

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8509>



USA

Chaos Here and There

- IV Online magazine - 2024 - IV592 - May 2024 -

Publication date: Thursday 2 May 2024

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SUPER TUESDAY, NIKKI Hayley's presidential campaign, and Colorado's hail-Mary effort to bar Donald Trump from the ballot all came and went. The United States of America hurtles, or stumbles, toward the November presidential choice that few people (outside the Trump cult) actually want. Either outcome — whether a Biden or Trump victory — is liable to be rejected as illegitimate by wide sectors of the population, opening up a potential deeper crisis. In regard to voting strategy, future issues of ATC will offer a range of perspectives.

We will explore here how dysfunction and looming chaos in U.S. bourgeois politics, and the existing and deepening global disorder, intersect and tend to magnify each other. Two genocidal wars and invasions occupy center stage — where in both Gaza and Ukraine, each day's monstrous atrocities are exceeded by the next — impacting both the United States and the mockingly named "rules-based" international order.

In the U.S. election, at the outset it's essentially not about "the economy, stupid" — at least in the conventional "big picture." It's about lived experience. For all the uncertainty in the economic picture, overall statistics look decent enough in domestic GDP growth, consumer spending, government infrastructure investment, easing inflation rates and the rest. The U.S. economy under Biden looks pretty good compared to most of Europe, and certainly crisis-ridden China.

If that's not the daily lived reality for tens of millions of people, the cause isn't the macro economy but rather brutal inequalities and social dysfunctions — structural racism, disastrous public health, poor access to affordable housing and education — leaving behind major sectors of the population among young people, racialized as well as economically depressed rural communities, and contributing greatly to the opioid drug overdose catastrophe.

That disconnect is not unique to the United States, and it's a big driver of a global tide of authoritarian, far-right, racist and anti-immigrant forces. Recent electoral contests show mixed results, with the extreme right suffering setbacks in Brazilian, Polish and municipal Turkish elections, for example, while gaining ground in places like Slovakia, Indonesia, Argentina, Ecuador and El Salvador.

In the United States, what's driving much popular anger toward the Biden presidency are actually products of longtime bipartisan policies. The massive migration and asylum crisis at the U.S. border and in our cities, first and foremost of course, is a life-and-death emergency for people undertaking those desperate journeys, and a nightmare for migrants being held in detention centers under brutal conditions. It's also an enormous burden on U.S. border communities and cities attempting to shelter new arrivals.

Contrary to rightwing and MAGA hysteria, this disaster has nothing to do with imaginary "Biden's open borders" or "catch and release." It's the direct result of decades of "free trade" that destroyed Mexican and Central American agriculture; genocidal U.S.-backed dictatorships and counterrevolutionary wars, not to mention ruinous interventions in Haiti and devastating sanctions on Venezuela and Cuba; and perhaps most of all, the insane half-century "war on drugs" that predictably fostered a continental industry of drug gangs and cartels.

None of this is helped by brutal and authoritarian regimes in Asia and Africa. Mass migration and its political fallout can't be understood in the U.S. context alone. Close to 100 million people are displaced by world capitalist system failures expressed in wars and genocides, political collapses and environmental catastrophes. Countries in Europe face migration flows and appalling levels of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea. Anti-immigrant violence has spread to South Africa as well, underscoring the truly global scale of this crisis.

As they seek to exploit the racist backlash for political gain, the forces of the far right in Europe and the Trump/MAGA cult in the United States understand what they have in common, how they can group together under a banner of “saving white Christian civilization” — and the willing partner they have in Vladimir Putin.

Ukraine, Palestine and Beyond

The wars in Ukraine and Palestine highlight, among other things, the consequences of U.S. political gridlock and imperial cynicism. To state the case bluntly: Ukraine, without the weapons it needs to defend itself from Russia’s invasion, would look like what Israel has done to Gaza with full U.S. support. Every Ukrainian city would already resemble Gaza City and Khan Yunis. And as for Gaza, without an immediate permanent ceasefire, what’s been called “the world’s largest open-air prison” has become a death and mass starvation camp.

For six months after October 7, the Biden administration supported Netanyahu’s mantra of “destroying Hamas.” That means annihilating Gaza — and Israel’s intention to irreversibly destroy Gazan society, and end any hope for Palestinian freedom, is as explicit as Russia’s objective of eliminating Ukraine as an independent nation.

In the Washington cesspool, essential aid for Ukraine is bottled up by the pro-Putin Republican wing in Congress — and chained to billions more U.S. dollars supported by Democratic and Republican leadership alike, for Israel’s Gaza genocide. This is happening just when a growing majority of the U.S. public supports a ceasefire to stop the slaughter in Palestine, and still supports aiding Ukraine’s struggle for survival. (See Howie Hawkins’ [dissection of the Ukraine aid struggle](#) in this issue of *Against the Current*.)

The depravity of “Genocide Joe” Biden’s embrace of Benjamin Netanyahu’s war is beyond description. The electoral hole he’s dug for himself and the Democrats among Arab, Muslim, young and progressive voters may prove too deep to tunnel out — although it’s not our purpose here to predict the eventual electoral consequences.

The powerful “Uncommitted” or blank votes in the Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Hawaii, Wisconsin and New York Democratic primaries showed the rage against American enabling of Israel’s Gaza genocide. So did the beautiful coalition of Palestinian, Jewish and antiwar activists in the street between the White House and Capitol, delaying the motorcade to Biden’s State of the Union speech.

Only after mounting protests, in the wake of the targeted Israeli massacre of the World Central Kitchen food aid convoy, did the Biden administration announce that the Gaza massacre is “disproportionate.” Meanwhile, as Donald Trump openly cheers on the genocide, it’s already clear on the world stage who anticipates Trump’s return to the White House: Netanyahu, Vladimir Putin, Hungary’s Viktor Orban, and other authoritarians and aspiring autocrats.

Not only does Russia’s President-for-life Putin believe his annexationist ambitions in Ukraine can be fulfilled, his puppet prime minister Medvedev projects Russia’s goal of carving up a defeated Ukraine among Russia, Hungary, Moldova and other neighboring states. (Does that remind us when wise U.S. politicians thought that carving up Iraq into three separate mini-states would be a Really Clever Idea?)

Is this extreme result likely? Not immediately — but without essential aid, Ukraine’s prospects are grim.

Expanded Conflict Looming

With deep future implications, there is one clear winner in the Ukraine war: NATO, with the accession of longtime officially-neutral countries Finland and Sweden. The consequences will long outlive the current crisis.

Much is made of the fact that without full U.S. buy-in, NATO's other members can't mount the production capacity to supply Ukraine against Moscow's brutal advances. Further alarm in European capitals arises from Donald Trump blustering to his neo-isolationist base about walking away from NATO and inviting Russia "to do whatever the hell they want." These factors now play to Putin's advantage to be exploited militarily as well as politically, both in Europe and in the U.S. elections. But NATO countries will begin to ramp up, not only for the support of Ukraine today but for the longer-term prospect of conflicts with Putin's and perhaps post-Putin Russia.

Over the coming years a re-armed Europe may create the appearance of military "balance," while actually exacerbating longer-range instability and war dangers. Hopes for lasting peace after the Cold War have been squandered in the twin triumphs of neoliberal and gangster-oligarch capitalist rule, in the West and post-Soviet Russia respectively. As for a possible Trump presidency, that prospect certainly emboldens the European far right — while also spurring NATO partners to escalate their military spending.

Whatever Trump's verbal threats to the alliance's future and whether or not he means them, breaking treaty obligations to NATO is not so easy, nor do we think that the imperialist U.S. ruling class would tolerate it. Above all, imperial strategic thinking looks much further ahead to future confrontations with China, in which the United States would need to have its major alliances in Europe as well as Asia well in line.

All this helps frame how, as we suggested at the outset, elements of U.S. political and global chaos feed into each other. The literally burning issues include capitalism's inability to confront — indeed, the ways it worsens — spreading disasters of climate change, uncontrolled calamities in Sudan, Haiti and the Democratic Republic of Congo to name just three, and now the emerging threat of military confrontation in space up to and including satellite-based nuclear weapons.

As horrific as they are in and of themselves, the Gaza and Ukraine wars bring into the spotlight what the Global South has experienced for a long time, mainly hidden from the headlines. Potential and actual genocides are ever-present in the workings of that highly praised global order.

American Prospects

Returning to the U.S. arena, the encouraging signs include of course, the outpouring of support for Palestine's survival; the resistance to outrageous assaults on abortion rights and women's reproductive freedom; and the rise of labor activism in industry as well as among sectors from fast-food to higher education workers.

As for the coming U.S. election and the presidential contest that so few folks really want, we know that the outcome will resolve none of the fundamental conflicts in our society and its dysfunctional, unrepresentative and elite-driven political system.

Imagine — because we need to, not because we want to — a second Trump presidency with its assaults on women's, workers' and all non-privileged people's rights, the destruction of all semblances of environmental and climate policy, the promised attempt to deport millions of people, wholesale crippling of small-d democratic and small-r republican norms and institutions, and potential unleashing of state repression as well as Proud Boys and Oath Keeper-type militias to terrorize dissident activity.

The forces behind Trump openly intend to rapidly implement savage social cuts, full-fledged judicial takeovers, federal as well as state-level abortion bans, DEI and trans rights bans among others, rightwing doctrinal

transformations of K-12 and university education, voter suppression and more, hoping that their domination will be baked-in beyond democratic popular challenge.

All this would further embolden the global far right electorally, in the streets, and potentially in the staging of military coups against “left” or reform governments (e.g. Brazil, Colombia, Bolivia...). The consequences for Palestine and Ukraine among many others are ghastly to contemplate.

Liberals and Democrats aren’t wrong to point to the magnitude of the threat. The problem is that their politics rule out any effective programs to defeat it.

Alternatively, against the nightmare for America and the world of a second Trump ascendancy, is the possibility that the cynical and morally compromised Biden administration squeaks through to a second term, with at best tiny Congressional and Senate majorities — or more likely minorities in one or both chambers.

In that case the right, far-right and white-nationalist forces will still be on the move, fueled by almost-certain new and old election-denial and Great-Replacement mythologies. The threat they represent may be slowed, if barely and temporarily, but certainly not defeated.

Electoral options for socialist and social-movement left forces in the United States will be discussed and debated in our pages and of course more widely. Certainly our movements do not control the electoral outcome in 2024, and may at most have some marginal influence in closely contested “swing states” and perhaps more in some important local races.

But either way our fundamental tasks revolve as they always have, on organizing the movements of resistance whether that’s for labor, for reproductive rights, for Palestine, for Ukraine — and for beginning the forging of long-needed, genuinely progressive independent politics.

Source: [ATC 230](#), May-June 2024.

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