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World situation

Global crisis, conflict and war: what internationalism for the 21st century?

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Jaime Pastor of [Viento Sur](#) spoke to Pierre Rousset.

Jaime Pastor - It seems clear that we are in the context of a multidimensional world crisis, one of the characteristics of which is relative geopolitical chaos, in which we are witnessing a multiplication of wars and a worsening of inter-imperialist conflicts. How would you define this phase?

Pierre Rousset - You refer to a "multidimensional world crisis" (I would rather say a *planetary* crisis). I think it's important to stop and think about this, before tackling the geopolitical issues. This crisis overdetermines everything, and we can no longer be content to play politics as we did before. We are reaching the 'tipping point' that we have long feared, and much sooner than expected.

Jonathan Watts, Global Environment Editor of *The Guardian*, sounds the alarm with the headline of his April 9 article "Tenth consecutive monthly heat record alarms and confounds climate scientists". Indeed, "If the anomaly does not stabilise by August, 'the world will be in uncharted territory', says one climate expert [...]. [...]. It could imply that a warming planet is already fundamentally altering how the climate system operates, much sooner than scientists had anticipate".

The expert quoted considers that stabilisation by August is still possible, but whatever the case, the climate crisis is already *part of our present*. We are in the midst of it, and its effects (climate chaos) are already being dramatically felt.

The global crisis we are facing affects all areas of ecology (not just climate) and their consequences for health (including pandemics). It concerns the dominant international order (the insoluble dysfunctions of neoliberal globalisation) and the big power geopolitics, the multiplication of conflicts and the militarisation of the world, the intimate social fabric of our societies (weakened by the widespread precarisation fed by all the above)...

What do all these crises have in common? Their 'human' origin, in whole or in large part. The question of human impact on nature is obviously not new. The growth in greenhouse gas emissions dates back to the industrial revolution. However, this 'general crisis' is closely correlated with the development of capitalism after the Second World War and then with capitalist globalisation. It is characterised by the *synergy* between a set of specific crises that plunge us into a situation without precedent, on the border between multiple 'uncharted territories' and a global tipping point.

To describe it concisely, I like the term "polycrisis". It may be a little confusing and foreign to everyday language, but it underlines the fact that we are talking about ONE multi-faceted crisis, resulting from the *combination* of multiple specific crises. So we're not dealing with a simple *addition* of crises, but with their *interaction*, which multiplies their dynamics, fuelling a death spiral for the human species (and for a large proportion of living species).

What is particularly revolting, and quite frankly mind-boggling, is that the established powers are now cancelling the meagre measures that were taken to try to limit global warming even slightly. This is particularly true of the French and British governments. It is also the case with the big banks in the United States, and with the oil companies. At a time when it was obvious that they needed to be strengthened, and strengthened badly. The very rich dictate the law. They do not consider that we are all in the same boat. Entire regions of the planet are on the verge of becoming unliveable, where temperature rises are combined with very high levels of humidity in the air. Never mind, they'll go

and live where it's still warm.

We have now entered the era of pandemics. The destruction of natural environments has created conditions of promiscuity favourable to the inter-species transmission of diseases of which Covid has become the emblem. The melting of the Siberian permafrost has been announced, and could release ancient bacteria or viruses against which there is no immunisation or treatment. Here, too, we risk entering uncharted territory: the climate crisis is creating a multidimensional health crisis.

The disaster was foreseeable and predicted. We now know that the major oil companies commissioned a study back in the mid-1950s that described the coming global warming with remarkable accuracy (although they denied it for decades).

We haven't finished exploring the thousand and one facets of the 'polycrisis', but perhaps it's time to draw some initial conclusions.

It is around the poles that the geopolitical impact of global warming is most spectacular, especially in the Arctic. An inter-oceanic shipping route is opening up to the north, along with the prospect of exploiting the riches beneath the subsoil. Inter-imperialist competition in this part of the world is taking on a new dimension. Since China is not a country bordering the Antarctic, it needs Russia to operate there. It is making Moscow pay the price for its solidarity on the western front (Ukraine) by ensuring its free use of the port of Vladivostok.

In terms of global geopolitics, I would like to highlight the importance of two issues that are not mentioned in the questions that follow.

Firstly, Central Asia. It occupies a pivotal position at the heart of the Eurasian continent. For Vladimir Putin, it is part of Russia's privileged zone of influence, but for Beijing, it is one of the key passages on the land side of its new "Silk Roads" to Europe. A complex game is currently being played out in this part of the world, but our analyses do not take much account of it.

Global warming also reminds us of the crucial importance of the oceans, which cover 70% of the earth's surface, play a decisive role in regulating the climate and are home to vital ecosystems, all of which are threatened by rising sea temperatures. As we know, the over-exploitation of ocean resources is a major issue, as is the extension of maritime borders, which pose no fewer problems than land borders. Global geopolitical thinking cannot ignore the oceans and the poles.

Another key aspect of the "multidimensional crisis" we are facing obviously concerns capitalist globalisation and financialisation. This has led to the formation of a more unified world market than ever before, to ensure the free movement of goods, investments and speculative capital (but not people). A number of factors have disrupted this 'happy globalisation' (for big business): a stagnation in trade, the rise of speculative finance and debt, the Covid pandemic which revealed the dangers of the international division of production chains, and the degree of Western dependence on China, contributing to the rapid change in relations between Washington and Beijing (from entente cordiale to confrontation).

It was big business in the West that wanted to turn China into the workshop of the world, in order to ensure low-cost production and break up the workers' movement in their own countries. It was Europe that was at the forefront of the generalisation of the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which Beijing had joined. They were all convinced that the former Middle Kingdom would be definitively subordinate to them, and so it might have been. If this was not the case, it was because the leading wing of the Chinese bureaucracy, once popular resistance had been broken in

blood (1986), succeeded in its capitalist mutation, giving birth to an original form of state capitalism.

State capitalism has a long history in East Asia, under the aegis of the Kuomintang (Guomindang) in China or Taiwan, South Korea... Because of its history, the Chinese social formation is obviously unique, but it combines quite classically the development of private capital and the capitalist appropriation of state owned enterprises. We are not dealing here with two separate economic sectors (a fundamentally dual economy); they are in fact closely linked through multiple links, as well as through family clans present in all sectors.

Firstly, under the aegis of Deng Xiaoping, China, which had converted to capitalism, quietly began its imperialist take-off and was able to benefit from the geographical distance from the United States, which for a long time was incapable of refocusing on Asia (this was only achieved by Joe Biden, in the wake of the Afghan debacle).

To conclude this section, let us note that :

- The international geopolitical situation remains dominated by the face-off between established imperialism (the United States) and rising imperialism (China). They are not, of course, the only players in the great global game between powers large and small, but no other power carries as much weight as the two "superpowers".
- A particular feature of this conflict is the very high degree of objective interdependence. The crisis of neo-liberal globalisation may be obvious, but its legacy is still with us. There is no longer any such thing as "happy globalisation", but neither is there any such thing as "happy (capitalist) de-globalisation". Geopolitical conflicts are both a symptom of this structural crisis and accentuate its contradictions. To some extent, here too we have entered in an "uncharted territory", unprecedented.
- While still the main "superpower", the hegemony of the United States has undergone a relative decline. It cannot continue to police the world without the help of reliable and effective allies, who are missing in action. They have been weakened by the political and institutional crisis provoked by Donald Trump and its lasting diplomatic consequences (loss of confidence among their allies). It could be said that there is no longer any "classic" imperialism, given the scale of the country's deindustrialisation. Joe Biden is now mobilising considerable financial and legal resources to try and turn things around in this area, but it is not an easy task. Remember that a country like France was incapable, even in the face of a life-threatening emergency (Covid), of producing hydroalcoholic gel, surgical masks and N95s, gowns for nursing staff. But this is not cutting-edge technology!
- China was in a much better position in this area. It had inherited from the Maoist era an indigenous industrial base, a population with a high literacy rate for the Third World, and a trained working class. Now the workshop of the world, it has ensured a new wave of industrialisation (partly dependent, but not exclusively). Huge resources were invested in the production of cutting-edge technologies. The party-state was able to organise the country's national and international development (there was a pilot in the plane). That said, the Chinese regime is now more opaque and secretive than ever. We know how the political and institutional crisis is affecting US imperialism. It is very difficult to know what is happening in China. However, the hypercentralisation of power under Xi Jinping, who has become president for life, now seems to be a factor in the structural crisis.
- The relative decline of the United States and the unfinished rise of China have opened up a space in which secondary powers can play a significant role, at least in their own region (Russia, Turkey, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, etc.). I believe that Russia has not ceased to present China with a series of faits accomplis on Europe's eastern borders. By acting in concert, Moscow and Beijing were largely masters of the game on the Eurasian continent. However, there was no coordination between the invasion of Ukraine and an actual attack on Taiwan.

In this context, can we consider that the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Western powers' support for Ukraine in response to it make this war an inter-imperialist war which leads us to evoke the Zimmerwald policy (war on war) in response? Or, on the contrary, are we facing a war of national liberation which, although supported by the imperialist powers, obliges the Western Left to show solidarity with the resistance of the Ukrainian people against the Russian invasion?

Zimmerwald's policy was to call for peace without annexations. Now, some of the people who present themselves as Zimmerwald's heirs are proposing to cede this or that piece of Ukraine to Russia, to organise referendums there to validate their separation from Ukraine, etc., but let's move on.

The simplest way to answer this question is to go back over the sequence of events. An invasion is prepared by mobilising considerable military resources at the borders, which takes time and is obvious. Putin did it. At the time, NATO was in the midst of a political crisis, following the Afghan adventure, and the bulk of its operational forces in Europe had not been redeployed to the East. Biden's main concern was China and he was still trying to play Moscow off against Beijing. The US secret services were the first to warn that an invasion was possible, but the warning was not taken seriously either by the European states or even by Zelinsky himself.

Most of us in Western Europe had little contact with our comrades in Eastern Europe (particularly in Ukraine) and many of us analysed events in purely geopolitical terms (a mistake that should never be made), thinking that Putin was simply exerting strong pressure on the European Union to stir up post-Afghan dissension within NATO. If this had been the case, the invasion should not have taken place, because it would have had the opposite effect: it would have given new meaning to NATO and enabled it to close ranks. And that's exactly what happened! What's more, before the Russian invasion, a majority of the Ukrainian population wanted to live in a non-aligned country. Today, only a very small minority see their security as anything other than a close alliance with the NATO countries.

For my part, it was only very shortly before the invasion that I had the feeling that it was possible, alerted by my friend Adam Novak.

We now know much more: the invasion had been prepared for several years. It was part of a grand plan to restore the Russian Empire within the borders of the Stalinist USSR, with Catherine II as its point of reference. The existence of Ukraine was merely an anomaly of which Lenin was guilty (in Putin's own words) and it was to be reintegrated into the Russian fold. In fact, Ukrainians call it the *full-scale invasion* and point out that the subversion and military occupation of Donbass, Luhansk and Crimea in 2014 was a *first phase of the invasion*. The "Special Operation" (the word "war" was prohibited until recently and remains so in practice) was to be very rapid and continue all the way to Kiev, where a government under orders would be established. The Western forces, caught unawares, could only bow to the fait accompli - and they were caught unawares. Even Washington was slow to react politically.

The grain of sand that brought the war machine to a halt was the scale of Ukrainian resistance, unforeseen by Putin, but also in the West. We can truly speak of a massive popular resistance, in osmosis with the armed forces. It was a national resistance, in which many Russian speakers took part (and the whole political spectrum, with the exception of few Moscow's loyalists). For those who doubted it, there was no clearer proof than this: Ukraine does exist. This is the second scenario you mentioned.

Time cannot erase this "original" truth and our obligation of solidarity. A double obligation of solidarity, I would add. With the national resistance of the Ukrainian people and with the forces of the left that continue to fight, in Ukraine itself, for the rights of workers and trade unions, for freedom of association and expression, against the authoritarianism of the Zelensky regime and against neo-liberal policies (advocated by the European Union)...

Naturally, Ukraine has become a flashpoint in the Russian-Western power struggle. Without the supply of arms from the United States in particular, the Ukrainians would not have been able to hold any "fronts". However, arms supplies have consistently fallen short of what would have been needed to decisively defeat Moscow. To this day, the Russian army's control of the air has not been countered. And NATO countries are once again divided, while the pre-election crisis in the United States is blocking the vote on funds for Ukraine.

After having had the opportunity to build up defences in depth and reorganise, Moscow continues to be the driving force behind the military escalation in Ukraine, with the help of North Korean shells and funding provided by India and China (via the sale of oil products), and it is pushing the policy of *fait accompli* to the point of ignominy: the deportation of Ukrainian children and their adoption into Russian families.

If so, how do we respond to those who believe that support for the resistance serves the interests of the Western powers (with the approval of the Zelenski government) who want to prolong the war, regardless of the devastation (human and material) it is causing, and that it is therefore necessary to promote an active policy of defending a just peace?

I myself am not actively involved in Ukraine solidarity. I am maintaining my Asian solidarity activities, against the tide of current events. I have immersed myself in the Israeli-Palestinian question (which is hard to live with). So I will remain cautious.

We are all aware of the scale of the devastation caused by this war, all the more so because Putin is waging a war that shamelessly targets the civilian population. It is unbearable.

However, it is not our support but Putin who is prolonging this war. We must not dilute responsibility. If by the term "just peace" we mean an indefinite truce on the current front line, that would condemn five million Ukrainians in the occupied territories to live under a regime of forced assimilation, with several millions deported to the Russian Federation proper.

I believe that the role of our solidarity movement is, above all, to help create the best conditions for the struggle of the Ukrainian people and, within it, for the Ukrainian social and political left. It is certainly not up to us to determine what the terms of a peace agreement might be. I think we need to listen to what the Ukrainian left, the women's movement, the trade unions, the Crimean Tatar movement and the environmentalists (among others) are calling for, and to respond to their appeals.

We must also listen to the left and the anti-war movements in Russia itself. Most sections of the Russian anti-capitalist left believe that Russia's defeat in Ukraine could be the trigger that opens the door to the democratisation of the country and the emergence of various social movements.

Those on the Western Left who claim that the Left in Eastern Europe "hardly exists" are mistaken.

To believe that a bad compromise on the backs of the Ukrainians could put an end to the war is an illusion that seems dangerous to me. This is to forget the reasons why Putin went to war: to liquidate Ukraine and continue the reconstitution of the Russian Empire, but also to seize its economic wealth (including its agriculture) and establish a colonial regime in the occupied zones.

Putin's state apparatus is gangrenous with secret service men (KGB-FSB). It has already intervened throughout its area of proximity, from Chechnya to Central Asia and Syria. It only exists internationally through its military

capabilities and its sales of arms, oil and agricultural products...

I have a total mistrust of "our" imperialisms, the fortitudes of which I am well aware and which I never stop fighting. I will never rely on them to negotiate or impose a peace agreement. Just look at what happened to the Oslo agreements in Palestine!

For me, then, there is no question of solidarity movements "falling in with the logic of the powers" (whatever they may be). They must retain their complete independence from states and governments (including Zelensky's). I repeat, we are listening to the forces of the Ukrainian left and the anti-war left in Russia.

On the other hand, the US and the EU are using the Russian war in Ukraine and rising international tensions as an alibi for rearmament and increased military spending. Can we speak of a "new cold war" or even the threat of a world war in which the use of nuclear weapons is not excluded? What should be the position of the anti-capitalist left in the face of this rearmament and this threat?

I am against rearmament and increased military spending by the United States and the European Union.

Having said that, I think we need to take a broader view. A new arms race is underway in which China (and even Russia) seem to have the initiative in several areas, including supersonic weapons that would render existing anti-missile shields ineffective or allow the armada of an aircraft carrier to be targeted from very far away. To my knowledge, nothing has really been tested, and I don't know what is true and what is science fiction, but other comrades are certainly more knowledgeable than I am in this area.

However, the arms race itself is a major problem. For the usual reasons (militarisation of the world, capture by the military-industrial complex of an exorbitant share of public budgets, etc.), but also because of the climate crisis, which makes it even more urgent to get out of the era of permanent wars. Production of weapons and their use is not included in the official calculation of greenhouse gas emissions. A terrible denial of reality.

Putin has repeatedly threatened to use nuclear weapons, to no avail (I'm not asking him to be consistent with his statements). I doubt that the threat of nuclear war is a direct result of the current Ukrainian conflict (I hope I'm right), but I nevertheless think that it is (unfortunately) a real issue. Here too I'm going to broaden the subject.

There are already four localised nuclear 'hot spots'. One is in the Middle East: Israel. Three are in Eurasia: Ukraine, India-Pakistan and the Korean peninsula. The latter is the only one to be "active". The North Korean regime periodically carries out tests and launches missiles in a region where the US naval air force is stationed and where the largest complex of US bases abroad is located (in Japan, especially on the island of Okinawa). Joe Biden already has his hands full with Ukraine, Palestine and Taiwan, and could do without a worsening of the situation in this part of the world (and China too), a situation in which Trump bears a heavy responsibility, but so does the last scion of the hereditary North Korean dynasty.

A small problem: it takes twenty minutes for a North Korean nuclear missile to reach Seoul, the capital of South Korea. Under these conditions, the commitment not to use nuclear weapons first becomes difficult to apply.

France is one of the countries politically preparing public opinion for the possible use of a "tactical" nuclear bomb. We must vigorously oppose this attempt to make nuclear weapons commonplace. Unfortunately, there is a kind of national political consensus that means that "our" nuclear arsenal is not a matter of principle for political agreements, even on the left and even when we are in favour of abolishing it.

The issue of rearmament, of the new arms race, of nuclear power, must be part and parcel of the activities of anti-war movements on both sides of the border. For example, despite the terrible intercommunal violence that accompanied the partition of India in 1947, the Pakistani and Indian Left are jointly campaigning for disarmament.

Can we talk about a "new Cold War"? I used to find this phrase very Eurocentric. In Asia, the war was torrid (the US escalation in Vietnam). What does it mean today, at a time when Russia is waging war in Ukraine? I understand that it is used in the press and in debate, but I don't think we should use it ourselves, for two main reasons:

- It reduces the analysis to a very limited approach to geopolitics. War is only "cold" because there is no direct confrontation between great powers. This formula does not prevent, but it does not contribute to a concrete analysis of 'hot' conflicts.
- Generally speaking, I'm not keen on historical analogies: "are we in...". We're never "in...", but in the present. I know that history helps to explain the present and that the present helps to revisit the past, but the formula "new Cold War" illustrates my reticence. The "first" Cold War pitted the "Western bloc" against the "Eastern bloc". At that time, the Soviet bloc and China had only limited economic relations with the capitalist world market. The revolutionary dynamic was continuing (Vietnam, etc.).

Today, the capitalist world market has become universal. Globalisation has taken hold. China has become one of its pillars. There is close economic interdependence between China, the United States and the countries of Western Europe. It is impossible to understand the complexity of the Sino-US conflict without taking this factor fully into account. So why resort to an old formula and then add: but everything is now different, of course.

I would say that the theme of the new Cold War suits the campists on both sides. Those who want to justify their support for Moscow and Beijing. Or to those who want to side with Democracy and Western values against autocrats.

A little counterpoint in conclusion: Biden is a man of the past. He has learned to negotiate nuclear threats through several major crises. This experience can still be useful to him today.

What is at stake in Israel's war of extermination in Gaza? Why does the United States continue to support Israel, despite its recent abstention from the UN Security Council? What role should our internationalist solidarity with the Palestinian people play?

What is at stake in this war? The very survival of the people of Gaza. A specialist in these issues (the elimination of populations) had a phrase that I think is very apt. He had never seen a situation so serious in its "intensity". In other cases, a greater number of people have died, but Gaza is a tiny territory undergoing a multi-faceted attack of unprecedented intensity. Even if the bombing stopped and aid arrived en masse, the deaths would continue over time.

The entire population will be living with repeated post-traumatic stress, starting with children, whose mortality rate is staggering. The youngest children, victims of malnutrition, will never have the right to a "normal" life.

Other issues at stake include the very existence of the West Bank, where Palestinians are subjected to daily violence by Jewish supremacist settlers, supported by the army and paramilitaries. Will the surviving Gazans be forced into exile via Egypt or the sea? Will the surviving West Bank Palestinians be expelled to Jordan? Will the Greater Israel project take hold?

The colonisation of Palestine can be seen as a long-term process, but this is a terrible turning point. Netanyahu has never defined his war aims (apart from the total destruction of Hamas, an undertaking that has no end). I'm not going to try to define them for him, especially as the situation is volatile.

The bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus on 1 April is an example of Netanyahu's headlong rush beyond the borders of Palestine. It is a flagrant violation of the Vienna Convention protecting diplomatic missions. The target of the attack was senior Hezbollah leaders who were there, but that doesn't "justify" anything. There are always "enemies" of choice in diplomatic missions, including senior officers. The Israelis know this well, as Mossad agents disguised as diplomats have murdered or kidnapped more than one person in foreign countries. It is curious and worrying that this bombing did not provoke more protests.

Tehran does not want war, but it must react. We are on a razor's edge.

Joe Biden has set his own trap by declaring his unconditional support for the Israeli government from the outset, out of his own Zionism and without consulting the experts in his own administration, which has led to a series of shock resignations. He could no longer support the unbearable, but he did not stop supplying arms and munitions to Israel. I may be wrong, but I have the impression that he has simply lost his diplomatic hand in the Arab world and is currently busy ironing out defence agreements with Japan and the Philippines, in case Trump wins the next presidential election.

[An update: Iran carried out an air strike against Israel on the night of 13-14 March. According to an Israeli count, more than 300 projectiles were fired: 170 drones, 30 cruise missiles and 110 ballistic missiles. Tehran had announced the operation, which was confirmed by the United States. It takes several hours for these weapons to reach Israel, so there was plenty of time to shoot down many of them along the way. The United States, Great Britain, France and Jordan all contributed to the operation. An Israeli military base was nevertheless hit. The aim of this operation was clearly political, a warning in response to the attack in Damascus. It was the first time that the Iranian regime had attacked Israel directly in this way. Tehran announced that its operation would not be followed up, at least not if the Israelis left it at that. Faced with Iran, Joe Biden is still in a position to activate a front of Western and Arab countries. Israel's dependence on its protectors is confirmed].

Let's come to the last question. What, in my view, are the tasks of internationalist solidarity with the Palestinian people?

First of all, the absolute urgency, on which a very broad consensus can be reached: an immediate ceasefire, the entry of massive amounts of aid via all access routes to the Gaza Strip, the protection of convoys and humanitarian workers (many of whom have been killed), the resumption of the mission of UNRWA, whose role is irreplaceable, a halt to settlement on the West Bank and the restoration of the rights of Palestinians who have been dispossessed, the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian political prisoners, etc.

We defend the Palestinians' right to resistance, including armed resistance, without any "buts"; but this does not imply political support for Hamas or denying that war crimes were committed on 7 October, as many independent sources attest. These sources include Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHRI); Bedouin villagers in the Negev whom Israel refuses to protect, but who have been repeatedly attacked by Hamas; Israeli activists who have dedicated their lives to defending the rights of Palestinians...

Hamas is now the main military component of the Palestinian resistance, but does it have an emancipatory project? We have always analysed the movements involved in the liberation struggles that we supported. Why should it be any different today?

Our role as internationalists is also to draw a line, however tenuous, between present tasks and an emancipatory future. We defend the principle of a Palestine where the inhabitants of this historic land "between the sea and the river" can live together (including the return of Palestinian refugees). This will not happen without profound social upheavals in the region, but we can give substance to this perspective by supporting the organisations that are acting together today, Jews/Jews and Arabs/Palestinians, against all odds. They are all taking great risks to continue to show this Jewish-Arab solidarity in the current context. We owe them our solidarity.

Jewish-Arab solidarity is also one of the keys to the development of international mobilisations, particularly in the United States where the Jewish Voice for Peace movement has played a very important role in countering the propaganda of the pro-Israeli lobbies and opening up the space for protest.

How do you analyse China's foreign policy strategy and its conflict with Taiwan?

I think that Xi Jinping's priorities are to continue China's global expansion and consolidation, to compete with the United States in the field of high technology with both civilian and military use, to seek significant diplomatic alliances (an Achilles heel in the face of the United States), to develop its own zones of influence in regions considered strategic at this stage (such as the South Pacific), and to strengthen its military aeronaval and space capabilities or its surveillance and disinformation capabilities. The invasion of Taiwan would not be on the agenda.

China's paths of expansion differ from those of its predecessors. Times have changed. Beijing has only one large conventional military base, in Djibouti. However, it is signing agreements with a growing number of countries to gain access to their ports. Better still, it takes possession of all or part of them, which gives it an extensive maritime network of points of attachment for both civilian and military use. The security services present in Chinese companies abroad are provided by military personnel, enabling the army to obtain information and establish contacts.

Chinese policy is imperialist in nature, and it is hard to see how it could be otherwise. Any major capitalist power must guarantee the security of its investments and communications, and the political and financial profitability of its commitments.

Beijing has proclaimed its sovereignty over the whole of the South China Sea, a major international transit zone, which it has militarised without taking into account the maritime rights of neighbouring countries. It is appropriating fish stocks and prospecting the seabed. An authoritarian regime uses authoritarian methods wherever it thinks it can. Of course, a so-called democratic imperialist regime can do the same...

In addition to the protracted war situations in Syria, Yemen, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, there is a war in Burma that is little talked about in the West. Could you comment on the current state of this conflict?

A word about Sudan. There is a wealth of experience of grassroots resistance in this country, under extremely difficult conditions, which deserves to be better known (and supported).

Burma was a textbook case. On 1 February 2021, the military grasped all power in a putsch. The next day, the country went into dissidence in the form of a widespread work stoppage and a huge movement of civil disobedience. The putsch was aborted, but the army could not be ousted for lack of immediate international support. The military gradually regained the initiative through a merciless crackdown. In the central region, which was initially peaceful, the popular resistance had to go underground and then engage in armed resistance. It sought the support of armed ethnic movements operating in the states of the country's mountainous periphery.

It's hard to imagine a broader civic resistance movement than the one in Burma - but the armed struggle became a vital necessity, basing its legitimacy on the evidence of self-defence. This enabled it to withstand the test of fire and gradually organise itself in the form of independent guerrillas or those linked to the National Unity Government, the expression of the parliament dissolved by the military and (at last) opened up to ethnic minorities.

The conflict took terribly harsh forms, with the army in particular having a monopoly on aviation. It was also complex, with each ethnic state having its own characteristics and political choices. Gradually, however, the junta lost the upper hand. It had the support of China (a neighbouring country) and Russia, but proved incapable of guaranteeing Beijing the security of its investments and the construction of a port giving access to the Indian Ocean. Its international isolation has deepened and its ASEAN allies have become divided.

Today, the army is losing ground in many regions and the opposition front against the junta has widened. Burma has a very rich history, but unfortunately it is little known in the West.

In conclusion, the worsening of the economic crisis and the multiplication of conflicts at both international and regional level seem to indicate a turning point in the international context that requires us to rethink the policies of internationalist solidarity. What are the avenues for building an internationalism that is in tune with the changing nature of international conflicts in the 21st century?

There is an in-depth recomposition, with the opposition between "campism" and internationalism as the main line of force. We may have many differences of analysis, but the question is whether we are defending all victimised populations.

Each power chooses the victims that suit it and abandons the others. We refuse to enter into this type of logic. We are defending the rights of the Kanaks in Kanaky, whatever Paris may think, the Syrians and the peoples of Syria in the face of the implacable dictatorship of the Assad clan, the Ukrainians under the deluge of Russian fire, the Palestinians under the deluge of US bombs, the Puerto Ricans under US colonial rule, the peoples of Burma even when the junta is supported by China, the Haitians denied protection and asylum by the so-called "international community".

We do not abandon victims in the name of geopolitical considerations. We support their right to decide freely about their future and, when that is the issue, their right to self-determination. We stand with progressive movements around the world that reject the logic of the "principal enemy". We are not in the camp of any great power, be it Japanese-Western, Russian or Chinese. Occupation is a crime in Ukraine as it is in Palestine.

Faced with the militarisation of the world, we need a global anti-war movement. It's easy to say, but hard to do. Can we rely on local cross-border solidarity (Ukraine-Russia, India-Pakistan) to achieve this? Or on the huge solidarity movement with Palestine? Or social forums like the one that has just taken place in Nepal?

We also need to integrate the climate issue into the problematic of anti-war movements and, conversely, militant environmental movements would gain, if they have not already done so, from integrating the anti-war dimension into their struggle. The same applies to nuclear weapons.

Greta Thunberg's personality seems to me to embody the potential of the younger generations confronted with the violence of the 'polycrisis'. But her commitments require tenacity, which she certainly doesn't lack, and the ability to act over the long term, which is by no means easy. My generation of activists was launched into orbit by the radicalism of the 1960s and, for us in France, by the seminal experience of May 68. Quite an impetus. What is the situation today?

15 April 2024

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