

## The Trump Doctrine and the New MAGA Imperialism

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**T**he dramatic shift in U.S. imperialism under the Donald Trump presidency, both in his initial term of office and even more in the current one, has created enormous confusion and consternation within establishment centers of power. This sudden alteration in U.S. foreign policy is manifested in the abandonment of both the liberal international order constructed under U.S. hegemony after the Second World War and the long-term strategy of NATO enlargement and proxy war with Russia in Ukraine. Imposition of high tariffs and shifting military priorities have put the United States in conflict with even its long-term allies, while the New Cold War on China and the Global South is accelerating.

So extreme is the shift in U.S. power projection, and so great the confusion that this has generated, that even some figures long associated with the left have fallen into the trap of seeing Trump as isolationist, anti-militarist, and anti-imperialist. Thus, disaffected leftist Christian Parenti has argued that Trump “isn’t an anti-imperialist in the left-wing sense. Rather, he is an instinctual America-First isolationist,” whose goal, “more than any recent president,” is “to dismantle America’s informal global empire,” and to promote a new “anti-militarist” foreign policy “opposing empire.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet, far from being anti-imperialist, the global shift in the external relations of the United States under Trump is due to a hypernationalist approach to world power, based in key sections of the ruling class, particularly high-tech monopolists,



["U.S. POLITICS IS BLACKMAIL,"](#) Moscow, 1984. Source: Kershin Yu.V., Soviet Anti-American Propaganda, The Sergio Grigorian Collection.

<sup>1</sup> ↪ Christian Parenti, ["Trump's Real Crime Is Opposing Empire,"](#) Compact, April 7, 2023.

as well as Trump's largely lower-middle class followers. According to this neofascist and revanchist perspective, the United States is in decline as a hegemonic power and threatened by powerful enemies: Cultural Marxism and immigrant "invaders" from within, China and the Global South from without, while hindered by weak and dependent allies.

Beginning with the first Trump administration following the 2016 election, the regime has stood for a hard shift to the right internationally, as well as domestically. Globally, all available resources are to be focused on a zero-sum increase in U.S. power and on the defeat of China as the newly arising rival. Thus, it was in the first Trump administration that the New Cold War on China was launched in earnest, with the concomitant shift toward détente with Russia.<sup>2</sup> Although the Joe Biden administration subsequently went forward with Washington's prior planned proxy war on Russia (which had commenced with the 2014 U.S.-backed right-wing Maidan coup in Ukraine), it nevertheless followed the Trump Republicans in continuing the New Cold War on China, thus confronting the two great Eurasian powers at the same time. Once back in power, Trump has sought to end the NATO proxy war in Ukraine, while turning more decisively to the struggle in Asia. Even the Middle East, where the Trump regime is currently supporting outright exterminism—or the complete elimination and removal of the Palestinians in Gaza in the name of "peace"—while bombing Yemen and increasing pressures on Iran, is viewed as secondary to the New Cold War on China.<sup>3</sup>

The radically new imperialist strategy represented by the Trump administration, particularly in its second coming, is based on the notion of "America First." This constitutes a rejection of the traditional U.S. role as a hegemonic world power in favor of a hypernationalist America First imperium. A manifestation of this is the U.S. attack on international organisations over which it does not have complete dominance or where it supposedly carries disproportionate burdens, such as the United Nations or even the NATO alliance. Moreover, trade relations are treated not so much as mutually beneficial exchange processes (which in reality are primarily to the benefit of the wealthier nations), but rather as transactional relations to be determined solely on the basis of national power.

In this context, the Trump regime's imposition of tariffs on all other countries, including high tariffs on some sixty countries (in his April 2 "Liberation Day" listing), is not a simple matter of trying to obtain economic advantage but is to be seen as a power play through which geoeconomic and geopolitical dominance can be secured. Under Trump's America First strategy, Washington seeks to obtain tribute from its allies, who will henceforth need to pay in one way or another for U.S. military support, resulting in new forms of interimperialist (or intrainperialist) conflict.

Targeting China, Trump's official military spending budget proposal for the coming fiscal year envisions a nearly 12 percent increase to \$1 trillion (actual military spending typically runs at twice the official level).<sup>4</sup>

The most likely result of such developments—if they are not stopped—is a New Age of Catastrophe, on a scale not unlike the 1930s, characterised by economic, ecological, and war-induced destruction.<sup>5</sup> This will lead not to increased U.S. dominance but to its accelerated decline, as its dollar hegemony and the international institutions on which U.S.

<sup>2</sup> ↪ Détente with Russia as part of the launching of a New Cold War with China was central to the first Trump administration. See John Bellamy Foster, *Trump in the White House* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), 50–52, 74–75.

<sup>3</sup> ↪ Trump has threatened to bomb Iran if it does not make a deal with the United States on its (nonexistent) nuclear weapons program, declaring in early April: "If they don't make a deal, there will be bombing. It will be bombing the likes of which they have never seen before." Doina Chiacu and David Ljunggren, "Trump Threatens Bombing if Iran Does Not Make Nuclear Deal," Reuters, March 30, 2025; Chris Bambery, "Trump's War Plans for Iran: Opening the Other Gates of Hell," Counterfire, April 4, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> ↪ Leo Shane III, "Trump Promises \$1 Trillion in Defense Spending for Next Year," *Defense News*, April 8, 2025; Gisela Cernadas and John Bellamy Foster, "Actual U.S. Military Spending Reached \$1.537 Trillion in 2022—More than Twice Acknowledged Level: New Estimates Based on U.S. National Accounts," *Monthly Review* 75, no. 6 (November 2023): 18–26.

<sup>5</sup> ↪ On the "Age of Catastrophe," 1914–1945, see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (New York: Vintage, 1994), Part I.

power has historically rested are further undermined. Within the Trump regime itself, Washington's attempts to project its power globally will only intensify the internal conflicts between monopoly-finance capital with its global economic interests and Trump's more narrowly nationalistic Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement on the ground. All attempts to keep such a reactionary regime together will require increased repression, while the future will depend on the scale of revolt that this repression engenders, both nationally and globally.

## The Trump Doctrine

Ironically, the strongest, and most controversial, claims with respect to the peaceful and anti-imperialist nature of the Trump regime have been introduced by erstwhile left figures like Parenti. Writing for the MAGA-hegemonic publication Compact in 2023, in an article titled "Trump's Real Crime Is Opposing Empire," Parenti claimed that Trump stood for an anti-Pentagon and "anti-imperial foreign policy," exhibiting utter "disdain for 'the National Security Complex.'"<sup>6</sup>

However, in characterising Trump as anti-imperialist, Parenti seems to have forgotten about the whole structure of imperialism, which has to do with global exploitation/expropriation and strategies for world domination. Trump not only introduced historic increases in military spending in his first administration and employed lethal force internationally on numerous occasions (including relaxing restrictions on the bombing of civilians), but also, and more importantly, initiated the New Cold War on China.<sup>7</sup> The second Trump administration is again massively increasing Pentagon spending and promoting conflict with China on a still larger scale. What is seen by Parenti and others as a form of anti-imperialism is in fact a new global imperial strategy at both the national and international levels, aimed at reversing the U.S. hegemonic decline and defeating China. This strategic reorientation has strong support both within Trump's MAGA movement and those elements of the monopoly-capitalist billionaire class, particularly the high-tech, private equity, and energy sectors, that are aligned with his demagogic regime. As celebrated Indian Marxist economist Prabhat Patnaik has remarked, Trump's foreign policy is neither anti-empire nor mindless but is best characterised as "imperialism's revival strategy."<sup>8</sup>

The national populist MAGA movement draws on a racially charged view of the world in which the United States is seen as a white Christian nation with a manifest destiny. In this perspective, having achieved over the course of its history the status of the number "one nation under God" by the twentieth century, the United States was subsequently undermined from without and within, requiring a resurrection of lost status.

It is no accident that Trump in March 2025 hung a portrait of James K. Polk, eleventh president of the United States, in the Oval Office. Polk presided over the largest territorial expropriation of land in U.S. history through the Mexican-American War, in which Washington seized more than five hundred thousand square miles of territory, including California and much of the Southwest, while annexing Texas and gaining sovereignty over disputed areas in the Pacific Northwest through the Oregon Treaty.<sup>9</sup> Trump's bombastic ambitions to annex Greenland, to retake the Panama Canal, and even (if more far-fetched) to incorporate Canada as the fifty-first state—not to mention renaming the Gulf of Mexico the Gulf of America—are all aimed at recreating the spirit of "the rising American empire."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> ↪ Parenti, "Trump's Real Crime Is Opposing Empire."

<sup>7</sup> ↪ Jeff Heer, "Surprisingly Durable Myth of Donald Trump, Anti-Imperialist," *The Nation*, April 17, 2023; John Bellamy Foster, "The New Cold War on China," *Jus Semper*, March 2025.

<sup>8</sup> ↪ Prabhat Patnaik, "Imperialism's Revival Strategy," *People's Democracy*, March 2, 2025, peoplesdemocracy.in.

<sup>9</sup> ↪ Josh Dawsey, Vera Bergengruen, and Alexander Ward, "The Painting That Explains Trump's Foreign Policy," *Wall Street Journal*, March 13, 2025.

<sup>10</sup> ↪ R. W. Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960).

In order to understand the MAGA regime's imperialist strategy, it is necessary to examine "the Trump Doctrine." Presidential doctrines on foreign policy are typically singled out and elaborated by the media based on White House declarations on critical foreign policy issues. However, in the case of the Trump Doctrine, it was fully articulated from the inside by leading MAGA ideologue Michael Anton, who from February 2017 to April 2018 was a member of the U.S. National Security Council and deputy assistant to the president for strategic communications. He is presently director of policy planning in the Department of State, a position equivalent to assistant secretary of state. During the first Trump administration, Anton was clearly given the assignment—once no longer directly employed by the White House—of providing coherence to Trump's numerous, seemingly contradictory statements on foreign policy.

In 2019, while employed as a lecturer and research fellow at the MAGA-dominated Hillsdale College in Michigan, Anton published an article in *Foreign Policy* based on a lecture at Princeton University titled "The Trump Doctrine" that was to become the semi-official statement of the MAGA regime's overall strategic posture.<sup>11</sup> Anton's task was to define Trump's America First strategy as one that was in line with national populism and anti-internationalism and yet sufficiently bellicose to represent a new aggressive global strategy. It thus constituted what was referred to as a "principled realism," rooted in national self-interest, in line with conservative renditions of the ideas of thinkers like Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. Trump's foreign and military policy was described by Anton in "The Trump Doctrine" as anti-imperial for two reasons. First, empires by nature were "multiethnic" in character, and Trump's policy was completely opposed to a multiethnic view of the American project. Second, imperial policy as pursued by neoconservatives was allied with globalism, while the Trump Doctrine was the negation of liberal globalisation. Globalization is viewed in the MAGA ideology as benefiting rising powers, like China, at the expense of established powers, such as the United States. The Trump Doctrine, Anton explained, was thus consistently nationalist all across the board: To the victor nations go the spoils.<sup>12</sup>

Such a consistent nationalism was portrayed as fully in accord with "human nature." If Aristotle had said—in Anton's words—that the three political units were "the tribe [ethnicity], the polis (or 'city-state'), and the empire," the Trump position was to emphasise the American ethnicity and the American state in an expansive mode on the world stage, and to downplay multiethnic empire, thus Making America Great Again. In this respect, the Trump Doctrine had four pillars: (1) national populism, (2) rejection of liberal internationalism, (3) consistent nationalism for all countries, and (4) the return of the nation to the homogeneous "normalcy" of the classical "ethne and polis"—as opposed to a heterogeneous character of the contemporary multiethnic empire (and the world as a whole). The fourth pillar thus constituted a racial-ethnic definition of national identity, underlying a racial nationalism. As in the case of Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, the moral basis of the Trump Doctrine was abundantly clear: justice is "the interest of the stronger."<sup>13</sup>

## Economic Imperialism and the Trump Doctrine

On April 2, 2025, Trump, in what he called "a declaration of economic independence," using national emergency powers, slapped 10 percent tariffs on every country in the world, with higher tariffs on some 60 other countries or trading blocs. This included new tariff duties of 34 percent on China (on top of the previous 20 percent making it a 54 percent tariff), 46 percent on Vietnam, and 20 percent on the European Union. After China announced a counter tariff, Trump raised the cumulative tariff increase on China to 104 percent, and then, in a further escalation, to 145 percent. In

<sup>11</sup> ↪ Michael Anton, "The Trump Doctrine: An Insider Explains the President's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, 232 (Spring 2019): 40–47.

<sup>12</sup> ↪ Anton, "The Trump Doctrine"; Amanda Taub, "The Trump Doctrine: The World Is a Zero-Sum Game," *New York Times*, March 7, 2025

<sup>13</sup> ↪ Anton, "The Trump Doctrine"; Plato, *Republic*, trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 14–22.

a warlike statement, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that any country that chooses to “retaliate” against the new U.S. tariffs will be seen as responsible for “escalation,” leading to the United States responding by going up the escalation ladder. The Trump administration’s actions are generating a world trade and currency war—a world recession. The new MAGA tariff strategy created panic on Wall Street, which had been until then highly supportive of his presidency, seemingly splitting the financial ruling class as securities tumbled. This forced Trump to pause some tariffs, while at the same time jacking them up on China. The Trump tariffs were calculated on the basis of what was required to generate a bilateral balance of trade with each country, a proposition devoid of any direct economic rationale but providing a blunt weapon with which the regime plans to achieve its wider ends.<sup>14</sup>

Economically, the Trump Doctrine is tied to what is known as “conservative nationalism,” represented by various MAGA-oriented think tanks directed at geoeconomic and geopolitical strategy, such as American Compass and the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, along with the Trump-aligned hedge fund Hudson Bay Capital Management. The founder and chief economist of American Compass, Oren Cass, is a long-time economic adviser to and associate of Trump’s present Secretary of State Marco Rubio. American Compass is heavily financed by the Thomas D. Klingenstein Fund, a multibillion-dollar foundation managed by Thomas D. Klingenstein. A Wall Street investment banker, Klingenstein is a partner in the multibillion-dollar hedge fund Cohen Klingenstein. He is also chairman of the board (and a major funder) of the leading MAGA think tank, the Claremont Institute, a Zionist, and a sharp critic of what he calls “Woke Communism.” Other funders of American Compass include the Walton Family Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.<sup>15</sup>

A flagship of conservative nationalism in economics, American Compass offers a fairly realistic view of the long-term stagnation and deindustrialization of the U.S. economy, while coupling this with strong opposition to free trade and avid support for tariffs.<sup>16</sup> Ideologically tied to Trump’s MAGA movement, it has taken a leading role in developing an economic strategy for the New Cold War on “Communist China.” Its 2023 report, *A Hard Break from China*, argued that “America must sever its economic relationship with China to protect its market from subversion by the Chinese Communist Party.” This includes cutting off economic relations with China in relation to investment, supply chains, and international economic agreements. All “capital flows, technology transfers, and economic partnerships between the United States and China” must end. Domestically, American Compass has declared war on “woke capital,” that is, on any attempts to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into corporate practices, a position that is clearly aimed at maintaining white racial dominance.<sup>17</sup>

Within the Trump administration itself, the high tariff strategy is overseen by Peter Navarro, senior counsel to the president on trade and manufacturing. In the previous Trump administration, Navarro was director of the Office of Trade

<sup>14</sup> ↪ Bryan Mena, “Key Takeaways from Trump’s ‘Liberation Day’ Tariffs,” CNN, April 2, 2025; Peter Foster and Sam Fleming, “Donald Trump Baffles Economists with Tariff Formula,” *Financial Times*, April 3, 2025; Nick Beams, “Trump’s ‘Reciprocal Tariffs’ Escalate Economic War Against the World,” World Socialist Web Site, April 3, 2025, [wsws.org](https://www.wsws.org); Jack Izzo, “Posts Online Correctly Cracked the Formula for Trump’s Tariffs,” Snopes, April 3, 2025; Helen Davidson and Joana Partridge, “Trump Imposes New Tariffs on Dozens of Partners, Sparking Fresh Market Turmoil,” *Guardian*, April 9, 2025; Josh Boak, “Trump Backs Down on Most Reciprocal Tariffs for 90 Days, but Raises Rate on Chinese Imports to 125 Percent,” PBS News, April 9, 2025; Léonie Chao-Fong, Tom Ambrose, Graeme Wearden, and Kate Lamb, “US Markets Close with Steep Losses as Trump Tariffs Branded ‘Worst Self-Inflicted Wound’ by a Successful Economy,” *Guardian*, April 10, 2025.

<sup>15</sup> ↪ “Oren Cass,” American Compass, n.d.; Influence Watch, “American Compass,” n.d., [influencewatch.org](https://influencewatch.org); Influence Watch, “Thomas D. Klingenstein Fund,” n.d.; Jason Wilson, “The Far Right Financier Giving Millions to the Republican Party to Fight ‘Woke Communists,’” *Guardian*, August 4, 2023; Thomas D. Klingenstein, “Winning the Cold Civil War,” *Newsweek*, September 8, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> ↪ “Where’s the Growth?,” American Compass, March 15, 2022, [americancompass.org](https://americancompass.org); Oren Cass, “Why Trump Is Right About Tariffs,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 27, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> ↪ “A Hard Break from China: Protecting the American Market from Subversion by the CCP,” American Compass, June 8, 2023; David Azerrad, “How to Put Woke Capital Out of Business,” American Compass, September 2, 2021; Vivek Ramaswamy, Woke, Inc.: Inside Corporate America’s Social Justice Scam (New York: Center Street, 2021).

and Manufacturing Policy. He is a virulent proponent of economic (and military) warfare against China, author of the 2008 book *The Coming China Wars*, and sees tariffs as playing the key role in that respect. Tariffs are touted by Navarro as providing trillions of dollars in government revenue, allowing Trump to reduce taxes on the wealthy. Navarro was imprisoned for contempt of Congress for his role in the MAGA attack on the capitol on January 6, 2021.<sup>18</sup>

However, the principal figure governing international economic strategy in the second Trump administration is Stephen Miran, chair of the Council of Economic Advisors. Miran was a former senior advisor to the Treasury Department in the first Trump administration and was subsequently senior strategist for the investment firm Hudson Bay Capital Management that was a large institutional investor in the Trump Media & Technology Group, which runs the Truth Social media platform. Miran is also an economics fellow at the Manhattan Institute. He is the author of *A User's Guide to Restructuring the Global Trading System*, published by Hudson Bay Capital Management at the time of Trump's 2024 election victory, which introduced the plan to use high tariffs and the leverage offered by the U.S. security umbrella to force countries to agree to a major devaluation of the U.S. currency under the rubric of the Mar-a-Lago Accord. The goal is to improve the global trading position of the United States at the expense of its major trading partners. This constitutes a global beggar-thy-neighbour policy to be imposed by the United States on both its allies and its designated enemies.<sup>19</sup>

The model for this geoeconomic strategy is the 1985 Plaza Accord worked out between the United States, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, and other countries, which allowed for an intentional multilateral devaluation of the dollar. The main historic result of this agreement was the bursting of the Japanese financial bubble and the introduction of a seemingly permanent deep economic stagnation in the Japanese economy, which at the time had been one of the most dynamic in the world. Soon after the Plaza Accord, Trump bought the Plaza Hotel, no doubt enamoured with the deal made there. (He later placed it into bankruptcy.) In 2025, however, the United States is considerably weaker globally than in 1985, and the countries holding the most dollar-dominated foreign exchange reserves, on which the envisioned Mar-a-Lago Accord would chiefly depend, are not under the U.S. military security umbrella, and hence not so easily pressured.<sup>20</sup>

Japan, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Mexico, Miran observed, could no doubt easily be pressured to comply with U.S. interests in this respect, having no other choice. In contrast, neither the European Union, nor China (which holds some \$3 trillion in U.S. currency and is well aware of what happened to Japan as a result of the Plaza Accord) would willingly agree to such an agreement. With respect to the European Union, the Trump plan includes forcing these countries to take on more of the costs of the U.S. security umbrella, and, using this as a bargaining chip, along with the imposition of high tariffs, to compel an agreement on a currency devaluation. Imposition of U.S. tariffs, Trump's conservative nationalist economic advisors contended, would lead initially to the dollar's appreciation, as in the first Trump administration, thus negating some of the unfavourable macroeconomic effects of the tariffs (though the actual result at first, this time around, has been the opposite, with the dollar depreciating).<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, in general, such tariffs are inflationary, with the intensification of stagflation as a likely result. Moreover, controlled devaluation of the

<sup>18</sup> ↪ Peter Navarro, *The Coming China Wars* (New York: Financial Times Press, 2008), 203–5; Jacob Heilbrunn, "The Most Dangerous Man in the Trump World?," *Politico*, February 12, 2007; John Bellamy Foster, *Trump in the White House*, 84–85; Alan Rappoport, "Trump's Trade Advisor Pick, a China Hawk, Was Jailed over Jan. 6," *New York Times*, December 4, 2024; D'Angelo Gore, "Independent Analyses Contradict Navarro's \$6 Trillion-Plus Tariff Revenue Estimate," *FactCheck*, April 10, 2025, [factcheck.org](https://factcheck.org).

<sup>19</sup> ↪ David Randall, "Hudson Bay, Morgan Stanley, Took Positions in Trump Social Media Firm in Q1," *Reuters*, May 15, 2024; Stephen Miran, *A User's Guide to Restructuring the Global Trading System*, Hudson Bay Capital, November 2024, [hudsonbaycapital.com](https://hudsonbaycapital.com).

<sup>20</sup> ↪ Josh Lipsky and Jessie Yin, "Meeting in Mar-a-Lago: Is a New Currency Deal Plausible?," *Atlantic Council*, March 13, 2015, [atlanticcouncil.org](https://atlanticcouncil.org).

<sup>21</sup> ↪ Miran, *A User's Guide to Restructuring the Global Trading System*, 13–14, 35.

dollar (not its appreciation) is the principal object of U.S. tariff policy in line with the hoped-for Mar-a-Lago Accord, which would have the effect of increasing the prices consumers pay for U.S. imports.<sup>22</sup>

The Trump tariffs, seen in the context of the desired Mar-a-Lago Accord, are thus a form of blackmail, with the stipulation that they will be lowered if countries comply by selling dollars in exchange for U.S. “century bonds,” that is, bonds which mature in a hundred years, typically with low interest rates. This would thus contribute to the dollar’s devaluation. Some combination of tariffs and intentional devaluation of the dollar, emphasising the latter, is thus envisioned. This is seen as promoting exports and deindustrialization. In addition to Miran, this policy is strongly supported by Treasury Secretary Bessent. The Mar-a-Lago Accord, Miran indicates, would create “a much stronger demarcation between friend, foe, and neutral trading partner” with respect to the United States. “Friends” would provide tribute to Washington in return for being under the U.S. security and economic umbrella, while “foes” would be subject to high tariffs and economic sanctions and threatened with military aggression.<sup>23</sup>

The entire Trump nationalistic imperial policy, initiating a global trade and currency war, is an enormous gamble, as it will likely destabilise the U.S. and world economies and global finance, accelerating attempts by countries, particularly the BRICS+ countries (comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and others), to find alternatives to the dollar.

The Trump administration seems unable entirely to grasp the reality of the Triffin Dilemma (named after Belgian economist Robert Triffin) that an international reserve currency (such as the dollar) requires a continuing deficit in the current account if the reserve currency country is to supply the world with needed liquidity, while this tends in the long-term to create conditions that erode faith in the reserve currency.<sup>24</sup> The Trump strategy, caught on the horns of this dilemma, will thus likely fail, expediting the demise of the dollar as the world’s hegemonic reserve currency and further undermining U.S. global economic dominance. As economist Michael Hudson writes:

*Trump bases his attempt to tear up the existing linkages and reciprocity of international trade and finance on the assumption that, in a chaotic grab-bag, America will come out on top. That confidence underlies his willingness to pull out today’s geopolitical interconnections. He thinks that the U.S. economy is like a cosmic black hole, that is, a center of gravity able to pull all the world’s money and economic surplus to itself. That is the explicit aim of America First. That is what makes Trump’s program a declaration of war on the rest of the world.<sup>25</sup>*

Meanwhile, the rearmament of U.S. allies, along with a massive increase in Pentagon spending and bellicose threats directed at designated enemies, could lead to the further proliferation of conflicts, heightening the chance of a Third World War. Washington’s strong-arm approach to its allies will engender tensions within the historical imperial core of global capitalism, generating growing interimperialist rivalry between the European Union and the United States. U.S. financial capital has hitherto strongly supported Trump, but has global economic interests. Thus, U.S. financial capital is approaching the Trump administration tariff power play and the prospect of a Mar-a-Lago Accord with trepidation, born of uncertainty.

<sup>22</sup> ↪ Michael Hudson, “Trump’s Tariff Threats Could Destabilize the Global Economy,” Geopolitical Economy, January 25, 2025, geopoliticeconomy.com

<sup>23</sup> ↪ Miran, A User’s Guide to Restructuring the Global Trading System, 37.

<sup>24</sup> ↪ David Deuchar, “Donald Trump and the Dollar: The Triffin Dilemma and America’s Exorbitant Privilege,” Seeking Alpha, May 24, 2016; Robert Triffin, Gold and the Dollar Crisis: Yesterday and Today, Essays in International Finance, no. 132 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), 1–6; Ismail Shakil, “Trump Repeats Tariff Threat to Disuade BRICS Nations from Replacing US Dollar,” Reuters, January 30, 2025.

<sup>25</sup> ↪ Hudson, “Trump’s Tariff Threats Could Destabilize the Global Economy.”

Trump's national-imperialist strategy is fully in accord with the reactionary views of his MAGA followers, who are not opposed to imperialism and militarism but are strongly against what they see as liberal globalisation at U.S. expense, coupled with indecisive wars against minor powers where there are no visible spoils. Trump in his first administration berated the members of his Joint Chiefs of Staff with respect to the wars in the Middle East and Central Asia on the lack of spoils gained by the United States, asking: "Where is the f—ing oil?"<sup>26</sup>

## Neofascism and Empire

The huge shifts in U.S. foreign and military policy being implemented under the Trump Doctrine are rooted in new class alignments associated with the neofascism of the MAGA movement and its close—if contradictory—connections to the ruling billionaire class, particularly in the high-tech, private equity, and oil sectors. The class basis of fascism in Marxist theory always lies in an alliance between monopoly capital and a lower-middle class/stratum. The latter consists of the small business owners, small landlords, and low-level corporate managers, along with fundamentalist religious elements and rural small landowners. It also incorporates some of the more privileged sectors of the working class. **The lower-middle class is disproportionately white and racist.**

Trump in the 2024 presidential election attracted most of those voters with less than a four-year college degree, a category that encompasses a majority of both lower-middle class and working-class voters. The same exit polls show that he won both the lower-middle class and working-class voters, according to income, but lost among the poorest voters. Millions of those who had voted for the Democrats in 2020, mainly from the working class, chose the Party of Nonvoters in 2024.<sup>27</sup> Trump's loyal base remains the lower-middle class, extended to more privileged workers.

Historically, the lower-middle class or petty bourgeoisie represents a sector of the population that is not only prone to white supremacism but that is also patriarchal and ultra-conservative with respect to sex and gender relations. It forms a rearguard of the capitalist system and is mobilised in fascist-style regimes on the basis of its own innate ideology, associated with a revanchist nationalist perspective aimed at making a given nation-state great again. Ernst Bloch, writing with respect to Nazi Germany in the 1930s, saw such populations as characterised by a regressive "non-contemporaneity," aimed at recovery of an idealised Aryan past.<sup>28</sup>

As Phil A. Neel has written, with respect to the class basis of MAGA national populism in the United States in his *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict*,

*The Republican Party operates on a roughly symmetrical base built up among rural white sub-elites and a whole array of urban or peri-urban petty capitalist interests.... In material terms, the far right tends to cluster among the interests of petty proprietors or self-employed but still moderately wealthy workers of the hinterland.... The material core of the far right is...the whitening exurb [outside the main cities and the suburbs]...which acts as an interface between the metropolitan and non-metropolitan, allowing the wealthier landholders, business owners,*

<sup>26</sup> ↪ Carol D. Leonnig and Philip Rucker, "'You're a Bunch of Dopes and Babies': Inside Trump's Stunning Tirade Against Generals," Washington Post, January 17, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> ↪ Green Party US, "Alienated, Not Apathetic: Why Workers Don't Vote," August 5, 2019, gp.org; "Median Income in the United States in 2023, by Educational Attainment of Householder," Statista, statista.com, n.d. In the 2024 elections, according to exit polls, Trump expanded beyond his lower-middle class base support into the working class, winning a majority of those with family incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000 a year, but he still lost to the Democrats among the poor (those with family incomes of \$30,000 or less). The major domestic issue accounting for this shift was the economy, principally inflation. "Exit Polls," NBC News, November 5, 2024. Millions of previous Democratic voters chose the Party of Nonvoters.

<sup>28</sup> ↪ Ernst Bloch, *The Heritage of Our Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 54, 68, 79, 108, 113. On the patriarchal, conservative sex/gender tendencies of the lower-middle class in capitalist societies and the role of this in generating fascist tendencies, see Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), 52–59.

*cops, soldiers, or self-employed contractors to recruit from adjacent zones of abject white poverty.... Violence plays a central role here.... The world can be restored...through salvific acts of violence, capable of forcing the collapse and hastening the approach of the True Community.<sup>29</sup>*

The mass MAGA movement rooted in the lower-middle class/petty proprietors is primarily motivated ideologically by what it refers to as the “Cold Civil War” against the liberal elites of the upper-middle class above and against the working class below. This has its roots in its ultra-nationalist beliefs; its connection to the “slaveholder’s religion” of white evangelicalism; its worship of past U.S. imperial expansion; its frequent glorification of extreme violence; its racist and jingoistic tendencies; and its strong patriarchal ideology—all of which are fully in accord with the America First ideology of the Trump Doctrine.<sup>30</sup> This includes at the international level support for the demolition of U.S. foreign aid (through the dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID) and opposition to the proxy war in Ukraine. The Ukraine War is seen as primarily serving European elites, whose conflict with Russia does not benefit the United States, while diverting Washington from its prime Asian enemies: China and the Islamic world.<sup>31</sup>

The Christian nationalism of the evangelical MAGA world has led to strong support of the Trump/Benjamin Netanyahu pact for the complete extermination/removal of Palestinians from Gaza, in which the United States is to obtain various economic rights, and even ownership—in the case of Trump’s fantasy of an American-owned riviera resort—along with preferential oil contracts in the Gaza Strip.<sup>32</sup>

As Georg Lukács remarked in relation to a much earlier historical figure:

*Hitler rebuffed the old Hohenzollern plans for colonisation and expansion. He criticised especially sharply the aim of assimilating conquered nations by force through Germanisation. What he advocated was extermination. It was not clear to people, he explained, “that Germanisation can only be practised on the land itself, never on human beings.” That is to say, the German Reich ought to expand, conquer fertile lands and expel or wipe out their population.<sup>33</sup>*

In a somewhat similar way, the prominent MAGA think tank, the Center for Renewing America (CRA) founded by Trump’s director of the Office of Management and Budget, Russell Vought, insists that Palestinians cannot be assimilated in Israel or the United States, and must be exterminated/removed, while their land must be seized in its entirety to be occupied by more “civilised” populations. In the words of the CRA itself, “The cultural practices of Palestinians,” lacking in universal values, “are mostly focused on grievances against Israel, Jews, and the United States, with a society fundamentally oriented toward violence and extremism” and “modern death worship.” They are thus “incompatible” with “our values, rooted in Western history and Biblical thought.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> ↪ Phil A. Neel, *Hinterland: America’s New Landscape of Class Conflict* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018), 36, 57–58. Contradicting his own argument, Neel suggests that these developments do not point to the development of fascism or neofascism in Trump’s Make America Great Movement, despite the similar class dynamics. Neel, *Hinterland*, 48.

<sup>30</sup> ↪ Charles R. Kesler, “America’s Cold Civil War,” *Imprimis* 47, no. 10 (October 2018); Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion* (Lisle, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

<sup>31</sup> ↪ Leila Abboud, Adrienne Klasa, and Henry Foy, “U.S. Tells European Companies to Comply with Donald Trump’s Anti-Diversity Order,” *Financial Times*, March 28, 2025.

<sup>32</sup> ↪ Dennis Laich, “Trump’s ‘Gaza Riviera’—A Profile in Arrogance,” *The Hill*, March 9, 2025.

<sup>33</sup> ↪ Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason* (London: Merlin Press, 1980), 737

<sup>34</sup> ↪ CRA Staff, “Primer: Palestinian Culture is Prohibitive for Assimilation,” Center for Renewing America, December 1, 2023, [americarenewing.com](https://americarenewing.com).

Trump's Secretary of Defence, Pete Hegseth, frequently glorifies the Christian Crusades against Islam of the twelfth century, suggesting that Trump should be a Crusader president. Hegseth sports a tattoo on his chest with the Jerusalem Cross, also known as the Crusader's Cross, along with a tattoo on his bicep of a Crusader battle cry. His book *American Crusade* has a chapter on "Make the Crusader Great Again," referring to a war on Islam—a crusade that is to be extended more universally to a war on "leftism" and all views that treat Christians as "infidels."<sup>35</sup>

In November 2023, the Ansar Allah-led Yemeni government commenced firing on Israeli-linked ships in the Red Sea in response to Israel's genocide in Palestine. Following U.S. and British "reprisals," this was extended to U.S. and British-linked vessels. The Trump administration commenced massive airstrikes in Yemen on March 15, 2025, promising "unrelenting war," while relaxing some of the constraints on such attacks introduced by the Biden administration, thus making it a much deadlier war on civilians. Trump promised that Ansar Allah, which he referred to as the "Houthi barbarians," would be "completely annihilated."<sup>36</sup>

Trump's official worship of the pro-slavery, pro-empire Polk, whose most notable "achievement" was the Mexican-American War, is in line with the revanchist MAGA ideology. It is in this same imperial vein that his administration has declared that the United States needs to retake the Panama Canal and acquire Greenland "one way or the other."<sup>37</sup> MAGA publications insist that the U.S. relinquishment of the Panama Canal to Panama was not legal on the Panamanian side, making U.S. seizure of it legitimate. In the face of these threats, Panama has made concessions, dropping out of the Belt and Road Initiative and questioning the management of the Canal by Chinese corporations. However, Trump's Washington insisted that this was not enough, and the United States needed direct ownership and control of the Panama Canal Zone, with Trump ordering the U.S. military to plan an invasion to seize it. In April 2025, the United States negotiated an agreement with Panama that would allow it to reoccupy all of its former military bases in the Panama Canal Zone and is moving large numbers of troops to these bases, while at the same time refusing to acknowledge Panama's ownership of the Canal. This is being called by Panamanian critics a "Camouflaged Invasion" in which the Panama Canal Zone has been taken over by the U.S. military "without firing a shot."<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, the Trump administration is employing all sorts of pressure to acquire Greenland, including a prospective buyout to be offered to the population. It is argued in the MAGA ideology that since Greenland is in the Western Hemisphere, it falls within the U.S. sphere of influence as defined by the Monroe Doctrine. It therefore should not be an autonomous territory of Denmark. Greenland's vast resources and strategic position are said to make it ripe for U.S. acquisition, generating a "New American Arctic Century."<sup>39</sup>

In the continuing attempt to overthrow Venezuela's Bolivarian Republic, the Trump administration has threatened to impose 25 percent tariffs on any country in the world that buys oil from Venezuela.<sup>40</sup> Under Rubio, the State Department is instituting sanctions on countries that contracted Cuban medical services, denying visas to present and former

<sup>35</sup> ↪ Lydia Wilson, "Pete Hegseth's Tattoos and the Crusading Obsession of the Far Right," *New Lines*, November 29, 2024; Pete Hegseth, *American Crusade* (New York: Center Street, 2020), 13, 24, 289–90, 301.

<sup>36</sup> ↪ Jon Gambrell, "Trump Threatens Houthi Rebels That They'll Be 'Completely Annihilated' as Airstrikes Pound Yemen," *Associated Press*, March 20, 2025.

<sup>37</sup> ↪ Dawsey, Bergengruen, and Ward, "The Painting That Explains Trump's Foreign Policy."

<sup>38</sup> ↪ Micah Meadowcroft and Anthony Licata, "Primer: The American Canal—The Case for Revisiting the Panama Canal Treaties," *Center for Renewing America*, January 31, 2025; Brett Wilkins, "Trump Orders U.S. Military to Plan Invasion of Panama to Seize the Canal: Report," *Common Dreams*, March 13, 2025, [commondreams.org](https://www.commondreams.org); "'Camouflaged Invasion': Panama Opposition Slams Security Pact with the US," *Al Jazeera*, April 12, 2025.

<sup>39</sup> ↪ Sumantra Maitra, "Towards Greater Engagement and Integration with Greenland and a New American Arctic Century," *Center for Renewing America*, March 3, 2025.

<sup>40</sup> ↪ José Luis Granados Ceja, "Trump Threatens 25% Tariff on Countries Buying Venezuelan Oil as US Continues Migrant Crackdown," *Venezuelanalysis*, March 24, 2025

government officials who work with or support Cuban doctors. Cuba has more than twenty-four thousand doctors working in fifty-six countries worldwide, mostly in the Global South, providing essential medical aid. Washington absurdly claims that these doctors are “forced labor” and represent “human trafficking.”<sup>41</sup>

The white supremacy built into Trump’s MAGA foreign policy is particularly blatant in its attacks on the South African government. In response to a South African land reform law that seeks belatedly to address the results of colonialism and apartheid in a country where a white minority, constituting some 7 percent of the population, still owns around 72 percent of the land, Trump, Rubio, and Elon Musk accused South Africa of racism against whites. This was coupled with criticisms of South Africa for its role in arguing before the International Court of Justice that Israel was carrying out genocide in Gaza. In a preliminary ruling, the International Court of Justice decided in favor of South Africa and against Israel.<sup>42</sup>

Trump falsely claimed that land was being confiscated by Pretoria from whites without compensation or legal redress, arguing that so-called white refugees from South Africa were “victims of unjust racial discrimination” and would be welcome in the United States. Rubio followed suit by accusing South Africa of unjustly “expropriating private property.” Musk, who was born and raised in apartheid South Africa, has promoted a myth of a “genocide” against white farmers, referring falsely to anti-white “racist ownership laws” and the “large scale killing of [white] farmers.” Based on these spurious accusations, Trump issued an executive order stopping all financial assistance to South Africa, most of which went to fighting HIV/AIDS. The South African ambassador to the United States, Ebrahim Rasool, was expelled from the United States by Rubio after the MAGA online infotainment site Breitbart reported on a talk Rasool gave in a webinar organised by a South African think tank. In his talk, Rasool, in the words of the Associated Press, had spoken “in academic language of the Trump administration’s crackdowns on diversity and equity programs and immigration and mentioned the possibility of a U.S. where white people soon would no longer be in the majority.”<sup>43</sup>

Trump’s nominee as ambassador to South Africa, L. Brent Bozell III, is the nephew of conservative National Review editor William F. Buckley Jr., and the founder of the right-wing Media Research Center. Bozell III is a white supremacist noted for his defence of the South African apartheid system while he was president of the National Conservative Political Action Committee, at which time he declared that he was “proud to become a member of the Coalition Against ANC [African National Congress] Terrorism.” Bozell III made the racially charged statement that U.S. President Barack Obama “looked like a skinny, ghetto crackhead.” Bozell III’s son, L. Brent Bozell IV, was one of the MAGA supporters arrested for storming the capitol on January 6, 2021.<sup>44</sup>

The MAGA ideology is also evident in the Trump administration’s withdrawals from the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change and from the World Health Organization, claiming that these steps were necessary to reclaim American

<sup>41</sup> ↪ Farah Najjar, “Why Are Caribbean Leaders Fighting Trump to Keep Cuban Doctors?,” Al Jazeera, March 15, 2025; Vijay Prashad, “Why Cuban Doctors Deserve the Nobel Peace Prize,” MR Online, August 25, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> ↪ Kate Bartlett, “What’s Trump’s Beef with South Africa?,” NPR, February 7, 2025; Michelle Gavin, “Trump’s Misguided Policy Toward South Africa,” Council on Foreign Relations, February 12, 2025, cfr.org; “Do White People Own ‘Only’ 22 Percent of South Africa’s Land?,” AFP Fact Check, July 19, 2019, factcheck.afp.com.

<sup>43</sup> ↪ Brett Davidson, “What Musk and Trump Describe Is Not the South Africa I Know and Love,” Al Jazeera, March 25, 2025; Bartlett, “What’s Trump’s Beef with South Africa?”; Gavin, “Trump’s Misguided Policy Toward South Africa”; Trita Parsi, “[ICJ] Lands Stunning Blow on Israel Over Gaza Genocide Charge,” Responsible Statecraft, January 26, 2024, responsiblestatecraft.org; Gerald Imray, “Expelled South African Ambassador Returns Home, Says Will Wear US Sanction as a ‘Badge of Dignity,’” Associated Press, March 23, 2025.

<sup>44</sup> ↪ Hunter Walker, “Trump’s Pick for Ambassador to South Africa Actively Opposed Fight to End Apartheid,” Talking Points Memo, March 26, 2025; Stephen Millies, “Trump Wants a Super Bigot to Be Ambassador to South Africa,” Struggle for Socialism/La Lucha por el Socialismo, April 1, 2025, struggle-la-lucha.org; Lucas Shaw, “Barack Obama: Now He’s a Skinny, Ghetto Crackhead?,” Reuters, December 23, 2011.

“sovereignty.”<sup>45</sup> Trump’s imperialist America First ideology extends extraterritorially to demanding that European corporations conform to his executive orders on removing all provisions on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) if they are to have dealings with the United States.<sup>46</sup>

The extreme nature of these positions has distanced the Trump administration from the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), known as “the imperial brain trust” and as “Wall Street’s think tank.” The bipartisan CFR has been a dominant force in U.S. geopolitical strategy since the Second World War.<sup>47</sup> Reflecting the general MAGA sentiments, Hegseth accused the CFR of liberal globalism in a letter resigning from the organisation.<sup>48</sup> James M. Lindsay, writing for the CFR from a globalist perspective, has criticised the Trump Doctrine as a “disruptive” reversion to “nineteenth-century power politics and spheres of interest.” According to Lindsay, Trump stands accused of adopting “a Thucydidean worldview—one in which ‘the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.’” Liberal globalists like Lindsay are not opposed to the overall objectives of Trump’s global power politics in this respect. Rather, they complain that it is too ham-fisted and ineffective when compared to the more adroit methods of traditional grand strategists of the American imperium.<sup>49</sup>

## The Trump Doctrine and the War on China

In 2010–2011, the Obama administration introduced its “Pivot to Asia,” aimed at the military and geoeconomic encirclement of China. Yet, at the time, the United States was still hoping for a “Gorbachev” to emerge in China who would represent a decisive shift to capitalism, undermining the Communist Party of China (CPC) and allowing the United States to regain its ascendance in Asia. By 2015, it had become apparent that these hopes on the part of U.S. imperial grand strategists had been disappointed, and that the rise of Xi Jinping as chairman of the CPC and president of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) stood for the reinvigoration of “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Hence, it was Republican strategists around Trump in his first administration that initiated the New Cold War on China, along with an attempted détente with Russia, all aimed at constraining and defeating Beijing.<sup>50</sup>

During the Biden administration following the 2020 presidential election, there was a shift back to the long-term imperial strategy of enlarging NATO eastward to Ukraine, the basis of which had already been laid by the U.S.-organised right-wing Maidan coup, leading to the overthrow of the democratically elected president Victor Yanukovich in 2014, followed by civil war in Ukraine. In 2022, after eight years of bloodshed, and Kyiv’s disregard of the Minsk peace agreements establishing Donbass as an autonomous region, the civil war in Ukraine expanded into a full-scale NATO proxy war between NATO and Russia, as Moscow intervened on the side of Russian-speaking Donbass on its border, forestalling an attack in preparation by the Kyiv regime.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, even while engaged in a major proxy war with Russia in Ukraine, during which the United States/NATO provided massive military aid and logistical support, the Biden

<sup>45</sup> ↪ Stewart Patrick, “Trump’s Distorted View of Sovereignty and American Exceptionalism,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 30, 2025; Donald Trump, “The Inaugural Address,” The White House, January 20, 2025.

<sup>46</sup> ↪ Abboud, Klasa, and Foy, “U.S. Tells European Companies to Comply with Donald Trump’s Anti-Diversity Order.”

<sup>47</sup> ↪ Laurence H. Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust: The Council on Foreign Relations and United States Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977); Laurence H. Shoup, *Wall Street’s Think Tank* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015).

<sup>48</sup> ↪ Hegseth, *American Crusade*, 92–94.

<sup>49</sup> ↪ James M. Lindsay, “The Costs of Trump’s Foreign Policy Disruption,” Council on Foreign Relations, January 31, 2025.

<sup>50</sup> ↪ Foster, *Trump in the White House*, 50–52, 74–75

<sup>51</sup> ↪ See Thomas Palley, “The Russia War Explained: How the U.S. Exploited the Internal Fractures in the Post-Soviet Order,” *Monthly Review* 77, no. 2 (June 2025).

administration continued to push forward the New Cold War on China launched by Trump, thereby threatening Russia and China at the same time.<sup>52</sup>

With the reelection of Trump in 2024, U.S. policy has now shifted back to attempts to end the U.S. proxy war with Russia in Ukraine so as to focus U.S. grand imperial strategy on the singular object of curtailing China's rise. In what has become known as a "reverse Kissinger strategy," the Trump administration has sought once again to establish détente with Russia in an attempt to divide the two Eurasian superpowers.<sup>53</sup> The MAGA regime is waging the New Cold War on China on an increasingly belligerent basis, accelerating its military spending, shifting national resources away from other foreign and domestic priorities, and weaponising all of its economic and technological means, accompanied by a New McCarthyism. This is unfolding as part of a larger racially charged crusade against all immigrants, "foreigners," and supporters of Palestine, China, and non-Westerners in general, accompanied by politically based deportations—in some cases to concentration camps abroad.<sup>54</sup>

Rubio, a vehemently anti-Communist ideologue, declared in the Senate hearings on his nomination that China "cheated to obtain superpower status" at U.S. expense. Hegseth has declared that "communist China...subsists on tyranny, theft, and deception" and is the main enemy of the United States. As Secretary of Defence, he has declared that Washington is "prepared" for war with Beijing, which it ostensibly still wants to avoid. Trump's National Security Adviser, Mike Waltz, ousted from his position in May over the Signal scandal, referred directly to a "Cold War" with China and characterised "the Chinese Communist Party" as Washington's principal enemy.<sup>55</sup>

In order to comprehend the strategic aspects of the U.S. Cold War on China and the dangers it poses of a Hot War, it is important to understand the nature of counterforce strategy and the notion of limited nuclear war between superpowers. The original conception of a Cold War in the post-Second World War era was that the nuclear superpowers could not engage in a Hot War with each other without mutual assured destruction (MAD). Hence, they had to engage in struggles around the world in ways that stopped short of direct superpower confrontation. U.S. nuclear policy was thus based for decades on MAD, which signified that nuclear weapons were unusable and nuclear war unthinkable. This was associated with a minimalist approach to nuclear armaments. By the 1980s, however, the U.S. nuclear posture had shifted to a maximalist counterforce doctrine, aimed at making nuclear weapons usable (again) and nuclear war thinkable. The counterforce doctrine has as its primary object development of first strike capability or nuclear primacy (which would allow Washington to eliminate the retaliatory capability of the other side in a first strike). Its secondary object—particularly if nuclear primacy is found to be beyond reach—is a limited nuclear war in which the United States would dominate all the levels of escalation. In a limited nuclear war, it is theorised, the United States will be able to defeat its superpower opponent, forcing it to back down, short of a global nuclear apocalypse.<sup>56</sup>

In the U.S. strategic planning community today, the foremost theorist of a limited nuclear war with China, to be fought most likely over Taiwan, is Elbridge A. Colby, Trump's undersecretary of defence for policy. A Harvard-educated blueblood, Colby is the grandson of former CIA director William Colby. Elbridge Colby served as deputy assistant

<sup>52</sup> ↪ John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, "Imperialism in the Indo-Pacific—An Introduction," *Jus Semper*, February 2025

<sup>53</sup> ↪ Vijay Prashad, "Donald Trump's Reverse Kissinger Strategy," *People's Dispatch*, March 6, 2025.

<sup>54</sup> ↪ This is the case with respect to deportations to Guantanamo and to notorious prison complexes in El Salvador. See Chris Hedges, "American Concentration Camps," *ScheerPost*, April 17, 2025.

<sup>55</sup> ↪ Antara Ghosal Singh, "China's Rubio Dilemma," *Observer Research Foundation*, February 11, 2025, [orfonline.org](https://orfonline.org); Hegseth, *American Crusade*, 157; Sarah Ewall-Wice, "Pete Hegseth Says the US Is 'Prepared' for War with China After Tariff Retaliation Threat," *Daily Mail*, March 5, 2025; Selina Wang, "Rubio and Waltz Picks Put China Back at the Center of U.S. Foreign Policy," *ABC News*, November 12, 2024.

<sup>56</sup> ↪ See John Bellamy Foster, "The U.S. Quest for Nuclear Primacy," *Jus Semper*, September 2024.

secretary of defence for strategy and force development in the first Trump administration. He was the lead author of the 2018 U.S. National Defence Strategy. Following the first Trump administration, he cofounded the strategic think tank, the Marathon Initiative, and has developed strong ties to the Heritage Foundation.

Colby's nomination was strongly opposed by Republican neocons (as well as Democrats) based on what was seen as his less than hawkish position on Iran and hence the Middle East. This was related to his stance that China is the real threat, and that the U.S. war machine should have a laser focus on the Indo-Pacific even at the expense of other theatres. In this respect, Colby had the full support of MAGA, including U.S. Vice President J. D. Vance; centibillionaire and DOGE czar Musk; Charlie Kirk, head of Turning Point USA; Compact magazine; and Heritage Foundation president Kevin Roberts, with whom Colby coauthored an article arguing that Washington should shift its focus from Ukraine to China.<sup>57</sup> Widely seen as a Republican "realist" in the Henry Kissinger mode, Colby's primary emphasis is on the need to prepare aggressively for a limited (nuclear) war with China over Taiwan. The 2018 National Defence Strategy under his direction singled out China as the principal enemy, and, for the first time ever, explicitly integrated limited nuclear war into overall U.S. national defence strategy.<sup>58</sup>

Colby is viewed in geopolitical and military circles as the leading proponent of the "strategy of denial" aimed at China. This is a "limited war" strategy, potentially employing full non-strategic military might plus counterforce weapons in accordance with the "Schlesinger Doctrine" (named after Richard Nixon's Secretary of Defence, James Schlesinger). Structuring his argument in terms of an impending PRC attack on Taiwan (recognised internationally, including by Washington, as an autonomous, self-governing part of China), Colby commences by declaring that the United States can no longer count on absolute military dominance globally or in the Indo-Pacific region. A U.S. "preventative war" against China over Taiwan, as in the case of numerous U.S. imperial wars in the past, must be avoided, since China, like the United States, has a nuclear arsenal that would survive a first strike. Nevertheless, Colby claims, the United States retains superior counterforce strike capabilities, giving it the advantage at the various stages of escalation. Nations, he states, do not "have equally good options for incremental escalation below the apocalyptic level." A strategy of denial thus means to take away the military objective of the other side by ensuring that for it to escalate its way out of the conflict or to follow the United States up the ladder of escalation would be far too costly.<sup>59</sup>

In a war with the PRC over Taiwan, relying on the strategy of denial, Colby tells us, Washington would seek to avoid using nuclear weapons for "city-busting," attacks on nuclear command centers, or direct attempts to "decapitate" the PRC's political leadership. There could be no "one fell-swoop" attack that would force the PRC to employ its full deterrent. Nonetheless, Washington could win the war, Colby argues, by making it prohibitively costly for China to escalate to the next level. This would include, in the U.S. climb up the ladder of escalation, attacks on mainland China's "internal transportation infrastructure...energy production and distribution sites, telecommunication nodes, and airports and seaports," plus, at a further level of escalation, its "industrial base, commercial technology production and financial sector," extending all the way to counterforce attacks on China's "nuclear power projection forces" and "ultimately regime targets," that is, aimed at the CPC itself. If the PRC were to succeed in securing Taiwan, which is seen as likely in such a conflict, the United States, Colby contends, should be prepared to fight a limited war to "recapture" it, as part of

<sup>57</sup> ↪ Daniel McCarthy, "Why Elbridge Colby Matters," Compact, February 21, 2025; Kelley Beaucar Vlahos, "Realists Cheer as Elbridge Colby Named Top DoD Official for Policy," Responsible Statecraft, December 23, 2024; Elbridge A. Colby and Kevin Roberts, "The Correct Conservative Approach to Ukraine Shifts the Focus to China," Time, March 21, 2023.

<sup>58</sup> ↪ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, Defense Acquisition University, dau.edu; John Bellamy Foster, "The U.S. Quest for Nuclear Primacy," 15; Jacob Heilbrunn, "Elbridge Colby Wants to Finish What Donald Trump Started," Politico, April 11, 2023.

<sup>59</sup> ↪ Elbridge A. Colby, *The Strategy of Denial: American Defence in an Age of Great Power Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 83, 95, 147, 172, 183.

the overall denial strategy. Colby's strategy of denial with respect to Taiwan involves building up the military capabilities of Taipei and of the first and second island chains of U.S. bases in the Indo-Pacific, as well as expanding U.S. military alliances throughout the region in preparation for a limited war. This could, he contends, escalate into a limited nuclear war, while theoretically avoiding total escalation to nuclear war. The United States recently, under the Biden administration, installed intermediate-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons in the Philippines, where they can strike the Chinese mainland.<sup>60</sup>

A crucial part of such so-called "defence" thinking is that the United States, because of its forward deployment, would be in a position to attack the Chinese mainland with regional forces and intermediate-range missiles, while the PRC would have few options to reply in kind—short of use of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of reaching the U.S. mainland—and hence would be reduced to targets like the major U.S. military base in Guam. If China were actually to reply with ICBM strikes on the U.S. mainland in response to U.S. attacks on the Chinese mainland, this would risk ushering in a full-scale global thermonuclear exchange. According to Colby, Washington should therefore strive, even in a limited nuclear war, to inflict damage to the PRC mainland sufficient to force China to accept a U.S. victory, while stopping short of what would induce China to attack the U.S. mainland—since this would have a high probability of inducing a global holocaust.

Colby's extraordinarily dangerous and fanciful strategy thus focuses irrationally on a limited war with China, which, in his own conception, would likely escalate into a limited nuclear war. It is wilfully asserted that escalation on China's part could be controlled and limited by U.S. dominance of each step in the escalation ladder, leading to "war termination" and final victory for the United States.

The 2018 National Defence Strategy, which was largely based on Colby's formulation, is sometimes referred to as "peace through strength." It was predicated on preparation to fight a limited nuclear war with China, with the assumption that victory can be achieved by "superior performance within a given set of rules," short of nuclear apocalypse for all parties.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, reason suggests that Colby's strategy of denial involving U.S. attacks on the Chinese mainland, likely escalating to counterforce attacks on strategic/nuclear targets, vastly increases the likelihood of MAD as the final outcome. A general thermonuclear exchange would lead to the extermination of almost all of global humanity due to megafires in hundreds of cities pushing smoke and soot into the stratosphere and the onset of nuclear winter.<sup>62</sup>

In his Senate confirmation hearings, Rubio flatly asserted that China would invade Taiwan this decade unless the repercussions of such a military engagement would be too steep, using the term "porcupine strategy" for the strategy of denial. He argued that Taiwan had to be armed to the teeth and that the U.S. military needed to be prepared to deny China's coercive resumption of direct sovereign rule of the island by making it cost prohibitive. In his own nomination hearing, Colby stated that Taiwan needs to increase its military spending from under 3 percent to 10 percent of its GDP. U.S. officials have continually referred to a planned PRC invasion of Taiwan in the lead-up to 2027, known as the "Davidson Window" after a declaration to that effect in 2021 by outgoing head of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Phil Davidson (who received his appointment under Trump). However, there is no real basis for the claim, with

<sup>60</sup> ↪ Colby, *The Strategy of Denial*, 182–83, 197; Elbridge A. Colby and Yashar Parsie, *Building a Strategy for Escalation and War Termination*, Marathon Initiative, November 2022, 9, 17–18, 20–23; Abdul Rahman, "China Demands Withdrawal of U.S. Missile System from the Philippines, Calls It a Threat to Regional Peace and Security," *People's Dispatch*, December 28, 2024. On the U.S. forward military deployment and the encirclement of China, see Foster and Clark, "Imperialism in the Indo-Pacific," 13–19.

<sup>61</sup> ↪ Colby, *The Strategy of Denial*, 90; Colby and Parsie, *Building a Strategy of Escalation and War Termination*, 17; Bill Gertz, "Pentagon Policy Nominee Says U.S. Must Act or Risk Losing War with China: Colby Vows to Adopt America First and Peace Through Strength," *Washington Times*, March 4, 2025.

<sup>62</sup> ↪ John Bellamy Foster, "'Notes on Exterminism' for the Twenty-First Century Ecology and Peace Movements," *Jus Semper*, June 2022.

respect to either the 2027 date or the decision on the part of China to intervene militarily. Beijing's official policy remains one of peaceful unification across the strait. According to Defence News, the fact that "DC became obsessed" with the idea of a invasion of Taiwan by the PRC by 2027 has influenced U.S. national security and military policy on China, creating additional tensions in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>63</sup>

Needless to say, while U.S. military operations are customarily couched in terms of "defence," this is invariably accompanied by the statement that the United States, as part of its official nuclear posture, is prepared to carry out a nuclear first strike, which remains at all times "on the table." As Musk, the Pentagon's biggest military contractor, put it in a 2024 interview of Trump, a nuclear holocaust "is not as scary as people think." He added that "Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed but now they are full cities again." Trump agreed, replying "That's great, that's great."<sup>64</sup>

Trump's most extravagant and inane military initiative is his "Golden Dome" meant to shield the United States from incoming missiles. In the initial stages, this would involve improvements of ground-based missile interceptors. The main emphasis, though, is on the development of thousands of satellites in outer space armed with hypersonic missiles. The lead in obtaining contracts to build the Golden Dome seems to lie at present with Musk's SpaceX, which dominates the field of small satellites and space launches and is the primary U.S. defence contractor in space-based weaponry. Moreover, the SpaceX cutout Castilion, led by ex-senior SpaceX employees, is focusing on the development of hypersonic missiles. Another leading contender for the Golden Dome contracts is major defence contractor Booz Allen Hamilton, which is floating its "Brilliant Swarms" idea entailing a whole constellation of satellites on twenty orbital planes from three hundred kilometres up, run by artificial intelligence, each satellite constituting a kill vehicle.<sup>65</sup>

Although Trump's envisioned Golden Dome is advertised as a defensive shield for the United States, its main purpose is offensive, as a United States effectively protected from incoming missiles would have nuclear primacy or first strike capability able to pick off stray missiles that had survived an initial attack on another nuclear superpower. Such a system would be absolutely useless against a full-scale nuclear attack by another superpower since it would share in the weaknesses of all other anti-ballistic missile systems in that it would easily be overrun by numbers. Moreover, missiles on the ground will always be easier and cheaper to build than space-based interceptors. Indeed, in order to take advantage of superior U.S. counterforce and space weaponry and to make his Golden Dome nuclear shield feasible, Trump has floated the idea of strategic denuclearisation that would limit the number of warheads/ballistic missiles on each side. This is because one of the main means of ensuring nuclear survivability, and the chief means of penetrating missile shields designed to provide first strike capability, is the sheer number of missiles. In fact, Trump's building of a Golden Dome is likely to make any further nuclear disarmament impossible and instead to launch a new nuclear arms race.<sup>66</sup>

Although Trump's Golden Dome is ostensibly aimed at protecting the U.S. population from nuclear exterminism, his administration simultaneously is revoking all efforts to protect the U.S. and world population from exterminism

<sup>63</sup> ↪ Micah McCartney, "China Will Launch War This Decade, Trump Nominee Says," Newsweek, January 16, 2025; "Taiwan Needs to Hike Defense Spending to 10% —Pentagon Nominee," Reuters, March 4, 2025; Noah Robertson, "How DC Became Obsessed with a Potential 2027 Chinese Invasion of Taiwan," DefenseNews, May 7, 2024; John Culver, "China, Taiwan, and the PLA's 2027 Milestones," The Interpreter, February 12, 2025, [lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter).

<sup>64</sup> ↪ Alisha Rahaman Sarkar, "Elon Musk Draws Fire for Playing Down Impact of Atomic Bombing of Japan: 'Not as Scary as People Think,'" Independent, August 13, 2024; Sumanti Sen, "Elon Musk Under Fire for 'Minimizing' Hiroshima and Nagasaki Tragedy by Saying It's 'Not as Scary as People Think,'" Hindustan Times, April 13, 2024.

<sup>65</sup> ↪ Patrick Tucker, "Trump to Get Golden Dome Options Next Week: Defense Source," Defense One, March 27, 2025; Binoy Kampmark, "Trump's Star Wars Revival: The Golden Dome Antimissile Fantasy," Dissident Voice, March 25, 2025.

<sup>66</sup> ↪ Zeke Miller and Michelle L. Price, "Trump Wants Denuclearization Talks with Russia and China, Hopes for Defense Spending Cuts," Associated Press, February 14, 2025.

associated with global warming. His MAGA regime has not only directly eliminated all federal climate change mitigation efforts, but in an Executive Order released in April 2025, he ordered the U.S. Attorney General to take actions aimed at preventing the enforcement of all existing state and local government laws directed at combating climate change. He did this by simply decreeing that such state and local measures to protect the environment were illegal and violated administration policy.<sup>67</sup>

## America First/Amerika Über Alles

Noam Chomsky famously argued that propaganda in democratic societies had to be more sophisticated than in authoritarian states, since in the former it occurs behind the backs of the people, relying on deeply internalised values and media complicity, using all the techniques developed in advertising/marketing, while in the latter it could be quite crude and open, enforced by the bludgeon.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, fascist-style propaganda against whole ethnicities and peoples, as Adolf Hitler's Germany demonstrated, is arguably at its most effective when presented in its most blatantly crude form, relying not so much on a bludgeon but on inducing masses of people to openly identify with it, even while conscious of its dehumanising and coercive character, drawing on "accumulated rage" generated by capitalism. This then becomes the high point of irrationalism. As Bloch wrote, the Nazi brownshirts were entirely "honest in one thing: in the art of not telling the truth," a brazen retreat from reason.<sup>69</sup>

A good example of such irrationalist propaganda is the infamous November 1933 Nazi poster that read "With Adolf Hitler, Yes for Equality and Peace."<sup>70</sup> The 1919 Treaty of Versailles had limited the German military to one hundred thousand troops. When the League of Nations refused to comply with Hitler's demands for rearming the country, Hitler held a national plebiscite on November 12, 1933, the fifteenth anniversary of the armistice that brought the First World War to an end. The Nazi slogan, as in the poster, was a call to support Hitler for "Equality and Peace." The population was asked to back the Führer in demanding equality of status for the German nation in its ability to make war, along with an accompanying promise of peace through strength. All of this was part of an attempt to make Germany great again after its defeat in the First World War and the indignities of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>71</sup>

Propaganda is not simply a matter of lies, it can also occur when truth claims are set aside altogether. Within contemporary philosophy, the concept of "bullshit" is seen as a form of "persuasive communication, distinguished from lying, that has no regard for truth, knowledge, or evidence." By ending rational debate, pure bullshit is often more effective than standard propaganda, even of the Orwellian variety, since it does not simply invert the truth, but openly exhibits contempt for truth of any kind, advertising its muscular, scornful, and evasive perspective.<sup>72</sup> It is thus a potent weapon of irrationalism. Climate change denialists often rely on bullshit in this sense to combat science, proudly exhibiting their denial of reason itself.<sup>73</sup> In announcing his "Liberation Day" tariffs, Trump said that "for decades, our country has been looted, pillaged, raped, and plundered by nations near and far, friend and foe alike," employing a rhetoric that was so hyperbolic and irrational that it can be classified not so much as a case of lying as pure bullshit. It

<sup>67</sup> ↪ Donald J. Trump, "The White House, Protecting American Energy from State Overreach," Executive Orders, April 8, 2025.

<sup>68</sup> ↪ Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Barsamian, *Chronicles of Dissent* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1992), 62–63.

<sup>69</sup> ↪ Bloch, *The Heritage of Our Times*, 70, 108–11, translation punctuation slightly modified.

<sup>70</sup> ↪ "Propaganda Advertisement Implying that Hitler Supports Equality and Peace," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accession Number: 1990.333.7, collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn3775.

<sup>71</sup> ↪ Norm Haskett, "Germany Exits League of Nations," *The Daily Chronicles of World War II*, ww2days.com.

<sup>72</sup> ↪ Vukašin Gligorić, Allard Feddes, and Bertjan Doosje, "Political Bullshit Receptivity and Its Correlates: A Cross-Country Validation of the Concept," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 10, no. 2 (2022): 411–29; Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>73</sup> ↪ Joshua Luczak, "Climate Denialism Bullshit Is Harmful," *Asian Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (2023): 1–20.

did not even pretend to be an accurate portrayal of the truth, but exhibited a disdainful attitude toward the entire world—one which, as the Marxist economist Paul A. Baran said in relation to Fyodor Dostoevsky's character, the Underground Man, "vomits up reason."<sup>74</sup>

When Trump declared in the 2024 elections in Dearborn, Michigan, that "I am the peace candidate," and went on to declare "I am peace," some took him simply at his word, failing to perceive this as a propagandistic statement by a leader of a neofascist, hypernationalist, racist movement, backed by the most conservative sectors of the U.S. ruling class.<sup>75</sup> During his election campaign, he intimated that he had a secret plan to bring peace to Gaza. He began to put this into place upon entering the White House by proposing, together with Netanyahu, the extermination/relocation of the entire Palestinian population of Gaza: that is, the peace of the grave.

Some previous leftists like Parenti have argued that Trump is an "America-First isolationist" opposed to empire.<sup>76</sup> In reality, "America First," historically was an imperialist slogan, more closely related to the title of the Nazi slogan *Deutschland über alles* ("Germany Above All") than to historical U.S. isolationism, itself largely a myth. *Deutschland über alles* was taken from the German national anthem adopted during the Weimar Republic, where it originally referred to the unification of Germany. It was reinterpreted and made into a slogan, weaponising the national anthem in Hitler's Third Reich, standing for a kind of German manifest destiny to rule Europe. In a somewhat analogous historical development, the slogan "America First" was introduced by Woodrow Wilson to stand for U.S. neutrality in the First World War—just prior to U.S. entry into the "War to End All Wars." In the 1930s, the media monopolist William Randolph Hearst placed "America First" on the masthead of his papers and celebrated the "great achievement" of the Nazi regime in Germany, with Hearst personally interviewing Hitler. Charles Lindbergh, the world-famous aviator, became the head of the America First Committee at the time of the Second World War and an exponent of Aryan racial superiority and antisemitism. He was presented with a medal by Field Marshall Hermann Göring on behalf of Hitler. The Anti-Defamation League urged Trump to drop the America First slogan, given its pro-Nazi history, but he continued to use it to define his foreign policy.<sup>77</sup>

Trump's slogan of "peace through strength" had its origins in the Roman Empire. It is said to have first been used by the Emperor Hadrian, best known for Hadrian's Wall, which was built in the Roman province of Britain in 122 CE. The wall was intended to help defend the boundaries of the Roman Empire, at the moment of its greatest expansion, against barbarian "invaders."<sup>78</sup> As imperial decline commences, the notion of barbarian invaders soon becomes ubiquitous, leading to demands to build border walls and Golden Domes. The irrationalism of the Trump Doctrine of renewed U.S. global domination through an aggressive racial nationalism points to what István Mészáros termed the "potentially deadliest phase of imperialism," a period of nuclear-armed barbarism.<sup>79</sup>

Writing in 1935, during the consolidation of the Nazi regime in *The Heritage of Our Times*, Bloch observed: "We have really reached the trump card here after a hundred years of the German workers' movement: a monster has come true

<sup>74</sup> ↪ Josh Boak, "[Trump Launches Tariffs, Saying Global Trade Has 'Looted, Pillaged, Raped, Plundered' US Economy](#)," Associated Press, April 2, 2025; Paul A. Baran, [The Longer View](#) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), 104.

<sup>75</sup> ↪ Mehdi Hasan, "[Is Donald Trump a Foreign Policy Dove?: If Only](#)," Guardian, November 13, 2024; Tia Goldenberg, "Trump Promises to Bring Lasting Peace to a Tumultuous Middle East. But Fixing It Won't Be Easy," Associated Press, November 6, 2024.

<sup>76</sup> ↪ Parenti, "Trump's Real Crime Is Opposing Empire."

<sup>77</sup> ↪ Lawrence S. Wittner, "The Ugly Origins of Trump's 'America First' Policy," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, March 19, 2024.

<sup>78</sup> ↪ Jarrett A. Lobell, "The Wall at the End of Empire," *Archaeology* 70, no. 3 (May–June 2017): 26–35.

<sup>79</sup> ↪ István Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 23–56.

and is committing the proletarians in chains to the Thousand-Year Reich, to capital finance as national community.”<sup>80</sup> In 2025, the United States is subject to a neofascist movement of enormous significance, in which the “trump card here,” after a long history of democratic struggle rooted in workers’ movements, is that “a monster has come true,” committing workers increasingly “in chains” to “capital finance as national community” and to a New Cold War against China and the Global South.

The billionaire ruling class of the United States has—along the path of support for Israeli genocide of Palestinians and a prospective war with China—shifted its support from liberal democracy to neofascism, or at best to a neofascist-neoliberal alliance. Key sections of the capitalist class have mobilised the lower-middle class on the basis of a nationalist, revanchist ideology, in which the population of most of the world is seen as the enemy. Structures are being put in place that are meant to eliminate the possibility of a mass democratic revolt from below and the reversal of today’s destructive trends. There is only one movement on Earth capable of turning these dangerous and destructive trends around on behalf of humanity as a whole: the global movement toward socialism, which is also necessarily an anti-imperialist movement. The worst error that could be made in this dire situation would be to underestimate the danger, or the extent, of the revolutionary human struggle now required.

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<sup>80</sup> ↩ Bloch, *The Heritage of Our Times*, 67.

❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Jus Semper Global Alliance aims to contribute to achieving a sustainable ethos of social justice in the world, where all communities live in truly democratic environments that provide full enjoyment of human rights and sustainable living standards in accordance with human dignity. To accomplish this, it contributes to the liberalisation of the democratic institutions of society that have been captured by the owners of the market. With that purpose, it is devoted to research and analysis to provoke the awareness and critical thinking to generate ideas for a transformative vision to materialise the truly democratic and sustainable paradigm of People and Planet and NOT of the market.

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