

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Itamar Ben-Gvir: torture, brazen cruelty, sexual abuse, ethnic cleansing and the shared principles of western 'civilisation'

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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PEOPLE WANT
TO BELIEVE



LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

Spart change

As a former member of the Spartacist League/Britain, this letter is based on what I originally wrote to the 'Neo Spartacist League' re their change of position on Ireland. I was replying last summer to a motion published in *Spartacist* No70, in May 2025, but their promised reply has not materialised. The author of the original *Spartacist* 'Theses on Ireland' (*Spartacist* No24, Autumn 1977) has also challenged their change of line in a letter that also remains publicly unanswered.

I wrote that the article in *Spartacist* by E McColgan on Ireland was a *mea culpa* to Irish nationalism of the most populist form. This she did to sever any connection to the old Spartacist League position on interpenetrated peoples, in their quest to gain acceptance into the family of the left.

To say the old SL/B accepted partition or were against a united Ireland is based on pure nationalist logic and the concept that nothing has changed since the foundation of the Irish state. Of course, every Irish nationalist and his dog knows that to resolve the Irish question you have to deal with the 'Protestant question'. It will not be done by quoting Wolfe Tone that Protestants are Irish, or rolling out James Connolly, which all and sundry do on this island, to give themselves a left cover. Imperialism imposed partition alongside the communalist divisions now existing in the north. As communists, we fought against them.

However Marxists deal in realities and seek a solution which benefits the working class (Protestant or Catholic). We don't treat the Protestants as a bloc as one class, but as trans-class, and hence aim to win advanced workers among them to a communist formation in which they can smash partition and unite Ireland under working class leadership. We would hope that could be done within a socialist federation of these islands. This leaves it open where the Protestants fall - we don't seek to force them into a united Ireland: we are not nationalist irredentists.

A bourgeois nationalist approach might well result in a reversal of the terms of oppression, or at least the genuine fear of that, thus risking driving significant sectors of the Protestant working class back into the grip of loyalist reaction.

As Lenin said, "The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a small part of the general-democratic [now general-socialist] world movement. In individual cases the part may contradict the whole. If so, it must be rejected" (*Collected works* volume 22).

We seek a Marxist solution, not the nationalist one which McColgan now propagates. Of course, to tar the old SL with the *Militant* position is beneath contempt: anyone reading *Spartacist* 24 can see it holds up to the test of time. So why did she uphold it for all her years in the SL, when she offers no critical analysis for her repudiation. The Sparts' adhesion to nationalism is plainly seen in their support for a referendum on Irish unity. This is the policy of Sinn Féin - included in the Good Friday agreement to get it over the line and placate those with doubts. It is entirely within the power of the UK whether a referendum is granted or not.

First the referendum, then their "united workers' republic" - which, by the way, most republican groups call for in one way or another. This is

what the neo-Sperts and McColgan will campaign for in Ireland, with an appeal to Protestants 'not to go down with a sinking ship': such faith in nationalism. I am sorry to say this, but she is a flea on a nationalist donkey.

Of course, there are Irish people who want a referendum. However, among the majority of the working class it is not a talking point. Workers seek to survive in a state which is seething with class anger from the cost of housing/lack of hospital beds, waiting lists (700,000 at present), class sizes the highest in Europe, the worst transport system in Europe, etc. The *Financial Times* has described Ireland as "a first-world economy with third-world infrastructure". The last election ran on economic issues - this was the electorate's concern.

Only a communist organisation with a clear programme will be able to appeal to those advanced Protestant workers, as James Larkin did in 1907 - or more recently, as was done in 2024 with the strike of 150,000 workers, which brought the north to a halt. Tie that into the massive disgruntlement in the south and you have the basis for class unity and potentially setting a flame, which could ignite a spark for our class in Britain.

The new world order puts Ireland in the crosshairs; it cannot rely on its old strategy for investments from the US, whose companies at present make up the bulk of the Irish tax base - a tax haven for them, but for how long in Trump's new world order if they pull out, leaving the working class to foot the bill?

The Sparts' new programme seeks nothing better than a referendum on Irish unity - capitalist at that - while, like all nationalists, sticking their head in the sand re the Protestants. No different from all who went before them. For those who seek to actually change history, I suggest you read for yourself *Spartacist* 24 and you will see it stands the test of time.

Patrick Sliney
County Wicklow

YP and AI

It has become abundantly clear that the Your Party Scottish working party that I wrote about in a letter to the *Weekly Worker* on May 14 only exists as a figment of Karie Murphy's bureaucratic imagination. To further highlight this I made my first foray into AI image generation and this has raised a number of issues that I feel are worth exploring.

First up, by attempting to find an alternative to the tech billionaires' models, I asked the politically, ethically and environmentally sound AI platform recommended by Tech for Palestine, called Thaura (Arabic for 'revolution'). It suggested some open-source models - in particular Stable Diffusion - so I tried to generate an image based upon the classic look of The Invisible Man movies: crepe bandages, sunglasses and fedora hat as a group of eight. This grouping was supposedly sortitioned from the Scottish membership, but clearly does not exist except as invisible comrades!

I thought to add a few 'See you, Jimmy' hats and wigs to make fun of the stereotype jocks that the Corbyn clique were patronising with this claimed way forward for YP Scotland. It was a tricky business to image-generate and turned out pretty naff as an image, but it obviously goaded enough to be removed and get me barred from the unofficial YP Scotland Facebook page for not following the community guidelines I didn't know existed but had apparently signed up to!

Undaunted, I tried again and found Chat GPT much easier to work with and was impressed by the ability to create a mood, as well as a literal

image, based upon a simple text outline. The group started as characters from the era of HG Wells' original story, but were easily brought into the present day and I couldn't resist adding a further dimension of a guess as to who was the puppet mistress manipulator. More pleased with the result and the possibilities for such simple political satire, I posted this on social media and around relevant Scottish WhatsApp groups.

As could be expected, most people have moved on from seeing any relevance in Your Party as a credible force, but several comrades in the Marxist Caucus Community (almost all as deep-fried nationalist as any around YPS) took great exception to even daring to use AI as a creative tool, especially as a leftist. Apparently this was a betrayal of the skills of comrades in creative fields and we should "cringe, no matter if left or right uses it".

We had a bit of banter back and forth on it all, with further accusations of how environmentally damaging AI is, but - as is the way with such debates - less and less light was shed with each exchange and more resorting to just plain jibes, ending with: "Tam, your ability to die on hills is laudable" and "It's also just really, really crappy agit-prop, dude".

Not a word from any of them on the content: ie, that the Corbyn clique were now just literally making things up as they went along and thus deserved exposure. Instead the plans afoot for an out-and-out nationalist rival to the Scottish Socialist Party are gathering pace with as little to offer the working class as the aforementioned YPS monstrosity.

Meanwhile, in the real world, we see hugely relevant debates on the growing use of AI as political tools. First and foremost there is the phenomena of the Lego animation videos generated since March this year as a searing critique of the US and Israeli war on Iran. Produced by Iranian students working anonymously under the umbrella of 'Explosive Media', they have become an internet sensation, viewed and shared by millions across the world - except in Iran itself, where an internet blackout has been endured by the masses there throughout the war.

The ability to produce such rapid-response visual content, combined with American-accented rap music narrations of often difficult concepts, such as the profound effect of sanctions on Iran, has a parallel in the direct military sphere of cheap drone warfare. These asymmetric new tools display a democratisation of force, cost effectiveness and technological disruption that are changing the nature of modern warfare (whilst, of course, not being the decisive factors in winning the war).

But what had been previously disparaged as "Slopaganda" when employed by Trump's team - remember the crass and dreadful AI images about the 'Gaza Riviera' - has become hugely memorable content in the Lego animations 'punching up' against those forces.

In the language of today there has been optimisation for algorithmic circulation. The new digital influence operates through decentralised amplification, where users themselves become agents of dissemination, shifting narratives into public digital spaces shaped by visibility and engagement.

I'm not, of course, comparing my paltry efforts so far with the genius of the Lego animations, but there is an aim to at least be on the same *Zeitgeist* spectrum. I've previously explored how to apply AI help on an agit-prop project, involving updating a 1920s street theatre sketch about imprisoned

Indian trade unionists. This was called 'Meerut' and our Workers Theatre Movement of the late 1980s was adapted by Jack Conrad to fit the 20th anniversary of British troops going into the Six Counties under a Labour government. Comrade Jack certainly didn't consider himself a playwright, but it was the politics that mattered, combined with chants in unison, behind bars made from wooden banner poles and the main call for solidarity.

"Comrades, hands across the sea!" That made for a powerful agit-prop sketch. With the assistance of the Thaura AI model, the sketch was updated for today, with a call for solidarity with the imprisoned youth who have taken action against Israel arms manufacturers. If this be termed agit-slop, so be it. We will use whatever means are at our disposal to fight for the politics we need and to expose the lies and mediocrity holding us back.

As with all the limitations and difficulties imposed by the capitalist mode of production, we circumvent and navigate as best we can, rather than cretinously carp on the sidelines, offering nothing. And, even on the environmental aspects raised against the use of AI, things are not nearly as simplistic as suggested. For example, there have been studies showing that, in both text and image generation, human carbon emissions still far exceed those produced by AI equivalents.

AI can and must be used as a tool to help avert climate catastrophe and, above all, to help make revolution on a world scale.

Tam Dean Burn
Glasgow

Christian lens

In recent years, I've been interested in learning more about religious tradition and historical materialism - two schools of thought which seem contradictory on a surface level. Of course, historical-materialist analysis divides society into categories of base and superstructure, arguing

that the former, which represents the economic foundation, primarily determines the latter, which represents the ideological system. Thus, the classic Marxist view is that religion, as part of the superstructure, will wither away, as the base changes and it no longer serves an ideological purpose.

Friedrich Engels expressed this consensus perspective in his 1877 text, *Anti-Dühring*: "All religion, however, is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life," he wrote. "When society, by taking possession of all means of production and using them on a planned basis, has freed itself and all its members from the bondage... only then will the last alien force which is still reflected in religion vanish; and with it will also vanish the religious reflection itself, for the simple reason that then there will be nothing left to reflect."

Following the totalitarian experience of the Soviet Union, when state atheism was so often used in Red Scare propaganda, I believe a more accommodating socialist relationship to religion would be productive. The American socialist pioneer, Eugene Debs, has long been an inspiration to me and I think his example in this respect could be a good model. While he was suspicious of organised religion, he peppered his political commentary with biblical references and had a portrait of Jesus of Nazareth hanging in his cell during his imprisonment for opposing World War I.

There's a famous quote, that I understand to be somewhat apocryphal, frequently attributed to the anarchist, Emma Goldman, which goes: "If I can't dance, it's not my revolution." In a similar vein, I would argue: if I can't pray, it's not my revolution. This is not only because I feel a genuine pull to spirituality, which I think anyone should be free to pursue, but also because I think government crackdowns on religion of the kind seen in the Soviet Union are indicative of a wider authoritarianism,

Online Communist Forum



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which will ultimately move beyond spiritual communities and impact the whole of society.

While I'm not an academic, reconciling religious tradition and historical materialism doesn't actually seem too difficult theoretically. What would be required is for the spiritual perspective to concede that specific forms of religious expression are influenced by a society's base. Meanwhile, the historical-materialist view would have to acknowledge that at least some people have an innate drive toward spiritual life. Admittedly, this would be quite hard in practice for many, perhaps most, representatives of both schools of thought. However, it seems achievable for more open-minded thinkers.

For instance, these days, I think of myself as a Christian perennialist, by which I mean I feel most at home in the Christian tradition, but interpret it through the lens of perennialism. If readers are unfamiliar with the term, perennialism is the belief that all religious traditions are describing a single, universal truth; differences between faiths can be ascribed to different cultural filters, through which seekers perceive that truth. Mapping historical materialism over this outlook appears fairly easy. I would argue that these cultural filters, which might be called the superstructure, are largely determined by the base.

Jon Hochschartner
Connecticut

Spanish left

The results of the elections in Andalucía were announced last week. Unsurprisingly, they characterised the current situation in Spanish politics.

Firstly, there was the continued growth in popularity of the far right and the increasing support for Vox. Although the conservative People's Party (PP) won 53 of the available 109 parliamentary seats, it didn't hold onto its majority to govern independently. As in the autonomous communities of Extremadura and Aragón, where elections have been held over the past eight months, the PP is now entering into agreements with Vox to govern. Winning 16 seats - an increase of one seat from the last election - Vox's brutal anti-immigration stance and its "national priority" perspective, which insists that public services are allocated to people with a "verifiable"

connection to Spain, were powerful enough to win the support of around 14% of the electorate.

Secondly, there was the continued historical collapse of the vote of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE). Despite the popularity of the anti-Trump and anti-war rhetoric of Spain's president and PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez on a national level, this simply wasn't translated to the autonomous level. Once a bastion in this region, the PSOE won only 28 seats (23% of the vote) - two seats fewer than in the same election four years ago and the party's worst result in the post-Franco era. It also marked its fourth consecutive loss in autonomous elections. Obviously, this is far from good news for the PSOE and doesn't bode well for the party's prospects in the country's general election next year - something that the left outside of the PSOE is aware of and is currently trying to exploit.

And it is the performance of the left that deserves a particular mention. Por Andalucía (PA), a coalition of left and green organisations led by the Communist Party of Spain's Antonio Maíllo, won four seats, equalling the number it obtained four years ago. This election was something of a test for many of the left in Spain in the run-up to next year's general election, where it is proposed to present a similar electoral coalition - Un Paso al Frente (One Foot Forward) - in an effort to overcome the fragmentation of left forces in the country and somehow unite the left. It made no significant progress.

What was interesting was the performance of Adelante Andalucía (AA), the other leftwing organisation in the election campaign. Despite standing on fundamentally the same electoral platform as PA - better housing, wages and the advance of democratic rights - its appeal for greater sovereignty for Andalucía (without advocating breaking away from Madrid) attracted a significant number of votes: over 400,000 and nearly 10% of the electorate. It won eight seats - an increase of six from the 2021 elections. Particularly noteworthy was the declaration by its leader José Ignacio García (triumphant on the night) for a "fresh left" - an independent party for the Spanish working class - and the need for an anti-capitalist "transformative" programme. He also rejected the

notion of entering any future power-sharing coalition government with the PSOE.

Both PA and AA are standing in next year's general election. According to Maíllo, PA wishes to do "progressive" "state politics" and to fight for a "state left". AA will fight on a platform of "progressive federalism". The question remains, however, how will the Spanish working class unite? And, more importantly, on *what* "progressive state" or "transformative" programme?

Paul Davies
Málaga

Soviet pop

Think about Russia, before glasnost and perestroika - what springs to mind? Perhaps it's lumbering parades of warheads, promising mutually assured destruction, men in great coats and their ushanka hats ... or is it bread queues outside Gum, snaking across Red Square?

But what about the music? The overtures of Tchaikovsky? Stravinsky? Or something else? In the 1980s, the Soviet underground music scene was a vibrant counterculture that thrived despite severe state censorship. Driven by the DIY tape-trading of homemade recording, bootleg records and unauthorised live gigs, musicians spearheaded a youth movement that ultimately helped push the Soviet Union toward openness.

This was around the same time as the 'red wedge' movement in the UK - whose iconic artwork was designed by Neville Brody, with more than a passing nod to the Bolshevik movement and the 1919 poster by El Lissitzky, 'Beat the whites with a red wedge'. The movement in the UK successfully blended pop culture with grassroots activism, with the likes of The Communards, Tom Robinson, The Smiths, The Style Council and the ubiquitous Billy Bragg declaring 'power in a union' and how 'we are joined in the ideological cuddle ...' But what was happening behind the Iron Curtain?

While the official state-sanctioned music was highly policed, with bands requiring state sanction to play or record - meaning they had to fit the message the state wished to project - there was a thriving sub-culture of underground artists who sought out and aggressively absorbed western influences, filtering them through their own socio-political realities.

Here you will find post-punk and 'new wave' sound, heavily influenced by bands like Joy Division and The Cure, with groups like Kino, led by the iconic Viktor Tsoi, Televizor and Kofe crafting melancholic, synthesiser-driven and at times minimalist tracks, reflecting the feelings of the brutalist landscape and perceived hopelessness around them. Then there is Soviet rock, with bands like Aquarium, the pioneers of Soviet rock/folk-fusion, and Alisa, blending poetic, subversive lyrics with energetic rock compositions.

Next we find the underground punk movement - nihilistic sounds with outfits like DK and Grazhdanskaya Oborona (which translates as 'Civil Defence'), creating raw, fast and highly politicised music that operated as direct, anti-establishment protest. Not perhaps what you would expect from music so highly controlled, but it was most certainly there - pushing the limits, testing the water, challenging state control and the state's stringent grip on music.

But look even further back in the annals of the Soviet counter-culture, and there you will find all manner of delights (funk, soul, fusion, electronica ...), harking back to Devo, Kraftwerk, Florian Schneider, Tangerine Dream and Robert Fripp.

At times, soaring rhythms, backbeats and grooves perhaps more akin in places to a stripped-down Studio 54 than to bread queues in Red Square ...

Fast forward - perhaps Punk didn't lead to perestroika, but the changing political climate has ultimately made way for Russian house, trance, hip hop and rap, with tracks such as 'Mama, I'm a criminal' by Chingiz Valinurov giving Kneecap vibes, complete with balaclavas and Raus's track, 'Putin', commenting on the president in ways that would have been unheard of not that long ago.

A lot has changed from those days of the May Day parades and the underground sound, from the days of the symbolism of the Bolsheviks penetrating and defeating their opponents, but some things have remained disappointingly unchanged - look up 'Kiev calling' by Beton (Joe Strummer would be proud) ...

Thelma Clark

email

Beautiful game

For those readers who sometimes escape into the realm of sport, particularly football, we have had a major story involving my hometown team, Middlesbrough FC, just as 'Spygate' hit the main news headlines. I am Boro born and bred and was indoctrinated into the local faithful from a young age, so my comments on this cannot be treated as totally unbiased.

A few days prior to the first leg of the English Championship play-off semi-final, Southampton FC were caught spying on a Middlesbrough training session, in breach of competition rules. After protests from the Middlesbrough chairman, the English Football League charged Southampton, who admitted guilt, and an independent panel threw them out of the competition (despite winning over two legs), awarded the tie to Middlesbrough, who were placed in the final - a game worth over £100 million to the winners.

And therein lies the issue. I believe the decision taken, and upheld on appeal, was the correct one, as there are precedents for this course of action. However, I do feel tremendously for most Southampton fans, who had already bought tickets, transport and accommodation for the Wembley final. Their club clearly cheated, assuming a fine was a worthy risk due to the huge financial prize on offer, and the fans were irrelevant to them. I'm also certain the decision by the Boro owner was less about the 'integrity of the competition' and much more about the potential financial reward.

Nonetheless, even though I let my season ticket lapse a couple of years ago, I am gutted that Hull won the final, but wish them all the best for next season. I still go to a few home and away games and, whilst I understand the fans at that level are little more than cash cows for rich owners (and the Premier League is another level completely), I can't shift the irrational love of a football club that is part of where I am from.

Like a growing number of fans, I have shifted to non-league football for my main fix and am a season ticket holder at Redcar Athletic FC. It's a totally different experience. A match typically has a few hundred fans watching, the chairman knows your name, you can have a beer and stand with opposing fans during the game, chat with players and chip in to help with time wherever you can. The fan base is local, predominantly working class, and this young club proudly calls itself 'the Steelmen' to respect our industrial heritage. Your entry fee does make a difference, as there's no TV money. You really are part of a community at this level.

We have group of us unashamedly 'of the left' - social democrats, socialists and communists: a minority, but with anti-fascist banners and T-shirts. The group includes someone whose grandfather was a founder member of the Communist Party in Wales and another who was involved helping shift cash around illegally for the National Union of Mineworkers during the Great Strike. A great bunch and, even though it's all about the football, there are lots of political discussions taking place, including with those who don't feel themselves to be overtly political. A place for organic, unforced, political discussion.

However, for the level we have just got promoted to (Northern Premier League) and the region we live in, we have a relatively wealthy backer, though by no means the richest in our league, so it isn't untainted by money. We're looking forward to the highest league we have ever been in, having won two promotions in two seasons, going to new grounds, and meeting up with new opponents. That includes the several thousand who go to Bury FC, and the large crowds at FC United of Manchester - a club formed by disaffected Manchester United fans to create a democratic, fan-led club.

It's not some kind of revolutionary school, but football is a huge part of working-class culture, an arena of debate - an arena where higher levels increasingly price out the working class and also where the class divisions in society are very clear. In the higher leagues, outcomes are increasingly decided by money, disciplinary panels and court cases. At non-league level you feel you can make a difference.

Don't get me started on the World Cup.

Ian Elcoate
email

Stupid and crass

I was truly appalled and outraged to learn the Songdown International Children's Camp of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has been subjected to sanctions by the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office of the UK.

On May 11 the FCDO published on its website a statement titled "Sanctions notice: 11 May 2026 regime: Russia", which duly announced that the children's camp was subject to sanctions by the UK government, even though it is not actually within the territory of the Russian Federation! Songdown had the following imposed on it: freeze on assets and making available provisions, trade and transport sanctions and travel bans.

But Songdown is a children's camp, not an intercontinental ballistic missile or nuclear complex! It is run by the DPRK, which promotes the noble ideals of international peace, solidarity, amity and friendship among the children of the world. Children from many countries, including the UK and Ireland, have visited the International Children's Camp.

Apparently these actions had been taken by the British government because the DPRK provided free-of-charge holidays to children from the Donbass. What is so wrong with this? Surely it was a positive and sincere measure of the DPRK to give free holidays to kids from a war zone? In the past the DPRK also gave holidays to children of the former USSR who were affected by the Chernobyl incident.

This action by the British government is as hostile as it is stupid and crass! It should immediately withdraw the sanctions against the Songdown International Children's Camp!

Dermot Hudson
London

Fighting fund

Finish with a bang

Can we do it? Our aim this month is not only to reach that £2,750 target, but to add another £250 to the total, taking us up to £3,000 for May. That would really eat into the overall deficit suffered since the second half of 2025.

Well, thanks to a very useful £533 that came our way since last week, our running total now stands at £2,595, with four days still to go, as I write. In other words, another £155 would get us home for May, but the £405 needed to take us up to three grand is definitely within reach!

Thanks very much to those who contributed over the last week. Best of the lot was comrade JC with his *three-figure* donation, followed by RL (£60), AG and TW (£50 each), JT (£25), RN and JP (£20), JM (£15) and TT (£10). All those came in the shape of either a standing order or a one-off bank transfer. On top of that, comrades

JB and DB donated £50 each via PayPal, together with ES with his £8. Finally, we have that well known supporter who consistently hands a £5 note to one of our team. Keep it up, comrade Hassan!

But now let's finish the month with a bang. To make sure we not only reach the regular target, but go shooting past the £3,000 barrier as well, please make your donation by either bank transfer or PayPal. We can do it!

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Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310 To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate

UFOs

People want to believe

Though it is quite obviously a distraction tactic, the release of Nasa and war department files on UFOs has been a big hit with the public. Paul Demarty looks at the modern obsession with 'alien visitors'

Publication of the 'Unidentified Flying Objects' files by the US Department of Defense - sorry, Department of War - has generated a lot of interest in the usual circles.

These circles are quite wide, at least in the United States. Half of Americans, by some polls, believe that we have hosted visitors from other worlds. The imagery of the classic accounts of 'close encounters' has fully penetrated into mass culture, with the flying saucers and little green (or grey) men. "Releasing the UFO files" was a popular on-again, off-again slogan of Donald Trump's re-election campaign, along with various other sets of 'files', some of which - not least the Epstein files - have caused him a lot of bother.

Luckily, no little green man is likely to be so troublesome. The disclosures in the files are so familiar as to be deeply nostalgic, for those of us raised on *The X-files*. Strange lights; apparently sober military men describing impossibly fast-moving objects glimpsed from a fighter cockpit; grainy videos of ... something or other. All we need is a little bit of cattle mutilation for good measure. (In the first episode of *South Park*, it turns out that the aliens are here to talk to the only truly intelligent species on earth - the cows. "Why have you been mutilating us?" demand the cows. "Sorry," the alien captain replies, "that was Carl. He's new.")

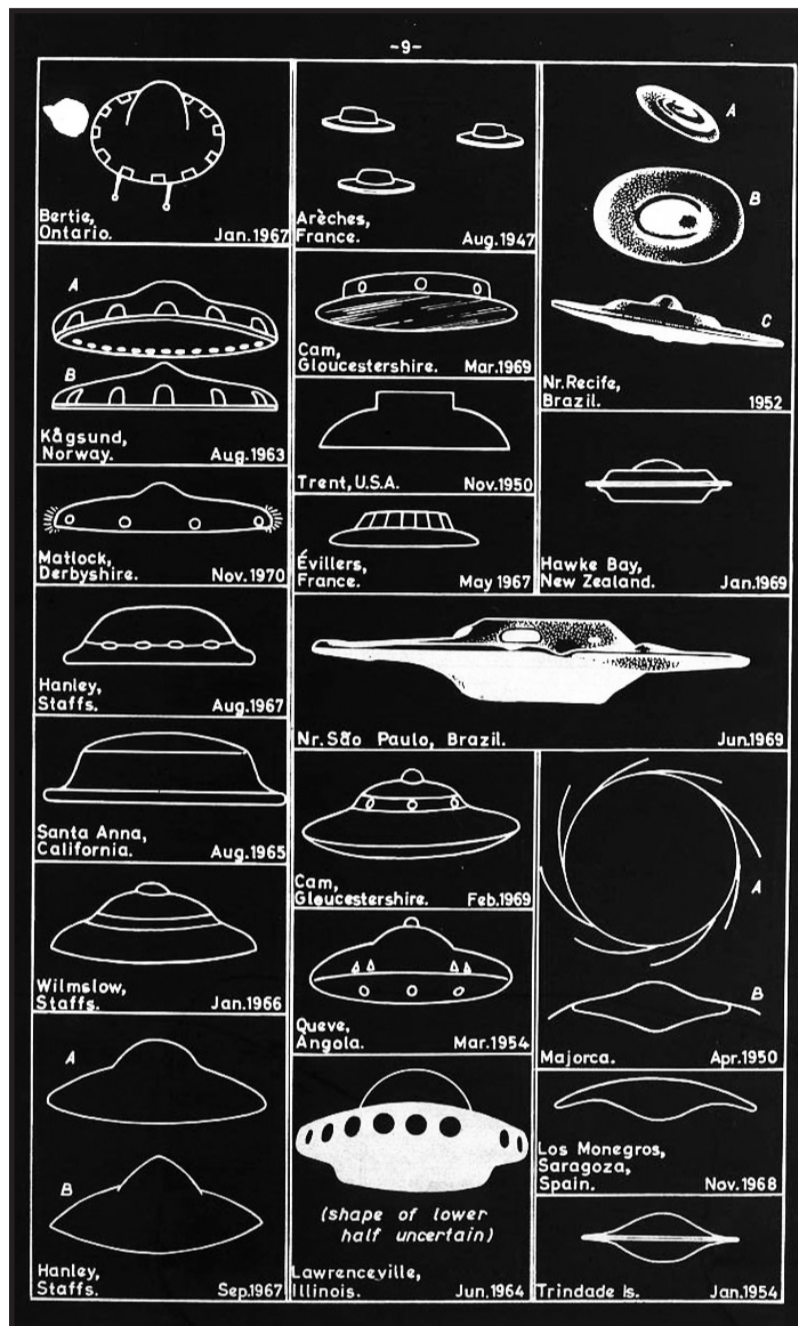
In any case, there are two things that need discussion here: the widespread and extremely persistent popular belief in extraterrestrial life, in the face of all available evidence; and the parapolitical obsession with obtaining these disclosures, and the disappointments built into the disclosures themselves.

Imagining aliens

'Popular ufology' is a product of the early cold war. This period, following on from World War II, saw rapid advances in aeronautical engineering and rocketry. The US and USSR alike had plenty of esoteric new craft to prototype, and each side further inherited its own allocation of ex-Nazi scientists. As the German strategic picture got worse, Hitler and his retinue took ever greater refuge in the invention of *Wunderwaffen* - futuristic weapons that would supposedly turn the tide. Few ever saw real use (notably the V-1 and V-2 rockets), and the resources lavished on them probably hastened defeat. Nonetheless, the designs fascinated the post-war superpowers, and there had even been a plan for a disc-shaped flying machine.

As new aircraft were tested, often in remote locations, commercial and military pilots - never mind the mere earthbound folks in smalltown USA - had no frame of reference for what they were seeing. Even jet engines were novel in those days. So these really were, in some sense, 'unidentified flying objects': the people working on these classified projects certainly were not going to publicly 'identify' them ... So fantasies tended to spread, as did the (correct) instinct that the government was somehow involved. Highly publicised incidents like the 1947 Roswell crash fuelled the mania.

In 1952, the US Air Force commenced Project Blue Book,



UFO sightings chart

which collected reports of UFO sightings. There was always a chance, after all, that these would be Soviet spy aircraft ... Enormous piles of material were assembled, but nothing conclusively interesting was learned, except that people with the idea of alien invaders in their heads tend to come up with very strange notions about weather balloons and high-altitude lightning. A very large number of the sightings were taken to be U-2 and A-12 spy plane prototypes; but, of course, this could not be publicly acknowledged.

Interest in UFOs and aliens has waxed and waned ever since. A significant uptick came after the end of the cold war; in the same year, the same US television network, Fox, broadcast a preposterously hokey alien autopsy film and the first season of *The X files*. This was the beginning, also, of the public internet; for the first time, a subset at least of ordinary citizens could easily share their experiences. Ufology was one of many subcultures to get a major lift from this; and the simultaneous and marked decline in general civic participation tended to increase the prominence of such obsessions.

What do the aliens want? Here, popular belief draws directly from science fiction. There are a few models: the evil invaders (*The X files*, *Invasion of the body snatchers*, and so on), the 'angels'

coming to rescue humanity (2001: *a space odyssey*, *Arrival*, or for that matter the fully-communist space travellers of the Posadists), and brute indifference (HP Lovecraft's elder gods, and the Strugatsky Brothers' *Roadside picnic*). A more recent theory was aired prominently by vice-president JD Vance: these are not aliens at all, but demons. This is actually an increasingly common belief in ultra-reactionary trad-Catholic circles, promoted notably by a popular influencer-exorcist with the unimprovable name of Father Chad Ripperger.

In each case, the alien in fact does the same work. Social contradictions can be projected outwards, externalised as either the threat of invasion/demonic possession or the promise of eschatological transformation. The mere possibility of confronting the alien visitors - militarily, or to accept their gifts - holds out the promise that the defects of human civilisation can be overcome. The remoteness of political structures may be put down to the adventitious agency of these godlike creatures, who manipulate our leaders. It is notable that Tucker Carlson, say, cannot face the fact that Trump has simply decided to launch an insane war of aggression against Iran, for perfectly ordinary reasons like hubris or cognitive decline: he must instead explain it by way of demonic possession. The secret alien conspiracy is a semi-secularised version of demonic possession, and

thus it is unsurprising to find that for men like Ripperger and Vance, the two ideas have wholly fused together.

This logic of political displacement also drives the 'release the files' phenomenon in the large - generally a phenomenon of so-called 'parapolitics', an interpretation of politics that puts deep-state conspiracies in the driving seat.

There have been many such sets of 'files' in the second Trump term - either released or dangled temptingly. A promise to release material on the John F Kennedy and Robert F Kennedy assassinations was part of the deal to get RFK's kooky son on board with the Trump campaign; the upshot for ordinary Americans is the return of measles. Precious little new emerged in the release last year, but it really would take alien intervention, one expects, to convince the American people that Lee Harvey Oswald did it alone.

The UFO files cannot be separated from the broad political context: Trump's popularity is cratering; he is trapped in a war with Iran, which is directly and obviously responsible for price inflation that will get worse before it gets better, having campaigned both as a peace candidate and an anti-inflation candidate. The Maga hardcore mostly keep faith with him, but some prominent celebrity supporters, like Carlson, are peeling off. The time is ripe, in other words, for a risible piece of political theatre.

Then there is the whole Epstein mess. Trump was always more circumspect on Epstein disclosures than popular opinion believed, but he nonetheless courted the Epstein-obsessive vote, and even put the ridiculous podcasters, Kash Patel and Dan Bongino, in at numbers 1 and 2 at the FBI (Bongino has since resigned; Patel continues to blunder his way from disaster to disaster). Trump, of course, would have known that he was at risk of reputational damage from new Epstein disclosures, since he had been a close friend at least into the 2000s.

Epstein files

There was nonetheless a big photo-op, where Epstein files were offered to various rightwing media celebrities, containing no new information. This handed the initiative to Trump's opponents, both the Democrats and renegade Republicans like the now-unseated Thomas Massie. The Epstein releases that followed have been major political events, though oddly the effects are more severe *outside* the US (as we Brits know only too well ...). Certainly no smoking gun has come out to catch Trump in a lie about his relationship with Epstein.

Precisely because they really have been consequential, the Epstein files demonstrate the ultimate futility of this basically archival approach to politics. You knock the crown off Prince Andrew's head; the monarchy remains. Peter Mandelson is disgraced; Gordon Brown and Harriet Harman return to advise the PM. The relentless digging for new personal connections with Epstein does discover new facts and possibilities, but discovers them in a *form* that is itself misleading. The Epstein obsessive comes to believe that the world is as it is because it is run by a paedophile cabal with intelligence connections; but this is backwards. Rather rich and powerful men get to indulge their depraved appetites with

impunity *because the world is as it is*. Their impunity is not an explanation: it is a thing to be explained.

So it is with the aliens. There was always something a bit broken about the very premise of *The X files*, after all - Mulder and Scully slowly uncover 'The truth', which is (spoiler!) that the American state is run by a shadowy cabal in league with alien invaders, hoping that they can survive the takeover as a kind of Vichy government. Mulder and Scully do all this as vulnerable junior employees of the FBI, controlled by the same cabal. Why are they suffered to do this? No serious answer is ever offered. If you want to enjoy the thing, you just have to go with it.

That works for a lovably hokey TV series, but there is something desperately sad about employing the same logic in politics. We demand the state release the files, which, if we are right about their content, will condemn it. The files are released with extensive redactions and omissions. Perhaps a change of government gets a new set of files, with different redactions. Even a major revelation cannot solve the confusion. If a memo is found where, let's say, 'Cointelpro' discusses promoting alien conspiracies as a piece of psychological warfare, the true believers will insist that the memo is fake and itself a psy-op. Conversely, say a memo is found that declares that US officials have really recovered an alien corpse - then a different set of sceptics will say the same thing: that it's been planted there to fool the 'sheeple'.

The ordinary enthusiasts, no matter how great their conviction, are not in fact in a position to verify any of this. They know they only find out what the government lets them, and thus the revelations therein must ultimately be untrustworthy. Release-the-files is ultimately a political doom-loop, an anxiety dream where all doors take you back to the same place you are trying to escape.

What the parapolitics obsessives lack is political agency, which for Marxism is an indispensable condition for serious political understanding. The end of the cold war and the defeat of the workers' movement across the advanced capitalist world has tended to degrade political agency, at least as it is understood by Marxists, both within the workers' movement and outside it, as there is no longer such a great need for anti-communist mass politics either.

It is perhaps unsurprising, but still regrettable, that this sort of parapolitics is a temptation for some on the left. The fall of the USSR and satellites is reinterpreted as merely a matter of CIA destabilisation, and not something ultimately rooted in those societies' intrinsic dysfunction. We all gently mock the 'Ufological' theories of J Posadas, but there is no less credulity in the widespread view that recent world history basically unspooled on Jeffrey Epstein's private island. The nicknaming of Trump's Iran war as 'Operation Epstein Fury' is witty, but wrong-headed.

If we ever get round to storming our own winter palaces, no doubt many strange stories regarding the secret state will emerge. We shall never get there, however, if we are trapped in the confusion and despair of conspiracy theories ●

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SOLIDARITY

Brazen cruelty and shared principles

Global protests over the treatment of Gaza aid flotilla activists will bring some comfort to the Palestinian masses, but the stench of hypocrisy from the bourgeois establishment is hard to stomach, says Carla Roberts

The brutal capture, severe mistreatment and widely broadcast humiliation of hundreds of activists from the Global Sumud Flotilla have caused understandable global protests. Fifty boats were intercepted, which carried 428 activists from all over the world, who wanted to “break Israel’s illegal siege and deliver life-saving humanitarian aid to Gaza”. Israel’s blockade of Gaza has caused severe shortages of food, drinking water, medicine and fuel. More than 72,000 Palestinians have been killed since the war began in October 2023, according to Gaza health authorities, while more than 800 have died since Israel agreed to a “ceasefire” in October 2025. Many more are predicted to starve to death or die from a lack of basic healthcare.

The flotilla organisers set out to “establish a sustained civilian presence” and start “rebuilding healthcare systems and basic infrastructure destroyed over the past two years”, with “doctors, nurses, eco-builders, war crimes investigators, unarmed civilian protectors and others” on board.

Of course, this was never going to happen - it would have been way too much bad PR for the Israeli government. And indeed the boats were intercepted 600 miles off the coast of Gaza. Footage proudly released by Israel’s far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, showed him mocking and taunting the kneeling and handcuffed detainees, lined up in rows, with some complaining that they also were sexually assaulted (which we can easily believe). “Welcome to Israel. We’re the landlords,” Ben-Gvir told them, while walking between the detainees like a deranged prison commandant.

Fake outrage

Cue for bourgeois governments across the world to express their “outrage”. Among the more surprising dignitaries protesting was Italy’s far right prime minister Giorgia Meloni, who denounced the treatment as “unacceptable” and “a violation of human dignity”, calling on Israel to apologise. Italian authorities have opened investigations into potential violations of international law, including kidnapping and torture. This is no doubt due to public pressure and widespread sympathy in Italy for the Palestinian cause, rather than any real concern on the part of Meloni for the 29 Italians on board - among them Alessandro Mantovani, a journalist writing for the independent leftwing daily newspaper, *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and, more surprisingly, Dario Carotenuto, a member of parliament for the right populist Five Star Movement.

Israeli ambassadors in various countries were summoned to explain and apologise. France has banned Ben-Gvir from entering its territory, with Poland considering a similar measure. Canada’s government has called the treatment “appalling”. Germany’s ambassador to Israel, Steffen Seibert, termed the incident “wholly incompatible with our shared democratic principles”.

That formulation of “shared democratic principles” really sums it up: the governments and politicians now feigning outrage are generally entirely on board with Israel’s deeply racist policies towards the Palestinians and have supported it for many decades. They might make mealy-mouthed criticism of this or that particularly outrageous action, but



No wonder the court system is clogged

are very much singing from the same hymn sheet, when it comes to labelling Palestine activists as ‘anti-Semites’, for example. A staggering 25 out of 27 EU member states have officially adopted or endorsed the so-called “working definition of anti-Semitism” published by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance; globally, it is 47 countries.¹ The IHRA document has become the most successful tool in the weaponry of the pro-Israel lobby - as we have pointed out many times, it does not actually define anti-Semitism (which is discrimination or hatred of Jewish people because they are Jewish people). Instead, it lists 11 examples, where it effectively labels criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic, thereby entirely changing the definition of the word.

This is very much part and parcel of a wider, international strategy of intimidation and criminalisation of all those critical of Israel (the key ally of US-led imperialism in the Middle East). In Britain, there is also the banning of Palestine Action, the conviction of Ben Jamal and Chris Nineham for “breaching police conditions” at a Palestine protest² and the attack on jury trials. The latter is being sold to the public as an important tool to deal with the ‘backlog’ in the courts. Part of the reason there even exists such a growing backlog is, of course, the fact that there have been hundreds and hundreds of pointless charges against, amongst others, pensioners, for holding up placards declaring, “I support Palestine Action”. And juries also have that pesky habit of finding protestors ‘not guilty’ - not always, but often enough to be an embarrassing thorn in the government’s side.

Israeli response

Publicly parading western nurses and doctors in humiliating poses has been a (small) step too far, and a number of Israeli officials, including foreign minister Gideon Sa’ar, have publicly distanced themselves from Ben-Gvir, stating that he had “caused harm to

Israel’s image” and “is not the face of Israel”. Even prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu felt the need to assure the world that Ben-Gvir’s actions were “not in line with Israel’s values and norms”.³

Oh, but they are. This is how the Israeli government has been treating the Palestinians for decades - and then some. In December 2024, pictures emerged of a group of blindfolded male Palestinian prisoners, who were subjected to similar treatment, but in addition had to strip to their underwear, kneeling or sitting hunched over, before they were thrown in “the back of Israeli military trucks like cattle”.⁴ And, of course, they did not have western governments protesting on their behalf - nor were they deported with great fanfare. Most of them will still be languishing in Israeli prisons, without access to lawyers, and many will almost certainly have been tortured. Nearly half of the current political prisoners in Israel (officially about 11,000) are being held without charge or trial under administrative detention, or because they are classed as “unlawful combatants”. The Israeli government has just set up a special military tribunal that will try Palestinians accused of participating in the ‘Gaza prison break’ on October 7 2023 - with the power to impose the death penalty.⁵

Ben-Gvir has defended his conduct as “patriotic”, arguing that the flotilla was a provocation “in service of Hamas” - echoing entirely a press statement by the US department of state, published while the flotilla was on its way to Gaza on April 30. In fact, it is difficult not to see the revolting US statement as an invitation to the Israeli government to do exactly what Ben-Gvir did:

The United States condemns the Global Sumud Flotilla, a pro-Hamas initiative and a baseless, counterproductive effort to undermine President Trump’s peace plan. This pro-Hamas flotilla is

organised by an OFAC⁶-sanctioned entity, the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad, which was named as a specially designated global terrorist organisation in January for operating at Hamas’s behest.

Consistent with international law, ports constitute internal waters over which coastal states exercise full territorial sovereignty. The United States expects all our allies, particularly those who have committed to supporting President Trump’s successful 20-Point Plan, to take decisive action against this meaningless political stunt by denying port access, docking, departure and refuelling to vessels participating in the flotilla. Our allies should also take additional actions, consistent with applicable law, including denying berthing to vessels reasonably suspected of enabling terrorism or presenting security concerns.

...The United States will explore using available tools to impose consequences on those who provide support to this pro-Hamas flotilla and supports our allies’ legal actions against it.⁷

US support

Ben-Gvir’s overreach was born out of the understanding that the US government will remain firmly behind the Israeli government, even if the US ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, has made mild criticism on the social media platform, X. Trump remains solid.

Israel is and remains the only reliable ally of US-led imperialism in the Middle East. Especially while negotiations with Iran are ongoing, Netanyahu clearly feels he has been given a free hand. It is no surprise he has felt emboldened enough to order the heaviest air strikes on Lebanon since the US-brokered “ceasefire” was agreed in April. Dozens have been killed in the attack on May 27, including many children.

US financial support for Israel is at a record high. While the “current baseline” of military aid is around \$3.8 billion a year, the US has provided at least \$21.7 billion in official military aid to Israel since October 7 2023. Both the Biden and Trump administrations have additionally agreed arms and services deals worth tens of billions of dollars, which will be paid for in years to come.⁸

The US government has also imposed sanctions on four activists involved in the flotilla, alleging that they were trying to reach the Palestinian territory “in support of Hamas”. Two are representatives from the advocacy group, Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad (PCPA), an organisation established in 2017 by Palestinians living outside Gaza and the occupied West Bank, with offices in Beirut and Istanbul. The other two are members of the Palestinian prisoners’ solidarity network, Samidoun.

When the Trump administration took office, it immediately lifted a set of US sanctions imposed on violent Israeli settlers. Shortly after, the administration imposed sanctions on several Palestinian civil society organisations and rights groups for supporting an International Criminal Court investigation into Israeli officials, then the judges themselves were put under sanction - and, after that, most famously, Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on occupied Palestinian territory, after she criticised the Israeli government and Washington.

Officially, such sanctions are only supposed to target any assets located in the US (which may be frozen) and that “Americans are broadly prohibited from doing business with them”.⁹ But, seeing as the US treasury has warned that any foreign banks or organisations dealing with sanctioned individuals could themselves face penalties, those individuals will find it extremely hard to access their bank accounts, get a loan or use any of the most common payment services worldwide.

Some on the left believe that these measures show that the ‘Israeli tail is wagging the American dog’; others believe that it is the other way around and that Israel is merely acting as the US attack dog. In reality, both are true - and thereby neither! The interests of both countries are quite specific, but often overlap. Yes, the Zionist lobby in the US is extremely strong, but the US also props up Israel because it acts as an American ‘attack dog’ in the region. And, as Moshé Machover put it recently, there is “a phenomenon which is well-known to dog breeders: if you train a Rottweiler to be an attack dog, it can sometimes be very difficult to control”.¹⁰ ●

Notes

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UKRAINE

Notes on the war

All of a sudden, it is Russia which is said to be on the back foot militarily, its economy facing ruin and its supply of manpower reaching exhaustion point. In reality, argues **Jack Conrad**, the stalemate continues

Just a few months ago Russia was pictured making a slow, steady, grinding advance that would, so it was said, eventually overwhelm poor little Ukraine. After all, reckoned the armchair generals, including those on the pro-Kremlin Z left, it was nothing more than a matter of simple arithmetic. Russia has a population three or four times bigger than Ukraine and a considerable military-industrial complex besides. Ukraine can therefore, ran the argument, only but lose.

True, given the rate of advance seen in 2025 - barring a political earthquake, such as the withdrawal of western support - it would still take Russia over a hundred years and millions of casualties before its forces could capture the whole of Ukraine. Eg, Russia gained 0.77% of Ukraine's existing territory in 2025, so we can then easily arrive at a neatly rounded 130-year result.¹ Even to take the entirety of the four oblasts - Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia - which were formally annexed in October 2022, would take six or seven more years by the same calculation.

However, all of that ignores little matters like fortress belts, wide, fast-flowing rivers, marshes, etc ... and, at a higher level of abstraction, the fact that war is not linear. It involves both quantitative and qualitative development and intangibles such as morale.

Showing it, today, almost across the entire mainstream bourgeois media we now have excited stories of Russia being edged back, of Ukraine more than holding its own, of Russia suffering unsustainable manpower losses, of its economy being at near breaking point.

Note, in April, according to the Institute for the Study of War, Russia lost control of 45 square miles. The first time Russia had suffered a net loss of territory since August 2024 (the month of Ukraine's surprise incursion into Russia's Kursk oblast).² That came in the wake of negligible Russian gains in February and March. So there is, arguably, a trend.

Hence, the *Financial Times* reports Xi Jinping telling Donald Trump at their Beijing summit that Putin "might end up regretting" his invasion (subsequently flatly denied).³ The *Guardian's* Dan Sabbagh, its defence editor, writes in the same spirit about how drone strikes, mounting casualties and a distracted US president means not only putting "a slow-motion victory ... in doubt", but has Putin himself talking about how the war in Ukraine is "coming to an end".⁴ As for radical journalist Patrick Cockburn, he paints Putin as an abject failure, who has to all intents and purposes already lost the Ukraine war and ruined Russia in the process. Putin, he says, "must win a decisive military victory to achieve his war aims, while Ukraine needs only to avoid defeat". Cockburn therefore states, rightly in my opinion, that the idea that Russia is set on invading Europe, beginning with the Baltic states, is "absurd".⁵

Meanwhile, it needs stressing, there has been virtually no change on the front line. More than that, though the US administration is focused on negotiations with Iran, the fact remains that the standing American position is to force Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Ukraine into agreeing Donald Trump's 28-point peace plan first mooted back in November 2025.⁶ If, and it is a big 'if', there is some sort of deal with Iran, attention in the



Trump and Zelenskyy: a few more cards now

White House will doubtless quickly shift back to Ukraine.

So it is worth revisiting Trump's 28-point plan. What under Biden were red lines have been unceremoniously rubbed out. No regaining every inch of lost territory. No departure of every last Russian soldier.

Trump's plan

In return, Russia is expected not to invade "neighbouring countries" (point 3) and Ukraine will get "security guarantees" (point 5). There will too be an international recovery fund to help get Ukraine back onto its feet economically (point 12). But there will be no Nato expansion, no Nato troops in Ukraine and no Ukrainian Nato membership (points 3, 7 and 8). Indeed Ukraine is obliged to limit its army to 600,000 (point 6) and relocate its European fighter jets to Poland (point 9). Ukraine is also expected to concede what territory Russia holds in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, withdraw from its 20% of Donbas and accept some sort of free economic zone (point 21).

On top of all that, Zelenskyy must allow presidential and Rada elections within a 100 days of an agreement (point 25). Long overdue because of the war, Zelenskyy and his Servants of the People party are widely thought to be in a weak position and are expected to lose in any free and fair election.

As Trump bluntly told Zelenskyy just 15 months ago in their heated Oval Office exchange, "You're not in a good position. You don't have the cards right now."⁷ Hence Zelenskyy has been doing his best to be seen to agree ... but meanwhile carry on with the fighting.

He says he supports elections and would put a Ukrainian withdrawal from Donbas to a national referendum. How the question is worded would doubtless play a deciding role. To ask 'Do you support dismembering the country?' is to invite rejection. But recommending a 'Do you support peace and a demilitarised buffer zone' question might just do the trick. Whatever the wording, one could though easily imagine the Ukrainian-Ukrainian population rejecting what will be branded, not least by the far right, as 'national betrayal'. Who knows what would happen then? Regime collapse, an Azov coup, a show trial of Zelenskyy and his corrupt cronies?

However, over the last year it seems that Zelenskyy has found himself some cards to play, both through Ukraine upping the scale of domestic drone production and putting into effect domestic advances in drone technology (discussed below). That - and with elections in Hungary seeing the back of Viktor Orbán - Ukraine is expecting, in June, the first tranche of

its massive €90 billion loan package from the EU for 2026-27. The EU will supposedly be repaid by reparations due to Ukraine from Russia (so do not hold your breath on that one).⁸

Some €60 billion of that package will be for arms purchases from within and without the EU. Ukraine is thereby expecting to renew its stock of artillery shells and obtain ammunition and spare parts for its F-16 fleet. Besides that Kyiv has its eyes set on Swedish Gripen fighter jets, British Storm Shadows and more and more American Patriot missiles.

As an additional bonus for Zelenskyy, in February 2026, SpaceX imposed stricter verification and whitelist controls on its Starlink satellite internet service that disabled unauthorized terminals believed to be used by Russian military units in Ukraine. Battlefield communications, including with drones, have thereby been made significantly harder.

Russia's economy is also said to be faltering. However, that should come with a health warning. After all, we have heard it many times before. Moreover, Russia has a war-orientated economy, not a total war economy. Note, while Russia devotes some 6.3% to 7.5% of its GDP to 'defence', during World War II British war spending reached a 62% high in 1944-45.⁹

Moreover, as far as the lives of

the mass of the Russian population is concerned, the war in Ukraine hardly touches them. Even those whose fathers, sons or partners have been killed are supposed to have their grief assuaged by compensation payments and other additional benefits worth up to \$68,000. And, needless to say, the shops are full and real wages continue to rise (in fact, to a 16-year high).¹⁰ There is no rationing, no long snaking queues, no rows of empty shelves.

Nonetheless, Russia's GDP experienced a 1.8% contraction during the first two months of this year. There is, then, a danger that the country could, with the next set of figures, formally enter a recession. Inflation is roaring too and the central bank has set high interest rates accordingly. Russia is also experiencing a chronic labour shortage. In part this is accounted for by the demands of the war industry, in part by those sent to fight in Ukraine and in part by those fleeing abroad (since the beginning of the 'special military operation' more than half a million conscription-age men have left the country¹¹).

Such cards put Ukraine in a much stronger position (despite higher oil and gas prices caused by the Iran war, which has handed Moscow a \$40 billion windfall). So, when the Trump administration once again focuses on dealing with the Ukraine question, expect slightly less onerous terms for Ukraine and slightly less favourable terms for Russia. In part at least, because Trump despises weakness and admires strength. For him it really is the strong who shall inherit the earth.

Energy war

No surprise, Ukraine is surviving Russia's drone and missile war against its energy sector. As we have argued, leave aside the extraordinary vulnerability of nuclear power plants, Ukraine's energy sector, is, in fact, noticeably robust.

During Soviet times it was deliberately grown oversized to help cope with bureaucratic socialism's inefficiencies, low productivity and permanent shortages. There has, moreover, been a drive towards decentralisation and diversification: solar panels, wind turbines, small gas modular turbines, old coal plants recommissioned, etc. That meant that during the June-September 2025 period Ukraine became a "net electricity exporter".¹²

But it was massive electricity imports from the EU that saved Ukraine from a winter shutdown in 2025-26. In other words, the Russo-Ukraine war is not just between those two countries. Behind Ukraine lies the diplomatic, economic and military strength of Europe. Using the ENTSO-E network that links together European grids, Ukraine was thereby able to import up to 42 GWh daily (most of it originating in neighbouring Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and Romania). That amounts to between 13% and 15% of the country's peak electricity needs, this is what kept the lights on over the cruel winter months ... and this summer Ukraine can once again be expected to become a net energy exporter.

It is certainly the case that a good number of Russian drones and ballistic missiles are shot down through ack-ack, SAMs, fighter jets and attack drones. Zelenskyy boasts that some 94% of Russian drones are intercepted and some 73% of its ballistic missiles.¹³ But, of course, though the hit rate is

constantly increasing (eg, it was 54% last year), so has the sheer volume of Russian launches. From the tens and twenties monthly, numbers grew to well over 5,000 monthly in 2026.¹⁴

So enough get through to cause considerable damage¹⁵ - especially the case with ballistic and hypersonic missiles, which are far harder to intercept. Note, ballistic missiles reach speeds of Mach 20+ by soaring into near space, while hypersonic missiles keep within the atmosphere and fly at speeds exceeding Mach 5, but are able to follow unpredictable flightpaths.

The limited availability of US-supplied Patriots has been a real headache in this context (exacerbated no end by the Iran war¹⁶). Nonetheless, *Politico* recently reported that Ukraine has successfully developed a “cheaper alternative”. Namely the Lima electronic warfare system, which at the cost of just a few million dollars interferes with satellite navigation signals and thereby diverts the course of Russian drones, missiles and glide bombs by a few degrees and thus causes them to miss their intended targets.¹⁷ Of course, the nature of warfare is that one innovation produces the next. Ukrainian jamming will, it is easy to predict, see Russian countermeasures. And so it will go on and on.

Despite Ukraine’s growing success in hitting, or diverting, Russian drones and missiles, power cuts are a regular occurrence. Over the winter of 2025-26 emergency rolling blackouts lasted some 12-18 hours. Not only a form of psychological warfare, but emergency repairs for the energy sector are hugely costly and constant outages disrupt domestic heating, water supplies, healthcare and industrial (eg, arms) production too.

Of course, Ukraine is conducting its own energy war deep into Russian territory. Ports, oil tankers, pipelines, oil and gas refineries and storage tanks are the main targets. With western targeting support, more than 50% of Russia’s refineries have reportedly been hit more than once.¹⁸ Exports have had to be correspondingly scaled back and refining capacity is much reduced (reportedly by some 15%).

Fortress war

Russian forces continue to advance here and there: eg, in the Kostyantynivka-Druzhkivka and Dobropillya tactical areas. However, they are also being forced to retreat here and there; eg, in the Kostyantynivka-Druzhkivka tactical area and in the western Zaporizhzhia oblast.¹⁹ It is no longer an almost unremittent story of slow, steady, grinding Russian advance. Hence the triumphant tone of much of the mainstream bourgeois media coverage.

But there has been no strategic breakthrough by either side ... and nor should one be expected any time soon. Once it was claimed that Russia capturing Pokrovsk, because of its E-50 highway and rail line, would mark a strategic defeat for Ukraine. Logistical supply lines feeding the rest of the Donetsk front would allegedly be lost and allow Russia to rapidly advance on Dnipro. Always a dubious proposition.

Well, although the town fell in early 2026, Russian forces have made no noticeable advances. Ukraine has its ‘fortress belt’ in place. Centring on four large towns in Donetsk oblast and their satellite settlements, it runs north to south along the H-20 Kostyantynivka-Sloviansk highway. The Institute for the Study of War reports that Ukraine put much money and effort into this 31 miles of strongpoints, bunkers, trenches, minefields, dragon’s teeth, anti-tank ditches and razor wire. The fortress belt is specifically designed with the topography in mind: “The terrain is fairly defensible, particularly the Chasiv Yar height, which has been underpinning the Ukrainian line,” says

Nick Reynolds of the Royal United Services Institute.²⁰

It is a similar story along the whole 600-mile long line of conflict. Both sides have chosen defensible positions, established strong points, dug ditches, poured concrete and planted mines. No wonder Russian advances have proved so costly. Attacks by large formations amount to slaughter. For a few yards of sod, thousands die. Instead Russian generals have turned to infiltration by small groups of two or three men. They exploit natural defensive gaps, use the cover provided by fog and rain, hide in woods, even crawl through disused gas and oil pipelines. Having established a sufficiently strong force, they strike from the rear.

As we have remarked many times before, the defensive lines of the Ukraine war are remarkably similar to those of World War I. Having been forced onto the defensive in 1915, the Germans responded by fortifying their front: trenches, barbed wire, machine guns, concrete bunkers. To have any hope of breaching such awesome defences required the delivery, via rail and lorry, of huge quantities of artillery shells, prolonged bombardments and then hugely costly infantry assaults (artillery conquered and infantry held any territorial gains).

Given the advantage of hindsight, it is now crystal-clear that the decision by Russia’s high command to withdraw from Kherson, Izyum, Lyman and the environs of Kharkiv in the autumn of 2022 was no rout, as claimed by a jubilant Zelenskyy - but, yes, a repositioning, a reset, to secure their forces behind the strongest, most advantageous defensive positions.

True, a hyperbolic storm of protest erupted from Chechnya’s warlord, Ramzan Kadyrov, and Yevgeny Prigozhin of Wagner. Defence minister Sergei Shoigu and top military commanders were branded cowards, traitors and incompetents who deserved to be stripped of medals and sent barefoot into battle. Given that Russia had banned any criticism of the conduct of the Ukraine war by making it illegal to “discredit the armed forces”, such language was highly significant. The Wagner coup happened a few months later, in June 2023, and shook the whole of Russia. Vladimir Putin was humiliated, but survived, and - surprise, surprise - successfully won a fifth presidential term in March 2024.

That aside, strategically, it is now obvious that the Russian high command took a German turn in 2022-23. Instead of pursuing the quixotic aim of “de-Nazifying” Ukraine (a euphemism for decapitating the Kyiv regime), Putin was forced to settle on keeping what Russia has got in Ukraine and pursuing a war of attrition in the hope of eventually securing all of the four oblasts annexed in October 2022: Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. The final outcome will therefore depend on who can produce, or obtain, the most artillery shells, drones, missiles and sustain the accompanying losses in manpower ... and which side can innovate the fastest.

Drone war

Of course, Ukraine is no rerun of the western front. There are drones, drones, drones. Battlefield skies are thick with them and the logistical and the strategic war is more and more reliant on them.

Modern Ukrainian drones started with Mavic scouts adapted to drop grenades. Then came FPV drones: first 7-inch frames, then 10, then 12. Then came 1kg payloads, 1.5kg and then bigger and bigger. Ukraine’s heavy bomber drones nowadays carry 5-10kg payloads. Other battlefield drones supply much needed water, food and munitions to the front line. There are also medium and deep-

strike drones. Medium-strike drones have a range of around 200km and are designed to stymie Russia’s ability to conduct offensive and defensive operations: hitting air defence systems, radar, warehouses, command posts, logistics, and oil and energy infrastructure. Deep-strike drones are capable of reaching targets as far away as Moscow.

Scout drones now often come equipped with nano night-vision cameras or thermal detectors. Attack drones come preprogrammed, others are controlled by radio signal or impossible to jam fibre-optic cable. There are now interceptor drones too.

These interceptor drones are small, fast and very cheap to make - costing between as little as \$1,000 and \$2,500. A snip when compared even to a Russian Shahed (\$35,000 to \$100,000 each). Some are conventionally manufactured, other are 3-D printed. They are designed to hone in on and destroy incoming attack drones either by ramming them or by exploding alongside them.

Compact enough to fit inside a soldier’s backpack, Ukraine’s drone interceptors - Sting, P1-SUN, Bolt, Octopus 100, etc - fly at between 195 and 280mph. More than needed to catch up with a Shahed 136 (known in Russia as a Geran-2). Most “combine thermal imaging with radar tracking and AI-assisted guidance, with a human operator taking manual control for the final seconds of the intercept.” Ukraine now has “more than 20 companies producing them”, its National Security and Defence Council announced in January.²¹

Indeed such has been the success of these interceptor drones that Ukraine has begun exporting them to eager buyers in the Arab world ... and has even sold licences to manufacture them to other countries, including Poland, France, Germany, Italy and Great Britain. Russia has, of course, countered Ukraine’s interceptor drones with its feared Geran-5, which can reach speeds of 370mph. So in a chase it can outrun anything Ukraine has in service ... for the moment.

Either way, drones have created a 20-30km-wide ‘kill zone’ along each side of the front line. Trenches therefore go unmanned. The wounded are left to die in no-man’s land, so risky is it to rescue them. Moving supplies to fighting troops by lorry has become almost impossible. Even using armoured vehicles is to invite a deadly drone strike. Fixed artillery positions have had to be abandoned too. Easy targets.

Rotating troops has become hellishly difficult. According to a report in *Politico*, “Most soldiers currently die during rotation.” They are therefore forced to spend weeks at the front. A recent BBC news item told of a poor Ukrainian grunt, code name ‘Kenya’, confined to a fox hole for 225 days before he got himself back to his unit: he was suffering from extreme muscle weakness.²²

When they are eventually rotated, the soldiers have to duck and dive through the kill zone before being picked up by a waiting car. “That,” we are reliably told, “creates a problem with morale.”²³ And morale matters. It is far more important than all those Leopard II tanks, F-16s and Storm Shadows put together. As Napoleon Bonaparte famously remarked, “In war, three-quarters turns on personal character and relations; the balance of manpower and materials counts only for the remaining quarter.”²⁴

Wounded soldiers face their own particular nightmare. Sometimes they have to wait for days before getting any kind of proper treatment. Getting them to a medically equipped armoured personnel carrier means hobbling, crawling or being carried. No wonder so many die. Not that they are safe anywhere near the front line. Drones hover above tracks and roads.

Ukraine has, as a result, turned to robotic surgery and virtual treatment by doctors. And, of course, drones deliver medical equipment, drugs and PPE to the front line.

Ironically, Ukraine’s surging production of drones relies heavily (80%) on Chinese components (navigation systems, chips, magnets and composites). Eg, Ukraine’s Motor-G plant, Europe’s largest producer of drone motors, turns out about 100,000 units per month. “But it still buys its high-grade magnets and copper wire from China.”²⁵ Not surprisingly, because it is such good business, the same pattern applies to Russia’s drones. Roughly 80% of Russia’s drone electronics, motors, fibre optic cables, etc come from companies of “Chinese origin” - often via Russian fronts (operating under the cover of producing refrigeration units).²⁶

Grand strategy

Whatever the exact terms of any Ukraine settlement might be in the future, it is vital to understand what the Trump administration is attempting to achieve. Dismissing him and his entire cabinet as nothing more than a bunch of half-wits is in itself half-witted. Getting behind Trump’s hectoring and often ranting and raving style is best done by putting Ukraine into the context of the *National Security Strategy* (published in November 2025).²⁷ This remains the fullest statement of what “putting America first in everything” means, when it comes to foreign policy.

The Trump administration has unceremoniously dumped the post-World War II so-called law-based international order. That is for sure. Yet, shorn of the Trumpite braggadocio, what is being re-established is the ‘might is right’ transactional politics of 19th century imperialism. American hegemony will take a new/old form: territorial ambition, naked force, protectionism, resource control, colonies.

NSS promises to assert a “Trump corollary” to the Monroe doctrine: America will be “pre-eminent” in the western hemisphere. In Latin America that first of all means dealing with Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua - the “sordid cradle of communism in the western hemisphere”. Well, the Chavista regime in Caracas has already bent the knee, leaving Cuba isolated, blockaded and suffering prolonged power blackouts. After Cuba, Nicaragua will be next. There is also Canada as the 51st state and Greenland as some kind of US territory (along the lines of Puerto Rico).

Previous approaches to China are rejected as deluded. American trade with China must be “rebalanced” and allies such as Europe, Japan, Mexico, Canada and South Korea are expected to cooperate in achieving that aim (ie, reversing the “inexorable” rise of China).

NSS repudiates the interventionist policy of strongarming other countries into adopting “democratic or other social change that differs widely from their traditions and histories”. According to *The Economist*, that is welcome news for “Russia, China and the monarchies of the Middle East”.²⁸ Yet, when it comes to Europe, NSS bluntly declares that “our goal should be to help Europe correct its current trajectory”. It stresses America’s “sentimental attachment” to Europe, especially “Britain and Ireland”, but ominously warns that “European states cannot reform themselves if they are trapped in political crisis”.

“American diplomacy” will therefore “continue to stand up” for what NSS calls “genuine democracy, freedom of expression, and unapologetic celebrations of European nations’ individual character and history”. In other words, America will “promote” the growing influence of

“patriotic European parties”: good news for Reform UK, AfD, National Rally, Brotherhood of Italy, Vox, etc.

When applied to Ukraine, NSS draws conclusions that mainstream conservatives, liberals and social-imperialists call “appeasement”,²⁹ the “spirit of 1938”³⁰ or “end the war by giving Putin everything he wants”.³¹ Such types cannot think about today’s Russia outside the Third Reich box.

Anyway, NSS envisages an “expeditious cessation” of the war in Ukraine to prevent further escalation. Evidently, Trump is wagering on cleaving Russia away from the embrace of China by offering an expanded sphere of influence and a revived G8 (point 13 of Trump’s 28-point Ukraine plan). That, or even establishing a G5 ... the US, China, Japan, India and, flatteringly, Russia. (Why ‘flatteringly’? Because despite its 150 million population and nuclear weapons, economically it ranks roughly on a par with Italy and Canada.)

Though, frustratingly, Putin failed to get his second pipeline deal agreed on his latest Beijing visit - following hot on the heels of Trump - a deepened Sino-Russian bloc is a much more likely scenario than a G8 American-European-Russian bloc. As for a G5, it is for the birds ... it will never fly ●

Notes

1. A linear calculation based on data collected by the hawkish Institute for the Study of War. Eg, it reckons that Russia took just 0.77% of Ukraine’s total area in 2025 (www.lvivherald.com/post/how-long-would-it-take-russia-to-occupy-all-ukraine).
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IRAN

Art of not doing the deal

Talks about talks, draft memorandums, shuttle diplomacy, strange rumours and threats of escalating military strikes. Yassamine Mather explains what is going on

After months of military confrontation, political theatre and indirect diplomacy, the outlines of a possible agreement are beginning to emerge. Yet nothing is settled. The talks remain fragile, contradictory and vulnerable to renewed escalation.

Although Israel played a central role in the opening phase of the war, the current negotiations are formally between Washington and Tehran. In practice, however, the talks involve a wider regional and international cast: Pakistan, Qatar, China, Oman and, offstage, Israel and Lebanon.

The most striking feature of the past week has been the extent of shuttle diplomacy. Senior Pakistani officials have travelled to Tehran, Qatar and Beijing, carrying messages between Iran, the US and China. Pakistani prime minister Shehbaz Sharif has been in Beijing for a four-day visit, joined by Asim Munir, Pakistan's army chief, who had recently visited Tehran. Their presence in China suggests that Pakistan is acting as the front-line mediator, while Beijing is playing the role of strategic overseer.

In the 21st century, this kind of diplomacy can look almost medieval. With secure phones, encrypted communication and video conferencing available, it is remarkable that so many officials still need to fly thousands of miles to deliver messages. But the very fact of these journeys shows the depth of mistrust. Neither side appears willing to rely entirely on electronic communication. Messages have to be carried, repeated, verified and politically guaranteed by third parties.

After weeks of war, the Islamic Republic has not collapsed. The expectation in Washington and Tel Aviv that a decapitation strategy would weaken the Iranian state so severely that it would either surrender or fragment has been proven to be illusory.

Iran's military and security structure had spent years preparing for precisely this kind of war. Its decentralised defence system, often described as the 'mosaic defence' doctrine, was designed to allow provincial and military units to continue operating, even if central command was disrupted. So, despite major strikes and the loss of senior figures, the regime has not lost control. Tehran has also managed the information war with discipline.

The result is that Iran enters the negotiations not as a defeated state begging for terms, but as a damaged regime trying to convert survival into political leverage. Its main argument is simple: the US and Israel used enormous military force, yet failed to destroy the Islamic Republic or impose regime change.

As of May 27 2026, a day after US airstrikes on Iranian military targets in southern Iran, the talks appear to be close to a framework, but not to a final agreement. US officials and regional sources suggest that progress has been made. Iran, more cautiously, says there has been movement but no final deal.

The likely deal would be built around seven connected issues.

- There would be an extension of the ceasefire, possibly for 60 days, while more detailed negotiations continue.

- The Strait of Hormuz would be reopened to shipping. This is the most urgent economic issue. The US wants the strait open, safe and free for global shipping. Iran wants recognition of its



Ahmadinejad in 2021

role in managing security and passage through the waterway.

- The US would lift or ease its naval blockade of Iranian ports. Tehran sees this as a necessary condition for any serious de-escalation.

- There would be measures to deal with mines and maritime security. Washington rejects any Iranian toll regime or coercive control over shipping. Iran frames the issue as lawful management of its own waters and regional security responsibilities.

- The nuclear question would be separated into a later (but urgent) stage. The US wants Iran's highly enriched uranium removed, destroyed, diluted or placed under strict verification. Iran rejects surrendering its nuclear programme outright, but may accept down-blending, suspension or tighter monitoring.

- Sanctions relief and the release of frozen Iranian assets would be phased. Iran wants broad sanctions removal and access to blocked funds. The US appears to be offering conditional relief, tied to Iranian steps on Hormuz, uranium and verification.

- There is the question of sequencing: who moves first? Washington wants verified nuclear and maritime concessions before major relief. Tehran wants sanctions relief, access to assets and respect for sovereignty before making irreversible concessions.

Regional effects

On May 25 an Iranian delegation led by parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and foreign minister Abbas Araghchi made an unannounced trip to Qatar as part of the Pakistan-mediated diplomatic process. The presence of central bank governor Abdolnaser Hemmati suggests that the release of frozen Iranian assets is a central part of the negotiations.

Qatar's role appears to be financial and diplomatic: Doha may help manage the release and transfer of funds. Pakistan's role is political and security-based: it has direct ties with Iran, a close relationship with China and sufficient links to Washington to act as a messenger. China's role is larger. Beijing is not necessarily conducting every negotiation directly, but it appears to be the power behind the mediation architecture.

This resembles China's earlier role in the Saudi-Iran 'normalisation process'. Regional actors do the

difficult preliminary work; China enters as the guarantor, organiser and final diplomatic stage-manager.

The fragility of the process was shown again on May 26, when the US carried out further strikes in southern Iran, while negotiations were still underway. US officials described the attacks as defensive, targeting missile launch sites and mine-laying vessels near the Strait of Hormuz. Whatever Washington's justification, the strikes strengthened Tehran's claim that it is being asked to negotiate under military pressure.

The emerging framework is not simply a return to the 2015 nuclear deal. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was primarily about uranium enrichment, sanctions and international verification. The current talks are about much more: war termination, maritime control, frozen assets, sanctions, regional ceasefires, Lebanon, Hormuz and the future balance of power in the Gulf. A narrow nuclear agreement might be technically possible, but a wending regional settlement is far more complicated.

Iran reportedly wants any agreement to include Lebanon and to restrain Israeli attacks on Hezbollah. The US and Israel have resisted making Lebanon part of the same package. Iran also wants regional non-aggression guarantees and recognition of its security role in the Persian Gulf. US hawks and Israel, by contrast, want Iran's missile programme and regional allies included in any deal. Yet current reports suggest that missiles and Iran's regional network may be left out, at least for now.

If the reported framework is accurate, Donald Trump faces a serious domestic problem. The deal could be attacked by hawkish Republicans as too similar to, or even weaker than, the Obama-era JCPOA. To protect himself, Trump appears to be seeking regional cover. By involving Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Pakistan and China, he can argue that regional allies pushed for the agreement and that he is responding to realities on the ground. Contrary to what sections of British media reported, this has absolutely nothing to do with Hajj (the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca) and everything to do with the dire economic consequences of the war for the countries of the Persian Gulf.

emerging US-Iran agreement looks like "a bad deal".

The main Israeli concern is that the agreement gives Iran time to recover. *The Times of Israel* reported that senior Israeli security officials said the deal "does not serve Israel's interest" and warned that after Iran gets time for "economic and military recovery" it may be difficult for the US and Israel "to go back and fight". Another key fear is that the deal could limit Israel's military freedom, especially in Lebanon. The same newspaper reported Israeli 'concern' that the agreement could restrict action against Hezbollah.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid has attacked the deal even more directly, saying: "The deal is bad for Israel, bad for the region, bad for the citizens of Iran." He also accused Netanyahu of failing to influence Washington, saying Israel is "not a vassal state and we are not a protectorate".

Changed image

Alongside the negotiations, a strange political story has emerged around former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. According to reports, before the war some US and Israeli officials considered the possibility of Ahmadinejad becoming an asset in the scenario following the assassination of supreme leader Ali Khamenei. The idea was that, if the Iranian state fractured, a familiar insider who had fallen out with the supreme leader might be used to divide or redirect the system.

Ahmadinejad was once one of the most aggressively anti-Israel figures in Iranian politics. His inflammatory speeches and confrontational nuclear policy helped Israel and the US present Iran as a global threat. Former Israeli officials have even described him as useful to Israel's public diplomacy, because he made Iran look dangerous.

After leaving office, however, Ahmadinejad changed his image. He clashed with the security establishment, was blocked from running for office and tried to rebrand himself as an anti-system populist. He used social media in English, appealed to ordinary Iranians and presented himself as a 'man of the people'. Although there are no credible reports of Ahmadinejad secretly meeting with Israelis before 2026, he has himself claimed that Mossad deeply infiltrated his government. His ties to Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán are well documented: in May 2024, he was invited to speak at Budapest's National University of Public Service and he also visited Hungary in 2025. Yet he lacks the organisation, military support and institutional backing needed to take power.

That is why many reject the idea that Ahmadinejad could seriously lead a post-war Iran. The Revolutionary Guards would not trust him. Opposition forces would not rally behind him. Some Iranians may remember his populist style. However, nostalgia is not a political machine. If the US and Israel really consider him as the next leader, it reveals less about Ahmadinejad's strength than about their misunderstanding of Iranian politics. Iran's power structure is not a seamless apparatus that can be captured simply by inserting a familiar face: it is fragmented, factional, coercive and deeply institutional. A missile strike cannot produce a new regime.

The region's service-and-transit economy, which includes aviation, tourism, luxury retail and high-spending expatriate life, has been interrupted. That is because Dubai and Doha are not just local cities: they are major international hubs. Dubai welcomed 18.72 million international overnight visitors in 2024, and Dubai International handled 92.3 million passengers in the same year. Qatar's travel-and-tourism sector also reached a record 81 billion Qatari riyal in economic contribution, while Hamad International Airport passed 50 million passengers in a rolling 12-month period.

Confidence

Now that these places look unsafe and inconvenient, airlines have been forced to reroute, tourists have cancelled trips, and business travellers avoid stopovers, in what remains a dangerous zone. The visible result is seen in empty airports, empty malls, empty attractions. But the deeper effect is economic. Fewer visitors means lower hotel occupancy, lower retail sales, fewer jobs and less tax and fee income for governments and firms. In places built around consumption and transit, even a short conflict can cause a sharp drop in confidence and spending.

The same would apply to the wealthy mobile groups that help keep these economies vibrant: 'tax exiles', influencers, financiers and other high-spending residents. If they leave, or stop coming, you lose not only their rents and restaurant bills, but also the wider halo effect that fills luxury districts, branded malls and premium real estate.

So the war has damaged the business model of the Persian Gulf as a safe, frictionless global stopover for money, movement and spectacle.

At the same time, Trump has emphasised that he spoke with Benjamin Netanyahu and that the call "went well" - suggesting that he is trying to reassure Israel, while moving towards a deal Iran might accept. Israeli media are reporting serious disagreements with US plans, with Israeli officials warning that the proposed deal may stabilise oil shipping and pause the war, but leave Iran's nuclear infrastructure, missiles, proxies and regional influence insufficiently weakened. Israeli officials are warning that the

TURKEY

Applying the law

Using tear gas and rubber bullets, the police stormed the HQ of the main opposition party in Ankara. **Esen Uslu** reports on the latest step towards one-man rule

Recip Tayyip Erdoğan and his regime have taken another step towards the long expected realisation of 'one-man rule' by effectively neutering the Republican People's Party (CHP): that is, the principal opposition party. This time the ploy was to declare the CHP's congress, held in November 2023, unlawful, through the order of a quite junior civil court. That meant ousting CHP leader, Özgür Özel, and reinstating former chair, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu - a divisive figure within the party - who lost to Erdoğan in 2023.

According to the Turkish legal system, only the Supreme Election Council can rule on the legality of a political party's congress and issue a certificate of election within a strict time limit. The SEC is an independent board, composed of six members elected by the Court of Cassation, and five members elected by the Council of State. Each member is appointed for six years. Political parties with groups in the Grand National Assembly send representatives to the SEC to participate in deliberations, but they do not have the right to vote.

SEC is responsible for carrying out and ensuring the integrity of elections, investigating and making final decisions on all cases of corruption, complaints and objections concerning election matters during and after elections, and approving election records. SEC decisions are final and binding. There is no right of appeal.

According to the rules, SEC certified the CHP congress and the outcome of its elections for party offices within the time limit after the congress was held and complaints were lodged.

On May 6, when the time came to replace the members who had served their full term, new members were selected for the SEC from the CC and CS. The new SEC was ready to comply with Erdoğan's whims, since he appointed nearly all of the CC and CS members.

Clever plan

However, a 'Baldrick's clever plan' was hatched: some members of the ousted CHP leadership sued the party in a lower civil court, arguing that the new leadership had been elected by corrupting some delegates. They sought to annul the congress and its consequences on the grounds of "absolute nullity". This argument was previously applicable to marriages and contracts when one of the parties was unqualified, such as a married man marrying again. It had nothing to do with congresses and the elections of political parties. But, hey presto! The court annulled the congress and reinstated the Kılıçdaroğlu old guard!

CHP's Özel leadership applied to the SEC and objected to the court's decision, citing lack of competency. The SEC rejected the application but has yet to publish its reasoning. No one cared about the legal niceties. The old party guard, accompanied by bailiffs and a large police force, forced their way into CHP's Ankara headquarters using rubber bullets and tear gas. Özel and other CHP members were violently thrown out.

Now, the spokespersons of Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) have the opportunity to claim that the CHP's internal affairs are none of their concern.



Erdoğan: next president for life?

It may take several months to clear up the mess CHP is in. The timing of the absolute nullity decision suggests that an early election may be scheduled for this autumn.

Erdoğan was elected twice, so he is not eligible to run in the presidential elections at the end of his second term. However, there is a catch: He can run in early elections. Therefore, an early election is expected, in order to perpetuate his rule.

CHP's presidential hopeful, Istanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, has been jailed on trumped-up corruption and espionage charges since March 2025. Almost all CHP mayors of major cities and towns have also been jailed on similar charges. Some administrators appointed by the government now rule those municipalities in an attempt to undercut the CHP candidate's grassroots support.

Now that CHP's central leadership has been ousted and the old guard reinstated, the troubled party will not be able to function properly or prepare for early elections. Thus, Erdoğan's one-man rule continues, as he makes decisions about everything, including the opposition's leadership.

There are still cards to play if CHP's ousted Özel leadership

attempts to cause trouble by calling for a quick congress to hold elections and reestablish legitimate leadership and unity of purpose. After the party headquarters in Ankara was stormed and the leadership forcibly ejected, a large crowd marched seven kilometres in heavy rain to the Grand National Assembly, crossing several police roadblocks along the way. A criminal investigation has begun. It is quite possible that their voice will be silenced through the courts. We shall see.

Backing

The Erdoğan regime's brazen moves in the political arena are only possible through the support it enjoys from western powers. At the Doha Forum in Qatar last December, Tom Barrack, US ambassador to Turkey and special envoy for Syria, said that attempts to impose democratic governance on the Middle East have failed and that "benevolent monarchies offer the best model for governing nations in the tumultuous region."

Barrack expressed similar views more elaborately and forcefully at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in April of this year. "If you look at the region - and again, I'll be criticised for saying

this because it's anti-democratic - the only thing that has worked are these powerful leadership regimes, whether benevolent monarchies or monarchical republics."

At that time, the now-ousted leadership of the CHP asked that he be declared persona non grata for suggesting something so hostile to a democratic republic formed by toppling and repudiating the Ottoman monarchy.

Just a few days earlier, Erdoğan had a phone conversation with Donald Trump. The US president praised him as a strong leader and his best friend. This was apparently a green light for him to proceed against the opposition.

Erdoğan's international support is not limited to the USA. In late April, when the Turkish foreign minister visited London, Britain and Turkey signed a 'Strategic Partnership Framework Document'. The Starmer government has a multibillion-pound defence agreement with Turkey that covers the sale of Eurofighter jets and Meteor missiles, as well as the training of Turkish pilots and maintenance crews. The agreement also aims to "enhance defence capability and industry cooperation" and to cooperate more broadly against

terrorism and organised crime. Both parties will maintain close alignment on international crises.

Nato secretary general Rutte visited Ankara to meet with Erdoğan and discuss preparations for the Nato leaders' summit, which will take place in Ankara on July 7-8. Erdoğan stated that the region's instability once again demonstrated the importance of Nato members' cooperation and solidarity.

Abraham Accords

President Trump reminded us of the price that will be paid. Tom Barrack has already stated: "The US is preparing to take steps to normalise relations between its regional allies, Turkey and Israel, via Syria." Turkey and Israel will maintain their respective spheres of influence in Syria without encroaching on each other, and the US will act as the guarantor of this balance. On May 25, Trump posted on Truth Social:

I stated that, after all the work done by the United States to try and pull this very complex puzzle together, it should be mandatory that all of these Countries, at a minimum, simultaneously, sign onto the Abraham Accords. Those Countries discussed are Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emirates (already a Member!), Qatar, Pakistan, Türkiye, Egypt, Jordan, and Bahrain. ... Therefore, I am mandatorily requesting that all Countries immediately sign the Abraham Accords, and that, if Iran signs its Agreement with me, as President of the United States of America, it would be an Honor to have them also be part of this unparalleled World Coalition.¹

All of these political developments are taking place amid deteriorating economic circumstances. The Turkish finance minister was holding a meeting in London to seek investment and offer preferential investment opportunities when the bombshell of "absolute nullity" exploded. Many potential investors left the meeting without hearing him out. Turkish stocks fell rapidly, and the Turkish central bank spent billions of dollars' worth of gold to prop up the Turkish lira.

Inflation rose again, and the purchasing power of workers and pensioners fell sharply as the Eid al-Adha holiday approached. Clearly, Erdoğan could not win a fair election. Therefore, he is trying to cripple the main opposition party.

He will probably increase the minimum wage in June and provide some relief for diminishing pensions, despite the fact that these measures will exacerbate inflation. He hopes that these actions will improve his chances of being elected again.

He is also banking on winning Kurdish votes by creating the expectation that he alone can restart the peace process. He continues his "Turkey without terror" rhetoric, but is dragging his feet on taking positive steps, implying that the success of the process hinges on his re-election. Neither Abdullah Öcalan nor the Kurdish freedom movement will fall for such illusions, but Erdoğan is a master of brinkmanship ●

Notes

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US-CHINA

T-traps and Punic wars

Michael Roberts delves into the history of the ancient world to find a suitable analogy for the rivalry between the US and China. It is not, he says, Athens and Sparta, but Rome and Carthage

On the first day of talks during Donald Trump's recent state visit to China, his host, China's Xi Jinping, invoked the so-called 'Thucydides trap' to warn against any war between the two superpowers that now dominate the world's economic and political landscape.

Xi was referring to the 5th-century BC Greek historian, Thucydides, who (it is claimed) argued that the threat posed by the then rising power of the Athens maritime city state so frightened the longstanding, land-based hegemonic power, Sparta, that the latter went to war to crush Athens. Xi warned that, if America had any such ambitions with China, it would be a trap for the US.

The concept of the 'Thucydides trap' was first developed in 1980 by Herman Wouk, the novelist and World War II veteran. Wouk then compared the US-Soviet cold war to the one that developed between Athens and Sparta, once they had defeated Persia (their common enemy) in the middle of 5th century BC. In 2015, American political scientist Graham Allison took up the lessons of the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta on a mainland Greek peninsula as an analogy for the rising conflict between the US and China. Allison claimed that, among a sample of 16 historical instances of an emerging power rivalling a ruling power, 12 had ended in war. He cited World War I, where the rising European power, Germany, went to war against the declining hegemonic powers of Britain and France. Then there was the rising economic power of Japan in World War II that launched an attack on the US in 1940.

Allison reckoned that Thucydides showed that when a rising power (such as Athens) challenges the status of a ruling power (such as Sparta), war would be difficult to avoid. This was the 'trap' that the US should avoid, said Xi, not surprisingly. Ironically, in the Peloponnesian war it was the emergent power (Athens) that lost and the dominant power (Sparta) that won, and it was the same for the world wars of the 20th century. So the Thucydides trap is not really a good analogy for Xi to use.

Anyway, is the Thucydides trap of ancient Greece relevant to the increased rivalry between the US and China in the 21st century? The examples that Allison cites are hardly convincing. For example, the US was no declining power in the 1930s - on the contrary. And World War I kicked off because a much weaker power, Austria-Hungary, launched an attack on the Balkan states, which brought Russia into the conflict and then spiralled to involve the world.

Moreover, the core lesson of the Peloponnesian war, according to Thucydides himself, was not the inevitability of war between rival powers, but the decisions made by the ruling elites in the two states. In the case of Athens, its rising economic strength led to hubris on the part of Athens' leaders. They thought they could invade Sicily, which was supported by Sparta at the time, and so gain huge new prosperous lands. But Athens was heavily defeated in that invasion, which weakened it so much that eventually Sparta triumphed.

US historians and military strategists naturally like to raise this angle on the Thucydides trap to argue that, if China decides to invade



Cornelis Cort 'Battle between Scipio and Hannibal at Zama' (1567)

Taiwan, it will suffer the same fate as Athens did in Sicily. They are happy to conclude that it was the 'declining' power, Sparta, that eventually crushed the 'rising' power, Athens. So the US will win its battle for hegemony if China attempts to occupy Taiwan.

But China is not so foolhardy. Yes, Taiwan is seen as part of China and so must be returned to the mainland, but Taiwan is not the same as 5th century BC Sicily. The US cannot really defend the Taiwanese statelet from China, short of outright war, which it is probably not capable of sustaining, unlike Sparta with Sicily. Moreover, in the 21st century, the rival powers have nuclear weapons of mass destruction that pose the possibility of annihilation for both (and the rest of us) in any war. Behind Xi's comment is that China seeks to play the waiting game. His warning about the 'trap' is to push back against any ideas that the US may have about military conflict with China over Taiwan.

Declining empire

In my view, the T-trap analogy is not very applicable to the 21st century global power struggle. A better analogy is not the Peloponnesian Wars, but the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage some 200 years later. By 250 BC, the Roman republic had come to dominate most parts of the Mediterranean through military prowess and a developing slave economy. But there was one major rival power that stood in the way of Rome's total domination, the north African city state of Carthage. Carthage controlled Sicily just as Sparta had done.

Rome launched an invasion of Sicily, which it eventually captured from the Carthaginians after 25 years of conflict. Carthage was not finished, however, and it took a series of wars (including the famous invasion of Rome by Carthage's military leader, Hannibal) before Rome was able to defeat its rival and completely destroy the city and its people. Rome then became the sole hegemonic power in the Mediterranean and it expanded its empire further through military conquest that provided millions of slaves for its domestic economy. But this did not last. Rome's slave supply dried up and the Roman state eventually lost any form of civic democracy and slipped into a corrupt military dictatorship under a succession of (sometimes insane) emperors.

This analogy fits better to the rise of the US as the dominant power in the 20th century faced with only one rival, the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s, the US achieved complete dominance, as Rome did in 200 BC. But, as in Rome then, the internal economic contradictions within the US capitalist economy have now begun to eat into its power from within. The 'globalists' at the head of the US state machine are still trying to control the world with financial repression and military adventures, just as Rome did under its emperors; but US political institutions under Trump have taken an increasingly corrupt and autocratic (king-like) form.

The US empire is now in decline. This is starkly indicated by the rising net liabilities of the US economy to

the rest of the world: ie, foreigners own more US assets than US investors own foreign assets. It is significant that the US net international investment position went negative just as the US became the sole hegemonic power in the early 1990s.

Collapse

US imperialism had managed to see the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it was losing relatively in trade and output to other major economies, particularly China. Europe had integrated further into the euro zone and widened towards eastern Europe using the cheap labour supply available there. And the Asian tigers leapt forward with new technologies. But particularly China took over as the manufacturing and trading global power (partly driven by US multinationals which had located there in the 1990s).

The negative investment position of the US reflects the inability of US industry to compete in world goods markets.¹ The reaction of the Trump administration to the high US trade deficit has been to impose tariffs and other measures to 'protect' American industry and reduce imports, but with no discernible success. So increasingly, the US has relied on foreigners buying more US companies and stocks ('the kindness of strangers') to finance its trade deficit.

There is still a long way to go before the mighty US economy will be on its knees. It may have the largest net liabilities globally, but it can manage that because it is also the only country that can issue dollars - and the dollar is still the international currency for

trade, investment and reserves. Trade-surplus nations like Germany, Japan and China must use most of their dollar earnings to buy dollar assets in the US economy. So the 'exorbitant privilege' of the dollar keeps the US empire ticking over.

Moreover, US investments abroad may be worth less *in value* than foreign investment into the US, creating that 'negative investment' position, but foreigners earn less *income* on those US assets than US investors do on their foreign assets. So there is a net surplus in income for the US of at least 0.5% of GDP on average since 2008, to add to its domestic economy.²

The US has not yet reached a 'tipping point', where the size of its net liabilities to foreigners is so high that its net income surplus disappears.³

From its peak of economic and military power in the Mediterranean in 200 BC, Rome took several centuries to decline and fall. It will not be so long in the modern capitalist world. Maybe, down the road, the US leaders will become more desperate and try to provoke China into a conflict. But China is unlikely to give Trump and the US globalists an excuse for outright war. As Xi says, China will not fall into the T-trap ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

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LEFT

The universal elixir

Supposedly the left does not lack fighting spirit. No, what it lacks is a shared understanding of what it is fighting for. But don't worry, **Nicholas Keats** has discovered the solution that will serve social democrats and revolutionary communists alike: decommodification

The left does not lack fighting spirit. It lacks a shared understanding of what it is fighting for, and capital exploits this every single day. Every major tendency on the left is, in practice, pursuing the same project. The union that wins a shorter working week removes hours from the wage relation. The campaign that wins public housing removes shelter from the market. The socialist government that expands healthcare removes medical provision from commodity exchange. The cooperative removes a workplace from private appropriation.

Each of these struggles removes something from the commodity form: time, shelter, medical provision, productive capacity. They share identical structural content, conducted by people who do not yet recognise each other as participants in the same project. That mutual blindness is what allows capital to treat each tendency as a separate target, concentrating its resources against each front in turn, while the others stand aside.

The goal that makes this recognition possible is *decommodification*: the progressive removal of essential goods from the commodity form and their reorganisation under democratic, collective governance. This is what every left tendency is already doing (even if unconsciously so). Making it explicit, adopting it as the shared criterion against which every struggle is assessed, is the only basis on which the left can function as a coordinated force rather than a collection of separate targets.

When capital launched the neoliberal offensive, it faced a fragmented left, where each tendency defended its own gain in isolation. The miners understood the attack on them as just an attack on miners. The health workers understood it as a health policy dispute. The council tenants understood it as housing policy. Capital concentrated its full force against each front in sequence, and the rest of the left treated each defeat as someone else's problem. We were outmanoeuvred, not because we were weak in aggregate, but because our aggregate strength never materialised as such. A left that understands the decommodification criterion knows that every attack on a decommodified institution is an attack on the shared project, and responds with the full weight of every tendency, because every tendency has a direct stake in the outcome.

The deeper failure of the post-war period was one of consciousness. The working class that held free healthcare, public housing and free education understood those gains as government services rather than as won rights in a continuing struggle against the commodity form. A class that understands free healthcare as a government service accepts its erosion as fiscal adjustment, because governments adjust fiscal policy. A class that understands it as a portion of working class life removed from the commodity form through struggle resists its removal as expropriation, because expropriation requires a response proportional to what is being taken. The post-war left built institutions without building the consciousness that would have defended and extended them. A conscious left builds both simultaneously, because the gain and the understanding of the gain are both necessary components of the project.



Hermes Trismegistus: bringer of divine wisdom

Now to the question many will rightly press: *what about revolution?*

The Soviet experience, and that of every major 20th century revolutionary state, reveals two structural problems. First, the vanguard party form concentrates authority for seizure and has no internal mechanism for redistributing it afterward, because every decentralisation, in conditions of counterrevolutionary threat, is treated as an invitation to overthrow. Second, these revolutions occurred in economies compelled to participate in the world commodity market to maintain their own reproduction, which required maintaining the wage relation and reproducing the commodity form under structural compulsion. The revolutionary state arrived at power in a commodity-organised society, with institutions built for seizure rather than for democratic governance of production, and found itself administering exactly what it had intended to transform.

Prior decommodification addresses both problems by the same mechanism. Capital's capacity to fund and sustain counterrevolution comes from accumulation within the commodity

form. As production is reorganised around need, the surplus that finances counterrevolution is progressively removed, weakening the threat that justifies concentrated authority. The post-revolutionary state, arriving after substantial prior decommodification, governs a society already partially transformed, with democratic governance capacities already built and a class that understands what it holds. The revolutionary moment consolidates what has been built rather than attempting to construct socialist relations from scratch in a commodity-organised society, which is what every historical revolutionary state was forced to do, with predictable results.

The inevitable charge of gradualism mistakes the logic. Gradualism treats each reform as a destination and accepts the commodity form as permanent. The decommodification orientation treats each gain as a platform from which the criterion immediately generates the next demand, because each gain shifts the conditions for the next struggle: a class not paying for healthcare has more time and money;

a class without student debt is less financially disciplined by capital; a class housed securely can sustain longer industrial action. And because rollback is understood as a direct attack on the shared project, every tendency responds to it with the full weight of the movement, rather than leaving the affected sector to defend itself alone.

Only decommodification can serve as the shared focal point for every leftist tendency, from social democrat to revolutionary communist. Only through decommodification can we build the stable parallel institutions required for the actual *transcendence of capitalism* ●

What we fight for

- Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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Hands off Cuba!

Under siege and still resisting

Attempting to replicate its success in Venezuela, the White House seems intent on leaving the existing regime intact, but transforming the country into a pliant neo-colony, writes **Eddie Ford**

Published in *The Telegraph* last weekend was an article by John Bolton, former national security advisor in Donald Trump's first administration. He eagerly anticipates the impending sweeping away of the Castroite regime and the Communist Party of Cuba.¹ Of course, he has a fearsome reputation as a warmonger, and indeed coined the term "troika of tyranny" as a description of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.²

But he has since fallen dramatically out of favour with the mercurial US president, to the point where he was criminally indicted last October, with FBI agents searching his home and office.³ Nonetheless, a hawk is a hawk, and his article ends by eulogising a future Cuba that has returned to the 'western community'. "Leftist Americans in the 1960s joined 'Venceremos brigades' in Cuba to harvest sugar cane, while protesting US imperialism," Bolton writes, but "those days are long gone". He concludes: "Soon their children and grandchildren may be welcoming a free Cuba back into the west".

Also at the weekend there was a more informed and measured article in the *Financial Times* that takes a different approach to the dreams of John Bolton.⁴ Rather, it is more likely that what the Americans - and now secretary of state Marco Rubio - are aiming for is something along the lines of Venezuela. What you do is some sort of deal that maybe involves removing from power, by one means or another, the general secretary of the Cuban Communist Party, Miguel Diaz-Canel. But, as for the 94-year-old Raúl Castro, it seems improbable that US military helicopters are going to land and whisk him away from wherever he has been hiding (events could prove us wrong, of course). Perhaps a possible deal will leave the existing state apparatus intact.

What is most interesting about the *FT* article is the point it makes that, as far as Rubio is concerned, this would be a U-turn, reminding us of the debates amongst the Republican candidates first time round, when the question of Cuba was raised. Trump rambled away about striking a "good deal" with Havana, possibly including hotel and golf investments, and Rubio pounced, exclaiming, "Here is a good deal" - a free Cuba that gets rid of the Castro regime - which went down well. In other words, as the *FT* puts it, how to deal with "the heady expectations" of the Cuban Americans in Florida that Rubio was "once happy to encourage" - given it is his home constituency, of course. An appetite that has been whetted by US officials announcing on May 20 murder charges against Raul Castro for his role in the shooting down of two planes in 1996 that were dropping 'Brothers to the Rescue' leaflets over the island, trying to ferment counterrevolution.⁵ They were shot down over Cuban airspace, no doubt, but actually crashed over international waters - hence the charge.

Unsurprisingly, a recent poll of



The poster, 1968, designed by Alfredo Rostgaard

Cuban Americans showed that a large majority support military intervention in Cuba and oppose an economic deal that keeps the regime in power - with Miami residents quoted in the press as saying they would not tolerate another Venezuela. But, breaking a taboo of the Cuban community against negotiating directly with Havana, Rubio has also at times dealt with Raúl's grandson, Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro. Therefore, the argument goes in the *FT* and elsewhere, it would be a 'Nixon in China' moment. That is, it took a *Republican* to go for a rapprochement with Red China, as a Democrat could never have got away with it. Similarly, only a Rubio or a Trump could keep in line the Cuban-American population - not least in Florida.

Rubio has also made the assertion that the minnow Cuba represents a "threat" to the superpower United States - maybe because of its 300 drones. Okay, so you launch them all against Miami and conceivably two get through - but who would do that? You might perhaps do it as your very last desperate stand, but it is the height of absurdity to think it poses any danger to America, unless you possess tin-foil-hat paranoia.

Barter

The fact of the matter - heroism and innovation aside - is that revolutionary Cuba only survived because of the backing of the Soviet Union, as Bolton and Rubio would be more than happy to tell you. Yes, the CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 was a humiliating failure and there were over 600 attempts on Fidel Castro's life, at least according to Cuban intelligence - some of them quite exotic, like exploding cigars, and even weirder things.⁶ But without the Soviets, something would have got

him and the comrades close to him - probably sooner rather than later.

Basically what you had was a *barter deal*: the Soviet Union would import from Cuba mainly sugar and in return Cuba would get industrial goods, oil, gas, etc - what it needed to keep going. Yet in 1989-91 the Soviet Union implodes - suffers the counterrevolution within the counterrevolution - and the deal finishes. The inevitable happens and an economic whirlwind hits society, Cubans 'officially' describing it as a 'Special Period'.⁷

There were stories of horses and carts replacing automobiles in the streets of Havana and ordinary Cubans being encouraged to grow their own food. The Cuban government was forced to turn to tourism to gain sufficient income. Hotels and other tourist infrastructure accounted for 37.4% of investment in an attempt to save the system, and private homestays also played a big role. Nevertheless, people were forced to live without many goods and services that had become the norm in the 20th century.

What happens next could be similar to Venezuela. It is not insignificant that, when Operation Absolute Resolve by US combined forces snatched Nicolás Maduro and his wife earlier this year, some 32 Cuban security officials were killed.⁸

As a result of that operation, of course, the new president of Venezuela, Delcy Rodríguez, and head of the same regime that Maduro operated, appears to be totally compliant - whether because she is a stooge, or due to the sheer weight of circumstances that leaves her no other options.⁹ Either way, Caracas has now cut off oil supplies to Cuba. Mexico too has also been strong-armed into

stopping oil deliveries. In the recent period, only *one* oil tanker has arrived on Cuba's shore and that is from Russia - with US permission.¹⁰

We have all seen the grim pictures and read the terrifying reports of blackouts becoming the norm in Cuba, as the country goes dark. Vicente de la O Levy, minister of energy and mines, declared on May 13 that the country has completely run out of oil - leading to severe power outages lasting up to 22 hours a day in Havana. "The only thing we have is gas from our wells, whose production has increased," said De la O Levy.¹¹ This is an almost totally unimaginable situation, when you think about day-to-day life in terms of the modern world. You cannot listen to the radio, watch TV or use your computer; you have to read a book by candlelight, and so on. How can you operate a school without electricity nowadays or perform an operation in a hospital? How do you cope if you are a pregnant woman?

Well, that is the life of Cubans now, where normality seems like a distant fantasy or something that you can only see on a screen for those few hours when you have electricity. The island is being remorselessly strangled by conscious and deliberate American policy.

Model

For Marxists, it is perfectly legitimate to critique early revolutionary Cuba, seeing that there are those who held it up as a model - and still do. Yes, it was less brutal and less weird than the regimes that you had in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, let alone China or North Korea, or the freak society of Cambodia under Pol Pot. Nonetheless, it was presented as something to emulate.

You can talk about it as an example of why socialism in one country does not work, but just leaving it at that would not give you the full picture. You need to add that, in the early years, Cuba attempted to do what Chávez talked about in Venezuela - which was a *Bolivarian* revolution that was all-Latin American. Bolívar was the 'great liberator', not just someone associated with one country. He was concerned precisely with a movement that embraced the whole of Latin America. That was certainly the case with Ernesto Che Guevara, who was internationalist to his core: he was an Argentinian who had experienced Latin American politics, not only in his native country, but also in places further up north like Guatemala.

As for the Cubans, they talked about a *tricontinental* revolution - hence the Tricontinental Conference of 1966 attended by roughly 500 delegates from 82 countries, which ended up founding the Organisation of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America.¹²

Bolívar was not the only inspiration - maybe there was Mao Zedong as well, with the idea that backward countries can surround the imperialist heartlands, as Mao's forces in China surrounded the cities. That was certainly the model for Che Guevara,

as can be found in his famous book, *Guerrilla warfare* - not only has it got technical advice on how to build a tank trap, for example, but generally how to conduct *rural* guerrilla warfare (though he does briefly write about suburban guerrilla warfare).

His model was the *guerrilla foci* - that all you need to do is start off with a few dedicated guerrillas, and they carry out a rural war against the existing unpopular regime, and people are inevitably attracted to this movement, which grows and grows, to the point where it becomes almost a conventional army - and then they take the cities. That is the theory he attempted to put into practice in Congo and Bolivia, for instance - but with disastrous results, of course. Ultimately, that was down to the failure of Guevara's model, not internationalism and orthodox Marxism - and not any lack of genuine conviction and heroic sacrifice.

Obviously there is a lot of deep discontent inside Cuba, with people highly dissatisfied with their lives, particularly amongst young people - how could it be otherwise? But the fault is manifestly to be laid at the door of the US - not those inside the wall being besieged, but those outside *laying siege*. US imperialism is attempting to subordinate Cuba to its wishes and open up the country to American 'investment' - which will require ordinary Cubans bending the knee to their great power bully of a neighbour less than a hundred miles to their north.

Nowadays, Cuba does not represent anything more than a show of *defiance* - for which it has to be punished, of course. Obey your masters. But it no longer represents a model to follow, as it once was for Hugo Chávez. However, Venezuela has massive oil reserves - purportedly the largest in the world. You simply cannot replicate that, just as you cannot simply replicate Cuba - because that would require understanding Cuba, not only in terms of Fidel, Che and so on, but also precisely in the context of the Soviet Union, when there was a genuinely *multipolar* world. OK, Moscow was much weaker economically and militarily than Washington. Nonetheless, it still could present a challenge to the hegemony of the United States ●

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