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MULTIPOLAR DISPUTE: BETWEEN OLD MISTAKES AND NEW UNCERTAINTIES

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«**metapolis** is a pluralist space: it is a place to propose ideas that supersede the traditional borders of knowledge, mobilizing them to confront global challenges. **metapolis** is a territory of hyper-connection, liberated from past nostalgia, critical of the present and committed to a sustainable and just future. It does not wait for reform that maintains the status quo, nor does it aspire to do so, either. In fact, in **metapolis** everyone suspects that this future may never come, but still are not convinced to give it up for good. The latest political, economic, technological, environmental, sociological and health emergencies just reinforce the need for us to work harder.»

metapolis is an initiative by common action forum. A collective effort of caf's team, members, collaborators and participants. Our goal is to develop and support a progressive agenda as alternative to the current model that has led us to a world of increasing inequalities, environmental devastation and unaccomplished freedom for most of the global citizenry.

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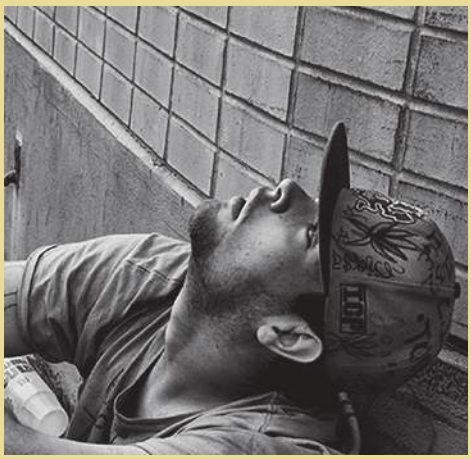

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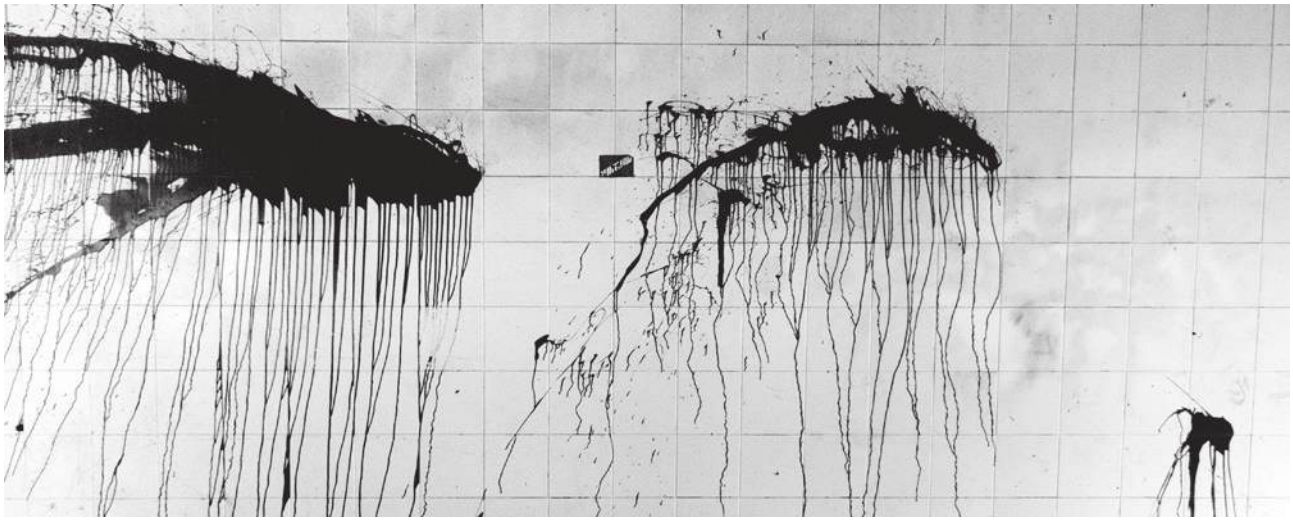

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00. MULTIPOLAR DISPUTE: BETWEEN OLD MISTAKES AND NEW UNCERTAINTIES

Marta Cazorla | Irene López

Jun, 2022

After the 2020 pandemic, which exponentially increased the level of uncertainty that we westerners were accustomed to living with, 2022 surprised us with yet another unexpected phenomenon, an occurrence that security-focussed think tanks believed to be a thing of the past: international war. War "like we used to have", with tanks and armies, bombed out cities and—to the delight of those harbouring nostalgia for the 20th century—the looming threat of nuclear war. A war waged by heterogenous blocs which, in the absence of any rigorous analysis to dispel simplistic Manichaeistic conclusions, could easily be rebranded according to the symbolic curtains and ideological ghosts of yesteryear.

The nuclear aspect of this conflict, which conjures images of the Cold War's "red telephone" (though without the East-West power balance that emerged between these two polar opposites, something Krauthammer would yearn for nowadays [1]), constitutes yet another existential threat to add to the collection of apocalyptic events that, since the beginning of the COVID-19 health crisis, seem to be part and parcel of the contemporary landscape: pandemic, war, shortages, soaring prices, natural disasters, and so on. One after another, these situations continue to barge in on our reality, wreaking havoc on even the most stable of welfare societies and preventing basic daily needs from being met – in other words, preventing us from knowing what tomorrow will look like. [2]

In the same way that "9/11 did not only mean that the Twin Towers fell, but that any two towers could fall at any moment in any part of the Western world," as explained by Prof. Galimberti, [3] the possibility of Russia pushing a nuclear detonation button has awakened previously unknown fears among the current younger generations and is forcing communities like those in Europe to get used to the idea that the exceptional is the new normal. Moreover, this exceptionality is associated with the suspension of constitutional rights, [4] legitimising the use of "desperate measures" and paving the way for an economic and geopolitical "shock doctrine".

Despite everything, as Eduardo Barcesat points out in his article featured in this issue, "COVID-19 has shown that we lack the knowledge needed to face extraordinary circumstances." [5] In other words, one of the tasks we have ahead of us, and that we attempt to explore in this volume, is how to re-orient ourselves now that the certainty upon which our civilisation was based seems to have collapsed.

In this sense, **Barcesat**'s **The future of human rights and overcoming anthropocentrism** warns against "the narcissistic urge [of] nations" and the rapidly accelerating environmental and climate crisis that we are facing but which, in contrast to other threats (such as the war itself, "mass migration", organised crime and epidemics), "does not terrorise anyone because that would not serve the system". [6] Instead he proposes an already well-established guiding light: The Universal

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Declaration of Human Rights, reclaiming the radicality of real commitment on the part of nation states, implemented and enforced with consequences. "The greatest challenge," he explains, "is not drafting a new declaration, but rather making a reality out of the rights that social theorists have been proclaiming for over 50 years but which, despite widespread recognition, have failed to solve the extreme inequality that pervades society on a community level." [7] In other words, we need to progress towards *realising* human rights. Human rights need to advance from being mere moral blather or a kind of ideology of Enlightenment and start functioning as a series of social and material imperatives that are demandable, tangible, effective and that can be applied *de facto*.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the conflicts currently dominating the geopolitical arena present a major stumbling block for the work of protecting and advancing human rights. If the so-called "world order" is defined as "the state of an international system currently protected by a general war", [8] it seems clear that that strategic world order is changing and that certain checks and balances which, until now, were able to stave off armed conflict have now failed or expired, unleashing a surge in violence on a global scale. This is precisely why in this issue we attempt to analyse the geopolitical reconfiguration that is currently taking place due to the Russo-Ukrainian War, along with all of its ramifications.

In their article **Beyond the 'Interregnum': Is a Non-Hegemonic World Possible?, Ramzy Baroud** and **Romana Rubeo** recall how Francis Fukuyama declared "the end of history" after the Cold War in light of the victory of Western liberal democracies over the Soviet socialist bloc. "With most global resistance pacified, subdued or contained, for Fukuyama, the battle for global dominance had been won," [9] they explain. Pax Americana involved the imposition of the capitalist system as a global economic model, as well as Yankee hegemony on cultural, ideological and moral levels. While Gorbachev's Soviet Union began what today we would call a process of self-destruction with a change in its international relations management strategy, there was no corresponding process of "yankeestroika". [10] On the contrary, the United States only doubled down on its arrogant and meddling approach to foreign policy, maintaining military bases throughout the world and leading invasions into Panama, Iraq, Afghanistan as well as sparking many other such incidents following the Gulf War. This ushered in an era of unipolarity, leaving no room for the possibility of limiting or balancing out the unparalleled power held by the North American "superpower".

However, as Baroud and Rubeo demonstrate, "Fukuyama was obviously wrong" [11], and the current squaring off of the entire North Atlantic Treaty Organisation against Russia demonstrates that we are no doubt witnessing a new chapter in history, a Gramscian moment in which a new strategic world order seems to be taking shape. Kagan's ironic observation that the "geopolitical fantasy" of the German lion laying beside the French lamb was only possible because of NATO [12] could just as easily be seen from a different perspective – that the ensuing spread of NATO throughout Europe was sooner or later going to wake the sleeping giant of Russia.

One of the main challenges examined in this issue is analysing on a geopolitical reconfiguration that has yet to fully form, not to mention doing so in an ever-changing and unstable setting with open conflict that smacks of "war by proxy": Washington and Moscow challenge each other, but in the end Ukraine falls victim. As a seasoned war journalist commented, "Weeks, months or even years are needed for the intoxication of war to wear off and for facts, level-headed analysis and painful results to slowly emerge." [13] With this in mind, and remembering that we are navigating a volatile and unpredictable scenario, we must begin to cultivate a culture of analysis based on intellectual, academic and journalistic integrity.

Thus, we are pleased to have access to calm and thoughtful voices such as that of **Rafael Fernández**, whose article **International Relations and the Energy Crisis: What has changed since the war broke out in Ukraine?** presents an analysis of

international energy relations which are unmatched since the Yom Kippur War. In light of this analysis, it is worth pondering whether the violent escalation of war, this time in Ukraine, is more an expression of superficial lip service instead of real change in trade and power relations between the dominant forces involved. After all, it does not appear that the war is going to result in a complete overhaul of energy pricing systems, but rather, as Fernández states, "the war will most likely strengthen rather than weaken the power of the key players" in the energy market. At any rate, it is the renewed concern regarding the issue of energy security that will be able to serve as a catalyst to implement a desperately needed strategy of real energy transition, leading to radical change in the global energy supply.

In a reality that is growing more and more dystopian by the day, in which the price of firewood is on the rise and the German government is handing out public assistance to its citizens to spend the winter in warmer climes in order to cope with the energy crisis, it is no wonder that the fantasies of migrating to Mars, presented in **Mary Jane Rubenstein**'s contribution to this present issue, **A Tale of Two Utopias: Musk and Bezos in Outer Space**, have managed to attract an increasing number of supporters. If apocalyptic prophets are right about anything, it is that our planet seems to be teetering ever more precariously on the edge of total destruction. We are either going to reduce the planet to ashes in a nuclear war or we will, through our own laziness, let it die a slow and painful death, bleeding out as we ignore the wounds inflicted by the environmental crisis.

The former (nuclear apocalypse) is precisely the topic **David Vine** addresses in his article **(The only way to) Stop Wars and Save the World**, in which he explains the role of the Military Industrial Complex, whose economic and political power has not ceased to grow since the end of the Cold War. Undermining this power, Vine asserts, is an indispensable prerequisite for freeing up the vast quantity of human and financial resources that the MIC has accumulated and which are needed to deal with the desperate social and environmental challenges that could very well lead to our extinction as a species.

Vine also reminds us that, though the MIC is a phenomenon inextricably linked with the emergence of the United States as the leading world power after the World War II, it has now turned into a global problem, whereby the role of the UN as a military and economic alliance formed around the sale of arms can no longer be ignored.

Fortunately, in the face of such future-phobic diatribes and the onward march of a system of war capitalism with such little respect for human life, feminism can help to ground us in reality and think about what comes next, what happens once the media focus and attention wanders elsewhere. We must think about the moment when the war loses its steam because, as war correspondents know all too well, that is when things can get even worse than during the open conflict itself.

Irene Zugasti does just that in her article **War Effort and Kitchen-Sink Geopolitics**, in which she calls for an internationalist, feminist and militant approach to diplomacy in contrast to the romantic and uncritical glorification of war. Recounting a war requires a perspective—and context—based analysis, especially when faced with the complexity of hybrid conflicts that involve digital strategies, misinformation, cultural and symbolic soft power and the increasingly significant participation of private capital and interests.

Nevertheless, this should not lead anyone to justify the lack of responsibility that a war entails for States and international law in terms of humanitarian disasters and political crises. On the contrary, faced with such disaster, Zugasti advocates for "kitchen-sink geopolitics", drawing from the feminist tradition of linking the personal with the political and cultivating different types of relationships with land, with "the other", with power and with conflict.

Envisioning this post-conflict horizon, which we can only hope is not too far off, it is worth reflecting on the words of poet Aimé Césaire, written at the darkest hours of World War II: "In this century, no hope is too audacious."

Thus, this issue of **metapolis** has been created to inspire hope and conjure up willpower without letting any single voice or idea fall by the wayside; we are going to need all of them. Human rights, feminism, utopia—these are just some of the tools proposed by the authors of this issue that we can use to face the future. May they help us all to envision a brighter future, or at least to work together to build one that is a bit more bearable.

Photo_ **Daria Nepriakhina**_ CC BY 2.0

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01.

BEYOND THE "INTERREGNUM": IS A NON-HEGEMONIC WORLD POSSIBLE?

Ramzy Baroud | Romana Rubeo

Jan, 2022

The letter "Z", which has been linked to the Russian war in Ukraine, has morphed to represent something bigger than a mere military symbol. Many people, especially in the Global South, are proudly donning this letter on their clothes and other accessories. The phenomenon has been reported in the Middle East and South America, as well as other countries. [1] Its appeal is omnipresent, to the extent that Germany, Austria and other European countries have either outlawed or discouraged the use of the letter as a sign of solidarity with Russia. [2]

The Russians say that the letter is simply meant to distinguish Russian military equipment from those of Ukraine. Some media reports suggest that the letter "Z" is short for the Russian word "*Za pobedu*", meaning "victory". [3] However, regardless of what purpose the symbol serves or means, the infatuation with a single letter for many people, especially in the South, raises the question: is this a reflection of pro-Russian—anti-Ukrainian—sentiment, or something else entirely?

In truth, Middle Easterners, Africans and others have no inherent animosity towards Ukraine. To the contrary, tens of thousands of students throughout these regions have graduated from Kyiv and other Ukrainian universities. Nor are they particularly fond of the Russian government, policies or leaders per se. That said, there are those who indeed admire Russian President, Vladimir Putin, due to his country's growing role in the Middle East, and its ability to confront US-western designs in the region as a whole and in Syria, in particular. But the fondness of Russia seems to be largely motivated by real, rooted hatred of US-western policies, from Iraq to Syria, to Venezuela and beyond. [4]

So far, the pro-Russian stances in the South—as indicated by the refusal of many governments to join western sanctions on Moscow, and the many displays of popular support through protests, rallies and statements—continue to lack a cohesive narrative. [5] Unlike the Soviet Union of yesteryears, Russia of today does not champion a global ideology, like socialism, and its current attempt at articulating a relatable global discourse remains limited, at least for now.

A New World Order?

Despite sporadic statements here and there, there is a growing sense that a new global agenda is forthcoming, one that could unite Russia and China and, to a degree, India and others, under the same banner.

The Russian position has morphed throughout the war from merely wanting to "demilitarize" and "denazify" Ukraine to a much bigger regional and, eventually, global agenda. [6] This was stated clearly by Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, on April 11. Speaking to Rossiya24, Lavrov explained that his country's

Those following the evolution of the Russia-China political discourse, even before the start of the Russia-Ukraine war on February 24, will notice that the language employed supersedes that of a regional conflict, into the desire to bring about the reordering of world affairs altogether.

"special military operation" is a way to "put an end to the unabashed expansion" of NATO, and the "unabashed drive towards full domination by the US and its Western subjects on the world stage." [7]

But Russia is not the only country that feels this way. The meeting between Lavrov and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in the Chinese eastern city of Huangshan on March 30, is likely to go down in history as a decisive meeting in the relations between the two Asian giants. [8]

The meeting was not only important due to its timing or the fact that it reaffirmed the growing ties between Moscow and Beijing, but because of the resolute political discourse articulated by the two top diplomats. In Huangshan, there was no place for ambiguity. Lavrov, again, spoke of a new "world order", arguing that the world is now "living through a very serious stage in the history of international relations."

"We, together with you (China) and with our sympathizers, will move towards a multipolar, just, democratic world order." [9]

For his part, Wang Yi restated his country's position regarding its relations with Russia and the West, also using precise language, some of which was employed before, following the February 4 meeting between Putin and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping. [10] "China-Russia cooperation has no limits… Our striving for peace has no limits, our upholding of security has no limits, our opposition towards hegemony has no limits," Wang said. [11]

Those following the evolution of the Russia-China political discourse, even before the start of the Russia-Ukraine war on February 24, will notice that the language employed supersedes that of a regional conflict, into the desire to bring about the reordering of world affairs altogether. [12]

Though the readiness to push against US-led western hegemony is inherent in both countries' political objectives, rarely did Moscow and Beijing move forward in challenging western dominance, as is the case today. The fact that China has refused to support western economic sanctions, condemn or isolate Russia is indicative of a clear Chinese forward-thinking policy. [13]

Moreover, Beijing and Moscow are clearly not basing their future relations on the outcome of the Ukraine war alone. What they are working to achieve is a long-term political strategy that they hope would ultimately lead to a multipolar world. However, is this new world order possible? If yes, what would it look like? These questions, and others, remain unanswered, at least for now. What we know, however, is that the Russian quest for global transformation exceeds Ukraine by far, and that China, too, is on board.

Budding Superstructures

It is obviously too early to examine any kind of superstructure resulting from the Russia-NATO global conflict, Russia-Ukraine war and the Russia-China solidification of ties. Per Friedrich Engels' definition, superstructures encompass all the "juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical and other ideas of a given historical period." [14] It is too early to make that determination because superstructures are by-products of substructures which, according to Marxist thought, are the economic system or modes that govern the inner workings of any given society. Though much discussion has been dedicated to the establishing of an alternative monetary system, in the case of Lavrov's and Yi's new world order, a substructure, in the Marxist sense, is yet to be developed.

New substructures will only start forming once the national currency of countries like Russia and China replace the US dollar, alternative money transfer systems, like

CIPS, are put into effect, new trade routes are open, and eventually new modes of production replace the old ones. Only then, superstructures will follow, including new political discourses, historical narratives, everyday language, culture, art and even symbols, like the letter Z.

The thousands of US-western sanctions slapped on Russia were largely meant to weaken the country's ability to navigate outside the current US-dominated global economic system. Without this maneuverability, the West believes, Moscow would not be able to create and sustain an alternative economic model that is centered around Russia. [15]

True, US sanctions on Cuba, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Venezuela and others have failed to produce the coveted "regime change", but they have succeeded in weakening the substructures of these societies, denying them the chance to be relevant economic actors at a regional and international stage. They were merely allowed to subsist, and barely so.

Russia, on the other hand, is a global power, with a relatively large economy, international networks of allies, trade partners and supporters. That in mind, surely a regime change will not take place in Moscow any time soon. The latter's challenge, however, is whether it will be able to orchestrate a sustainable paradigm shift under current western pressures and sanctions.

Time will tell. For now, it is certain that some kind of a global transformation is taking place, along with the potential of a "new world order", a term, ironically employed by the US government more than any other.

Unending History

Speaking to a joint session of the US Congress on September 11, 1990, then US President George H. W. Bush spoke about his world vision during the first Iraq War. "Recent events have surely proven that there is no substitute for American leadership. In the face of tyranny, let no one doubt American credibility and reliability," Bush announced amid a thundering applause. He then declared that one of his country's objectives is a "new world order." [16]

Though the Iraq war in 1990, and the subsequent Iraq war, invasion and occupation of 2003 are often discussed within regional contexts, in reality, they were intrinsically linked to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of traditional bipolarism. Once the US managed to dominate the world's strategic reserve of oil and gas in the Gulf, the US-western intellectual classes began the process of creating superstructures that politically, culturally and morally defended and justified American dominance.

In 1992, US political scientist Francis Fukuyama published his now infamous book "The End of History and the Last Man". [17] Drawing on the Hegelian dialectic, which sees human history as a linear series of philosophical conflicts culminating in the moment when humanity acquires self-consciousness and, therefore, full awareness, Fukuyama concluded that that moment—meaning the end of history—had arrived with the conclusion of the Cold War and the decisive victory of Western liberal democracies over socialism. [18]

Fukuyama was obviously wrong. If great powers were capable of bringing history to a halt, then historical progress would have been stymied, if not completely frozen, during the height of the Roman Empire (around 100 CE), for example, [19] or the magnificent rise of the Tang Dynasty in China (618-906 CE) [20] or during the centuries of Abbasid caliphate rule in Baghdad, starting in the eighth century. [21]

But there is a good reason that drove Fukuyama to conclude that history was ending.

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Aside from his own intellectual prejudices regarding the superiority of Western values, liberal democracies and free market, he also concluded that no other ideology is capable of replacing that of the US. For such intellectuals, this must also be true since the dominant global substructure—western capitalism—and the adjoining superstructures—western thought in politics, academia, media, etc… —are entirely defined by the west. With most global resistance pacified, subdued or contained, for Fukuyama, the battle for global dominance had been won.

Fukuyama, was of course, one of many. The west's intellectual apparatus was rife with such hyped predictions and grand hypotheses. Samuel Huntington, for example, spoke of "Christianity, pluralism, individualism, and rule of law" as the "distinctive character of (Western) values and institutions," which, according to him, "made it possible for the West to invent modernity, expand throughout the world, and become the envy of other societies". [22]

Palestinian-American Professor Edward Said, along with other anti-colonial intellectuals dissected the "relentlessly aggressive and chauvinistic" rhetoric of the likes of Huntington, who forces the reader to "conclude that he's really most interested in continuing and expanding the Cold War by other means, rather than advancing ideas that might help us to understand the current world scene or ideas that would try to reconcile between cultures." [23]

Limits of Military Power

Post-Cold War euphoria notwithstanding, it quickly became obvious that American dominance was unsustainable anyway, not only because historical analysis tells us that history is in constant motion, but because, under the most extreme circumstances, many nations around the world continued to fight back through the creation of their own substructures. Social movements in South America, the farmers struggle in India, the homegrown resistance in Palestine and numerous other examples, all reveal the extent of people's durability, ability to organize, mobilize and fight back even within the restrictions imposed by the unipolar world order, which has no space for social mobilization, let alone dissent of any kind. [24]

One of the many problems in the US-dominated global system is its overreliance on militarism and habitual use of violence as a form of coercive diplomacy. According to the American University Digital Research Archive, the US has an estimated 750 military bases in at least 80 countries around the world, [25] and spends more than $2 billion every day on its defense budget. [26] For relatively weak, but rebellious and heavily sanctioned countries like Iraq just before the US invasion in 2003, this colossal US war machine can roll into action whenever needed to bring about regime change and to restore the pro-American world order. While such possibility is not easily attainable in the case of bigger and stronger countries, like Russia and China, US designs, in these cases, remain confined to "containment", sanctions and trade wars.

Of course, this oppressive reality—oppression, containment and isolation—is not only confined to geopolitical spaces and conflicts, but is openly manifested in the class division, racism and disregard of human rights within western societies as well. A 2017 Credit Suisse Report revealed that "the wealthiest 1 percent of the world's population… owns more than half of the world's wealth". [27] This discrepancy applies to the US as much as other western societies. According to a 2020 Pew Research Center report, the "Income inequality in the US is the highest of all the G7 nations" and "The wealth gap between America's richest and poorer families more than doubled from 1989 to 2016". [28]

At grassroots levels, this translates into horrific work conditions, minimum wage jobs with no benefits and overworked labor force. Tragic stories often seep through social media of how huge conglomerates, such as Amazon, treat their workers. Last March, for example, after a brief denial, Amazon apologized for forcing its workers to urinate in

One of the many problems in the US-dominated global system is its overreliance on militarism and habitual use of violence as a form of coercive diplomacy. The US has an estimated 750 military bases in at least 80 countries around the world, and spends more than $2 billion every day on its defense budget.

water bottles, and worse, so that their managers may fulfill their required quotas. [29]

Like resisting nations and communities in the Global South, oppressed communities in the US and other western countries also fight back to assert themselves, though often at a high price. On April 4, for example, workers in Staten Island, in New York formed the first independent Amazon Labor Union in the US. This may seem as a small achievement, but considering the very restrictive, anti-union environment in corporate America, the Amazon workers' accomplishment is no less than a major victory. [30]

Photo_**Konstantin Malanchev**_ CC BY 2.0

Conclusions

Rosy, reassuring language and political triumphalism aside, the truth is, the US has been experiencing a major decline for years. Structural weaknesses in the US economy have led such financial experts like Lawrence Light to conclude, in 2021, in the Chief Investment Officer international magazine that the US economy was in a "race to the bottom." [31]

This deterioration is expressed both at home and at the global stage. The US ability to police the world and to enforce "American values" through wars and sanctions has been largely hampered. It failed in Iraq, leading to a major US policy shift in 2012, known as the "pivot to Asia". This failure was also palpable in Libya and Syria, as the US and, by extension, its western partners failed to influence political outcomes in these countries. But the greatest and most embarrassing spectacle was the forced US withdrawal—read: defeat—in Afghanistan in August 2021. Fleeing Kabul under the pressure of a ragtag army of poorly equipped Taliban fighters was reminiscent of the US defeat in Vietnam in 1973.

It is argued, and rightly so, that the Russian war in Ukraine may have served as an opportunity for the US to reassert its leadership over NATO and to thwart any European initiatives to gain full political independence from Washington, let alone establish, as advocated by French President, Emmanuel Macron, in 2018: "I want to build a real security dialogue with Russia, which is a country I respect, a European country—but we must have a Europe that can defend itself on its own without relying only on the United States," Macron said at the time. [32]

Alas, for Macron's nascent army, the successive and often exaggerated steps taken by Washington, through its leadership of NATO, to fight Russia in the Ukraine, might not be possible in the short run. US post-WWII hegemony seems destined to linger on.

Still, there are too many moving pieces that make it difficult for us to assess the full spectrum of possibilities. While those advocating a "new world order"—Russia and China—or seeking some degree of independence from the US—France and other EU countries—have strong reasons to pursue these ambitions, Washington, too, has strong reasons to maintain the status quo. For the US, it is not only a question of leadership, military and political hegemony, but also a fight over natural resources, trade routes and massive profits.

Until the tussle is over, the world will continue to experience a transition, rife with possibilities but also dangers. Italian anti-Fascist intellectual Antonio Gramsci wrote about this phenomenon, which he dubbed "Interregnum"—the transition between two vastly different realities—from his prison cell in the 1930s:

"The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." [33]

We are already experiencing some of these "morbid symptoms", manifested in the horrors of war, growing poverty and food insecurity. The hope is that, once this Interregnum is over, the world will be reborn with much greater margins for equality, justice and freedom.

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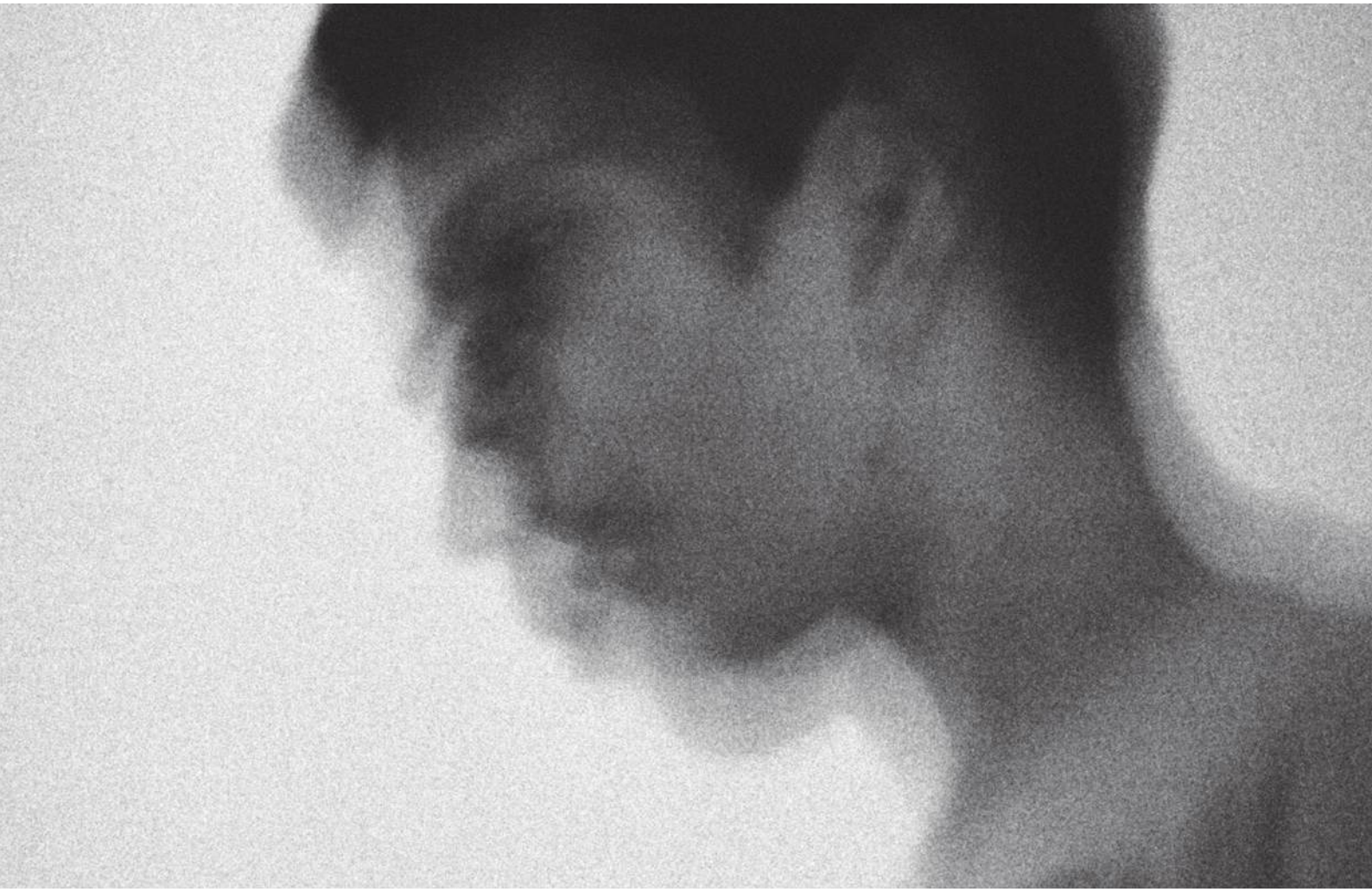

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02. THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND OVERCOMING ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Eduardo Barcesat

Feb, 2022

In our current climate, between the aftershocks of a pandemic that seems to have no end and a growing wave of militarism resurrecting dangerous ghosts from the past, the notion of humanity itself has become a topic of debate. Natural disasters are becoming more frequent and intense, resulting from global warming caused by extreme, extractivist and predatory policies that are upending the natural harmony between living creatures and their environment. All of this serves as the background for our mournful story, which could end up being the last story ever told. Social scientists urgently need to address these circumstances, not only in order to make a diagnosis of the status quo, but also to lead the way down a new and urgently needed pathway.

The COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 has shown that we lack the knowledge needed to face extraordinary circumstances. It has taken enormous efforts in science, medicine and pharmacology to develop vaccines that, so far, are merely preventive and only *reduce* the risk, reach and rate of transmission, but as of yet have not been able to eradicate the virus or even stop it from spreading.

These scientific efforts are the result of a previously unimaginable level of mobilisation and economic resource investment. For once, the world aimed to protect the values of life, health and personal integrity instead of investing in arms, which are always tools of destruction, never tools of peace.

However, given that this effort was carried out in a world dominated by globalisation, competition among drug manufacturers and the commodification of medicines, governments found themselves obligated to intervene in order to ensure that research would be conducted and vaccines would be produced. They understood that individuals would not be able to provide these services using their own financial means and that various forms of state intervention would be needed to ensure that vaccines were acquired and distributed according to need rather than wealth.

Let's be clear, though: medicines are still commodified. Nation states have simply assumed the costs of acquiring them instead of putting the cost on individual consumers. However, as different countries exhibit great financial inequality, vaccines accumulated in places of greater financial means, and were lacking—and still are—in places where the needs of the people are most dire, in countries that are poor, marginalised, dependent, "underdeveloped" or "emerging"—choose whichever term you see fit. The bottom line is always a lack of wealth.

Add to this the short-sightedness and outright stinginess of certain governments and it sets the stage for widespread dispossession of rights. Of course, as social scientists

This gives an indication of how we should approach the dichotomy of, on the one hand, supply and demand for a commodity and the economic resources available to produce and acquire it, and on the other hand, the state intervention needed to meet a real need and guarantee human rights.

we can limit ourselves to saying that health care, in all its forms, is a human right and not a commodity. However, in order to avoid falling into hypocrisy, we absolutely must ask ourselves: how can local, provincial, national and international institutions guarantee access to vaccines, medicines and other medical care according to need rather than financial means?

This gives an indication of how we should approach the dichotomy of, on the one hand, supply and demand for a commodity and the economic resources available to produce and acquire it, and on the other hand, the state intervention needed to meet a real need and guarantee human rights.

The new militarism

We could formulate an extensive analysis of the conflict between two countries that share a vast border and that were once a single country, historically speaking, but this would only result in heavily biassed explanations and would contribute little towards a solution.

The only certainty we can gain from the insights of social scientists, or from common sense for that matter, is that the indefinite prolongation of this conflict is not only exacerbating the humanitarian crisis, but also contributing to the almost certain possibility that the war will develop into a nuclear conflict and destroy, along with the enemy, all life on this planet.

What is clear is that the project of universal peace and an efficient and balanced world organisation that can intervene and resolve conflicts quickly and effectively has vanished. Ethical declarations may serve as a universal objection, but they do not seem to be able to substitute the use of arms and the narcissistic urge for nations to determine who is the strongest or most capable of destruction, or even worse, who is most willing to prove it.

Reflecting on the reality of how this conflict could develop, we modestly offer the precepts laid out in articles 28 and 30 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

> *"Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realised.*
> *Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein."*

The environmental limits of anthropocentrism

The anthropocentrism that, until now, has dominated how we see the world and how human society behaves, is slowly giving way to a new biocentrist paradigm, in which humans cease to take centre stage as supreme doer and undoer of all things and assume a role as just another part of nature, and therefore must adapt their existence as a society to mother nature's rules of survival and reproduction. Ideas such as "crimes against nature" or "ecocide" have gained traction in the social sciences and present new challenges that, I repeat, should be addressed according to this new biocentrist paradigm. Nature now has its place as a subject protected under law, and is therefore entitled to "human" rights as well.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed in any way to social theory it's that it has dealt a blow to humanity's arrogance, omnipresence and belief that we can create our own destiny. It has revealed our existential fragility and our need to preserve this unique world in which our society's survival remains inextricably tied to and governed by nature, and in fact entirely dependent on it. Yet, despite how painfully

undeniable our current situation is, social theory is still ill equipped to answer one important question: 'So how do we get out of this mess?'

The contribution of Human Rights

The concept of Human Rights is the greatest contribution made by 20th century social and political theory, and indeed all signs indicate that the mission of today's social scientists lies in furthering the direction of this clearly humanistic theory and philosophy. Our goal should be to keep human rights from serving as a lofty set of norms, a kind of idealised enlightenment, and instead focus on making them an experience inherently contained within societal concepts of law and justice. In simpler terms, human rights should not just be used as instruments of virtue signalling for State institutions (as is currently the case), but rather must have some tangible effect on the day-to-day lives of those objectively in need, who should be able to have their needs met through rigorous use of and adherence to the principles of human rights.

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These rights, though recognised and consecrated in standardised, almost sacred texts, do not emerge from some inherent humanness, nor from their positive impact, but from the growing complexity of social relationships—social conflicts, various forms of antagonism and the many hereto unresolvable struggles within the macrostructure of international geopolitics. With wealthy, minority world countries on the one hand and less wealthy majority world countries on the other, we see a growing inequality in the distribution of wealth that presents a challenge to the values of "freedom", "equality" and "fraternity". This is perhaps most clearly expressed in the inaugural speeches of UN human rights summits, which recognised that our greatest challenge at present is not drafting a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but rather bringing to fruition the rights that social theory has been championing for more than 50 years, which, despite widespread recognition, have yet to solve extreme inequality among different communities.

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The challenge of putting words into action

A clear example of this contradiction is addressed in Resolution 1/2020, April 10, 2020, of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ICHR), regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the validity of human rights, in particular Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (ESCER). After defining the rights threatened by the pandemic as the rights to life, health and integrity, the resolution dedicates a lengthy section to describing the extreme inequality that can be found in the Americas. Indeed, these continents possess an enormous and diverse mass of wealth and natural resources—arable land, exceptional landscapes, reservoirs of potable water, hydrocarbons, an abundance of minerals that are strategically important for scientific and technological development, and so on. Nevertheless, huge pockets of the population are left without access to drinking water or rural land and are condemned to what Professor Asbjorn Eide called "the silent genocide of hunger", which every two years takes more lives than the total number of WWII victims.

The first clauses of both UN international agreements, which in addition to enshrining the right to self-determination for communities and their right to economic independence, also proclaim communities—not the States or their governments—to be the owners of their land's natural resources, but this has not become a reality for the peoples of the Americas. It is paradoxical that the most respected and powerful norms of international and human rights law, which cover and are obligatory in all of the States of the UN, and which in countries like Argentina, as a result of the 1994 Constitutional Reform, follow the same hierarchy as the constitutional clauses. Nevertheless, the provisions made by these International Agreements have no influence or practical impact on the internal legislation of individual States.

Once again, we are simply practising institutional virtue signalling, but there is no social engineering to exercise these rights, the highest expression of the people's judicial conscience, or to turn human rights into instruments of transformation and victory over unequal international structures of power. With the effective implementation of these rights comes the great responsibility of true sovereignty and economic independence for the people of the Americas.

However, beyond just emphasising the inherent unity of civil and political rights with economic, social and cultural rights—to which we can now add environmental rights—ensuring life and health for a human being requires their economic, social, cultural and environmental rights to be fully in effect.

On the conceptualisation of these rights, Eide maintains that when a State endorses or adopts a treaty or convention referring to economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, not only does it undertake to not arbitrarily disturb those who more or less enjoy these rights, but it commits itself to delivering results; that is, to guaranteeing access to these rights as promised by the law. It should also guarantee that such results are enforceable, because otherwise the treaty would be nothing more than a moralising rant or political discourse, but have little to do with actual rights. This is because a right is something that can be enforced, and that generally should be enforced in the day-to-day material world.

For our part, we would like to contribute to this idea by arguing that dispossessing people of their legally guaranteed rights is objectively unlawful. That is, human rights policy should not busy itself with trying—almost always in vain—to determine who is guilty of taking away people's rights, but should rather focus on verifying instances where people are stripped of their rights in order to be able to reinstate their access to those rights via legal channels. Thus, the word "access" is, in our opinion, the most important word in human rights policy. Furthermore, we say 'policy' in order to differentiate it from empty declarations. Human rights policy entails the assumption of obligation to fulfil these rights, with recourse and via established social structures.

Structural and epistemological obstacles

All State legal norms must necessarily be subordinate to recognised human rights texts. However—and herein lies the contradiction—this greater hierarchy is not developed within the internal legal system of said States.

On the contrary, all of the subjective rights that facilitate the transmission of wealth are given priority and are supported by the majority. Our primary codes and laws are aimed at upholding that patrimonial right to transmit wealth (goods and services), as well as the provision of the means for legal protection, in order to separate "yours" from "mine", as argued by Karl Olivecrona, expert in Scandinavian legal realism.

This reveals a paradigmatic and reified legal order in which the subject under law appears as the personification of all of the goods that make up their estate. In other words, the subject under law is the estate and not a human being as such. One only needs to observe the persistence of the distinction between personal rights and property rights, the latter wielding structural legal power directly over its object.

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The fetishisation of thinking that we have direct legal relationships with things is one of the epistemological barriers that must be removed if we are to give way to seeing human rights as part of a higher order, as they deserve to be seen. One only needs to observe that wealth and natural resources tend to be positioned as State-owned private goods (national, provincial, local) in order to see how neglected the proclamation of the UN International Agreements is with regard to public ownership of a community's wealth and natural resources.

To summarise, all human rights policy will have to face two types of obstacles: a) the inequality built into international geopolitical structures; b) the epistemological barrier stemming from hegemony and the prevalence of the notion of subjective rights (legally protected interests), together with the emerging hierarchical prevalence of human rights.

Proposals for human rights policy

After defining which rights are protected and which rights are at risk due to the pandemic, as well as a description of the profound inequalities in the Americas, Resolution 1/2020 of the ICHR proceeds to propose various measures, including how to deal with the economic burden and conditions resulting from foreign debts. The resolution recommends suspending payment on loans and sanctions and a significant reduction in the corresponding amounts (point 18 of the proposals). It also calls for (point 13) the adoption of extra financing for the duration of the pandemic and its aftermath. Point 19 recommends that State authorities throughout the Americas monitor the compliance of businesses with their obligations related to economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, particularly during the pandemic, in order to guarantee access to and enforcement of these rights in this or any other emergency situation.

Let us also mention that there are other themes that must also be addressed: a) Capital Flight for the benefit of international finance capitalism; b) dependence on technology and payment for the transfer of technology, which subjects less developed countries, among other things, to a situation in which they cannot develop sufficient, much needed vaccine policies to ward off the COVID-19 pandemic and other manmade, military or natural disasters (earthquakes, tsunamis, forest fires, droughts, etc.).

John Kenneth Galbraith, one of the most influential economists of the 20th Century, has made the excellent argument that marginalised countries remit royalties and levies to minority countries, in the order of two to three dollars annually for every dollar that they receive in international loans. He also argued that no *honest* business,

whether industrial or commercial, could collect these profits of two to three dollars annually for every dollar loaned out (which, moreover, would have to be repaid at high interest rates). This is precisely why Galbraith proposed, at the beginning of the 21st Century, to cancel the foreign debt of marginalised countries in order to avoid a collapse of the international financial system. This was proposed, all the while making it clear that cancelling these countries' foreign debt was not enough and that it would also be necessary to cancel payments for the transfer of technology. "Copyleft and not copyright" is the new paradigm behind how knowledge is treated in the 21st Century.

In some of the many essays inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been speculation about the change needed in economic and geopolitical relations that could bring about a new, more egalitarian and solidarity-based relational model for our society. We cannot and should not dismiss this possibility. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that inequality in the distribution of wealth has grown over the course of the pandemic and has been compounded by war, the economic impact of which has been felt internationally. This reveals that the value, idea and norm of fraternity, or solidarity, has not succeeded in bringing about significant change in the distribution of wealth, either nationally or internationally.

The World Summit on Climate Change, held in October of 2021, showcased beautifully worded speeches, both from majority and minority countries, but until now no concrete policies have materialised to put such proclamations into effect, especially those made by the leaders of highly industrialised countries. Instead, these countries continue to alter and destroy the planet. Secretary General of the UN, Antonio Guterres, has had to admonish leaders of world powers because of their non-compliance with commitments made at the World Summit on Climate Change, both with regard to policies that are destructive to nature and to the payment of annual contributions to economically marginalised countries in compensation for the environmental destruction caused by unchecked extractivist capitalism while exploiting their natural resources and wealth.

A few concluding proposals

1: Emphasise the stipulations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding the idea that none of the recognised rights will be possible if peace is not maintained among nations. There must be an end to colonial and neo-colonial enclaves and attachments. Acts of force and territorial conquests based on violence, as in the case of the Falkland Islands and the South Atlantic, must not be recognised by the international community.
2: International and regional organisations devoted to protecting the validity and effectiveness of human rights must guarantee not only the integrity of their texts, but also their fundamental implementation and enforcement in the material, day-to-day life of individuals and communities.
3: To foster a more egalitarian society, between nations and especially within their borders, in order to:
3.1: Definitively cancel foreign debts owed by poor, marginalised or emerging national economies.
3.2: Eliminate or significantly reduce the cost of the transfer of technology.
3.3: Adopt an International or Regional Convention for the Prevention and Penalisation of Capital Flight.
3.4: Make advances in the recovery of legislative and jurisdictional sovereignty in marginalised countries, abolishing any submission to foreign or supranational jurisdictions in economic matters.
3.5: Diversify legal forms of ownership in order to guarantee legal ownership of communities over all of the natural resources and wealth in their territories.
3.6: Assure that well-being and progress are a social good, establishing guidelines for the redistribution of wealth.
3.7: Preserve the systemic balance of nature through a biocentric paradigm.
3.8: Always remember, in all circumstances, that human rights cannot exist where communities and individuals live in fear and poverty.

Eduardo Barcesat

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03. A TALE OF TWO UTOPIAS: MUSK AND BEZOS IN OUTER SPACE

Mary-Jane Rubenstein

Mar, 2022

I. Meet the Astropreneurs

I first realized something was up when Elon Musk launched a car into orbit. It was January of 2018 and SpaceX was looking to test its Falcon Heavy rocket, woo the U.S. military, and make sure everyone was watching. So rather than display the Falcon's carrying capacity with, say, slabs of concrete or steel, Musk decided to strap a blazing red Tesla Roadster to its back. A perfectly good, even exquisite, car. One hundred thousand dollars' worth of chrome, leather, steel, glass, state-of-the-art navigation software, green technology, and human labor hurled uselessly into orbit—not around the Earth but around the *sun*. It was an act of immense bravado, extraordinary waste, and literally *cosmic* presumptuousness: now along with eight planets and some dwarves, moons, and asteroids, there is a tricked-out convertible circling our solar orb, driven 'til the end of days by a spacesuited mannequin called "Starman."

Musk named his doomed astrobot after the alien messiah of David Bowie's 1972 *Ziggy Stardust* album. Bowie's song "Life on Mars" accompanied the rocket launch that flung the Roadster toward the stars and his "Space Oddity" still loops endlessly on the car's JVC speakers. Starman's glove compartment is stuffed with multimedia versions of Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy. And the Falcon Heavy rocket itself is named after the Millennium Falcon of *Star Wars*. Musk, you might say, is a geek's geek, his aesthetic composed by a nostalgia for the future of his teenage past: rockets, spacesuits, Martian colonies, glam-rock, and a free-market promise of infinite possibility.

Musk is also an inveterate showman. Back in 2003, he was having a hard time getting NASA to take SpaceX and its newly fabricated Falcon 1 seriously. So he drove the seven-story rocket on an enormous flatbed truck from Boca Chica Texas to Washington D.C. and parked it on the street outside the headquarters of the Federal Aviation Administration [1]. In the two decades since then, Musk has continued to manufacture all manner of eye-catching spectacles: Twitter-stormed launches, dramatic explosions, tickets sold to billionaires for trips on unbuilt ships, and a manifesto about his intention to save "humanity" by getting the hell off the doomed planet Earth [2].

Meanwhile, on the other side of Texas, Jeff Bezos has been making a lot less noise. In the early 2000s, while Musk was dragging NASA, the Air Force, Boeing, and Lockheed Martin into high-profile antitrust suits, Bezos was quietly buying up ranches to build his own space company, Blue Origin. Under the auspices of improvised corporations, Bezos cobbled together over 300,000 acres of West Texan land so he could test his rockets without anyone noticing [3]. Musk had bought land too, of course, but he makes so much noise that the rangers at Mother Neff State Park now warn their visitors that if something sounds like the end of the world, it's probably not. (At least not yet.)

It is probably old news to you by now: Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos want us off the planet. Not all of us, of course, but according to both of these absurdly wealthy utopians, the future of the species will depend on those humans who have got the foresight, fortitude, and finances to head to outer space. Just as it was for Captain Kirk and the Apollo crews, space has become for these latter-day pioneers "the final frontier": a place of new worlds, untold fortunes, and immense danger.

The men are both magicians, but of really different sorts. Musk pulls rabbits out of hats while Bezos makes the coin disappear behind your ear. While Musk is shouting, "Look, Mom! [*explosion*] Wait, that's not it," Bezos hides in his room to perfect the trick. Both billionaires are building reusable, affordable, state-of-the-art rockets, but Musk raced to the launches while Bezos worked on the landings. Elon's had us looking up at the exploding skies while Jeff has kept us staring at our own damn laps, 1-Clicking the lint rollers, cake pans, and dog sweaters that finance his more cosmic endeavors. As Bezos finally explained about a year ago, "Every time you buy shoes, you're helping Blue Origin. I appreciate it very much." [4] (And suddenly I hate my shoes.)

Bezos himself articulated the methodological difference between Blue Origin and SpaceX in a 2004 letter to his then-tiny aerospace staff: "Be the tortoise," he told them, "and not the hare." [5] His motto for the company is *Gradatim Ferociter*, or "step by step, ferociously"—a grittier, Latinate rendition of "slow and steady wins the race." The phrase is inscribed on banners beneath the company's coat of arms (it's got a coat of arms), which features two turtles standing on top of a globe, reaching from North America to a gilded solar system. Crowning the image is a cruciform sun, anchoring it is a winged hourglass with all the sands run out, and the whole thing looks like a 15th Century cosmograph walked into a Harry Potter fanzine.

More nerd than geek, Bezos reads everything in print, considers even the most outlandish alternatives before making up his mind, and demands that ideas be pitched in full-paragraph form. As we all know, he is a books guy; in addition to Aesop, his references include JRR Tolkien, Isaac Asimov, Jules Verne, Ian M. Banks, Neal Stephenson, and William Gibson. Now and then, he even mentions *A Wrinkle in Time*, the single work by a woman to make the astropreneurial canon. But when it comes to space, Bezos's biggest influence is *Star Trek*.

While Musk is off actualizing George Lucas with his exploding Falcons and epic soundtracks, Bezos is cultivating the more genteel gestalt of the starship Enterprise. As the *Atlantic*'s Franklin Foer reports, Bezos initially wanted to call Amazon "MakeItSo.com" as an homage to Captain Jean-Luc Picard, whom he now uncannily resembles [6]. Bezos named his dog Kamala in honor of the empathic metamorph from Krios Prime [7], and as we all know, he just boldly took William Shatner where no ninety-year-old actor had gone before. The question you might be asking is, *why?* What are these billionaires up to in space?

II. Life on Mars

It is probably old news to you by now: Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos want us off the planet. Not all of us, of course, but according to both of these absurdly wealthy utopians, the future of the species will depend on those humans who have got the foresight, fortitude, and finances to head to outer space. Just as it was for Captain Kirk and the Apollo crews, space has become for these latter-day pioneers "the final frontier": a place of new worlds, untold fortunes, and immense danger.

Musk and Bezos are notorious rivals, competing for contracts, exchanging online jabs, and continually trading places as the Wealthiest Man on Earth. Both of them have testified repeatedly that their efforts in space are of utmost personal, professional, and existential importance, and that their obscene fortunes are justified as means to a humanitarian end—which is to say, the salvation of life as we know it. Despite these significant similarities, however, the two men differ not only in temperament and approach, but also in values and vision. When it comes down to it, the two billionaires want different things in different places for vastly different reasons.

Infamously, Musk wants to go to Mars. In fact, as he explained in a 2016 manifesto, it's been his goal all along: "making humans a multiplanetary species" by setting up a "self-sustaining city" on the Red Planet [8]. Having learned the argument from

the aerospace engineer and long-time Mars advocate Robert Zubrin, Musk explains to anyone who will listen that the Earth is a ticking time-bomb. Sooner or later, something will destroy humanity, whether it be an asteroid, nuclear war, or AI robots gone rogue. Sooner or later, we are going to have to find somewhere else to live, and given the literally infernal conditions of Venus, Mars is our best chance. Of course, five billion years from now, the sun will explode into a red giant and engulf Mars along with Earth in a fiery apocalypse. So, if we want humanity to endure forever, we will eventually have to make it to another solar system. But we will never be able to live *anywhere* else unless we start close to home – and soon, before a giant asteroid or Alexa 5.0 wipes out the whole species.

At times, Musk seems to realize how much he sounds like that guy on the street with a cardboard sign that says "THE END IS NEAR." Both disavowing and adopting the role of lunatic prophet, he writes, "I do not have an immediate doomsday prophecy, but eventually… there will be some doomsday event." With apocalypse on the horizon, our first option is to let the disaster extinguish us as it did the dinosaurs—an option Musk finds so intolerable he never even entertains it. "The alternative," he says, "is to become a space-bearing civilization and a multi-planetary species, which I hope you would agree is the right way to go." [9] So Mars it is.

Much like any other doomsday prophet, Musk keeps revising his timeline. Having initially promised to send crewed missions to Mars in 2020, he then nudged it to 2025, and at this point, Musk hopes to send the first few humans to the Red Planet just before or after 2030, with the goal of getting a million people to Mars by 2050. A million people. To Mars.

The challenge will be making the enterprise affordable… ish. At the moment, Musk shows by means of a perfectly bizarre Venn Diagram, the price to Mars is infinite, leaving the set of people who want to go to Mars completely distinct from the set of people who can *afford* to go to Mars. Using conventional technology, Musk estimates that the price for a round-trip ticket to Mars could drop to 10 billion dollars a person. But once his rockets attain full reusability and efficiency, Musk predicts he will be able to lower the cost to $200,000, "the median cost of a house in the United States." [10] At that price, in his words, "almost anyone" could go to Mars. All they would need to do is save up a bit, sell their house, and pack a *very small* bag. Anyone who does not have the money can always get sponsored by an employer and pay it off with a few years of labor, indentured servant-style. [11]

Fashioning himself after the American tycoons of the 19th Century, Musk promises to build an interplanetary transportation system akin to the transcontinental railroad. This cargo route will bring earthly supplies to the nascent Martian colony every 26 months when the two planets come closest to one another. As it becomes self-sufficient, the colony will rely less and less on such deliveries, gradually gaining the capacities to grow its own food, manufacture its own fuel, and mine sufficient resources to create and sustain infrastructure. Eventually, there will be no need for ships to come at all, except to transport passengers and perhaps to engage in trade.

When it comes to advertising his new colony, Musk alternates between appealing to aspirational homesteaders and revving up post-prom kids. On the one hand, he admits, Mars is going to be seriously hard work. Under current conditions, it is impossible to breathe or even just be on the planet without a space suit. Since Mars has so little atmosphere, it would turn all the water in a human body to steam and kill it instantaneously. Even *with* a space suit, there is so much radiation on Mars that it will likely cause the colonists severe health problems. So as Musk concedes from time to time, Mars will be like the Oregon Trail on a really bad day: "There's a good chance you'll die," he says; "it's going to be tough going." [12]

On the other hand—and this is the part Musk tends to dwell on—the Martian Trail is going to be *pretty cool*. The trip itself will be like an astronautic Club Med: a hundred people aboard one 400-foot BFR, or "Big Effing Rocket," for a seven-month trip

that Musk insists will never "feel cramped or boring." There will be zero-gravity games (Musk is really into bouncing around), plus "movies, lecture halls, cabins, and a restaurant. It will be really fun to go," Musk enthuses; "you are going to have a great time!" [13] (Nowhere in these descriptions does Musk explain who will be staffing the restaurants, cleaning the cabins, or wiping the space puke off the gleaming walls of the BFR. [14])

As for the planet itself, Musk promises, "it would be quite fun to be on Mars, because you would have gravity that is about 37% of that of Earth, so you would be able to lift heavy things and bound around." [15] Sure, the air is primarily carbon dioxide, but the same stuff that is so toxic to humans will make it easy to grow plants "just by compressing the atmosphere." Faced with the problem of "the radiation thing," Musk says inexplicably that it's "not too big of a deal," [16] and although he understands that Mars is "a little cold"—the average temperature is -80 degrees Fahrenheit (-62 degrees Celsius) – he assures his future colonists that "we can warm it up." [17]

How exactly do you "warm up" a frozen planet? Musk's ideological predecessor Zubrin proposes "greenhousing" Mars; that is, imitating the process currently roasting the Earth by releasing chlorofluorocarbons, genetically engineered gassy bacteria, or even more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere of Mars. [18] The popular physicist Michio Kaku favors the idea of harvesting methane from Saturn's moon Titan and importing it to the Martian skies. [19] But all this sounds far too complicated to Musk, who suggests we can just "nuke Mars," instead. Hit the airspace above the ice caps with some hydrogen bombs and you'll jumpstart the warming process, liberate tons of water, and move the colony that much closer to autonomy. To be sure, most scientists think this is an absolutely ridiculous plan. [20] The Director of the Russian space agency Roscosmos has estimated it would take more than 10,000 missiles to carry out the "nuke Mars" plan. Musk's Twitter-response? "No problem." [21]

If you are furrowing your brow at this fantasy of planetary hacking, you are not alone. As astrobiologist Lucianne Walkowicz reminds us, we do not have a great track-record of controlling geological processes on the planet we have already got. How can we hope to make a habitat out of Mars when we cannot even preserve the habitability of Earth? [22] It would seem that regulating the biosystems of an already-oxygenated, temperate, blue-green orb would be a far easier task than bringing a planetary dust-storm to life. I mean, we can't even figure out how to prevent a few devastating degrees of climate change on Earth.

(Actually, it is not that we don't know how to do it. It is just that we don't want to.)

When asked why he is choosing to "save" humanity by sending us to Mars rather than by addressing injustice, poverty, and climate change on Earth, Musk will often laugh and say, "Fuck Earth." [23] Earth is done; Earth is history; Earth is so last-aeon. Considering the coral reefs, wetlands, and clean skies that SpaceX has polluted and destroyed, and considering Musk's own advancement of artificial intelligence, one could even accuse him of worsening the disaster to intensify the need for salvation. Of making the planet genuinely uninhabitable so that we will, indeed, need to leave it. For a Martian utopia.

The word "utopia" comes from the Greek word *topos*, or "place." The "u" is privative, meaning that it negates the word it precedes. Etymologically, then, *utopia* means "no-place." And it is just this imprecision, this lack of location, this perpetual fuzziness that allows utopianism to flourish. If it is never quite anywhere, or never quite realized, then a utopia can be whatever you would like it to be. Classic utopians like Plato, Thomas Moore, and Marx and Engels gave us very clear ideas of what their ideal societies would look like: classes are either concretized or demolished, money is either distributed or abolished, and so on. Musk, by contrast, offers what one might call *utopianism without the utopia*. You will not find any social or political blueprints in Musk's motivational talks or business plans. What you will

find instead are abstract promises of "freedom"—from Earth, from international regulation, from gravity, and even from death, at least at the level of the species. He has not hammered out the details, because the details would destroy the perfection. But it is going to be awesome on Mars.

III. Sitting in a Tin Can

Jeff Bezos is not so sure. In fact, Bezos thinks Mars will be perfectly awful. We have sent probes to every planet in the solar system, he reasons, "and believe me, Earth is the best one. There are waterfalls and beaches and palm trees and fantastic cities and restaurants… And you're not going to get that anywhere but Earth for a really, really long time." [24]

"To my friends who want to move to Mars one day," Bezos reports, "I say, 'Why don't you go live in Antarctica first for three years, and then see what you think? Because Antarctica is a garden paradise compared to Mars." [25] So if Musk is happy to "fuck Earth," Bezos is set on saving it; if Musk named his SpaceX after the place he would like to go, Bezos named Blue Origin after the place he will always be from: this "gem" of a planet called Earth. [26]

How, then, will Bezos restore and preserve the blueness of our origin? The beauty of our Earth? By getting us the hell off the planet. The problem, for Bezos, is energy: we are using too much of it. Given an expanding and "modernizing" human population, global-industrial humanity will reach some absolute limits within the next century. There is simply not enough fuel—whether from the ground, the wind, or even the sun as it's accessible to earthlings—to power a whole planet's worth of first-rate hospitals, bleeding-edge electronics, megachurches, superstores, slaughterhouses, and industrial farms. We need more energy, so we have to go to space.

More philosophically minded than Musk, Bezos pauses to consider a few objections. Efficiency will not save us, because no matter how many solar panels or LED bulbs we install, our Earth and its resources are stubbornly finite. The only earthly alternative would be to stop using so much energy, but that would require "rationing" and perhaps even "population control," both of which Bezos finds intolerable. But the real problem with the prospect of sustainable life on Earth, he says, is that "it's going to be dull. I want my great-great-grandchildren to be using more energy per capita than I do. And the only way they can be using more energy per capita than me is if we expand out into the solar system." [27]

So the old Marxist adage is true: it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. [28] Rather than proposing an alternative to the extraction of "resources," the relentless pursuit of profit, and the wasteful cruelty of factory farming; rather than using his prodigious intellect to solve the problem of food distribution or his prodigious *fortune* to seed a universal basic income (or even to pay a few dollars in federal taxes), Bezos is spending his money and time exporting the whole damned system into space. The alternative, he says, would be "stasis," or even reversal. And Bezos wants to keep moving "forward," so he is going to have to go up and away.

Here's the way it will work. Rather than schlepping all the way to Mars, Bezos proposes that we construct a series of bases on the Moon. We install solar panels on every base, gaining access to far more solar energy than we could ever harness on Earth. We mine the Moon for water, whose elements can be split and recombined into rocket fuel. Using far less energy than we would need at Cape Canaveral, we will power mini-missions to mine asteroids for heavy and rare-earth metals, at which point we begin to construct miles-long, free-floating habitations between the Earth and the Moon.

Yes, you have heard that right: giant space pods. The idea comes from Gerard O'Neill, the Princeton physicist who began proposing in the mid-1970s that all

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The question is, do we have the courage to unmask this messianic delusion? To give up on the dream of some cosmic-capitalist paradise and break our enchantment with what climate activist Greta Thunberg calls "fairy tales of eternal economic growth"? What if, instead of asking how the universe might belong to us, we were to ask how we might belong to the universe?

heavy industry and much of the human population be moved into space. Mines and factories would occupy asteroids and the Moon, while residence, recreation, and commerce would take place in giant cylindrical tubes, rotating to simulate gravity and positioned at "Lagrange points" to maintain a steady orbit. Having attended O'Neill's lectures in college, Bezos remains a devotee. "This is Maui on its best day, all year long," he promises. "No rain, no storms, no earthquakes." [29] In our climate-controlled Edens, we would have everything we love on Earth, like air, trees, birds, and beaches, but nothing we hate—O'Neill infamously promised we would finally be free of mosquitos. And in the meantime, Mother Earth would get a long-overdue nap.

With all heavy industry and a good deal of humanity relocated off-planet, the Earth could be zoned for light industry, some residence, and recreation. In short, Earth would become a planetary park—a great vacation spot, a lovely place to go to college.

Meanwhile, out in space, humans would get to play as many video games, have as many kids, and eat as much red meat as they would like, powered by limitless energy. According to Bezos's calculations, an O'Neill-hacked solar system could in principle support one trillion human beings. "That's a thousand Mozarts," he marvels; "A thousand Einsteins. What a cool civilization that would be." [30]

It seems a cheap but necessary shot to point out that, by this dopey logic, we would also gain a thousand Hitlers and Stalins. But Bezos is leaving it to the STEM kids he strategically places at the front rows of his lectures to work out the details. How are we going to build O'Neill colonies? Out of what materials? Under what sort of political systems? Bezos has no idea. He is here to build the infrastructure so that the big thinkers of the future can hammer out the details. In short, Bezos will establish the extraterrestrial *roads* and *bridges* so that future dreamers can figure out what to do with them. Bezos will pave the way for future Bezoses and Zuckerbergs—and even for future Musks, once they have had enough of those radioactive dust-storms on Mars.

So these are our two utopias: "fuck Earth and occupy Mars" versus "save Earth by drilling the universe."

And the public is getting excited. As off-handedly "anti-corporate" as your average middle-class American may profess to be, we quite like our fast cars and same-day deliveries, especially if they make us think we are doing something virtuous. As one college newspaper puts it, Elon Musk and Tesla are "saving the planet by being awesome." [31] And as Franklin Foer reports in the Atlantic, Americans express "greater confidence" in Amazon.com than in "virtually any other American institution," including the military. [32] Order a three-pack of airtight canisters and you get, the next day, a three-pack of airtight canisters. Figure out how to open the doors of a Tesla and that thing will get you two hundred miles away on one charge while accelerating like a dream, stopping on a dime, recommending local restaurants, and entertaining your passengers with fart jokes and video games. Bezos and Musk have built companies that work. Why not trust their visions of our future in space?

Of course, both these visions are a long way off. So far, no one has been to Mars, no one has mined an asteroid or built a rotating space cylinder, and it has been half a century since anyone walked on the Moon. But in the meantime, the NewSpaceniks are already making a total mess. Musk has filled his allotted altitude in low earth orbit with so many Starlink satellites that he is edging into the territory allocated to Amazon. [33] Astronomers and space ecologists keep warning that between dead satellites, live satellites, paint chips, lost tools, shrapnel, old cameras, and the International Space Station, there is just *too much stuff* up there. At speeds of 18.000 miles per hour (29.000 kilometers per hour), the collision of anything with anything else is disastrous, and despite our steady ability to *produce* this deadly litter, we have absolutely no way to clean it up. (The most promising idea so far, which failed spectacularly the one time it was tested, is that we might be able to snag some passing garbage with a harpoon. A *harpoon*.)

The scene in space is total chaos, and yet Bezos, Musk, and a growing cadre of smaller-time astropreneurs continue unfazed, promising thousands more satellites, suborbital tourism, orbital tourism, private space stations, space hotels, and kazillion-dollar asteroids, all as means to our beautiful future in space. The road to utopia is paved, this time, with towering egos and careening space junk, and the promised landscape is infinite. Call it a *pantopia*: not so much a nowhere as an everywhere, for a select, horrifically wealthy few.

The question is, do we have the courage to unmask this messianic delusion? To give up on the dream of some cosmic-capitalist paradise and break our enchantment with what climate activist Greta Thunberg calls "fairy tales of eternal economic growth"? [34] What if, instead of asking how the universe might belong to us, we were to ask how we might belong to the universe?

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Photo_**Vladyslav Huivyk**

04. (THE ONLY WAY TO) STOP WARS AND SAVE THE WORLD

David Vine

Apr, 2022

While millions have suffered due to Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine, some have profited. Oil companies and major weapons manufacturers have been among those to benefit most. As the main suppliers of the Ukrainian military, the United States' arms makers, in particular, have profited mightily. Beyond arms sent to Ukraine, U.S. weapons manufacturers and their allies in and around the U.S. Congress have taken advantage of the war to boost total U.S. military spending—having nothing to do with Ukraine—to record levels. They are adding tens of billions of dollars to a total Pentagon budget that already exceeds $1,000,000,000,000 ($1 trillion). [1] That is more than China, India, Britain, Russia, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and South Korea spend combined. [2] Some have called for adding hundreds of billions more.

The ability of powerful actors to use the war in Ukraine to dramatically increase the size of the U.S. military budget is a quintessential example of an increasingly powerful Military Industrial Complex (MIC). The MIC is that often overlooked phenomenon that U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower famously warned about as he was leaving office in 1961. The former World War II general and commander of allied forces in Europe warned U.S. citizens that after the war the country had created "an immense military establishment and a large arms industry" that had accumulated unprecedented "economic, political, even spiritual" influence over nearly every aspect of public and private life. The president warned about the "the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power" and the need to "guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence." [3]

Almost without exception, U.S. leaders have ignored Eisenhower's warning. The implications have been global. Other than the intertwined forces of capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, there may be no force in our world that is more destructive than the MIC. Consider the history of near-constant U.S. wars dating to World War II. Far beyond recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. military has been part of wars in Somalia, Libya, Syria, Pakistan, Yemen, the Philippines, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Grenada, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Korea, among others. While there are complex causes behind these conflicts, the MIC bears significant responsibility for this pattern of permanent war—and for the damage the wars have inflicted. The damage includes tens of millions of deaths, many tens of millions more injured physically and psychologically, and unfathomable societal and ecological harm.

Consider, too, the deaths and harm that could have been prevented if U.S. leaders chose other ways to invest around $1 trillion a year than in the MIC. The Complex has systematically diverted money, labor, and energy away from pressing human needs such as building green infrastructure to stop global warming, pandemic preparedness, ending hunger and homelessness, and eradicating poverty.

As catastrophic as the damage has been, the MIC now may be helping lead the world down a path toward even greater destructions. Members of the MIC and related elites in the United States and among its European and Asian allies are leading the world toward direct confrontations—not just new Cold Wars—with Russia and China, aided by Putin's war and Russian and Chinese leaders' own escalatory, reckless language, weapons development, and military provocations. Most frightening of all is the rapidly increasing risk of a nuclear war, accidental or otherwise, between the United States and its allies and Russia or China—or both. Such a war is more likely now than at any point since the end of the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1961, the year Eisenhower issued his original warning about the MIC. Any single nuclear attack could easily spiral out of control into a full-scale nuclear war that could kill billions of people and potentially end the species. [4]

Ike—as Eisenhower was known—was right about the threat of the MIC. And to confront this threat, the MIC must be dismantled.

Dismantling the Military Industrial Complex will sound unrealistic to some. It is not. While money and profit will remain a part of war until humans abolish war completely, the MIC is a relatively new, post-World War II phenomenon that formed through a political and economic process that unfolded over time. As a phenomenon formed through a process, that process can be reversed. The interlocking political and economic power structures of the Complex can—and must—be broken. Like empires, the MIC is neither inevitable nor forever.

We must dismantle the MIC. The question, of course, is *how?*

The Emergence of a Monster

Since World War II weapons manufacturers and other parts of the war system have accumulated quantitatively and qualitatively greater levels of economic, political, and ideological power, as well as immense profits. This accumulation of power emerged out of a permanent war economy that the United States and the Soviet Union created during the so-called Cold War (that was not at all cold for millions). While the Soviet permanent war economy shrank dramatically after the dissolution of the USSR (Russian military spending is currently around one-twelfth that of the United States), [5] the U.S. war machine has expanded in power, influence, and control over U.S. resources, especially since the George W. Bush administration launched a "War on Terror" in 2001.

Prior to World War II, the United States had a relatively small military and weapons industry. The U.S. war machine was a substantial one that helped change the course of WWI, but after the war, the country largely demobilized, shutting down arms manufacturing factories and dramatically shrinking the size of its military.

During World War II, the U.S. government turned on a faucet of military spending unlike any the world had ever seen, building a military machine involving millions of troops, weapons factory workers, base construction laborers, and countless others. Spending dropped after the war, but the faucet remained open perpetually. When the government turned the faucet up higher in the early years of the so-called Cold War, amid the war in Korea, turning it off became harder still.

What emerged from this military spending and the economic and political relationships it created was the Military Industrial Complex that President Eisenhower first warned about in his 1961 farewell address. Despite Eisenhower's warnings, the MIC only grew in power and influence after he left the office to John F. Kennedy. The Complex made military spending what scholar Catherine Lutz has called the United States' "largest public works project" from the early Cold War to today. While most wealthy industrialized nations created social welfare states after

World War II—investing in universal health care, education, childcare, housing, and other social benefits—U.S. leaders created a *warfare state* revolving around an increasingly powerful Military Industrial *Congressional* Complex (as scholars believe Eisenhower initially and more accurately named it).

At the heart of the Military Industrial Complex is a long-standing three-sided "Iron Triangle" relationship between Congress, the military, and weapons manufacturers and other military contractors. Analyst Stephen Semler explains how the basic system works: Military spending "props up an entire industry chock full of tens of thousands of private companies that provide goods [including weapons] and services to the military as contractors. Big military budgets stock these private contractors' coffers full of cash, which the firms then reinvest into the political system to keep the largesse flowing. Every year, military contractors spend hundreds of millions of dollars on political contributions, lobbying expenses, and donations to prominent think tanks" [6], helping to shape a hypermilitarized approach to U.S. foreign policy.

Major weapons makers go farther to secure billions of dollars in annual contracts by ensuring their manufacturing processes take place in as many Congressional districts as possible. Congress members love the jobs associated with military spending (even though research shows that military spending creates far fewer jobs compared to spending on health care, education, and green infrastructure).

Over time, the more tax dollars Congress members have poured into the Complex, the more powerful the Complex has become. The more powerful the Complex has become, the more money and power it has claimed, expanding like a snowball rolling downhill. As the power of the MIC grew, it systematically diverted money, labor, and energy away from pressing human needs in the United States and globally, such as universal health care, poverty alleviation, public health, racial equity, affordable housing, public schooling, and efforts to combat global warming. In a 1953 speech, Eisenhower rightly called this diversion of funds "a theft"; he then oversaw a major military buildup throughout the rest of his presidency.

Today's MIC has grown in power far beyond Eisenhower's worst nightmares. Following the end of the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. military budget did not shrink but instead expanded by tens of billions of dollars, even before the start of the war in Ukraine. Many now acknowledge that the primary beneficiary of the U.S. war in Afghanistan was the industrial part of the Military *Industrial* Complex, which reaped hundreds of billions from the conflict: The title of a 2021 article in the corporate newspaper of record, *The Wall Street Journal*, read, "Who Won in Afghanistan? Private Contractors."

In recent years, the Military Industrial Congressional Complex has become a "much more serious menace" than it was in Eisenhower's time, writes journalist Gareth Porter. Today's Complex has accumulated broader and deeper influence than it had in 1961, expanding into new societal and economic realms. Former U.S. intelligence official Ray McGovern calls it the "MICIMATT"—the "Military-Industrial-Congressional-Intelligence-Media-Academia-Think-Tank Complex." In his book *The Complex*, historian Nick Turse points to an even broader "military-industrial-technological-entertainment-academic-scientific-media-intelligence-homeland security-surveillance-national security-corporate complex."

The Complex has become "the most powerful lobby of all" in shaping policy and spending in Washington, DC, says McGovern. With the help of pliant members of Congress, contractors regularly demonstrate the power to force the military to buy weapons the military does not even want. Contractors are "obligated to shareholders rather than the public interest," *Washington Post* reporters Dana Priest and William Arkin show in their book *Top Secret America*. "It just hits you like a ton of bricks when you think about it," one high-ranking officer told them. "The Department of Defense is no longer a war-fighting organization, it's a business enterprise."

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Between 2001 and 2021, U.S. wars alone cost U.S. taxpayers more than $8 trillion, amid total military spending of $19 trillion. [7] Today the Complex is responsible for a U.S. military budget that is completely out of proportion to the threats facing the United States. The budget is larger (adjusting for inflation) than at the height of the Cold War despite the absence of any threat or enemy comparable to the Soviet Union. The U.S. military budget now exceeds that of the next nine nations combined (most of whom are allies). U.S. military spending is more than 10 times Russia's and three times China's. Combined with the budgets of U.S. allies, the U.S. military budget is six times the size of China's. [8]

The MIC's damage extends far beyond the financial. In the eight decades since the end of World War II, there have been exactly two years when the U.S. military has not been involved in a war or other combat. Accounting for CIA-backed coups, arms shipments to war zones, and other forms of foreign meddling, the U.S. government has likely never been at peace in the post-war period (the record is little better before World War II). [9]

Deaths and injuries from U.S. warfare reach into the tens of millions. In the last 20 years, alone, the MIC has helped drive a so-called war on terror that has killed an estimated 4.5 million, injured tens of millions, and displaced 38 million. The total cost of these wars extends to the U.S. military's carbon footprint, which is larger than that of any organization on earth: Between 2001 and 2021, the military emitted 1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases—more than twice the annual emissions of the nearly 300 million cars in the United States. [10]

A Global Problem

While the Complex is a distinct problem rooted in the emergence of the United States as the world's most powerful country after World War II, other countries have developed their own military industrial complexes. The Soviet Union had one before its collapse. Russia, China, Britain, and France have their own versions. Yet each pales in comparison to the original MIC given the far larger sums the U.S. government has invested in its war machine. The United States represents around 40 percent of global military spending. [11] At the height of the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, U.S. military spending represented around half of all military spending worldwide.

The original MIC also has grown increasingly transnational over time, expanding far beyond U.S. borders. Foreign weapons makers regularly bid on and win major arms contracts with the U.S. Pentagon. Some major U.S. military contractors are no longer U.S. corporations, having moved their headquarters outside the United States to evade taxes. A recent *Washington Post* expose shows how retired U.S. generals and admirals frequently earn lucrative salaries working for foreign militaries, especially those in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. At times these contracts and the relationships involved appear to have influenced major weapons sales and U.S. foreign policy.

For decades NATO has been an economic alliance revolving around arms sales as much as it has been a military alliance. The U.S. government's emphasis on the "interoperability" of militaries across NATO has a military function to coordinate military forces; it also has an economic function in ensuring that NATO allies remain deeply dependent on future purchases from U.S. arms manufacturers, while also integrating other nations' arms industries into the U.S. war machine. Major weapons systems frequently involve joint partnerships between multiple corporations across multiple countries allied with the U.S. The F-35 fighter jet, the most expensive weapons system in history, involves more than 1,900 companies from 14 countries, according to prime contractor Lockheed-Martin.

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Dismantling the Military Industrial Complex(es)

The MIC has been the largely hidden, often overlooked force obstructing the efforts of movements worldwide struggling to stop U.S.-led wars, oppose U.S. imperialism, cut military spending, prevent nuclear annihilation, and promote peace. The Complex is a major reason why, despite some encouraging work and signs of progress, our efforts have been largely ineffective. Anti-war, pro-peace activists must admit that we currently lack effective strategies to successfully challenge this entrenched node of power. We're pretty good at pointing out the nature of the problem, but what would it take to fix the problem itself?

Recognizing that I do not know how to dismantle the MIC, I have been speaking recently with a wide range of MIC experts—activists, academics, analysts, veterans, Congressional staffers, journalists, and others—about that question: *What would it take to undermine the power of and ultimately dismantle the MIC?*

Across dozens of conversations, there has been broad agreement that we need:

1. To take on the MIC directly;
2. To better coordinate the diverse people and groups who are too often pursuing anti-war, anti-imperialist, pro-peace work isolated from each other;
3. To develop far better strategies and tactics if we are going to reduce the power of the MIC;
4. To scale up our best existing strategies that may require far more labor and funding to be effective;
5. To raise far more money—tens of millions of dollars more—if we want to seriously challenge a Complex involving some of the world's wealthiest corporations and their army of extravagantly-funded lobbyists, retired generals and admirals, advertisers, think tank spokespeople, and paid-off politicians. While raising tens of millions of dollars may seem daunting and laughable, there are people with the desire to dramatically improve living conditions for billions for whom $10 million is a small fraction of their wealth.

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Given the threats facing us, this is a time to think as boldly as possible about strategies, tactics, and campaigns to roll back the MIC's power and to build the world we want to see. We must discard ideas about what's "realistic," which so often constrain our thinking unnecessarily. We should look for strategies, tactics, and inspiration from movements that have successfully challenged comparable entrenched nodes of power such as Big Oil, Big Tech, Big Tobacco, Big Pharma, Big Agriculture, racism and white supremacy, and the U.S. Prison Industrial Complex.

Among many other approaches, we should consider lawsuits and divestment campaigns; a sophisticated multi-million-dollar advertising and social media campaign; nationalization of weapons manufacturers to remove the profit motive from arms manufacturing; the conversion of arms merchants into not-for-profit corporations; and the conversion of large parts of the military into an unarmed disaster relief, public health, and infrastructure construction force. We should consider recruiting allies from industries that are losing out when every year the U.S. Congress gives half of the U.S. government's annual budget to the military and the arms industry. We should seriously consider whether making progress against the MIC and the other major social justice struggles of our time will require creating a movement of movements on the left—at national and international levels—to collaboratively challenge racism and the MIC, global warming and poverty, patriarchy and Indigenous land theft, and more.

Conclusion

When we succeed in diminishing the power of the MIC's power, we will make the world safer, healthier, and more secure. Decreasing the power and influence of the MIC can help turn the United States and its allies away from a pattern of permanent war and growing momentum toward a potentially species-ending nuclear war with China, Russia, or both. A substantially diminished MIC would have fewer weapons systems, fewer U.S. military bases globally, fewer nuclear weapons, fewer lobbyists, and less power in Congress and the media to advance the militaristic, imperialist foreign policy that has defined the U.S. role in the world since 1945.

Success in reducing the MIC's power would almost surely involve a significant decrease in the size of the annual military budget in the United States and beyond. While I have called for a halving of the U.S. military budget, even a 30 percent decrease—comparable to after the Cold War's end—would free hundreds of billions of dollars annually and still leave the United States with a military budget larger than that of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea combined.

Hundreds of billions of dollars would be available to meet pressing human and environmental needs, including the development of green energy infrastructure, pandemic preparedness and vaccine development, global poverty alleviation, affordable housing, improved public education, and a deepened commitment to international diplomacy. Downsizing the MIC, and thus the entire military machine, on its own would help reduce US carbon emissions and slow global warming given that the US military is the world's largest institutional carbon polluter.

Some will object that the MIC is what's keeping Ukrainians' alive in the face of Putin's imperialist invasion. While U.S. and allied weaponry certainly has aided Ukrainian self-defense, the weapons manufacturers are far from altruists. If they truly cared about Ukrainians, they would forgo any profit, leaving more money for humanitarian aid for Ukraine (or saving U.S. taxpayer money). Of course they don't. The Complex has used the war cynically to inflate profits and stock prices dramatically.

While more modest objectives have failed, some will continue to believe that *dismantling* the MIC is unrealistic. Given the stakes, we cannot afford self-fulfilling forms of pessimism or foreclosing our sense of what is possible. To do so will be to accept defeat and a perpetuation of a status quo that harms billions.

We need a sense of urgency that if we do not dismantle the MIC, new catastrophe looms for the United States and the world: If we are collectively to avoid squandering trillions of taxpayer dollars on a permanent war; if we are to save ourselves from the worst effects of global warming by building green infrastructure; if we are to address the world's other most urgent problems like pandemics, poverty, and inequality; if we are to prevent war between the United States and its allies and Russia or China; if we are to avoid nuclear annihilation, we must build a transnational movement to dismantle an increasingly transnational MIC.

Ultimately, it comes down to this: If we want to save the planet, we must build a movement to dismantle one of Earth's most harmful but ignored forces: the Military Industrial Complex.

David Vine

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05. WAR EFFORT AND KITCHEN-SINK GEOPOLITICS

Irene Zugasti

May, 2022

"War-Effort" is one of the most twisted pieces of wartime language which, though it has been a while since we have heard it used in Europe, has withstood the test of time It means, essentially, that the State can call on its people to make sacrifices and mobilise their resources—their bodies, time, work, and even their lives—in the name of victory and national interest.

This concept is devious because effort is, in and of itself, a dangerous idea, pertaining as it often does to guilt, responsibility, hardship, moral duty and work ethic, all of which are questionable yet deep-seated values in a culture that legitimises inequality and violence. The typical dictionary definition of "effort" frames it as the expending of physical or mental energy in order to overcome difficulties, a perspective that doesn't exactly inspire us to get up and get to work, does it?

In War Effort, this "physical or mental energy" has little or nothing to do with one's own will, and everything to do with the coordinated demands of a higher power, offering no alternative but for you to make the effort. Throughout history, the concept of War Effort has often taken the form of forcefully conscripting civilians who are sent to die on the front lines as young soldiers, as Russia and Ukraine are doing now with their own citizens. War Effort was also used to force women into military industries during the 20th century at the expense of their own health, cheered on by hypocritical cries of "We can do it!" only to later find themselves sent back into the kitchen once more to support households recovering from the war. War Effort meant being made to give away your money and empty your pantry for "The Cause" as its battalions passed by, even if this cause was not your own. War Effort meant opening your home, and sometimes even your legs, to provide a resting place for warriors in an endlessly romanticised ideal of selfless service to the homeland. War Effort means having to migrate, to exile yourself, to cross the world with nothing but the clothes on your back, with no guarantee of a warm welcome wherever you might end up. Incidentally, War Effort has almost always been the burden of women, though songs and tales of heroic deeds leave out this detail, mentioning it only to glorify sacrifice and justify the harm done to a valiant and hardworking female citizen. A famous example of this is Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon, whom he was forced to sacrifice in order to mobilise his ships during the Trojan War. Other examples can be found among the countless subordinates of literature and cinema: mothers, widows, grieving lovers. There is, in fact, an entire musical genre—*Abschiedslied*, farewell songs—which refers to those tunes that for centuries have been sung in wartime, channelling the anguish of waiting and farewells: *Bella, ciao*.

Although today we do not have to darn uniforms, build bombs in a workshop or pay special taxes to the government, we are undoubtedly staring down the barrel of an inevitable and necessary War Effort. Back in March Spanish prime minister Pedro Sánchez appeared before the Spanish Congress of Deputies stating that the measures

Kitchen-sink geopolitics acts as a counterpoint to all this, as it is critical, honest, and understands that the personal is political and the political is international. It draws a line between the butter on your toast and the fall of the Berlin Wall, between rising rents and British Petroleum's currently tripled profits. It is not only urgently needed, but it is also the only way we can avoid the notion of War Effort being turned into an excuse or explanation for dystopian and uninhabitable futures.

in place and the future of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict were going to "take a toll, and demand sacrifices". In August Macron declared "the end of abundance", a relative term for the millions for whom this abundance had never even begun. This Summer, the Spanish Defence Minister Margarita Robles also warned that "winter was going to be tough", and even cautious Germany joined the chorus of gloomy predictions about energy reserves. I wonder how we will reconcile this dark and dystopian Winter filled with fear, scarcity and blackouts with toy catalogues, Black Friday and turkey dinners. Perhaps, if the headlines are anything to go by, in a few months' time this outlook will be supplanted by a different, much more nuclear, winter.

In this setting, it is easy for War Effort to mingle with uncertainty—an extremely and increasingly lucrative upside for some—given that it feeds into fear, populism, fascism and "unprecedented measures". I am not only referring to uncertainty in the face of the big questions, such as how long this bloody war will last, what China's next move will be, or what alternatives there are to the looming energy shortages. I cannot provide answers to these questions, and despite being bombarded daily with information and contradictory statistics I cannot, for the life of me, find a way to do so. I am referring instead to more everyday uncertainty about things like breakfast, the price of the milk we put in our coffee and the butter we put on our toast, the uncertainty that makes our heads spin with anxiety. This is, as I call it, kitchen-sink geopolitics which, among friends and neighbours, is stitched into our lives through platitudes, small talk and shared worries. Monsters can grow out of this uncertainty, and it is here that clinging to truths and predictions may seem the only way to live with unrest and danger, even when these truths may themselves be dangerous, false, or deeply flawed.

It is rare in geopolitics for someone to admit their mistakes. When all is said and done, it is a field that has, for centuries, been firmly rooted in economic, military, political and patriarchal power and all that comes with it. Traditional imaginings of security, international relations and geopolitics call to mind images of military men huddled over maps, or engravings of nineteenth-century lords dividing up the world with compasses and rulers (not to mention the help of several million slaves). It invokes images of high-level summits where suited men shake hands around a table, or arrange themselves neatly, like school children, for group photos (not long ago this took place here in Madrid in the name of NATO and, to make matters worse, in front of Picasso's Guernica). These images remind us of all the stuffy analysts who speak with confidence and conviction in oak-panelled offices, surrounded by the stale, dated iconography of globes and chess sets.

As someone who has studied these important men of maps, and did so in the institutions which were set up to perpetuate their memory, I am no stranger to the feeling of being an intruder, and of being an outsider to their debates. I also know the difficulties of creating other ways of talking about "multipolar disputes" which, in layperson's terms, means talking about the world and its interdependent relationships from perspectives other than those described in the previous paragraph. I was reminded of these difficulties every day by those long-surnamed gentlemen whose portraits hung in the corridors, and all those good boys with good manners who were being groomed to one day divide up the planet. Kitchen-sink geopolitics acts as a counterpoint to all this, as it is critical, honest, and understands that the personal is political and the political is international. It draws a line between the butter on your toast and the fall of the Berlin Wall, between rising rents and British Petroleum's currently tripled profits. It is not only urgently needed, but it is also the only way we can avoid the notion of War Effort being turned into an excuse or explanation for dystopian and uninhabitable futures.

As previously mentioned, in geopolitics we are not used to owning up to mistakes and their consequences (if we can call them that). This refers just as much to self-serving mistakes as it does to those which result from tactical or strategic clumsiness, such as the now infamous military defeats on Russian soil, especially against "General Winter". Other more recent examples can be seen in cases of famed weapons of mass

destruction failing to materialise, or the guns-blazing invasion of Afghanistan which condemned the country to an ungovernable future. As analysts we also frequently make mistakes which stem from inflamed passions, or a misjudged relationship between our wishes and reality. A fine example of this was committed by yours truly when, after studying the Russo-Ukrainian region for years, all my theory and analysis amounted to little when I predicted a quick and efficient war that would end after a few short skirmishes. It was a spectacular error on my part and, unfortunately, I was proven very wrong.

It is precisely from such a position of vulnerability and accountability, a rarity in geopolitics, that we can provide the few certainties that might allow us to understand and navigate our current scenario a little better. It is a position that grows out of uncertainty, mundanity and more than a touch of fatigue, but which holds within it an optimism and willpower which are, in themselves, no mean feat.

This is because conflict narration requires cool-headed analysis that opens up space for a range of diverse voices. The gravest consequence of this lack of perspective, context and dissent is the absolute dehumanisation of the Other, who becomes either collateral damage or, even worse, the target for hate.

The path dependence of supervillains

Many months have passed since Russia invaded Ukraine (eight years since the conflict began, if we want to be orthodox about it) and we are still lacking a clear narrative of why this is happening. This reduction and simplification of the story, far from being accidental, is the beating heart of war propaganda. It allows the story to be told like a Marvel movie, pitting Putin the supervillain—cold, controlling, capricious, cold-blooded and relentless—against his nemesis Zelenskiy, the unexpected hero forced into his role, broadcasting his side of the war nightly from a smartphone. The victims are reduced to a mass of "women and children", who serve no purpose beyond providing eyewitness accounts to pad out news reports and acting as the martyrs needed for soldiers to be mobilised into battle. All without anyone ever asking whether there might have been any alternative.

In economics, the idea that a result depends on the complex sequence of events which lead up to it, and not just the current situation, is known as "path dependence". This self-evident truth allows social sciences to account for the fact that no historical or political event can be explained solely by the here and now, even if unforeseen events can sometimes turn things upside down, and neither the lunacy of a single person, nor the power of leadership, should ever be underestimated.

In the case of this war, the Marvel narrative would not hold up if greater emphasis were put on path dependence, on how economic and power structures operate behind the scenes, on how you cannot understand the film without seeing the whole series. In this way we could understand how the war in Donbass has much more complex origins, whereby collective memory and conflicting identities play a fundamental role, in addition to the collapse of the Soviet empire and Ukraine's historical role as the hinge between two worlds, or as the gentlemen of geopolitics would put it, a "heartland".

There is a trail of breadcrumbs that we can follow here: the Maidan Uprising, the Orange Revolution, gas pipelines, the investments of foreign oligarchs, the policies of the IMF, agreements with Moscow and decades of precarity-induced migration to Europe. By picking up these crumbs, we can gain a much clearer and fairer picture of exactly what has happened, and thus we might be surprised to learn that the villain was, not so long ago, an acceptable NATO ally in the war on terror back in 2000 and a confidante of the Spanish crown, to the extent that we were on the verge of selling Repsol to him. We would also do well to learn a little more about what lies behind Zelenskiy, who governs a country using martial law that violates human rights, under which twelve political parties have been outlawed, but who was actually, in his early days, seen as a symbol of peace for the region. This was not even that long ago; it was part of his campaign in 2019.

Such scrutiny can be applied to all wars, and in fact to almost all conflicts. Without

The fact of the matter is that, theories aside, there has been an undeniable shift which can be observed over the last three decades. This is because wars—and the industry which surrounds them—are ensnared in an unstoppable process of privatisation because warfare, just like hospitals, building societies and public companies, can be privatised.

it, a singular narrative is imposed, devoid of shades of grey or nuance, without any chance of finding common ground. This is because conflict narration requires cool-headed analysis that opens up space for a range of diverse voices. The gravest consequence of this lack of perspective, context and dissent is the absolute dehumanisation of the Other, who becomes either collateral damage or, even worse, the target for hate.

Old new wars: between hybridisation and privatisation

Let us now go back to the current war, which is often talked about as if it were an earthquake, a volcano or a meteorite; something sudden, natural and unavoidable. We can see this just by reading the insufferable introductions that precede recent institutional declarations, international summits and political interventions, where Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine are baked into the framework of any speech or decision. If we are to answer an alternative, more pacifist call, we can see that war is much more than a simple absence of peace, and unlike a natural disaster or accident it is an inherently human production, and can thus be reversed or avoided.

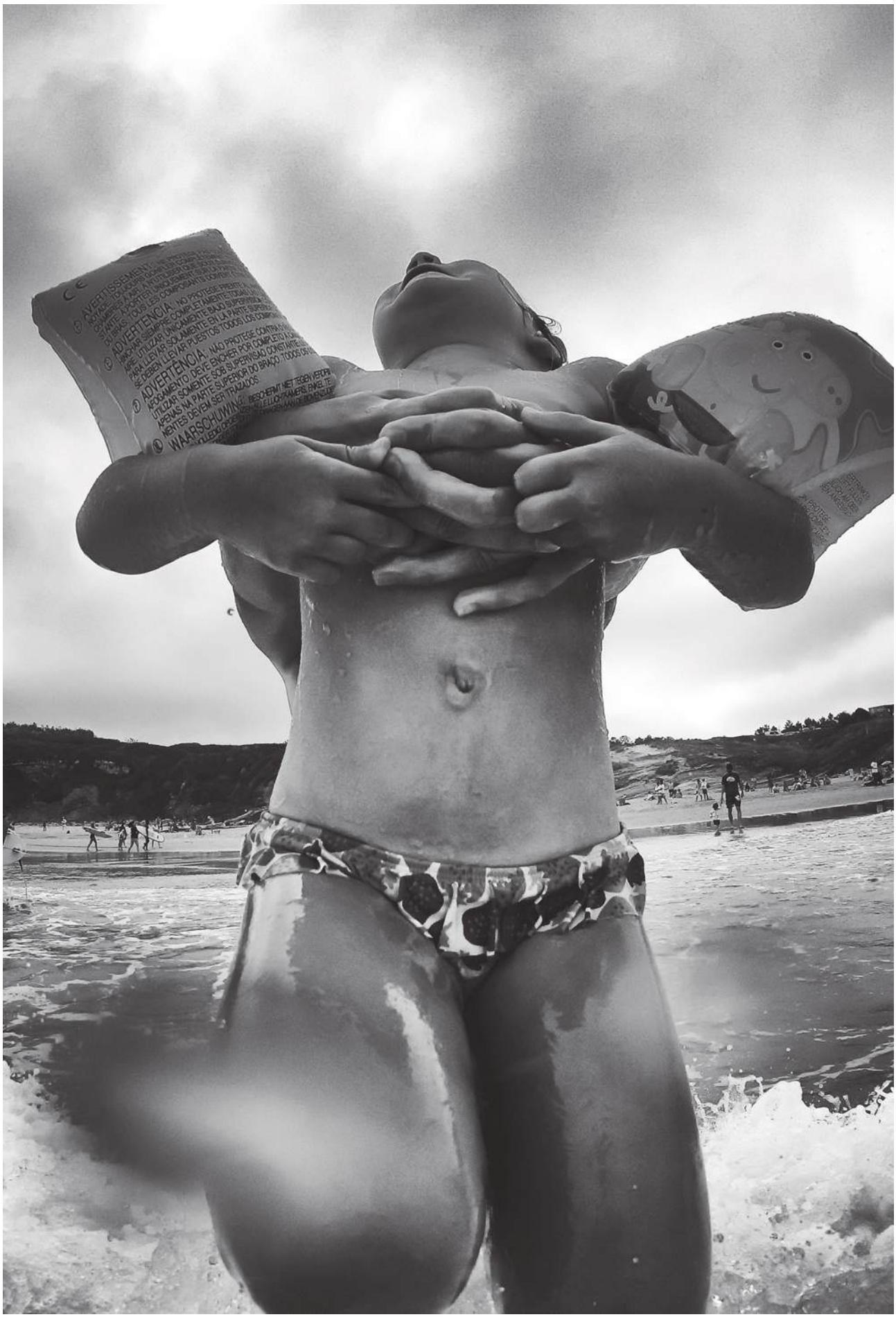
It is said that the Russo-Ukrainian war is a hybrid war, but what war is not? The theory of hybridised warfare was pioneered by US army Lieutenant Colonel Frank Hoffman at the beginning of the 2000s during the Chechnya conflict and the escalating "War on Terror" in the Middle East. For Hoffman, the key to hybrid wars is that they can be carried out both by states and a by a range of non-state actors via a variety of tactics: guerrilla organisations; paramilitary insurgents or terrorist groups; digital strategies of misinformation and the cultural and symbolic soft power of nation states; even third states which become an arena for proxy conflicts which have little to do with them, as is the case in Ukraine.

This concept, however, has been stretched and warped beyond recognition. Rarely have wars in the last century exclusively involved confrontation between regular armies, and, therefore, their consequences have always been hybridised. There are, in fact, some wars which have never had any significant military involvement: what war is older or more hybridised than class war? In much the same way hybridising wars can be a clean and easy way to not only justify them, but also to justify failings or loopholes in which neither states nor international law can be held accountable for the barbaric acts which are committed.

Therefore, whether we call them hybrid, asymmetrical or "new" wars, the fact of the matter is that, theories aside, there has been an undeniable shift which can be observed over the last three decades. This is because wars—and the industry which surrounds them—are ensnared in an unstoppable process of privatisation because warfare, just like hospitals, building societies and public companies, can be privatised.

Although it is true that mercenaries have existed throughout history—from Egypt, to the Crusades, and the brutal Francoist *Guardia Mora* (Moorish Guard) who were key to the success of the coup which started the Spanish Civil War—there have never been so many private, mobilised military organisations as there currently are in the world. So called Private Security Companies or Private Military Companies are the most obvious symptom of this, as they provide services of a military nature to states, walking the finest of lines between mercenarism and mere "private security".

The majority of these came about in the 1990s to deploy warmongering political actions in Africa and the Middle East, as well as the Balkans, and they exist to this day. Blackwater, Titan Corp, Northrop Grumman (all of them from the U.S.) or the Wagner Group (from Russia) are the most well known, but these groups number in the hundreds, and serve private clients in addition to states. They are comprised of a mix of experienced ex-combatants with dubious track-records and experts in military technology, the latter often poached from national militaries in exchange for better pay and working conditions. However, these businesses, which go where



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Borrell's European garden has very tall fences, some of them topped with razor wire, and according to him it requires "gardeners" who are willing to venture out into the jungle in order to defend it.

UN Conventions cannot reach and have perpetrated some of the most infamous human rights violations of recent decades, are tremendously expensive to keep afloat. The accelerating year-on-year expansion of the weapons industry has combined to make running these companies a volatile and very, very expensive affair. Perhaps this is why the Summer 2022 NATO summit in Madrid resulted in a commitment to raise military spending to 2% of GDP; it may also be why the Spanish Defence Minister Margarita Robles seems so pleased with the the General State Budget for 2023, in which defence spending (what the Spanish government is calling the "peace budget") has gone up by 25%. This rise does not even account for many other hidden items that we would know little about were it not for the work of collectives, such as the Centre Delás or anti-militarist movements, which have brought new figures to light, figures which the state never planned for us to see.

Borrell's garden at the centre of the world

This escalating, kamikaze warscape can only be understood from a Eurocentric mindset, which Borrell has outlined in terms which, more than once, have used the metaphor of a garden fending off an encroaching jungle to explain the current state of affairs. The EU's inexplicable stance on Ukraine has thus far been based on uncritical support for NATO and a policy of boomerang sanctions which, under the pretext of harming Putin, have destabilised an entire continent. In addition to this policy of sanctions there is also a "Peace Fund", which has sent 2.5 billion euros worth of weapons to Kyiv, accompanied by a rhetoric which opposes anything remotely Russian, wiping out any semblance of neighbourliness and leaving millions of people on both sides of the Dnieper river in dire straits. At the same time Frontex, the European border control agency, has expanded operations in the Balkan region mere months after its involvement in pushbacks in the Mediterranean was revealed, rendering European asylum and refugee policy a simple case of cherry picking based on skin colour and passport, and not on the need for international protection. Borrell's European garden has very tall fences, some of them topped with razor wire, and according to him it requires "gardeners" who are willing to venture out into the jungle in order to defend it.

Is from this invisible, everyday experience that Colombian women have created peace and reparation processes, from which refugees have set up solidarity and mutual support networks, and from which activists have deployed action-focused, international, militant diplomacy.

On the day that Borrell's metaphorical garden was born, several unvarnished truths came to light. First was the absolute self-centeredness of of the old Europe and its old guard, who ignore the fact that we no longer live in 1950 and that the world is multipolar, complex and interdependent and that Europeans, in the face of China, India and Latin America, are stuck in the past and are losing their power.

The second of these truths was the persistent validity of colonial, white-supremacist, xenophobic thinking in Brussels. Its rhetoric is clumsily masked behind hollow narratives of inclusion and policies of cooperation which, as time goes by, remind us of how little we have changed, and that we still see the world from our watchtower as a case of "civilisation" versus barbarism. Incidentally, this xenophobia has also been applied to Slavic people; for decades Ukraine's poverty and vulnerability were exploited to provide cheap labour to all of Europe.

The third of our gardener's truths is the harshest and most unbelievable, and it is rooted in the belief that Europe, purely and simply, embraces war, death and destruction (as well as reconstruction, resulting in a cycle which is undoubtedly lucrative). It consists of Borrell—with an Atlanticist agenda that would have made Aznar in his prime shudder—stating that "war is won on the battlefield". Not at negotiating tables, not in multilateral discussions or peace agreements, but on the battlefield.

Peace Effort: the antidote to War Effort

The last and most significant of the abovementioned truths is that only a militant, feminist peace movement can lead us forward. More than a mere platitude or political slogan, this critical stance towards the invasion and escalating conflict in Ukraine was in fact first staked out by pacifists and feminists. Both were roundly dismissed, even by the political left itself, as ingenuous, naïve, simplistic or unrealistic. They were given no space in the media, nor legitimacy in international discussions, and no country put their grievances on the agenda.

However, in spite of the heterogeneity of social and political movements, the fact of the matter is that women have always been at the forefront of the fight for peace: the women of 1917 Russia, Sarajevo's Women in Black, the Mothers of *Plaza de Mayo*, the suffragists who tried to stop the First World War, the hippies who sang against the Vietnam War. In their diversity of backgrounds and positions, these women were vital political actors who held up a mirror to warfaring gentlemen and exposed their shameful flaws. What I am saying here does not stem from sappy essentialism, because pacifism has nothing to do with submissiveness, nor any intrinsic predisposition to being creatures of care and light whose sole purpose is to pacify others. There are warfaring women, terrible women (some of them already alluded to in this text), but in reality, if women have sustained pacifist movements for centuries—defending them by putting their bodies and often their lives on the line—it is because there are other ways of understanding relationships with land, otherness, power and conflict, ways which women have led from the margins. It is from this invisible, everyday experience that Colombian women have created peace and reparation processes, from which refugees have set up solidarity and mutual support networks, and from which activists have deployed action-focused, international, militant diplomacy.

People wax poetic about War Effort, but rarely about Peace Effort; the lengthy postwar recovery periods built on the backs of women, of managing defeat, inflation, the toll taken by violence and broken futures. I would, therefore, like to celebrate the only positive of all these certainties by revindicating the historical legitimacy of those who have imagined better worlds and fought for them, who bear the burden of bloodshed and pain and have proposed alternatives when no one wanted to hear them. Let us celebrate their existence and resistance.

Let us continue on with our kitchen-sink geopolitics, disputing the war and its efforts, healthily and sanely critiquing many of its underlying convictions which have, for decades if not centuries, failed to take us very far. When all is said and done we can remember the myth (or one of its retellings) in which Iphigenia, minutes before being sacrificed to the gods of war, flees and escapes her unjust fate.

Irene Zugasti

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06.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THE ENERGY CRISIS: WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE WAR BROKE OUT IN UKRAINE?

Rafael Fernández

Jun, 2022

Fifty years ago the Yom Kippur War marked the beginning of a new stage in the history of international energy relations. With more than a hint of *déjà vu*, we are living in times reminiscent of those critical years: an embargo on Russian oil; Russia's subsequent response of reducing and then interrupting Europe's gas supply; the price hikes on both forms of fuel; inflation shock; stagflation; energy saving measures, energy security returning to the forefront of national political strategy and international relations. Given the similarities between these two moments in time, the resulting question is unavoidable: will the war in Ukraine mark the beginning of a new stage in the history of international energy relations? If this is the case, what will be the main shifts, and what will their implications be in a post-post Cold War world?

The consequences of the Yom Kippur war

The Yom Kippur War drove the heaviest consumers in the West (the United States and Europe) to look for new locations to produce and export crude oil in order to reduce their dependence on the Middle East and rein in the market power of OPEC member-states. From this moment on concentrated trade between a handful of geographic areas, which had dominated petroleum industry operations until the 1970s, gave way to a more open stage, with imports coming from North America (Canada and Mexico), Europe (the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway), Latin America, Africa and, later on, Russia and Central Asia. At this time, countries in the Middle East were pivoting their imports towards East Asia, which would, in time, go on to become the largest global importer of crude oil.

The war did not only alter trade relations; it also brought about change on a higher level by transforming pricing systems. The old system consisted of the seven largest companies (Dutch-Shell, British Petroleum, Exxon, Chevron, Mobil, Gulf and Texaco) agreeing on a fixed, universal price which was used for all deals at the wellhead. This was rendered obsolete when the administration behind price-fixing came under the control of OPEC member-states. [1] The system that replaced it is still in use today, and has more recently been applied to the natural gas market, where prices are reached by contractors who work closely with large financial institutions. In these markets, a relatively small number of purchase and sale transactions of a specific type of crude oil (such as Brent) are carried out. A price is derived from these transactions and published by private agencies, which other traders within the system then collectively use as a benchmark to determine prices across the endless transactions for (over 300) other varieties of crude oil which are continuously being carried out in international markets.

Together with the changes to trade flows and pricing systems, the war also marked a turning point in power dynamics among the main players of the petroleum business. For decades, the aforementioned Seven Sisters had not only determined the system

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used to decide the price of crude oil, the allocation of extraction areas (excluding the United States and the Soviet Union) and the distribution of profits among companies and oil-producing governments; they had also established firm control over the distribution, refining and marketing of petroleum products. [2]

The implementation of this corporate structure, which had government support in the countries where these companies operated, ground to a halt when exporter countries forced the nationalisation of fossil fuel production. From this point on, polyarchy, or a large variety of players in different positions of relative power, has become one of the defining features of the international petroleum industry.

Within this polyarchy International Oil Companies (IOCs) have maintained a presence in the background, despite having lost their privileged positions in primary extraction sites. They have also maintained their technological and commercial power and, as a result of mergers which were finalised at the end of the previous century, they stand to benefit greatly from the continual rise in oil prices. The same has been true for OPEC countries. Their ability to influence market conditions has proven much weaker than expected or commonly assumed, but in spite of this price dynamics have been extraordinarily kind to them. Therefore, while the cartel's influence has declined, the power held by its members, much like large, non-OPEC exporters (above all Russia), has been increasing in economic, political and even military terms. Looking specifically at the energy sector, this power is wielded by state-run companies (National Oil Companies, or NOCs), who control the majority of the world's crude oil and natural gas reserves, some of which now have their own distribution networks, refineries, marketing companies and interests in other industries. [3]

Despite the increasing influence of exporting countries, the United States government continues to play a pivotal role on the international energy stage. Since the energy crisis of the 1970s, the main objective of U.S. policy has been ensuring a continual and abundant flow from the main oil producers into the international market. In order to achieve this, numerous interventions have been made in the international export arena, both to gain allies (beginning with Saudi Arabia, with the aim of making it a "swing producer" which can tip the system's scales), and to confront enemies (including Iran, Iraq, Libya and Venezuela). Leaving aside the benefits of this policy (especially for military-industrial contracts), its cost to the United States has mounted as it becomes increasingly difficult to contain the conflicts that the policy itself has generated.

The emergence of China has added new layers of complexity to this polyarchic—and increasingly conflictive—world order, making it even more difficult for the United States to control the strategies of producer countries. Faced with a continually growing demand for energy, the Chinese government has been actively participating in the formalisation of long-term contracts for purchasing large quantities of crude oil, while simultaneously reaching agreements with exporters regarding their companies' participation in extraction projects and the construction of transport infrastructure. In this way, the policies of the Chinese government and Chinese companies have further strengthened the negotiating power of producer countries as a reliable alternative to the unilateral and secure supply of the North American model, combining production capacity with a lack of political interference.

Lastly, following the crisis of 1973, international energy relations ceased to revolve exclusively around petroleum. To confront rising prices and the nationalisation of resources by exporting countries, the governments of high-consuming countries promoted policies focussed on saving and diversifying their energy sources. Nuclear power and natural gas, which abound in Canada, the United States and the North Sea, emerged as alternatives which would, it was presumed, reduce dependency on outside sources. For various reasons the development of the former (nuclear) did not meet initial expectations. On the other hand, the development of gas, though slow to start, eventually took off thanks to a combination of factors: its economic and environmental advantages over petroleum and coal in the generation of electricity,

and over coal and electricity in heating homes and buildings; large-scale, low-cost agreements made between European countries and the former Soviet Union; the development of liquid gas, fundamental to the gas business in East Asia; the appearance of new producers (Norway, Qatar, Australia); the development of fracking, and so on. In this way international energy relations ceased to hinge solely on petroleum; gas came onto the scene with its own business structures, trading mechanisms and power dynamics.

Will the war in Ukraine bring in significant changes in the structure of energetic trade?

Let us return to our original question: has the war in Ukraine caused changes in trade flows, pricing, power dynamics and energy sources that rival those caused by the Yom Kippur War? Are these changes so profound as to affirm that we are currently facing the dawn of a new era in the history of international energy relations? Of these questions it is, without a doubt, the first that has been answered most immediately. Indeed, there has probably never before been such a rapid and intense change in the structure of trade as that seen in recent months.

On March 8th, days after the invasion began, the United States announced that they would stop importing Russian petroleum. Keeping in mind that trade between the two countries was insignificant at most, we can easily deduce that this move was not intended to cause direct harm to Russia's economy, but rather to set in motion a campaign that would pressurise the EU into following suit and joining the embargo. The campaign was successful, and set off a chain reaction which, though predictable, was quite dramatic: a reduction in European petroleum imports, cuts to Russian gas supplies, skyrocketing prices of both fossil fuels, and a restructuring of commercial relations at an international level.

With regard to petroleum, Russia began selling in Asia what it had previously sold in Europe, in return for granting substantial price breaks to buyers and paying hefty premiums to shipping companies. For their part, Europe began to buy oil, previously supplied by Russia, from the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, although European refineries have yet to find a simple substitute for the Russian oil commonly used in the production of diesel and other derivatives, which has made the price hikes on these products especially acute. At the same time Europe's search for oil in other regions and the reorientation of Russian trade towards Asia—which is expected to intensify from December onwards when the European ban on the purchase of Russian oil (by sea) comes into effect—will make way for other large exporters to raise their quotas and for significant shifts in the destination of their sales.

As expected, Europe's announcement that it would stop buying Russian oil was met with threats from Russia to stop selling gas. With the realisation of these threats, changes to trade flows have followed the same path as those of oil. In the case of oil, even if relations between Russia and Europe take time to normalise, the logical conclusion is that the future will bring a certain realignment of the current shifts in trade flows. In the case of gas this change of direction cannot progress as quickly, though it will undoubtedly end up being all the more irreversible if, in addition to its emergency energy-saving and reserve-filling measures, the EU invests in infrastructure capable of at least partially substituting that which currently connects the European continent to the fields of eastern Siberia.

If, as the United States has proposed, and the EU has suggested in REPowerEU, these investments are made and the disconnection becomes permanent, then the gas industry would be set to undergo a radical transformation. The Middle East, closely followed by the United States, could become the main supplier to the EU, complemented by exports from Norway and Algeria. At the same time Europe will become a secondary natural gas market due to its reduced consumption, and this will leave East Asia as the dominant, burgeoning market.

Russia will lose its overall position as the world's main exporter, placing the Middle East and East Asia at the forefront instead, with other countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia soon joining Qatar at the head of the pack. In this way, the majority of energy trading—both gas and petroleum—will come to be concentrated in the Indo-Pacific area.

Currently, the impact on prices and production is so pronounced that initiatives have once again emerged—of course, within the bounds set by the EU—which seem to call energy pricing systems into question.

Unlike in the case of oil, Russian gas will stick around for a defined period of time until it can, little by little, make its way into the Asian market, which is currently served by the Power of Siberia pipeline through which, for the time being, no more than 60bcm of natural gas can flow towards China and the liquefaction plants located on the island of Sakhalin. For gas to make its way out of Western Siberia, where the majority of reserves are concentrated, Russia would need to build extremely long gas pipelines, as well as deploy the northern project in order to normalise the transport of maritime freight traffic through the Arctic, from the liquified gas plants in Yamal (in Western Siberia) to the Pacific. Both projects require time and funding (of which there is certainly no surplus among Russian businesses) and, in any possible scenario, the price of this gas once it reaches Asian markets may render it quite unprofitable, or perhaps uncompetitive, in comparison to other available options. [4]

The first consequence of the above is that relative scarcity in the global gas market (where Russia makes up a quarter of the entire exported supply) will continue beyond the end of the conflict, causing gas prices to remain above prewar levels.

The second consequence is that if the major Eurasian pipelines, through which three quarters of Russian exports and more than a third of European imports used to pass, are no longer in use, world trade in natural gas will be dominated by liquefied gas and LNG carriers. Before the war, maritime trade accounted for around 40% of all international transactions. By paralysing the backbone of the onshore gas trade a large market for liquified gas, not unlike the oil market, would be established.

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The third consequence is that Russia will lose its overall position as the world's main exporter, placing the Middle East and East Asia at the forefront instead, with other countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia soon joining Qatar at the head of the pack. In this way, the majority of energy trading—both gas and petroleum—will come to be concentrated in the Indo-Pacific area. Incidentally, the United States will be able to take advantage of developments in their own national industry, as well as pricing conflicts and Europe's need to find an export route for a small part of their own product. However, this export position is unlikely to be long-lasting, as gas reserves which are mined through fracking have relatively short life cycles.

To conclude, the changes to the gas market are expected to be further-reaching than those in oil. If we look at both together, there can be no doubt that few one-off shocks have had as big an impact on international energy relations as the war in Ukraine. But will this war have the same impact as the Yom Kippur war on the formation of prices and the power of different actors?

Continuity in the formation of prices and power dynamics

Before the war, a new, bullish super-cycle already seemed to be underway, much like those recorded in 2000-2008 and 2011-2015. Following the invasion of Ukraine, the price per barrel of Brent crude oil reached as high as 97 USD. At the beginning of March, when fears were confirmed that the energy trade could be affected by the conflict, this price peaked at 120 USD, and natural gas skyrocketed up to 217 EUR per Mw/h, and continued to rise until it hit its maximum of 276 EUR in August (compared to 48 EUR in August 2021).

In the wake of the Yom Kippur War, the price shock led to a change in the pricing system a few years later. Currently, the impact on prices and production is so pronounced that initiatives have once again emerged—of course, within the bounds set by the EU—which seem to call energy pricing systems into question.

This first happened with electricity and the extraordinary profits derived by the businesses who benefit most from this sector, thanks to a system in which the reference price is determined by the most expensive energy source that forms part of the energy mix on any given day. This system guarantees that producers are always willing to respond to any increase in demand, and that all companies in the sector have the incentives and resources to make any investments which are needed to increase available capacity. In exchange, they are given—regardless of the technology being used to produce their electricity—the secure knowledge that the reference price will always be much higher than than production costs, especially in cases when the technology being used does not require the use of the most expensive energy source (gas or coal, generally speaking), or if initial investment costs have already been fully recouped. The "discovery" that this system showers energy companies with millions of euros in unearned profits has raised the issue of a strong need for reform.

After this, attention has turned to gas; firstly because it was the energy source responsible for the increased price of electricity, and secondly because its elevated price also affected end users. The price of electricity was thought to be exceptionally high as a result of the war and, accordingly, the EU proposed pooling purchases among large European importers. Despite reforms made to the gas pricing system, this had the exact aim of making importers—now separated from distributors and consumers—compete with one another for supply in markets that were created ad hoc on the insistence of the EU itself.

The price increases were later determined to not only be the result of supply and demand (as had always been thought), but rather they were also being fuelled by the predominance of speculative activity in these markets, or "hubs", thus making some form of intervention necessary. This was in spite of the fact that the EU itself had been

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Companies will emerge from the war, if anything, more confident in the extreme profitability of an industry which, both directly and indirectly, is responsible for the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions, and governments will undoubtedly emerge more determined to approach their relations with other actors in even more starkly realistic terms than in the past.

the architect of these "gas to gas" markets, considering them more efficient than the old systems which supplied long term contracts with pricing pegged to that of oil.

Following this, the levying of taxes on gas and oil companies has been approved, given that these companies are reaping enormous profits thanks to exceptional increases in the price of fossil fuels caused partly by the war, and partly by speculation. Finally, discussions are underway to impose a price cap on oil and gas coming from Russia, in light of the "discovery" that the system of oil and natural gas price formation, the former since the 1980s and the latter since the 2000s, has allowed Russia to make more money by exporting less product. This effect is not the result of some war-provoked anomaly, but of two interesting features of the oil market, both of which have extremely beneficial repercussions for producers.

The first of these is that upstream companies operate with very different production costs, given that physical and technological conditions vary greatly from one extraction site to another. This means that reference prices, which are established in spot markets, are systematically set far above the production costs of the companies who dominate the majority of the world's crude oil reserves (this includes, among many others, Russian companies). In a bull market this margin always generates astronomical profits, nowadays for Russian producers, as it has always done for all others. The justification for this has always mirrored that of the electrical sector, even though now is coming under criticism: this is how consumers can always be guaranteed a supply to meet any possible level of demand.

The second of these features is that the daily prices paid by traders in short-term markets are increasingly financialised, meaning their prices are increasingly determined by the futures prices set in paper markets. More and more, non-commercial traders are participating in these markets, and for them any change, be it real or imagined, to any supply or demand variable which may affect prices stimulates the generation of mutually reinforced expectations, self-fulfilling prophecies and narratives justifying both sudden rises and sharp drops. This is how these prices—future prices which become daily prices—are presented as one seamless, if exaggerated, image of what really goes on in the petroleum industry, in what experts refer to as market fundamentals. [5]

Instability intensifies these dynamics, causing prices to rise not just beyond the costs of most producers, but also, inevitably, far beyond the (always unknown) costs of those who operate within a relatively small cost-profit margin. This is not a new situation, it has been the norm for decades, especially since the beginning of this century, and sits at the root of an enormous system for transferring profits on an international scale, the political and economic implications of which are hard to overstate.

The war in Ukraine is by no means independent from these implications, as the Russian government has been lining its pockets for two decades thanks to this system, and the United States has been causing conflicts and quarrels in the region to protect it for even longer. It has led some players to propose interventions in price formation, arguing that the reference markets are too financialised, or that it is not exactly desirable for large windfall profits to enrich authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, these proposals are almost always motivated by opportunism, as they focus on exceptional or transitory corrective measures, or on highlighting some aspects in isolation without looking at the bigger picture, thus failing to interrogate the fundamental logic which underpins the way prices are decided in the three main energy markets of petroleum, gas and electricity.

Additionally, these proposals almost always come from organisations or people who have very little influence on international energy market regulations. It is true that the changes which followed the Yom Kippur war were not felt until ten years later, but at that time the political economy was conducive to system-wide transformation, which was imposed by the United States in order to deprive large producers of their ability to select their own prices, and done under regulatory principles in keeping

with the dominant interests of the nascent neoliberal era. Currently, with prices sitting well above one hundred USD, neither the United States (who are close to energy self-sufficiency and have a growing domestic industry) nor IOCs, OPEC members, their state-owned companies, or other gas and oil producing nations, appear to be the slightest bit interested in changing the pricing system for fossil fuels. Obviously, the same can also be said of the traders and myriad other financial organisations with direct or indirect ties to this industry.

All of this is to say that it does not seem that the war in Ukraine will unleash a widespread restructuring of the pricing system—and along with it the system which internationally distributes fossil fuel profits—since the war does not seem to be causing significant transformations to the power dynamics among those who benefit from this distribution. Russia will obviously be weakened, and the EU will continue to pursue its background role even though it now wishes to move towards a shared energy policy, something that it has never had before. All other players, however, will emerge stronger.

Companies will emerge from the war, if anything, more confident in the extreme profitability of an industry which, both directly and indirectly, is responsible for the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions, and governments will undoubtedly emerge more determined to approach their relations with other actors in even more starkly realistic terms than in the past. This will likely be especially noticeable in the Middle East, where innumerable conflicts and unsettled scores between countries (and between social groups within each country), have built up after decades of scheming and interference. To this we can now add tensions which are likely to arise as attempts are made to dismantle Russia's presence in the region and to counter China's growing influence in both "friendly" (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Iraq) and "enemy" (Iran and Russia) countries. Rivalry with China (and Russia) may also take the form of attempts to control shipping routes, or occasional squabbles over access to resources in Central Asia, Latin America and Africa.

In short, the war will most likely weaken the power of the key players. It is therefore difficult to imagine that the war will trigger significant changes to pricing systems, or to the mechanisms used to distribute the industry's profits. In turn, without changing these mechanisms, it is difficult for power relations between actors to change. Incidentally, the conflict started by Russia, the explicit weaponisation of energy, and the apparently final decision by the United States to put relations with China on a confrontational Cold-War style footing do not suggest that changes in the relations between these actors could move in a very different direction from that described in the previous paragraph. Evidence that energy relations are moving in this direction can be found in the widespread disapproval surrounding German policy in European public opinion, as Germany stands accused of risking the energy and political security of all of Europe. If we uncritically embrace these arguments we overlook the fact that Russian gas formed part of Germany's more than reasonable energy diversification plan, with regard to both energy sources and the supply of these sources. We also overlook the fact that interdependence among states has always been the best antidote to war and conflict. In short, we overlook that what is being accepted is an approach to international relations—one of mistrust, scheming and confrontation—which has been followed on other fronts by those who now criticise Germany and which has led us to the sad situation in which we find ourselves today.

Beyond its environmental implications (which are, of course, the most important), this transition also holds revolutionary potential from a political perspective, because it can act as a catalyst to transform the current system of international energy relations. It has the potential to radically alter trade flows, to force changes in pricing and to impact existing power dynamics.

Energy security as a catalyst for transformation

Now that we have reviewed trends in relation to market flows, prices and power dynamics, all that remains is to look at the possible consequences of the war on changes to energy supply, and it is here that there is more room for optimism. The crisis in the 1970s stoked concerns about energy security and paved the way for the development of natural gas and nuclear energy as alternatives to petroleum. In

much the same way the war in Ukraine, which has awoken the same fears regarding energy security, may become a decisive supporting factor in the transition towards renewable energy sources.

Beyond its environmental implications (which are, of course, the most important), this transition also holds revolutionary potential from a political perspective, because it can act as a catalyst to transform the current system of international energy relations. It has the potential to radically alter trade flows, to force changes in pricing and to impact existing power dynamics.

With regard to trade flows, all countries would become rich in resources for the production of electrical energy, thus putting an end to the dichotomy of unidirectional commercial axes which connect producing regions to consuming regions, meaning international trade would come to be based more on regional interconnection. With regard to trade mechanisms and the rules governing prices, nothing would have to change, but what is certain is that the need to accelerate the green transition constitutes a fundamental incentive to intervene in pricing and in the distribution of profits created by any and all sources of energy. With regard to key players, the displacement of fossil fuels from its central role would also mean the displacement of governments and companies who have occupied this spot for most of the last century. The large companies which dominate thermoelectric production, as well as many petroleum and gas companies, will continue to play a fundamental role, not only as producers of fossil fuels but also in the production, distribution and sale of renewable energy, though they will have to share the stage with companies in other sectors (manufacturers of solar panels, wind turbines, batteries, electrolysers, infrastructure and so on). That being said, renewables are likely to enable greater participation for smaller businesses, local communities and other organisations, both in terms of production and consumption.

We must, however, be cautious, because the fight for access to new primary materials which are needed to manufacture equipment and the technological and financial challenges which the green transition must tackle (large-scale electricity storage, development of hydrogen as feedstock and fuel, producing batteries for electric vehicles, digitalisation and securing networks, capacity installation and so on) could be the source of major conflicts among businesses and governments, and also between groups of people depending on how the costs and benefits are distributed. It is possible (though not guaranteed) that we will soon leave behind the final stage of an era in which international energy relations have been dominated by fossil fuels, not because of the war in Ukraine, but because of the green transition. It would be desirable (though, again, not guaranteed) if in the period that follows we are able to avoid repeating many of the dynamics which governed the last.

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