We Know a Different World Will Be Born Out of This Mess: The Fourth Newsletter (2024)

Luis Felipe Noé (Argentina), *La naturaleza y los mitos II* ('Nature and Myths II'), 1975.

Dear friends,

Greetings from the desk of **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**.

'The West is in danger', **warned** Argentina's new president, Javier Milei at this year's World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos, Switzerland. In his dangerously appealing **style**, Milei blamed 'collectivism' – that is, social welfare, taxes, and the state – as the 'root cause' of the world's problems, leading to widespread impoverishment. The only way forward, Milei declared, is through 'free enterprise, capitalism, and economic freedom'. Milei's speech marked a return to the orthodoxy of Milton Friedman and the Chicago Boys, who

pushed forward an ideology of social cannibalism as the basis for their neoliberal agenda. Since the 1970s, this scorched earth policy has devasted much of the Global South through the structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund, but also created factory deserts in the West (what Donald Trump, in his inauguration address in 2017, **called** the 'American carnage'). Therein lies the confounding logic of the far right: on the one side, calling for the billionaire class to dominate society in their interest (which produces the social carnage) and then, on the other side, inflaming the victims of said carnage to fight against policies that would benefit them.

Milei is right in his overall judgment: the West *is* in danger, but not because of social democratic policies; it is in danger because of its inability to come to terms with its slow demise as the dominating bloc in the world.

From Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and Global South Insights (GSI) come two important texts on the changing global landscape: a landmark study, ***Hyper-Imperialism: A Dangerous, Decadent New Stage***, and our seventy-second dossier, ***The Churning of the World Order*** (the dossier is an 'executive summary' of the study, so I will be referring to them as if they were one text). We believe that this is the most significant theoretical statement that our institute has made in its eight-year history.

In both *Hyper-Imperialism* and *The Churning of the World Order* we make four important points:

First, through a deep analysis of the concepts of the Global North and the Global South, we show that the former acts as a bloc, while the latter is merely a loose grouping. The Global North is led by the United States, which has created several instruments to extend its authority over the other countries in the bloc (many of which are historic colonial powers and settler-colonial societies). These platforms include the Five Eyes intelligence alliance (initially set up in 1941 between the US and UK, the network has now expanded to Fourteen Eyes), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO, set up in 1949), and the Group of Seven

(G7, set up in 1974). Through these and other formations, the United States and its political allies within the Global North are able to exercise authority over their own countries and the countries of the Global South.

In contrast, the countries of the Global South have historically been much more disorganised, with some, looser alliances and linkages around regional and political affiliations. The Global South has neither a political centre nor an ideologically driven project.

The analysis in the texts is detailed, relying upon public databases and databases built by GSI. The bottom line is that there is one world system that is managed dangerously by an imperialist bloc. There are no multiple imperialisms, no inter-imperialist conflict.

Mahmud al-Obaidi (Iraq), *Untitled*, 2008.

Second, the platforms of the Global North exercise power over the world system through a number of vectors (military, financial, economic, social, cultural) and through a range of instruments (NATO, the International Monetary Fund, information systems). With the gradual decline of the Global North's control over the international financial system, raw materials, technology, and science, this bloc mainly exercises its power through military force and through the management of information. In these texts, we do not go over the question of information, although we have previously **written** about it and will take it up again in a study on digital sovereignty. The focus of these texts is largely on military spending, where we show that the US-led bloc accounts for 74.3% of world military spending and that the US spends 12.6 times more than the world average on a per capita basis (Israel, second to the US, spends 7.2 times above the per capita world average). To put this into perspective, China accounts for 10% of world military spending and its per capita military spending is 22 times less than that of the United States.

Such enormous spending on the military is not innocent. Not only does it come at the **cost** of social spending, the Global North's military power is used to threaten and intimidate countries, and – if they are disobedient – to punish them with hellfire and brimstone. In 2022 alone, these imperialist nations made 317 deployments of their military forces to countries in the Global South. The highest number of these deployments (31) were made to Mali, a nation strongly seeking sovereignty, and which was the first of the Sahel states to stage popular-backed coups (2020 and 2021) and **eject** the French military from its territory (2022).

Between 1776 and 2019, the United States carried out at least 392 interventions worldwide, half of them between 1950 and 2019. This includes the terrible, illegal war against Iraq in 2003 (at this year's WEF meeting, Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani **asked** for Global North troops to leave Iraq). This vast military spending by the Global North, led by the United States, reflects the militarisation of its foreign policy. One of the little remarked aspects of this militarisation is the development of a theory in both the United States and United Kingdom of 'defence diplomacy' (as it was **noted** in the UK Ministry of Defence's *Strategic Defence Review* of 1998). In the United States, strategic thinkers **use** the acronym DIME to reflect on the sources of national power (diplomacy, informational, military, and economic).

Last year, the European Union and NATO – the institutions at the heart of the Global North – jointly **pledged** to 'mobilise the combined set of instruments at our disposal, be they political, economic, or military, to pursue our common objectives to the benefit of our one billion citizens'. In case you did not catch it, that power – mostly military power and military diplomacy – is not to serve humanity, but to serve only *their* 'citizens'.

António Ole (Angola), *The Maculusso Mural*, 2014.

Third, Part IV of our *Hyper-Imperialism* study is called 'The West in Decline', and looks at the evidence for this trend from a perspective that rejects Milei's 'the West is in danger' fearmongering. The facts show that

since the start of the **Third Great Depression**, the Global North has struggled to maintain its control over the world economy; its instruments – monopolies over technology and raw materials, as well as dominion over foreign direct investment – have fundamentally eroded. When China surpassed the United States' share of global industrial output in 2004, the United States lost hegemony in production (by 2022, the former held a 25.7% share versus the 9.7% held by the latter). Given that the United States is now dependent on large scale net capital imports, which reached $1 trillion in 2022, the US has little internal capability to provide economic advantages to its Global North or Global South allies. Owners of capital in the United States have siphoned off their profits from the country's exchequer creating the economic conditions for the social carnage that afflicts the country. The old political coalitions rooted around the two parties in the United States are in flux, with no space within US political system to develop a political project to exercise hegemony over the world economy through legitimacy and consent. That is why the US-led Global North resorts to force and intimidation, building its massive military apparatus by increasing its own public debt (since there is little domestic consensus to use that borrowing to build the infrastructure and productive base of the country).

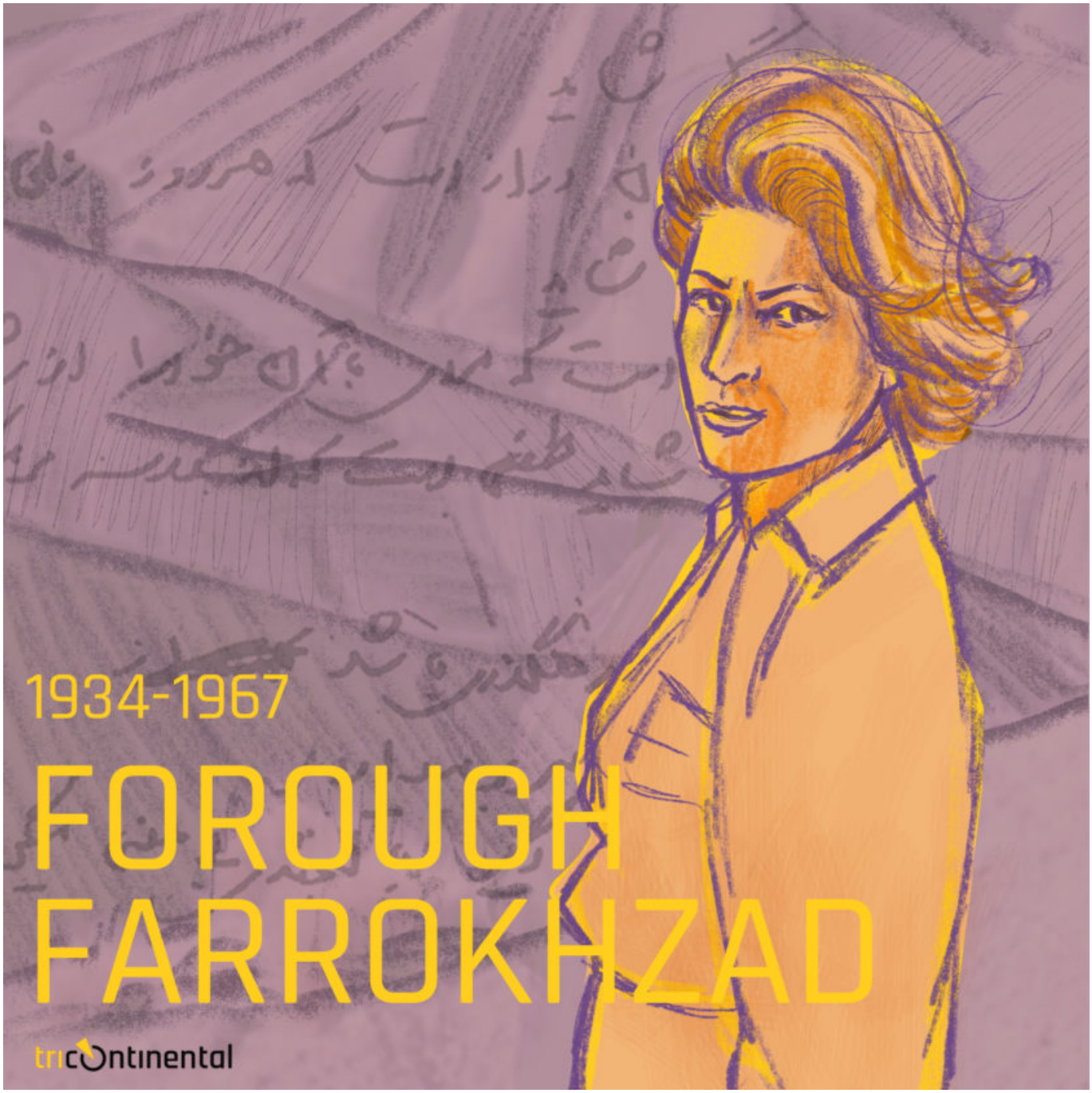
The root of the **New Cold War** imposed by the United States on China is that China has outpaced the United States in net fixed capital formation, whilst the US has seen a gradual decline. Every year since 1992, China has been a net exporter of capital, this surplus of capital creation has made it possible to finance international projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative, now ten years old.

El Meya (Algeria), *Les Moudjahidates*, 2021.

Fourth, we analyse the emergence of new organisations rooted in the Global South, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (2001), the BRICS10 (2009), and the Group of Friends in Defence of the UN Charter (2021). These interregional platforms are in an embryonic stage, but they provide evidence for the growth of a new regionalism and multilateralism. Although these formations do not seek to operate as a bloc to counter the Global North's bloc, they reflect what we have previously called a 'new mood' in the Global South. The new mood is neither anti-imperialist nor anti-capitalist, but is shaped by four main vectors:

- **Multilateralism and regionalism** centred on the creation of Global South-anchored platforms for cooperation.
- **New modernisation** centred on constructing regional and continental economies that use local currencies in place of the dollar for trade and reserves.
- **Sovereignty**, which would create barriers to Western intervention. This includes military entanglements and digital colonialism, both of which facilitate US intelligence interventions.
- **Reparations**, which would entail collective bargaining to compensate for the West's century-old debt traps and abuse of the excess carbon budget as well as its much longer-reaching legacy of colonialism.

The analysis in these texts goes deep beneath the surface, providing a historical materialist assessment of our present crises. Documents produced by the institutions of the Global North, such as the WEF's *Global Risks* **report** for 2024, provide a list of the dangers that we face (climate catastrophe, social polarisation, economic downturns) but cannot explain them. Our approach, we believe, provides a theory to understand these perils as the outcome of the world system managed by the hyper-imperialist bloc.



In thinking about these texts, my mind wandered to the work of the Iraqi poet Buland al-Haydari (1926–1996). When all seemed futile, al-Haydari wrote that 'the sun will not rise' and that 'at the bottom of the house, already dead, are the steps of my children, reduced to silence'. But even then, when we 'were without power', there remains hope. His civilisation drowns, but then 'you arrived with the paddle', he sings. 'Such is the history of our yesterday, and its taste is bitterness', he concludes, 'such is our slow walk, the procession of our dignity: our only good until the hour when will rise, finally, a free paddle'.

That anticipation defines a classic by the Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad (1934–1967), 'Someone Who Is Not Like Anyone' (1966):

> I've had a dream that someone is coming.
> I've dreamt of a red star,
> and my eyes lids keep twitching
> and my shoes keep snapping to attention
> and may I go blind
> if I'm lying.
> I've dreamt of that red star
> when I wasn't asleep.
> Someone is coming,
> someone is coming
> someone better.

Warmly,

Vijay