The Jus Semper Global Alliance

In Pursuit of the People and Planet Paradigm

Sustainable Human Development

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NATO and the Long War on the Third World

They say to me: Eat and drink. Be glad you have it!
But how can I eat and drink if I snatch what I eat
From the starving, and
My glass of water belongs to one dying of thirst?
And yet I eat and drink.[1]
—Bertolt Brecht

Pawel Wargan

The Two Axes of Counterrevolution

NATO und Totenkopf [NATO and Skull]. By Mr. Schnellerklärt - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, Link.

For the first time in capitalism's long history, the global economic center of gravity is shifting decisively eastward. The balance of trade now favours China, and the nations of the Third World are preparing for the end of the era of U.S. hegemony, a period of enforced imbalances in the world-capitalist system that accelerated the underdevelopment of postcolonial societies. The tectonic movements unleashed by this process are sending tremors around the globe. The so-called "Western world," formed over centuries by the dominance of capital, is impotent in the face of the catastrophes of hunger, poverty, and climate change. Barred from marshalling their economic might towards the betterment of society—a process that would challenge the preeminence of private property—the old colonial powers are siphoning resources toward the protection of private wealth. Fascism is rearing its head, and fresh crosshairs are being painted on nations seeking to embark on the path of sovereign development. In this way, the counterrevolutionary drive of the old Cold War is carried forward into a new century, once again filled with promise and terror in equal measure.

In the twentieth century, the colonial counterrevolution would play out along two geographic axes. One was the war of Western nations against the cascading process of emancipation unleashed in the east. In 1917, men and women with sweaty brows and calloused hands seized power in Russia. They would achieve what no peoples had yet been able to

[1] ↩ Bertolt Brecht, "To Posterity," Chicago Labor and Arts Festival (blog), chilaborarts.wordpress.com.

do. They built an industrialised state that could not only defend their hard-won sovereignty, but also projected it toward those living under colonialism's yoke. The clarion call of October would be heard around the world. For Ho Chi Minh, it shone like a "brilliant sun…over all five continents." It opened, Mao Zedong said, "wide possibilities for the emancipation of the peoples of the world and opened up the realistic paths towards it." Years later, Fidel Castro said that, "without the existence of the Soviet Union, Cuba's socialist revolution would have been impossible." The barefoot, the illiterate, the hungry, and those whose backs were strained by the plow learned that they, too, could rise up against the indignities of colonialism and win.

In 1919, Leon Trotsky wrote the Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World, which would be adopted by fifty-one delegates on the final day of the First Congress of the Communist International. The Manifesto saw in the First World War a battle to preserve the grip of the colonial world on humanity:

> *The colonial populations were drawn into the European war on an unprecedented scale. Indians, Blacks, Arabs and Malagasy fought on the territories of Europe—for the sake of what? For the right to remain the slaves of Britain and France. Never before has the infamy of capitalist rule in the colonies been delineated so clearly; never before has the problem of colonial slavery been posed so sharply as it is today.*

If that war was a expression of imperialist rivalry for the division of the spoils of colonialism, then the principal duty of internationalism was to strike at imperialism. This was the message that Indian revolutionary M. N. Roy brought to the Second Congress of the Communist International. "European capitalism draws its strength in the main not so much from the industrial countries of Europe as from its colonial possessions," he wrote in his Supplementary Theses On The National And Colonial Question.[2] Since the super-profits of the imperialist ruling classes were fuelled by the systematic looting of the colonies, liberating colonised peoples would also bring about an end to imperialism—a challenge that the workers of capitalist states, fed and clothed by imperial plunder, would not deliver. "The European working class will only succeed in overthrowing the capitalist order once [the source of its profits] has finally been stopped up," Roy wrote. Informed by these interventions, the Communist International set itself the task of organising the peasant and proletarian masses in the colonies. From nationalist anti-imperialists to pan-Islamists, these groups represented the vanguard of the revolutionary anticolonial struggle. The Soviet Union would extend "a helping hand to these masses," V. I. Lenin said, the October Revolution blowing in their tall sails.[3]

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The establishment of a state hostile to capitalism and colonial domination was intolerable to the imperialist powers. In the first three decades of its existence, the Soviet Union was tossed from invader to invader. In the waning years of the First World War, imperial Germany made way for the powers of the Entente, the United States and the United Kingdom among them, who backed the Tsarist White Army in its war to preserve bourgeois rule in Russia. Then came Adolf Hitler's Germany. If the Nazi movement caught Europe unaware, its festering roots were plain to see for the world's colonised peoples. In 1900, W. E. B. Du Bois had warned

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[2] ↩ Minutes of the Second Congress of the Communist International, Fourth Session, July 25, 1921, Marxists Internet Archive, marxists.org.

[3] ↩ V. I. Lenin, "Report of The Commission on The National and The Colonial Questions," in *The Second Congress of The Communist International* (Publishing House of the Communist International, 1921).

that the exploitation of the colonised world would be fatal to Europe's "high ideals of justice, freedom and culture." That warning would be furiously and solemnly echoed by Aimé Césaire fifty years later. "Before they were its victims," he wrote, Europeans were Nazism's accomplices: "they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them…they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimised it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples."

It is impossible to extricate Hitler's mission from the long project of European colonialism, or the particular expression it found in U.S. settler-colonialism. Hitler openly admired how the United States had "gunned down the millions of Redskins to a few hundred thousand, and now keep[s] the modest remnant under observation in a cage." The war of extermination waged by the Nazi regime sought nothing less than the colonisation of Eastern Europe and the enslavement of its people, aiming to conquer the "Wild East" just as U.S. settlers had conquered the "Wild West." In this way, Nazism carried forward the colonial tradition against the emancipatory promise unleashed in October 1917—and for that reason, Italian philosopher Domenico Losurdo would call it the first colonial counterrevolution. Germany, Hitler said in 1935, would stand as "the bulwark of the West against Bolshevism."[4]

In the United States, Harry S. Truman did little to conceal the cynical opportunism that is still characteristic of the U.S. establishment today. "If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia. And if Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany and that way let them kill as many as possible," the future president said on the eve of Operation Barbarossa, which would claim 27 million Soviet lives.

Precisely because fascism promised to preserve the structure of capital ownership, the West remained complaisant and unprincipled in its opposition to it before, during, and after the war. In the United Kingdom, which had financed Benito Mussolini's rise from the start, Winston Churchill openly expressed his sympathies for fascism as a tool against the Communist threat. In the United States, Harry S. Truman did little to conceal the cynical opportunism that is still characteristic of the U.S. establishment today. "If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia. And if Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany and that way let them kill as many as possible," the future president said on the eve of Operation Barbarossa, which would claim 27 million Soviet lives. The New York Times would later celebrate this "attitude" as laying the groundwork for Truman's "firm policy" as President. That firmness involved the first and only uses of nuclear weapons in history—"a hammer" against the Soviets, as Truman once called the bomb. The ashes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki coloured the Cold War for decades to come, intoxicating their architects with the promise of omnipotence. In 1952, Truman contemplated issuing the Soviet Union and China an ultimatum: compliance, or the incineration of every manufacturing plant from Stalingrad to Shanghai. Across the Atlantic, Churchill, too, basked in the atomic glow. Sir Alan Brooke, head of the British Imperial General Staff, recorded in his diaries that Churchill saw "himself capable of eliminating all the Russian centres of industry." With the advent of the atomic bomb, white supremacy had acquired supreme power.[5]

The threat of annihilation pushed the Soviet Union to accelerate its own nuclear program, at tremendous cost to its political project. The USSR would eventually build military parity with the United States, but the constraints imposed by the arms race limited its social development. Economic and political burdens mounted for the young state. These would be absorbed into and amplified by George Kennan's "doctrine of containment"—a broad set of policies designed to

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[4] ↩ Robert J. Miller, "Nazi Germany and American Indians," *Indian Country Today*, August 14, 2019. See Pedro Marin, "Domenico Losurdo interviewed by Opera Magazine (2017)," February 22, 2022, redsails.org.

[5] ↩ Tom Kingston, "Britain 'secretly backed' Mussolini's March on Rome," *The Times*, October 3, 2022; Alden Whitman, "Harry S. Truman: Decisive President," *New York Times*, December 27, 1972; Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 182; Arthur Bryant, *Triumph in the West* (London: Collins, 1959), 478.

[In Russia] the number of poor people increased from 2.2 million in 1987–88 to 74.2 million in 1993–95—from 2% of the population to 50% in just over five years.

isolate the Soviet Union and limit the "spread of Communism" around the world. Facing a new set of contradictions that could not be resolved militarily for fear of mutual destruction, U.S. policy aimed to "enormously increase the strains" on Soviet governance to "promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the breakup or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power."[6]

By the late 1980s, accelerated by contradictions in its socialist process, the material, political, and ideological strains on Soviet governance became intolerable. Perhaps driven by a naive faith in détente with the old West, Mikhail Gorbachev's administration introduced reforms in a process that sidelined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and paved the way for the consolidation of the opposition around Boris Yeltsin, who dismantled the USSR. The Soviet people would pay a tremendous price—one that was particularly severe in Russia. In the 1990s, Russia experienced a profound drop in living standards as public assets were captured by a bourgeoisie that quickly ingratiated itself with Western financial capital. Its GDP collapsed by 40 percent. Its industrial inputs fell by half, and real wages dropped to half of what they were in 1987. The number of poor people increased from 2.2 million in 1987–88 to 74.2 million in 1993–95 —from 2 percent of the population to 50 percent in just over five years.[7] Life expectancy decreased by five years for men and three years for women, and millions died under the regime of privatisation and shock therapy between 1989 and 2002.[8] In that time of collapse and depravity, half a million Russian women were trafficked into sexual slavery.[9] As the instruments of Western colonisation began to seep in through every crack, crevice, and pore, similar stories emerged across the disintegrating Union. It is telling that this was the only time that Russia was considered a friend to the West.

Unconsummated on the European battlefield, the Cold War between the eastern and western nations alchemized into an epochal assault by the North against the South.

The assault on the Soviet Union was one axis in the war against human liberation. The other would sharpen as the United States emerged as a global hegemon after the Second World War. Unconsummated on the European battlefield, the Cold War between the eastern and western nations alchemized into an epochal assault by the North against the South. From Korea to Indonesia, Afghanistan to Congo, Guatemala to Brazil, tens of millions of lives were claimed in a battle that would pit popular forces against a shape-shifting imperialism that tolerated no dissidence from its extractive drive. If the United States and its allies could not defeat the Soviet Union in direct military confrontation, they would wield extreme violence in the service of a grand strategy that, as early as 1952, sought to establish nothing "less than preponderant power."[10] As British historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote, the violence—both actual and threatened—unleashed in this time could "reasonably be regarded as a Third World War, though a very

Some 80 percent of U.S. military interventions after 1946 took place after the fall of the USSR. From Afghanistan to Libya, these terrible wars served both to invigorate the militarist project in the United States and signal that dissidence would not be tolerated beyond its borders.

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6 ↩ George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Policy*, July 1, 1947.

7 ↩ Branko Milanovic, Income, Inequality, and Poverty During the Transition from Planned to Market Economy (World Bank, 1997).

8 ↩ David Stuckler, Lawrence King, and Martin McKee, "Mass Privatisation and the Post-Communist Mortality Crisis: A Cross-National Analysis," *Lancet* 373, no. 9661 (2019).

9 ↩ Mary Buckley, "Human Trafficking in the Twenty-First Century," in *Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia*, ed. Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press).

10 ↩ Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Nitze) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews), Office of the Historian (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 1952).

peculiar one"; with the advent of the atomic bomb, the cold zones of this world war threatened at times to sear humanity from existence. Between these two axes of the Cold War, then, we find a historic battle between competing engines of emancipation and submission.

That struggle never ended. Instead, the project of human liberation was deferred, its promise of dignity put on hold. From Angola to Cuba, nations that depended on bonds of solidarity with the USSR were devastated by its collapse. If Soviet power acted as a check on U.S. belligerence, the unipolar moment inaugurated an era of impunity. The United States found itself with nearly free reign to influence or topple governments that stood opposed to it; some 80 percent of U.S. military interventions after 1946 took place after the fall of the USSR. From Afghanistan to Libya, these terrible wars served both to invigorate the militarist project in the United States and signal that dissidence would not be tolerated beyond its borders. In doing so, they helped sustain a cruel balance in the capitalist world system, condemning the states of the Third World to a position of permanent underdevelopment to protect the rapaciousness of Western monopolies.[11]

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That was the significance of Lenin's insights on imperialism and their application to the project of the Third International. At an advanced stage, Lenin wrote, capitalism will export not only goods but also capital itself—not only cars and textiles, but also smelting plants and factories, moving abroad in search of workers to exploit and resources to plunder. This process disciplines workers in the advanced capitalist countries, who are muzzled by the threat of unemployment hovering over them and pacified by the welfare that imperialist loot makes possible. The advanced capitalist countries develop by exploiting their own people and the people and resources of distant territories. This essentially parasitic relation secures the profitability and continued expansion of Western monopolies as national interests, ultimately backed by brute force. In the bind of global exploitation, states of the Third World cannot hope to achieve any meaningful level of development. Economic underdevelopment in turn arrests social change. A people who cannot eat or go to school, who cannot heal their sick or live in peace, cannot advance freedom or creativity. This underdevelopment is reflected in the character of their states, and in the capacity to engage in relations with others and defend against threats. In this way, imperialism's totalising power distorts social and economic processes both within the imperialist bloc and in states that seek to embark on sovereign development paths. This is why the struggle between imperialism and decolonisation must be understood as the principal contradiction—the determinative battle for the future of humanity.[12]

Where do we find that imperialism today? We find it among the two billion people who struggle to eat. We find it in the fragility, conflict, or violence that two-thirds of humanity will face in the coming decade.... The development of the Western world, secured by its global counterrevolution, is the mirror image of Third-World misery.

Where do we find that imperialism today? We find it among the two billion people who struggle to eat. We find it in the fragility, conflict, or violence that two-thirds of humanity will face in the coming decade. We find it in the many livelihoods that are regularly swept away by rising tides, drought-stricken fields, and creeping desert sands, and among the billion people who do not own a single pair of shoes. We find it in the arduous march, tens of millions strong, of subsistence peasants who are forced from their lands each year by misery and violence—an ongoing flight from

[11] ↩ Barbara S. Torreon and Sofia Plagakis, "Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798–2022," (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2022).

[12] ↩ V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2010); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso, 2018).

capitalism unmatched by even the most fanciful counts of "dissidents" and "escapees" from Communism. We find it in the gold and cobalt, diamonds and tin, phosphates and oil, zinc and manganese, uranium and land whose expropriation sees the headquarters of Western corporations and financial institutions grow to increasingly dazzling proportions. The development of the Western world, secured by its global counterrevolution, is the mirror image of Third-World misery.[13]

NATO and the Counterrevolution

Like the fascist project, NATO was forged in anti-Communism. The ashes of the Second World War had not yet settled in Europe, and the United States was busy rehabilitating fascist dictators, from Francisco Franco in Spain to António de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal. (The latter became a founding member of the North Atlantic alliance.) The United States and Western Europe absorbed thousands of fascists into institutions of power through amnesties that violated Allied agreements on the return of war criminals. This included figures like Adolf Heusinger, a senior Nazi officer and associate of Hitler. Heusinger was wanted by the Soviet Union for war crimes, but the West had different designs. Heusinger became head of the West German military in 1957 and later served as Chairman of the NATO Military Committee. Across Europe, covert "stay-behind" operations cultivated a new generation of militants to thwart left-wing political projects—beginning in at least 1948, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency funnelled millions in annual funding to right-wing groups in Italy alone, and made it clear that it was "willing to intervene militarily" if the Communist Party seized power in the country. Hundreds were massacred in attacks carried out by these groups, many of which were pinned on the left—part of a "Strategy of Tension" that terrorised people into abandoning their loyalties to the rising Communist and socialist movements. NATO's mandate derived explicitly from "the threat posed by the Soviet Union," and the rising popularity of Communism outside of the USSR fell within its purview. In this way, NATO constrained democratic choices and undermined security within its member states, resolving political contradictions in favor of the capitalist order and its right-wing servants.[14]

NATO's dark mandate did not stop there. If Trotsky saw in the First World War a cynical ploy to engage the colonised world in the project of its own submission, Walter Rodney recognised the same forces at work in NATO's violent enterprise on the African continent: "Virtually the whole of North Africa was turned into a sphere of operations for NATO, with bases aimed at the Soviet Union.… Time and time again, the evidence points to this cynical use of Africa to buttress capitalism economically and militarily, and therefore in effect forcing Africa to contribute to its own exploitation."[15]

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Along with projects like the European Union, NATO transformed the imperialist order. If the first part of the twentieth century seemed destined for endless inter-imperial conflict over the spoils of colonialism, by the 1950s a new, collective imperialism was in formation. Increasingly, global trade agreements and lending infrastructures engineered by the old colonial powers would see the spoils of imperial extraction shared among them. They also pooled their instruments of violence. In 1965, the Guinean revolutionary Amílcar Cabral described how the aggregate brutality of the West flowed into Africa through NATO, supporting the Salazar regime's wars against Portugal's colonies in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea, and Cabo Verde:

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[13] ↩ World Health Organization, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021 (2021); Vijay Prashad, "Solely Because of the Increasing Disorder: The Thirty-Sixth Newsletter," Tricontinental, September 9, 2021.

[14] ↩ Ronald Landa, "Previously Unpublished Draft Defense Department History Explores U.S. Policy toward Italy, Spotlights Role of Flamboyant Envoy, Clare Boothe Luce," National Security Archive, February 7, 2017.

[15] ↩ Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, 189.

> *NATO is the USA. We have captured in our country many U.S. weapons. NATO is the Federal Republic of Germany. We have a lot of Mauser rifles taken from Portuguese soldiers. NATO, for the time being at least, is France. In our country there are Alouette helicopters. NATO is, too, to a certain extent, the government of that heroic people which has given so many examples of love of freedom, the Italian people. Yes, we have captured from the Portuguese machine-guns and grenades made in Italy.*[16]

Today, weapons of war reflecting the full diversity of the "free world" litter all the front lines of imperialism, from Ukraine and Morocco to Israel and Taiwan. That violence would find its engine in imperialism's central node, the United States, which had long held its sights on total hegemony—an aspiration that the demise of the Soviet Union made irresistible. On March 7, 1992, the New York Times published a leaked document containing the blueprints for U.S. hegemony in the post-Soviet era. "Our first objective," the Defense Planning Guidance said, "is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere." The document, which became known as the Wolfowitz Doctrine after the U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy who co-authored it, asserted U.S. supremacy in the world system. It called for the "leadership necessary to establish and protect a new order" that would prevent "potential competitors" from seeking a greater role in the world. In the wake of the leak, the Wolfowitz Doctrine was revised by Dick Cheney and Colin Powell and became the doctrine of George W. Bush, leaving a trail of death and sorrow across the Middle East.[17]

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At that time, the contours of U.S. imperial strategy were most forcefully articulated by Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of the leading architects of twentieth-century U.S. foreign policy. In 1997, he published The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives. The fall of the Soviet Union, he wrote, saw the United States emerge "not only as the key arbiter of Eurasian power relations but also as the world's paramount power…the sole and, indeed, the first truly global power." Beginning in 1991, U.S. strategy would seek to entrench that position, arresting the historical process of Eurasian integration. For Brzezinski, Ukraine was an "important space on the Eurasian chessboard"—critical in tempering Russia's "deeply ingrained desire for a special Eurasian role." The United States, Brzezinski wrote, would not only pursue its geostrategic goals in the former Soviet Union but also represent "its own growing economic interest…in gaining unlimited access to this hitherto closed area."[18]

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That project would be realised in part through NATO. The alliance's expansion coincided with the creeping spread of neoliberalism, helping secure the dominance of U.S. financial capital and sustain the rapacious military-industrial complex that underpins much of its economy and society.[19] The umbilical bond between NATO membership and neoliberalism was expressed clearly by leading Atlanticists throughout the alliance's eastward march. On March 25, 1997, at a conference of the Euro-Atlantic Association held at Warsaw University, Joe Biden, then a senator, outlined the

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16 ↩ Amílcar Cabral, "The Nationalist Movement of the Portuguese Colonies," Marxist Internet Archive, marxists.org.

17 ↩ Patrick E. Tyler, "U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop," *New York Times*, March 8, 1992.

18 ↩ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* (New York: Basic, 1997), 51, 209.

19 ↩ James M. Cypher, "The Political Economy of Systemic U.S. Militarism," *Monthly Review* 73, no 11 (April 2022): 23–37.

conditions for Poland's accession to NATO. "All NATO member states have free-market economies with the private sector playing a leading role," he said. Furthermore,

> *The mass privatisation plan represents a major step toward giving the Polish people a direct stake in the economic future of their country. But this is not the time to stop. I believe that large, state-owned enterprises should also be placed in the hands of private owners, so that they can be operated with economic, rather than political interests in mind.… Businesses like banks, the energy sector, the state airline, the state copper producer, and the telecommunications monopoly will have to be privatised.*[20]

Membership in the imperialist alliance calls on states to surrender the very material basis of their sovereignty—a process that we see replicated with precision all along its violent path. In a recent proposal for Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, for example, the RAND Corporation lays out what could properly be described as a neocolonial agenda. From "creating an efficient market for private land" to "speeding privatisation… in 3,300 state-owned enterprises," its proposals add to a broad raft of liberalisation policies implemented with foreign influence and under the cover of war, including legislation that deprives the majority of Ukrainian workers of collective bargaining rights. In this way, the mission of NATO expansion is inseparable from the cancerous advance of the neoliberal model of globalisation, which hardens within NATO member states into a condition of perpetual exploitation.

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States within the alliance are required to siphon a substantial portion of their social surplus away from housing, jobs, and public infrastructure toward voracious military monopolies, the largest of which are based in the United States. In the process, they strengthen the domestic ruling class, which, as in Sweden and Finland, is the primary cheerleader for accession to NATO and stands to be its main beneficiary. These factors gradually foreclose anticapitalist and antimilitarist political alternatives: there can be no socialism within NATO.[21]

When my native Poland acquired its junior seat at the imperialist table, it became a vassal and a collaborator following the model of Vichy France. We were a nation that, under socialism, had helped channel our experiences in post-war reconstruction to the Third World.

Beyond the economic havoc, NATO accession carries with it the moral stain of the collective West's violence. When my native Poland acquired its junior seat at the imperialist table, it became a vassal and a collaborator following the model of Vichy France. We were a nation that, under socialism, had helped channel our experiences in post-war reconstruction to the Third World. Our architects, urban planners, and builders helped envision and construct mass housing projects and hospitals in Iraq. Decades later, we sent troops to lay siege to the cities we helped build. At the Stare Kiejkuty intelligence base in northeastern Poland, we hosted a clandestine U.S. prison, where detainees were viciously tortured—a clear violation of our national constitution. Budimex, a company that once drew up a development plan for Baghdad, has now completed building a wall along Poland's border with Belarus—a buffer against the Middle Eastern refugees that, in the words of Poland's ruling class, infect our nation with "parasites and protozoa." If fascism is a tool for shielding capitalism from democracy, NATO is its incubator.[22]

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[20] ↩ The Debate on NATO Enlargement, Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 105th Congress, vol. 4, 373 (1997).

[21] ↩ William Courtney, Khrystyna Holynska, and Howard J. Shatz, "Rebuilding Ukraine," The RAND Blog, April 18, 2022; "Arms production," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020), accessed June 15, 2022; Lily Lynch, "Joining the West," Sidecar (blog), *New Left Review*, May 20, 2022.

[22] ↩ Jan Cienski, "Migrants Carry 'Parasites and Protozoa,' Warns Polish Opposition Leader," *Politico*, October 14, 2015.

Russia and the Third World

In 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev presented a vision for a "European Common Home": a doctrine of restraint to replace a doctrine of deterrence, as he later put it, which would make armed conflict within Europe impossible. Just three years later, the promise of a new security order grounded in Gorbachev's proposals began to take shape. It might have seemed, for a time, within reach. The Charter of Paris for a New Europe, adopted by the countries of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in November 1990, contained the seeds for a shared security architecture grounded in the principles of "respect and co-operation" set out in the United Nations Charter. This new model of mutual security would have included the countries of the former Soviet Union, Russia among them.[23]

Publicly, NATO members supported the process and reaffirmed the commitments given by James Baker to Gorbachev in 1990 that NATO would "not expand an inch" eastward... But privately, the U.S. government was busy plotting its era of hegemony.

Publicly, NATO members supported the process and reaffirmed the commitments given by James Baker to Gorbachev in 1990 that NATO would "not expand an inch" eastward. Germany's Der Spiegel recently unearthed UK records from 1991 in which U.S., U.K., French, and German officials were unequivocal: "We could not…offer membership of NATO to Poland and the others."[24] But privately, the U.S. government was busy plotting its era of hegemony. "We prevailed, they didn't," George H. W. Bush said to Helmut Kohl in February 1990, the same month the United States gave the green light to the CSCE process. "We can't let the Soviets clutch victory from the jaws of defeat." No organisation would "replace NATO as the guarantor of Western security and stability," Bush told French President François Mitterrand in April of that year, no doubt referring to proposals taking shape within Europe. Successive waves of NATO expansion gradually eroded the idea that a common security architecture—outside of the sphere of U.S. domination—might emerge on the European continent.[25]

Still, as late as 2006, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov talked about participation in a "transformed NATO" grounded in proposals for demilitarisation and equal cooperation along the lines proposed under the Charter of Paris in 1990. But NATO expanded toward Russia's borders—not with it, but against it. This expansionist policy aimed at undermining processes of regional integration that were then picking up steam. Following the financial crisis of 2007–2008, Russia and China began dramatically to accelerate the construction of new infrastructures for regional cooperation. In parallel, China carried out seismic reforms to increase its independence from U.S. markets, establishing development programs and financial institutions that could operate outside of the U.S. sphere of influence. Together with Brazil, India, and South Africa, Russia and China set the BRICS process in motion in 2009. The Belt and Road Initiative was launched just four years later. These processes coincided with an increase in Russian energy sales both to China and to Europe, and the participation of many European states in the Belt and Road Initiative. The persistence of the EU's vicious austerity politics saw its member states turn to China as ports and bridges crumbled after years of underinvestment. These

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Since the Soviet era, U.S. strategists have recognised the particular threat that European-Russian energy trade would pose to U.S. interests.

[23] ↩ Christian Nünlist, Juhana Aunesluoma, and Benno Zogg, The Road to the Charter of Paris (Vienna: OSCE, 2017); Charter of Paris for a New Europe (Paris: OSCE, 1990).

[24] ↩ Klaus Wiegrefe, "Neuer Aktenfund von 1991 stützt russischen Vorwurf," *Der Spiegel*, February 18, 2022.

[25] ↩ Mary E. Sarotte, "A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow About NATO Expansion," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 90–97.

developments marked the first time in centuries that trade within Eurasia took place outside an adversarial context, on principles of partnership rather than domination.[26]

This threatened the basis of the so-called rules-based international order, the informal set of norms that sustain U.S. economic and political dominance. Since the Soviet era, U.S. strategists have recognised the particular threat that European-Russian energy trade would pose to U.S. interests—a warning that was repeated by every U.S. administration from Bush to Biden. The clear imperative, then, was to interrupt this process. The contours of this strategy became clearer as the West's march on Europe's eastern periphery continued. Reports like Extending Russia: Competing from Advantageous Ground, published in 2019 by the RAND Corporation, gave definition to strategic imperatives identified by Brzezinski more than two decades earlier. From halting Russia's gas exports to Europe and arming Ukraine, to advancing regime change in Belarus and exacerbating tensions in the southern Caucasus, the report set out a raft of measures aimed at pulling Russia apart at the seams. If Russia would not bend voluntarily to the interests of the West, it would be coerced into doing so, even if the entirety of Eurasia had to pay the price. The neocolonisation of Ukraine—a goal that warranted $5 billion in U.S. spending before 2014—represented, as Brzezinski had foreseen, a critical move on the Eurasian chessboard.[27]

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The obvious threat that these policies posed to Russian security was visible to U.S. leadership as early as 2008. "Experts tell us that Russia is particularly worried that the strong divisions in Ukraine over NATO membership, with much of the ethnic-Russian community against membership, could lead to a major split, involving violence or at worst, civil war," CIA director William Burns wrote to the U.S. ambassador in Moscow. "In that eventuality, Russia would have to decide whether to intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face."[28]

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Russia would come to see that only two paths lay ahead: submission to the peripheral status imposed on it in the 1990s, or deepening integration with other states in Eurasia. These forking possibilities reflected two tendencies within the Russian ruling class. One hoped for closer integration with Western financial capital along the model of the 1990s, which saw the wealth of the few balloon to extraordinary proportions. This tendency found cheerleaders in figures like Alexey Navalny, whose associate Leonid Volkov outlined a political strategy that would sideline the left in a project of regime change aimed at reinstating the pro-Western comprador class with the support of the burgeoning professional middle class in Russia's metropoles. The other represented a state-capitalist tendency that sought greater centralisation of economic power and could, eventually, find its outlet in more socialised economic governance. For a long time, Vladimir Putin's government navigated these two tendencies, a precarious see-saw between aggressive neoliberalism and the pursuit of economic sovereignty. But as the contradictions unleashed by Western belligerence heightened, the trajectory of Russian development began gradually to resolve toward the latter tendency—evidenced today by the spectacular way in which Western sanctions have boomeranged. Russia now regularly elevates socialist China as a model to be emulated.[29]

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26 ↩ Vijay Prashad, "The United States Wants to Prevent a Historical Fact—Eurasian Integration," Tricontinental, July 7, 2022.

27 ↩ James Dobbins et al., Extending Russia: Competing from Advantageous Ground (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019).

28 ↩ "Nyet Means Nyet: Russia's NATO Enlargement Redlines," cable from William J. Burns, 2008, Wikileaks.

29 ↩ Alexey Sakhnin, "The February Theses—The Left and the Political Crisis in Russia," Progressive International, April 21, 2021.

Hints of this direction could be seen in 2007. That year, Putin gave a speech at the Munich Security Conference. The erosion of international law, the projection of U.S. power, and the "uncontained hyper use of force" were, he said, creating a situation of profound insecurity around the world. He connected these developments to the dynamic of global inequality and the question of poverty, outlining one of the principal mechanisms of imperialism: "developed countries simultaneously keep their agricultural subsidies and limit some countries' access to high-tech products," a policy that sustains severe underdevelopment in the Third World. For Putin, the policy of unilateral military power projection, embodied not only in NATO but in other formations of U.S. military power around the world, served to expand a politics of subordination.

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If Western aggression pushed Russia to prioritise sovereign development, that historical process also pushed it into alignment with the broader Third World project. What was the threat of a "return to the nineties" in Russia, but the danger that the conditions for its economic sovereignty would be dismantled, producing the kinds of indignities experienced by most of the world's nations? That, in turn, would harden U.S.-led unipolarity, undermining the capacities for meaningful multilateralism in the world system. Russia's response has been to accelerate Eurasian integration—pursuing a vigorous relationship with China, India, and its regional neighbours—while expanding alliances with Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, and other states suffocated by the knee of U.S. imperialism. From South America to Asia, many nations have responded in kind. If Russian statehood and identity had historically careened between Eastern and Western tendencies—its national eagle facing ambiguously in both directions—Russia would come to situate both its past and its future firmly within the Third World. "The West is ready to cross every line to preserve the neocolonial system which allows it to live off the world," Putin said in 2022. It is prepared "to plunder it thanks to the domination of the dollar and technology, to collect an actual tribute from humanity, to extract its primary source of unearned prosperity, the rent paid to the hegemon."[30]

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The material imperatives shared by Russia and the Third World explain the isolation of the Western powers in their war of condemnation and economic siege against Russia. While Western leaders heralded the emergence of global unity in condemning the invasion—"the European Union and the world stand with the Ukrainian people," said Olof Skoog, the EU's representative to the United Nations—the numbers at the UN General Assembly increasingly painted a different picture. At the emergency session to vote on a resolution on Russia's "Aggression Against Ukraine" in March 2022, 141 nations voted in support, thirty-five abstained and five voted against. The forty countries that abstained or voted against the resolution—including India and China—collectively make up the majority of the world's population. Half of these states were from the African continent.[31]

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30 ↩ "Signing of Treaties on Accession of Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson Regions to Russia," Office of the President of Russia, September 30, 2022.

31 ↩ Farnaz Fassihi, "The U.N. General Assembly Passes a Resolution Strongly Condemning Russia's Invasion," *New York Times*, March 2, 2022.

If the nations of the world were divided on the gesture of condemnation, they remain united in the refusal to join the economic war against Russia. Here, the countries of the old West find themselves wholly isolated. Of the 141 powers to condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine, only the thirty-seven nations of the old imperialist bloc and its surrogates implemented sanctions against it: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, South Korea, Switzerland, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Singapore, and the twenty-seven states of the European Union. Sanctions are not a "mechanism to generate peace and harmony," Argentina's foreign minister Santiago Cafiero said. "We are not going to take any sort of economic reprisal because we want to have good relations with all governments," said Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador.[32] By November, eighty-seven states abstained or voted against a resolution calling on Russia to provide reparations to Ukraine. The Third World wants no part in the intrigues of the North Atlantic axis.

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Isolated and ignored, the West has turned once again to coercion, cajoling and prodding the world's poorer nations into joining the chorus of moral condemnation and economic war against Russia. At their most egregious, the demands carry the penalty of retribution. The United States has threatened sanctions against India, China, and other states that continue to do business with Russia, even as it sought briefly to rehabilitate Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro in a ploy to dampen the effects of rising oil costs. What is this, but an attempt to blackmail the nations of the world into supporting their oppressors once again?[33]

In this New Cold War, as in the colonial wars of the past century, the aspirations of the many to build lives of dignity cuts across ideological fault lines. Today, bonds between the countries of the Third World are hardening against the imperialist threat. China's Xi Jinping and India's Narendra Modi, worlds apart in their political projects and convictions, are rejecting the "Cold War mentality." So are South American states. When the United States convened the Summit of the Americas—excluding Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua—the presidents of both Mexico and Bolivia boycotted the event. Others voiced their indignation at the exclusion. The "integration of the whole of America," López Obrador said, is the only way to face the "geopolitical danger posed to the world by the economic decline of the United States."[34]

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The determined resistance to the siren song of the New Cold War underscores the urgency of multipolarity. It is an antidote to the enforced imbalances in world capitalism that have characterised much of the past five hundred years, and which the unipolar moment had secured. If humanity is to have a shot at resolving the civilisational crises of our time—from pandemic to poverty, from war to climate catastrophe—it must build a foreign policy based on sovereign development and cooperation against imperialism's subordinating drive. That cooperation, to the degree that it takes

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32 ↩ Bala Chambers, "Argentina Rejects Sanctioning Russia: Foreign Minister," Anadolu Agency, March 4, 2022; Jalen Small, "Mexico, Brazil Leaders Ignore Their UN Delegates, Refuse to Sanction Russia," *Newsweek*, April 4, 2022.

33 ↩ Jordan Fabian and Josh Wingrove, "India to Face Significant Cost If Aligned with Russia, U.S. Says," *Bloomberg*, April 7, 2022; Michael Martina, "U.S. Says China Could Face Sanctions If It Supports Russia's War in Ukraine," Reuters, April 6, 2022; Marianna Parraga and Matt Spetalnick, "U.S. Ties Easing of Venezuela Sanctions to Direct Oil Supply," Reuters, March 9, 2022

34 ↩ "López Obrador pide a América Latina un frente común por el declive de EU ante China," SinEmbargo, July 5, 2022.

shape, becomes a profound rebuke to the divisive technologies of conquest deployed for centuries by the colonialist and imperialist powers. It runs counter to the logic of the neoliberal world order, constraining its field of movement and weakening its hold on the economies of the world's poorer nations. Multipolarity is a step, in other words, toward the articulation of alternative political projects outside the sphere of monopoly capitalism's accumulating drive. And for that reason, it is the most profound threat that the collective West has ever faced. "The most dangerous scenario," Brzezinski wrote in The Grand Chessboard, is of an "'antihegemonic' coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances." Brzezinski, of course, was thinking from the perspective of geopolitics, not political economy. But the complementary grievances that are emerging are material at heart. They concern basic questions of dignity—of survival. That is why, from pan-Africanism to Eurasian integration, projects of cooperation become the first targets of imperialist retribution.

Three Theses for the Left

In 1960, Ghanaian revolutionary Kwame Nkrumah gave a speech at the United Nations. "The great tide of history flows," he said, "and as it flows it carries to the shores of reality the stubborn facts of life and man's relations, one with another." What does it mean for internationalists to address the stubborn facts of life? What kinds of relations, among peoples and nations, can find answers to the great crises of our time?

In nuclear weapons and the ecological crisis, we find the looming spectre of omnicide hanging ever more heavily over our societies.

These questions see me return time and again to the debates of the Third International. No doubt, conditions have changed today. The old colonial powers, no longer in the clutches of endless war against their peers, operate through a collective imperialism. They have new strategies to drain the resources of peoples and nations. In nuclear weapons and the ecological crisis, we find the looming spectre of omnicide hanging ever more heavily over our societies. But one insight obstinately remains: capitalism cannot be overcome unless the arteries of imperialist accumulation are severed on a global scale. As Roy argued over a century ago and history has amply demonstrated, as long as the Western powers can feed in the troughs of Third World labor and wealth, capitalism will continue its destructive march. That path, today, is secured by powerful militaries prepared to trample people and destroy nations.

What does this mean for those of us who live and organise in the imperial core? I would like to put forward three brief theses that follow from the preceding analysis:

(1) *The revolution is already in motion.* Since the first anticolonial struggles unfolded, the revolution against imperialism —or capitalism in its international dimension—has been advancing along a winding path through the Third World project. By holding the capacity to arrest the flows of imperial extraction that have made our world, the peoples of the Third World are the engines of progressive change for humanity.

(2) *Those in the West are not the revolution's primary protagonists*. The European revolution was brutally crushed by a powerful ruling class supported by imperial plunder. Lacking state power, the left in the imperialist states cannot dictate the terms of the tectonic processes taking place, and should not try to direct them in ways that provide ideological cover for our ruling classes. Too much ground has been ceded to the imperialists in the pursuit of narrow electoral gains or parliamentary strategies. No power can be built by targeting our limited political capacities against the official enemies of our ruling classes.

(3) *The anti-imperialist left in the West operates inside the monster.* The weakness of the Western left is a mirror image of the strength of its ruling classes. At a moment when the Western bourgeoisie faces a historic challenge to its

hegemony, the task is not to reassert its power through milquetoast reforms that buttress capitalism against its calamitous contradictions, but to fight for its ultimate defeat. It is an enemy we share with the majority of the world's people and the planet we inhabit.

Our most important task, then, is to reclaim socialist anti-imperialism as a category of thought and action—working with the grain of revolutionary change rather than against it. This demands nothing less than the recovery of the political audacity we lost at the so-called end of history, when the positions of global socialism retreated and the imperialist ideology proclaimed itself to be as inevitable as oxygen. History has not gone anywhere. Today, it calls on us to be clear in our critique of imperialism, unrelenting in our assault against it, and bold in envisioning an alternative to capitalism that answers the cries of the working classes in our societies—cries that are being met once again by the siren song of the far right.

The stakes could not be greater. Will the Third World rise, and dismantle the centuries-long grip of the colonising powers on the vast majority of the world's people, opening at least the possibility of a different political project on the global scale? Or will the forces of collective imperialism continue to drive us down a path of war and environmental collapse? The answer depends on our firm and determined commitment to one of these paths, which stand in dialectical opposition to one another. It depends on us studying the story of the West's bloody inheritance, and learning from the forces that have resisted it. Built into our struggles, that knowledge holds the key to remaking our world. It enables us to build with and march in step with the vivacious and brave struggles of the Third World against the fading grip of the ruling classes of the collective West. We cannot answer the cries of humanity if we snatch what we eat from the starving.

It depends on us studying the story of the West's bloody inheritance, and learning from the forces that have resisted it. Built into our struggles, that knowledge holds the key to remaking our world.

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