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THE NUCLEAR NON-OPTION

Doing away with
the doomsday weapons

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ICAN/Darren Omitz



With the spectre of nuclear conflict once again looming over humankind, the world must be rid of these ultimate weapons of mass destruction. 13

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Resisting the new green colonialism

A drive to produce green hydrogen in Tunisia prioritises European energy needs over local sovereignty.

Saber Ammar

IN recent months, discussions about green hydrogen in Tunisia have dominated the media, particularly concerning the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed on 28 May between TotalEnergies (a French multinational integrated energy and petroleum company), Eren Groupe (a French company specialising in renewable energy and resource efficiency), Verbund (Austria's leading electricity company) and the Tunisian government. This MoU aims to explore the implementation of a large green hydrogen project named 'H2 Notos'. The project is intended for export to Central Europe via the 'SouthH2 Corridor' pipelines, which run from the Northern African coast in Tunisia through Italy, Austria and Germany; it aims to produce 200,000 tons of green hydrogen annually during its initial phase, with the potential to scale up production to one million tons per year in South Tunisia. This infrastructure enables the supply of low-cost renewable hydrogen produced in the South to key European demand clusters and is expected to be fully operational as early as 2030.

Shortly thereafter, on 31 May, another MoU was signed with the Saudi company ACWA. This agreement plans to produce 600,000 tons of green hydrogen annually in three phases, also for export to Europe. Tunisia is now experiencing a surge of interest in hydrogen. On 29 July, Industry, Mines and Energy Minister Fatma Thabet Chiboub signed six new MoUs with various

foreign corporations from Britain, France, Belgium and Germany. It's as if the country is being swept up by a hydrogen fever.

Tunisia aims to position itself as a hub for green hydrogen production, with ambitions to export six million tons annually by 2050, as outlined in the Tunisian Hydrogen Strategy. Despite its renewable-energy potential, Tunisia currently faces a significant energy deficit, which stood at approximately 50% in 2022. Tunisian Secretary of State for Energy Transition Wael Chouchane has emphasised the potential of green hydrogen to address the country's energy deficit and generate substantial employment opportunities.

However, rather than prioritising domestic renewable-energy investments to generate green electricity to close this gap, the government plans to use this electricity to produce green hydrogen for export to the European Union (EU). This approach, while central to Tunisia's energy transition strategy, mirrors similar initiatives in other African nations, such as Namibia, South Africa, Egypt and Morocco.

Critics argue that the EU's push towards a green hydrogen economy, touted as mutually beneficial for both the EU and exporting countries from the Global South, neglects several critical issues. These include the potential negative impacts on water resources, energy access, as well as concerns over land grabbing and displacement. Moreover, the economic gains for Southern countries may be limited, as they continue to import high-added-

value technologies while exporting raw materials with lower added value, reinforcing unequal trade relationships.

Despite European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's assertion in her speech on 16 June 2022 that 'the idea of spheres of influence are ghosts of the last century', it appears that Africans are still operating within the sphere of the EU. It is clear that the EU, especially Germany, is pushing for a green hydrogen economy where they dominate the value chains and technologies while externalising the socio-environmental costs to the peripheries (i.e., the Global South). This can be seen as a new form of energy imperialism, where European countries, or more broadly, the imperial cores, aim to use the continent as a battery for their needs.

There is nothing new here; it strongly echoes the colonial past. EU countries continue to have an essential need to extract resources and wealth from their peripheries, especially from Africa. The raw materials these regions possess, combined with an undervalued and disciplined labour force, continue to sustain the so-called developed world while causing a massive flow of wealth and resources from Africa to Europe.

This pattern of exploitation and economic constraint is not new and strongly resonates with the arguments made by Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. In this book, Rodney explains how European colonialism systematically extracted wealth from Africa and imposed structures that hindered the continent's capacity

for self-sustained development. The ongoing extraction of resources under the guise of projects like the green hydrogen initiative in Tunisia risks perpetuating this cycle of dependency and exploitation, undermining local energy sovereignty and development.

Energy neocolonialism

The green hydrogen pipedream was introduced to Tunisia by Germany following the signing of an MoU in December 2020. During the last four years, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) funded and shaped the national hydrogen strategy. By mid-2024, the first MoU for the production and export of green hydrogen by the private companies mentioned above was signed.

However, these foreign-dictated neocolonial green hydrogen projects are not passively accepted by Tunisians but are questioned and scrutinised. There is even popular resistance. On 24 April, coinciding with World Anti-Colonialism Day, a small protest took place in front of the GIZ Energy Cluster in Tunis. The protest was organised by a coalition of organisations, including the Stop Pollution Movement, trade unions, student unions, political parties and pro-Palestine activists. These activists joined the protest as they wanted to highlight that Germany is not only pursuing neocolonial projects in Tunisia but also complicit in and actively supporting the genocide in Gaza by being the largest European supplier of weapons to Israel, providing 30% of Israel's weapons between 2019 and 2023.

During the protest, one of the main demands focused on blocking and stopping the planned water- and land-intensive green hydrogen projects and denouncing the German organisation's control and influence over the Tunisian energy agenda. This explains the target and place of the protest in front of the

GIZ Energy Cluster, rather than the nearby Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy. Protestors believe that GIZ is the main decision maker when it comes to renewable energies and green hydrogen.

The protestors called for energy sovereignty that is people-centric and a just energy transition that serves the country's needs first.

A decolonial Pan-African movement is needed to defend our lands, water, food and energy systems.

According to the Tunisian national hydrogen strategy supported by GIZ, the plan is to use 248 million cubic metres of desalinated water by 2050, which equals the consumption of five million Tunisian citizens – approximately half the current population in a country considered one of the most water-scarce in the world. The planned green hydrogen production in Tunisia is also land-intensive, requiring 500,000 hectares (twice the area of Greater Tunis) to produce the renewable energy necessary for hydrogen production that will be exported. This land, referred to as the 'hydrogen valley', is located in the southern part of Tunisia, a region already suffering from severe water scarcity and some land conflicts.

The southern region is known for its communal land belonging to Tunisian tribes and locals who use it for pastoralism and small-scale farming. The hydrogen strategy fails to address how this land will be acquired, raising concerns about land grabbing. An article by the Working Group for Energy Democracy discusses this particular issue occurring in South Tunisia by profit-driven energy corporations, highlighting the disconnect between the strategy's goals and the needs

of local communities. Besides, it seems absurd that a country that imports its own food uses its land and water for hydrogen production to serve another country's energy needs. After the signing of the two MoUs mentioned above, several social movements, including the Stop Pollution Movement and the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights, published statements. They consider green hydrogen production and export to be another mechanism of plunder that primarily serves the EU's energy needs.

It is worth mentioning that the Tunisian parliament has been tasked to discuss a new draft law to encourage green hydrogen. However, this draft law primarily offers foreign investors harmful tax incentives and advantages. This means there is a pressing need to engage with parliamentarians on this issue as well. When there is resistance, there is hope. A just transition is possible for Tunisia and the entire African continent.

Given the recent legislative developments, creating a movement opposed to the new green hydrogen colonialism is becoming urgent and necessary, not just at the country level but across the entire continent. Such a decolonial Pan-African movement is needed to defend our lands, water, food and energy systems. We Africans must prioritise our needs and work towards achieving energy and food sovereignty. The priority in our continent is to provide cheap green electricity to the 600 million people currently lacking access to it, rather than rushing to produce green hydrogen for the EU. It is crucial to follow and support these dynamics against green hydrogen and connect the struggle from South Africa to Namibia and up to the North African countries. ◆

Saber Ammar is an activist, researcher and Arab region programme assistant at the Transnational Institute (TNI). This article is reproduced from Africa Is a Country (africasacountry.com) under a Creative Commons licence (CC BY 4.0).

US corporations pump aquifers dry as police kill water defenders in rural Mexico

Farmers are risking their lives to fight back against the US-owned factory farms that are destroying Mexico's water.

David Bacon

Reprinted from [Truthout](#)

ON 20 June, more than 200 angry farmers pulled their tractors into the highway outside the Carroll Farms feed plant in the Mexican town of Totalco, Veracruz, blocking traffic. Highway blockades are a traditional form of protest in Mexico. Every year, poor communities mount dozens, seeing them as their only way to get powerful elites to hear their demands.

At first, the Totalco blockade was no different. Farmers yelled at the guards behind the feed plant gates, as they protested extreme water use by Carroll Farms and its contamination of the water table. Then the police arrived in pickup trucks. They began grabbing people they thought were the leaders. One was Don Guadalupe Serrano, an old man who'd led earlier protests going back more than a decade. After he was put in handcuffs and shoved into a police car, farmers surrounded it and rescued him.

'Then four police grabbed me,' recalls Renato Romero, a farmer from nearby Ocotepéc and a protest leader. 'I was rescued too. But then more police arrived and began beating people. We put our bodies in front of their guns and said, "Shoot us!" And they began shooting.'

Two young brothers, Jorge and Alberto Cortina Vázquez, were killed, their bodies found beside their family's tractor used



The mill for hog feed owned by Granjas Carroll de Mexico near Perote.

in the demonstration. Each had been shot several times, one of their widows said. Others were wounded by gunfire. The farmers had no weapons. As they fled back into town, the police chased them, Romero says. 'They followed people in the streets, and went into homes, shooting. Afterwards you could see the high-calibre shells on the floors of the houses. They didn't try to talk. They just wanted to terrorise us.'

This bitter confrontation and the death of two campesinos is one more example of the impact US food corporations have had on local farm communities as they've expanded in Mexico. That process is felt north of the border as well, in the spread of disease, the displacement of local communities and resulting migration, and even in the national politics of both countries.

Granjas Carroll (the name of Carroll Farms in Mexico) is a division of the huge US-based Smithfield Foods meatpacking

company. It owns a vast network of industrial pig farms in this one valley on the border of Puebla and Veracruz states. Here, large barns each house hundreds of animals at a time. The urine and faeces they produce is concentrated in big open-air oxidation pools or lagoons.

According to a Humane Society International report, pigs produce four times more waste than human beings: 'One animal facility with a large population of animals can easily equal a small city in terms of waste production. This is particularly worrisome for certain regions in Mexico like the Perote Valley, which ... has a pig population five times greater than that of its human population.'

The killings created a political storm in Veracruz. Within a few days, more than 50 organisations throughout Latin America had signed a statement condemning 'brutal repression' and demanding to know who was responsible. Despite the police attack, after

David Bacon

four days farmers returned and reinstituted their *planton*, or blockade. The municipal president of Totalco, Delfino Ortega, blocked the road with them.

The state administration of Governor Cuitláhuac García Jiménez then announced that the special police unit that shot the farmers, the Fuerza Civil, would be dissolved. The unit was created in 2014 by the previous governor, Javier Duarte de Ochoa (now in prison for corruption), and had a reputation for kidnappings, extortion and disappearances.

Six days after the killings, Governor García announced the company plant in Totalco would be partially closed because of violations of regulations governing water consumption and pollution from the lagoons. The Veracruz State's Attorney Office for Environmental Protection said it would carry out inspections at the 51 Granjas Carroll facilities located in the municipality of Perote, where Totalco is located. The head of the agency, Sergio Rodríguez Cortés, said that so far nine facilities have been reviewed and various irregularities have been found.

Granjas Carroll pumps water, farmers go dry

Perote and Totalco are towns in the Libres-Oriental basin, a large enclosed valley surrounded by mountains and volcanos. It's dotted with shallow lakes in former volcanic craters, historically sustained by underground water. In this basin, water runs not to the ocean, but into its interior, and rain that falls here sinks into the aquifer below. There is very little surface water, and the recharge of the aquifer mostly comes from surrounding mountains as it passes underground into the basin. Libres-Oriental is essentially an enormous natural water storage facility.

Farmers say that 20 years ago, the water level was just a metre below the surface in their fields near the lakes, with natural springs

throughout the region. Today, the land is dry.

Mexico has enormous and growing water problems. Some 104 basins like Libres-Oriental have a deficit – the amount of water recharging their aquifers is less than the amount being extracted. The University Centre for Regional Disaster Prevention (Cupreder) at the Benemérita Autonomous University of Puebla charges that in 2016, the aquifer already had a deficit of 0.35 million cubic metres annually. This was the year the Audi auto assembly plant located in the basin started up its assembly lines. By 2023, the aquifer deficit approached 22 million cubic metres.

Cupreder Director Aurelio Fernández Fuentes says Conagua, the National Water Commission that manages Mexico's water and gives permits for its extraction, does not have an aquifer recharge policy. 'It only extracts,' he said. 'There is no transparency in issuing concessions, because there is a shady business that the Fourth Transformation [the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)] has not resolved.'

According to José Vicente Nolasco Valencia, another researcher at Cupreder, the alarming growth of the deficit is due to corporate extraction from the industrial park where the Audi and Mercedes-Benz plants are located, Coca-Cola's water bottling facility, the recently built complex of 14 military factories, and Granjas Carroll's pig farms.

Agribusiness operations, which started two decades ago, also contribute. Former Mexican President Vicente Fox began growing broccoli on his large landholdings in the basin after leaving office in 2006, and today factory farms grow and sell berries for the Driscoll's berry conglomerate. They all have Conagua's permits for industrial agriculture.

Granjas Carroll was given five concessions between 2020 and 2024, in addition to its original

permits, to pump more water from the aquifer below the Libres-Oriental basin. The company's water consumption doubled in that period. It now has permits to pump 3.8 million cubic metres of water per year. Of that, Granjas Carroll says it uses 3.54 million cubic metres to produce 1.67 million pigs per year on 121 farms, as well as in a processing plant and two feed distribution facilities.

The basin has theoretically been closed to new water extraction for 20 years, because the rate at which water is pumped is greater than the recharge of the aquifer. As a result, throughout that time, small farmers have been denied pumping permits, Romero told me. But under neoliberal changes in water law made since 1982 by the administrations prior to the government of López Obrador, water use was modified. New permits were made available for industrial users and private water concessions. Granjas Carroll got its permits as an industrial user under this neoliberal system.

'We have been six years with no harvests,' Romero charges, 'and for three years we haven't even had water for planting. I'm 63, and my land belonged to my mother. I've lived my whole life here. But we have no way to farm anymore.' The government action in closing the Totalco plant is meaningless, he says. 'This is just where they make food for the pigs. They have others like it, and more than 100 farms where the contamination comes from. No one is closing them. Our fields are dry, while big ranches have green fields of broccoli all year around.'

Romero is a member of the Movement in Defence of Water in the Libres-Oriental basin. Farmers in the movement have three demands: They should have access to water, so they can stay on the land; the foreign companies in the Libres-Oriental basin should be forced to leave; and the people responsible for the murders of the two farmers should be held responsible. 'Who gave the order?' Romero asks.

Doing what it couldn't do at home

'Granjas Carroll can do here what it can't do at home,' Carolina Ramirez, who formerly headed the women's department of the Veracruz Human Rights Commission, told me. In the US state of Virginia in 1997, Federal Judge Rebecca Smith imposed the largest Clean Water Act fine to that date – \$12.6 million – on Smithfield Foods, which owns Granjas Carroll, for dumping pig excrement into the Pagan River, running into Chesapeake Bay. The state of North Carolina, no friend to environmentalists, went further, passing a temporary moratorium on the creation of any new open-air hog waste lagoons, made permanent in 2007.

In the Libres-Oriental basin, however, Granjas Carroll didn't have to worry about US regulations. No complaint was ever filed under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)'s side agreement supposedly enforcing Mexican environmental standards. Each of the company's 121 hog farms has a lagoon for waste.

When the company built one of its sheds half a mile from the farm of Fausto Limon, it changed his life. On some warm nights, his children would wake up and vomit from the smell. He'd put his wife, two sons and daughter into his beat-up pickup, and they'd drive away from his farm until they could breathe the air without getting sick. Then he'd park, and they'd sleep in the truck for the rest of the night. Limon and his family all had painful kidney ailments until they began hauling in bottled water. Once they stopped drinking from their farm's well, the infections stopped too.

According to Veronica Hernandez, a schoolteacher in La Gloria, another town in the basin, students told her coming to school on the bus was like riding in a toilet. 'Some of them fainted or got headaches,' she charged. In 2007, Granjas Carroll filed criminal

complaints against Hernandez and 13 other leaders for circulating a petition protesting the conditions, charging them with 'defaming' the company. Until the charges were dropped after a year, she had to travel to the state capital, Puebla, every month to report to the prosecutor's office.

Then, in early 2009, the first confirmed case of swine flu, the A/H1N1 virus, was found in an 8-year-old boy from La Gloria, Edgar Hernandez. According to Hernandez and others from the town, pickup trucks from the local health department began spraying pesticide in the streets to kill the omnipresent flies that could potentially transmit the virus from pigs to humans. Nevertheless, the virus spread to Mexico City. By May, 45 people in Mexico had died. From there, it spread around the world.

Granjas Carroll's Public Relations Director Tito Tablada Cortés denied the virus came from its Veracruz hogs, and Mexican officials were quick to agree. He wrote to the newspaper *Imagen de Veracruz*, asserting, 'Our company has been totally cleared of any links with the AH1N1 virus,' and 'the official position of the Secretary of Health and the World Health Organization leaves no room for doubt.' In the valley, though, 'no one believed it', Limon recalled.

Because there is no water outlet to the ocean, what goes into the Libres-Oriental groundwater stays there. Anabel, an environmental activist with Manos Unidas por una Cuenca Libre (United Hands for a Free Basin), who didn't want to use her last name for fear of retaliation, told me: 'Wells around the pig farms are contaminated with *aguas negras* [black, or polluted, water]. They bring up mud with a bad smell. Many of those older wells that farmers have had for years are going dry. Because they're shallow, to get more and cleaner water they need to dig deeper and can't get permission. In any case, deeper

wells cost a lot of money, which they don't have. The only farms that can get permission and have the money are the big industrial farms.' Small towns also feel the impact. Many of them don't have public wells or can't get permission to dig new ones. Water service has been privatised, and private operators get permits from Conagua for commercial use, she charges.

Granjas Carroll also had a big impact on Mexican pig farmers. Smithfield not only produces hogs in Mexico, but is also one of the biggest exporters of pork to Mexico from its US operations. According to Alejandro Ramírez, general director of the Confederation of Mexican Pork Producers, Mexico imported 811,000 tons by 2010, after NAFTA took down tariff barriers. Pork prices received by Mexican producers dropped 56 percent. 'We lost 4,000 pig farms,' Ramírez estimated, '20,000 farm jobs directly from imports. Counting the five indirect jobs dependent on each direct job, we lost over 120,000 jobs in total. ... That produces migration to the US or to Mexican cities.'

Growing resistance

The first environmental movements to protect the basin were organised in the 1980s and 1990s, against a project to pump out water to supply the city of Puebla, and eventually Mexico City itself. That was stopped, but as NAFTA took hold, the government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari modified Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution to allow the privatisation of land formerly held in *ejidos*, the collective units established under the land reforms following the revolution of 1910–20 and the land struggles that followed.

That change allowed Granjas Carroll to buy the land for its swine sheds. Farmers have been trying to stop the operation of Granjas Carroll ever since the enterprise arrived in the Perote Valley in 1993

and dramatically changed rural life.

Various groups, like Pueblos Unidos del Valle de Perote (United People of the Perote Valley), have fought the company, along with residents of many of the valley's towns. In 2005, protesters blocked the main highway, as they did in June. A construction crew about to build a shed and oxidation pond was met by a thousand angry farmers. Police had to rescue the workers, but their heavy equipment disappeared once they left. In 2007, Granjas Carroll's Tito Tablada signed an agreement with local towns blocking any new expansion. In 2011, however, company representatives convinced the municipal president of Guadalupe Victoria, the municipality next to Perote, to grant a permit for construction of new hog farms.

Following the most recent protests, communities and environmental organisations held a National Meeting in Solidarity with Totalco and the Movement in Defence of Water in Libres-Oriental. Their demands included 'the departure of transnational companies that plunder its resources'. They declared a state of rebellion against Conagua, accusing it of being 'submerged in corruption' for granting concessions only to corporations and not to farmers, noting that the basin has been closed to locals for 20 years.

The meeting announced the formation of the Veracruz Assembly of Environmental Initiatives and Defence of Life. 'We join the cry for justice that resonates throughout Mexico against Granjas Carroll,' its statement said, 'a company that for more than 15 years has contaminated the air, soil and water of the region with the complicity of the government'.

Pushing foreign companies out?

Local and national environmental groups have different perspectives on how to

resolve the water crisis in the Perote Valley. The Veracruz government asserts that its partial and temporary closing of the Granjas Carroll feed plant in Totalco, and the promise of more rigorous inspections of the company's other facilities, will protect the rights of residents and the environment. At the same time, the company will continue to operate.

Sergio Rodríguez Cortés, director of the Veracruz State Environmental Protection Agency, says it has found violations in nine other facilities, and more inspections are planned. Most involve the pig faeces and urine collected in the lagoons attached to the sheds, which he admitted were finding their way into the water table.

The agency gave the company until September to remedy the violations, and Granjas Carroll has signed an agreement to spend money on remediation. Further sanctions, however, are up to Conagua and the federal prosecutor for environmental protection. Neither has said publicly what enforcement measures they plan to take, if any. Puebla Governor Salomón Céspedes Peregrina said he has set up a dialogue process between farmers and the company.

'We don't want any more dialogue,' Renato Romero responded. 'We've seen for 20 years that it changes nothing.' Another group, the Colectivo Ambiental Diente de Leon (the Dandelion Environmental Collective), issued three demands in response to the recent protests: 'Granjas Carroll get out! Make a new general water law in Mexico. Get rid of Conagua, and establish a fair administration of water.'

Anabel of Manos Unidas por una Cuenca Libre warns that far from diminishing the role of foreign investment, the Puebla state government is encouraging more. 'Our first demand should be stopping the investment wave,' she says. The valley may have lithium

deposits, much sought after for electric vehicles, and the Mexican army has been given the concession nationally for exploration and development. The Libres-Oriental basin already has Canadian mine concessions and several military installations.

'Getting rid of foreign companies will be a very long struggle,' Anabel warned. 'Maybe they'd go if the water dries up, but in the meantime, they'll be extracting even more of it. So, we want the government at least to stop giving more concessions, especially for mining, and then to go on to cancel the ones already given.' At the same time, she says, 'We want a better level of regulation of the use of water. Residents get water once or twice a month, and the companies get it every day. There should at least be equal access.'

In the neoliberal economic model Mexican governments pursued for decades, strict regulation was considered a barrier to foreign investment. Lack of enforcement of existing laws, no matter how good they were, was used as an incentive for companies to invest, from the maquiladora factories on the US border to Granjas Carroll in the Perote Valley.

The accumulated popular anger of almost four decades was a big reason President Andrés Manuel López Obrador won office in 2018, and he promised a change in direction. Speaking to the Mexican Congress as he was sworn in, he declared: 'For three decades the highest authorities have dedicated themselves ... to concessioning the territory and transferring companies and public goods, and even functions of the State to national and foreign individuals.'

In the Perote Valley, AMLO's description rang true. Granjas Carroll and Smithfield 'turned the local economy into a living laboratory for all that is wrong with NAFTA', Tim Wise, senior advisor at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy at Tufts University

in the US, told me. 'Open-door policies for multinational firms are enshrined in NAFTA and its successor agreement, the USMCA [US-Mexico-Canada Agreement]. Thanks to the agreements, these firms don't have to guarantee environmental compliance, labour rights or good working conditions as a condition for their investments. And the profits do not have to be reinvested in Mexico.'

Promising change, AMLO told Congress: 'We will put aside the neoliberal hypocrisy. The State will take care of reducing social inequalities, social justice will not continue to be displaced from the government's agenda. Those born poor will not be condemned to die poor.'

'AMLO's economic policies then fostered the development of safety nets for poor people especially, with cash transfer programmes, including pensions and education subsidies,' explained Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, director of the Center for Mexican Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and co-founder of the Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales, an organisation of Indigenous Mexicans with chapters on both sides of the border. In reality, however, AMLO's administration inherited an economy that was already heavily dependent on foreign investment.

'The money for those programmes depended on healthy economic growth, and that in turn depended on investment and increased ties to the US, Mexico's number one trading partner. So, the neoliberal model wasn't dramatically altered, and we now see the contradictions,' Rivera-Salgado told me. 'There's a growing fight for natural resources, especially water, which has become very scarce. The primary consumer with guaranteed access is industry, like Granjas Carroll. In effect, it is a subsidy. This is a structural issue. You can tinker around the edges,

but the model depends on the subsidies.'

Social conflicts over water access, mining concessions and environmental degradation are the product of these continuing contradictions. And with the political changes of the Fourth Transformation, the name given to AMLO's policy agenda, the Mexican state is now administered by people who fought neoliberal policies in their youth. Both Puebla and Veracruz are governed by Morena, AMLO's party. As a student, Veracruz Governor Cuitláhuac García Jiménez belonged to the Mexican Socialist Party and was a follower of Heberto Castillo, a historic figure of the Mexican left.

The conflicts include those within Morena itself. One Morena deputy in Puebla, Fernando Sánchez Sasía, proposed punishing farmers who organised more *plantons* with up to four years in jail. Puebla Governor Salomón Céspedes Peregrina killed the proposal, saying that criminalising protest 'will never be the answer' to social conflict. President López Obrador declared in one of his daily morning press conferences that there would be no impunity for the two police officers arrested for shooting Jorge and Alberto Cortina Vázquez.

A new president, but a new direction?

Mexico has just chosen a new president, Claudia Sheinbaum, who comes from a left-wing family of scientists and was herself a left activist in her youth. With a doctorate in energy engineering, she was secretary for the environment in Mexico City when AMLO was mayor, and eventually was elected mayor herself. As mayor, she agreed that water is a human right, and promised to provide water service to everyone in the city. As a scientist, she seems to grasp the looming environmental crises facing the nation, especially when it

comes to water.

However, according to Paloma Duran, an analyst for *Mexico Business News*, although the corporate elite were worried, 'the appointment of the new cabinet members, especially Marcelo Ebrard as the new Minister of Economy, has brought certainty and confidence to both investors and international markets.' Ebrard's appointment especially 'signals openness to business, alleviating market concerns'.

Sheinbaum herself reiterated López Obrador's rejection of neoliberalism and privatisation in a joint post-election tour of Puebla and other states in early July. 'Now President López Obrador has returned the rights that belong to the people of Mexico and we will never allow them to be taken away again,' she said. In San Luis Potosí she declared that AMLO had replaced the neoliberal model with a moral economy and Mexican humanism, 'a government by and for the people of Mexico'.

'Will Sheinbaum be able to maintain the core investment model and at the same time address the issues the farmers are raising?' Rivera-Salgado asks. 'We don't know yet. A lot depends on how strong the social movements become, and their demands for change.'

Anabel is confident, though. 'We water defenders say: the water is worth more than gold, it is life,' she declares. 'We have denounced the death industries. Two people have died, and others are sick. But we don't have to wait until blood flows, if these farmers and the original inhabitants of this valley are heard.'

David Bacon is a US-based writer and photographer, and former union organiser. He is the author of several books on labour, migration and the global economy, including In the Fields of the North / En los campos del norte, The Children of NAFTA, Communities Without Borders, Illegal People and The Right to Stay Home. His photographs and stories can be found at dbacon.igc.org and davidbaconrealitycheck.blogspot.com.

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The 20-year battle against a silent disease

The fight against Chagas disease in Bolivia has also been a fight against stigmatisation, misconceptions and lack of funding.

Nils Sabin

‘HELLO, is this your first visit to us?’ asks Yurli Escobar. The nurse behind the reception desk at the screening centre welcomes the patients as warmly as possible. ‘The people who come here are often reticent to talk about their situation because they’ve been stigmatised, so we try to make them feel as comfortable as possible,’ she explains.

The ‘situation’ Yurli Escobar is referring to is having Chagas, a disease endemic in 21 Latin American countries affecting six million people worldwide, including between 600,000 and one million in Bolivia. A silent infection, long ‘associated with poverty and rural areas, although wrongly so’, according to Gimena Rojas, one of two doctors at

the Chagas Platform (Plataforma de Atención Integral a Pacientes Adultos con Enfermedad de Chagas, in Spanish) in Cochabamba, in central Bolivia.

Every month, the centre receives dozens of patients, free of charge, who come to be tested or treated for the disease. ‘I’ve had chronic Chagas for years. I’m asymptomatic, but I come for a check-up every year,’ explains Gloria, a patient in her sixties. The nurse takes her into one of the centre’s small rooms, saying: ‘Today, we’re going to check how your heart is doing.’

Named after Brazilian infectious disease specialist Carlos Chagas, who identified it in 1909, the disease is caused by a parasite



Chagas disease is caused by a parasite transmitted by the bite of the triatomine bug.

transmitted by the bite of the triatomine bug. After an acute phase lasting several weeks, the disease becomes chronic and asymptomatic for years or even decades. In 40% of cases, cardiac or digestive complications follow. According to the estimates of the World Health Organization, some 10,000 people die of the disease every year.

‘In the 2000s, many people with Chagas still thought that death was the only outcome, and that treatment was useless,’ explains Rojas. ‘But when the disease is detected and taken care of without delay, it responds very well to treatment.’

Until very recently, the disease was the object of many misconceptions. Triatomine bugs,

locally known as *vinchucas*, are very common, for example, in adobe houses, made of dried earth,

‘and many people believe that these houses and this disease only exist in rural areas, but I’ve seen this type of construction, infested with the bugs, in urban areas, in Cochabamba,’ says María Jesús Pinazo Delgado, head of the Chagas programme at the Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi), an international not-for-profit research organisation working to develop treatments for neglected patients.

People with the disease also used to be stigmatised and even discriminated against: ‘If a man applied to join the army or the police and tested positive for Chagas, he was instantly rejected,’ recalls

Rojas.

‘Many people come to us saying “My husband, or wife, doesn’t want to be with me anymore because I have Chagas”, without having any knowledge of how the disease is passed on,’ says Escobar. That’s why special care is taken to ensure that patients ‘feel at ease’. It is also why the two doctors and the two nurses understand and speak Quechua. ‘There are people who come to the centre who speak mainly Quechua, and it’s easier for them to talk about their situation in that language,’ continues the nurse.

While the situation has improved over the last 20 years, there is still much room for improvement in the way patients are cared for in public health

centres. ‘We’re still being told that in such and such a district, they don’t want to see us, and the like,’ says Verónica Rodríguez, a member of the Corazones Unidos por el Chagas (Hearts United for Chagas) association in Cochabamba.

The association organises conferences and debates with healthcare professionals to explain the importance of ‘warm and quality care’. ‘Nowadays, people who are infected feel more at ease about seeing a doctor, but if they’re not well received or if they’re told to come back in a fortnight, they lose motivation.’ That’s why some would rather come to a centre that only treats this infection, as the day-to-day emergencies at public health centres mean that Chagas patients are not seen as a priority.

New outbreaks linked to migration

One of the first things the nurses ask when a new patient arrives is whether any of their parents have Chagas and whether they ever lived in a place with triatomine bugs. ‘I lived in the countryside when I was a child and, yes, there were *vinchucas*,’ replies Beatriz, who now lives in Cochabamba. At age 50, this is her first visit to the centre and she is a little worried about having tested positive: ‘I wanted to give blood, but they told me I had Chagas and that I should come here.’ This is how many people find out that they are infected, as the disease can be transmitted through blood transfusions.

The bugs are still a source of transmission, but it is congenital transmission that is the chief concern among doctors. In around 5–6% of cases, an infected mother can pass on the disease to her child. This makes the fight against the disease all the more difficult as migration means that the disease can be transmitted to areas where there are no triatomine bugs.

‘We are now alerting people to new outbreaks of the infection, for example in the tropical areas of eastern Bolivia,’ warns Dr Jimmy Pinto. ‘There, the *vinchucas* are not yet contaminated with *Trypanosoma cruzi* [the parasite that causes Chagas], but with the arrival of infected people to these regions, the bugs could pick up the parasite and start to transmit the disease.’

For the doctor, it was migration-related congenital transmission that led to the fight against Chagas in Bolivia: ‘To be perfectly honest, if there hadn’t been an increase in cases in Spain, with immigration from Bolivia and other Latin American countries, I’m not sure that Spanish cooperation would have come here in the 2000s.’

The investments made via the Ceades Foundation, financed by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), have been decisive in developing a strategy to combat the disease in Bolivia, as screening and treatment were virtually non-existent prior to the opening of the Chagas Platform in Cochabamba in 2009. It is the doctors from these platforms that have been giving training in tackling the disease to staff in the country’s public hospitals and health centres. Over 50 establishments in the public health system are currently applying their approach in Bolivia.

Improving treatment and access to it

Despite these breakthroughs, the fight against this disease is far from over. For Delgado of DNDi, progress needs to be made on several fronts at the same time: ‘At DNDi, we are working on improving access, because less than 10% of people with Chagas are diagnosed, but we’re also working on more effective treatments or treatments with fewer side-effects.’ In 2011, DNDi’s work led to the

development of paediatric doses for the treatment of children. Prior to that, doctors had to estimate the dose needed for children and give them a portion of the adult dose.

Pinto agrees, saying that medical research into the disease needs to be stepped up: ‘The current treatment lasts two months, has adverse effects on 30% of patients and the longer a person has been infected, the less effective it is. All this needs to be improved.’

But research into the disease is hampered by pharmaceutical companies’ lack of interest: ‘It’s not profitable for them,’ says Delgado. ‘So we’re trying to convince them to take part without them losing or making money from the project, by making their molecule bank available, for example.’

The whole research process has to be adapted to the economic situation of the countries where the infection is present. ‘It wouldn’t be much use finding the perfect molecule to treat Chagas if no one was able to pay for the treatment,’ she sums up. The DNDi network is nonetheless working on new molecules, but always based on the criterion of affordable treatment.

With funding to combat the disease becoming increasingly scarce, the Chagas Platform in Cochabamba looks set to close in a few years’ time, for want of new projects. ‘Since 2020, much of the international funding has been directed towards COVID-19 and with the improvement in the situation [in terms of Chagas], there is less interest,’ explains Pinto.

‘The pandemic has hit us very hard, and a lot of our funding has come to an end,’ adds the head of DNDi’s Chagas programme. The upshot could be new flare-ups of the disease, particularly in areas with high levels of migration. ◆

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The coming tax-the-rich rumble in Rio

Amid sky-high inequality, the world's major economies are considering, for the first time, a global deal to tax the ultra-rich.

Sam Pizzigati

FOR the richest among us, life on Earth can sometimes get rather boring. But worry not for our world's deepest pockets. At least five firms worldwide, notes the swanky lifestyle *Robb Report*, are now racing 'to deliver passengers to the stars on giant balloons attached to pressurised luxury capsules'.

Sometime next year, those passengers will be making six-hour roundtrips to the edge of space, enjoying the view from 'massive windows' while munching on Michelin-starred gourmet meals. All for no more than \$200,000 per posh seat.

Some of those rich high-flyers, come next year, might find themselves wishing they never had to come down. Here on terra firma, something unthinkable – for our mega-wealthy – may be starting to unfold. Our terrestrial world might actually be putting in place a global wealth tax.

This coming November, the heads of state of the world's top economic powerhouses – the G20 nations – will have on their annual summit agenda a vision for creating what amounts to a minimum tax on the wealth of the world's wealthiest.

That vision comes from the G20's national finance ministers. Meeting in Rio de Janeiro in July, these ministers adopted a 'declaration on international tax cooperation' that emphasises the importance of getting 'all taxpayers, including ultra-high-net-worth individuals, to contribute their fair share in taxes'.



'A global deal to tax the ultra-rich would be a shot in the arm for multilateralism: proving that governments can come together for the common good.'

The declaration goes on to proclaim, as a G20 'commitment', the need 'to engage cooperatively to ensure that ultra-high-net-worth individuals are effectively taxed'.

How much importance should we give this unprecedented G20 finance minister declaration? Mogens Lykketoft, a former Danish finance minister and UN General Assembly president, is calling the declaration 'the first time' that 'an international standard to tax the super-rich has been put on the G20 negotiation table'.

And that breakthrough, Lykketoft adds, could hardly be timelier. Over the past decade, as research out of the activist global charity Oxfam has pointed out, our globe's richest 1 percenters have pocketed over \$40 trillion in new wealth, about 34 times more than humanity's entire poorest 50% have gained over the same period of time.

The credit for this G20 finance minister breakthrough? That all belongs to Brazil, the nation that holds this year's G20 presidency. The Brazilian finance minister, former São Paulo mayor Fernando Haddad, had brought before this year's February meeting of the G20 finance chiefs 'a proposal to tax the super-rich' that rests on research from one of the world's top experts on our planet's maldistributed wealth.

That expert, the EU Tax Observatory director Gabriel Zucman, presented to the G20 finance ministers the case for a global minimum tax on billionaires that would kick in whenever the world's richest aren't paying in annual taxes a sum equal to at least 2% of their personal wealth.

Zucman would subsequently deepen his case for that tax in a more detailed report – 'A blueprint

for a coordinated minimum effective taxation standard for ultra-high-net-worth individuals' – that the Brazilian G20 presidency commissioned.

Brazil's finance minister, in the meantime, spent the next four months working to build momentum for Zucman's plan. At the spring meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, for instance, Haddad asked world leaders to show the 'political courage' to embrace 'innovative solutions'.

'In a world where economic activities are increasingly transnational,' Haddad urged, 'we have to find new and creative ways to tax these activities' and 'direct the revenues to common global endeavours such as ending hunger and poverty and fighting climate change'.

By the start of April, Haddad had the French finance minister on board with his tax-the-super-rich effort. Later that month, he would join with fellow finance ministers from Germany, South Africa and Spain to plug Zucman's call for a minimum annual tax on billionaires equal to 2% of their overall wealth.

'Global billionaires pay only the equivalent of up to 0.5% of their wealth in personal income tax,' the four finance ministers noted in a *Guardian* op-ed. 'It is crucial to ensure that our tax systems provide certainty, raise sufficient revenues, and treat all of our citizens fairly.'

'Such a tax reform,' the finance ministers continued, 'belongs on the agenda of the G20.'

'The G20 effort to tax the super-rich led by Brazil is building momentum,' Oxfam's Susana Ruiz would marvel late in May. 'We absolutely need to tax the richest in every country – and governments, including the US, need to recognise that international coordination will help them do so.'

The United States, unfortunately, has yet to do that recognising. In late July, the day before the G20 finance ministers'



Pedro Gontijo/Senado Federal (CC BY 2.0)

Brazilian Finance Minister Fernando Haddad has spearheaded efforts to secure a G20 deal to tax the world's wealthiest.

vote on Haddad's effort, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told reporters in Rio de Janeiro that 'tax policy is very difficult to coordinate globally, and we don't see a need or really think it's desirable to try to negotiate a global agreement on that'.

'Global billionaires pay only the equivalent of up to 0.5% of their wealth in personal income tax.'

That opposition would help keep the G20 finance ministers from endorsing Zucman's specific proposal in the tax-the-rich declaration that their 25-26 July meeting produced. But Brazil's Haddad still considers the new declaration a 'significant step forward'. As does Gabriel Zucman himself. The declaration that gained the G20 finance minister approval, Zucman notes, represents a new 'consensus among G20 countries that the way we tax the super-rich must be fixed'.

The G20 finance ministers have now placed that consensus before this November's G20 heads of state summit in Rio. Former G20 heads of state – a group that

includes Chile's Michelle Bachelet, Sweden's Stefan Lofven and Canada's Kim Campbell – have already released an open letter that urges those heads of state to follow the Haddad lead.

'A global deal to tax the ultra-rich,' the open letter reads, 'would be a shot in the arm for multilateralism: proving that governments can come together for the common good.'

The particular shot in the arm that Brazil would like to see adopted wouldn't by itself end the continuing concentration of the world's wealth. To start deconcentrating the wealth of our world's richest, Oxfam researchers estimate, a global wealth tax rate on the rich would have to run at least 8% annually, quadruple the 2% rate that Brazil is now seeking. But tax rates on the rich, history shows, can rise rather quickly.

In 1913, the year the first modern US income tax went into effect, the tax rate on top-bracket income ran a mere 7%. Five years later, that top rate ran 77%. ♦

*Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, co-edits Inequality.org, where this article was first published under a Creative Commons licence. His latest books include *The Case for a Maximum Wage* and *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900–1970*.*

Negating the nuclear threat

As the terrifying prospect of nuclear conflict looms over the horizon, it is time to put an end to these supremely destructive weapons before they put an end to us.

THE Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) calls them 'the most dangerous invention the world has

ever seen'. To the writer Arundhati Roy, they are 'the most anti-democratic, anti-national, anti-human, outright evil thing that man has ever made'. *The Boston Globe* sees them as 'the most clear and present danger to humankind'.

Just how big a danger nuclear weapons pose was demonstrated so devastatingly in August 1945 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where the US atomic bombings are estimated to have killed up to over 200,000 people and left a horrific legacy of long-term side-effects from radiation exposure.

Almost eight decades on, as tensions flare between major powers and conflict rages in Ukraine and West Asia, the threat of atomic apocalypse is a very real one. 'The nuclear shadow that loomed over humanity last century has returned with a vengeance,' United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres warned in February. 'The nuclear risk is higher than at any moment since the depths of the cold war.'

And any nuclear assault this time round is set to be far more destructive. According to the US-based UCS, just one US nuclear-armed submarine carries warheads packing seven times the power of all the bombs dropped in World War II, including the two atom bombs dropped on Japan. The US usually has 10 of these submarines at sea

Lean Ka-Min

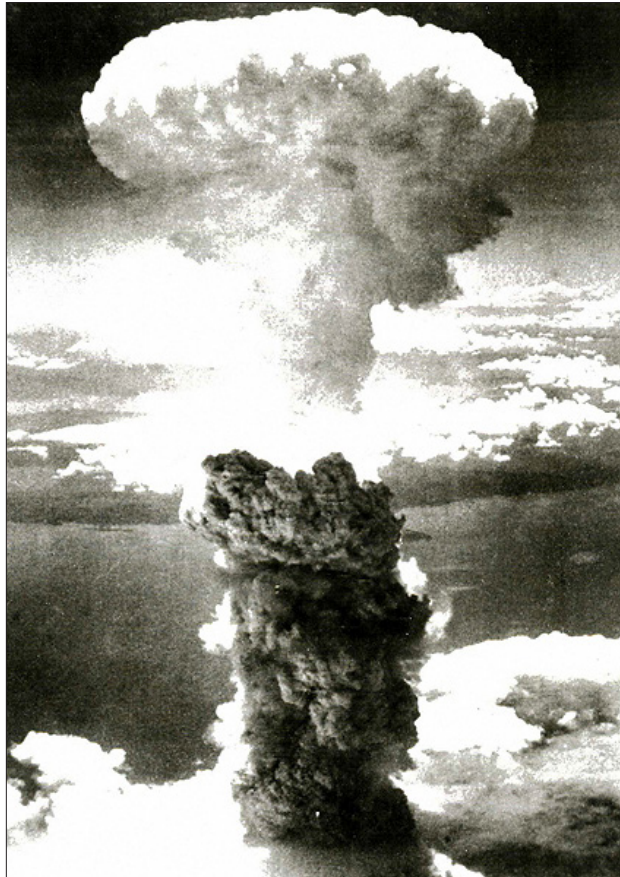
billion people would be in jeopardy from mass starvation'. The death toll from a full-scale nuclear war

between the US and Russia could amount to five billion in the space of two years.

Still, the quest to develop even deadlier arms continues feverishly apace. The US and Russia, which together already hold about 90% of the world's nuclear weapons, are both seeking to 'modernise' their armouries amid frayed relations. The US plans to spend some \$1.7 trillion over the next 30 years, as flagged by UCS, to maintain and replace its entire nuclear arsenal with new weapons, including nuclear-armed bombers, missiles and submarines. Further, the potential application of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted decision making, to nuclear command and control systems only adds to the dangerously high stakes. Given today's

troubled geopolitical scene, a full-blown nuclear arms race could be on the cards, in what would be an exceedingly macabre version of keeping up with the Joneses.

All this immense firepower is concentrated in the hands of just nine countries: Russia, the US, China, France, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel and North Korea. Of the global stockpile of some 12,700 nuclear weapons, the US holds about 5,400, 1,744 of which are deployed and ready to be delivered, according to UCS. Around half of the deployed



The US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are estimated to have killed up to over 200,000 people.

at any one time. The most powerful weapon in the US nuclear arsenal, the B83 gravity bomb, is over 80 times stronger than the Hiroshima bomb.

Apart from the lives that would be immediately lost, a nuclear strike will also have cataclysmic longer-run impacts. The International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War estimate that a 'nuclear war using as few as 100 weapons anywhere in the world would disrupt the global climate and agricultural production so severely that the lives of more than two

weapons are kept on ‘hair-trigger alert’: land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) can be launched in a couple of minutes, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) within 15 minutes. The president, who has sole authority in the US to order a nuclear strike, is not required to consult anyone before doing so. The Russian nuclear arsenal, meanwhile, comprises around 6,000 warheads, 1,584 of which are deployed.

The nuclear powers argue that these weapons are needed as deterrence: no enemy state would wage a nuclear attack against you, knowing that it would only invite an equally or more destructive retaliatory assault. Maintaining the ability to retaliate quickly before one’s own weapons are destroyed (‘use them or lose them’) is why hair-trigger alerts are seen as necessary. Yet it is this very capacity to strike at short notice that poses such great risk – the fate of humankind can be sealed in a matter of minutes based on one single decision made in conditions of extreme pressure. A false alarm, miscommunication or technical fault could all lead to the pressing of the doomsday button.

There have in fact been a number of close calls to catastrophe over the years. For example, on 5 October 1960, as documented on the UCS website, the US began preparing for a retaliatory strike under hair-trigger alert protocol after the radar system reported dozens of Soviet nuclear missiles headed for the country. What was deemed to be warheads coming over the horizon turned out to be the rising moon, which had unexpectedly reflected radar waves back to the radar.

As a form of deterrence, therefore, possession of nuclear arms does not meet its supposed objective – it makes us less, not more, safe. However, some nuclear advocates contend that these weapons can be employed in a preemptive strike to wipe out an adversary’s own nuclear arsenal



Just one US nuclear-armed submarine carries warheads packing seven times the power of all the bombs dropped in World War II, including the two atom bombs dropped on Japan.

before it can be used; this, they say, is the only way to win a nuclear war. But given the indiscriminate, all-encompassing destructive power of nuclear bombs, any such ‘victory’ would come with the most terrible of tolls in human lives – a price that must never be paid.

Nuclear war is thus perhaps best seen as ‘a strange game’ in which ‘the only winning move is not to play’, as the 1983 American movie *WarGames* put it. Why then do countries continue to ‘play’, and ‘play’ so intently? The answer in large part, as it so often is, is money.

The late Pentagon Papers whistleblower and former high-level nuclear analyst Daniel Ellsberg, in a 2018 interview, maintained: ‘You would not have these arsenals, in the US or elsewhere, if it were not the case that it was highly profitable to the military-industrial complex, to the aerospace industry, to the electronics industry, and to the weapons design labs to keep modernising these weapons, improving accuracy, improving

launch time, all that. The military-industrial complex that Eisenhower talked about is a very powerful influence. We’ve talked about unwarranted influence. We’ve had that for more than half a century.’

Consider the case of the US, where decisions on funding federal government spending, including on ‘defence’, are made by Congress. According to the researchers Hekmat Aboukhater and William D. Hartung writing in *TomDispatch*, ICBM contractors have made financial contributions to 505 of the 535 lawmakers across both Congressional chambers (the House of Representatives and the Senate) this year; some received hundreds of thousands of dollars. Over the past four election cycles, companies involved in production of the Sentinel ICBM – the centrepiece of the modernisation of the US nuclear arsenal – have donated over \$3 million to senators from four states that either house major ICBM bases or host significant work on the Sentinel programme.

Besides political financing, nuclear weapons firms also engage in lobbying. In any given year, say Aboukhater and Hartung, the arms industry as a whole employs between 800 and 1,000 lobbyists in the US, well more than one for every member of Congress. ICBM contractors spent some \$226 million on 275 lobbyists in the last four election cycles. ‘The influence of such special interest groups and corporate weapons-makers over life-and-death issues should be considered both a moral outrage and perhaps the ultimate security risk,’ Aboukhater and Hartung warn.

Weapons built to satisfy corporate interests even though they can end the world as we know it, are weapons that should be eliminated. And a path towards this goal has already been blazed. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) bans the use, possession, testing, development and transfer of these weapons under international law. Adopted at the United Nations in 2017 and having entered into force in January 2021, the agreement currently has 70 member countries although they do not include the nine nuclear-armed states, which are therefore not legally bound by its provisions. The overwhelming majority of the membership are developing countries, many of which have long championed the cause of nuclear disarmament.

Building on the TPNW as its foundation, this struggle for a nuclear-free world can be won. As Melissa Parke, Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), notes: ‘Despite sceptics saying nuclear-armed states will not eliminate their nuclear weapons, it has happened before so it can happen again. South Africa got rid of its nuclear arms and is now one of the leading TPNW countries. Other states, including Brazil, Sweden, and Switzerland, had programs to develop nuclear weapons that they decided would not bring them security and abandoned them.’



UN Secretary-General António Guterres addressing the First Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2022.

Turning away from nuclear weapons is indeed an imperative, but it's an imperative that does not go far enough for many, who call for nothing less than nuclear abolition. ‘A nuclear abolition framework,’ explains US anti-nuclear activist Jasmine Owens, ‘goes beyond the ... goal of eliminating nuclear weapons; it strives to upend the systems of oppression that support and are supported by nuclear weapons. Nuclear abolitionists understand nuclear weapons to be related to other oppressive systems – such as white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy – that reinforce each other at the expense of life on Earth...

‘The nuclear abolition movement enables organisers to highlight how the elimination of nuclear weapons can help dismantle other oppressive systems. A nuclear abolition framework doesn't discount or eliminate all other work to curb or completely eradicate the nuclear threat, but it calls for formulating and promoting arms control and disarmament policies that seek to radically transform the world we live in.’

The need for such transformation is brought into even sharper focus as we approach the 80th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings next year. The change should usher in a world delivered from the spectre of nuclear armageddon, with the colossal sums now devoted to instruments of mass

death freed up for the life-affirming aims of healthcare, education and poverty eradication. In this world, no longer would its inhabitants be trapped within the terrifying confines of that ‘strange game’ which threatens to checkmate us all. ♦

Lean Ka-Min is editor of Third World Resurgence.

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Reflections on the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and the present nuclear resurgence

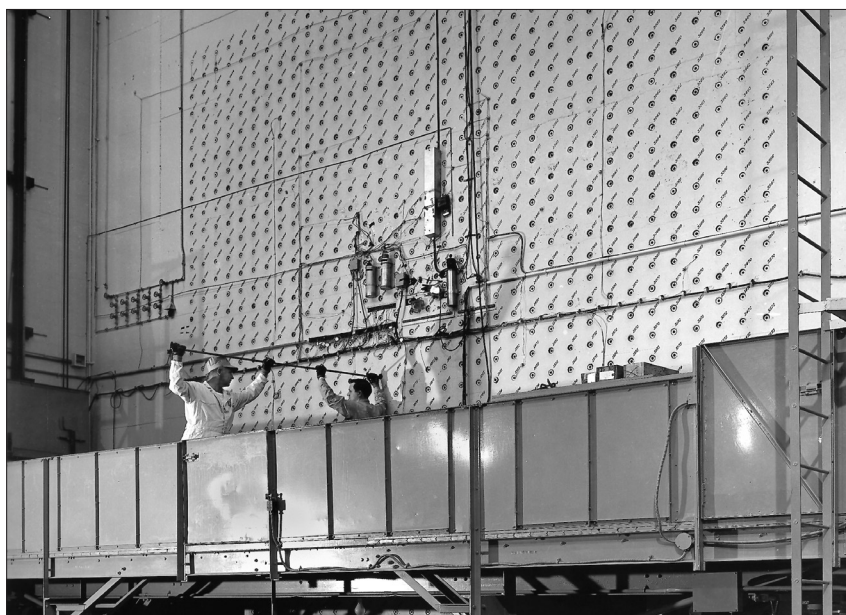
The history of the development of the nuclear bomb is rife with delusion upon deadly delusion, right up to the present day.

Arjun Makhijani

HIROSHIMA was obliterated on 6 August 1945, razed to the ground by just one bomb from a single plane. That day, Mitsuno Ochi¹ had been waiting to withdraw money from a bank; she was instantly evaporated into a mere shadow that remains today. The advice of some leading scientists that the use of an atomic weapon without notice to the Soviet Union could trigger an unconstrained nuclear arms race resulting in the complete destruction of civilisation was set aside. What was foretold, transpired. A bomb a thousand times as powerful as those dropped on Japan was already a gleam in some scientists' eyes. In the 1950s nuclear power was promoted as a distraction from the horrors of the radioactive fallout of such a weapon.

The Cuban missile crisis brought the world within a hair's breadth of total destruction; it did not cause fundamental change. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union saw a renewed US delusion (and desire) that, as the 'sole superpower', it could shape the world unconstrained.

Two decades later, the famous atomic 'Doomsday Clock' is closer to midnight than ever 'in large part because of Russian threats to use nuclear weapons in the war in Ukraine'. Russia occupies the six-reactor Ukrainian Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest



Ed Westcott

The Manhattan Project was the US programme to develop the world's first nuclear weapons. Picture shows workers at a production reactor built as part of the Project.

in Europe. The site contains more highly radioactive caesium-137 than was released in more than 400 atmospheric nuclear tests conducted by all nuclear states put together. A release of roughly 1% of this inventory would be comparable to the 1986 Chernobyl disaster that blanketed parts of Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and several European countries with radioactive fallout. In the midst of the war, Ukraine's state-owned nuclear corporation has signed a surreal agreement with a US company, Holtec, to build as many as 20 small modular reactors with the aim of grid connection by 2029. All this while the United States, Russia and China are re-engaged in a fevered nuclear weapon technological race. A

nuclear bomb on a nuclear power plant could render an entire country uninhabitable.

It is a Matryoshka doll of delusions within delusions at the edge of the nuclear abyss and the climate emergency.

Ruling the world

Even as the US Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson warned the newly installed President Truman about the potential for total destruction in April 1945, he also pointed to the possibility that the United States had for total control of the postwar world: 'On the other hand, if the problem of the proper use of this weapon can be solved, we would have the opportunity to

bring the world into a pattern in which the peace of the world and our civilisation can be saved.²

An atomic-tipped coercive peace was not what the scientists, led by émigrés like Einstein and Leo Szilard (who first thought of the possibility of a nuclear chain reaction in 1933), had recommended. They asked for a US bomb project as a deterrent against a Nazi atomic monopoly and blackmail.

But Vannevar Bush had a grander idea. Even before the United States was in the war, he believed ‘the world is probably going to be ruled by those who know how, in the fullest sense, to apply science.’³ New weapons of all kinds were not only about winning the war; they were about who would rule the world. A brilliant inventor, Bush was Vice-President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At the start of the fateful year, 1939, in the wake of the discovery of nuclear fission in Germany, he was appointed President of the Carnegie Institution, a leading private funder of scientific research in the United States. He brimmed with ambition as he moved from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Washington’s marbled corridors, inspired in part by imperial Rome.

The war spread quickly; between September 1939 and September 1940, the Nazis had invaded Poland, Denmark, Belgium, Holland and France and were blitzing London with bombs. The United States was not yet in the war; Bush, like many others, believed that it should be prepared. He wanted to be at the centre of the science that would deliver to the United States the capacity to rule the world.

On 12 June 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt penned a simple ‘OK – FDR’ on Bush’s one-page proposal to centralise military research in the civilian sector in a new White House office, and gave him his wish. The National Defense Research Committee (NDRC),

with Bush at the helm, was born. It was the seed of the Manhattan Project and the bombing of Japan. Bush’s ambition was centred on a single, simple goal, powered by a practical *carte blanche* from President Roosevelt. Bush, his biographer has noted, wanted ‘to revolutionise the fighting of war within the framework of *this war*’,⁴ though Pearl Harbor was still a year-and-a-half away. The Uranium Committee, set up after Einstein recommended a bomb project in 1939, became part of his portfolio at the NDRC.

At first, Bush did not press ahead with the atomic project. He doubted the bomb could be made in time for use in *this war*. He focused, instead, on projects with more immediate impact, like radar and the ‘proximity switch’ (or ‘proximity fuze’), the technical core of what became the first smart explosive. Millions were made during the war.

The scene was transformed in two ways in the summer of 1941. First, a British scientific committee had concluded that a modest amount of uranium, enriched in the fissile isotope uranium-235, could be used to make a workable bomb. Second, Hitler, breaking his pact with Stalin, had invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941; the Germans were speeding towards Moscow and Leningrad with terrifying efficiency. The prospect of a Nazi atomic monopoly was suddenly far more menacing. Moreover, despite the flood of brilliant Jewish scientists who had emigrated to the United States in the 1930s (including Einstein), Germany still had one of the greatest physicists of them all – Werner Heisenberg, the author of the famed ‘uncertainty principle’ in quantum mechanics. This combination of developments changed everything.

On 9 October 1941, Bush recommended to FDR that the United States should make a major effort to determine the feasibility of making a workable and deliverable atom bomb. This time the ‘OK

– FDR’ was verbal, and large expenditures were unleashed. A prerequisite: uranium would have to be secured in quantity. Congo, with the richest ores in the world, was the go-to place; most of the uranium for the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs would come from there. In fact, Einstein had specifically pointed to the Congolese ores – ‘the most important source of uranium’, he said in his 1939 letter. Uranium resources in Canada and the Colorado Plateau in the United States, which were more secure, were also tapped.

Building – and using – the bomb

Thus, about two months before Pearl Harbor, the die was cast. Bush, with his determination that the weapons he oversaw should be used in this war, had recommended major investments and obtained the green light to pursue the bomb. Major questions still hung in the air, however. Would it work? If so, where would it be used?

The initial answer came on 5 May 1943, two years before the end of the war in Europe. The Manhattan Project was underway; J. Robert Oppenheimer had been appointed as its Scientific Director. Vast sums were being spent. The team in Chicago had built an ‘atomic pile’ and demonstrated a chain reaction. General Leslie R. Groves, of the Army Corps of Engineers, had been put in operational charge in September 1942; he was the *de facto* Executive Director. The answer to the first question was now known: yes, it would work.

A Military Policy Committee was appointed; it functioned as the board of directors. Bush was its Chairman; Groves was a member. The Committee reviewed the progress of the project that day. Then it discussed possible targets. The minutes are brief on this point, but the drift of the discussion is crystal clear. Germany was considered – and rejected. It was

too risky in case the bomb was a dud; the Germans knew too much nuclear science. Preventing capture of advanced weapons, notably the proximity switch, in case they were duds, was already policy. Tokyo was discussed and was also deemed too risky; after all, Japan had nuclear expertise too. The Japanese fleet stationed at the Pacific island of Truk would be the target; if the bomb was a dud, it would sink and be difficult to recover.

No military commander was consulted – not General Eisenhower, not General MacArthur, not ‘Hap’ Arnold, the chief of the Army Air Forces, not Admiral King, the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy. The Military Policy Committee had three members besides Bush and Groves: James Conant (president of Harvard University), General Styer (Army Corps of Engineers), and Admiral Purnell, who worked on new weapons development for the Navy.

Apart from Bush and Conant, no other scientists were present and none were consulted. Bush preferred it that way. He wanted, as Richard Rhodes, author of *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, has put it, to ‘run the show’. Policy, Bush said, ‘has not been turned over to them [other scientists] as a subject.’ They were to stick to technical matters.⁵ It was an echo of the founding of the Royal Society in 1660 as the premier scientific institution in England. The scientists were not to meddle with ‘Divinity, Metaphysics, Morals, Politicks, Grammar, Rhetoric, or Logick.’⁶

To all available evidence, Germany was never explicitly targeted, though the scientists at Los Alamos continued to believe the bomb project was all about Hitler. Even Oppenheimer had no clue that, as Groves put it in his 23 April 1945 memorandum to Secretary of War Stimson, ‘[t]he target is and was always expected to be Japan’.⁷ The answer to the second question, ‘Where would it be used?’, was in two parts: Japan; not Germany. For



The bomb being unloaded at the site of the first ever test of a nuclear weapon, codenamed ‘Trinity’, conducted by the US in New Mexico state on 16 July 1945.

all their brilliance and centrality to the bomb project, the scientists building the bomb had no control.

By December 1944, the Allies were deep enough into Nazi territory to know that Germany had no viable bomb project. The purpose for which Einstein had recommended the atomic effort was accomplished. Germany did not need to be deterred. But instead of being stopped, the project was accelerated to ensure the bomb would be used in *this* war. The purpose of Einstein’s letter was defeated. In the year of his death, 1955, he called the letter his ‘one great mistake’.

Contest for control

It was the United States that would emerge from the war with an atomic bomb monopoly. What would it mean for the postwar world? Groves had been blunt about that: ‘There was never from about two weeks from the time [in September 1942] I took charge of this Project any illusion on my part but that Russia was our enemy, and the project was conducted on that basis.’⁸

It would be a contest for world

control with the Soviet Union. Looking to the postwar world, Groves’s April 1945 memorandum was emphatic about the need to control Congo’s uranium resources. Already in February 1944 the Military Policy Committee had recommended that the United States and Britain should take ‘joint control’ of Congo’s resources, ‘not only for the period of the war, but for all time to come’.⁹

Belgium, one of the most brutal colonial regimes,¹⁰ had already been extracting uranium ore (for its radium content) and copper decades before World War II. An intense US spy operation during the war had the dual purpose of ensuring US control of the uranium and denying it to the Nazis, who had overrun Belgium in May 1940. The Belgian administrator of Congo had decided to side with the Allies; he sent uranium ore stocked there to the United States at the end of 1940.¹¹

The same dual purpose carried over after the war, with the Soviet Union replacing Germany as the primary object of uranium denial, both under Belgian rule and, even more intensely, as the independence movement gathered steam in the

1950s. The US-British promise of postwar self-determination, self-government and freedom from want in the August 1941 'Atlantic Charter' was cast aside.¹²

That was the spirit of the 1948 advice of George Kennan, the architect of the policy of containment of the Soviet Union: '[W]e have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. This disparity is particularly great as between ourselves and the peoples of Asia. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and daydreaming. ... We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world-benefaction.'¹³

Stimson warned Truman that the US atomic monopoly would not last. It didn't. By the time of the Korean War, the Soviets had already tested their bomb, laid the Techa River in the Southern Ural mountains to waste, and, in an eerie, radioactive echo of the 16 July 1945 'Trinity' test in New Mexico, subjected villages near the test site in Kazakhstan to heavy fallout. In 1953, Oppenheimer forecast 'a state of affairs in which two Great Powers will each be in a position to put an end to the civilisation and life of the other, though not without risking its own. We may be likened to two scorpions in a bottle, each capable of killing the other, but only at the risk of his own life.'¹⁴ Churchill, in his farewell address (in 1955) to the British Parliament, also made it graphic. The logic of deterrence, he said, was that 'safety will be the sturdy child of terror, and survival the twin brother of annihilation'.

The rest of the world was hardly even a footnote in this US-Soviet drama. They were, after all, only objects of total control or total

destruction, with no agency.

Yet, the scorpions themselves were losing power. The terror was real, but the safety was not so sturdy.

The United States could not use nuclear weapons during the Korean War for fear of Soviet retaliation. Its nuclear threats did not prevent a costly stalemate. Millions died. Nuclear threats did not prevent the United States from defeat in its war on Vietnam. Millions were killed. Its 1971 nuclear threat to India during the South Asian war only precipitated India's decision to go nuclear, where it had been hesitant before. Its 1973 nuclear alert during the oil crisis did not prevent loss of control of oil resources in the Persian Gulf region by the multinational oil companies.¹⁵ As for the Soviets, they built even more nuclear weapons than the United States. It did them no good; by the 1980s they had spent themselves to exhaustion. Most of the weapons are dismantled; the thousands of useless plutonium pits stored near Tomsk stand as Siberian sentinels to nuclear folly. The US has its own near Amarillo, Texas.

Total control has yielded to near-total helplessness. A little-known aspect of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis reveals this truth. While President Kennedy and General Secretary Khrushchev did make a secret deal to save the world and prevent a nuclear holocaust, they would not even have had the chance had not Vasily Arkhipov, a Soviet naval chief, saved the world a few days before. The US Navy was playing 'cat-and-mouse' games with Soviet submarines, trying to force them to the surface, without a clue that they had nuclear weapons aboard. The officers on one of the Soviet submarines thought that a US-Soviet war had begun. They had no way to talk to Moscow and had been preauthorised to use their nuclear weapons. Three officers had to agree. Two said fire; Arkhipov said no. The states that wielded the bomb had no agency; one morally awake Soviet sailor did, and spared

us all.

The United States remained in ignorance of this fact for decades; it became public only at the end of the Cold War. But even that knowledge did not inspire the United States to step back as the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union disintegrated. There were, instead, proclamations of victory, even of the 'end of history'. It was triumphalist self-delusion: the Russians continued to possess enough weapons to obliterate the United States in 15 minutes.

The 'peaceful atom'

Deep secrecy, deception and delusion had become a pattern. By 1953, atomic gloom was turning to thermonuclear doom as the United States and the Soviet Union prepared explosions that could evaporate entire islands. Eisenhower was preparing to address the United Nations but found the speech too sombre. He wanted something brighter, more hopeful, to say. Thus, 'Atoms for Peace' was born on 8 December 1953.

A propaganda campaign followed. In 1954, Louis Strauss, the Chairman of the US Atomic Energy Commission, said of nuclear power that 'our children would enjoy ... electrical energy too cheap to meter', despite the fact that every serious study by government, industry and academia concluded it would be expensive. Atomic power, wrote General Electric's director of research in 1950, is an 'exceptionally costly and inconvenient means of obtaining energy. ... The economics of atomic power are not attractive at present, nor are they likely to be for a long time in the future. This is expensive power, not cheap power as the public has been led to believe'.¹⁶

[Cheap nuclear power is as far away as ever; in fact, there is no realistic prospect of it. The most promising US Small Modular Reactor project (NuScale's 'Carbon-Free Power Project') was

abandoned in late 2023 when it was abandoned by prospective customers after a nearly fourfold cost increase before any concrete was even poured – a decade and hundreds of millions of dollars wasted. NuScale hopes to build its reactors in Ukraine, among other countries.]

Nuclear power propaganda was deemed essential in a year when the world was focused on the deadly fallout from the 1 March 1954 15-megaton US test (1,000 times Hiroshima), named ‘Bravo’, at Bikini Atoll that had made the people of Rongelap Atoll exiles in their own country, sickened Japanese fishermen in the *Lucky Dragon Number 5* that was nearby, and poisoned the tuna aboard. There was a global uproar and a demand for cessation of testing. The Japanese were especially upset.

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles groaned that ‘[c]omparisons are now being made between ours and Hitler’s military machine’. Eisenhower was concerned that ‘[e]verybody seems to think that we are skunks, saber-rattlers, and warmongers’. It would be salutary, it was thought, to divert Japanese eyes from the memory of the ashes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The United States could make ‘a dramatic and Christian gesture’, as Commissioner Murray of the Atomic Energy Commission put it, in the form of a nuclear power plant.¹⁷

The ‘peaceful atom’ was thus born as a fig leaf on the horror of the hydrogen bomb.

One result is atomic wastelands at hundreds of sites in the United States, the former Soviet Union, France, Britain, China and elsewhere. The people of Rongelap poisoned by the 1954 Bravo thermonuclear test are still in exile, as are the people of Bikini. That 1954 test series (‘Castle’) created hotspots in Mexico City, Mexico, and in Colombo, Sri Lanka, among others. New Mexico communities irradiated with intense fallout

by the first ever test, codenamed ‘Trinity’, still await recognition. Add Australia and Kiribati, Algeria, French Polynesia, Kazakhstan, Lop Nor....¹⁸ In the United States alone, the Navajo Nation and neighbouring lands in the Colorado Plateau are littered with abandoned mines, poisoned waters, and hundreds of millions of tons of uranium mining and milling wastes.

There is also this little-known result: there is far more plutonium in highly radioactive used fuel from nuclear power plants than in all the nuclear weapons in all nine nuclear-bomb-wielding countries.

The World War II archipelago of radioactive contamination of Congo’s uranium ore, extracted under Belgium’s wretched rule, is a toxic emblem of what is being passed to future generations. It was stored on Staten Island. It was converted to forms needed to build the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs in Tonawanda (New York), Port Huron (Ontario, Canada), Bloomfield (New Jersey), Cleveland (Ohio), downtown St. Louis (Missouri), Oak Ridge (Tennessee),¹⁹ and on Indigenous lands in Hanford (Washington), where it was used to make plutonium. All before it was fashioned into bombs on Indigenous lands that Los Alamos occupied.

At the edge of the nuclear void

Today, there are nine scorpions in the bottle, and they are more confused than ever. They cannot let go, fearing total control by the other. They refuse to enter into discussions with the parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons who have forsworn the bomb. Yet, they know that it could all be ended by accident, not to speak of by design. For example, large numbers of US and Russian nuclear weapons remain in dangerous ‘launch-on-warning’ posture – a recipe for misunderstandings and a nuclear holocaust by accident. The world has come close more than once.

Reason is lost to atomic terror and the contrary fear of losing control, and the world remains hostage at the edge of the nuclear void. It is the bitter fruit of not stopping in December 1944, when the job was done. Einstein came to believe that signing the 1939 letter had been his biggest mistake. Richard Feynman, among the great physicists at Los Alamos, gave the following reflections in a 1981 interview with the BBC:

‘With regard to moral questions, I do have something I would like to say about it. The original reason to start the project, which was that the Germans were a danger, started me off on a process of action which was to try to develop this first system at Princeton and then at Los Alamos, to try to make the bomb work. All kinds of attempts were made to redesign it to make it a worse bomb and so on. But what I did – *immorally I would say* – was to not remember the reason that I said I was doing it, so that when the reason changed, because Germany was defeated, not the singlest thought came to my mind at all about that, that that meant now I would have to reconsider why I am continuing to do this. *I simply didn’t think, okay?*’²⁰

Even this startling confession of immorality encompasses only part of the story. There was a broader moral failure. Why did some US scientists think, as late as 1960, that it was acceptable for the United States to inflict ‘major birth defects’ on 6,000 babies worldwide so that it could conduct nuclear tests and build its vast arsenal?²¹ Why are the people of the Congo still suffering; millions have died and are still dying – only the resource mix is different? It is a country exemplary of how the carnage of the last 500 years turned the resources of the Global South into a curse.

Inside the Matryoshka doll of the delusions of nuclear weapons and power also lie the moral issues that total control, total destruction and total helplessness have raised.

Marrying these broader questions to nuclear weapons abolition is essential for an enduring peace with justice for all peoples.

Peace with justice will be, by all indications, a long struggle. But two steps could vastly increase safety and give us the time and room to get there. They are straightforward and can be implemented immediately. Specifically, the nuclear weapons powers should:

1. Accept the principles of nuclear weapons abolition in the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and engage with the parties to it to discuss how all nuclear weapon states might be integrated into its framework; and
2. Declare a 'nuclear ceasefire'. The concept was developed by the late Admiral L. Ramdas, former Chief of Staff of the Indian Navy, after India and Pakistan tested nuclear weapons in 1998, as part of his advocacy for complete nuclear disarmament. It combines 'no first use' with physical measures to take nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert, known as 'de-alerting', which makes verification of 'no first use' possible, at least in principle.²²

The three parties to the most serious nuclear tensions – the United States, Russia and China – could take these steps now unilaterally. They should derive inspiration from the historic step that Presidents George H.W. Bush and Gorbachev took in 1991 as the Soviet Union was disintegrating. There was no time for treaties. Recognising the dangers of 'loose nukes', they unilaterally withdrew thousands of 'tactical nuclear weapons' from deployment and dismantled them. It is most relevant to note that the United States acted first, on a proposal made years before by President Gorbachev.²³ ◆

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(justsolutionscollective.org) this essay is reproduced – and President of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research in Takoma Park, Maryland, USA.

Notes

1. Her identity remains uncertain.
2. Henry L. Stimson, Memorandum discussed with the President, 25 April 1945.
3. As quoted in G. Pascal Zachary, *Endless Frontier: Vannevar Bush, Engineer of the American Century*, New York: The Free Press, 1997, p. 89.
4. Zachary, 1997, op. cit., p. 159.
5. Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, Simon and Schuster, 1986, p. 378.
6. Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970, p. 115.
7. General Leslie Groves, Memorandum to the Secretary of War, 23 April 1945, italics added.
8. As quoted in Martin Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and Its Legacies*, Third Edition, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 62.
9. Military Policy Committee minutes, 4 February 1944, as quoted in Vincent C. Jones, *Manhattan: The Army and the Atomic Bomb*, Center of Military History, United States Army, 1985, p. 296, italics added.
10. Adam Hochschild has described Belgian rule in his book *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 1998.
11. A detailed account of US wartime spying and a summary of postwar Congo is in Susan Williams, *Spies in the Congo: America's Atomic Mission in World War II*, Public Affairs, 2016.
12. His signature on the Atlantic Charter was hardly dry when British Prime Minister Winston Churchill made clear it was not to apply to the colonies that Britain ruled. In November 1941 he said, 'Let me, however, make this clear ... I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.' Congo's resource curse continues. It is not so much uranium now; it is cobalt and other minerals for batteries and smartphones, and, as always, copper. Millions have been killed.
13. George Kennan, 1948, as quoted in Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis (eds.), *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy 1945–1950*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1978, pp. 226–227, italics added.
14. J. Robert Oppenheimer, 'Atomic Weapons and American Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, July 1953.
15. A list of nuclear alerts and threats, with references, is in *Science for Democratic Action*, October 1998, pp. 32–33.
16. As quoted in Arjun Makhijani and Michele Boyd, 'Nuclear Power: A Cold War Propaganda Tool', *Science for Democratic Action*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 12–13.
17. Quotes are as they appear in Peter Kuznick, 'Japan's nuclear history in perspective: Eisenhower and Atoms for War and Peace', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 13 April 2011.
18. A series of articles on the major nuclear weapon test sites, with references, can be found at <https://ieer.org/resource/disarmamentpeace/articles-on-the-health-and-environmental-impacts-of-nuclear-weapons-testing-at-the-major-test-sites/>
19. Department of Energy, 'Uranium Milling and Processing Facilities', The Manhattan Project: An Interactive History, <https://www.osti.gov/opennet/manhattan-project-history/Places/Other/uranium-production.html>
20. Richard Feynman, interview, 1981, in BBC Horizon TV, *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out*, italics added. Video at <https://vimeo.com/340695809>; quote starts at 16:40.
21. April 1960 editorial in the *California Engineer*, reprinted in 1990, and quoted in Arjun Makhijani, *Manifesto for Global Democracy*, Apex Press, 2004, Part II, p. 28.
22. Discussion of de-alerting and many other nuclear-disarmament-related issues can be found in the 1998 special issue of *Science for Democratic Action*, 'Achieving Enduring Nuclear Disarmament'.
23. National Security Archive, 'Unilateral US pullback in 1991 matched by rapid Soviet cuts', 30 September 2016.

Honour the victims of the nuclear age by bringing it to an end

Speaking at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Committee at the UN in Geneva on 23 July, *Ivana Nikolić Hughes* called for righting the wrongs caused by past nuclear arms use and testing while looking to a future free of these weapons. Below is the text of her speech.

THE Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) state parties are meeting for a third year in a row in the shadow of the devastating war in Ukraine, which has taken hundreds of thousands of lives, destroyed key infrastructure in Ukraine and elsewhere, and turned friends and family members into enemies. In the past 10 months, the attack on Israel and the war in Gaza have shattered all who have dared to confront the enormous civilian toll, the ongoing justifications of violations of international humanitarian law, and the divisiveness that the conflict has brought to environs from university campuses around the world to the halls of the United Nations.

The human suffering we witness on repeat is unfathomable, and yet, the fact that both of these conflicts involve – directly and indirectly – states that possess nuclear weapons is a stark reminder that things could be far worse. Whether deliberately, as has been threatened by Russian and Israeli politicians, or by accident, and especially if the current conflicts widen to regional wars, the use of nuclear weapons is a possibility that cannot be ruled out. This is so as long as nuclear weapons exist, and most especially as long as current policies not only allow but call for their instantaneous use to defend interests of states.

Taking nuclear disarmament seriously is not only an existential imperative at this very moment, but an obligation of all state parties to the NPT. The Nuclear-Weapon States – China, France,

Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – have a special responsibility. According to Article Six of this treaty, they are mandated to negotiate in good faith towards nuclear disarmament, something that they have ostensibly not been doing. This must change.

All other NPT state parties must move away from threats of nuclear annihilation as a strategy for conducting international affairs. The stationing of US and Russian weapons in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Türkiye (in the case of the US) and Belarus (in the case of Russia) must end imminently. So must the so-called nuclear umbrella promise. Nuclear weapons don't make anyone safer – they put all of us, all of humanity, and all of life on the planet at risk of extinction. To state that this is unacceptable is to state the obvious.

What should be done?

Next year will mark the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, and the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. The Nuclear-Weapon States should use this and next year's Preparatory Committee to chart a path that includes signing and ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in conjunction with the other four nuclear-weapon possessors: India, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan. Doing so by 2035 would allocate 10 years to make history. Once all possessors

have ratified the TPNW, all nuclear weapons should be eliminated by 2045.

As we look towards a future in which nuclear weapons are abolished, eliminated and no longer threaten to extinguish human civilisation, we also must look to the past and present in order to address the suffering of communities that were impacted by nuclear weapons use and testing. The NPT state parties can no longer pretend that the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were a necessary evil and sweep the nuclear testing era under a pile of rugs. The evidence of harm is all too real, and the scars are more than visible.

In Algeria, the radioactive equipment from the French nuclear testing programme remains buried in the Saharan sands. In the Marshall Islands, the food on the famous Bikini Island, after which the swimsuit was named by the French designer who wanted his design to be explosive, still brims with caesium-137 left over from the US nuclear testing. On Kiritimati Island in Kiribati, the local population has yet to receive an acknowledgment and assistance for harms done by the UK and the US during their nuclear weapon testing programmes. And in Kazakhstan, too many of the victims of the Soviet nuclear testing programme need far more help than they have received so far. This is despite the earnest efforts of the Kazakhstan government, which has taken serious steps towards environmental remediation and victim assistance in the affected

region. The stories go on and on and circle the globe.

The states responsible for these heinous acts must begin by issuing an apology. Next, they should come together with the international community to right these historical wrongs and to promise never to commit such crimes ever again.

Here too, the TPNW paves the way forward through its humanitarian provisions, spelled out in Articles Six and Seven. We furthermore call on all states, including the nine that abstained or voted last December against the resolution in the UN General Assembly to address the legacy of nuclear testing – the resolution provides an opportunity for a wide-reaching conversation about nuclear justice, which has been elusive for far too many and for far too long. Every state must come to the nuclear justice table.

There is work to be done. Statements and gatherings must be followed by real action and by concrete and time-bound steps.

We must honour the victims of the nuclear age by bringing about its end and by helping them earnestly and wholeheartedly. But beyond these tasks, we must recommit to the promise of the UN Charter in which states address their differences through negotiations; engage in peaceful cooperation and competition; and reject all threats, including those of nuclear Armageddon, as not just an enormous risk to humanity, but as an insult to our humanity. We are better than that.

The work and ideas of Mozart, Gandhi, Mandela, Parks, Franklin, Allende and so many others blaze the path forward. This path does not include nuclear weapons. ◆

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Preparedness of Nepal's Pharmaceutical Sector to Cope with the Challenges of the Country's LDC Graduation

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE)

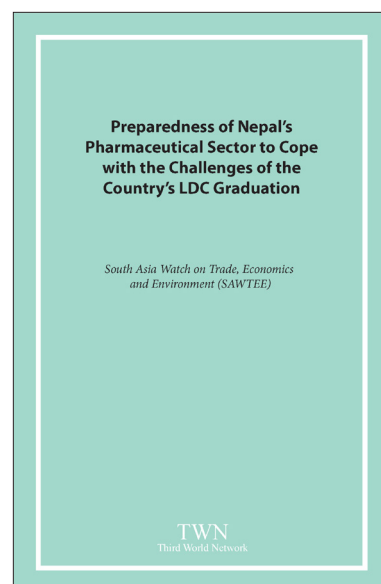
As a least-developed-country (LDC) member of the World Trade Organization, Nepal is not required, under the WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), to provide patent protection for pharmaceutical products. With no patent restrictions in force, Nepal's domestic pharmaceutical industry has expanded over the years to meet an increasing share of the country's medicine needs. This growth is now under threat, however, as Nepal is set to lose its LDC status – and, with it, the TRIPS exemption – in 2026.

This paper assesses how the Nepali pharmaceutical sector can face the challenges posed by implementation of the WTO

intellectual property rules after the country's graduation from the LDC category. It calls for full utilization of policy flexibilities allowed by the TRIPS Agreement and strengthened government support to boost the local pharmaceutical industry and enhance access to affordable medicines.

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) is a non-government organization registered in Nepal with a vision of ensuring fair, equitable, inclusive and sustainable growth and development in South Asia. Established in 1999, SAWTEE has been actively engaged in research, advocacy, capacity building, sensitization and alliance building on issues of trade, economics and environment. The SAWTEE team is comprised of highly skilled and experienced professionals who are passionate about contributing to informed and inclusive policymaking. Researchers at SAWTEE have provided inputs to regional and global organizations, besides the Government of Nepal and the Nepali private sector.

Available at: <https://twm.my/title2/books/Preparedness%20of%20Nepal's%20Pharmaceutical%20Sector.htm>



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Expendable lands and colonial legacies: Nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands

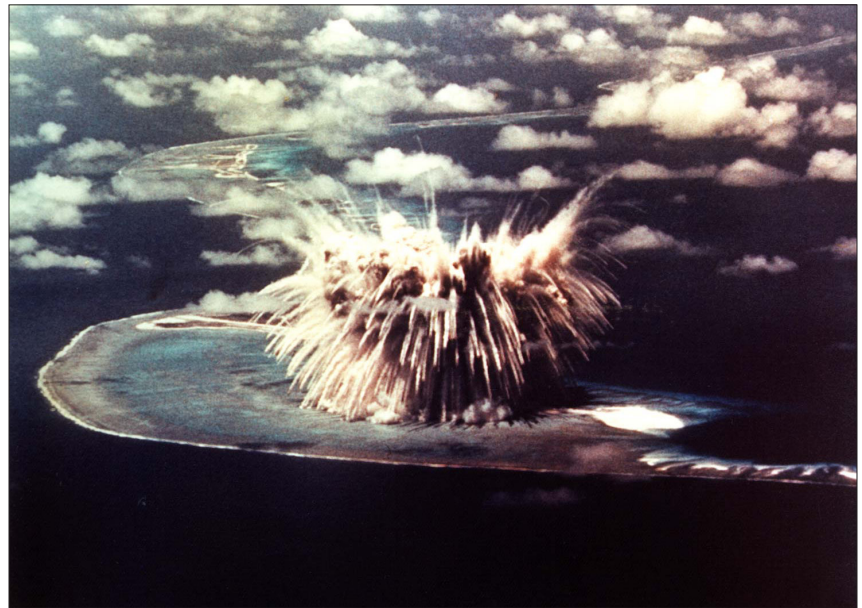
The US's testing of nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands, which has wrought ruinous health and environmental impacts down the years, reflects a colonialist attitude of exploitation and disregard.

Alicia Berube

NUCLEAR colonialism refers to the practice whereby colonial powers choose territories inhabited by marginalised and Indigenous populations to conduct nuclear testing with little regard for the effects on the local populations. The term encapsulates the colonialist view of Indigenous peoples and their territories as expendable. This attitude of expendability is foundational to colonialism and its legacies; nuclear colonialism represents one particularly dramatic phase in a lengthy, destructive history and its perpetuating legacy.

Beginning in 1945 and throughout the Cold War, over 2,000 nuclear tests were conducted in various territories by various states, with the US responsible for the majority of these tests. The US government's process of selecting the Marshall Islands for nuclear testing reveals the colonialist attitudes that informed its decision. The search criteria required that the territory be remote, away from US populations, and under US control. When testifying to the US Congress, officials brazenly said of the site, 'Above all, it had to be away from population centers of US ... and yet in an area controlled by the US.'

The Marshall Islands fulfilled every criterion: a remote island archipelago in the Pacific Ocean under US occupation since 1944, following two years in which



A US nuclear weapons test at Eniwetok Atoll in the Marshall Islands in 1956.

the US military transformed the territory into a battlefield while driving out the Japanese military administration. The US wasted no time in using the already ravaged islands for military ends: on 1 July 1946 – less than a year after the devastating nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – the first peacetime nuclear test was conducted on Bikini Atoll. Between 1946 and 1958, the US conducted 66 additional nuclear tests on the islands concentrated on two atolls, but the fallout blanketed many of the other 27 atolls that make up the Marshall Islands.

In 1947, the United Nations officially placed the Marshall Islands under the trusteeship of the US.

The stipulations of this agreement included paradoxical obligations, spelled out in Articles 5 and 6 of the document. Article 5 obligated the US to ensure the trust territory contributed to 'the maintenance of international peace and security', thus validating its use for military ends. Article 6, conversely, sets forth the obligations of the governing state to ensure and promote the governed territory's independence, protection and security. It explicitly states the obligation to 'protect the inhabitants against the loss of their lands and resources'.

While the agreement lacked explicit permission to use the territories for nuclear testing, both the broad administrative and

military control it granted the US and the narrative that the tests were imperative to national security justified the testing that took place. However, the known effects of nuclear testing meant that any nuclear explosions on the islands rendered the obligation from Article 6 impossible to uphold; in fact, any testing directly ensured the violation of the obligation.

Not only have the Marshallese experienced devastating health consequences – including higher incidences of cancer – but significant radiological contamination remains on the islands, including in the locally grown foods, rendering parts of the Marshall Islands uninhabitable. This contamination robs displaced Marshallese people of the opportunity to safely inhabit their native lands and live according to their culture and tradition. Although certain compensation schemes have been set up over the last few decades, they remain egregiously inadequate to address the scale of the problem, including the devastating health impacts and the ongoing environmental challenges.

The broader context of US colonial exploitation

The willingness of the US to exploit the Marshall Islands under nuclear colonialism is only one piece of a vast colonial legacy. Since the 19th century, the US has continually annexed territories under conditions that sanction their exploitation, as evidenced by its acquisition of Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippines following the conclusion of the Spanish-American war in 1898. Shortly following the annexation of these territories, US senator Albert Beveridge remarked that God ‘has made us the master organizers of the world ... that we may administer ... among savage and senile peoples’.

After these territories were



A Marshallese man being tested for radiation levels at a US laboratory in 1957. The Marshallese have suffered higher incidences of cancer following US nuclear testing over the years.

acquired, the US Supreme Court ruled that they would remain under US control as unincorporated territories in the Insular Cases. This served to prevent the full realisation of constitutional rights for the citizens of these territories. In keeping the territories unincorporated, the US retained plenary power over these regions, enabling them to implement policies and decisions without the consent of the governed. The strategic classification of the territories as constitutional exceptions was informed by the settler colonisation of Native American peoples and territories and made on the basis that the inhabitants, like Native Americans, were ‘unfit for automatic citizenship or for territorial sovereignty’. The colonialist attitudes that informed the decision to deprive these territories of constitutional protections paved the avenue for their exploitation.

Like all other colonised territories, Puerto Rico draws remarkable parallels to the Marshall Islands. Puerto Ricans posed minimal resistance to US control in 1898 under the impression

that US occupation would facilitate their independence. However, US interest in Puerto Rico was strategic, fuelled by the compelling economic and military value the territory would provide. The region was ideal for expanding US commercial and military reach.

In pursuit of these military and economic ends, the US displaced Puerto Ricans, exploited their lands and disrupted their ways of life. These actions have resulted in significant environmental damage and health issues, such as contamination of land and water sources, increased cancer rates and other chronic illnesses among the local population.

Today, the Marshall Islands and Puerto Rico remain hindered by their history of occupation. Both territories struggle to realise economic independence due to the systemic exploitation of their resources and people by colonial powers. Their ongoing economic challenges and public health crises result directly from the policies and actions of the US and its failure to compensate the territories adequately.

This history of exploitation and disregard for Indigenous and marginalised populations underscores the broader patterns of colonialism that persist in various forms. Nuclear colonialism, as illustrated by the US actions in the Marshall Islands, is a stark reminder of how colonial legacies continue to inflict harm and maintain inequities. Nuclear testing is extraordinary in the novelty and nature of the weapons and their effects but very typical in terms of how former colonial powers treat smaller populations and territories under their control – as expendable. ♦

Alicia Berube wrote this article while interning with the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, from whose website (www.wagingpeace.org) it is reproduced. She is a Wellesley College graduate with a Peace and Justice Studies bachelor's degree, and is completing her Master's in International and Development Studies with a concentration in human rights.

Suffer the children

A nuclear strike or test will inflict great and terrible harm all round, but to children most of all. The following extract from a report by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) explains why the smallest victims of these weapons are the biggest casualties.



Kikuchi Shunkichi

An October 1945 photo of two child victims of the atomic bombings in Japan. The boy died in 1949 and his elder sister in 1965.

NUCLEAR weapons are designed to destroy cities; to kill and maim whole populations, children among them.

In a nuclear attack, children are more likely than adults to die or suffer severe injuries, given their greater vulnerability to the effects of nuclear weapons: heat, blast and radiation.

The fact that children depend on adults for their survival also places them at higher risk of death and hardship in the aftermath of a nuclear attack, with support systems destroyed.

Tens of thousands of children were killed when the United States detonated two relatively small nuclear weapons (by today's standard) over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

Many were instantly reduced to ash and vapour. Others died in agony minutes, hours, days or weeks after the attacks from burn and blast injuries or acute radiation sickness. Countless more died years or even decades later from radiation-related cancers and other illnesses. Leukaemia – cancer of the blood – was especially prevalent among the young.

In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the scenes of devastation were apocalyptic: Playgrounds scattered

with the dead bodies of young girls and boys. Mothers cradling their lifeless babies. Children with their intestines hanging out of their bellies and strips of skin dangling from their limbs.

At some of the schools close to ground zero, the entire student population of several hundred perished in an instant. At others, there were but a few survivors. In Hiroshima, thousands of school students were working outside to create firebreaks on the morning of

Dead bodies scattered over a playground

Fujio Tsujimoto, five years old, was at a school playground with his grandmother when they heard an aeroplane in the distance over Nagasaki.

I grabbed my grandmother by the hand and ran towards the shelter. 'Enemy plane!' yelled the watchman on the roof of the school building as he struck the bell. 'Look out!' People on the playground came running straight for the shelter. I was the first to plunge into the deepest part of the shelter. But at that moment – flash! – I was blown against the wall by the force of the explosion.

After a while, I peered out of the shelter. I found people scattered all over the playground. The ground was covered almost entirely with bodies. Most of them looked dead and lay still. Here and there, however, some were thrashing their legs or raising their arms. Those who were able to move came crawling into the shelter. Soon the shelter was crowded with the wounded. Around the school, all the town was on fire.

My brother and sisters were late coming into the shelter, so they were burnt and crying. Half an hour later my mother appeared at last. She was covered with blood. I will never forget how happy I was as I clung to my mother. We waited and waited for Father, but he never appeared.

Even those who had survived died in agony one after another. My younger sister died the next day. My mother, she also died the next day. And then my older brother. I thought I would die, too, because the people around me, lying beside each other in the shelter, were dying one by one. Yet, because my grandmother and I had been in the deepest part of the shelter, we apparently had not been exposed to [as much] radiation and in the end we were saved.

the attack. Approximately 6,300 of them were killed.

Those children who, by chance, escaped death carried with them severe physical and psychological scars throughout their lifetimes. What they witnessed and experienced on 6 August and 9 August 1945 and in the days that followed was permanently seared into their memories.

Thousands of children lost one or both parents, as well as siblings. Some 'A-bomb orphans' were left to roam the streets, with orphanages exceeding capacity.

Many of the babies who were in their mothers' wombs at the time of the atomic bombings were also harmed as a result of their exposure to ionising radiation. They had a greater risk of dying soon after birth or suffering from congenital abnormalities such as brain damage and microcephaly, as well as cancers and other illnesses later in life.

Pregnant women in Hiroshima and Nagasaki also experienced higher rates of spontaneous abortions and stillbirths.

In communities around the world exposed to fallout from nuclear testing, children have experienced similar harm from radiation.

Since 1945, nuclear-armed states have conducted more than 2,000 nuclear test explosions at dozens of locations, dispersing radioactive material far and wide.

Among the general population, children and infants have been the most severely affected, due to their higher vulnerability to the effects of ionising radiation. Young children are three to five times more susceptible to cancer in the long term than adults from a given dose of radiation, and girls are particularly vulnerable.

In the Marshall Islands, where the United States conducted 67 nuclear tests, children played in the radioactive ash that fell from the sky, unaware of the danger. They called it 'Bikini snow' – a

'The Boy Standing by the Crematory'



This iconic photograph, taken in Nagasaki one month after the atomic bombing, shows a young boy with his dead baby brother strapped to his back, waiting to dispose of the body at a crematorium. The photographer, Joe O'Donnell of the US Marine Corps, described the scene as such:

I saw a boy about 10 years old walking by. He was carrying a baby on his back. In those days in Japan, we often saw children playing with their little brothers or sisters on their backs, but this boy was clearly different. I could see that he had come to this place for a serious reason. He was wearing no shoes. His face was hard. The little head was tipped back as if the baby were fast asleep. The boy stood there for 5 or 10 minutes.

The men in white masks walked over to him and quietly began to take off the rope that was holding the baby. That is when I saw that the baby was already dead. The men held the body by the hands and feet and placed it on the fire. The boy stood there straight without moving, watching the flames. He was biting his lower lip so hard that it shone with blood. The flame burned low like the sun going down. The boy turned around and walked silently away.

reference to the atoll where many of the explosions took place. It burned their skin and eyes, and they quickly developed symptoms of

acute radiation sickness.

For decades after the tests, women in the Marshall Islands gave birth to severely deformed babies

Intergenerational harm in Ma'ohi Nui

Between 1966 and 1996, France conducted 193 nuclear tests at Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls in Ma'ohi Nui (also known as French Polynesia).

Hinamoeura Morgant-Cross, a Tahitian anti-nuclear campaigner and parliamentarian, has worked to draw global attention to the intergenerational harm wrought by these explosions. She was seven years old when the testing programme ended, and as a young adult was diagnosed with chronic leukaemia.

In an interview in 2024, she said that the suffering in her family from the nuclear tests began with her great-grandmother, who had thyroid cancer. Then her grandmother, mother and aunt all developed radiation-related illnesses.

Now she is afraid that her young children will become victims of the bombs, too. 'I really feel that I have poison in my blood,' she said. 'So if my kids get sick, I'll feel that it's me who poisoned us, you see.'

at unusually high rates. Those born alive rarely survived more than a few days. Some had translucent skin and no discernible bones. They would be referred to as 'jellyfish babies', for they could scarcely be recognised as human beings.

Similar stories have been told by people living downwind or downstream of nuclear test sites in the United States, Kazakhstan, Ma'ohi Nui, Algeria, Kiribati, China, Australia and elsewhere.

We have a collective moral duty to honour the memories of the thousands of children killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as those harmed by the development and testing of nuclear weapons globally. And we must pursue the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world with determination and urgency, lest there be any more victims, young or old.

Under international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments have a legal obligation to protect children against harm in armed conflict. To fulfil this obligation, it is imperative that they work together now to eliminate the scourge of nuclear weapons from the world.

Disproportionate harm

So long as nuclear weapons exist in the world, there is a very real risk that they will be used again, and that risk at present appears to be increasing.

In the event of their use, it is all but certain that many thousands of children – perhaps hundreds of thousands or more – would be counted among the dead and injured, and they would suffer in unique ways and out of proportion to the rest of the population.

In a nuclear attack, children would be more likely than adults:

- To die from burn injuries, as their skin is thinner and more delicate and burns deeper, more quickly and at a lower temperature;
- To die from blast injuries, given the relative frailty of their smaller bodies;
- To die from acute radiation sickness, as they have more cells that are growing and dividing rapidly and are significantly more vulnerable to radiation effects;
- To be unable to free themselves from collapsed and burning buildings or take other steps in the aftermath

that would increase their chances of survival;

- To suffer from leukaemia, solid cancers, strokes, heart attacks and other illnesses years later as a result of the delayed effects of radiation damage to their cells; and
- To suffer privation in the aftermath of the attacks, as well as psychological trauma leading to mental disorders and suicide.

Furthermore, babies who were in their mothers' wombs at the time of the attack would be at greater risk of:

- Death soon after birth or in early childhood;
- Microcephaly, accompanied by intellectual disability, given the higher vulnerability of the developing brain to radiation damage;
- Other developmental abnormalities;
- Growth impairment due to the reduced functioning of the thyroid; and
- Cancers and other radiation-related illnesses during childhood or later in life.

These horrifying realities should have profound implications for policymaking in countries that currently possess nuclear weapons or those that support their retention as part of military alliances.

They should also prompt organisations dedicated to the protection of children and the promotion of their rights to work to address the grave global threat posed by nuclear weapons.

While children played no part in developing these doomsday devices, it is children who would suffer the most in the event of their future use – one of the myriad reasons why such weapons must be urgently eliminated. ♦

The above is excerpted from the report The Impact of Nuclear Weapons on Children, written by Tim Wright and published in August 2024 by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). The full report is available at www.icanw.org/children.

The triad is not the trinity

Or, ending my thermonuclear odyssey

US military veteran *William J. Astore* ponders the madness of his country's nuclear force, much of which is redundant and obsolete and all of it deserving of dismantlement.

AS a late-stage baby boomer, a child of the 1960s, I grew up dreaming about America's nuclear triad. You may remember that it consisted of strategic bombers like the B-52 Stratofortress, land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) like the Minuteman, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) like the Poseidon, all delivery systems for what we then called 'the Bomb'. I took it for granted that we needed all three 'legs' – yes, that was also the term of the time – of that triad to ward off the Soviet Union (aka the 'evil empire').

It took me some time to realise that the triad was anything but the trinity, that it was instead a product of historical contingency. Certainly, my mind was clouded because two legs of that triad were the prerogative of the US Air Force, my chosen branch of service. When I was a teenager, the Air Force had 1,054 ICBMs (mainly Minutemen missiles) in silos in rural states like Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming, along with hundreds of strategic bombers kept on constant alert against the Soviet menace. They represented enormous power not just in destructive force measured in megatonnage but in budgetary authority for the Air Force. The final leg of that triad, the most 'survivable' one in case of a nuclear war, was (and remains) the Navy's SLBMs on nuclear submarines. (Back in the day, the Army was



A Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile on display at the National Museum of the US Air Force. ICBMs and another 'leg' of the US nuclear triad, bombers, 'have long been redundant, obsolete, a total waste of taxpayer money'.

so jealous that it, too, tried to go atomic, but its nuclear artillery shells and tactical missiles were child's play compared with the potentially holocaust-producing arsenals of the Air Force and Navy.)

When I said that the triad wasn't the trinity, what I meant (the obvious aside) was this: the US military no longer needs

nuclear strategic bombers and land-based ICBMs in order to threaten to destroy the planet. As a retired Air Force officer who worked in Cheyenne Mountain, America's nuclear redoubt, during the tail end of the first Cold War, and as a historian who once upon a time taught courses on the atomic bomb at the Air Force Academy, I have some knowledge and experience here. Those two 'legs' of the nuclear triad, bombers and ICBMs, have long been redundant, obsolete, a total waste of taxpayer money – leaving aside, of course, that they would prove genocidal in an unprecedented fashion were they ever to be used.

Nevertheless, such thoughts have no effect on our military. Instead, the Air Force is pushing ahead with plans to field – yes! – a new strategic bomber, the B-21 Raider, and – yes, again! – a new ICBM, the Sentinel, whose combined price tag will likely exceed \$500 billion. The first thing any sane commander-in-chief with an urge to help this country would do is cancel those new nuclear delivery systems tomorrow.

Instead of rearming, America should begin disarming, but don't hold your breath on that one.

A brief history of America's nuclear triad

It all started with atomic bombs and bombers. In August 1945, the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were

obliterated by two atomic bombs carried by B-29 bombers, ending World War II. However, in the years that followed, as the Cold War with the Soviet Union heated up, the only 'delivery system' the military had for its growing thermonuclear arsenal was the strategic bomber. Those were the glory days of the Strategic Air Command, or SAC, whose motto (believe it or not) was 'Peace Is Our Profession' – the 'peace' of a mass nuclear grave, had those hydrogen bombs ever been dropped on their intended targets in the Soviet Union and China.

However, as this country's weapons makers produced ever more powerful hydrogen bombs and strategic bombers, a revolution was afoot in missile technology. By the late 1950s, missiles tipped with nuclear warheads became a practical reality. By the 1960s, the Air Force was already lobbying for 10,000 ICBMs, even if my old service had to settle for a mere thousand or so of them during the administration of President John F. Kennedy. Meanwhile, the Navy was manoeuvring its way into the act by demonstrating that it was indeed possible for mobile, difficult-to-detect submarines to carry nuclear-tipped missiles.

By the late 1960s, that triad of potentially ultimate nuclear death had become so sacrosanct that it was untouchable. More than half a century later, America's nuclear triad has endured and, all too sadly, is likely to do so far longer than you or me (if not, of course, used).

You might wonder why that should be so. It's not for any sensible military or strategic reason. By the 1980s, if not before, bombers and ICBMs were obsolete. That was why President Jimmy Carter cancelled the B-1 bomber in 1977 (though it would be revived under President Ronald Reagan, with the Air Force buying 100 of those expensive, essentially useless aircraft). That was why the Air Force developed the 'peacekeeper' MX ICBM, which was supposed to be mobile (shuffled around by rail) or hidden via an elaborate shell game.

Such notions were soon abandoned, though not the missiles themselves, which were stuffed for a time into fixed silos. The endurance of such weapons systems owes everything to Air Force stubbornness and the lobbying power of the industrial side of the military-industrial complex, as well as to members of Congress loath to give up ICBM and bomber bases in their districts, no matter how costly, unnecessary and omnicidal they may be.

In that light, consider the Navy's current force of highly capable *Ohio*-class nuclear submarines. There are 14 of them, each armed with up to 20 Trident II missiles, each with up to eight warheads. We're talking, in other words, about at least 160 potentially devastating nuclear explosions, each roughly five to 20 times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb, from a single sub. In fact, it's possible that just one of those submarines has an arsenal with enough destructive power not just to kill millions of us humans, but to tip the earth into a nuclear winter in which billions more of us could starve to death. And America has 14 of them!

Why, then, does the Air Force argue that it, too, 'needs' new strategic bombers and ICBMs? The traditional arguments go like this: bombers can be launched as a show of resolve and, unlike missiles, recalled. They are also allegedly more flexible. In Air Force jargon, they can be rerouted against 'targets of opportunity' in a future nuclear war. Of course, generals can always produce a scenario, however world-ending, to justify any weapons system, based on what an enemy might or might not do or discover. Nonetheless, strategic bombers were already nearing obsolescence when Stanley Kubrick made his classic anti-nuclear satire, *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), so prominently featuring them.

And what about land-based ICBMs? Once the claim was that they had more 'throw-weight' (bigger warheads) than SLBMs and were also more accurate (being

launched from fixed silos rather than a mobile platform like a submarine). But with GPS and other advances in technology, submarine-launched missiles are now as accurate as land-based ones and 'throw-weight' (sheer megatonnage) always mattered far less than accuracy.

Worse yet, land-based ICBMs in fixed silos are theoretically more vulnerable to an enemy 'sneak' attack and so more escalatory in nature. The US currently has 400 Minuteman III ICBMs sitting in silos. If possible incoming enemy nuclear missiles were detected, an American president might have less than 30 minutes – and possibly only 10 or so – to decide whether to launch this country's ICBM force or risk losing it entirely.

That's not much time to determine the all-too-literal fate of the planet, is it, especially given the risk that the enemy attack might prove to be a 'false alarm'? Just before I arrived at Cheyenne Mountain, there were two such alarms (one stemming from a technical failure, the other from human error when a simulation tape was loaded into computers without any notification that it was just a 'war game'). Until they were found to be false alarms, both led to elevated DEFCONs (defence readiness conditions) in preparation for possible nuclear war.

New ICBMs will only add 'use them or lose them' pressure to the global situation. Mobile, elusive and difficult to detect, the Navy's submarine force is more than sufficient to deter any possible enemy from launching a nuclear attack on the United States. Strategic bombers and ICBMs add plenty of bang and bucks but only to the Air Force budget and the profits of the merchants of mass nuclear death who make them.

A sane path forward for America's nuclear force

I still remember the nuclear freeze movement, the stunningly

popular anti-nuclear protest of the early 1980s. I also remember when President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev met in 1986 and seriously discussed total nuclear disarmament. I remember Barack Obama, as a 2008 presidential candidate, being joined by old Cold War stalwarts like Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn in calling for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

Today, we're not supposed to recall any of that. Instead, we're told to focus on the way a developing 'new cold war' with Russia and China is driving a 'requirement' for a 'modernised' US nuclear triad that could cost \$2 trillion over the next 30 years. Meanwhile, we're discouraged from thinking too much about the actual risks of nuclear war. The Biden administration, for example, professes little concern about the possibility that arming Ukraine with weaponry capable of hitting deep inside Russia could lead to destabilisation and the possible use of nuclear weapons on the battlefield (something Vladimir Putin has threatened to do). Nor are we to fret about surrounding China with ever more US military bases and sending ever more weaponry to Taiwan, while the Chinese are enlarging their own force of ICBMs; or, for that matter, about the fact that the last nuclear agreement limiting the size of the American and Russian arsenals will run out in less than 1,000 days.

To such issues, the only response America's 'best and brightest' ever have is this one: give us more/newer strategic bombers, more/newer ICBMs, and more/newer nuclear submarines (whatever the cost)! To those men, it's as if nuclear war were a theoretical (and distinctly money-making) chess match – and yes, they are indeed still mostly men – a challenging game whose only components are profits, jobs, money and power. Yet when the only story to be told is one featuring more nuclear warheads and more delivery systems, it's hard

not to conclude that, in some horrific fashion, nuclear Armageddon is indeed us (or at least *them*).

And though few spend much time thinking about it anymore, that's madness personified. What's needed instead is a new conviction that a nuclear Armageddon must not be our fate and, to make that so, we must act to eliminate all ICBMs, cancel the B-21 bomber, retire the B-1s and B-2s, work on global nuclear disarmament, start thinking about how to get rid of those nuclear subs, and begin to imagine what it would be like to invest the money saved in rebuilding America. It sure beats destroying the world.

And again, in the most practical terms possible, if we're set on preserving Armageddon, America's existing force of *Ohio*-class nuclear submarines is more than enough both to do so and undoubtedly to 'deter' any possible opponent.

There was a time, in the early stages of the first Cold War, when America's leaders professed fears of 'bomber' and 'missile' gaps vis-à-vis the Soviet Union – gaps that existed only in their minds, or rather only in the reverse sense, since the US was ahead of the Soviets in both technologies. Today, the bomber and missile 'gaps' are, in fact, gaps in logic wielded by a Pentagon that insists strategic bombers and ICBMs remain a 'must' for this country's safety and security.

It's all such nonsense and I'm disgusted by it. I want my personal thermonuclear odyssey to come to an end. As a kid in the 1970s, I built a model of the B-1 bomber. As an ROTC cadet in the early 1980s, I made a presentation on the US/Soviet nuclear balance. As a young Air Force officer, I hunkered down in Cheyenne Mountain, awaiting a nuclear attack that fortunately never came. When I visited Los Alamos and the Trinity Test Site at Alamogordo, New Mexico, in 1992, I saw what J. Robert Oppenheimer's original atomic 'gadget' had done to the tower from which it had been

suspended. When the Soviet Union collapsed, I genuinely hoped that this country's (and the world's) long nuclear nightmare might finally be coming to an end.

Tragically, it was not to be. The gloomy Los Alamos of 1992, faced with serious cuts to its nuclear-weapons-producing budget, is once again an ebullient boom town. Lots of new plutonium pits are being dug. Lots more money is flooding in to give birth to a new generation of nuclear weapons. Of course, it's madness, sheer madness, yet, this time, it's all happening so quietly.

Even as the nuclear clock ticks ever closer to midnight, nobody is ducking and covering in America's classrooms anymore (except against mass shooters). No one's building a nuclear bomb shelter in their backyard (though doomsday shelters seem to have become status symbols for the ultra-rich). We're all going about our business as if such a war were inconceivable and, in any case, akin to a natural disaster in being essentially out of our control.

And yet even as we live our lives, the possibility of a nuclear Armageddon remains somewhere in our deepest fears and fantasies. Worse yet, the more we suppress the thought of such horrors and the more we refuse even to think about acting to prevent them, the more likely it is that such an Armageddon will indeed come for all of us one day, and the 'trinity' we'll experience will be a horrific version of the blinding flash of light first seen by J. Robert Oppenheimer and crew at that remote desert site nearly 80 years ago. ♦

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The UN's settler-colonial bloc

Introducing WEOG, the white world's grouping which wields disproportionate power in the United Nations and pursues an agenda rooted in colonial logic.

WHAT do two South Pacific countries, two North American countries, one country in the Middle East and (until recently) one country in southern Africa have in common with Europe? The answer is rooted in centuries of imperialism and conquest in the ideologies that have sustained them – and in the four-letter acronym 'WEOG'.

Five countries – the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Israel (and for several years during apartheid, the South African regime) – are part of the UN diplomatic grouping known as 'WEOG', together with 20 European states.

WEOG stands for the 'Western Europe and Other Group'. The 'WE' for Western Europe is self-evident. But the 'other' in the group is more coded, representing states founded by European settler colonialism.

WEOG is one of the five official 'regional groupings' of the United Nations. But while the other four are all defined by regional boundaries (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean), WEOG is cross-regional and represents something else: the white world.

The white world's bloc

This will instantly shock the casual reader, but for practitioners and academics in the world of international relations, it's a familiar concept. The West has long centred its approach to international relations on race. Indeed, the study of international relations began in the West as 'race relations'. And *Foreign Affairs*, the leading US publication on international relations, was originally the *Journal*

Craig Mokhiber

of Race Development.

That approach was never horizontal, but rather one in which whiteness was centred and supreme. While sometimes obscured by a more genteel façade, below the surface the same dynamics continue today.

Of course, WEOG avoids any such direct racial billing, instead describing itself as a group of 'western democracies'. The problem they have, however, is that their membership includes some states that are not (geographically) western, and some that are not democracies. Israel, former member South Africa, Australia and New Zealand are all situated outside the West.

And as for democracies, original WEOG members Spain, Portugal and Greece were governed during their membership by dictatorial regimes until the mid-1970s. South Africa and Israel were both admitted under apartheid regimes. And the United States had a formal system of racial segregation until the mid-1960s and was therefore hardly a 'democracy' for a significant part of its population.

In other words, WEOG is not now and has never been a group of 'western democracies'.

At other times, WEOG has been described as a principally anti-communist or anti-Soviet alliance. But there have been plenty of countries in the Global South that opposed the Soviet Union and communism but were never admitted to WEOG. And while the Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1991, WEOG has continued

on the same course for over three decades since, proving that this is not principally a Cold War alliance either.

Institutional inequity

Those tempted to view this as a matter of mere academic interest should first consider that WEOG wields disproportionate power in the UN. WEOG countries represent only about 11% of the global population. They are the second smallest UN group – with 29 members compared with the 54 members of the Africa Group, for example.

Nevertheless, three out of five permanent members of the UN Security Council are WEOG members, and the group enjoys an additional two elected seats on the Council beyond the five permanent members. Similar patterns of structural inequities privileging WEOG are reflected in the composition of other intergovernmental bodies as well.

They are also grossly over-represented in the UN's senior management team. The post of head of political affairs is unofficially reserved for an American, as is the head of UNICEF and of the World Food Programme. The head of peacekeeping is reserved for the French, and humanitarian affairs for the British. And of the nine Secretaries-General in the organisation's history, four have been from WEOG countries.

The group also benefits from the formidable sticks and tempting carrots of the US empire. Regardless of who occupies the rotating chair of the group, the dominant actor remains the United States, the group's 'first among

equals'. Even though it sometimes claims to be an 'observer', the United States conveniently accepts full membership when electoral slates for UN bodies are decided.

This disproportionate influence is brought to bear across the UN agenda. The imperial, colonial and white supremacist roots of WEOG run deep, and they directly impact the policy positions taken by the group (especially the 'OGs') in UN voting. Voting patterns bear this out especially in the defence of colonialism, apartheid and political Zionism, and in opposition to Indigenous rights, the anti-racism agenda, Palestinian rights, and to the right to development.

This colonial logic is evident in WEOG's opposition to guaranteeing people control over their own national development, to efforts to control mercenaries (often deployed to deny peoples' self-determination), and to moves addressing the devastating impact of unilateral coercive measures (like sanctions) imposed by Western governments on countries of the Global South.

Members of WEOG actively oppose anti-colonial and post-colonial perspectives on trade, debt, finance and intellectual property. And when the UN moved to recognise the human right to food in 2021, only the United States and Israel, both WEOG members, voted no. Virtually every effort by formerly colonised countries to break from the exploitative economic relations and destructive racial legacies imposed by their former colonial masters is resisted by WEOG states.

Colonial values

A clear demonstration of the true nature of the sub-group can be found in its position on the UN's official global programme to combat racism, known as the Durban Declaration.

The global Durban

Conference that drafted the declaration in 2001 was boycotted by Israel and the United States – and both the subsequent Durban II review conference and the Durban III meeting were boycotted by Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Israel and the United States, along with a few European states. The group's opposition is regularly registered in voting, in diplomatic demarches and, importantly, in positions taken in annual budget negotiations.

Worse still, the United States, Israel and a hodge-podge of pro-Israel lobby groups, often with the complicity of some European nations, have carried on a decades-long campaign of disinformation to discredit the Declaration, going so far as to call it antisemitic, which is especially ironic given that the Declaration specifically commits the UN to combatting antisemitism.

The Declaration's real offence? It directly challenges institutionalised racism, including in these countries, and sets out a programme of remedial measures. Needless to say, the settler-colonial pedigree of these countries, and their long histories of institutionalised racism, put them squarely in the bullseye of the Declaration, a position that they cannot and will not tolerate. In their view, human rights critique is for the countries of the Global South – not for the wealthy, white world of WEOG.

The world saw the same positioning again when the UN General Assembly convened on 13 September 2007 to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, after 20 years of debate. The Declaration was adopted with the overwhelming majority of states voting in favour, a handful abstaining and four countries (the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) voting against. Israel skipped the vote altogether.

Obviously, the shared history (and continued policies) of these five countries in persecuting,

dispossessing and exterminating the Indigenous peoples of the lands they colonised stands in direct contradiction to the provisions of the UN Declaration, and this realisation was front and centre when they joined forces to oppose it in 2007.

The settler-colonial agenda of the alliance is also evident in voting on Palestine. While most countries of the world recognise the State of Palestine, WEOG is once again the outlier.

The United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and several European states (and, of course, Israel) have still not recognised Palestine. Israel and the United States (which also uses its veto in the Security Council to block Palestine's full UN membership) consistently vote against UN resolutions supporting the human rights of the Palestinian people, while Canada often votes no or abstains, and Australia and New Zealand frequently abstain. Apartheid South Africa, during its tenure, was one of Israel's closest allies and routinely supported it in the UN, while post-apartheid South Africa would become one of Palestine's closest allies.

Indeed, perhaps most revelatory of the strident commitment of these countries to the defence of settler colonialism is their lockstep support of Israel, even as Israel perpetrates history's first livestreamed genocide against the indigenous Palestinians. WEOG countries that had previously made human rights and international law key centrepieces of their international public positioning (however cynically) have turned on a dime to openly distort, devalue and dismiss these rules in order to buttress Israeli impunity.

Some have even crossed the line into direct complicity in war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, exposing themselves both legally and politically. The United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom,

Germany and several other European states have provided arms, financial investments, intelligence support and diplomatic cover for Israel's crimes, even while they are being committed.

Calls for reform

The message is clear: the defence of settler colonialism (and its inherent atrocities) trumps all other values, all other interests and all other rules. The wagons must be circled. The colonial project must be protected. Human rights and

international law be damned.

But the UN has been on a constant trajectory of change, peaking in the mid-1970s after the entry of a large number of newly independent states – and again now, as the unipolar moment of the United States begins to fade.

Calls for reform are growing. And if the UN is to survive, the vestiges of the colonial era will need to give way to more equitable diplomatic, political and economic arrangements. The principles of the organisation, including self-determination, human rights and

equality, will need to play a more central role in intergovernmental processes.

And WEOG will need to find its place in a diplomatic museum, alongside the top hats, all-male meetings and smoke-filled rooms of yesteryear. ♦

Craig Mokhiber is an international human rights lawyer and former senior United Nations official. He left the UN in October of 2023, penning a widely read letter that warned of genocide in Gaza, criticised the international response, and called for a new approach to Palestine and Israel based on equality, human rights and international law. The above article is reproduced from the Foreign Policy in Focus website (fpif.org).

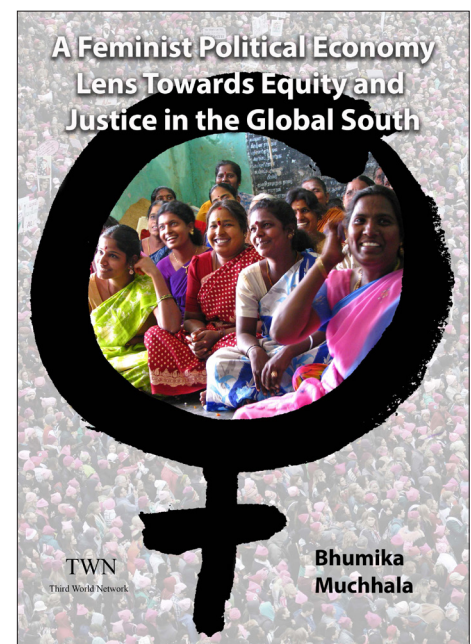
A Feminist Political Economy Lens Towards Equity and Justice in the Global South

By *Bhumika Muchhala*

THE global political dynamics of financialisation, sovereign debt distress and fiscal austerity generate structural inequalities within and between nations. A feminist political economy lens centres the social provisioning approach, where economic activity encompasses unpaid and paid work, human well-being is the yardstick of economic success, and power inequities, agency and economic outcomes are shaped by gender and intersectional inequalities. Transforming macro-policy norms and frameworks towards gender and intersectional equity involves reorienting fiscal policy from expenditure reductions to sustained, long-term and gender-responsive investment in public sectors and services to support gender equality and protect women's economic and social rights.

In this insightful collection of papers and articles, scholar-activist Bhumika Muchhala examines how financial subordination generates conditions of gendered austerity through channels such as social reproduction and unpaid care work, reduced access to quality public services, and regressive taxation. This analysis involves a perceptual shift from viewing women as mere individuals to gender as a system that structures power relations within economy and society. Writing from a critical political economy and South-centric perspective, she also maps out possible pathways – ranging from fiscal policy reformulation and sovereign debt workouts to social dialogue and movement building – towards a decolonial transformation for gender and economic equity.

Available at: <https://twm.my/title2/books/pdf/A Feminist Political Economy Lens Towards Equity and Justice in the Global South.pdf>



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‘We are going to turn our pain into rights’

The women searching for victims of forced disappearance in Colombia seek justice for their loved ones and protection for their work as peacebuilders.

THERE is a small bird in Colombia that's famous for fighting off large hawks to protect its young: the sirirí.

This is the origin of the name of ‘Operation Sirirí’, which is what Fabiola Lalinde christened her tireless effort to learn the truth about the disappearance of her son, Luis Fernando, in 1984. Her work prompted the first international condemnation of Colombia for forced disappearance in 1987.

Lalinde's story is not unlike those of thousands of mothers, daughters, sisters, wives and friends who have led searches for the disappeared in Colombia. Cases like hers number in the hundreds of thousands in Latin America, a land filled with beauty and tragedy.

Colombia's ongoing internal armed conflict has led to a serious underreporting of disappeared persons and government institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) do not agree on how many there are. The final report of the Truth Commission, which came out of the 2016 Peace Agreement with the FARC rebels, acknowledges more than 210,000. This number includes civilians, members of the military and guerillas, but the report only covers 31 years (from 1985 to 2016).

Most Colombians expected that the 2016 peace deal would bring an end to disappearances, but the conflict has been reconfigured. New armed groups have emerged and pushed enforced disappearances back into the national discussion.

The searchers

Disappearances occur in many places and in many ways, but

Daniela Díaz Rangel

there is a common thread: the work of searching for the disappeared is feminised. This is true from north to south, from the more than 160 search collectives in Mexico to the Migrant Families Network in Central America to the iconic Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.

The work of searching for the disappeared is feminised.

Colombia's internal armed conflict has posed enormous challenges for women searchers. They not only face obstacles and criminality from the state, but they are also subject to violence by non-state armed groups, who harass, surveil, threaten to kill, and physically and sexually assault them as they search rural areas for victims' remains.

As with the number of the disappeared, no one knows exactly how many search groups there are in Colombia. Initial mapping done by the International Commission on Missing Persons indicates that there may be over one hundred.

Most of these groups are NGOs that were created in the context of the armed conflict from the 1980s to the 2000s. The most recently formed groups were founded in 2021, in the context of the social uprising, massive nationwide demonstrations and the severe

police repression that led, in some cases, to forced disappearances.

Yaneth Bautista, director of the Nydia Erika Bautista Foundation, and Pilar Navarrete, who is a member of the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE, in its Spanish acronym), are familiar with the many obstacles that searchers face and how they have been overcome.

Navarrete's husband, Héctor Beltrán, was disappeared in 1985 in the Palace of Justice incident, when M-19 guerillas took over Colombia's parliament. The army stormed the building in an event known colloquially as the ‘retaking’. In the midst of the ensuing chaos, hundreds of civilians were disappeared and killed.

Since then, Navarrete, who has deep blue eyes and a powerful presence, has not stopped seeking justice for Beltrán and for the thousands of others disappeared in Colombia. She says that the work has not been easy, either emotionally or physically. Most of the organisations dedicated to searching hang on by a thread, operating with limited resources in the midst of violence.

Yaneth Bautista is the sister of Nidya Erika Bautista, also an M-19 militant, whom soldiers sexually assaulted, tortured and disappeared in 1987. Today, Bautista is one of the best-known figures in the struggle for the disappeared in Colombia.

In more than two decades of work, Bautista, her daughter and her nephew, Nidya's son, have suffered persecution and threats and even had to go into exile. She states proudly that her foundation currently supports the families of

over 500 victims.

Navarrete, Bautista and other family members and organisations have been fighting for economic, political and social guarantees for their work as searchers. They face threats as they search for their loved ones on land, in rivers and at sea due to the armed conflict, economic precariousness and the enormous emotional toll.

This scenario is not new. 'Women who are family members of a disappeared person are particularly vulnerable to serious adverse social and economic effects, as well as to suffering violence, persecution and reprisals as a result of their efforts to locate their loved ones,' warned the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances in 2016.

Unity is strength

Bautista knows that searchers are stronger together. She brought together women from different territories to push for the passage of a law to bring searchers and their work out of the shadows. 'We are going to turn our pain into rights,' she told the *Ojalá* digital weekly.

Eight organisations of women searchers, among them 'Mothers for Life' from Buenaventura, 'Network to Live' from Montes de María in Bolívar and relatives of the disappeared from the San Basilio Indigenous Resguardo in Putumayo, joined forces with a common goal. They sought to unite processes led by diverse women searchers: Black, Indigenous, peasant and rural. Some have cases dating back decades, whereas others have family members who have become victims in recent years.

Their work bore fruit on 18 June when, after many attempts, the Congress of the Republic passed a law that protects searchers and also takes a crucial symbolic step by recognising them as peacebuilders. The ruling party promoted Law 2364 in Congress and, after 17 months of delay tactics by the right

wing, a majority approved it.

One of its articles orders the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to solicit recognition from the UN General Assembly and to make 23 October the International Day of Women Searchers.

Navarrete sees this as a tribute to years of resistance. 'Most of us who have thrown ourselves heart and soul into responding to different facets of the armed conflict, such as displacement or forced disappearance, have been women,' she said in a telephone interview.

'We have found our place. We no longer call ourselves relatives of victims of forced disappearance, but women searchers,' Bautista said. 'That is a social recognition for all of us. The next step is for the state to protect us and give us a political place as actors for peace,' she explains.

It has taken years of pain to be recognised. For a long time, the topic of forced disappearance was taboo in Colombia. Equitas is one organisation that has seen the mettle of these women. It specialises in forensic science and has been working hand in hand with the searchers since 2005.

'Disappearance was denied for a long time,' said Angie Fernández, Equitas director, in an interview with *Ojalá*. 'This happened in different ways. Recognising the work [of searchers] is to recognise that the disappearances happened and continue to happen.'

The work of women searchers

The fact that women predominantly perform the work of searching makes everything more complex. Women searchers bear a triple burden: care work, their salaried jobs, and the work of finding loved ones. In fact, many are so dedicated to searching that they give up their careers and devote themselves completely to humanitarian labour. This is true of

Bautista and Navarrete.

'Many of the women who lead searches are also in charge of supporting their families, of being heads of household, of sustaining their homes economically,' said Fernández.

At 65 years old, Bautista feels that the state still owes many debts to the searchers and to the victims of disappearances, including one that is the most difficult to achieve: justice.

Navarrete agrees and adds another great challenge: truth. For her, reconciliation and peace are possible only if there is truth and memory. She refuses to give in to forgetting, not only of her family members, but also of the burden that state negligence has imposed on hundreds of women who, like her, have dedicated their lives to searching, and who are forced to leave their careers, which impacts their family's wellbeing.

She is grateful for Bautista's sustained push to get a law passed. This may enable others, perhaps future generations of searchers, to carry out their work under better conditions. Little by little, she says, their battle has been gaining ground and inserting itself in national debates; now they want concrete results that improve their daily lives.

'Our work now has a place at the political level,' says Bautista.

After decades of steadfast struggle, Colombia's women searchers have created a place for their struggle and for the disappeared in the memory of an entire country. Bautista is confident that the community of hope, as she calls the new generations of social movements organising for peace, will carry on these women's legacy and that they'll do so with more and better protections. ♦

Daniela Díaz Rangel is an independent Colombian photojournalist focused on human rights, gender and peacebuilding. This article is reproduced from Ojalá (www.ojala.mx/en/ojala-home/).

Chilean fisherwomen seek visibility and escape from vulnerability

Orlando Milesi highlights the struggle for rights and recognition waged by fisherwomen in one of the world's leading fishing countries.

THE number of organisations that bring together fisherwomen who seek to be recognised as workers, make their harsh reality visible and escape the vulnerability in which they live is growing in Chile.

These women have always been present in the fishing sector but have been ignored, classified as assistants, and relegated socially and economically.

There are 103,017 registered artisanal fisherpeople in Chile, and 26,438 of them are women who work as seaweed gatherers on the shore, known as *algueras* in Spanish, and related tasks.

According to statistics from the government's National Fisheries Service (Sernapesca), in 2023 there were 1,850 artisanal fisherpeople's organisations in Chile, of which 81 were made up of women alone.

The fisheries sector in this long and narrow South American country of 19.5 million people exported 3.4 million tonnes of fish and seafood in 2021, bringing in \$8.5 billion. Chile is one of the 12 largest fishing countries in the world, its industrial fishery being the most economically relevant.

Meanwhile, artisanal fishing is carried out in 450 coves or inlets where groups of fisherpeople operate from the far north to the southernmost point of the country, stretching 4,000 kilometres in a straight line.

Seaweed harvesting, which



Seaweed gatherers Hortensia, Sonia, Cristina and Elizabeth at the municipal building of Pichilemu before a meeting to seek a concession to exhibit and sell handicrafts, soaps and various products made from seaweed in order to earn a living during the winter, when seaweed extraction is banned.

Orlando Milesi/IPS

we fisherwomen are invisible throughout the country. We have always been in the shadow of our husbands. There is a lack of recognition of women also from the authorities, in society and policies,' she told Inter Press Service (IPS) in the Bucalemu cove.

'There are many trade unions, but their projects only reach men, never anything that serves women. And we don't have health, welfare, nothing,' claims Loyola.

is mainly carried out by women, lasts from December to April. In the remaining seven months, the *algueras* barely survive on their savings and must reinvent themselves in order to earn an income.

The invisible seawomen

Marcela Loyola, 55, is the vice-president of Agrupación de Mujeres de Mar (Seawomen Group) in the coastal town of Bucalemu, which belongs to the municipality of Paredones. It is 257 kilometres south of Santiago and part of the O'Higgins region, bordering the southern part of the capital's metropolitan area.

The Agrupación brings together 22 *algueras*, as well as fish filleters, weavers who sew and place the hooks spaced out in the fishing nets, and shellfish shuckers, who extract their edible meat.

'The main problem is that

Together with Sernapesca, her group launched an activity to legalise workers in artisanal fishery. 'We held an application day and a lot of people came because they didn't have a licence. In Bucalemu alone, 60 people signed up. Some had fishing credentials, but no permit to collect cochayuyo [edible brown seaweed] or in other related activities,' she explained.

Bucalemu also hosted a National Meeting of Women of the Land and Sea on 31 May, attended by more than 100 delegates from different parts of Chile.

Gissela Olguín, 40, coordinator of the national Network of Seawomen in the O'Higgins region, told IPS that the meeting sought to defend seafood sovereignty. 'We are working to learn from seawomen about food sovereignty. From the right to land, water and seeds, we analysed how people of the sea are threatened today because the inequality of the

rural model is now being repeated on the coast,' she said.

Women-only management area

Delfina Mansilla, 60, heads the Women's Union of *Algueras* in the municipality of Pichilemu, also in O'Higgins, 206 kilometres south of Santiago. It brings together 25 members and is in charge of the La Puntilla management area, the only one given to women in central Chile.

The leader told IPS by telephone from her town that the management area has cochayuyo (*Durvillaea antarctica*) and huiro (*Macrocystis integrifolia*) seaweed, along with the bivalve molluscs called locos (*Concholepas concholepas*), as its main products.

The cochayuyo is extracted by going into the sea with a diving suit and using a knife to cut the stalk attached to the rocks so that the seaweed can grow back. In the case of huiro, an iron barrette, called *chuzo* by the *algueras* and fishermen, must be used.

'Our main issue is that the men are bothered by our management area and come diving in. Some people don't respect women and also go into an area that was given to us and that we have taken care of for years,' she said.

These women sell the locos to restaurants in Pichilemu, while the cochayuyo is traded 'in green [the estimated extraction, not yet extracted]', to middlemen in Bucalemu.

According to Olguín, there has been significant growth in women's organising nationwide thanks to the Gender Equity Law, number 20820, passed in 2020.

'The labour of women has been invisible in the fishing sector, and even more so within the fisheries organisation because, although unions have women, they are in the minority,' she said. The law, she explained, opened up the possibility for women to train and organise themselves.

In spite of this progress, male chauvinist mentality persists in the

fishery. 'They believe women can't be on the boats or they have smaller spaces for them in the cove. It is a behaviour of men who still think that women only help in the fishing industry, but don't work in it,' she said.

Critical situation of the *algueras*

The leader describes the situation of women seaweed gatherers as bad. 'The women who work at sea live and sleep in little shacks with minimal conditions. They don't have water or electricity and everyone has to make do as best they can. The same goes for sanitation, they have to make makeshift toilets,' she said.

It is hard work because the timetable is set by the sea, she adds. The first low tides can be at 7 a.m. or sometimes at noon in summer, with the sun over their heads.

'Conditions are always a bit extreme. Throwing seaweed out when cutting the cochayuyo is a job requiring much physical strength,' she explained.

Since the working season is short, the women prefer to stay in the shacks, improvised dwellings made of sticks and cloth that are erected on the sand or ground resembling tents.

'Here, women stop going to the sea only when their bodies prevent them from doing so. I know women over 70 who are still working on the shore because that's how they subsist,' she added.

Another determining factor is the price of seaweed, which is set by buyers and ranges from 200 to 500 pesos per kilo (between 20 and 50 US cents).

The fisherwomen work long hours to extract more product. 'It is a very vulnerable sector, with no social security or cultural recognition,' concluded Olguín.

The threat to seaweed

Alejandra González, a doctor in ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Chile, told IPS that some species of brown and red

macroalgae found along Chile's coasts are raw material for the food, pharmacological and medical industries.

This commercial value and high demand leads to direct extraction, 'causing a reduction in natural populations and fragmentation, with a slow recovery rate of only those that survive harvesting', she explains.

'This scenario makes populations less able to cope with environmental change, leaving them vulnerable to events such as Enos [El Niño], heatwaves, increased tidal surges, changes in seawater pH, many of them associated with climate change,' she said.

Among the greatest threats to macroalgae are habitat destruction due to coastal port constructions, pollution caused by urbanisation, and invasive species associated with ship movements and migrations.

Other threats are overexploitation related to human population growth, climate change caused by increased carbon dioxide (CO₂) and its side-effects, such as higher temperatures, storm surges and chemical changes.

According to González, the greatest threat to seaweed is the combination of all these variables.

Chile has developed various strategies for the conservation and management of natural seaweed meadows, but these measures are inadequate, argues the specialist.

'In Chile's north, the exploitation of brown macroalgae from natural meadows is greater, because drying is free on the beaches themselves, but it is also affected by El Niño current events. While in the south it is necessary to invest in sheds or drying systems, it is more efficient to cultivate them because there are tamer bays,' she said.

González also believes that measures to recover natural seaweed meadows are not efficient 'either because of legal loopholes, difficulties in on-site monitoring and/or other additional environmental variables such as those associated with climate change'. — IPS

Nurturing seeds of freedom in Palestine

To the agroecological farmers in the West Bank working in the shadow of Israeli occupation, 'agriculture is resistance'.

Marta Vidal

Agroecology as a tool for liberation

SURROUNDED by a 26-foot-high separation wall, barbed wire and a watchtower, a group of young Palestinians prepares a 3.5-acre piece of land for the growing season in spring. The noise of their hoes shaping the soil mixes with the humming of construction cranes from the nearby Israeli settlement of Modi'in Illit. Established in 1996 on land appropriated from Palestinian villages, the Israeli settlement is illegal under international law but continues to expand.

The Om Sleiman farm in the village of Bil'in is part of a growing agroecology movement in the occupied West Bank that is turning to sustainable farming as a way to resist the Israeli occupation and stay rooted to the land. Established in 2016, Om Sleiman – Arabic for 'ladybug' – aims to connect Palestinians to the produce they consume and to promote food sovereignty.

'We share the yield of the farm with 20 to 30 members, depending on the season,' explains Loor Kamal, a member of Om Sleiman, as she prepares raised beds where eggplants, tomatoes, watermelons, peppers and beans will be sown. The farm operates on a community-supported agriculture, or CSA, model in which members pay for their share of the produce at the beginning of each season, sharing both the yield and the risks of production.

One day in April, Kamal shows us around the property, which is located in Area C of the West Bank, under full Israeli military control. Here vegetables are grown alongside olive and fruit trees, but

Kamal, who works at Om Sleiman with a team of five other women, mentions that a part of the land is inaccessible. 'In March, we were walking around the farm, checking the carob trees inside our land, and suddenly soldiers started shooting at us,' she recalls.

Growing food under military occupation has become increasingly dangerous as settler violence and repression escalate. Even with the world's attention focused on the war in Gaza, Israeli soldiers and settlers have killed hundreds of Palestinians in the West Bank since last October.

Despite the dangers, Om Sleiman's team is determined to continue their work. 'We have to go on, even when there is fear, because our presence here is important,' says Kamal as she picks eggplants, apples and mulberries from the farm.

The land on which they grow organic produce has special significance. The concrete wall that cuts through the West Bank expropriated hundreds of acres of Bil'in's agricultural land in 2005. After years of protest and legal action, residents managed to regain about half of the lost farmland, a victory that turned the village into a symbol of popular resistance.

A part of the reclaimed land was donated for the establishment of this agroecology farm. For members of Om Sleiman, growing food in defiance of the encroaching wall and settlements is a way of continuing the struggle for freedom.

'If we want to be free, we need to plant our own food,' says Angham Mansour, who is from Bil'in and joined Om Sleiman two years ago. The farm aims to promote independence from the occupier's economy but also to reconnect Palestinians with the land. 'Farming is part of our heritage. Going back to the land is going back to our roots, to our identity,' she says.

Palestine is part of the historical region of the Fertile Crescent, seen as the birthplace of agriculture, where people started cultivating grains and cereals as they transitioned from hunter-gatherer groups to agricultural societies.

For Saed Dagher, a farmer and agronomist who started working with agroecology in Palestine in 1996, sustainable farming is a crucial tool for liberation. 'As a farmer I am free when I don't depend on outside inputs, when I produce the food in my land the way I see fit, with my own seeds, and the inputs that are locally available. I am not dependent on seed and chemical companies. And I don't depend on the occupation,' he says.

Dagher is one of the co-founders of the Palestinian Agroecology Forum, a volunteer group aiming to spread ecological farming in Palestine. In the past decade he has noticed a growing interest in agroecology, an approach that tries to minimise the environmental impacts of farming by using local, renewable resources. This method reduces dependency

on purchased inputs and prioritises soil health and biodiversity.

According to Dagher, Palestinian farmers have practised forms of agroecology since long before the term was invented. 'Traditionally, Palestinian farmers would plant olive trees with wheat, barley, beans, potatoes, tomatoes, onions and garlic. In the same field, we would have fig trees, grapes, almonds. It was diverse,' he says. Palestinian farmers used to rely mostly on local resources and rain-fed agriculture, helping preserve local varieties in the fields, orchards and terraced hills.

The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 – through a violent process that entailed the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages and the forced displacement and dispossession of Palestinians – meant farmers lost most of their lands and livelihoods.

Since the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, the remaining Palestinian territory became a captive market for Israeli products. The local food system was transformed from a food-producing to food-buying one, deepening Palestinian dependence on the occupying forces.

In the decades since then, Palestine's diverse agricultural heritage has been in decline, as Palestinian growing traditions have been increasingly displaced by monocultures and industrial agriculture, which are reliant on agrochemicals and genetically modified seeds, particularly after the Oslo accords signed in 1993.

'Israel wants to destroy Palestinian agriculture, so [Palestinians] become dependent on them and on humanitarian assistance,' says Moayyad Bsharat, project coordinator at the Union for Agricultural Work Committees, or UAWC, an organisation supporting Palestinian farmers. 'If Palestinians are food secure and don't depend on Israeli products and Israeli markets, they will dream of freedom, and

Israel doesn't want it. It wants Palestinians as slaves working for them.'

The importance of food sovereignty has been highlighted by the catastrophic situation in Gaza. According to human rights reports, Israel has been using starvation as a weapon of war by deliberately blocking the delivery of food and by destroying farmlands.

As dependence on Israeli produce and agribusiness grows under occupation, so does the land grabbing. This year, Israel has declared a record 2,743 acres of land in the occupied West Bank to be state-owned – a move that paves the way for continued settlement construction.

'If we want to be free, we need to plant our own food.'

'The occupation keeps trying to take the land from us, to restrict our access to it, and prevent farmers from reaching it,' Mansour says. 'The goal is to make our lives here impossible, to make us leave. They want to uproot us.'

The systematic appropriation of land and water resources by expanding Israeli settlements, the separation wall and the military have all alienated Palestinians from the land and caused the loss of native seeds and traditional practices.

But despite farmers' continuous dispossession and the widespread destruction of agricultural land, Bsharat says farmers haven't been defeated. 'We will rebuild again. We will support farmers with local seeds and continue our projects to build food sovereignty. We will use all our efforts to dismantle the colonial project by sowing local seeds, taking care of the land, and teaching

our children not to forget.'

The Union for Agricultural Work Committees is collecting and distributing 60 varieties of heirloom seeds and is working on the rehabilitation of agricultural land in Gaza and the West Bank. In recent years, it has helped establish agroecology projects and trainings in some of the villages most affected by settler violence.

'We are still present in the land, despite the restrictions imposed on us and the violence of the settlers,' says Ghassan Najjar, who manages an agroecology cooperative in Burin, a village surrounded by extremist Israeli settlers who regularly attack Palestinian farmers, burning orchards and uprooting olive trees.

'Agriculture is resistance,' says Najjar, standing in a greenhouse where members of the cooperative grow cucumbers and tomatoes using agroecology techniques.

Despite the growing settler violence and repression, Dagher says he is motivated to 'do more and more'. He considers the fact that many Palestinian workers have lost their Israeli jobs since last October to be 'an opportunity to encourage more people to work in agriculture'.

The farmers at Om Sleiman will keep sowing the land, spring after spring. 'These days when the situation is so difficult, we feel this project is even more important. We feel we have to continue, we have to be present,' Mansour says.

'Every day we come and we work the land because we have hope,' adds Kamal. 'Because we believe that we will be free.' ♦

Marta Vidal is an independent journalist focusing on environmental and social justice across the Mediterranean. Her work has been published in The Guardian, Al Jazeera, The Washington Post and the BBC, among other outlets. This article was originally published by YES! Magazine (www.yesmagazine.org) under a Creative Commons licence (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0).

Goodbye Julia brings Sudan front and centre

Director *Mohamed Kordofani* speaks with *Yassmin Abdel-Magied* about how the film became a powerful exploration of injustice and reconciliation.

THE death of John Garang de Mabior, the South Sudanese politician and revolutionary leader, marked a profound turning point in Sudan's history. The mysterious 2005 helicopter crash that killed Garang occurred a mere three weeks after he signed a peace deal ending the nation's 21-year civil war and took office as Sudan's first vice president. News of Garang's passing was received with an uprising of rage and grief among his mostly South Sudanese followers, characterised as riots and met with brutal retaliation by the state, leading to 130 deaths. Less than six years later, the Southerners voted overwhelmingly for sovereignty, with 99% of voters choosing to secede from the North.

It is in this febrile, pivotal period in Sudanese history that aviation-engineer-turned-film-director Mohamed Kordofani sets his debut feature *Goodbye Julia*, which explores the relationship between North and South Sudanese through the arc of a friendship between two women. Mona is a light-skinned, Arab Sudanese woman trapped in a house melancholic with secrets. When she invites Julia—a self-assured, dark-skinned Southerner – to live in her home, the hopeful breath of friendship hangs in the air. That is, until we see Mona folded over in the brown kitchen, painting each item of Julia's crockery with a dot of red nail polish, to mark the dishware Julia and her son are allowed to use in the household. Apartheid or Jim Crow laws might not exist in this Sudan, but in Julia's world, they



play out all the same.

The film opens with the announcement of Garang's death and the uprising that followed. Driving along back roads to avoid crowds, Mona, a Northern middle-class housewife, strikes a young Southern boy. When his father, Santino, runs out to confront her, Mona panics, driving off and calling her husband, Akram. 'A Southerner is chasing me,' she says, knowing full well his prejudice would displace any need for explanation. Akram shoots Santino without exchanging a word.

Wracked with guilt, Mona hires Santino's widow as a live-in maid, inviting Julia and her son into their home. But the secret is an ever-present time bomb underneath their friendship's surface, exploding into view just as the election splits the

country in two.

Goodbye Julia made history not only by being the first Sudanese feature to screen at the Cannes Film Festival, but also by receiving the Cannes Freedom Prize. *Variety* remarked that the film 'unfolds like a morality thriller'. It tackles hefty topics with confidence and a graceful sensitivity, exploring Sudan's systemic racism, political and ethnic divisions, and gendered family dynamics through a galloping plot. Elevating the film from polemic is Kordofani's focus on the domestic—on the intimate relationships between husband and wife, lady and maid, Northerner and Southerner, home life and street life. These dynamics are fraught with tension, and Kordofani draws from his own experiences growing up in Khartoum to render them honestly.

'The film helped me understand myself,' Kordofani says in our interview, and you can infer his hope is that audiences might understand themselves better too. *Goodbye Julia* acts as a mirror, inviting audiences to reflect on how the choices of everyday people are echoes and refractions of those made by society as a whole.

This film cannot be extracted from the context of its setting or its moment in history. As Kordofani notes himself, much of the response to the film has been steeped in despair regarding the current war ravaging Sudan, which has resulted in at least 15,550 deaths since it began in April 2023 (although the true number is likely much higher).

'The war has made the

audience more receptive to the film,' Kordofani says. He initially expected backlash from Sudanese audiences as they reacted to being perceived and critiqued, but audiences instead have been reflective, nostalgic, 'more accepting of self-criticism'. A bittersweet surprise.

Kordofani spoke about racial injustice within African societies, art as a means of reconciliation, and the unique challenges that emerged from creating a centrally Sudanese film.

Yassmin Abdel-Magied: **Congratulations on all the success that *Goodbye Julia* has enjoyed, mashallah! Tell me, how was the seed of *Goodbye Julia* planted? What was so impactful about the time when South Sudan voted for sovereignty from the North?**

Mohamed Kordofani: The vote was shocking; 99% was very shocking for me. I didn't think it would be this much—especially because it was monitored by international observers. This was a proper vote. It wasn't a fake election like that of [former President] Omar al-Bashir. This was different. It was kind of like, wow.

It was a pivotal time. There was the death of John Garang and angry riots that followed, then the retaliation by the Northerners, then the referendum itself. It explains a lot about our history. In 20, 30, 40 years from now, you'll have people wondering what happened. How did Sudan go from being the biggest country in Africa to separating? Yes, they will find out about the war and the news reports, but they won't find anything from the homes, or anything happening at the social level. I felt responsibility as a witness to document this, and this is where art comes in.

You've talked in the past about the 'wasted opportunity' between 2005, when the North and South signed the peace agreement, and 2011, when the referendum was held. Why did

you decide to set *Goodbye Julia* during that time? What should have happened, and what didn't?

Kordofani: We should have had a process of reconciliation. Now that 50 years of war had finished, I thought in this five- or six-year transition, before the Southerners voted, maybe we should have done something. At least admit guilt, admit wrongdoing, admit the atrocities, then maybe apologise. Instead, we settled for wealth and power sharing, and this material compensation. That's what the film is about. If Mona had admitted guilt in the first place, we wouldn't have had the drama, and Mona also compensates Julia with money. I thought that was not enough—and it wouldn't have been enough for them to change the vote.

You're referring to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which brought an end to the civil war between the North and the South, and included the sharing of oil revenues and a reconciliation process which critics say was not respected. What are the unique challenges of discussing anti-Blackness and racial injustice and the need for reconciliation within African societies?

Kordofani: The biggest challenge is that many non-Sudanese people don't understand it. I remember the first time I pitched *Goodbye Julia*. I was in a little town in Portugal called Espinho. I prepared myself very well because I don't do well with public speaking, and this was the very first time I had ever pitched in public. When I pitched the story, there was just awkward silence. After a moment, one of the judges raised their hand and said, 'I don't understand. You're Black, aren't you? ... And the Southerners are also Black?' They didn't quite understand what we meant by racism. I cracked a joke: 'If this film was a comedy, we would call it *Fifty Shades of Black*.' They laughed, and we won an award that day.

It's funny: When you're in it, you don't think of it as Black versus Black, you think of it as Arab versus African, or whatever delusion we live in. I was brought up in Sudan. For us, it was about race, ethnicity, Arab, Black, African ... I only came to understand this [difficulty of communicating racism within African societies] after I wrote the film, meeting white people and Europeans.

It affected the way I cast. I ended up casting a little bit of a difference in skin tone, so it was more obvious for people looking from the outside. It took me a while to accept the thought of casting people who were fair-skinned for Northerners and darker-skinned for Southerners, to make the distinction clear. Although we have people from the North who are darker than people from the South, I realised it would be counterintuitive to put that in the film—the additional complexity would require a lot of explanation which I didn't need to add for people to understand the story.

How has making this film changed you, or challenged your own prejudice?

Kordofani: I realised that I had that racism in me, probably because it's in a lot of people around me. It was a conscious decision to make this film and force myself to always double-check myself. You have to make a conscious effort to overcome these inherited ideas and thoughts. Right now I am much better than I used to be 10, 15 years ago. I notice myself more, and put extra effort into not treating people differently because of their race, religion and gender. *Goodbye Julia* isn't only about race—it's about many things—but they all are prejudices based on difference, and these are things I try to not do at all now. The film helped me in that way.

It also helped me discover myself. The writing process is therapy for me. You end up knowing

that you are writing about your own fears and your own issues and your own secrets that you sometimes don't even know about yourself. The film helped me understand myself. It also helped me appreciate people, to be honest. The crew that worked with me, the dedication that they had for the project emotionally touched me in ways I never expected.

How would you say the racism in a place like Sudan differs from the racism of, say, Europe? How much is class intertwined in these dynamics?

Kordofani: I don't think it differs. It is some sort of twisted and sick way for communities to survive. It's an instinct gone wrong. I think it's the same everywhere. Definitely class and racism are intertwined in Sudan and similar countries, because you have a war that lasts a long time. Those impacted by the war, like the IDPs [internally displaced people], suffer because they only get minimum-wage jobs, and then you have a class issue added to the racism. Sometimes they fuel each other to the point where you don't know which is which.

There is a lot of moral grey in the film. It feels like you've taken pains to ensure there are 'no villains', only 'normal people who make mistakes.' Why was that important to you, and what were ways you brought that out in the filmmaking process?

Kordofani: I think that's what life is. There is no 100% good, no 100% evil. We all have that in us. We all have the good and the bad and the evil and the ugly and the kind. If you want to talk about reconciliation, the first step is understanding one another. Understanding why we do the things we do, why the other person is doing what they're doing. I wanted to challenge and polarise audiences, and make them side with different characters in the film yet understand what is happening with the other character and why they are making those decisions. Maybe,

in doing so, reconciliation becomes easier. If you look at life the same way you look at the film, maybe things become easier for you. What you can't forgive or understand becomes easier once you become willing to see things through the other person's perspective.

Did you feel like, at any point, you really wanted to say 'this choice is bad', or take a moral stance—especially when characters are openly racist or anti-Black?

Kordofani: It wasn't very hard to stop myself from judging my characters because a lot of people in my family—and even myself—carry this kind of racism. I'm sure everyone in Sudan has someone in their family, or in their immediate circle, who is openly racist. We know these are not evil people—maybe they are racist, but they are not evil people. By knowing these people, you are more understanding. The way I see it, they are a product of their own communities, even a victim of their communities. Maybe they were not exposed enough, or they didn't think enough. Sometimes I think racism is a defence mechanism in a way; people who are oppressed try to oppress others. It doesn't necessarily mean a person is entirely evil.

What's unique about Sudanese culture in general is the crossfade between the Arab and the African. The thing we try to avoid the most is actually what is special about us. I was in Nairobi recently and noticed we share so much with the African world that we don't even know. We tend to want to belong to the Northern part of Africa and the Middle East, but the truth of the matter is our food, the way we dress, the way our markets look, even our music and the way we behave sometimes, it looks so much like Central Africa and Eastern Africa, and we just don't notice.

What were the difficulties in getting a Sudanese film made and

distributed? Was it mostly about the finances, or about political and social instability?

Kordofani: There are so many difficulties. Funding is of course a big part of it, because there is no local funding. But you can't even go the investor route, because there are no theatres in Sudan. Even if you make a good commercial film, it's going to be hard to sell it in the country. So it's always a problem financing a film in Sudan. There's also the infrastructure you need for filmmaking: actors, makeup, set design, hair, wardrobe, all of the different departments—editing, colouring, sound design—it's a whole industry, it's a pipeline, and you need all the gears that make the machine work. That doesn't exist in Sudan. So you have to improvise sometimes; you have to start from scratch other times; you have to do some of it outside Sudan. In a way, it's fun, because there is no clear path and you have to find your way, but it's also hectic, and it takes longer than in other countries. Then, of course, the political situation and the turmoil in the country also makes it really hard. But that's also part of the fun! For me, it was always a fun process, doing something that hasn't been done. It was challenging, and challenging is nice.

What has been the most surprising outcome for you since the film's release?

Kordofani: Winning in Cannes was definitely a big surprise. I wanted to get into Cannes, but I didn't think I would win. Also, Lupita Nyong'o became an executive producer on the film! We were also awarded The Jean Renoir Prize. But overall, I never imagined this much success. ♦

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The last days of mankind

Even as their long-held guiding intellectual assumptions now lie shattered, Western policymakers and journalists have been unable to come to terms with the reality of decolonisation in all its political, economic and cultural manifestations. *Pankaj Mishra* examined this failure in a 16 September lecture in Toronto, Canada, on the occasion of his acceptance of the 2024 Weston International Award. The text of the speech is reproduced below.

‘IN the beginning was the press and then the world appeared,’ Karl Kraus wrote in 1921. The biblical allusion was no rhetorical flourish. Living through an apocalyptic era, the Austrian writer, and arguably the first major media critic, had reason to believe that journalism had moved from being a neutral filter between the popular imagination and the external world. It had taken charge of forging reality itself.

Kraus’s critique had assumed sharper focus during World War I, when he began to blame newspapers for deepening the disaster they were meant to be reporting on. ‘How is the world ruled and led to war?’ Kraus asked, arguing that the origin of the 20th century’s seminal war lay in a continent-wide collapse, triggered by the press, of cognitive and imaginative faculties, which allowed European nations to blunder into a war they could neither anticipate nor stop. ‘Through decades of practice,’ he wrote, ‘[the reporter] has produced in mankind that degree of unimaginativeness which enables it to wage a war of extermination against itself.’

It may seem easy to look down, from our higher and well-furnished vantage point, on the parochial world of Viennese periodicals that Kraus fulminated against. But as ferocious wars rage unstoppably in Europe and the Middle East, threatening wider conflagrations and rending the social fabric of several societies, Kraus’s critique of the fourth estate, the so-called pillar of democracy, not only becomes more pertinent. It resonates as a broader analysis of

the decay of democratic institutions in the West.

Their innate fragility was evident long ago to the Asian and African subjects of European colonialists. Mohandas ‘Mahatma’ Gandhi, who saw democracy as literally the rule of the people, insisted that it was merely ‘nominal’ in the West. It could possess no reality so long as ‘the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists’ and voters ‘take their cue from their newspapers which are often dishonest’.

An equally blunt assessment today would conclude that a large part of the digital media, trafficking in fake news and conspiracy theories, is now systematically dishonest. The mainstream press, often owned by big business tycoons, maintains its pretensions to political and ethical responsibility, claiming to be a beacon in the darkness where democracy supposedly dies. But the evidence of its inadequacy and even corruption has accumulated rapidly and ominously during my own three decades in journalism.

My career as a writer of literary nonfiction really began with the war on terror, the seminal war of our own century, which devastated large parts of Asia and Africa, and eviscerated civil liberties in the West before finally ending in the humiliating Western retreat from Afghanistan in 2021. Early in 2001, I had travelled to Afghanistan and Pakistan on behalf of *Granta* and the *New York Review of Books*. My long articles based on these travels appeared soon after September 11; and, consequently, many in the

American and European media came to see me as a ‘terrorism expert’.

I didn’t reject this absurd label as vehemently as I should have. There were, back then, very few writers of non-Western origin in the Anglo-American press; bigoted screeds against Islam filled the op-ed pages; and I felt oppressed by a sense of responsibility. Though I recoiled from the puerile question ‘Why do they hate us?’, I wanted to do whatever I could to resist the further brutalising of profoundly damaged societies like Afghanistan and Iraq and the demonising of minorities in the West.

As it happened, I could only look on incredulously as the BBC screened in primetime a documentary about the globally beneficial effects of the British Empire. In my own writings for Western periodicals, I felt myself under pressure to not depart too much from their broad consensus: that the simultaneous invasion of multiple countries was just, righteous and necessary, aimed at liberating their populations, especially women, from cruel oppressors and advancing democracy.

And I could only watch helplessly as the most respectable parts of the Western press not only egged on a war based on fraud, but also helped heavily racialise it. In the fantasies of far-right nationalists today, a dark-skinned sub-human enemy, presently gorging on pet animals, stands ready to destroy white Western civilisation. But fantasies of violence against this

swarthy nemesis flourished for years among so-called legacy periodicals and liberal intellectuals.

'Time to Think about Torture,' *Newsweek* declared a few weeks after September 11. 'Focused brutality,' *Time* recommended. As the invasion of Iraq got underway, *The Atlantic* laid out the advantages of 'torture lite' in a cover story. In the *New York Times Magazine*, Michael Ignatieff not only urged Americans to embrace their imperial destiny and invade Iraq: this professor of human rights also defined how black and brown bodies could be subjected to 'forms of sleep deprivation' and 'disorientation (like keeping prisoners in hoods) that would produce stress'. The article appeared inconveniently just as the first pictures of hooded prisoners from Abu Ghraib prison emerged.

The impunity with which Israel murdered nearly two hundred writers, academics and journalists in Gaza, after banning foreign reporters from the scene of the executions, was granted to the country by its Western supporters soon after September 11. In 2002, after Israel bombed and destroyed a broadcasting centre in the West Bank, Anne Applebaum, a prominent critic today of 'autocracy', asserted that 'the official Palestinian media is the right place for Israel to focus its ire'. Trump's 'Muslim ban' and J.D. Vance's violent fantasies seem outrageous only if one forgets that in 2006 Martin Amis conspiratorially confided to a London *Times* journalist his 'definite urge' to say things like, 'The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order. What sort of suffering? Not letting them travel. Deportation – further down the road. Curtailing of freedoms. Strip-searching people who look like they're from the Middle East or from Pakistan.'

Today, the war on terror is widely accepted as a military and geopolitical failure. But it is still not fully understood as a massive

intellectual and moral fiasco: an attempt by the Western media as well as the political class to forge reality itself, which failed catastrophically, but not without embedding cruelty and mendacity deep and enduringly in public life. And partly because this disaster was unacknowledged – editors and writers pushing false narratives and cheerleading large-scale violence remained entrenched and even received promotions – it is being reenacted today in the Western media's coverage of Israel's war on Gaza: another war that has ignited a bonfire of international legal and moral norms and deadened and perverted consciences.

The historian Omer Bartov has pointed out that Israel, ostensibly responding to an unprecedented terrorist attack from Hamas, sought from the very beginning 'to make the entire Gaza Strip uninhabitable, and to debilitate its population to such a degree that it would either die out or seek all possible options to flee the territory'. Today, with all the two-thousand-pound bombs lavished on them by the United States, Israel's far-right leaders seek to further militarise their occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and to provoke their enemies, through acts of terrorism, in Lebanon and Iran into a wider war. But all these obvious realities, and even the liquidation of Gaza, which, unlike many atrocities, has been livestreamed by both its perpetrators and victims, are daily obfuscated, if not denied, by the main organs of the Western media.

Palestinians and Arabs have known for decades the many hidden red lines constraining discussion of Israel's trajectory. My own sporadic attempts to tackle the subject in the past made me aware of an insidious Western regimen of repressions and prohibitions. But it isn't just non-Western perspectives like mine that are being suppressed or unheeded. Senior editors in the West, as has become clearer lately, seem to have decreed a broader proscription

while trying to preserve their pretzel logic: that, as Gideon Rachman, chief foreign affairs commentator of the *Financial Times*, put it, 'the best chance of preventing a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is to support Israel'.

In garish contrast to the clear identification of Russian barbarity in Ukraine, the passive voice is the preferred mode in Western reports of Israeli atrocities, making it harder to see who is doing what to whom, and in what circumstances. ('The lonely death of Gaza man with Down's syndrome' was the initial headline of a BBC report on Israeli soldiers unleashing an attack dog on a disabled Palestinian and then leaving him to die.) *The New York Times*' report on a grim landmark, the killing by Israel of 30,000 Palestinians, overwhelmingly women and children, was headlined 'Lives Ended in Gaza'. A more recent report on the Israeli regime of starvation by the Associated Press is titled, 'A 10-month-old Palestinian baby suddenly stopped crawling. Polio had struck Gaza.'

Unverified reports, eventually exposed as false, of beheaded Israeli babies were given prominence by journalists as well as the US President. They have together drawn a veil of silence over the multiple documented reports of rape and torture in Israeli prisons. An article in *The Atlantic*, presently edited by a former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operative and peddler of a notoriously false report about Iraq, could argue, even after the murder of thousands of children in Gaza, that 'it is possible to kill children legally'.

Certainly, the Western media's account of Israel's 'self-defence' yet again exposes the radical discrepancy between what is said by mainstream journalists in the West and what the rest of us see happening in the world. I cannot avoid a sense of déjà vu, and an old question: is it still possible to enlarge cognitive capacity within the dwindling kingdom of Western

journalism – the enchanted realm in which I have profitably spent most of my own life?

After all, we inhabit a much bigger world than the one inhabited by Karl Kraus in early 20th-century Vienna, with infinitely greater variety of experiences and perspectives. There is a lot more demographic diversity in publishing and media offices than when I started out as a writer. Could the continuing intellectual and moral debacles of journalism be avoided by a less conformist climate of opinion, and an openness to different experiences and viewpoints?

Perhaps, but the first step in this direction is to acknowledge the formidable obstacles ahead: we live in a very confusing time, and it is especially bewildering for an older generation of Western journalists and commentators. They came of age in the decades after the end of the cold war and the collapse of communism, when Western-style democracy and capitalism seemed to define the future of the entire world.

Today, each one of the assumptions that underpinned Western policymaking and journalism for nearly three decades lies shattered. We live in a world where the future of democracy is not assured even in Europe and America, let alone India. Western-style capitalism has generated far too much inequality and now engenders a vicious backlash. Demagogues and despotic leaders are in the ascendant. Most disturbingly, white nationalism is yet again, after a long hiatus, the explicit ideology of mainstream political parties on both sides of the Atlantic.

At a time of widespread economic distress, ethnonationalists in the United States and United Kingdom as well as Germany, France, Hungary, Poland and Italy are united by their antipathy to immigrants and targeting of institutions deemed insufficiently patriotic or indulgent of sexual, ethnic and racial minorities. This

bleak scenario can be further elaborated. The main economic ideologies of endless growth and global prosperity have come up against environmental constraints and technological innovation, as well as built-in limits, and look unsustainable.

Editors and writers in hallowed periodicals were never mentally prepared for the collapse of their ideology of capitalist globalisation and the rapid diminishment of Western power, legitimacy and prestige. They were too attached, by national and class origin, and training, to the intellectual assumptions developed during the unchallenged hegemony of the West. Personally too implicated in the death agonies of the old world, they cannot now feel the birth pangs of the new. Indeed, they struggle to comprehend their own societies as these drastically change around them; they obsess over mere symptoms of a splintered social consensus such as ‘culture wars’ and end up wringing meaning out of abstractions like ‘populism’, ‘democratic backsliding’ and ‘crisis of liberalism’.

A greater problem is that intellectual as well as political elites in the West have very few means to understand, let alone explain, the rest of the world. Mainstream journalists try to capture the speed and scale of an ongoing world-historical transformation – the rise of the Global South – through quantitative analysis. They offer statistics about the growing share of foreign trade of China, the expanding size of the Indian, Brazilian and Indonesian economies. But these facts and figures are mere surface ripples on the spate of global change, which is sweeping away all that we once knew to be true.

We inhabit a world that differs radically, in all its political mentalities and emotional outlooks as well as economic structures, from the world that existed just two decades ago. History has always been a clash between stories in

which people aspire to recognise themselves. Our preferred story about the past orients us to the world as it is, offers us a place and an identity, and broadly explains our feelings of possibility. The widely used framework of Western journalism was built on Western triumphs – defeats of totalitarian regimes in two world wars, the postwar taming of Germany, Italy and Japan, and then victory over communism in the cold war, followed by the worldwide dissemination of Western-style capitalism and democracy. This rare experience of progress in the postwar West made it possible for its beneficiaries to generalise, optimistically, about changes in the rest of the world, and the West’s own capacity to direct them.

But this story in which several generations of Western journalists flatteringly recognised themselves now clashes with another, much bigger, more resonant and persuasive story: of decolonisation, the central event of the 20th century for the vast majority of the human population.

The word was first used to describe the historical process that began in the 1940s, when the ‘darker peoples’ (W.E.B. Du Bois’s phrase) of Asia and Africa began to liberate themselves from direct and indirect Western rule. But it now denotes more than just world-historical shifts of political and economic power. Decolonisation serves as a shorthand for describing the way many non-white people, including many African Americans and immigrant populations in the West, locate themselves in a longer historical continuum – the way they see their past and measure their potential in the future.

Certainly, if there is an analytical framework that can explain a broad range of domestic and international phenomena – from the rise of Chinese nationalism and the upsurge of the far right in the West, to culture wars in Europe and North America, disarray over Gaza

at American universities, schisms at PEN America, or Kylie Jenner's loss of nearly one million Instagram followers – it is decolonisation.

This is why Western leaders and commentators, especially those too absorbed by the post-1989 fantasy of the end of history, are called upon to respond to not only a crucial historical dynamic: the rebalancing of Western power that was originally built through imperialism. They are also obliged to understand the many different cultural and psychological ways through which this rebalancing is manifested.

Needless to say, this is a tall order. For even some rudimentary facts of global history – imperialism, decolonisation – are not so easily discovered: they languish in darkness behind the monumental Plato-to-NATO narratives about Western civilisation.

I remember that when, in the 1990s, I started publishing in Europe and America, writers and journalists commonly presented their countries as spiritual heirs of Athenian democracy, Renaissance individualism and Enlightenment rationality. One could read millions of words on the merits of Western democracy and liberalism and the evils of Eastern totalitarianism by such intellectual luminaries of Anglo-America as Michael Ignatieff, Timothy Garton Ash, Martin Amis, Thomas Friedman and Anne Applebaum without encountering a paragraph on the consequences of slavery, imperialism and decolonisation. They seemed fixated with the crimes of Hitler, Stalin and Mao, but these so-called liberal internationalists barely manifested any awareness of the modern Western history of mass bondage, colonial dispossession and genocidal wars against indigenous peoples.

Such ignorance, an affordable luxury once, would be fatal today for a younger generation of journalists and commentators: they confront a global order where democracy and

liberalism, or even ordinary political stability, are no longer a given. They are required to see the world as it is, without the cold war imperative to prettify one's own side. They are in one sense forced to accurately chart our fragmented geopolitical and cultural landscape, and to recognise its multiple histories and geographies and newly emerging constellation of forces.

This would mean, first and foremost, recognising that what united the disparate struggles of the wretched of the earth – and has survived the post-colonial failures of many nation-states – was a shared conviction that racial privilege should no longer underpin the global order. Today, assertive, even aggressive, histories and worldviews in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are radically challenging dominant Western assumptions. History was supposed to have ended in the triumph of Western-style liberalism and capitalism. Today, however, the members of a non-Western intelligentsia – an architect in Jakarta, a doctor in Kuala Lumpur, a lawyer in Mumbai, a sociologist in Istanbul, an economist in Doha, a professor in Lahore, a student in Cape Town – seek to articulate their own experiences, explore their own histories and traditions.

They can see that leaders, policymakers and journalists responsible for the West's calamitous wars remain unaccountable to this day. They can also see the great contrast between the West's generous hospitality to Ukrainian refugees and the walls and fences European countries and the United States build to keep out darker-skinned victims of their own wars.

They remember that the West not only denied poorer countries the technology to make their own vaccines during a long and destructive pandemic; it hoarded vaccines past their sell-by date. Such 'vaccine apartheid' cost millions of lives in Asia, Africa

and Latin America, and confirmed yet again in many eyes that the West seeks always to protect its own interests under the guise of a universalist rhetoric of democracy and human rights.

We see this heightened consciousness very clearly today in the furious rejection by the non-Western world of Israel's and the West's violence in the Middle East. The seemingly irreconcilable antagonism between Israelis and Palestinians is mapped on one of the most treacherous faultlines of modern history: the 'colour line', described by W.E.B. Du Bois as the central problem of international politics, 'the question as to how far differences of race will hereafter be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilisation'. Outrage grows explosively among the global majority as a Western proxy in the Middle East demonstrates the ease with which black and brown bodies can still be seized, broken and destroyed outside all norms and laws of war.

Long before the war erupted, and coverage of it became brazenly mendacious, people of non-Western ancestry were making urgent demands to decolonise Western systems of knowledge, and a change in the self-image of the former empires that enforced white supremacy. This involves an overhaul of public cultures, from replacements of place names, statues and museum holdings to refining of academic curricula, journalism and political rhetoric.

Understandably, this makeover is unacceptable to many in the West. Their response is to double down on failed ideas and shattered assumptions, and scramble to reinforce the structures of inequality that benefitted them. White nationalism in politics today has come to have a sinister counterpart in the cultural realms that seeks to stamp out intellectual

diversity even while paying lip service to demographic pluralism.

We have seen this despotic power at work in the attempt by many in Western political, corporate and media classes to suppress scholarly and artistic explorations of racism and imperialism. We see it now in the crackdown on ordinary political dissent. A lecture I was scheduled to give on Israel, Gaza and the West for the *London Review of Books* was preemptively cancelled by its hosts, London's Barbican Centre. Coming to Canada, I have discovered more instances of people who try to resist the enforced depoliticisation of literature and arts and find themselves ostracised.

In 2018, *The New York Times* called Wanda Nanibush 'one of the most powerful voices for Indigenous culture in the North American art world'. And then last year she abruptly disappeared, after some Instagram posts on Palestine, ominously reminiscent of the way even very powerful people used to be airbrushed out of public life in totalitarian societies.

Naomi Klein writes that 'the extraordinary raids, arrests and property seizures of the Indigo 11 represent an attack on political speech the likes of which I have not seen in Canada in my lifetime'. Is it merely coincidental that the *Globe and Mail* deleted all references to Israel from this speech while proposing to publish an excerpt?

The South African writer Kagiso Lesego Molepe asked at the Writer's Trust gala in Toronto a few months ago, 'The time is coming when the world will start to apologise for what is happening – and when that time comes we will be asked: what did you do with your power?' It is a question that all individuals and institutions have to ask ourselves. But many of them have, at best, assumed the posture of those Democratic delegates in Chicago who plugged their ears to the names of dead Palestinian children as they walked out of the convention centre.

At worst, a range of Western institutions – from Ivy League universities to public broadcasters – have resorted to patently anti-democratic measures, violating their own principles of freedom of conscience and speech. Yesterday, the University of California put on its website a list of military weaponry it seeks in order to wage war on its students: the list includes 3,000 rounds of pepper munitions, 500 rounds of 40mm impact munitions, 12 drones, and nine grenade launchers.

I wrote in late February that we are seeing some kind of collapse in the free world. The evidence has accumulated with ominous frequency since then. Perhaps it should not be surprising. The intellectual incompetence and moral turpitude of the fourth estate was diagnosed right from the time Kraus warned against 'the intellectual self-annihilation of mankind by means of its press'. Looking ahead to our own era, Gandhi predicted that even 'the states that are today nominally democratic' are likely to 'become frankly totalitarian' since a regime in which 'the weakest go to the wall' and a 'few capitalist owners' thrive 'cannot be sustained except by violence, veiled if not open'. Vaclav Havel, celebrated as an anticommunist 'dissident' in the West, actually argued in his essay 'Politics and Conscience' (1984) that totalitarian systems in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe represented the future of the Western world; he warned against the power that operates 'outside all conscience, a power grounded in an omnipresent ideological fiction which can rationalise anything without ever having to brush against the truth'.

It is our fate to watch helplessly how a power operating outside all conscience and grounded in ideological fictions can rationalise even a livestreamed genocide. I certainly feel even less confident after Gaza about the possibility of recovering from the post-truth

age. My own contributions to literary and intellectual journalism over three decades now seem very insignificant, disproportionate to the recognition and material rewards I have received.

But I cannot fail to recognise how urgently we need fresh ideas about how to rethink our past, and to chart our way out of the present into a liveable future. I strongly believe that they will come from a younger generation of writers, artists and journalists. I also know that as our polycrisis – inescapable wars, climate disasters and political earthquakes – deepens, our longings for a vivid and fair description of the world will become even more irrepressible; and many of us will feel compelled to fulfil them.

There are many writers and journalists who won't join us in this essential task. These are the writers, academics and journalists killed by the IDF. I cannot get over the fact that the extrajudicial executions of our colleagues, and the destruction of schools, universities and libraries in Gaza, are still largely unacknowledged by literary, academic and journalistic communities in the West.

Increasingly, it seems that, as Arundhati Roy pointed out, 'the only moral thing Palestinian civilians can do apparently is to die. The only legal thing the rest of us can do is to watch them die. And be silent. If not, we risk our scholarships, grants, lecture fees and livelihoods'.

Today, I must join those trying to break the inhuman shackles on our minds and souls. I dedicate this prize to the memory of writers murdered in Gaza. I have already given away much of the money that comes with it, and I will give away the rest, to writers and journalists in Palestine. Thank you. ♦

Pankaj Mishra won the 2024 Weston International Award for excellence in nonfiction writing on the global stage. Born in northwest India, he is an essayist, memoirist and public intellectual whose books include the best-selling Age of Anger: A History of the Present. The above earlier appeared on the n+1 website (nplusonemag.com).