**Book Review**

***Pentagon on Alert: The Russian Peace Threat***

**By Dave Lindorff**

In the preface to his remarkable three-volume *History of the Russian Revolution*, Leon Trotsky, writing in 1930 about earth-shaking events in which he was a key actor, explains his view of writing history. Citing the reactionary French historian Louis Madelin, who wrote that “…the historian ought to stand upon the wall of a threatened city, and behold at the same time the besiegers and the besieged” in order to achieve a “conciliatory justice,” Trotsky scoffs that “The words of Madelin himself testify that if he climbs out on the wall dividing the two camps, it is only in the character of a reconnoiterer for the reaction.” In contrast, Trotsky, while vowing to draw on historic documents, not fallible personal memory or anecdote, in explaining the events in which he played a key role, says that he will be writing with a “scientific conscientiousness, which for its sympathies and antipathies — open and undisguised — seeks support in an honest study of the facts, a determination of their real connections, an exposure of the causal laws of their movements.”

Ron Ridenour, a veteran journalist and author, former member of the US Communist Party, dedicated anti-war activist and a self-described revolutionary socialist, like Trotsky writes from a perspective of outside the city wall, but in his latest book, *Pentagon on Alert: The Russian Peace Threat (Punto Press,* New York, 2018), does an admirable of job, with an abundance of readily accessible citations (hot-linked in the book’s online version), of presenting, instead of some coldly “objective” history, the perspective of someone passionately opposed to American imperialism and to this country’s century-long hostilty towards Russia. He documents how from the outset of the Russian revolution of 1917, when US marines joined other European armies in seeking to overthrow the new socialist state by force, down to the present, Washington, whichever party was in power, has sought to hem in the Soviet Union, and now the Russian Federation, on all sides, with the ultimate aim being to create a client regime through “regime change,” or to destroy the country with a nuclear first strike.

As someone who studied Russian history, I found myself nonetheless being continually surprised in reading The *Russian Peace Threat*, by shocking new facts about that US hostility that I had not been aware of. For example, at the end of Chapter 10, on the launching of the Cold War by then Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Harry Truman at the end of World War II, Ridenour describes how Churchill presented a plan to the US called “Operation Unthinkable,” which envisioned having the combined forces of the US, Britain and Canada along with some 100,000 rearmed Nazi troops attack the presumably exhausted and over-extended Soviet Red Army then still fighting remnants of the Wehrmacht in eastern Germany. Operation Unthinkable, which Ridenour writes was kept secret until 1998, also envisioned, as early as mid-1945, using the new atomic bombs being developed by the US and Britain in the Manhattan Project and not yet even tested on Japan, against Soviet troops and even on the Soviet capital of Moscow.

He goes on in the next chapter about the launching of the Cold War, which he notes was begun not by Stalin, but by Churchill and Truman, to describe how, over the period from 1946-1949, Truman had his Pentagon generals feverishly developing a series of monstrous plans, more detailed than the thankfully never launched Operation Unthinkable, all of which centered on the use of America’s growing nuclear arsenal to completely destroy the USSR’s industrial base.

With names like Operation Pincher and Operation Dropshot, these plans continued to be developed until 1949, when Russia, thanks in part to the assistance provided by sympathetic Manhattan Project scientists and workers who feared — rightly it turns out! — a US with a monopoly on atomic weapons after the war. Even though the Pentagon planners estimated that dropping some 300 nuclear weapons on Soviet military bases and industrial centers could kill half the that war-battered country’s remaining population, it was the only the recognition that the Soviets could finally strike back that halted that active planning (and it was only the lack of a sufficient number of bombs and delivery systems to do the job that had kept them from launching a “pre-emptive” genocidal war before that).

Over and over Ridenour exposes how it has been the US, not Russia or the USSR that has created the wars and tensions with the Soviet Union. Take Vietnam, which Ridenour, an Air Force veteran himself, says was central to his political evolution as a revolutionary activist. He reports on how the US military in Vietnam was practically in open revolt after the Tet Offensive in January 1968. He says the smoking of marijuana by US soldiers was widespread as well as the taking of LSD, but says heroin became the drug of choice, and quoting Pentagon sources says that by the early 1970s 15% of Army troops were on smack. He also talks about fragging again quoting Pentagon sources as saying there were more than 900 cases of soldiers using grenades to kill commanding officers they felt were incompetent, aggressive or a threat to their survival, and says the situation, combined with an expanding and increasingly militant anti-war movement back in the US contributed to the US finally losing the war.

Not afraid to move into the present, Ridenour gives a solid account of the current era in which both the Obama and Trump administrations have produced increased tensions with Russia, from the coup in Ukraine orchestrated and funded by the US under President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, which led to a fascist, anti-Russian government in Kiev, to the current illegal US military role in Syria backing jihadi terrorist groups against the Syrian government, which is being aided by Russia.

Ridenour gives a well documented history of the rise of Russian President Vladimir Putin, explaining in detail how the US first helped install the alcoholic Boris Yeltsin in a second term as president — a man who allowed US business interests to rob the country blind — and how Putin came in, at first supported by the US, and turned the country around from its headlong plunge into economic and social decline, at which point the US turned on him.

Putin’s “crime,” Ridenour explains, is that after the Ukraine coup, he finally called an end to the undermining of Russia. He explains in detail how Russia’s only warm water naval base in the south, in Crimea, was threatened by the change in government in Kiev, and then quoting Harvard political scientist John Mearsheimer, says, “Putin saw that the time to act against Ukraine and the West had arrived.”

There was no “invasion” of Crimea, he explains. Russia already had 25,000 troops based in Crimea under an agreement with Ukraine. They were there to defend the Russian base, which was leased from Ukraine under an agreement struck when Ukraine became independent as part of the break-up of the USSR. Crimea, historically a part of Russia, and only annexed to Ukraine in 1954 as a “gift” ordered by Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev, himself a Ukrainian, was 68% ethnically Russian and only 16% Ukrainian. When the people of Ukraine expressed a desire to have the territory returned to Russia because of threats against ethnic Russians from the new Kiev government a plebiscite was held in which 83% of eligible voters voted, and 97% favored reintegration with Russia. Putin agreed. That was the invasion.

Ridenour, quoting Western sources, says the “invasion” only involved Russia sending over to Crimea six helicopters and two small boats with 500 s0-called “little green men” — actually Russian Special Forces acting as “polite police.” There were six killings in the transfer of Crimea to Russia, he reports: two were Crimean Russian civilians, one a Crimean Ukrainian civilian, one Russian soldier, one Ukrainian soldier and one Crimean self-defense soldier. He adds that the Russian soldier was killed by a Ukrainian Right Sector militant who fled to Ukraine and that none of the other deaths was caused by a Russian soldier. While Hillary Clinton was comparing the Crimean re-annexation by Russia to Hitler’s march into Sudatenland, Ridenour quotes *Forbes* magazine as writing: “The US and European Union may want to save Crimeans from themselves. But the Crimeans are happy right where they are. One year after the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula in the Black Sea, poll after poll shows that the locals there — be they Ukrainians, ethnic Russians or Tatars, are mostly all in agreement: life with Russia is better than life with Ukraine.”

While Trotsky may have disparaged anectotes in his *History*, Ridenour, who spent eight years living in Cuba (he famously burned his passport and renounced his US citizenship after the US launched the Gulf War against Iraq, throwing the ashes over the wall into the US Interest Section compound in Havana), before moving to Denmark where he now lives, provides many anecdotes about his life in Castro’s Cuba, about his experience as a US Airman stationed in Japan, and about his experience as an activist in the US. These enrich the book and allow the reader to know where the author is coming from. Example: In his chapter the US War on Vietnam, he describes how on May 1, 1975, he took out a promotional record he had been given years earlier that had been intended to be performed years back at anti-war marches and rallies. Called “War is Over,” he says he felt it was too optimistic for the times so for years he’d never played it. “After 15 years of anti-war activism, Vietnam won so now I could play it,” he writes, “and I did repeatedly, crying on and off for hours.” He adds, “Just reading these sentences out loud I break out in tears and heartache.”

That’s the Ron I remember from the days he, and several other Los Angeles journalists, myself included, back in 1976, in the wake of the collapse of that city’s pioneering alternative paper, the *Free Press* that same year, founded a feisty if short-lived worker-owned-and-run alternative left news weekly, the *Los Angeles Vanguard*. A committed socialist revolutionary, Ron is veteran radical journalist, an excellent writer and a passionate believer in the pure evil of war and in the need for a re-ordering of global society on the basis of real socialism, not capitalism or welfare-statism.

His book *The Russian Peace Threat* is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand what is driving the insane US effort to gin up a new cold war with both Russia and China at a time when the real threat facing humanity is of either nuclear annihilation or the destruction of the very planetary ecosystem allowed the human species to evolve to this point. As Ridenour meticulously documents, mostly drawing on western news sources, especially from the end of World War II it has been US that is the driving force for increasing enmity between itself and first the Soviet Union and today Russia, and increasingly China too. It is also the US that has been responsible for tens of millions of mostly Third World deaths since the end of that last horrific global conflict.