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The Environmental Crisis Is a Capitalist Crisis

The photographs in this dossier were taken by Sebastião Salgado, one of Brazil’s – and the world’s – greatest photographers. He passed away in May 2025, leaving behind an artistic legacy inseparable from his commitment to humanity and the preservation of the environment. Salgado travelled the globe portraying peoples, territories, and workers with dignity, capturing life’s beauty while bearing witness to an era marked by capitalism’s brutality against humanity and nature. His photographs, like this dossier, remind us that we cannot remain mere spectators of destruction: we must be agents of change.

We are grateful to the team that safeguards his legacy and, in a spirit of solidarity, authorised the use of his images to enrich and strengthen this dossier.

Pico da Neblina, Yanomami Indigenous Territory, State of Amazonas, Brazil, 2014. © **Sebastião Salgado**

Capitalism Will Not Solve the Environmental Crisis

The environmental crisis is one of the greatest challenges we face today. At its root lie the capitalist mode of production and the logic of capital accumulation pursued by the ruling classes of the Global North and South. The devastation wrought by capitalism is plain for all to see, as climate change intensifies and accelerates year after year, threatening the very existence of humanity. As Fidel Castro warned in his speech at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, 'An important biological species is in danger of disappearing due to the rapid and progressive liquidation of its natural living conditions: humanity'.[1]

Many international organisations and bodies have sought solutions to the environmental crisis, but always within the framework of capitalism. In November 2025, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) will be held in Belém, Pará, in the Amazon region of Brazil. The Amazon is home to countless generations of Indigenous peoples who, through their interaction with nature, have allowed the planet's most biodiverse ecosystem to flourish.

Today, the Amazon is the site of one of capitalism's central contradictions: agribusiness destroys it by burning and clearing land to expand the agricultural frontier while the very same land is financialised by transnational

corporations trading its territories as carbon reserves on stock exchanges. While the ruling classes insist on presenting the environmental crisis as a problem for all of humanity – without any class distinctions – we must not forget that the class contradictions inherent to capitalism are also reflected in the environmental question. In fact, those most affected by climate disasters are the urban and rural poor, who live under precarious conditions in hazard-prone areas.

One of the main tasks in the battle of ideas is therefore to politicise the debate around the environmental crisis by showing its class character – something that is urgently needed, as reflected by a recent survey that found that more than 30% of Brazil's population is unaware of climate change, with this figure rising to over 50% among the lowest income groups.[2] In light of this reality, this dossier seeks to popularise the debate on the environmental crisis from a Brazilian and Global South perspective in dialogue with working-class organisations. In this dossier, we analyse the causes of the environmental crisis and examine, and critique, proposals for a transition to a low-carbon economy. By seeking alternatives within capitalism, such proposals create new forms of accumulation without resolving the root problem. Finally, we present popular solutions to the crisis along with a set of demands that have emerged from the accumulated experience of Brazil's popular movements.

Serra Pelada Goldmine, Pará, Brazil, 1986. © **Sebastião Salgado**

The Destruction of Life and the Logic of Capital

Climate change is the most visible and urgent aspect of the environmental crisis. Chemical pollution, loss of soil cover, ocean acidification, biome destruction, and the loss of biodiversity are also fundamental dimensions of the crisis. As Vijay Prashad rightly pointed out:

> One million of the estimated eight million species of plants and animals on the planet are threatened with extinction. The main threat to the majority of species at risk of extinction is biodiversity loss caused by the capitalist agribusiness system of food production. Agricultural production – currently accounting for more than 30% of the world's habitable land surface – is responsible for 86% of projected losses in terrestrial biodiversity because of land conversion, pollution, and soil degradation.[3]

The environmental crisis manifests in ways that underscore its inseparability from the class struggle. We see this in the floods that devastated southern Brazil in 2024; the heatwave and then floods that hit Pakistan in 2022, leaving millions homeless while elites remained protected; the 2018 floods in Kerala, India; the 2022 flooding and blackouts in Cuba caused by Hurricane Ian – a phenomenon intensified by rising ocean temperatures; and the increasingly extreme cycles of floods and droughts in the Horn of Africa. From 2019 to 2020, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia faced heavy rains followed by devastating floods. From 2020 to 2023, these countries faced one of the longest droughts in the past seventy years, only to be hit by new floods in 2023–2024. These instances show that the environmental crisis is deepening.[4]

The main factor driving climate change is the high level of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from fossil fuels as energy consumption from these fuels continues to rise year after year. If we take a closer look at global emission levels, the data once again speaks volumes: the richest 10% are responsible for nearly twenty times more emissions than the poorest 50%.[5] Moreover, both historic and current GHG emissions are directly linked to inequality – not only between the Global North and South but also between the richest and poorest segments of the global population. According to the Global Carbon Project, the twenty-three most developed countries account for half of all CO_2 emissions since 1850. The United States alone has emitted 24.6% of all carbon released into the atmosphere, followed by Germany (5.5%), the United Kingdom (4.4%), and Japan (3.9%). The other half of emissions is spread across more than 150 countries.[6]

Recent data shows that this reality has not changed: according to a 2022 study by Climate Watch, the World Resources Institute's data platform, the ten largest emitters are still responsible for 76% of global CO_2 emissions. In 2022 China was the largest emitter of CO_2, followed by the United States, India, Russia, and Japan, which would make Asia the planet's biggest emitter today.[7] However, because the populations of countries such as China and India are much larger than those of the United States, European countries, Japan, or Australia, measured in per capita emissions the United States is by far the world's largest CO_2 emitter, with a per capita rate twice that of China and eight times higher than India's.[8]

Globally, the fossil fuel industry is the largest emitter of CO_2, with roughly one hundred companies

responsible for 71% of global historical CO_2 emissions, according to a Carbon Majors report published in 2017.[9] Among them are giants such as ExxonMobil, Shell, BHP Billiton, and Gazprom. Another 2019 study by the Climate Accountability Institute found that just twenty companies have been responsible for one-third of all global CO_2 emissions since 1965.[10]

Agribusiness is another structural driver of GHG emissions. In 2023 alone, 3.7 million hectares of forest were cleared worldwide, largely for cattle ranching and industrial crops. Over the past twenty years, the sector's production chain – from fertilisers to processing and transport – has increased its emissions by 130%.[11] Though the energy sector accounts for approximately three-quarters of GHG emissions on a global scale, it is worth taking a closer look at countries where raw materials dominate exports. Brazil is a striking example of this: according to the *Plan for Ecological Transformation* published by the Ministry of Finance, agribusiness is the country's largest source of GHG emissions, directly accounting for 29% of the total. Deforestation-related emissions add another 38%, with livestock and agriculture responsible for about 96% of deforested land, according to the *2022 Annual Deforestation Report*. Taken together, agribusiness is responsible for roughly 67% of Brazil's total GHG emissions, compared to just 23% from energy generation.[12] Predatory extractive practices also play a major role, especially in Global South countries, from mining to the purchase of natural and Indigenous reserve lands by foreign interests as carbon market assets.

Despite regional and national differences, what is clear is that climate change and the destruction of nature are direct consequences of the logic of capital accumulation advanced by the ruling classes.

Kuningan District, Jakarta, Indonesia, 1996. © **Sebastião Salgado**

Green Capitalism: Supposed Alternatives to the Environmental Crisis

Various socialist currents have raised ecological concerns since the early days of capitalism, from the nineteenth-century socialist and artist William Morris to the environmental and countercultural movements of the mid-twentieth century. Yet it was only in the 1970s, more than a century after the first industries appeared, that the environment became a matter of concern for nation-states and began to gain prominence on the international political agenda. The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, Sweden, was a milestone in advancing the environmental question. As Andrei Cornetta notes:

> In addition to population growth in a context of resource scarcity, [the conference] also discussed how to bring various forms of [water, air, and soil] pollution under control at a time when the global energy crisis was on the agenda, especially after the impact of the oil shock of 1973.[13]

Despite the urgency of the environmental question, no new forms of organising production or relating to nature were proposed at the conference: rather, all alternatives fit within the capitalist mode of production. Meanwhile, growing social and economic inequality between the imperialist core and the dependent periphery sharpened the debate, especially regarding whether to continue developing or to restructure the industrial model along 'zero growth' lines.[14]

In 1979, the First World Climate Conference in Geneva acknowledged the seriousness of ongoing climate change. It was not until 1992 that the Second United Nations Conference on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro, where a multilateral agenda to address the climate question was proposed. This agenda entered into force in 1994 and served as the precursor to the Conference of the Parties (COP), the decision-making body for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change which meets biennially to review and advance the convention.

Among the many outcomes of the COP process, two stand out. First, the Kyoto Protocol, adopted after COP 3 in 1997, which set binding quantitative targets for reducing GHG emissions for Annex I countries (those that had been industrialised the longest). Second, the Paris Agreement, adopted after COP 21 in 2015, which required signatory countries to set their own emission reduction targets, known as Intended Nationally Determined Contributions.[15] However, the targets were never met and both the Kyoto and Paris agreements ended up as failures.

In response to the urgency of climate change, some states have promoted a transition to a low-carbon economy aimed at reducing the amount of harmful GHG emissions – without, of course, touching the profits of major corporations and the capitalist core. From this approach emerged so-called 'green capitalism'

alternatives, including carbon markets, offset schemes, and energy transition policies.

The Kyoto Protocol emission targets, initially intended to curb air pollution, soon became the basis for a new form of capital accumulation via so-called carbon credits[16] that are traded on stock exchanges and function as a kind of 'license to pollute'.[17] This system involves not only financial capital but also significant technological and scientific developments that measure and calculate carbon emissions. They also project potential reductions by modelling what emissions would have been in the absence of offset activities. These offset schemes include reducing emissions caused by deforestation and forest degradation as well as promoting forest conservation, sustainable management, and an increase in forest carbon stocks. However, in practice, once companies exceed their GHG emission limits, they can buy carbon credits on the stock exchange to offset their emissions. Thus, the biophysical process by which plants absorb carbon from the air and convert it to oxygen through photosynthesis – a natural function of plant life and part of the commons – is turned into a commodity.

The main contradiction of green capitalism is that the same agribusiness, oil, and mining transnational corporations that shape the environmental agenda in international bodies and national governments are also those that most aggressively exploit the commons. The agribusiness sector, which drives deforestation and burning in the Cerrado and Amazon biomes[18] in order to expand the agricultural frontier, also touts the digitalisation of its production chains, which certify that its products are deforestation-free and decarbonised. Similarly, oil corporations are involved in energy transition policies, and mining companies promote carbon market schemes.

In Brazil, agribusiness – the main source of the country's GHG emissions – has made sustainability a central theme of its ideological campaign. Far from a genuine commitment to sustainability, this serves as a way to expand into other sectors, increase political influence, and boost profits.[19] The agribusiness model – based on large-scale monocultures and the extensive use of pesticides – is among the most damaging to the environment. Yet while companies pursue new avenues of profit through the financialisation of nature and a discourse of sustainability, their production model has not changed; on the contrary, it continues to drive deforestation, burning, and the poisoning of soil, water, and air.

By playing an active role in advancing false solutions to the environmental crisis, the very sectors that most damage the environment have found new ways to profit from the financialisation of nature. These sectors are present not only in government ministries across many countries, but also in international climate bodies and conferences such as the COP. The environmental agenda has long been captured by transnational corporations, and the alternatives they propose never challenge the profit rates of big capital. Brazilian agribusiness, with its rhetoric of sustainability, is among the key players in these international bodies. Brazilian companies such as Suzano Papel e Celulose,[20] the food multinational JBS, and the mining corporation Vale all play a major role in 'sustainability' projects and the carbon market. For them, offset schemes have become a lucrative form of capital accumulation.

Take, for example, the Maísa project in the Brazilian state of Pará, run by the leading carbon market certifier Verra. The project was meant to preserve a 26,000-hectare stretch of the Amazon rainforest that included the Sipasa Farm, yet the designated protection area later became a mining site, and in early 2024 sixteen farm workers were rescued from conditions comparable to slavery. The fallacy – and failure – of such projects is

clear: they serve transnational giants like iFood, Uber, Spotify, Audi, and Google, which pour millions of dollars into offset schemes to cover the emissions generated by their own activities.[21]

In addition to commodifying one of nature's commons, projects like Maísa harm biodiversity and undermine the way of life of Indigenous communities who, through the labour of countless generations, have helped shape these forests and their biodiversity. By promoting solutions that fail to confront the destructive logic of capitalist accumulation, such schemes destroy ways of life that have coexisted in harmony with nature for millennia.

The 2019 report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services paints an alarming picture of ecological collapse brought on by such projects:

> One million of the roughly eight million plants and animal species are threatened with extinction; human activity has driven at least 680 vertebrate species to extinction since 1500, while global populations of vertebrate species have fallen by 68% over the last fifty years; the abundance of wild insects has fallen by 50%; and by 2016, more than 9% of all domesticated mammal breeds used in food and agriculture had gone extinct, with another thousand breeds now facing extinction.[22]

One thing is clear: there are no capitalist solutions to a crisis created by capitalism. If we are to save the Earth and humanity, the answers must come from beyond capitalism.

Cuiabá Farm, Xingó Backlands, Sergipe, Brazil, 1996. © **Sebastião Salgado**

Popular Perspectives on the Environmental Question

At the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Fidel Castro underscored the urgency of the environmental crisis from an emancipatory perspective and condemned the unjust economic and social order between dependent countries in the periphery and those at the capitalist core:

> It must be said that consumer societies are primarily responsible for the atrocious destruction of the environment… With only 20% of the world's population, they consume two-thirds of the metals and three-quarters of the energy produced worldwide. They have poisoned the seas and rivers, polluted the air, weakened and perforated the ozone layer, and saturated the atmosphere with gases that alter the climate with catastrophic effects from which we are already beginning to suffer… It is impossible to blame this on the countries of the Third World – yesterday's colonies, today's exploited and plundered nations by an unjust world economic order… If we are to save humanity from this self-destruction, we must achieve a fairer distribution of the wealth and technology available on the planet – less luxury and less waste in a few countries so that there may be less poverty and less hunger across much of the Earth.[23]

What is at stake is nothing less than the survival of human life on Earth. The environmental crisis is a product of the crisis of capital, which not only fails to resolve problems such as hunger and inequality but deepens them while relentlessly seeking new ways to generate profit for the ruling classes. The environmental struggle must therefore be waged as a direct confrontation with, and ultimate overcoming of, the capitalist mode of production. Unless we challenge the logic of capital – based on the exploitation of working-class labour and the plunder of the Global South – we will not be able to confront the environmental crisis.

The struggle for climate justice must combat not only inequality between the Global North and South but also environmental racism, as it is the poorest, and disproportionately Black and Brown, populations in the Global South that are the most exposed to the effects of the environmental crisis. In Brazil, for example, a study found traces of glyphosate – one of the most widely used pesticides in agribusiness – in breast milk across several regions. Meanwhile, the environmental crimes committed by the mining transnationals Samarco, Vale, and BHP Billiton in the cities of Mariana (2015) and Brumadinho (2019), in Minas Gerais state, not only killed nearly 300 people but also devastated the biodiversity of the Doce River, which runs through Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo, disrupting the way of life of numerous *comunidades ribeirinhas*<[24](river communities).[25]

Brazil's Black population, which is concentrated in urban peripheries, is also disproportionately affected by the environmental crisis, such as in the form of frequent floods and landslides. Women, too, are more acutely impacted than the general population; in rural areas, for example, it often falls on them to handle the pesticides that the agribusiness production model imposes on peasant families. Environmental and climate justice movements must therefore build close connections with antiracist and feminist struggles. The environmental crisis cannot be solved without confronting all forms of social inequality, from racism to patriarchy.

Among the many fronts of struggle, peasant movements linked to La Vía Campesina stand out. Their agenda calls for:

a. **Popular Agrarian Reform and the Defence of Peasant and Indigenous Territories.** Popular Agrarian Reform is the struggle to democratise access to land, directly confront latifundios (large, landed estates), and combat the concentration of land in the hands of the few. This demand goes beyond land redistribution: it challenges the agribusiness model that commodifies nature and deepens the environmental crisis. The struggle for land is tied to the protection of Indigenous and *quilombola* lands, recognising land concentration as a colonial legacy that must be overcome. By defending peasant and Indigenous territories, La Vía Campesina seeks to ensure that land fulfils its social function as a space for life, work, and cultural reproduction rather than being reduced to a financial asset.
b. **Food Sovereignty.** Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to decide what to produce, as well as for whom and how to produce it, and to guarantee access to healthy and culturally appropriate food. It stands in opposition to the logic of agribusiness, which prioritises export commodities over feeding the people. To achieve food sovereignty, it is essential to support regional food cultures, strengthen short supply chains, and prevent food production from being controlled by large corporations. In order to achieve food sovereignty, public policies must be enacted that strengthen peasant agriculture and ensure that food is treated as a right, not a business; such policies include mandating the institutional purchase of agroecological products and support of those markets.
c. **Agroecology.** Agroecology calls for a radical change in the technological model of agriculture, replacing the

predatory system of agribusiness with diversified forms of production that are in harmony with nature. This includes the use of bio-inputs, agroforestry, and sustainable soil management, which create biodiverse environments that are resilient to climate change. Beyond its technical dimension, agroecology is a political practice that builds new relationships between human beings and nature based on cooperation, peasant autonomy, and the recovery of traditional knowledge.

d. **Care for the Commons.** Water, minerals, seeds, land, and biodiversity are not mere 'natural resources' or 'raw materials' to be exploited: they are commons that are essential to life. Protecting the commons is central to building a popular project for the countryside in which nature is not commodified but rather cared for as collective heritage, ensuring their care for current and future generations.

A central component of Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST) is to plant trees and produce healthy food. This is an integral part of building popular agrarian reform, since overcoming the environmental crisis will only be possible through a new model of rural production based on agroecology and new social relations that overcome patriarchy, racism, and LGBTphobia while fostering cooperation and solidarity. As MST leader João Pedro Stédile said about the particular challenges that Brazil faces with respect to the environmental crisis (though his words apply to the Global South more broadly):

> We need zero deforestation. There is no need to cut down a single tree to meet the people's needs. We must ban the export of timber and gold and impose strict controls over mining activities and their environmental impacts. The country needs a publicly funded national reforestation plan to recover millions of hectares throughout the territory. To tackle pollution, mitigate rising temperatures, and confront the problem of individual transportation powered by fossil fuels, we must provide a plan for free, high-quality mass public transport, reforest major cities, and expand the use of solar energy in as many productive activities as possible. In the countryside, agrarian reform must advance with a national agroecology programme that produces healthy food free of agrotoxins for all the people.[26]

Another perspective that has emerged from social struggles in Latin America, especially in Ecuador and Bolivia, is *buen vivir* (good living), whose principles were incorporated into the new constitutions of both countries under presidents Rafael Correa and Evo Morales, respectively. Drawing on Indigenous traditions, buen vivir challenges capitalist notions of progress and development and is based on five principles: 1) a holistic vision, or *Pacha*;[27] 2) embracing multipolarity; 3) the search for balance; 4) the complementarity of diversity; and 5) decolonisation.[28]

Ecosocialism, for its part, is a political and theoretical current that combines socialism with radical ecology, criticising both capitalism and traditional socialism for ignoring the planet's ecological limits. It aims to build an egalitarian and sustainable society in which the economy is reorganised to meet human needs without destroying the environment. For Michael Löwy, one of ecosocialism's leading theorists, the central dilemma facing the working classes in the twenty-first century is the environmental crisis, which must be addressed from a socialist perspective that conceives of a new mode of production attuned to ecological challenges.

The environmental crisis will not be resolved by the ruling classes. This is the task of the rural and urban working classes. We must create another way of producing and reproducing life that is based on healthy

relations between human beings and the environment and built through popular organisation. This path forward must expose the true culprits of the crisis and advance proposals that prioritise all forms of life over profit.

Pico da Neblina, Yanomami Indigenous Territory, Amazonas, Brazil, 2014. **© Sebastião Salgado**

A Minimum Agenda to Confront the Environmental Crisis

Brazil's popular movements understand the need to wage struggles on multiple fronts. Despite the limits of the COPs and the negotiations held there, popular movements recognise that it is essential to pressure their governments to secure a minimum agenda that holds the social classes and countries most responsible for pollution accountable and combats the climate catastrophe driven by capitalism. In this spirit, working alongside the MST, we created an agenda to confront the environmental crisis:

I. Compliance with and Advancement of International Agreements

- Building on the agreements of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which established the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities', compel Global North

countries – which bear historical responsibility for the climate crisis – to rapidly cut their carbon emissions and prevent global temperatures from rising above the critical 1.5°C threshold.
- Ensure that Global North countries provide climate compensation to Global South countries for the losses and damages caused by their carbon emissions and provide substantial funding for public infrastructure to replace reliance on carbon-based energy.
- Fulfil the Paris Agreement pledge that Global North countries provide $100 billion annually to meet the needs of Global South countries, particularly for policies that mitigate the real and disastrous impacts of climate change that they are already experiencing (especially low-lying nations and small island states). These resources must come in the form of grants directly transferred to subnational projects for forest protection and restoration. Since loans are not transfers of resources, they should not be considered to fit within the scope of the Paris Agreement, though this has often been the case. These funds should serve as instruments of climate justice, not as pretexts for financial sector profit obtained through private or multilateral development banks.
- Transfer technology and financing to Global South countries to phase out carbon-based energy systems and build alternatives based on sovereign national strategies.
- Hold Global North countries accountable for polluting water, soil, and air with toxic and hazardous waste – including nuclear waste – such as by making them bear the costs of cleanup and by prohibiting technologies and modes of production that generate such waste.

II. A Planned and Just Energy Transition with Social Participation

An energy transition programme is needed to adapt carbon-based energy systems in order to mitigate their environmental impact. It must be carefully planned, carried out with broad social participation, and supported by financing channels for Global South countries that respond to their specific needs. In addition, it must diversify the energy grid, improve energy efficiency, and guarantee the raw material supply needed for any future energy transition. This programme must:

- End direct and indirect government subsidies for the fossil fuel industry.
- Aggressively increase taxes on emissions and polluting products.
- Prohibit the financial sector's participation in the fossil fuel industry in order to prevent any transition from being driven by financial speculation.
- Receive state investments in order to combat the climate catastrophe, protect and support affected populations, and restore the environment, as well as guarantee that such investments will not be restricted or undermined by local or international austerity policies. It is the responsibility of states to safeguard the rights of populations affected by these projects.

III. Protection of and Support for Peasant Agriculture and Food Sovereignty

- Implement comprehensive agrarian reforms that decentralise and democratise access to land, making it feasible for peasants to return to the countryside, and replace destructive agribusiness practices with agroecological production.
- Build and support mechanisms that spread and aid with the implementation of agroecology by providing technical assistance and financing for peasant farmers.
- Eliminate synthetic agrotoxins by 2035 and reduce synthetic fertilisers by half within the same period.
- Support the widespread use of bio-inputs for agroecological farming by creating bio-factories (community

facilities that produce and reproduce natural inputs such as biofertilisers and biopesticides). Provide the necessary equipment for their use and guarantee free technical assistance for farmers.[29]
- Protect peasants' rights to biodiverse seeds. Guarantee the intellectual property rights of Indigenous and traditional communities by combatting biopiracy and the appropriation of our knowledge and practices.
- Restructure livestock farming so that herd sizes and practices correspond to land capacity and food demand – not to the demands of the market.
- Ban all unproven agricultural technologies and eliminate all public subsidies for harmful practices and products.
- Adopt public policies that regulate and protect agricultural markets and the right to healthy, culturally appropriate food.
- Prioritise agroecological products in government food-purchasing programmes.
- Establish legislation to protect agroecological production zones, creating areas free from poisons, GMOs, and aerial spraying.
- Require governments to conduct studies that assess the need to rethink agricultural and livestock activities in response to global warming. This includes creating new agroclimatic maps and developing policies that protect biodiversity and ecosystem services.[30] These studies must also involve, in a meaningful way, the communities rooted in each territory and draw on their culture and expertise.
- Ensure that technological products and processes used in rural areas are reassessed every five years, drawing on the participation of civil society representatives.

IV. Effective Policies for Reforestation and Combatting Deforestation

- Take all necessary measures to prevent the Amazon from reaching its point of no return, such as by protecting 80% of its territory by 2026.
- Halt all illegal deforestation by 2026.
- Achieve zero legal deforestation by 2027.
- Halt the expansion of the agricultural frontier by sanctioning companies and individuals responsible for land grabbing, displacing forest-dwelling peoples, and producing goods that drive deforestation, degradation, and pollution.
- Prohibit funds from the Paris Agreement from being channelled to agribusiness, mining, or false solutions like replanting and offset schemes in protected areas.
- Repeal legal instruments that promote the destruction of the Amazon.
- Rehabilitate, recover, and restore deforested and degraded areas.
- Ensure that all Indigenous, Afro-descendant, quilombola, and traditional communities in the Amazon are given titles to their ancestral lands as well as full legal and physical protection of their collective ownership of these lands.
- Guarantee respect for the territorial rights of isolated Indigenous peoples and implement a gender perspective in the distribution of land titles.
- Strengthen alternatives for an agroecological transition as well as community-based agroforestry production and ecotourism.
- Guarantee the meaningful participation of forest-dwelling peoples in every stage of the energy production chain – including planning, management, and governance – as part of building a just, popular, and comprehensive energy transition.
- Ban subsidies, investments, and financial credits for projects that destroy forests.
- Classify ecocide as a crime in national legislation and ensure the punishment of all environmental crimes.

- Prosecute corporations and companies responsible for environmental disasters in their countries of origin and require them to repair the damage done to nature and affected peoples.
- Promote financing for projects that protect the Amazon and other forests of the Global South, ensuring that all debt-for-climate or debt-for-nature swaps are: a) comprehensive, transparent, direct, and carried out with the participation of the peoples of the Amazon in ways that are self-determined, self-organised, and self-managed; b) embedded in current financing mechanisms with guaranteed participation, oversight, and social accountability to prevent abuse, waste, and corruption; and c) designed to ensure that nature is not commodified.
- Establish a carbon tax on major polluting industries and agribusinesses, directing the revenue toward protecting the Amazon and other forests of the Global South.
- Ban forest offsets and other forms of financial speculation and false market solutions in these territories.
- Require governments to implement large-scale reforestation projects, the countryside, and cities and to support the production and distribution of seedlings and the restoration of degraded areas.

V. Proper Planning and Management of Water Resources

- Use water efficiently, prioritising human and animal consumption and agroecological production over corporate interests.
- Manage aquatic systems to include the creation of protected areas that safeguard the health of river basins.
- Subsidise agroforestry, with an emphasis on food production in family farming units connected to food supply systems.

VI. Restrictions on Mining

- Immediately halt and combat illegal mining.
- Reduce mercury use in mining each year until it is fully eliminated.
- Ban mining in Indigenous, ancestral, and communal territories.
- Establish plans to restore areas degraded by mining.
- Implement remediation plans for ecosystems and communities affected by mercury and other mining impacts.
- Create monitoring systems and penalties for activities that compromise surface and groundwater quality.

VII. Public Participation

- Ensure that the population – especially forest-dwelling peoples and those disproportionately affected by climate change – has a voice, a vote, and veto power in decision-making, oversight, and resource use in projects and production chains that significantly affect their territories.
- Require institutional bodies responsible for introducing new technologies in rural areas to provide opportunities for affected populations to intervene both before and during their commercial authorisation.

Brooks Range, Alaska, United States, 2009. **© Sebastião Salgado**

Notes

[1] Pericás, 'Fidel Castro e a questão ambiental', our translation.

[2] Tereos, 'Mudanças climáticas'.

[3]FAO, 'The State of the World's Biodiversity'; UNEP, 'Our Global Food System'; UNEP, 'Agriculture'; IUCN, 'The IUCN Red List'; Tricontinental, 'Please Ensure That the Planet Does Not Burn'.

[4] Tricontinental, 'A World So Changed'; Tricontinental, 'Pakistan Under Water'; Tricontinental, 'Brazil's Flood of Austerity'; BBC News, 'Furacão Ian'; UNDRR, 'Horn of Africa Floods'.

[5] Chancel, 'Global Carbon Inequality'.

[6] WRI Brasil, 'Os países que mais emitiram'.

[7] WRI Brasil, 'Os países que mais emitiram'.

[8] WRI Brasil, 'Os países que mais emitiram'.

[9] Climate Accountability Institute, 'Carbon Majors'.

[10] Climate Accountability Institute, 'Carbon Majors'.

[11] Weisse, Goldman, and Carter, 'Quanta floresta'.

[12] Tricontinental, 'A Transição Energética'.

[13] Cornetta, *Crise ambiental,* our translation.

[14] Cornetta, *Crise ambiental,* our translation.

[15] Cornetta, *Crise ambiental,* 121, our translation.

[16] Carbon credits are tradable certificates representing the reduction or removal of one metric tonne of carbon dioxide (or its equivalent in other greenhouse gases). They are typically generated by offset projects such as reforestation, renewable energy, or carbon capture schemes.

[17] Merlino, 'Mercado de carbono'.

[18] Brazil is home to six major biomes: the Amazon (the world's largest tropical rainforest), the Cerrado (a vast tropical savanna, second only to the Amazon in biodiversity), the Atlantic Forest (Mata Atlântica, a coastal rainforest, now largely deforested), the Caatinga (a semi-arid scrubland unique to Brazil's northeast), the Pantanal (the world's largest tropical wetland), and the Pampa (temperate grasslands in the south). The Amazon and Cerrado, both heavily targeted by agribusiness, play a particularly crucial role in regulating

rainfall, storing carbon, and sustaining biodiversity.

[19] Ganaka, 'A Transição Energética'.

[20] Suzano Papel e Celulose is a paper producer responsible for environmental imbalance through the creation of vast eucalyptus plantations, known as green deserts, which produce raw material for cellulose.

[21] Harari and Dallabrida, 'Uber e Audi'; Bispo, 'Mais da metade'.

[22] Tricontinental, 'Only One Earth'.

[23] Pericás, 'Fidel Castro e a questão ambiental', our translation.

[24] In Brazil, river communities (*comunidades ribeirinhas*) live along riverbanks and depend on fishing, small-scale farming, and forest resources for their livelihoods. They are considered part of Brazil's traditional peoples and communities (*povos e comunidades tradicionais*), a broad category recognised by federal law that includes groups such as *quilombolas* (descendants of Afro-Brazilian communities formed by enslaved people) as well as Indigenous peoples and other culturally distinct communities.

[25] Caetano, 'Raio-X dos crimes'; Fuhrmann, 'Evidências apontam'.

[26] Landless Workers' Movement, 'Propostas para enfrentar', our translation.

[27] Pacha is a Quechua and Aymara concept often translated as 'world' or 'cosmos', but its meaning is broader. It refers to the unity of space, time, and life, encompassing the interconnectedness of human beings, nature, and the universe. In the Andean cosmovision, Pacha underpins principles of balance and reciprocity that inform the philosophy of buen vivir.

[28] Marques and Depieri, 'Análisis crítico', 115.

[29] Bio-inputs (*bioinsumos*) are biological products used in agriculture – such as biofertilisers, biopesticides, and biostimulants – that improve soil fertility, protect crops, and support plant growth without synthetic chemicals. They are central to agroecology because they reduce farmers' dependence on agribusiness corporations that control pesticides and fertilisers, and many can be produced locally. Biofactories (*biofábricas*) are facilities – often community-based or cooperative – where these bio-inputs are produced and multiplied using preserved strains, cultures, and other biological stock. Together, they strengthen food sovereignty by enabling farmers to develop their own ecological alternatives to agribusiness.

[30] Ecosystem services are the benefits that peoples and societies derive from healthy ecosystems, such as pollination, water purification, soil fertility, and climate regulation; provisioning services like food, fresh water, and medicinal plants; and cultural services tied to traditional knowledge and ways of life. Protecting biodiversity helps sustain these essential functions, which are often undermined by industrial agribusiness.

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Mexico and the Fourth Transformation

The artworks in this dossier are from the mural series *Los Nadies* (The Nobodies), created by Colectivo Subterráneos in Oaxaca, Mexico. Founded in 2021 to democratise art as a tool for social transformation, the collective draws on Mexico's graphic tradition – from the Taller de Gráfica Popular (People's Graphic Workshop) to Mexican muralism – as well as the 2006 Popular Teachers' Movement of Oaxaca. Inspired by Eduardo Galeano's poem of the same name, the series includes prints and murals that highlight indigenous and mestizo peoples forgotten under colonial rule and modern capitalism, confronting the historical debt to the marginalised and amplifying voices that demand justice in a Mexico under transformation.

Introduction

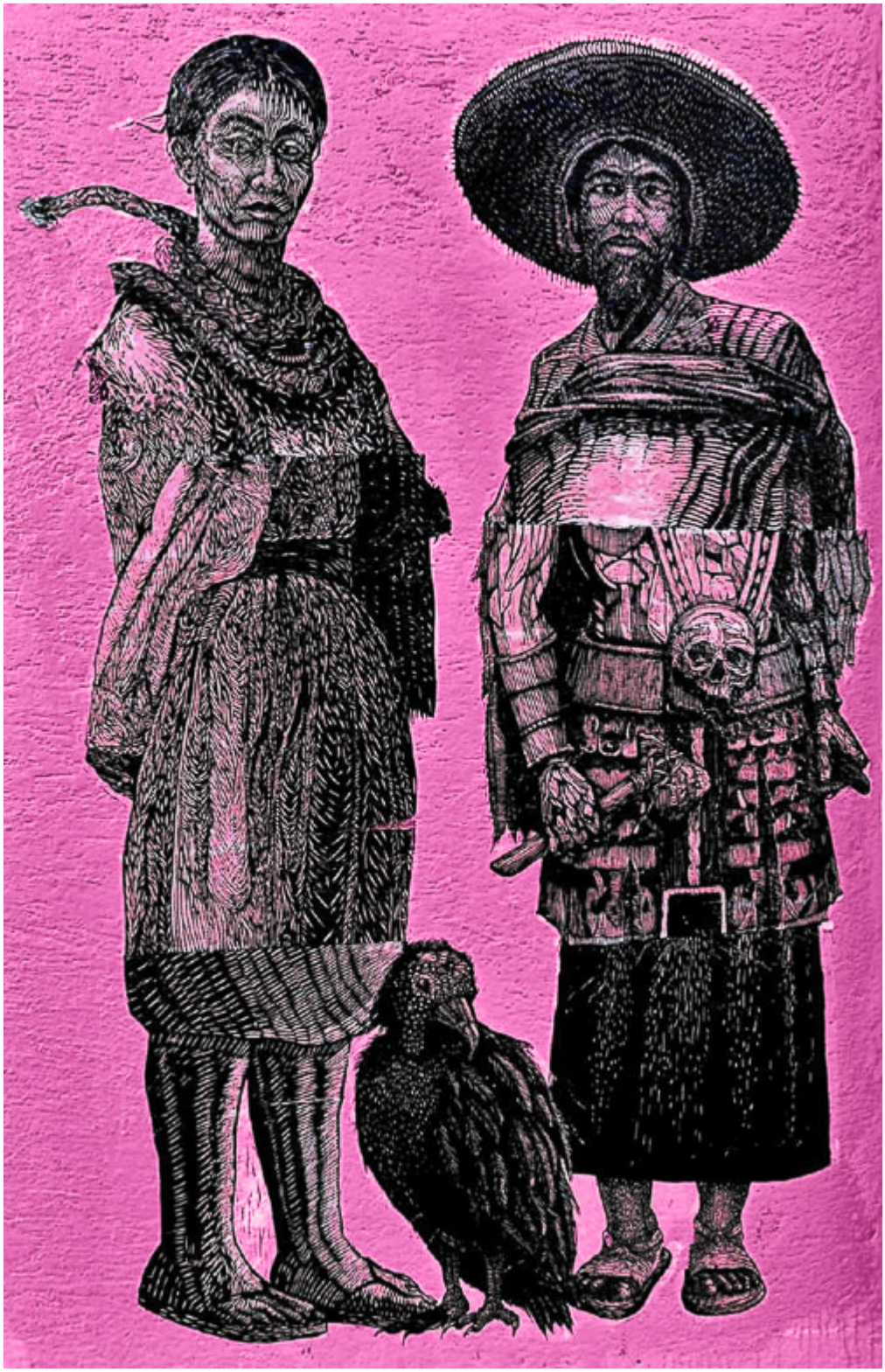
It is 24 April 2005, and something both predictable and unprecedented is happening in the streets of Mexico City. The historic city centre and its iconic national square, the Zócalo, are no strangers to protests. This is where the Mexican masses have marched, occupied, stood their ground, and never remained silent. That day,

a stew of outrage, exasperation, optimism, and stubbornness was brewing in the streets of the capital.

Thirteen years later, this mixture would lead to the Fourth Transformation (*la Cuarta Transformación*) – Mexico's first left government in almost one hundred years. More than a million Mexicans took to the streets to resist President Vicente Fox's attempt to use the *desafuero*[1] to strip Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) of constitutional immunity in order to invalidate his presidential candidacy. The strategy smacked of a great fraud against AMLO, who was emerging as a real threat to the two-party hegemony of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) and the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN). Electoral fraud was nothing new. In 1988, for instance, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, then a fellow member of AMLO's party – the now-defunct Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD) – lost the presidency despite having won at the polls.

Facing the possibility of their candidate being disqualified, AMLO's supporters decided that they would not let themselves be trampled. They occupied the city centre and showed that there was a social base willing to build an alternative to the regime that had begun to consolidate itself as the 'PRIAN'.[2] Thus began a new chapter in Mexican history – a history of struggles and victories, repression and setbacks, rebellion and revolution, betrayal and defeat, and of undeniable transformations that, like all evolutions, are not linear but ebb and flow across time.

This dossier, *Mexico and the Fourth Transformation,* examines the changes that have taken place since the National Regeneration Movement (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional, Morena) came to power. To better understand these changes, we situate them within Mexico's long processes of democratisation since its independence. The research was conducted by Stephanie Weatherbee of the International Peoples' Assembly and Alina Duarte, a journalist and International Political Education Coordinator for Morena's National Institute for Political Education (Instituto Nacional de Formación Política de Morena).



The Three Transformations

A republic born out of violent Spanish colonisation, Mexico has traversed a long and turbulent path in search of sovereignty, social justice, and development over the last two centuries. Morena conceives of this history as one of successive transformations, namely the War of Independence (1810–1821), the War of Reform (1858–1861), and the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917). Its national project is therefore identified as a

Fourth Transformation, or '4T'.

The War of Independence (1810–1821)

The colonisation of the Mexican territory was a brutal process that devastated a multiethnic population whose history stretched back thousands of years. Across what is now Mexico lived Olmecs, Zapotecs, Mayas, Nahuas, and other peoples, many of whom survive to this day.[3]

During the independence era, Spanish-descended criollos[4] invoked the grandeur of pre-Hispanic civilisation in response to domination by peninsular Spaniards. This shared mythology of 'Mexican greatness' played an important role in the War of Independence and, in some ways, continues to resonate today.[5]

The struggle for independence was a war of the masses, waged by hundreds of thousands of soldiers – mainly peasants and indigenous people – initially led by Father Miguel Hidalgo. Brandishing the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Hidalgo rallied the people to insurrection, calling for a struggle that went beyond material demands to bring about a social and political reorganisation of a population he believed was destined to live in freedom. In Mexico's political imaginary, Hidalgo has been canonised as a heroic figure who took the first steps towards the formation of the motherland, a kind of political 'father' of a rebellious people thirsting for liberty. This mythology – and the idea of Mexico as a tireless people with a proud ancestry – continues to shape the country's political culture and each subsequent process of transformation.

The War of Reform (1858–1861)

The prolonged conflict between liberal and conservative forces – with opposing national projects – culminated in the War of Reform. This confrontation represented the struggle between a centralist, monarchical model supported by the conservatives and a liberal, federalist state advanced by the liberals. In this context, the liberals sought to weaken the political and economic power of the clergy, whose privileges were also coveted by the nascent bourgeoisie.

Before and during this period, Mexico was the site of several invasions that threatened its sovereignty: the United States in 1846, which led to the loss of more than half of the national territory, and France, first from 1838 to 1839 and again from 1861 to 1867. These threats forged a nationalist resistance in which the people fought fervently to defend their sovereignty and motherland.

Undoubtedly, the War of Reform was one of the pivotal historical processes that most contributed to the development of Mexico's national consciousness. The victory of the republican forces, led by Benito Juárez and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, over French intervention marked a milestone in the country's history. The execution of Emperor Maximilian I at Cerro de las Campanas became an unequivocal symbol of Mexico's resolve to remain a sovereign and anti-monarchical nation.

The liberal victory not only consolidated independence from foreign powers but also enabled a series of reforms that wrested power away from the Church. These transformations paved the way for the rise of a bourgeois oligarchy capable of advancing the country's modernisation and industrialisation.

The Mexican Revolution (1910–1917)

The Mexican Revolution was the process of social transformation with the greatest popular participation in the country's history, marked by the leadership of the peasant and indigenous population. The Liberation Army of the South (Ejército Libertador del Sur), led by Emiliano Zapata, and the Division of the North (División del Norte), commanded by Pancho Villa, made up the revolution's principal popular forces. Their unity was symbolised by their triumphant entry into Mexico City in 1914.

Inspired by the Plan of Ayala,[6] these revolutionary caudillos[7] advanced an alternative national project that was profoundly popular and transformative. The indigenous peasantry of the southeast and the ranchers of the north embodied this vision, which continues to serve as a model and inspiration for many social movements in Mexico today.

The United States played a decisive role in shaping the course of the revolution. US intervention – including the occupation of the port of Veracruz in April 1914 and the supply of weapons and ammunition to supporters of Venustiano Carranza, a less radical leader – was key to stopping and eventually defeating the popular project led by Zapata and Villa. US President Woodrow Wilson's support for Venustiano Carranza was cemented by Wilson officially recognising Carranza, which contributed to the decisive defeat of the popular revolutionary forces.[8]

The political order that emerged from the revolution would be the most complex and influential in modern Mexico – and it is precisely this legacy that Morena's contemporary political project would confront. Despite the defeat of the popular revolutionary project, the revolution left a profound mark: it fostered social consciousness, national self-esteem, and popular confidence that could no longer be ignored. Conservative forces were compelled to come to terms with these new realities.

As a result, the 1917 Constitution enshrined many of the demands of peasants and workers, though compliance by the ruling elites has historically been limited. To maintain power in a radicalised and still armed country, presidents such as Venustiano Carranza (1917–1920) and Álvaro Obregón (1920–1924) relied on a system of revolutionary caudillos: military leaders who inherited political positions in exchange for loyalty to the *jefe máximo* ('maximum leader') of the day. This system, which served the interests of the bourgeoisie that survived the revolution and the former large landowners, has endured in various forms until today.

Morena's 4T is conceived as a continuation of these three processes that laid the foundation of contemporary Mexico. The legacy of each is embedded in what is known as 'Mexican humanism', which weaves together millennia-old indigenous culture and the country's historic struggles. On the one hand, it upholds the values of indigenous peoples, embodying a spirit of freedom and communalism opposed to colonial private property. Beyond recognising the importance of indigenous cultures and respecting their customs, Mexican humanism affirms the rights of these communities as political subjects. On the other hand, it draws inspiration from key figures such as Father Hidalgo, José María Morelos, Benito Juárez, Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, Francisco I. Madero, and Lázaro Cárdenas, who personify values such as social justice, democracy, and sovereignty.[9]

The 4T has sought to root these principles in a transformative project that revitalises national identity and builds a new, inclusive power bloc deeply bound to the Mexican people and their history. The conception of the 4T is intended not only to legitimise Morena's political project, but also to distinguish it from the

priismo[10] of the Institutional Revolutionary Party and other currents of the country's ideological left.

The Revolution Betrayed

After the revolution ended in 1917, the ruling forces had to face – without rest or respite – a radicalised, organised, and in some cases armed people who had not forgotten what they dreamed of and built during the ten years of the revolution.

The struggles of workers, peasants, and tenants were part of a tireless effort to continue the fight against the betrayal of the revolution under the governments of Venustiano Carranza (1917–1920), Álvaro Obregón (1920–1924), Plutarco E. Calles (1924–1928), and the Maximato (1928–1934).[11] Ultimately, the relentless peasant, worker, and urban movements saw the fruits of their persistence in the 1934 victory of their presidential candidate, Lázaro Cárdenas.

Cardenismo

A revolutionary caudillo from the state of Michoacán, Lázaro Cárdenas built the first left government in Mexico's history. *Cardenismo* – anti-large landowner, anti-imperialist, and pro-worker – enacted the most far-reaching popular reforms the country had ever seen: agrarian reform, oil expropriation, the welfare state, and an education system oriented around a national project.[12]

Despite eliminating large, landed estates and introducing *ejidos*[13] as collective units of family agricultural production, the agrarian reform carried out between 1935 and 1937 failed to dismantle the political power of the landed elite or create the economic structures needed to ensure the economic and productive survival of the ejido. Despite these limitations, Cárdenas's agrarian policy undeniably helped lift the countryside out of the backwardness and marginalisation imposed by colonialism and the latifundio system.[14] In addition to the redistribution of the country's most productive lands came expanded access to education, healthcare, and culture in rural areas.

A long and fierce struggle by the oil workers' unions against foreign capital created the conditions for oil expropriation. The 1935 strike and the 1937 general strike went to the Supreme Court, which ruled in favour of the workers' wage demands. Confronted with this challenge – posed not only by organised labour but also by a state committed to the people – foreign companies mounted a campaign to pressure and discredit the Cárdenas government. Convinced of the companies' bad faith, Cárdenas announced in 1938 that the state had no choice but to expropriate oil for the good of the country.[15]

Cardenismo was, therefore, a reaffirmation of the struggles and the national project that had seemed defeated after the revolution. It implemented a developmentalist, redistributive economic policy that promoted growth through the expansion of the domestic market – a model upheld by subsequent governments until the rise of neoliberalism. Politically, however, Cárdenas introduced new ways of organising the state, exercising power, and integrating popular organisations into state institutions, paving the way for the creation of the PRI. In the countryside, agrarian reform was institutionalised, and the drive to politically strengthen the ejido gave rise to organisations such as the National Peasant Confederation, whose dependence on the state undermined the independent political action of the peasantry.[16]

After Cárdenas's presidency, both the commitments forged in the revolution and the advances of cardenismo were betrayed. The right's rejection of cardenismo was consolidated under presidents Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940–1946) and Miguel Alemán (1946–1952), who, in alliance with the PRI, built an authoritarian project that buried cardenismo's socialist horizon and repressed social movements. Violence against trade unionists and peasants – such as the 1962 assassination of Rubén Jaramillo and the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre – revealed the PRI regime's repressive character. Meanwhile, left parties failed to build a viable alternative to the PRI: the Popular Socialist Party (Partido Popular Socialista, PPS) was coopted, and the Mexican Communist Party (Partido Comunista Mexicano, PCM) remained marginal.[17] The absence of an effective left alternative contributed to the curtailment of democracy while the PAN established itself as a docile opposition.

Following the repression of the 'Dirty War',[18] sectors of the left abandoned armed struggle in favour of the electoral path. In 1988, after the fraudulent election that installed Carlos Salinas as president, the National Democratic Front (Frente Democrático Nacional) was born under the leadership of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. The following year saw the creation of the PRD as a left alternative, with support from movements such as the University Student Committee (Comité Estudiantil Universitario, CEU) of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM).[19] However, the PRD – weakened by its many factions and patronage practices – failed to achieve internal unity, lost political direction, and became an electoral vehicle.[20] This replication of the PRI's vices contributed to the PRD's decline and the emergence of Morena.

Morena and the 4T

Between 1989 and 2018, struggles against neoliberalism and for democratisation abounded across the country. Among them were the Zapatista uprising (1994); the El Barzón movement against the plan to rescue twelve private banks that formed the Banking Fund for the Protection of Savings (Fondo Bancario de Protección al Ahorro); the fight against the neoliberal project for higher education that gave rise to the General Strike Council (Consejo General de Huelga) at the UNAM in 1999; the resistance to a new airport by the residents of Atenco (2001–2006); the defence of teachers' labour rights during the 2006 education reform waged by the Popular Association of the Peoples of Oaxaca (Asociación Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, APPO); the #YoSoy132 (#IAm132) student movement (2012); and the mass movement against the disappearance of forty-three student teachers in Ayotzinapa (2014). Of all the resistance movements that emerged in this period, Zapatismo was undoubtedly the one that became a national point of reference for the social left, representing an anti-systemic and anti-capitalist struggle that rejected the electoral path as a strategy for change.

During this same period, López Obrador established himself as an alternative political figure. His political education began in his home state of Tabasco, where he worked with indigenous communities to fight against social exclusion. His time in the PRI and the PRD led to his election as the head of the Mexico City Government, consolidating his political profile as an opponent of the system. The removal of his constitutional immunity – orchestrated by the PRI and the PAN – transformed him into a symbol of resistance. Following the 2006 electoral fraud, Morena began to be built from the ground up, starting with the National Democratic Convention.[21] Despite not having initiated or led the major social struggles that defined the resistance to neoliberalism, López Obrador succeeded in channelling the people's discontent and indignation into the creation of a new electoral vehicle: Morena, which in 2018 won the presidency with a popular, grassroots, and nationalist project.

The 4T, in the words of current Secretary for Women's Affairs and former General Secretary of Morena Citlalli Hernández, is a project that seeks to forge a new nation by transforming its political and economic structures. Six and a half years into the process, we can identify the core aims of Morena's transformative proposal: the deconstruction of neoliberalism and the redemocratisation of the country. Both dimensions of this transformative project face contradictions, some stemming from Morena's heterogeneous composition, others from the inherent difficulty of reversing, in a short period of time, an economic and state structure that was consolidated over the course of decades.

Reversing, Reforming, or Burying Neoliberalism

When presenting the 2019–2024 National Development Plan (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, PND), López Obrador – whose 2018–2024 presidential term inaugurated the 4T – declared that neoliberalism in Mexico had been definitively overcome and would no longer guide the country's economic policy. The statement was undoubtedly aspirational, as six years later the country remains bound to economic conditions that reproduce neoliberalism.

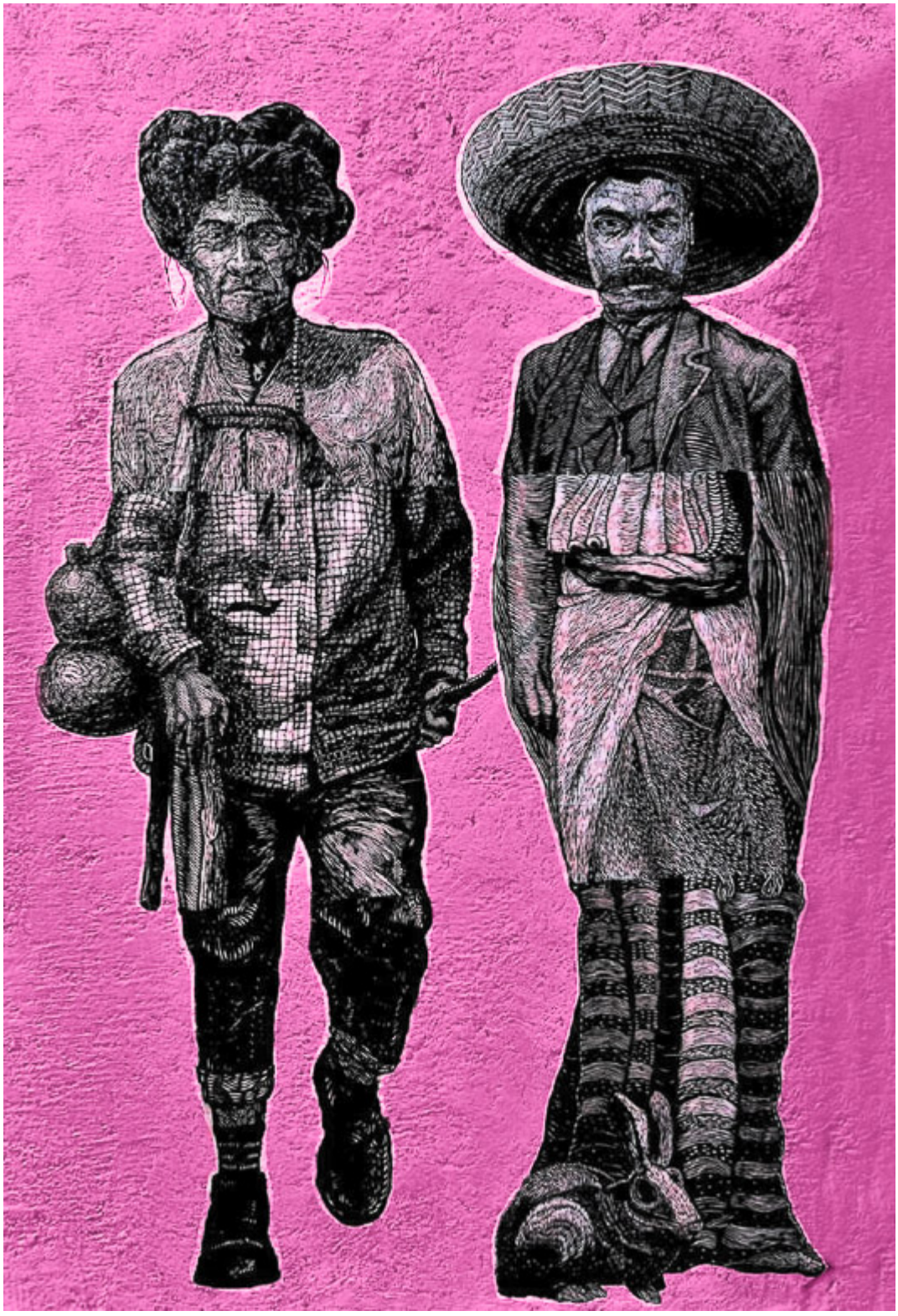
Before Miguel de la Madrid's presidency (1982–1988), Mexican economic policy was marked by deep and broad state involvement, an import substitution industrialisation (ISI) model, and a large portfolio of state-owned enterprises. The adoption of programmes recommended by the IMF, the World Bank, and the US

Federal Reserve and Treasury Department drastically reshaped national economic policy. The financial system was almost entirely privatised and foreign trade liberalised, opening the door to foreign investment in ways that shifted the economy almost exclusively toward external markets – notably that of the US.[22]

Trade liberalisation, which began in 1983 with tariff reductions, was followed by Mexico's entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986 and culminated in the 1993 approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The aggressive privatisation of public enterprises, a regressive tax reform, and fiscal discipline through public spending cuts destroyed the already weakened pact between the working class and capital built by post-revolutionary governments. During Ernesto Zedillo's presidency (1994–2000), the dismantling of the Supreme Court allowed unconstitutional reforms to advance without due process.

The Pact for Mexico (Pacto por México), signed in 2012 under Enrique Peña Nieto as an agreement uniting the PRI, PAN, and PRD parties, represented the culmination of more than three decades of neoliberalism. The pact promoted an energy reform that in 2013 opened the hydrocarbons market to greater private participation and a telecommunications reform that same year which established autonomous state regulatory bodies that favoured private initiative over the public interest.

In López Obrador's discourse, neoliberalism is framed as a grand scheme of corruption and systematic impoverishment that benefitted only a small portion of the population. While this view may oversimplify a more complex reality, it aligns with the widely held perception that the reforms of the neoliberal period were an abuse of power by the ruling classes and that they unfairly and disproportionately benefitted those with access to power.[23] Notable examples of these policies include the sale of state-owned companies at low prices, which facilitated the creation of monopolies; tax breaks that drained public coffers; and the expansion of maquiladoras,[24] which gave rise to an impoverished industrial proletariat geared toward foreign markets.



The discourse on corruption has therefore resonated deeply with the majority of the population, who view the 4T as a bulwark against these abuses despite the absence of substantial changes to neoliberal economic policy. In this way, reversing neoliberalism has come to be understood as synonymous with fighting corruption. The 4T's main reforms have amounted to modifications – not transformations – of the state and how it mediates relations between capital and labour, between national and foreign business interests, and between the state and the Mexican people. Ending corporate debt forgiveness, collecting evaded taxes, nationalising lithium,

substantially raising wages, and regulating subcontracting through the Federal Labour Law (Ley Federal del Trabajo) are examples of this modification of the state.

During the second 4T government, led by Claudia Sheinbaum (2024–2030), energy sovereignty has been strengthened through the recovery of state control over the country's strategic resources. After years of deliberate neglect that opened it to private interests, Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex) was rebuilt with public investment. Hydrocarbon production and national reserves increased, while crude oil exports and imports of gasoline, diesel, and natural gas from the US decreased. The 2022 purchase of the Deer Park refinery in Texas – the cost of which was recouped in just one year – and the construction of the Olmec refinery in Tabasco marked a shift toward fuel self-sufficiency. In addition, contracts were renegotiated to align extraction with national consumption, improving operational efficiency.

At the same time, the Federal Electricity Commission (Comisión Federal de Electricidad) was strengthened with state backing, consolidating its strategic role. The company increased revenue, regained value as a public asset, and positioned itself as a pillar of the national electricity grid.

Energy reform, presented in January 2025 as part of the 4T's second package of modifications, restores the state's role in planning the electricity sector, which is essential both for increasing the value of Mexican companies and ensuring inclusive economic development. The same reform also recognises electricity as a fundamental element of a dignified life rather than as a commodity, both in legal and discursive terms.[25] The reform further enshrines in the constitution that all activities of public enterprises must prioritise coverage and access over profit.

Such reforms required overcoming neoliberalism at the ideological level – a shift that should not be underestimated or minimised. An essential part of the struggle against neoliberalism involves dismantling a belief system that vilifies the state and the collective while deifying the market. In the words of Héctor Díaz Polanco, the president of Morena in Mexico City:

> [Morena] construct[ed] a new common sense, which included the fundamental task of demystifying everything that the triumphant, prevailing neoliberalism meant for the country. That was the structure that had to be defeated, which meant a very clear rejection of the idea that the market could solve society's problems. To recall the classic idea that the market can regulate itself, we began from the premise that the market cannot regulate itself and that all the country's problems stemmed from that initial idea.[26]

While the significance of the reforms should be acknowledged, it must be stated that neoliberalism is not simply corruption, nor can it be reduced to limiting the state's role in managing the economy. It is also closely linked to the reorganisation of production for export and, in Mexico's case, to the country's economic integration with the United States and the reinforcement of dependency this entails.

During the first 4T government – López Obrador's first term – the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) came into force after being renegotiated by Enrique Peña Nieto's administration (2012–2018). Far from reversing the dependence created under NAFTA, the USMCA deepened it. The treaty expanded investment rights for US companies, removing barriers and prohibiting measures that might

favour national production or regulate speculative capital flows. It also guaranteed preferential treatment for foreign financial services and prohibited nationalisation. While sovereignty over hydrocarbons was formally preserved, more than one hundred extraction contracts with protections were initiated during Peña Nieto's energy reform.[27] The agreement further liberalised the Mexican agricultural market, increasing imports of genetically modified products and limiting subsidies to local farmers. This in turn exacerbated food dependency in Mexico, which already imports 40% of the food it consumes from the United States.[28]

Although AMLO's government did not renegotiate the treaty, it endorsed the content and investor guarantees and shepherded it through ratification in Congress. The treaty preserved the profitability of domestic and foreign companies, consolidated the privilege of foreign capital in various sectors, weakened food sovereignty, and reinforced land dispossession and the extractivist policies that rural communities had resisted since the rise of neoliberalism.[29]

In the countryside, the adverse effects of the treaty were mitigated by the 4T governments through production subsidies for the domestic market.[30] In this regard, two programmes stand out: Harvesting Sovereignty (Cosechando Soberanía) and Production for Well-being (Producción para el Bienestar), launched in 2025, which provide various forms of support and services to small- and medium-sized producers.[31] These were added to Sowing Life (Sembrando Vida), launched by AMLO, which aimed to provide farmers with financial and in-kind assistance ranging from community plant nurseries to biofactories and training centres that formed agricultural learning communities, encouraging knowledge exchange and collective initiatives.[32] These policies have helped stabilise and in some cases reduce the prices of several products.

At the same time, although land dispossession remains one of the most damaging effects of trade agreements with the United States, the 4T has restored land to indigenous communities. The most notable case was the return of 2,900 hectares to the Yaqui people as part of the Plans for Justice and Comprehensive Development of Indigenous Peoples and Communities (Planes de Justicia y Desarrollo Integral de los Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas).[33] These plans have introduced mechanisms to support community decision-making, establishing a consultation process that enables community participation that did not exist under previous governments.[34]

For the historian and Morena activist Armando Bartra, the 3,142 km border with the United States is an inescapable reality. Bartra asserts that, economically speaking, Mexico's proximity to the US is a comparative advantage that the 4T could not – and should not – have wasted, given that its foremost priority was to deliver immediate material improvements for the population:

> When you come to power as part of the progressive left and you come from a process of exclusionary and impoverishing neoliberalism, you have a job, and that job is to reduce poverty. They are not telling you to build socialism. They are not telling you to break with capitalism. They are telling you to reduce poverty and restore hope. We want to live better, not worse – we want our children to have a better life with us. We want that and, moreover, we elected you for that.[35]

To fulfil this mandate, the 4T adopted a comprehensive policy of 'For the good of all, the poor come first' (*Por el bien de todos, primero los pobres*). This follows the line of recent progressivism in Latin America, which Bartra referred to as 'welfare revolutions' centred on rebuilding the social fabric damaged by neoliberalism.[36] To date, the 4T has lifted eleven million people out of poverty, both through social programmes and a 241% increase in the minimum wage.[37]

Meeting the essential goal of eliminating extreme poverty made breaking or transforming trade relations with the United States unfeasible in the short term, since Mexico lacks the infrastructure to implement an alternative model. Bartra argues that the 4T governments must now prioritise economic integration with Latin America, moving beyond their dependent relationship with the United States.[38] However, there is no consensus within Morena on this reorientation. Epigmenio Ibarra, a businessman and communicator close to the 4T, argues that integration with the United States is not only inevitable, but also essential for the country's development.[39]

A less debated but equally crucial aspect of economic treaties with the United States is Mexico's integration into the US security framework. NAFTA not only promoted economic cooperation but also laid the foundations for Mexico's participation in US arms production, the alignment of its armed forces with the US Northern Command, and the operation of US security agencies on its territory. This process reinforced a regional security paradigm under US control and direction, extending its influence beyond the economy into the strategic and military spheres.[40] The signing of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP) in 2005 advanced this integration project, which was given concrete form through the implementation of the Merida Initiative in 2008.[41]

Mexico's integration into the US security framework has been justified as part of a strategy to combat organised crime under the guise of the so-called 'War on Drugs' launched by former president Felipe Calderón in 2006. It has since been proven that Calderón's secretary of public security had made a deal with organised crime involving the entire state apparatus and placing state institutions at the service of a cartel.[42]

Far from pacifying the country or reducing criminal activity, the War on Drugs significantly increased levels

of violence and militarised the country. Citlalli Hernández comments on this reality:[43]

> Neoliberal economic policies destroy the social fabric, but entrenched violence – as is already the case in several countries on our continent – is also an aggressive means of dismantling society. It is likewise a way of combating any form of resistance because it permeates society with a generalised fear that brings any process to a halt. We see this as going hand in hand with the imperialist project of the United States.[44]

The 4T's record with respect to its central objective – overcoming neoliberalism and the inequalities it produced – is positive despite the contradictions that remain. Beyond what has been achieved in terms of constitutional reforms, the ideological battle against neoliberalism has been consistent and forceful, paving the way for deeper transformations in the future.

Regenerate and Redemocratise

With regard to democratisation, Morena's project seeks to restore the people's central role in politics while overcoming neoliberal policies and the mistrust of government. This orientation is tied to the party's own formation, in which mass politics and grassroots participation have always been defining features, distinguishing it from the PRD. For Morena, this political process aims to generate a revolution of consciousness, which Rafael Barajas, director of Morena's National Institute for Political Education, describes as follows:

> It was a profound revolution of consciousness, a process of transformation that went to the grassroots and drew on forms of protest and organising long discarded, such as study circles, political education, and door-to-door visits… This made it possible to overcome a highly effective control mechanism – and to do so peacefully, which had once seemed absolutely impossible.[45]

The 4T did not abandon the mobilisation and politicisation that brought it to power; rather, it adopted a popular mode of communication in line with its slogan 'First the Poor'. The morning presidential addresses known as *La mañanera* (The Morning Address), inaugurated by AMLO and continued by Sheinbaum, not only confront opposition from the media: they also seek to draw the people into the exercise of power. Using clear, everyday language, they report on government actions and foster direct dialogue with citizens.

This format positioned López Obrador as a central figure in the national discourse, since the topics discussed in *La mañanera* dominate the public agenda. This communication policy reinforces closeness to the people, projects transparency, and counters perceptions of corrupt politicians. At the same time, it has consolidated the 4T's political hegemony.

The transformation of consciousness promoted by the 4T entails a recognition of inequality and is articulated from the perspective of poor and everyday Mexicans. According to Teresa Rodríguez de la Vega, a university

professor:

> In every demand from the common people, from the masses, I think the oligarchy sees a threat… Because of course it is threatening – a process of class consciousness in a country as profoundly unequal as this one opens the door to revolutionary hypotheses with a transformative impact far, far beyond what the 4T can achieve.[46]

Whether or not the ideas advanced in Mexican humanism are radical, rooted in the country's historical left, or realised through the 4T programme is open to debate. What is much clearer is that they have managed to build the consensus necessary for Morena's electoral victories. For Epigmenio Ibarra, this consensus is only possible through a project that overcomes class divisions and enables all sectors of society to participate in the construction of a new country:

> Humanism does not recognise the dominance of one class over another. It recognises – and this is its basic principle – that for the good of all, of every class, the poor must come first. It does not speak of the predominance of one class but rather of the coexistence and cohabitation of classes, with one essential recognition: the poor come first.[47]

The 4T as a Broad Hegemonic Front

The diversity within Morena is an undeniable factor behind its success and underscores the abstract and amorphous character of its political-ideological project. Morena has been a broad front since its inception – the only viable strategy, according to Epigmenio Ibarra, to regenerate the country, since earlier left formulations had become obsolete in a context that required the participation of all sectors of society.

Paco Ignacio Taibo II, a writer, political activist, and the director of the Economic Culture Fund (Fondo de Cultura Económica), told us that Morena faces a contradiction: its openness, while necessary to gain electoral strength, also enabled the inclusion of former PRI members and others with varying ideological affinities to the transformation project, generating internal tensions within its political structure.

Morena seeks to build a left-leaning political project. Yet its internal diversity reflects a broad ideological spectrum, in part due to opportunistic affiliations that followed its consolidation as a dominant political force after coming to power. For the academic Diana Fuentes, this is not so much a result of Morena's current weaknesses but rather stems from more than a century of Mexican political culture, marked by corporatism and *caudillismo*:

> Mexico is a country in which corporatism [is] a method of playing the political power game, of producing cadres, a fundamental factor in exercising power… which implies that when a political force emerges… it does not emerge alone. It is not just the individual political figure but rather: how many come with them? how many peasants? how many workers? how many? In other words, how many political forces are you bringing with you?[48]

The hegemony that Morena has built is evident in its overwhelming electoral victories, in its capacity to set the terms of national political debate, and in the absence of any real opposition from the right or any criticism or challenge to its project from the left.[49] It is clear that the mass and triumphant character of the 4T has subsumed other left currents, which today remain marginal in both political and discursive terms.

Héctor Díaz Polanco emphasises that the virtues of social movements are essential to building a process of the 4T's magnitude. As he explained in our interview, social movements operate through 'a process of democratic coordination, participation, and a sense of belonging with a profound social force that also nourishes the political party in positive ways'.[50]

For Bartra, the absence and relative weakness of the social left, both within and outside Morena's base, undermines the project's transformative capacity, since the very notion of being a party-movement implies the necessity of social struggle. As he told us:

> Today we are an electoral party and not a movement, and I don't think we'll be a movement [for long] because the party's composition has changed. Today we have ten million members, most – nine out of ten – of whom have never had any organic participation in social life, unlike seven, eight, or nine years ago, when we founded the party.[51]

Bartra attributes this in part to the inability of social movements to shift from resistant opposition to active builders of a transformative government. Movements, he argues, continue to act as they did under repressive and neoliberal governments, when dialogue and inclusion in building a national project were virtually impossible.

For Diana Fuentes, the party has not played the role of bringing together the social forces that would strengthen the project through the actions of those involved in the struggle. As she explained:

> The government is required to create mechanisms that enable political participation in those other spheres of life that make up the social fabric. And this, rather than being seen as a threat… is where natural leadership could emerge, along with strategic and, let's say, very clearly defined social demands in certain sectors of society that could feed into Morena's political ranks. Because, in my opinion, Morena's problem now, in building its grassroots base, is that it continues to follow the logic that it must nurture political cadres for the state, but it is no longer thinking about the need for social leaders who can spearhead struggles arising from the tensions of the present moment.[52]

Conclusions

The election of Claudia Sheinbaum in 2024 and her government's successful performance challenge the view of the 4T as AMLO's personal project. As Teresa Rodríguez de la Vega noted in the interview quoted above, the intention to establish a regime capable of both transformation in terms of constitutional reforms and the exercise of power is clear and irreversible.

The second package of 4T transformations, known as the 'second floor', still faces enormous challenges. As Rafael Barajas observed, the collapse of the opposition parties does not mean that the 4T is without formidable enemies:

> The enemy is international big capital; it is the government of the United States, the international right, the Atlas Network. It is not a minor enemy… It is a far more potent and powerful enemy, and a dangerous one. It is a very formidable enemy, not least because it has no ethical qualms, no humanistic outlook, and is extremely destructive and, it must be said, utterly monstrous.[53]

Undoubtedly, establishing a relationship with Trump's United States on terms that reaffirm national

sovereignty is a top priority for Sheinbaum's government. The elimination of poverty and inequality remains unfinished and, according to Armando Bartra, will require new strategies. It is not enough to simply continue along the current path; there must be second-generation reforms that tackle multidimensional poverty.

In this context, the role of the party-movement in proposing and promoting the next wave of transformations is indisputable. In our interview with university professor Diana Fuentes, she stressed the importance of a process of democratisation within the party to create spaces for debate and criticism of the government, thereby deepening the transformation and curbing the bureaucratisation to which any government is vulnerable.

Rafael Barajas argues that popular assemblies, centred on debating the national project, are an essential tool for grounding the 4T in the grassroots and turning the people into protagonists and drivers of the government programme. In his view, without this active, programmatic participation of citizens in the discussion and construction of the project, Morena risks becoming merely an electoral machine and repeating the same mistake of other progressive processes in the region, which pushed the people out of governance and mobilised them solely for electoral support. Citlalli Hernández summarises these challenges:

> The threats today are different, and in this sense Morena's challenge is not to fall into bureaucracy, institutionalism for institutionalism's sake, or a lack of criticism and self-criticism. We must not fall into the trap of thinking that our victory is already complete. Perhaps the greatest challenge will be to achieve three things: to exercise power, to maintain good governance, and to continue winning over the Mexican people so that they accompany this project.[54]

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Notes

[1] In Mexico, the *fuero constitucional* grants certain public officials immunity from prosecution for common crimes unless Congress first votes to remove this protection through a process known as desafuero. The Mexican Congress used the desafuero to strip López Obrador, then head of the Mexico City Government, of his constitutional immunity so that he would be compelled to defend himself against charges brought by the attorney general's office for failing to comply with a court order to halt construction of a road on land that previous city administrations had expropriated. The Fox administration knew that, even if López Obrador were acquitted, he would be unable to run for the presidency in the 2006 elections while the legal proceedings were ongoing. As anticipated, the proceedings were protracted, and AMLO was not able to run.

[2] López Obrador introduced the term 'PRIAN' into the country's political vernacular. A portmanteau of the PRI and PAN parties, the term condemns the collusion between the two parties and critiques the false democracy and alternation of power that emerged after Vicente Fox's 2000–2006 administration.

[3] Escalante Gonzalbo, 'México antiguo'.

[4] In colonial Latin America, criollo (or criolla when referring to women) most commonly refers to people of full Spanish descent who were born in the Americas, distinct from *peninsulares* (Spaniards born in Spain). Though they shared ancestry, criollos were socially and politically disadvantaged compared to peninsulares and played a central role in many independence movements.

[5] González Casanova, 'El Estado', 21–98.

[6] The plan of Ayala, set out by Emiliano Zapata in 1911, established the distribution of land to the people and the expropriation of large, landed estates known as *latifundios* as fundamental demands of the revolution. Absent these commitments, reconciliation with the people in revolt would have been impossible. The Plan of Ayala transformed a political revolution proposed by Francisco I. Madero into a social revolution. See Salmerón, *Cien preguntas sobre la Revolución Mexicana* and Pineda Gómez, *Ejército libertador 1915*.

[7] A caudillo is a political-military leader who commands personal loyalty and authority, often emerging in revolutionary or populist movements in Latin America.

[8] Piñeda Gómez, 'Ejército libertador'.

[9] López Obrador, *¡Gracias!*

[10] *Priismo* refers to the political culture and practices associated with the PRI's decades in power.

[11] The period between 1928 and 1934 is known as the *Maximato,* taking its name from Plutarco E. Calles, known as the *Jefe Máximo de la Revolución* ('Maximum Leader of the Revolution'), the most influential politician and military leader of the time. During this period, Emilio Portes Gil, Pascual Ortiz Rubio, and Abelardo Rodríguez served as presidents.

[12] Benítez, *Lázaro Cárdenas*.

[13] The ejido is a form of communal property established after the Mexican Revolution through which members of the ejido have the right to use and benefit from the land.

[14] Bartra, *Los nuevos herederos de Zapata.*

[15] Benítez, *Lázaro Cárdenas*.

[16] Bartra, *Los nuevos herederos de Zapata.*

[17] Taibo, *Bolcheviques.*

[18] The 'Dirty War', here, refers to a set of military and political repressive measures aimed at dissolving political opposition movements and guerrilla groups that acted against the Mexican state. See Mendoza, 'La tortura en el marco de la guerra sucia en México'.

[19] Cedujo Ramos, 'Disputas por la modernización'.

[20] Torres-Ruiz, 'Historia del PRD'.

[21] Bartra, 'Por un Partido'.

[22] Tello, *Estado y desarrollo económico*.

[23] The sale of the state-owned telecommunications company Telmex is the most important example of this. After the company was privatised in 1990, a five-year regulated rate plan was approved, which increased the company's value. To date, telephone service prices in Mexico are considered high due to the monopoly that was created.

[24] A maquiladora is a foreign-owned factory in Mexico that imports materials or components for assembly and then exports the finished products, typically to the United States. Maquiladoras rely on lower-paid labour, historically concentrated among women workers, and have been widely criticised for exploitative working conditions and environmental impacts.

[25] Romero, 'Reformas y soberanía'.

[26] Díaz Polanco, interview, our translation.

[27] The country's energy sovereignty was guaranteed thanks to López Obrador's intervention. See Escobar, 'En el T-MEC quedó blindada la soberanía energética de México, reitera AMLO'.

[28] Calderón Salazar, 'Análisis de algunos capítulos'.

[29] Economist Pierre Matari asserts that the neoliberal approach to the country's economic policy has not been significantly modified and that the reforms carried out by the 4T have left the accumulation regime centred on the export of goods and foreign direct investment untouched. Specifically, the treaty grants foreign companies national or favourable treatment in the financial services sector and eliminates the Mexican government's ability to regulate the flow of speculative capital. In 2023 the Mexican government issued a decree prohibiting the consumption of genetically modified corn in an effort to mitigate the harmful health effects of importing agricultural products permitted under the USMCA. This measure has been challenged by transnational companies that have taken the matter to USMCA panels, which ruled against Mexico in favour of the import of genetically modified corn. On the date the USMCA came into effect, the Mexican Network of People Affected by Mining (Red Mexicana de Afectados por la Minería) stated that the treaty continued the regulatory framework and mining policy that has allowed the devastation of communities. See Matari, 'La situación política económica del gobierno de la Cuarta Transformación', 147–148; Calderón Salazar, 'Análisis de algunos capítulos del T-MEC'; Jiménez and Sánchez Jiménez, 'AMLO: firme postura sobre maíz transgénico'; Alegría, 'Gana EU panel de maíz transgénico'; REMA, 'Con el TMEC se profundiza el modelo extractivo minero'.

[30] The Mexico Plan (*Plan México*) presented by President Claudia Scheinbaum includes an investment of 53.971 billion pesos (roughly USD $2.6 billion) for small- and medium-sized producers of corn, beans, rice, cocoa, and honey. See Government of Mexico, Presidency of the Republic, 'Presidenta presenta plan para garantizar la soberanía y la autosuficiencia alimentaria'.

[31] Government of Mexico, 'Programas para el Bienestar'.

[32] Government of Mexico, 'Gaceta Sembrando Vida'.

[33] Government of Mexico – INPI, 'Inicia restitución'.

[34] Governmento of Mexico – INPI, 'Planes de Justicia'.

[35] Bartra, interview, our translation.

[36] Among the main redistribution policies of the 4T are welfare payments for disabled people and senior citizens and a programme for the children of working mothers. Together, the 4T programmes and policies resulted in a reduction in material poverty from 48.8% in 2018 to 43.5% in 2022, compared to an increase of 9.4% during Felipe Calderón's administration and a reduction of 3.5% during the governments of Felipe

Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto, respectively. See Government of Mexico, CONEVAL, 'Pobreza en México'; Bartra, interview.

[37] World Bank, 'Poverty'; Government of Mexico, 'Evolución del salario mínimo'.

[38] Bartra, interview, our translation.

[39] Ibarra, interview, our translation.

[40] Sandoval Palacios, 'El TLCAN'.

[41] Under the Merida Initiative, Mexico has received billions of dollars in weapons and military training. In 2013, Mexico received 154 million pesos, while Colombia received 279 million pesos under Plan Colombia. In the case of Mexico, these amounts are justified not only by the call to combat drug trafficking but also by the effort to curb migration at the country's southern border. In addition, also as a result of the Merida Initiative and SPP, agents of the DEA, CIA, and FBI are operating throughout Mexican territory. See Ceceña, 'La dominación de espectro completo sobre América Latina', 133.

[42] The case against former Public Security Secretary Genaro García Luna, prosecuted by the US attorney in New York, accused García of receiving millions of dollars from the Sinaloa cartel as payment for facilitating cocaine trafficking to the United States. In October 2024, he was sentenced to thirty-eight years in prison. See Brooks, 2023 and Feuer, 2024.

[43] Official government figures report that 367,402 people were disappeared between 31 December 1952 and 9 July 2025, of whom 130,006 have not yet been located. The number of missing persons rose sharply from 2007 onward. Between 1952 and 2006 there were 70 disappearances per year on average, whereas the annual average since 2007 has been 17,000. See Interior Ministry of Mexico, National Search Commission, 'Versión Estadística RNPDNO'.

[44] Hernández, interview, our translation.

[45] Barajas, interview, our translation.

[46] Rodríguez de la Vega, interview, our translation.

[47] Ibarra, interview, our translation.

[48] Fuentes, interview, our translation.

[49] Mondonesi, 'La hegemonía'.

[50] Díaz Polanco, interview, our translation.

[51] Bartra, interview, our translation.

[52] Fuentes, interview, our translation.

[53] Barajas, interview, our translation.

[54] Hernández, interview, our translation.

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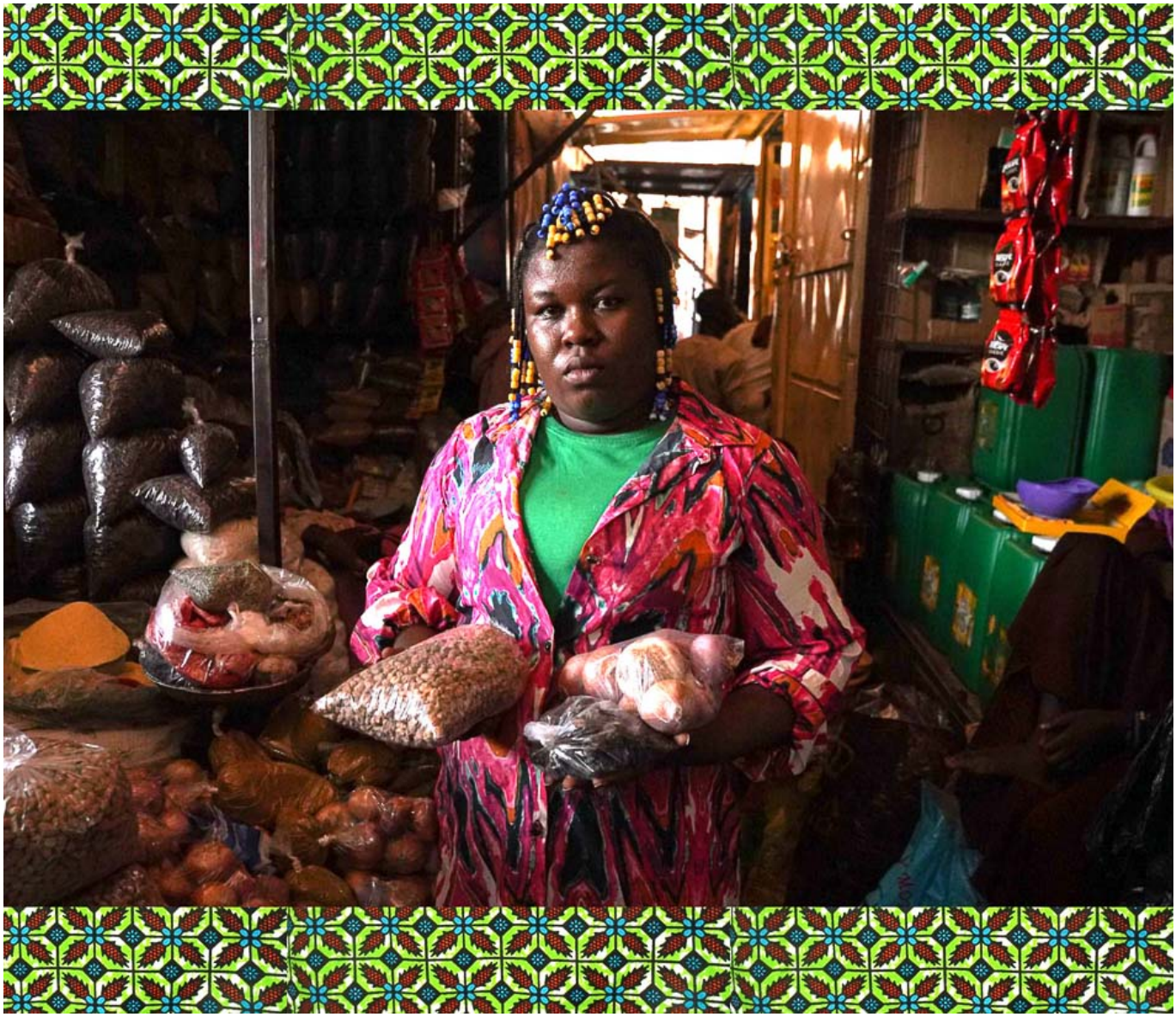
The Sahel Seeks Sovereignty

The images in this dossier highlight the everyday life of working-class people in the Sahel, who form the base of the region's popularly supported military coups. Taken by Pedro Stropasolas (*Brasil de Fato*), the photographs document scenes from the International Conference in Solidarity with the Peoples of the Sahel in Niamey, Niger (November 2024), from Sakété, Benin (July 2025), and from Ouagadougu and Koubri, Burkina Faso (July 2025).



Introduction

In September 2023, coming on the heels of coups led by progressive factions of the military, the heads of state of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger met in Bamako (Mali) to sign the *Charter of Liptako-Gourma Establishing the Alliance of Sahel States* (AES).[1] Article VI of the charter stipulates that:

> Any violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one or more contracting parties shall be considered as an aggression against the other parties and shall give rise to a duty of assistance and relief by all the parties, individually or collectively, including the use of armed force, to restore and ensure security within the area covered by the alliance.[2]

The move to form the AES was a direct response to the threat of military intervention in Niger by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) following the country's popularly supported

military coup. ECOWAS, along with the African Union (AU), also imposed sanctions and suspended the memberships of all three AES member states following their respective coups: Mali in August 2020, Burkina Faso in January 2022, and Niger in July 2023.

In January 2024, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger jointly announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS. The decision, which became official in January 2025, was justified as follows:

> The brave peoples of Burkina, Mali, and Niger note with deep regret and great disappointment that the organisation [ECOWAS] has strayed from the ideals of its founding fathers and from Pan-Africanism. It no longer serves the interests of its peoples but has instead become a threat to its member states and populations, whose happiness it is supposed to guarantee.[3]

The leaders of the AES – Mali's Assimi Goïta, Burkina Faso's Ibrahim Traoré, and Niger's Abdourahamane Tchiani – are united by their emergence from popular coups and their impatience with ECOWAS's pro-Western politics. They represent a new generation of military officers channelling widespread public frustration with French neocolonialism, and their withdrawal from ECOWAS is rooted in the bloc's historical limitations.

Though ECOWAS was established in 1975 with the Pan-African rhetoric of leaders like Ghana's General Acheampong, who promised that this new regional organisation would 'remove centuries of division and artificial barriers imposed on West Africa from outside', it was always a limited project. In reality, it was established to focus on economic issues, such as creating a common market, without serious aims for political integration.[4] This limited scope was immediately hobbled by internal divisions and, more significantly, competing external loyalties. The parallel francophone West African Economic Community (CEAO), backed by France, often subverted the bloc's goals. This was demonstrated during the Chadian crisis of 1979–1981, when France and the CEAO undermined Nigeria's peacekeeping mission, turning it into a failure for ECOWAS and a victory for their own bloc. Similarly, existing military pacts between France and its former colonies stymied efforts to create a common defence strategy.[5]

It is this history of internal division and persistent foreign influence that informs the AES perspective today. The alliance argues that ECOWAS now acts as a regional enforcer of external interests, betraying its founding principles by falling 'under the influence of foreign powers'.[6] Consequently, at the Niamey summit where the AES was launched, the member states affirmed that their withdrawal from ECOWAS is definitive, even as they plan transitions to civilian rule.

Though mainstream security institutions, political commentators, and non-governmental agencies acknowledged the failure of ECOWAS and other security partnerships to provide meaningful security in the region, they widely condemned the steps taken by the AES as 'a huge blow to a regional integration project' that would likely increase 'greater fractures' and 'exacerbate the worsening [security] situation' in the region.[7] Yet, a counternarrative is forming across the Sahel. From the perspective not only of the AES's political leaders but also local grassroots organisations and the broader population, the alliance was forged in the crucible of the broader contemporary insecurities and inequalities faced by many Global South countries

actively grappling with questions of sovereignty and development. For AES members, 2023 marked a collective rupture with failed security arrangements (such as the G5 Sahel), the delegitimised leadership of regional bodies like ECOWAS and the AU, and long-standing and unequal political entanglements with the European Union, France, and the United States – all underpinned by decades of neoliberal economic policy.[8]

This dossier explores the emergence of the AES and seeks to stimulate a debate on the current conjuncture in the region. We see this new formation as an example of anti-imperialist regionalism within the broader context of how Global South states navigate sovereignty, dependency, and internal-external security challenges. It invites reflection and debate on the meaning and implications of this return to the path of sovereignty – not as nostalgic nationalism, but as a bold and necessary attempt to reclaim political autonomy, economic self-determination, and civilisational dignity in the face of hyper-imperialism.

From Colonial Rule to Flag Independence

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are land-locked neighbours with significant portions of their territories

straddling the southern edge of the Sahara. Together, they account for roughly 45% of West Africa's land mass and 17% of its population, or 73 million people combined (Niger, 26.2 million; Mali, 23.8 million; and Burkina Faso, 23 million).[9] These nations share deeply rooted cultural norms, with a significant emphasis on communal values, oral traditions, a predominantly agrarian lifestyle, and societal structures and daily life profoundly influenced by the dominant religion, Islam.

Like much of West Africa, these countries experienced the contradictions of colonial rule most acutely during the Second World War. While the Normandy landings are among the most celebrated moments in French military history, what is often left out of this narrative is that many of the troops and labour corps who helped secure victory over Nazi Germany were Africans from French colonies, including what are now Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Their sacrifice on European soil contributed to a growing political awareness and laid the groundwork for postwar demands for equality and self-determination.[10]

In the wake of the war, and encouraged by the emerging socialist bloc, the call for independence accelerated. In Niger, for instance, the Nigerien Progressive Party (PPN) was founded in 1946 and affiliated with the African Democratic Rally (RDA), a Pan-African, anti-colonial movement led by figures such as Modibo Keïta in Mali and Ahmed Sékou Touré in Guinea. The RDA initially demanded equal treatment with French citizens but quickly shifted toward demanding full independence. In Burkina Faso, the Voltaic Union (UV) party joined the RDA in hopes of building a regionally coordinated national liberation front, though the UV ultimately dissolved under French pressure. This political awakening would lay the foundation for national liberation struggles in West Africa.

Following the costly defeat in Vietnam in 1954 and amid the escalating war in Algeria (1954–1962), France faced growing pressure at home and abroad. Fearing a total loss of economic and political influence in Africa, President Charles de Gaulle, newly returned to power, called for a referendum in 1958 as part of the new constitution of the Fifth Republic. The referendum offered African colonies two choices: vote 'yes' to remain part of the Franco-African Community, under French influence, (the so-called 'transitionary' option, which promised deferred independence while keeping key powers in French hands), or vote 'no' for immediate independence, with the threat of sudden French withdrawal and looming economic instability. Djibo Bakary, the founder of the Sawaba party (meaning 'freedom' in Hausa) and later head of the Nigerien government after the first elections in 1957, led the 'vote no' campaign. In the end, only Guinea, under the leadership of Sékou Touré, successfully voted 'no', becoming the first West African French colony to gain independence in 1958.

Advocates for a full break with France, like Bakary, were met with domestic repression and sidelined by colonial collaborators, including traditional leaders, colonial administrators, and *évolués* (meaning 'the evolved ones', these were Africans who had been educated in French institutions, granted limited rights or status, and groomed to serve the colonial order).[11] To sabotage the referendum in Niger and undermine Sawaba, which had also fought against French uranium exploitation, de Gaulle sent a new governor: Don Jean Colombani. The Colombani government used its full control over key state institutions – such as security, finance, and territorial administration – to launch a campaign of repression, intimidation, and even psychological warfare, most notably by dropping leaflets from planes warning that 'no' voters were enemies of the state.[12] Despite widespread public support for Sawaba, massive electoral fraud ensured a manufactured victory for the 'vote yes' campaign in Niger in 1958.

Nonetheless, the victory of Guinea's 'vote no' campaign that same year, building on Ghana's earlier independence from Britain in 1957, forced the French to cede more ground on the question of political independence, and in 1960, seventeen African countries – including fourteen former French colonies – declared independence. Yet this flag independence was achieved with no real economic transformation. French tutelage and discretion continued, and economic control was retained through a range of 'cooperation' agreements, including defence accords, technical assistance protocols, and financial arrangements such as the CFA franc system. One such agreement was the April 1961 defence accord signed by Côte d'Ivoire, Benin (formerly Dahomey), and Niger, which enabled 'France's unrestricted use' of assets of military interest.[13] In the case of Niger, France also maintained significant control through the following mechanisms, reflecting a broader pattern employed across the region:

- **Colonial debt regimes:** Niger was required to 'reimburse' France for colonial-era infrastructure, such as roads and schools constructed through forced labour.
- **Resource control:** France retained the right of first refusal over Niger's strategic exports, particularly uranium, and French companies received preferential access to key sectors of the economy.
- **Tax exemptions:** Based on the principle of non-double taxation, French businesses operating in Niger paid taxes only in France and were exempt from local obligations – including duties, sales taxes such as value-added taxes, and even fuel taxes – which significantly undermined the country's fiscal revenue.
- **Monetary dependency:** Niger was required to use the CFA franc, a currency issued and regulated by the French Treasury, limiting its control over monetary and fiscal policy.
- **Military entrenchment:** France maintained military bases and was granted 'free use of military installations'. This included unrestricted movement on land, air, and waters; free access to transportation and communication infrastructure; and the right to install aerial and maritime signalling and transmission systems.[14]

Furthermore, Annex II of the 1961 defence accord secured the military's role as an enforcer of French capital interests and economic policy in the signatory countries. Notably, Article I of the annex established two categories of strategic raw materials: 1) liquid or gaseous hydrocarbons; and 2) uranium, thorium, lithium, and beryllium, as well as their ores and compounds. Article II stated that 'the French Republic shall regularly inform the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, the Republic of Dahomey, and the Republic of Niger of the policy it intends to follow concerning strategic raw materials and products, taking into account the general needs of defence, the evolution of resources, and the *situation of the world market*' [emphasis added]. Article V stated that the Africans in turn had to ensure that France was 'kept informed of programmes and projects concerning the export outside the territory… of second-category raw materials and strategic products'. In addition, all three countries were required to 'facilitate, for the benefit of the French armed forces, the storage of strategic raw materials and products' and, when defence interests required it, 'limit or prohibit their export

to other countries'.[15] By embedding economic directives within military cooperation frameworks, the accord transformed the country's defence infrastructure into a tool for safeguarding French commercial and geopolitical interests.

Mali, too, attempted to assert its economic and political sovereignty in the years immediately following its independence in 1960. Under the leadership of Modibo Keïta (1960–1968), the country pursued socialist-oriented economic policies such as establishing state enterprises and adopting a national currency independent of the CFA franc in 1962 to break French monetary dominance. These efforts faced significant retaliation, including diplomatic isolation, trade restrictions, and the withdrawal of French technical and financial support, all of which contributed to a deepening economic crisis. The economic turmoil that followed enabled Lieutenant Moussa Traoré's French-backed military coup in 1968, leading Mali to rejoin the CFA franc zone in 1984.

As the Cold War ended, France shifted its Africa policy by introducing 'political conditionality' at the 1990 La Baule summit, with President Mitterrand declaring that French aid would be tied to so-called democratic reforms such as multiparty elections.[16] This ushered in a wave of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) imposed across Africa in the 1980s, such as in Mali, where austerity measures, public sector cuts, and trade liberalisation accompanied the country's 1984 re-entry into the CFA franc zone. The 1990s ushered in a second wave of SAPs on the continent, especially after the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994, when the currency was halved in value under pressure from France, the IMF, and the World Bank. Framed as a measure to boost exports and restore financial stability, in reality the devaluation triggered sharp price increases, wage erosion, and widespread unrest across the region. This second phase combined economic liberalisation with donor-enforced governance reforms.[17] While framed as democratisation, these changes reinforced neocolonial control through debt, privatisation, and externally managed state restructuring.

These reconfigured instruments of domination were accompanied by the expansion of US military presence under the pretext of combatting terrorism. In 2002, the United States launched the Pan-Sahel Initiative, which marked the beginning of a sustained Western military presence in a number of countries in the region, including Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania, later expanding into Burkina Faso under its successor, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership in 2005.

The regional security crisis was, as Mali's Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Maïga explained to the UN General Assembly in 2024, 'exacerbated by NATO's reckless military intervention in Libya in 2011'.[18] The collapse of the Libyan state opened the floodgates for unregulated arms trade and growing terrorist activities. The bombing of what was then one of the most developed African states – with the highest Human Development Index figures on the continent and large infrastructural development projects such as the Great Man-Made River irrigation project – was widely seen as a turning point. It also undermined the African Union's Peace and Security Council, which was ready to send a mission to Libya's capital, Tripoli, when the first bombs were dropped.[19]

Following the 2011 bombing of Libya – again under the banner of counterterrorism – French and US military activities expanded significantly across the Sahel. New US drone operations, AFRICOM-led training missions, and US and French military deployments and bases were established in Gao (Mali), N'Djamena

(Chad), Niamey (Niger), and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). In 2014, French troops launched Operation Barkhane, consolidating their regional presence and forming the G5 Sahel joint task force, which included Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.[20] Yet terrorist activity has increased significantly in the decade since. Malian officials have repeatedly alleged that French military operations not only failed to contain terrorism but were in fact the drivers of terrorist activity, accusing France of selectively targeting armed groups, tolerating or protecting others, and using the security crisis to justify its prolonged military presence and safeguard strategic interests. In August 2022, Mali's then Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop openly accused France of repeated airspace violations, espionage, and direct support to terrorist groups – including the aerial delivery of weapons and coordination with jihadist leaders – and demanded an emergency UN Security Council meeting to halt what he described as 'acts of aggression against [Mali's] sovereignty and territorial integrity'.[21]

As foreign military actors undermined national sovereignty under the guise of counterterrorism, transnational corporations continued to extract wealth from the Sahel under deeply unequal terms. These nations remain heavily dependent on the export of raw materials – such as uranium from Niger and gold from Mali – under exploitative terms. In 2010, for example, Niger received only 13% of the total export value generated by the two dominant French uranium mining companies operating in the country.[22] Despite becoming one of Africa's largest gold producers from the 1990s onwards, Mali retained minimal economic benefits. Tax exemptions, inequitable royalty structures and other policies enabled companies such as Randgold Resources (which merged with Barrick Gold Corporation in 2018) and AngloGold Ashanti to extract profits with little reinvestment.

This economic dependency reinforced long-term underdevelopment, leaving states vulnerable to external pressures and limiting their capacity to diversify their economies or negotiate favourable terms of trade. The resulting lack of sustainable development has contributed to a range of political, social, and security crises. Since the 1990s, coups and regime changes have become a common feature as elites compete for power in weak institutional environments. Corruption, inadequate public services, and the exclusion of marginalised groups have further undermined state legitimacy and deepened public distrust.

Military Intervention for National Sovereignty

Mass mobilisations

Popular frustration with state institutions hollowed out by decades of neoliberal restructuring and foreign interference erupted into mass mobilisations in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger between 2017 and 2022, which eventually led to popular coups in the three countries.

Starting with protests against the CFA franc in Senegal in September 2017, demonstrations quickly intensified across the Sahel. The currency – issued by the French Treasury – was widely seen as a tool of continued economic domination and a symbol of neocolonial control. In Mali, large-scale protests emerged in April 2019 following a surge of intercommunal violence, including the massacre of around 160 Fulani villagers by members of the Dogon ethnic community.[23] The situation escalated in January 2021 when a French airstrike hit a wedding party in the village of Bounti, killing at least nineteen civilians. While the French military claimed to have targeted jihadist fighters, a subsequent UN investigation concluded that the

strike had overwhelmingly affected civilians in violation of international law.[24] These events fuelled mass demonstrations that demanded the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and the withdrawal of French and international troops, ultimately contributing to Keïta's removal and the formation of a military-led government in August 2020.

Similarly, Burkina Faso saw mass mobilisations against President Roch Kaboré's ineffective security policies starting in 2018. They reached a turning point in November 2021 when protesters in Kaya and elsewhere blocked French military convoys, suspecting them of complicity with terrorist groups. This sustained unrest culminated in a military revolt in January 2022 that brought Captain Ibrahim Traoré to power.

Concurrently, in Niger, protests erupted following a deadly attack by Islamic State militants on a military base in December 2019 which killed at least 71 Nigerien soldiers and fuelled public anger over state incapacity. Tensions flared again in November 2021 in the town of Tera, where demonstrators confronted a French military convoy that had previously been delayed for over a week by protestors in Burkina Faso. The convoy opened fire, killing at least two civilians and injuring several more, further intensifying public outrage.[25]

Popular Coups

Africa has frequently been cited as suffering from a 'coup epidemic'.[26] Between 1950 and 2022, the majority of the attempted military coups in the world – 214 of 486 – took place in Africa, half of which were successful.[27] The mainstream narrative about the recent coups in the Sahel has largely framed them as yet another cycle of political instability in Africa – part of a pattern of 'autocratic political entrepreneurs in the coup belt bidding for power'.[28] Yet, unlike previous coups across the continent, these seem to exemplify a distinct patriotism, which President of the West African Peoples' Organisation Philippe Toyo Noudjnoume describes as 'military intervention for sovereignty'.[29]

These military governments are distinct from previous ones in the region in at least three significant ways: first, in the class origins and ideological orientation of the coup leaders; second, in the active participation of popular organisations; and third, in their development of endogenous Pan-African, anti-imperialist national programmes.

1) The class origins and ideological orientation of the coup leaders. Many of the key coup leaders are of a different ilk compared to other officers that have led coups in the region. The archetypal coups of the 1960s and 1980s were largely Western-backed and targeted national liberation leaders to curtail the spread of anti-imperialist or left-aligned governments and social forces. In those cases, the survival of a military government was less tied to ideological concerns and more to securing support from civilian elites and foreign backers.[30] These recent coups do not fit that mould. As Vijay Prashad, director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, observes:

> People like Burkina Faso's Captain Ibrahim Traoré (born in 1988), who was raised in the rural province of Mouhoun and studied geology in Ouagadougou, and Mali's Colonel Assimi Goïta (born in 1983), who comes from the cattle market town and military redoubt of Kati, represent

> these broad class fractions… Discarded with no real political platform to speak for them, large sections of the country have rallied behind the patriotic intentions of these young military men, who have themselves been pushed by mass movements – such as trade unions and peasant organisations – in their countries. That is why the coup in Niger is being defended in mass rallies from the capital city of Niamey to the small, remote towns that border Libya. These young leaders do not come to power with a well-worked agenda. However, they have a level of admiration for people like Thomas Sankara: Captain Ibrahim Traoré of Burkina Faso, for instance, sports a red beret like Sankara, speaks with Sankara's left-wing frankness, and even mimics Sankara's diction.[31]

2) The active participation of popular organisations. Popular organisations have shaped core elements of the national agenda and are actively participating in its construction. When the coup in Niger took place in July 2023, mass organisations across all sectors laid siege to French military bases and the French embassy – not only to celebrate the toppling of a flailing regime and defend the coup, but also to assert long-standing demands to eject the French neocolonial forces. Prior to the coup, social movements had already begun to build a mass front against imperialism, a process that can be traced to popular organising in 2022 building upon decades of political organisation and education. When Niger's military government broke with France, it signalled to the people that their interests were being advanced. Grassroots leaders have since continued to call for the AES to uphold its anti-imperialist commitments and have emphasised the need for institutional mechanisms that ensure both accountability and popular participation. Effred Mouloul Al-Hassan, secretary general of the Nigerien School Union, articulated this dynamic of conditional support at a November 2024 conference in Niamey: 'We support you as long as you are for the people. If not, we will fight you as we have fought the colonialists'.[32]

3) The development of endogenous Pan-African, anti-imperialist national programmes. The new coup governments have initiated new national programmes that have a distinctly anti-imperialist orientation based on endogenous development models and the region's social and intellectual heritage. Mali's *National Strategy for Emergence and Sustainable Development* (SNEDD 2024–2033) outlines a medium-term programme for national renewal rooted in a historical rupture with externally imposed models of governance and development. SNEDD 2024–2033 is informed by *Mali Kura ɲɛtaasira ka bɛn san 2063 ma* (A New Mali: A Vision for 2063), a government-issued foresight report that articulates a broader vision for the country's future.[33] Together, these frameworks seek to re-anchor national reconstruction in Mali's precolonial political thought and ethical traditions.

As part of its redefinition of national identity and institutional priorities, SNEDD 2024–2033 explicitly links Mali's post-coup renewal to three pillars of the country's civilisational heritage. First, the Manden Charter – the constitution of the Mali Empire, created in 1236 and often cited as one of the world's earliest declarations of human rights – which promoted values such as social solidarity, protection of vulnerable sectors of the population, and participatory governance through assembly-based decision-making. Second, the legal codes of the Massina Empire (1818–1862), founded in the Inner Niger Delta in central Mali, which combined Islamic jurisprudence with local governance to institutionalise justice, environmental stewardship, and checks on executive authority. Third, the manuscript traditions of Timbuktu, which span law, science, ethics, and public administration and reflect centuries of homegrown intellectual production and debate on just rule, the moral

responsibilities of leadership, and the pursuit of knowledge in service of the common good.

Together, these traditions serve as foundations for a new anti-imperialist vision of Malian identity and statecraft based on social justice, collective governance, and civilisational dignity.[34] The Mali 2063 Vision calls for the development of 'a new Malian individual (*Maliden kura*). … a responsible, patriotic, respectful of values citizen, [who] is hardworking, conscientious, and open-minded – who works for the sovereignty and well-being of all'.[35]

This national strategy affirms the reconstruction of Mali as both a national and civilisational project based on 'a strong, stable, and economically sovereign state' that 'must ensure its sovereignty over several strategic sectors'.[36] Anchored in popular participation and resistance to neocolonial influence, it proposes a holistic transformation centred on a 'new endogenous development model (*Mali Kura Taasira*)' in areas such as governance, education, justice, and economic sovereignty.[37] This foundational vision places cultural integrity and sovereignty at the heart of national development, marking a clear departure from neocolonial donor-driven frameworks of the past.

This programme is being gradually realised through several major initiatives. Key infrastructure projects include upgrading the Bamako-Koulouba-Kati dual carriageway and the strategic Trans-Saharan Road (Bourem-Kidal section) and building the 200 MW Sanankoroba solar plant (authorised in 2024).[38] In the mining sector, described by the government as the strategic 'lever of growth and economic development', major reforms were enacted through the 2023 Mining Code, issuance of large-scale gold permits (such as the Korali-Sud licence in the Kayes region), and Mali's acquisition of an 80% stake in the Yatela gold mine, which was formerly held by foreign companies.[39] The 2023 Mining Code revised the terms of engagement with all foreign multinationals, mandating increased state participation of up to 30% in mining ventures, stripping away tax exemptions, and set the stage for the state to pursue unpaid taxes and dividends. These measures aim to recover billions of CFA francs previously lost through inequitable agreements (a recent audit revealed a loss of 300–600 billion CFA francs in state revenue due to such deals) and signal an aggressive posture towards historical plunderers of Mali's gold wealth.[40] The government has also advanced plans to build a Russian-backed gold refinery and develop lithium extraction with Chinese assistance through the Goulamina project, positioning Mali to climb the value chain rather than remaining a supplier of raw ores.[41]

The Formation and Development of the AES

The AES countries continue to face substantial economic challenges. For instance, in 2023, Niger's per capita GDP was just $560 – one of the lowest in the world – with an international poverty rate of 47.8% and a life expectancy of 61 years.[42] Mali and Burkina Faso also exhibit comparable indicators, reflecting widespread poverty and limited access to essential services. Security challenges have only been exacerbated by the prevailing economic challenges. Over the past fifteen years, the Sahel has experienced a dramatic rise in terrorist activity, with a 2,860% increase in deaths and a 1,266% increase in incidents. In 2023 alone, nearly 4,000 people were killed in terrorist attacks in the region, accounting for 47% of global terrorism deaths and 26% of all recorded incidents. The vast majority occurred in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.[43] Ongoing violence, combined with environmental degradation, has displaced millions of people across the region, contributing to a growing population of internally displaced persons and refugees.[44] These demographic and security pressures collectively influence the AES's strategic priorities and policy decisions.

It is in this context and against the backdrop of growing anti-French sentiment that the AES began to take shape. By February 2022, Mali had expelled French diplomatic and military forces and withdrawn from regional security partnerships such as the G5 Sahel, condemning their failure to address the region's security needs. By July, Mali deepened military cooperation with Russia through new agreements for training and joint operations. That September, Burkina Faso experienced its second coup of the year, bringing to power new leadership that echoed Mali's anti-Western stance and sought alternative security partnerships. In Mali, tensions with France escalated further, culminating in the suspension of French aid programmes in November 2022.

The year 2023 marked the formal establishment of the AES as a regional bloc. In January, Burkina Faso demanded the withdrawal of French troops, effectively ending military agreements and closing French bases in the country. By July, Niger joined Mali and Burkina Faso in rejecting Western political and military influence in the wake of their respective military coups. In August, the AES declared a collective defence pact – later formalised in the *Charter of Liptako-Gourma* signed the following month – stating that an attack on one member would be considered an attack on all. The alliance also expanded its international partnerships at the Russia-Africa Summit in Saint Petersburg, where member states secured new military and economic agreements with Russia. By September, AES member states expelled US and European diplomats accused of interference and began formal negotiations with China to explore infrastructure investment and resource-sharing projects.

In 2024, the AES undertook a series of strategic initiatives to deepen its regional presence and assert its sovereignty. In July, it held its first Heads of State Summit and formalised its withdrawal from ECOWAS. In the months that followed, the alliance conducted its first joint military exercises, centred on coordinated counterterrorism operations and border security. By March, on the heels of Niger terminating operations of one of the largest US drone airbases, the AES had further expanded its security agreements with Russia, focusing on arms procurement and intelligence-sharing.[45]

In April 2024, AES leaders participated in a Pan-African Security Forum, advocating for greater regional autonomy and African-led solutions to security challenges. By June, the alliance reaffirmed its commitment to resource sovereignty, highlighting the strategic importance of uranium in Niger, gold in Mali, and agricultural resources in Burkina Faso. In July, the AES rejected calls from the United Nations and Western powers for accelerated transitions to liberal democratic civilian rule, prioritising stability over externally imposed timelines. The alliance also issued a statement condemning ongoing Western sanctions against member states, framing them as imperialist tools designed to undermine regional sovereignty. On 6 July 2024, AES members adopted a treaty officially establishing the Confederation of Sahel States, deepening the alliance formed under the 2023 *Charter of Liptako-Gourma*. The treaty outlines shared priorities in security and defence, the fight against terrorism, and the promotion of economic, commercial, and cultural cooperation among the three countries.[46]

These developments underscore the AES's commitment to strengthening regional autonomy and fostering a unified approach to addressing the Sahel's complex challenges. As France was expelled and its influence diminished, the region expanded its relations with China and Russia. This shift raised concerns in Washington and the West over the erosion of Western influence in the region, turning the Sahel into a battleground for international conflict.

Economic Challenges Ahead

The AES faces fundamental constraints as their economies remain anchored in extractive resource dependency, reflecting ongoing neocolonial patterns of unequal trade relations and limited value addition.

Country	Main Export Commodity (2023)	Share of Exports (%)	Total Exports (USD Billion)	Top Destination
Burkina Faso	Gold	81.8%	3.65	Switzerland (67%)
Mali	Gold	94.1%	5.02	UAE (72%)
Niger	Gold, Oilseeds, Uranium	~68.5% combined	0.8	UAE (25%), China (20%)

Compiled from Harvard's Atlas of Economic Complexity based on UN Comtrade data.[47]

As the AES countries leverage their mineral wealth to kickstart changes in their economies, they do so against the backdrop of dependency, diversification, and value addition.[48] Though trade destinations have shifted from French dominance, today Switzerland (a gold refining hub) and the UAE (a growing regional trade and

refining centre) dominate AES exports. While Switzerland largely functions as a transit hub, re-exporting refined gold with minimal local value addition for African states, the UAE engages in some refining, reflecting a slight strategic improvement in diversification. Yet, in both cases, the value chain remains overwhelmingly outside African control, sustaining commodity dependency. AES economies therefore remain vulnerable to global commodity price fluctuations. For example, a decline in gold prices or disruptions in UAE financial markets could severely impact Mali and Burkina Faso's foreign exchange earnings. Meanwhile, Niger's uranium dependency remains politically sensitive. As a major supplier to Europe's nuclear energy sector – particularly France – the country's post-coup political realignment and tensions with Western powers have raised concerns over supply security. These tensions have been exacerbated by sanctions and aid suspensions, turning uranium into both an economic lifeline and a geopolitical bargaining chip.

While AES countries have demonstrated a clear political aspiration towards sovereign economic development, structural vulnerabilities remain, from resource ownership to CFA currency hegemony. Genuine self-reliance will require not only diversifying export destinations and products but fundamentally altering production structures: building domestic refining capacity, controlling monetary policy, strengthening regional trade, and industrialising beyond raw commodity dependence.

Strongly Seeking Sovereignty

As most of Africa's leaders began arriving at the 2023 Russia-Africa Summit, international press followed closely. When Burkina Faso's President Ibrahim Traoré and Malian President Assimi Goïta entered the venue, there was a media frenzy over these 'renegade' leaders who had adopted increasingly assertive behaviour indicative of the broader geopolitical shift underway in strategic nodes of the Global South.

During the bilateral meeting with Russia's President Vladimir Putin, Traoré prioritised national security and development agreements but also pointedly referred to 'the developments in Niger', where General Abdourahamane Tchiani was leading a military coup at that very moment. This gesture signalled alignment with Niger's political rupture and reinforced a narrative of shared struggle within an unjust international order that AES leaders argue must be reshaped.[49] Traoré and Goïta's diplomatic strategies reflected a deliberate pivot away from neocolonial entanglements and toward sovereign development partnerships, echoing a growing tendency among many Global South states within today's architecture of hyper-imperialism to adopt what might be called a posture of 'strongly seeking sovereignty'.[50]

These diplomatic engagements – including strategic realignments and joint economic or security initiatives – are not simply opportunistic alliances but expressions of deeper aspirations for structural repositioning. The AES is not merely balancing threats in the mainstream security studies sense (i.e., aligning with one power to offset another), nor is it merely seeking new patrons. Rather, its posture could be described as a 'sovereignty offensive' – a condition in which states, confronted by the constraints of a hyper-imperialist order, assert policies and institutional strategies that aim to break with dependency and reconfigure their place in the global system.

At the November 2024 International Conference in Solidarity with the Peoples of the Sahel in Niamey, Brigadier General Abdou Assoumane Harouna – a leader of Niger's National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) and governor of Niamey – declared: 'We will face the might of imperialism… No military power in the world can stop the bid for independence and the rejection of the former world order'.[51] This framing reflects a broader aspiration not only in the Sahel but across the Global South to break free from the straitjacket of imperial command and to assert independent paths of development, regional cooperation, and ideological clarity.[52]

The AES's sovereign repositioning is not ideologically spontaneous; it emerges from deeply rooted traditions of liberation struggles and the rejection of dependency that grassroots movements have long demanded. The bellowing calls from below have distinctly shaped how the AES leaders have framed their military-led transitions as forms of 'corrective sovereignty'.

While some analysts reduce these shifts to 'band wagoning' with Russia or opportunistic military populism, such framing misses the structural dynamics of delinking from a system of enforced subordination. As President Goïta noted in his bilateral negotiations with President Putin during the 2023 Russia-Africa summit:

> Numerous African countries, especially Mali, are suffering from the unprecedented pressure

> from several countries that are all but ready to introduce sanctions against us for our partnership with Russia – for our *sovereign choice* [emphasis added]. We are stunned by this neocolonialist practice that must be curbed through a concerted effort at the international level.[53]

This 'sovereign choice' comes from shared interests and longer historical processes that are still unfolding. Burkina Faso's President Traoré explained during his speech at the summit that Russia was like family to the African people because of their shared history. 'Russia made enormous sacrifices to liberate the world from Nazism during the Second World War. The African people, our grandfathers, were also forcibly deported to help Europe rid itself of Nazism,' he explained. 'We share the same history in the sense that we are the forgotten peoples of the world'.[54]

This posture of the AES remains significant. When President Ibrahim Traoré declares that 'a slave who cannot assume their own revolt does not deserve to be pitied' or when Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop states that 'the fate of our countries will not be decided in Brussels, Paris, Washington, or London. It will be decided in Bamako, Ouagadougou, Niamey', it is not simply a rhetorical flourish.[55] Such statements are political affirmations that resonate with a popular sentiment for sovereignty through armed and institutional struggle – a break from the demobilised, comprador-led liberal regimes of recent decades. This was made abundantly clear when a series of attempted attacks and interventions against Traoré were met with multiple rallies, protests, and demonstrations in support of his leadership on 30 April 2025 in countries across the continent and the world, from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Kenya to the United States, United Kingdom, and France.[56]

This is not to romanticise the AES. These governments face profound internal contradictions and must navigate the dangers of old and new dependencies. Changes in the geopolitical landscape can quickly shift the AES's ability to leverage its new relationships. As Vijay Prashad writes about the events in Syria and their repercussions in the Sahel:

> The change of government in Syria has not only weakened Iran in the short term but has also weakened Russia (a long-term strategic goal of the United States), which previously used Syrian airports to refuel its supply planes en route to various African countries. It is no longer possible for Russia to use these bases, and it remains unclear where Russian military aircraft will be able to refuel for journeys into the region, notably to countries in the Sahel. This will provide the United States with an opportunity to push the countries that border the Sahel, such as Nigeria and Benin, to launch operations against the governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. This will require a close watch.[57]

Despite its symbolic and strategic achievements so far, the alliance's success hinges on its ability to create durable institutions, foster economic integration, and align its internal goals with regional stability. New initiatives – such as regional coordination regarding resource management; proposals for a Sahelian currency; a single AES passport enabling free movement between states; network interconnection; joint military forces; and calls for South-South cooperation – reflect initial steps toward a new development paradigm rooted in

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How the World Looks from Tricontinental

The artwork in this dossier brings together some of the publications we have produced over the past decade, reframing our logo at the centre of our work. Inspired by the Soviet artist El Lissitzky's poster 'Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge' (1920), in which the red wedge represents the advance of the Bolshevik forces (Red Army) against the monarchist forces (White Guard), the red wedge in the Tricontinental logo symbolises our intervention in the ongoing battle of ideas.

From 28 to 31 July 2015, social and political movements from around the world gathered at the Landless

Workers' Movement of Brazil's Florestan Fernandes National School for the Second Dilemmas of Humanity Conference. They assessed the global order and the state of the class struggle, which included an acknowledgment that movements of workers, peasants, and other oppressed peoples simply did not have a way to elaborate their view of the world or stimulate debate in the public domain. To this end, the delegates decided to create a number of processes and institutions, including a research institute, which became Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. Ten years later, this dossier sets out to summarise our view of the world, which we have constructed in the decade since in conversation with hundreds of movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The Era of Hyper-Imperialism

Before he left office, US President Joe Biden gave a speech at the State Department in which he spoke about a 'fierce competition' that had been taking place in the world – one, he said, that Washington had won.[1] Yet Biden did not clarify who the parties to this competition were or what this competition was about. If you did not know the context of Washington's anxiety, it would not be clear what Biden was talking about, and you might have been forgiven for thinking that this was just another of his great rambles. But despite Biden's reticence to name the parties to the competition, he was precise in his assessment and in his assertion. The competition that Biden referred to was between the United States and its Global North allies on the one side and China and Russia on the other.

Since 2011, the United States has published one version or another of this worldview in its many strategic documents, speaking of China and Russia as 'threats' and 'competitors'. Perhaps the most disturbing of these is the 2024 *Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States*, in which Biden approved a nuclear weapons strategy that would allow the US to simultaneously strike China, North Korea, and Russia.[2] Similarly, the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence released its *Annual Threat Assessment* in February 2024 in which it wrote of 'an ambitious but anxious China, a confrontational Russia, some regional powers, such as Iran, and more capable non-state actors' who are 'challenging longstanding rules of the international system as well as US primacy within it'.[3] This is the 'competition' to which Biden referred, one that is accepted as the norm by the entire US elite political spectrum.

It says a lot about Washington's approach that it sees the emergence of Chinese economic dynamism and Russian anxiety about its borders as 'threats'. Who is threatened by China's growth rate, particularly when it comes to new quality productive forces?[4] Who is threatened by Russia's concerns about the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)? China has openly articulated its goal for a peaceful and mutually beneficial world order while Russia – despite its invasion of Ukraine in 2022 – has stated that it does not want to get into a major battle with NATO or, worse, with the United States directly. Neither China nor Russia wants to see world affairs as a 'competition', certainly not in military terms, and neither country has a programmatic need to draw the United States and its allies into a full-scale war. They might not see the current struggle as a 'competition', but Washington certainly does.

An important study published by Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and Global South Insights in January 2024 found that the United States and its Global North allies account for 74.3% of global military spending. It is important to recognise that the United States is in a multilateral military pact with most of these countries (NATO) and has bilateral military alliances with others. While the Global North operates as a

military-political-economic alliance, the Global South does not. In terms of military power, the United States appears to be in competition with itself, with military spending that far outpaces any other nation. As we wrote in 2024, 'the US spends 12.6 times per capita above the world average (Israel, coming in second, spends 7.2 times above the world average per capita)' and 21 times per capita more than China.[5]

Only the United States has used nuclear weapons against another country, and only the United States and its allies have consistently overthrown political processes in the Global South that have tried to exert their sovereignty.[6] The existence of this massive military might – with over 900 known military bases around the world – should not be seen as innocent: it is consistently used to exert the power of the Global North over countries that are trying to overcome the neocolonial structure of the international order.[7] US President Donald Trump's desire to annex Greenland from Denmark and the Panama Canal from Panama are not idle threats, since the United States already operates military bases in both countries (the Pituffik Space Base in Greenland and the Naval Support Activity Panama City). Trump has reiterated his demand that Canada become the 51st state. Behind these three seemingly incoherent demands lies a sinister and highly intentional strategy.

On 27 January, Trump signed an executive order called The Iron Dome for America.[8] Deceptively referred to as a missile defence shield, this 'iron dome' would enable the United States to conduct nuclear and large bomb first-strike attacks on its adversaries and prohibit them from launching a counterstrike. The US has renounced the strategy of mutually assured destruction and has instead adapted an offensive military counterforce strategy.[9] Furthermore, since 2001, the United States has unilaterally destroyed the arms control regime set up between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War (the final nail in the coffin was when Trump exited the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019). Russia and China, on the other hand, view their nuclear weapons systems as defensive shields. China and Russia's nuclear deterrence strategies have been weakened by such withdrawals as well as the 'iron dome' and the US counterforce doctrine. This creates enormous instability in the global security landscape.

A Changing Economic Geography

As the Third Great Depression began in 2007, the countries of the North Atlantic saw their growth rates splutter.[10] They stagnated near, and sometimes dropped below, zero. When they recovered slightly, it was largely because their governments funnelled enormous amounts of public funds into the economy, borrowing from the future. The household debt problems in the United States, illustrated by the mortgage defaults, suggested that the country would no longer be the buyer of last resort for the industrial products

manufactured in the Global South. Several countries in the South – from China to Brazil – worried about their reliance upon exports to the North Atlantic and began to reconsider their economic models.

In 1999, in the wake of the financial crises in Asia (1997) and Russia (1998), the Group of Seven (G7) – made up of the core countries of the capitalist order that have subordinated themselves to the United States – gathered a group of other countries into the Group of Twenty (G20) – made up of nineteen countries of the Global South and North as well as the European Union and African Union which together account for 85% of the world's GDP.[11] The goal was to find a way to maintain the principles of neoliberalism and globalisation and to prevent a return to *dirigisme* or state intervention. The G20 was largely dormant until 2008, when it was revived to meet annually to discuss how to save the global order, which was now in danger due to the depression that began the previous year. But the G7 never allowed the G20 to act as a genuine decision-making body or to challenge G7 dominance. It soon became clear that the G20 was designed primarily to ensure that Global South countries with trade surpluses would use their finances to shore up the Global North-dominated banking system, prevent them from erecting financial or trade barriers, and control these rising economies rather than integrate them into leadership of the world order.[12]

Governments in the Global South never really regained confidence in the Global North's ability to recover economically and began to consider other options. Older theories of South-South cooperation were put back on the table, and the larger Global South countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) formed the BRICS project in 2009.[13] BRICS was designed as an instrument to encourage commerce across the Global South countries with trade and development as its focus. There was no immediate interest in any political issues, apart from the old demand that the countries of the South must be appointed as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council with full veto power.[14] Global South countries increasingly began to decouple their trade from the Global North and trade with each other. India is a good illustration of this given its political proximity to the United States: from 1991 to 1992, the country sold 16.4% of its exports to the US (its largest destination), but by 2023, this figure was down to 13.7%. Though the US remained the largest destination, India's exports diversified such that twenty countries now accounted for 67% of its total exports.[15] Even in India, which has subordinated its foreign policy to the United States since 1991, there has been a trend to move away from the US. Since 2017, when Trump first took office, the US share of global trade has shrunk to 15% while the country failed to settle trade agreements with Asia and Europe (in fact, since that date, the US has not signed even one major trade agreement).[16]

As long as the Global South countries continued to serve as factories for the Global North-based multinational corporations, they were allowed to trade freely with each other. The problem for the capitalist class in the Global North started when the forces of production in the Global South began to develop rapidly, as is evident with China's strides in the production of a range of high-tech goods. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute's Critical Technology Tracker, which has observed tech developments over the past two decades, found that:

> The US led in 60 of 64 technologies in the five years from 2003 to 2007, but in the most recent five years (2019–2023) is leading in seven. China led in just three of 64 technologies in 2003–2007 but is now the lead country in 57 of 64 technologies in 2019–2023, increasing its

> lead from our rankings last year (2018–2022), where it was leading in 52 technologies.[17]

It is this tendency that led to Obama's 'pivot to Asia' (2011), Trump's 'trade war on China' (2018), Biden's export controls and investment bans on China (2022), and Trump's imposition of tariffs on Chinese goods (2025).[18] The US-driven New Cold War, which has focused its crosshairs on China, has little to do with a call for 'democracy' in Hong Kong (2019), the allegations of genocide in Xinjiang (2021), or the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis (2022) but everything to do with the existential threat that China's technological developments and resource nationalism in other Global South countries pose to US unipolarity.[19]

The banning of Huawei and ZTE equipment by the United States government in 2018 demonstrates how the Silicon Valley tech sector sought government protection for its markets using allegations of corporate and political espionage.[20] The 2024 US government ban (following a 2023 executive order) on investments from the US into China's tech sector and the transfer of 'sensitive' technologies to China is part of an overall attempt to prevent China's economic advancement in the name of national security. The problem for the United States is that none of this seems to be working. By 2022, China-based scientists not only filed more patent applications but had more of their papers cited in leading science research journals. In 2022, Chinese companies filed 18,223 applications for semiconductor patents, or 55% of the world total, while US firms filed 26% of the total in this area.[21] In 2023, Huawei released a new 5G smartphone made mostly with Chinese parts (including a 7-nanometre chip manufactured by China's Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation). China's DeepSeek – built entirely by scientists and engineers trained in China using Chinese technology – has not only remained competitive with ChatGPT and on par with the hype around Trump's Stargate Project; it is also far more efficient and innovative, consuming 20% of the resources of ChatGPT and offering an open-source code and model that marks a significant advance in the democratisation of AI.[22] Therefore, DeepSeek is potentially a great threat to the Global North's monopoly, closed-source system that is based on the theft of human knowledge. In a sign of the times, the Indian government is considering using DeepSeek-V2 for fifteen AI initiatives.

The Centre of Gravity

Since the 2010s, the world's centre of gravity has been shifting from the North Atlantic to Asia.[23] The character of these two regions is fundamentally different: the former has a history of colonising other parts of the world and operates in a global neocolonial structure that provides it with an economic advantage, while the latter has a history of being colonised and has no interest in building a system of unfair advantages. The old colonial powers blame these shifts in the economic geography on political factors (such as the nature of

governance and corruption in the Global South) that bear little relevance and are merely talking points of a bloc that once held uncontested power.[24]

The principal feature of Global North-led development was the suspension of any move towards economic sovereignty by the newly independent countries. This manifested, for instance, in crushing these countries' demands, such as to increase the prices of raw material exports, and their attempts to diversify their economies. Coups, invasions, unilateral coercive measures, and denials of credit became the instruments for discipline from Iran (1953) to Chile (1973).[25] During this same period, a large part of the world experimented with socialism and tried to build a development agenda that promoted forms of sovereignty, including in the Global South.[26]

With the collapse of the Third World Project following the debt crisis of the 1980s and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the Global North opportunistically pushed an agenda of globalisation. This agenda suited its capitalist bloc (the G7 countries in particular) and allowed the capitalist firms to export their industrial capacity via arms-length control to the Global South. Global North firms took advantage of lower costs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America by offshoring industrial capacity and reduced transportation expenses through cheaper energy sources and the containerisation of ships. At the same time, the policy of neoliberalism allowed the capitalist class to go on a tax strike and refuse to pay into the social wages in their own societies, further suppressing the incomes of the working class and peasantry.[27]

These two methods – globalisation and neoliberalism – reduced the possibility of capitalist and state investments in the Global North, which – more than merely financialisation – were responsible for the economic slowdown in the heartlands of early industrial capitalism. After the Dotcom bubble burst in 2000–2001, the growth rate in the United Stated remained below 4% and then fell dramatically in 2008–2009 to –2.6% due to the 2007 financial crisis. In 2020 it fell to –2.2% due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these shocks, however, the rate remained between 2% and 3% from 2022–2023, still far lower than the rates in Asia, where net-fixed capital formation has been a part of the general logic of development.[28] The capitalist crisis in the North Atlantic has been sharper than elsewhere largely because the capitalist class in that region has almost complete control over the state apparatus and therefore does not permit the state to play even a moderately adjudicatory role in the class struggle (refusing, for instance, to transfer a higher share of the social surplus to social welfare or permit workers to build trade unions).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was the first clear sign that the centre of gravity of the world economy had shifted from the North Atlantic region to Asia. In 2013, three countries in Europe (Belarus, Moldova, and North Macedonia) signed memoranda of understanding with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); by 2019 that number had increased to nearly thirty (out of forty-four European states). These states were Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, and Turkey in 2015; Georgia and Latvia in 2016; Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Ukraine in 2017; Greece and Portugal in 2018; and Cyprus, Italy, and Luxembourg in 2019. What is striking is that almost all Eastern European countries decided to participate in building Eurasian infrastructure, and so did most Mediterranean countries (with particular interest in refurbishing their ports). As Europe's integration with the US economy began to fray, countries in the region – which had already become increasingly reliant upon Russian oil and natural gas and China's BRI – began to integrate more with the Asian continent. This was part of the broader weakening of the Atlantic bloc, further exemplified by the

failure of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership in 2019, the fallout from Brexit in 2020, and Britain's shift away from Europe through the US-UK Economic Prosperity Deal of 2025.

The European Commission's Network and Information Systems (NIS) Cooperation Group – which was established in 2016 by the NIS Directive – cemented this shift away from Asian integration with a publication in 2020 called *Cybersecurity of 5G Networks EU Toolbox of Risk Mitigating Measures*, which obsessed over the 'risk profile of suppliers', and urged states not to use technology from so-called risky countries.[29] The natural tendency of Europe to integrate with Asia threatened Europe's subordination to the United States. The increasingly militarised responses to Russia (around Ukraine) and China (around Taiwan and allegations over espionage) splintered that integration even more. Italy tore up its memorandum of understanding with China's BRI in December 2023, several Eastern European states began to back off from their eagerness for Chinese investments, and European states shifted from purchasing cheaper Russian energy to importing more expensive energy from the United States.[30] The Atlantic alliance was preserved at the cost of the socioeconomic life of the citizens of its member countries, and Europe's gradual integration with the Asian states was suspended.

Through this period of jockeying between the Atlantic alliance and Eurasian integration, NATO played a strong role in tilting the scales toward the former.[31] When the European Union opened discussions with a country about becoming a new member, NATO entered to draw that country into its orbit. The EU promised economic and political integration (despite low levels of EU investment compared to what could come from Asia), and NATO provided military security and political direction – particularly to draw these countries into the NATO mindset and US-driven New Cold War against China, Russia, and the emergence of sovereignty in the Global South. The joint expansion of the EU and NATO mostly took place across Eastern and Central Europe after 1999: the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joined NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004, and then a swathe of countries from Estonia to Slovenia joined both the EU and NATO between 2004 and 2013.

The New Mood in the Global South

To exaggerate the shift in the world economy's centre of gravity or to overread the growth of the BRICS+ bloc is a great temptation. These are major developments in our times, but they must be understood with soberness. Seventy years after the 1955 Bandung Conference, without any sort of social democratic or socialist consensus or a mass anti-colonial struggle, the Bandung Spirit has long dissipated.[32] In many Global South countries, the working class and peasantry remain largely disorganised, trapped in disarticulated production

regimes and precarious employment. Though there is evidence of growing confidence in some Global South states, it is not grounded in mass political struggle and does not inherently suggest the arrival of multipolarity – simply that the era of unipolarity, ushered in by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, is now ending. The United States and its allies continue to dominate in the arenas of military and communications power, but they no longer fully dominate the capacities of technology and science, raw materials, or finance.

Global South countries operate through a range of multilateral and regional organisations and platforms, rather than as a single or closely aligned bloc. They are not prepared to become poles in a global contest. For instance, Turkey, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and the Philippines are for historical reasons part of the Global South, yet two of them (South Korea and the Philippines) are practically military colonies of the US and Turkey is a NATO member that colluded with Western forces to remove Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and enable Israel's occupation of large border areas of Syria. Saudi Arabia, for its part, welcomed the weakening of Iran's allies.[33]

Nonetheless, in this new period, as the structures of unipolarity crack open, space has opened for countries of the Global South to assert their sovereignty. Though these assertions are mostly economic – for instance, Indonesia stating that it will not export unprocessed nickel and India refusing to stop buying Russian oil – they nevertheless have important political ramifications, such as Indonesia joining BRICS+ and India refusing to condemn Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. Examples of these assertions are legion, and they are indicative of the new mood in the Global South.[34]

The temperature of this new mood is also exemplified by the kind of politics visible in Latin America.[35] Inspired by the example of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, wave after revolutionary wave has flooded Latin America with hope against US imperialism and for a left-wing breakthrough. The **first wave** was crushed by extreme violence that sought to make an example of the Cuban Revolution through military coups and the US-orchestrated campaign of abductions, torture, and assassinations known as Operation Condor. These coups, from Brazil (1964) to Argentina (1976), stayed the hand of the Cuban alternative. Yet, the illegal US blockade against Cuba did not prevent the island from accelerating its socialism or expanding its internationalism. The **second wave** – beginning with the Nicaraguan and Grenadian revolutions of 1979 – renewed hope, which was once more contested by imperialist forces through massacres in Central America and by alliances between these forces and narco-terrorists of the region. The **third wave** came with the election of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez in 1999 and the advancement of what was known as the 'pink tide' in Latin America. This tide was hindered by the United States' illegal hybrid war against Venezuela, the decline in commodity prices, and the weakened ability of social and political movements to effectively contest the entrenched bourgeoisie in much of the region. Yet in each of these waves, the example of Cuba shined. We are now at the end of the **fourth wave**, with the electoral victories of Chile's Gabriel Boric (2021), Colombia's Gustavo Petro (2022), and Brazil's Luiz Inácio

Lula da Silva (2022) ending the dominion of the right wing but unable to move a left agenda. This wave is significant but should not be exaggerated. Even the mildest centre-left governments should have been forced to address the serious social crises in the hemisphere, crises deepened by the collapse of commodity prices and by the COVID-19 pandemic. Policies to address these crises would have been possible using funds either from the various domestic bourgeoisies or from the royalties raised from the extraction of natural resources, which would have forced these governments into a clash with both their own bourgeoisies and with US

imperialism. Few of these governments stood up. The test, therefore, was not what these governments said about this or that issue (such as Ukraine), but how they acted when faced with the refusal by the forces of capitalism to solve the major social crises of our time. The new mood in the Global South merely provides the space to begin to address these crises. Perhaps a **fifth wave** will emerge with more confidence.

This new mood is generated not by mass struggles of the working class and the peasantry, but by the vicissitudes of history and the necessity of exercising sovereignty and expanding development priorities. Most of the governments in Global South countries that have demonstrated this new mood are either not of the left or their main base is not rooted in the organised working class and peasantry. In most of these countries, the working class and peasantry have seen an increase in precarious labour practices, the weakening of their own class organisations, and a politics of defensiveness in their relationship to centre-right to far-right governments.[36] Widespread unrest continues because of the contradictions of capitalism, but it does not easily translate into a political agenda driven by mass-based left organisations.

The attrition of state institutions that provide social welfare has forced sections of the left to build service provision mechanisms, drawing the revolutionary left into the necessity of providing services for survival (often through cooperatives and collectives). Meanwhile, the right wing, better funded certainly by Western foundations, has built NGOs that promote a culture and world view for the working class and peasantry that is ruthless, petty, and often rooted in forms of exclusionary religiosity or racial supremacy.[37] For that reason, in many countries of the Global South the working class and peasantry are drawn towards other, more hateful explanations for their despair and atomisation, pointing the finger away from the ruling class and squarely at those who are treated as Others (such as religious or ethnic minorities, and immigrants). The collapse of social welfare systems and the paltry to non-existent redistribution of resources has revived older patriarchal hierarchies that place the labour of childcare, household management, and eldercare on the shoulders of women, who continue to be underpaid and overworked in the labour market at the same time.[38] With electoral politics and democratic institutions in the bourgeois-landlord states of the Global South swamped by money power, the opportunity for the working class and peasantry to escape clientelism of different forms is minimal.

If growth rates remain relatively high, centre- to far- right governments in the Global South can maintain some redistributionist policies and invest considerable amounts of public funds in infrastructure. High growth rates, regardless of the quality of the investment, have a significant positive impact on life expectancy and social measures in general. But when the downward pressures of capitalism return, and when the bourgeoisie in these Global South states refuses to contribute to any counter-cyclical spending, the class struggle in these countries will be renewed. In what direction this class struggle will go depends entirely on the prospects for rejuvenating independent working-class and peasant movements as well as left-wing parties. It is only when the class struggle is more intense, and when the working class and peasantry can put their stamp on state policy, that the gains that can be reaped from high growth rates will improve the *quality* of investments and not just their volume. That is the only scenario in which there is a possibility of moving in a socialist direction; today's nebulous new mood in the Global South is not, in and of itself, an indication of such a shift.[39]

Bursts of mass activity do take place, as they did in the Sahel, along the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. Here, in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, widespread protests against the French military and its bases led to a

general rebellion against the established political elites, which then led to military coups led by popular officers. These popular coups brought in governments that are committed to building sovereign processes, inspired by the legacy of figures such as Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso (1983–1987) and by the possibilities of regionalism (such as the Alliance of Sahel States, established in 2023). This anti-French sentiment has spread across the region, with Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, and Senegal calling for a French military withdrawal over the last two years. Meanwhile, in Ghana, at the inauguration of the newly elected social democratic President John Mahama, the warmest applause of the event was for Ibrahim Traoré, the invited leader of Burkina Faso. It is inspirational to mass movements across the Global South, which are cautiously watching to see whether these states will be able to break from the Washington Consensus and its tentacles. Less dramatic, but equally significant, are the centre-left governments in places such as Sri Lanka which emerged on the back of inchoate mass struggles and drew the forces of the left to build patriotic platforms that are not programmatically left-wing but are at least rooted in demands for sovereignty. Whether these popular fronts will be able to develop a clear agenda for their governments is yet to be seen.

Hope, of course, rests on countries like China, which has been able to successfully pursue its own form of social development under a state committed to socialism. But China, like other socialist projects, must navigate three core tasks: first, to protect itself from economic, political, and military threats to its sovereignty; second, to ensure the welfare of its own people; and third, to uphold its commitment to internationalism. These mandates are not easy to maintain at the same tempo. It is unrealistic to expect China, which has made great strides but is still nonetheless a developing country, to be the saviour of the Global South. China provides forms of investment and technology transfer that have already been useful to several countries in the Global South. The issue here is not Chinese investment and technology but what kind of development theory and strategy will be enabled by the political projects in the individual Global South states and by the regional experiments that they have already begun to develop.[40] What happens when the class struggle generates sufficient force to propel a left or even centre-left alliance to power? What will they do when they are in office? Will they be able to take advantage of the churning of the world order to construct new processes in their societies, strengthen the confidence and clarity of the working class and peasantry, and embolden other countries to stand up and prevent the imperialist bloc from asserting its old habits?

More and more of the world is in motion, seeking to break from neoliberalism and imperialism and assert sovereign rule and paths of development. More and more people across the world seem to understand the futility of permanent austerity. But their projects are fragile and appear in ways that are not necessarily progressive. As of yet, the *quantity* of areas that seek to break from the current world order is not widespread or powerful enough to change the *quality* of the world order. But change is on the horizon. It is at the heart of the global class struggle. Something is bound to happen.

Notes

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NATO: The Most Dangerous Organisation on Earth

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The posters in this dossier were created by artists from around the world and displayed in the *(In)security* exhibition organised as part of the 2022 Madrid Peace Summit in the lead-up to the NATO Summit held in the same city. The exhibition was a collective initiative of the International Peoples' Assembly's European secretariat with support from Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, the World March of Women, and others.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) claims that it is facing the greatest existential crisis in its nearly eighty-year history. As US President Donald Trump and his national security team have – on the surface – turned their back on Europe and said that they will no longer pay for its security, the region's leaders scramble to raise the funds to increase their support for the war in Ukraine and build up their own military

production and capacity. Yet, there has been no concrete indication that the United States, which is the dominant force in NATO, will either withdraw from that military instrument or seek to disband it. NATO serves a wide range of purposes for the United States and has done so since it was founded in 1949. To pressure European states to pay more for their own defence is one thing; to mistake this for a broader US strategic withdrawal from Europe is another. Despite the rhetoric, what Trump is doing is not outside the ambit of the US elite's overall approach: namely to maintain global power through instruments such as NATO and a pliant European state system, rather than isolating the United States behind the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. NATO will remain an instrument of Global North power regardless of the surface bumps that are inevitable in the period ahead.

The title of this dossier, *NATO: The Most Dangerous Organisation on Earth*, is in line with the judgement of political scientist Peter Gowan (1946–2009), who wrote at the time of the NATO bombardment and break-up of Yugoslavia in 1999:

> We must bear in mind two unfortunate facts: first, that the NATO states have been and are hell-bent on exacerbating the inequalities of power and wealth in the world, on destroying all challenges to their overwhelming military and economic power and on subordinating almost all other considerations to these goals; and second, the NATO states are finding it extraordinarily easy to manipulate their domestic electorates into believing that these states are indeed leading the world's population toward a more just and humane future when, in reality, they are doing no such thing.[1]

NATO uses the language of human rights and collective security to conceal the underlying motivations for its birth and current existence. It would be worthwhile to set aside this rhetoric and look at the actual record of this *military* – not *human rights* – alliance.

This dossier comes in three parts. The first provides a history of NATO and an assessment of its role in the US-led imperialist system. The second focuses on how NATO, since the fall of the Soviet Union, has redefined itself as a global policeman and intervened – as the third part shows – in different ways in the Global South.

Part 1: The Aggressive Alliance

The idea of NATO originated during the last years of World War II, when the United States and the United Kingdom began to discuss new security arrangements once the fascist powers in Europe had been defeated.[2] In 1945, the United States hosted the San Francisco Conference, where the United Nations was formed. The UN Charter, ratified by the fifty participants of the conference, allowed (in Chapter VIII, Article 52) for the formation of regional security organisations and granted them enforcement action – such as sanctions and military intervention – but only with the authorisation of the UN Security Council (in Chapter VIII, Article 53).[3] It was based on this allowance by the UN Charter that the United States gathered ten European countries and Canada to sign the Washington Treaty in 1949 and create NATO. The European countries

that joined NATO had a variety of post-war experiences: most of them, such as France and Germany, had to rebuild their militaries virtually from scratch; others, such as Britain, retained relatively intact militaries, while one – Iceland – had no standing army at all. NATO provided these countries with a US military (and nuclear) shield. In 1949, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) circulated a memorandum to explain that NATO's true objective was not only to deter the Soviet Union from threatening Europe, but also to continue the 'long-term control of German power' and settle the question of 'who is going to control German potential and thus hold the balance of power in Europe'. This hard-nosed assessment is a more accurate view of NATO than an exegesis of its charter.[4] The CIA's understanding had a European cognate. As NATO's first secretary general, Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay, wrote in an internal memorandum in 1952, the organisation must 'keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down'.[5]

The year before NATO's founding, George Kennan of the US State Department mused about how the United States had 'about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population'. The implications of this would need to be settled. As Kennan wrote in the twenty-third *Report by the Policy Planning Staff*:

> This disparity is particularly great as between ourselves and the peoples of Asia. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security.[6]

The 'pattern of relationships' that needed to be built to control the 'envy and resentment' of the peoples of Asia and the broader Global South began the year before NATO was formed, when the US reshaped the security arrangements in the Americas with the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (or the Rio Treaty) of 1947 and then with the adoption of a new charter for the Organisation of American States (OAS) in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1948. Both of these arrangements yoked the countries of Latin America to the United States. A few years after the founding of NATO in 1949, the United States built security pacts in East Asia (the Manila Pact of 1954, which created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation, or SEATO) and in Central Asia (the Baghdad Pact of 1955, which created the Central Treaty Organisation, or CENTO). Along with these pacts, the US-led OAS committed itself to anti-communist action with the 1962 Special Consultative Committee on Security Against the Subversive Action of International Communism.[7] The United States established this ecology of military pacts for two purposes: to constrain the development of any communist parties or forces in the regions and to enable US influence on governments around the world. This was part of a broader projection of power that enabled the US to build and maintain military bases – in some cases with nuclear capability – far from its own shores but close to the Soviet Union, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and the People's Republic of China, effectively laying the groundwork for a global military presence.

The need for military pacts began to wane for several reasons from the 1960s to the 1980s. First, the United States had already established an enormous global military footprint, with bases from Japan to Honduras that had been created through bilateral treaties. Second, military technology had improved dramatically, allowing

the US to be far more flexible and mobile with its arsenal of intermediate-range missiles, nuclear-powered submarines, and enormous aerial capacity. Third, the US had developed a strategy known as 'interoperability', which allowed it to use sales of its own military technology to allied countries as a way to promote joint military exercises – effectively conducted under US military command and mostly for US strategic interests. Finally, the US had created regional command structures – such as Pacific Command in 1947 (Pacom, which would become the Indo-Pacific Command in 2018), Southern Command (Southcom) in 1963, and Central Command (Centcom) in 1983 – which had already established bilateral and multilateral agreements with allied militaries. It therefore did not require additional regional military alliances. These new mechanisms for the US global military footprint made security pacts less necessary in places such as Asia and the Middle East. SEATO was dissolved in 1977, largely due to lack of interest by the Southeast Asian countries, and two years later, after the Iranian Revolution, CENTO was shut down.[8] This was not the case, however, in Latin America, where the OAS continues to operate to this day, focused with laser sharpness on how to minimise the role of the left in Latin America (Cuba was suspended from the organisation in 1962, after which Fidel Castro referred to it as the 'Ministry of Colonies').

Alongside the OAS, NATO was the other, crucial exception. It was not disbanded. Lord Hastings' formula was intact. *Keep the Soviet Union out*: retain US and NATO military bases with US nuclear weapons in Europe as a deterrent to any Soviet moves beyond the established lines after World War II. *Keep the Americans in*: from a US perspective, this in fact meant keep the Europeans down, which implied that they must never be allowed to create their own continental army and that whenever expanding European Union (EU) was discussed, expanding NATO went along with it so as to maintain US influence in the region. *Keep the Germans down*: ensure that the old imperialist powers have no ambitions beyond being the subordinate allies of the United States, a vision that the US maintained not only for Germany but also across Eurasia – especially for Japan. NATO, therefore, remained an essential element of the architecture of US imperialism.

Regardless of what the US and NATO officials said, it was clear that they had three objectives for this military pact: to prevent the left from growing in their own countries (destroying the popular fronts in France, Greece, and Italy during the late 1940s and 1950s, as well as the anti-war movement in West Germany during the 1960s and 1970s), to contain and roll back the socialist bloc (including, after 1959, the Cuban Revolution), and to prevent the national liberation movements in Africa and Asia from succeeding (including supporting Portugal's colonial wars in Africa from the 1960s to the 1970s and assisting the United States in Korea in the early 1950s and Vietnam from the 1960s to the 1970s).[9]

Madrid Peace Summit Poster, 2022.

Part 2: Global NATO

In November 1991, a month before the Soviet Union was formally dissolved, NATO released a report called

New Strategic Concept that acknowledged that there was a 'new, more promising, era in Europe'.[10] In this climate, NATO members could have built the confidence to say *let us dissolve the alliance*. Instead, they legitimised NATO's continued existence, warning of 'multidirectional' threats that necessitated coordinated interventions, even outside the territories of NATO member states.

In 1997, at NATO's headquarters in Brussels, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said that with the Soviet Union gone, 'many people believe that we no longer face such a unifying threat, but I believe we do'. What, then, was NATO's purpose? Albright explained:

> It is to stop the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. It is to douse the combustible combination of technology and terror, the possibility, as unthinkable as it may seem, that weapons of mass destruction will fall into the hands of people who have no compunctions about using them. This threat emanates largely from the Middle East and Eurasia, so Europe is especially at risk.[11]

In other words, NATO had to intervene in areas outside Europe to protect Europe. This is the charitable, surface interpretation. But there is another way to understand what Albright said so clearly. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia – under a pliant President Boris Yeltsin (who owed his 1996 re-election to US interference) – effectively surrendered to the US, and so the United States took the opportunity to use its own overwhelming military power and that of its main global instrument, NATO, to expand its dominion across Eastern Europe and punish any 'backlash states' (as Anthony Lake of the US State Department called them in 1994) that refused to adopt the policies of globalisation, neoliberalism, and US primacy.[12]

Global North governments require the image of a menacing enemy to legitimise NATO's existence. Whether the perceived threat of communism (the Soviet Union during the Cold War) or allegations of terrorism (al-Qaeda) or authoritarianism (Russia and China more recently), NATO member states sow fear about the 'enemies of the free world' to convince their own populations of the necessity to further militarise their societies, such as by expanding their military and police forces.[13] Such demagoguery also serves to integrate otherwise progressive movements and trade unions into NATO's war drive.

In fact, in 1991, it had already become clear that the United States would use NATO to subordinate Eastern Europe and Russia and that it would then be used as a global policeman against any 'rogue state' that decided to defy US power in this new era. NATO's lines of engagement would follow US policy to the letter. As US President George W. Bush's 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* noted, 'Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in the hopes of surpassing, or equalling, the power of the United States'.[14] The concept of 'potential adversaries' – initially 'backlash states' or 'rogue states' in 1994 and then 'catastrophic terrorism' in 1998 – would soon be focused on Russia and China.[15]

There were geopolitical mandates that informed this decision, but there was also money involved. When the

Soviet Union collapsed, the weapons industry feared that a 'peace dividend' would follow and that their profits, which had grown immensely during this period, would suffer. So, the weapons industry created the US Committee to Enlarge NATO, chaired by Bruce Jackson (then vice president of Lockheed Martin), which lobbied the US Congress to pass the NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act of 1996. Over the next two years, from 1996 to 1998, the six largest military contractors spent $51 million lobbying Congress to promote NATO expansion.[16] As Joel Johnson of the Aerospace Industry Association put it, 'the stakes are high. Whoever gets in first will have a lock for the next quarter century' (since aircraft sales presume enormous additional purchases of spare parts and new aircraft to maintain and expand fleets).[17]

New NATO members were strongly encouraged to buy from the US weapons industry, and so the enlargement of NATO was also the enlargement of the weapons market for Boeing, Lockheed Martin, McDonnell Douglas, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and Textron (known at the time as the 'big six', all based in the United States).[18] Between 2015–2019 and 2020–2024, for example, European NATO members more than doubled their imports from the weapons industry, with 64% coming from the United States.[19]

Europe's reliance on US arms manufacturers has been an issue for the region's bureaucrats for decades. In 2003, for instance, a European Commission study wrote that 'there is a danger that European industry could be reduced to the status of sub-supplier to prime US contractors, while the key know-how is reserved for US firms'.[20] This was part of the overall vision to subordinate Europe to US ambitions.

In 1999, exceeding any UN mandate for peacekeeping, NATO went to war in Yugoslavia to break up the country. During this war, NATO bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, which the Chinese continue to believe was a deliberate act.[21] This was the first indicator of NATO's push outside it's area of operations. Two years later, NATO conducted another 'out of area' operation by entering the US-initiated war on Afghanistan. This provided NATO with the confidence that it now had the ability and permission to operate as the policeman of the US-led order, with Ivo H. Daalder – who became the US ambassador to NATO in 2009 – and James Goldgeier (a long-time advocate for NATO expansion) writing in *Foreign Affairs* about 'Global NATO' in 2006.[22] While NATO did not formally enter the illegal war on Iraq in 2003, it nonetheless supported both Poland and Turkey with logistics and communications in the war. During this period, NATO began to expand its relationships with military forces across the world, notably in Eastern Europe and East Asia, and participated in the US War on Terror in different ways.[23]

Before the Soviet Union collapsed, and to allow for the annexation of the German Democratic Republic (DDR), the United States government made a commitment to the Soviet government that NATO would not expand beyond Germany's eastern border.[24] However, after the fall of the Soviet Union, NATO did exactly that. The 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia sent a clear message to Eastern European nations: you are either with us or against us. In the years that followed, these countries were incorporated into NATO: Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999; Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004; Albania and Croatia in 2009; Montenegro in 2017; and North Macedonia in 2020. During this process, the US took steps to ensure that the now reunified Germany was 'kept down' and operated only within the

boundaries set by Washington.[25] The EU's eastward expansion was permitted, but it was preceded by (or at least concurred with) NATO expansion. US hegemony in the Western bloc was thus secured, particularly in Eastern Europe.

Though four countries that border Russia (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland) had already joined NATO by the mid-2000s, the Russian government was not going to permit Georgia and Ukraine, two countries that share sizeable borders with Russia, to join. At the April 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, in the context of Europe's increasing reliance on Russian natural gas and oil, France and Germany blocked Georgia and Ukraine's entry into NATO. The deployment of Russian troops following a Georgian military confrontation with Russia in South Ossetia that same year provided the first indication of how far Moscow would go to prevent Georgia's ambitions to join either the EU or NATO. The US-influenced removal of the Ukrainian government in 2014, the insistence by the Global North that Ukraine join NATO, and the US withdrawal from key arms control treaties – including the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (2002) and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (2019) – suggested to Russia that Washington aimed to place mid-range nuclear weapons on its border.[26] This was non-negotiable to Moscow, and it led to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Since the early 1950s, the United States has complained about having to shoulder the burden of NATO spending because European countries do not spend enough on their military capacity.[27] In 1952, even the UK parliament debated the unevenness of military spending and of compulsory military service across NATO countries.[28] Nonetheless, the low level of military expenditure by European countries remained, and indeed there was even a decline in the 1970s due to the process of détente that followed the signing of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the 1975 Helsinki Accords as well as the stagflation that smothered European economies in the same period. In the 1980s, then US President Ronald Reagan's administration mounted pressure on Europe to increase military spending. In the post-Cold War era, US officials again sang in harmony over the need for higher European military spending.

At the same time, however, Europe recognised that its reliance on the US prevented it from operating independently. After the wars in Bosnia (1995) and Yugoslavia (1999), for instance, there was a debate in European capitals about their dependence on the United States.[29] The push to build Europe's navigation satellite system, Galileo, was motivated largely by this anxiety. 'If the EU finds it necessary to undertake a security mission that the US does not consider to be in its interest', a European Commission paper noted in 2002, Europe 'will be impotent unless it has the satellite technology that is now indispensable'.[30] By the 2006 NATO Riga Summit, the members agreed that they should raise their military spending to 2% of their GDP, a norm reinforced at the 2014 NATO Wales Summit.[31]

While aware of the problems of military dependence, European states nonetheless wanted to remain under the cover of the US military blanket. European leaders hastened from NATO summit to NATO summit to agree to raise their military spending regardless of the damage this would do to their societies and to their own foreign policy, which was becoming increasingly militarised. In 2022, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz gave a speech later known as *Zeitenwende* (meaning 'turning of an era'), where he pledged a $100 billion fund

to increase military spending.[32] Then, in 2025, when the US government decided to cut military assistance to Ukraine, the German government (now led by Chancellor Friedrich Merz) – which had been an arrogant voice of fiscal prudence toward its own people and against the peoples of poorer European countries (such as Greece) – ignored its debt brake rule (a cap that limits government borrowing and was enshrined in the country's constitution in 2009) in order to increase military spending.[33] That same year the EU also announced plans to approve 800 billion euros in war credits.[34] In other words, money can be found for NATO but not for social protections or key infrastructure.[35]

Goyen Chen, *War Only Brings Pain*, 2022.

Part 3: NATO and the Global South

In 2023, a year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, German Ambassador Christoph Heusgen hectored

Namibia's Prime Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila about why her country had not condemned Russia. Kuugongelwa-Amadhila calmly responded that her country was 'promoting a peaceful resolution of that conflict so that the entire world and all the resources of the world can be focused on improving the conditions of people around the world instead of being spent on acquiring weapons, killing people, and actually creating hostilities'.[36] The money that is used to buy weapons, Kuugongelwa-Amadhila added, could be used even in Europe, 'where many people are experiencing hardships'. What is significant from this exchange was not *what* Kuugongelwa-Amadhila said, but *that* she said anything at all that was contrary to the Global North consensus.

Bewilderment spread across the room and beyond. Why are these leaders of small and poor Global South countries speaking out against the Global North, and why are they not as subordinate as they once were? As Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi wrote in the preface of the country's *Diplomatic Bluebook 2023*, which set out to understand the emergence of the Global South, 'The world is now at a turning point in history'.[37] In a November 2024 report, NATO's rapporteur and former Lithuanian foreign minister Audronius Ažubalis acknowledged the changes taking place in the world with the rise of the Global South:

> Arguably, the West did not adapt quickly enough to this new reality, allowing authoritarian powers such as Russia and China to make significant inroads into Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific, reaping significant economic and geopolitical benefits.[38]

Ažubalis's assessment demonstrates how little the Global North's leaders understand about the rise of the Global South. Indeed, it is the emergence of a new hub of industry and productive forces in Asia (from India and China to Vietnam and Indonesia) and the creation of a new set of development institutions (including the New Development Bank) that have allowed poorer states some leverage against the US Treasury Department-dominated International Monetary Fund. In other words, it is not that China is making 'significant inroads' into these continents, but that China – and other countries – are able to underwrite development efforts in the poorer nations. Since the Global North is not doing this, these countries are no longer beholden to it. To simply dismiss China and Russia as 'authoritarian powers' and assume that the tired rhetoric of Western liberalism and democracy is going to attract countries that want to develop their economies is foolhardy. Equally absurd is the accusation of authoritarianism from countries that routinely ally with monarchies. The failure to understand the actual movement of history paralyses the NATO intellectuals, who instead fall back on the assumption that the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific are merely being duped by Russia and China, and that if they only knew the truth about Western liberalism and democracy, they would make the correct decision to subordinate themselves to the Global North.

Nonetheless, NATO has developed a major presence in the Mediterranean region, on the African continent, and in Asia (and has a minor role to play in Latin America, where its major ally is Colombia). For the remainder of this section, we will focus on these three regions of significant NATO activity.

The Mediterranean, the War on Terror, and the Instrumentalisation of Migration

By the 1990s, NATO had set out its tentacles to explore collaborations around the world, beginning with

what it called its 'southern neighbourhood' (namely the countries to the south of the Mediterranean Sea). In 1994, it launched the Mediterranean Dialogue, a forum for countries outside the NATO zone to exchange with NATO countries. Countries joined the dialogue in waves, from Algeria, Egypt, and Israel to Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, many of which had no relations with Israel and yet sat around the table with that country's representative. In 2004, one year after the United States and several of its NATO allies participated in the illegal war on Iraq, NATO gathered four Gulf Arab countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates) into the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative to enhance military cooperation between NATO and the Arab Gulf. Several of the countries in these initiatives (including at least Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Morocco) participated in NATO's 2011 Operation Unified Protector, which destroyed the Libyan state. In 2016, NATO opened the Strategic Direction South Hub near Naples, Italy; in 2017, it opened an Istanbul Cooperative Initiative Regional Centre in Kuwait; and then, within that dialogue process, it suggested opening a NATO Liaison Office in Amman, Jordan. This office was announced at the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius and then opened the following year.

These pronouncements and communiqués speak effusively of human rights and democracy, but the key words in reality are counterterrorism and the interdiction of migrants across the waters. After the atrocity of NATO's 2011 war on Libya, when the alliance was already knee-deep in the swamp of the War on Terror, it began its war on migrants from various parts of the Global South who travelled to that war-torn country to attempt to cross the sea to Italy. NATO leaders began to speak of this tragedy as the 'instrumentalisation of migrants', which meant to them that their enemies were deploying migrants as a 'hybrid threat' to overwhelm their countries (a phrase that was used specifically when Russia allowed asylum seekers from a range of countries to cross the border into Finland in 2024). At a meeting in Washington in 2024, former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg directly acknowledged that 'NATO has a role to play' in the 'instrumentalisation of migration'.[39] This is NATO bringing its entire panoply of military assets to defend Fortress Europe, a right-wing, anti-immigrant idea.

Africa Says, 'NATO, Dégage!'

NATO's most consequential action south of the Mediterranean was its use of force to destroy the Libyan state in 2011. That action both opened the door for Africans and others to migrate to Europe through Libya and set in motion a terrorist assault on Algeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. More than a decade later, the detritus of the NATO intervention remains.

Notably, this intervention took place under the pretext of the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P), an international norm developed by a beleaguered United Nations that 'seeks to ensure that the international community never again fails to halt the mass atrocity crimes of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity'.[40] While the International Committee on Intervention and State Sovereignty developed R2P in 2001 in response to the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, it was only after the United States damaged the idea of 'humanitarian intervention' with its illegal war on Iraq in 2003 that more concrete steps were taken to consolidate R2P as an international norm until it was formally adopted at a UN World Summit in 2005.

France, which was one of the authors of the destruction of Libya, used the subsequent terrorist assault on the Sahel to legitimise its own military intervention in the region, which has now been pushed out by popular

coups under the slogan *France, dégage!*.[41] That sentiment, 'France, get out!' slides into a wider orbit: *Europe, get out! NATO, get out!*

For most people on the African continent, it would not be easy to distinguish between the EU, the US, and NATO. The EU's policy on migration, for instance, is not a civilian policy but a paramilitary one that used Italy's Arma de Carabinieri and Spain's Guardia Civil to patrol the Sahel through the Rapid Action Groups for monitoring and intervention in the Sahel (GAR-SI) from 2017 to 2021. Meanwhile, the US flew drones to provide surveillance capacity from AB 201, a massive US military base in Agadez, Niger.[42] French military intervention, US bases in the region, the use of surveillance technologies in the Sahel and Sahara that are tightly regulated or banned in Europe: this is how northern Africa experiences the NATO project – not for human rights, but for brutality.[43]

Yet, NATO's presence in Africa has posed a challenge for governments on the continent, which continue to seek money and technical assistance. In 2015, this dynamic bought NATO the right to create a liaison office in the African Union (AU) headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.[44] It is this concession to NATO that allows African states to request training and funds for the fledgling African Standby Force (one of its five regional forces being the Economic Community of West African States Standby Capacity, which almost invaded the states of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger after their popular coups in 2021, 2022, and 2023, respectively).[45] African military leaders continue to circle in and out of the military headquarters of NATO countries, which have now been formalised as the NATO and AU Military-to-Military Staff Talks.[46] With this kind of cosiness, it means almost nothing that the AU's Peace and Security Council made a statement in 2016 asking member states to be 'circumspect' about foreign military bases on their soil.[47]

Goyen Chen, *Know Love, Know Peace. No Love, No Peace*, 2022.

NATO's China Challenge

The wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Libya took NATO out of its direct area of operations. Yet this is far from the limit of NATO's geography of imperialism. As Sten Rynning of the Danish Institute for

Advanced Study wrote in his 2024 book *NATO: From Cold War to Ukraine, a History of the World's Most Powerful Alliance*, 'Naturally, NATO cannot afford to ignore the Indo-Pacific, because this theatre has become the primary geopolitical preoccupation of the United States'.[48] This formulation would interest a linguist: NATO 'cannot afford to ignore' the central issues that preoccupy not the NATO members as a whole, but the United States. In other words, Rynning, whose book is the closest we will get to an authorised study of NATO, openly makes two admissions. First, that the organisation's policy is determined not by the North Atlantic Council (officially NATO's primary decision-making body), but by the United States. Second, that since 2009 (when Barack Obama became the president of the US), the US has increasingly come to see China as its principal rival, pushing NATO to expand its orbit to threaten the Chinese and put them in their place.

Until recently, NATO described China as providing both 'opportunities and challenges', as it wrote in the 2019 London Declaration. Two years later, under US pressure, NATO decided that China no longer provided 'opportunities' but that its 'stated ambitions and assertive behaviour present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to Alliance security' (according to the 2021 Brussels Declaration).[49] In an essay published on NATO's website in 2023, Luis Simón of the Madrid-based Real Instituto Elcano (which is founded and funded by the Spanish state) argued that 'China constitutes a challenge to an international system that still largely reflects transatlantic values and interests'.[50] This is a correct observation: it is not that China opposes the 'rules-based international order', as the US State Department claims, but that it might oppose the transatlantic *domination* of this system.

Simón notes two other significant ways that China is 'relevant' to NATO's security. First, China has weapons systems that could reach Europe, and it has 'critical infrastructure holdings in Europe'. Second, because the New Cold War on China is 'immensely consequential for the United States', NATO must be involved in the Indo-Pacific frontier. This reinforces Rynning's point that if it is important to the US, then it must be important to NATO (here, Simón, a Spanish national, is in agreement with Rynning, a Danish national, that the sovereignty of their own countries' foreign policies can be surrendered before Washington).

It is this attitude that has motivated NATO to use its Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (created in 2021) to build close ties with Australia and New Zealand (both of which were already members of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance) as well as Japan and South Korea. These countries are now part of the Indo-Pacific 4 (IP4) and attended the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid as near members.[51] Then, in September 2024, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba called for the formation of an 'Asian NATO'. However, even though the alliance has considered opening a liaison office in Tokyo in the past, an Asian NATO would be largely redundant given the already established elements of the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy, such as:

- Five Eyes, a network of intelligence agencies bound by undisclosed agreements comprised of Australia, New Zealand Canada, the UK, and the US.
- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or Quad), which includes Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.
- The Squad, which substitutes out a less enthusiastic India for the Philippines.
- The Australia-United Kingdom-United States alliance (AUKUS).
- The Japan-South Korea-US alliance (JAKUS).

Additionally, the United States government has very provocatively drawn the Chinese province of Taiwan into NATO's growing role in Asia. For instance, the US Congress' draft Taiwan Policy Act considers Taiwan to be a 'major non-NATO ally' while a recommended amendment to the 1976 Arms Export Control Act includes it on the list of 'NATO Plus recipients', allowing it to sidestep non-proliferation rules of different kinds.[52]

In other words, there are already several platforms that do the work of an Asian NATO, and NATO is already fully involved in the Indo-Pacific, as evidenced by its willingness to join the US project of patrolling the waters around China and building security projects such as bases and alliances. NATO's Atlantic alliance has already set sail in the Pacific Ocean. This is twenty-first century gunboat diplomacy.

In 1839, the British ships that forced opium on the Chinese came with evocative names such as the *HMS Volage* and the *HMS Hyacinth*, the former (Volage) indicating fickleness, and the latter (Hyacinth) a reference to Greek mythology indicating jealousy. These names are worth preserving. NATO's alliances, too, are fickle. NATO's interests, too, are driven by jealousy, protecting the interest of its member states over global interests, as it pretends. It wants to maintain the US rules-based system and prevent other countries from developing. That is what makes NATO the most dangerous and reactionary organisation in the world today.

Othman Ghalmi, *Where Can I Find Peace*, 2022.

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Africa's Faustian Bargain with the International Monetary Fund

The artwork in this dossier illustrates the Faustian bargain that all African countries have to make, which comes at a cost to their financial, industrial, agricultural, and political sovereignty. The images are created by members of Tricontinental's art department.

On 20 June 1960, Senegal won its independence from France. Two years later, on 31 August 1962, Senegal became a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Almost two decades after independence, in 1979, Senegal entered into an arrangement to gain credit in exchange for more IMF control over Senegal's economy. From 1979, Senegal's many governments have sought IMF assistance over twenty times over the forty-six years since then. The IMF arrangements have had different names: Extended Fund Facility, Extended Credit Facility, Standby Arrangements, Structural Adjustment Facility Commitment, Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility, Concessional Facility Arrangement, Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, Exogenous Shock Facility, Rapid Credit Facility, Rapid Financing Instrument, and Standby Credit Facility. But their essence is the same: in exchange for the IMF's help, including accessing funds from the private and public credit markets, the government of Senegal has had diminished sovereignty over its fiscal policy (Senegal's power over its monetary policy has already been lessened by its use of the CFA franc).[1]

It was a Faustian bargain that all African countries made at some point in their history. Countries that had no established exchequers, poorly funded central banks, barely any control over their raw materials, and very low levels of industrialisation faced an uphill task after independence to build the integrity of their national

economies and regional trade networks. They remained integrated in a neocolonial structure, which IMF interventions reinforced. They were discouraged from diverting their resources to build up human capacity or the industrial base of their economies.

At no point did the IMF interventions for Senegal, for instance, produce growth of a robust kind; an IMF study from 1996, after almost two decades of the same adjustment policies, noted, 'While the policies pursued under these programs have contributed to a reduction in macroeconomic imbalances, economic growth has remained erratic and subdued, and savings and investment ratios have been relatively low'.[2] In other words, there had been no development. Where there was growth, these studies acknowledge, it was largely sporadic and due to the rise of commodity prices. This commodity price-driven growth was not converted into net fixed capital since it was frequently used to pay off exorbitant debt payments, and to finance social welfare to prevent the large-scale collapse of society.

In an important 2002 report, the IMF acknowledged the problems of what it called 'prolonged use' of IMF resources.[3] The report features two Asian countries (the Philippines and Pakistan) and one African country (Senegal). In the chapter on Senegal, IMF researchers wrote that the policy from 1979 to 2002 had been marked by 'an incentive to "overpromise" on the pace of restoration of sustainability that stemmed from internal guidelines requiring that there be significant progress toward external viability by the end of three-year arrangements'.[4] Furthermore, the overoptimism was blamed on 'the heavy weight given to export-based indicators', which meant that IMF staff reports 'tended to downplay the extent of Senegal's debt problems'. The report concluded that Senegal could not export its way out of the crisis. Yet, despite this startling admission it did not inform subsequent IMF policy – certainly not in the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility that ran from 2003 to 2006 in Senegal.

This dossier looks at the IMF's long history with the fifty-four countries on the African continent, all of whom are IMF members. Here, we build on two previous dossiers on the general contours of Washington Consensus policy: *Life or Debt: The Stranglehold of Neocolonialism and Africa's Search for Alternatives* (dossier no. 63, April 2023) and *How Neoliberalism Has Wielded 'Corruption' To Privatise Life in Africa* (dossier no. 82, November 2024). It also builds on our Inkani Books volume *Can Africans Do Economics?* (2024), edited by Grieve Chelwa.

In this dossier, we will turn our attention to the structural adjustment policies *predating* the first major bankruptcy in the Third World Debt Crisis (Mexico, 1982), and therefore, not in response to the financial chaos created by the rise of US interest rates after October 1979. The dossier draws on two case studies, from Kenya and Zambia, to illustrate our overall analysis, and the prolonged use of the same policies to stifle genuine development for Africans. While this dossier is largely critical of the IMF, our overall work from Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research is to build a theory of development that can produce genuine development. This theory is being built on the actual conditions that the African working class and peasantry require to drive forward their own dreams of emancipation, which are not the dreams of the IMF staff missions dispatched to our part of the world.

A Nightmare that Returns Every Night

From its formation in 1944, the IMF mainly focused on the provision of short-term finance to prevent countries, particularly in war-torn Europe beginning their reconstruction, from collapsing under the weight of balance-of-payments crises. This was illustrated by the IMF's first loan, $25 million to France in 1947, which was intended to prevent a catastrophic devaluation of the *franc*. It was only after 1952 that the IMF began to consider longer-term financing, particularly in the Third World, but made this finance conditional on certain important changes in their policy orientation. For instance, through the newly developed Stand-By Arrangement (SBA), the IMF would provide short-term and longer-term funding to a Third World country if it would reduce its budget deficits ('fiscal consolidation'), control inflation ('monetary policy adjustments'), and conduct important structural reforms, such as privatising state functions and creating market conditions that favoured the private sector ('enhance competitiveness'). The IMF grant to Chile in 1955 for $12.5 million was the first to be **structured** through the SBA and to demand conditions. Chile's main revenue earner was copper exports, which were in high demand in those years due to rebuilding after World War II. Chile had little problem paying off this first SBA, which set an IMF precedent to demand payment and reject the strategy of debt forgiveness.[5]

The conditions imposed for taking IMF loans produced an almost immediate backlash from populations unwilling to accept austerity conditions for themselves to pay off badly structured loans. Anti-IMF protests took place in Greece (1953) and Argentina (1956), where governments put their relationship with Western creditors and the IMF ahead of their own people. It is important to absorb the politics of this moment: while the IMF set up a policy framework around conditions to enforce the modernisation of the Third World, it accepted fairer rules for Western allies such as the Federal Republic of Germany. It was detailed in the February 1953 *Agreement on German External Debts* that Germany was to reconcile its debts in its national currency, and it was forbidden from using more than 5% of its export revenues to service its debt. They also benefitted from a preferential interest rate capped at a maximum of 5%.[6] It was clear by the late 1950s that the IMF policy logic was to ensure that newly independent countries, largely in the Global South, remained within a neocolonial economic structure. They could not try to enforce their sovereignty, and only those with fealty to the Western security apparatus would be given any leeway regarding the rules.

The IMF did not have an active role on the African continent until the decolonisation process fully set in. In 1962, the first SBA for an African country was a loan to Egypt. A string of SBAs followed, going mostly to North African states (Morocco, 1963; Tunisia, 1964; Algeria, 1966) and to the newly free states of Ghana (1966) and Kenya (1967). Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah refused to engage with the IMF, understanding that it would interfere with national sovereignty; it was only after the *coup d'état* against Nkrumah that the new military government went to the IMF. Jomo Kenyatta, meanwhile, went to the IMF only because Kenya had emerged from colonialism through a bloody and destructive war that wrecked its economy. Immense fluctuations in the prices of tea and coffee, the country's main exports, exacerbated a difficult situation. None of these states approached the IMF enthusiastically. They knew its problems from the first. In his landmark 1965 book *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, Nkrumah described multilateral aid through international organisations such as the IMF as a neocolonialist trap. 'These agencies have the habit', Nkrumah wrote, 'of forcing would-be borrowers to submit to various offensive conditions, such as supplying information about their economies, submitting their policy and plans to review by the World Bank, and accepting agency supervision of their use of loans'.[7]

Due to the lack of credible alternatives, in some cases African countries have also sought long-term aid for large-scale projects from the World Bank and the IMF. Over the 1952–2023 period, almost half of the commitments the IMF made were to African countries, largely due to the lack of continental alternatives.[8] By 2023, the continent's total external debt was estimated by the African Development Bank to be $1.152 trillion, with annual debt service payments of $163 billion (up from $61 billion in 2010).[9] The African Export-Import Bank's *State of Play of Debt Burden in Africa 2024* pointed to several key factors: already high debt levels, rising particularly fast from private creditors, and the cost of borrowing attached to external debt growing 'markedly'.[10] Compounding the situation, low domestic saving rates (mostly due to rising austerity and inflation) and a lack of control over raw material extraction and export have left many African countries in a serious monetary spiral. Each year, therefore, when the IMF study team arrives in any of the fifty-four capitals across the continent, the nightmare of IMF arrogance begins anew and the noose of conditions, austerity, low savings, more borrowing, and greater debt whips populations into despair.

Africa's Institutions

To prevent the 'neocolonial trap', Nkrumah and others insisted upon the need to create robust African institutions both to generate political unity and to build economic integration across the rich African continent. The Organisation for African Unity (OAU) set the process in motion in 1963, followed by the Monrovia Declaration (1979), the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), the Abuja Treaty (1991), the Sirte

Declaration (1999), and the African Union's Agenda 2063 (2013). Central to this process was the recognition of the need for regional cooperation (through the building of Regional Economic Communities or RECs), a continental free trade area, and the creation of a system of monetary unification (including perhaps a continental currency). For monetary unity, African countries agreed to build an African Central Bank, an African Investment Bank (AIB), a Pan-African Stock Exchange, and an African Monetary Fund, with 2016 and 2018 being the target establishment dates for the latter three. None of these institutions have seen the light of day.[11]

Given the grip of colonial powers on the African continent, monetary policy was not devolved to the colonies until the last decades of colonial rule. In some cases, as with former French colonies, this foreign grip persisted after independence. Very few African states developed central banks (the first was in South Africa – a country subject to colonialism of a special type – in 1921). In 1931, Emperor Haile Selassie closed the old, private Bank of Abyssinia and established a modern Bank of Ethiopia, which could have become an important initiative in central banking on the continent, but it was shut down after the Italian invasion in 1935. Following Ghana's independence in 1957, the new government in Accra set up the Bank of Ghana, but its sovereignty was constrained by the IMF in 1966 (after the coup that removed Nkrumah). Given the paucity of funds on the continent due to colonial plunder, the early central banks became institutions to attract finance rather than nodes for either long-term monetary planning or for any direct social goal (such as to advocate for full employment). The experience of independent central banking has, therefore, not been significant enough and has partially led to a lack of confidence in creating an African Central Bank or African Investment Bank (AIB). It is important to record that the AIB was envisaged to be in Tripoli, Libya, with initial funds coming from the oil sales of a Libyan sovereign wealth fund. The overthrow of the government of Muammar al-Gaddafi in 2011 has suspended that conversation.[12]

Of the three institutions, the African Monetary Fund has held the most promise. In a key study from 1985 by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the authors wrote that because there is 'no unified monetary system in Africa, individual central banks find it difficult to respond effectively to the vagaries of the international monetary situation'.[13] Because Africa's central banks 'hardly consult each other on monetary policy', the report continued, and there is an absence of any other mechanism for consultation, 'the continent needs a regional institution'. The authors of the study went on to indicate six problems:

1. The diminishing power of domestic monetary policy to cope with the current economic crisis.
2. The growing influence of external factors on such policies.
3. The drastic decline in Africa's export earning capacity and the consequent depletion of countries' foreign exchange reserves.
4. Mounting balance-of-payments deficits and the resulting slowing or stopping of development growth.
5. Increasing interest rates and other charges on external borrowing.
6. Growing external debt, which has cumulatively created a vicious circle out of which many African economies have been unable to emerge.

Unless there are major changes, the report notes, 'it is estimated that Africa's economic situation will be worse at the end of this century than it is now'.[14] This is a clearsighted message. Forty years later, an analogous statement about the 21st century could be made.

African Continental Free Trade Area

One of the most serious impediments to the creation of these continental arrangements is the low level of intra-African trade, itself caused by low manufacturing and processing capacity in most countries.[15] Low levels of integration are caused by the high export levels of unprocessed and manufactured raw materials to other continents and the consequent import of goods from outside Africa. Africa's share of global manufacturing fell from 1.9% in 1980 to 1.5% in 2010) and it is declining (in sub-Saharan Africa, manufacturing's share of GDP fell from 13% in 2000 to 10% in 2017).[16] The situation is so dire that the OAU (now the African Union, or AU) proclaimed in July 1989 that 20 November would be celebrated as Africa Industrialisation Day (which was then adopted by the United Nations).[17] In 2012, the AU member states began to negotiate an African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which was then agreed upon in 2018. There is immense enthusiasm for the treaty because its territorial area includes over 1.3 billion people with a combined GDP of $3.4 trillion.[18] However, South Africa and Nigeria – Africa's first and fourth largest economies – threaten the viability of the AfCFTA because they are putting their national interests ahead of continental interests.

The AfCFTA has an enormous task ahead. Currently, intra-African trade only accounts for 15% of total trade in the region.[19] Some of this has to do with the colonial shape of the continent's infrastructure, which was first understood to be an obstacle in the initial two decades of independence. In most African countries, roads and railways had been designed to carry goods from mines and fields to ports and to link provincial centres with colonial capitals. Little other infrastructure existed. Reconstructing transportation networks remains expensive, so a range of continental initiatives, such as Trans-African Highways Bureau (1971); Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Programme (1987); Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (2012); and the African Integrated High Speed Railway Network (2013), have not been able to advance. The most credible estimate suggests that African countries will need to raise $130 billion to $170 billion per year to begin dealing with the infrastructure gap.[20] Despite the potential benefits of this investment, private investment is simply unavailable, and public investment has been squeezed dry. African countries have begun to rely upon various global initiatives, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (2013), the European Union's Global Gateway (2021), and the G-7 countries' Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (2022).

Case Studies: Kenya and Zambia

Kenya

On 18 June 2024, mass youth-led protests broke out across Kenya, culminating in the storming of the Kenyan Parliament seven days later. The Finance Bill of 2024, a piece of legislation that proposed a slew of tax

measures that would grant concessions to the wealthy and multinational corporations at the expense of Kenya's poor, was being contested.[21] The bill sought to raise government revenues by levying additional taxes on food (such as eggs, potatoes, bread, and vegetable oil), public transportation, sanitary towels, and mobile money transactions – the kinds of goods and services vital to the welfare of Kenya's working class.[22] Although the bill was ostensibly sold as being the brainchild of Kenya's National Treasury, it was effectively the result of a financing arrangement that the Kenyan government had entered into with the IMF in April 2021. Many of the young protestors on the streets were aware of this fact and, therefore, in some circles, the protests were known as 'anti-IMF' demonstrations. On 27 June 2024, two days after the protesters stormed parliament, President William Ruto announced the withdrawal of the bill along with the dismissal of his entire cabinet, including Finance Minister Njuguna Ndung'u. President Ruto's actions were unprecedented in Kenyan history.

Kenya's historic anti-IMF protests flew in the face of many, including the IMF, which had been arguing for some time that it had reformed from its insistence on the anti-poor austerity that had been a defining feature of its interventions in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in 2016, the IMF published a remarkable essay titled 'Neoliberalism: Oversold?', presenting a partial critique of the defining tenets of neoliberalism. The authors wrote:

> There is much to cheer in the neoliberal agenda… However, there are aspects of the neoliberal agenda that have not delivered as expected. Our assessment of the agenda is confined to the effects of two policies: removing restrictions on the movement of capital across a country's borders (so-called capital account liberalisation); and fiscal consolidation, sometimes called 'austerity', which is shorthand for policies to reduce fiscal deficits and debt levels. An assessment of these specific policies (rather than the broad neoliberal agenda) reaches three disquieting conclusions:
>
> - The benefits in terms of increased growth seem fairly difficult to establish when looking at a broad group of countries.
> - The costs in terms of increased inequality are prominent. Such costs epitomise the trade-off between the growth and equity effects of some aspects of the neoliberal agenda.
> - Increased inequality in turn hurts the level and sustainability of growth. Even if growth is the sole or main purpose of the neoliberal agenda, advocates of that agenda still need to pay attention to the distributional effects.[23]

The IMF concluded: 'Policymakers, and institutions like the IMF that advise them, must be guided not by faith, but by evidence of what has worked'.[24]

As one would expect, this publication caused a stir in the finance and economics world. The economist Rick Rowden argued that the IMF had dropped 'a political bombshell' and that their critique of neoliberalism was akin to 'the Pope declaring that there is no God'.[25] Mark Weisbrot, the co-director of the Centre for Economic Policy and Research (CEPR), jokingly said it was as if Donald Trump had written an op-ed with the title 'Insulting Your Opponents: Oversold?'.[26] More importantly, some came to see the IMF's *mea culpa* as

signalling a hopeful change in how the fund would conduct its affairs going forward. These hopes were urged on by comments from Kristalina Georgieva, the IMF's managing director since 2019, who remarkably warned against 'the suffocating force of austerity'.[27]

In this section, we closely study two relatively recent forays of the IMF into Africa to determine whether the fund has truly reformed in ways that would support widely held aspirations for sovereignty. Specifically, we study the financial terms of two major programmes agreed with Kenya (in April 2021) and Zambia (in September 2022).

The IMF and Kenya

At the beginning of the last decade, Kenya's economy was heralded as one of Africa's rising stars by *The Economist*.[28] Encouraged by such positive press and IMF advice to diversify the sources of its credit, the country went on a borrowing binge that saw its external debt stock rise by over 300%, from $7 billion in 2010 to $34 billion in 2020.[29] The World Bank's International Debt Statistics shows that debt service payments grew from $90 million in 2010 to $1.2 billion from in 2020.[30] With such an unsustainable debt profile, the Kenyan economy was predictably sent into an economic tailspin with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020.

On 19 March 2021, Kenya's Minister of Finance Ukur Yatani and Central Bank Governor Patrick Njoroge jointly wrote a letter addressed to the IMF's Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva in which they pleaded for immediate assistance to weather mounting debt service costs, a declining economy, and the global pandemic. Their letter explicitly stated: 'we wish to request a [three-year financing] arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) [totalling] USD2.3 billion'.[31]

Yatani and Njoroge went on to argue that the loan, if granted, would fill Kenya's 'fiscal and external financing gaps' and restore the country to economic health in record time. Georgieva promptly presented the letter to the IMF's executive board for consideration along with a detailed report on the state of the Kenyan economy that had been prepared by IMF economists. Two weeks later, on 2 April 2021, Georgieva announced in Washington that they had favourably considered Kenya's request and granted the country the full amount that had been requested.

However, lost in all the celebrations was the fact that the IMF had structured the loan so that Kenya would not receive the $2.3 billion in one fell swoop but would do so in instalments over a three-year period.[32] Executive board approval meant that a sum of $307 million was immediately made available to the country, but the balance of some $2 billion would only be released after Kenya satisfied the IMF's conditions.[33]

What were these conditions? First, the lynchpin of the programme would be fiscal consolidation achieved through tax increases and spending cuts. On the spending side, the IMF wanted to see a drastic reduction in Kenya's primary fiscal balance from a deficit of 5% of GDP in 2021 to a surplus of 0.2% of GDP by 2024, virtually wiping out billions of dollars in government expenditure over a very narrow window of only three years. On the tax side, the IMF wanted Kenya to increase its tax-to-GDP ratio, a measure of the efficiency of tax collection, from 12.9% of GDP in 2021 to 15.6% by 2024.[34] Generally, increases in tax collection

efficiency are desirable as they can afford the state the necessary resources to invest in social sectors. In this case, however, the majority of the increases in tax efficiency would have to be borne by increases in taxes, such as on wages, VAT, mobile financial services, and so on, which disproportionately affect the working class. Taxes levied on Kenya's private sector and on multinational corporations were left virtually unchanged.

The second part of the programme required so-called structural and governance reforms. On the structural reforms side, the IMF argued that subsidies to Kenya's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were adding an unnecessary burden to the country's finances. Accordingly, the fund wanted to see reduced government support to the following SOEs: Kenya Railways, Kenya Airways, Kenya Ports Authority, Kenya Airports Authority, Kenya Power, Kenya Electricity Generating Company, and Kenya Ports Authority. Also earmarked for spending cuts were Kenya's three largest public universities. The IMF also wanted the government to strengthen its anti-corruption framework, having identified corruption as a driver of Kenya's fiscal problems.[35]

The final part of the programme addressed monetary arrangements. The IMF required the Central Bank of Kenya to move from accommodative monetary policy (lower interest rates) to tighter monetary policy (higher interest rates) over the medium term. These conditions were to be strictly monitored via quarterly assessments by the IMF. Failure to deliver on some or all of them risked jeopardising the programme and the suspension of further disbursements. This point is important given the verbal sleight of hand. The programme was billed as the *Kenyan* authorities' programme. Why did it require such close monitoring, and why was it tied to financial disbursements if it was wholly designed and owned by the Kenyan government?

As voluminous literature has established, the IMF's conditions were anti-growth, anti-poor, and, importantly, anti-development. Unsurprisingly, even though the ECF/EFF was meant to run until April 2024 (three years), the Kenyan authorities requested an extension, additional funds, and a new loan facility under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF).[36] The RSF came with another round of conditions that were similar to the previous arrangements. In other words, even though austerity had not worked under the ECF and EFF, the Kenyan government bizarrely asked for more austerity in the hope that the additional dose would somehow work.

Zambia

Zambia was one of the countries that was seen as being on the verge of take-off at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century. The forecast for the price of copper (the country's mainstay) was hopeful owing to the increased demand for the commodity coming from a growing China. In 2011, Zambia obtained its first Fitch sovereign credit rating, giving it the license to borrow on international capital markets. Zambia's external debt increased by an incredible 1,100% from $1 billion in 2011 to $12 billion at the end of 2019.[37] Debt service payments ballooned from $67 million in 2011 to $1 billion in 2019, consuming 16% of the national budget from just 2% in 2011.[38] Given the similarity of Zambia's debt trajectory to that of Kenya, it was not surprising that when the COVID-19 shock arrived, Zambia's economy, much like Kenya's, plummeted. In November 2020, a couple of months after the onset of the pandemic, Zambia ceased interest payments on its external debt and became the first country in the COVID-19 era to enter into debt default.

Like Kenya, Zambia looked to the IMF for assistance. Two years into the default, on 8 August 2022,

Zambia's Minister of Finance Situmbeko Musokwatane and Central Bank Governor Denny Kalyalya wrote an urgent letter addressed to IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva:

> the Zambian Government requests the IMF's support [under] this policy programme… The request is for financial assistance through a [three-year] arrangement under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF), covering the period 2022 to 2025, in an amount of [$1.2 billion] … This financial support and the catalytic impact of the Fund programme would help us address our pressing balance of payments needs (totalling $11 billion over 2022–25) and support our reform agenda. We intend to use half of the IMF financing as budget support and the other half to rebuild buffers by boosting the country's international reserve position.[39]

As in Kenya's case, the request was approved. Two weeks later, on 31 August, the IMF's executive board immediately gave the Zambian government access to $185 million, with the remainder of about $1.1 billion to be disbursed over three years and tied, like the Kenyan case, to conditions.

In deriving Zambia's conditions, the IMF saw the objectives of the new ECF as follows:

> The proposed ECF-supported programme aims to restore macroeconomic stability and foster higher, more resilient, and more inclusive growth… and is tailored to addressing Zambia's most pressing macroeconomic challenges, namely (i) restoring sustainability through fiscal

> adjustment and debt restructuring; (ii) creating fiscal space for social spending to cushion the burden of adjustment; and (iii) strengthening governance and reducing corruption vulnerabilities, including by improving public financial management. The programme will seek to ensure that monetary and exchange rate policies support the restoration of macroeconomic stability, international reserves return to adequate levels, and the financial sector remains stable.[40]

Zambia's programme, like Kenya's, had three objectives: fiscal austerity, structural and governance reforms, and, finally, monetary reforms. In terms of austerity, Zambia's ECF was much more aggressive than Kenya's, requiring 'a large, front-loaded, and sustained fiscal consolidation' between 2022 and 2025.[41] Specifically, the IMF wanted to see the fiscal deficit reduced from 6% of GDP at the beginning of 2022 to a fiscal surplus of 3.2% of GDP in 2025.[42]

This drastic fiscal consolidation had two sides: expenditure reductions and tax increases. On the expenditure side, the IMF wanted the Zambian government to reduce public expenditure in the billions of dollars from 2022 to 2025. They demanded an immediate stop to new capital expenditure (on public goods such as roads and power stations) and a reduction or elimination of expenditure favourable to the poor and working class. In the latter category, the IMF wanted the government to abolish fuel and electricity subsidies, although this would lead to cost-of-living increases.[43] Crucially, the IMF singled out the highly successful Farm Input Support Programme (FISP), which had been introduced in 2002 and had greatly aided Zambia's food sovereignty by providing input support to millions of peasant farmers. The IMF required the government to reduce its funding to the FISP from 3% of GDP at the beginning of 2022 to 1% of GDP by 2025. A recent analysis has argued that this decision is largely responsible for the hunger crisis that enveloped Zambia in 2024 and continues to the present day.[44]

Revenue increases accounted for the other side of the fiscal consolidation. Here, as in the Kenyan case, the burden of the increases was to be borne largely by the poor through higher taxes on wages and through a reduction in the number of goods that had been zero-rated for purposes of value-added tax (VAT). As is well known, VAT is a regressive tax in the sense that it impacts the poor more than the rich, and governments will often charge a VAT rate of zero on some necessities to protect the poor. In this case, the IMF recommended the removal of such exemptions. Taxes on corporate profits and especially profits realised from Zambia's giant multinational mining houses were hardly changed and in some cases were reduced.

A second part of the IMF's conditions focused on structural and governance reforms. As in Kenya, the IMF targeted Zambia's SOEs. Key among these was the Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO), whose implicit subsidy the IMF wanted the government to eliminate, which would increase electricity tariffs charged to poor households. Further, the IMF wanted the government to begin drawing up plans for the possible privatisation of the electricity utility or, at the very least, unbundle it into smaller units that would be easier to manage.

A final part of the IMF programme, concerned with the conduct of monetary policy, encouraged monetary tightening (raising of interest rates), a scenario that would affect the cost of credit across the economy.

The above conditions were to be closely monitored via semi-annual reviews which tied satisfactory performance to the release of further disbursements of the ECF loan. Just as in the Kenyan case, the IMF referred to the programme of conditions as 'homegrown', another verbal sleight of hand meant to hoodwink readers into thinking the policy prescriptions were autonomously derived by the Zambian government. Unsurprisingly, the Zambian economy has struggled to recover during the life of the ECF loan. The current loan is set to expire in October 2025, and the minister of finance recently suggested that he would ask the IMF for an extension and augmentation of the loan in a similar fashion to Kenya.[45]

The Kenyan and Zambian case studies show that IMF austerity is alive and well despite the organisation's protestations to the contrary, a reality that is widespread across the Global South. A 2021 study from the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that the IMF was tragically still requesting austerity as a precondition for assistance during the worst months of the COVID-19 pandemic.[46] A new book from political economists Alexandros Kentikelenis and Thomas Stubbs entitled *A Thousand Cuts* (2023) has found that the only consistent aspect of IMF lending policy over the period from 1980 to 2019 has been its insistence on austerity, especially in the poorest countries.[47]

Rather than engendering development and enhancing sovereignty, the IMF's forays into Africa continue to impoverish the continent while eroding national sovereignty and its broader continental project. Senegal, where we began this dossier, sits at a crossroads. A government audit shows that the previous administration misreported data, which reflected far lower debt burdens and budget deficits. This means that the loans were secured on false presumptions.[48] The IMF, therefore, has suspended the $1.8 billion credit facility to the country. Now, the government of Diomaye Faye, which came to power with a progressive mandate, will seek a new IMF loan in June.[49] Will other paths open up for Senegal, or will it be fated to trudge through the IMF debt-austerity agenda that has plagued countries of the Global South for decades?

Notes

[1]On the CFA Franc, see the tremendous book by Fanny Pigeaud and Ndongo Samba Sylla, *Africa's Last Colonial Currency: The CFA Franc Story* (London: Pluto Books, 2021).

[2]Amor Tahari, Jules de Vrijer, and Manal Fouad, 'Senegal, 1978–93', *Adjustment for Growth: The African*

Experience, Occasional Paper no. 143, edited by Amor Tahari, Michael Nowak, Michael T. Hadjimichel, and Robert Sharer (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 1996), p. 33.

[3]IMF Independent Evaluation Office, *Report on the IEO [Independent Evaluation Office] on Prolonged Use of IMF Resources* (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2002).

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The Bandung Spirit

The art in this dossier honours the Bandung Conference, where diverse peoples, nations, and political projects, each following their own trajectory – or orbits – came together, gravitating around a shared struggle to build a world beyond colonialism. Anti-colonial leaders and nations were brought together by the Bandung Spirit, represented by a yellow thread weaving through the pages of the dossier. From that era's aspirations for national liberation, new threads, new trajectories, and a new mood are emerging in the Global South today.

Seven decades ago, in 1955, the heads of government of twenty-nine African and Asian countries, as well as representatives from colonies that had not yet won their independence, met in Bandung (Indonesia) for the Asian-African Conference. It was one of the high points in the process of decolonisation. This was a historical gathering because it was the first time that representatives of hundreds of millions of people from the Third World came together to discuss the enormous social process known as decolonisation and assess its implications. Sukarno (1901–1970), who headed the government of Indonesia and hosted the conference, opened it with a speech that suggested the ambitions of the people who organised it. He said that he wanted the conference to 'give guidance to humankind' and that this guidance would 'point out to mankind the way which it must take to attain safety and peace'. These leaders gathered not only to celebrate the independence of India (1947), the Chinese Revolution (1949), and the devolution of power in the Gold Coast (1951) that would eventually lead to a free Ghana (1957); they wanted to 'give evidence that a New Asia and a New

Africa have been born'.[1]

Sukarno's associate Roeslan Abdulgani (1914–2005) was the secretary-general of the Bandung Conference. During and after the conference, he began to speak about a 'Bandung Spirit', which he described as 'the spirit of love for peace, anti-violence, anti-discrimination, and development for all without trying to intervene for one another wrongly, but to pay a great respect to one another'.[2] This 'Bandung Spirit' was not idealistic; it had a material basis rooted in the freedom struggles of peoples in the colonised world, which the United Nations General Assembly described five years later in the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* as 'a process of liberation' that is 'irresistible and irreversible'.[3]

This spirit was born in the mass struggles against colonialism and was then brought together by anti-colonial activists as they met in places such as the Sixth International Democratic Congress for Peace in Bierville, France, (1926) and the First International Congress against Colonialism and Imperialism in Brussels, Belgium (1927). Abdulgani later reflected that those who met at these conferences had 'the same impassioned spirit, and they all spoke with the same reverberating voice: that is the spirit and the voice of their peoples, who were colonised, oppressed, and humiliated'.[4] The Bandung Spirit was the voice of the hundreds of millions who had lived under colonial rule and who spoke against the horrendousness of colonialism as well as their hope for a new world.

For a range of reasons, largely spurred on by the pressures from the neocolonial structure that continued despite the end of formal colonial rule, the Bandung Spirit dissipated. Only nostalgia for it remained. Generations born after colonial rule no longer held close to them the residue of the long and difficult anti-colonial struggles. The national liberation agenda corroded within those neocolonial structures; the peasants and workers of the post-colonial era saw their own ruling classes as the problem and did not see the inherited problems of that intractable structure as their enemy. Seventy years after the Bandung Conference, it is worthwhile to ask if the Bandung Spirit remains intact, even as an ethereal fog in the Global South. That is the objective of this dossier, more an extended essay that raises some provocations rather than the fruit of a long-term research programme.[5] We hope that these provocations will generate discussion and debate.

Part I: What the Bandung Spirit Meant

Interlopers in an Oriental World

From 5 October to 14 December 1953, US Vice President Richard Nixon went on an extensive tour of Asia, visiting fourteen countries in the region (from Japan to Iran) and two countries on its edge (Australia and

New Zealand). Nixon came to Asia with a few important objectives: to reassure US allies about the armistice signed on the Korean peninsula in July; to assess the US position in Indochina, where it had already taken on the bulk of military financing from France and would later take over its military role after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954; and to understand the new role of the Chinese Revolution in Asia. In his memoirs, written two decades later, Nixon reflected on this visit and said that 'when wishful thinkers in Washington and other Western capitals were saying that Communist China would not be a threat in Asia because it was so backward and underdeveloped', he saw 'firsthand that its influence was already spreading throughout the area'. Unlike the Soviets, Nixon wrote, who 'like us, were still interlopers in an Oriental world', 'the Chinese Communists had established student exchange programs, and large numbers of students were being sent to Red China for free college training'.[6] The United States, Nixon reported to his government, had to respond vigorously to the new developments in Asia that had been spurred on by the Chinese Revolution.

In September 1954, eight countries formed the South-East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) following the signing of a collective defence treaty called the Manila Pact. Only three of the countries were situated in Asia (Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand), while two were in Europe (France and the United Kingdom). The three other members of SEATO had already signed a military pact in 1951 called the Australia, New Zealand, and the United States Security (ANZUS) Treaty. This treaty and SEATO came alongside three other key treaties in the Pacific flank of Asia: the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty between Japan and the Allied Powers, the 1953 Mutual Defence Treaty between South Korea and the US, and the 1954 Mutual Defence Treaty between the Republic of China (then Formosa, now Taiwan) and the US.[7] In 1951, John Foster Dulles, who became the secretary of state in 1953, argued that the United States needed to build an island chain of naval bases from Japan to the Malay Peninsula (which encompasses parts of Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore) to encircle the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC). These five treaties laid the groundwork for such a chain from Japan to Thailand.[8] In 1956, a US State Department official received a British memorandum 'regarding SEATO Military Planning proceeding on the assumption that nuclear as well as non-nuclear weapons will be used in defence of the area… Any planning which did not take into account nuclear weapons would obviously be unrealistic and not worthwhile'.[9] In other words, the five treaties that encircled China encouraged the placement of nuclear weapons on the edge of Asia and authorised their use if necessary.

It is important to remember that none of this was merely theoretical. The United States had already used atomic bombs on Japan in 1945 and had bombed every available piece of infrastructure in the northern part of Korea by the end of 1951 (the bombing, however, continued until 1953).[10] Major General Emmett O'Donnell, commander of the US Air Force that bombed Korea, told the US Senate in June 1951, 'Everything is destroyed. There is nothing standing worthy of the name'. O'Donnell added that when the Chinese forces crossed the Yalu River on the border with North Korea in November 1950, the United States Air Force grounded its bombers because 'There were no more targets in Korea'.[11] In December 1953, US President Dwight Eisenhower suggested to Winston Churchill that the US would drop atom bombs on China if Beijing violated the Korean armistice. Shortly after, in March 1955, the United States government made it clear to the PRC that it was willing to use nuclear weapons if the People's Liberation Army entered Formosa (now Taiwan).[12]

Peaceful Coexistence

In the wake of World War II, the United States was slowly establishing itself as the leading force of the old imperialist bloc, particularly because of its massive military and economic advantage over a battered Europe. At the same time, Britain was prosecuting a violent counterinsurgency in the Malaya Peninsula (the Malaya Emergency, 1948–1960) and France was fighting a wretched rearguard war in Indochina (the Dutch had already been defeated in Indonesia by 1949). Blood soaked into the soil of Asia and filled the nostrils of the anti-colonial leaders who came to Bandung. That is why the discussions at the conference were so focused on peace and racism: the anti-colonial leaders in attendance feared that the old colonial mentality of the international division of humanity would persist in the post-colonial era, as would the unbridled use of violence against those seen by the colonialists as being on the other side of that division. The *Dasasila*, or ten principles, of Bandung elaborated on the *Panchsheel*, or five principles, that China and India drafted in 1954 to help guide them through their differences. These principles of 'peaceful coexistence' strongly opposed building military alliances and bases around Asia and threatening countries with nuclear attacks.

In 1956, four years after Turkey joined NATO, the Turkish communist poet Nazim Hikmet wrote an elegy to a seven-year-old girl from Hiroshima titled 'Hiroshima Child', most known for the line 'when children die, they do not grow':

> All that I need is that for peace
> You fight today, you fight today
> So that the children of this world
> Can live and grow and laugh and play.

This was the essence of the Bandung Spirit. It was as simple as that. That essence permeates the ten principles, which were published in the conference's final communiqué on 24 April 1955:

1. Respect for fundamental human rights and for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
2. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations.
3. Recognition of the equality of all races and of the equality of all nations large and small.
4. Abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country.
5. Respect for the right of each nation to defend itself singly or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
6. (a) Abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers.
   (b) Abstention by any country from exerting pressures on other countries.
7. Refraining from acts or threats of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country.
8. Settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means, such as negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, or judicial settlement as well as other peaceful means of the parties' own choice, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
9. Promotion of mutual interests and cooperation.

10. Respect for justice and international obligations.[13]

Effectively, these principles argued for an international order rooted in the UN Charter (1945) rather than one based on the creation of military blocs and the use of military force to shape the world and subvert sovereignty. In his reflections on the Bandung Conference, Abdulgani suggested that it was a forum to 'determine the standards and procedures of present-day international relations' and that it championed coexistence instead of co-destruction.[14] By 1955, seventy-six countries had signed onto the UN Charter, which held treaty obligations towards its signatories; about eighty territories, including most of the African continent and a majority of the Pacific islands, remained under colonial control. The UN Charter was then, and remains now, the most important consensus document in the world; as countries gained their independence from the late 1950s to the 1970s, they joined the United Nations as full members.

The Bandung Spirit travelled rapidly, touching down in Cairo for the 1957–1958 Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference and then in Accra for the 1958 All-African Peoples' Conference before continuing to Tunis for the 1960 All-African Peoples' Conference, Belgrade for the 1961 Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, and finally to Havana for the 1966 Tricontinental Conference. Each of these conferences established institutional organs: the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organisation in Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. At their core was the fight against imperialism, with a focus on the nuclear threat and disarmament and the recognition that the waste of precious social wealth on weapons meant that the development agenda was being squandered. That calculation between guns and butter was at the heart of the deliberations. Any arms control mechanisms that developed during this period, such as the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty, were a product of the negotiations forced by these non-aligned Third World state projects.[15]

Developmental Cooperation

Beyond the call for sovereignty and peace, the Bandung era also carried within it the seed for a new international economic order. South-South cooperation was the clarion call at Bandung. The first section of its final communiqué was dedicated entirely to economic cooperation and outlined the desire for economic development and technical assistance. There was also a call to establish the Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development in order to finance investment in these countries. As imperialism had only seen fit to develop the colonies as sites to produce raw materials, much emphasis was placed on the need to stabilise commodity prices and develop domestic capabilities to process these commodities before export.

One of the lasting effects of the Bandung Conference was its influence in shaping multilateral institutions and processes that continue to this day, albeit in an often diminished or coopted form.[16] These include the establishment of the Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development in 1958, which would later transform into the United Nations Development Programme in 1965. There was also the establishment of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964 and its New International Economic Order, a set of proposals that were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1974. On UNCTAD's sixtieth anniversary in 2024, Deputy Secretary-General Pedro Manuel Moreno declared, 'It is with the same spirit [as the Bandung Conference] that nine years later the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, was born'.[17]

A World of Coups

A few weeks before the Bandung Conference, in April 1955, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles held a meeting with the British ambassador to the US, Sir Roger Makins. Dulles told Makins that he had been 'considerably depressed' about the 'general situation in Asia'. This 'situation' was embodied by a speech made by Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister following its independence, in the Indian Parliament on 31 March 1955 in anticipation of the Bandung meeting, in which he attacked SEATO as a hostile pact, NATO for giving Portugal support to retain Goa in India, the apartheid regime in South Africa, and the West for 'meddling' in West Asia. Nehru's speech, Dulles said, 'had taken the general line that Western civilisation had failed and that some new type of civilisation was necessary to replace it'. This depressed Dulles, who wanted to scuttle the Bandung Conference since it was, he said, 'by its very nature and concept anti-Western'.[18]

Coups in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954) announced the West's refusal to allow a new world order to be built. This was followed by a series of coups in Africa (against the people of the Congo in 1961 and of Ghana in 1966), Latin America (against the people of Brazil in 1964), and Asia (against the people of Indonesia in 1965). Each of these four coups produced epicentres of imperialist reaction, with the new military regimes in these countries playing a continental role in suffocating any progressive developments. The coup in Indonesia, which resulted in the murder of a million communists, was almost revenge for Bandung.[19]

Part II: Why Is There No Bandung Spirit Today?

Bathed in Nostalgia

In April 1965, Sukarno's beleaguered government held a ten-year anniversary conference with delegates from thirty-seven countries. Yet, it was a pale shadow of the original conference: Indonesia had suspended its

United Nations membership in January, and its military would leave the barracks in October to overthrow Sukarno. In 1965, an attempt to hold a second Afro-Asian Conference in Algiers, Algeria, had to be cancelled due to the June 1965 overthrow of Ben Bella; the Sino-Soviet dispute; and divides between the newly independent African states, with the Casablanca Group eager for a strongly aligned form of Pan-Africanism and the Brazzaville Group advocating for closer ties to the old colonial masters. Because many of the institutions that came out of the Bandung Conference remained intact and would have a marked influence on world affairs over the decades to come, the failure to hold a second conference was not as indicative as it appears. What destroyed the Bandung Spirit was the Third World debt crisis, which catapulted the countries of the developing world into a permanent situation of debt and austerity and torpedoed their development aspirations. That was when the Bandung Spirit evaporated.

The Third World debt crisis was itself an indication of the Bandung Spirit's inability to overcome, in a short time, the material basis of the neocolonial division of labour. While the subjective conditions for cooperation and exchange existed, the objective conditions did not. All the infrastructure inherited by the newly independent states had been constructed by imperialism to facilitate extraction from the periphery to the core.

In 1963, over 70% of exports from developing countries were destined for developed countries.[20] Ancient trade ties within what we now call the Global South had been severed by colonialism, and rebuilding them was not an easy task. Moreover, these newly independent states accounted for a small part of global trade, despite being home to the majority of the world population. Their low level of technological development also prevented any effective sharing of technical expertise.

Each of the newly independent states in the Bandung process had a unique character of capital formation and internal class structure, and each remained compartmentalised in the international division of labour determined by imperialism.[21][xvii] Unable to overcome the pattern of colonial underdevelopment and the imperialist onslaught of coups and counterinsurgency, the Third World debt crisis ushered in a shift from a spirit of cooperation to the law of competition. This crisis was used to divide and discipline the periphery and reincorporate it into a global market on terms favourable to multinational capital.[22]

In 2005, almost all the countries of Africa and Asia – 106 out of 177 – attended the fiftieth anniversary Asian-African Summit in Bandung (Israel was not invited, nor were Australia or New Zealand, but most Pacific Island states and Palestine participated), and several Latin American countries were present as observers. Heads of government left the Sovay Homann hotel and walked down Asian-African Street (named in commemoration of the first conference) to the venue, just as their predecessors had done fifty years previously. The gathering was bathed in nostalgia, but also in a sense that the world was in transition despite this conference being held in the midst of the ugly War on Terror that had already destroyed Afghanistan and Iraq and would soon lay waste to a range of other countries (including Indonesia itself, where the October 2002 bombings in Bali had brought this War on Terror to Southeast Asia). The final communiqué, *A New Asian-African Strategic Partnership*, was riddled with neoliberal concepts of comparative advantage and development targets, a departure from the anti-imperialist logic of the original declaration. The Bandung Spirit on display had been well bottled; it was not in the air. The point, then, was not to merely revive the ghost of Bandung, but to find its spirit once more.

The New Mood in the Global South

It was not until the Third Great Depression set in (2007–2008) that there was a vital realisation that the West would neither permit nor enable the advancement of the Global South. In 2009, that realisation produced the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) process, which in 2025 was expanded to include five other countries (Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates) and thirteen partner states.[23] While the early BRICS summits focused on South-South cooperation, or trade and investment across the Global South, the subsequent summits have reintroduced the idea of economic independence from the Global North and the idea of political multilateralism rather than US-driven unipolarity. Sixteen years is not enough time for the BRICS project to be subject to a full assessment. Even during these years, it has suffered from political differences between its member countries (China and India, for instance) and from the changing nature of their leaders (such as Brazil moving from Dilma Rousseff's centre-left government to Jair Bolsonaro's neofascistic government and then returning to the centre left under Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva). Buoyancy for the BRICS process and other such South-South structures came because of the economic growth that began to define the large countries of Asia (China, Vietnam, India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia in particular). In January 2025, on the seventieth anniversary year of the Bandung Conference, Indonesia became a full member of BRICS.

The shift of the world economy's centre of gravity to Asia birthed the start of a new confidence, or 'new mood', in the Global South since the countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America no longer had to rely so fully on the institutions of the Global North for finance and technology. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), adopted in 2013 in response to the Third Great Depression, was an extremely important development in this regard, as it provided objective conditions for South-South cooperation that simply did not exist at the time of the Bandung Conference. Initiatives such as the construction of railways in East Africa and the opening up of a new port in Peru create pre-conditions for internal trade between the countries of the Global South. By 2023, 46.6% of China's trade was with countries in the BRI network.[24] While it is far too early to say that anything resembling 'delinking' has happened, it is clear that a major shift is taking place as China is now the major trading partner for over 120 countries.[25] Meanwhile, the BRI itself has had its share of ups and downs and requires its member countries to bring their own national development projects to the table.

In many of Tricontinental's publications, we have used the phrase 'new mood' to define the present. The principal objectives of the 'new mood in the Global South' are rooted in two concepts, *regionalism* and *multilateralism*, both motivated by a desire to democratise the world order in economic and political terms. From the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), this regionalism is already being developed and has been bolstered by an increase in local currency-denominated trade, making it materially possible to achieve 'economic self-determination' and 'regional complementarity', in the words of Indira López Argüelles of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[26] Linked to this regionalism is the expansion of the idea of multilateralism, the belief that global institutes (such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation) must not be instruments of the Global North but must allow their agenda to be shaped by all of their member states.

There Is No Bandung Spirit Today

In the 1950s and 1960s, national liberation movements had a mass base (often the majority of their populations). Despite being led – in most cases – by the petty bourgeoisie and sections of the landed elite, these movements' commitment to national liberation forced them toward a socialist path, to take over

governments within the structures of neocolonialism, and to respond to their organised mass base. These 'socialisms' came with different orientations, whether the 'socialist path to society' of India's second Five-Year-Plan (1956–1961), the African socialism of the Arusha Declaration (written by Julius Nyerere of Tanzania in 1967), or indeed the mass politics of variants of populism in Latin America such as Argentinian Peronism (*¡Ni yanquis, ni marxistas!, ¡peronistas!*, or 'Not Yankees, not Marxists, peronistas!'). Despite the class orientations of the leadership of these tendencies and the narrowness of their own perspectives, the activated masses would not permit them to abandon the widest programme of national liberation. That is why we can talk of a Bandung from below.

Today, the state of people's movements is much weaker. Only in a few countries in the Global South do they command society. The progressive governments of our times are coalitions of a range of classes – including a petty bourgeoisie and liberal bourgeoisie that can no longer tolerate the atrocities of neoliberalism but will not easily break with its orthodoxies. While the second pink tide in Latin America, for example, and the emergence of progressive governments in countries such as Senegal and Sri Lanka are an effect of the collapse of neoliberalism and a response to the horror of the right, they are not elevated upon the backs of organised mass movements, nor are they united around a programme that breaks with neoliberalism.[27] Across the Sahel region of Africa – in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso – anti-imperialist military coups are backed by a new wave of social movements that are still in the process of formulating a broader project for sovereignty and development. These developments are capable of a new mood – a 'BRICS Spirit', for example – but not yet of the equivalent of the Bandung Spirit. It would be premature, even idealistic, to announce such a phenomenon, a Bandung Spirit from below for our time, a mass phenomenon capable of driving the actual movement of history.

The fundamental context shaping this new mood, and the looming threat that necessitates the revival of the Bandung Spirit, is hyper-imperialism.[28] In our research at Tricontinental, we have proposed that there is only one true political-economic-military bloc in the world: the US-led alliance of NATO and Israel. Despite waning economic and technological power, this bloc retains unparalleled military might and significant control over the global information system. The use of hybrid war tactics, and the threat or use of violence against even modest sovereignty-seeking nations, requires a collective response from the Global South, which may take the form of a rekindling of the Bandung Spirit.

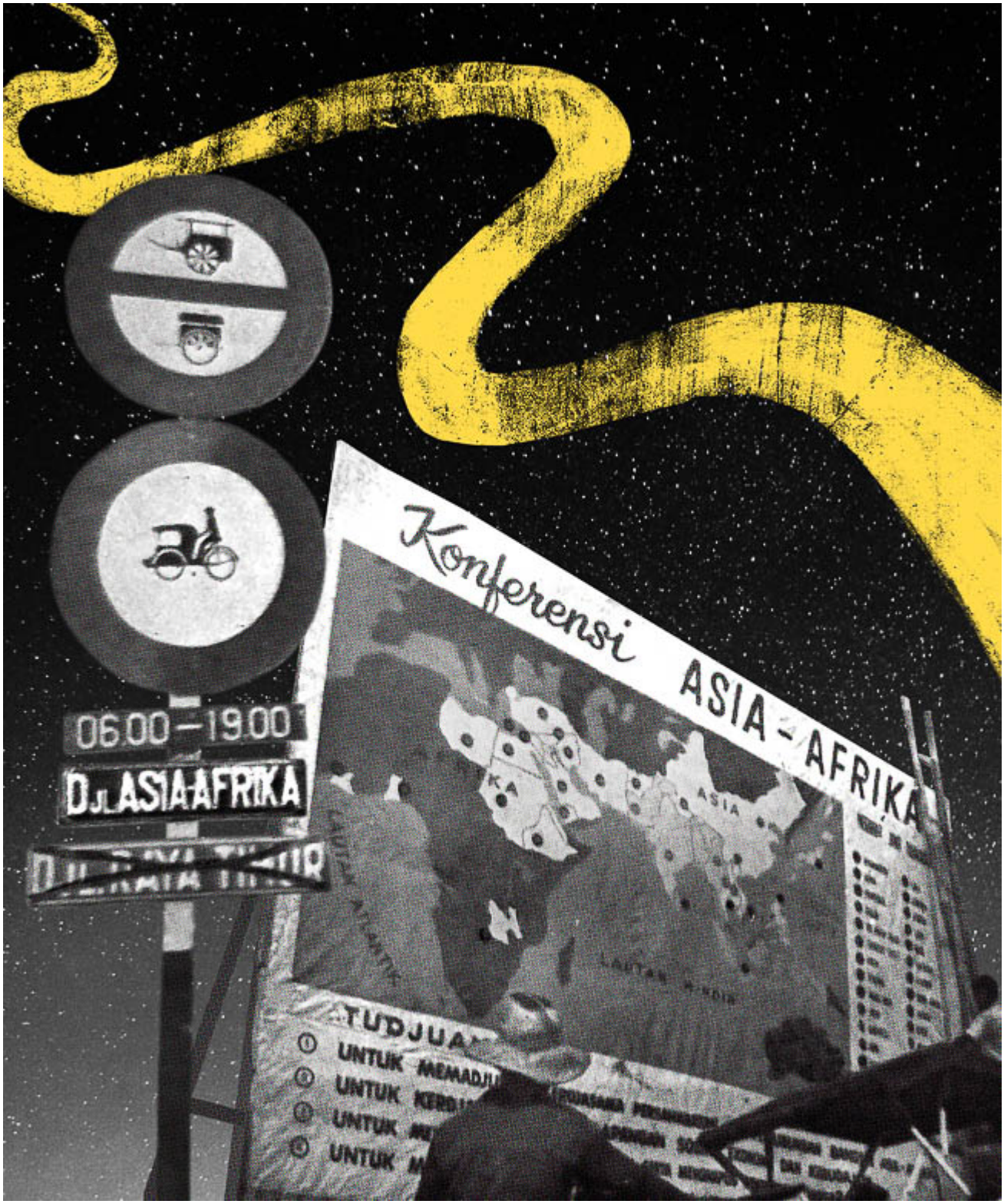
However, there are a set of factors that limit the emergence of a new Bandung era in the Global South:

1. There remains both a fear of and desire for Western leadership despite its many failures, its decadence, and its dangerousness. It is logical that the states of the Global South fear the possibility of war by all means (from unilateral coercive measures to aerial bombardment) because this is not a theoretical assumption, but an actual fact.[29] Yet, at the same time, there is a captivating sense that Western leadership is necessary given the remains of the Western-dominated international order.
2. There is a lack of clarity in the Global South about the advances made in Asia, especially by China. Other countries do not see these gains – particularly when it comes to the qualitatively new productive forces – as easily replicable, which leads to a mutual underestimation of the potential strength of a collective Global South. There is, furthermore, and against the available evidence, a growing belief pushed by the Global North that the advances of the locomotives of the Global South will be dangerous for the poorer countries. It is being suggested that the advances of Asian countries, in particular, are more of a threat than the record

of danger from the Global North over hundreds of years.

3. There is a surrender to the reality of the West's control over the digital, media, and financial landscapes, which is made to seem unsurpassable.
4. A significant portion of the ruling economic elite in the Global South remains deeply intertwined with global financial capital. This is particularly manifest in their dependency on the US dollar as a safe haven for investment and their participation in extracting wealth from their own countries to invest in the Global North's real estate and financial markets. These class interests are readily supported by intellectuals and policymakers who cannot see beyond the theories of neoclassical economics and the Washington Consensus.[30] That is why we at Tricontinental have argued for a new development theory for the Global South.[31]
5. There are old habits in many of our social movements that the left must permanently oppose the realities of class politics and that we cannot win power in these conditions. Any compromise with reality to take power and build our agenda further is seen as a dissolution of our final aims. The failure to win is a captivating sensibility that was unknown in the national liberation era, when winning state power was the immediate and intractable goal. There is even an orientation that suggests that left movements should fight the right, build a dynamic against neoliberalism, and then, rather than demand and seize state power, deliver power to the centre left. The worst orientation is to not contest state power at all.

Until the peoples of the Global South are able to overcome some of these (and more) challenges, it is unlikely that the Bandung Spirit will be part of the actual movement of history. We are emerging slowly out of a defunct epoch of history, the epoch of imperialism. But we have not yet emerged into a new period that is beyond imperialism – the hardest of all structures from which to break.



Notes

[1] Sukarno, 'Opening address given by Sukarno (Bandung, 18 April 1955)', *Asia-Africa Speak from Bandung* (Djakarta: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 1955), 19–29.

[2] Roeslan Abdulgani, *Bandung Spirit: Moving on the Tide of History* (Djakarta: Prapantja, 1964) and *The*

Bandung Connection: The Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung in 1955 (Singapore: Gunung Aguna, 1981), 89.

[3] The poetic resolution was formally placed before the UN General Assembly by the Soviet diplomat Vasily Kuznetsov. See United Nations General Assembly, *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* (A/RES/1514), December 14, 1960. The president of the General Assembly at that time was the Irish diplomat Frederick Boland. Boland's daughter Eavan became a famous poet and in 1998 published 'Witness', which contains these lines:
What is a colony
if not the brutal truth
that when we speak
the graves open.
And the dead walk?

[4] Abdulgani, *The Bandung Connection*, 11.

[5] The overall narrative in this dossier draws heavily from Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007) and *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* (New Delhi: LeftWord, 2013). It will form part of the basis for *The Brighter Nations* (2026).

[6] Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), 136. Also see Richard Nixon, 'Asia After Viet Nam', *Foreign Affairs*, 1 October 1967, **https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1967-10-01/asia-after-viet-nam**.

[7] For more on the San Francisco Treaty, see Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *The New Cold War Is Sending Tremors through Northeast Asia*, dossier no. 76, 21 May 2024, **https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-76-new-cold-war-northeast-asia/**.

[8] For a full sense of the argument, see John Foster Dulles, *Policy for the Far East* (Washington: US Government Publishing Office, 1958).

[9] 'Memorandum of a Conversation Between the Counsellor of the Department of State (MacArthur) and the British Ambassador (Makins), Department of State, Washington, February 29, 1956', US Department of State, Conference Files: Lot 62 D 181, CF 656, Secret; John P. Glennon, Edward C. Keefer, and David W. Mabon, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, East Asian Security; Cambodia; Laos, Volume XXI*, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), 180–181.

[10] Su-kyoung Hwang, *Korea's Grievous War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[11] I. F. Stone, *The Hidden History of the Korean War, 1950–1951* (New York: Little Brown, 1969), 312.

[12] At a press conference on 15 March 1955, John Foster Dulles explained the doctrine of 'less-than-massive retaliation'. If China crossed into Formosa, Dulles said, the US would use tactical nuclear weapons against the Chinese forces. See Elie Abel, 'Dulles Says US Pins Retaliation on Small A-Bomb', *New York Times*, 16

March 1955, **https://www.nytimes.com/1955/03/16/archives/dulles-says-us-pins-retaliation-on-small-abomb-lessthanmassive.html**.
When Eisenhower was asked to confirm Dulles' statement the next day, he said that tactical nuclear weapons should not be used 'just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else. I believe that the great question about these things comes when you begin to get into those areas where you cannot make sure that you are operating merely against military targets. But with that one qualification, I would say, yes, of course they would be used'. See William Klingaman, David S. Patterson, and Ilana Stern, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, National Security Policy, Volume XIX* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), 61. For Churchill's diary notes, see John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries, 1939–1955* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 687. On the broader question of nuclear retaliation, see Matthew Jones, 'Targeting China: US Nuclear Planning the "Massive Retaliation" in East Asia, 1953–1955', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 37–65.

[13] *Asia-Africa Speak from Bandung*, 161–169.

[14] Abdulgani, *Bandung Spirit*, 72.

[15] For example, L. C. N. Obi of Nigeria was a key, but now forgotten, figure in the debate around the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty while Ismael Moreno Pino of Mexico was the central negotiator for the 1967 Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, known as the Tlatelolco Treaty, the first to establish a nuclear weapons free zone.

[16] Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London: Zed Books, 2008).

[17] Pedro Manuel Moreno, *60 years of UNCTAD: Charting a New Development Course in a Changing World*, UN Trade and Development, 14 May 2024, **https://unctad.org/osgstatement/60-years-unctad-charting-new-development-course-changing-world-session-1**.

[18] John P., Harriet D. Schwar, and Louis J. Smith, eds., 'Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, April 7, 1955', in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, China, Volume II* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1986), 454.

[19] Alan Burns, the governor of the Gold Coast and Nigeria from 1941 to 1947, was appointed to be the United Kingdom's permanent representative at the UN Trusteeship Council from 1947 to 1956. Soon after leaving the UN, Burns published a book that went after Bandung and argued that it represented 'the resentment of the darker peoples against the past domination of the world by European nations'. See Alan Burns, *In Defence of Colonies* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), 5. For more on the coup in Indonesia, see Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *The Legacy of Lekra: Organising Revolutionary Culture in Indonesia*, dossier no. 35, December 2020, **https://thetricontinental.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/20210127_Dossier-35_EN_Web.pdf**.

[20] Bela Balassa, *Trends in Developing Country Exports, 1963–88*, Policy, Research, and External Affairs working papers no. WPS 634, World Bank World Development Report, 31 March 1991, **http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/561401468766799448/Trends-in-developing-country-exports-1963-88**.

[21] Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), 16.

[22] S. B. D. de Silva, *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (London: Routledge, 1982), 506.

[23] For more on the Third Great Depression, see Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *The World in Economic Depression: A Marxist Analysis of Crisis*, notebook no. 4, 10 October 2023, **https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-notebook-4-economic-crisis/**.

[24] The State Council Information Office, 'China's Trade with BRI Countries Booms in 2023', press release, 12 January 2024, **http://english.scio.gov.cn/m/pressroom/2024-01/12/content_116937407.htm#:~:text=China's%20trade%20with%20countries%20participating,2022%2C%20customs%20data%20showed%20Friday**.

[25] Alessandro Nicita and Carlos Razo, 'China: The Rise of a Trade Titan', UN Conference on Trade and Development, 27 April 2021, **https://unctad.org/news/china-rise-trade-titan**. For more on delinking, see Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Globalisation and Its Alternative: An Interview with Samir Amin*, notebook no. 1, 29 October 2018, **https://thetricontinental.org/globalisation-and-its-alternative/**.

[26] For more on regionalism, see Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Sovereignty, Dignity, and Regionalism in the New International Order*, dossier no. 62, 14 March 2023, **https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-regionalism-new-international-order/**.

[27] For more on the second pink tide in Latin America, see Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *To Confront Rising Neofascism, the Latin American Left Must Rediscover Itself*, dossier no. 79, 13 August 2024, **https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-neofascism-latin-america/**.

[28] Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Hyper-Imperialism: A Dangerous Decadent New Stage*, Contemporary Dilemmas no. 4, 23 January 2024, **https://thetricontinental.org/studies-on-contemporary-dilemmas-4-hyper-imperialism/**; Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *The Churning of the Global Order*, dossier no. 72, 23 January 2024, **https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-72-the-churning-of-the-global-order/**.

[29] For more on unilateral coercive measures, see Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Imperialist War and Feminist Resistance in the Global South*, dossier no. 86, 5 March 2025 **https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-imperialism-feminist-resistance**.

[30] For more on the role of intellectuals on both sides of the class struggle, see Tricontinental: Institute for

Social Research, *The New Intellectual*, dossier no. 12, 11 February 2019, **https://thetricontinental.org/the-new-intellectual/**.

[31] Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Towards a New Development Theory for the Global South*, dossier no. 84, 14 January 2025, **https://thetricontinental.org/towards-a-new-development-theory-for-the-global-south/**.

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Imperialist War and Feminist Resistance in the Global South

The artwork in this dossier was created by women from around the world as part of the *Anti-Imperialist Feminism to Change the World* (2021) and *Feminist (In)Security: Women against War* (2022) exhibitions organised by Capire. This media platform was created in 2021 'to echo the voices of women in movement, to publicise struggles and organisational processes from different territories, and to strengthen local and international references of anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and grassroots feminism'.[1]

Alejandra Laprea (Venezuela), *El acuerpamiento de las mujeres es nuestra estrategia de defensa* (Women's Embodied Solidarity Is Our Defence Strategy), 2022.

> They say we are an unusual threat, and it is true. We are an unusual threat because we are

> politically educated, because we are conscious, because we don't want to keep being [the US's] backyard, and because we want to continue being free, sovereign, and independent.
>
> – Ayarit Rojas, spokeswoman for the Antímano Ecosocialist Revolutionary Infantry for Habitat and Housing (Infantería Revolucionaria Ecosocialista por Hábitat y Vivienda Antímano), Venezuela.

A clear reconfiguration of global power relations has been underway since the first decades of the twenty-first century, marked by the weakening of the United States' unipolar dominance. Its crisis of hegemony is as ferocious as its response: together with its allies in the political, military, and economic bloc that makes up the Global North, the US has tried to compensate for its loss of economic and technological power with militaristic domination.[2] These countries have a shared history of violence against the peoples of the Global South, such as the genocide of the indigenous peoples of the Americas in the colonial era, the transatlantic slave trade, the use of nuclear bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people.

This exercise of disciplining and subjugating entire populations takes many forms, such as territorial occupation and militarisation, imposing unilateral coercive measures (UCMs),[3] sanctions, and genocide. This unbridled phase of capitalism, in which cruelty is wielded as a form of control and domination, is what we have designated as hyper-imperialism.[4]

A distinctive feature of UCMs as an instrument of power is that they do not kill people directly – instead, they operate by financially, commercially, and politically isolating the targeted countries, triggering supply shortages and economic strangulation. UCMs prevent targeted countries from accessing financial resources as well as the most fundamental goods and services necessary for sustaining life, such as water, food, electricity, medicine, and medical supplies. Beyond the impact of the decreed sanctions and UCMs, there is often overcompliance by the individuals, companies, and organisations with whom impacted countries seek to establish relations, whether economic, political, or cultural. In other words, for fear of becoming the target of sanctions and UCMs themselves, these entities choose to avoid or limit their relations with the countries subject to them beyond the confines outlined by sanctions and UCMs.

This model of intervention has intensified exponentially as global disputes have sharpened. In the past two decades alone, sanctions have increased by 933%.[5] The United States is leading in their application, imposing over three times more sanctions than any other country or international body (15,373 as of April 2024). These measures are inflicted upon one third of all countries, including more than 60% of all low-income countries.[6] The countries with the most UCMs are Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Syria, and Venezuela.

The isolation that UCMs produce is a form of collective punishment: they are mechanisms of political control used to violently discipline and subordinate entire populations and disconnect them from global networks of commercial, financial, and political interdependence. Furthermore, UCMs are deployed alongside media campaigns aimed at stigmatising the targeted countries. In a cunning reversal, the imperialist power accuses the governments and populations affected by UCMs of being responsible for the very violence to which they are subjected. These countries are typically accused – without any evidence – of not supporting the war on

drugs or fighting organised crime, of being undemocratic, etc. – and the accusation alone is enough to warrant the punishment. This reversal provides cover for the criminalisation of and discrimination against populations, leaders, and governments that do not align themselves with the interests of the hegemonic powers. These countries are targeted because they resist the neocolonial, capitalist, and patriarchal power of hyper-imperialism by working to build their own sovereignty.

UCMs are considered a strategy of 'hybrid warfare', 'asymmetric warfare', or 'unconventional warfare'. They operate on all areas of social life – especially on the bodies, hearts, and minds of the population. They are an undeclared part of war that does not recognise borders, permeating the entirety of society and exerting control over all spheres of social reproduction and organisation.[7] All studies and reports from national and international experts and UN agencies consulted for this dossier highlight that sanctions as well as UCMs disproportionately impact the most vulnerable sectors of the population – in particular, women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ people. While the lack of employment and sources of income impact the entire population, women are disproportionately impacted by the destruction and weakening of the infrastructure of social services. This process directly affects social reproduction, especially care work, which is performed almost exclusively by women. Sanctions and UCMs clearly reinforce patriarchy and other forms of social discrimination.

In 2023, the third Dilemmas of Humanity Conference took place in South Africa. At the panel 'Feminism and Struggles against Patriarchy', the lasting impact of imperialism on the lives of women and the LGBTQIA+ people came up repeatedly. Women from the Arab Maghreb region and Palestine described the horror of imperialist territorial occupation, the difficulty of surviving in conditions of inhumanity, the permanent threat of death and sexual violence, the collapse of health services, the cutting off of water supplies, and the consequences that these conditions have on social reproduction and women's lives. Although they may not all face the constant threat of death from weapons of war, according to participants from Venezuela, Cuba, and other African and Asian countries, the UCMs imposed by the United States have a similar impact on women's social reproduction and their ability to organise popular struggles and participate in political life in each territory. In this dossier, we analyse, from a feminist perspective, the economic and political impact of UCMs as imperialist mechanisms of subordination and control on women in some of the most targeted countries.

The process of engaging in dialogue with women from impacted countries involved overcoming various logistical and contextual barriers. Nonetheless, we established spaces for meaningful exchange in Venezuela, where women shared their experiences and strategies for resistance, reaffirming their commitment to sovereignty and communal life. We interviewed feminist leaders from various popular peasant and worker organisations, including the Antímano Ecosocialist Revolutionary Infantry for Habitat and Housing, the Venezuelan Housing Assembly Jorge Rodríguez Padre (Asamblea Viviendo Venezolanos Jorge Rodríguez Padre), and the Heroines Without Borders Organisation (Organización Heroínas sin Fronteras). The Simón Bolívar Institute for Peace and Solidarity among Peoples (Instituto Simón Bolívar para la Paz y Solidaridad entre los Pueblos), based in Venezuela, provided key support facilitating opportunities for connection and exchange, including in the most adverse circumstances. This process also reinforced the importance of documenting these struggles in order to advance collective resistance.

Valentina Machado and Valentina Lasalvia (Uruguay), *Untitled*, 2021.

Economic Impact: Forced Underdevelopment and

Economic Decline

UCMs are usually directed against countries that attempt to affirm their sovereignty by prioritising self-sufficiency and resource nationalisation. These countries resist integration into the neocolonial economic structure that seeks to maintain Western dominance while keeping Global South countries underdeveloped and economically dependent through mechanisms such as debt, trade imbalances, and foreign control of resources. The goal is that economic decline will provoke social uprisings that facilitate regime change to governments that are friendly to imperialism.

UCMs have adverse economic impacts on targeted countries, such as by reducing per capita GDP, increasing inflation rates, and causing fluctuations in foreign direct investment, foreign aid, and financial subsidies. Income inequality rises, manufacturing sector employment drops, and household consumption declines, among other disruptions. Together, these impacts provoke economic collapse and a consequent increase in poverty. Here are some examples:

> **Cuba**. The six-decade-long US-imposed economic, commercial, and financial blockade against Cuba is structured around the longest-standing and most comprehensive UCMs in modern history. The blockade was intensified when US President Donald Trump reversed the measures implemented by his predecessor, Barack Obama, to ease restrictions and placed the country back on the US State Department's list of supposed state sponsors of terrorism in 2021. This act of hostility continued under Joe Biden, who left Cuba on this list until his final week in office, and was again repeated on Trump's first day in office during his second term, on 20 January 2025, when Cuba was added back to the list just days after it had been removed. The blockade inflicts monthly economic damage of US $421 million and to date has cost the Cuban economy an accumulated total of $1.5 trillion. Without the blockade, it is estimated that Cuba's GDP would have grown by 8% in 2023.[8]
>
> **Venezuela**. More than 1,000 UCMs and other punitive and restrictive measures have been imposed on Venezuela, which have severely impacted its oil and other productive industries as well as foreign trade since 2014.[9] In 2020–2021, the oil sector produced less than 500,000 barrels per day, compared to the 2.2–2.3 million barrels per day produced between 2008 and 2016. Losses range from 797,000 barrels per day, equivalent to $16.4 billion per year at current prices, to 1,800,000 barrels per day, equivalent to $48 billion per year at current prices.[10] In 2021, the Venezuelan government's revenues totalled 10% of those in the year that UCMs were first imposed. Hyperinflation has provoked the devaluation of the national currency, with a consequent decrease in wages, and has affected imports.[11]
>
> **Iran**. From 2010 to 2015, Iran exported between 700,000 and 1.4 million barrels of oil per day. Following the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal) in 2015, this increased to 2.5 million barrels per day from 2016 to 2018. With the return of sanctions and UCMs after the US withdrew from the agreement, crude oil exports fell by 57% in 2018–2019 alone. Between 2005 and 2021, the country's estimated annual foreign exchange

earnings fell by more than 62%, from $66 billion (2005–2011) to $25 billion (2019–2021).[12]

Syria. Once one of the largest oil producers in the region, with 385,000–500,000 barrels per day (of which it exported about 100,000 until 2010), the country has become a net importer of crude oil since 2011, when the conflict began. From 2000 to 2010, the Syrian economy grew an average of approximately 5% per year. In contrast, its GDP fell from $252.5 billion in 2010 to just $11 billion in 2020 – 4% of its 2010 level. The conflict has caused severe damage to and destruction of productive capacity, property, and infrastructure, with a large section of the population becoming displaced and entering refugee status. UCMs compounded the situation, causing the economy to shrink by around 90%. Between 2016–2019, the economy improved slightly, with a weak average annual growth of 0.6%. However, the intensification of UCMs and the state's inability to access a large part of its resources because they were outside the territory it controlled, along with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, caused an economic contraction of 3.9% in 2020.[13] UCMs were eased once a pro-Western government came into power in Damascus at the end of 2024.

Zimbabwe. Since 2001, the country has faced UCMs imposed by the US and its allies directed at key sectors of the productive economy such as mining, manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture. In 2000, the country registered a trade surplus of $155 billion (around 74% of GDP), with an increase of 1.44% in overall production. In 2010, following the imposition of additional UCMs and other measures, the country's trade balance fell to less than 23.8% and has remained in the negative ever since. The deindustrialisation caused by UCMs has resulted in severe economic contraction (from –3.1% in 2000 to –17.7% in 2008). The economic collapse has provoked acute unemployment, a drop in per capita income, and the loss of skilled professionals (currently, vacancy rates range between 30%–50% in different sectors). Furthermore, company closures and worker layoffs affected more than 610,000 people between 2005 and 2020. In 2008, inflation soared from 56 percent to over 230 million percent, causing the public system to collapse and rendering the government incapable of providing essential services, from healthcare and transportation to electricity and education.[14]

Export disruptions caused by UCMs severely impact women's livelihoods because women in targeted countries in the Global South are overrepresented in both precarious and formal work in export-oriented industries such as textiles, garment production, leather goods, and electronics assembly.[15] When UCMs create economic hardship, women are the first to be laid off from their jobs, which increases their dependence on family members for financial support and thereby restricts their autonomy.[16]

The growing economic crises faced by targeted countries force many people to emigrate in search of better working conditions. Through this process, women, children, and gender-diverse populations are at risk of becoming targets of human trafficking, illegal exploitation, organised crime, xenophobia, and gender-based violence.[17] The refugee and migrant population is relegated to informal, unskilled, and low-paid jobs where, due to discriminatory hiring practices, women are again disproportionately affected.[18]

Luana Fernandes (Brazil), *Mujeres resistentes* (Resistant Women), 2022.

Induced Shortages and Food Insecurity

> From the moment Comandante Chávez died, the onslaught began to intensify with an economic war against the national currency that caused hyperinflation, and everything became more expensive and then grew scarce. All of this rearranged the social dynamics. … As women who were at the forefront of the Bolivarian Revolution… we had to withdraw from the community struggle, the social struggle, from our own organisations, from our own dynamics of regular meetings, assemblies and everything, to go wait in long lines to be able to buy food. … Lines of three or four hours in the sun, waiting to see if they'll sell me flour, sugar, oil, or whatever was available at the moment.
>
> – Laura Franco, Simón Bolívar Institute, Venezuela.

Restrictions caused by UCMs also impact food production, in many cases imposing bans on the import of farm machinery, fertilisers, and seeds and leading to shortages in fuel and water for irrigation. These factors result in higher food prices, increased inflation, the creation of parallel markets, and a profound food crisis that disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable sectors of the population. UCMs also include extortion mechanisms, such as restrictions imposed on private food providers, the criminalisation of businesses, and confiscation by the international financial system of money intended to pay food suppliers.

In Cuba, in 2019–2020, fuel shortages prevented 12,399 hectares of rice from being planted, causing the production of this staple good to fall by more than 30,000 tonnes. Similarly, the lack of fuel affected transport, impeding the production of 2 million litres of milk and 481 tonnes of meat, compromising the country's basic food supply.[19] Furthermore, the absence of fertilisers and pesticides has led to a 40% drop in the historical yield of various crops, leading to a 81%, 61%, and 49% decrease in the production of rice, eggs, and milk respectively since 2019.[20]

In countries impacted by UCMs, food insecurity is also intensified because of restrictions on the import of food and the collapse of direct investment in the sector. In Venezuela, there has been a severe drop in food imports since 2014, from $10 billion that year to less than $1 billion in 2019 – a decrease of more than 90%.[21] Cuba reports paying 76% more for the same amount of food imports in 2024 compared to 2019.[22]

According to UNICEF, between 2016 and 2022, restrictions on food imports in Venezuela caused a steady increase in malnutrition, with over 2.5 million people facing acute food insecurity.[23] In 2019, there was a sharp decline in food imports of almost 90%, resulting in widespread undernourishment.[24] In 2017, the US financial system blocked the shipment of 18 million boxes of subsidised food to Venezuela from the Local Food Production and Provision Committees programme (Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción, CLAP), a programme launched in 2016 in response to the food shortages caused by the economic war. The same year, a total of 23 Venezuelan financial operations intended for the purchase of food, basic supplies, and medicine were suspended by international banks.[25] Food supply has been further compromised by the operational collapse of state-owned enterprises, the agricultural sector's lack of access to intermediate products, fuel shortages that impede both production and the distribution of finished products to markets, and a drop in workers' purchasing power.

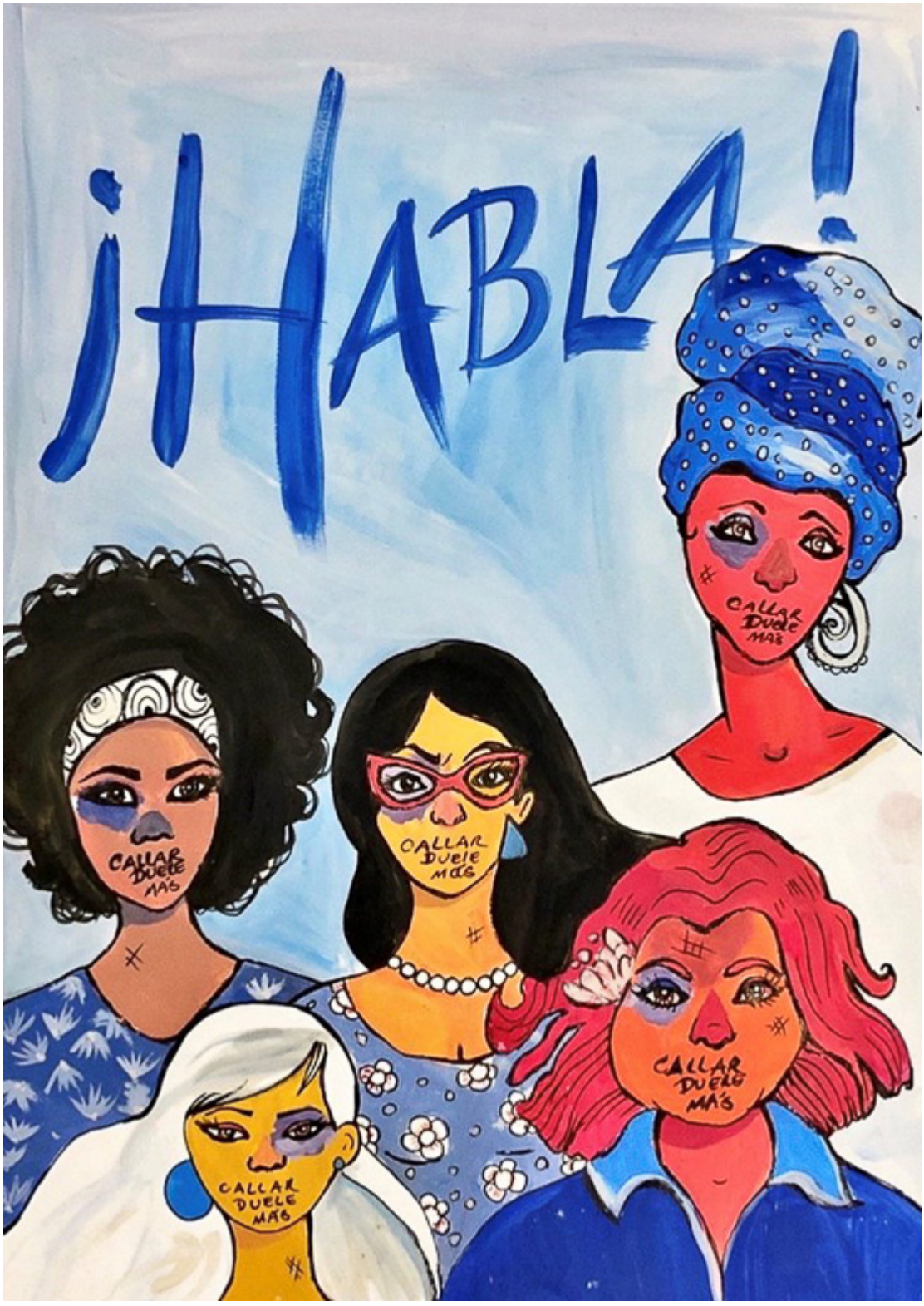
Under UCMs, Syria also confronted a severe food crisis. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 12 million Syrians – over half of the population – experienced food insecurity in 2021, up 51% from 2019. As part of her report on Syria, the UN special rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena F. Douhan, revealed that between 2020 and 2021, there was a 48% increase in malnutrition among children under five years of age while over 10% of pregnant and breastfeeding women were malnourished.[26]

The food crisis has also been a key concern in Zimbabwe since 2001, both in terms of accessibility and affordability, with a 29% increase in the proportion of the population experiencing food insecurity from 1995 to 2003. The situation was even worse by the end of 2020, reaching over 60% of the population. By 2017, 30% of the rural population required food assistance.[27]

Food insecurity hits the most vulnerable sectors hardest, where women are overrepresented. In Venezuela, 65% of poor households are monoparental, with single mothers as the head of the household.[28] In these homes, access to food is largely dependent on women, a task to which they dedicate a large amount of time and effort and is the cause of significant stress. Thus, the impact on access to food also results in a differential impact based on gender.

In these situations, food distribution policies are extremely relevant. As of 2020, 88% of Venezuelan households (7.5 million families) were receiving food supplements provided by CLAP.[29] In addition to food distribution and supply policies to address food insecurity, in some of these countries government policy to ensure food and agricultural self-sufficiency have become a priority. In Iran, food self-sufficiency rates ranged from 53–82% between 2000 and 2012 according to the WFP. Currently, the country is still dependent on food imports, with a self-sufficiency rate of approximately 85%.[30] However, the reimposition of UCMs in 2018, together with trade and financial restrictions by foreign banks, has significantly disrupted the supply of seeds, fertilisers, and agricultural equipment needed for production.

The Venezuelan government has made significant efforts to reverse its dependence on food imports. According to the National Superintendency for Agrofood Management (Superintendencia Nacional de Gestión Agroalimentaria), in just a few years Venezuela went from importing 85% of food for domestic consumption to producing 97% of the food that the Venezuelan people take home every day.[31]



Daily Guerrero Hernández (Cuba), *Habla, callar duele más* (Speak Up; Staying Quiet Hurts More), 2021.

The Dismantling of Social Infrastructure

Beyond impeding the transport of people and goods like food, the lack of fuel and inability to obtain parts for

strategic areas of production and infrastructure affect the sustainability of hydrocarbon, energy, and drinking water production and distribution systems. This process has a critical impact on the population's access to essential services.

Special Rapporteur Alena Douhan noted that UCMs prevent targeted countries from acquiring parts to maintain infrastructure vital for everyday life. In acts of overcompliance, foreign companies and financial institutions refuse to supply construction materials, replacement parts, and software for power plants, refineries, and water pumping stations – or they block financial transactions for the purchase of such goods and services.[32] As a result, due to their inability to provide maintenance and improvements to distribution plants and infrastructure, these countries face severe shortages of electricity, fuel, and drinking water, leading to frequent power outages.

In Syria, electricity is available between two and four hours per day on average.[33] In Cuba, the energy crisis has worsened, and in 2024, days were recorded in which over 50% of the island was without power. In both countries, the outages are mainly due to a shortage of fuel, resulting from the lack of foreign currency to import it; frequent breakdowns in the country's thermoelectric power plants; and a chronic lack of investment. In recent months, Cuba has received solidarity aid from the People's Republic of China, which donated 69 tonnes of radiators, motors, parts, and other accessories to support the recovery of the island's electrical system.[34]

Trade and financial restrictions resulting from UCMs also create challenges for acquiring mechanical and electrical equipment for water and sewage projects, which affects populations' access to water and sanitation. In Venezuela, though an estimated 90% of households are connected to the national water system, there are frequent disruptions to the electricity supply. According to Douhan's 2021 report, the minister responsible for water services disclosed that 52% of the technology used in the water distribution system was from the US, while 29% was from Germany and Switzerland. Because of the increasing difficulty of procuring replacement parts and carrying out maintenance work, only 50% of distribution stations were operational. This meant that water had to be rationed in order to ensure that it reached everyone.

In Syria, only 50% of the country's water and sanitation systems work properly due to the destruction and lack of maintenance of the power system and reduced electricity generation capacity. In 2022, Douhan visited the country and observed that, in addition to having only two hours of electricity per day, primary and secondary schools serving hundreds of students in the rural city of Homs have no running water. Drinking water allocation has been reduced to 30–40 litres per day, compared to 130 litres per day prior to 2011.[35]

In Zimbabwe, water scarcity also has severe consequences. Reports indicate that in 2019, 77.1% of households lacked access to improved sources of clean water, with disparities between rural (67.9%) and urban (97.3%) areas. The water shortage has aggravated epidemics such as cholera and typhoid fever (especially in 2008 and 2018), with a combined death toll of more than 3,000 people, while putting more than 100,000 others at risk.[36]

Paulina Veloso (Chile), *Untitled*, 2021.

The Precarisation of Health

UCMs reduce states' capacity to sustain public services that are essential for their most vulnerable populations.

Their right to health is hindered because of restricted access to electricity, water, food, personal hygiene products, diapers, sanitary pads, medicine, health clinics, and more – all of which are necessary for a healthy life.

In Venezuela, for instance, the ban on imports of supplies and replacement parts affects the operation of medical equipment, currently only 20% of which is in optimal working order. Another consequence was the shortage of vaccines against measles, yellow fever, and malaria in 2017–2018.[37] Furthermore, UCMs impeded the operation of the Venezuelan Institute of Social Security's High-Cost Medication programme (Medicamentos de Alto Costo): while in 2014 the programme distributed 535,071 medications, in 2020 it provided a mere 64,078 – an almost 90% reduction in coverage.[38] Yirley Rodríguez, a Venezuelan social worker, popular feminist, mother, and caregiver, told us how, while she was pregnant, she worried about 'not being able to get things needed for the birth and the baby. … I couldn't get all the food I needed, [and there were] medicines I couldn't find'. Douhan reports similar conditions in Syria.[39]

CITGO, a US-based subsidiary of Venezuela's national oil company, financially supported key social programmes to vulnerable populations, such as making treatment available to persons with disabilities – especially for complex medical and surgical procedures outside the country. When it was usurped as part of the UCMs imposed on the country, this had a particularly harsh impact not only on vulnerable populations but also on their predominantly female caregivers.[40]

In the face of these difficulties, one solution has been to turn to natural medicine to alleviate some of the harmful effects of the blockade. Marta of the All Hands on the Harvest Programme (Programa Todas las Manos a la Siembra) described the importance of using plants to treat illnesses, without denying the importance of conventional medicine: 'Scientific, technical, ancestral, and popular knowledge should go hand in hand, always working in conjunction to obtain better results'.

The reproductive health of both women and sexually diverse populations is particularly affected by UCMs in a number of ways, such as by limiting access to Pap tests, thereby making the early detection of cervical and breast cancer difficult for thousands of women and in many cases resulting in their deaths, and impeding the acquisition and free distribution of antiretroviral therapy for treating HIV. Similarly, the free and mass distribution of oral contraceptives, condoms, intrauterine devices, and other forms of family planning and STI prevention have been hindered, increasing the chances of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.[41]

Venezuela's maternal mortality rate, which had been decreasing until 2014, started to rise again after the application of UCMs and only returned to previous levels after the pandemic.[42] In Zimbabwe,[43] where health indicators have declined to critical levels since the imposition of UCMs, the maternal mortality rate was 614 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2014 and may have reached as high as 314 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2020 according to World Bank model estimates, still among the highest in the world. The infant mortality rate is also very high: 29 per 1,000 live births.[44]

Cuba's free and universal healthcare system, one of the pillars of the revolutionary process, has also been devastated by the embargo. However, even after the COVID-19 crisis, the country maintains an elevated life

expectancy of 73.7 years, similar to the average for the Americas and higher than the world average.[45] Because of the excellent training of Cuban healthcare workers, 71% of whom are women, healthcare services account for 71% of the country's total exports. Cuba's medical missions reached sixty countries during the pandemic but had to withdraw from some because of the 'sustained smear campaign by the Trump administration', as a 2021 OXFAM report stated.[46]

UCMs severely affect access to medicine in Cuba, where 51% of the 651 medicines included on the country's National List of Essential Medicines (Lista Nacional de Medicamentos Esenciales) are not available. There is also a scarcity of contraceptives, condoms, medicines for pregnant women, diagnostic tools, pregnancy tests, and tests for sexually transmitted diseases.[47] As Indira Pino describes, 'We suffer because of medicine shortages. The pharmacies are empty because it's hard for our country to get the raw materials. For example, the materials used to make sanitary napkins aren't good quality, and that causes problems for women during their menstrual cycles'.[48]

Though Iran produces around 95% of its medications and basic vaccines as a measure to alleviate the impact of UCMs, like Venezuela it suffers from a lack of access to life-saving medicines, supplies, and equipment for more rare or complex diseases.[49] Meanwhile, in Zimbabwe, 70% of essential medication depends on imports, and there is an alarming shortage of healthcare workers, with an 89% vacancy rates for midwives, 64% for doctors in the public healthcare sector, and 49% for clinical nursing instructors.[50] Syria's pre-war pharmaceutical production exceeded 87% of the country's needs and provided exports to seventy-three countries, but today it suffers from a significant shortage of medical equipment and a severe deterioration of the public healthcare system. This forces people to turn to the private system, which the most vulnerable populations, including women, cannot afford.[51]

The genocidal intentions of the blockade became clearer when, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, additional UCMs were imposed on Cuba – including banning the import of ventilators and oxygen – making it more difficult to obtain test kits and personal protective equipment.[52] Venezuela and Iran experienced similar difficulties.[53]

The Added Burden of Care Work

> The burden of domestic, caregiving and work-related tasks has, of course, increased. First, we women go out to work all day with two or three jobs, then at night when we get back we have to do domestic work, not just washing, scrubbing, cooking, but also we have to study with our children… if we have parents or grandparents at home, we have to take care of them; they are our responsibility. That takes a toll, and, well, lastly, we must also be wives to our husbands.
>
> – Commune resident and peasant leader (44 years old).[54]

Imperialist war, in its hybrid form, has a significant impact on daily life and the ability to balance work, care,

leisure, and political participation. This silent war has reaffirmed the sexual division of labour, impacting how time is used and lengthening women's unpaid working hours as they take on a greater burden of care.[55]

This situation has a profound impact on women, who absorb part of the crisis through unpaid work. Women's responsibility to manage the needs of the household demands more and more time as the crisis deepens, to the detriment of time spent on paid work and other activities. This is evidenced, for instance, in the day-to-day difficulties caused by water shortages. Women are generally responsible for obtaining and managing drinking water for their families, which can be much more demanding when water is scarce. As Yirley Rodríguez told us in the case of Venezuela:

> The lack of water disrupts our daily lives, and much more time is needed for care work because getting water has become very different. It has become very difficult to balance our responsibilities as mothers with the time spent working at our jobs and the time doing political work – it's a mess. Because the priority is water, when the water arrives you have to go out and wash and store [what's left], regardless of what time it is. This has a negative impact on our ability to organise and balance our time and leads to an overload of care work.

Elsa Rakoto (France/ Sawtche Afro-feminist Collective), *Todas las feministas en lucha contra el imperialismo* (All Feminists in Struggle against Imperialism), 2021.

Women at the Forefront of Social Organisation

Indeed, in the face of adversity caused by sanctions and UCMs, women become a safety net, providing collective solutions within the framework of community organisation and ensuring the sustainability of life within their territories. When life becomes difficult, women step up to organise the provision of healthcare in their communities as well as distributing food and handling problem-solving. In so doing, they demonstrate resistance, reinvention, and resiliency in myriad forms.

In the most difficult moments of the economic war against Venezuela, women who lead processes of community organisation became key in the implementation of state food distribution policies throughout the country. For instance, in 2016, the CLAP programme was created to replace private food distribution networks. This new public distribution mechanism incorporated community participation with a novel component of popular oversight. By promoting the delivery of food baskets directly to households without the private sector as an intermediary, this programme helped build social and familial organisation, especially among women, who are still largely responsible for the unpaid tasks linked to social and domestic reproduction. It is not a coincidence that women anchor the front line that, through the CLAP programme, ensures food distribution to communities in the city and the countryside. Furthermore, over 70% of the people who participate in communes (*comunas*) and communal councils (*consejos comunales*)[56] are women, who have a leading role in resisting imperialist aggression and patriarchy. [57]

The All Hands on the Harvest Programme (Programa Todas las Manos a la Siembra) was created by the Ministry of Popular Power for Education in 2009 during Venezuela's oil crisis to increase knowledge in schools about food sovereignty, sustainable production, and environmental issues. It was also created to support local food production processes and projects. Marta, a member of the All Hands on the Harvest Programme, told us that during the worst moment of the economic war, with the support of the Sovereign Country Markets (Ferias del Campo Soberano) programme, agroecology schools organised local popular markets where they sold food at lower prices. This programme, which ended up being an important strategy to alleviate the inflation crisis and food shortages, was also the government's response in rural areas to distribute low-cost protein, fruits, and vegetables in 1,500 prioritised rural communities in which women farmers played a leading role.

Nevertheless, it is important not to romanticise these efforts. Although women are exemplary for their work sustaining life in the midst of crisis, this tendency also reinforces the sexual division of political labour. While women have an important presence and leadership role in community organising, this does not necessarily extend to other spheres of political representation and state management. Community tasks extend women's unpaid workday beyond the home. They widen the gender inequality gap in relation to work and income, with its correlate represented in the feminisation of poverty and overrepresentation in informal labour markets. Furthermore, these tasks often obstruct women's right to leisure, recreation, and a good life.[58] As the Cuban transportation organiser Yunisleydis Duvergel explains: 'It is much harder for women, as they generally have the weight of domestic responsibilities; not being able to rely on transportation generates greater stress'.[59] The blockade doesn't create gender inequalities, but it does worsen the conditions under which women must perform the domestic and care work that is traditionally assigned to them.

Conclusions: Resistance and Community

Women besieged by hyper-imperialism have developed forms of resistance and confrontation based on a

return to the land and an alternative, familial, and cooperative economy. Women's work as the connective tissue of society and communal organisation has played a central role in sustaining and deepening revolutionary processes and confronting external and internal attacks that seek to create terror and discourage hope. This work has taken place in the face of great adversity. Ayarit Rojas is a spokeswoman for the Antímano Ecosocialist Revolutionary Infantry for Habitat and Housing, a Venezuelan women-led grassroots organisation that has implemented more than 1,600 projects to construct new ecosocialist communities and housing based on a system of participatory design since 2011. She tells us about the projects that the organisation has managed to complete through effort, creativity, and courage, despite the severe lack of access to imported construction materials as a result of the blockade:

> We were classified as an unusual threat. The induced shortages, the hyperinflation, all of this, led us to become stronger every day and look for alternatives to continue moving forward. In terms of construction, the UCMs were chaotic and we as women were the ones with the triple burden of home, work, and construction duties on our shoulders – it was too much. Nevertheless, we achieved our goal: today we have our dignified housing and habitat thanks to this revolutionary process.

Despite facing adverse economic, productive, and social consequences, women play a decisive role in the face of the psychological war that this reality provokes. Women's participation, which on a daily basis politicises precarity and collectivises survival, is a critical factor in resisting the neoliberal pedagogy of cruelty, abandonment, and hyper-individualism. As Yirley Rodríguez told us:

> The strength to move forward in this difficult context [comes from] community relations and this common sense that still prevails in Venezuela, this great consensus for collective life, to solve problems in community, to support each other, like this great social fabric that the Bolivarian Revolution has been constructing… What gives me strength is that, here, there are political conditions to communalise life; there is a different proposal for the world, for a different society and social relations, which is to communalise [life and labour], instead of the major capitalist powers' proposal to liberalise [them]. This is what gives me strength: that there's a possibility to create, to struggle, without it costing us our lives, to engage with those who are in positions of power, of decision-making. This political and social scenario is what gives me strength to continue believing and continue supporting structural changes through popular feminism and to confront the situation we live in today in the face of economic sanctions and this psychological war that they wage against our emotionality and spirituality.

As Yirley reminds us, the strength to resist in the worst conditions comes from the conviction that it is possible to build a different world, one that is not based on exploitation or on the destruction of the social fabric, but rather on the possibility of building a life in community, that is led by the people, and where everyone can live with dignity.

Sarah de Roure (Brazil/World March of Women), *Equipo de lucha* (Tools for Struggle), 2021.

Notes

[1] Capire, 'About us'. To see the 2021 and 2022 exhibits, visit Capire's 'Poster Gallery: Anti-Imperialist

Feminism to Change the World' at **https://capiremov.org/en/multimedia/gallery/poster-gallery-anti-imperialist-feminism-to-change-the-world/** and 'Feminist (In)Security: Women against War' at **https://capiremov.org/en/multimedia/gallery/feminist-insecurity-women-against-war/**.

[2] Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Churning*.

[3] UCMs are commonly but erroneously referred to as sanctions. However, in the international arena, only measures applied by the United Nations in accordance with the UN Charter can legitimately be designated sanctions. While sanctions are nonetheless often applied in violation of the process outlined by the UN Charter, and therefore in violation of international law, UCMs are by definition illegal as they are not reflected in the charter. The UN defines UCMs as 'economic measures taken by one state to compel a change in the policy of another state', whereas its definition of sanctions alleges that they are to be used as a 'last resort when it comes to addressing massive human rights violations, curbing illegal smuggling or stopping extremism groups' (even though we know this is seldom the case in practice) and must follow a clear process for approving their application. See OHCHR, 'OHCHR and Unilateral Coercive Measures' and UN News, 'UN Sanctions: What They Are, How They Work, and Who Uses Them'.

[4] Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Hyper-Imperialism*.

[5] Tricontinental, *Churning*, 24.

[6] Stein and Cocco, 'How Four US Presidents'.

[7] Ceceña, 'La dominación'.

[8] Republic of Cuba, 'Cuba's report', 78.

[9] Observatorio Venezolano Antibloqueo, 'Se elevan'.

[10] Rodríguez, 'The Human Consequences of Economic Sanctions', 71–72; Arellán, 'Sanctions ON'.

[11] Observatorio Venezolano Antibloqueo, 'Los números', 31–32.

[12] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran', 5.

[13] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 5.

[14] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 5.

[15] Peksen and Drury, 'Coercive or corrosive'.

[16] Al-Ali, 'Reconstructing Gender'.

[17] Madriz Franco and Oropeza, *ABC de la Trata de Personas*.

[18] Inter-Agency Plataform RV4, 'Three Quarters of Refugees'.

[19] Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 94.

[20] Republic of Cuba, 'Cuba's report', 15, 28.

[21] Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 94.

[22] Republic of Cuba, 'Cuba's report', 28.

[23] Arizmendi, *Infancia bajo asedio*, 76.

[24] Arizmendi, *Infancia bajo asedio*, 80.

[25] Arizmendi, *Infancia bajo asedio*, 76.

[26] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 9.

[27] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe'.

[28] Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 44.

[29] Arizmendi, *Infancia bajo asedio*, 75–76.

[30] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran', 9.

[31] SUNAGRO, 'Venezuela produce 97%'.

[32] ONU, 'Unilateral Sanctions'.

[33] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 7.

[34] Swissinfo, 'China dona 69 toneladas'.

[35] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 8.

[36] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 7.

[37] Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 35.

[38] Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 'Ninth Periodic Report', 26.

[39] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 10–11.

[40] Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 65.

[41] Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 57.

[42] Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 58.

[43] As stated in the special rapporteur's report, up-to-date data is no longer being collected directly – only estimates.

[44] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 8.

[45] WHO, 'Health Indicators 2021'.

[46] OXFAM, 'Right to Live without a Blockade'.

[47] Republic of Cuba, 'Cuba's Report', 89.

[48] OXFAM, 'Right to Live without a Blockade', 2021: 17.

[49] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran', 7.

[50] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 8.

[51] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 8. UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 10.

[52] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 8. Republic of Cuba, 'Cuba's Report', 12; OXFAM, 'Right to Live without a Blockade', 6.

[53] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 8. Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 38; UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran', 8–9.

[54] UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 8. Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 91, our

translation.

[55] Franco, *ABC de la Trata de Personas*, 2022.

[56] Communes are a key part of the Bolivarian Revolution's vision for handing power over to the people and exercising self-governance from the grassroots. There are roughly 3,600 registered in the country, and they are a key space for popular organisation, supported by the government's Ministry of Communes. As revolutionary leader and former President Hugo Chávez said, 'the commune must be the space where we can bring socialism forth. Socialism should not emerge from the Presidency of the Republic; it should not be decreed. It has to be created from the bases, a popular creation of the masses'. Communes bring together multiple communal councils, which are the smallest units of self-government, within a defined territory and a citizens' assembly as the highest decision-making body. Communes likewise incorporate social movements in the territory and own means of production, with the long-term goal of assuming more responsibilities and coming together into higher-level bodies, with eventually replacing the bourgeois state with a new, communal state. See Ministry of Popular Power for Communes, 'Commander Hugo Chávez. Eternal Father of the Communes'. For further reading, also see Hugo Chávez, 'Las comunas y los cinco frentes para la construcción del socialismo' [The Communes and the Five Fronts for the Construction of Socialism].

[57] Franco, *ABC de la Trata de Personas*, 2022.

[58] Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 75.

[59] OXFAM, 'Right to Live without a Blockade', 2021: 2.

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Yirley Rodríguez, social worker, popular feminist, mother, and caregiver, Venezuela.

Ayarit Rojas, principal spokeswoman for the Antímano Ecosocialist Revolutionary Infantry for Habitat and Housing (Infantería Revolucionaria Ecosocialista por Hábitat y Vivienda Antímano) and of the urban development project Venezuelan Housing Assembly Jorge Rodríguez Padre (Asamblea Viviendo Venezolanos Jorge Rodríguez Padre), Venezuela.

Norma Valdez, Heroines without Borders Organisation (Organización Heroínas sin Barreras), Venezuela.

Laura Franco, Simón Bolívar Institute for Peace and Solidarity among Peoples (Instituto Simón Bolívar para la Paz y la Solidaridad entre los Pueblos), Venezuela.

Towards a New Development Theory for the Global South

Around the world, progressive governments have taken office, yet they do not have a clear strategy to rebuild their societies from the detritus of neoliberalism. These governments, in countries such as Honduras, Senegal, and Sri Lanka, articulate clear critiques of the International Monetary Fund's debt-austerity regime, but they often lack a concrete policy programme capable of decisively moving beyond it. Unable to develop a policy that fully breaks from neoliberalism, many of these progressive governments slip back into neoliberal immobility.

International institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), have also been unable to chart an alternative framework. One notable attempt dates to 2000, when the UN inaugurated a process of highlighting outcome-based goals for development with the establishment of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focused on issues such as poverty and education.[1] The MDGs were succeeded by seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, which are supposed to be met by 2030. However, like the MDGs, the SDGs merely outline a broad set of goals that are toothless, ineffectual, and lack an underlying theory or programme.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the SDGs are 'moderately to severely off track' as a 2023 UN report noted, a failure that it attributes to developments such as the Third Great Depression (2007–2008), COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, and genocide against the Palestinian people. More specifically, only 12% of the 140 targets are on track, 50% moderately or severely off track, and 30% either stagnated or regressed.[2]

Those who defend the SDGs' methodology argue that the solution to improving their success is to increase funding for development. However, this approach ignores the reality that funding from the Western-dominated financial system is simply not available. As it stands, there is a $4 trillion yearly shortfall of funds needed for the SDG targets to be met by 2030.[3] The 1970 pledge by Global North countries to spend 0.7% of their Gross National Income (GNI) on Official Development Assistance (i.e. foreign aid) – and therefore toward the SDGs programme – has not been met: in 2023, the United States spent a mere 0.24% of its GNI

on development assistance, France spent 0.5%, and the United Kingdom 0.58% (this is in contrast to the 2014 pledge by North Atlantic Treaty Organisation members to increase their spend on war making to 2% of Gross Domestic Product).[4] Furthermore, countries in the Global South that align their development plans with the SDGs are more likely to attract international aid, loans, and foreign direct investment tied to development projects, including lending initiatives from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Yet these lending initiatives are often conditioned on those countries adopting 'free market reforms' (including austerity policies, deregulation, and government downsizing). So, poorer nations are 'incentivised' (i.e., coerced) to take on more debt or to open their economies to Western financiers in order to meet SDG targets and attract investment for development. And since there is no theory underlying SDGs and the only way to finance their progress is by taking on debt, in practice SDGs are used more as sticks than carrots. This actuality goes against SDG 17.4, which is to 'assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief, and debt restructuring'.[5] In other words, the SDG framework is not merely limited by a lack of funding, as its proponents argue, but by a world order and development programme that seeks to keep the South underdeveloped and by the lack of an alternative development theory and programme for the Global South that is able to overcome this reality.

As early as 2018, three years after the SDGs were outlined and adopted by every member of the United Nations, IMF Deputy Managing Director Tao Zhang wrote that 40% of low-income countries were in high risk of debt distress – up from 26% in 2015, when the SDGs were adopted – and therefore could not service their debt.[6] Further, the UN's *Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2024* showed that the median debt service burden for the poorest developing countries rose to 12% in 2023, 'the highest level since 2000'.[7]

There is a burning need for a new development theory for the Global South, one that can go beyond the overambitious goals of initiatives like the SDGs or the failed approach of the IMF and its debt-austerity regime. Without a scientific development theory, there can be no development programme.[8] This dossier, a collaboration between Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and Global South Insights, lays out the debate over the failed development theories of neoliberalism and the need for a new development theory for the Global South, offering an initial framework for the latter. Over the course of the next few years, we will produce more texts on a new development theory of this nature by analysing specific countries and regions and then studying the overall possibilities.

Theories of Underdevelopment

Before we elaborate on some of the key elements of a new development theory, it is important to go over other approaches to development, such as modernisation theory (exemplified by the work of W. W. Rostow), the Washington Consensus, and more radical lines like dependency theory and the debates it has evoked on the left.

Modernisation Theory

In 1960, the US economist W. W. Rostow, who advised both US presidents Lyndon Johnson and John F. Kennedy in their campaigns against socialism and national liberation, published *The Stages of Economic*

Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto. Its title announces its intentions. Rostow, an ideologically committed anti-communist and Cold Warrior, theorised a universal and linear path of development from so-called 'traditional society' to the 'preconditions for take-off', 'take-off', the 'drive to maturity', and, finally, the 'age of mass consumption'.[9] He argued that secular education would help give rise to an entrepreneurial class that would place 'rational' economic incentives over 'irrational' traditions. This, he claimed, would lead to a high rate of investment and economic diversification, ultimately culminating in a consumer society akin to that which had allegedly already been achieved in the Global North.

Rostow's theory was a caricature of post-World War II modernisation theories which, following figures such as Saint Lucian economist W. Arthur Lewis, argued that economic growth would happen when surplus labour was reallocated from a mainly rural and agrarian traditional economy to a mainly urban and industrial capitalist economy.[10] Rostow and other modernisation theorists saw development in terms of a transition to capitalism. Their fatal flaw was their ahistorical approach, which assumed that after five hundred years of colonialism the Global South was starting from a similar position as Europe before the Industrial Revolution. They viewed underdevelopment as an original condition. In reality, there was no 'traditional society' as such in the Global South. Rather, there was a completely new socioeconomic system that had been violently imposed by colonialism and imperialism. Moreover, unlike pre-industrial Europe, the Global South was operating in a world where technology, trade, and finance were dominated by monopolies of the Global North, with a neocolonial economic and political structure already fully in place.

Rostow's argument built on his earlier work, such as *An American Politics in Asia* (1955, written with Richard W. Hatch), which was more explicit about the Cold War context of modernisation. In *An American Politics*, Rostow wrote that the 'alternative to total war initiated by the United States is not peace. Until a different spirit and different policy prevail in Moscow and Peking, the alternative for the United States is a mixture of military, political, and economic activity'.[11] In other words, the United States had to use its entire arsenal of weapons, including 'total war', to overthrow communism in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. For theorists like Rostow, war making had to be encouraged in the crusade against communism rather than recognised as the waste of precious human labour that it is. Indeed, in the 1960s, political scientist Samuel Huntington came up with the theory of 'military modernisation', which argued, first, that the militarisation of states in the Third World would be the most effective way to achieve 'social modernisation' and, second, that as a result, military rule should be encouraged to fight communism and build a 'modern society' modelled after the US.[12]

Modernisation theory defined the development paradigm for the IMF and the World Bank from the 1950s to 1980s. Its failure to generate a 'take-off' in the Third World did not impact its credibility in the halls of power. It did lose its sting due to the Third World debt crisis that struck countries that had relied upon stable and relatively low interest rates for the US dollar. When the US Federal Reserve raised interest rates precipitously in 1979, it reduced available credit for the developing states and led to several perilous financial situations (including the bankruptcy of Mexico in 1982).[13] Modernisation theory collapsed with the peso, and a new theory arose to define the work of the IMF and the World Bank.

The Washington Consensus

In the 1990s, John Williamson, a British economist and senior fellow of the Peterson Institute for

International Economics, coined the term Washington Consensus to describe the neoliberal agenda to privatise state-owned enterprises (SOEs), commodify public goods, and liberalise capital accounts and trade.[14] These policy choices, driven by the IMF and World Bank in alignment with the US Treasury, find much of their theoretical justification in neoclassical economics and the works of thinkers like Friedrich Hayek and those associated with the neoliberal Mont Pelerin Society.[15] The Washington Consensus paradigm is perhaps most famous for its role in the so-called structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which led to a lost decade on the African continent.[16]

For the past several decades, the IMF has enforced a combination of austerity (what they call a 'balanced budget' agenda), privatisation, and trade liberalisation on decolonising nations. This has stripped states in the Global South of the capacity to drive their development processes and protect their infant industries. In order to deal with the resulting imbalances, the IMF has frequently encouraged underdeveloped countries to borrow from private capital markets, leading to more debt traps. Meanwhile, the World Bank has historically followed an agenda of recommending *anything but large-scale industrialisation* for the Global South. In the early post-World War II era, this manifested in its recommendations for countries to stick to their 'comparative advantage' in exporting raw materials. By the 1990s, the World Bank was promoting 'financial deepening', code for encouraging financial deregulation as a panacea for mobilising resources for development.[17] More recently, the World Bank has shifted its focus to promote development in the service sector and investment in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), both recipes for continued debt bondage on the national and household level. The service sector is often dominated by multinational corporations (MNCs) with monopolistic structures, making states that focus their development on this sector susceptible to the whims of MNCs in the Global North. SMEs, which typically lack the resources (including government subsidies) to compete with MNCs and do not have the advantages of scale of MNCs, end up absorbed into these larger monopoly-dominated networks. Indeed, the combination of financial liberalisation and the promotion of SMEs locks countries into what Samir Amin called generalised monopoly capital, with both upstream (raw materials, technology, and capital) and downstream (distribution, marketing, and consumer access) networks of control.[18]

One of the main outcomes of the Washington Consensus has been an almost religious belief in the power of foreign direct investment (FDI) to drive economic growth and structural transformation. The FDI mindset drives Global South states towards a narrow focus on opening up their labour and natural resource markets to Western monopolies, thereby linking their agendas to the rent-seeking needs of financiers rather than the developmental aspirations of their populations. Empirical evidence of FDI's transformative capacity, however, is limited at best: this form of investment fails to promote integrative growth that could pave a pathway out of indebtedness and towards national sovereignty, instead promoting unproductive sectors of the economy. Three characteristics of FDI are important to note:

1. **FDI flows are declining**. FDI peaked in 2007, the year that the Third Great Depression took hold in the major capitalist countries, and has decreased in the years since.[19] Indeed, according to the United Nations' Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), both FDI and project finance (long-term infrastructure or industrial funding) have experienced a gradual decline. From 2022 to 2023, for instance, developing countries saw a 7% decrease in FDI flows to developing countries.[20]
2. **FDI flows are non-productive**. Over the past few years, UNCTAD's annual investment reports have shown

the changing character of FDI. While in the past it was concentrated in the manufacturing and industrial sectors as well as natural resource extraction, FDI has increasingly been channelled into the financial and service sectors, where it does not generate integrated or transformative development that could help transcend colonial underdevelopment.

3. **FDI flows do not drive growth or investment**. According to a 1999 UNCTAD report, large FDI inflows to developing countries in the 1990s had little impact on increasing investment patterns.[21] More recent studies by UNCTAD have shown a clear divergence between FDI flows and GDP growth since the Third Great Depression.[22] This means that economic growth is increasingly independent of FDI flows.

The Washington Consensus has only reinforced the colonial pattern of underdevelopment, producing debt burdens that cannot be easily serviced. With bondholders mercilessly seeking repayment and interest regardless of a country's economic situation, the debt spiral eats into precious revenues that could otherwise be spent on health care, education, and productive industry and infrastructure. Countries borrow and go into debt. When they cannot repay their debt, they borrow more to pay off their existing debt, and the spiral continues.[23] As Raghuram Rajan, the IMF's chief economist from 2003 to 2007, wrote in his book *Fault Lines* (2010), the IMF's policies are a 'new form of financial colonialism'.[24]

Dependency Theory

Dependency theory, which developed in opposition to modernisation theory, has a long and powerful history. Its roots trace back to Latin American structuralism and the interventions of giants like Raúl Prebisch and other *dependentistas*, as they were known, who argued that the world capitalist system is organised in two tiers: first, a core set of countries that hold dominion over the global political economy and, second, a large set of peripheral countries unable to break away from that regime. As the *dependentistas* showed, the deteriorating terms of trade between the industrialised core and the unindustrialised periphery fuelled underdevelopment and instability in the latter.[25] The peripheral countries largely produce unprocessed commodities, which are purchased at a low cost and then sold through multinational corporations to the core, which uses its industrial capacity to produce finished, higher-value commodities that are then sold back into the periphery. The terms of trade between the core and periphery allow capitalist accumulation to take place in the core, which is then used for the innovation of new products and technologies. These scientific and technological improvements in turn provide the core with advancements that allow it to remain in control of the system. Andre Gunder Frank called this the 'development of underdevelopment', a pessimistic assessment of a sombre reality.[26]

Dependency theory made it very clear that this sombre reality stems not from the cultures of the Third World but from the neocolonial world system established during the colonial and imperialist eras. That is why Walter Rodney's 1972 classic is called *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, with an emphasis on European colonialism.[27] As Gunder Frank explains, 'underdevelopment is not an original state, rather it is a result of economic capture and control of backward regions by advanced metropolitan capitalism'.[28]

The pessimism that results from this theory led Samir Amin to develop the argument that the periphery had to 'delink' from the core. Delinking, Amin wrote in 1987, is 'the refusal to submit national-development strategy to the imperatives of "globalisation"'.[29] Since this 'refusal' is rooted in political power, and not in

economic policy per se, states in the developing world must have sufficient political power to construct their own national development strategy and break from the bondage of global value chains (which Benjamin Selwyn accurately calls 'global poverty chains') or 'delink'.[30]

Critiques of Dependency Theory

Dependency theory offers a precise assessment of the *need* for a new development theory, but it does not, by itself, provide such a theory. In other words, dependency theory limits itself to critiquing the neocolonial system and assessing the importance of delinking to create space for a national development strategy, but this tradition – which is also our tradition – does not articulate a strategy or plan to affect these changes.[31]

Further critiques of the dependency school from within progressive and Marxist economic tendencies could be synthesised into three main lines of thought.

First, some heterodox economists thought that the rise of the 'Four Asian Tigers' (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan) disproved the pessimism of dependency theory and claimed that coordinated state intervention, combined with a pragmatic mixed economy, could overcome the inertia of capitalist underdevelopment. Interest in the phenomenon of the Four Asian Tigers subsequently birthed an entire school of literature on the developmental state and industrial policy. Johnson Chalmer's book *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (1982) and Alice Amsden's book *Asia's Next Giant* (1989) are foundational in this regard.[32] Even the World Bank came into the act with a large report called *The East Asian Miracle* (1993), though its assessment attempted to underplay the role of the state.[33] No doubt, the works of figures like Ha-Joon Chang and Mariana Mazzucato have also been influential for centre-left governments in the Global South.[34] Yet their line of thinking is merely a proposed strategy of statecraft based on past precedent and fails to present a new development theory or take into account the diverse realities across the Global South. Whereas the Four Asian Tigers grew under the protection of the US security umbrella during the Cold War, countries in Africa, Latin America, or other parts of Asia have had to develop under neocolonial intervention or imperialist and capitalist encirclement.[35]

Second, some Marxists, such as the British scholar Bill Warren, actively argued in favour of the supposedly progressive aspects of imperialism. In his book *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism* (1980), Warren argued that imperialism could act as a transformative force in modernising backward countries in the Global South since, he claimed, it laid the foundations for both industrialisation and democracy.[36] Warren's supposedly left-wing rehabilitation of imperialism was widely critiqued by Marxist-Leninists in the Global South who were keenly aware that not only had imperialism as capital in motion failed to develop the productive forces in the South: it had also violently underdeveloped their economies, plundered their resources, and entrenched dependency through brutal wars, repression, and the destruction of indigenous systems of production.[37] Warren's theory amounted to nothing more than a version of neoclassical modernisation theory garbed in Marxist jargon.

Third, in the 1970s and 80s some Marxists, known as political Marxists, charged the *dependentistas* with being 'neo-Smithian Marxists' for overemphasising the relations of exchange between the core and periphery while neglecting the internal social and political relations in the periphery.[38] Yet there may be room for conciliation

between the so-called neo-Smithians and political Marxists, with some theorists linking externalities like imperialist relations to internal socio-political dynamics like class relations.

In his magnum opus *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (1982), the Sri Lankan Marxist political economist S. B. D. de Silva argued that imperialism developed and strengthened the role of merchant capital while stifling its transformation into industrial capital.[39] De Silva believed that rather than engage in a semantic debate as to whether or not the periphery had transitioned to capitalism (*dependentistas* believed it had, whereas political Marxists, such as Robert Brenner, believed it had not), it was more productive to examine how imperialism acted through internal class structures to prop up elements opposed to industrialisation. For de Silva, underdevelopment was linked to the absence of a class and an economic system that was dedicated to capital accumulation not just in money terms, but also in productive fixed assets.

Similarly, scholars from the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe and Central Asia developed their own analysis of neocolonial dependency in the world economy and the role of internal class structures in the Global South. For instance, the Soviet political economist Sergei Tyulpanov argued that the state had to isolate those domestic forces hindering industrialisation (feudal landlords and merchant capital) and create a strong public sector while encouraging the progressive potential of the national bourgeoisie in a private sector.[40] Within this strategy of 'non-capitalist development', it was crucial that national-democratic parties take charge and not relinquish political power to the bourgeoisie.

A Marxist Development Theory

Over the past fifty years, during the height of the Washington Consensus, most of the poorer nations slumped into cycles of debt and austerity, high rates of poverty, and deep despair. China, however, has been able to break through the 'development of underdevelopment' since the 1949 revolution and move from high levels of poverty to a society that has eradicated absolute poverty and emerged as a major economic power.[41] What distinguishes China from other countries is that the balance of political power is not in the hands of the capitalist class (certainly not with MNCs) and that the Chinese government, ruled by the Communist Party of China, has developed a planning process that allocates resources both for growth and social betterment in a dialectical balance. Any robust and pragmatic Marxist development theory must engage with the breakthroughs made in China. Two points are important to highlight in this regard.

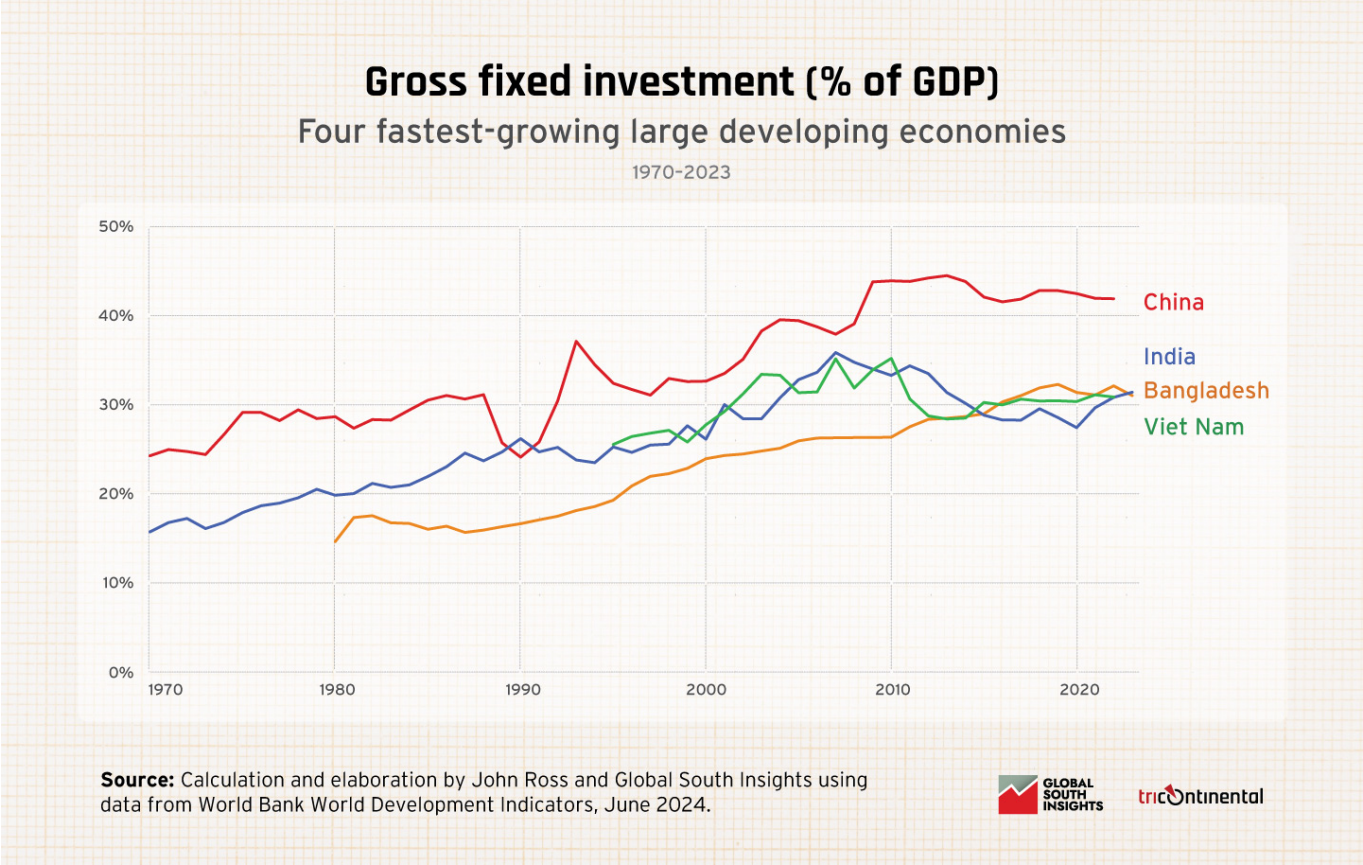
First, while a capitalist class exists in China, it has not been allowed to consolidate political power. The dynamics that are present in Global North societies – where the state and other institutions are directed by private capital – are not present in China, where these institutions are instead directed by a political force that is committed to socialism. Furthermore, China has a large public sector that encompasses land, finance, trade, and heavy industry. This sector is sufficiently powerful to prevent the capitalist law of value from overwhelming economic decision making in China. Therefore, China's experience does not conform with modernisation theory.

Second, because political power rests with the Communist Party of China, political decisions made in the country are not driven by other countries' or entities' interests (such as those reflected by the Washington Consensus). China has, as Amin says, successfully 'delinked', allowing its own national development strategy to define its development policy.[42] This is accomplished by the country's public control over land and finance,

which enables the state to connect with the world economy through trade, investment, and global value chains, deepening the socialisation of labour (a key element in Marx's political vision for socialism). This has allowed China to break with the pessimism of dependency theory to become the largest trading nation in the world.

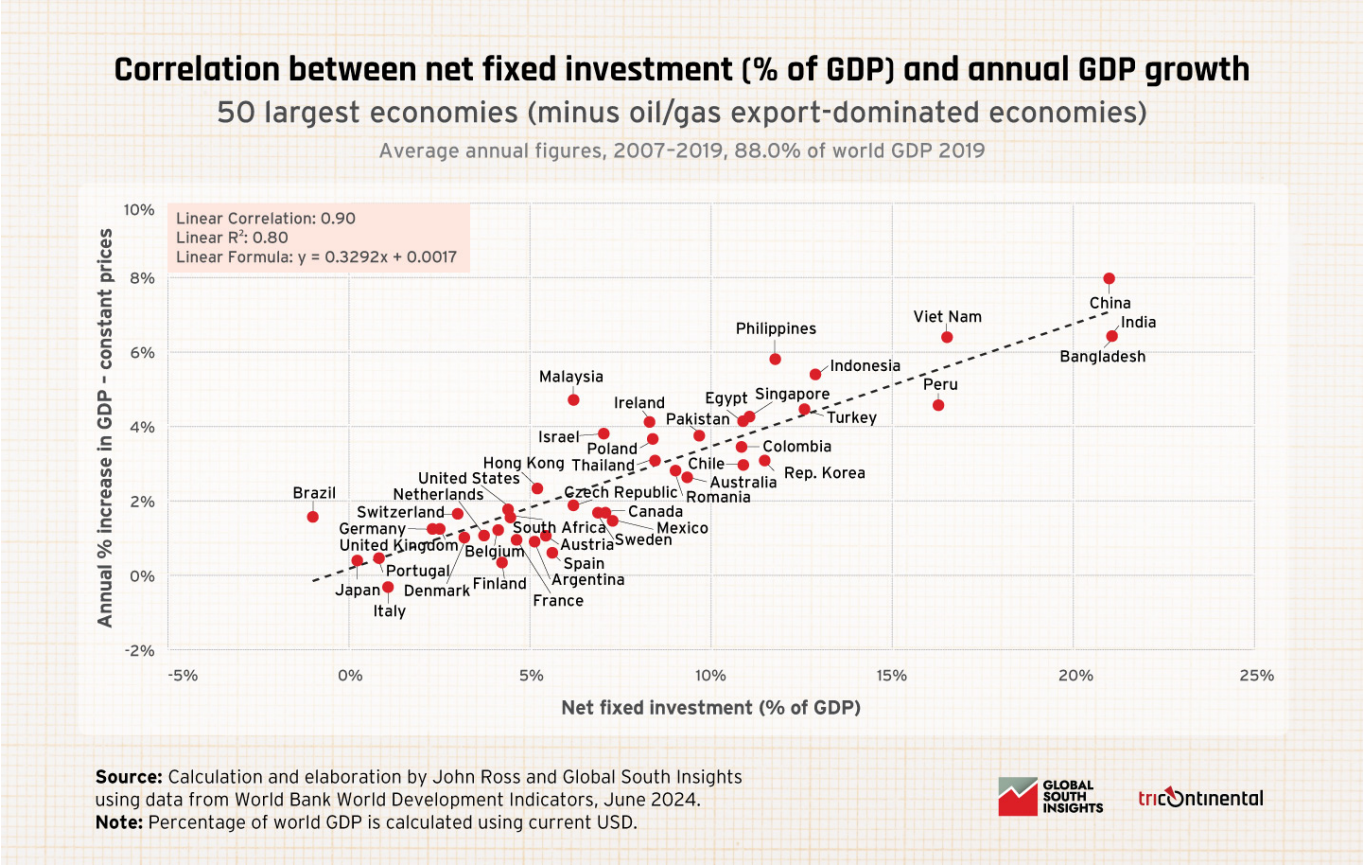
Neither modernisation theory nor dependency theory can fully explain China's rise. While China does exhibit certain aspects of a developmental state with proactive industrial policies, this still does not provide us with a theoretical explanation of its rapid growth. China's Reform and Opening Up (1978) was an iterative and experimental process, always emphasising the importance of local conditions. Though it has not yet emerged as a developed economy and society, China has, as Enfu Cheng and Chan Zhai argue, achieved 'continuous progress toward prosperity', moving from the periphery to the position of 'quasi-centre' of the global system.[43]

Yet, even from this position, China has been able to eradicate extreme poverty and make significant progress in science and technology. What factors led to this peculiar outcome? A key component, and the starting point of our new development theory, is that China's economic model has maintained a consistently high ratio of investment to GDP, leading to significant fixed capital formation in the form of infrastructure and industrial capacity.

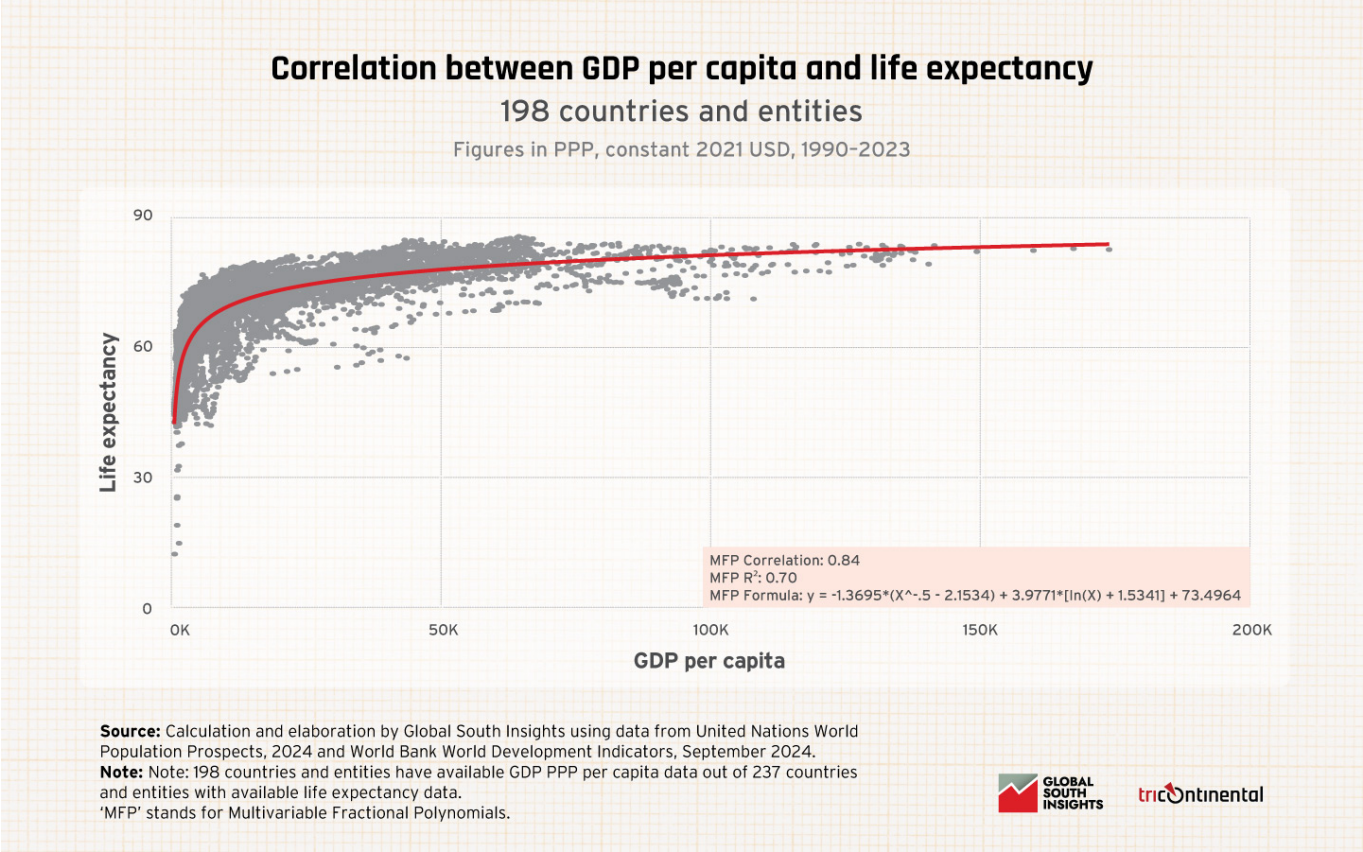


New research by Global South Insights (GSI) suggest that there is an ultra-high correlation between a high quantum of GDP growth and a high share of net fixed capital formation, which we shorten to net fixed investment (NFI). Net fixed investment refers to new fixed capital investment (e.g., expenditure on production machinery, infrastructure, etc., called gross fixed capital formation, minus that proportion of a country's existing capital stock which wears out or becomes obsolete in the same period, which would be

called depreciation for a singular enterprise). In short, the higher the share of net fixed investment in GDP, the higher the rate of growth. This high correlation applies to the 50 largest economies which constitute 88% of the world's GDP. It also applies to over 50 smaller economies in the Global South.[44] This is to say that it is not simply financial inflows but also their investment into new tangible assets that drives GDP growth.



GDP is of course an imperfect measure of economic development, as it does not capture 'externalities' such as environmental degradation or elements of social progress. This does not mean that GDP is unimportant. Research by Global South Insights has found a statistically strong and significant correlation between GDP per capita and life expectancy. This correlation has risen since the 1990s. Moreover, increases in GDP per capita are correlated with proportionally larger increases in life expectancy for people with lower income levels. In other words, GDP growth can have very real material benefits for the people of the Global South. On the other hand, a stagnation in GDP growth, such as that brought about by the Third World debt crisis and the onset of neoliberalism, can lead to lost decades where little to no progress is made in terms of human development. Of course, social protection plays a role too: there are exemplary cases, such as that of socialist Cuba, which has achieved a high average life expectancy even without rapid economic growth due to the criminal over six-decade US blockade.



Since we know that NFI is positively associated with GDP growth and that GDP per capita growth is positively associated with an increase in life expectancy, it stands to reason that the basic task for progressive governments in the Global South is to increase the share of NFI in GDP. However, this presents three challenges:

1. The share of NFI in GDP cannot be raised to such an extent as to depress consumption to intolerable levels in the short term. This requires supportive domestic and international financial institutions that can provide concessional and long-term finance for NFI.
2. Mechanisms are needed to stem the plunder of resources from the Global South and to channel them into NFI. This would require international coordination on corporate corruption such as taxation evasion, transfer pricing, and trade misinvoicing. Additionally, multilateral mechanisms are needed to stabilise commodity prices.
3. The NFI must be of a productive and ecologically sustainable nature (i.e., good quality). It is self-evident that NFI in speculative aspects in real estate cannot deliver the same outcomes as NFI in productive investment in infrastructure, agriculture, and modern industry. The latter is more conducive to the accumulation of skills and technology and the production of material goods. Furthermore, NFI in housing and household's related infrastructure positively impacts both GDP growth and life expectancy. All this would require country-specific industrial and welfare policies that can only be shaped by the balance of forces in the class struggle in each particular case.

Conclusion

China's rapid economic growth and rising living standards since the 1949 revolution cannot be explained by conventional development theories. However, they can be explained by the high rate of NFI prioritised by the

Communist Party of China. Consider, for instance, the massive investment and mobilisation of people required to build China's high-speed railway system – the largest in the world. This is in no way a novel idea. Though there are disagreements as to how investment can be mobilised in conditions of semi-feudalism and imperialist encirclement, the Marxist-Leninist tradition has always emphasised that large-scale industry is the material basis for socialism. In 1920, Vladimir Lenin pithily summarised communist development as 'Soviet power plus electrification for the whole country'.[45] Half a century later, the African revolutionary Amílcar Cabral taught us that the goal of national liberation is 'the freeing of the process of development of the national productive forces'.[46] Therefore, the formulation of a new development theory for the Global South is also a return to the source of our struggles for freedom from imperialism and neocolonialism. With it, we will chart the path for the Promethean aspirations of the darker nations.

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The Twentieth Century, the Global South, and China's Historical Position

Foreword

Wang Hui (born in 1959) is a professor of Chinese language and literature at Tsinghua University as well as the director of the Tsinghua Institute for Advanced Study in Humanities and Social Sciences. He is the author of a number of important books, including the four-volume study *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* (现代中国思想的兴起), published in 2004, the first two volumes of which are now available from Harvard University Press in English. In an extensive review, Zhang Yongle, who teaches at Beijing University School

of Law, wrote that 'nothing comparable to Wang Hui's work has appeared in China since the late Qing-early Republican period' (at the turn of the twentieth century).[1]

Wang Hui's early work was on Lu Xun (1881–1936), often considered to be the founder of modern Chinese literature, in whom he detected a sympathetic character who wanted to dig deep into the well of Chinese thought and culture but who grasped their limitations in a world where technological progress had sped up the clock. Two points emerge from such a detection: first, that the gravity of European colonialism forced countries outside Europe to measure themselves against its standard – a measurement that was intended to leave them wanting – and, second, that human development is not linear, not even in Europe, nor is it territorially based, which means that countries and cultures learn from each other and enrich each other's cultural resources. The Western binary opposition between tradition and modernity occludes, on the one hand, the immense weight of the old world on the new and, on the other, the mutual influence between Europe and the rest of the world. This orientation to the past allowed Wang Hui to accept both that there were ground-breaking revolutions in the twentieth century, from the 1905 Russian Revolution onward, and yet that these revolutionary breaks retained a continuity with the past and drew from it in ways both productive and unproductive. Careful theoretical reconstruction of the past provides far more than antiquarian interest: it reveals the way in which countries, such as China, develop through their complex relationship to both the immensity of their break with the past (the 1911 and 1949 Chinese Revolutions) and the roots of these breaks both with a history that predates them and with areas of the world (such as the Soviet Union) that influenced them. This enriched attitude toward the cultural world of China freed Wang Hui to produce an enormously important body of work on Chinese thought.

It is perhaps not surprising in this context that China has not been a frame of reference for scholarly work from colonial times onward. China, in the colonial mode of thought, was compared with the West or assessed using Western concepts and categories and always seen as lacking or inferior. Once more, the binaries of advanced versus backward halt serious intellectual thought. Europe is not advanced, nor is China backward, and these two regions are not immune from influencing one another. Yet, the arrogance of the colonial mode of thought remains with us. Not only is there a general lack of knowledge of Chinese thought (although this is changing now), but there has been little interaction in the academies of the world outside China with Chinese intellectual debates and discussions. This is precisely why Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research partnered with the important Chinese journal *Wenhua Zongheng* (文化纵横) to produce an international edition, where Wang Hui sits on the editorial board.

From May 1996 to July 2007, Wang Hui was the editor of the influential Chinese magazine *Dushu* (读书, or *Reading*). The first issue of this magazine, in 1979, carried an essay by Li Honglin entitled 'No Forbidden Zone in Reading', which called for a 'movement to liberate thought'. Before and after his time at *Dushu*, Wang Hui wrote a series of important essays on the need to revitalise politics in China. 'Western democracy based on general elections is not the only model of democracy', he wrote, 'nor is democracy a merely formal practice. Democracy must be predicated on political dynamism. Once this momentum is lost, no form of democracy can survive'.[2] This dynamism, Wang Hui argued in a number of essays, had to come from the mass line, which Mao Zedong had described as 'from the masses, to the masses'.

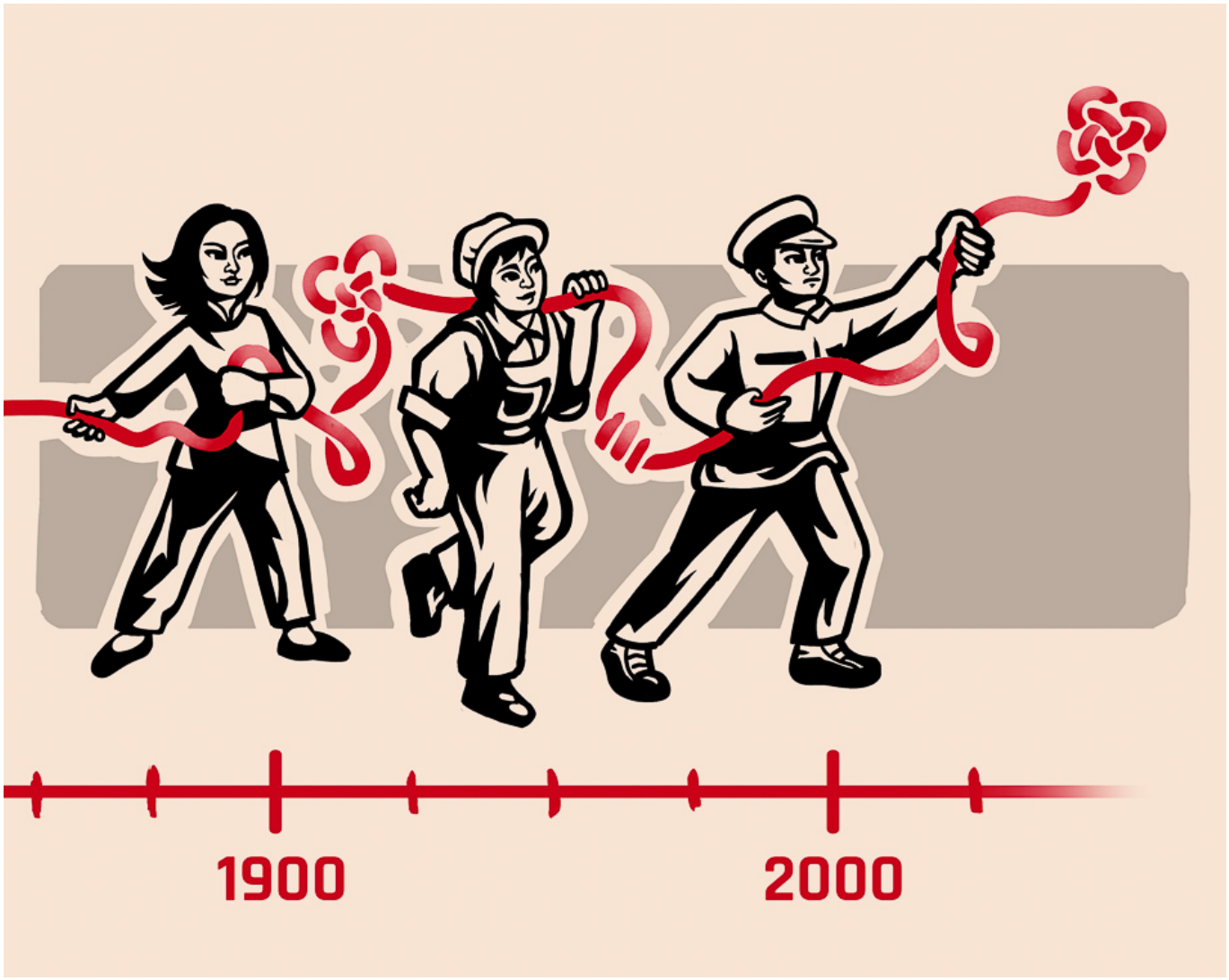
In April 2020, Wang Hui published a fascinating article in *Wenhua Zongheng* entitled 'The Revolutionary Personality and the Philosophy of Victory: Commemorating Lenin's 150th Birthday' (汪晖, 《革命者人格与胜利的哲学——纪念列宁诞辰150周年》). In this essay, Wang Hui reflected on the emergence of a new

dynamism and political revitalisation in the Chinese government and the Communist Party of China, particularly around the response to the COVID-19 pandemic: the mass line, revolutionary optimism, and the importance of a party with a leader who has a revolutionary personality. But this is a fragile combination, with any one element liable to change, that requires intellectual vigilance. That is precisely what Wang Hui has done in the substantial essays and books he has published over the past thirty years, and in this dossier. We are proud to feature Wang Hui's essay as our October 2024 dossier, October for the Russian Revolution and 2024 for the centenary of Lenin's death.

Introduction

The twentieth century has passed. How do we understand the historical legacy of twentieth-century China and its position in world history? The preamble of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (1949) states, 'In the twentieth century, momentous historical changes took place in China'.[1] The wars of imperialism and the Cold War profoundly shaped China, but the revolutions sparked by war and social crises, especially the founding of the People's Republic of China within these revolutions, have had an indelible impact on the subsequent changes in China and the world: not only were national independence and industrialisation completed during the revolutions and construction processes, but social, human-nature, geopolitical, and other relationships all underwent unprecedented transformations. There is hardly an area that has not experienced profound changes, from spoken and written languages to political systems, from social organisations to labour and gender, from cultural fashions to everyday life, from urban-rural relations to regional relationships, from religious beliefs to social ethics. The 'short twentieth century' was shaped by a broad, complex, profound, and intense process with unprecedented density, depth, and breadth.[2] Today, it is difficult for people to imagine a life other than the one that has been transformed by the twentieth century. Without the explorations, innovation, and failures of revolutions, it is impossible to grasp the significance of this era.

The birth of the century marks the emergence of global simultaneity in Chinese history and the struggles and explorations to transform the internal imbalance of simultaneous relations. Only from the dual perspectives of the Chinese historical context and historical upheavals in the world can we grasp the position of twentieth-century China.



Part One: The Birth of the Century

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, against the backdrop of significant changes, various forces formed their own assessments of the 'propensity of the times' (时势), leading to competing views on the concept of time itself. For instance, political thinker and reformer Kang Youwei proposed the 'Confucian Calendar' in *Preface to Notes on the Liyun Chapter of the Book of Rites* (《禮運注》叙, published in 1901 but written in 1884 according to his own record), while philosopher Liu Shipei put forward the 'Yellow Emperor calendar' in 1903. These perspectives on time were often in opposition to one another, yet they shared a new consciousness of progress regarding the unification of history and the historical timeline.

At midnight on 30 January 1900 – the Year of Gengzi[3] and also the 26th year of the Qing Dynasty Emperor Guangxu's reign – Liang Qichao, a Chinese reformist, scholar, and journalist who was living in exile in Hawaii, was moved by the unfolding events and wrote 'A Song for the Pacific Ocean in the Twentieth Century' (《二十世紀太平洋歌》), in which he reflected: 'Suddenly, I wonder what night is tonight, and what place is this place, realising that it is the boundary between two centuries, and the centre of the eastern and western hemispheres'. Liang Qichao brought together two important new concepts: one representing time – the twentieth century – and the other representing space – the Pacific Ocean. This new spatio-

temporal perspective, vastly different from previous expressions, later became more widespread, providing a new framework for exploring China's historical position in the twentieth century. Let's first look at the concept of time. The Gregorian calendar was established in 1582, initially used by overseas Catholic territories of Spain and then adopted by Britain in 1752, Japan in 1873, China in 1912, and Russia in 1918. For Liang Qichao, a century was not just a method of numbering years, but also a way of understanding and defining the historical propensity of the times, of judging the basis for action. All understandings of the past, present, and future were recombined within this intense shift in historical consciousness. Although the concept of the twentieth century emerged in the context of entanglement with Confucian narratives like the 'Gongyang Three Ages Theory',[4] it was more so a product of the fact that these traditional narratives were unable to cope with the nature of the profound changes of the era.

The universalisation of the concept of the 'century' is a result of the new propensity of the times. From a spatial perspective, the Pacific era has been closely related to the rise of the United States since the late nineteenth century. The global capitalist centre began to shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific: in this vast space, beyond the old empires of the nineteenth century, two new political-economic entities, or in politician Yang Du's words 'economic warfare nations', emerged, namely the United States and Japan, which drastically changed the world situation. Twentieth-century China and its fate were closely linked to this transformation. Liang Qichao had already begun to use the term 'national imperialism' in his long poems, and in 1903 he discussed the characteristics of the twentieth century from an economic perspective. That year, while touring the United States, Liang Qichao closely examined this 'economic warfare nation' and published the lengthy article 'Trust, the Giant of the Twentieth Century' (《二十世紀之巨靈托拉斯》), which analysed the new features of twentieth-century capitalism such as economic monopolies, overproduction, and capital control. He proposed that 'Trust is the imperialism of the economic realm; the political realm's inevitable trend towards imperialism, and the economic realm's inevitable trend towards trust, are both inevitable outcomes of natural selection'.[5] This supplemented his interpretation in 'A Song for the Pacific Ocean in the Twentieth Century' of the real driving force behind the US expansion into the Pacific after the Spanish-American War (1898).

Twentieth-century China was the first era in the country's history to define itself by the concept of the 'century', and judgments about the characteristics of this era were closely linked to observations of the entire world pattern. Liang Qichao's 'A Song for the Pacific Ocean in the Twentieth Century' (1900) and 'Trust, the Giant of the Twentieth Century' (1903); Kōtoku Shūsui's *Monster of the Twentieth Century: Imperialism* (1901); J.A. Hobson's *Imperialism: A Study* (1902); Paul Lafargue's 'American Trust and Its Economic, Social, and Political Significance' (1903); Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance Capital* (1910); Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913); Karl Kautsky's *Ultra-Imperialism* (1914); and Vladimir I. Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) are part of a lengthy sequence that contemplates the nature of the twentieth century. Imperialism is not only an expansive economic and military system, but also an ideological and value spectrum, with the latter intervening in various narratives about others and oneself through an expansive knowledge system. The consciousness of the 'century' is both an awareness of and strong resistance to this process.

The advent of the 'century' is an event: the adoption of this concept of time was precisely to terminate the old concepts of time, such that the twentieth century could not naturally derive or evolve from these previous concepts – neither from dynastic chronologies, the Yellow Emperor calendar, or the Confucian calendar, nor could it be grasped through the sequential concepts of time of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth

centuries. However, all other concepts of time would be reconstructed as the prehistory of the twentieth century. The concept of the 'century' provides an epistemological framework that integrates diverse spaces and times into a universal history of simultaneity, thus sparking reflections on the internal imbalances, contradictions, and conflicts of this universal history. The distinction of the twentieth century from all past eras is not just a temporal distinction, but a grasp of the propensity of the times. At this unique historical moment, in order for the Chinese people to create their own prehistory for modern China and distinguish China's unique position in the world, they also had to think about the issues in Europe and across the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even earlier periods.

Therefore, the historical narrative of the twentieth century must be understood in a reversed manner: the twentieth century is not the result of its prehistory, but its creator.

Part Two: Revolutions in Peripheral Areas

Nineteenth-century Europe is the central axis of modern historical narration. Many historical and theoretical discussions, whether about the classical period, the Middle Ages, the early modern period, or the twentieth century and postmodern eras, are mostly reconstructed according to the historical view and problem

consciousness of Europe's nineteenth century. The nineteenth century and the concept of modernity almost completely overlap: rooted in the dual revolution (the French Revolution and the British Industrial Revolution) and the narrative of capitalist modernity, with Europe's revolutions, capital, empires, and their fluctuations forming the central story. Changes in other regions of the world are subordinate to this central story.

Compared to the 'long nineteenth century', the twentieth century remains a brief 'age of extremes': World War I, World War II, ethnic cleansing, the Cold War, tyranny, etc., are all social experiments that ended in failure.[6] Eric Hobsbawm once lamented that the twentieth century is intimately linked with the fate of a single country: the Soviet Union. In such narratives, what position do China and other non-Western worlds occupy?

The rise of imperialism, the pattern of the great powers both competing and collaborating to divide up colonial territories, and the shift of the global power centre to the Pacific constitute the historical conditions needed to understand the fundamental issues of the twentieth century. From China's perspective, if we speak only of the phenomenon of imperialism, it is difficult to draw a boundary today as clear as that drawn by many classic writers on imperialism between 1840 and 1870.

Alongside the shift of the world capitalist centre, the birth of the twentieth century was accompanied by a series of revolutions in peripheral areas. Imperialism is not only an international system, but also a military, economic, political, social, and cultural system that infiltrates societies internally. What clearly distinguishes the twentieth century from the nineteenth century are the revolutions in non-Western areas, which were nurtured by the internal and external conditions of the imperialist era. The novelty of this new period is not merely defined by the developmentalist story that capitalism spread from the central areas to the global stage. Rather, it was also shaped, on the one hand, by the colonies' and semi-colonies' continued resistance against the imperialist hegemony of economic development as well as their struggle for political independence and cultural survival and, on the other hand, by the transformations of the internal social relations that obstructed both the goals and the exploration of new social forms in this process of resistance and transformation. For example, in the age of war and revolution, to understand the transformations of twentieth-century China through the war itself, it is necessary to ask what the characteristics of the warfare of this era in China were. The Northern Expedition (1926–1928), the Agrarian Revolutionary War (1927–1937), the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1937–1945), the Liberation War (1946–1949), and the wars before the twentieth century, such as the Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860), the Sino-French War (1884–1885), and the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), have significant differences: these are conflicts of revolutionary organisations mobilised in warfare, conflicts of revolution waged through warfare, fights to build a revolutionary country during warfare, struggles to create a new political subject of 'the people' through warfare, wars that combined the national liberation war with the international anti-fascist war, and wars that achieved the goal of national liberation through domestic revolutionary wars and resonated with the international socialist movement.

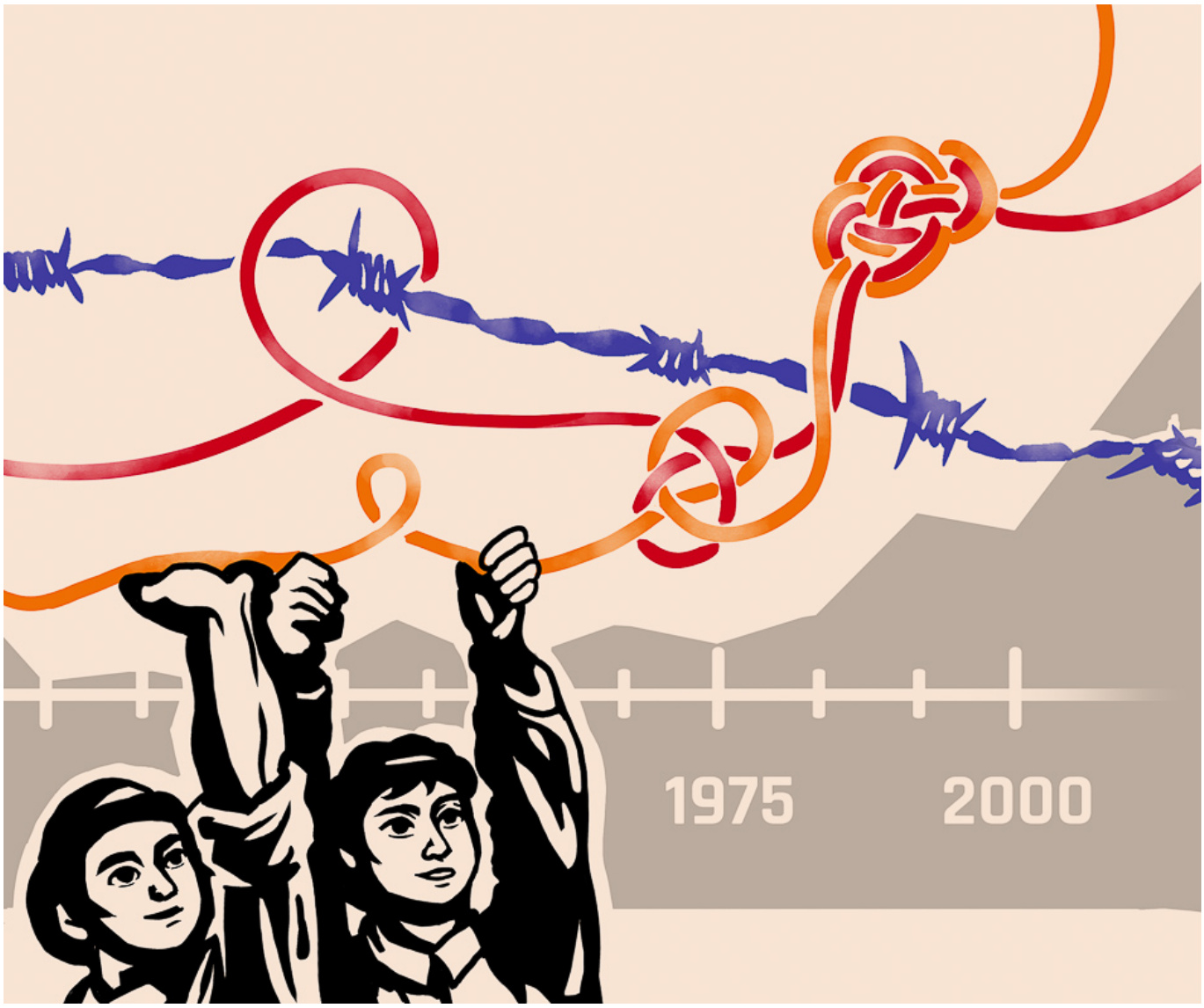
Twentieth-century China was born within this context. Because of this, the twentieth century is likely not, as Eric Hobsbawm suggested, solely defined by a single country (the Soviet Union), but, rather, is linked to revolutions in peripheral areas and their sequential consequences. To discuss the starting and ending points of the twentieth century is thus to explore the multiple origins, convoluted processes, and declining forms of this era's revolutionary waves. An analysis of this issue must begin with an analysis of the non-uniformity of the

imperialist system. If the non-uniformity of the imperialist world system creates the 'weak link' of this international system, then domestic divisions caused by competition among major powers also provide the 'weak link' for domestic revolutions. Thus, in the era of imperialism, there are two types of weak links. One type of 'weak link', as Lenin said, is 'uneven economic and political development' as 'an absolute law of capitalism', leading to the conclusion that 'the victory of socialism is possible first in several or even in one capitalist country alone'. Another 'weak link' arises from uneven political and economic development domestically as well as the contradictions among imperialist agents within oppressed nations. This second 'weak link' provided the conditions for Chinese revolutionary forces to survive and develop in the vast countryside, along provincial borders, and in peripheral areas.[7]

I perceive the 'short twentieth century' as the century of revolutions. This revolutionary century did not originate from the establishment of economic and military hegemony in Europe or the United States, but from the new 'non-uniformity' caused by the process of establishing such hegemony – or, more precisely, from the revolutionary opportunities created by this 'non-uniformity' – which consists of a series of interconnected major events: national, political, and social revolutions. The Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) directly triggered the 1905 Russian Revolution, which inspired the massive strike by the Polish Socialist Party and the Lodz insurrection the same year, affecting the Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911) and the Turkish Revolution (1908–1909). These revolutions, together with the 1911 Chinese Revolution, formed a revolutionary sequence in Asia (and Eastern Europe).[8] The October Revolution of 1917 in Russia and the 1924 Nationalist Revolution in China under the First United Front, which can also be placed within this revolutionary sequence, provided the premise for the land revolution movement led by the Chinese communists. The October Revolution is usually understood in the context of European warfare, but this overlooks the continuity between this revolution and the Asian revolutionary sequence. Closely related to this sequence are the decolonisation and national independence movements that developed in different forms in different countries and regions, such as the Indian independence movement. Though all of these revolutions and movements took place in different historical and cultural contexts, constituting different modern paths, their interconnections and mutual inspirations are apparent. Years later, these revolutions and movements were part of the historical foundation of the Bandung Conference (1955) and the Non-Aligned Movement (1961 to present). Therefore, the birth of the 'short twentieth century' had to begin with an exploration of 'weak links', which can only be identified within the search for opportunities for revolution and change. From the vantagepoint of seeking opportunities for revolution and change, it is not the old Eurasian geopolitical competition, but the revolutionary situation caused by the new structure in Asia after the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, not the imperialist wars, but the 'awakening of Asia' triggered by these wars and shaped by the aforementioned series of revolutions, that marked the multiple beginnings of the 'short twentieth century'.

Therefore, temporally speaking, the 'short twentieth century' did not begin in 1914, but rather between 1905 and 1911; spatially, it did not start at a single point but from a set of beginnings; and in terms of opportunity, it arose not from destructive wars but from the dual exploration that sought to break through the imperialist system and old regimes. Geopolitically, the twentieth century was not just a post-colonial era but also a post-metropolitan era,[9] during which revolutions and reforms in peripheral areas not only transformed their own regions, but also the central-peripheral relations of the world, significantly affecting the central regions and the transformations they experienced. It is only recently, at a time when countries of the Global South account for nearly 60 percent of the global GDP and BRICS countries over 30 percent, that people have

begun to understand the features of the 'post-metropolitan era', though this is a prolonged process.[10] The widely used trans-geopolitical concepts 'tricontinentalism' (亚非拉), the surge of national independence movements and the Non-Aligned Movement, and the emergence of the Global South along this trajectory all stem from this sequential revolutionary process. What is the Global South? The South is not just a region or merely a 'backward' or impoverished area; in the tradition of the Bandung Conference, it resonates with the East, forming unity through differences. China and the Global South are no longer merely peripheral areas totally dominated by the colonial metropoles of the colonial era; they are the epochal forces that propelled the transition from the metropolitan era to the post-metropolitan era. This process began a century ago and is one of the premises for understanding the twenty-first century.



Part Three: The Politics of Displacement and the Creation of Continuity

The birth of the century signifies the transformation of multiple worlds under different timeframes into uneveness within a world of synchronicity, thus creating an absolute need to observe history along a horizontal axis. This temporal transformation is actually conditioned by the so-called 'spatial revolution'.

Under the premise of the spatial revolution, temporal relationships increasingly take on a lateral nature, and contemporary changes – as well as the discourses describing these changes – cannot be narrated along a longitudinal axis of diachronic relations. Rather, they must be explained across multiple timeframes. I summarise this phenomenon as conceptual lateral movement, whose function is to transform historical contents from different timelines into realities that can be expressed by the same set of discourses within a framework of synchronicity.

In this context, how does politics take place? Without a series of entirely new concepts or categories, the politics of the twentieth century and its historical significance seem impossible to represent; yet, at the same time, if these concepts, which have been translated or transcreated, are used as foundational categories to construct and explain historical scenarios, the misalignment between discourse systems and social conditions is often quite apparent. In this era, concepts such as the individual, citizen, state, nation, class, people, political party, sovereignty, culture, and society become central in the new politics; production, modes of production, social formations, and their associated concepts become foundational categories for describing Chinese and other societies; concepts of 'weak links', friend-enemy relations, 'border areas', 'middle ground', 'Three Worlds', united front, and so on all arise from assessments of and strategic and tactical thinking about the global and domestic realities under imperialist conditions.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, a leading Indian scholar of subaltern studies, found that the efforts to seek revolutionary subjects in India and other non-Western worlds have produced a series of substitutes for the Western category of proletariat, such as peasants, the masses, subalterns, and so on.[11] However, the phenomenon of repetition and displacement does not only occur with categories such as the proletariat, but also with almost all the categories mentioned above. Both revolution and counter-revolution embody the logic of this displacement.

These categories can neither be explained simply by nineteenth-century logic, nor by their classical roots. The majority of these key concepts, categories, and propositions (with the exception of a few that emerged from specific struggles, such as 'border areas' and 'middle ground') originate from translations and appropriations of nineteenth-century European concepts and propositions. However, the political content of these terms or concepts – such as state, sovereignty, people, class, citizen, political party, etc. – cannot be defined solely by their European origins. Twentieth-century revolutionaries and reformers swiftly utilised these concepts, categories, and propositions for specific political practices, causing much distress for historians of the new era. For example, if 'feudal' was originally a misused term, then what basis is there to describe societal forms before and after? Similarly, as European capitalism and colonialism developed in the nineteenth century, socialists invented the concept of the 'proletariat', which was seen as the true, future-oriented revolutionary subject. In twentieth-century China, the search for the proletariat as a revolutionary subject was an ongoing political process. However, in a society with such weak industrialisation, there were few groups of workers in terms of number, scale, and organisational level, and it is questionable whether or not the capitalist group, as its counterpart, constituted a class. Does this imply that the Chinese Revolution itself was the product of a 'misunderstanding'?

Many categories and themes of twentieth-century China are repetitions of nineteenth-century Europe, but each repetition is also a displacement – not merely a product of different contexts, but also a political displacement. Therefore, it is necessary to inquire about the formation and meaning of categories such as the state, nation, sovereignty, political party, people, class, etc., under specific historical conditions; to inquire

about how people's wars transformed and created new political organisations (although with the same names) and state forms (like the soviet) that were different from previous political parties; to inquire about how, through organisation and mobilisation, peasants became a driving force or political class in the revolution; and to inquire about how to understand sovereignty and sovereign disputes within the League of Nations and the warfare amongst these nations. In this sense, none of these categories can be explained simply according to nineteenth-century logic, nor can they be based on the classical roots of the terms. These concepts reorganised historical narratives and broke the dominance of old narratives, thus paving the way for new politics to unfold. This is not to say that the discursive practices of this era did not involve the misplacement of concepts or categories, but rather that without analysing the political unfolding of these concepts or categories, we cannot understand their true meaning, strength, and limitations, and thus cannot use them to understand the uniqueness of twentieth-century China. When these unfamiliar concepts were used under historical conditions vastly different from those that gave birth to them, they not only fostered new consciousness, values, and actions, but also produced a new political logic. Therefore, without the internal perspective of the Chinese Revolution, it is difficult to explain the significance of twentieth-century China.

This political displacement provides a methodological premise for understanding two unique aspects of twentieth-century China, namely that it was not a simple transplantation, but a displacement under specific historical conditions and traditional contexts that established a dialectical relationship between revolution and continuity. We might reexamine two unique aspects of twentieth-century China from this perspective.

The first centres on the beginning of the 'short century', specifically the issue of continuity between the old dynasty and the new state during the revolutionary state-building process. The twentieth century began with Asian national revolutions and constitutional democracy, and we can regard the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911, the Turkish Revolution of 1908–1909, and the Chinese Revolution of 1911 as the inaugural events of the 'Awakening of Asia'. The 1911 Revolution quickly led to the founding of Asia's first republic, endowing the revolution with the significance of a true beginning. I also place the 1905 Russian Revolution within the sequence of Asian revolutions, not only because its direct trigger was the Russo-Japanese War and Russia's defeat within the territory of the Qing Dynasty, but also because this war and revolution catalysed the process of the Chinese national revolution (Tongmenghui of China, or China's Revolutionary Alliance, was founded in the same year), triggering fierce debates between republicans and constitutionalists, and inspired the subsequent revolutions in Iran and Turkey.

We can associate the 'Awakening of Asia' with World War I as an age of the collapse of empires. Though the 1905 Russian Revolution failed, it revealed symptoms of decay in the huge and multiethnic Russian empire, which ultimately collapsed amidst the smoke of revolutions and wars. The Russian Revolution and nationalist forces marched forward together, and the principle of national self-determination prevailed in Russian border regions like Poland and Ukraine. Although the border nations later joined the Soviet Union as 'federated republics', the 1991 dissolution revealed that the Soviet structure was profoundly connected to the national principle. In 1918, the Austro-Hungarian Empire established in 1867 collapsed, and Austria and Hungary each established their own republic while the smaller nations that were formerly part of the empire acquired the status of independent nations. The Social Democratic Party of Austria's nationalist concept of revolution and reform within the Austro-Hungarian Empire – consistent with Otto Bauer's theory – resulted in utter failure. The Ottoman Empire had a wide territory and large population spanning Europe and Asia; its rise was an internationally significant world historical event that had prompted the age of European naval exploration. In the smoke of World War I, that empire, a survivor of previous revolutions, limped toward

collapse, and the newborn Turkey relinquished its institutional pluralism for a smaller territory and a less complex structure. In the successive collapses of these three great empires, nationalism, constitutional reform, and the disintegration of complex institutional pluralism were different facets of the same event. In 1918, Woodrow Wilson's 'fourteen points' placed the national principle above imperial interests in the name of national self-determination; nation, nationalism, and the nation-state as antitheses to empire dominated the political logic of the entire twentieth century.

At first, the Qing Dynasty seemed very similar to other empires: a regional uprising in 1911 triggered the breakdown of the entire imperial system, and winds of separatism and independence spread throughout the empire. On a philosophical level, ethnic nationalism resonated in areas with Han, Mongolian, Tibetan, and Uyghur peoples. Zhang Taiyan, an intellectual revolutionary leader, compared the Qing with the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires.[12] Surprisingly, however, in spite of violent turmoil, fragmentation, and foreign invasions, the precarious republic ultimately managed to remain unified, maintaining the territory and population of the previous empire. How can we explain the unique continuity between the unified multiethnic empire and a unified multiethnic sovereign state?

Modern China's second unique characteristic is the continuity between the revolutionary and the post-revolutionary periods at the end of the 'short twentieth century'. In the 'short twentieth century' in Asia, beginning with the Russian Revolution of 1917, national revolutionary movements were no longer simply allied with bourgeois constitutional democracy, but also with social revolutions and certain kinds of state-building movements with a socialist orientation. The October Revolution in Russia was a product of the European wars, but it echoed the spirit of Asian revolutions because it continued the path established by the 1911 Chinese Revolution, which combined national revolution with a socialist economic programme and state-building project.[13] On the other hand, a socialist state and programme of action needed to be established in order to develop capitalism in a backward agrarian country (capitalism without a bourgeoisie).[14] The key feature that distinguished the 1911 Chinese Revolution from the 1905 Russian Revolution, the 1905–1911 Persian Constitutional Revolution, and the 1908–1909 Turkish Revolution was that it linked national movements with socialist nation-building movements and international revolutions. This feature presaged the radical difference between the twentieth-century revolutions and those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as exemplified by the American and French Revolutions. Therefore, the 1911 Chinese Revolution was a significant turning point for the sequence of revolutions following 1905; in other words, it was the 1911 Revolution – not the 1905 Russian Revolution – that marked the true beginning of this 'short century' (which extends further back than the 'age of extremes'). The short-lived 1911 Revolution was a clarion call for the long Chinese Revolution. The 1911 Chinese Revolution, the 1917 Russian Revolution, and the establishment of the global socialist camp remade the global landscape, which had been dominated by the one-way expansion of capitalism since the nineteenth century. We cannot understand the overall world order after the late nineteenth century, therefore, without the perspective of 'revolution'.

After the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries disintegrated one after another, and the national principle and market-democracy capitalist system gained a double victory. In the West, this change was compared to the disintegration of earlier empires and viewed as a moment of liberation for nations and peoples from the 'despotic' Soviet empire and a step toward constitutional democracy. In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the rupture between the ages of revolution and post-revolution was readily apparent. But since the end of the 'age of extremes' described by Eric Hobsbawm, China itself has not only

maintained the integrity of its political structure, population composition, and size, but has also completed, or is on its way to completing, a market-oriented economic transformation directed by its socialist state system. Why is that?

The first consideration in answering this question has to do with the relations between the Qing Dynasty and the modern Chinese nation, on the one hand, and between the imperial and republican systems, on the other. The second consideration has to do with the relations between socialism and the market economy. After 1989, no one expected that China would develop its economy as quickly as it did while still maintaining its political structure. Similarly, in the turbulent years following 1911, no one had any idea where the social upheaval of the times would lead. Modern China's political structure is the product of the revolutionary nation-building that began in 1949; its size and sovereign relations, however, date back to the continuity established between the Qing Dynasty and the newly born republic after the 1911 Revolution. In other words, the creation of revolution, transformation, and continuity – inevitably also expressed as ruptures of continuity – encapsulates the crucial secrets of China's 'short twentieth century'. If this unique political process is also viewed through the lens of the 'continuity of sovereignty', it becomes apparent that the emergence, renewal, and completion of the 'sovereign continuity' in the course of the Chinese revolutionary and state-building process was accompanied by the birth of a new political subject and its ever-increasing capacity for political integration.

Unlike the French and Russian Revolutions, the Chinese Revolution cannot be marked by a single event; rather, it is a long process of mobilising and transforming society in all fields – political, economic, cultural, military, etc. – a process of creating continuity through continuous self-transformation, even self-negation, and a process that not only established its position in global relations but also changed global inequality. The revolution is shaped not only by tangible characters and events, but also by invisible forces such as ideas, values, customs, and traditions that are part of instigating events and coalesce in their eruption. The political subjectivity of the 'Chinese people' was born and strengthened through this long process. The historical continuity of modern China was born in specific historical events, produced by its participants under various historical forces. The energy and capacity of twentieth-century China to create its own continuity through revolution and transformation lays the foundation for facing contemporary and future challenges.

Interpreting the history of twentieth-century China or discussing contemporary China and its future hinges on the fundamental assessment of the issue of continuity, which can neither be seen as a natural extension of traditional China and its civilisation nor as a fabrication from modern revolutions and transformations. The discussion on continuity would not exist without the revolutions and transformations of twentieth-century China: both the practical experiences of Chinese revolution and reform and the relationship between modern China and classical civilisation must be understood within this framework.

Part Four: Crisis and Opportunity in the Post-Metropolitan Era

If one of the global characteristics of the twentieth century was the revolutions emerging in the peripheral regions outside the centre of global capitalism, then this series of revolutions also signified the emergence of new political subjects in global relations, successively called oppressed nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Third World, and the Global South based on different historical conditions. The nations and peoples under these designations differ tremendously across various historical conditions and cultural backgrounds. As Indonesian President Sukarno stated at the opening ceremony of the Bandung Conference in 1955, the participating nations 'have not gathered together in a world of peace and unity and cooperation. Great chasms yawn between nations and groups of nations. Our unhappy world is torn and tortured, and the peoples of all countries walk in fear lest, through no fault of theirs, the dogs of war are unchained once again'.[15] Decades later, contradictions still abound across nations, religions, ethnic groups, classes, genders, and between humanity and nature, forming a chain of crises.

The historical foundation of neoliberal globalisation lies in the multiple monopolies formed during the era of

imperialism and the Cold War, including finance, technology, natural resources, weapons of mass destruction, and communications. From the industrial and electrical revolutions to the biotechnological and digital revolutions, this global order and its inherent inequalities increasingly fail to meet the development needs of China and the Asian region, provide support for further development in African and Latin American countries, or offer a new framework for fair global development and overcoming ecological crises. If the oppressed nations, the Third World, and the Non-Aligned Movement were responses to imperialism and hegemonic politics, the Global South today must address the chain of crises brought about by neoliberal globalisation and advocate for a new political, economic, and cultural relationship and a new international order that accommodates the rise of peripheral regions.

Comparing the international conjuncture during the Bandung era with that of today, the most significant difference or development is the rise of China and other peripheral regions, which, through revolution and transformation, has partially changed the hegemonic structure of the global order. From the Bandung era onward, hegemony persisted but was loosening in a way that was difficult to restrain. If the crisis of war in the colonial era stemmed from conflicts among imperialist nations vying for colonies, spheres of influence, and the so-called balance of power, today's greatest threats to peace arise from efforts to suppress the rise of peripheral regions as hegemonic structures have begun to loosen. Following World War II, countries in the Global South, including the East, gained the basic conditions for modernisation through national liberation and socialist movements. With this foundation, some countries and regions have made significant progress through independent and cooperative development and continuously seek a fairer order in global processes. Accompanied by internal and external crises, Global North countries have shifted from neoliberal globalisation to more overt containment and monopoly, and regional war crises have the potential to escalate into larger-scale global conflicts. The financial, trade, and technological restrictions and sanctions repeatedly imposed by the United States and the European Union are manifestations of a hegemonic crisis. Global North countries can no longer monopolise natural resources as in the colonial era. Even in terms of weapons of mass destruction and media, the monopoly of hegemonic nations is in decline. The issue of defending peace that was raised at the Bandung Conference presents a new urgency and different implications in the context of a new era. Today, the more intense contemporary conflicts are closely related to internal changes within five monopoly structures: finance, technology, natural resources, weapons of mass destruction, and communications.

First, let's look at the financial system, where hegemony still exists but has clearly begun to loosen. The internationalisation of the renminbi is already underway as China uses its own currency in trade settlements with several countries. The financial sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union during the Russia-Ukraine war have acted like a double-edged sword; while harming other countries, they have also exposed the evident weaknesses of the dollar system. The system of financial hegemony has not ended, but the struggle surrounding it is becoming increasingly intense.

Second, in the current situation, the crisis in technological monopolies is even more severe than in the financial sector. The US Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) and Science Act (2022) is a typical example of this; as soon as non-Western countries make technological breakthroughs and strengthen their autonomy, Global North countries resort to any means necessary to suppress, sanction, limit, or divide Global South countries. The process of disorder imposed by neoliberal globalisation is evolving into a process of intense conflicts.

Third, a crisis has also emerged in the Global North's monopoly over natural resources as Global South

countries gain independence and increasing economic autonomy. The hostility and resistance of Europe and the US towards the Belt and Road Initiative reflect the unprecedented challenges to the resource monopoly that has been established since the colonial era. Therefore, how China develops a model distinct from European hegemony and clearly articulates its development strategy on a global scale is also a crucial issue for Global South countries.

Fourth, when it comes to weapons of mass destruction, a monopoly still exists, though it is not all-encompassing. This has led to a new danger of a global nuclear crisis and arms race. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) trilateral agreement are designed to maintain the monopoly on weapons of mass destruction and establish new strategic frameworks globally that further this objective.

Fifth, the communications monopoly remains strong. Following the collapse of the socialist system, the monopoly of large Western media outlets not only persists but has become even stronger. The emergence of social media platforms like TikTok and the hearings in the US Congress prove that the US and Europe will use all means to suppress any technology that can partially break through the media monopoly, whether it is a large national media outlet or a social media platform. However, the new restrictive digital policies being formed and established by the US and Europe also reveal these regions' increasingly strained situation.

What has not stopped amidst these changes is the continuous rise of Asia's position in the global economy, the new possibilities for economic development in African countries, the long-term trend of Latin American countries increasingly seeking independent development, and waves of twenty-first century socialism. Thirty years ago, Samir Amin said that globalisation is not order but disorder, and today this disorder is accelerating into conflicts through a chain of multiple crises, posing a significant threat to global peace and development. As a broad global movement, the goal of the Global South is not merely to pursue unilateral development but to work towards a more just, peaceful, and eco-friendly world order. To this end, it is crucial to dismantle the monopolies on finance, technology, media, natural resources, and weapons of mass destruction and to organise global disarmament to defend peace. In this sense, the movement of the Global South is not simply a movement in the South but a global movement promoting changes in global relations and seeking a new universality for the survival and development of human civilisation.

Notes

Foreword

[1] Zhang Yongle, 'The Future of the Past', *New Left Review*, no. 62 (1 April 2010): 47–83.

[2] Wang Hui, *China's Twentieth Century: Revolution, Retreat, and the Road to Equality*, ed. Saul Thomas (London: Verso, 2016), 160.

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[1] Constitution of the People's Republic of China, preamble, accessed 20 August 2024, **http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Constitution/node_2825.htm**.

[2] 'The short century' is a term coined by the British historian Eric Hobsbawm referring to the period from the

beginning of World War I in 1914 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1995).

[3] The Year of the Gengzi (庚子年) refers to a year in the traditional Chinese sixty-year cycle of time. 1900 was the most well-known Year of the Gengzi because of the anti-colonial and anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion, supported by the Qing Dynasty under the Guangxu Emperor (光绪帝), and the subsequent invasion by the Eight-Nation Alliance, which included forces from Japan, Russia, Britain, France, the United States, Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary. This year represents the national humiliation and crisis at the time.

[4] Attributed to Confucian scholar Gongyang Gao during the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), the 'Gongyang Three Ages Theory' (公羊三世说) presents a Confucian view of time in which history progresses through distinct 'ages', each representing a different level of moral and political development.

[5] Liang Qichao 梁启超, 'Ershi shiji zhi juling tuolasi二十世纪之巨灵托辣斯' [Trust, the Giant of the 20th Century], *Xinmin Congbao 新民丛报* [New Citizen Journal], no. 40–43 (2 November to 4 December 1903).

[6] The 'long nineteenth century', as theorised by Eric Hobsbawm, refers to the historical period between the French Revolution in 1789 and the start of World War I in 1914, a period characterised by the rise of industrial capitalism, the spread of nationalism, and the expansion of European empires, among other significant changes.

[7] V. I. Lenin, 'On the Slogan for a United States of Europe', *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 2, 709.

[8] The 1911 Chinese Revolution, also known as the Xinhai Revolution, ended China's last imperial dynasty, the Qing Dynasty, and led to the establishment of the Republic of China.

[9] 'Metropolitan' refers to the Western colonial powers represented by metropolises, such as London and New York, and their associated relationship of domination of colonies, semi-colonies, and post-colonies. Therefore, the so-called 'post-metropolitan era' corresponds to 'post-colonialism'. Today, with the economic rise of China and East Asia and the changes in the world order, the 'post-(Western) centre' era has begun, a process which began with the revolutions and changes that took place in the peripheral areas in the twentieth century. The influence of these areas on central areas has increased such that Western society today must face its own 'post-centre' or 'post-metropolitan' reality.

[10] Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Hyper-Imperialism: A Dangerous Decadent New Stage*, Studies on Contemporary Dilemmas no. 4, 23 January 2024, **https://thetricontinental.org/studies-on-contemporary-dilemmas-4-hyper-imperialism/#toc-section-6-1**.

[11] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Belatedness as Possibility: Subaltern Histories, Once Again', *The Indian Postcolonial: A Critical Reader*, vol. 1, eds. Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri (London: Routledge, 2011), 163–76.

[12] Zhang Taiyan, 'Zheng chou Man lun' [Correct Discourse on Hatred of Manchus), *Xinhai geming qian*

shinianjian shilun xuanji [Selected Essays From the Ten Years Preceding the 1911 Revolution], vol. 1, ed. Zhang Nan and Wang Renzhi (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1963), 98.

[13] Lenin first took notice of the distinctive characteristics of the Chinese Revolution in 1912–1913. In 1919, he argued that the socialist revolution 'will be a struggle of all the imperialist-oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries, against international imperialism'. See Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works of Lenin*, vol. 30 (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1957), 137. For Lenin's 'discovery' of the 1911 Revolution, see Wang Hui, 'The Politics of Imagining Asia', in *Depoliticised Politics* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2008).

[14] The socialist aspect of the 1911 Chinese Revolution was embodied by the fact that the state-building programme of Sun Yat-sen, the 'father of modern China' and first president of the republic, entailed not only a national political revolution, but also a social revolution that aimed to overcome the weakness of capitalism. Its main tactics to accomplish this were to equalise land ownership and tax increases in land value, a policy influenced by Henry George's theories.

[15] Asian-African Conference Bandung, Indonesia 1955, *Asia-Africa Speaks from Bandung* (Jakarta: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia, 1955).

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