



IV570 - July 2022

## Biden in the Middle East: Gross Imperial Spectacle

31 July 2022, by David Finkel

Nothing in his record, his rhetoric, or his endless political campaigns suggested any progressive content in Biden's attitudes regarding the Middle East. Why would that somehow change after this veteran political hack was elevated to Chief Executive Officer of U.S. imperialism?

This doesn't make the spectacle of Biden's tour any less stomach-turning, to say nothing of the celebratory coverage. As Orly Noy of the valuable online Israeli newsletter +972 puts it:

(D)espite the blatant violations of human rights, media outlets around the world continue to buy into Israel's distortions, often portraying the reality on the ground as a struggle between two equally powerful entities, rather than as a nuclear-armed state against a population that is criminalized for even the smallest acts of protest and resistance. President Biden, who is visiting Israel this week, will see and say very little about this reality.

Beth Miller, an organizer for Jewish Voice for Peace's political action arm JVP Action, adds:

When Biden lands in Israel, the Israeli army will be in the midst of carrying out the forced expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in Masafer Yatta — the single largest forced expulsion of Palestinians since 1967. As he shakes hands with leaders in Saudi Arabia, he will effectively be ignoring over seven years of Saudi Arabia's horrific war on Yemen, where nearly 400,000 Yemenis have died.

Not coincidentally, Biden's trip also coincides with Washington's entirely predictable complicity in the Israeli coverup of the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh (see [The Murder of Shireen Abu-Akleh](#)).

Given that what actually happened was immediately obvious — the clearly identified Palestinian-American journalist was shot in the head, undoubtedly by an Israeli sniper — the U.S. "investigation" had no choice but to find that the bullet was "probably" Israeli but that the facts are "inconclusive" and responsibility can't be determined, blah blah. (With this slapdash whitewash now done, perhaps Palestinian and Israeli journalists and human rights organizations on the ground might be able to conduct a genuine inquiry, but it's unclear whether that's possible.)

If it's possible to exceed this atrocity, Biden in Saudi Arabia will renew U.S. friendship with the royal house of what he'd once called a "pariah" state after Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman directed the 2018 kidnap, torture-murder and dismemberment of Washington Post columnist and Saudi critic Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. Neither this, nor the recent mass executions of 81 Saudi prisoners, nor the near-genocide in Yemen, can detract from the immediate task of begging the Saudi rulers to graciously open their oil taps to bring down gasoline prices a few cents in advance of the U.S. November midterm elections.

### Confronting Iran

On the larger strategic front, of course, the objective is to consolidate the alliance of one gang of murderers against another — Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf kingdoms versus the Iranian regime and its client forces in Syria and Lebanon.

By many accounts, some of which might be true, Iran has been coming closer to nuclear weapons capability since Trump unilaterally pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Program of Action, negotiated with Iran by the six

permanent UN Security Council member states plus Germany). This would provide the pretext for some kind of U.S.-Israeli military action.

Falling deeper into Trump's trap, when the Biden administration moved to rejoin the JCPOA it did so conditionally, maintaining brutal U.S.-enforced sanctions on Iran unless Tehran bows to terms that probably no Iranian government could accept — unless there were ironclad U.S. promises of permanent sanctions relief that no one would trust this treacherous superpower to keep.

With the current negotiations threatening to unravel, and Iran facing the threat of a growing regional war alliance, the U.S. State Department pretends to be shocked and alarmed that Iran is aligning with Russia in Putin's murderous war against Ukraine — and allegedly preparing to supply the Russian effort with attack drones and the training to use them. (If this is a surprise, it's for what it says about the current condition of the Russian military, but that's a different discussion.)

This writer's guess (hopefully not overoptimistic) is that the immediate threat of a shooting war with Iran is low, even though the Israeli government has long hoped to provoke one. But it looks like a longterm simmering crisis, coming on top of the global hunger disaster triggered by the war in Ukraine, inflation and dangers of world economic recession, and the ever-present unfolding environmental catastrophe.

Back in Israel, team Biden has tossed a bone to the crumbling Palestinian Authority leadership, promising a meeting with PA president Mahmoud Abbas. We can expect the faint echo of a U.S. renewal of support for the "two-state solution," while blocking the slightest initiatives — whether by Palestinians, progressive voices in the U.S. Congress, or anyone else — that might conceivably help advance it. The purpose on the ground is to consolidate the PA's role as the local police adjunct of Israeli repression.

This comes at a point when far-right Zionist mobs are rampaging through

occupied East Jerusalem, Israeli settlements are expanding without limit, and the military is carrying out mass arrests and killings in Jenin. In any case, successive U.S. administrations' "two-state" gestures for some time now have transcended the boundaries of hypocrisy and entered the realm of comedy.

## The Broader Picture

There's a wider set of issues in the reconfiguration of regional forces and the strategic orientation of U.S. imperialism in the contest to rule the world. Analyzing the full picture is beyond the limited scope of this article, but some of it is laid out by Israeli analyst Dr. Moshe Terdiman in Haaretz, July 10, 2022: "Biden's Americas is Returning to the Red Sea Basin."

Biden's visit is said to have "another goal that has not received any attention: To restore U.S. influence in one of the world's most important trade routes, and in several of the key countries along its shores — which it lost to Russia and China over the past 18 months."

For one thing, the United States lost influence in Ethiopia when it sided with Egypt and Sudan over Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam project — "the largest hydroelectric plant in Africa, which seriously threatens Egypt's water, food and economic security." Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed regime turned to a military cooperation agreement with Russia, and also received assistance "by drones from China to bomb the Tigrayans and their allies who are threatening his rule."

At the same time, the Sudanese coup regime "was driven into Russia's arms" when U.S. aid was suspended, and then publicly supported Russia when it invaded Ukraine. Further, "Eritrea was pushed into China's and Russia's embrace after the United States imposed sanctions on the Eritrean army, the country's ruling party and two senior government officials in November, 2021 over the involvement of the Eritrean army in the Ethiopian civil war."

Eritrea then joined the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, resulting in a \$15.7 million pledge of Chinese aid and interest in developing Eritrea's coast, not to mention contacts "currently underway between Russia and Eritrea to establish a Russian logistics base of the coast of Eritrea."

China's broader interest in the Horn of Africa ranges from expanding railroad connections to Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposing "that ethnic, religious and regional conflicts be resolved in a way that would create a unified, stable and harmonious development environment in the Horn of Africa." (That's pretty rich in itself, considering what's happening to the Chinese Uighur people.)

All this in turn helps explain why the United States is redeploying 450-500 troops to assist the embattled government of Somalia, while "investing considerable efforts in negotiations on ratifying the agreement between Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia for the return of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, with a Saudi commitment to ensure the freedom of navigation of Israeli ships in the region" and Israeli flights over Saudi territory to the Far East.

Overall, "U.S. activity contributes to restoring influence in the Red Sea Basin and to the construction of a new geopolitical space that extends from India to France...Israel is meant to play a central role within this space, stemming from its location between the eastern Mediterranean Basin and the Red Sea and Gulf states, and resulting from its military strength, its commitment to freedom of navigation and to dealing with the Iranian threat to freedom of navigation in the Red Sea."

There are many more details of course, but all this helps to explain why Palestinian freedom really doesn't matter — including, for example, the total absence of "freedom of navigation" for Gaza fishermen in their own coastal waters.

Indeed, all the regimes in this swirl of regional and imperial rivalries — Egypt and Sudan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Russia

and China, Israel and the United States — are engaged in the most vicious and anti-democratic

oppression. May the rulers sink together in the Red Sea.

15 July 2022

Source [Solidarity](#).

# British Trade Unions Donate Vehicle and Medical Equipment to Ukrainian Counterparts

30 July 2022, by [Ukraine Solidarity](#)

The unit, which is largely staffed by miners, put out a call for funds, medical supplies, and vehicles last month via the Ukrainian miners' union PRUP.

The National Union of Mineworkers, together with other British unions, including ASLEF and GMB, responded with donations totalling over £20,000 - enough to buy the pickup and additional equipment in the UK.

The pickup, a Mitsubishi L200 was driven to Lviv, Ukraine, by Wayne Thomas, NUM Vice President and Area Secretary for the South Wales NUM, and Mick Antoniw MS, Labour Member of the Welsh Senedd for Pontypridd, who is of Ukrainian descent.

Wayne Thomas said: "The NUM is proud to have gathered donations from a range of trade unions in the UK to take to our colleagues in Ukraine

with whom we have long-established links. We hope the vehicle and the specialist medical equipment will help save lives."

Mick Antoniw MS added: "I am using my holiday time to help deliver this vital equipment to the brave trade unionists who are putting their lives on the line every day to protect their comrades, families and freedom against Russian fascism."

They were met by Sergey Yunak, head of the PRUP miners' union and Andriy Denysov, a Battalion Commander. Sergey Yunak said: "Ukrainian miners and trade unionists are grateful to the solidarity from British trade unions as our members lay down their lives to defend our country and freedoms."

Andriy Denysov, Battalion Commander said: "I want to thank British workers for their support and donations of

much-needed material aid which will help Ukraine defeat Russian Fascism."

In addition to the vehicle, the team took vital medical equipment, including tourniquets, chest seals and blood clotting agents used to treat casualties, plus two CPR training kits, torches, and vital spare tyres for the vehicle.

Mick Whelan General Secretary of the train drivers' union ASLEF said: "ASLEF is proud to be supporting workers in the Ukraine at this most difficult and dangerous of times as they strive to protect their independence and freedom."

The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign seeks to organise solidarity and provide information in support of the Ukrainian labour movement. [www.ukrainsolidaritycampaign.org](http://www.ukrainsolidaritycampaign.org)

Source: [Anti\\*Capitalcity Resistance](#).

# Quebec: climate strike on 23 September

29 July 2022, by [Workers for Climate Justice](#)

"We have run out of time," says François Geoffroy, spokesman for Travailleuses et travailleurs pour la justice climatique (TJC - "Workers for Climate Justice"). "Our only chance to avoid catastrophic climate change is

to start a complete exit from oil and gas now. Our governments refuse to do so."

The mobilized unions, five of which have already adopted a strike mandate, are calling for a complete

ban on fossil fuels, as well as massive taxation of wealth, reinvestment in public services and social programs. "Only the strike will allow us to build the balance of forces necessary to counterbalance the fossil fuel lobby,"

Geoffroy says.

“Students must take to the streets to protect their future,” says Amélie Beaulé, delegate of the Cégep de Saint-Laurent student association. “From the beginning of the school year, we will propose that our members join the strike movement. We invite all student associations in Quebec to do the same”. Like the trade union associations, they denounce the lack of ambition in climate and social areas of the Legault government. “The fight against climate change and the financing of

public services and social programs must be central issues in the next election campaign,” said Beaulé.

Several community organizations are also involved, including the Mouvement d'éducation populaire et d'action communautaire du Québec (MÉPACQ), the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU) and the Réseau québécois de l'action communautaire autonome (RQ-ACA). The Fédération nationale des enseignants et enseignantes du Québec (FNEEQ-CSN), the Fédération de la culture et des communications

(FNCC-CSN), the Conseil central des Laurentides (CCSNL-CSN) and the Conseil central de l'Estrie (CCSNE-CSN) also endorsed the movement's demands.

The two main demands of the movement are:

- Ban fossil fuels by 2030, in terms of production, processing, export and import;
- Massively tax wealth and reinvest massively in public services and social programs, to ensure decent living conditions for all.

## South Africa: between corruption and neoliberalism

28 July 2022, by **Paul Martial**

Before coming to power in 2009, Jacob Zuma had already been charged for corruption during an arms sale by the Thales company. In 2016, he was accused of using public money, nearly 15 million euros, for the rehabilitation of his residence in Nkandla. But this was nothing compared to what would be revealed in 2018 by the commission of inquiry on his complicity in corruption with the Gupta siblings.

The latter have methodically penetrated all public companies. Judge Zondo's investigation report is damning. Eskom, the power generation and distribution company, paid hundreds of millions of dollars upfront for the purchase of low-quality coal from a Gupta company. They tried to influence the national railway company PRASA (Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa) in a locomotive purchase operation. South African Airways has come under enormous pressure to abandon the route to India in favour of Jet Airways, owned by the family. Again with Zuma's help, they had a key say in the appointments of ministers. Thus, with the help of a consulting firm Bain & Company, they managed to make the

tax services, previously among the most effective in Africa, a structure that has become inefficient.

Jacob Zuma, who played a central role throughout his time in office in this state capture, has repeatedly manoeuvred to avoid answering to justice. Attempts to cover up cases, intimidation of journalists, refusal to appear before the anti-corruption commission of inquiry, use of violence to protest against his imprisonment with riots unleashed in particular in Johannesburg, with looting and more than 300 deaths. To end his incarceration, he has cited health problems.

### The ANC in decline

While the ANC remains the dominant party in the country, its electoral results are eroding. Mandela's party has embarked on the path of neoliberalism and, if there have been some efforts in the social field, they are far from adequate. The system has amplified inequalities and above all benefited the party leaders who have become considerably richer. Most

justify themselves by invoking the suffering and deprivation endured during the struggle against apartheid.

Upon becoming President in 2018, Cyril Ramaphosa promised to wage a firm fight against corruption. A difficult project given its generalization in the ruling circles. Judge Zondo advocates prosecution of more than a hundred people, including former ministers. Ramaphosa's probity was damaged by a case of theft in one of his properties. The burglars found the equivalent of 3.8 million euros, which raises legitimate questions about the origin of such a sum. During a speech at the Rustenburg stadium, northwest of Johannesburg, for Mayday, Ramaphosa was copiously booed by workers. The leaders of COSATU, the union federation close to the government, were unable to calm the crowd.

### Dangerous exasperation

The emergence of Julius Malema's radical organization, the "Economic Freedom Fighters", is reinforced by a

critique of the ANC's economic policy and corruption, but the country is riven by sometimes violent xenophobic demonstrations. The main targets are immigrants from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Nigeria, as well as Somali refugees. The Operation

Dudula movement - which could be translated from Zulu as "Force out" - makes undocumented immigrants the main cause of the country's misfortunes. They are accused of delinquency, drug trafficking and undermining the labour market. Pressure is mounting on businesses

and small businesses to employ only South Africans. This type of movement is unfortunately not new but now it is taking root among the people and could degenerate into large-scale violence. Hence the urgency of building a political alternative.

## Erdogan at war on all fronts

27 July 2022, by **Eyüp Özer**

Changes in the global geopolitical order have, moreover, largely worked in his favour. Over the past decade, Erdogan has sharpened his ability to put world events at the service of his own haggling to consolidate his position or, at the very least, delay his political demise. This is the case with the war in Ukraine, which he used to overcome the problems posed by the decline in purchasing power of the working class and his loss of popularity in the run-up to the new elections. Erdogan, showing a certain skill, is therefore trying to build on the world situation, but finding himself forced to wage war on all fronts.

### On the economic front

The fragility of Turkish capitalism is long standing, and the AKP government has always sought "creative" solutions aimed to at least delay the effects of crisis. But the trends observed in Turkey now are also closely linked to the crisis of global capitalism. After the 2008 crisis, when central banks all over the world were injecting liquidity into the world economy, Turkey too saw a huge amount of money arrive and with it a certain illusion of wealth. The bad aspects of debt appeared when the time came to start to repay. With the announcement of the gradual cessation of asset purchases on the financial markets by the central banks, two different sets of interests corresponding to two distinct

capitalist sectors in Turkey began to manifest themselves.

On the one hand, the TÜSIAD, the organization of the traditional big bourgeoisie in Turkey, openly criticized the government's policy and demanded an increase in central bank interest rates. [1] On the other hand, there are the "small and medium-sized enterprises," some of which, however, have emerged as large capitalist interests in their own right. These are most often politically allied with the Erdogan government and have relied on him to keep interest rates low.

Despite their relative divergences, these two sectors of the capitalist class also have common interests, whether in terms of their investments in the export-related industrial sector, or their hostility to workers' freedom of association and the right to strike. If, therefore, the nuances can be quite fine between these Turkish capitalist circles, a general classification is possible based on a difference between capitalists in capital-intensive sectors and those in labour-intensive industries. A general distinction could also be made between those who have enough capital to lend and those who are looking for cheap credit. Therefore, despite their common priorities, there is a limited ground for confrontation between these two groups of capital holders.

Faced with an inevitable economic crisis, the government had to make a choice between high inflation or high unemployment. In the run-up to the elections (to be held no later than June

2023), the choice was that of the inflation rate against a possible increase in the unemployment rate, with the continuous reduction of interest rates, intended both to stimulate the economy and to support the capitalist groups around Erdogan, all convinced that, with employment preserved, the loss of purchasing power would cause less discontent within its electoral base.

Over the past ten months, the Erdogan government has been attempting an economic experiment: while keeping the value of the Turkish lira [TL] low, the government has tried to aid exports while supporting producers seeking to increase production based on very low interest rates, while the real interest rate is approaching -40%. The main objective was to support exports and replace imports with new productive investments. However, their experimentation, coupled with the overall increase in prices, helped trigger a rise in inflation: officially 70%, but according to ENAG, an independent research organization, it has reached 175% annually.

The purchasing power of the working class has fallen sharply, leading to widespread poverty. In particular, the lack of access to imported cereals and other food products because of the war in Ukraine has only aggravated the situation for most workers. The government was forced to raise the minimum wage - usually increased only once a year - a second time this year. The new minimum wage has been increased from TL 4,253 (€242)

to TL 5,500 (€313), but neither of these amounts ensures normal living conditions. It should be remembered here that most Turks earn the minimum wage for a 45-hour work week, and the minimum wage has become virtually the average wage in Turkey.

But at the same time, Erdogan's policy of orienting Turkish capitalism towards export is on favourable ground, especially given the restructuring of supply chains within global capitalism during the health crisis. This policy of cheap production costs in Turkey with low exchange rates has, to some extent, borne fruit. Even in a context where Europe, Turkey's main export market, grew by only 0.3% in the first quarter, for almost a year, every month, Turkey has beaten its export record of the previous months. In May 2022, exports reached \$19 billion. Now, changes in alliances in global politics further foster this trend as supply chains move towards sets of "strategic partners."

## **On the foreign policy front**

TÜSIAD anticipated this development by issuing a warning to the government: "Now supply chains are moving to countries sharing common 'values' and the government must reorient itself towards Western alliances in order to take advantage of these changes in global supply chains." This statement came during the dispute between Turkey and its NATO allies, particularly over the issue of the integration of Sweden and Finland into NATO. Erdogan openly reproached them for their "treachery" and "anti-national" behaviour before agreeing exactly with the advice that had just been addressed to him: after having played his veto card with NATO, he signed a memorandum of understanding with Sweden and Finland. He had until now accused these countries of supporting "terrorism" and asked for help with his plans to invade Syrian Kurdistan to establish a so-called 30 km buffer zone in Rojava where houses would be built

to accommodate refugees.

Strange as it may seem, many people in Turkey believe in Erdogan's project as a way to welcome refugees in Turkey and also to change the demographic balance of Syrian Kurdistan. Of course, the 30 km are also a bargaining issue for Erdogan: with his nationalist allies, he is looking for assets in his negotiations with Russia and the United States in order to be able to launch a military invasion operation.

Sweden and Finland were just the beginning. At the beginning of July, the then Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi visited Turkey to sign agreements signed on a wide range of topics ranging from military cooperation to diplomatic cooperation, from memoranda of understanding on civil protection to an agreement on the mutual recognition of driving licences between the two countries. During their meeting, among other things, an increase in trade to reach 30 billion euros and a strengthening of road transport between the two countries were discussed, an additional prerequisite for increasing trade with Turkey.

It is no exaggeration to say that over the past two decades Turkey has become one of the main manufacturing centres for European capitalists and now, with the reorientation of supply chains and its very weak currency, together with a well-trained but unorganized and low-cost workforce, Turkey is more than ever on the way to becoming a new China for Europe. Despite its differences with the government on other issues, even the TÜSIAD could not be happier.

## **On the home front**

In a context of increasing poverty, loss of purchasing power and repeated military attacks in Iraqi Kurdistan and Rojava, the government knows it must be brutal in the face of any public expression of discontent. It knows that letting the slightest sign of weakness appear runs the risk of seeing the protest spread. Thus, even local demonstrations of workers in their workplaces, for wage increases, are

violently repressed by the police. In recent months, however, these police attacks have been accompanied by raids by fascist thugs.

The violent attacks on gay pride, the encouragement given to Islamist far-right groups to attack LGBTI activists in the streets, and the reporting on social networks of various "civilian" paramilitary associations, also raises fears among the opposition that this could be a kind of pre-election strategy. And it seems that these barely concealed paramilitary associations - which make open shows of strength - are aimed at intimidation and paralysis of the opposition, increasingly worried about the conditions in which these elections will take place and the role that street violence will play in them.

The postponement of the crisis in Turkey is being done on the backs of the working class whose lives are increasingly hard. The government is trying to suppress any opposition by terrifying society through arrests, police violence, and by trying to provoke a national mobilization around the wars in Iraqi Kurdistan and Rojava. This strategy seems quite clear: to dissuade by fear any oppositional mobilization, to establish a form of economic aid with the increase in the minimum wage and a marginal improvement in pensions, to push for nationalist mobilizations in the country based on external "victories," and to divide the opposition with the creation of a neo-fascist opposition focused on refugees. For its part, the opposition coming from the bourgeoisie consists in waiting for the elections and not engaging in any "provocation" until they are over, thus getting rid of Erdogan without displaying any political differences between their program and his.

Unfortunately, in the absence of a left-wing alternative, even if we get rid of Erdogan, we still do not see the political program emerging to allow the working class to improve its working conditions and self-confidence.

23 July 2022

# Crisis of the Draghi government in Italy

26 July 2022, by **Franco Turigliatto**

Mario Draghi's government was formed in February 2021, backed by the bourgeoisie to bring about a profound restructuring of Italian capitalism through a considerable input of European funds (almost 200 billion euros) aimed at financially supporting the most successful companies, imposing an even greater flexibilization of labour and implementing new and profound neoliberal counter-reforms in favour of capital.

## You reap what you sow

It was a government of "national unity" involving all the main parties except Fratelli d'Italia, a far-right party, which only made a facade of opposition, largely agreeing with all the measures adopted.

Draghi's policies have been shameful, starting with the "non-management" of the health crisis, increased military expenditure at the expense of social spending (health and school), the so-called differentiated autonomy of the regions that will further divide the country and, finally, economic policies that have favoured the reduction of wages and pensions and the generalization of precariousness.

The government is now beginning to reap what it has sown. It bears responsibility for a dramatic social collapse as evidenced by data from the National Institute of Social Security (INPS) and the Institute of Statistics: 5.6 million poor people, a third of workers earning less than 1000 euros per month, a large majority of new very short-term employment contracts, wages and retirement benefits among the lowest in Europe, and still further eroded by the

explosion of inflation.

## The crisis is not over

Social unrest, anger and despair are sweeping across large sectors of society, so much so that within the government, fearing uncontrollable popular uprisings, talk has begun of a "social agenda", making some tax cuts to relieve wages and pensions a little, but further diminishing public resources while without in any way attacking rents and profits.

Even in a "normal" phase of capitalism, this project would have caused great social contradictions, but in the face of major events such as war, inter-imperialist conflicts, the climate and energy crisis, the resurgence of inflation (8%), and all this in a context of persistence of the pandemic, it could only plunge the country into a dramatic social crisis.

In this context of social crisis, all parties supporting the government (right and centre-left) have entered into conflict, each looking for proposals and tactical positions to stand out politically from the others before the general elections (no later than spring 2023), especially since FdI (Fratelli d'Italia), in the ranks of the opposition, although only in appearance, has been leading the polls for many months.

The M5S (MoVimento 5 stelle - 5-Star Movement) of Giuseppe Conte, the party of undifferentiated contestation that combines partially valid themes with objectives and practices that can be harmful, the majority force in three different governments, subject to pressures aimed at transforming it increasingly into a "normal" bourgeois party and assuming an increasingly

marginal role, faces the threat of electoral collapse. Under pressure from its base and in the hope of recovering popular support, it is trying to break the deadlock with a kind of break in continuity. Hence the political crisis of the government and the resignation of Draghi, its referral to the Chambers by the President, a conflictual climate where everyone is positioning themselves against.

## Blocking the road to the right and the far right

Many are mobilizing to recompose the government and keep the former banker in place; the interests of the bourgeoisie are more than ever working with a Draghi government to pass the financial law and the continuation of the so-called recovery and national resilience plan (PNR). It is no coincidence that Western leaders and bosses are supporting Draghi and pushing him to continue the "dirty" work he has begun for the capitalists.

Whatever the conclusion of the political crisis, the main thing for the working classes is whether or not they will have the strength to build a social mobilization capable of opposing the policies of the bourgeoisie and its governments, of fighting against the high cost of living, against poverty, against the various forms of precariousness, for real wage increases snatched from the profits of the bosses, for a revaluation of pensions and to impose a real taxation of capitalist fortunes, rents and profits. It is also the only way to block the way to the right and the far right by preventing the apathy and anger of broad layers of society from moving in this very dangerous direction.

# Philippines: Ferdinand Marcos Jr. succeeds Rodrigo Duterte and his clan completes the reconquest of power

25 July 2022, by **Pierre Rousset**

Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said in his inaugural speech that he must look to the future, yet he kept referring to his father, praising his accomplishments and following in the footsteps of his reign - the dictatorial regime of martial law (1972-1986). For the record, the martial law regime meant, among other things, corruption and looting of resources, massive attacks on press freedom, arrests, torture, killings and disappearances.

Ferdinand Marcos Jr. also sang of national unity, but the father whose legacy he endorses not only suppressed popular movements, but also attacked and marginalized rival big families - even ordering the assassination of Benigno Aquino in 1983. Washington advocated the "modernization" of the Philippine state as part of its supposedly democratic policy of "Nation-Building" [2]. The recurrent reference in US policy to this notion has been masterfully shattered, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. Marcos privatized the state for the sole benefit of his clan and its allies, but since he made the Philippines an anti-communist bastion, all was forgiven in advance. Let the family dictatorship be.

Ferdinand Marcos Jr. warmly praised the actions of his predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte (who nevertheless shunned the inauguration, even though his daughter Sarah was elected vice president). Under his rule, in the name of the "war on drugs", tens of thousands of people have fallen victim to death squads and a policy of extra-judicial killings. The International Criminal Court is investigating these killings, so much so that Duterte has decided that the Philippines should leave this institution. The Philippine prosecutor

Karim Khan has nevertheless reaffirmed the right of the ICC to continue its investigations, at least for the period during which the country was a member.

The ball is now in the court of "Bongbong" who seems reluctant to respond positively to the request of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in support of the ICC. He has just put an end to the investigation of crimes committed during the dictatorship of his late father and aimed at recovering the stolen property... for which his mother remains indebted. Under Duterte's rule, as before under Ferdinand Marcos Sr., the forces of repression have enjoyed almost total impunity - a historical continuity, once again, that the current president does not seem ready to combat.

As if being president and commander-in-chief of the armed forces were not enough, "Bongbong" has also reserved a ministry for himself, that of agriculture, the only sector he said he would reform during his campaign. He is already taking the issue of rice production in hand. Considerable public funding can be devoted to this essential sector, but it is not clear that small-scale producers and consumers will benefit. The Masagana plans aim to increase the productivity of hybrid varieties. In the 1970s, Masagana 99 was aborted, causing the bankruptcy of the rural banks and leaving farmers heavily in debt. There is also talk of tackling the coconut sector again. As journalist Maria Ceres Doyo recalls, the campaigns to tax coconut production in order to modernize it led, during the time of Marcos senior, to one of the biggest corruption scandals, again leaving small producers in debt for life [3]. Under

these circumstances, Marcos Jr.'s self-appointment as Minister of Agriculture raises questions.

"Bongbong" said, without laughing, that he had not offended any of his rivals. Yet, as sociologist Randy David notes [4], armies of strategists and trolls spread lies and misinformation on a massive scale via social media "to wage the most divisive presidential campaign in the nation's political history. Mr. Marcos Jr. could pretend to stay above the fray because his own partisans of hate were busy doing the attacking for him." New technologies have made him more in line with the legacy of Duterte than his father.

## The power of a clan

It is not a man, but a clan that has regained power 36 years after the "EDSA revolution [5]" on February 25, 1986, which forced Washington to exfiltrate to Honolulu the Marcos family, which fled with the cash: a fortune in art treasures, precious goods and dollars, the fruits of prevarication.

There is nothing secret about the return of the clan to power, as evidenced by the staging of his inaugural speech on June 30, the omnipresence of his mother Imelda (92) on that day and his celebration of victory among friends from the same world.

True to his mother's "tradition," Bongbong "has revived the ostentatious display of wealth during the inaugural ball and dinner at the Rizal Hall in Malacañan Palace on the evening of June 30. The glittering



party that night was attended by a limited number of guests, among whom were the country's well-heeled, elite members of high society. Each guest was given "as a unique and expensive gift "a gleaming gold medallion engraved with Mr. Marcos' image", "encased in a well-crafted, elegant-looking red box." By distributing "images of himself carved in a gold medallion," the new president inherits his mother's "unbridled sense of entitlement and narcissism." A touch of caution in this glitzy day, the ball and dinner were not covered by television [6].

Bongbong's older sister Imee is a senator, a powerful institution in the Philippines with only 24 members. Relatives were placed in key positions, such as Ricardo de Leon, who was appointed Marcos' chief security coordinator. This former police lieutenant-colonel had fled with the Marcos family in 1986. As for Juan Ponce Enrile (98), he became Chief presidential legal counsel (CPLC). A lawyer, he had been the damned soul of Ferdinand Marcos Sr., thinker of martial law, then presiding over the Philippine Coconut Authority and its juicy profits when, with the wind changing, he joined the minority military rebellion that initiated the "February 1986 revolution". Since then, he has been able to pursue a timely political career. From father to son, the circle is now complete.

The Marcos clan, assured for the time being of the cooperation of Vice President Sara Duterte, the very first member of the cabinet to be appointed after the May elections, even if she only receives a consolation prize: Secretary of Education, when she would have preferred the portfolio of Defense [7]. He has the support of key families, a majority in the House of Representatives (the Parliament) and the Senate, and the "goodwill" of institutions such as the Supreme Court. The independent press is under

pressure - the news website Rappler.com is threatened with a ban.

We should not expect the misnamed "international community" to pressure Marcos to respect rights and freedoms in the archipelago. Joe Biden is relieved to be able to deal with a "rational" character, after the trying experience of the erratic Duterte presidency. The latter had, however, fallen in line by renewing with Washington the bilateral security pact (the Visiting forces agreement) that allows the US Navy to use Philippine military bases and ending at the eleventh hour - June 23! - to talks begun in 2018 with Beijing on joint exploration of gas and oil reserves in the Philippine exclusive economic zone, citing Chinese demands that are incompatible with the Philippine Constitution.

As in the days of martial law, the important thing in Washington's eyes is that Manila sides with the United States in the geopolitical confrontation with China in the Indo-Pacific region. As a sign of goodwill, Joe Biden was represented at Ferdinand Marcos Jr's inaugural address by Douglas Emhoff, the husband of US Vice President Kamala Harris. As Sophie Boisseau du Rocher wrote on June 25, 2022, in a note from Ifri (French Institute of International Relations) [8] "in order to best preserve interests with its former colony, the United States has no choice but to come to terms with the Marcos family" while it wants to "reinvest more actively in the region (...) to counter the growing influence and ambitions" of Beijing.

## **No return to democracy**

Ferdinand Marcos Jr. inherited from the Duterte presidency an anti-terrorist law that is particularly liberticidal and favors the use of *red-*

*tagging* - the all-out accusation of being a communist agent against NGO associations, media or opposition personalities, lawyers and trade unionists, whistle-blowers and community activists.

Rodrigo Duterte has waged a dirty war on drugs by inciting the police to "kill" alleged drug dealers - NGOs denounce several tens of thousands of extrajudicial executions - and has used every means at his disposal to silence critics. He has persecuted former senator Leila de Lima, imprisoned since 2017 on drug trafficking charges - de Lima's main accusers recanted their statements just before the elections. He harassed the opposition media. Rappler, run by Nobel Peace Prize winner (2021) Maria Ressa, is still under an injunction from the stock exchange authorities to close down, on the pretext of the acquisition of a foreign shareholding in the company's capital (prohibited by law, but disputed by Rappler), when the latter has already been converted into employee shareholding (a large international campaign is underway in defense of Rappler).

Bongbong said during the campaign that he opposed the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation into his predecessor's war on drugs. However, the investigation was suspended in November 2021 and has now been reopened by the new ICC chief prosecutor, Karim Khan. He believes that justice works well in the Philippines and that the intervention of an international judicial authority is not necessary. He shows no willingness to fight the policy and culture of impunity that allows the forces of repression to do as they please.

With the return to power of the Marcos clan, international solidarity with the progressive forces in the Philippines unfortunately loses nothing of its topicality and urgency.

# **Belarusian 'railway partisans' face death**

# penalty

## 24 July 2022, by Simon Pirani

The state Investigations Committee says they could face the death penalty, although lawyers say there is no basis for that in Belarusian law.

On Saturday 23 July, Belarusians [will protest at their country's embassy in London](#), in support of the Svetlagorsk defendants and eight others arrested on terrorism charges.

Ravich, Dzikun and Malchanau were detained in Svetlagorsk on 4 March this year - a week after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine - along with Alisa Malchanau, Aleh's daughter, and Natalia Ravich, Dzimtry's wife, who were released a few days later.

Dzianis Dzikun's brother, Dmitry, said in [an interview last month](#) that Dzianis had wanted "to help Ukraine somehow". Three people had been arrested, he said, and:

As far as I understand, people knew [at that time] that all the Russian equipment was moving towards the north of Ukraine through Belarus. And for that they used the railways. They wanted to help Ukraine somehow - to stop these armaments, to make sure they couldn't go further.

There are 11 people in the "railway partisans" case, and now the first three are going to court. For me, these people are heroes. They didn't sit at home, like the "armchair battalion". At least they tried to do something.

Dmitry said that Dzianis, who is in a detention centre at Gomel', had been able to send and receive letters, and had been visited by his partner and his sister.

Straight after his arrest in March, it

was very different. Dzianis was severely beaten and forced to record a so-called confession on video - one of the Belarusian security forces' standard techniques. Dmitry said:

On the so called "confessional" video it is clear that my brother's face was smashed in. A black eye, swelling on his chin. The day before he was arrested, we spoke [on line] in the evening. I saw how he looked; not so much as a scratch. He was feeling fine. [But after his arrest] he was limping. Other people saw him. He was holding his side, his face was bruised.

The case against Ravich, Dzikun and Malchanau concerns an arson attack on a railway relay cabinet. This is reportedly the most common form of rail sabotage: it wrecks automatic signalling systems, disrupts schedules and forces trains to move at reduced speeds of 15-20km/hour.

The Svetlagorsk trio have been charged with: participating in an extremist organisation; acts of terrorism; deliberate harm to the transport system, resulting in serious damage and threats to life; and treason.

The Investigations Committee said the trio could face the death penalty. But Zerkalo, the independent news site, [published legal advice](#) that the death penalty for terrorism offences, introduced on 29 May this year, can not be applied retroactively. Prior to that date, it could only be applied if the offences had led to deaths.

Obviously there is no reason to think that Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime will obey its own laws, and so the lives of the Svetlagorsk accused are in

danger.

On 21 April, a coalition of six human rights organisations [recognised](#) the Svetlagorsk three, and eight other "railway partisans", as political prisoners.

An [overview](#) of the "railway partisans" movement by Belarus Digest estimated that in the first two months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there were more than 80 actions.

"Incidents at this scale have not been seen since world war two", Lizaveta Kasmach wrote in that report. Railway workers had been among those arrested, and in the last week of March, independent Telegram channels had reported that more than 40 of them had been arrested.

The authorities charged the detainees with high treason, espionage, and terrorist acts. By 30 March, Telegram channels affiliated with the security forces posted more than three dozen "confession" videos featuring arrested railway workers.

The fate of these detainees is unknown to Belarusian activists I have been in touch with. They are not included in the human rights organisations' list of political prisoners, but that does not mean they are safe. There are so many detainees that activists are struggling to keep track of them all; people are only included on the list according to narrow criteria.

In April, the Belarusian opposition politician Franak Viačorka reported that, as well as sabotage, there were "dozens" of smaller actions, e.g. by train drivers who refused to carry equipment.

A decentralised network, including Bypol (former security services officers now in exile), the Community of Railway Workers (organised on Telegram) and the Cyber Partisans (Belarusian IT professionals now in exile), helped facilitate action against Russian military transport, [the Washington Post reported](#).

The “railway partisans” actions are indicative of widespread discontent with the Belarusian regime over its support for Russia’s war on Ukraine. In response, the authorities have lashed out with renewed repression of trade unionists, journalists and other opponents.

The Supreme Court of Belarus last week (12 July) [ordered the liquidation of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union](#), which for thirty years has played a leading role in the struggle for workers’ rights.

“The union’s activities have always been about increasing workers’ wages, workplace safety, and fair and dignified relations with people in the workplace”, its organisers [stated](#) prior to the decision.

Since 1991 members of our trade union, united in primary organisations of Mozyr, Novopolotsk, Soligorsk, Grodno, Bobruisk, Minsk, Mogilev, Vitebsk,

independently defended their legal rights by concluding collective agreements.

The union’s president Maksim Poznyakov [was arrested](#) in May in Novopolotsk. A week previously he had been elected as president of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions – to replace Aleksandr Yaroshuk and his deputy, Sergei Antusevich, who were also arrested.

This month, Katsiaryna Andreyeva, a journalist, had an eight-year sentence for treason [added](#) to her two-year jail term for participating in the 2020 protests, and Danuta Perednia, a student, was [sentenced](#) to six-and-a-half years for reposting an anti-war statement.

Human rights organisations say there are now [more than 1200 political prisoners](#) in Belarus – although the total numbers detained in response to protest activities (such as the rail workers mentioned above) is far higher.

Railway workers’ support for the antiwar movement this year follows their active participation in the wave of protests that swept Belarus in 2020.

Those actions, too, led to dismissals, arrests and jailings, which are documented, together with

information about the “railway partisans”, in a report by Our House, the civil society campaign group. (A downloadable version of the report, that Our House has circulated among trade unionists in the UK, is [here](#).)

In September last year, three railway workers – [Sjarhei Dzjuba](#), [Maksim Sakovicz](#) and [Hanna Ablab](#) – were rounded up as part of a “treason” case against the Rabochy Rukh labour rights group.

□ On Saturday 23 July, Belarusians and their supporters in the UK will [demonstrate](#) in support of the “railway partisans” and other political prisoners. 12.00 midday, at the Belarusian embassy, 6 Kensington Court, London, W8 5DL.

The demonstration is called “in support of the rail workers of Belarus, who despite facing tremendous repression from the regime, successfully disrupted the Russian invasion in Ukraine by sabotaging the railway network. We will be demanding an immediate release of the imprisoned heroes”.

Earlier this month, a conference of the UK rail workers’ union RMT [resolved](#) to support Belarusian rail workers facing repression. This welcome stand will help to strengthen desperately needed solidarity.

Source: [People and Nature](#)

## NATO expands - Kurds betrayed

23 July 2022, by [Phil Hearse](#), [Sarah Parker](#)

Erdoğan sensed a key opportunity and played his cards well. The United States agreed to sell Turkey the most advanced version of the F-16 fighter plane, and Sweden and Finland in return agreed to deport Kurdish ‘terrorists’ back to Turkey.

Erdoğan’s government says supporters of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) are terrorists, but also members of the YPG (the Kurdish-led

People’s Protection Units in Northern Syria) and the left wing HDP (People’s Democratic Party) in Turkey. Members and supporters of all these movements are dubbed terrorists, including Turkey’s 59 HDP parliamentary deputies. Evidence does not much concern the Erdoğan government as it hands out the ‘terrorist’ label.

Faced with upcoming elections,

Erdoğan’s party, the Islamist AKP, is beating the Turkish nationalist drum to mobilise its right-wing supporters. On 17 June, 20 journalists were arrested in southern Turkey and sent to jail, accused of membership of various left-wing and Kurdish nationalist parties. All of this is part of the expected nationalist crescendo which will grow louder as the elections approach.

All radical opposition parties in Turkey are characterised as terrorist organisations. From Erdoğan's perspective, now that Sweden and Finland have signed up to be his police force in the two Nordic countries, he can make demands for the extradition of any Kurdish or Turkish oppositionists, and provoke Turkish nationalist outrage if any are not deported.

There is a lot for Erdoğan to work on, with 100,000+ Turkish and Kurdish people in Sweden, plus up to 10,000 in Finland. The Finnish prime minister Sana Marin has stressed that in considering any demands Finland will 'respect all human rights'. In fact anyone sent into the hands of the Turkish state is likely to suffer torture and a very long prison sentence—or death in prison.

The total size of the Turkish and Kurdish diaspora in Europe includes at least 5 million in Germany; one million in France; 500,000 in the United Kingdom; 270,000 in Austria and 50,000 in Italy. All are potentially now under threat, as Erdogan steps up his demands for all NATO countries to deport 'terrorists'.

There is another more worrying aspect of the deal with NATO. One well informed website says Erdogan is planning a new massive military incursion into northern Syria and northern Iraq, with the aim of crushing Kurdish-led resistance forces there. They say:

The Turkish president is clear. He has already drawn up a military plan to "liberate" Syrian Kurdistan and now wants NATO's backing. This fight against the Kurds would also include members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a mixture of Arab and Kurdish members, led by the latter, who led the fight against Daesh [Islamic State-ISIS] in the context of the Syrian civil war.

Deepening massive repression has been the lot of the opposition in Turkey since the 2016 attempted

coup, organised mainly by dissident military officers and the 'soft' Islamists who follow the exiled cleric Fethullah Gülen. More than 100,000 have been imprisoned and a similar number have lost their jobs.

The agreement of Finland and Sweden to deport 'terrorists' is likely to hit Kurdish and Turkish residents very hard. In any case, the attempted deportations are likely to cause political uproar, encouraging Erdoğan to once again use Turkish nationalist outrage to garner political support for his AKP party.

The second major agreement with Erdoğan was for the US to sell Turkey the latest F-16 American fighter planes, and update kits for the 40 older F-16s already in Turkish hands. The United States excluded Turkey from the project to build its latest stealth fighter, the F-35, as a punishment for Turkey buying the Russian S-400 air defence missile, a system certainly cheaper than anything the Americans had on offer and according to many observers, more capable.

Having been excluded from the F-35 project, Turkey demanded the next best thing, the upgraded F-16B. The updated F16B does not have all the capabilities of the F-35, in terms of being able to 'see' a battlefield over a vast area, and engage 20 targets simultaneously. The F35 capabilities might be needed for a war with China, but are not necessary for combatting the mainly infantry guerrilla forces of the PKK and YPG.

And the F-16s come in at a more affordable \$10-12 million each, whereas the F-35B costs upwards of \$80 million. And the new F-16 planes put Turkey in a much more equal position to others in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Erdoğan may also resent his Mediterranean rival Greece being able to buy the F35, but an armed clash between Turkey and Greece is unlikely. And in training exercises the new F-16 has 'shot down' F-35s on a number of occasions.

Another tack of Erdoğan's attempt to break out of recent regional isolation

is by repairing bridges with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States under the Saudi's thumb. These super-rich and oil-providing states have been at loggerheads with Erdoğan over which country has leadership of the Islamic world. Erdoğan deepened his anti-Saudi line, using the fact that the Saudi crown prince Mohamed bin Salam gave the order for the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a vocal Saudi critic of the regime—in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Now Erdoğan has been touring the Middle East, from Libya to Riyadh to Dubai, ensuring all that he is not challenging for leadership of the Muslim world and would welcome their investment in Turkey. Needing financial support, Erdoğan bowed to his regional neighbours, who are awash with petro-dollars, especially when oil prices are so high.

At the start of the Ukraine war, Erdoğan reckoned he could maximise his benefits through taking a neutral stand and helping to broker a negotiated settlement, although a neutral position did not rule out selling Turkey's home-made and very advanced drones to Ukraine. Now in the face of absolute Russian intransigence to a negotiated peace, as well as Ukraine and its allies ruling out negotiations at this stage, he is moving away from Russia towards a friendlier attitude to the Western powers.

Erdoğan and his ruling Islamist party the AKP, have imprisoned tens of thousands since the bungled 2016 military coup. More than 100,000 have been sacked from their jobs, as alleged supporters of terrorism. This included thousands of activists in the broad left party, the HDP (Peoples Democratic Party).

At the end of June, 22 people, 21 of them journalists, were arrested. The arrests were in the mainly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in southern Turkey—what the Kurds called 'North Kurdistan.'

There have been demonstrations in both Sweden and Finland against joining NATO, but these have been mainly confined to the political left,

and have been much larger in Sweden than Finland. Some reports have alleged that there is an age difference in attitudes to NATO, with older and middle-aged people in Sweden being against joining NATO, nostalgic for its neutral position during the Cold War (roughly 1950-90).

But actually the demographic most opposed to joining NATO is young men aged 18-25. And you don't have to think very hard to guess why. Overall in Sweden about 38% are said to be against NATO membership, a huge swing away from Sweden's traditional neutrality, caused of course by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Pro-NATO feeling, has grown in the Russia borderlands, from Eastern Europe to Scandinavia, thanks to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Support for NATO goes hand-in-hand with support for intensifying the militarisation of the continent. The military and their right-wing political supporters are using the invasion to build support for NATO and increased arms spending. The mantra of increased arms spending is unanimous in the Tory party election. Militarisation goes way beyond what is needed to arm Ukraine to resist the invasion. Everything that is needed by Ukraine could be supplied from current inventories, absolutely massive in the NATO forces. Heavy weapons are being doled out to Ukraine with an eye-dropper, for political reasons and not because NATO needs to acquire more weapons to meet Ukraine's military needs.

In Britain the labour movement and

left political organisations should of course oppose deportations to Turkey. We should also stand with those in Sweden and Finland opposed to NATO membership, as that alliance resumes its 70-year role of tying countries in Europe and beyond to American political and military leadership.

STOP PRESS: The Turkish offensive against Kurds in northern Iraq and northern Syria, predicted in this article, may have already begun. On Wednesday (20 July) Turkish shells hit the Iraqi tourist resort of Zakho, killing 9 people. Turkey blamed fighters of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) for the attack, as it normally does.

20 Jul 2022

Source: [AntiCapitalist Resistance](#)

## In Sri Lanka's crisis, a new president and old problems

22 July 2022, by **B. Skanthakumar**

Wickremesinghe had been the pundit's favourite in what began as a four-horse race, since the majority party in parliament - the Sri Lanka Podujana Party (SLPP—People's Front) of the Rajapaksa clan - declared in his favour. Hostility to his nomination from within the SLPP, smaller parties once aligned to it, and opposition parties, echoing the sentiments of substantial opinion within the unstructured protest movement, proved inadequate.

This result confirms the lack of public legitimacy of the 225-member parliament, expressed in the slogan of the Janatha Aragalaya ('People's Struggle'): "No to the 225!" The ineffectiveness of parliamentarians to arrest and address the breakdown of the economy and provide solutions to the people's needs had in any case damaged trust and confidence in it. Ranil Wickremesinghe's election is the last nail in the coffin. It fuels further

political instability. The pressure for an early general election to choose new legislators will now grow.

Alongside the Rajapaksas, whose maladministration, nepotism and kleptocracy are now blamed by the ethnic majority Sinhala populace for Sri Lanka's bankruptcy, Wickremesinghe has no popular mandate. His United National Party (UNP), an affiliate of the International Democratic Union that includes the Conservative Party, was wiped off the electoral map in 2020. It secured one seat through proportional representation. His surprise appointment as prime minister in May, was rightly seen as a deal within the political elite to safeguard the Gotabaya Rajapaksa administration in return for a share in state power

As Wickremesinghe now assumes office as president, Sri Lanka is under a state of emergency that he

proclaimed on 18th July. This suspension of democratic rights vests greater powers in him, including use of the military to clamp down on public protests. Already, a court order has been established to begin removing people who have besieged the president's office in a continuous protest ('GotaGoGama') since early April, providing a rallying point to the movement across the island.

Meanwhile, big business, the upper middle class and mainstream media are already calling for the Aragalaya to wind up. It has accomplished their goal of reining in the Rajapaksas and securing a neoliberal in the highest office of state. The new president and the coalition government he will form in the coming days, should in their view now be allowed to stabilise the turbulent political order, as a precondition for economic stability.

The unlikely vehicle for such stability

is the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The multilateral agency is expected to provide a funding line to a state whose coffers are empty - usable foreign exchange reserves are around USD250 million, which is under four days equivalent of imports - and that has nowhere left to borrow from.

Sri Lanka has lost access to the international capital markets through which it accumulated almost half of its US\$51 billion external debt. Its sovereign credit rating was downgraded even further following a default on debt repayments in April. China, an important new lender in the Rajapaksa era, has held back on new credit during the crisis. India stepped in with bridging finance for imports of fuel and fertiliser, but this too is now exhausted.

This will be Sri Lanka's 17th agreement with the IMF since 1965. In the decades in between, the country's reliance on foreign loans and stock of debt has only increased sharply. Exhausted by the daily struggle of finding transport to move around for want of petrol and diesel; the scarcity of medicines (80% are imported) and cooking gas; the lack of forex to finance inputs in manufacturing, agriculture and services; and soaring food prices accompanied by shortfalls in domestic production; inflation spiking at 60% and wages trailing far behind; the consensus across social classes is that an IMF 'bail-out' will somehow rescue

the economy.

In anticipation of the IMF's structural adjustment conditionalities, the government had already increased the pump price for fuel by 300% and abandoned consumers to price-fixing by the cartels that supply the staple food, rice, as well as milk powder and sugar among other basic commodities. Once other reforms begin rolling out, including reduction of the state sector payroll - one in seven of the work force - rollback of public expenditure, user fees in education and health (that are free of charge though under-resourced), and 'targeting' of social programmes, the burden on the poor and lower middle class will only become more unbearable.

The election of the new president and evidence of his majority in parliament, along with the achievement of the initial objective of the protest movement to throw out the former president, will likely see some fall in support and intensity of public protest.

However, the co-dependence between Ranil Wickremesinghe and the Rajapaksas is a liability to both. There is no guarantee that the new cabinet of ministers he cobbles together will last long, as everyone schemes to minimise their culpability for what is a [structural crisis of dependent capitalism](#) and secure their political future in an upcoming general election.

On the streets and in social media, the activists of the Aragalaya have vowed to maintain their opposition to the Wickremesinghe-led government, including the ongoing occupation of the entrance and grounds of the president's office and other sites in public places across the island. Their campaign for reduction in the executive powers of the all-powerful presidency will continue, pending constitutional change that abolishes these in toto. The democratic consciousness of the movement is high. There are novel demands for right of recall of elected representatives and the right to have referendums on matters of national importance.

While the largely Sinhala people's movement has yet to confront the gross violation of human rights during Sri Lanka's 26-year internal war and reckon with the demands of the Tamil nation for justice for war crimes, truth over the disappeared, and for internal self-determination, this difficult dialogue has begun among its most conscious elements. Already its most recent demands include the release of Tamils in long-term detention and for an end to racism, including the rampant post-war Islamophobia directed at the ethno-religious Muslim minority. Whatever challenges are ahead, the gains of this moment and movement must be defended.

Source: [Labour Hub](#)

## **Biden's Trip to Middle East Angers Progressives, Socialists**

**21 July 2022, by Dan La Botz**

On October 2, 2018, Saudi government agents assassinated Jamal Khashoggi, a dissident Saudi journalist and Washington Post columnist, an act apparently carried out at the behest of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who essentially has been running the country. While

Khashoggi's brutal and grotesque murder at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul was extraordinary, thousands of others have suffered repression as well. Amnesty International writes that the Kingdom's "Specialized Criminal Court handed down heavy prison terms to individuals for their

human rights work and expression of dissenting views."

As a candidate for president in 2020, Biden expressed his belief that Khashoggi was murdered on the order of the crown prince and he pledged to make it very clear that "we were not

going to, in fact, sell more weapons to them, we were going to, in fact, make them pay the price and make them, in fact, the pariah that they are." Today, however, with oil scarce and prices rising, and with control of the Middle East of strategic importance in the great game for world domination, all of that is forgotten. Biden never put sanctions on Saudi Arabia and Congress continued to approve billions in military sales.

The other murder that hangs over Biden's visit is that of Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian American reporter for Al Jazeera television who was shot and killed on May 11 of this year by the Israeli Defense Forces. While the IDF initially denied that its soldiers were responsible, investigations by the Associated Press, Bellingcat, CNN, The New York Times, and The Washington Post all independently

concluded that she was killed by fire from IDF soldiers, as did the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. CNN suggested that she had been targeted by the IDF, as many Palestinians and others believe.

Like Khashoggi's murder, Abu Akleh's was not only a horrible event, but also highly symbolic, here of the situation of the Palestinians in the occupied territories who have been dispossessed, denied basic rights, subjected to humiliating controls on their movements, and violently repressed. Unlike his vow to treat Saudi Arabia as a pariah, Biden never made important promises of support for the Palestinians and their rights. Biden calls himself a Zionist and says that if Israel didn't exist the United States would have had to create it. But Israel's support among the population

has been declining, especially among Democrats, and a growing fraction of American Jews support Palestinian rights. A quarter of U.S. Jews consider Israel to be an "apartheid state."

Some U.S. progressives, the Democratic Socialists of America and other leftists—many Jews among them—support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement led by Palestinians, which aims to apply pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories, to grant full and equal right for Palestinian citizens, and to guarantee the Palestinian right of return to their land and homes.

Biden's trip is unlikely to improve the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia or Palestine.

20 July 2022

## The United States and Eurasia: Some geopolitical reflections at a time of global crisis

20 July 2022, by **Pierre Rousset**

The international political situation is dominated by the conflict between a new rising power, China, and the established power, the United States. This face-off is analysed here as an inter-imperialist conflict. The social structure of China is certainly very specific (this is not a detail), but the extent of the break in continuity between the Maoist regime and that of Xi Jinping is well documented. [9] There is obviously controversy in this area and the very concept of imperialism has several legitimate interpretations (as when we talk about the imperialism of Tsarist Russia). It is perfectly possible to study the ongoing geopolitical conflicts while retaining reservations about the stage of development of Chinese (or Russian) society, without this upsetting the analysis - unless you think that the

regimes of Xi Jinping and Putin, resulting from counterrevolutions, remain "progressive".

The conflict between a rising power and the established power is a classic scenario. But it must imperatively be analysed in its historical context. The present context is that of the global crisis into which capitalist globalization has plunged us, thus a context unprecedented in its implications. We will come back to this, but before that, let us emphasize the singular place that Eurasia occupies in global geopolitics.

### Eurasia and great

### power conflicts

The great game between the rising power and the established power is played out all over the world, but for historical and geostrategic reasons it is particularly acute in Eurasia. An economic zone of the utmost importance (with China at its heart), the continent borders the North Atlantic to the west and, to the east, the Indo-Pacific zone from where China, again! can project itself as far as the South Pacific. It was the epicentre of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary upheavals of the twentieth century involving Europe, Russia, China, Vietnam, and many other countries in the region. It experienced, more profoundly than elsewhere, Nazism, Stalinism, division

into blocs, wars.

The continent bears the scars of that time. The nuclear threat is global, but Eurasia has a monopoly on "hot spots", where holders of nuclear weapons share the same border - Russia and NATO members in the west, India and Pakistan in the centre, Taiwan in the south (China-USA), the Korean peninsula in the east.

That past is over, however. The international defeat of my activist generation in the 1980s paved the way for the expansion of the neoliberal counter-revolution and capitalist globalization. The vocabulary and reflexes of the so-called Cold War (burning in Asia) have reappeared in reaction to the invasion of Ukraine, and this framework of analysis is no less obsolete. Russia and China are integrated into the same global market as the United States and Europe. One of the major issues currently concerns the contradictions caused by conflicts between states in an interdependent world governed by the free movement of goods and capital.

We must free ourselves from the more or less unconscious analytical software of the Cold War to think anew at a time when Eurasia has once again become the scene of an acute confrontation of the great powers, whether in the East around Taiwan since Xi Jinping came to power or in the West since the invasion of Ukraine.

The United States remains, by far, the world's leading military power, but that does not mean that it is always in a position of superiority everywhere. This superiority depends on the nature of the theatre of operations, the reliability of the allies, the internal political situation, logistics and so on. Indeed, we can say that on all Eurasian "fronts", they have been in a situation of weakness.

President Obama would have liked to tip the "pivot" of the US political-military apparatus towards Asia. He could not, mired in the Middle East crisis. Beijing took the opportunity to establish its grip on the entire South China Sea over which it proclaimed its sovereignty without taking into

account the maritime rights of other riparian countries. It exploits its economic wealth and has built a set of artificial islands housing a dense network of military bases on reefs. Donald Trump was unable to pursue a coherent Chinese policy. Joe Biden has managed to refocus the US on the Asia-Pacific front, but he is facing a fait accompli situation.

War is not just a military affair, far from it, but the outcome of battles is not without significance. However, a conflict in the South China Sea would on first impression be likely to turn to the advantage of Beijing, which could use its most modern weapons, the combined firepower of a militarized maritime zone and a militarized coastal line, the proximity of continental bases (missiles, aviation and so on), as well as the logistical facilities provided by a modern road and rail network (speed of transport and movement on the front of troops, ammunition and so on). The war in Ukraine is long-lasting and we see how much it is consuming shells! The constant rearmament of the fronts is a major constraint, much simpler for Beijing to resolve than Washington. The Pentagon is faced with a complicated equation to solve.

However, this analysis can be questioned. [10] China has no experience of modern warfare. The Maoist strategy was defensive, with the army and popular mobilization as its pillar. Xi Jinping is forcibly building the attributes of a great power with the Navy as its pillar. However, its troops, its equipment, the reliability and precision of its weapons, its chain of command, its logistical organization, its information system (mastery of space) and artificial intelligence have never been tested in real situations - while its fleet of strategic submarines always represents an Achilles heel

At the time of the invasion of Ukraine, Washington was also in a weak position in Europe. Russia had been preparing for at least two years for an offensive on the European front, both economically and militarily. Even though Putin hoped for a lightning victory in Ukraine (a mistake that cost him dearly) and the consequent paralysis of NATO (he was aware of its

state of crisis), he had other goals in mind and knew that the tension at his borders would be lasting. On the other hand, Washington's lack of preparedness was obvious.

After the Afghan failure, NATO was in a state of crisis and its forces in Europe were not massed in large numbers on Russia's borders. Donald Trump had dynamited the multilateral cooperation frameworks of the Western camp. The impotence of the European Union was obvious, incapable of any coherent diplomacy in relation to China and Russia.

With Brexit, cooperation between the two countries with armies of intervention, France and Britain, was at a standstill and their means remain very limited. Morale is not high (the succession of failures suffered by Paris in Africa is not for nothing). French forces have no strategic autonomy, dependent on Washington for intelligence and... Russians and Ukrainians for deployment. Ironically, Paris has for a long time long leased wide-body aircraft belonging to Russian and Ukrainian companies to transport its troops. I imagine that is no longer the case (although, capitalism and trade being what they are, it is possible).

## Ukraine in context

NATO was neither the sole nor the main reason for the invasion. In Putin's own words, it aimed to wipe Ukraine off the map - a state that in his eyes should never have existed. [11] It is impossible to know what would have happened if a blitzkrieg had allowed Russia to conquer the country, balkanize it and establish a puppet government in Kyiv. This was not the case, as the Russian offensive was thwarted by massive national resistance involving the army, territorial forces and the people. It is under these conditions that the war in Ukraine has become a major geopolitical fact that causes geostrategic realignments which are much more complex than might be imagined.



## Beijing and the scenario that did not take place

To what extent was the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership warned of the Russian plans? On the eve of the invasion, Xi Jinping and Putin announced with fanfare an agreement on unlimited strategic cooperation. However, Beijing did not attack Taiwan, opening a second front, although the opportunity may have seemed favourable and Xi had made the “reconquest” of this territory a marker of his reign. In fact, China began by taking a cautious stance at the UN, not explicitly dissociating itself from Moscow, but not vetoing the first condemnation of the invasion and even claiming that international borders must be respected. Remember that for the leadership of the CCP (and the UN), Taiwan is a Chinese province and not a foreign state.

Why this restraint? Let's consider several reasons. The first is military. Taiwan is a huge abscess of fixation in the heart of the South China Sea that Beijing would like to break, but crossing the strait, 120 kilometres wide, makes an invasion very perilous. The Taiwanese probably have the means to resist for the time that US forces would arrive to cover. Whatever progress is made, China's naval air force is not in a position to cope. Xi Jinping has certainly not forgotten the past failures, when Mao, at the end of the civil war, tried three times to attack Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (Guomindang) forces on the island. The reciprocal is also true: a US invasion of China seems unthinkable.

Secondly, Russian and Chinese interests do not always coincide, far from it. Their alliance makes sense in a defensive context and Russia has experience that China has sought to take advantage of, for example by participating in joint military exercises in Siberia. However, the historical dispute between Moscow and Beijing in the background of the Sino-Soviet rupture of 1969 is very heavy (it led at the time to fighting for control of the Amur River border). With Xi Jinping's major initiative of the New Silk Roads,

Chinese influence has significantly strengthened in Central Asia in a region that Putin considers his own. The invasion of Ukraine called into question Chinese interests in Eastern Europe (including Ukraine) and Western Europe. Abandoning its own European ambitions in the name of Moscow's imperial ambitions is not obvious. However, the worst possible scenario for Beijing would be to find itself alone against Washington.

Third, Xi Jinping's position in the CCP is not consolidated. His management of the Covid-19 pandemic is criticized. The Army General Staff has not digested the purges to which it has been subjected. The factions of the organs of power that have been unceremoniously eliminated are waiting for their time of revenge. Xi has imposed a constitutional reform that allows him to preside for as long as he wants - but can he? A party of 90 million members in a country-continent cannot be led by the nose and his situation is probably more fragile than it seemed.

## A generalized crisis of governance

Joe Biden's situation in the United States was already critical at the time of the invasion of Ukraine, without a functional majority in Congress, under the threat of a return with a vengeance of Trumpism. Since then, things have worsened, with the creeping judicial coup conducted by the six ultra-conservative members (against the three sane members) of the Supreme Court.

We now know how the far right (especially its evangelical component) has for decades prepared its stranglehold on the institutions by training and placing lawyers and judges in key positions. [12] We know the extent of the Trumpian plot that led to the assault on the Capitol. [13] And yet I cannot understand how in the United States six people (six!) can impose their dictatorship by breaking with the traditional functioning of the Supreme Court, by attacking reproductive rights, by blocking the

(yet so moderate) program in the fight against global warming and by announcing that this is only the beginning and that their obscurantist offensive will continue in other areas, including that of elections. [14]

There are significant checks and balances in the United States, such as the role of the states. This is not the case in France, a country of hyper-presidentialism where Macron is trying to impose an authoritarian “transcendence” of bourgeois democracy, a project fortunately thwarted (for the time being) by the recent parliamentary elections. The situation is no less disastrous across the Atlantic, as in Europe (Boris Johnson's burlesque farce, for example). We are going through an agonising democratic crisis.

## Globalization in critical crisis

Market globalization is now at a standstill, even if this is not necessarily the case with financial globalization. Geopolitics studies in principle the correlation between many factors, which can only be a collective work. [15] It is outside my subject here. However, Eurasia has provided a new geopolitical factor of primary importance: the Covid-19 pandemic. Born in China, it spread to Europe which served as a springboard to reach the whole world.

The speed with which the epidemic became a pandemic is explained by the negligence of governments that have been slow to act (in Europe too), the density of trade of globalized capitalism and the characteristics of the Sars-Cov-2 virus, including its ability to manufacture new lines of variants and to attack almost all pulmonary systems, blood, nervous, digestive and so on (so nothing to do with the flu). The only precedent could be the misnamed Spanish flu (it was originally from the United States), at the time of the First World War, but we did not know then how to analyse the variants and therefore we cannot compare.

We have entered the era of epidemics, in addition to the climate and

ecological crisis. Covid-19 has exploded the contradictions of a global economy based on just-in-time production and unlimited trade growth. There will be no turning back.

## The new tectonics of geopolitical plates

Nearly five months after the invasion of Ukraine, the world situation might seem simple to characterize: Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific remain the epicentre of geopolitical conflicts, US leadership has been restored in the Western camp, NATO has been refounded with new ambitions, Russia and China stand together despite their disputes which we have discussed, a “deglobalization of war” is underway on all fronts, the climate, ecological and health crisis is accelerating accordingly, the suffering of peoples is increasing in line with the disasters in progress.

## The refoundation of NATO

The invasion of Ukraine has, as expected, enabled NATO to overcome its post-Afghanistan crisis by giving it a new *raison d'être* and legitimacy – a very hard blow to the fight against the Organisation and military alliances. The Madrid Summit, at the end of June 2022, was an opportunity to acquire an unlimited mandate, authorizing it to intervene worldwide against any “threat”, whatever it may be. [16] Russia is presented as “the most significant threat” for the moment and China, in the long term, as the main “strategic competitor” in all areas.

NATO’s “new strategic concept” is in no way ambiguous. The question remains: does the Organization have the means for its policy? There is nothing obvious about that. While most countries at the United Nations condemned the invasion, only a small minority embarked on the path of sanctions. Today, Joe Biden and NATO are demanding that the countries of Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific stand

together against both Russia and China. What have they got? The accession of new European countries to the Organization with, and this is what is important, popular support, the agreement of the vast majority of the members of the European Union to fall under the US military umbrella, the enthusiastic alignment of Japan.

Concerning Japan, the country’s constitution contains a pacifist clause (Article 9) that prohibits the country from reconstituting an army (“the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation”) and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. This clause was circumvented (“reinterpreted”) from 1954 by the (right-wing nationalist) Liberal Democratic Party which developed the “self-defence forces” in contradiction with Article 9 which specifies that “in order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained”.

Japan thus has the fifth largest army in the world, behind the United States, Russia, China and India. It has 1,450 aircraft (only the US has more) and a navy with 36 destroyers. Destroyers are the most powerful warships after aircraft carriers. Tokyo does not have nuclear weapons but could acquire them very quickly. The government believes that by participating in multilateral operations, it will be able to create a *fait accompli* and send its forces to external theatres of operations. Tokyo will play its own game and will not be a subordinate ally of Washington.

As for India, Joe Biden has promoted the concept of an Indo-Pacific zone to integrate New Delhi into a common front against China. He now has no chance of getting the Modi government’s agreement to side with Washington against Russia. For obvious reasons of expediency, India ostensibly displays a principle of diplomatic neutrality. It has maintained continuous ties with Moscow since the 1960s and about 60% of its military needs are covered by Russia. It would even agree to consider trade in roubles (the Russian currency) and not in dollars. [17]

## The new non-aligned

Non-alignment has become a recurring theme again. The term is a seductive one, reviving the memory of the Bandung Conference in 1955. This conference was held under the auspices of Indonesian leader Sukarno, featuring Zhou Enlai for China, Nehru for India, Nasser for Egypt, Sihanouk for Cambodia, Tito for Yugoslavia, as well as Japan (the only industrialized country) and Hocine Ait Ahmed for the Algerian FLN. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was part of a vast struggle for decolonization and a questioning of the dominant order.

Nothing to do with today’s non-aligned countries, generally composed of regimes that have nothing progressive about them. Thus, Modi’s India is considered by many left currents as fascist. [18] However, the reference to non-alignment means that business will continue as before and that Russia is not isolated internationally, especially since its denunciation of the West’s perfidies resonates with the popular memory of colonization or the invasion of Iraq.

On Russia’s European borders, everything being relative, NATO and the European Union certainly appear more democratic than the Putin regime, even if the program of reconstruction of Ukraine discussed in Lugano, in the perspective of the post-war period, seeks to impose on the population the canons of the neoliberal order. [19]

## Solidarity

The future remains very uncertain. We do not know how crises of national democratic decomposition can affect the international situation, whether a paroxysmic crisis will open tomorrow in the Mediterranean around Turkey or in the Middle East, how “total war” (including sanctions and economic countermeasures) will continue, if the brutality of the effects of the climate crisis will cause waves of migration and a new hardening of Fortress Europe.

The Ukrainian crisis, however, was an opportunity for the Western European left to understand the importance of the Eastern European left's own experience, to integrate their "point of view." We cannot think about geopolitics without rising above our national horizons and learning to see the world from elsewhere. It is not enough to support our comrades who

are fighting on both sides of the Russian border, especially Sotsialniy Rukh, the Ukrainian "Social Movement," we must also listen to them and learn.

Similarly, Ukraine must not make us forget the terrible war ravaging Burma (Myanmar), or the dangerous

nature of the continued struggle in the Philippines after the return to power of the Marcos clan. The radical left will be internationalist in action, or it will not be.

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## Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Death: Inherited Right-wing Politics Then and Now

19 July 2022, by **Yong-hui Hong**

On July 11, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, widely known as the Unification Church, said the mother of the suspect is a member of the religious group. The religious group also said the mother had joined the group around 1998 and went bankrupt around 2002. Japanese political parties and media called the act "a challenge to democracy" or "attack on freedom of speech". At the time of writing, the motive of the suspect isn't yet completely clear. And the police and media reports indicate that it wasn't political. However, the incident revealed Abe's past as a right-wing nationalist that has never been told in Japan. Also, what the Japanese population have been lost by his "one-strong" politics was buried in the dark.

### Politicians' links

### with a "certain religious group"

The incident of gun violence is extremely rare and unexpected in Japan, where possession of firearms is strictly prohibited. So, Abe's death has shone a spotlight on the suspect's family troubles with a "certain religious group": the former Unification Church (currently Family Federation for World Peace and Unification). For decades, the close relationship between the former Unification Church and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leaders has been the issue that has hardly been discussed in Japan. The former Unification Church was established in 1954 in the South Korean by anti-communist Sun Myung Moon. Some

officials of the then Sung-man Lee regime were also involved in the establishment [20]. The Japanese branch was opened in 1959. And in the 1990s, the group expanded aggressively throughout the world. Abe and his grandfather Nobusuke Kishi, also a former Japanese Prime Ministers, were not members. But they were known as supporters [21].

The group was one of the LDP's reliable allies against communism. Abe appeared at the former Unification Church-related events as a speaker in September 2021 via video link with the former US President Donald Trump [c]. The former Unification Church (currently Family Federation for World Peace and Unification) is inseparable from the anti-communism rightist group: International Federation for Victory over Communism [