, as well as the increasing reliance of the government on executive orders to maintain normal operations, reflects the concentration of power in the Executive branch of the government.

The two-party system in the U.S.—and the extremely limited democratic representation that it affords—long ago became too inefficient for making the basic decisions needed to maintain bourgeois class rule and U.S. imperialist domination of nations abroad. Just in the past year the federal government has shut down three times because the legislators have been unable to agree on a budget that Trump will sign, even though the Republican party had a majority in both the House and the Senate. To deal with such deadlocks in Congress, the ruling class has increasingly concentrated power in the Executive branch. This is reflected in the government's ever growing reliance on executive orders to make basic policy and also in Congress ceding its powers to the Presidency via laws like the AUMF. The trend of concentrating power in the Executive branch is indicative of the ruling class' inability to resolve the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, and their related need to increasingly undermine the basic democratic rights in this country that were won through the course of struggle.

In this regard—despite the largely symbolic nature of the recent vote—the Senate's vote against the Yemen War is significant. The vote was coupled with a unanimous resolution to hold Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) personally responsible for the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The latter vote was largely a rebuke of the Trump administration's defense of MBS. This too is significant, especially given that so many members of Trump's party voted for the resolution. Taken together, these two votes reflect the sharpening contradictions internal to the U.S. ruling class. While the ruling class remains dominantly united on how to maintain its class rule, these sharpening contradictions are significant.

A growing section of the ruling class are increasingly concerned with domestic and international opposition to the Yemen War and the U.S.'s relationship with Saudi Arabia. While there is general agreement among them that both the war and the alliance with the Saudis should continue, there are sharp divides on how to carry these things out. Trump has pushed for continued support of MBS and the continuation of the war in Yemen. He dismissed the importance of MBS's involvement in the Khashoggi killing, saying "it could very well be that the Crown Prince had knowledge of this tragic event – maybe he did and maybe he didn't!" Others within the ruling class are pushing for a different approach. They're worried that the brutality of the war in Yemen and the

Saudis' treatment of dissidents will turn outright support for these policies into political suicide. This section of the ruling class has also helped facilitate the return to Saudi Arabia of Prince Ahmad bin Abdulaziz—the younger brother of King Salman—who was previously living in exile. Prince Abdulaziz has been an open critic of MBS, and those who helped him return are hoping that he will reign in his nephew. Through the recent bill they also hope to foster the illusion that the U.S. is not supporting the War, but rather only conducting missions against al-Qaeda. They also want to create the impression that the war in Yemen is Trump's war, when it was in fact begun by Obama, and is a direct continuation of U.S. policy in Yemen going back decades.

The increasingly tense political situation internal to the U.S. relates to sharpening contradictions in the imperialist world system. The U.S. relationship with China is increasingly fraught, and although there has been a recent draw-down in some reciprocal tariffs, the underlying contradictions remain unresolved. The U.S. is also dealing with significant confrontations with Russian imperialism on a variety of fronts. The foremost among these is the multi-year, still-unresolved Syrian civil war, but the U.S. and Russia have also come close to direct military conflict in Ukraine. Following Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, it began openly sponsoring Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. The U.S., for its part, has sponsored a constellation of Ukrainian far-right and fascist groups which oppose the Russian presence in Ukraine. As these confrontations with rival imperialist powers have grown more intense, the differences internal to the U.S. ruling class about how best to protect the U.S. empire also have intensified.

The U.S. is also increasingly at odds with some of its close allies in NATO. For instance, French and German capitalists invested heavily in Iran following Obama's negotiation of the deal that withdrew U.S. sanctions and allowed Iran's nuclear program to continue. When Trump decided to de-certify the Iran nuclear deal many of those investments were lost, because the U.S. sanctions on Iran will now prevent those business deals from going forward. Many among the French bourgeoisie greatly resent these and other ways that the U.S. limits how and where they can invest their capital and nurture a nostalgia for France's past role as one of the leading imperialist countries in the world. Similar sentiment exists in Germany as well.

The growing contradictions internal to the U.S. ruling class and the increasing inter-imperialist competition that we see today are a result of fundamental and unresolved economic contradictions. Contrary to the lies of bourgeois economists, the worldwide financial crisis of 2008 never ended. The programs enacted by central banks and governments around the world have staved off total collapse but they have not addressed the underlying crisis of overproduction and excess capacity. Overproduction leads to capitalist crises as goods can no longer be sold profitably. For the U.S. ruling class there is not an easy solution to this problem. They used a series of measures—including bailouts, debt creation, and money creation—to stave off the crisis in 2008. A full-blown

depression could help alleviate some aspects of the crisis, as it would result in the destruction of a significant amount of capital, but these are very risky for the ruling class. The millions of working people thrown into poverty during depressions have everything to gain and little to lose by rebelling in such a situation. What's more, overproduction is a direct result of capitalist exploitation, and cannot be resolved under capitalism.

The effects of overproduction can also be mitigated if the ruling class can find new markets to flood with excess commodities. However, in the age of capitalist-imperialism the world's markets are already divided up between imperialist powers. Therefore, any gain in market share for the U.S. bourgeoisie is a loss for another bourgeoisie (whether ally or rival). This dynamic sharpens inter-imperialist conflict (as well as contradictions between imperialist powers and the oppressed nations), and increases the likelihood of proxy wars and even open inter-imperialist warfare. These conflicts can partially alleviate the crisis of overproduction, as they lead to the destruction of a large amount of productive capital, as well as mass death of the poor. This reduces the surplus population and opens the door for a new wave of investment to replace factories and infrastructure that were destroyed. These possibilities set the stage for more forceful confrontations between the U.S. and its rivals and also growing contradictions with its allies.

These underlying contradictions of the capitalist mode of production have been deepening since the start of the 2008 crisis, and the various government schemes to prop up the economy have simply masked the crisis, rather than addressing its fundamental root cause. In effect, the ruling class staved off certain aspects of the crisis by massive debt creation—borrowing from the future—and the wholesale printing of trillions of dollars, which were then put directly into the pockets of major financial institutions. Trump has pointed to low unemployment numbers of just under 4% as a sign that the U.S. economy is strong and growing, but the government's official unemployment statistic is extremely misleading. A more accurate picture of employment in the U.S. is shown by the labor force participation rate, which measures the percentage of able-bodied working age people who work even one hour a week. This number shows that unemployment is actually around 37% and that it has been steadily growing since 2008, and this does not even account for underemployment. Household debt has also increased since 2013, after a decrease after 2008, and the average person in the U.S. now has around \$50,000 in debt. The U.S. government debt, during the same period, increased from 67% of GDP to 105% of GDP. These statistics show that the post-2008 "recovery" is little more than a relative and temporary mitigation of the worst aspects of the crisis; in many ways the situation is rapidly deteriorating. The ruling class can only kick the can down the road for so long. The fundamental contradictions of capitalist-imperialism have not been resolved, and the full-blown crisis is now reemerging.

The sharpening contradictions in the imperialist world system and the relative gains in strength of rival imperialist powers increasingly threaten to destabilize

the United States' position in the world. This situation is reflected in contradictions among the U.S. ruling class, whose disagreements and internal conflicts are becoming sharper. The Senate decisions to both oppose the U.S. war in Yemen and state their belief in MBS' involvement in the Khashoggi killing are a strong rebuke of a sitting U.S. president. This reflects the deep divisions internal to the ruling class about how to deal with strategic rivals like Russia and China while managing political fallout related to the war in Yemen. These divisions among the ruling class present a real opportunity for revolutionaries in the U.S. to organize mass opposition to imperialist wars of aggression and provide greater openings for mass exposure of political issues, as the bourgeoisie is no longer as unified in the narrative that it presents.

The heightened contradictions internationally have also been accompanied by recent developments in other imperialist countries. In France the Yellow Vest protest movement forced the government to make several big concessions, including canceling a planned fuel tax increase and raising the minimum wage. In China Maoist students and workers have organized a number of large protests and strikes to demand improvements in working conditions. In the UK the Brexit process has become more and more chaotic, and Theresa May recently faced a no-confidence vote which was called by members of her own party. In Germany the coalition that put Angela Merkel in power has fractured, and far-right anti-immigrant parties are gaining ground. These events all reflect the deepening crisis in the capitalist mode of production as well as heightened inter-imperialist competition. The Yellow Vests in France and the Maoist protests in China show how these cracks in the system can provide major openings for progressive and revolutionary political movements.

The sharper conflict internal to the U.S. ruling class is part of an unfolding crisis in the current political system in this country. As this conflict becomes more intense and the international situation becomes more desperate for the U.S. ruling class, they will be forced to adopt more and more reactionary measures to clamp down on opposition to bourgeois class rule at home and to imperialist wars abroad. This will create openings for revolutionaries to expose the reactionary nature of the U.S. ruling class to the masses, who will be drawn into more and more open class struggle. These factors will create an increasingly favorable situation for revolutionary organizing in this country. However, if we do not seize the time, these favorable objective conditions will be little more than a missed opportunity. We need to get organized and develop the advanced section of the masses into revolutionaries. It is also very important that we continue to sum up the lessons of past revolutionaries struggles the world over, so that we can learn from their successes and avoid repeating their mistakes.

The developing crisis is creating very favorable conditions for revolutionary organizing in this country, the likes of which have not been seen since the 1960s and 70s. At the present moment, the contradictions internal to the U.S. ruling class have created significant openings to organize domestic opposition to U.S. imperialism and its wars of plunder abroad. For example, the war in Yemen

is publicly acknowledged—even by bourgeois media like the New York Times—as a U.S. war of aggression resulting in the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Regenerating the Anti-War movement in this country is a key aspect of revolutionary organizing, and is particularly necessary given the nature of U.S. imperialism.

As the crisis of the imperialist world system intensifies, more and more political openings will develop in this country and other imperialist powers around the world. For a long time, comrades in oppressed countries have been at the forefront of the world proletarian revolution, and the level of mass struggle has been significantly greater in the oppressed countries. However, the sharpening inter-imperialist conflict and strategic decline of U.S. imperialism are transforming the objective situation the whole world over. Therefore, revolutionaries in this country and other imperialist countries must be prepared to seize the time. We are a detachment of the world proletarian revolution, and have a key role to play in the struggle for the common liberation of humanity from oppression and exploitation.