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USA

Election and Widening War

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With war and genocide spreading from Palestine to Lebanon and Iran, with Florida and southern states inundated by the twin biggest climate-change flood disasters in U.S. history, and people's general insecurity about their own and the country's future, the United States lurches toward what's called "the most consequential election in our lifetime" that may resolve little or nothing.

The outcome isn't known as Against the Current goes to press a couple weeks before November 5, but will be shortly after or before this issue reaches our subscribers — or possibly the results, unless they're unexpectedly decisive, might be rejected as illegitimate by close to half the country, with a looming potential for constitutional crisis and chaos.

Rather than speculate on the outcome, we'll look here at the confluence of domestic and global factors that go into making such a volatile moment in U.S. politics, set to persist well after November 5.

1) The 2024 presidential election rides on likely razor-thin margins in seven or so "swing states," so that a few tens of thousands of votes either way outweigh 150 or 160 million cast nationwide — the product of the United States' uniquely absurd Electoral College system.

The latter is not only grotesquely undemocratic but vulnerable to all kinds of voter-suppression and other schemes at state levels. This includes threats that election results might not be certified by local officials or hopelessly delayed by bureaucratic obstruction (such as a new Georgia ballot hand-count requirement, voter roll purges and barriers to registration).

The MAGA-run Republican Party in particular is openly putting in place the mechanics for a multi-front Grand Theft Election game to be rolled out in vote counts and certification battles — procedural, legal and potentially physical. And while these moves are pretty well publicized, the Democrats are contributing their share to voter suppression through various pretexts to exclude the Green Party and other options from state ballots.

Arsenal of Genocide

2) U.S. elections conventionally don't hinge on international issues. In 2024, however, it's impossible to overlook the explosion in the Middle East, where the United States plays the central role as the arsenal of genocide. Israel's war now entails the depopulation of southern Lebanon, and a potential risk to the very survival of that country — while northern Gaza undergoes what Palestinian officials call "genocide within genocide."

Throughout the year-long destruction of Gaza, the Biden administration has pontificated about Israel's right to "defend itself," while bleating about its own "round the clock" brokering negotiations for ceasefire and hostage release deals. The government of Benjamin Netanyahu, driven both by his personal need to stay in power and by the ideological goal of continuing and expanding the war, has openly sabotaged these efforts. In the process it has essentially abandoned the Israeli hostages in Gaza captivity.

It's also entirely clear that Netanyahu (like Russia's Vladimir Putin) intends to boost the chances of Donald Trump's

return to the White House. Yet faced with Netanyahu's contempt, the U.S. president responds with more and more weapons transfers to Israel. That amounts to Biden pouring gasoline on the fire he claims to be trying to put out — with predictable results.

Biden sends unlimited weaponry to Israel — with no restraints, even when U.S. law explicitly forbids arming human rights violators. Meanwhile Biden refuses to give Ukraine permission to use American-supplied weapons to attack the Russian bases that launch terror bombing raids on Ukraine's people and its critical infrastructure.

The Gaza massacre continues. That now constitutes mass murder for its own sake, with the real death toll by now almost surely well into six figures. Meanwhile and mostly under the daily headline radar, the Israeli military and heavily armed settlers rampage with murderous impunity in West Bank Palestinian villages.

Amidst this came the stunning sequence of events, beginning with Israel's assassination in Tehran of Hamas leader Ismael Haniyeh — who served as the organization's negotiator for a ceasefire and hostage release deal. This was followed in Lebanon by the detonation of Hezbollah's pagers and walkie-talkies, systematic assassinations of its leadership, and bombings carried out with U.S.-supplied weapons with little regard for civilian death and destruction in densely populated neighborhoods.

A million desperate Lebanese civilians are displaced not only from the south of the country but districts of Beirut as well. It's the height of delusion to think that somehow these atrocities wouldn't feed back into U.S. politics, from the November election to events well into the future. The impact on the Arab-American vote in November is just for openers. Additional factors include the alienation of sectors of the Democrats' progressive voter base, the bitter polarization on university campuses and punitive repression of pro-Palestinian activism.

Israel's assault on Lebanon is an "incursion" which no sane observer expects to remain "limited." And Netanyahu's ultimate dream, to bring the United States into a war with Iran, may be changing from fantasy to reality (and more likely if Trump returns to office).

Even though Israel's military and intelligence services were so unprepared for the October 7, 2023 Hamas raid, for the past 18 years they've prepared the war to destroy Hezbollah — ever since the inconclusive end of the 2006 33-day war. Inevitably this is also a war against Lebanon itself that may lead to the total collapse of that fragile state. Netanyahu himself has warned the Lebanese population to "rise up against Hezbollah" or suffer the fate of Gaza.

Undoubtedly U.S. and probably other allies' intelligence agencies assisted Israel in the astounding penetration of Hezbollah's security infrastructure. Furthermore Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah apparently believed, along with most commentators and probably Washington and Tehran too, that its rocket exchanges with Israel would remain "within bounds" short of full-scale-out war. That was a fatal miscalculation, and not Israel's intention.

Whatever happens next, Israel has torn an enormous hole in the strategic capacity and fearsome image of what's called the "axis of resistance." This "axis" included Hezbollah and the Houthi movement in Yemen, as well as forces allied to Iran inside Iraq.

Contrary to rightwing and Israeli propaganda, these forces are not puppets responding to Iran's orders. They are actors with their local interests and initiative — and despite their rhetoric and the illusions of some activists, Palestinian freedom is not the top of their respective agendas. But they — especially Hezbollah — are or at least had been a kind of insurance policy for Iran against the threat of a direct Israeli-U.S. attack.

As that shield is severely weakened if it still exists, the Iranian rulers, already facing a very weak economy and openly at war with their own population, may be forced to pursue closer protective relations with Russia and China.

Attacking Iran has potential implications for other conflicts, including Russia's annexationist invasion of Ukraine which the Iranian regime has supported, that are difficult to predict. U.S. imperialism is inextricably front and center in these events, whatever the verbal postures of the Biden team to "prevent a wider war" may have been.

The transition period between the November 5 election and the January 20 presidential inauguration could be even more ominous globally as well as at home. In the end, "Genocide Joe" Biden's presidential legacy is the destruction of Gaza and the new Middle East catastrophe. Whether it also includes the return of Donald Trump is to be determined.

Political System in Decay...

3) On the home front, whatever the ultimate result, the U.S. electoral cycle has revealed the stench of decay in the country's supposedly sacred institutions. It's not just that the system of elections is vulnerable to voter suppression and manipulation, in ways we sketched at the outset and more.

What were supposed to be safeguards of "stability," if not democracy — the absurdly unrepresentative Senate, the autonomous powers assigned to the states, the supposedly above-partisanship of a Supreme Court whose nearly uncontrollable majority is now both white-supremacist and semi-monarchist — are now enablers of instability and potential chaos.

More than that, the elimination of any meaningful campaign finance regulation in our politics has turned the twin Republican and Democratic parties into money-vacuuming apparatuses. There is no accountability to anyone but the corporate powers and megadonors (let alone the parties' nonexistent "memberships"). That domination in turn makes the capitalist parties, and the political system, largely impervious to the popular will or the massive crises that affect the society.

A partial counterweight is available in the form of ballot initiatives in some states, notably right now as a vehicle for defending reproductive and abortion rights against the vicious attacks from the right wing. Women's right to abortion of course is a central and critical issue on which the Democrats hope to cling to the presidency.

But fundamental issues that should be at the core of political discussion are ignored: We've repeatedly emphasized that the obscene inequalities of wealth and opportunity in the United States are at the heart of the stresses afflicting millions of Americans from inflation, poor access to medical care, miserable housing and working conditions.

Because neither capitalist party addresses the core issues and consequences of inequality, their quarrels about economic policy are mainly empty noise, or in Donald Trump's case about the health care crisis, "concepts."

Within the next few years, the United States along with the whole world will confront climate-change disasters of magnitudes we can barely imagine now. The incredible devastation in southern states wrought by Hurricane Helene, hundreds of miles inland from landfall and estimated at \$100 billion or more even before Milton hit Florida, is just a foretaste. The Amazon rainforest is drying and burning throughout South America, from Brazil to Ecuador to Colombia.

...While Struggle Continues

4) The left in the United States does not meaningfully affect electoral outcomes, but more importantly social movements and working-class struggles have not taken a break for the long election season. Although the east coast longshore strike won a huge wage increase, it is suspended until mid-January with talks continuing over automation. After a five-week strike Boeing mechanics voted down a contract with a 34% wage increase over four years because it failed to restore pensions. Meanwhile the United Auto Workers threaten to strike Stellantis over the company's failure to implement provisions of the historic contract that the union won last year.

No matter how the election turns out, campus and community movements in support of Palestine will persist with renewed energy, especially with Israel's escalating invasion of Lebanon. University administrations, pressured by donors and congressional committees, have embarked on punitive and repressive campaigns against pro-Palestinian students and faculty that threaten the very foundations of campus speech and academic freedom.

At the same time, there are initiatives within unions and city councils for Palestinian rights. These call for divestment from Israeli-linked corporations and arms suppliers, demand a U.S. arms embargo, and support the resolution initiated by Bernie Sanders in the Senate to block the Biden administration's new \$20 billion weapons transfer to Israel. Here is where leftwing activism can play a significant role.

An open question is whether a significant opening for independent politics — the Green Party in particular — can emerge from progressive revulsion over “Genocide Joe” Biden's role in the Middle East slaughter and broader disaffection from the capitalist parties' destructive duopoly. It's important to note that the Green Party runs campaigns not only in top-level national elections but also in local races, with some significant impact.

Right now, none of the left forces in the electoral field have anything like a mass base, but each speaks to different sectors looking for political alternatives. One urgent task is to continue finding common grounds among movements toward building a serious, genuine political alternative that can reach out to broader popular sectors in the electoral sphere. That prospect is by no means quick or easy, but beyond November 5 and in the period to come will be part of urgent ongoing discussions. As always, building the movements of resistance — whether under Trump or Harris — remains central.

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