



# TWILIGHT:

THE EROSION OF US CONTROL  
AND THE MULTIPOLAR FUTURE



Dossier n° 36

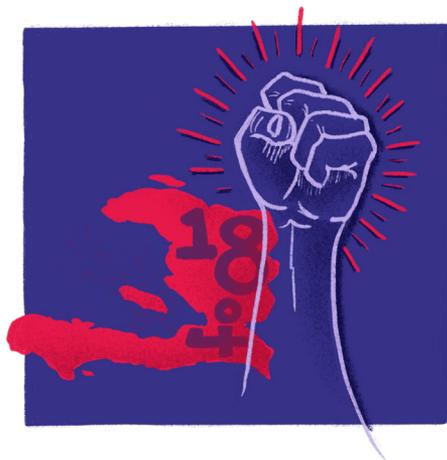
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*History moves often in leaps and bounds and in a zigzag line.*  
– Friedrich Engels, *Das Volk*, no. 16, 20 August 1859

In 1492, when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Caribbean, history began to cleave into two. Before this moment, no empire had a planetary reach. After 1492, the major European powers came to dominate the world and, from the late seventeenth century, this domination was organised and legitimated in the name of race, a fabrication with catastrophic consequences for humanity.

Colonial authority faced constant resistance. Colonial intellectuals imagined themselves in terms drawn from Ancient Greece, as Hercules at war with the monstrous hydra of rebellion – rebellion at sea, on the plantations, in the mountains and forests, in the portside taverns, in the commons that survived outside of the reach of colonial power, and in the insurgent new spaces created by those who escaped.<sup>1</sup> When capitalism, rooted in the colonial

plantation, began to grip the planet in its tentacles, the factory and the city became key sites of struggle.

If there was one revolution that marked the beginning of the end of the colonial epoch and that inaugurated a new worker-led civilisation, it was the Haitian Revolution of 1804. Enslaved Africans defeated the four major European powers of the day, won their freedom, and declared an independent republic. That revolution was swiftly encircled. In 1825, the French sent twelve warships to demand that the new republic pay compensation to the former plantation owners, well more than \$20 billion in today's terms.<sup>2</sup> The assertion of freedom was met with the imposition of debt, a tactic of neo-colonial domination that would be exploited mercilessly against the liberation struggles of the century that followed.

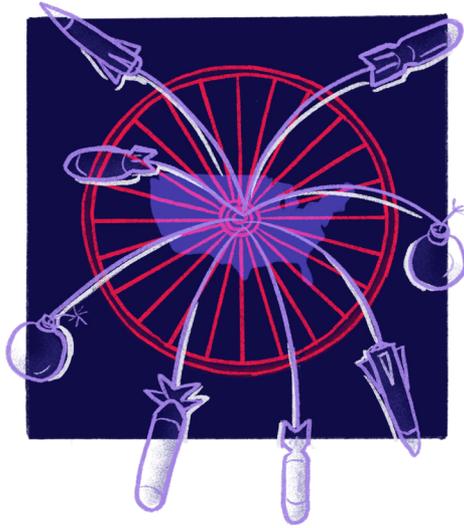
World War II, resulting from the attempt of the fascists in Germany to return colonial practices to Europe, pulled the European powers into a terrible conflagration. At the conclusion of the war, with the European powers severely weakened, it was the United States, the most powerful of Europe's settler colonies, that took over the neo-colonial management of the planet. Now, almost eighty years later, the primacy of the United States has entered twilight. US intellectuals, returning to Ancient Greece again, argue that the rise of China threatens the US and makes war inevitable; this theory, the Thucydides Trap, is drawn from the argument in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* that the rise of Athens drew Sparta into a necessary war to defend its interests.<sup>3</sup> The United States has imposed a hostile conflict on China, and on other countries that it deems to be a threat. China does not seek to supplant the US, only

to inaugurate a multipolar world order. The idea of a Thucydides Trap is part of the hybrid war that now grips the planet.

Our dossier no. 36 (January 2021) explores the emergence of a new cold war imposed by the United States on China and the forms of hybrid war that have been utilised as part of this new strategic scenario.



## *Part 1: The American Century*



The US Department of State's Policy Planning Staff circulated a memorandum in the late 1940s, which argued that 'To seek less than preponderant power would be to opt for defeat. Preponderant power must be the object of US policy'.<sup>4</sup> The United States emerged from the terrible violence of World War II with the most powerful economy, an undamaged infrastructure, and a formidable military force that possessed the most dangerous weapon: the nuclear bomb. It used these advantages to establish a range of institutions to extend US power across the globe; these included multilateral political institutions (such as the United Nations), multilateral economic institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), regional security institutions (such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the Central Treaty Organisation, and the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation),

and regional political institutions (such as the Organisation of American States).

The US moved swiftly to contain the new states that emerged from anti-colonial struggles. Patrice Lumumba, newly elected as president of the Congo, was assassinated in a US-backed plot in 1961. Radical movements were dealt with mercilessly. In Indonesia, over a million people were murdered as the military, acting with US support, sought to destroy the Communist Party of Indonesia and its support base following the 1965 coup.<sup>5</sup>

The Soviet Union and other communist states, as well as the radical section of the anti-colonial forces in the Third World, operated as a partial brake to the ambitions of the United States. When the USSR began to fragment in 1990, that shield vanished, and the accelerator of US primacy went to the maximum. The *US Defence Planning Guidance* (1990), chaired by Dick Cheney, laid out the agenda clearly:

Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere... This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defense strategy and requires that we endeavour to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power. ... Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor.<sup>6</sup>

In 2000, the Project for a New American Century published *Rebuilding America's Defences*. The report wrote that US primacy 'must have a secure foundation on unquestioned US military pre-eminence'.<sup>7</sup> Funding for the US military expanded astronomically before the al-Qaeda attack on 11 September 2001. In 2002, President George W. Bush's *National Security Strategy for the United States of America* noted that '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'.<sup>8</sup> By 2019, US military spending – at \$732 billion<sup>9</sup> (\$1 trillion if you add the largely secret but estimated intelligence budget) – spent more than the next ten countries combined. Every known inventory of weapons shows that the United States has a much greater capacity to wreak havoc than any other; but the US security community has now come to understand that while it can bomb a country to smithereens, it can no longer subordinate all countries through military might alone.

The United States used its earlier 'hub and spokes' alliance system to extend and consolidate its global power. A number of key pillars of that system need to be clearly understood:

1. The United States stood at the hub, while its primary allies (the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, and others) were its spokes. At the outer edge of these spokes were its subsidiary allies, such as Colombia, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, and others. These allies remain essential for the global reach of US power, since they operate against US adversaries with full backing

from Washington, and they provide the US military with bases, intelligence, and logistical capacity. Any challenge to these allies is swiftly put down with the full force of US power, as evidenced in the US attack on Iraq (1991) and in Plan Colombia (1999).

2. The emergence of any 'potential future global competitor', as the 1990 *US Defence Planning Guidance* put it, had to be shut down through the use of the alliance system. Pressure was built up against China and Russia through the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe and with the build-up of US forces in the Pacific Rim region. The election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (1998), the emergence of a new set of left-leaning South American leaders, and the new momentum for regional integration (such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas or ALBA) had to be challenged. This challenge began with a military coup attempt against the government of Chávez in 2002; two years later, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the progressive Haitian president elected with an overwhelming majority, was successfully removed in a US-backed coup. The hybrid wars followed.
3. The global commodity chain developed to advantage Western multinational corporations had to be protected at all costs. The electronic revolution ushered in a new era that has seen the doubling of computer capacity every eighteen months to two years; between 1955 and 2015, computer power increased over one trillion times. New

productive forces ushered in the end of the old centralised and large industrial factory system. The US Congress extended intellectual property laws for copyright protection first to twenty-eight years in 1976 and then to one hundred years in 1998. This pernicious intellectual property system was pushed through the World Trade Organisation in 1994.

The ability to disassemble large factories, globally distribute them, and introduce just-in-time inventory systems undermined national sovereignty and trade union power. Diplomatic and military power were deployed to ensure that no alternative to these arrangements would be possible. Mechanisms such as the War on Drugs and the War on Terror were used to attack any challenges to the global commodity chain that began in the 'sacrifice zones' where raw materials are extracted or grown.

4. The Dollar-Wall Street complex that has dominated economic and financial systems for decades could not be allowed to be challenged by new global currencies. Such currencies posed a threat to the Dollar-Wall Street complex in multiple ways: they could be used as reserves and for trade that would undermine the dollar; they could be used by new development banks or procedures that would weaken the IMF and the World Bank; or they could be used by new financial institutions to circumvent the Western-dominated financial networks that are rooted in the US Treasury Department, in the Wall Street-City

of London-Frankfurt financial banks, and in the money transfer networks (such as the Belgium-based SWIFT system).

The illegal US war on Iraq (2003) and the credit crisis (2007) showed the wilting of US power. The US military machine could easily destroy a country's institutions – as it showed in Iraq in 2003 and in Libya in 2011 – but it could not subordinate its populations. Battles could be won, but not long-term wars.

The credit crisis revealed the internal weakening of the US economy, where chiefly credit-induced consumerism allowed the myth of the 'American Dream' to remain intact even as stagnant wages and a structural jobs crisis plagued the lives of the working class and even the middle class. Between 1979 and 2018, average annual US hourly wages in constant dollars declined.<sup>10</sup> These weaknesses led to a debate over the decline of the United States, although the reservoirs of US domination – such as military power, economic and financial power, and cultural or 'soft' power – remained intact. Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump were not able to reverse the slide of the US economy, once more held afloat by the global authority of the dollar, among other processes.

In his inauguration speech in 2017, Trump bemoaned the 'carnage' that had struck the working class and the middle class in the US, who lived near 'rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation'.<sup>11</sup> Trump's solution to this 'carnage' was cynically racist, blaming undocumented migrants

(and Mexico) as well as blaming intellectual property theft and subsidised production overseas (and China). Biden's agenda has nothing substantial to say beyond what Bush, Obama, and Trump have said: rebuild the US economy and use US power to defend US interests. As Biden's campaign website notes, 'Biden will never hesitate to protect the American people, including when necessary, by using force. We have the strongest military in the world – and as president, Biden will ensure it stays that way'.<sup>12</sup>

The United States is approaching a position where it will no longer be the largest economy in the world by any measurement in the foreseeable future. In purchasing power parity (the real physical flow of goods and services), China's economy is already 16% bigger than that of the US; by 2025, the IMF projects it will be 39% bigger. As with almost all developing countries, the size of China's economy is understated when calculated at current exchange rates, but it is already 73% of the size of the US economy at current exchange rates and, based on IMF projections, will be 90% of the size of the US economy in 2025.

By the end of the decade, China's GDP will be bigger than that of the US no matter how it is measured. Already we sense the shift; bazaars and malls across the world have the feel of the culture of the United States, but the goods in them are made in China. In other words, the United States continues to set the terms for the *form* of the present, but China already provides the *content*. Gradually, form will come in line with content. A decade ago, China had very few globally known brands, but now Huawei,

TikTok, Alibaba, and others are known throughout the world and are the subject of daily comment in the economic media.

Reaction to this evidence has taken many forms, of which the most common are the most extreme. There is a literature of *catastrophism*, an anticipation of the collapse of the US from its position of great power. This view is that an imploded US economy, now struggling during the pandemic despite the highs of Wall Street and the infusions of credit from the US Federal Reserve, will lead to a loss of structural power by the US-driven institutions and to the increased use of US military power to hold on to the country's authority. In contrast to this is the literature of *revival*, usually on the basis of hopes and projections of a second 'American century' in the absence of serious data. This view suggests that the US economy is resilient; it sees the power of the dollar as sacrosanct and has undeterred faith in the ingenuity of US-based firms that are able creatively to destroy old sectors simply to rise – phoenix-like – with new inventions to power the US. US power, it is thought, derives not from yesterday's General Motors (now becoming oriented to financial services in addition to its historic role as a car company), but from the next Microsoft.

Neither of these views – that the US will collapse or that the US will revive – are complete. Both have elements of truth, but only partially. There is a great weakness in the US hold on primacy, illuminated by the failure of the US to prevent the scientific and technological advances of China – amongst other countries – which threatens the monopoly that the US has on technological innovation. It is this high technology, and the monopoly intellectual

property rent that it garners, that power the US economy. The US conflict with China stems from the recognition by a large section of the US elite that China's rising scientific and technological advancement is an existential threat to US primacy. Obama's 'pivot to Asia' in 2015 was premised on fears of this rise and on the realisation that there was not going to be a Chinese Gorbachev who would internally destroy China.

China's rise poses an existential threat to US hegemony. Like the European domination opened in 1492, the US attempts to preserve its stronghold on global power can be read in racial terms.

The historic decline of the US is taking place while it still possesses great historical reserves; there will be a long period when the US will continue to strike back against its decline. It is not an accident that Mao Zedong's *On Protracted War* has once again become one of the most quoted works in China.

## *Part 2: The War in Eurasia*



In April 2019, the US Indo-Pacific Command released a document entitled *Regain the Advantage*, in which it pointed to the ‘renewed threat we face from Great Power competition. ... Without a valid and convincing conventional deterrent, China and Russia will be emboldened to take action in the region to supplant U.S. interests’. Admiral Philip Davidson, who leads the US Indo-Pacific Command, asked the US Congress to finance enhanced ‘forward-based, rotational joint forces’ as the ‘most credible way to demonstrate U.S. commitment and resolve to potential adversaries’.<sup>13</sup> The report has a stunningly science fiction quality to it, expressing a desire to create ‘highly survivable, precision-strike networks’ that run along the Pacific Rim, with missiles – including with nuclear warheads – and radar installations from Palau to outer space. New weapons systems already in development would enhance US pressure on both China and Russia along

their coastlines; these weapons include hypersonic cruise missiles, which shorten the strike time against Chinese and Russian targets to within minutes of launching.

After the collapse of the USSR and the communist state system, the US found that it could exert its power without major challenge. For instance, it could bomb Iraq and Yugoslavia, and it could push for a trade and investment system that favoured its allies. The entire decade of the 1990s seemed like a victory lap for the United States, with its presidents, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, preening at international meetings, beaming into the cameras, and making sure that everyone saw the world through their eyes, with the 'rogue states' (Iran and North Korea, for example) in their gun sights, and with China and Russia seemingly committed to US leadership.

In the decades since then, much has changed. China's economic growth has been spectacular. The per capita disposable income in real terms expanded by 96.6% in the 2011-2019 period alone.<sup>14</sup> On 23 November 2020, China announced that it had eliminated absolute poverty nationwide. China used its very high level of investment to build infrastructure within the country and used its massive foreign exchange to aid across the world through the Belt and Road Initiative, which began in 2013. While the US was bogged down by its wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, China built up a system of trade and commerce that linked large parts of the world to its economic locomotive. During the coronavirus pandemic, China was first to break the chain of the infection and resume near-normal economic activity. As a consequence, the

IMF projects that nearly 60% of the estimated global GDP in 2020-2021 will be due to China's growth.

Key to the new period is not merely Chinese economic buoyancy, but its tightened links to Russia. China's new linkages driven by the Belt and Road Initiative are taking place along the southern flank of Asia into Europe and Africa; its links to Russia allow for integration along the northern flank of Asia. The new ties between China and Russia culminated in a range of economic and military agreements that have been signed over the past five years.

Since the early years of the twenty-first century, countries across the Global South – including China – have sought to create regional and multilateral institutions based on international law and a genuine development agenda for the world's people. These institutions are meant to transcend the period of full-scale US primacy that had opened up after the fall of the USSR. A range of such initiatives developed, including regional platforms – such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Asia (2001) and ALBA in Latin America and the Caribbean (2004), as well as more global platforms – such as IBSA or India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue (2003) and BRICS or Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (2009). The fourteenth Non-Aligned Movement summit in Havana in 2006 was framed around the issue of regionalism and multilateralism. At the 2013 BRICS meeting, leaders released the eThekweni Declaration, which summarised the spirit of this opening, indicating their commitment to the 'promotion of international law, multilateralism, and the central role of the UN', as well

as the need for ‘more effective regional’ efforts to end conflict and to promote development.

The BRICS project developed a set of proposals to create new multilateral institutions to substitute for the institutions dominated by the United States. For example, a Contingency Reserve Arrangement was created to supplement the IMF with short-term liquidity for countries in foreign exchange trouble and a BRICS Bank was formed as a challenge to the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. But the entire BRICS project had limits from the start: it articulated no ideological or policy alternative to neoliberalism, it lacked key independent institutions (even the Contingency Reserve Arrangement would utilise IMF data and analysis), and it had no political or military ability to counter US military domination.

Regional projects such as ALBA developed alternative forms of integration that experimented with building inter-state relations and new institutions. ALBA led to the creation of new regional formations, such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, 2004) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC, 2010), and it created a new regional bank (BancoSur), a new virtual currency (Sucre), a new communications network (anchored in TeleSur), and a new attitude of hemispheric independence from US power. This is precisely why the United States spent effort and funds to undermine many of the constituent movements of ALBA, such as through an old-fashioned coup in Honduras (2009) and a lawfare coup in Brazil (2016).<sup>15</sup> Such attacks against social and political regional

integration in South America, alongside the subordination of the hemisphere to US power, have been the defining features of the United States' policies in Caribbean and Latin American politics for the last two centuries.

The internal limitations of the BRICS project eroded its potential when political developments in India (2013) and Brazil (2016) brought the right wing into power. Both countries immediately subordinated their foreign policy to Washington, unwilling to be party to any regionalism or multilateralism. There is no longer the possibility even of a sub-imperialism, as Ruy Mauro Marini argued in 1965, since now these fragments of the elites in places such as Brazil and India were content with being the forward posts for the US State Department rather than driving their own policy in their regions.

The exit of Brazil and India from any effective leadership in the BRICS bloc came alongside political convulsions in South Africa, where former President Jacob Zuma turned the African National Congress, once a movement for national liberation, into a repressive kleptocracy. For the past five years, the BRICS project has not been able to advance any significant agenda, although its continued existence as a grouping that includes the largest developing economies in the world has some significance. Despite differences, China, India, and Russia have also continued to cooperate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

It is in this context that we see the growth of the Chinese and Russian pact, spurred on by attacks by the United States and other

Western powers and by the attrition of the BRICS bloc. A great gulf between China and Russia appeared during the Sino-Soviet dispute from 1956, and tensions between the two countries continued to linger through the immediate years following the fall of the USSR, with an initially pliant Moscow looking toward the West for alliances. It was only in 2008 that China and Russia finally settled a long-standing border dispute, opening the way for the close ties of the present period.

In this period, US policy makers sought to corral a weakened Russia into a project to encircle China. The West overplayed its hand and attempted to bring Russia to its knees through the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe, breaking a promise made during the dissolution of the German Democratic Republic. Russian power seemed destined to be totally drained when the West threatened both of Russia's only warm water ports in Sevastopol (Crimea) and in Tartus (Syria). A set of further aggressive moves by the West against Russia – including Russia's expulsion from the G8 in 2014 and a harsh sanctions regime set up by the United States – struck at vital Russian interests, enormously offended Russian national opinion, which was deeply involved with the events in Ukraine, and pushed Russia towards greater alignment with China.

In 2019, China's President Xi Jinping and Russia's President Vladimir Putin spoke at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, an annual business meeting set up in 1997, the scope of which has increasingly included assessing Russia's relations with Asia as well as with the West. Xi and Putin spoke of the intimate ties between their two countries, emphasising that the two of

them had personally met at least thirty times since 2013. Amongst the many agreements to increase trade, the two leaders agreed to enhance bilateral trade by using the rouble and the yuan – rather than the dollar – to reconcile cross-border payments. This snub was not the only thing that alarmed Washington – so did the increase in arms sales between the two countries, which came alongside more frequent joint military exercises: in September 2018, a third of Russia’s soldiers participated in the China-Russia Vostok 2018 exercises.<sup>16</sup> In October 2020, when Putin was asked if China and Russia would form a ‘military alliance’, he answered, ‘We don’t need it, but, theoretically, it’s quite possible to imagine it’.<sup>17</sup>

Weakening Russia in political and military terms has certainly been part of the overall eastward expansion of NATO, but China has been the main economic target for the United States and its allies. In particular, there is great anxiety about the developments in Chinese high-tech firms that produce telecommunications equipment and software, robotics, and artificial intelligence, among other things. It was one thing for China to be the workshop of the world, for its workers to be employed by multinational corporations while its own companies remained in the medium technology sector; it is entirely another thing for China to become a key technological producer in the world. That is the reason why the US government, nudged by Silicon Valley firms, went after Huawei and ZTE. In April 2019, the US Defence Innovation Board noted:

The leader of 5G stands to gain hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue over the next decade, with widespread job

creation across the wireless technology sector. 5G has the potential to revolutionize other industries as well, as technologies like autonomous vehicles will gain huge benefits from the faster, larger data transfer. 5G will also enhance the Internet of Things (IoT) by increasing the amount and speed of data flowing between multiple devices, and may even replace the fiber-optic backbone relied upon by so many households. The country that owns 5G will own many of these innovations and set the standards for the rest of the world.<sup>18</sup>

This country is not likely to be the US; even the Defence Innovation Board admits that neither AT&T nor Verizon will be able to manufacture the kind of transmitters needed for the new systems. Nor is it likely to be Sweden (Ericsson) or Finland (Nokia), who the Chinese firms are far ahead of. This is a grave threat to the future prospects of the US economy, which is why the US government has used every instrument to constrain the growth of China.

None of the largely false accusations against the Chinese firms (of intellectual property theft or of the erosion of privacy) have deterred customers around the world. What has stopped the commercial prospects of these firms has been direct US political pressure on governments to contain or ban the entry of Huawei and ZTE. The US acknowledges that China's rapid technological growth is a generational threat to the main advantage that the US has had for the past decades, namely its technological superiority. It is to prevent China's technological ascent that the US has used

every mechanism, from diplomatic pressure to military pressure, but none of these seem to be working.

China, for now, is resolute. It is unwilling to back down and dismantle its technological gains. No resolution is possible unless there is an acknowledgment of reality: that China is equal to if not more advanced than the West in terms of its technological production in some sectors, that this is going to be gradually spread more widely, and that is not something that needs to be or can be reversed by warfare.

In 2001, China's then-Vice President Hu Jintao said that 'multipolarity constitutes an important base in Chinese foreign policy'.<sup>19</sup> China remains committed to multipolarity, eschewing any prospect of a 'Chinese Century' to follow the 'American Century'. The Chinese position is mirrored in some of the US strategic documents, such as in the 2012 US National Intelligence Council's report, which states that 'by 2030, no country – whether the US, China, or any other large country – will be a hegemonic power'.<sup>20</sup> What there will be instead is a 'diffusion of power'. But others in the US strategic analysis community, such as Richard N. Haass, the president of the Council of Foreign Relations, argue that if the US does not continue its 'leadership' of the global order, then the alternative 'is not an era dominated by China or anyone else, but rather a chaotic time in which regional and global problems overwhelm the world's collective will and ability to meet them'.<sup>21</sup> Multipolarity, or a decline in US primacy, Haass claims, will be chaos: 'Americans would not be safe or prosperous in such a world', Haass wrote in *Foreign Policy Begins at Home* (2013). 'Our

Dark Ages was one too many; the last thing we need is another'.<sup>22</sup> For liberals such as Haass as much as neo-fascists such as Trump, there is no substitute for US primacy. It is the failure of the US elites to understand the inevitability of a multipolar future that drives them towards new cold wars, dangerous military interventions, and hybrid wars of all kinds.

### *Part 3: Hybrid War*

In 2015, Andrew Korybko published a fascinating book called *Hybrid Wars: The Indirect Adaptive Approach to Regime Change*. Through a reading of public and leaked US military documents, Korybko laid out the various strategies used to overthrow governments seen to be impediments to US power. Korybko explains the objective of a hybrid war by quoting the US Army's *Special Forces Unconventional Warfare* classified training document: 'to degrade the government's security apparatus (the military and police elements of national power) to the point where the government is susceptible to defeat'. The point is not always to replace a government hostile to US interests with one that is favourable to it; 'at its core', Korybko writes, 'hybrid war is managed chaos'.<sup>23</sup> A low-intensity conflict that gradually saps the country of its resilience and creates disarray in the region is perhaps the goal of the kinds of conflicts that are prosecuted through information wars and sanctions, two key elements in the hybrid war toolkit.

The US-led hybrid war is currently being deployed most fiercely against Iran and Venezuela, which have been weakened by the information warfare against them and the chaos in the petroleum markets. What prevents these countries from collapsing under the pressure is the wells of legitimacy that have been dug by their own social and political processes. In Venezuela, for instance, the regular mobilisation of the people both for demonstrations and for the practical work of social reproduction at a community scale affirms the popular legitimacy of their revolutionary process. Hybrid wars

do not always succeed, but – even when they do not succeed – they threaten the basic social bonds between people.

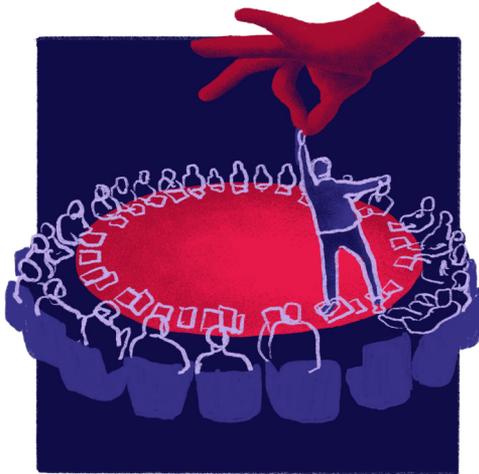
Drawing from Korybko, and from a range of US government documents, here are four of the most important aspects of the hybrid war strategy:



1. **Information War.** In 1989, William Lind, an author who helped develop the theory of fourth generation warfare (a synonym for hybrid wars), wrote that ‘Television news may become a more powerful operational weapon than armoured divisions’.<sup>24</sup> To control information and to define people and events shapes the way that conflicts are understood. Control over the storyline is essential, but this control cannot be seen

as naked propaganda. The narrative is so carefully defined that everything that comes from a 'rogue state' is interpreted as false, and what the United States and its allies say is seen as true. Even if false statements are made – such as that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction – these are taken to be errors and not falsehoods.

Deep-seated racist ideas are mobilised to construct certain leaders as dictators – even as genocidal – while the Western leaders who send bombers to annihilate cities are depicted as humanitarian. This basic exercise in the branding of political leaders is characteristic of the power of information warfare. The United States might be responsible for over a million dead in Iraq, but it is always going to be Saddam Hussein – rather than George W. Bush – who will be seen as a war criminal and therefore deserving of his ugly fate. Muslims are always terrorists, Russians are always gangsters and spies, and the state that is deemed to be an adversary is no longer ruled by a government but by a 'regime'. Wildly unbalanced claims about human rights violations become a central tool to delegitimize dissent, whether by states or popular movements. There is a revolving door between Human Rights Watch, an organisation set up by US actors during the Cold War, and foreign policy officials in the US government.



2. **Diplomatic War.** To remove a country's legitimate representative from a multilateral body is a crafty way to delegitimise the country's government. The US unseated Cuba from the Organisation of American States in 1962 as a way to punish any country that crossed swords with the United States. But Cuba had not invaded the US; it was the US that had invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, and – according the OAS Charter – it should have been the US that lost its seat in the OAS. But, since the OAS is an instrument of US power, it was Cuba that was ejected. To eject the ambassador, to pressure allies to do the same, to isolate the country in the United Nations – all of this is part of the effective mechanisms of a diplomatic war.





- 4. Political War.** The full spectrum of information and diplomatic warfare is used to undermine the political legitimacy of a government and to cast doubt about the entire political system that is in place in the country under attack. Election processes are depicted as fraudulent, political leaders are maligned, the legal system is used against popular political leaders through a process known as lawfare, faith in the entire political system is sought to be eroded. Funds are provided to 'opposition groups', including some non-governmental organisations, which are often instruments of the old elites. The difficult economic situation created by the economic war creates serious internal tensions, which are then blamed on the government by this 'opposition' rather than on the economic war. Funds and political support are then afforded to the disaffected population, which under the weight of the political war, begins to support regime change. Social media is turned

into a weapon against the government, as described in *Special Forces Unconventional Warfare*, a US government manual from 2010. This is a ‘colour revolution’, a revolution of Astroturf rather than the grassroots. If there is police action against the protests, even if to intervene in mobilisations that terrorise working-class neighbourhoods and physical assault the people, it is depicted as authoritarian or even genocidal. Next, clamour for ‘humanitarian intervention’ begins to lead to an open military intervention by the United States. The US Joint Chiefs of Staff *Joint Vision 2020* suggests that one aim is to promote chaos in the targeted society through what are called ‘information operations’ (including ‘psychological operations’ and ‘computer network attacks’).

In a hybrid war, the aggressor targets the vulnerabilities of a society through these aspects of non-military warfare (information, diplomatic, economic, and political) and deepens the chaos through acts of sabotage and threats of invasion. The pressure builds up in the targeted society, where resources of solidarity and resistance are called upon to prevent total social and political collapse.

Among the sustained hybrid war techniques that the US is employing against China are hostile rhetoric against the Chinese government and people, distortions about events in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Xinjiang, and the depiction of the coronavirus pandemic as a ‘China virus’. Evidence is not as important here as the use of older racist and anti-communist ideas to demonise China. But these techniques have not succeeded within China, where the middle class – the target for a ‘colour revolution’ – does not

have any appetite to overthrow the government. It is content with the direction of the government and sees that its government has improved living standards and has been able – unlike Western governments – to tackle the coronavirus pandemic. A Harvard University study published in July 2020 shows that the government led by the Communist Party of China has increased its approval from 2003 to 2016, largely because of the social welfare programmes and the fight against corruption pushed by both the Communist Party of China and the government. The overall approval stands at 95.5%.<sup>26</sup>





The epoch of European domination of the planet that opened in 1492 will come to an end. In fact, we can see it coming to an end. But important questions arise. We do not know how long the process will take, how effective and devastating the US-led resistance will be, or what will replace it. Our task is to continue the resistance that defeated the slave powers in Haiti in 1804 into the present until there is another date to put alongside 1492, a date when the epoch of the domination of the planet by Europe and its settler colonies comes to an end.



## Notes

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