

# THE U.S. AS FOURTH REICH

By Dave Stratman

September 2, 2002

[newdemocracyworld.org](http://newdemocracyworld.org)

The U.S. is making itself an object of fear and hatred throughout the world. Bush Administration spokesmen have promised the world "endless war" against as many as sixty countries, have claimed for the U.S. the right to launch pre-emptive war on any nation which the U.S. suspects may become a threat in the future, and have reserved the right to first use of nuclear weapons. The U.S. now seems about to launch a pre-emptive war against Iraq which is likely to result in tens of thousands of civilian deaths, not to mention substantial U.S. military casualties, a war for which the U.S. has support only from U.S. Pekinese Tony Blair and Israel.

Has the Bush regime become unhinged? Or do its extremely bellicose policies serve some arcane strategic purpose which U.S. ruling circles believe make them worth their enormous political and economic costs?

As ill-considered as these war-like policies may seem, in fact there are powerful strategic reasons behind them.

The media are full of stories about Israel and Iraq and other arenas where the overwhelming military might of the U.S. and its client state leads many people to feel utterly powerless and hopeless about the possibility of ordinary people changing the world. Missing from our front pages, or indeed anywhere in the mainstream media, are stories about the rising levels of mass resistance to capitalism around the globe: general strikes in Italy and Spain; labor unrest of historic proportions in China; South America in flames, with unrest in Brazil, insurrections and factory seizures in Argentina, strikes and riots in Uruguay, insurrections against privatization in Peru, mass mobilizations in Venezuela; and a level of disillusionment with corporate thievery in the U.S. not seen since the 1930s. Couple all these with growing danger of financial collapse and global deflation, and the future of capitalism begins to look shaky indeed.

The war plans and rhetoric of the Bush administration are meant to distract attention from capitalism's profound strategic weakness and focus instead on its overwhelming military strength, with the result that, even as capitalist economic and ideological power unravels, it appears to be insuperably strong. But the bellicose policies of the U.S. have in addition more profound goals than to serve as diversionary emblems of overwhelming military power. This is what gets us to consideration of the U.S. as Fourth Reich.

As dangerous as World War II was for world capitalism, war for and against the Third Reich was meant to save the world system of elite rule. The world was deep in Depression in the 1930s. Anti-capitalist sentiment was on the rise and workers' movements were increasingly powerful. Germany was on the verge of civil war when Hitler was appointed Chancellor by the German elite on January 30, 1933 to crush the growing workers' movement, which he proceeded to do with concentration camps for 100,000 Communists and militant workers. Japan was riven by strikes and anti-capitalist sentiment when the military leadership invaded China in 1937 in a desperate drive for natural resources and national unity. French capitalists were besieged by factory occupations and welcomed the Nazi invaders. Industrial unionism and sit-down strikes were sweeping the U.S. In the USSR Stalin was holding onto power through ferocious repression, with executions or the gulag for millions of workers, peasants, and Old Bolsheviks.

War gave the Nazi regime a national purpose and an external enemy to justify Gestapo domination of German life; while Hitler and many of his closest henchman died or were imprisoned after the war, the industrial elite which had placed him in power prospered. War brought unity and national purpose to a British society riven by class conflict. The French Vichy government collaborated with the occupying Nazis to break French workers' unions. U.S. corporations imposed a No-Strike Pledge on workers for the duration of the war and consolidated corporate power in American life. The German invasion came close to shattering Soviet power, but national resistance to the Nazis in the end saved Stalin's rule and helped keep the USSR from internal collapse for another fifty years.

Mobilization for war led these economies out of Depression. In the U.S., FDR's New Deal programs had negligible effect. What saved the U.S. economy was producing tanks and ships and planes for WWII. Mobilization for war led Nazi Germany from massive unemployment to a labor shortage.

What does any of this have to do with the present day? I submit that the U.S. has determined (whether with the connivance of its elite partners is not clear) to serve a role similar to that of the Nazi regime in the 1930s and '40s. The U.S. will play Fourth Reich to the other governments of the world, in particular to those most likely to be threatened by mass insurrections and revolutionary upheavals in the coming years: China, certain Western European powers, and South American nations.

The U.S. will go on the attack against many of the world's people - especially those who have the misfortune to be sitting on top of a lot of oil - to insure elite control of world resources and, more importantly, to police against revolutionary movements, all in the name of "fighting terrorism." Ironically though it will be the excessive violence and lawlessness of the U.S. approach that will be most useful to governing elites.

The growing anti-capitalist movement among the world's workers and other people presents the world business elite with a deeply threatening situation. The elites of each of the countries in which resistance is growing need an external enemy against which they can lead their own people, either in real battle or in moral indignation. They need to be able to say that the problem in Italy or Spain or China is not Italian or Chinese leaders or the capitalist system: the problem is the Americans.

The role of the U.S. will be to act as a stimulant and target of world anger so that the burgeoning world anti-capitalist movement can be turned into an anti-American movement, in which the working classes of China and Spain and Italy and France and South America can be recruited into movements of national unity - Popular Fronts - against the Americans. In this way - or so it is hoped - potentially revolutionary working class movements will be transformed into nationalist movements under elite leadership.

Does this strategy seem far-fetched? In fact it is nothing new for the U.S., but merely playing out on a world scale its strategy in the Middle East. The U.S. has long used Israel as a lightning rod to deflect the class anger of impoverished Arab workers away from their own rulers, thus keeping in power shaky U.S. client regimes throughout the region.

This is also the strategy the U.S. used in Iran to prevent the revolution against the Shah from sweeping away capitalist control there and sparking a prairie fire of democratic revolution in the Middle East. The U.S. secretly colluded with the Ayatollah Khomeini, even as he attacked the U.S. as the "Great Satan" and took over the U.S. Embassy in Teheran and held Americans captive. The U.S. was perfectly willing to permit, even encourage, this storm of anti-Americanism, since it deflected popular anger away from capitalism and class rule itself and permitted the reactionary regime of the mullahs to consolidate its grip on Iranian society.

Playing the role of the Fourth Reich will have an added benefit for the U.S. elite. As Fourth Reich-like policies bring the U.S. under attack from terrorists and lead to real war, they will be used to justify tighter and tighter government control of the U.S. population. Constitutional protections will prove as flimsy as the prisoners' huts at Guantanamo.

The U.S. strategy amounts to a very serious gamble with enormous stakes. While it is intended to intimidate people and make them feel powerless, it does so at the cost of calling into question the ability of capitalism to offer them a secure future. In other words, embarking on endless war will intensify the strategic erosion of capitalist ideological control while strengthening the capitalist state. While making war will immediately strengthen the hand of the rulers, over time it will undermine their position.

It is worth recalling here the complicated history of WWII and of nations which succumbed to German or Japanese invasion. While people were initially stunned into defeated silence by invasion and occupation, over time they organized Resistance movements which rose up not only against their foreign occupiers but also against their own business and aristocratic classes which had collaborated with the enemy. As the German occupiers were routed in France, Italy, and Greece, sweeping social revolutions were only narrowly prevented when Communist parties obedient to Stalin succeeded in disarming triumphant Resistance forces. Communist-led partisan forces under Tito in Yugoslavia refused Stalin's order, defeated Nazi occupiers and native Fascist forces alike, and took power. The Chinese Communist Party likewise refused Stalin's orders to desist; after waging civil war from 1946 to 1949, Mao's forces defeated Chinese Nationalist armies and seized state power.

Even peoples who had not suffered occupation emerged from the war with greatly raised expectations of what their societies should be like, expectations which threatened their rulers. British voters swept Churchill and the Tories from power at war's end and established a welfare state. Workers in the U.S., which had suffered none of the ravages of war that European countries had endured, in 1946 embarked on the greatest strike wave in our history. It took the Taft-Hartley Act, the declaration of the Cold War, and a ferocious anti-Communist campaign to bring labor under control. (Communists in the labor movement were particularly vulnerable to attack since they had vigorously supported the No Strike Pledge during the war and had led the attack on rank-and-file militants who resisted it.)

Will elite strategy lead to another world war? Given the embattled situation of world capital and the trajectory of history in the last fifty years, a war involving, say, China and perhaps India or some other Asian powers vs. the U.S. or some mix of European powers, may be more possible than we would like to think. Capitalism is running out of options. The future depends largely on how threatened governing elites feel and to what lengths they believe they must go to protect their rule. One can imagine, for example, a Chinese Communist government threatened by domestic upheaval attacking Taiwan in a desperate bid for national unity, realizing that this will bring war with the U.S. The consequences of such possible developments are unforeseeable.

As the air waves ring with threats by U.S. officials against Iraq, it is sobering to reflect that the Bush regime has staked its entire credibility on more terrorist acts occurring; indeed Administration policies in Israel and Afghanistan and Iraq seem calculated to stir up more attacks on Americans. Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Ashcroft have promised us some new terrorist outrage. Let us hope that this Administration does not decide to furnish us with the terrorist catastrophe that it has promised.

Will the elite strategy succeed? Only time will tell, but the facade of Bush's post-September 11 power-grab seems to be cracking, as more and more Americans

connect the dots between the "war on terrorism," attacks on Constitutional rights, Wall Street thievery, and government promises of endless war. No one likes to admit that entities as powerful as the U.S. government and Corporate America are not our friends but our enemies, but many people are coming to this conclusion and are finding their voices. What seems undeniably true is that the world has entered a new and dangerous period of war and revolution in which the fate of humanity hangs in the balance.

\*\*\*\*

[Back](#)

[Other Articles by Dave Stratman](#)