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Geopolitics

Faultlines in a new epoch of crisis: Imperial rivalry, authoritarianism, and resistance



- Features -

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Trump's rise to power didn't come out of the blue, argues Ashley Smith. It's a feature of a new crisis-ridden era. The original version of this article appeared as a discussion document for this summer's convention of the Tempest Collective. We expect to share more of these documents in the coming months.[*Tempest*]

We have entered a new epoch of global capitalism. It is characterized by crisis, imperial rivalry, authoritarian nationalism, and episodic, explosive resistance from below. The Trump administration's brief year of misrule has brought all these to a head, particularly with its war on Iran. That war has put a definitive end to Washington's imperial order of free trade globalization that it constructed within its bloc after World War II and expanded globally after the Cold War. Now the U.S. is a predatory imperialist state out for its own interests against nominal allies, rivals, regional powers, and subject nations.

Trump's rise to power, like that of other authoritarian nationalists, did not come out of the blue. The electoral successes of the Right are the product of capitalism's multiple crises and the establishment parties' inability to overcome them. Their failure has triggered political polarization to the right and left. Given the revolutionary Left's decline and reformist parties' incapacity to deliver when in power, the new Right, in the form of authoritarian nationalism, has been the principal beneficiary. But their program of austerity, bigotry, and scapegoating has also failed to address capitalism's systemic crises, undercutting their ability to secure hegemony and impose stable rule. As a result, political instability is the order of the day throughout the world.

These conditions have triggered wave after wave of resistance from below. But so far this resistance has been episodic and unable to win, largely because of the decomposition of class, social, and political organizations to sustain struggle and pose an alternative to the establishment parties and the Right. Nonetheless, these struggles open opportunities to rebuild the infrastructure of resistance, cohere a militant minority, and reconstruct a revolutionary Left for the 21st century.

Capitalism's global slump

Capitalism is beset by multiple systemic crises from climate change to mass migration and pandemics like COVID. The other two, which are the most important ones for shaping our new epoch, are the global economic slump and the return of inter-imperial rivalry. The 2008 economic crisis triggered the Great Recession, which brought an end to the long neoliberal boom that began in the 1980s.

While capitalism survived, its recovery has been characterized by low profitability and slow growth, punctuated by recessions and weak recoveries. The heartlands of the system, from the U.S. to Europe and Japan, are either growing at a modest rate or are stagnant. As far as the U.S. is concerned, only the high-tech companies' massive investment in AI data centers and the accompanying stock market bubble have kept the economy growing. But that is now in jeopardy as a result of the war with Iran. Even China, which was key to the global recovery after the Great Recession, has seen its growth drop from 10 percent a year in the 2000s to under 5 percent today.

Inflation in the wake of the COVID recession has forced the U.S. and Europe to maintain relatively high interest rates, hampering investment and growth. On the other hand, overinvestment, cutthroat competition, and low profitability have fueled deflation in China, forcing its corporations to seek out profitable sites for investment internationally

through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), while exporting their surplus products and in the process undercutting their competition everywhere.

The combination of U.S. high interest rates and Chinese dumping has triggered a double crisis in the Global South. First, high interest rates have hammered indebted countries, which are now facing the prospect of another debt crisis like the one they suffered in the 1980s. Already, creditors are demanding austerity measures from governments in the Global South. Second, Beijing's exports have undermined the Global South's domestic manufacturing base, reducing it to exporting raw materials to China for China's ongoing expansion.

Thus, we are in a global slump. It will continue until a deeper crisis clears out all the uncompetitive capital in the world economy. Up to today, the main capitalist states have stopped this from happening. They have bailed out corporations they consider too big to fail, fearing mass bankruptcies and a 1930s-style depression. That has propped up the so-called zombie corporations. These are so unprofitable that they are forced to take out ever more loans to repay interest on their existing loans. As a result, the system limps along.

By contrast, ruling classes have imposed austerity measures on their workers, cutting social welfare spending and attacking wages and benefits. As a result, class inequality has deepened throughout the world. At the same time, states have turned to protectionism and other beggar-thy-neighbor policies to protect their capitals against other states and their capitals.

The return of inter-imperial rivalry

Thus, the global slump is intensifying the second key crisis—inter-imperial rivalry, especially between the two biggest economies in the world, the U.S. and China. Washington no longer oversees the unipolar world order as it did after the Cold War. The long neoliberal boom produced new centers of capital accumulation from China to Russia and a host of regional powers.

The U.S. attempt to defend its increasingly challenged hegemony through wars in Afghanistan and Iraq backfired, leading to disastrous defeats. On top of that, the Great Recession hammered the U.S., Europe, and Japan, in contrast to China, which used massive state investment to keep its economy booming, and with that, all its tributary economies expanding from Russia to Australia and Brazil.

These developments led to the relative decline of the U.S. against its rivals, especially China, ushering in today's asymmetric multipolar world order. The U.S. remains the largest economy with the biggest military and greatest geopolitical influence. Its dollar remains the world's reserve currency, it oversees an empire of 800 military overseas bases, and uses that power to bully allies, rivals, and so-called rogue states.

But it is no longer unrivaled. China is now a potential peer competitor, while Russia, with its vast nuclear stockpile and fossil capitalist economy, is an outsized regional power with global pretensions. In this context, regional powers exploit conflicts between the great powers to pursue their own interests. Iran, for instance, oversaw the so-called Axis of Resistance, which it used to build regional imperial influence against the U.S., the Arab states, and Israel.

Faced with this new order, successive U.S. administrations have abandoned Washington's post-Cold War strategy of superintending capitalism by incorporating all states into a neoliberal world order of free trade globalization. Obama initiated a shift toward great power competition with China through his Pivot to Asia.

In his first term, Trump enshrined great power rivalry as Washington's new grand strategy, naming specifically China and Russia. His America First foreign policy put what he perceived to be U.S. interests over and above those of both friends and foes. He began to abandon free trade for protectionism, particularly by raising tariffs on China. But his administration's internal divisions, hostility to traditional allies, propensity to make transactional deals with rivals, and general incompetence prevented its coherent implementation.

The Biden administration retained Trump's focus on great power but abandoned his unilateralism. Instead, it tried to rebuild Washington's alliance structure, especially NATO, and unite its vassals against China and Russia in defense of the so-called rules-based international order. It paired that with strategic protectionism against Beijing and an industrial policy to ensure U.S. dominance in high-tech industries, especially microchips, which it wanted to onshore from Taiwan.

Biden capitalized on Russia's imperialist war on Ukraine to rally NATO behind Kyiv's national liberation struggle. His aim was not to defend Ukraine's right to self-determination but to weaken Russia. However, his administration fatally discredited its claims to support international law, human rights, and oppressed nations by championing, bankrolling, and arming Israel's genocidal war in Gaza.

Waves of resistance

The global slump, growing inter-imperial rivalries, and capitalism's other systemic crises have combined to destabilize societies around the world. These conditions have set off waves of resistance from below by various classes, from the petty bourgeoisie to the working class and peasantry. The movements have been politically heterogeneous, spanning the gamut from right-wing small business revolts to uprisings of workers and the oppressed.

Most important for the Left have been the progressive class and social struggles throughout the world from the Arab Spring revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa to the Red State Teachers Revolt, Black Lives Matter, and Palestine solidarity in the U.S. These movements have been the largest since the 1960s and have a class content more like that of the 1930s, expressing rage against the deep economic and social inequalities of our epoch.

But they all have been hampered by the weaknesses inherited from the previous period of defeat and retreat. These include everything from the collapse of the revolutionary Left to the dramatic drop in trade union density and retreat of social movements from membership-based groups to grant-funded NGOs with all their golden chains.

As a result, workers and the oppressed have gone into struggle bereft of class, social, and political infrastructures of dissent. That has impacted the character of movements today. They tend to seemingly come out of nowhere and explode in size, challenging capital and the state. Their demands are usually negative in character, like the slogan of the Arab Spring, which was "the people want the fall of the regime," and lack a positive alternative. In the words of one analyst, they are revolutions without revolutionaries.

That makes them vulnerable in all sorts of ways. The states and capitals can crush them with brute force as the regimes succeeded in doing throughout the Middle East and North Africa. They can also co-opt them as the Ford Foundation did with key leaders of Black Lives Matter. Reformist parties can also channel uprisings into the dead-end of electoral attempts to use the capitalist state to overcome systemic crises and inequalities. The movements can also dissipate in demoralization over the difficulties of winning victories faced with the intransigence of the state and capital.

That said, more and more activists have drawn lessons from these experiences that it's necessary to build more serious class, social, and political organizations capable of sustaining struggles for positive demands and reforms on the way to systemic change.

Political polarization to the right and left

Global capitalism's crises and the waves of resistance have intensified political polarization to the right and to the left. The various regimes and parties of the capitalist classes offer no solutions either to the system's intractable problems or popular grievances. Undemocratic regimes have turned to increasing authoritarianism to enforce their rule in countries like China and Russia. In bourgeois democracies, angry electorates have voted out capital's traditional parties, searching for alternatives on the right and the left.

The chief beneficiary of this polarization has been the Right for obvious reasons. The revolutionary Left is far too weak to offer an alternative. The reformist Left has ridden the resistance to win elected office in various countries, but constrained by capitalism's crisis and the intransigence of the capitalist class, their electoral strategy has been unable to deliver reforms to improve people's lives. They have, at best, administered neoliberal capitalism with a human face or, worse, broken their promises and turned on their working-class base. The examples of this are legion, from Syriza's betrayal of Greek workers to the collapse of the Pink Tide in Latin America.

The authoritarian nationalist politicians have reaped the rewards of disappointment with establishment and reformist parties. The Right's parties represent at best a minority of capital but are mainly an expression of petty bourgeois radicalization. They have found a base in the atomized, defeated, and demoralized sections of the working class. As a result, authoritarian nationalist regimes have multiplied throughout the world, from Putin in Russia to Modi in India, Orban in Hungary, Kast in Chile, Milei in Argentina, and, of course, Trump in the United States.

But their "solutions" of class war, bigotry, and scapegoating, especially of migrants, have also failed to solve the system's crises and address mass popular grievances from their own petty bourgeois base to the much larger popular classes. So, they too have not been able to establish stable regimes and have even been driven out of power. For instance, Hungarian voters recently voted Orban out of office. Authoritarian states also have faced resistance from below as well as other forces. President Xi Jinping faced a mass uprising against his brutal Zero-COVID policy, and Vladimir Putin faced a coup attempt by the Wagner Group.

In bourgeois democracies, when the new Right has faced governmental crises, some have been tempted to turn to authoritarian rule, like Brazil's Bolsonaro, who tried to organize a coup after he lost the election to stay in power. He failed. In reality, few democracies have yet fallen to such seizures of power. Instead, the old capitalist parties have exploited the failure of the reformists and the Right to return to power, often by adopting elements of the authoritarian nationalists' program, especially its attacks on migrants.

But such triangulation only confirms the arguments of the Right, giving them a new lease on life. With bourgeois rule unstable, states across the board are becoming more authoritarian, enforcing rule through coercion, not consent. At the same time, they are becoming more aggressive internationally, the great imperial powers in particular.

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Trump's authoritarian nationalism

The Trump administration is part of this global pattern of the rise of a new Right. Trump's victory in the 2024 election was entirely the fault of the Democratic Party and its commitment to capitalism and imperialism. The Biden administration failed to address the system's crises, oversaw the immiseration of workers through inflation, and carried out mass deportations. Abroad, it ramped up inter-imperial conflict and backed Israel's genocidal war in Gaza.

Trump exploited disappointment with the Democrats, but still only managed to squeak out a narrow victory over Harris, winning around half of those who bothered to vote, only about 33 percent of the overall electorate. Like other authoritarian nationalists, he does not represent a capitalist consensus, but a rogue clique of billionaires and the radicalized petty bourgeoisie. And, at best, he won a weak mandate in the 2024 election.

But that does not make his administration any less vicious. Unlike his first term, Trump now has a coherent program in Project 2025 and a unified cabinet of sycophants that, despite their differences, support their leader, including his wildest impulses and without question. They are aggressively implementing their authoritarian nationalist project.

In the U.S., they have launched a class war, cutting taxes on the rich, firing government workers, stripping the rest of union rights, gutting social welfare, and deregulating the economy. They are carrying this out through classic divide-and-rule tactics, blaming the oppressed and scapegoating them, especially immigrants, for the system's failures. He has poured \$85 billion into ICE's budget over the next four years to hire and unleash thousands of new agents to occupy cities and arrest hundreds of thousands of migrants, detain them in new concentration camps, and deport them back to their countries of origin.

In a fit of irrationalism, Trump is also carrying out revenge on the deep state, slashing entire parts of the government bureaucracy essential for reproducing U.S. capitalism, like the National Institute of Health, and managing U.S. imperialism like the State Department. In place of professional managers, he is appointing right-wing hacks, ideologues, and lackeys.

He's extended this assault into the private sphere as well, targeting, for example, elite higher education, which trains future CEOs, scientists, professionals, and state managers, all personnel essential for U.S. capitalism and its state. He really seems to want to Make America Stupid Again.

Ripping up the imperial order

Abroad, largely in defiance of the capitalist class and state managers, Trump has ripped up the entire order that the U.S. built after World War II and expanded globally after the Cold War. His administration's project is not isolationist, but one of predatory dominance in pursuit of its conception of U.S. interests against both allies and rivals. Trump's representatives laid out this in their National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and a series of speeches by JD Vance and Marco Rubio.

Their stated goal is to Make America Great Again by putting America First, definitively abandoning all their predecessors' project of superintending global capitalism. In geopolitics, they are withdrawing from multilateral bodies like the UN and World Health Organization that the U.S. set up to oversee the world. Trump has even gutted funding for humanitarian aid programs like USAID that used to garner support from countries in the Global South. He dismissed those as corrupt welfare schemes, essentially abandoning any use of soft power.

In economics, he has abandoned free trade globalization, establishing a protectionist trade regime against both allies and rivals. But he has run into international and domestic opposition. China, unlike most other states, stood toe to toe with his administration, imposed crippling restrictions on its exports of processed rare earths, and left Trump no choice but to lower his tariffs.

In the U.S., the capitalist class and Trump's own petty bourgeois base of farmers forced him to grant them carve-outs. And the Supreme Court ruled against his use of the International Emergency Powers Act to impose his tariffs, forcing the administration back to the drawing board to use other powers to maintain the new protectionism.

Finally, on the military front, the administration has doubled down on hard power, jacking up the Pentagon's budget to over \$1 trillion. And now Trump is proposing to raise it to \$1.5 trillion. At the same time, his regime has retreated from enforcing global order. It is demanding that its nominal allies in Europe and Asia shoulder the burden of their own security so that the U.S. can focus on carving out a sphere of influence in Latin America through crude gunboat diplomacy for naked economic gain.

The goal of its new "Donroe Doctrine" is to lock the region under its dominion, crushing opponents, and pushing out China. Already, Trump bullied Panama into withdrawing from China's BRI, carried out a coup in Venezuela to seize control of its oil, threatened to take over Greenland to establish bases and stake claim to the Arctic's resources, and has imposed a brutal blockade on Cuba, threatening it with regime change to open it up for U.S. real estate capital.

While that sphere of influence is Trump's top priority, he has three others—Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. In Europe, he is supporting the far Right to restore "white civilization" and imperialist pride, pressuring the EU to deregulate, and bullying NATO to increase its military spending and manage its own security, including against Russia. He has all but sold Ukraine down the river, conceding to Moscow its old sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.

In Asia, he has stated that he intends to maintain the status quo standoff with China, but he's also hinted that he might cut a deal with Beijing to concede it a sphere of influence. And in the Middle East, he backs Israel to finish off Hamas in Gaza, impose a predatory "peace" there, and dismantle the rest of the so-called Axis of Resistance, including its headquarters in Iran. After that, Trump wants to expand the so-called Abraham Accords to normalize relations between Israel and the region's regimes, all under the thumb of the U.S., not China and Russia.

Survival of the most vicious

With this project, the Trump administration has put the world on notice that it has abandoned the so-called rules-based order to advance its narrow economic interests without disguise. It is establishing a new world disorder where might makes right, the great powers struggle for dominance, and the weak, in the words of Thucydides, "suffer what they must."

While other powers like the EU may pine for the rules-based order, they have no choice but to adapt to the pressure from the U.S. and other great powers to abide by their dog-eat-dog rules. In a stunning speech at the World Economic Forum, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney laid out the new global disorder in stark terms. He eulogized the old rules-based order. While he recognized that it was always a sham, he argued that at least there were some political and economic restraints on great powers.

But Trump, he noted, has laid waste to it and so-called middle powers like Canada must recognize that fact and

respond accordingly, otherwise they “won’t be at the table but on the menu.” Whether he liked it or not, Carney argued, Canada has to put its imperial interests first. Already, he is advancing that project, increasing his state’s military budget, staking claims to the Arctic, and cutting economic deals with U.S. rivals like China. Other U.S. allies are doing the same. In a shocking example, Denmark actually made plans to deploy its troops to Greenland and blow up its airport runways to stop a U.S. invasion.

All states are adapting to Trump’s contest for the survival of the most vicious. The EU, NATO, and individual states, especially France and Germany, do not trust the U.S. and recognize that they have no choice but to stake out their own path. The European powers are cutting trade deals with China and Latin America in defiance of the U.S., jacking up their military budgets, and imposing austerity on workers with cuts to social welfare spending, wages, and benefits. Russia has already established a war economy to fuel its imperialist invasion of Ukraine. In Asia, Japan is doing the same. So is China, Washington’s key rival. We are thus in the midst of a new global arms race.

Iran—A turning point in world history

The so-called rules-based order was already in tatters in the wake of Russia’s imperialist war in Ukraine and the U.S. and Israel’s genocide in Gaza. And now with his war on Iran, Trump destroyed what remained of it. Flush with success after kidnapping Maduro in Venezuela and turning the remnants of his regime into a servant of U.S. imperialism, Trump thought he and Israel could do the same in Iran. Instead, it has blown up in his face with Tehran launching a regional war in response.

While the U.S. and Israel started this war together, they have different war aims. Trump had sought a Venezuela-style solution; he wanted to find a figure in the regime that would play the role Delcy Rodriguez did in Caracas and cut a deal to survive on the condition of obeying U.S. dictates. He hoped a reconfigured Iranian regime would then join the Abraham Accords along with the Arab states and normalize relations with Israel.

By contrast, Netanyahu intends to destroy the entire regime, balkanize the country, and wipe out its allies to ensure that none can pose any challenge to Israel’s regional hegemony. Thus, as Trump admitted, Israel undermined Washington’s goal by killing the Iranian leaders Washington hoped to cut a deal with. Unsurprisingly, Israel has paired its blitzkrieg in Iran with a new offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon to go with its ongoing genocide in Gaza and settlement expansion in the West Bank. It aims to carve out its own mini-empire—Greater Israel.

Of course, Israel pressured Trump to launch the war, but it did not sucker him into doing it. The tail does not wag the dog. Even Netanyahu ridiculed that idea in an interview with Sean Hannity. When Hannity said, “There are people that say, ‘Wow, the prime minister of Israel dragged him into it,’” Netanyahu laughed. “That’s ridiculous,” he said. “Donald Trump is the strongest leader in the world. He does what he thinks is right for America.”

Thus, Trump launched the war for his own stupid reasons. He is no puppet of Israel. But he catastrophically miscalculated. Iran is not Venezuela; it is a battle-tested, theocratic regime with a loyal base in a minority of the population. It has carried out a regional war and repeatedly crushed every democratic uprising of its workers and the oppressed peoples. And it had been elaborately prepared not only to survive a U.S. and Israeli war but also to launch a devastating counter-attack.

Catastrophic consequences

So, when Trump started this war, Iran withstood the assault and responded by firing missiles and drones at Israel, all the Arab states, and even NATO powers. It attacked Turkey and British bases in Cyprus and Diego Garcia. And they shut down the Strait of Hormuz, cutting off shipment of oil and natural gas to the world. That sent fossil fuel prices spiraling upwards, threatening global economic growth and setting off inflation—the capitalist nightmare of stagflation.

And the danger to the world economy could get far worse if the conflict escalates. Already, when Israel struck Iran's natural gas field, Tehran responded by attacking Qatar's liquid natural gas (LNG) processing plant in Ras Laffan, which supplies Asia with much of its LNG. That provoked Trump to tell Israel to refrain from further strikes. But the damage may have already been done. Qatar reports that it will take 3 to 5 years to repair its massive plant. One analyst said this will lead to the Armageddon scenario—the biggest oil and natural gas shock in history.

But the impact of the war will be even greater than that. Contrary to stereotypes, the importance of the region's economy to the world extends far beyond fossil fuels. The Gulf states have transformed themselves into centers of industry, international travel, commercial shipping, and finance capital. The disruption of all this will be devastating for the system and, more importantly, for the working class and peasants of the world.

The war and the closure of the Strait are blocking the export of the region's fertilizer industry. That will lead to shortages and drive up prices of fertilizer right as planting season starts over the next few months across the world. Farmers in the Global North may be able to stomach the costs and gobble up the bulk of the supply, but farmers in the Global South will be priced out of the market, suffer shortages, and produce lower crop yields. The combination of increased fertilizer and fuel costs will trigger a spike in food prices in the Global North and famine in the Global South.

The war is also blocking the region's export of all sorts of fossil fuel byproducts that are essential for the global economy. For example, its plants produce naphtha, one of the key components for the global manufacturing of plastic, which corporations use for almost everything from packaging to cars and fighter jets. Another example is helium. It is essential for the manufacture of microchips, without which today's high-tech economy can't function.

Moreover, the region's ports and airports are essential hubs for both international travel and commercial transit. Their disruption is causing all sorts of problems in the world economy. Even if the Strait of Hormuz reopens along with the airports, corporations will now distrust them as reliable hubs for transport and commerce, throwing into question their vast investments, infrastructure, and trade and travel routes.

Finally, the Gulf states like the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have turned themselves into major centers of international finance capital. They have used their funds to invest in all sorts of things, but especially AI data centers, not only in their region, but also in the United States. Now, companies will doubt the security of data centers in the Gulf states. And the Gulf states will have to pull back from their international investment and use their capital to rebuild their own infrastructure. Such a drawback will undercut the U.S. data center boom and could pop the high-tech bubble, the main prop for U.S. capitalism's growth. Thus, the war is disrupting the whole system.

The logic of escalation

Trump has thereby stumbled into the biggest imperialist crisis since Iraq and potentially a far worse one. The U.S., Israel, and Iran, up until the ceasefire, were locked in a logic of escalation with no clear end in sight. The Iranian regime faced an existential threat and will fight to its death. It therefore expanded the war to force states throughout the region and world to compel the U.S. and Israel to stop it and prevent another one. No doubt they will be

determined to build nuclear weapons after the war to deter any future attack.

Iran's counterattacks forced the U.S. and Israel to respond, prolonging what Trump had hoped would be a quick victory. Thus, like the sorcerer's apprentice, Trump lost control of a spiraling war. And his decision to stage his own blockade of the Strait of Hormuz to cut off Iranian exports has intensified the conflict's damage to the world economy.

Faced with this crisis, Trump relented, agreeing to a ceasefire with none of his goals achieved. Iran's regime remains in power, it still has nuclear stockpiles, it retains significant missile and drone capacity to threaten attacks on the region, and it has promised to continue support for its regional allies in Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen.

At this point, the Strait of Hormuz remains blocked, the talks are at stand still, and the world economy stands at the precipice of an even greater crisis. The Iranian regime clearly believes it can weather the standoff longer than the U.S.. While Trump clearly wants to cut a deal, he cannot accept one that further humiliates the U.S. Meanwhile, Israel is braying for more war in Iran and Lebanon.

Regardless of what happens, the U.S. is in the midst of a metastasizing economic, geopolitical, and military crisis. The world economy has been hammered. No one in the region can now trust the United States. All its military bases and defense systems have not protected its vassals like Saudi Arabia but have made them targets for attack. And no regime will risk normalizing relations with Israel against the wishes of the masses of the population in the region, who are now furious with the U.S. and Israel. That puts Trump's Abraham Accords in jeopardy.

Trump has thoroughly alienated all of Washington's allies, whom he kept in the dark about his plans to launch the war. Now, with the U.S. in crisis, none of them has agreed to bail Trump out. They all have refused to join his war and send ships to open the Strait of Hormuz. At this point, they want to keep out of it and have become increasingly critical of it. The German chancellor's remark that Iran had humiliated the U.S. drove Trump in a fit of rage to threaten to withdraw all of Washington's troops from Europe, threatening the entire NATO alliance.

Even worse for the U.S., Trump's war has benefited Washington's main rivals, Russia and China. In a desperate attempt to lower fossil fuel prices, Trump lowered sanctions on Russia's oil exports. Putin has thus scored a victory, securing desperately needed funds to aid his ailing economy. That will enable him to escalate his imperialist war on Ukraine. Trump lowered sanctions on Russia even though it is aiding Iran by giving it military intelligence. Sensing his advantage, Putin even offered to suspend its intelligence sharing if the U.S. stops doing the same for Ukraine.

China is happy to see the U.S. bogged down in yet another catastrophic war. While it has lost oil and natural gas from Iran, it can, for now, draw on its huge fossil fuel reserves and can expand contracts for more supplies from Russia, further consolidating their "friendship without limits." But China is not immune to the war's consequences. It will find difficulties securing key materials for its manufacturing, the global slump will weaken its export markets that are its main engine of continued growth, and countries in its debt will find it ever more difficult to repay their loans, putting Chinese financial capital in jeopardy.

Trump's intensifying domestic crisis

Trump's war will intensify his domestic political crisis. Already deeply unpopular, he now faces splits in his MAGA leadership with figures like Tucker Carlson opposing the war. He has also alienated sections of his base that voted for him, believing naively that Trump would keep the U.S. out of "forever wars." With no end in sight, this war dooms the Republican Party to defeat in the upcoming midterm elections, if they are free and fair. The Democrats will take

the House, possibly the Senate, tie Congress up in hearings, block all legislation, and try to impeach Trump and members of his cabinet.

Trump knows that. So, he is turning to more and more authoritarian means to maintain power. He is trying to rig the election through gerrymandering and voter suppression, most recently with the Save America Act, which would effectively disenfranchise millions. The Supreme Court also helped Trump in its recent ruling that overturned Louisiana's congressional map that afforded Black voters a majority in two districts. Their decision effectively guts the Voting Rights Act, risking a return to electoral white supremacy not seen since the Jim Crow era. Already, in a dangerous precedent, Louisiana has suspended the primary election to enable redistricting to the advantage of the GOP.

In an even more ominous sign, some on the right, like Bannon, have argued for Trump to deploy ICE at polling locations. Trump has already tested the water by deploying ICE to the airports across the country. Thus, U.S. norms of bourgeois democracy hang in the balance. Lest anyone think this to be an exaggeration, three new studies found that the U.S. is slipping toward an autocracy at astonishing speed.

Faced with this spiraling crisis, the Democratic Party spent the last year practically in hiding. They adopted James Carville's "possum strategy"—literally playing dead when faced with a predator. While outliers like Bernie Sanders and AOC agitated for action against the billionaire class, the establishment Democrats bided their time, hoping Trump would punch himself out and discredit the GOP so that they could sweep the midterms. Then they could find some new corporate standard bearer like Gavin Newsom or JB Pritzker or even worse turn back to genocidaire, Kamala Harris, to win back the White House in 2028 and restore the status quo ante.

Truth be told, the Democratic Party did next to nothing to resist Trump until the Minneapolis mass strike against ICE. Only then did they challenge the funding of ICE and Homeland Security. But just like they have done with police, their demand was not for the abolition of ICE's racist goon squad, but that its agents wear body cameras, get more training, and stop wearing masks. With those "reforms," they have promised to grant ICE more funding! That should surprise no one since the Democrats have bankrolled DHS and ICE with billions since their creation in 2003. And, under Obama and Biden, they used ICE and Border Patrol to deport millions of people.

Their supposed opposition to Trump's catastrophic war on Iran has been even more pathetic. Why? Because they share with the GOP U.S. imperialism's determination since Iran's 1979 revolution to topple the Islamic Republic. So, their initial objections were procedural—that Trump had not made the case for war, had not secured support from Congress under the War Powers Act, and had no plan or clearly stated goals. And their main concern is that Trump's idiotic war has weakened U.S. imperialism and its capacity to fight China and Russia.

While some reformists in the party have denounced the war, they remain trapped in an imperialist party, which is both reactionary and incapacitated in a moment of emergency. As a result, despite the fact that the Democrats are likely to win the midterms, if the elections happen in any normal fashion, they remain deeply unpopular and offer no solutions to the system's crises and popular grievances.

In resistance, there is hope

Unlike the Democratic Party, workers and the oppressed have risen up against Trump, producing a mass heterogeneous resistance. Some of its currents predate Trump's presidency, like the Palestine solidarity movement, which persists despite state repression and hostility from liberal and Zionist forces. Most other currents have been galvanized by Trump's unrelenting class and social attacks, particularly on ICE's war on immigrants. All these

converged in Minneapolis, culminating in a mass strike and protest that forced Trump to retreat, fire his commander of the Border Patrol, Greg Bovino, demote Secretary of Homeland Security, Kristi Noem, and withdraw hundreds of ICE and Border Patrol agents.

That uprising against ICE was based on a developed infrastructure of resistance forged over the last couple of decades. That included the George Floyd uprising against police brutality, union organizing and strikes, immigrant rights struggles, and indigenous-led climate justice campaigns. But most parts of the country lack this infrastructure of resistance. And even there, the militant minority and revolutionary Left remain small as elsewhere. These hamper the organization and politics of the resistance.

Nevertheless, the struggle is forging new organizations and a new Left. The two main organized currents of the national resistance are Indivisible and May Day Strong. Indivisible was formed by two Democratic Party organizers who explicitly conceived the project as a means to galvanize its base in struggle and then turn it to elections to defeat Trump and Republicans. It is thus a popular front formation, wedding workers and the oppressed to a capitalist party in the hopes of securing liberal reforms.

It has staged three massive No Kings rallies. But, because of its ties to the Democratic Party, it has tended to exclude Palestine solidarity activists and has proved reluctant to even include opposition to the war on Iran. Its strategy is to turn the millions on its demonstrations into campaigners for the Democrats in the midterms and 2028 presidential elections. But, as we know from bitter experience, the Democrats are no alternative for the vast majority. Nevertheless, the people at those demonstrations are open to much more radical ideas and strategies.

The other formation, May Day Strong, was spearheaded by the Chicago Teachers Union. It has brought together unions, immigrant rights groups, other social movement organizations, and NGOs in a potential united front of working-class forces. It does include Indivisible and another liberal formation, 5051, and it is limited by the horizons of the left union bureaucracy. Nevertheless, it has put May Day back on the map, encouraged solidarity schools to prepare unions to stage political strikes against Trump, and pushed the slogan, “no work, no school, no shopping,” for this year’s May Day.

May Day Strong offers the Left a national vehicle to advance the argument for a general strike to challenge Trump’s increasingly authoritarian regime. Its explicit model is the South Korean strike that blocked a coup and toppled the government. That said, it does not exist in all cities and towns. It is also not immune from co-optation by the Democrats through the trade union officialdom’s alliance with the party’s reformist wing. And it is an ominous sign that Indivisible plays such a prominent role in its midst. Nonetheless, May Day Strong is an important strategic orientation for the revolutionary left in building the resistance. Our challenge is how to forge similar local formations aligned with the national coalition. It is our best shot to agitate for mass, independent working-class action to topple the Trump regime.

Rebirth of the revolutionary Left

This new epoch of crisis, imperialist rivalry, authoritarianism, and resistance is opening up space for the construction of a new socialist Left. Indeed, all political organizations are now growing from reformism to neo-Stalinism and revolutionary socialism. The struggle is on to shape a new generation’s politics, strategies, and tactics for an epoch of crisis and class struggle.

Tempest argues that the tradition of [socialism from below](#) offers the best way to fight here and now on the road to international socialism. We aim to embody these politics in an organization with branches that avoid the traps of the

Faultlines in a new epoch of crisis: Imperial rivalry, authoritarianism, and resistance

[micro party](#) that has paralyzed our forebears—ideological uniformity, sectarianism, ultraleftism, and organization building in isolation from the living struggle. Join us to build a socialist organization, forge new infrastructures of resistance, cohere a militant minority, and eventually found a revolutionary party. These are tall tasks, but necessary ones in our apocalyptic times.

Source: [Tempest](#) 10 May 2026.

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