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FRONTLINES OF RESISTANCE: AT THE EDGES OF A BURNING WORLD

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Metapolis
Vol.7_ N°1 2026

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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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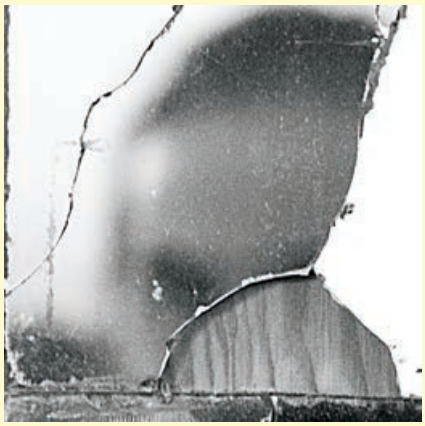

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FRONTLINES OF RESISTANCE: AT THE EDGES OF A BURNING WORLD

Zaid Jaloudi | Irene López

Jun, 2026

There are moments in history when the pace of events outstrips the language available to describe them. We are living inside one of those moments. By the time this volume reaches its readers, the world will have shifted again—another border crossed, another city besieged, another community displaced, another government bending the knee to forces it once dressed up as order. And yet something else is also happening, something that this issue of Metapolis has set out to name and take seriously: the world is not only burning. It is also resisting.

This seventh volume of Metapolis arrives at a conjuncture that feels, even by the compressed standards of recent years, genuinely historic. The old architecture of the post-war liberal order—already cracked by the 2008 financial crisis, hollowed further by the pandemic, and battered by the return of open warfare to the European continent—is now decomposing in real time. The United States (US), once the self-appointed guarantor of a rules-based international system, has officially announced the end of that role. As the Stimson Centre's 2026 risk assessment put it plainly, Washington's own National Security Strategy now declares that "the days of the United States propping up the entire world order like Atlas are over." What replaces that order is not yet clear. What is clear is that the vacuum is being filled —by force, by extraction, by fear, and in some corners of the world, by remarkable acts of collective courage.

The theme of this volume—Frontlines of Resistance—did not choose itself by accident. Palestine, Sudan, and Yemen have become laboratories for a particular kind of warfare: the deliberate use of hunger, siege, and systematic civilian targeting as instruments of political will. In Gaza, recorded deaths have surpassed 72 thousand since October 2023, with tens of thousands more estimated buried in rubble or uncounted, as the genocide continues. In Sudan, the same tactics are being repeated—sieges of cities, attacks on hospitals, starvation weaponised against entire populations—while the world's attention moves on with a restlessness that is itself a form of complicity. The solidarity movements connecting these struggles are growing, and they are growing precisely because more and more people are recognising what analysts and activists have long argued: these are not separate crises. They are expressions of the same machinery.

A Geography and Doctrine of Atrocity

That machinery has a geography. Its migration routes run through Darién, through the Sahara, through the waters between Libya and Lampedusa. Its detention centres are filling in Lesbos and on the US southern border. In the United States, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has more than doubled its personnel, conducting what the Trump administration proudly describes as the largest domestic deportation operation in American history—an operation that has already produced

its dead, including Renee Good, a US citizen shot by an ICE agent in Minneapolis in January 2026. The tactics deployed in these operations—the door-knocking raids, the terror by presence, the criminalisation of sanctuary—are not new to those who have lived under similar operations in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro or the banlieues of French cities. They are being imported, refined, and scaled.

As harrowing examples of this r*efinement of barbarism* stand the thousands of Palestinians being incinerated in Gaza by weapons of extreme heat. Lives that have come to be known as "the evaporated", as they are made to vanish without a trace [1]. The thermal munitions and thermobaric weapons being used nowadays by the Israeli army are capable of reaching temperatures of up to 3,500 degrees Celsius, reducing organic matter to ashes or minute fragments. It is the sophistication of atrocity, a refinement of methods of death aimed not only at mass murder—at killing more and better—but at inflicting as much pain as possible. By leaving not even a body to identify, these latest-generation weapons manage not only to maximise suffering, but also to destroy the evidence: the *corpus delicti* also disappears. In those cases where there is a body to say goodbye to, the torment can also continue by other means: the world has recently witnessed how a group of Israeli settlers forced a Palestinian family to exhume a corpse from the cemetery to bury it elsewhere [2]. Apartheid continues *post-mortem*; the cruelty knows no end.

Meanwhile, the scramble for resources continues to reorganise the map. Greenland's minerals, Venezuela's oil and lithium, the Democratic Republic of Congo's coltan —these are not background conditions to the political crises described in this volume. They are their engine. The Trump administration's brazen overtures toward Greenland and its January 2026 military strike on Venezuela are not aberrations from a foreign policy tradition; they are, as several of this volume's contributors argue at length, a direct continuation of doctrines—Monroe, manifest destiny, gunboat diplomacy—that never really went away. They merely took different forms during the decades when the architecture of multilateralism made their cruder expressions impolitic.

Cartographies of a Resisting World

The US' interventionist foreign policy never left (…) merely took different forms during the decades when the architecture of multilateralism made its cruder expressions impolitic.

What is striking about this particular moment—and what this volume's editors find both urgent and hopeful—is that the hubris driving these actions is being met with a clarity of resistance that is equally unprecedented in its reach and its internationalism. From university campuses in the United States to neighbourhood assemblies in Latin America, from diaspora communities organising in European cities to indigenous movements defending territories across the Global South, a generation is connecting its local struggles to a shared global analysis. The *Global Sumud Flotilla*, in spring 2026, mobilised over a hundred boats and hundreds of overland trucks to break the siege on Gaza—not as a symbolic gesture but as a sustained, professional civilian presence. This is what resistance looks like when it refuses to be managed into legibility.

It is in this spirit that the six articles comprising this volume were assembled. They approach the theme from different geographies and different disciplines, but they share a commitment to thinking through the structural conditions that produce the frontlines, rather than merely describing the frontlines themselves. Together, they form a cartography of the burning world—and of the forces within it that are trying to find another way.

Ana María Larrea opens the volume with an in-depth analysis of the nature of capitalism and some of its effects: necropolitics, the rule of the super-rich, the re-primarisation of Latin American economies, extraction and violence. In *The People Who Became a River: The Struggle for the Commons in Ecuador*, the former deputy minister recounts some historic milestones she experienced first-hand, and whose significance resonated far beyond the small Andean country: both the

constitutional recognition of the Rights of Nature and the proposal for international shared responsibilities for the protection and non-exploitation of the Amazon rainforests were pioneering initiatives in the safeguarding of natural spaces and the environment. However, the author makes it very clear that all these paths were paved collectively and from the grassroots up: it is organised civil society that is defending our planet's natural heritage from the front lines. Indigenous peoples, environmental defenders, and local residents have mobilised in Azuay, gathering in human rivers to demand their right to water. In this regard, it is telling that the activists opposing mining projects in this region of southern Ecuador are referred to as *Comuneros*. The term actually refers to the Comunas (communes), a traditional form of community and indigenous organisation protected by the constitution in Ecuador's decentralised state; but it is also symbolic in that they could well be considered communalists, defenders of the "commons". For if Larrea's article demonstrates anything, it is that they, who are leading the environmental struggles whilst facing persecution and criminalisation, are the ones safeguarding the common goods of all humanity across different parts of the world.

Just as the so-called rules-based international order licenses military invasions, the memory of the Holocaust is shielding a genocide.

Jaume Asens continues the volume with a contribution that is as philosophically rigorous as it is politically urgent. In *Germany and the Holocaust: the Weaponisation of Memory*, Asens—philosopher, politician, and current member of the European Parliament—traces the long genealogy by which the memory of the Holocaust, born as an ethical imperative never to repeat, was gradually converted into a political instrument: a source of what he calls "moral capital" that granted Israel an exemption from the criteria applied to all other states, and that transformed the duty of remembrance into a mechanism of impunity. Drawing on the work of Norman Finkelstein, Hannah Arendt, and Enzo Traverso, among others, Asens shows how Germany's particular reckoning with its past—which appeared, for decades, to represent a model of historical accountability—in fact encoded a functional philo-Semitism that revered the militarised Israeli state while failing entirely to extend the memory of the Holocaust's ethical imperatives to other dehumanised peoples. The result, he argues, is a country that built entire museums to teach its children not to repeat barbarism, while aligning itself with a state applying the mechanisms of collective punishment and racialised violence to the Palestinian people. Critically, Asens connects this to Germany's unreckoned colonial past—the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples in Namibia, where practices were tested that would later reappear in Europe—arguing that the inability to face that earlier genealogy has left a moral vacancy that is violently resurfacing today. This is a necessary and uncomfortable article. It asks all of us to examine whose memory we protect, who bears the cost of whose redemption, and what happens when memory stops challenging the present and begins instead to shield it.

John Ralston Saul brings to the volume a perspective that is both historically deep and acutely present-tense. In *Stubborn Compassion: A New Canadian Independence*, the writer and philosopher argues that Canada's current existential confrontation with US imperial pressure is neither surprising nor, ultimately, unnavigable—provided Canadians are willing to be honest about how they arrived here. With characteristic rigour and wit, Saul traces the line from the founding compassion of LaFontaine and Baldwin's Great Ministry of 1848 through the repeated failures of Canadian economic sovereignty—the Gordon Budget of 1963, the capitulation of 1988's free trade election—to the present moment, in which forty years of deep integration into the US economy has left Canada structurally exposed to a neighbour that has, simply, changed its mind about what that relationship is worth to them. Saul's argument is not nostalgic; it is demanding. He insists that Canada's multilingual complexity, its diversity, and its democratic continuity are not sentimentalities but strategic assets—assets that require, now, the courage to be deployed. His analysis of how empires function—normalising the previously unthinkable through casual repetition, invoking before acting—resonates far beyond Canada's borders, and his invocation of Voltaire's reminder that ridicule is democracy's most effective weapon against authoritarianism feels both timely and necessary. The story of Greenland

Just like those young women in Gaza who are making bricks by mixing rubble with clay, ash and glass, it is up to us to gather the fragments of destruction and try to rebuild from them.

Photo_ **Hayden**_ CC BY 2.0

—where a small unarmed population made the world's second most powerful man look like a fool—is, he suggests, a template: small peoples, weaponless, standing firm, forcing retreats. This is a text about compassion as a political practice, not a sentiment. It deserves to be read as such.

It is not only the gallows that have made their comeback: imperial spectacles of violence have returned too.

Lorena Fréitez Mendoza writes from inside the Venezuelan crisis with the precision of someone who has been thinking through its structure for years. In *Rebuilding the Nation-Dam in the Face of Radicalised Imperialism: Challenges from Venezuela*, the former minister advances a thesis at once classical and urgently contemporary: imperialism can only truly advance over a nation that has already broken down as a political community. Drawing on Gramsci, Turchin, and Venezuelan history from Bolívar to Chávez and beyond, Fréitez Mendoza argues that the US military strike of January 3, 2026—an event unprecedented in Venezuelan republican history—was not simply the product of American imperial ambition but the structural consequence of a decade of national dissolution: the haemorrhage of the diaspora, the fragmentation of the Chavista social base, the transformation of a revolutionary project into a demand for allegiance rather than a space for participation. Her analysis refuses the easy consolations available on either side of the Venezuelan political divide, insisting instead on the conditions necessary for a genuine national reconstruction —deliberation, participation, and the patient rebuilding of a political community capable of governing itself. In a world where the recolonisation of the Global South is accelerating, her argument that the nation—understood as a collective endeavour, not an ethnic or authoritarian project—remains the primary instrument of resistance against dispossession carries a weight that extends well beyond Venezuela.

Zeidon Alkinani contributes to the volume with a structural analysis of Arab geopolitics that is, in its ambition and its diagnostic clarity, one of the most crucial and daring analyses of this pressing issue. In *Arab Existentialism in the Face of Regional Rivalries*, Alkinani maps the condition he calls "penetrated regionalism": the dynamic by which Arab strategic fragmentation—rooted in colonial cartography, the rise and fall of pan-Arabism, and the institutional failures of the Arab Spring—has become the structural condition that three non-Arab regional powers—Iran, Israel, and Türkiye—actively exploit and perpetuate. Drawing on regional security complex theory, Walt's balance-of-threat framework, and comparative regionalism scholarship, he argues that Arab multilateralism is no longer merely a regional aspiration but a global systemic requirement—the absence of a coherent Arab collective actor generating economic and security risks that extend into energy markets, maritime chokepoints, and global capital flows. The 2026 Iran-Israel conflict and its cascading effects on the Strait of Hormuz serve as real-time evidence. Alkinani's proposed architecture—five pillars of structured Arab multilateralism, binding on specific high-stakes domains without requiring prior resolution of all bilateral disputes—is a serious institutional proposal, not a utopian vision. His concluding formulation cuts to the heart of the matter: the Arab world's most consequential strategic choice in the coming decade is not which external power to partner with, but whether to present itself as an actor with collective agency or a terrain on which others' projects are contested.

Eva Saldaña Buenache closes the volume with *Trenches of Hope: Ecotopias in an Upside-Down World*, a piece that refuses to treat the climate crisis and the wars chronicled elsewhere in this issue as separate emergencies. Writing while Greenpeace's *Arctic Sunrise* sails to support the *Global Sumud Flotilla*, Saldaña names the logic connecting these predicaments "fossil colonialism": a doctrine in which the invasion of Venezuela, the pressure on Greenland and Cuba, and the war on Iran all converge, not by coincidence, on the world's last reserves of fuel the planet cannot afford to burn. For Saldaña, decarbonisation is not an environmental add-on to peace-building but its precondition; demilitarising the world, she argues, is inseparable from breaking its addiction to fossil energy. She grounds this claim in the documented ecological devastation of Gaza, where the majority of agricultural land has been rendered unusable and most available water poisoned, arguing that there can be no climate justice on occupied and militarised ground. From there

she turns constructive, laying out Greenpeace's roadmap for the Iberian Peninsula, including energy sufficiency, public transport as a pillar of the welfare state, mass home retrofitting, food sovereignty, and a permanent citizens' parliament, as proof that an alternative is not utopian but buildable now. Her closing brief for a "green social shield," care as political strategy, and resistance to the criminalisation of protest through SLAPP suits rounds out a piece that reads less as a manifesto than as a working blueprint for what she calls an activist ecotopia.

The Return of the Roman Circus: Moral Collapse and *De-civilisation*

Reading these six articles together, several threads emerge that feel to us like the intellectual signature of this particular historical moment. An atavistic and bloody moment, which has brought back to life the words with which the British philosopher Jonathan Glover described the 20th century:

> "Our origins continue to disfigure us. We still live in tribes with seemingly endless epidemics of mutual slaughter. Our political systems designed to contain violence continue to fail us on the whole. The festival of cruelty goes on (…)" [3].

First is the collapse of moral immunity. Across all four contributions, in different registers and different geographies, we find the same dynamic: the frameworks that were supposed to protect against the recurrence of atrocity have been turned against that purpose. The memory of the Holocaust shields genocide. The "rules-based international order" licenses military invasions. Democratically elected governments conduct operations that by any other name would be called state terror.

If, according to the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, "Civilisation is nothing other than the attempt to reduce force to a last resort" [4], we must accept that humanity has failed. We are living in such a violent and dehumanised present that we could say we are immersed in a process of *de-civilisation*. To give just one—but eloquent—example, the images making global rounds, showing the Israeli Minister of National Security with a birthday cake bearing a drawing of a gallows, celebrating the Israeli Knesset's approval of the death penalty for Palestinian hostages—including thousands of children—by means of this medieval method [5]. And it is not only the gallows that have made their comeback: the imperial spectacles of violence have returned too. As giant screens broadcast live the bombings in Lebanon to the delight of the masses [6], we must be reminded of the human circus attended by the Roman elites 20 centuries ago. Back then, entertainment meant watching a wild beast tear a slave or a prisoner to pieces; now the Zionist crowds revel in the spectacle of the very ethnic cleansing they are perpetrating.

The National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), which investigated the crimes committed by the Argentinian military dictatorship of the 1970s, titled its final report "Never Again", hoping that such torture and cruelty should never be repeated [7]. The page of human history on which we find ourselves right now is so dark that it seems as though we have deliberately reopened that textbook: those horrors are not only being repeated in the cells and torture chambers of Palestine, but, unlike in the last century, they are well known, condoned and even publicised. We need not wait for a Truth Commission or Nuremberg Trials to be organised; today's world is far more transparent. This time there is no room for doubt as to whether those who lived near the concentration camps knew what the smoke, the stench and even the tufts of hair that found their way into their homes were caused by. This time—as has been said ad nauseam—we are seeing live what Trump and Netanyahu are doing.

Moral frameworks must be constantly wrested back from those who would weaponise them.

However, the response to this bleak outlook cannot be nihilism. The lesson drawn by this volume's contributors is that moral frameworks must be constantly wrested back from those who would weaponise them, and that this wrenching is itself a form of politics, one that requires courage and precision in equal measure.

Building with Rubble: Towards National, Global and Structural Resistance

The second thread is the structural nature of fragmentation. Whether we are reading about Arab strategic incoherence, Venezuelan national dissolution, Canada's economic dependency, or the manufactured selective memory of European liberalism, the analysis converges on the same point: what looks like accident or failure of will is, in fact, structurally reproduced. Fragmentation is not found; it is made, and it is made by forces that benefit from it. This diagnosis is clarifying. If fragmentation is structural, then resistance must be structural too—not merely reactive, not merely moral, but institutional and collective.

The third thread, running quietly beneath all six pieces, is what we would describe as the return of the nation as a site of resistance. Not the nation as exclusion, not as ethnic hierarchy or military chest-beating—but the nation as a political community capable of deliberating, organising, and defending its collective resources and dignity. Fréitez Mendoza makes this explicit; Alkinani argues it structurally for the Arab world; Saul insists on it for Canada with the force of a man who has watched his country sleepwalk toward its own dissolution; Larrea proves it from the grassroots and local level; and even Asens, in his critique of the weaponisation of national memory, implies its corollary—that genuine memory, genuinely universalised, could instead be the foundation of a politics that protects all dehumanised life. Finally, Saldaña translates this into a regional and community-based vision that places life—and the care work that sustains it—at the forefront.

We are at a juncture at which the outcomes are not determined. The old order is decomposing, but what emerges from that decomposition is genuinely open. The forces of extraction, coercion, and imperial restoration are real, well-resourced, and operating at scale. But so too are the forces of resistance: in the flotillas, in the university encampments, in the neighbourhood assemblies, in the patient intellectual work of contributors like those gathered in this volume. The question—and it is *the* question—is whether those forces can find forms of solidarity and coordination adequate to the scale of what they are facing.

There has never been a more important time to build those forms. And there has never been a more important time for a publication like this one—committed to putting the thinking of experts, activists, and scholars from across the world at the service of an active and engaged global citizenry—to do its work with seriousness and without illusion.

Just like those young women in Gaza who are making bricks by mixing rubble with clay, ash and glass [8], it is up to us to gather the fragments of destruction and try to rebuild from them. Both literally and figuratively, we must move from resistance to resilience, piecing together the broken shards from all these real frontlines. We invite you to read, to resist, and to act.

[1] Al Jazeera. (2026, February 10). Israel used weapons in Gaza that made thousands of Palestinians evaporate. Available here: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2026/2/10/israel-used-weapons-in-gaza-that-made-thousands-of-palestinians-evaporate

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[3] Glover, J. (2001). Humanity: A moral history of the twentieth century. Yale University Press.

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[6] Middle East Eye. (2026, May 22). Footage shows Israelis watching video of Lebanon bombings on big screen Available here: https://www.instagram.com/reels/DYoaQAGjtNP/

[7] Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas. (1984). Nunca más: Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas [Never Again: Report of the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons]. Equipo Nizkor / DerechosHumanos.net. Available here: http://www.derechoshumanos.net/lesahumanidad/informes/argentina/informe-de-la-CONADEP-Nunca-mas.htm

[8] BBC News. (2026, May 13). Gaza sisters win prize for turning rubble into reusable bricks. Available here: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce8p7vngmp3o

Zaid Jaloudi

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Foto_ **Ian Panelo** [Nothing Ahead]

01.

THE PEOPLE WHO BECAME A RIVER: THE STRUGGLE FOR THE COMMONS IN ECUADOR

Ana María Larrea

Jan, 2026

In an increasingly turbulent world, where the hegemonic power imposes its individualistic values and denies even the existence of climate change, pockets of resistance are slowly taking shape. And when they emerge, they open windows and allow us to glimpse that change is possible, and that the hope of building a better world must spread from one territory to another.

Documenting and reflecting on these struggles and acts of resistance is a vital task in these times. This article aims to capture the experience gained in the defence of water and life in southern Ecuador, drawing on reflections on the commons and cosmopolitics. To this end, it takes the constitutional recognition of the rights of nature in that country's Constitution as its starting point.

We begin with a reflection on the current crisis facing humanity, before addressing the importance of the struggle for the commons today, framing the discussion within the context of Latin America. Finally, we present the Ecuadorian experience, drawing on the constitutional recognition of the rights of nature and the struggle to defend water and life against mining in the province of Azuay.

The Contrasts of a Civilizational Crisis

We are living through a civilizational crisis, in which the foundations of communal life and of what it means to be human are collapsing. A crisis that fills us with uncertainty, for although we can see the old order crumbling, we cannot know whether there will be anything to replace it, or whether what lies ahead will be better or worse than what we have already experienced. The horizon looks clouded. As Gramsci so aptly put it when describing such moments of crisis: "The old world is dying. The new one is slow to emerge. And in that twilight, monsters arise." [1]

Western capitalist modernity is hitting rock bottom. Several warning signs bear this out: the planet, our common home, is also on the brink of collapse. According to the World Meteorological Organisation's report, in 2024 the world reached a global average temperature of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. [2] Global warming is not a future threat: we experience it day in, day out, with vastly unequal opportunities to tackle it between the Global North and South and between social classes within countries. According to OXFAM, the richest 10% of the world's population generates 52% of cumulative carbon emissions, whilst the poorest and most vulnerable populations suffer the greatest impact of its effects. [3]

A second warning sign of the deterioration of the current capitalist system is the need to live in a state of perpetual war to satisfy the interests of the military-industrial complex. *Necropolitics* is here to stay and thrives on the growing interdependence between governments run by billionaires, organised crime and the need to test the

efficiency of new technological developments in the arms industry. Works like those of Sayak Valencia [4] have illustrated how organised crime, drug trafficking, contract killings and extreme violence are not an undesirable side-effect of the system, but rather constitute one of its economic driving forces.

The current capitalist system requires living in a state of perpetual war to satisfy the interests of the military-industrial complex. *Necropolitics* is here to stay.

The obscene levels of accumulated and concentrated wealth, which have led to enormous inequality gaps between and within countries, constitute further evidence of capitalism's profound limitations in sustaining life. As far back as 2016, Oxfam warned that we were living in a "1% society" where wealth is concentrated to intolerable levels: the richest 1% of the global population held more wealth than the remaining 99%. [5] Ten years on, Oxfam is sounding further alarms: this concentration has continued to rise, to the point where the 12 richest men on the planet now hold more wealth than half the world's population. [6] Furthermore, the presence of billionaires in elected office today distorts the principles of liberal democracy, which are meant to ensure transparent political competition on a level playing field. According to Oxfam's estimates, [7] billionaires are up to 4,000 times more likely to hold political office than ordinary citizens. The "government of the billionaires" has dealt a fatal blow to international law, the rules-based world order and multilateralism.

The geography of extractivism perpetuates inequalities between the North and the South. The mining sector has seen sustained growth in its share of the global economy, driven by rising demand from Northern countries for high-tech products and the need for metals to support the energy transition. However, extraction has declined in the Northern economies, whilst expanding extensively in the Global South, owing to the presence of large untapped reserves, weak national regulations and the neoliberal boom of the late 20th century, which led to deregulation and the liberalisation of foreign direct investment. [8]

Currently, Latin America plays a key role in global mineral extraction, cementing its position as a strategic global partner, particularly in the supply of resources necessary for the energy transition. [9] According to the World Bank, [10] the world will need to increase mining output to drive the shift to clean, low-carbon energy. Solar panels, wind turbines and electric vehicles all require aluminium, copper, silver, cobalt and nickel. [11] By 2026, the region is set to become the epicentre of mining investment, having attracted approximately 74% of the value of mining mergers and acquisitions in the first three quarters of 2025, [12] thereby consolidating a process of re-primarisation of Latin American economies.

Current trends in mining expansion in Latin America run parallel to the long history of colonial exploitation in these lands, which enabled the original accumulation of capital and the region's integration into the world system as a supplier of raw materials. Both during the colonial era and today, the process of mineral extraction in Latin America has been accompanied by coercion and violence to ensure the dispossession of local peoples and communities. [13]

Faced with these realities, voices are rising around the world calling for a post-imperial and post-extractive world.

The Struggle for the Commons in Latin America

"The challenge is to appreciate nature anew and to recognise ourselves as human beings who embody both culture and nature, so that we may thus move towards another plausible world"
(Dorronsoro Villanueva, 2009).

The fight for the commons is essential to saving humanity, the planet, and life itself. In Latin America, this struggle dates back to colonial times, when indigenous

peoples sought to preserve their beliefs, their worldview and their communal cultural heritage in the face of the plundering, exploitation and discrimination perpetrated by the conquistadors.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, grassroots movements in Latin America played a significant role in defending the "commons": the Water Wars in Cochabamba (Bolivia, 2000); the Zapatistas' defence of maize in Mexico (since 1994); the recognition of the rights of nature in the Ecuadorian constitution (2008); the struggle for agricultural land by the Landless Movement in Brazil; resistance against extractivism in Peru, Colombia and Ecuador; and the fight against dams in Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Colombia… To name just a few of the most significant experiences on the continent.

Today, the concept of "the commons" is one of the cornerstones of ecological critique of capitalism. [14] The neoliberal model of accumulation has privatised public or communal assets through dispossession and violence. Capitalism not only exploits the workforce, but also prevents the regeneration of nature, on which it depends. The "commons" challenges the logic of private accumulation and its dominance over nature, and argues that nature is the system on which we all depend: its destruction puts life on the planet itself at risk. Thus, it calls for a transformation of this accumulation pattern by placing the sustainability of life at the centre of theory and political action.

The newly established constitutionalism in Latin America, reflecting the long-standing demands of indigenous, environmentalist and feminist movements, incorporated—with varying degrees of emphasis—the notion of "the commons" into the constitutions of Colombia (1991), Venezuela (1999), Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2009). The Ecuadorian case is paradigmatic, as it was the first country in the world to recognise the rights of nature. Its constitution is structured around the notion of "Good Living" or "Sumak Kawsay". [15] This recognition of the rights of nature represented a radical shift, as it conceives of the territory as "an Other", [16] as a living cosmic space, and not merely as a repository of resources.

The paradigm of modernity was built upon the separation between nature and culture. Whilst culture was tied to reason, nature was identified with the irrational. Nature was viewed either as a threat or as a resource. Consequently, women, migrants and ethnic minorities/majorities were considered to be living in a "state of nature", and were therefore deprived of recognition as full citizens. They were excluded from the social contract of modernity to such an extent that the history of modernity is, in fact, the history of social struggles to secure inclusion within said social contract. [17]

Organised crime, drug trafficking, contract killings and extreme violence are not an undesirable side-effect of the system: they constitute one of its economic driving forces.

By contrast, the discourses of "Good Living" are "cosmopolitical" because they succeed in unifying nature and culture. Indigenous peoples conceive of human beings as embedded in a series of relationships with nature, the divine and their ancestors, in which exchange and reciprocity play a fundamental role. Nature and human action are interdependent. Culture is an articulated extension of nature. Their boundary-pushing practices and understandings sow a new ecology of knowledge that has bloomed into the recognition of rights for other living beings and for the earth itself. [18]

The Rights of Nature in the Ecuadorian Constitution

As mentioned above, Ecuador was the first country in the world to recognise nature as a legal entity with its own rights, in its 2008 Constitution. Article 71 of the Ecuadorian Constitution states: "Nature, or Pachamama, where life is reproduced and realised, has the right to full respect for its existence and to the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes". [19]

In this way, nature is no longer regarded as a resource but as the space where life is produced and regenerated. This is crucial, as it implies that the rights of nature include respect for its life cycles and the preservation of its capacity to regenerate and renew itself. [20]

The recognition of the rights of nature in Ecuador was a historic milestone for humanity. Since then, more than 35 countries have granted some form of legal recognition to the Rights of Nature. [21] The United Nations, in the report "In Harmony with Nature" presented by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly in 2019, stated that "over the last decade, Earth Jurisprudence can be considered the fastest-growing legal movement of the 21st century", [22] constituting one of the keys to understanding the history of this era.

In Ecuador, the Legal Observatory for the Rights of Nature has documented 64 cases brought before the country's courts, invoking the right enshrined in the Constitution. Some of these have already resulted in favourable rulings. [23]

It should not be overlooked that the recognition of the rights of nature was the result of years of struggle by the main social movements in Ecuador: the Constituent Assembly incorporated this demand following several hearings with various social groups and national and international experts.

Billionaires are up to 4,000 times more likely to hold political office than ordinary citizens.

The immediate precedent for this was President Rafael Correa's presentation of the Yasuní–ITT Initiative to the United Nations in September 2007. This effort sought to keep Ecuador's primary oil reserve—around 920 million barrels of oil, corresponding to approximately 20% of the country's proven oil reserves—in the Yasuní–ITT block underground, in exchange for international shared responsibility for carbon emissions that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere. The Ecuadorian government requested compensation from the international community, amounting to 50% of the price of the crude oil that would have been extracted–around 3,600 million USD. Ecuador's contribution would have been the remaining 50%, as it would not have received these funds for the national treasury. In 2013, President Rafael Correa officially scrapped the initiative due to a lack of international support, clearing the way for the exploitation of the Yasuní–ITT block, located in one of Ecuador's most biodiverse nature reserves.

This change in public policy sparked protests from various environmental groups, who formed the Yasunidos collective. They proposed holding a national referendum to decide whether or not to extract oil from Ecuador's Amazon rainforest. The collective launched a wide-ranging campaign to collect signatures to call for a referendum through a citizen initiative. In 2014, Yasunidos submitted around 750,000 signatures in support of the referendum. The National Electoral Council (CNE), however, invalidated around 66% of the submitted signatures and refused

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to allow the referendum to proceed, whilst the national government pressed ahead with the exploitation of the field. Yasunidos's campaign continued for several years. In 2020, they secured a ruling from the Constitutional Court that the CNE had violated due process by invalidating the collective's submitted signatures, and the court ordered the Electoral Court (TCE) to review the case. In compliance with this ruling, the TCE ruled in 2022 that Yasunidos's submitted signatures were valid and gave the go-ahead for the referendum to proceed. This referendum was finally held in 2023, when 59 per cent of Ecuadorians voted in favour of suspending oil activities in Yasuní National Park. Nevertheless, to date, Daniel Noboa's government has not complied with the people's mandate: it has merely proposed a phased closure extending until 2034, a timeframe that the organisations consider excessively long.

This series of petitions before the Constitutional Court and the popular struggle for the Yasuní are examples of how the recognition of the rights of nature has strengthened environmentalist sentiment amongst the Ecuadorian population.

The Struggle for Water in Azuay

"(…) in the face of the centralized and neo-colonial threat to impose upon Cuenca a destiny foreign to its historical project of preserving its natural and cultural heritag—its moors, wetlands, lagoons, forests, springs, aquifers, ravines, streams and rivers, its landscape and the building of an organised, autonomous community that respects rights, where art, science, research, the development of clean energy, and the harmonious production of material and cultural goods flourish"
(Castro, 2025).

The city of Cuenca, capital of the province of Azuay, in southern Ecuador, was founded by Spanish colonists in 1557. It was originally named Santa Ana de los Cuatro Ríos de Cuenca, as it is crisscrossed by four beautiful rivers. This connection with nature has fostered a very strong sense of environmental preservation and protection amongst the city's inhabitants, who regard their rivers as common goods that make up an integral part of city life. [24]

The "government of the billionaires" has dealt a fatal blow to international law, the rules-based world order and multilateralism.

The struggle to defend water in Azuay dates back to colonial times, as David Fajardo explains: "Chronicles from the 17th century have been found which recount that, in the upper reaches of our rivers, there was alluvial gold. When its extraction began to pollute the water used for drinking, irrigation, washing, or powering fulling mills and watermills, the struggle began." [25]

From the 1990s onwards, Ecuador adopted a policy of openness to mining capital, which has led to 14% of the national territory being used for large-scale mining today. [26] Since then, communities in the province of Azuay have stepped up their struggle to defend water and life, supported at various times by their local authorities—mayors and prefects. Consequently, this struggle has become a rallying cry in defence of the territory, standing up to industrial mining backed by transnational corporations from the Global North. [27]

In Azuay, the immediate catalyst for resistance to mining activity was the concession for the Río Blanco project in Molleturo in 1994. Exploration was carried out by the British company Rio Tinto and subsequently by the Canadian company International Mineral Corporation–San Luis Minerales. In 2013, the license was sold to the Chinese company Junefield Mineral Resources S.A., which began the mining phase in 2016. The local population supported the project until 2013, as under the first two companies, they had received support for community projects, fair treatment and employment. However, from 2013 onwards, this situation changed. With the start of mining operations in 2016, conflicts with the company intensified. [28]

In 2015, the Cabildo por el Agua—the Water Council—was established: a coordination forum for civil society and local governments to defend water. In

Cuenca, they launched an informal education programme to help people in the city understand why water is more valuable than gold and why the territory must be protected from mining. [29]

In 2016, both the Azuay Provincial Council and the Cuenca Municipal Council declared their respective territories free from metal mining. In 2017, the community blocked access to the Río Blanco mining camp. In 2018, an agreement was reached allowing the company to continue its operations under community supervision, but within a few months, the community once again blocked access to the mining camp. Clashes broke out with the security forces, resulting in the burning of part of the mining company's infrastructure and machinery. This triggered legal proceedings against 43 community members, five of whom were arrested. Protests took place in Cuenca against the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement officers, and a legal action seeking protection was brought against the mining company—on the grounds that it had failed to carry out prior, free and informed consultation before the mining project was established. The judge ruled in favour of the community, and the mining project is currently on hold, pending the consultation. The judge also ordered the immediate demilitarisation of the project area. [30]

We attend to the re-primarisation of Latin American economies. (…) By 2026, the region is set to become the epicentre of mining investment.

The Río Blanco mining project was followed by processes of land reconcentration and property fragmentation, changes to the community's productive structure, increased insecurity and violence, and a permanent presence of law enforcement in the area. According to testimonies gathered by Carpio [31], all of this instilled fear and distress among the population. However, this experience also strengthened anti-mining sentiment in the province, one that has been expressed on numerous occasions. The most striking example of this is probably the attempt to implement the Kimsakocha project—a Kichwa word meaning "three lagoons".

The Kimsakocha or Loma Larga mining project is located some 30 kilometres outside the city of Cuenca. Covering an area of around 8,000 hectares of moorland, the concession spans three cantons: Cuenca, Girón and San Fernando. Cuenca has a population of around 600,000 people, whilst Girón and San Fernando are small cantons with populations of 12,000 and 4,000, respectively. [32] According to the Canadian company seeking to develop the project, INV Metals Inc., the site contains proven and probable reserves of 2.2 million ounces of gold, 13.3 million ounces of silver and 88 million pounds of copper. [33] Meanwhile, the community organisations defending the area maintain that the project's operations would leave 14 million tonnes of toxic sludge in the area, which would contaminate its water sources. [34]

The Ecuadorian public—particularly the people of Azuay—has repeatedly and overwhelmingly spoken out against mining. In 2018, the national government organised a constitutional referendum asking the nation, amongst other issues, whether it agreed to a blanket ban on metal mining at all stages, in protected areas, so-called "intangible zones" and urban centres. 69% of Ecuadorians voted in favour of the ban. In 2019, a public consultation was held in Girón, Azuay, following a citizens' initiative, in which the population was asked whether they supported a ban on mining in Kimsakocha. 87% of Girón's citizens approved the ban. Subsequently, in 2021, on the initiative of the Cabildo del Agua and the Municipality of Cuenca, a referendum was held among the population of Cuenca, in which 80% of the population voted in favour of banning mining in the canton. [35]

In response to this outcry, national authorities have argued that the results of the referendums are not retroactive, but take effect from the date of the citizens' decision—and therefore do not entail the revocation of mining concessions already granted. However, in the case of Kimsakocha, the exploitation phase had not yet begun in 2021, when the referendum was held; therefore, in accordance with the law, the Ecuadorian State could not proceed. [36]

Nevertheless, on 23 June 2025, the Ministry of the Environment and Energy granted the environmental license for the mining exploitation phase of the Kimsakocha

project to the Canadian company Dundee Precious Metals (DPM). This decision sparked widespread outrage amongst the people of Cuenca and the Azuay region: the measure was seen as a top-down, neo-colonial imposition that undermined the city's autonomy by failing to respect the people's will as expressed in the referendum.

The fact that a year before the environmental license was granted, the Canadian company had publicly donated to the foundation of Lavinia Valvonessi—wife of the President of the Republic—caused even greater unease and led to legal complaints from certain political figures.

The People Who Became a River

Civil society responded by convening the Cuenca Citizens' Assembly, which organised demonstrations, community consultations and cantonal citizens' assemblies to preserve the moorlands and defend the water recharge sources in Azuay. [37] Local authorities also played an important role through the statements issued by the Cuenca Cantonal Council and the Azuay Provincial Council opposing mining

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operations at Kimsakocha. Both statements included studies and technical reports demonstrating the serious environmental impacts the project would have, as well as the risks to the health of the populations of Cuenca and Azuay.

On 19 July 2025, residents of Cumbe, Tarqui, Girón, San Gerardo and Cuenca marched to Kimsakocha as part of a procession organised during the Assembly for Water and the Moors, to defend the groundwater recharge sources in the province threatened by the mining project. [38]

On 16 September 2025, the so-called "March of the Fifth River" was held in Cuenca—organised by the Cuenca Citizens' Assembly—with over 100,000 participants demanding the revocation of the environmental license granted to the Kimsakocha mining project, compliance with the will of the people as expressed at the ballot box in 2021, and the designation of Kimsakocha as a water recharge area. As the authorities and march attendees put it: "Cuenca rose up, and the fifth river overflowed." The massive turnout took the whole country by surprise, as widespread apathy had prevailed in recent years.

The demonstration took place amidst a State of Emergency declared that very same week by President Noboa in seven provinces across the country. It is worth noting that, from November 2023 to January 2026, Ecuador has experienced 17 States of Emergency. During Daniel Noboa's government, mechanisms of exceptionality have become the norm in Ecuador—and they do not live up to their name. When the exceptional becomes the rule, democracy turns into a sham.

Although the march was peaceful, the crackdown was swift and was carried out through the court system. Some leaders of the Cuenca Water Council, such as David Fajardo, had their bank accounts frozen and were charged with unaccounted private earnings by the Public Prosecutor's Office. The criminalisation of social protest has been a constant feature under recent governments in Ecuador, with indigenous social organisations being labelled "terrorists" to justify the violence perpetrated against them by the state. [39]

The march took place on 16 September; by the 19th, the accounts had already been frozen. A week later, the complaint had been filed. I was never notified; never given the right to a defence or a hearing. I found out about this from third parties. They say we are making money by stirring up conflict in indigenous communities, and that, with that money, we are paying people to take to the streets. What they are doing to me, they are doing to many others. There are 52 more people on the list. Most are members of social organisations working to defend human rights and nature (David Fajardo, in Vásquez Moreno, 2025).

Nevertheless, opposition to mining in Kimsakocha was so overwhelming that the national government had no choice but to revoke the project's environmental license on 3 October 2025. This constitutes, without a doubt, a major victory for the social organisation, which forced the national government to backtrack on its plans. However, the revocation does not reference the ban on mining in water recharge zones approved in the 2021 referendum, meaning that, in a sense, the threat of the project going ahead remains. This is reinforced by the fact that several officials, such as the Deputy Minister for Mining, have made public statements indicating that the government has not ruled out the mining project in Kimsakocha. [40]

For this reason, the civil society organisations grouped within the Cuenca Citizens' Assembly intend to continue their struggle until all mining licences in the province are revoked and these territories are truly designated as protected areas. [41]

It is no coincidence that, one month after the "March of the Fifth River", President Noboa issued the regulations for the Social Transparency Act: this legislation prohibits civil society organisations from carrying out activities that might "hinder

Capitalism not only exploits the workforce, but also prevents the regeneration of nature, on which it depends.

Ecuador has experienced 17 States of Emergency in 3 years. These mechanisms of exceptionality do not live up to their name. When the exceptional becomes the rule, democracy turns into a sham.

or interfere" with mining projects; it also stipulates that any activities related to mining require authorisation and supervision by the relevant sectoral authority. [42]

The fact is that Cuenca's "Fifth River" was an oasis of hope in the middle of a desert: In Ecuador, authoritarianism has become the norm, silence has become synonymous with fear, apathy goes hand in hand with individualism, the co-opting of the State's functions and powers by the Executive has destroyed liberal democracy, while re-centralisation increasingly suffocates local governments. Amid this bleak landscape, Cuenca stands as a symbol of the defence of life and the struggle against centralism and tyranny.

Conclusions

The movement to defend water and life in Azuay arose in rural areas and has gradually drawn in the population of the city of Cuenca, as well as cantonal and provincial authorities. It has grown significantly over the years and has become increasingly widespread, illustrating the link between territorial identity, local autonomy and cultural transformation.

Southern Ecuador has historically fought for its autonomy, evolving into a region that has achieved endogenous territorial development, with a deeply rooted identity. In addition to its struggle against centralized government, this identity is characterised by the protection of nature, which in recent years has played an increasingly significant role. The preservation of nature has gradually shaped a vision for the city and the region in which the defence of the commons is paramount. As a result, Cuenca has become a model for wastewater management in Ecuador and is also renowned for the purity of its rivers and the quality of its drinking water.

All these features enable civil society and local governments to come together in defence of their territorial project. And this is extremely important in today's Ecuador, currently experiencing a period of concentration of power and persecution of local governments. May the rivers multiply and succeed in channelling hope and change towards a more caring and environmentally just society.

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02.

GERMANY AND THE HOLOCAUST: THE WEAPONISATION OF MEMORY

Jaume Asens

Feb, 2026

For decades, our views on Israel and Palestine have been filtered through history's ghosts: the Holocaust, European anti-Semitism, guilt and redemption. This article does not seek to recount the history of a distant conflict by reciting dates and battles; rather, it seeks to examine the ethical and political frameworks that allow a state project born of European trauma to become a force of dispossession and oblivion for another people. Here, genealogies, memories and political narratives are intertwined: from the birth of Zionism in Europe, through the Nakba and the ongoing colonisation, to the construction of a moral immunity that justifies present crimes in the name of past guilt. The question that guides this reflection is simple yet radical: whose memory protects whom, and what violence remains hidden in the shadows of history?

The Holocaust Industry

"The Holocaust industry has simply become a network of extortion."
Norman G. Finkelstein, Jewish historian, descendant of Holocaust survivors.

There was a time when I thought Europe had learnt something essential from its horrors. My first readings in philosophy school were those of thinkers—most of them Jewish—who began to reflect after Auschwitz: Arendt, Adorno, Benjamin, Levinas, Camus, Améry. I matured intellectually in the shadow of the Holocaust, convinced that this trauma had forever changed the way we look at others, understand evil, and conceive of politics. It seemed that there, on that soil scorched by genocide, Europe had found a basic ethics: the obligation not to repeat, not to dehumanise, not to turn one's neighbour into an object of extermination.

But over the years, I began to discover that this ethic born of the Holocaust was riddled with silent omissions. There were limits, absences, and a colonial and Eurocentric substrate that I had not identified when I was young. Auschwitz was the epicentre of European thought, but beyond it lay other horrors: colonial empires, wars of liberation, and peoples whom mainstream Europe never fully recognised as human beings. It was in Palestine that this discovery became unavoidable. As I reread Arendt's words about rendering the other "superfluous", or Adorno's assertion that writing poetry after Auschwitz was impossible, I witnessed schools and hospitals being bombed without the continent batting an eyelid. As I recalled Camus talking about dignity in the face of terror, I saw Europe calling those who denounced the extermination of an entire people "anti-Semitic". What happened? Something had broken. Far from serving as a universal cautionary tale, the Holocaust had been transformed into a moral shield to justify new forms of destruction.

In order to reflect sincerely, it was necessary to reopen that wound. The distortion of memory began quietly. First in the United States, then in Israel. In the years following the Second World War, the Holocaust was rarely mentioned in speeches,

newspapers, or history books. It was a shadow that hung over family kitchens. American Jewish elites preferred not to talk about it too much. They had to prosper, to integrate. Remembering was an inconvenient luxury.

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The Holocaust was not seen as a separate atrocity, but as one among the atrocities of war: the attempts to exterminate Slavs, Roma, homosexuals, political dissidents, and disabled people. At the Nuremberg trials, the extermination of the Jews did not even take centre stage. The term "Holocaust" did not become widespread in English until the 1960s, and "Shoah" took even longer.

In the twilight of the Cold War, Nazi crimes had to be downplayed. Churchill called for a "blessed act of oblivion" after 1945. West Germany was a strategic ally of Washington and London. And allies do not scrutinise each other. In this convenient amnesia, the Holocaust became a footnote. Remembering it was seen almost as a communist ploy.

At that time, Israel did not occupy the central place it has today in the Western imagination. It was a small, peripheral state with no geopolitical weight. The United States (US) did not want to antagonise the Arab world. The American Jewish community viewed the Zionist project with distance.

Israel, Western Stronghold

"Holocaust awareness is official propaganda indoctrination, a mass production of slogans and distorted worldviews, whose true aim is not at all to understand the past, but to manipulate the present."
Boas Evron, Israeli author.

Everything changed in 1967. The Six-Day War transformed the consciousness of a people, as well as the Western narrative. Israel went from uncertainty to military power. From a fragile nation to a stronghold of the Western bloc. The resounding victory cemented a new myth: that of the chosen people who, after surviving the worst atrocity of the 20th century, proved their strength to the world. Israel became the "chosen people of the West".

From then on, the memory of the Holocaust began to be rewritten for political purposes. And a new standard was established: never forget! Norman Finkelstein, the grandson of survivors, explained with relentless lucidity how that memory was converted into an industry: a symbolic production system with guardians, temples, patrons, commissions, films, foundations, official martyrs and outlawed heretics. Memory ceased to be a duty and became a commodity. Remembering became profitable. Tragedy was stripped of its humanity and turned into dogma. Peter Novick called it "the American civil religion." Elie Wiesel was its high priest.

Wiesel argued that the Holocaust should not be understood, but venerated. Attempting to explain it was tantamount to desecrating it. Comparing it to other atrocities was an absolute betrayal. Acting at Israel's behest, the US Holocaust Memorial Council removed virtually all references to Armenians from the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and Jewish pressure groups in Congress prevented a day of remembrance for the Armenian genocide from being held. Mentioning the Armenian genocide perpetrated by Turkey, an ally of Israel, was almost taboo. Furthermore, Jewish suffering was thus elevated to an absolute category, inaccessible to any other human pain. From that pedestal arose a new privilege: that of those who could remember without being challenged.

Memory had become a powerful tool in the hands of Israeli leaders and their allies. The idea of "moral capital" was established: special suffering conferred special rights. An inexhaustible credit of innocence, amassed in the name of the past, allowed Israel

to acquire nuclear weapons of its own, to colonise in the name of survival, to kill in order not to die again. Any criticism was received as a form of anti-Semitism, even when it responded to Israeli aggression. It had become the secular version of the chosen people, as Ismar Schorsch pointed out.

By the 1970s, real anti-Semitism had virtually disappeared from American life. And the "new anti-Semitism" no longer served to protect Jews from hatred, but to protect the State of Israel from any dissent. Seven large Holocaust museums were built in the United States, while there was not a single one dedicated to slavery or the extermination of the Native Americans. Justifying the exclusion of the Roma genocide—proportionally greater than that of the Jews—was the greatest challenge these museums faced. American historian Edward Linenthal believed that for the Holocaust Memorial Council, those other victims were considered "inconvenient and embarrassing relatives" because they questioned the exceptional nature of the Holocaust as an exclusively Jewish phenomenon.

This logic was enthusiastically imported to Europe. The European Union made the Shoah a requirement for membership. What Finkelstein called the "Holocaust industry" is today a global model of bureaucratic memory management that is proliferating in museums, conferences and ceremonies, while the present repeats the crimes it claims to commemorate.

A memory born of horror had been stripped of its power of redemption. Memory —the real one—is not a sanctuary: it is an uncomfortable questioning. Arendt wrote: "Evil can reappear at any moment, because there is no past that guarantees it." That is why memory cannot be anyone's monopoly. When memory is privatised, its meaning is destroyed.

Westerbork, Netherlands, Jews boarding a deportation train to Auschwitz (between 1942 and 1943) | Photo_ **Rudolf Breslauer**_ Public Domain

Unlike Spain—where amnesia became state policy under the kindly name of "reconciliation"—it seemed to me that Germany had consolidated a much more rigorous and demanding culture of memory. But then I began to notice the shadows and the power relations hiding beneath that shining surface: even where memory seemed solid, a profound distortion was taking place. What Gaza revealed had been there from the start, for decades. To fully understand this distortion, we must understand how Germany, which made memory a pillar of its identity, ended up using it to legitimise genocide.

German Complicity

"What happened in Germany can happen anywhere, to any people, even my own."
Yehuda Elkaná, Israeli historian.

In February 2026, the spokesperson for the German Green Party met with Israel's Foreign Minister. It was not just any other formal gesture. It was a way of legitimising a government facing accusations of genocide before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), whose president is subject to an international arrest warrant and whose ministers have even criminalised Green MEPs who participated in the humanitarian flotilla to Gaza, describing it as a "pro-terrorist" initiative.

The meeting revealed a disturbing fact: the persistence of a German political rationale that makes support for Israel an unquestionable moral imperative, even when that support is in direct conflict with international law. A rationale that, paradoxically, coincides today with that of the European far right.

When I joined the European Greens in the European Parliament, I did so with caution. Not so much because of the group's internal plurality as because of the German delegation's specific weight. It was the largest and therefore the most influential.

After the attack on 7th October, the German delegation unreservedly defended Israel's "legitimate right to self-defence", even as the offensive on Gaza had already claimed thousands of civilian lives and allegations of collective punishment were mounting. The discussion was not legal. It was about identity. This pattern was not limited to the Greens. It was replicated, with different nuances, among liberals, social democrats and even the German left. Over time, things changed.

Prisoners of the Herero and Nama tribes 1904-1908 | Photo_ **Author unknown**_ Public Domain

Not without resistance. And in the end, the Green group passed a resolution that assumed much of the discourse anchored in international law and the equality of victims: the recognition of genocide and the State of Palestine, the prohibition of arms trafficking, and the suspension of the trade agreement between the European Union and Israel. But the concern remained: how could the country that had made memory a pillar of its identity be unable to apply to Israel the same criteria as to any other state?

That memory operated not only as trauma or accountability, but also as pride. Some German colleagues were convinced that they understood anti-Semitism better than anyone else. This self-perception generated a subtle form of moral superiority: Germany not only atoned for its guilt but also felt authorised to dictate the boundaries of decency in Europe. However, this certainty coexisted with an inability to recognise when memory stops challenging the present and begins to shield it instead.

Auschwitz was the epicentre of European thought, but beyond it lay other horrors: colonial empires, wars of liberation, and peoples whom mainstream Europe never fully recognised as human beings.

Functional Philo-Semitism

"After the Holocaust, Jews can do anything."
Golda Meir, Israeli Prime Minister.

After 1945, Germany embarked on a reckoning with its past that was unparalleled in Europe. Memorials, museums, and school education. In this context, a metamorphosis took place in the German imagination regarding Jews. The country that had considered them a foreign body, an internal enemy, began to admire them... but not all of them. Only a particular group: the armed, disciplined, young, virile Israelis. Not those who had been deported, humiliated or murdered, but those who embodied the perfect opposite of the Nazi stereotype.

Anti-Semitism did not simply disappear; it transformed. It became what some Holocaust survivors, such as Primo Levi, called "functional philo-Semitism": a strategic admiration for the strong, militarised Israel that emerged victorious after 1967. I understood this suddenly while reading an internal German report from the time of Eichmann's trial in Israel. It stated, literally, that young Israelis had "none of the characteristics we used to see as Jewish." Israeli soldiers were described as the "living rectification" of the European Jew. There could be no cruder confession: the same gaze that had dehumanised Jews in Europe now revered Israelis because they fit their ideal of power. The European Jew was the victim; the Israeli Jew, the rehabilitated warrior.

As this admiration grew, a silent operation was simultaneously carried out: the reconversion of Nazi elites. Nuremberg jurists recycled their careers, officials with murky pasts were rehabilitated, and police and administrative structures moved from one regime to another with a moral ease that, from today's perspective, is unbearable.

I was particularly struck by one specific episode in this process: Adenauer manoeuvring to ensure that Hans Globke, his closest collaborator and co-author of the Nuremberg Laws, was not implicated during the trial of Nazi criminal Eichmann, which took place in Jerusalem in the 1960s. Compromising files were removed during the trial, and names were deleted. An operation that amounted, as Pankaj Mishra summarised, to Israel receiving weapons, cash and legitimacy while Germany received absolution and silence—despite its incomplete denazification.

The Eichmann trial downplayed the persistence of Nazi support in Germany, while exaggerating Nazi presence in Arab countries. As Arendt pointed out in her chronicle of the trial, it suited both Germany and Israel to portray Arabs as the embodiment of Nazism.

Israel as "Raison d'État"

"If certain cultures have been capable of destroying others... the destructive forces they engender can also turn inward."
Octavio Manno, French psychoanalyst.

The idea of "moral capital" was established: special suffering conferred special rights. An inexhaustible credit of innocence, amassed in the name of the past, allowed Israel to acquire nuclear weapons, to colonise in the name of survival, to kill in order not to die.

The phrase that best sums up this historic shift came from Angela Merkel in 2008: Israel's security is a matter of state for Germany. It was not a moral statement: it was a dogma that removed all doubt and made support for Israel a hallmark of German democracy. The Holocaust was presented as the unparalleled original sin; the Jews as absolute victims; Israel as their guarantor; and Germany as the mandatory guardian of this moral temple. Anyone who questioned this order was perceived as breaking the tacit post-war covenant.

That functional philo-Semitism lives on today as a moral shield for a state with carte blanche to commit any atrocity. Israel is spoken of as if it were a metaphysical pillar of its own identity. And no identity takes criticism well. On the contrary, it perceives criticism as an existential threat. Facts are not discussed: reflections are defended.

When we debated the decisions of the United Nations or the International Court of Justice, our German colleagues wondered whether criticising Israel would "embolden" extremists. What was being discussed was not Gaza, but the spectre of Germany's own past. A deeply European issue, but one that is nonetheless alien to the Palestinian reality.

Colonialism, Selective Memory, and Namibia

"Israel's alliance with Germany was a conspiracy to cleanse the reputation of the German people. In return, they paid us billions."
Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Israeli author.

If I learned anything from studying German history in depth, it is that the Holocaust was the culmination of a much longer genealogy. In the early 20th century, in south-west Africa, the German army perpetrated one of the first genocides of the modern era: the systematic annihilation of the Herero and Nama peoples. There, practices were tested that would later appear, amplified, in Europe: concentration camps, slave labour, mass deportation, and extermination through starvation. For decades, this colonial crime remained out of German textbooks, as if history had begun in 1933. But the thread was there: the seed of racialised colonialism later germinated into Nazism, and the inability to face up to this continuity has left a moral vacuum that is violently resurfacing today with German policy towards Palestine. The Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe warned: "Europe never reconciled itself with its colonial past. It only archived its crimes." Germany provided economic reparations to Israel, but never to Namibia. It recognised the Herero and Nama genocide only a century later, with watered-down formulas, without assuming criminal responsibility, without real compensation and without listening to the surviving communities.

Memory—the real one—is not a sanctuary: it is an uncomfortable questioning.

The same logic that dehumanised the Herero and Nama peoples resurfaces in current discourse on Palestinians: "terrorists", "human animals", "subhumans", "dangerous masses". It is no coincidence that this Israeli rhetoric found a comfortable echo in segments of the German political class. Dehumanisation is an ancient language, learned long before Nazism. The disturbing thing is that the pedagogy of the Holocaust does not seem to have served to dismantle that language. It did serve, however, to internalise a national guilt towards European Jews. but not to universalise responsibility, nor to understand that all dehumanised life opens the door to horror.

That is why, when Germany today justifies the massacre in Gaza as "self-defence", when it crushes demonstrations, when it bans Palestinian symbols, censors journalists, accuses those who denounce crimes of anti-Semitism... it is not breaking with its history: it is repeating it in colonial terms. And the paradox is almost unbearable: a country that built entire museums to teach its children not to repeat barbarism has aligned itself with a state that applies the mechanisms of expulsion, collective punishment and racialised violence to another people.

Syria – Aleppo – An Armenian woman kneels beside a dead child in a field (between 1915 and 1919) | Photo_ **Near East Relief**_ Public Domain

The Relocation of Racism

"A lie spreads, expands and ultimately survives on one condition: that it finds fertile soil in the society in which it is disseminated. In that society, people unconsciously express their prejudices, their hatred, their fears, all their strong emotions."
Marc Bloch, French historian.

The more the evidence of the genocide in Gaza emerged, the more Muslim minorities within Germany were singled out. For years, the official narrative claimed that the country had confronted its past, defusing the seeds of hatred. But that self-image was shattered when the refugee crisis hit in 2015. Suddenly, a new subject appeared on whom to place fears and blame: the Muslim. The Arab. The migrant. The refugee. The equation was immediate and politically useful: they are the risk, they bring the anti-Semitism that we have freed ourselves from; they embody what we have overcome.

German politics revealed its most intimate, almost unconscious mechanism: the need to shift onto others the guilt that it does not know how to manage. A narrative that allowed white, Christian German society to continue to see itself as redeemed, while pointing to others as bearers of hatred. That was the framework that exploded

Israel received weapons, cash and legitimacy while Germany received absolution and silence.

after 7th October. Every time we talked about Palestine, the same mantra popped up: "We have to protect the Jews of Europe." And it was true. But the sentence was never finished: "From whom?" Official data showed that the vast majority of anti-Semitic crimes were committed by the white far right, not migrants.

And so, while the neo-Nazis were rising in the polls, the political focus shifted to pro-Palestinian demonstrations, mosques, and young people wearing keffiyehs. Islamophobia became the new face of the old anti-Semitism. Germany had not defeated its anti-Semitism; it had simply relocated it. On the streets, repression advanced: demonstrations were banned, children were arrested for carrying Palestinian flags, teachers were disciplined for teaching international humanitarian law, and artists were fired for signing open letters against genocide. And then something even more disturbing was revealed: many of those being persecuted were Jews.

Germany had not defeated its anti-Semitism; it had simply relocated it.

By 2024, Germany had arrested or charged more Jewish people than in any other year since the Holocaust. Any Jew who did not fit into the pro-Zionist doctrine became a suspect. It was an obscene reversal: children and grandchildren of Holocaust victims being lectured by those who belonged to the nation that murdered their families. The descendants of the persecuted were treated as a threat by those who should have listened to them first. Germany, in its zeal to atone for a crime, recruited the ghosts of Auschwitz and ended up profaning its own moral promise. The memory of the Holocaust was used to gag those who embodied that very memory. The victims of the past were exploited to silence those who today denounced another crime. All under the same slogan: "security for the Jewish community", even though that community—diverse, pluralistic, with highly critical voices—had not asked for anyone to be silenced. The state used its name, but it was not defending the Jews: it was defending its own image and narrative of redemption.

This was the definitive proof that Germany had drained its racism of anti-Jewishness, filling it with anti-Arabness instead. The current German Chancellor, Friedrich Merz, acknowledged this bluntly in June 2025: "Israel does the dirty work for us." Who was this "us"? Once again, the idea of Western civilisation. This is the decisive step in justifying Israel's violence in Gaza in terms that should have disappeared from German history: "civilisation against barbarism", "the West against savagery", "self-defence against hordes". The same Nazi or colonial categories of German Namibia are now directed at another people. The same dehumanisation, just with a different name. Another victim. Another continent.

The fundamental question is not whether Germany should commit to Israel's security. It is whether that commitment can be sustained by ignoring the rights of another people, downplaying serious charges before international courts and criminalising solidarity.

The Genealogy of Zionism and the European Shadow

"Yesterday's anti-Semites are today the ones who most denounce anti-Zionism as a form of anti-Semitism."
Enzo Traverso, Italian intellectual.

For a long time, I was afraid to think about Israel. Not to criticise its policies, but to think about its history with the depth it deserved. As I have explained, I come from a philosophical background shaped by authors who wrote in the shadow of the Holocaust. My moral and political education had been built on the cautionary tale that they all left recorded in their books: evil can happen again, because the human capacity to destroy our own kind remains intact.

That teaching shaped us. It taught us to distrust the state when it becomes absolute, to distrust the crowd when it stops thinking, to distrust even ourselves. It was an

Romani prisoners at Belzec extermination camp, 1940 | Photo_ **Author unknown**_ Public Domain

ethical school as demanding as it was necessary. And yet, over time, I began to notice the shadow that tradition had refused to look into: its Eurocentric, colonial underpinnings, the almost implicit idea that Europe was the moral centre of the world and that everything else had to be considered from that vantage point. If the Holocaust was the ultimate crime, then all other suffering had to be weighed against it. Nothing could compare. Nothing could challenge it. Nothing could question the symbolic privilege that mainstream Europe had granted itself as the guardian of remembrance.

It was through the writings of intellectuals such as Edward Said that I discovered that this framework had a devastating blind spot: the tragedy of another people—the Palestinians—had been silenced, erased or minimised in order to sustain a narrative of European redemption. What was memory for some became oblivion for others. And then another piece of evidence emerged, as simple as it was brutal: the anti-Semitism that had devastated Europe was not born in Palestine, but here, on our continent; yet the price was paid there.

It was not the Arabs who built concentration camps, who deported, who exterminated. It was not the East that expelled the Jews from European history: it was Europe. And yet Palestine ended up bearing the consequences of that European crime.

That realisation was an internal earthquake. It forced me to re-examine what I had learned and to dismantle my own certainties. I discovered—like so many other Europeans—that the history of Zionism could not be understood without European anti-Semitism, nor could European anti-Semitism be understood without the colonialism that permeated the political imagination of the 19th century and much of the 20th.

Then came the difficult questions: how was it possible that a persecuted people ended up building a national project on the expulsion of another? How did criticising the crimes of a state come to be considered an act of hatred against a

This appeals to the very heart of our time: how memory becomes power, fear becomes ideology, and suffering becomes an alibi.

people? Europe needed redemption, Israel needed protection, and the United States needed an ally. And Zionism became the perfect piece in a geopolitical machine where memory itself was also a weapon.

It was not a question of denying the Jewish tragedy—the magnitude of which forms part of the ethical roots of this article—but of recovering its universal meaning. Because defending the Palestinians is not denying the Holocaust: it is honouring it. It is preventing its memory from being used to justify what should never be repeated.

And because, in the end, this reflection is not only about Israel, nor only about Palestine, nor only about Germany. It is about the very heart of our time: how memory becomes power, fear becomes ideology, and suffering becomes an alibi. This is where Zionism, anti-Semitism and the Palestinian tragedy intersect. To understand the history of Israel without understanding European Zionism is to lose sight of the root of the problem. To understand European anti-Semitism without recognising how it shielded itself behind Zionism is to betray the ethical lesson itself.

As a Conclusion: Nakba, Colonisation, and Moral Immunity

"Why should the West and Christianity hand over Islamic Palestine as compensation? Why don't they hand over a part of Poland, where Jews were subjected to the most horrific tortures? Why don't they offer a state of the Federal Republic of Germany as compensation for the Holocaust? Why does Christianity have to compensate for this torture inflicted on the Jews over the last two thousand years at the expense of Islam?"
Ali Shariat, Iranian intellectual.

Zionism was not born in Palestine; it was born in Europe, as a response to anti-Semitism, but inheriting its mindset: exclusionary nationalism, territorial colonialism, and settler logic. The "promised land" became a laboratory where Europe displaced its guilt, and where the narrative of absolute suffering shielded a project of domination.

Today, the Nakba continues. Colonisation, displacement, dispossession and denial persist in the present, sustained by a selective European memory that conflates duty with immunity. Memory that becomes absolutised turns suffering into privilege and history into a shield. There is no moral credit that exempts us from present judgment. The past explains, but it does not absolve. And those who believe themselves immune to ethical judgment ultimately find themselves as vulnerable as everyone else.

Memory that is not universalised runs the risk of replicating that which it swore to combat. Europe needs a memory that does not confuse criticism with hatred. Because if the 20th century taught us anything, it is that dehumanisation always begins with language. And when institutions fear a symbol more than a crime, something essential has been lost.

Jaume Asens

Jaume Asens is a renowned Catalan lawyer and politician, currently a Member of the European Parliament in the Greens/European Free Alliance group for the Comuns party. With a degree in Law and Philosophy from the University of Barcelona, he was president of the Unidas Podemos parliamentary group in the Spanish Congress (2020-2023) and a Member of Parliament. He previously served as the deputy mayor of Barcelona (2015-2019), where he launched initiatives such as the Ethical Mailbox and the Transparency Office. As a lawyer specialising in human rights, he pursued cases against crimes committed during the Franco regime and international crimes, and was recognised for defending activists and social movements. He has authored several books.

[Photo: © European Union 2024 – EP]

Palestinian refugees displaced to the Beach camp in Gaza board boats to Lebanon or Egypt in 1948 | Photo_ **Hrant Nakashian**_ CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO

Photo_ **Frank Michel**_ CC BY 2.0

03. STUBBORN COMPASSION: A NEW CANADIAN INDEPENDENCE

John Ralston Saul

Mar, 2026

We all know what compassion means. But like most things that we believe we know, it's worth going back to think it over again. To continually remind ourselves that compassion is not pity. It's not just empathy. It contains empathy. It is not, certainly not, just sympathy. It's far away from sympathy because it includes action. It *requires* action. To put this in the simplest possible way, compassion is action in order to make things better. It's the very hard work of identifying with the other, identifying with the needs of others, identifying with the needs of our society, and being conscious of our need to become involved in working on all of that.

The Foundations of Canadian Compassion

I write these lines on the 11th of March, looking back 178 years to the birth of our Canadian democracy. It was on the 11th of March, 1848, that Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine was called by the Governor General, Lord Elgin, to form the government. His number two was Robert Baldwin. A Montrealer and a Torontonian. The two leading citizens of their cities. Great reformists in pursuit of justice had won a majority a few months before, and with their leaders making up the cabinet, this administration would soon be known as The Great Ministry.

Over the next three years, they worked day and night, through riots, tensions, and even the burning down of parliament buildings, to lay the foundations of what are still the humanist foundations of modern Canada—which, at its best, has compassion at its core. Today, there are economics and political science departments—even history departments—across this country which will describe its coming into being without including any of that. As per their account, Canada was built in a colonial context by rival factions, which they often see as little more than interest groups. The country is nothing more than a series of economic and political trade-offs. They don't go back to look at the extent to which leaders like LaFontaine and Baldwin were driven by compassion and ethics.

As unusual as it is in politics to count on a leadership so clearly driven by the desire to make society better, the foundation they and their allies put in place remains. Their laws are still the basis of this society, even if most of them are invisible to us day to day. One has to dig layer upon layer down through the laws and regulations to uncover their foundations. And yet, what these events of 1848 mean is that ours is, as I will keep saying, the oldest continuous democratic federation in the world. And the reason it's important to insist on this is that, for most of the 20th century, it became an endlessly repeated cliché to say Canada was a new country. That we were just getting going—a good excuse for those in power to act as if they could do whatever, as if nothing had happened before them.

But in fact, since 1848, almost two centuries ago, Canadian citizens have been working to make this country function at its best. True, most of the time it doesn't function at that level, and granted, some of the time it functions at its worst. We all know when that happens, because those dark stains on our society are there forever. I chose that word carefully. These are not lessons. They are stains. The principal outcome of our long, continuous democratic history is that people who try to act consciously in this country know what to avoid. They can feel what they need to avoid.

I chose that word, *continuous*, carefully as well. So not only are we the world's oldest continuous democratic federation, but we are also one of the oldest continuous democracies overall. Of the many established ones out there, many broke up and came back together. A continuous democracy is quite a different matter. True, we have done a lot of terrible and stupid things. But we never went that extra step to start massively killing each other or successfully overthrowing governments.

The Sources of American Violence

With 1.5 million casualties, soldiers, civilians and wounded included, the appalling breakup of our neighbour's democracy comes to mind. The US Civil War saw 3.2 million citizens fight each other in astonishing violence. Certainly a failure of civilisation. And yet, despite the contrasts between the Northeast and the Southeast, we can pinpoint the origin of this fundamental violence to the very foundation of the country and its economic system: an unbroken line of slavery of over 400 years, from the early 1600s to the end of segregation, of which, as economic studies prove, even the non-slave areas benefited. It's not until the early 1960s that the first real laws—enforceable ones—take shape. And even that was difficult.

The settler's march across the continent was enthusiastically seen as a conquest of the West, subduing Indigenous civilisations, and a now global US film industry was built on the celebration of this violence.

Simply put, as terrible as the US Civil War was and despite many relevant social movements driven by compassion, an unbroken line of profound violence, based on mass industrialised slavery and segregation, negates the idea of continuous democracy completely. Something as deep as that never goes away. Just as the great mistakes made in Canada or any other country never go away. And they reappear regularly. One can argue—and this may be an understatement—that Mr Trump's regime is but a reappearance of that same line of fundamental violence, as well as a rejection of the idea of the citizen and citizens' rights.

When the president of the United States, with no reason or excuse, starts denigrating and threatening its neighbour—claiming Canada shouldn't really exist, and implying that it could be made not to—it becomes clear not just that the lineage of violence is resurfacing, but also that this time, at least in part, it has set its eyes on us.

Even that is hardly new. The U.S. is a remarkable country, largely built by bullying its neighbours, invading and raking their territory. In 1847-48, it violently seized half of Mexico, invading it again twice in 1914 in order to force a change in government. The long settler's march across the continent was enthusiastically seen as a conquest of the West, subduing Indigenous civilisations by force, and a now global US film industry was built in good part on the celebration of this violence. As for the broader hemisphere, in the 20th century alone, there were between 40 and 50 U.S. military interventions in Latin America to force government changes, on top of innumerable indirect interventions backing murderous regimes and coups d'état. Chile is one of the most famous examples.

This is mainstream US foreign policy from tip to toe, from the Arctic to the Antarctic, in the Americas and beyond. Not something marginal. Not something that happens from time to time.

So when the United States president threatens Canada, never mind the particular antics of the man at the reins, one just can't imagine this is incidental and let it pass. Britain and France used this very method to build their reach in the 19th Century.

When Empires want to do something unacceptable, they begin by invoking it. Just words muttered periodically, in press conferences, interviews, or while casually getting on or off airplanes. Threats are repeated one at a time, casually, as if it's nothing at all, normalising over time concepts like justifiable coups, invasions, or forced changes of government.

In this case, you normalise the idea that Canada shouldn't exist and that it's okay to destroy it, because, underlying that ever-present dismissal, there's a hope you'll end up getting the riches.

When Empires want to do something unacceptable, they begin by invoking it.

And why shouldn't they have the riches? You recently heard that argument from the U.S. president—"Canada has never done anything." Per that narrative, we're totally dependent on them, we've taken advantage of them, we've existed thanks to them. Therefore, our riches are their payoff. Which is to say, they get to destroy Canada. This is real. I am not paranoid. And neither are you. I want you to remember that Mr Trump, and in particular Mr Vance, who may well become president, are surrounded by a cabal of ultra-rich, ultra-influential individuals who, like Peter Thiel, openly declare not to believe in democracy. A deep state vehemently opposed to the notion that society can be ruled by compassion and not self-interest.

How Empires Function

Let us not forget that strange little incident over Greenland. I'm sure you remember it. The vice president's wife. Then the vice president. Suddenly, they were there, for no other reason than a classic, brazen, yet half-baked attempt at imperial takeover. Why classic? It's a matter of the actions and the language: broad strategic reasons, the good of civilisation, protecting us all from a barbarian invasion. In reality, they were after the mineral wealth—a crummy little play for economic riches.

They didn't succeed because democracy's greatest weapon against authoritarianism is ridicule. In Greenland, a small population made the world's second most powerful man look like an idiot. He was forced to withdraw from a stunt that he and his boss thought was going to be easy. So no dog-sledging race photo-opps, and cultural, "soft-power" diplomacy. Unexpectedly—in their view of the world—a small population of weaponless natives stood up to them. It was then that the EU spoke up, and eventually Canada did as well.

As Voltaire, father of modernism, taught us, we can stand up to raw power with language—ridicule, irony, humour. The US president and vice president realised they were being laughed at around the world. They were going to have to work at it a little harder if they wanted to defeat the less than 57,000 unarmed Greenlanders. But what if the Greenland coup had succeeded? The next step would have been Canada, and its equally vast mineral wealth; the Canadian North at first—Baffin Island sits right beside Greenland. A long list of imperial ambitions would follow.

Then came Iran, whose ruling regime is, let me say, all but a pretty one. Its long story of state violence and repression against those who speak up is horrifying. The thing is, there are a lot of ugly dictatorships in the world. And each has an internal logic—a history of its own.

The definition of imperialism is that one country believes it has the right to shape the destiny of other peoples. Mr Trump thought that about Iran, as he did about Greenland. Two very different places and situations to which he applied the same logic. Should he get his way, the outcome in the former will be just as disastrous as it could have been in the latter.

To put it simply, the sustained bombing of Iran has reinforced the regime and undermined the country's democratic forces. Bombing has never won a war or overthrown regimes. Bombing infuriated the British in WWII and strengthened

Mr Trump and Mr Vance are surrounded by a cabal of ultra-rich individuals who openly declare not to believe in democracy. A deep state vehemently opposed to the notion that society can be ruled by compassion.

their will to fight on. The subsequent flattening of German cities by Allied bombers had the same effect and is generally thought to have prolonged the war. The U.S. bombing of Cambodia—a human disaster as much as a strategic failure. The most probable outcome of the air attacks on Iran will be to cement hatred in that country for the US and perhaps the West as a whole.

That single phrase—"We are going to bring them back to the Stone Age, where they belong"—puts the United States on the side of barbarism. These words carry broad implications for disorder in the area, for the further isolation of Islamic countries, for the creation of generations of angry youth, and for the probable rise of a new wave of terror as the simplest response to an attack in which there are no soldiers to fight. This U.S. 'initiative' will undoubtedly have a negative impact on all Western countries, including Canada.

Wondering only what it will look like is asking the wrong question. Once you open wide the Pandora's box of violence, you lose control over the forces you have unleashed.

Just think about that phrase—"…back to the Stone Age, where they belong"—those words were addressed to one of the world's oldest civilisations. 1800 years ago, Cyrus the Great ruled from India to Eastern Europe. Successive Persian empires followed, and major contributions were made to medicine, literature, philosophy, and engineering. We are talking about a civilisation older than anything in the West. Mr Trump's dismissive words were uttered with ignorance, and they will hang there in the uncontrollable global memory, unexcusable, used as the justification for the years of violence and death to come.

Prime Ministers' Toughest Job

Going back to the narrower issue between Canada and the US, what I have described so far will help you to understand why the principal foreign policy job of all Canadian prime ministers has been to keep us out of that sort of mess. And we do that by distracting Washington as much as possible. By being nice or appearing nice. By smiling a lot. By doing whatever we can to stop them from focusing on us or getting an excuse to actually do to us some of what they've done to our neighbours. Of course, sell every single piece of bubblegum, every computer and whatever else you can to the United States. It's a gigantic market. And be very nice in a way that will help to keep the markets open. Smile, be friendly. But don't hug. Keep your distance. This has been understood throughout Canada's full history.

That was what John A. Macdonald's National Policy was about in 1894. In simplified terms, economic integration with the US is what led Wilfrid Laurier to lose the 1911 election. That's why Mackenzie King, in his long premiership, had to manoeuvre and maximise business and personal friendship with the US president, while at the same time distancing the UK. He was accused of being weak, unclear, and obscure, but was the master of the game. At avoidance. I guess that is what the game is called. He was perhaps the perfect model.

And then came 1958, the justifiable destruction of the Liberal Party and the arrival of Lester Pearson, along with a guy called Walter Gordon, a businessman who had a strong sense of compassion. He rebuilt the Liberal Party after the '58 meltdown. He structured and organised Lester Pearson's victories in the early '60s. True, they never got a majority, but they did win power. He put in place much of the Pearson-era legislation, reflecting a clear platform of compassion built on a strong nation-state. And in 1963, in one of the most disastrous days in modern Canadian history, came the Gordon Budget. One that was almost identical to what Mark Carney is doing today, designed to make Canada function as an independent country, disengaged from core US economic interests.

The Bay Street bankers and corporate managers went bonkers. A massive panic campaign led by the business community insisted that our economy would collapse and that we'd become a third-world country. And Pearson, who was a good Prime Minister but didn't know anything about economics, caved. Thus was Walter Gordon, one of the greatest political figures of post-WWII Canada, destroyed. I only got to know this great man in his old age. Even then, you could sense his enormous courage and—central to that—that he didn't care what people said. He was willing to go out there and take it.

From that point on, the steam was knocked out of our foreign policy. We had lost confidence in Canada's ability to pursue an independent economic policy. One of the leading forces in WWII was somehow reduced to a passive international status.

The Economic Assimilation of Canada

Partly as a result of our failure to become a more hard-hitting, economically independent power, we began to look increasingly inwards. From Universal Healthcare to the abolition of Capital Punishment, we started to focus more and more on compassion, putting in place the national and provincial policies that would make Canada a very different place from its neighbour.

In 1973, after some years at the helm, Pierre Trudeau tried to do something akin to what Walter Gordon had tried to. His so-called "The Third Option" attempted to diversify our trade as a way to diversify our international political relationships. He got no mainstream business support and little from economists in general. A policy can't go far if nobody is willing to pick it up and run with it. And so we get to 1988's "free trade election" that didn't live up to its name. That election was about everything else that the deal it ran on implied, which was basically broad economic integration into the US economy. Meaning for Canada to have less and less control over everything else, less and less ability to pursue a foreign policy and less freedom to expand our interesting concept of a non-monolithic country. You could say that it was *the* attempt to get us to a point of no return.

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, I must say, had a number of good qualities. He, for one, led the international fight against apartheid in South Africa. But he *betrayed* the country over that 1988 deal with the United States, taking us down a road of much more than broad economic integration. I use this word carefully, too, for it has kept its meaning and has not lost an ounce of force through overuse. The result of this betrayal was thrilling for Big Business and borderless commerce, but we slipped down 40 years of being a subsidiary for US companies and markets, more and more focused on mass-production as opposed to high-level innovation. For all these world-class universities, one has to wonder why so many of our graduates leave for the US. At risk of generalising, there are simply few sophisticated jobs for them in Canada.

As Voltaire, father of modernism, taught us, we can stand up to raw power with language —ridicule, irony, humour. (…) Democracy's greatest weapon against authoritarianism is ridicule.

As additional collateral, a small group of people made a great deal of money, and the country's rich-poor divide widened. Culture and volunteerism, however, increasingly became the counterweight to this broad economic submission. Canadians were still saying, out loud, we were going to do something different. With them, once again, I would say, compassion turned out to be central to the ways of our people.

Time for Existential Questions

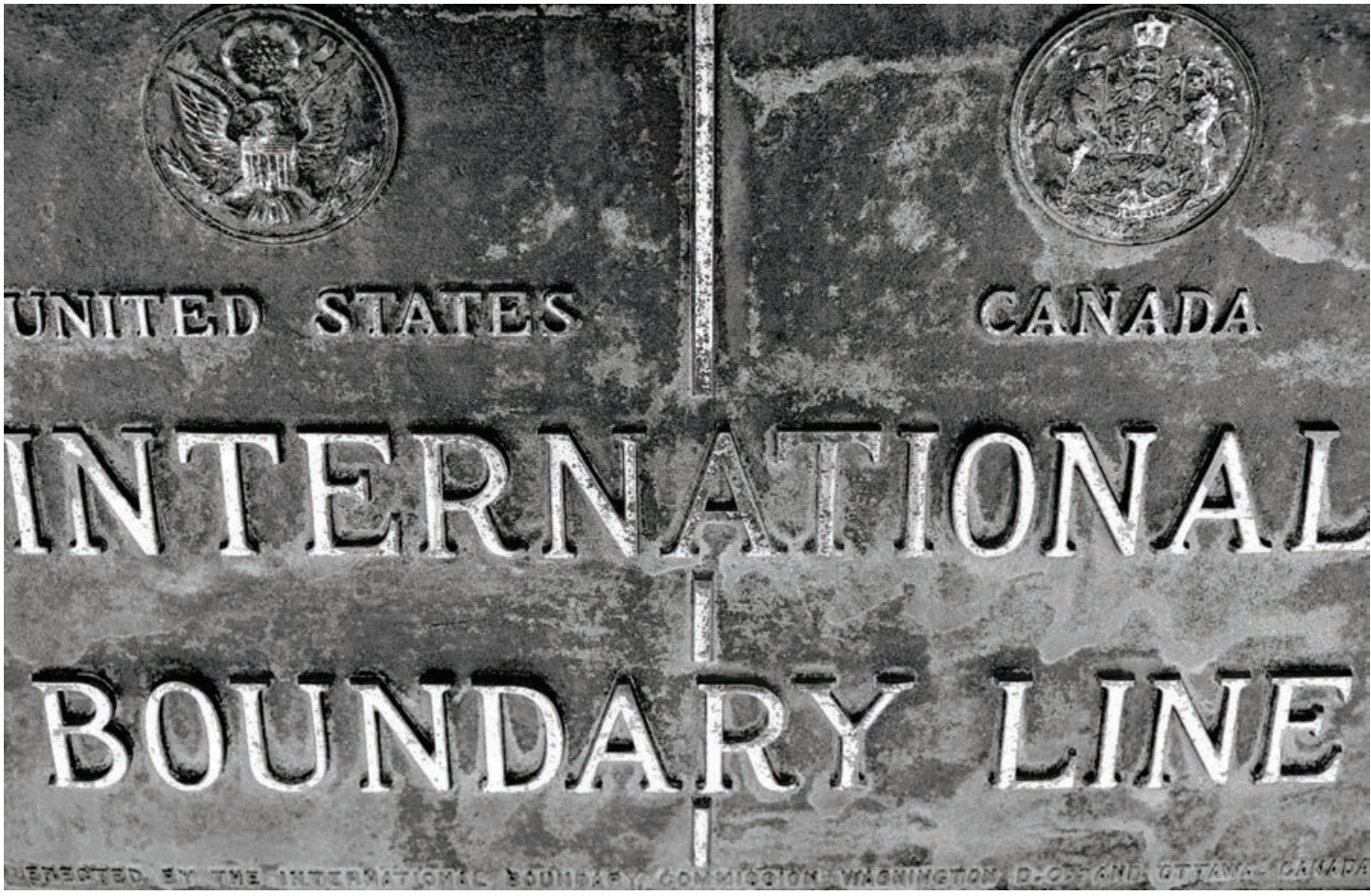
And then, a new reality struck. About twelve months ago. Washington—the Roman Empire of our day, sitting on our doorstep—changed its mind. Empires do that. They have their own timetable.

Of course, we do have some influence: on bits and pieces of markets, on some people we do business with, and on our personal US friends. But all of that adds up to little. And nothing at all when it comes to broad US policy. That's why our best option is to sell what we can, buy what we need, keep our distance and smile a lot. Nobody had any control over Rome, 18th-century Paris or 19th-century London.

Canadians tend to say that the change we are facing today is due to Trump. That is a comforting explanation, suggesting our problems are short-term. I don't think that is the case. Suddenly, the US has lost interest in its standard economic control over its appendages from Central and South America to Canada. As often happens with empires, they just lose interest, providing their appendages don't cause trouble.

So now is the time to ask ourselves real questions. For example, there is the upcoming trade negotiation aimed at renewing CUSMA, our three-way trade agreement. Why do we need this deal? Can we organise ourselves differently? Perhaps we will be able to pull off a new deal with the unstable and intellectually challenged US government, but can you imagine what they'll ask for when we sit down to negotiate? Mr Trump has been preparing that ground for months, endlessly repeating that they were robbed last time around.

I believe we should accept that we won't have a deal, and that a door opens up for us to do what we should have done back in '88. We can sell as much as we want there and elsewhere and we're certainly not going to give them the extra power over us that they'll be demanding this time.



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If we want to survive as a nation, we have to ask ourselves a question that's nothing short of existential: *What's happened?*

Trump and Vance have simply returned to the old U.S. tradition of being an inward-looking country. Keep in mind that there is nothing inherently wrong with that. They did so back in the 18th Century to get away from England, to be independent of international forces. That more or less worked until Japan attacked them in 1942, forcing them into WWII against their will. They went on to do a fine job during the war and, in many ways, almost automatically became the leaders of the Western democracies. But it was tiring. Ultimately, it wasn't really what they wanted to be. It's not in their tradition. And so after many decades, they're done.

The most probable outcome of the air attacks on Iran will be to cement hatred in that country for the US and perhaps the West as a whole.

Of course, they don't want to lose control. They don't want to give up their markets. But it's expensive, consuming, and even boring to lead the "free world." It's time-consuming. Is it not? As a result, all those Canadians, many of them business leaders and economists, who took us down that road of integration, have been picked up by the scruff of their necks and thrown on the floor, having failed miserably, having put us in an almost impossible position. So, again, what happened? Everybody is saying Carney is doing a great job trying to change Canada's direction, but nobody is going back to examine how we got into this mess.

There is no harm, but justice, in identifying those who are to blame, the people who thought we could exist as a happy wagging tail. The thing is, if you don't know how you got into a mess, you will hardly succeed in getting out of it. It was not even 12 months ago that business leaders lobbied for greater integration in the US economy, and now, in shock, they call for economic diversification. They want Europe. They want South Asia. They want East Asia. They are trying to invent a whole new way of life for which they are not trained or prepared in any way, shape, or form.

Of course, some of our regions, like Quebec, are more or less prepared to build new bridges. But the big problem we face is that, for decades, those in the Canadian mainstream economic community have built their careers on a north-south axis and remain completely unprepared for the complexity of the new internationalism, lacking the experience, the vocation, and even the languages.

Imagining a Gigantic Pivot

We require not just a leap, but a gigantic pivot.

Once you open wide the Pandora's box of violence, you lose control over the forces you have unleashed.

That's why the prime minister is on a plane the whole time. Thank God he's willing to do it. And that he's young and strong enough, and that his wife is supporting him through this, while he takes up the weight of our nation's future in flying around the world to convince everyone we are serious. This is an enormous challenge because there is no reason anyone should believe us.

Our good character and reputation may precede us, but many things in Canada need to change to demonstrate our commitment. We will need to move away from the low-level mass-market strategies we were obliged to adopt for US integration. Suddenly, we have to look at the much higher levels of complexity of, for example, the European market and face our own contradictions, such as how a highly educated yet mass-production-focused society makes no sense.

Many countries out there still want us for our mass-produced agriculture, our mining and our lumber. No one can deny the importance of those sectors, let alone today, but we simply can't afford to go back to focusing on just that—back to 1910, the exact place where the US leadership and business would like us. We need to double down on our structural sophistication, nationally and internationally,

stopping the brain drain, keeping our young and formed to thrive at home, building on what we already have, on the potential of our cultural diversity and our multilingual strengths, on the referential cities like Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, or Calgary.

Nobody had any control over Rome, 18th-century Paris or 19th-century London.

And mind that I am not invoking cheap nationalism or suggesting we close the borders. Quite the contrary. We need to open the borders in dozens and dozens of new ways, rather than being lazily reliant on one market, close by and unilingual in English. Granted, this whole internationalism is much more complicated, but let me argue, it's much more interesting, much more fun. We, and our companies, should be promoting, in that sense, that our elites and future leaders look beyond Harvard and into the promise of a university education in India, China, Malaysia, Germany or Russia.

As soon as negotiations with the US begin, I can almost guarantee you that the US-integrated Canadian elites will swerve, calling for us to cave on a whole series of fronts, demanding we abandon smaller, successful sectors they don't care about. It'll be '88 all over again, only even more hysterical, and they will try to make it sound sophisticated. And it is in the advent of this new attempt at mass-producing panic that you, citizens, really need to step up. This is when you, Canadians everywhere, will have to go the extra mile to make yourselves heard and seen, from the streets to your representatives' offices. We have to be, you have to be, ready to be firm in public. Firm with the people you might elect. Firm with your ideas. Calm, yet determined. We simply won't be able to build a solid independence based on the old model. But if we are clear that we're willing to do the work required for international diversity, then we are sure to survive.

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The Opposite of Boring

It's no secret why the prime minister is being welcomed in such interesting ways as he travels endlessly around the world, seeking new markets and new friends. His initiatives, his standing up to Trump, and especially his recent speech in Davos have made many realise that there is a chance for another model here, slowly coming to shape. But if we are going to succeed out there, internationally, in a new Canadian independence, we have to be willing to take this on. That direction will rely on us, on you, on citizen intervention, on you being heard, maybe even on you being as annoying as possible in a creative way.

Let me carefully choose my words once again, when I say all of this can and should be exciting. Risk is *exciting*. Change is exciting. Diversification is exciting. Multiplicity is exciting.

Why should we then be boring? After all, on those foundations of compassion, we have managed to build a naturally exciting country, our Canada. From our multilingual wealth to our thriving, sophisticated cities, and the growing social and cultural diversity we're rightly so proud of. We should learn to harness this very comfort with diversity at the international level, economically and politically, using our own prowess at building bridges to further enrich our nation as much as to contribute to the prosperity of others.

If we manage to do that, Canada is certain to be a key player on the world stage. We will not just survive, but thrive together. We have all the tools we need to change. Compassion, after all, is action in order to make things better.

John Ralston Saul

John Ralston Saul is an award-winning essayist and novelist. A long-time champion of freedom of expression, he served as President of PEN International and has written extensively, with his most renowned work considered to be "The Unconscious Civilization."

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04. REBUILDING THE NATION-DAM IN THE FACE OF RADICALISED IMPERIALISM: CHALLENGES FROM VENEZUELA

Lorena Fréitez Mendoza

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I maintain that imperialism can only advance over a nation that has broken down as a political community. History is clear, and so is the classical theory of imperialism [1]. When a people becomes scattered, radically fragmented, as a consequence of its own inability to share a common future and reject a common enemy, only then does it fall prey to more powerful nations, which, incidentally, are so thanks to their own cohesion. Nineteenth-century China, for example, weakened by internal rebellions and courtly factionalism, was left exposed to the Opium War and its "unequal treaties". Post-Soviet Russia, following the collapse of its internal order, allowed the strategic encroachment of Western powers. More recently, the same pattern was repeated in Libya and Iraq: in the former, the combination of tribal divisions, armed factional rivalries and a weakened state left the country unable to mount a coordinated defence against intervention by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In the latter, years of devastating sanctions, the rift between Shia, Sunni and Kurdish communities, and the extreme debilitation of the state apparatus created the vacuum that gave way to the US invasion and subsequent occupation.

Peter Turchin's theory [2] sheds light on a key aspect of this phenomenon by revealing how overproduction and internal competition amongst elites precipitate state collapse. However, national dissolution is not confined to fragmentation "up top": it also manifests itself "at the bottom", when the masses lose narratives of belonging, sources of legitimate authority and projects of collective development. This political orphanhood—which takes shape in demobilisation, migration or identitarian withdrawal—weakens the organic cohesion of the nation and undermines its capacity for resistance. For this reason, I argue, imperialist expansion is the structural consequence of national dissolution, understood as the simultaneous rupture of the elite-people cohesion underpinning the political community's very existence.

On the other hand, we observe how this same hypothesis accounts for the expansionist impulses of the great powers. Faced with the risks of national disintegration, imperialist expansion—colonisation—the designation of foreign enemies, the constant seeking out of threats to national security, and the march towards warfare are all policies designed to foster internal cohesion. War, in these cases, serves to cement the nation acting as an imperial core.

From this perspective, I consider the Venezuelan question in opposition to the moral explanations currently in vogue regarding the advance of global imperialism, led by the far right. These interpretations assume that, because imperialists are driven by the inherently evil nature of power, the irrationality of religious fanaticism, or the disposition of absolute financial might or unchecked military force, they pursue their expansionist policies without restraint. In contrast to this approach, it is worth recalling that, in politics, no actor unilaterally controls social change: their behaviour is political because it is framed by the quest for order. The effectiveness of a coup is proportional to the capabilities or weaknesses of its opponent, shaped by the effects

Imperialism can only advance over a nation that has broken down as a political community.

of past or present actions, and to political timing. In other words, it is proportional to opportunity or fortune. Whoever wins the struggle for hegemony does so within the framework of specific conditions arising from previous situations, to the detriment of another contender's bid for order.

The Twilight of the Free World Mythos

The upheaval of a global order based on the idea of a "Free World"—which emerged after World War II—is possible because the policies that gave it shape have weakened the very nations that embraced it. These policies have made life exceedingly difficult for thousands of people—especially the youngest among them—leading to disillusionment and fragmentation. Against this backdrop, the countries of the "Free World" are struggling to remain united. Perhaps also because, as their nations weaken, other forms of national and international order are emerging, showcasing the limitations of the Western model.

This political orphanhood —which takes shape in demobilisation, migration or identitarian withdrawal— weakens the organic cohesion of the nation and undermines its capacity for resistance.

This context challenges the West as a shared territorial and cultural sphere. Within it, fractures are apparent, and alarms ring warning of the risk of extinction and the weakening leadership of Western civilisation. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's speech at the Munich Security Conference on 16 February 2026 clearly illustrates how the United States—the world's leading power—is reading the situation. Rubio openly challenged the premises of a Free World, pointing out as a mistake that the West had subscribed to the "End of History" thesis. According to it, it was to be assumed that all countries would transition towards liberal democracies as a result of the free market, and that globalisation policies would take precedence over national interests. For Rubio, this approach has weakened the ability of Western nations to control critical supply chains, causing them to forfeit sovereignty and fuelling mass migrations that, in his view, are destroying Western culture. He interpreted the situation as a crisis, confirming the "decline" of a civilisation "that has every reason to be proud of its history" and every reason to "continue expanding" as it did for five centuries before 1945. He also attributed the causes of Western failure to the "godless communist revolutions" that promoted "anti-colonial uprisings that would transform the world" but which ultimately led to Western decline. All this to suggest that it would be the religious right—which he represents—that would do "whatever is necessary" to fix it.

Indeed, this crisis of cohesion within the empire leads to a knee-jerk reaction and incites action. Under the leadership of this new right-wing, elites are challenged, and war is waged. The battle is fought in apocalyptic terms because it seems there is no other way to remain united except through fierce rivalries that—based on the friend-or-foe mentality—keep Western nations unified. The fact that it is Rubio who is leading the conversation amongst European elites suggests that this crisis of civilisation is being defined as a crisis of the political principles of social democracy, which led the reconstruction of the Western world after the Second World War. The left, lacking an alternative, seems unable to formulate new narratives that would re-engage the masses—left politically orphaned by the financial crisis—in a progressive direction.

The right wing of the world's leading power is working to maintain a lasting adversarial boundary that sets it apart from the other rising giants. It seeks to agree on who the enemy is so that, from that point, it can redefine what it wants and who its allies are. This reinvention of the Western order is epitomised in Latin America as the Trump corollary to the so-called Monroe Doctrine. However, remaining consistent with our initial hypothesis, we must note that this doctrine is only applicable in contexts where the national cohesion of the countries facing these threats of domination is weakened.

We could say that the US wishes to appropriate South America's strategic resources for national security reasons. We could also assume that, faced with its weaknesses in

Eurasia, it has decided to consolidate its positions in the Americas. But its intentions are one thing and its capabilities quite another. The Venezuelan case presented special conditions for a brutal application of the *Monroe Doctrine*.

Venezuela: National Crisis and Imperialist Expansion

In Venezuela, a decade prior to the military invasion (2015–2025), the United States had been pursuing a consistent policy to undermine the nation's ruling coalition, driven by an opposition political elite which, powerless in the face of Chavista hegemony, turned to "foreign intervention" to seize state power. This policy was characterised by three strategies: 1) the economic suffocation of the country through more than 900 economic sanctions against the government, the main driver of the economy and owner of the country's oil resources; 2) the systematic attack on the government's reputation, which eroded its relations with the West; and 3) support for a policy of internal insurrection which, combining violent tactics and electoral episodes *in turbido*, accentuated the country's social fractures following the conflicts sparked by the Bolivarian Revolution.

The Chavista government's response to these three operations was a strategy of entrenchment involving the construction of state-sponsored barricades. This strategy led to a process of de-institutionalisation, as the state openly took sides, thereby forfeiting its role as the representative of all Venezuelans. This configuration of the conflict produced an unprecedented social and political crisis in Venezuelan democracy, which led to the largest diaspora in Latin American history and a social fracture that remains irreparable. The process we describe is nothing other than a process of national dissolution, which made Venezuela a captive, a land-object, of imperial doctrine.

It could be argued that Venezuela—like any country in the Global South with significant reserves of valuable natural resources—has historically been not only the target of imperial ambitions, but also, in practical terms, served for almost a century as a strategic economic hub for the US oil industry and as a political stronghold for its influence in the region. Indeed, following Hugo Chávez's rise to power and his strident anti-imperialist rhetoric, tensions with the United States escalated after a shift in oil policy and the expansion of Venezuela's international relations. This constantly raised the spectre of the use of force to secure control over Venezuela. However, never before in the history of the Venezuelan Republic had an imperialist power found an occasion to carry out a military invasion of the nature witnessed on 03 January 2026. This was partly because it had not sought such an opportunity, given that the United States' geopolitical situation was somewhat different—it was more preoccupied with maintaining its global positions in the Middle East and competing with Asia—; or because it had secured domestic allies to plunder the collective resources of the Venezuelan people; or because, until recently, the Chavista political project had managed to rally the majority, becoming the movement representing the wider society and maintaining a strong national unity.

Never before in the history of the Venezuelan Republic had an imperialist power found an occasion to carry out a military invasion of the nature witnessed on 03 January 2026.

However, the decade of economic and diplomatic suffocation to which we allude and the type of political conflict it descended into led to significant social fractures. These not only weakened Chavismo but the nation itself. What Chavismo had united by channelling political conflict through electoral means and the construction of new collective identities was fragmented by a resurgence of existential political conflict following Chávez's demise.

Following his death, there was a shift in how Chavismo organised itself politically. Against the backdrop of the financial weaknesses inflicted by the economic blockade on the state and its capacity to guarantee citizens' rights, this shift went hand in hand with the Chavista government's decision to entrench itself within the state apparatus to defend against the insurrection led by the opposition. Although this entrenchment sought to counter hostile attacks, it entailed a secrecy that damaged its ties with the

project's social base. Chavismo thus ceased to be a political space energised by social engagement—a government that "ruled by obeying"—and became a political project that demanded only allegiance to its leaders. This defensive withdrawal, coupled with the acute economic crisis, demobilised large sections of society from politics, leaving Chavismo weakened—in terms of the strength of its grassroots support—to confront the opposition forces which, in operational terms, functioned as the national branch of empire.

Chavismo ceased to function as a hegemonic project—in the sense that it no longer represented the political community as a whole—and became the subject of significant disputes not only over the control of power, but also over the nature of the social order. The implications of this hegemonic weakening of the Chavista project are of the utmost importance for the nation: if the Bolivarian Revolution had lifted the masses out of political apathy and social exclusion, forging a political body that powerfully energised the political community and represented the nation, its disintegration would manifest as a disintegration of the nation itself. Indeed, as Juan Carlos Portantiero [3] explains based on his reading of Gramsci, the *crisis of the state* is not merely a crisis of the political class—it is not merely a crisis of representation—but also a cultural crisis that manifests as the disintegration and loss of strength of the organisational forms—mediations—through which subordinate groups achieve an "effective presence in the state". This, at the ideological-cultural level, is experienced as a crisis of political identity, a crisis of society's convictions regarding all things intended to govern public and collective life.

Politically "burnt out" social segments could harbour dangerous feelings of political frustration, which, if not countered by credible political alternatives, could push them to accept the institutionalisation of a foreign government.

For this reason, the experience of that decade (2015–2025) can be defined as a national crisis, a crisis of the meaning that defines and binds the nation together. To summarise, we can identify at least three major debilitating effects of this crisis, which first became apparent in 2017. The first is the human exodus from the homeland: its people were migrating. The largest wave occurred between 2017 and 2019, when the outflow ceased to be a migration of elites—as it had been since Chávez came to power—and became a mass migration driven by survival. The second was the attempt at territorial fragmentation following the resurgence of the territorial dispute over Guayana Esequiba (2023), which sought to strip Venezuela of territory amid the weakening of its state [4]. And the third: the US military invasion of 3 January 2026, when there was a perception not only of a breakdown of the elites and the discrediting of the president, but also of a politically demobilised society.

This is not Venezuela's first national crisis. These dissolution processes are nothing more than the consequence of a style of antagonistic political struggle that has become a tradition in Venezuelan state culture, and which has also been fuelled by foreign forces. A form of political struggle characterised by intense political conflict, marked by severe exclusions, and laden with revenge, warmongering and violence. This struggle constantly overflows the boundaries that define collective life and shatters the state as the universal entity of the political community. For much of the 19th century, this type of conflict plagued the country with small but constant wars between local warlords, leading at the turn of the century to the imposition of order through a brutal dictatorship that stunted its political and social development. With the advent of democracy, from 1958 onwards, relative systemic stability was achieved, allowing for 30 years of relative development. However, democracy produced a series of radical exclusions that led to a crisis at the end of the 20th century. This gave way to a new form of state and political system —the Chavista model—which, whilst achieving relative stability through popular participation, failed after 15 years in power to manage or channel the political conflict in a stable manner.

The national crisis we refer to—which led to foreign invasion—expresses, in an aggravated form, the same kind of effect that previous conflicts had on the nation: its social petrification, the dissolution of the people's connections with the elites, and the fading of faith in the nation's collective capacities.

The Foundations of a Political Reconstitution to Recover the Nation

Within this context—which is not dissimilar to processes of recolonisation, war and dispossession in other parts of the world—the questions raised by this issue of *Metapolis* invite us to reflect on strategies of resistance, narratives and lessons learnt. These forms of resistance, from our perspective, are nothing other than the drive of peoples who struggle to remain united, to recognise and defend their territories, traditions and identities; who fight for their collective existence and vital resources; who fight for their nation.

In a world marked by "gunboat diplomacy", where the international order is fracturing, and the threat of nuclear war is once again a genuine risk, the reconstruction of the internal political community is a precondition for survival.

What we are currently witnessing in Venezuela is a *sui generis* form of imperialist domination: Chavismo continues to hold power, and we do not see US troops maintaining public order. However, we do observe a form of guardianship expressed in far-reaching changes to the legislation that regulates the extraction of natural resources, trade conditions—international arbitration—and the management of funds earned from Venezuela's oil sales—mediated by the US Treasury Department. Similarly, whilst Chavismo controls power and the threat of civil war appears to be contained, the underlying political conflict that sparked the national crisis remains unresolved. On the one hand, the opposition's leading figure, María Machado, is lobbying in Washington, pressing for her return to Venezuela, for the economic stranglehold on the country to be maintained, and for immediate elections. On the other hand and in the face of the kidnapping of the president, the government operates under an interim leader who, lacking the strength that comes from a direct election, is subject to all manner of pressures to plunder Venezuela's resources.

Under these conditions, the Venezuelan people face a critical challenge: either to rebuild their nation-state or to be condemned to its dissolution and annexed as a people—a nation—by another. Faced with this existential challenge, society harbours three major movements. A first movement is embodied by a segment of society that appears unwilling to relinquish its sovereignty, and which seeks to reclaim it through the broad principles of democracy that it has, albeit with setbacks, built: rights, agreements and consensus as the basis for coexistence. In this regard, changes have taken place in the state's policies of social control—such as the amnesty law—providing opportunities for society to return to public deliberation. Society is speaking out, beginning to take to the streets and discuss politics—albeit within the framework of its most fundamental demands: its economic rights. The small organisations that months ago were calling out alone for democratic rights and guarantees are now beginning to fill spaces and organise themselves more effectively. They are being heard in the hope of advancing an institutional normalisation process that will create the best conditions for an electoral scenario in which the political conflict can be resolved sustainably.

A second group consists of those who are "*burnt out*" of politics. Having no ties to any collective organisation and suffering the consequences of a political crisis that has driven many loved ones from the country and plunged millions into poverty, they have lost all hope and trust in the political class. They do not believe that Venezuelan politicians are capable of governing the country effectively. This is a segment of the population that could harbour dangerous feelings of political frustration, which, if not countered by credible political alternatives, could push them to accept the institutionalisation of a foreign government. The assessment made in this regard by the Chavista leader Elías Jaua—Hugo Chávez's vice-president—clearly illustrates the problems of the Venezuelan political class:

> "The greatest mistake committed by our political generation has been our inability or lack of will to manage the political conflict in a national and democratic manner. That grave error opened the door to foreign interference that has jeopardised the security and dignity of the entire nation. That foreign interference has never sought the welfare of our nation, but rather control of our energy and mineral resources, and it exploited our irresolvable differences to achieve this" (Elías Jaua, Chávez's vice-president, April 2026)

The nation, understood as a collective endeavour, remains the primary instrument for defending independence and a dignified life in times of global disorder.

A third movement is represented by highly politicised social groups from all walks of life, harbouring resentment, wounds and a desire for revenge against those they consider enemies. These groups exist because the political conflict that fragmented the nation produced numerous victims on both sides of the political divide—Chavistas and opponents—who have been exploited by a far-right narrative demanding retribution. However, under current conditions, where the conflict remains active, a logic of punishment and revenge would exacerbate the spiral of state crisis already ravaging the country.

Out of these three political movements, the one that stands out as the alternative most likely to rebuild the nation along a new historical trajectory is the first, as it appears to be a grassroots force drawing on a variety of stances and articulating itself around a strategy of common ground. "New" because it seeks to overcome the legacy of the existential conflict that has weakened the nation-state throughout this period. It is a movement that could harness social assets of enormous value.

Despite the crisis, Venezuela retains a well-organised and mobilised civil society, as well as a People's Power—aligned with Chavism—which, over the years, has built solid experiences of participation and alternative economies—Communes, Community Councils, local productive networks, etc.—that today can diversify and enrich forms of political representation. All these structures, born from the grassroots, have the capacity to challenge the ruling class and demand an ethical and policy renewal that restores legitimacy to the parties and confidence that the nation can govern itself. In a context of foreign guardianship and widespread distrust, these forms of popular organisation constitute a reservoir of social sovereignty that can drive a democratic reconstruction of the nation-state.

In this sense, it must be noted that, whilst 3 January established an overt regime of foreign tutelage over the Venezuelan state, in terms of domestic politics, it functioned as a "political reset" that has left open the values that govern collective life. It therefore presents itself as an intensely political moment that opens up new possibilities for articulating a change in the ways through which we fight for the agreements that organise society.

Conclusions

History shows that national disintegration opens the door to imperial domination. But it also teaches us that nations can rebuild themselves when their societies regain the capacity to deliberate, organise and recognise themselves as a political entity. In Venezuela, despite foreign tutelage and internal division, signs of recovery are emerging: social sectors are reclaiming the public sphere, demanding rights and seeking to rebuild the basic consensus necessary for democratic coexistence. This movement—still fragile—constitutes the country's most important asset.

In a world marked by "gunboat diplomacy", where the international order is fracturing, and the threat of nuclear war is once again a genuine risk, the reconstruction of the internal political community is a precondition for survival. Only a cohesive nation can contest the margins of sovereignty in a global landscape trending towards re-colonisation and dispossession. Venezuelan history confirms this: Simón Bolívar was able to undertake his emancipatory struggle only because he succeeded in articulating a collective political entity, uniting diverse regions, classes, and social groups under a common vision for independence. Without that unity, breaking away from the Spanish empire would have been impossible.

Today, in the same way, the possibility of Venezuela regaining its sovereignty hinges on its ability to reconstitute itself as a nation, to overcome the logic of existential antagonism, and to rebuild a shared space where differences can be resolved democratically. If Venezuelan society manages to consolidate this process of recovery—based on deliberation, participation and institutional reconstruction—it will be able to stake its claim in a turbulent world without being reduced to an object of foreign guardianship. It is therefore clear that the nation, understood as a collective endeavour, remains the primary instrument for defending independence and a dignified life in times of global disorder.

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[1] Hobson, John A. *El imperialismo: un estudio* [Imperialism: a Case Study]. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981; Lenin, Vladimir Ilich. *El imperialismo, fase superior del capitalismo* [Imperialism: the Advanced Stage of Capitalism]. Madrid: Akal, 2014; Arrighi, Giovanni. *El largo siglo XX: dinero, poder y los orígenes de nuestro tiempo* [The Long 20th Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Time]. Madrid: Akal, 1999

[2] Turchin, Peter y Sergey A. Nefedov. *Ciclos seculares: dinámicas históricas de Estados y sociedades* [Secular Cycles: Historical Dynamics of States and Societies]. Madrid: Akal, 2015.

[3] Portantiero, Juan Carlos (1998). "Notas sobre crisis y producción de acción hegemónica" [Notes on Crisis and the Production of Hegemonic Action]. En Labastida Martín del Campo (Coord.) (1998). *Hegemonía y Alternativas Políticas en América Latina* [Hegemony and Political Alternatives in Latin America]. México: Siglo XXI Editores.

[4] A conflict that had been dormant since the 1966 Geneva Agreement —which proposed a practical and satisfying solution through diplomatic channels— until 2023. And which was reignited when Guyana—in partnership with ExxonMobil and with Washington's support—upset the political balance by launching a round of tenders for oil fields in waters that Venezuela claims belong to its Atlantic coastline, seeking a final ruling on the territorial dispute from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

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05. ARAB EXISTENTIALISM IN THE FACE OF REGIONAL RIVALRIES

Zeidon Alkinani

Rethinking the Arab Strategic Framework and the Rise of Non-Arab Power Competition in the Post-American Middle East

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Introduction: The End of the American Ordering Principle

The regional architecture of the Middle East was constructed on a foundational premise: that US primacy would function as the structural guarantor of stability among otherwise competing and fragile states. From the Carter Doctrine to the Gulf War coalition, from Operation Iraqi Freedom to the Abraham Accords, Washington served as the indispensable ordering authority—the external reference point against which Arab states calibrated their security postures, their economic partnerships, and their diplomatic alignments.

That premise no longer holds. The process of US retrenchment is neither accidental nor reversible. Across successive administrations—Obama's strategic pivot to Asia, the first and second Trump terms' transactional bilateralism, Biden's selective re-engagement—the United States has progressively reduced its appetite for absorbing the costs of regional order maintenance. What has replaced US primacy is not a new hegemon but a structural vacancy, and into that vacancy three non-Arab regional powers have inserted their competing projects.

Mainly Iran and Israel, and currently much less soTürkiye, are not merely influential actors in the Middle East; they are advancing qualitatively distinct visions of regional order—or, more precisely, qualitatively distinct strategies for exploiting regional disorder. They are doing so in an Arab state system that, for reasons rooted deeply in history, institutional design, and the structural legacies of colonialism, is incapable of mounting a coherent collective response.

This article advances three interconnected arguments. First, Arab strategic fragmentation is not an accident of culture or personality but a structurally reproduced outcome: the predictable result of asymmetric external penetration operating in the absence of a regional counterweight. Second, fragmentation and penetration are mutually constitutive—each reinforces the structural conditions for the other, and this dynamic cannot be arrested through bilateral hedging strategies by individual Arab states. Third, Arab fragmentation has ceased to be a merely regional governance deficit; it now constitutes a source of systemic risk to the global political economy, with consequences for energy security, maritime commerce, and global capital flows that extend far beyond the region's borders.

The article proceeds in seven substantive sections. It begins with a historical account of Arab identity formation, the rise and collapse of pan-Arabism (Arab nationalism), and the structural lessons of that trajectory. It then develops the theoretical

framework—the penetrated regionalism model—before examining the receding US ordering role, mapping the tripartite non-Arab competition, and analysing Arab fragmentation as a structural enabler of external penetration. The article then turns to the global political economy stakes before concluding with a normative architecture for structured Arab multilateralism.

I. From Ottoman Dissolution to Post-Arab Spring Fragmentation

Iran, Israel, and Türkiye are advancing distinct strategies for exploiting regional disorder.

Colonial Cartography and the Paradox of Statehood

Arab political identity did not emerge from the boardrooms of European imperial powers but from the intellectual ferment of the Arab Nahda—the nineteenth-century renaissance of Arabic-language thought that generated a distinctly Arab political consciousness across Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and Baghdad. The 1916 Arab Revolt translated this cultural solidarity into an attempted political project, only to collide immediately with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the foundational betrayal that placed Arab political aspiration and European imperial cartography in permanent structural tension.

The mandate system that followed produced the paradox at the heart of Arab political modernity: the same colonial state-building process that frustrated pan-Arab aspirations also generated the competitive state interests that would eventually destroy them. Ruling elites in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt developed increasingly powerful stakes in their own territorial sovereignty. The structural tension between Arab unity as aspiration and Arab statehood as interest was encoded from the outset.

The Rise and Fall of Pan-Arabism

The Arab League's founding in 1945 was the first institutional expression of Arab collective identity—but its organising logic, sovereign equality rather than federal union, simultaneously enabled collective action and constrained it. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe) discredited existing Arab ruling elites and created the conditions for a new generation of revolutionary nationalist politics.

Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt—culminating in the 1956 Suez Crisis and the United Arab Republic (UAR)—represented pan-Arabism's maximum ambition. The UAR's collapse in 1961 was the first major institutional demonstration that Arab unity was easier to aspire to than to institutionalise. [1] The Ba'ath Party's competing vision, dominant in Syria and Iraq, transformed pan-Arab ideology from a popular movement into a legitimating vocabulary for single-party authoritarian rule.

The June 1967 War against Israel delivered the decisive blow. The swift military defeat was not merely a military loss but a civilisational shock—the Naksa (setback)—that discredited secular pan-Arab nationalism and accelerated a turn toward Islamist politics. The 1973 oil embargo transferred material power from the populous republican nationalist states to the conservative Gulf monarchies, shifting Arab political gravity decisively. Egypt's Camp David Accords in 1979 formalised the outcome: the most powerful Arab state had permanently opted out of the pan-Arab confrontational posture toward Israel.

The Arab Spring and Definitive Fragmentation

The 2010–2011 uprisings briefly appeared as a pan-Arab moment—simultaneous popular mobilisations reflecting shared social grievances across a dozen states. They were not. Pan-Arab solidarity expressed itself at the level of shared sentiment; it was

absent as political framework, institutional architecture, or coordinated strategy. The divergent trajectories of the uprisings—Tunisia's democratic reversal, Egypt's military restoration, Libya's civil war, Yemen's catastrophic conflict, Syria's decade-long destruction—were not accidents. They were structural outcomes of an Arab state system that lacked collective governance capacity.

The Syrian war became the culminating expression of Arab political fragmentation: a multi-party proxy conflict involving Iran, Türkiye, Russia, Israel, the US, and multiple Arab states, with no collective Arab framework capable of shaping its outcome. The 2017 Gulf crisis—the Saudi-UAE-led blockade of Qatar—and the 2025 Saudi-UAE rift revealed that even within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), underlying divergences were sufficient to produce open political rupture within the region's most institutionally developed sub-framework.

The structural lesson of this arc is precise: pan-Arabism's collapse is not the end of Arab identity but the end of a historically contingent political project that attempted to translate cultural solidarity into unified foreign policy. The absence of institutional architecture capable of managing internal differences—not the absence of Arab solidarity—is what failed. And that structural diagnosis points directly toward the institutional remedy.

II. Theoretical Framework: The Penetrated Regionalism Model

This article's central theoretical intervention is straightforward: Arab strategic fragmentation is not a residual condition of failed state-building but a structurally reproduced outcome of asymmetric external penetration operating in the absence of a coherent regional counterweight. Three dominant theoretical accounts—realist balancing, constructivist identity, and liberal institutionalism—each capture part of the picture while missing its structure.

Realist accounts predict coalition formation against concentrated external threats, yet Arab states have systematically under-balanced against the tripartite non-Arab rivalry. Constructivist accounts overestimate normative solidarity as a political resource. Liberal institutionalist accounts underestimate how existing institutions have been hollowed out by the very fragmentation dynamics they were designed to manage.

The Arab world's structural position in the global economy is not peripheral (…) Three maritime chokepoints —the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab el-Mandeb, and the Suez Canal— collectively handle an estimated 30% of global seaborne trade.

Buzan and Wæver's RSCT provides the foundational framework: regional security dynamics driven by patterns of amity and enmity among geographically proximate states. [2] The Arab Middle East constitutes a fractured security complex—unlike a classical regional security complex (RSC) with a dominant internal ordering pole, the Arab sub-complex lacks a single organising centre and is simultaneously penetrated by three non-Arab regional powers. This article extends RSCT through the concept of *differential penetration*—the condition in which external powers exploit not merely the absence of regional order, but the specific fault lines within the penetrated complex.

Walt's balance-of-threat theory refines the picture: proximity, offensive capability, and perceived aggressive intent operate differently across Arab states, producing the divergent Saudi-UAE deterrence orientation versus the Qatari-Omani diplomacy orientation. [3] Individual Arab states perceive the three external powers asymmetrically, preventing the formation of a unified threat perception. Bilateral security relationships with external guarantors substitute for collective Arab balancing—what this article terms *alignment substitution*.

Drawing on comparative regionalism scholarship—particularly Acharya, Fawcett, and Hurrell—the article assesses what forms of regional institutionalisation are feasible under conditions of internal heterogeneity and external penetration. [4][5][6] The article's institutional design conclusion is structured multilateralism: binding coordination mechanisms on specific high-stakes domains that do not require prior resolution of bilateral disputes as a precondition for collective action.

Fragmentation and external penetration are mutually constitutive—each reinforces the structural conditions for the other.

The article's distinctive contribution is an additional dimension: Arab fragmentation constitutes not merely a regional governance deficit but a source of systemic risk to the global political economy. Drawing on interdependence theory, the Arab world's structural position as energy provider, host of maritime chokepoints, and node in global investment flows repositions the argument for Arab multilateralism from regional aspiration to systemic necessity.

The penetrated regionalism model synthesises these elements: (i) a regional sub-complex lacks a dominant internal ordering pole; (ii) multiple external powers exploit internal fault lines through differential penetration; (iii) individual member states substitute bilateral external alignment for collective balancing; (iv) the resulting fragmentation produces systemic risk effects extending into the global political economy. The model's prediction is stark: fragmentation will intensify as US ordering capacity recedes unless a qualitatively different Arab collective institution emerges.

III. The Receding American Ordering Role

The arc of US retrenchment from the Middle East spans a generation. The Obama administration's pivot toward Asia, its strategic hesitation over Syria, and the Iran nuclear negotiations signalled a recalibration of US regional priorities. The first Trump administration's transactional bilateralism—maximalist pressure on Iran, the Abraham Accords, but strategic indifference to Arab state security concerns—introduced further uncertainty. The Biden administration's selective re-engagement could not reverse structural trends. The second Trump administration has continued a pattern of selective presence combined with reduced appetite for the costs of regional order maintenance.

The critical distinction is between military presence and structural influence. US forces remain deployed across the region, yet their presence no longer functions as a structural guarantor of regional order. The 2019 Aramco strikes—in which Iranian-aligned forces struck the heart of Saudi oil infrastructure with limited US response—demonstrated in real time that extended deterrence had become contingent rather than credible. The 2026 Iran-Israel war, with its cascading effects on the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf energy markets, underscored the same point at a greater scale.

Intra-Arab trade represents less than 10% of total Arab external trade—one of the lowest regional trade integration figures globally.

Arab states have responded to US retrenchment through hedging and alignment diversification—engaging China, Russia, and Türkiye as partial counterweights while maintaining core security relationships with Washington. This response is individually rational but collectively self-defeating. Greater freedom of manoeuvre for individual Arab states has not produced greater collective Arab leverage; it has produced a competitive fragmentation of diplomatic and economic assets that external powers exploit with precision.

IV. Three Non-Arab Powers, Three Projects

Iran: Network Power and the Axis of Resistance

Iran's regional strategy is distinctive in kind, not merely in degree. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—Quds Force (IRGC-QF) model does not pursue hegemony through conventional military projection; it pursues permanent indispensability—ensuring that no regional settlement of consequence is possible without Tehran's participation. The instrument is a network of ideologically aligned non-state actors: Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Iran-backed groups within the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) in Iraq, the toppled Assad government in Syria, and, to a much lesser extent, the Houthis in Yemen and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza.

This network gives Iran geographic reach from the Lebanese Mediterranean coast to the Red Sea—an arc of influence that, at its most functional, constitutes a

near-continuous corridor of political leverage. The 2026 Iran-Israel war represented a strategic inflexion point: Iran demonstrated a willingness to absorb significant military degradation while sustaining retaliatory reach into the Gulf, signalling that its core strategic posture is resilient to conventional military pressure.

Israel: Security Architecture and the Normalisation Frontier

Israel's regional strategy has undergone a structural transformation in the post-Oslo era. The Abraham Accords—normalisation agreements with the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco—represent not merely diplomatic achievements but a reordering of the Arab-Israeli strategic relationship: the construction of a security architecture bypassing Arab publics to build state-level partnerships around shared threat perception, principally toward Iran.

Israel's preemptive military posture operates across multiple simultaneous theatres—Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, and the 2026 Iran campaign. The strategic logic of normalisation from above is complementary to this posture: embedding Israel as an indispensable security partner within the Arab state system while retaining unilateral freedom of military action when deemed necessary.

Türkiye: Neo-Ottoman Reach and the Soft-Hard Power Combination

Türkiye's regional repositioning combines a growing military footprint—northern Syria, Libya, Somalia, and the Qatar base—with sophisticated soft power instruments: the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), educational networks, humanitarian diplomacy, and increasingly, drone technology exports that have reshaped military balances in multiple conflict theatres. Türkiye presents itself as a legitimate co-architect of regional order, benefitting from its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) membership while maintaining strategic ambiguity toward both Russia and Iran.

Türkiye's ambition is structurally distinct from Iran's or Israel's: it does not seek permanent indispensability through proxy networks, nor security architecture through normalisation. It seeks recognition as an indispensable regional power in its own right—a Muslim-majority NATO member capable of bridging Western and Islamic political worlds while projecting autonomous strategic influence.

Arab sovereign wealth funds collectively manage over 4 trillion USD in global assets—yet compete against each other in the same markets, neutralising collective leverage.

Interaction Effects: Where the Three Projects Collide

The three projects do not operate in parallel isolation. Syria has become the most acute theatre of tripartite overlap, with Iranian, Israeli, and Turkish military presences simultaneously operating—and occasionally colliding—across a single state's territory. The Palestine question functions as a fault line that differentiates Iranian and Turkish postures from the Israeli-normalisation agenda. Points of inadvertent convergence also exist: competition among the three external powers can paradoxically stabilise certain local dynamics while destabilising others, as each power has structural incentives to prevent total collapse in areas of its investment.

V. Arab Fragmentation as Structural Enabler

Arab fragmentation is not simply the context within which external penetration occurs—it is the structural condition that external powers actively exploit and perpetuate. Three mechanisms are central.

First, competing foreign alignments within the Arab world eliminate the possibility of unified threat perception. The Saudi-UAE deterrence axis, oriented primarily

toward Iran, pursues strategic postures that the Qatari and Omani diplomacy camps regard with suspicion. Egypt's retrenchment and Iraq's entrapment between Iranian influence and Gulf financing produce further divergence. No single external threat generates a convergent Arab response because no shared threat hierarchy exists.

The failure of maximalist pan-Arabism as a political project does not foreclose a minimalist but binding Arab multilateral framework.

Second, external powers exploit intra-Arab religious, sectarian, and identity cleavages with precision. Iran's instrumentalisation of Shia political networks across Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain has been the most visible example—but it is not unique. [7] Türkiye's deployment of Sunni solidarity narratives and the selective use of Palestinian solidarity as a legitimating frame by multiple external actors reflects a broader pattern of identity weaponisation against which Arab collective frameworks have no adequate response.

Third, and most consequentially, bilateral hedging strategies by individual Arab states accelerate rather than arrest collective strategic incoherence. When a Gulf state deepens its security relationship with Washington, tightens its economic links with Beijing, and simultaneously pursues diplomatic accommodation with Tehran, it is individually rational—but collectively, the multiplication of these strategies across a dozen Arab states produces a competitive fragmentation of diplomatic and economic assets that external powers read, correctly, as an open invitation for differential engagement.

VI. The Global Stakes: Arab Fragmentation as Systemic Economic Risk

The Arab World's Structural Position in the Global Economy

The Arab world's structural position in the global economy is not peripheral. Arab states account for approximately 30% of global oil production and hold over 55% of proven global oil reserves; Gulf liquefied natural gas (LNG) represents a critical and non-substitutable component of European, Asian, and South Asian energy security. [8] Three maritime chokepoints—the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab el-Mandeb, and the Suez Canal—collectively handle an estimated 30% of global seaborne trade. Their security is structurally inseparable from Arab political coherence.

Arab sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) collectively manage in excess of 4 trillion USD in global assets, representing one of the largest concentrations of patient, long-term capital in the world. Arab states sit at the intersection of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), Chinese Belt and Road investments, and African development financing, positioning the region as a structural node in the next generation of global trade and infrastructure architecture.

The Economic Cost of Fragmentation

The economic costs of Arab fragmentation are concrete and quantifiable. Fragmented Arab SWFs frequently compete against one another in the same global asset classes, depressing returns and reducing collective negotiating leverage. Intra-Arab trade represents less than 10% of total Arab external trade—one of the lowest regional trade integration figures globally. Arab states collectively spend among the highest proportions of gross domestic product (GDP) on defence globally, yet without coordinated procurement, joint capability development, or interoperable command structures, this expenditure generates less collective security than its scale implies.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) into Arab markets carries a structural political risk premium that reflects the absence of a regional framework providing investors with predictable rules of engagement across borders. The absence of harmonised regulatory frameworks and visa regimes means the region captures a fraction of the connectivity rents its geography would otherwise command.

The 2026 Iran-Israel War as Economic Stress Test

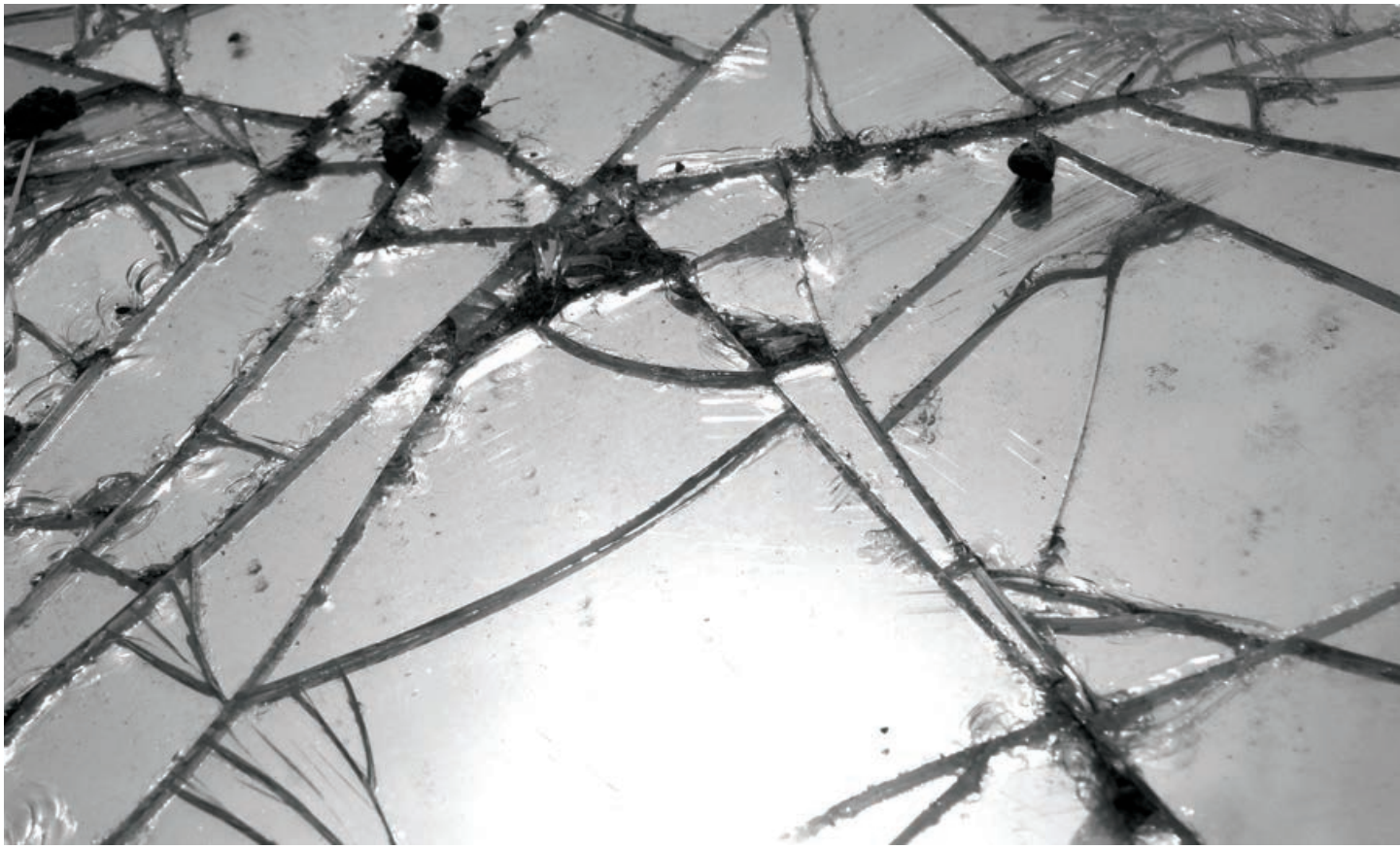
The 2026 Iran-Israel conflict provided a real-time demonstration of the economic fragility that Arab political fragmentation produces. The effective partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz disrupted approximately 20% of global oil and LNG supply —cascading effects that extended from European spot markets to South Asian energy security arrangements. The absence of a coordinated Arab economic response meant individual SWFs managed conflict-driven market volatility in isolation.

The investor confidence deficit generated by the conflict—the demonstration that Arab states could be individually targeted without triggering collective Arab response—reinforced the perception that Arab economic assets remain individually exposed. The reconstruction challenge underscored the case for a collective Arab economic resilience framework capable of distributing recovery costs and coordinating post-conflict reconstruction financing.

VII. Toward Structured Arab Multilateralism

Why Existing Frameworks Fall Short

The GCC has achieved partial success—monetary coordination, common market elements, and defence cooperation among six Gulf states—but is geographically and politically insufficient as a broader Arab collective action framework. The Arab League has been hollowed out by competing member state interests and lacks the enforcement mechanisms to function as a genuine collective security or economic institution. Bilateral partnerships with external powers—however valuable—cannot substitute for the collective leverage and systemic risk reduction that only a multilateral Arab framework can generate.



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The Arab world's most consequential strategic choice in the coming decade is not which external power to align with—but whether to present itself as an actor or a terrain.

Five Pillars of Structured Arab Multilateralism

The architecture this article proposes is not pan-Arabism revived. It does not aspire to unity of political system or foreign policy. It aspires to structured coordination—binding mechanisms on specific high-stakes domains that do not require resolution of all bilateral disputes as a precondition for collective action.

The first pillar is shared red lines against external interference: a binding collective commitment that any attempt by a non-Arab regional power to instrumentalise domestic Arab political, sectarian, or governance divisions triggers a coordinated Arab diplomatic and economic response. The second is crisis coordination mechanisms: binding consultation protocols automatically activated by external military action, economic coercion, or maritime disruption affecting any Arab state. The third is a unified economic posture: a coordinated framework governing Arab engagement with global investors, energy partners, technology firms, and multilateral institutions—enabling Arab states to negotiate as a bloc. The fourth is diplomatic burden-sharing: a structured division of labour between deterrence-oriented and diplomacy-oriented Arab states that transforms competitive fragmentation into a complementary architecture. The fifth is collective economic resilience infrastructure: a pan-Arab framework for coordinating energy grid interconnection, digital connectivity, food security reserves, and post-conflict reconstruction financing.

The Sovereignty Paradox and Comparative Lessons

The sovereignty paradox is the article's most counterintuitive claim: binding multilateralism enhances rather than diminishes effective autonomy. Smaller Arab states that currently trade sovereignty for bilateral security guarantees from external powers would gain greater collective leverage through a multilateral framework. The institutional design challenge is managing internal heterogeneity—accommodating the diversity of Arab political systems, economic models, and foreign policy orientations without requiring prior harmonisation as a condition of participation. [9]

Two comparative reference points are instructive. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) non-interference-plus-coordination model demonstrates that heterogeneous states with significant internal political divergences can build durable coordination frameworks without requiring political convergence. The African Union's (AU) norm evolution from non-interference to non-indifference offers a model for how Arab states might collectively address the governance crises that enable external penetration. Saudi Arabia, as the region's largest economy and most significant military actor, is the indispensable anchor—but institutional design must distribute decision-making authority and protect smaller state autonomy to prevent the multilateral framework from reproducing Saudi dominance under a collective label.

Conclusion: Collective Architecture as Strategic Necessity

The argument of this article may be summarised in three propositions. First, Arab strategic fragmentation is not an Arab cultural condition but a structurally reproduced outcome of specific historical choices, institutional designs, and the colonial cartography of Arab statehood—and is therefore reversible. Second, the tripartite non-Arab competition among Iran, Israel, and Türkiye will intensify regardless of US strategic posture: retrenchment and re-engagement alike fail to substitute for Arab collective capacity. Third, Arab multilateralism is not a regional aspiration; it is a global systemic requirement—the absence of a coherent Arab interlocutor generates economic and security risks that extend well beyond the region's borders.

From the Nahda to the Arab Revolt, from the Arab League to the UAR, from the Naksa to the Arab Spring, the Arab world has confronted a continuous structural dynamic: the recurring gap between the aspiration for collective action and the institutional architecture capable of sustaining it. The penetrated regionalism of the current moment is not a novel condition but the latest iteration of that dynamic —and the most consequential, because the stakes are now embedded in the global political economy in ways they were not during earlier iterations.

The historical arc teaches a precise lesson: the failure of maximalist pan-Arabism as a political project does not foreclose a minimalist but binding Arab multilateral framework—one that does not aspire to unity but to structured coordination, does not suppress state sovereignty but pools it selectively. The question is whether Arab political leaderships are prepared to recognise that the bilateral hedging strategies that have served individual state interests in the short term are, in aggregate, the mechanism by which their collective strategic position continues to erode.

The Arab world's most consequential strategic choice in the coming decade is not which external power to partner with, but whether to present itself as an actor with collective agency or a terrain on which others' projects are contested. The architecture for the former exists; what remains is the political will to build it.

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06.

TRENCHES OF HOPE: ECOTOPIAS IN AN UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD

Eva Saldaña Buenache

Jun, 2026

This could be the headline of our times: *The geopolitics of fear and fossil colonialism as drivers of contemporary barbarism*. Halfway through 2026, we can see that the 21st century is haemorrhaging due to structural extractive violence. The global map has been aggressively redrawn under the banner of what we might call "fossil colonialism". The Trump administration, in the name of so-called energy security, is cementing expansionism and military interference. This regressive doctrine has been evidenced by the invasion of Venezuela, threats of corporate and sovereign incursion into Greenland or Cuba, and the open conflict between the United States and Israel against Iran. It is no geographical coincidence: the main theatres of war coincide precisely with the last reserves of fossil fuels that the planet, for the very sake of climate security, cannot afford to burn.

We are trapped in a calculated geopolitics of fear. We are told, through the megaphones of power, that to maintain our "freedom" and well-being in the Global North, we must continue to acquiesce to the destruction of the rights of the peoples of the Global South. We are faced with the ultimate expression of a world turned *upside down*: a system that destroys, in the name of security, the material foundations sustaining life and uses induced scarcity to paralyse the collective political imagination.

This fossil-fuel-dependent, imperialist and militarised model, however, is a giant with feet of clay. The extreme volatility of the financial and energy markets, coupled with suffocating inflation that punishes ordinary families on a daily basis—driving up utility bills, fuel costs and grocery prices—is not a glitch in the system: these are intrinsic features of its design. Absolute dependence on gas, coal and oil not only destroys ecosystems and drives climate change, but also funds authoritarian regimes, fuels global wars and renders us profoundly vulnerable to the tyrants of capital.

Faced with this stark diagnosis, paralysis is not an acceptable option. Breaking out of this chain of dependency is not merely a matter of environmental mitigation: it represents the greatest and most pressing act of peace-building of our era. Decarbonising Western economies is, in essence, demilitarising international relations. Recognising this interconnection places an immense historical and moral responsibility upon us. We cannot stand idly by because the technical, social and political solutions already exist, and because turning this reality on its head is the only viable path to guaranteeing dignified lives worth living. This course correction will not arise from concessions made by elites, but from our collective capacity to *hack* this dystopian present and establish a new paradigm of shared, ecofeminist and demilitarised security. And this inevitably entails transitioning from an extractivist economy to one that respects nature's cycles.

Genocide, Ecocide and Resistance: From the *Global Sumud Flotilla* to Planetary Justice

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In this world turned *upside down*, where those who defend human rights are persecuted, and those who finance human and planetary destruction sit on boards of directors, trenches are no longer merely a place of transit or a space for tragic, defensive confinement: they become an active ethical stance and a laboratory for transformative civil disobedience. When, on 15 April 2026, Greenpeace's ship *Arctic Sunrise* set sail to join the *Global Sumud Flotilla* in the Mediterranean Sea, it did so not under the logic of charitable aid; but with the firm determination to act as a disruptive political agent, accompanying and empowering a global citizenry determined to demonstrate that their collective dreams of justice are infinitely more powerful than the fears instilled by those in power. Our mission there has been clear: to help break the criminal siege and demand an immediate end to systematic genocide and ecocide.

In the Gaza Strip, the war machine is not only claiming human lives in an atrocious manner: it is deliberately destroying the biophysical infrastructure, the material foundation that makes it possible to even conceive of a viable future in the region. As we have publicly stated from the front lines of the protest, genuine peace can never be reduced to the mere absence of bombings or a temporary armed truce. Real peace is defined by a population's structural capacity to drink clean water from its aquifers, breathe air free from military toxins, and grow healthy food in soil free from poison.

The scientific and cartographic analysis of this catastrophe reveals devastating figures [1]: over 81% of Gaza's agricultural land has been completely razed or irreversibly poisoned by the Israeli Army's operations, whilst 95% of the available water has become toxic and undrinkable due to the deliberate collapse of sanitation systems. This planned annihilation of local ecosystems and water networks is not collateral damage of war, but a military strategy of occupation and ecological *apartheid*.

Against this backdrop, we at Greenpeace raise our voices with absolute conviction and intellectual rigour: there is no such thing as climate justice—nor will there ever be—on occupied, militarised and colonised lands. There is a fundamental ethical contradiction in seeking to build a green, circular or sustainable future upon the mass suffering and extermination of human communities. To silence the Palestinian genocide, or any other imperialist aggression in the Global South, is to implicitly validate an unacceptable thesis: that ecology is a "luxury" reserved exclusively for times of peace in wealthy nations, and not a requirement for biological survival and universal human rights.

The journey of the *Arctic Sunrise* alongside the Freedom and Dignity Flotilla to Gaza stands as the great metaphor of our era. It signifies moving forward with determination against the geopolitical siege, defying the paralysis they seek to instil in us, and unwaveringly recognising that the inalienable right of peoples to exist is the cornerstone upon which any ecotopia is built. We do not ask permission to exercise our humanity: we organise ourselves to defend it wherever life is under attack.

The Audacity of Self-Sufficiency: Designing and Building Together a Future that Already Dwells within Us

It is precisely from this intersection between active resistance and international advocacy that we must move, with audacity, towards the architecture of real alternatives. The prevailing system has trained us in the false assumption that there is no alternative to unlimited growth and the irrational exploitation of resources, but reality shows us that true realism lies in designing structures that fit within the Earth's biophysical limits.

Drawing inspiration from the pioneering scientific principles of Donella H. Meadows, set out as early as the 1970s in *The Limits to Growth* [2]; but also by various post-growth and degrowth economic models that followed [3], we must be able to recognise that the insatiable appetite of a significant part of our industrial society towards the constant accumulation of objects and the pursuit of activities and processes regardless of the energy they consume is nothing more than a neurotic symptom. A failed attempt to satisfy, through the consumption of ephemeral goods, deeply human yet strictly non-material needs, such as identity, community, self-esteem, affection, beauty and a sense of purpose. Fossil capitalism has systematically swindled us by selling us purely material, extractive solutions in response to longings that can only be satisfied in the social, relational, and community spheres—essentially, through a more harmonious and regenerative relationship with nature.

Greenpeace Spain & Portugal's policy proposal in response to these challenges is comprehensive, systemic and solution-oriented. In addition to being set out in this article, it is summarised in a strategic roadmap for the Iberian Peninsula, whose title is a declaration of intent and principles: "Energy for a better life" [4]. This document is by no means a rationing catalogue or a punitive austerity plan for the working classes: on the contrary, it is a political manifesto for social and energy emancipation, as well as a proposal for a new relationship with life and future generations. We dare to propose a rigorous and viable sufficiency scenario with our sights set on the year 2040—a deadline that is absolutely essential to reach the net-zero emissions target and fulfil our climate commitments and historical responsibility. The proposal is structured around three fundamental pillars, which challenge the rationale of the system and the interests of the energy oligopoly:

- A 39% reduction in final energy consumption. This goal cannot be achieved through individual sacrifice or the impoverishment of those at the bottom of the ladder, but rather through the comprehensive and planned redesign of "15-minute cities"—with local public services—, the overhaul of bloated transport systems —based on the "one person, one car" mantra—and the energy-efficient refurbishment of buildings and homes; alongside the electrification of industrial processes, the provision of energy services with the lowest possible consumption —efficiency—and, most significantly, the elimination of activities and processes that consume energy but do not contribute to social well-being—sufficiency.

  In this new design for urban and regional daily life, we must dare to right the world and understand that public transport must become the next pillar of the welfare state [5]. By contrast, in the current *upside-down system*, private combustion-engine cars and aviation—inaccessible to the majority of socially vulnerable people—are subsidised with public funds, whilst the trains, trams and buses that connect our suburbs and rural areas are underfunded. Sustainable, collective and affordable mobility is not merely a cosmetic addition: it is a tool for redistributing wealth, health and life expectancy. Guaranteeing a high-quality public transport network, fully electrified and supplemented by universal social fares, is the only real way to break the monopoly of fossil-fueled roads over mobility. It is the only way to ensure that the right to travel, to work and to study does not depend on one's bank balance. We must therefore commit to transforming the commuter train into a rolling social safety net, freeing families from the tyranny of fuel costs.

- Genuine, clean and diversified energy sovereignty. For this change to be structural, it is not enough to consume less alone; we must transform how we produce energy. In contrast to the fossil fuel and nuclear oligopoly model, we advocate a 100% renewable roadmap for the Iberian Peninsula [6], which meets society's energy needs—adjusted for sufficiency and efficiency—with the lowest possible impact and cost. This technical alternative demonstrates, through

Decarbonising Western economies represents the greatest and most pressing act of peace-building of our era. (…) It means, in essence, demilitarising international relations.

empirical data, that democratic and citizen-led energy sovereignty is viable if based on a distributed deployment of facilities; prioritising self-consumption, local energy communities and regional participation. We do not need to continue using fossil fuels that suffocate life on the planet, nor nuclear energy that dooms future generations. Nor do we need to continue devastating ecosystems or encroaching on high-value agricultural land: the renewable roadmap we propose demonstrates that it is possible to achieve net-zero emissions by 2040 in a way that respects biodiversity and without relying on fuels or minerals sourced from conflict zones or through neocolonialism.

- An architecture of happiness and emotional durability. It is urgent that we fundamentally replace planned obsolescence with the value of what is durable, repairable and shared. We must collectively ask a question long forbidden by the market: how much energy do we truly need to ensure a happy, fulfilling and secure existence for all humanity and for those who come after us? The scientific answer is clear-cut: we require far less than the financial system forces us to burn through daily in its mad dash towards the abyss. Having demonstrated that we do not need to destroy the planet to live better, the major debate we must now tackle is where we draw the line, and how we allocate the carbon budget that will allow us to continue living with dignity.

In the Gaza Strip, the war machine is not only claiming human lives in an atrocious manner: it is deliberately destroying the biophysical infrastructure, the material foundation that makes it possible to even conceive of a viable future in the region.

This paradigm shift ties in directly with the principles of ecofeminism [7], a school of thought and action that reminds us we are ecodependent and interdependent beings. Putting life at the core means dismantling the pyramid of patriarchal and anthropocentric domination that disregards care and social reproduction—precisely the things that sustain our daily existence.

Nevertheless, the Iberian ecological transition cannot be limited to replacing combustion engines with electric ones whilst leaving class and gender hierarchies intact: it must be a process that acts as a beacon of transformation for Europe—and, if we set our ambitions high, for other countries in the Global North—demonstrating that sufficiency must be part of the democratic path to ensure the redistribution of material wealth whilst multiplying relational wealth. It is a moral responsibility towards our sons and daughters, and future generations: not to bequeath to them a scorched planet, but a clear roadmap demonstrating that we were able to organise in time to live better with less pressure on the biosphere.

Housing as a Laboratory for Alternative Futures: The Right to Shelter and Climate

If energy represents the vital force that flows through and invigorates our societies, housing constitutes the fundamental architectural and social vessel in which that life can flourish and be cared for with absolute dignity. In the current context of global polycrisis, it would be theoretically impossible and politically irresponsible to divorce the housing crisis—which is driving families out of their neighbourhoods—from the climate crisis scorching our cities. The Greenpeace report entitled *Your Key to Decent Housing* [8] makes it abundantly clear that homes cannot continue to be treated as speculative financial assets for the enrichment of hedge funds and tourism operators, but must instead be protected as the first line of biophysical and social defence for citizens against the onslaught of a world in flames.

In the face of a model based on real estate speculation, touristification, and uncontrolled urban development, our organisation advocates a transformative goal: the comprehensive, in-depth renovation of 10 million homes in the Iberian Peninsula by 2040. This figure is neither a pipe dream nor a whimsical target: it reflects the structural scale required to democratise thermal comfort once and for all, eradicate the structural energy poverty suffered by millions of people, ensuring that our homes do not conflict with the climate. In a socio-economic system obsessed with building inefficient new developments and gentrifying city centres for the

quick profit of the markets, proposing a large-scale policy of public renovation of working-class neighbourhoods and an increase in public social housing constitutes an act of political resistance of the highest order. It means stripping the free-market logic of its absolute control over a fundamental constitutional right and returning it to where it should never have left: the sphere of public health, gender equality and redistributive social justice.

A decarbonised, electrified home that is properly insulated and equipped with community solar energy systems should under no circumstances be an "eco-luxury" reserved for the upper-middle classes: it is the most basic material guarantee that vulnerable families are not forced to make the impossible choice between eating properly or turning on the heating in winter—or the air conditioning during summer heatwaves. It is a matter of applying the macroeconomic principle of sufficiency directly to the built environment: we do not need to continue devouring the land with more concrete and asphalt; what we urgently need is to live better, using criteria of justice and efficiency, in what has already been developed.

This is another true urban ecotopia: rethinking cities not as spaces for the accumulation of capital, but as human ecosystems that heal themselves from within their own neighbourhoods; transforming inefficient blocks of flats into genuine community climate shelters, capable of protecting life against the extreme phenomena of climate change.

Food Sovereignty: The Land and Sea, Alive against the Financial Algorithm

The trenches of ecofeminist and grassroots resistance do not end at city limits: they extend with equal urgency towards the furrow, the seed and the rural world. In these turbulent times, fertile land is no longer understood by dominant institutions as a living, complex ecological fabric, but instead relegated to the status of a mere speculative commodity. We are witnessing a global process of agricultural land grabbing on a scale without historical precedent, perpetrated by large international investment funds and venture capital firms which—completely detached and indifferent to the ecological and historical reality of the territories they purchase—are buying thousands of hectares as if acquiring financial derivatives or crypto-assets on a screen. A good example of this is the case of Spanish olive groves [9], which we at Greenpeace have documented. Their sole objective is the maximisation of short-term profit, imposing industrial livestock macro-farms and highly technified intensive monocultures that deplete underground aquifers, poison and desertify the soil with agrochemicals and fossil fertilisers, and irreversibly undermine the social fabric of our villages. This model is not exclusive to agriculture: it is equally replicated in livestock farming and fisheries.

In the face of this brutal offensive by financial capital against the very foundations of human nutrition, the response can be none other than the resolute articulation of food sovereignty. To turn this *upside-down system* on its head, we at Greenpeace have also designed a rigorous alternative: our proposal for a sustainable food model [10], a roadmap for social justice that demonstrates that another way of producing, distributing and consuming is entirely viable if the people who consume and produce—and the ecosystems themselves—are placed at the heart of public policy.

Within this strategic framework, the steadfast defence of family farmsteads, extensive livestock farming and small-scale artisanal fishing is by no means an exercise in folkloric sentimentality or rural nostalgia: it represents one of the most crucial strategies for climate security and civil resilience at our disposal. It is the political recognition that only those communities who are deeply rooted in the land and the sea—and who depend directly on the health of their ecological cycles—possess the genuine interest, historical memory and empirical knowledge necessary to safeguard biodiversity and keep ecosystems alive for future generations.

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Real peace is defined by a population's structural capacity to drink clean water from its aquifers, breathe air free from military toxins, and grow healthy food in soil free from poison.

There is no such thing as climate justice—nor will there ever be—on occupied, militarised and colonised lands.

Food sovereignty, underpinned by the scientific and social pillars of our model, thus positions itself as the true rural ecotopia through three avenues for immediate action:

- Decommodifying the right to food in its entirety. The food security of communities and the constitutional right to healthy nutrition cannot continue to depend on speculative fluctuations or future bets made on the commodity exchanges of Chicago, London or Frankfurt. Food is life, and there are people behind it. It is not a commodity for financial speculation.

- Rootedness and interdependence in the face of corporate extractivism. Whilst investment funds exploit water resources and withdraw unpunished from territories once their soil has been exhausted and salinated; whilst large meat producers farm for export and poison the water; and whilst we overempower —and provide exclusive subsidies—to an industrial fishing fleet that plunders the seas of "third countries"; family and cooperative farming, extensive livestock farming and sustainable fishing anchor the population in rural and coastal areas, generate stable local economies, redistribute wealth and act as the true guardians of the landscape and native biodiversity.

- Climate resilience: agroecology and sustainable fishing. A relocalised food system, based on short supply chains, fair prices for producers and the diversity of agroecological crops or fish species, is infinitely more resilient and robust in the face of global supply crises than the industrial macro-chains controlled by a handful of transnational corporations.

Just as we have argued for the energy sector, the global food system requires an urgent transition towards self-sufficiency, local production and decarbonisation. The planet does not need more polluting mega-farms—whether at sea or on land—nor more industrial agriculture saturated with petrochemical pesticides: what it urgently needs are more people from the sea and the countryside who are committed to the health of ecosystems. Implementing a sustainable food model [11] from the ground up, in the face of the financial system's algorithms, is ultimately about defending our democratic autonomy to decide what we eat, how we feed ourselves, who produces or catches our food and how, and how we inhabit and interact with the landscape that sustains us. It means restoring to the land and the sea their sacred role as the life-giving matrix. Snatching the food system from the hands of those who see in it nothing but a cold balance sheet of profits and losses would, in short, be a savings account for the future of the primary sector and for the feeding of all people.

The Green Social Shield: Protecting Basic Rights as an Ethical and Political Imperative

We do not ask permission to exercise our humanity: we organise ourselves to defend it wherever life is under attack.

In order to sustain over time this enormous project of systemic transformation and resistance against the onslaught of capital, it is not enough just to arm ourselves with the best scientific arguments or the most refined technical proposals: it is absolutely essential that we simultaneously build solid networks of mutual support capable of acting as a real shield for our collective integrity. It is also essential to reach a broad agreement so that the majority of society can make ends meet, averting the "end of the world", guaranteeing present and future well-being, and offering special protection to the groups most exposed to economic and climate insecurity. In a world *turned upside down*, where consumerist hyper-individualism and fierce competition are hailed as social virtues whilst the population's isolation and mental health deteriorate to epidemic levels, the act of loving, caring for and supporting one another as a community ceases to be a merely private or therapeutic matter: it becomes an ethical imperative and one of the most revolutionary and subversive political tools at our disposal.

That is why our policy proposal in the face of social vulnerability is not strictly limited to the environmental realm: it is strongly centred on the demand for a

green, inclusive and democratic social shield [12]. By this notion, we allude to a set of coordinated public policies and community practices specifically designed to protect the social majority through economic and environmental justice solutions. A set of policies that ensures the economic and social costs of the necessary ecological transition are fairly borne by the wealthy and the corporations that have historically enriched themselves through the destruction of the planet—unconditionally safeguarding the rights of the social majority and the most vulnerable groups. The green social shield is the practical embodiment of redistributive justice: a mechanism that ensures no one is left behind in any crisis or transition, turning the ecological transition into a historic opportunity to reduce inequalities of class, gender and background. To be truly robust and resilient, this shield must be complemented by a profound cultural and organisational transformation that places care and compassion at the forefront of a broad and inclusive society.

Transformative activism must not, however, replicate within its own ranks the productivist, self-exploitative and competitive logics characteristic of the very system it seeks to overcome. To do so would be to condemn our teams and activists to chronic exhaustion and burnout. Caring for those who care for the Earth and human rights is a strategic priority of the highest order.

We must be able to design spaces for activism and work that act as safe havens where radical kindness, active listening, the reconciliation of life's rhythms, and the explicit and mutual recognition of our vulnerability and interdependence are not seen as weaknesses, but as the primary sources of our collective strength. Loving one another through action is what makes us politically invincible in the face of the geopolitics of fear. Community affection is the glue that binds the trenches together and the inner energy that allows us to hold onto our smiles and our active hope in the midst of the storm.

The Criminalisation of the Right to Protest: SLAPP Suits and Collective Judicial Response

This growing capacity of self-organised citizens to imagine, co-create and implement real alternatives to disaster has triggered a fierce legal and institutional counter-offensive by those who benefit from the fossil fuel model. At present, social movements must not only devote our energies to mitigating rising global temperatures, protecting ecosystems, halting destructive projects or promoting solutions: we are forced to engage in constant legal battles against a planned offensive of intimidation and judicial persecution. We are witnessing an alarming rise in the criminalisation of protest and so-called Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP). These are tools of legal harassment promoted by large transnational corporations that do not seek justice in the courts, but rather to economically suffocate, psychologically drain and politically paralyse the organisations and activists who dare to expose their environmental crimes and colonial practices.

We have observed with deep concern how certain political and media sectors are deliberately attempting to criminalise peaceful social protest and non-violent direct action, even going so far as to brand as "eco-terrorism" or "vandalism" what is in fact a legitimate exercise of self-defence and freedom of expression. The system, once again in its *upside-down* logic, seeks to judge those who sound the climate alarm whilst granting total impunity and tax incentives to those who continue to dump millions of tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

It is precisely in this hostile environment that the environmentalist legal front stands firm and proves its democratic worth. The irrevocable acquittals of activists in court should not be seen merely as individual procedural reliefs or successes of our lawyers' technical defence: they constitute genuine democratic precedents of inestimable value to civil society as a whole.

Through these rulings, the judiciary is beginning to recognise—with rigour and a focus on fundamental rights—that peaceful civil disobedience does not threaten the democratic order. On the contrary, it acts as an essential safeguard and a legitimate mechanism for political participation when institutions and governments fail resoundingly in their constitutional and historical obligation to protect the lives, health and environment of the population.

However, the democratic response to this civilizational emergency cannot be confined to acts of street-level resistance or reactive legal strategies: it must boldly push the boundaries of institutional innovation. It is a blatant contradiction to attempt to steer a systemic and biophysical transition of this magnitude using the worn-out tools of formal governance, which today is hijacked by short-term electoral politics and the interests of corporate lobbies. Faced with this structural deadlock, political environmentalism must promote and defend the opening of channels for direct and binding participation, such as a permanent citizens' parliament to defend democracy and climate [13]. Only by opening up major strategic state decisions to deliberative citizens' assemblies—selected by lottery and shielded from the financial influence of the fossil fuel oligopoly—will we be able to break the current political deadlock and ensure that regulatory frameworks are, once and for all, subordinate to the objective limits of the biosphere.

Being brave in the 21st century unequivocally means refusing to be intimidated by the spurious use of laws, especially those designed or twisted to shield corporate privilege and the impunity of the elites at the expense of the universal right to a decent life. Let us not forget that the most basic civil, labour and democratic rights we enjoy on a daily basis today—from women's suffrage to unionism and freedom of association, including workplace safety regulations and the protection of natural spaces—were historically classified as "illegal acts" and subversive by the establishment.

The Iberian ecological transition cannot be limited to replacing combustion engines with electric ones whilst leaving class and gender hierarchies intact.

We recognise our own activist DNA in that historical disobedience. Today, our work in the courtrooms is exactly the same as that which we carried out at the cooling towers of thermal power stations, within the supply chains of the arms industry, or in the waters of the Mediterranean: to firmly remind those in power that legality must be subordinate to justice, and that regulations must be living tools for the protection of the biosphere—never containment walls to halt the social change that science and human dignity demand without delay.

Memory as Fuel: From "Impossible" Victories to Earned Collective Rights

When we defend the viability of these specific ecotopias, the economic establishment and the mouthpieces of the *status quo* tend to label us as utopian, naive or removed from reality. They seek to make us forget that the social history of humanity is, in fact, the graveyard of those absolute truths of power once considered unchangeable. The abolition of the legal institution of slavery, the achievement of universal suffrage, the right to divorce and abortion, and the introduction of the eight-hour working day were all dismissed in their respective eras by the ruling classes as senseless, dangerous and unworkable delusions. If today they constitute fundamental and indisputable human rights—at least within these geographical boundaries—it is because there were organised communities that had the audacity and political courage to envision what did not yet exist in the law, and to risk their lives to bring it into reality. Rights do not fall from the sky nor are they benevolent concessions: they are won through collective struggle.

In our immediate territorial context, resounding grassroots victories—such as the definitive shelving of the Altri pulp mill mega-project in Palas de Rei (Galicia) or the social mobilisation that has halted the expansion of the Guggenheim Museum in the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve (Basque Country)—should not be interpreted as

mere local successes or regional environmental conflicts. They are true laboratories of democratic courage and hubs of an interconnected global resistance against extractivist capitalism. These triumphs demonstrate, through the weight of hard facts, that when citizens organise from the grassroots and arm themselves with scientific evidence and social legitimacy, the so-called "common sense" of transnational corporations and complicit administrations buckles and retreats.

Every time green and neighbourhood activism stops a useless, destructive or speculative infrastructure project, it is not only protecting a specific ecosystem, a river or a forest: it is safeguarding our collective mental space and the democratic right to imagine a radically different model of development. We are able to see the living forest where financial logic sees only cubic metres of timber and short-term revenue. We are able to recognise human communities with deep roots and long histories where boards of directors see only "human resources" or "sacrifice zones" with low population density. The memory of these victories is the fuel that drives our present resistance. It teaches us that resignation is an ideological trap and that the audacity to question the status quo is the only historical force capable of permanently expanding the limits of what is possible.

Only those communities who are deeply rooted in the land and the sea—and who depend directly on the health of their ecological cycles—possess the genuine interest, historical memory and empirical knowledge necessary to safeguard biodiversity.

Conclusion: The Rebellion of Imagination and the Historical Responsibility to Act

At this point in our reflection, it is imperative to undertake an exercise in radical and rigorous honesty: the current state of civilisation is extremely serious and deeply troubling. The diagnosis of a "world on fire", which serves as the backbone of this issue of the *Metapolis* magazine, is by no means a poetic licence, a rhetorical hyperbole or a distant academic metaphor: it is a material reality that manifests itself starkly in the thick smoke of the sixth-generation wildfires devouring the Amazon and the Mediterranean forests; in the trail of destruction left by bombs funded by fossil fuel greed in the Middle East; and in the extreme cold or heatwaves endured by thousands of households in our neighbourhoods, caught up day after day in the deliberate scam of the energy oligopoly.

But it is precisely for this reason—because the macroeconomic and ecological outlook is unsettling and places us on the brink of biophysical tipping points—that the choice between surrender, enlightened cynicism or inaction represents an unconscionable luxury and a historic betrayal that none of us can afford. Under no circumstances.

Our daily work within organisations such as Greenpeace is not limited to the necessary recording of disasters or the public denunciation of corporate impunity: our fundamental mission is to act decisively as the architects and co-creators of a just future that already exists, in the shape of potential and alternatives, through the resistance practices of countless groups and individuals across every corner of the planet. In structural terms, all the proposals we have outlined in these pages—from energy self-sufficiency, sustainable mobility and housing regeneration to food sovereignty—are intended to function as a systemic mechanism to maximise the safe and fair space for humanity. This set of proposals constitutes the modest way in which, at Greenpeace Spain and Portugal, we are attempting to steer an entire bioregion towards a post-fossil future. A habitable future that we can only achieve by putting into practice Kate Raworth's so-called "doughnut economy": that is, by establishing an unshakeable social foundation that guarantees dignified lives for all without exceeding the ecological ceiling of planetary boundaries. In short, it is about laying the groundwork for a new green social contract where collective well-being is not measured by growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but by our social capacity to guarantee rights and the biophysical conditions to care for and sustain life.

We acknowledge with pride, remembrance and political legitimacy that we are the direct heirs of all those generations of indigenous communities, militants, trade unionists and activists who were once branded as utopian, foolish or unbalanced

simply for daring to imagine that the seas and oceans should be protected from industrial predation, that forests possessed intrinsic rights, or that the nuclear arms race between superpowers could and should be halted by pressure from global citizens. Today, our greatest display of collective courage lies in our flat refusal to accept that the total collapse of the planet is an easier scenario to imagine and plan for than the democratic end of fossil capitalism.

The social history of humanity is, in fact, the graveyard of those absolute truths of power once considered unchangeable.

We are not prepared to sit back and wait passively for a future designed by the boards of multinational corporations to be imposed upon us: we have organised ourselves to navigate the present and intervene directly to shape it. We do so armed with the unwavering compass of ecofeminist climate justice, driven by the transformative engine of material sufficiency, and sustained by the firm political conviction that decarbonising our socio-economic structures is the only real way to demilitarise the international stage and guarantee lasting peace among the peoples.

As the architect and systems designer R. Buckminster Fuller so lucidly reminds us, our historic mission on Earth is by no means to resign ourselves as mere victims of events: we were called into existence to act as architects of our own future. We have been summoned by our moral responsibility to present and future generations to co-design and build a habitable world, where many worlds can coexist with dignity.

This is our activist ecotopia: a bastion of hope that does not merely combat the effects of disaster, but has the power to flourish, propose and build alternatives through mutual support. The future does not belong to denialist leaders, nor is it written in the balance sheets of investment funds: it belongs entirely to those fighting on the streets, putting into action the solutions that light the way forward. To those who demonstrate, with political courage, radical compassion and collective organisation, that it is possible to halt the geopolitics of fear and fossil colonialism. That it is possible, beginning today, to build an alternative together.

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