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UNITED STATES

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Discussion, debate and author’s opinions - To encourage the broadest possible discussion and debate around the aims of exposing capitalism and promoting socialism, we hope our readers appreciate that not all opinions expressed by individual authors are necessarily those of *The Socialist Correspondent*.

Proposals for articles and letters to the editor should be sent to tscsubs@btinternet.com

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The threats facing humanity are graver than ever and are a product of the decline of the West, in particular the United States as it acts aggressively to maintain its hegemony.

The US threat

Simon Korner and Steve Howell both point to the challenges to US power, including the weakening position of the dollar in their articles *Extreme adventurism – the dangerous decline of the USA* and *Divisions in Washington: same goal, different strategies*. As we have seen with the kidnaping of President Maduro of Venezuela and the seizure of ships on the high seas in flagrant breach of international law, US military might still reigns supreme. It far out-guns other countries and most would hesitate to challenge it on the battlefield, so it only needs to make its intentions known to bully others into submission. Erstwhile allies are equally subject to this and they are also fearful of a major, perhaps final, breach with the US. The EU and Denmark are not about to go to war over Greenland, meaning the US can do what it wants.

Unable to countenance the alternative of challenging it, the EU, UK and other western countries have trapped themselves into groveling subservience to the US, what Simon Korner describes as “vassalisation” - occasional reservations from governments notwithstanding. But it is not so in the rest of the world. Steve Howell points out that China and the BRICS countries are diversifying away from the dollar. He says, “the dollar’s share of foreign exchange reserves has declined from more than 70% to 56% over the last 25 years [and] the renminbi is estimated to be used in 50% of intra-BRICS trade.” Another example of waning US influence is the growing Chinese trade with the Global South. Simon Korner points out that, “Trade

between Latin American and China has increased from \$12 billion in 2000 to \$315 billion in 2020 and is on course to double again by 2035. Fifty-three African countries now have tariff-free access for their exports to China, which is the top trading partner of most African countries, up from \$14 billion in 2000 to \$290 billion in 2024.”

The contrast between US and Chinese strategy globally is also expanded on by Milly Cunningham in *Latin America: The United States and China*, and Uri Cohen in *China and the new world disorder*.

As Steve Howell points out there are those in the US who are concerned about the consequences of the loss of US soft power and confrontation with allies as well as designated enemies. The critics are in all likelihood correct, that Trump’s policies will, in the long term, weaken not strengthen the US by reducing its influence across the globe. But there are also those who see the naked grab for power and resources as the only way to shore up the US in the face of underlying decline. They do not want to experience the same fate as Britain, which was eventually forced to cede its hegemonic power to the US and has experienced slow decline ever since.

Collapse of liberalism

It is not only in world affairs that we can see the collapse of post-second world war liberal norms. Just as international law and institutions are ignored, along with even the spurious rationales for military interventions – ‘human rights’ or ‘removing dictators’ – so the norms of the liberal regimes are being eroded within countries. This is all part of the same collapse of liberalism and shows how deeply the crisis of capitalism runs.

Noah Tucker in *When truth becomes treachery* explores how free speech

is being shut down in Britain. Draconian legislation, ostensibly aimed at combatting terrorism, is being used to investigate and prosecute musicians and others. People, protesting entirely peacefully, are arrested and charged with terrorism offences. Professionals are hounded by false allegations of anti-Semitism with the threat of them being struck off and losing their livelihoods. Foreign media channels are banned. By contrast at the height of the Cold War, when the establishment would have had us believe we were under direct threat from the Soviet Union, its publications were freely available.

The attack on the right to trial by jury is a further aspect of the erosion of democratic structures within our society and the significance of this is analysed by Clare Bailey in *Jury trials - 12 potentially angry people*. Although jury service is part of creating consent for the system, she highlights their democratic potential. There is a history of juries reaching ‘perverse’ decisions in political trials, acquitting defendants against the direction of judges to find them guilty. Not only is the system of jury trials itself under threat, the right of jurors to act according to their consciences is being suppressed.

A different world order

As the liberal order implodes, the world has become a more dangerous and repressive place. Some in that old order want to reconstruct its institutions and norms from the wreckage being created by Trump. But recreating the international system which sustained US power and enabled the rise of Trump is not the answer. The case for an alternative world of respect for national sovereignty, of collaboration and peace between nations is clear.

EXTREME ADVENTURISM

The dangerous decline of the USA



PHOTO BY FORT DRUM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

US prepares for war

by Simon Korner

The world is more dangerous than it's ever been. The US has escalated a campaign of reckless violence across the globe to try to offset its long-term decline. This strategy is not a Trumpist aberration but is fully backed by the whole American machine. The “extreme adventurism” (Putin’s words) we are witnessing is more dangerous than US war-mongering up to now, not only because it’s so widespread, fire-raising in multiple theatres simultaneously, but because of the utterly brazen and provocative way it’s being conducted. All pretence at restraint has been removed. Let’s look at the current context.

US world dominance

American global dominance is under pressure as the size of its economy relative to the rest of the world shrinks. But like capitalism in general, the US has a great capacity for innovation, renewal, and violence to enforce its dominance.

Looking at a few key indicators, the US remains strong. It dominates the list of the top 100 companies in the world, 58, whereas Europe only has 18 and China 12. Of the

top 10 global companies, 6 are US tech companies – Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon, Facebook and Nvidia, showing the strength of US science and technology – though their overvaluation makes a crash likely. The US also holds nearly half of all the world’s stocks, about 5 times China’s holdings.

The dollar still reigns supreme. Increasing global instability has been driving investors to the still relatively safe haven of the dollar, which further reinforces its

dominance over other currencies. The US establishment thinktank the *Atlantic Council* says, “Over the past eight decades... dollar dominance has long been associated with the United States’ exorbitant privilege to finance large fiscal and current account deficits at low interest rates. This has helped the United States run a large defense budget and conduct extensive military operations abroad”. [1] But in 2025 the dollar’s grip on the world economy began to loosen. The *FT* reported last summer that the dol-

lar had lost a tenth of its value in the first half of the year. Despite stabilising later, the dollar's fluctuating value remains an economic weakness. This matches a longer-term downward trend in the dollar's share of foreign exchange reserves.

And while US stocks and shares are riding high, partly due to the weaker dollar which helps US exporters sell their products at lower prices, nevertheless (apart from the tech companies) the economy looks very unhealthy. Unemployment is high. Agriculture is in crisis, partly because tariffs have shut off China's huge market for American soya beans. The price of gold is soaring – usually a sign of trouble.

If dollar dominance continues to erode, it could lead to a loss of confidence in the dollar's reserve currency status, which could in turn trigger a collapse of the market for US Treasuries – Treasuries are government bonds based on debt, and a bedrock of the US financial system. If investors start hedging, i.e. betting against the risk of dollar depreciation, it could make Treasuries unattractive and lead to a financial crisis. The FT reported (1/3/26) that Treasuries are “now clearly unsafe.”

A further vulnerability is that Trump's tariffs could lead to a decline in the global use of the dollar as countries seek a way out of economic strangulation, which could damage confidence in the US as a safe place to invest, and that would mean a reduction of US global influence. US power rests on the strength of the dollar dominating the world's economies, which means it will seek to maintain dollar supremacy at all costs. The US oligarchs won't accept a gentle decline of their empire, and the US is using the weapons of sanctions, tariffs – and increasingly war – to protect their profits. These are high-risk weapons for the US, and lethal for the rest of us.

Tariffs

American tariffs have been applied massively over the past year, alongside sanctions. Some of the harshest tariffs have been against China, initially set at 100% and later lowered to 34% in the face of China's counter-measures.

Tariffs of 50% were imposed on India, including a 25% punishment for its continuing purchases of Russian oil; 50% on Brazil, under fire for sentencing former coup president Bolsonaro; and 30% on South Africa, in part for taking Israel to the International Court of Justice. Like sanctions, tariffs function as both economic coercion and an attack on national sovereignty. Their arbitrary imposition is used to create a deliberate climate of economic uncertainty, enhancing US control.

Even close US allies in Europe haven't been spared. The EU agreed in summer 2025 to 15% tariffs on European exports to the US, entirely unreciprocated, while steel and aluminium exports will face tariffs of 50%. The deal marked a strategic capitulation by the EU, which, far from giving the individual European nations collective strength, has deprived them of any national levers – such as subsidising their own industries – to defend their economies.

The tariffs are the culmination of a process of vassalisation whose most dramatic representation was the sabotage in 2022 of Germany's part-owned Nord Stream cheap energy pipeline from Russia - an act of war Berlin accepted without demur. One German minister went so far as to say that the pipeline should never have been built at all, a low point in grovelling German Atlanticism. Many EU countries are now energy dependent on the US, committed under the terms of the trade deal to spending £750 billion on very expensive US fossil fuels.

Division of labour

What are the results of the European submission to the US? The US economy has grown to roughly twice the size of Europe's, from a position of rough parity in 2008. Germany, in recession for the past 3 years, is de-industrialising. Two million fewer German cars were made in 2024 than 2017. France, also in difficulties, has been downgraded by the Fitch ratings agency because of the huge size of its national debt.

And Europe is paying more than the US for NATO's war against Russia. Europe and the UK have so far spent \$95 billion on Ukraine compared to the Americans' \$75 billion. Altogether, Europe is planning to spend €6.4 trillion on arms spending over the next decade, \$600 billion of which will go on buying US-made weapons.

The EU's traditional fiscal restraint has given way to major borrowing. The EU's war loan to Ukraine of €90 billion agreed in December 2025 was forced through without unanimous agreement of member states after a larger loan pushed by unelected EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen was rejected by a divided EU. The most important objection came from Belgium, where the Euroclear bank is headquartered, which feared that the proposed theft of Russian reserves could lead to a backlash from the money markets and legal action by Russia.

All this spending is what US War Secretary Pete Hegseth calls “international burden sharing”. It's a division of labour. The Europeans continue America's Ukraine war, and pay for it, in line with US strategy, while the US focuses on China. [2] Despite its control, the US can't afford to let up its pressure on Europe. When Germany became too competitive industrially for US liking through its cheap Russian imports of natural gas and coal,

This war readiness and bloc formation goes hand in hand with the US-orchestrated campaign of violence across the world, what commentator Thomas Fazi calls “permanent destabilisation and engineered chaos”.

which was half its total supply, the US initiated its proxy war in Ukraine in part to sever Germany from Russia for good.

But European leaders had their own reasons for warmongering too, eyeing the rare earths, abundant agriculture, cheap labour, and the lucrative weapons market of Ukraine. So, while they’re waging war on the US’s behalf, each is also chasing its own interests.

War preparations

All in all, we’re witnessing the formation of a disciplined US military and economic bloc preparing for world war. While Trump’s peace proposals appear to counter Europe’s aggressive escalation of the Ukraine conflict, they are simply a tactical shift in the face of NATO battlefield defeats, calling for an “expeditious cessation of hostilities in Ukraine”. Meanwhile it is pushing arms spending and opening a new phase of the conflict in the form of attacks on Russian oil tankers in international waters. The US is expanding the conflict, not de-escalating. The aim of any ceasefire is to give Ukraine time to re-arm itself, as the Minsk treaties succeeded in doing.

The same war preparations are happening in the Pacific where Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand are being drawn into the US noose more tightly. South Korea has been forced to invest \$350 billion in the US economy in order to lower punishing US tariffs. Taiwan has been sold \$10 billion of new US arms, provoking protests from China. Japan, like Germany, is re-arming rapidly, tearing up its postwar peaceful constitution, and expressing nuclear ambitions. It too has been forced to accept 15% tariffs.

Under the latest US National Security Strategy, China is openly identified as the primary long-term

rival and the First Island Chain, extending from Japan to Taiwan and beyond, is becoming a series of US bases.

This war readiness and bloc formation goes hand in hand with the US-orchestrated campaign of violence across the world, what commentator Thomas Fazi calls “permanent destabilisation and engineered chaos”.

We’ve seen its military attack on Venezuela as it asserts hemispheric control and heading off Chinese investment, coming hard on the heels of its bombing raids in northern Nigeria and threats to seize Greenland. There’ve been attempted colour revolutions in Nepal, Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as conflicts provoked between Pakistan and India, Pakistan and Afghanistan and Cambodia and Thailand. There has been destabilisation in Georgia, Serbia, and Moldova. And in the Middle East, we’ve seen Israel’s total destruction of Gaza and bombardment of Lebanon, Syria and Iran. When Merz the German Chancellor says Israel is “doing the dirty work for us”, he’s right, Zionist atrocities and adventurism are not outliers, they are what imperialism does, its defining features.

Overall, extreme adventurism is serving the US well. The successful western regime-change in Syria weakened Russian and Iranian regional influence and gave Israel free passage to attack Iran through Syrian airspace, control over Druze areas in the south and an opportunity to create its so-called David’s Corridor through to Iraq as part of its Greater Israel project. Turkey, a NATO ally that helped instal the ISIS Syrian regime, has achieved far greater control over Syria’s north-east, rather than just a buffer zone, while the US occupation of Syria’s oilfields continues.

Meanwhile, the US has gained greater control over central Asia,

once Russia's sphere, by helping Azerbaijan create a transport corridor carved out of Armenia's territory along Iran's northern border. Azerbaijan is now directly connected to its western enclave of Nakhchivan, and that gives its sponsor Turkey greater regional influence, fulfilling its Ottoman ambitions, and gives the US a route for transporting central Asian energy westwards bypassing Russia and Iran.

What links all the US's destabilising moves is the strategy of overextending and encircling Russia, encircling China and choking off its energy supply, and asserting control over its own 'backyard' in Latin America. It is a continuation of the 1990s Wolfowitz doctrine which advised stamping out strategic rivals while integrating Germany and Japan, "into a U.S-led system of collective security...".

Unintended consequences

But the problem for the US is that promoting wars, instability and economic chaos – what Mark Zuckerberg called "moving fast and breaking things" – is creating difficulties for itself and its allies, which they cannot easily evade.

In Europe, Macron's warfare not welfare policies have made his position precarious with poll ratings down to 15%. Starmer's government is also deeply unpopular for similar reasons. Poland is politically split, with a pro-EU parliament and a new Eurosceptic president. Romania is also divided after a soft coup last year removed the anti-EU presidential candidate Georgescu, whom at least half the population support. One commentator noted that the "liberal order in Romania...stands on alarmingly fragile ground". Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic all oppose the Ukraine war, and Austria is defying the EU by blocking sanctions against Russia.

In most European countries, it is the nationalist Right that is expressing



US soya bean exports hit by tariffs

PHOTO BY FOREST AND KIM STARR

people's disaffection and desire for national sovereignty, but underlying the ongoing political crises is a loss of faith in bourgeois democracy in general.

US tariffs and sanctions have also had the unintended consequence of pushing the BRICS countries closer together. Not only Russia and China, but more widely. Trade between Latin American and China has increased from \$12 billion in 2000 to \$315 billion in 2020 and is on course to double again by 2035. [3] Fifty-three African countries now have tariff-free access for their exports to China, which is the top trading partner of most African countries, up from \$14 billion in 2000 to \$290 billion in 2024. [4] India, though it continues to appease the West, has refused to cut its re-exports of Russian and Iranian oil despite US threats.

It is US aggression that is unintentionally accelerating co-operation within the global majority. Trump was described by one analyst as "breathing new life" into the September 2025 Shanghai Co-operation Organisation summit, while China is becoming "the standard-bearer of a multipolar world led by the Global South" as 20 countries, including Russia and India, agreed to resist western economic bullying. [5] [6]

Meanwhile, Israeli barbarism has given rise to a great global movement, which isn't going away, despite the so-called ceasefire. Israeli participation in football, in Eurovision, in culture in general, is being challenged. Judicial pressure and pressure at state level, including arms divestment, is mounting. Mainstream Jewish-American support for Israel has fallen – 61% now say Israel has committed war crimes according to a Washington Post poll – and the once uniformly Zionist US MAGA movement is split. Zionism is losing control over the global narrative, and is going to extreme lengths, such as buying TikTok, to try to win it back. As Arundhati Roy says "the carcass of Western liberal democracy is buried under the rubble in Gaza."

In the Sahel, CIA-backed coup attempts and a \$5 million bribe offered to Ibrahim Traore's closest security to assassinate the Burkina Faso leader have only served to strengthen the Alliance of Sahel (AES) states between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso which in December 2025 launched a joint military force. These patriotic military regimes have pushed the Americans out of their huge drone base in Niger and the French out of Mali and Chad, though they face continuing destabilisation by US and French forces as well as the west-

ern-backed Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in particular Nigeria and Côte D'Ivoire. [7]

Another unintended consequence has been a military treaty between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed just a week after the Israeli bombing of Qatar. The Saudis, who have recently joined BRICS, are rightly fearful of their own allies and beginning to hedge their bets. [8] Meanwhile, Iranian society united in patriotic resistance to the western 12-day war against it and despite recent economic protests so far remains solid.

There's been blowback too in Taiwan. A recall election in July 2025 resulted in a clear snub to the anti-China policy of the ruling party and surprise gains for the Kuomintang party which is pro-China. Its new young leader warned that Taiwan should reject becoming "the sacrifice of geopolitics" and take pride in being Chinese.

Meanwhile in South Korea, a declaration of martial law last year was overturned by popular protest and earlier this year the president was impeached.

Countering the warmongers

All these examples are success stories. But as yet no unified, coherent counter-hegemonic alliance has emerged, unlike the old Socialist bloc. The BRICS summit in Brazil in July 2025 revealed a "sobering display of the bloc's inherent contradictions....," according to *Business Day*.

China still needs time to grow. Russia is preoccupied with Ukraine – hence its inability to save Assad in Syria. Iran is on the defensive and Venezuela a target. Both Russia and China abstained on the Gaza ceasefire motion at the UN Security Council, neither strong enough to form an active pole of resistance to US hegemony, particularly when

the necessary potential allies such as the Palestinian Authority, Arab and other Muslim-majority states all supported the motion.

On the other hand, the fact that Russia and China have been capable of technological breakthroughs – such as Russia's hypersonic missiles, and China's advances in chip production, space exploration, sustainable energy, and AI – points to real problems for the US in future. And China is quietly undermining US hegemony, for instance by bringing Iran and Saudi Arabia together, and facilitating a groundbreaking summit of the Palestinian factions. In response to US tariffs, it has imposed retaliatory tariffs and halted rare earth exports, which the US depends on. The display of armed might in Beijing at last year's victory over fascism parade was a clear sign of China's growing strength and confidence, and a warning to the US against warmongering.

The question is, how fast and far the US will go in its economic and military provocations in order to stave off its own decline, and thus how much time any emerging counter-hegemonic grouping has to develop, expand trade links and weaken the dominance of the dollar.

The outlook for peace is not good. The growing constraints on democracy within the USA – mirrored by its allies in Europe – are a precondition for war. As Trump put it in September 2025, "We should use some of our American cities as training grounds for our military". Here in the UK, the TUC motion reversing its pro-armaments line was positive, a response to political pressure against austerity. But it isn't nearly enough when 80% of the world's arms spending is by NATO and its allies, and when the US Department of War announced that its mission is, quote, "War fighting; preparing for war and preparing to win". At the same time all the old treaties and institutions are

being torn up and undermined, as the fascists did before World War 2.

Our role must be to try and weaken the warmongers closest to us as best we can, and attempt to exploit any cracks and weaknesses that emerge. In such a difficult period, it's worth remembering Lenin's observation that in times of capitalist stability people can remain dormant for a long time, but in a crisis, people learn quickly. The leaders of the working class can also learn very quickly. Most NATO rulers are deeply unpopular domestically and resorting to new authoritarian forms of rule. They are taking us to war, and it will be in resisting the coming violence that a profound challenge must emerge.

[1] <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/atlantic-council-strategy-paper-series/why-the-us-cannot-afford-to-lose-dollar-dominance/>

[2] <https://themarathoninitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Strategic-Sequencing-Revisited-Final-2024-10.pdf>

[3] <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/latin-americas-china-ties-wont-be-easily-severed/>

[4] <https://africa-news-agency.com/china-africa-an-unprecedented-partnership-ignored-by-the-west/>

[5] <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/09/02/sco-summit-2025-key-takeaways.html>

[6] <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/global-south-can-gain-as-trump-tariffs-redraw-global-power-map/>

[7] <https://www.stripes.com/incoming/2024-09-12/africom-west-africa-niger-terrorism-15149773.html>

[8] <https://www.belfercenter.org/research-analysis/beyond-hype-pakistan-saudi-defense-pact-not-saudi-nuclear-umbrella-0>

DIVISIONS IN WASHINGTON

Same goal, different strategies

by Steve Howell

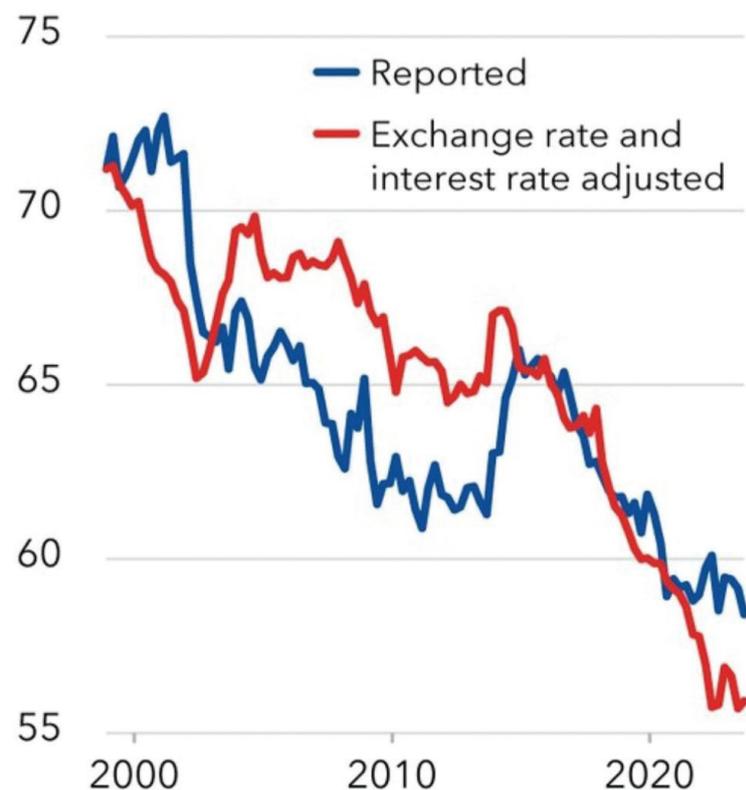
The radical implications of President Trump's foreign policy have become brutally clear in the last few weeks, leaving Democrats schooled in the sanctity of NATO and the pretence of a rules-based order reeling. While the first year of his second term followed a path that was largely predictable – particularly on Israel, Iran and Ukraine – the kidnapping of Venezuela's president and the confirmation of US designs on Greenland have left no doubt that we are seeing a seismic and aggressive shift in Washington's strategy.

Risking alliances

The response of Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy was typical of senior Democrats as the penny dropped. An archetypal Atlanticist, he said: "The consequence of Greenland becoming an actual thing we have to worry about is earth-shattering because it is the end of NATO (and) there is really no way to manage and confront the rise of China without the United States and Europe working together". A US takeover of Greenland would, he continued, be "the biggest gift ever constructed for China because they would get a free ride to global primacy if the United States and Europe were at war with each other." [1] [2]

The possibility of the US actually going to war over Greenland was dismissed by White House deputy chief of staff Steve Miller but only because he thought Europe would not be able to mount any resistance.

US dollar share of FX reserves
(percent)



"Nobody's going to fight the United States militarily over the future of Greenland", he said.

That calculation is almost certainly true – at least in the short-term – given that the European powers do not have the capacity for a war with the US, even if they had the will. But US annexation of Greenland would not be without major consequences, including moves to close

US bases in Europe. Retired French General Michel Yakovleff is among those already saying "we will kick them out of Ramstein, out of Naples... They won't have a single ship left in the Mediterranean."

So why is the US risking its alliance with Europe over Greenland? Far from seeing any risk of it being a "gift to China", Trump and those around him consider prioritising

self-interest over alliances as a “necessary, welcome correction” to the view adopted at the end of the Cold War that “permanent American domination of the entire world was in the best interests of our country”. This statement in the introduction to the National Security Strategy published in November sets the premise for a raft of strategic shifts among which are the assertion of total US hegemony over the Western Hemisphere – hence Venezuela and Greenland – and a view that Europe should “stand on its own feet” because it enjoys “a significant hard power advantage over Russia by almost every measure, save nuclear weapons.” [3]

The essence of what the Strategy calls “flexible realism” is a retreat from battles “peripheral or irrelevant” to US interests to focus its military and economic power on those that are central, the latter including not only domination of the Western Hemisphere but also “preserving freedom of navigation in all crucial sea lanes” and preventing “an adversarial power from dominating the Middle East”. The document describes “the ultimate stakes” with China as being economic, though it does then talk about “ending threats to our supply chains” in Asia and “detering conflict over Taiwan, ideally by preserving military overmatch.”

Opposition to Trump

Trump’s new strategy is not without opposition in US ruling circles, both for its geopolitical priorities and for its tactics. An early indication of this was the 52-47 vote in the US Senate to require Trump to gain approval from Congress before taking any further military action against Venezuela. The involvement of Rand Paul (Kentucky) in instigating this was no surprise, but Republican defectors also included Susan Collins (Maine) who backed the kidnapping of Maduro but said she does not “support committing additional U.S. forces or entering into any long-term military

involvement in Venezuela or Greenland without specific congressional authorization”. [4]

Outside politics, while Trump undoubtedly enjoys considerable support in big business circles, there are important figures who have expressed misgivings. One of the more vocal critics is Jamie Dimon, the chief executive of J P Morgan, the US’s biggest bank and, with a market capitalisation of \$899 billion, the world’s 13th largest company. Early in Trump’s presidency he used his annual letter to shareholders to outline what amounted to an alternative foreign policy. [5]

“If the Western world’s military and economic alliances were to fragment, America itself would inevitably weaken”, he warned, adding that “America First is fine as long as it doesn’t end up being America alone”. On the US’s geopolitical priorities, he said Israel and Ukraine were “the battlefields of freedom” (my emphasis) and that a peace deal with Russia that left Ukraine in a weakened position would prompt Europe to “search for better security arrangements.”

Challenge to Dollar

Dimon’s biggest worry, however, was the possibility of the US dollar losing its status as the world’s reserve currency. This was, he said, “the cornerstone of America’s commanding global influence”. It meant that the US was able to borrow \$2.5 trillion “in effect...without paying interest” but that it depended on America being “broadly trusted and reliable”, and on sanctions being used “judiciously” and “generally done in concert with our allies”. There is, he argued, “a correlation between the strength of our economic and military alliances and our status as reserve currency.”

That status has clearly been put at risk by the rise of China and efforts by the BRICS countries to diversify. While the ending of the dollar’s

dominant status is not imminent, its erosion is clearly happening by multiple measures: the dollar’s share of foreign exchange reserves has declined from more than 70% to 56% over the last 25 years; the share of gold in foreign exchange reserves has more than doubled from 4% to 9% with China, Russia and Turkey being the largest buyers; the renminbi is estimated to be used in 50% of intra-BRICS trade; and a large and growing proportion of trade in oil and coal is being conducted in the currencies of the countries involved. [6]

The strength of the dollar has allowed Washington, as Dimon says, to borrow from the rest of the world to fund its budget deficit. Not surprisingly, its possible demise is causing consternation among supporters of US-led Western hegemony generally. The Atlantic Council launched a ‘Dollar Dominance Monitor’ in 2023. The Geneva Centre for Security Policy, which is part of NATO’s Partnership for Peace, has warned that “meaningful de-dollarisation would have profound implications for the global security architecture, reducing the United States’ capacity to fund its military and impose coercive economic pressure.” [7]

Trump is no less concerned than Dimon about the threat to the dollar. His response, however, is to issue the kind of threats that Dimon sees as injudicious. Shortly after his inauguration, he said: “There is no chance that BRICS will replace the US Dollar in International Trade, or anywhere else, and any Country that tries should say hello to Tariffs, and goodbye to America!” [8]

Amid the euphoria in the White House after the kidnapping of Maduro, Trump declared on Truth Social that he wants to increase US military spending from \$1 trillion in 2026 to \$1.5 trillion in 2027 “to allow us to build the ‘Dream Military’ that we have long been entitled to.” [9] He thinks the “tremen-

dous income” from tariffs can pay for this, but most estimates suggest that it will not even offset domestic tax cuts he has already made. If that’s the case, funding his wars will require either spending cuts and tax increases or yet more debt. The former will threaten his popularity and the chances of the Republicans winning the mid-terms in November. Growing debt to fund military spending could further undermine the dollar or even trigger a major financial crisis.

Delivering peace

Trump acting like a maniac on a mission may in part be because he only has three years left in office but it is also undoubtedly driven by pressure to arrest US decline. The divisions in US ruling circles arise from this singular imperative. Trump and the likes of Dimon and Murphy want the same thing, and their routes to achieving it involve wars. While in the short-term

Democrats in Congress can be allies in constraining Trump, a return to their Atlanticism is not going to deliver peace.

Ongoing de-dollarisation by BRICS and the Global South could reduce US capacity to mount wars, but it may also increase the risk of Washington resorting to ever more dangerous tactics to shore up its power. Ultimately, there is no substitute for building the peace movement internationally, both at grassroots level – especially in the US and Europe - and by strengthening the coalition of countries prepared to stand up to US imperialism.

[1] Chris Murphy, Senator for Connecticut, interview on All In With Chris Hayes, MSNBC, January 7, 2026

[2] Steve Miller, White House deputy chief of staff, interview with Jake Tapper, CNN, January 6, 2026

[3] National Security Strategy of the United States, November 2025

[4] Susan Collins, Senator for Maine, quoted by CNBC, January 8, 2026. Five Republican senators voted with the Democrats: in addition to Collins and Paul, they were Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Josh Hawley of Missouri and Todd Young of Indiana

[5] Jamie Dimon, J P Morgan, Chairman and CEO Letter to Shareholders, Annual Report 2024, April 7, 2025

[6] Sources: J P Morgan Insights, ‘De-dollarization: Is the US dollar losing its dominance?’ July 1, 2025 and Atlantic Council ‘Dollar Dominance Monitor’

[7] Ali Ahmadi, Director of Geoeconomics & Sanctions, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, ‘De-dollarisation and the Second Trump Term’, June 5, 2025

[8] Donald Trump, Truth Social post, quoted by Reuters, January 31, 2025

[9] Donald Trump, Truth Social post, re-posted on X by the White House, January 7, 2026.

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LATIN AMERICA

The United States & China

by Milly Cunningham

The United States' welcome to the New Year came on 3 January 2026. President Trump announced to the world on social media, 'The United States of America has successfully carried out a large-scale strike against Venezuela and its leader, President Nicolas Maduro, who has been, along with his wife, captured and flown out of the Country. This operation was done in conjunction with US Law Enforcement. Details to follow'.

On the same day a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry responded, 'China is deeply shocked by and strongly condemns the US's blatant use of force against a sovereign state and action against its president. Such hegemonic acts of the US seriously violate international law and Venezuela's sovereignty, and threaten peace and security in Latin America and the Caribbean region. China firmly opposes it. We call on the US to abide by international law and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, and stop violating other countries' sovereignty and security'. [1]

US military action

The United States (US) attack on Venezuela is the culmination of a direct military build-up in the Caribbean since CNN reported on August 15 that the US had sent 4,000 Navy and Marine personnel along with a fleet that included guided-missile destroyers and submarine assault vessels. On September 13, F-35 fighter jets arrived in Puerto Rico, stationed at a naval base that was defunct

for more than two decades and on October 24, US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth ordered the deployment of the US Navy's largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald Ford, to the Caribbean. The carrier hosts about 5,000 troops over 75 aircraft with attack, support and surveillance capabilities. On October 26, a US destroyer with Marine personnel docked in Trinidad and Tobago, seven miles off the coast of Venezuela. The US and Trinidadian government said it was for a training exercise as part of bilateral military cooperation. [2]



PHOTO BY ENEAS DE TROYA

Al Jazeera reported on 4 January, 'The Trump administration has struck at least 32 vessels, killing about 115 people in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean since September.' In refutation of Trump's claim that Venezuelan oil belongs to the US, *Al Jazeera* also had this to say, 'In 1975, after decades seeking greater control of its oil resources, Venezuela nationalised its oil industry.

"Trump's claim that Venezuela has stolen oil and land from the US is baseless," Francisco Rodriguez, a Venezuelan economist at the University of Denver, told the *Washington Post*. "The US was much more interested in having Venezuela be a provider of oil – relatively cheap oil – than to have a production collapse in Venezuela", Rodriguez added'. [3] That's quite apart from the fact that Venezuela's oil belongs to Venezuela.

Steve Howell reports that the attack on Venezuela involved 150 aircraft launched "from 20 different bases on land and at sea across the Western Hemisphere". [4] This is a reminder that the United States has some 750 military bases outside the US itself, and that US military spending is 37% of the world total according to the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 2024 fact sheet*. China comes next with 12%, and Russia third with 5.5%.

This military aggression is typical of the US' response to the development of global alternatives to its dominance, the dollar, and US-dominated international bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank which heavily interfere in countries' politics and economics when lending money. In particular China, with its powerful economy and stance of win-win, mutually beneficial relations with other countries, and non-interference in countries' internal affairs offers a real alternative and in that sense a real threat. Bodies like the China-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) forum foster mutual relations and

have made the region China's second-most important trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding \$518 billion in 2024. [5]

It goes without saying that progressive governments like Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba have found in China a reliable ally which seeks mutually advantageous cooperation. In Venezuela there has been cooperation in sectors like energy, telecommunications and infrastructure. Nicaragua has cooperated in areas like agriculture, health and digital connectivity. Cuba and China have cooperated in biotechnology, medicine, renewable energy, 5G telecommunications, and port infrastructure development. However, because of the ever-tightening US blockade, even Chinese companies can be hindered from freely operating with Cuba for fear of US retaliation.

China welcomes 2026

On New Year's Eve Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered his 2026 New Year message through *China Media Group* and the internet. He marked the completion of the 14th Five Year Plan for economic and social development, highlighting the key improvements in the living standards of the Chinese people, and looked forward to the 15th Plan which starts in 2026.

In sharp contrast to the United States greeting the new year with its attack against Venezuela, Xi also spoke about China in the world, 'We continue to embrace the world with open arms. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit in Tianjin and the Global Leaders' Meeting on Women were very successful; and island-wide special customs operations were launched in the Hainan Free Trade Port. To better address climate change, China announced new Nationally Determined Contributions. After announcing the three global initiatives on development, security, and civilization, I put forward the



President Xi Jinping of China and President Lula da Silva of Brazil

Global Governance Initiative to promote a more just and equitable global governance system. The world today is undergoing both changes and turbulence, and some regions are still engulfed in war. China always stands on the right side of history, and is ready to work with all countries to advance world peace and development and build a shared future for humanity'. [6]

On 9 December, in accordance with the President's Global Governance Initiative, the Group of Friends of Global Governance, consisting of 43 countries, was inaugurated and issued a joint statement. From Latin America and the Caribbean, the group included Antigua and Barbuda, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. The group also invited all like-minded United Nations member states to join. Highlighting the founding of the United Nations (UN) 80 years ago and committing to upholding its legacy, the statement emphasised 'respecting sovereignty equality, territorial integrity and political independence of any state, and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of other states, and refraining in our international relations from the threat or use of

force.' The statement continued, 'We recognise that the world is entering a new period of turbulence and transformation, as the UN and the multilateral system face increasing strain and global governance deficits continue to widen. We express particular concern over the serious under-representation of the Global South, the erosion of the authority of international law, including the purposes and principles of the UN Charter...We welcome the Global Governance Initiative proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping and its five core concepts – sovereign equality, international rule of law, multilateralism, a people-centred approach and taking real actions'. [7]

Brazil

Brazil, Latin America's most populous country with 212, 812,405 inhabitants in 2025, is a founding member of the cross-continental partnership of BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa - now BRICS+ since it has expanded to include 11 members and 10 associate states, including Bolivia and Cuba. BRICS+ represents around 50% of the world's population and 43.93% of global gross domestic product (GDP) in purchasing power parity terms. (8) In 2025, Brazil simultaneously chaired the G20 and BRICS+. COP30 in Belem, under Brazilian auspices, highlighted the Amazon and climate justice as central features of the BRICS agenda. Brazil used its BRICS presidency to advance the New Development Bank (NDB) into operation, promoting the use of local currencies in trade between members. It also launched an initiative for food and climate security in the Global South. None of this can have come as music to the ears of the US government. [8]

Argentina

Argentina is Latin America's fourth most populous country with 45,851,378 inhabitants. The United States, which is quick to raise

PHOTO BY VICE-PRESIDÊNCIA DA REPÚBLICA

accusations of electoral interference by other countries, did just that before the mid-term elections in October 2025. In a low turnout, and despite low popularity as a result of a corruption scandal and two years of austerity, President Javier Milei, originally elected in 2023, gained 64 of the 127 lower house seats and 13 of the 24 Senate seats that were contested. While he still does not have a majority in Congress, it will be easier for him to push through policies like loosening the labour laws, and altering the taxation and pensions systems. This result followed only weeks after Milei's party suffered a landslide defeat in provincial elections in Buenos Aires, a defeat which prompted US President Donald Trump to offer a \$40 billion loan to help stabilise the Argentine peso provided the electorate showed their support for Milei in the mid-term elections. In addition he announced a plan to buy Argentine beef, even though this was unpopular with US farmers.

In the run up to the elections, China came into the picture. In September, the Argentinian government lowered export taxes on soya beans and several other products to increase foreign sales and stabilise the peso. US farmers had been unable to export soya beans to China since May as a result of US trade tariffs and China's response. The value of Argentine soya exports to China between January and August had risen by more than \$700 million. Shortly after Trump announced the loan, a leaked message exchange between US government officials labelled Argentina's actions unfair to US farmers, and Argentina at once reimposed export taxes on soya beans. On 13 November, the US and Argentina signed a trade deal which provides Argentina with 'preferential market access' for certain US exports.

This turn to the US contrasts with the policy of Milei's predecessor Alberto Fernandez who secured

a second financial relief package, this time of \$6.5 billion, from China in 2023. At the time Fernandez tweeted, 'Every time we went through difficult times Xi Jinping's government was very generous and attentive to our needs'.

Argentina is the largest debtor to the IMF and currently owes it more than \$41 billion. The repayment terms of the US loan have not been made public. Milei's neoliberal government will no doubt make the people pay the price. In the words of Matt Barlow, an expert in international political economy at the University of Glasgow, "Inflation is still high, unemployment is rising, the cost of living is difficult for a lot of people, and that's before any of these changes to labour laws come in. People are feeling the pinch and Argentina has a strong history of social mobilisation."

Experts also cast doubt on whether Trump's \$40 billion will solve Argentina's problems. Economist Paul Krugman points out that Argentina has defaulted three times on sovereign debt since 2001 and predicts that investors will 'sell their Argentine assets at inflated prices, after which the peso will promptly fall again'.

In 2024, Milei signed agreements with the Biden administration to facilitate investments in Argentina's mining sector. However, realisation of these plans is hindered by Argentina's federal governance scheme, where provincial governors control their mining resources, and by the inability of the government – and presumably the unwillingness of the US – to provide the infrastructure to connect Argentina's mines in remote areas to processing and export facilities.

It should be added that military cooperation with China has been replaced with purchase of US-made jets and armoured vehicles, and that Milei has applied to join NATO as a Global Partner. An agreement



PHOTO BY KARTICK DUTTA

between Argentina's National Anti-Terrorism Centre and the FBI to enhance collaboration on money laundering and develop joint training centres coincided with the announcement of the \$40 billion loan. [9] [10]

Chile

Chile comes seventh in terms of population in Latin America, with 19,859,921 inhabitants (after Venezuela in sixth place, with over 28 million people). In December 2025 Chile elected Jose Antonio Kast as the next president. He won with more than 58% of the vote, beating the left-wing coalition candidate Jeanette Jara, in the first presidential election in Chile where voting was mandatory and registration automatic for those eligible. The BBC described Kast as 'far right-wing', adding, 'Kast's victory in Chile follows a string of elections in Latin America that have shifted the region to the Right in recent years – including in Argentina, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and El Salvador'. [11]

Nevertheless, China has not given up on Chile, and has stayed true to its policy of non-interference in internal affairs. On

22 December Xinhua reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping had congratulated Kast on his election, and continued, 'Xi pointed out that Chile is the first South American country to have established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, and the two countries have always adhered to mutual respect, equality, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation... Xi said he places great importance on the growth of China-Chile relations and is ready to work with President-elect Kast to carry forward traditional friendship, elevate the China-Chile comprehensive strategic partnership to new heights, and deliver more benefits to the two peoples'. [12]

As Martin Brown put it in *The Diplomat*, 'China controls approximately two-thirds of Chile's energy sector through mainly financial acquisitions of companies operating in the region. Also, as of 2023, China bought just under 40 per cent of Chilean exports. The next largest export destination – the United States – was well behind, accounting for just 15 per cent of Chile's total exports.' He continued, 'As of 2024, Chile and China's bilateral trade was worth an estimated \$37.8 billion. That year, Chile's exports to China were primarily made up of minerals... Of these minerals, the most prominent is copper, with Chile exporting £5.5 billion-worth of copper to China. Chile holds an estimated 23% of the world's reserves in copper, and as of 2024 produced 24% of the world's copper, signifying the importance of China as a stable buyer. In 2005, China's Minmetals Corporation signed a 50-50 joint venture with Codelco, Chile's state-owned copper producer, for £550 million. This venture would ensure China with 55,000 tons of copper for more than 15 years.' Not surprisingly 'Kast aims to open Codelco to private capital...selling non-core assets to pay Codelco's debts. Chinese firms would likely be keen to take part in the bidding'.

Brown outlines other aspects of Chile-China cooperation. 'In 2024 Valparaiso [Chile's largest port] also exported 31 per cent of its cargo to Asia – primarily China. Chile has plans to expand the port, which is owned by the state company EMPORCHI.' China's Belt and Road approach is to invest in superstructure, and this is not confined to Chile. Chinese-built Chancay port in Peru can handle Ultra Large Container Vessels (ULCVs), unlike Chilean ports, and the new 'Chancay Express' connects the Chilean ports of Lirquen and San Antonio to Peru's port. Shipping times for Chilean exports to China are reduced from 35 days to 23 and costs are cut by 30%. In fact, Chancay is a vital transport hub for the whole of Latin America. [13]

Future relations

Trade relations with a stable, planned economy like that of China are clearly in the interests of Latin American countries. But will the US government under Trump succeed in disrupting this peaceful development by a combination of promises, threats and actual force?

Back to Venezuela. Steve Howell ends his article with important points for those in Britain who want to show genuine solidarity with the Venezuelan people at this terrible time, 'It is not for leftists in the West to pontificate about what Venezuelans should do or should not do... US intelligence agents are experts in dividing and demoralising people by covertly spreading rumours and planting what we would now call "fake news" in the media...Our response has to be to expose and mobilise the maximum opposition to Trump's oil grab and to demand the immediate release of Venezuela's kidnapped president'.

[1] *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Remarks on the US Military Strikes on Venezuela*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs People's Republic of China, 3/1/26

[2] *Timeline: US Military Ramp-Up in the Caribbean Raises Tensions with Venezuela*, Khalea Robertson, AS/COA, 31/10/25 updated

[3] *Fact-checking Trump following US 'capture' of Venezuela's Maduro (and following short articles)*, Al Jazeera, 4/1/26

[4] *Donald Trump thinks Venezuela now has an electorate of one – him*, Steve Howell, *The Rest is Bullshit* substack, 5/1/26

[5] *The rise of China and the crisis of the unipolar order' in China, the construction of multipolar world and the pursuit of sovereignty*, Pedro Monzon Barata, *website of Al Mayadeen*, 8/11/25

[6] *Chinese President Xi Jinping's 2026 New Year message*, website of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, 1/1/26

[7] *Joint statement on the Launch of the Group of Friends of Global Governance*, website of the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, 9/12/25

[8] *The US isolates itself, the EU stands still, the BRICS+ take advantage: 2025 changed the world order*, Loretta Napoleoni, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 28/12/25

[9] *After Argentina's midterms, a New Chapter for US-Argentina Relations*, Henry Ziemer, Henry Large, *Center for Strategic International Studies*, 29/10/25

[10] *Rule of law: Milei election win raises questions over US interference*, Ruth Green, *International Bar Association*, 27/11/25

[11] *Chile elects far-right Jose Antonio Kast as next president*, Ione Wells, *BBC*, 15/12/25

[12] *Xi congratulates Jose Antonio Kast on election as Chilean president*, Xinhua, 22/12/25

[13] *One Belt, One Road, One Chilean Headache*, Martin Brown, *The Diplomat*, 15/8/25



WHEN TRUTH BECOMES TREACHERY

narrowing the window

PHOTO BY NUMBER 10

by Noah Tucker

Were there to be a modern, British equivalent of Rip van Winkle, falling into a coma during, say, the 1980s, and being awakened via some new medical advances in our present day, he (not unlike his fictional predecessor) would surely be astonished at much of what lies before his renewed consciousness.

To take the information and viewpoints available to him: following amazement at the range and ubiquity of electronic media, and it having been explained to him that not only had the side of freedom and democracy triumphed long ago in the Cold War, but that the major armed conflict within the territory of the UK had been ended by consensus between the government and the IRA, he might become somewhat perplexed at the range and scope of bans and restrictions on what is now allowed to be publicly said or presented. For example, on our

protagonist exploring his curiosity about the popular culture of the second quarter of the 21st century, the phenomenon of musical performers being denounced by the government, investigated by the police and even put on trial – not for using obscene language or references to sexual activity, but for their expressions on the treatment of Palestinians by Israel – might come as a surprise to him.

Having a particularly wide variety of institutional means and methods currently used to narrow the windows of permitted information and discourse, there is space here to consider only a very few. Having a particularly chilling effect is the extension of anti-terrorism legislation. It has been used to ban Hamas and Hezbollah, movements which do not conduct armed operations in the UK or outside the Middle East, and Palestine Action, which conducts direct action, e.g. spray painting military equipment, in order, as the activists would no

doubt express publicly if allowed to do so, to disrupt or hamper the mass murder of civilians in Palestine.

As Jonathan Cook has observed, “The Terrorism Act 2000 has a series of provisions that make it difficult to voice or show any kind of support for an organisation proscribed under the legislation, whether it is writing an article or wearing a T-shirt. Recent attention has focused on Section 13, which is being used to hound thousands of mostly elderly people who have held signs saying: “I oppose genocide, I support Palestine Action.” They now face a terrorism conviction and up to six months in jail. But an amendment introduced in 2019 to Section 12 of the Act...is even more repressive. It makes it a terrorism offence for a person to express “an opinion or belief that is supportive of a proscribed organisation” and in doing so be “reckless” about whether anyone else might be “encouraged to support” the organisation.” [1]

Notably, unlike with the law on defamation, neither truth nor honestly held opinion (previously denoted as ‘fair comment’) are defences against prosecution under the terrorism laws. Thus a situation is created in which conveying particular information (even if factual), analyses and views, or even attempting to counter misinformation or false information put forward against a banned group, becomes impossible without incurring some risk of a prison sentence, which in the case of a breach of Section 12, is of up to 14 years. Whatever the actual likelihood, in any specific instance, of a prosecution for the making of a speech, writing an article, or posting a social media comment, the effect is to intimidate and restrict. The non-availability of truth and honest opinion as defences harks back to the proceedings of the Star Chamber in the early 1600s, which acted for the English Crown against offences including ‘seditious libels’ as printed media was emerging on a mass scale, and which explicitly ruled that neither truth nor intent could be a defence in such cases. [2]

Whose terrorists?

While evoking the need to protect random and defenceless civilians from being blown up in bomb attacks, the UK’s terrorism legislation, which has its roots in concepts and measures developed to protect British colonial power (e.g. in Ireland, India, Egypt and Malaya), continues in our modern times as a means of serving strategic and cynical interests. [3]

Among revealing examples of this is Britain’s designation in 2019 of the political wing of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation. The then Home Secretary Sajid Javid explained, “Hezbollah is continuing in its attempts to destabilise the fragile situation in the Middle East – and we are no longer able to distinguish between their already

banned military wing and the political party. Because of this, I have taken the decision to proscribe the group in its entirety.”

To which Jeremy Hunt, the Foreign Secretary at the time, added, “The government is sending a clear signal that its destabilising activities in the region are totally unacceptable and detrimental to the UK’s national security...Hizballah was established during the Lebanese civil war and is committed to armed resistance to the state of Israel. It continues to amass weapons in direct contravention of UN Security Council Resolutions, putting the security of the region at risk. Its involvement in the Syrian war since 2012 continues to prolong the conflict and the regime’s brutal and violent repression of the Syrian people.” [4]

The motivation here barely even requires one to read between the lines of these statements. Britain’s ‘national security’ interests, and bizarrely, ‘Middle East stability’ and ‘security’ were seen as bound up with backing the armed depredations of Israel in Lebanon and Palestine, and the branches of Al Qaeda in Syria, to both of which Hezbollah was presenting an obstacle. If such decisions were actually about terrorism as commonly understood, would not the Israeli Defence Forces, Mossad, the CIA and branches of the US military be under consideration for designations as terrorist forces?

Also clearly connected with supposed national security interests, though disguised behind regulatory considerations of ‘impartiality’ and ‘independence’ were the banning from British TV viewing of *PressTV* (Iran) in 2012, *CGTN* (China) in 2021, and *RT* and *Sputnik* (Russia) in 2022.

The reasons given by the regulator OFCOM for removing the broadcasting licenses of these outlets stand out as particularly absurd, given that the chair and board members of OFCOM itself are

appointed directly by the British government. Furthermore, control of the BBC is now so tight that, in one example, the corporation sent explicit written instructions to its journalists banning them from reporting that Venezuelan President Maduro had been kidnapped in the attack by US forces, instructing them to refer instead to him being “captured” in the USA’s “operation.” [5]

No good deed goes unpunished

Such restrictions are now par for the course among Western nations. EU and NATO members and allies, particularly in central and eastern Europe, prove their adherence to freedom not by how they allow competing views to flourish, but by the extent to which they block and restrict ‘pro-communist’ or ‘pro-Russian’ views, and by cancelling elections or banning candidates as required in order to ensure the continuation of democracy.

Another use of regulatory bodies in the clampdown on discourse is their role as a vehicle, mainly at the instigation of a group entitled UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI), to harass, intimidate, and threaten with loss of employment, professional people who have spoken out on Palestine. Targets have included doctors, dentists, solicitors and academics. The UKLFI modus operandi is to complain simultaneously to the target’s regulatory board, to their employer, to the police, and to the press, using a letterhead comprised of lords, ladies, knights, baronesses and other legal luminaries, to achieve, if not the target’s professional suspension or exclusion, at least to tie them up in huge legal costs, process and litigation for months on end.

For example, Dr Abu Sittah’s vindication at a ‘fitness to practice’ tribunal in January 2026, followed a year in which that renowned surgeon, who is also the elected

As Jonathan Cook has observed, “The Terrorism Act 2000 has a series of provisions that make it difficult to voice or show any kind of support for an organisation proscribed under the legislation, whether it is writing an article or wearing a T-shirt”.

• Rector of Glasgow University,
• had been pursued by the General
• Medical Council, on charges of
• antisemitism and support for
• terrorism instigated by UKLFI. To
• attend the tribunal he had flown in
• from Lebanon, where he had been
• treating war-wounded patients.
• The head of Dr Abu Sittah’s legal
• team commented that the case,
• “illustrates the growing misuse of
• regulatory and legal mechanisms
• to silence and punish those who
• speak out against grave injus-
• tices in Palestine, and the serious
• chilling effect such tactics have
• on humanitarian, medical, and
• academic voices.” [6]

• **British governments vs British values**

• But why should people in the
• UK be allowed to hear informa-
• tion and points of view other
• than those within the range that
• is welcomed or countenanced by
• the British state and establish-
• ment? The philosopher John Stuart
• Mill, summarising a key element
• not only of the liberal ideology
• upon which the principles of the
• Western world are supposedly
• based, but of the British values in
• which British governments and
• main political parties claim to
• wrap themselves, was succinct:
• “The peculiar evil of silencing the
• expression of an opinion is, that it
• is robbing the human race; poster-
• ity as well as the existing genera-
• tion; those who dissent from the
• opinion, still more than those who
• hold it. If the opinion is right, they
• are deprived of the opportunity
• of exchanging error for truth: if
• wrong, they lose, what is almost
• as great a benefit, the clearer
• perception and livelier impression
• of truth, produced by its collision
• with error.”

• Now to return for a moment to our
• updated Rip van Winkle figure. He
• might recall, from his earlier life,
• that Sinn Fein - the political wing
• of a movement that was conduct-
• ing a campaign of armed struggle

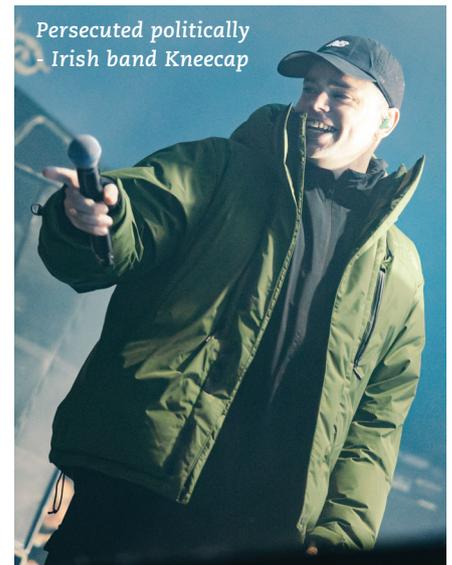


PHOTO BY LLOYD TUDOR

within and against the UK, involving the killing of over a thousand British soldiers, the deaths of many civilians and the attempted assassination of the prime minister and leading cabinet members – was never banned. Even when the government decreed that its spokespersons could not be heard on radio or TV, the BBC in those days retained enough independence to subvert that ruling by using actors’ voices to continue giving the advocates of ‘terrorism’ the ‘oxygen of publicity’.

He might possibly remember also, that despite it being an ideological opponent of the ‘free world’, having a very different economic system, funding and arming states and movements that were at odds or even in military conflict with the West and its allies, the Soviet Union was not legally or officially prevented from conveying its views and information to people in Britain via the available means at the time - although its viewpoint was not exactly given an even handed presentation in the mainstream press and television.

The Cold War and its freedoms

Thus, even while Western govern-ments and virtually the entire Western media, including some left

wing publications, were denouncing the Soviet military action in Afghanistan as an expansionist invasion, *Soviet Weekly* was openly available in W H Smiths and public libraries, and the English language programmes broadcast by *Radio Moscow* were not subject to electronic jamming. To their relatively small British audience, they sought to explain that the USSR had sent troops to Afghanistan at the request of its own government, which was working to give land to the impoverished peasants, liberate women in the countryside, and improve the country's appallingly low rates of literacy. It also explained that the freedom fighters lauded in the West were in fact an international force of jihadi extremists, mobilised and armed by the US and its allies, and devoted to a medieval and repressive ideology.

Our protagonist could also have had some knowledge that there was race relations legislation, enacted in 1965 and 1976, which included bans on incitement to racial hatred, but if so, he might well have been unaware that there were very few prosecutions. And even among those, a significant number were against black people who had expressed resentment against the white majority.

It would of course be mistaken to exaggerate the freedom of political expression and association allowed in the UK and the wider West during the Cold War period. The biggest restrictive factor (then as now) was the ownership by wealthy companies or individuals, or institutional control by establishment forces, of mass media outlets.

In addition, television programmes critical of the role of the British state in Ireland were banned at the behest of the government, and state-backed death squads operated alongside the army in the north of Ireland itself. Left wingers and active trade unionists in

Britain were routinely prevented from earning a living via the use of secret blacklists by employers. State infiltration of, and spying on, left, trade union, and anti-capitalist organisations was (and continues to be) rampant.

Among our NATO allies, fascist and military dictatorships ruled where and when expedient in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Turkey. In West Germany, the Communist Party was banned in 1956 and, although communist activity eventually became legal again, a Nazi era measure (the *Berufsverbot*) was reinstated to block people with left wing views from working in public sector professions. Of course there was no expectation that regimes in Third World countries that were installed by or allied to the West would operate according to principles of political liberty.

Yet there was sufficient content to claims of freedom of expression, in most of the richer liberal democracies, to give the Western side in the Cold War the aura of consistency with its professed values. And that - alongside a rising prosperity extended to working class people via the post-World War 2 economic compromise involving nationalisation, economic regulation and taxation of the rich - formed the major ideological element of the winning package in the great battle of the mid to late 20th Century.

There will be more Maduros

After the defeat of the threat of communist revolution, the widespread prosperity began to follow it into history quite soon afterwards. The brief promise of 'trickle down' became an upwards gush of wealth and income to further enrich the very rich. In the wealthiest countries, individual aspirations for a better future are collapsing alongside the material and social infrastructure. The space of collective hopes (such as were represented

in Britain by Corbyn's Labour Party in the late twenty-teens), when crushed, is filled by culture wars and ethnic hate.

And disappearing too now are the edifices of political liberalism - thrown over the side everywhere in the West. The USA under Trump openly dispenses with the illusions of democracy promotion, seeking support instead from a jaded electorate by openly boasting of grabbing other countries' resources.

Perhaps our national and world economic system, and its beneficiaries, can continue to run on quite well, bereft, or perhaps even unencumbered by, liberal political ideology and practices.

Jeremy Corbyn, despite the upsurge supporting him, was politically defeated. He did not need to be kidnapped or 'captured'.

Bear in mind though, that President Maduro and what he represents (whatever his fate) is also the product of such a collapse of capitalist economics and illusions. The combined snatching away by the rich Western world, of material hopes, and ideals that could be admired and aspired to, will ensure that many, many more will follow Maduro's example.

[1] <https://jonathancook.substack.com/p/how-reporting-facts-can-now-land>

[2] <https://consoc.org.uk/very-short-history-of-freedom-of-speech/>

[3] <https://www.lse.ac.uk/research/research-for-the-world/politics/global-anti-terrorism-law>

[4] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hizballah-to-be-banned-alongside-other-terrorist-organisations>

[5] <https://www.owenjones.news/p/exclusive-bbc-bans-journalists-stating>

[6] <https://www.icjpalastine.com/2026/01/09/tribunal-finds-no-basis-for-misconduct-in-gmc-case-against-dr-abu-sittah/>



The British State

Like the Hydra of Greek myth, the British state has countless heads whose purposes and powers are unified at root. Some wield power directly; others act on behalf of the ruling class in less visible ways.

The bourgeois state reaches into all aspects of life, constantly developing its forms and methods. It responds ruthlessly to serious challenge, however small. In a period like this one, where a huge transfer of wealth away from the working class to an ever-smaller section of the oligarchy is well underway and a major war is in preparation, all bodies of the extensive state have to work harder to stifle opposition.

The more visible 'heads' of the British state – the armed forces, the police force, the monarchy, Parliament etc. – are not the subject of this series of articles, which will instead look at some of the smaller bodies performing essential functions for the state, often going unnoticed.

JURY TRIALS

12 potentially angry people

by Clare Bailey

Jurors are temporary actors in a judicial system designed to protect property and profit. [1] At the same time, they are admitted into that system in a role that accords them real powers as well as access to privileged information that exposes the workings not just of the British state's legal apparatus but also of the world it serves.

It could be argued that someone doing jury service in the UK briefly wields more public or civic power than they are likely to do at any other time in their life. For the duration of the service, they have the authority, shared with 11 others, to decide the outcome of a criminal trial, possibly a number of different trials if they are short enough. Some cases can involve directly the interests of government, of corporations and of wealthy people who stand to lose a lot if things go against them. Juries may reach decisions that reinforce reactionary and repressive laws, but they can also use the powers of the state temporarily invested in them to make decisions in the interests of ordinary people, and it is this second possibility that has made juries the subject of countless government reviews, reports and laws over the last two centuries and the last fifty years in particular.

Trial by peers

The idea of the right to trial by one's peers or equals has been traced back as far as Magna Carta (1215); some argue juries have their origins earlier still in the Saxon period. [2] But jury trial as a contemporary juror might recognise it was first defined by the 1825 Juries Act, which codified the previously complicated and some-

times surprisingly informal arrangements. It stipulated that in order to serve on a jury you would have to be a property-owning man between the ages of 21 and 65, entitled to be addressed as 'Esquire'. This broadened the jury pool to include the growing class of bankers and merchants. There were further Juries Acts in 1862 and 1870 - the first sequence of many anxious tinkering, leading up to the proposals of the Leveson Report of July 2025.

The specific form of the contemporary jury dates from 1974, when the requirement that a juror had to own property was removed. In 1970, 20% of people in the UK rented privately and a further 29% lived in council housing, meaning that up to that point, the working class had been effectively excluded from jury service. Women had theoretically been included in the jury pool since 1918 but, rarely named on legal documents as property owners, they were greatly underrepresented on juries.

The current qualifications for jury service are: to be a UK citizen registered as a voter; to be aged between 18 and 75; to have been resident in UK for 5 years. These requirements mean that juries are more generally representative of the UK population than they have ever been, though some groups are less likely to be registered to vote than others and lawyers can deselect individuals once the case comes to trial and a jury is being formed. Around 200,000 - 250,000 people serve on juries each year - a considerable number, and three times as many people will have been called in order to arrive at this number. There are many appeals, postponements, and exemptions.

Complex fraud

Lawmakers and lawyers tend to be fulsome in their praise of the jury system. In the words of one previous High Court Judge, Lord Devlin, "Trial by jury is more than an instrument of justice and more than one wheel of the constitution: it is the lamp that shows that freedom lives." (Trial By Jury, 1956)

Yet over the course of a century juries have slowly been excluded from most cases. In 1933 the Administration of Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill removed the right to trial by jury in civil cases except those involving libel, slander, malicious prosecution, seduction and breach of marriage. Libel and slander were removed from this list by the Defamation Act of 2013. A bare 1% of criminal trials is now heard before a jury. These consist of indictable (serious) offences including murder, manslaughter and rape, criminal damage, and a diminishing number of 'either-way' cases where the defendant may opt for a jury trial.

Why then do juries preoccupy UK governments to the extent that they do?

The answer lies largely in the type of case that can still be tried before a jury. Not so much the murder or rape cases, but others more potentially troubling for the state. One such category of criminal case that has exercised governments for decades is serious fraud. There have been repeated attempts to remove complex fraud cases from juries on the grounds that they are too long and too difficult for juries to understand. The first review addressing this question was in 1983, a mere ten years after jury qualification was widened to admit the working class, and the most recent report is Brian Leveson's. Leveson states unambiguously, "I recommend that serious and complex fraud cases should be tried by judges alone. Eligible cases should be defined by



Plaque in the Old Bailey

their hidden dishonesty or complexity that is outside the understanding of the general public."

Complex accounting can be hard to follow. Where it involves highly skilled professionals facilitating fraud, it is labyrinthine by design. The whole point is to escape detection and understanding. This does not mean that twelve members of the public cannot arrive at an understanding of properly presented evidence that exposes what has been concealed. Bypassing juries in such cases would remove sophisticated fraud from the public realm, leaving it in the hands of those who can be safely trusted to bring the right verdicts. It would also close down access to rare lessons in how financialised capital works at the highest and most profitable level. The concern is less that juries are too stupid to follow the evidence, but rather that, hearing such a case, they are likely to discover how difficult it can be to distinguish between spectacular fraud and the normal workings of the City.

The determination of successive governments to remove juries from these cases is testament to the fact that serving on a jury can be an education not only in the machinery of state but also in the workings of capital.

Perverse verdicts

Juries deliberate in secret and are not obliged to explain their verdicts. This means they retain the power to decide matters of law and, most importantly perhaps, to decide according to their consciences or convictions. Where they do so, against the instructions of the presiding judge, they return what is known as a perverse verdict.

The outcome of one of the earliest and best known perverse verdicts is recorded on a plaque mounted in the entrance to the Old Bailey (see photo above). In 1670 two Quakers were charged with preaching to an unlawful assembly in the City of London. The jury hearing the case rejected the judge's direction to convict and was then held for three days without food in order to bring it to heel. When the jurors stuck to their guns and refused to pay the fines imposed on them, they were imprisoned. Their success in regaining their freedom through a writ of habeas corpus is commemorated in this plaque, which has been the subject of renewed attention in recent years since a retired social worker, Trudi Warner, sat outside the Inner London Crown Court on 27th March 2023 holding a placard inscribed with its closing words.

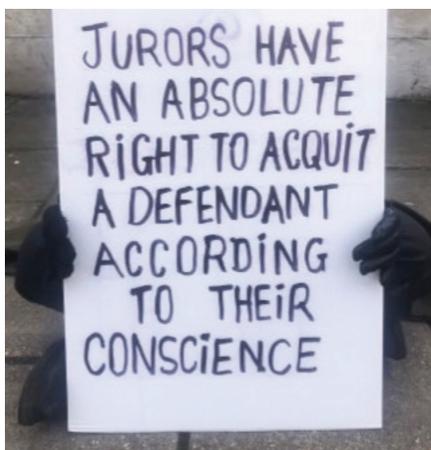
Warner was reminding the members of the jury on the Just Stop Oil case underway inside that they had the right to acquit the four defendants no matter what the judge told them to do - just as a jury had done two years earlier in April 2021 when, against the judge's direction, it acquitted Extinction Rebellion protestors. The then Tory Attorney General started contempt proceedings against Warner after the judge accused her of trying to influence the jury. When the High Court refused permission for the case to proceed, the new Labour government chose at first to appeal the refusal, only abandoning its appeal in August 2024 after more than 250 people had sat outside courts in different cities holding identical placards.

There have always been perverse verdicts - Victorian juries, for example, sometimes refused to find defendants guilty where fines they had no hope of paying would have been imposed. Some more recent examples include the acquittal of Clive Ponting, the civil servant who revealed the government had lied about the circumstances of the sinking of the Belgrano during the Falklands war. It is in the last five years that acquittals have become more frequent and more problematic for the forces of law and order. In January 2022 the Colston 4, charged with criminal damage after they had dumped the statue of slave trader Edward Colston into Bristol's harbour in June 2020, were acquitted. The defendants were allowed by the judge to make their case freely to the jury. Other judges since then have refused to allow defendants the same freedom, preventing them, for example, from arguing they were acting in the public interest.

The numerous Palestine Action cases have taken things a stage further. There have been 2,700 arrests of supporters of the group since its proscription as a terrorist organisation. In addition, the Filton 24 are



Demonstrators defend juries' rights



set to be imprisoned on remand for over 2 years before trial over the alleged causing of £1m criminal damage to an Elbit Systems site. There will be four trials involving the Filton defendants in total, the first of which began on November 17th 2025 at Woolwich Crown Court, where the first six defendants are charged with aggravated burglary, criminal damage and violent disorder. While this trial is taking place, the judicial review of the government's decision to proscribe Palestine Action will arrive at its judgement - probably sometime in January 2026. If the proscription is upheld and Palestine Action is confirmed as a terrorist organisation, the immediate consequences for the Filton defendants and their supporters will be grave, as will the implications for future political protest in the UK. [4]

There is recent precedent for the removal of juries altogether where criminal charges for 'scheduled offences' relating to terrorism are brought, namely the Diplock courts in Northern Ireland, which ran from 1973 until 2007, trying up to 300 cases a year. Since then, the Justice & Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 allows the DPP to certify a non-jury trial for an indictable offence as long as it was committed by or on behalf of a group proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000. As has so often been the case, draconian laws are first tested in colonial territory.

Channel 4: The Jury

As juries begin to receive more government attention, the media have a role to play in moulding opinion. It is no accident that the first TV programme focused on juries was run as a 4-part series by Channel 4 in 2024. 'The Jury' featured two juries made up of volunteers, each unaware of the other's existence. The two juries watched the re-enactment of an actual murder trial, with actors using a transcript of that trial to play the roles of judge, barristers etc.

The tone and purpose of the series were set at the beginning when, accompanied by dramatic music, a voiceover asked: 'Can we trust our justice system?', 'Is the jury fit for the 21st century?' and '7% of jurors cannot remember points of law they've been instructed on.' Trial by jury was referred to as 'pot-luck', a casino process 'spinning the wheel of justice' and throughout the first episode jurors were edited so as to be seen as a collection of emotional people driven by personal histories rather than by reason. The participants were aware of the camera and inevitably played to it in a way that, in the protected privacy of the real jury room, a jury does not have to.

The reason for having two juries became clear at the end when they returned different verdicts, demonstrating the supposed inherent

unreliability of the jury system. A TV series of limited use and interest then - and widely ridiculed as sensational nonsense by lawyers. Nonetheless, it encouraged a way of thinking about juries that undermines belief in their competence and fairness. As barrister/journalist Catherine Baksi wrote in the Law Gazette, "The programme plays into the hands of those who would seek to limit the right to trial by jury, at a time when some argue that it is already being undermined in the cases of climate change protesters who are prosecuted as a result of their actions. Only last week, a judge threatened jurors with criminal charges if they sought to try climate change protesters charged with causing criminal damage to JP Morgan on the basis of their conscience rather than the evidence."

The contradictions

Not all states have jury systems - many European states do not, China does not. They are not necessarily, as some would have it, synonymous with justice. They are, however,

While juries may generally reinforce consent in the population to being governed by a state that operates solely in the interests of capital, there are also times when they don't, when in fact they both reflect a withdrawal of consent and strengthen the feeling that injustices are being perpetrated.

an interesting anomaly in the UK justice system and possibly now too expensive an indulgence for the ruling class.

The Leveson Review addresses directly the question of the right to a jury trial in the context of literal cost and efficiency and what he calls the risk of "total system col-

lapse'. In doing so he holds the jury system largely accountable for the backlog of cases that has built up over years, where people charged last year may well have to wait until 2029 for their case to be heard. He rejects the fact that trial by jury is an entitlement or that it has a basis in common law, arguing that it is merely 'tradition'. If Secretary of State for Justice David Lammy accepts this view along with the other proposals made, as he has said he is minded to do, it paves the way for more than just further restrictions on the type of case juries can hear.

The dilemma for the establishment, however, remains. As Humphrey Malins MP argued in Parliament 25 years ago after the Auld Report of 2001, [3] which also called for a reduction in the number of jury trials, "If we have fewer jury trials and more professional judges, it will bring us more into line with the systems of our European partners, but it will result in the citizen gradually and subtly being removed from the judicial process. It is the place of the

citizen in the judicial process for so many years that has created a sort of confidence in the system." Lord Justice Auld himself said something very similar in the body of his 700-page report, noting, "the powerfully symbolic effect of the jury as a means of enabling citizens to participate in the trial process and the public confidence that,

rightly or wrongly, it engenders in the system."

Juries are seen to shore up belief in the whole system and for this reason strong voices in the legal profession and in government are loathe to do away with it. Some go so far as to call juries the cornerstone of British democracy. While juries may generally reinforce consent in the population to being governed by a state that operates solely in the interests of capital, there are also times when they don't, when in fact they both reflect a withdrawal of consent and strengthen the feeling that injustices are being perpetrated. There are signs that we are currently in such a period. Juries appear to be ready to defy judges' instructions, returning 'not guilty' verdicts in cases involving civil disobedience, climate protests and direct action of all kinds. [5] If juries are becoming more of a liability for increasingly unpopular and authoritarian government, we can expect their room for manoeuvre to be narrowed down to almost nothing, while ministers and judges will continue, of course, to sing their praises.

[1] <https://www.thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk/articles/no-justice-no-peace/>

[2] While the broad argument of this article applies across the UK, specific details of law and the scope of reports like Leveson's apply only to England & Wales

[3] <https://www.criminal-courts-review.org.uk/chpt5.pdf>

[4] https://open.substack.com/pub/jonathancook/p/barristers-powerful-speech-at-filton?r=5j6fs&utm_medium=ios&shareImageVariant=overlay Barrister in Filton trial making a powerful case for the role, power and independence of juries

[5] <https://defendourjuries.net/resources/>

REPORT on the conditions of lorry drivers



PHOTO BY VERONICA538

What is the future for lorry drivers?

by Pat Turnbull

I'm following a housing development in the borough where I live because I was part of a campaign against its approval. It's like so many developments in London and other British cities and consists of three tower blocks ten, twenty and twenty-five storeys high, packed close together. It will deliver 290 units of private market housing aimed at investors, 30 units of shared ownership and 51 units of council social rented housing. The council is the developer. It's the sort of development that shouldn't even be happening at all, because it doesn't meet people's housing needs.

The people living next to the construction site – I'm luckily not one of them – have had their lives seriously disrupted by noise, vibrations from drilling, and traffic disturbance. One of the complaints raised repeatedly by local residents is about heavy goods vehicles making deliveries. They can arrive before and after the agreed site working hours. Although it is not supposed to happen, they may be parked up, as many as four at a time, in narrow local roads, for one or two hours. Although they are meant to approach the site from one direction, and leave by another, they can be going in both directions. Residents raise the dangers to walkers, cyclists and the pupils of the two schools directly adjoining the site.

Problems for lorry drivers

A senior employee on the site kindly explained more to me about the operations of the heavy goods vehicles.

More than 50 companies are involved in providing materials to the site at various times and at various stages of the development. The lorry drivers are employed by a range of delivery couriers and logistics companies which the site management itself has no contact with. The drivers will operate for the material supplier the product was bought from. A logistics company acts as a coordinator, booking in deliveries to a schedule so as to allow other site activities - like fork lift or crane unloading - to be organised. The logistics company employs traffic marshals to help with these exercises. This logistics company does not employ any drivers.

Drivers contend with the problems of city traffic. If they arrive late they may be turned away, and have to come back tomorrow. This is an incentive for drivers to arrive early to beat the traffic, and creates potential conflict between the interests of drivers and those of local residents.

Drivers have other factors to contend with. They are heavily monitored. Automatic vehicle location (AVL) manages the movement of heavy equipment and materials. Telematics gives managers detailed data on driver behaviour – speed, braking, fuel usage and other things.

As an article on this subject online in *Tracking Mag* puts it: 'This helps fleets cut costs and improve efficiency. But drivers may feel under a microscope. Some companies offer positive feedback and training rather than just focusing on mistakes.' Presumably other companies just focus on 'mistakes'.

There is a range of other automated services, like advanced global positioning systems (GPS) and routing systems; digital tachographs which automatically track driving hours and rest breaks, keeping drivers in line with UK regulations without manual logs; advanced driver assistance systems with lane-keeping, adaptive cruise control, blind-spot monitoring and emergency braking. But as the article points out, '...some drivers worry about over-relying on these systems; ultimately they're responsible if something goes wrong.' Even more intrusive are 'sensors and cameras [which] track eye movement and head position to detect signs of fatigue, sounding alarms if drivers show signs of drowsiness'. The article says, 'Many drivers feel these close-watch technologies cross privacy lines.'

Electric trucks are increasingly joining the fleets. These drive differently and drivers have to be trained. Problems include battery management and maximising range, and lack of charging stations which makes route planning more complex. Trials for semi-autonomous trucks are underway, raising the big question of job security.

Apps which allow for automated inspections, damage reports and proof of delivery are all available from a smart phone. But there is a danger of blurring work and leisure, where companies may expect responses outside of driving time. [1]

In London there is the added matter of low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs), which entail the partial closure of many streets. They face drivers with longer routes and restricted access, increasing journey times and fuel consumption, especially when there are many LTNs in a single area.

Since fatigue is clearly a risk for lorry drivers, places for rest, refreshment and toilet facilities are obviously important. But there may not be any en route. The Health and Safety Executive advises, 'Drivers should be provided with a dedicated waiting or rest area where possible, from where they can access toilets and handwashing facilities. If there is no suitable waiting room or area, drivers should wait in their cabs while their vehicles are being loaded or unloaded. 'You must ensure drivers waiting in their cabs still have safe and easy access to welfare facilities on site...' [2] This sounds fairly cursory. The government gives advice on working hours. To give a flavour this is just one extract, 'In any working day the maximum amount of driving permitted is ten hours... mobile workers must not work more than six consecutive hours without taking a break.' [3]

Bogus self-employment

I wondered whether self-employment was a feature of lorry driving, as bogus self-employment has been a feature of the construction industry for decades – readers may remember the campaign against the 'lump'.

Logistics companies and others advertise for drivers on contracts. I saw some offering wages of about £40,000 a year. But an article by Backhouse Jones, which offers legal advice to the transport industry,

made me still wonder. The article quoted a case from 2017 where drivers engaged by a company had no written contracts, and were usually engaged by phone the evening before a job. They were paid a fixed rate for the day and received no other benefits such as holiday pay and had no guarantee of working. A tax tribunal found the drivers were employees of the company rather than self-employed. A similar case only came to light because the operator was called to a public inquiry following a bridge strike i.e. a lorry hitting a bridge. The tribunal found that the operator put the 'competitive advantage' they gained from using bogus 'self-employed' drivers before compliance. The tribunal revoked the operator's licence. Backhouse Jones used these cases to warn off other operators, which makes me suspect it must be a wider phenomenon. [4]

Role of trade unions

Several unions have heavy goods vehicle drivers as members. These include Unite, GMB, RMT and the specialist URTU – United Road Transport Union.

Lorry drivers' wages and conditions are clearly a concern for the unions. In September 2021 Unite the Union national officer Adrian Jones complained: 'The government's response to the lorry driver crisis has been to extend driving hours, reduce training requirements, water down tests and weaken the licence required to drive a tanker.' This was in response to an estimated 600 drivers leaving the industry every week. As Unite said: 'There has been no attempt to improve pay and conditions across the board by introducing national agreed minimum standards into the industry. Nor has there been any attempt to improve the number or quality of parking areas, welfare facilities and truck stops used by lorry drivers.' [5] An interesting online chat session on the usefulness of unions to truck drivers offered a reminder

of the days when, if you were not a member of the Transport and General Workers Union, you would be turned away from the docks or refineries and the company would be black listed. [6]

Several contributors advised membership of a union in case of accidents. The case of a URTU member who was supported by Thompsons Solicitors was a reminder that driving a lorry can be a dangerous business. In 2021 Craig was involved in a head on traffic collision that left him trapped in his vehicle for over an hour. The accident happened while he was at work. He was airlifted to Leeds General Infirmary where he had to undergo a below the knee amputation. This was a 33 year old man with a pregnant wife. The story is about how his URTU membership gained him the support of Thompsons in getting money for adaptations in his home and retraining to become a personal trainer. But he's lost his profession and as URTU's general secretary said, 'The collision he endured was horrific and entirely preventable.' [7]

A sombre reminder of the risks of being a lorry driver.

[1] *How has technology impacted truck drivers in the UK, and what future developments are on the horizon?* Simon Hastelow, *Truckingmag.co.uk* 6/11/24

[2] *Access to welfare facilities at work. What drivers should be provided with, Health and Safety Executive*

[3] *Drivers' hours and tachographs: goods vehicles, Gov.uk, published 23/2/16, updated 23/4/25*

[4] *Self-employed commercial vehicle drivers, Backhouse Jones, 11/9/25*

[5] *Longer lorry driver hours dangerous and fail to address the labour shortage warns Unite, from Without lorry drivers the UK stops!, Unite the Union, 30/9/21*

[6] *Union(s) for HGV drivers? July 2022, TruckNetUK, By drivers for drivers. The UK professional drivers forum interactive*

[7] *Amputation claim: Craig's story, Thompsons Solicitors, thompsons.law*

CHINA AND THE NEW WORLD DISORDER

by Uri Cohen

A snapshot of China's place in the New World Disorder was provided by a BBC news report on October 13th that the Dutch government has taken control of Nexperia, a Chinese-owned chipmaker based in the Netherlands. According to the Dutch government, "The Chinese company posed a threat to the continuity and safeguarding on European soil of crucial technological knowledge and capabilities." [1] Nexperia manufactures microchips for cars and consumer electronics in Europe. These are Chinese manufactured microchips, not American nor Taiwanese chips which are prohibited for export to China under US sanctions. Therefore, this is a Dutch theft of intellectual property by any definition of bourgeois corporate law. The plunder goes hand in hand with US and EU sanctions and embargos on imports of any advanced technology into China.

After the illegal theft of all of Russia's international assets worldwide we have a familiar pattern unfolding and it's called the unravelling of the post war liberal international order.

Post war international order unravels

That post war order which gave birth to the United Nations and to a rules-based framework of international law is no more.

This was not a global order created by heavenly angels. The main participants in its inception in 1945 were colonialist imperial powers alongside the exterminators of humanity in Hiroshima and Naga-



Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party

PHOTO BY ROMAN KUBANSKIY

saki. They would go on violating the rules they had created but for over 50 years from 1945 it was important for every imperialist power to be seen to be compliant with the international rule of law. The war time Soviet leader Josef Stalin endorsed and signed up to the new international frameworks, even though many of the global institutions were beholden to US power. For Stalin the new global liberal framework was preferable to yet another world war, since the USSR was totally devastated and impoverished by the second world war.

But the flip side was that the new liberal global order was specifically created because of the Soviet Union. Capitalist leaders perceived the victorious Red Army which had

just swept into half of Europe as the general staff of international labour and anti-colonialist liberation movements. This perception was true in the sense that a labour movement anywhere or an anti-colonial freedom movement anywhere, had somehow benefited, whether one hated the Kremlin, loved the Kremlin or were indifferent to the USSR. The fear of Western leaders was that you might side with the USSR and the socialist camp or had received assistance from the socialist camp. That's partly why the liberal rule based international order had a democratic social dimension in many countries with considerable concessions gained by the working class.

The Implosion of the USSR between 1988 and 1992 began the demise of the post war liberal order. First the social democratic dimension of the post war order was attacked and dismantled. The ruling classes had come to a collective conclusion that the socialist alternative to capitalism was by then discredited enough to withdraw earlier concessions to the vast majority of their citizens. Under the neoliberal version of globalisation capital was released from the democratic obligation to please the nation state and most of its citizens.

Capital was now free to roam where the labour force was cheaper and less organised, and taxes were lower or non-existent. Theoretically at least, the global labour force also became free to roam from poorer nations to richer ones, fulfilling the same objective for capital - to crash wage demands by organised labour and increase profits.

The transfer of wealth from the workers over to the wealthiest segments of all societies on earth was also preceded by mass privatisation of every segment of the economy, including essential public services and in the case of Third World countries, privatisation of healthcare, education and other social services. Poorer Third World countries that refused to comply with impoverishing their citizens were severely punished by Western institutions, leading to an increase in the price of their national debt and orchestrating a run on their national currencies that further weakened their ability to service debt. This was to be followed by political upheaval to replace unfriendly governments with leaders that were more willing to obey every order from Washington, Brussels, the IMF and the World Bank.

Neocon assault on international law

The next phase came with the neocon assault on international law following the 9/11 atrocity. The neocons in Washington set out to dismantle any semblance of international law through global rendition, kidnapping suspected opponents to concentration camps, to the illegal occupation of Iraq based on fake charges of weapons of mass destruction. Washington had initiated the slippery moral slope to the current Western backed genocide in Gaza, a mass extermination campaign conducted with collective North American and European government support.

The domestic political dimension of murderous global lawlessness in the West has been augmented by the rise of white nativism across the United States and Europe. Unlike apartheid South Africa, white nativism doesn't even bother to provide privileges to ordinary white people duped by racist lies. Instead, the role of the populist right is to distract public attention

away from the biggest transfer of wealth from the vast majority of citizens over to the hyper wealthy 1%. Every misery and social failure in Western countries is projected on to the Muslims; Chinese exports; the Russian war machine; the immigrants; the Africans; the Somalis; Pakistani men and so on and so forth. When the German Chancellor was asked, why he wants to deport immigrants, Merz replied, "Ask your daughters", implying that every rapist in Germany is an immigrant of darker complexion. The German government never asked the daughters of Gaza before supplying the weapons that murdered them.

China's response

The Chinese leadership saw this aggressive new posture by the West coming for years, in fact they started getting more and more nervous about Washington from the beginning of War on Terror. Xi Jinping became general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) straight after Obama's Pivot to Asia – with Obama's stated policy that China had become the main rival and danger to the West instead of terrorism of non-state actors

In 2013 Xi submitted to the Party a policy paper entitled Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era. Strangely for someone who intended to launch a new era, Xi began by focusing on the demise of the USSR and its relevance to domestic ideological battles in China in 2013. Xi made it clear that he's relaxed about learning from the mistakes of Stalin and Mao or other leaders of 20th Century Socialism.

But what Xi Jinping can't abide is what he calls nihilist approach to revolutionary history. Basically he says one can't pretend that you speak an objective truth that is independent from the main dialectical contradictions in the world. There are multiple global conflicts and contradictions at any

given time, but for Xi Jinping the main contradiction for humanity remains the struggle between capitalism and socialism. Any Chinese communist militant, who can't effectively defend the accomplishments of 20th Century Socialism will be crushed by the enemies of the Revolution because these comrades become unwitting tools to distract from the most important demands of the masses and will rapidly lose their support.

I'm going to quote Xi's remarks but it doesn't mean that I agree with his position. I think it is important that we follow the thought process of the Chinese leadership ahead of the new era policy formulations back in 2013.

Xi asked the Central Committee audience, why did the Soviet Union disintegrate? Why did the Communist Party of the Soviet Union fall to pieces?

"An important reason is that in the ideological domain, the competition is fierce. To completely repudiate the historical experience of the Soviet Union, to repudiate the history of the CPSU, to repudiate Lenin, to repudiate Stalin was to wreak chaos in Soviet ideology and engage in historical nihilism. It caused Party organisations at all levels to have barely any function whatsoever. It robbed the Party of its leadership of the military. In the end the CPSU — the great a Party of Lenin as it was — scattered like a flock of frightened beasts. The Soviet Union — the great a socialist state as it was — shattered into pieces. This is a lesson from the past." [2]

He went on to draw direct parallels with China, as a warning about the ideological weaknesses in the CCP which had to be surmounted. He predicted in 2013 that the new era will demand the most challenging transformations of Chinese society and its economy, which will result in domestic and international backlash from hostile forces.

The domestic political dimension of murderous global lawlessness in the West has been augmented by the rise of white nationalism across the United States and Europe.

Chiefly Xi highlighted the mortal threat facing China's security and the need to overcome China's biggest weaknesses.

The party must move the country towards economic self-sufficiency and self-reliance by the creation of new, quality forces of production, by upskilling industry with the most advanced technology. It is very important for us to note that between 2012 to 2016 it was a domestic Chinese decision to upgrade technology at home that set Western leaders into a global confrontation with China. It was never about flooding Europe and the US with cheap Chinese bathroom and kitchenware, toys or consumer electronics. We must debunk the far-right myth that China is destroying our industries in the West through unfair state subsidies. The evil portrayal of China's rise plays neatly into the white nationalist narrative about us in the West being under attack by foreign races on all fronts. Even the leader of the French Left Jean Luc Mélenchon denounced China as the viper in America's nest. Mélenchon claims that it was America that made China rich and now China had turned against the Americans. That's totally fake history.

When China started instigating market economy reforms in 1979, the United States slowly lifted trade sanctions and restrictions throughout the 1980s. There was no American Marshall Plan to finance China's industrialisation. In fact American private sector investments in search of profits amounted to a very small fraction of direct foreign investment.

In reality the bulk of China's finances for modernisation came from the diaspora Chinese bourgeoisie in Taiwan, Hong Kong and broader East Asia in partnership with the Chinese state and its strategic investments through the 5 year plans. They were closely followed by Japanese capitalists as more junior partners.

Furthermore, the Chinese government was never responsible for loss of industrial jobs in North America and Europe. When huge sectors of American heavy industry were closed down in the Reagan and Bush Senior years, China wasn't even a global competitor to American and European car firms or steel firms and shipbuilders. In the 1980s and 1990s, deliberate neoliberal, de-industrialisation policies were predicated on the assumption of eternal global American technological superiority, under which the Third World became the industrial assembly plant, whilst the West held on to the higher end of the manufacturing value chain, that required more technologically sophisticated levels of production to make the most expensive products. After 40 years of being told that government is a total failure in running businesses and public services we are now being told by the same neoliberals that the entire private sector of the capitalist world is hopelessly uncompetitive against the Chinese public sector. Goodbye Milton Friedman.

Contradictions

Now for a quick look at contradictions that propel the Chinese growth engine and at the same time disrupt and destabilise it. In my opinion, the chief contradiction is a Chinese constitution that was originally designed for the dictatorship of the proletariat during the middle of the last century is now a constitution that currently governs the most digitally enabled market economy on the planet. A tiny portion of the constitution is displayed on the Chinese flag, representing the revolutionary vanguard of workers, peasants, the intelligentsia and the military forces that protect from the class enemy.

But who represents the bloated elephant in the market economy - the bourgeoisie? Are Chinese billionaires disfranchised? Hardly. In the superstructure of Chinese civil society capitalist interests are well repre-

sented – from business lobby groups, to stock exchanges to industry associations and mass media groups.

So what is the role of the revolutionary vanguard party? Apart from effectively administering the market economy? According to Xi Jinping the role of the party is to keep up the spirit of “vigorously carrying the revolution through to its completion.” This is an incendiary political phrase in China because it comes straight from Mao Tse Tung. The “completion” being bringing about a communist society. Mao’s efforts to vigorously advance to communism are not remembered fondly by everyone.

But Xi makes it clear that at this stage of China’s development party militants act as a vanguard by fighting a revolutionary battle of ideas. The task of communists is to subordinate civil society institutions to the social interests of the vast majority of the people. Literally to whisk these institutions away from operating along the logic of capitalism. Which prioritises the accumulation of surplus capital as the primary objective of society.

According to Xi the party must fight to achieve an ecologically safe planet, a fairer international order free from hegemonic abuse of poorer and weaker nations, and in China the party must prioritise full employment, universal healthcare and education, reduce inequality and increase living standards. To plan a future over and above the needs of capitalist accumulation.

Implementing policies

But as we all know talk is relatively cheap in politics - slogans are relatively cheap unless successfully applied in practice. So let’s take a look at three policies that were vigorously implemented and the outcomes.

1) The Ecological Civilisation, is the most recent example of the Chinese



PHOTO BY RG72

state focus on the welfare of people and planet against mindless capitalist accumulation.

The industrialisation of China during the 1990s was on a bigger scale and faster pace than had ever been accomplished in the history of our planet. Side effects of this break-neck speed industrialisation accelerated fossil fuel emissions in China and no doubt contributed to pollution and global warming.

The 14th five-year plan (2021-2025) of the CCP set the concept of ecological planning at the heart of social and economic development. Beijing poured hundreds of billions of dollars into the clean tech sector, both to state-owned developers and the private sector, almost five times as much as the US and fifteen times as much as Japan. The spectacular acceleration in global renewable investment became, in fact, a story about one country: China. In 2023 and 2024 approaching two thirds of newly installed wind and solar capacity was accounted for by China alone. China is more or less unique in having seen substantial growth in wind power. Compared to the geriatric manoeuvring of Europe and America’s static energy systems, China is attempting a power slide, steering, breaking and accelerating the most massive energy system the world has ever seen. Chinese companies now lodge around 75% of global clean energy patent applications. In 2000, the figure was just 5%.

Cheaper Chinese technology has enabled 25% of emerging markets to leapfrog the USA in end-use electrification and 63% have leapfrogged it on share of solar generation.

2) Developing new, quality forces of production is a commitment to close the high technology gap with the USA, which is crucial for China’s security concerns. In the face of strict US technology sanctions over the last 6 years, China has made spectacular strides to close the tech gap

An article in the October issue of Foreign Affairs is titled the Real China Model. According to the magazine, China’s most subtle piece of deep infrastructure is its more than 70 million-person industrial workforce—the largest in the world.

“Thanks to the country’s intense buildup of complex manufacturing supply chains, Chinese factory managers, engineers, and workers have decades of “process knowledge”—hands-on knowledge, gained from experience—about how to make things and how to make them better. This process knowledge enables iterative innovation, or constantly tweaking products so that they can be made more efficiently, at better quality, and with lower costs. It also enables scaling. Chinese factories can rally a large, experienced workforce behind making almost

any new product. Finally, and most important, process knowledge allows China to create entire new industries. A factory worker in Shenzhen might assemble iPhones one year and Huawei Mate phones the next and then move on to build drones for DJI or electric vehicle batteries for CATL. Process knowledge in the Chinese workforce may be Beijing's greatest economic asset." [3]

The first thing that came to mind reading this is, was that the labour law of value applies in a commodity exchange economy no matter how advance we get in automation and even advanced robotics.

But crucially the CCP commitment to upskill technical levels of education and improve living conditions, has been seriously pushed forward in real life, not in political spin propaganda.

3) Finally what matters the most in the longer term is the effects of these policies on the rest of the world.

In March 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed a vision of a global community with a shared future; the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI has seen cumulatively over



PHOTO BY CHRIS LIM

\$1.175 trillion in Chinese engagement since 2013, with a record \$121.8 billion in 2024 through construction contracts and investments. Key figures include a recent surge in energy-related projects, a growing focus on high-tech areas like solar and EV batteries, and continued investments in metals and mining. 150 countries signed up to the BRI. It has accomplished of over 3,000 infrastructure projects like railways, industrial park projects, and livelihood projects such as schools and hospitals, which span Asia, Africa, and Latin America, including some developed countries.

As shown by Trump's current invasion of Venezuela with the declared intention of diverting Venezuelan oil supplies away from China to

be plundered by the USA, China doesn't yet have global defence capabilities to protect its vital interests in every corner of the world. Yet China has already demonstrated itself capable of working towards an alternative moral and economic international system of cooperation that is opposed to imperialist occupation and plunder and subjugation of the Global south.

[1] Dutch crackdown on China tech <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckgk21nng0vo>

[2] <https://www.palladiummag.com/2019/05/31/xi-jinping-in-translation-chinas-guiding-ideology/>

[3] <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/real-china-model-wang-kroeber>

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NUCLEAR WAR AND CLIMATE

Shaping up to existential threats

by Brian Durrans

The United States is the only nation to have used atomic weapons for the mass slaughter of civilians. What happened in Japan was not necessary to defeat the enemy but to deter an ally (as the Soviet Union was at that time) from promoting a more progressive post-war settlement in east Asia, and to proclaim the new *Pax Americana*.

US nuclear posture

On 24 January 1946, while world opinion was still shaken by the U.S. war crimes in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the first resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, then representing 51 states, called unambiguously for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and set up a commission to handle the issue. [1]

Alongside China, the USSR had suffered most from fascism and contributed most to its defeat but now had to look to its own defence. The world's first defensive nuclear weapon was tested on 29 August 1949, and since then its Soviet, Russian, Chinese and North Korean successors have dissuaded the U.S. from undertaking a first (or 'pre-emptive') strike against enemy targets. In the meantime, and especially since the defeat of Socialism in the USSR and eastern Europe, the spread, hoarding and destructive capacity of all such weapons, and the military contexts in which they might be used by accident or design, have dangerously increased.

Since it is inconceivable that the US top brass does not appreciate the "mutually assured destruction" (MAD) of a full-scale nuclear exchange, their 'first strike' policy,

even if only covert, aims to weaken the enemy's economy by forcing it to overspend on defence. This was the successful logic of President Reagan's "Star Wars" strategy. US first strike policy claims to respond to the same policy of the other side. [2]

Double trouble

Since the 1980s, the existential threat of nuclear war has been joined by another: the comparably alarming, but more easily measured, threat of global warming. Although their causes are different, if either threat was realised it could trigger the other and intensify yet further its impact on the most vulnerable, the whole of humanity or even life itself.

The best-known risk in which a nuclear exchange triggers environmental collapse is the "nuclear winter," first discussed in US military circles in the early 1980s, around the same time that climate change itself was becoming a major concern. [3] Even only a few nuclear detonations, if big enough, could scatter sufficient debris in the atmosphere to blot out the sun and interrupt photosynthesis, on which human food-chains depend, causing in turn a "nuclear famine." The bigger the bombs or the more (or more prolonged) the explosions, the more likely they would leave the world lifeless for the first time in 3.7 billion years.

In a second scenario, climate crisis precipitates war, potentially nuclear. Climate scientists and demographers warn that international conflict, potentially escalating into nuclear war, grows more likely as the Earth heats up, driving increasingly desperate competition for

essentials like water, food and relief from extreme temperature and/or rising sea levels. In these respects, peoples of the global South and the poorer sections of all nations are already disadvantaged. For them, further global warming only makes a bad deal worse, but global climate and supply-chains mean not even the currently privileged can escape the looming catastrophe (though some billionaires may try to migrate to Mars).

Furthermore, it's not hard to imagine in this second scenario a nuclear conflict serious enough to trigger the first.

Disasters at scale

The catastrophic scenarios referred to above are plainly, but not totally, different from everyday situations which emergency service personnel are trained to tackle. Larger-scale emergencies, like famines, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, pandemics, fires, road, rail or air crashes, sinking ships, collapsed mines, crushed crowds, and similar events, demand pooling responses beyond those locally available, and sometimes at international scale. And no-one makes a fuss that they are funded from general taxation.

The impact of global warming is already being felt in famines, the spread of disease, emergence of new pathogens, and in extreme weather patterns, which still cost lives although only a fraction of what we or our successors can expect from full-scale climate collapse.

Such increasingly familiar events demand an immediate life-saving response but since they are also alarm signals of worse to come,



PHOTO BY ALLSDARE HICKSON

the response needs to be not just by “firefighting” in the present or “capacity building” against similar or more severe risks in the future, but above all by reducing them. So far, so logical; but unless funds are available to manage both relatively minor (even if increasingly serious) short-term risks and, in the longer-term, risks that have been hitherto unthinkable, then planning for the long-term will never be taken seriously.

In the past, socialist countries for most of their existence popularised, at least, five-year plans and in the capitalist West, during its most stable period after the Second World War, some major corporations followed suit, though in a commensurately more limited way. More recently, China’s five year plans explicitly anticipate the interests of future generations. In short, where current conditions allow, socialist planning takes posterity seriously, but to slay the dragons of nuclear war and climate collapse in the time available, we don’t have the luxury of socialist planning cycles.

Linked objectives

Co-ordinated global action (including potential contributions from enlightened capitalist interests) to reduce and finally remove the existential threats of nuclear war and climate collapse can’t happen too soon. But well short of such worst-case scenarios are, nevertheless, kinds of activity which, although rarely discussed in such terms, could contribute much to overcoming them. To put this more strongly, it is hard to imagine how winning the war against such catastrophes could happen at all without smaller, contributory victories along the way. One way to do that could be to campaign both for peace and for meeting internationally agreed carbon emission targets.

From October 2023 until January 2025 probably most of the carbon footprint of Israel’s still-continuing genocide in Gaza was the airfreighting of military support from the US and Israel’s own delivery systems and exploded ordnance which, “exceeded the annual planet-warming emissions of a hundred individual countries”. [4] Although Israel

is a nuclear power heavily dependent on another (the US), it’s worth noting that this military shortening of odds against the Earth’s longer-term interests happens without deploying nuclear weapons.

Global defence spending – for imperialist powers, “defence” often covers aggression as well – includes the cost of military bases, the vast majority American, as well as of more conspicuous budget lines such as open hostilities, and increasingly of expensive, high emission-generating AI infrastructure. In a recent issue of the eminent science journal *Nature*, Chinese researchers reveal how such expenditure seriously obstructs efforts to meet IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) mitigation targets. [5] Further damage is also done by the militaries of, and conflicts between, non-imperialist nations: climate is indifferent to the excuses of those who affect it.

Practical considerations

In strictly scientific terms, nuclear war and/or climate collapse are real threats, yet the means and understanding necessary to avert them are still available. The scientific justification of such concerns is widely known and needs no repetition here. However, if past foolishness can’t now be undone, present foolishness divides climate deniers from those who accept the science, and sets the fearful, panicked and unconvinced at each other’s throats. “Divided we Fall” is another way of saying we are not yet united by what we agree on. That is why it matters to organise for social well-being – sustainable jobs, health, housing, education, transport, genuine security – and against the dangerous, wasteful and unsustainable drive to war.

The working class and its potential allies, despite all current divisions, share far more in their everyday lives than divides them in their assessments of the chances of nuclear or climate disaster. One of

the great principles of trade union organisation, which is also the experience of people drawn into collective activity at community level, in political parties or in campaigning on almost anything, is of course “Unity is Strength” - the classic alternative to “Divided we Fall.” Not everyone whose support is needed in the struggle for a sustainable planet can be expected to rally to the Labour Movement’s best-known principle, nor will the principle alone be enough for those who can.

But the numbers of people with experience of collective struggle have been declining for decades with de-industrialisation, fragmentation of production and service employment, digitising of the social sphere and anti-trade union legislation; and this was only made worse by the pandemic. People have not only been denied that more collective experience but pushed increasingly into social and therefore political isolation.

For many, especially younger people, social media certainly offers alternative views – an outstanding example is its unrivalled coverage of the Gaza genocide when Israel excluded even complicit mainstream media from on-the-spot reporting.

The UK’s expression of solidarity with Palestine since October 2023 is most remarkable not just in scale but in its consistency, which could show that if the issue resonates with them and if their collective action has an impact, then even broader sections of people can begin to overcome the isolation and frustration encouraged by decades of stale capitalism to surge united towards a viable future.

Against panic, fear, despair or indifference

■ In 2011, a highly-respected specialist in the field of assessing such risks, Prof. Martin E. Hellman,

wrote, “[...] a child born today may well have less-than-even odds of living out his or her natural life without experiencing the destruction of civilization in a nuclear war.”

■ In 2018, environmental scientist Jem Bendell, “consider[ed] it inevitable [from evidence then available] and already occurring, that climate change will lead to the collapse of our societies and, consequently, the end of our own lives.”

■ On 28 January 2025, *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* recalibrated its Doomsday Clock from 90 to 89 seconds short of its fateful midnight, the closest since its inception in 1947, when it was set at seven minutes to midnight. [6]

As far as can be seen, none of these authorities have direct, personal experience of organising or participating in broad-based campaigns involving people from different backgrounds and experiences. This might not excuse their pessimism but could help explain it.

A formula to answer them and sum up this article might be:

Science + shared mobilisation (including the optimism or determination that goes with it) + a little luck = a sustainable future

[1] www.icanw.org. The U.S. and the Soviet Union were founder members of the U.N. and both signed the resolution

[2] Daniel Ellsberg, *The Doomsday Machine* (London, Bloomsbury, e-book, 2014, pp11-12, loc.231)

[3] <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/climate-change-transparency-project-nuclear-vault/2022-06-02/nuclear-winter-us>

[4] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/30/carbon-footprint-of-israels-war-on-gaza-exceeds-that-of-many-entire-countries>

[5] <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-025-59877-x>

[6] Hellman: thebulletin.org/2021/03/an-existential-discussion-what-is-the-probability-of-nuclear-war/) Bendell: in view of responses to it, and of further scientific information, however, Prof Bendell revised his assessment in 2023, which made it less pessimistic: <https://jembendell.com/2023/04/17/i-was-wrong-to-conclude-collapse-is-inevitable/#:~:text=When%20I%20concluded%20that%20societal,Adaptation%20paper%20attracted%20unusual%20attention>

Bulletin of Atomic Scientists https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22829880916&gbraid=0AAAAAC3qOh830Y9XozA2zzYbplYb74G-l&gclid=Cj0KCQiA6Y7KBhCkARIsAOxhqtMxtqH4FwTJESXetKfvCLkpnWjwl8cGu1de0vn8kiQWgyRU40Cvw-MaAgeGEALw_wcB#nav_menu

See also David Rooney, *About Time: A History of Civilization in Twelve Clocks* (London, Penguin Books, 2022), pp228-229

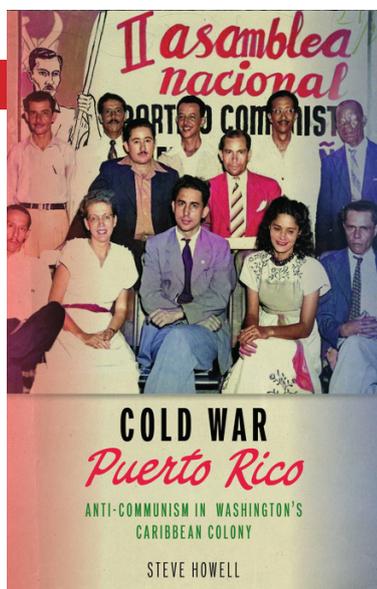
From The Socialist Correspondent 10 years ago

Permanent wars in the Middle East

“Underlying the western war against Assad – apart from his symbolic position as the last significant representative of the old secular order, including his staunch opposition to Israel, which has marked him for ousting – is the fight the fight to control oil and gas pipelines transporting energy from the gulf. Most of these pipelines cross Syria...”

Issue 24 Winter 2015

by Simon Korner



COLD WAR PUERTO RICO – ANTI-COMMUNISM IN WASHINGTON'S CARIBBEAN COLONY

by Steve Howell, University of Massachusetts Press,
Amherst and Boston 2026

Review by Frieda Park

In November last year the United States reopened its Naval Station Roosevelt Roads in Puerto Rico in preparation for military strikes on Venezuela aimed at regime change and grabbing the country's oil reserves. Prior to the attack on Venezuela in January this year, a build-up of US military forces was observed on Puerto Rico where it has seven other bases. It was a clear declaration of intent that the US intends to impose and vigorously apply the Monroe Doctrine across the continent, which has been reinforced by Trump's subsequent actions and statements.

Its strategic military importance is a key reason that the US has continued to hold Puerto Rico in its colonial grasp since 1898, when it took it from Spain. This fact, and the consequent repression of independence and left wing movements on the island, is a central theme of Steve Howell's forthcoming book, *Cold War Puerto Rico – anti-communism in Washington's Caribbean colony*.

The origin of the book

Howell explains that his journey to writing the book started with finding a trove of documents belonging to his father, Brandon Howell. These shed light on Brandon's political and professional life but

also gave rise to questions which Howell was motivated to try to find answers to. Why did the FBI devote so much time and attention to gathering information on Brandon even after he moved to the UK, and was his eventual exile to Britain voluntary or forced by the prospect of arrest should he return to the US or Puerto Rico?

Brandon Howell was a US citizen and worked in architecture and town planning at a time when progressive ideas about the importance of people's lived environment were gaining traction and being put into practice. His professional commitment sat alongside a developing commitment to left wing politics and communism. Through much of the 1940's Brandon worked as a planner in Puerto Rico, having been invited there by the US Governor of the island. Speaking Spanish, which he had learned when working in Chile, he became immersed in communist politics and his powerful political cartoons seemed to be what attracted the attention of the FBI, who were keen to know who the artist was as they appeared under pseudonyms.

This period of his father's life becomes Howell's access point for delving into the history of Puerto Rico. It is a great strength of the book that, starting with one man's story, it locates that story in the social and political context of the

time. As Brandon contributed to the communist, labour movement and independence movements, so his life was shaped by the times and above all by the other participants in those movements. We get fascinating portraits of activists and leaders; of their principled politics, commitment and bravery in the face of persecution by the FBI and the authorities in Puerto Rico, and the toll it took as well.

The book is thoroughly researched, drawing on existing histories, official records, FBI files and meetings with the families of individuals involved in the struggle. The author had a long battle to get the FBI files on his father released, and while some are heavily redacted and others destroyed, the files do give a picture of the depth of their investigations, which went to the top with reports going the Director, J Edgar Hoover. They also record links to the British Security Services, who continued to provide information to the FBI after Brandon moved to Britain.

Through the eyes of activists

What makes the book engaging and a lively read is that much of the history and politics is told through people who were involved, including a number of women activists. Prominent are César Andreu Iglesias and Jane Speed. Pen pictures

of other young comrades who went on to be leaders also appear. All experienced periods of imprisonment for their activism and beliefs. *HUAC humiliated in San Juan*, the chapter on the abortive hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) held in Puerto Rico, benefit from the description of the testimony of the witnesses summoned to give evidence and the interventions of their defence lawyers. Not to mention the accounts of the growing demonstrations against the hearings which occurred daily.

US colonialism

A key theme of the book is its exposure of the true colonial nature of US domination of Puerto Rico, which designates the island as a “commonwealth”, an “unincorporated territory” of the United States. The effect of this has been that, although Puerto Rico has a parliament and elections it is, at the end of the day, controlled by the US. It cannot act independently domestically or internationally and its economy is at the service of US interests. This dependency has acted both as a spur to the independence movement, but also, paradoxically, as an impediment with people fearing the consequences of breaking away from the US. Howell picks these arguments apart in the conclusion of the book, demonstrating the economic cost to Puerto Rico of not being able to develop its own economy, including the loss of land to US military bases, and that it could actually be better off freed from the US. He points out that poverty on the island is higher than in even the most impoverished US states. Twice as many Puerto Ricans live in poverty as in even the poorest US states – 39.6% in Puerto Rico, compared with 18.9% in Louisiana and 18.0% in Mississippi.

The ambiguity of Puerto Rico’s status as quasi-autonomous was a deliberate tactic by the US, designed to forestall accusations of colo-

onialism, but the reality has struck home continuously in its history. The myth all but disappeared completely when, in 2015, Puerto Rico was unable to service its debt. Unlike cities within the US faced with a similar predicament, it could not file for bankruptcy; instead the United States imposed a Financial Oversight and Management Board to take major decisions regarding the economy. So much for self-governing status.

Persecution

Another central theme is the nature of the persecution of the independence movement, the left and, in particular, the communists, coupled with how this was closely linked to similar campaigns of persecution in the US itself. The central reason for the persecution in Puerto Rico was the benefits the US derives from the island’s colonial status, economically and militarily, but it was also fed by anti-communist, anti-New Deal politics and underpinned by racism. The same cast of actors and organisations appear in the island’s history as in the US: the FBI under J Edgar Hoover, the House Un-American Activities Committee and its leading figures.

Legal instruments were used to try to silence opponents of US rule - the “Gag” Act, The Smith Act and the HUAC. Illegal spying and dirty tricks campaigns were also used to spread disinformation and create division and fear, primarily the transplantation of COINTELPRO, run by the FBI, whose illegal activities were only exposed many years later through the work of activists and the US Senate Church Commission. Howell details each phase of repression through the stories of the activists affected.

The history of the independence movement, its high and low points, is also tracked in the book. After the second world war, politicians emerged promoting a line that

Puerto Rico could prosper under US domination and faced risks if were to pursue independence. The movement waned, divisions opened up and the Communist Party declined in size. The movement, however, was revitalised by the 1959 revolution on the neighbouring island of Cuba. Among the cartoons created by Brandon Howell and reprinted in the book is one which urges unity of working class organisations. Working together they can push the car out of the mud and onwards on the road to happiness and prosperity (see illustration below). As the author says, ‘It’s a metaphor conveying a timeless message.’



All of the above themes hold important lessons for anti-imperialist and working class movements everywhere on the role of the state and imperial power in using all means at their disposal, legal and illegal, through force and propaganda, to suppress opposition and create division, as well as on the need for a determined and principled opposition, prepared to challenge that power and the importance of unity in the movement.

Puerto Rico’s future

As to what lies ahead for Puerto Rico and the campaign for independence, Howell refers to the views of César Andreu, who, after a lifetime of struggle for independence, ‘... argued that the majority would not think about independence until the “neocolonialism”

incorporated into Puerto Rico's status had been "exhausted." Howell sees some hopeful signs that this is beginning to happen. He points to the success of historic campaigns to assert Puerto Rico's interests – against the HUAC hearings and the military bases for example. Support for the Popular Democratic Party, which has formed the government of Puerto Rico for many years and effectively opposes independence, has plummeted and in 2024, for the first time, a left candidate for Governor came second with 31% of the vote.

However, the US will not give up easily. Its military occupation of the island, which it has found a renewed use for in launching aggression against Venezuela, will make it more determined to hold on to it. It would be a major victory for anti-imperialism world-wide if Puerto Rico were to reject colonialism and everything that that implies.

Steve Howell is a journalist and writer. He was an adviser to Jeremy Corbyn, author of *Game Changer* and *Collateral Damage*, and a contributor to left publications in the US and UK, including *The Socialist Correspondent*.

Cold War Puerto Rico – anti-communism in Washington's Caribbean colony is due out on May 1st but can be pre-ordered now at a discount from the author's website: <https://www.steve-howell.com/cold-war-puerto-rico/>

BRITAIN AND THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS BUILD UP

by Pat Turnbull

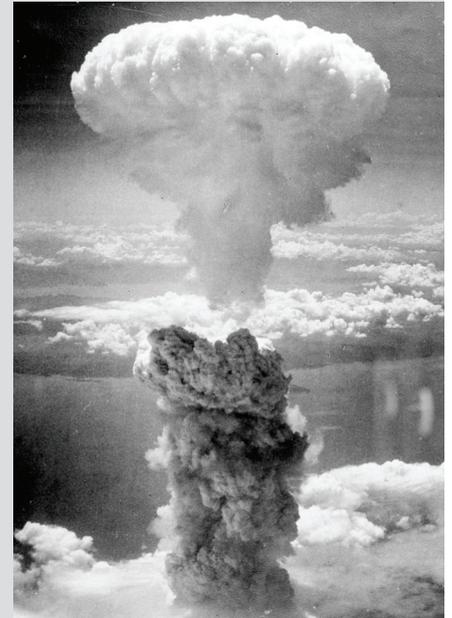
The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was opened for signatures in 1996 and since then neither Russia nor the United States (US) has conducted nuclear weapons tests.

However, on 30 October 2025 the BBC reported that Donald Trump has 'called on US military leaders to resume testing nuclear weapons'. A transcript of a meeting of the Russian Security Council on 5 November quotes President Putin as saying that if the United States or any signatory to the CTBT conducted nuclear weapons tests, 'Russia would be under obligation to take reciprocal measures.'

British nuclear weapons

In the UK, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) held a well-attended conference on 22 November under the title *Stop British nuclear expansion: how to reverse the government's war drive*.

US nuclear weapons were stored in Britain between 1954 and 2008, CND says, 'until they were removed following popular protests'. However, in 2022 the UK was added to a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) list of nuclear weapons storage locations. This would make the UK the sixth European NATO member to store US nuclear weapons. CND 'calls on the government to make an urgent formal statement on their return and allow for a transparent debate and vote in Parliament. Stationing these bombs here makes Britain a target in the event of a



Atomic bombing of Nagasaki on August 9, 1945

war between NATO and Russia. CND supporters have repeatedly protested at RAF Lakenheath and across the country since we first heard about the possibility of US nuclear weapons coming to Britain and we will continue to do so.'

CND has also publicised a new report from the Public Accounts Committee, which oversees the UK government's spending, that the costing for Britain's F-35 jet plane programme, which includes 12 nuclear-capable F-35As, announced by Keir Starmer during the summer, is unrealistic. The National Audit Office calculated the full programme at £71 billion. However, this does not take into consideration the additional costs associated with the certification of the F-35A jets for NATO nuclear missions, so the figure will certainly increase.

PHOTO CHARLES LEVY