

Provocations By The U.S. State Department Can Chill Press Freedom In Latin America



Vijay Prashad

The headline is provocative: “The Kremlin’s Efforts to Covertly Spread Disinformation in Latin America.” This was a [statement](#) on the U.S. State Department website, posted on November 7, 2023. The United States government accused two companies—Social Design Agency and Structura National Technologies—of being the main agents of what it alleged is Russian-backed disinformation. The statement named the heads of both of the firms, Ilya Gambashidze of Social Design Agency and Nikolay Tupkin of Structura. On July 28, 2023, the European Union [sanctioned](#) several Russian individuals and firms, including SDA and Structura. The European Union accuses these two IT firms of being “involved in the Russian-led digital disinformation campaign” against the government of Ukraine. The statement by the U.S. State Department now alleges that these IT companies are involved in a disinformation project in Latin America.

Neither the European Union nor the U.S. State Department offer any evidence in their various public statements. The U.S. document does, however, refer to the 2023 Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, which [says](#) the following: “Russia’s influence actors have adapted their efforts to increasingly hide their hand, laundering their preferred messaging through a vast ecosystem of Russian proxy websites, individuals, and organizations that appear to be independent news sources.” Here, we get mainly the methodology—laundering information through proxy websites—rather than any hard evidence.

On May 3, 2023, the U.S. Foreign Relations Committee held a [hearing](#) on “The Global Information Wars: Is the U.S. Winning or Losing?” The main speaker at the hearing was Amanda Bennett, the Chief Executive Officer of the [U.S. Agency for Global Media](#) (USAGM), an umbrella group that runs several U.S. government media projects from Europe (Radio Liberty) to the Americas (Office of Cuba Broadcasting) with an \$810 million annual budget. Bennett, the former director of the U.S. government’s [Voice of America](#), [told](#) the senators that if the U.S. government fails to “target investments to counter inroads Russia, the [People’s Republic of China], and Iran are making, we run the risk of losing the global information war.” These three countries, she argued, have “outspent” the United States in Latin America, an advantage that she said needed to be overcome by increased U.S. interference in Latin American media.

The Role of RT

In Latin America, Jessica Brandt of the Brookings Institute [told](#) the Senators, Russian media has secured a decisive advantage. The facts she laid out are worthwhile to consider: “Through the first quarter of 2023, three of the five most retweeted Russian state media accounts on Twitter messaged in Spanish, and five of the ten fastest growing ones targeted Spanish-language audiences. On YouTube, RT en Español has also proven capable of building large audiences, despite the platform’s global ban on Russian state-funded media channels. On TikTok, RT en Español is among the most popular Spanish-language media outlets. Its 29.6 million likes make it more popular than Telemundo, Univision, BBC Mundo, and El País. Likewise, on Facebook, RT en Español currently has more followers than any other Spanish-language international broadcaster.” In other words, RT by itself has become one of the most influential media outlets in Latin America. Brandt’s facts are widely accepted, including by a [report](#) published in March by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism called “Despite Western bans, Putin’s propaganda flourishes in Spanish on TV and social media” and by a [study](#) from the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab from 2022.

[RT](#) (formerly Russia Today) is owned by [TV-Novosti](#), a non-profit organization founded by the state-owned [Ria Novosti](#) in 2005. RT is banned or blocked in Canada, the European Union, Germany, the United States, and several other Western countries. In fact, at the Senate hearing, there was little discussion about the entire web of RT projects. The focus was on the “laundering” of

“disinformation”.

‘Most Likely’

What is striking about the U.S. State Department statement is that it names two news projects that operate in Latin America as these “proxies” without any evidence but with hesitant language. For instance, the U.S. State Department says that part of the Russian campaign is to cultivate a group of journalists “most likely in Chile,” but not definitely. This hesitation is important to underline because a few paragraphs later, the doubt vanishes: “While the network’s operations are primarily done in concert with Spanish-language outlets [Pressenza](#) and [El Ciudadano](#), a broader network of media resources is available to the group to further amplify information.”

Pressenza, founded in 2009 in Milan, Italy, emerged out of the debates and discussions provoked by the International Commission for the Study of Communications Problems (formed by UNESCO) and its report, *Many Voices, One World* or the [MacBride Report](#) (1980). The MacBride report itself built on discussions about media democracy that had resulted in the formation, in 1964, of [Inter-Press Services](#), and then later in Pressenza. El Ciudadano was founded in 2005 as part of the process of democratization in Chile in the aftermath of the fall of the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in 1990.

Both outlets denied (in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)) that they are either funded by the Russian government or that they launder information for the Russian government. In their joint statement, signed by David Andersson (editor of Pressenza) and Bruno Sommer Catalán (editor of El Ciudadano), they say, “We believe that this kind of attack is malicious, and we insist that the US State Department withdraw this accusation as well as publicly apologize to us for maligning our reputations.” In a separate statement, Italian journalist Antonio Mazzeo (who won the [Giorgio Bassani prize](#) in 2010) [said](#): “This affair worries me because it could prepare for the next step, the creation of a proscription list... to put all those who do not accept to think only of war and therefore become dangerous and must be silenced.”

By Vijay Prashad

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Source: Globetrotter

Wannabe Führer Donald J. Trump Must Be Stopped



Preventing the former president from being reelected should be the primary goal of all progressive forces from this point on.

During Trump's tumultuous four-year reign (2017-2021), democratic norms in the U.S. experienced a huge shock. Almost overnight, the U.S. became a different country as Trump's policies and racist rhetoric tore the social fabric of inclusive democracy and inflicted a body blow to the concept of a decent society. In the end, abnormal became the new normal.

Indeed, Trump's 2016 campaign was unlike anything seen in U.S. presidential elections in decades. It was solely driven by racism, sexism, and xenophobia. And it had a dramatic impact. For example, [hate crimes](#) surged by more than 220% in counties that hosted Trump's campaign rallies in 2016 and reached an all-time high in [2021](#), according to the FBI. [White nationalist hate groups](#), an integral component of the far-right movement in the U.S. targeting immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ people, Blacks, Muslims, and other groups, increased 55% throughout the Trump era.

Trump's inflammatory rhetoric and posturing himself as the only leader able to save the country led many to wonder whether Trump was more than a racist and a populist with an unmistakably authoritarian streak. Scholars and pundits alike began wondering whether it was time to use the "F" word about Trump, and some started doing just that. I happen to be one of the people who objected to the idea of using [fascism](#) as a catch-all term to describe leaders and movement with authoritarian tendencies, while acknowledging that the movement that Trump had created and still leads has a proto-fascist lineage.

Trump's revenge politics and desire to cleanse U.S. society of undesirable elements like migrants, refugees, LGBTQ people, and radical leftists may very well find us with a dictator in charge in 2025.

Fascism represents the most extreme form of the "exceptional capitalist state," and should not be confused with all forms of authoritarian rule, as the late Marxist theoretician Nicos Poulantzas argued in *Fascism and Dictatorship*, a work that is essential reading for anyone interested in a serious study of fascism. Fascism worships the state, promotes militarism, and establishes absolute state power over private enterprise. Trump's nationalist, racist, sexist, homophobic, cult-like movement embraces none of these fascist characteristics and beliefs.

Most [experts](#) agree with this assessment. The Trumpist movement is an extreme populist movement and, as such, poses a clear threat to open society. When granted the opportunity, it will destroy liberal democracy by imposing censorship and even arresting political opponents. If the institutions have not become as weak as the prevailing norms, and if the democratic forces are significantly divided to the point that they muster little resistance to the dismantling of government institutions and their transformation into some sort of proto-fascist state. These are indeed the critical questions that all democratically minded citizens should be concerned with as the 2024 election gets close.

The U.S. is on a very dangerous political trajectory.

Trump is the most likely GOP nominee to run for the White House and, apart from Chris Christie, all other Republican presidential candidates will back Trump even if convicted. [Republican National Committee chairwoman Ronna McDaniel](#) also said that she will support Trump even if he's convicted. More worrisome is the fact that a recent poll found that [Trump leads Biden](#) by 4 percentage points among registered voters and that most [Americans are unhappy with the state of](#)

[the economy](#) under Biden.

The U.S. is on a very dangerous political trajectory. If Trump succeeds in returning to the White House, not only will he unleash state power to exact revenge on those who he feels wronged him but may try to turn the U.S. into a Christofascist state. As he pledged to his supporters in a speech in New Hampshire on Veteran's Day, by copying Hitler's rhetoric from "Mein Kampf," he will "root out the Communists, Marxists... and Radical Left Thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country..." Clearly, the wannabe führer felt the need to double down on Nazi propaganda after he had said in a recent interview that immigrants and asylum seekers are "poising the blood of our country."

This brings to mind Martin Niemöller's famous quote "First they came for the socialists.. then they came for the trade unionists...then they came for the Jews..."

How one counters and neutralizes the effect that Trump's rhetoric is having on millions of U.S. citizens has no easy answer.

Of course, what is shocking here is that we are not in the midst of a Great Depression and the U.S. has not been humiliated by some sort of a Treaty of Versailles—two key factors in the rise of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party to power. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of Republican voters stand behind Trump, believe in all his lies, pay no attention to his criminal activities and the indictments, and apparently embrace his vision of a United States where white supremacy and authoritarianism rule the day and a world in which the principles and values of strongmen prevail.

The US has a serious problem with its citizenry. Even in a country like Greece, when unemployment in 2013 had reached nearly 28%, more than 30% of its citizens lived below the poverty line, and a policy of fiscal sadism had been imposed on the country by its international creditors, the far-right Golden Dawn party only got as high as 6.9% of the popular vote in the 2015 legislative election and lost all its parliamentary seats in the general election of 2019. The fact that nearly half of U.S. voters are still behind Trump says that the country faces a severe political crisis with profound moral connotations.

The ideals of the Enlightenment are largely absent from the mindset of most of the followers of today's GOP.

Whether it is because of deeply held religious beliefs and the legacy of slavery

and racism, or because of political socialization and the constant bombardment of mainstream media propaganda, the ideals of the Enlightenment are largely absent from the mindset of most of the followers of today's GOP. Hence their rejection of science, cosmopolitanism, reason, and tolerance. This is why Trump appeals to the emotions of his primary base and not to their reason—just like Mussolini and Hitler did with their own followers. Trump demonizes his enemies, presents them as threats to U.S. society, and then pledges to get rid of them. In this context, he follows to the letter Hitler's belief that "all propaganda has to be popular and has to accommodate itself to the comprehension of the least intelligent of those whom it seeks to reach."

How one counters and neutralizes the effect that Trump's rhetoric is having on millions of U.S. citizens has no easy answer. Vigilance, community organizing, solidarity, and resistance are all the weapons progressive forces have in today's United States to prevent the further spread of the proto-fascist movement headed by Donald Trump. The U.S. will surely experience major repression in the event that Trump returns to power. And this time the stakes are higher than ever before. Trump's revenge politics and desire to cleanse U.S. society of undesirable elements like migrants, refugees, LGBTQ people, and radical leftists may very well find us with a dictator in charge in 2025. How to stop that from happening should be the primary goal of all progressive forces from this point on. Failure to do so may very well mean the difference between living in a decent society or in one where cruelty and horror dominate.

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<https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/stopping-fascist-donald-trump-2024>

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US, Israel, And Gaza: A Failure Of International Systems Of Governance



Gaza Strip - Ills.:
en.m.wikipedia.org

Gaza is facing a humanitarian catastrophe as Israel continues its massive assault across the besieged region. More than 11,000 people have already been killed and most of Gaza's infrastructure is destroyed. Even hospitals have not been spared from the Israeli rage. Yet, the international community is unwilling to act and force Israel to stop the killings. This is a failure of grand proportions for the international systems of governance, argues political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist *C. J. Polychroniou* in an interview with the French-Greek journalist *Alexandra Boutri*. Polychroniou also objects to the idea that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unique in history and explains why. In this context, he contends that the US bears immense responsibility for the plight of Palestinians under Israeli occupation.

Alexandra Boutri: Since the end of the Cold War, the international system has undergone fundamental changes. Liberal democracy spread around the world, economic globalization deepened, and the nature of the "security problem" changed. Yet, the end of the Cold War did not bring the end of armed conflict, there was little impact on international law, and the collective problem-solving

mechanisms of the United Nations remained ineffective. In addition, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has raised again the specter of nuclear war while even an ultranationalist junior minister in Netanyahu's government suggested dropping a nuclear bomb on the Gaza Strip. How do you assess the international order erected after the Cold War? Is it collapsing, as some suggest? And how does it relate to what's going on today in Gaza?

C.J. Polychroniou: The so-called "liberal international order" erected after the end of the Cold War was flawed from the start and, in fact, started to crumble by the late 2010s. It was flawed because it came to signify nothing more than a new era of US hegemony and the "imitation of American ways." From politics to economics, the US had the upper hand, faced no competition, and sought to spread its own version of the *ideal* politico-economic order around the globe, especially since it had "[utterly unrivalled advantages in global power-projection capabilities and the tools and aptitude needed to control the global commons.](#)" In fact, some thought that since the US had emerged victorious in its ideological battle with Soviet Communism, and capitalism and liberal democracy had won, that history had come to an end.

To avoid simplifications, it should be said that Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis did not mean to imply that history as such had reached an end point but, rather, that there was nothing to surpass liberal capitalist democracy. In other words, there were no systematic alternatives left to liberal capitalist democracy and the expectation was that "peace" would break out in many regions of the world.

However, things turned out quite differently and rather quickly. So many crises erupted shortly after the end of the Cold War (the Gulf War, the Yugoslav Wars, the Chechen Wars, the 9/11 attacks, and the Afghan and Iraq Wars, to name just a few) that it became immediately obvious that the post-Cold War order was already unravelling as it was not about fundamental principles but geopolitics as usual. As for the spread of capitalism, the Washington Consensus dogma and the economics of shock therapy that were implemented in eastern Europe, Russia, Latin America, and Africa produced oligarchs, weak states, massive inequalities, and social decay. Moreover, the "unipolar moment" of US hegemony soon came to be faced with a far more complex global strategic environment on account of the rise of great powers such as Russia and China, while the Washington Consensus encountered global backlash. The latter development was yet another strong

indication that the capitalist liberal international order envisioned by the United States during its “unipolar moment” was fraught with inherent contradictions. In any case, by the early 2000s, the US had lost whatever international credibility it may have gained in the early years after the end of the Cold War. For example, Obama’s drone murder campaign was so notorious that, as former CIA director [Michael Hayden](#) put it at the time, “there isn’t a government on the planet that agrees with our legal rationale for these operations, except for Afghanistan and maybe Israel.” Unsurprisingly enough, from the early 2010s onwards, people worldwide have come to regard the [US as the biggest threat to world peace](#).

More recently, we have seen the global expansion of authoritarian rule, including in the US with the rise of Donald Trump to the presidency and his complete control of the Republican Party, Brexit, the advance of far-right parties across western Europe and in many other parts of the world, and the delegitimation of international governance—all of which are strong indicators that the post-Cold War order is in fact over. We are living in the times of interregnum—in a time of transition from one world order to another.

Unfortunately, what’s happening in Gaza right now is a continuation of a global order in which international systems of governance simply do not work, and that includes the UN architecture.

Alexandra Boutri: The Middle East is one region of the world where major geopolitical shifts have taken place in recent years, yet peace in the Israeli-Palestinian remains elusive. Why is that?

C.J. Polychroniou: It’s true that we have recently seen a seismic geopolitical shift taking place in the Middle East, starting with the Saudi-Iran reconciliation. Equally important is the fact that the normalization of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran was brokered by China. Why is that important? Because it’s not merely about China’s rising influence in the Middle East and its interest in positioning itself as an international mediator in a troubled region. This move must be seen in the context of China’s global initiatives to remake the world order—i.e., to forge an alternative international order, one away from the “liberal international order” that was established in the aftermath of the Second World War and its post-Cold War variation. Egypt and Iran are also moving toward a closer relationship. Economic considerations seem to be at the heart of the rapprochement between Cairo and Tehran, but so are security issues. Of course, both the Saudi-Iran deal

and the prospects of close relations between Egypt and Iran may be something of a nightmare for Israel as these developments could shake up the Middle East, but only time will tell what the future holds.

The question as to why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved can be viewed from several different perspectives. It is a conflict with a long and complex history which cannot be addressed here. Essentially, however, it is about territory — disputes over borders, competing claims on Jerusalem, and security — while religious ideologies among ultra-orthodox Jews and radical Muslim Palestinians tend to stoke tensions and spark violence. Israel itself is a divided society over political values and the role that religion should play in politics. Many years ago, Israeli activist [Uri Avnery and Ariel Sharon](#) had a friendly discussion. Avnery told Sharon that he is “first of all an Israeli, and after that a Jew.” Sharon responded heatedly that he is “first of all a Jew, and only after that an Israeli.” Indeed, [polls](#) indicate that secular Jews in Israel see themselves as Israeli first and Jewish second, while most ultra-orthodox Jews see themselves as Jewish first and Israelis second. Similarly, secular Jews assign priority to democratic principles over religious law, while the opposite is true for a large share of ultra-orthodox Jews.

But not everything in life is black and white. Many orthodox Jews worldwide have expressed strong support for Palestinian hardship under Israeli occupation. Holocaust survivors have condemned Israeli actions and the unprecedented scale of destruction in Gaza where the Palestinian death toll has surpassed 11,000 people. And some Israeli citizens are protesting the war and calling for a ceasefire. We shouldn't ignore these courageous voices and make sure that we condemn antisemitism along with islamophobia and racism.

One basic perspective as to why peace has remained an elusive goal in the Israel-Palestine issue suggests that it is because the two sides simply hate each other so much that they are willing to do inhuman things to one another. Sure, Israeli leaders have frequently used dehumanizing language toward Palestinians, the Israeli regime imposes a system of oppression and domination in the occupied territories, and the latest assault on the occupied Gaza Strip is simply barbaric. On the other hand, Hamas also revealed its true colors with the horrific attack inside Israeli territory which killed about 1,200 people (the Israeli foreign ministry revised downwards the death toll from the October 7 Hamas attack), mostly civilians, including many women and children. [Ismail Haniyeh](#), the leader

of Hamas who lives in luxury in Qatar and Turkey, said this on the day that his fighters were massacring young people at a music festival and at Israel's kibbutz communities: "We have only one thing to say to you: get out of our land. Get out of our sight. Get out of our city of Al-Quds [Jerusalem] and our al-Aqsa mosque. We no longer wish to see you on this land. This land is ours, Al-Quds is ours, everything [here] is ours. You are strangers in this pure and blessed land. There is no place of safety for you."

Another perspective, apparently a bit more sophisticated, suggests that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unique, perhaps unlike any other in modern history, which is why it is nearly impossible to resolve. I beg to differ with both perspectives.

Firstly, over the course of human history, many different ethnic, racial, and religious groups hated each other with as much passion as some Israeli Jews and Palestinians hate each other today. Think of Catholics and Protestants in early modern English history, Greeks and Turks, the English-Irish conflict, Hutus and Tutsis, to offer just a few examples. Think also of Nazi indoctrination and the extreme anti-Semitic beliefs in Germany, which ultimately led to the pursuit of one of the greatest evil plans in the history of humankind, i.e., the "final solution," and how beliefs toward Jews were eventually modified after the war through policy intervention.

Secondly, what exactly is unique about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? [Looked at from a comparative and historical perspective](#), neither the level of civilian destructiveness nor the scale of indiscriminate violence makes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict unique. In terms of civilian destructiveness, hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed in places like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, and so on. In terms of indiscriminate violence, which both parties in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are guilty of, there are scores of cases where aerial bombardment of areas inhabited by civilians (US in Vietnam and the Battle for Fallujah, for example) and indiscriminate attacks on civilians (the armed struggle in Algeria for independence from France involved indiscriminate attacks on civilians, abductions and killings of foreigners) hold far greater significance in the modern history of human violence.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict dates back to the end of the 19th century, and while the creation of Israel (with the Holocaust playing a central role, though there are

historians who claim that the establishment of Israel would have been possible without the Holocaust due to the role of the Zionist movement) sparked the first Arab-Israeli war, the situation becomes especially complicated after 1967 as the six-day war redrew the region's landscape in many and fundamental ways and also shifted the nature of the armed conflict. Arab states at the time showed no interest in recognizing Israel or in peace with Israel, but this position was shattered with the 1979 Israel-Egypt peace treaty, followed by the Israel-Jordan treaty of 1994, and ultimately reversed by the Saudi-led peace plan that was adopted by the Arab summit in Beirut in 2002. But as Arab state positions toward Israel became more flexible, the Israeli position, which was at first somewhat flexible, became more unyielding: no two-state solution, no freezing of settlements, no Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem, no to return of Palestinian refugees. And this position really hardened as Israeli society began a rightward turn.

Nonetheless, the position of Israeli leadership wouldn't have become so unyielding if the US had exerted pressure on Israel by threatening to end military aid. However, the US had no interest whatsoever in pressuring Israel to make any kind of concessions that might indeed have produced tangible results towards peace between Israel and Palestinians. Washington's primary objective was maintaining US hegemony in the region and that required the use of Israel as a satellite state. As Harvard professor of international relations [Stephen Walt](#) recently argued, the US is primarily responsible for the lack of progress towards a political solution on the conflict between Israel and Palestinians and, as a matter of fact, "a root cause" of the latest war.

For decades now, every US administration, whether Democratic or Republican, has said the same thing: namely, that the United States is "committed to a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." However, in practice, US policy toward Palestine has been driven by one and only one objective, which is to maintain the status quo. The US has always looked the other way when it came to Israeli crimes and violations of international law. To take one example, Israel has a long-running policy of settling civilians in occupied Palestinian territory. From Ford and Carter to Biden today, every US president has gone on record opposing the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. But this has been a completely meaningless "criticism" since it has not been accompanied by any pressure on Israel to cease settlement activities which are illegal under

international law. Pillage is also a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. To add insult to injury, over the past several decades, the US has opposed more than 53 UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israeli policies.

The same can be said about the two-state solution. The US has paid only lip service to the two-state solution. In fact, since the Oslo Accords, the two-state solution has become “an open joke in the corridors of the United Nations,” according to ex-UN official [Craig Mokhiber](#).

In sum, it's impossible to grasp why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved if we do not add into the picture the essential role that the United States has played in accommodating, to the greatest extent possible, Israel's objectives. Washington needs Israel for its own geostrategic interests in the Middle East. This is why Israel plays such an outsized role in US policy and why Israel is “[the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign assistance since World War II.](#)” This is also why Washington tolerates Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity, which of course makes the US fully complicit in the horror in occupied Palestine. But never mind complicity. The US has launched numerous wars, committed atrocities, and created black holes in many places around the world. It is guilty of many war crimes.

Alexandra Boutri: Human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have issued reports describing Israel as an apartheid state. Many legal experts also agree with the characterization of Israel as an apartheid state, including UN-appointed rapporteurs. Of course, Israeli officials and pro-Israeli groups in the US have denounced reports labelling Israel an apartheid state as antisemitism, while recently the House also passed a resolution saying Israel isn't a racist or apartheid state. What's your take on the issue?

C.J. Polychroniou: First, let me say the idea that all criticism of Israeli policies is inherently antisemitic is beyond ridiculous and is only intended to silence criticism and debate. As for the House resolution, that should have come as no surprise to anyone who understands the dynamics of US politics and US policy toward Israel. Let's also not forget that the United States supported the white apartheid government of South Africa apartheid and opposed Mandela. So, when it comes to human rights and international law, the US is the last country in the western world that anyone should be listening to what it says. As for Israel being

an apartheid state, I don't think that what goes on inside Israel is comparable to what was going on in South Africa under apartheid. Under apartheid, the South African regime enforced rigidly racial laws. Blacks were controlled by racist laws that forced them into poverty and hopelessness. Everything was segregated while policemen with barking dogs and armed soldiers patrolled townships. Palestinians living in Israel, and that's about a fifth of Israel's citizens, have second class status and their rights have surely eroded since Netanyahu began his second term as prime minister, but South Africa's apartheid is a poor analogy for Israel. On the other hand, as [Noam Chomsky](#) has repeatedly pointed out over the years, what goes on in the occupied Palestine territory is worse than South Africa's apartheid. I think his point that apartheid South Africa needed black labor while the Israelis simply have no use for Palestinians in places like Gaza is spot on.

Alexandra Boutri: So, if the international systems of governance in today's world are incapable of dealing even with a horrendous humanitarian crisis like the one unfolding in Gaza, what hope is there for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

C.J. Polychroniou: I wish I had the answer to this question, but I don't. The fact of the matter is that we are still in the age of the dominance of the nation-state and where, unfortunately, Thucydides' maxim "the strong do as they wish, and the weak suffer what they must" still applies in international relations. Putting pressure on the US government to compel Israel to respect international law and end the occupation is the only thing American citizens can do. On the other hand, hopefully Israelis will also come to their senses and elect a decent government that will pursue in earnest the two-state solution as this is the best alternative for Israel's own security.

Source:

<https://znetwork.org/znetarticle/us-israel-and-gaza-a-failure-of-international-systems-of-governance/>

How The War On Gaza Has Stalled The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)

On September 9, 2023, during the G20 meeting in New Delhi, the governments of seven countries and the European Union [signed](#) a memorandum of understanding to create an India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. Only three of the countries (India, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates or the UAE) would be directly part of this corridor, which was to begin in India, go through the Gulf, and terminate in Greece. The European countries (France, Germany, and Italy) as well as the European Union joined this endeavor because they expected the IMEC to be a trade route for their goods to go to India and for them to access Indian goods at, what they hoped would be, a reduced cost.

The United States, which was one of the initiators of the IMEC, pushed it as a means to both isolate China and Iran as well as to hasten the normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. It seemed like a perfect instrument for Washington: sequester China and Iran, bring Israel and Saudi Arabia together, and deepen ties with India that seemed to have been weakened by India's reluctance to join the United States in its policy regarding Russia.

Israel's war on the Palestinians in Gaza has changed the entire equation and stalled the IMEC. It is now inconceivable for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to enter such a project with the Israelis. Public opinion in the Arab world is red-hot, with inflamed anger at the indiscriminate bombardment by Israel and the catastrophic loss of civilian life. Regional countries with close relations with Israel—such as Jordan and Turkey—have had to harden their rhetoric against Israel. In the short term, at least, it is impossible to imagine the implementation of the IMEC.

Pivot to Asia

Two years before China inaugurated its “One Belt, One Road” or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the United States had already planned a private-sector-funded trade route to link India to Europe and to tighten the links between Washington and New Delhi. In 2011, then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave a

[speech](#) in Chennai, India, where she spoke of the creation of a New Silk Road that would run from India through Pakistan and into Central Asia. This new “international web and network of economic and transit connections” would be an instrument for the United States to create a new intergovernmental forum and a “free trade zone” in which the United States would be a member (in much the same way as the United States is part of the [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation](#) or APEC).

The New Silk Road was part of a wider “pivot to Asia,” as U.S. President Barack Obama put it. This “pivot” was designed to check the rise of China and to prevent its influence in Asia. Clinton’s [article](#) in Foreign Policy (“America’s Pacific Century,” October 11, 2011) suggested that this New Silk Road was not antagonistic to China. However, this rhetoric of the “pivot” came alongside the U.S. military’s new AirSea Battle [concept](#) that was designed around direct conflict between the United States and China (the concept built on a 1999 Pentagon [study](#) called “Asia 2025” which noted that “the threats are in Asia”).

Two years later, the Chinese government said that it would build a massive infrastructure and trade project called “One Belt, One Road,” which would later be called the [Belt and Road Initiative](#) (BRI). Over the next ten years, from 2013 to 2023, the BRI investments [totaled](#) \$1.04 trillion spread out over 148 countries (three-quarters of the countries in the world). In this short period, the BRI project has made a considerable mark on the world, particularly on the poorer nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where the BRI has made investments to build infrastructure and industry.

Chastened by the growth of the BRI, the United States attempted to block it through various instruments: the [América Crece](#) for Latin America and the [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#) for South Asia. The weakness in these attempts was that both relied upon funding from an unenthusiastic private sector.

Complications of the IMEC

Even before the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, IMEC faced several serious challenges.

First, the attempt to isolate China appeared illusory, given that the main Greek port in the corridor—at Piraeus—is [managed](#) by the China Ocean Shipping Corporation, and that the Dubai Ports have considerable [investment](#) from China’s Ningbo-Zhoushan port and the Zhejiang Seaport. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are

now members of the BRICS+, and both countries are participants in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Second, the entire IMEC process is reliant upon private-sector funding. The Adani Group—which has close ties to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and has come under the [spotlight](#) for fraudulent practices—already owns the [Mundra port](#) (Gujarat, India) and the [Haifa port](#) (Israel), and seeks to take a [share](#) in the port at Piraeus. In other words, the IMEC corridor is providing geopolitical cover for Adani’s investments from Greece to Gujarat.

Third, the sea lane between Haifa and Piraeus would go through waters contested between Turkey and Greece. This “Aegean Dispute” has provoked the Turkish government to [threaten](#) war if Greece goes through with its designs.

Fourth, the entire project relied upon the “normalization” between Saudi Arabia and Israel, an extension of the Abraham Accords that drew Bahrain, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates to [recognize](#) Israel in August 2020. In July 2022, India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States formed the I2U2 Group, with the [intention](#), among other things, to “modernize infrastructure” and to “advance low-carbon development pathways” [through](#) “private enterprise partnerships.” This was the precursor of IMEC. Neither “normalization” with Saudi Arabia nor advancement of the I2U2 process between the UAE and Israel seem possible in this climate. Israel’s bombardment of the Palestinians in Gaza has frozen this process.

Previous Indian trade route projects, such as the [International North-South Trade Corridor](#) (with India, Iran, and Russia) and the [Asia-Africa Growth Corridor](#) (led by India and Japan), have not gone from paper to port for a host of reasons. These, at least, had the merit of being viable. IMEC will suffer the same fate as these corridors, to some extent due to Israel’s bombing of Gaza but also due to Washington’s fantasy that it can “defeat” China in an economic war.

By Vijay Prashad

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Source: Globetrotter

Why We're Seeing Shifting Patterns In Global Manufacturing



*John P. Ruehl - Source:
Independent Media
Institute*

11-08-2023 ~ Amid other crises, China's economy has reeled from Western decoupling efforts. While several countries stand to gain from this process, it has only partially reduced China's extensive global influence.

The [10th anniversary](#) of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Beijing on October 18, 2023, witnessed the usual smiles and handshakes. But China's economic landscape, dependent on robust supply chain networks, is facing turbulent times.

The U.S.-led trade war had already disrupted Chinese industry and supply chains before the COVID-19 pandemic further backlogged ports and exacerbated disruptions. The Biden administration has meanwhile continued to expand policies [restricting China's access](#) to the U.S. market and [technologies](#), including new restrictions on advanced chip exports announced just [one day before the BRI summit](#).

Foreign direct investment into China also [plummeted by 43 percent](#) in 2022, while the United States has persuaded allies to curtail their economic collaborations with China. For instance, Italy, which joined China's BRI [in 2019](#), announced its withdrawal from the project [in April 2023](#). Meanwhile, the Netherlands began imposing restrictions on semiconductor exports to China [in March](#). The 2018 [arrest of two Canadian businessmen](#), widely perceived as retaliation for Canada's detention of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou at Washington's request, has made foreign executives [increasingly hesitant to travel to China](#).

The greatest concern for Beijing, however, is the threat to China's manufacturing and export-led economic model, which has driven China's growth for most of the 21st century. [In the first half of 2023](#), China's share of U.S. goods imports stood at 13.3 percent, a decline from 21.6 percent in 2017, marking the lowest figure since 2003. Some of this decline can be attributed to "reshoring" policies, which are encouraging American companies to [build factories in the U.S.](#), with [European companies](#) also promoting local manufacturing.

Economic decoupling initiatives have also prompted Western companies to establish manufacturing infrastructure in friendly or nearby countries, often referred to as nearshoring or friend-shoring. Countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, Indonesia, India, Mexico, and others are vying for Western companies' attention, offering [subsidies, tax breaks, and other incentives](#). The newest iPhone was [assembled in India](#), for example, while more than half of Nike's shoes are now [made in Vietnam](#).

However, it is Mexico that appears poised to reap the most benefits from this "[lifetime opportunity](#)" according to Bank of America. Its proximity to the U.S. and the USMCA free trade agreement with the U.S. and Canada has driven American companies to [ramp up production in Mexico](#). Combined with the [growing automation](#) of the U.S. manufacturing sector, these developments have sparked debate about whether China's "[peak manufacturing](#)" has already passed.

Nonetheless, as the “[world’s factory](#),” China’s dominance in manufacturing remains stable enough to support its economy. Its share of global manufacturing actually grew from 26 percent in 2017 to [31 percent in 2021](#) (aided by the [global decline in manufacturing](#) in the years leading up to and during the COVID-19 pandemic), whereas India, Mexico, and Vietnam contributed only 3 percent, 1.5 percent, and 0.6 percent, respectively. China’s share of global manufactured exports by value also grew from [17 percent to 21 percent in the same period](#), and despite some [declines in bilateral trade](#), U.S.-China trade [hit a record high in 2022](#).

China’s resilience to global supply chain shifts can be attributed to strategic infrastructure investments that have streamlined its manufacturing and export operations. Efficient ports, extensive highways, reliable rail systems, well-established industrial parks, stable governance, a large working-age population, and other factors set China apart from potential competitors.

Although the value of manufacturing [in the U.S. has risen](#) and 800,000 manufacturing jobs have been created [over the last two years](#), for example, this has not kept up with job growth in other industries, and manufacturing’s share of U.S. GDP has [continued to decline](#). There are also fears that the U.S. will have a shortage of 2.1 million skilled manufacturing workers [by 2030](#). [India faces challenges](#) related to competition from cheaper imports, high input costs, taxes, and regulatory hurdles, while Mexico contends with [corruption](#) and [instability from cartels](#) and Vietnam grapples with [power outages](#) and [bureaucratic red tape](#).

Instead, many of China’s manufacturing competitors have opted to collaborate with China, reinforcing traditional supply chain dependencies that Washington is striving to break. This is exemplified most clearly in Mexico, where the advantageous conditions for U.S. companies have also made it an [attractive destination for Chinese companies](#) seeking a nearby gateway to the U.S. market. Remarkably, [80 percent](#) of the land leased to foreign companies in Mexican industrial parks is now in the hands of Chinese enterprises (compared to 15 percent for U.S. companies), allowing Chinese goods to be delivered for final assembly before being exported to the U.S.

This phenomenon extends beyond Mexico. [At the end of 2022](#), the U.S. Department of Commerce discovered that major solar suppliers in Southeast Asia were barely altering Chinese products before they were sent to the U.S. [Across](#)

[the region](#), Chinese green tech companies are making significant inroads into the manufacturing infrastructure. Even Vietnam, despite its [ongoing and historical tensions](#) with China, has [cautiously embraced](#) Chinese companies looking to drastically expand their presence in the country.

After spending billions of dollars building economic relations with their Chinese counterparts, U.S. companies have [also resisted cutting ties with their Chinese partners](#). A 2021 Federal Reserve research note suggested that [many are underreporting their imports](#) from China to evade tariffs imposed by Washington. Others [are encouraging](#) their Chinese partners to establish factories in North America. Additionally, the [cancellation](#) of programs (or those slated to expire [in the next few years](#)) allowing goods from many developing nations to enter the U.S. duty-free may leave room for China to step in as a preferred source for U.S. distributors.

Despite the limitations of Western decoupling policies, it's worth noting that China is also working towards a form of decoupling [to reduce its dependence on the West](#). Announced in 2015, [the Made in China](#) (MIC25) initiative seeks to eliminate Chinese companies' reliance on foreign nations for critical technologies and products. Policies also continue to be introduced to [expand China's domestic market](#) to compensate for restrictions on overseas markets.

China's economy will continue to be characterized by strengths and weaknesses. The [rising wages of Chinese workers](#) have steadily eroded the international competitiveness of the country's [shrinking labor pool](#), while an [ongoing property crisis](#) has shaken faith in China's domestic economy. Moreover, Beijing has become [less liberal with capital](#), opting instead to [recover outstanding loans](#) from the BRI.

However, Chinese officials and businesses are [increasingly lobbying](#) local governments with "[small but beautiful projects](#)" that negate the need for consultation with more suspicious national leaders. China also remains crucial in areas such as [rare-earth minerals](#) and is expanding its role in manufacturing [higher-end products](#), from [aviation](#) to [green tech](#), to compete with high-tech Western firms. Chinese endeavors in Latin America and Southeast Asia to adopt Chinese supply chains also position it to sell to these markets.

Although it may seem that we have "[already hit or passed the peak share of China](#)

[in world manufacturing](#),” no other country has or is projected to rival China’s manufacturing power and export networks. Furthermore, neither China nor the West are able or willing to sever their economic ties. Even amid the collapse in relations between the West and Russia since 2022, [Russian energy](#) has continued to flow to Western countries, Western technology has [continued to enter Russia](#), and Western companies that have said they are leaving Russia [have remained](#).

The massive disruptions required for true economic decoupling from China are unpalatable to the public and the private sector. This reality is reflected in the [shifting language of U.S. and EU officials](#), who now emphasize [de-risking instead of decoupling](#) from China. Chinese and Western companies instead look to continue bypassing restrictions and conducting business, reflecting the resilience of the Chinese manufacturing sector and making it clear that U.S.-Western economic codependency is a formidable bond that won’t be easily broken.

By John P. Ruehl

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Bijeenkomst & boekpresentatie:

Joseph Beuys en de naoorlogse (kunst)geschiedenis: Een ander perspectief.

Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten en Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam

Spui25, 5 oktober 2023

<https://spui25.nl/programma/beuys-en-de-naoorlogse-kunstgeschiedenis-een-andere-perspectief>

Joseph Beuys en de naoorlogse (kunst)geschiedenis: Een ander perspectief'.

Met: Felix Rottenberg (moderator), Joseph Sassoon Semah, Linda Bouws (curator), Gregor M. Langfeld (hoogleraar Kunstgeschiedenis, Cultureel Erfgoed en Identiteit), Bas Martijn (Chief Country Officer Netherlands van Deutsche Bank) en Emile Schrijver (algemeen directeur van het Joods Cultureel Kwartier in Amsterdam).

Wat is de betekenis van Joseph Beuys in de context van de naoorlogse westerse kunst?

In de reeks tentoonstellingen, debatten en performances in On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) IV - How to Explain Hare Hunting to a Dead German Artist [The usefulness of continuous measurement of the distance between Nostalgia and Melancholia], (september 2021-februari 2023) hebben Joseph Sassoon Semah en curator Linda Bouws het publiek geïnformeerd over de ontbrekende informatie over Joseph Beuys en de naoorlogse West-Duitse kunstgeschiedenis en -politiek. Een nieuw en conceptueel perspectief op Beuys vereist een bredere discussie in de kunstwereld.

Inleiding: Gregor M. Langfeld

Na WWII kwam het tot een radicale breuk in de kunstopvattingen waarbij de nationaalsocialistische dichotomie tussen 'nazikunst' en 'entartete' kunst als het ware is voortgezet maar de waardering voor beide simpelweg werd omgedraaid. Door deze zwart-witvisie zijn bepaalde kunstvormen en kunstenaars nog altijd merkwaardig taboe of juist gecanoniseerd. Deze presentatie sluit aan bij Joseph

Sassoon Semah's kritische reflecties over de mythen en stereotiepe voorstellingen over modernistische kunst die men na de oorlog heeft gecreëerd. Het blijkt dat het nationaalsocialisme tot op de dag van vandaag in de kunstwereld doorwerkt.