

Who Will Manage Global IP Protections?



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

06-02-2025 ~ The growth of new technologies and geopolitical rivalries has complicated international IP protection. WIPO's flexible, mediating approach may succeed where more rigid regulatory frameworks have struggled, but hurdles remain.

Amid the military posturing, economic sanctions, and political power struggles shaping the U.S.-China rivalry, intellectual property (IP) disputes remain a major battleground. [In January 2025](#), Chinese company DeepSeek's latest AI model [helped wipe \\$1 trillion](#) off the U.S. stock market by demonstrating how open-sourced collaboration—refining publicly available AI technology—can rival proprietary models without massive investment.

Major U.S. AI company OpenAI, however, [quickly accused DeepSeek](#) of infringing on its work, joining the chorus of [U.S. officials](#) and [companies](#) that have long accused China of IP theft across various industries. Yet OpenAI itself has been accused of [using other copyrighted material](#) without permission to build its generative AI model, even though it maintains that it is protected under the [fair use doctrine](#).

The internet and newer technologies like AI and 3D printing allow creators to produce, distribute, and monetize their work without traditional gatekeepers. Yet, these same tools expose these works to rampant infringement and diminished

control. Globalization has further complicated IP protection, with fragmented enforcement and tensions over protecting innovation and public access.

Globalization and IP Protections

While IP has weathered past technological disruptions, today's rapid innovation in a globalized context is dismantling old protections faster than policymakers can adapt. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has positioned itself as the key mediator to address 21st-century IP disputes involving countries, corporations, and individuals, but faces growing obstacles in keeping pace with the fast-moving changes.

[Advocates](#) argue that strong IP laws drive innovation by protecting creators, encouraging collaboration in a fair system, and enabling others to build on existing work. [Critics counter](#) that these laws often favor large corporations and shareholders over consumers and developing countries, hinder collaboration, create monopolies, and restrict access to essential goods.

Global IP protections are nonetheless a relatively recent concept. They trace back to Ancient Greek [recipe safeguards](#), but gained momentum in the last few centuries. The printing press revolutionized content distribution in the 15th century, and the industrial revolution later fueled invention, mass production, and transportation advances—alongside rampant IP theft. Post-independence, [U.S. entities frequently copied British industrial designs](#), accelerating industrial growth.

Pivotal agreements—like the Paris Convention (1883) for industrial property, the Berne Convention (1886) for literary and artistic works, and the Madrid Agreement (1891) for international registration—laid the foundation for today's global IP framework. WIPO, created in 1967, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), created in 1995, later emerged alongside other bodies to oversee the [four main types of IP](#)—patents (inventions), trademarks (brand identity), copyrights (creative works), and trade secrets (like customer data and algorithms).

The Challenges of Regulating an Evolving Digital World

The WTO sought to harmonize trade rules amid accelerating globalization in the 1990s. Its Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement aimed to standardize global IP protections but has [struggled to do so](#). [Only WTO members](#) can participate in the agreement, excluding some African,

Middle Eastern, and Central Asian countries, and private actors. The WTO's processes [can be slow](#), with few disputes [reaching resolution](#)—most are [either stalled or settled on terms dictated by more powerful members](#).

TRIPS's compulsory licensing allows third parties to produce patented inventions without the owner's consent under specific conditions, but such measures often provoke retaliation. When Thailand issued a license for HIV medication [in 2007](#), the U.S. and the EU pressured it to backtrack, while pharmaceutical giant Abbott separately [responded](#) by withholding some of its products from the Thai market.

Additionally, Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have [sidestepped TRIPS](#) enforcement. [The North American Free Trade Agreement \(NAFTA\)](#), for instance, curbed IP violations more effectively than WTO. The United States's [unilateral actions, including](#) “blocking the reappointment of Appellate Body members who were seen as not having ‘served’ U.S. interests sufficiently,”—especially since 2019—have further weakened the system. Domestic agencies like the U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC) and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), meanwhile, [enforce their own IP standards](#), undermining TRIPS rules. China, with its newfound economic power, [is following suit](#).

Perhaps TRIPS's greatest challenge is keeping pace with emerging technologies. During WTO's inception in 1995, the public internet was in its infancy. Today, digital piracy is widespread, with AI and 3D printing further disrupting traditional IP frameworks, causing TRIPS's rigid structure to buckle under the weight of a rapidly evolving digital world.

“[T]he TRIPS agreement does not define how to deal with AI-generated works, and individual members have taken different approaches in their domestic legislation, ranging from full protection of AI-generated works to a requirement of human creativity that effectively leaves such works unprotected. This patchwork is likely to become increasingly unsatisfactory as the share of intellectual property—both copyright and patents—generated by AI and traded across borders continues to rise,” [points out](#) a 2023 article in the International Institute for Sustainable Development.

WIPO Steps in to Regulate the Digital Space

WIPO, which became a UN-specialized agency in 1974, has positioned itself as the leading force in global IP protection. Unlike TRIPS, which enforces trade-based IP

rules, WIPO oversees [27 broad IP treaties](#), including the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) for international patent applications and the Madrid System for trademark registration.

Rather than imposing strict enforcement, WIPO provides guidelines, training, and resources to strengthen IP laws and institutions. It takes a [cooperative approach](#) to dispute resolution and harmonization, working with companies and agencies like the USPTO and [partnering](#) with organizations like the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization to support capacity-building in developing nations. Largely [self-funded](#), WIPO derives most of its revenue from IP services and registrations, reducing reliance on member contributions and limiting external influence.

WIPO's ability to navigate modern IP problems remains under scrutiny, with COVID-19 serving as a major test. It expanded its [PATENTSCOPE](#) database for COVID-related patents and strengthened the [Access to Research for Development and Innovation \(ARDI\) program](#), providing developing countries with free or low-cost access to scientific journals. [WIPO also sought to mediate](#) between the WTO—backed by pharmaceutical corporations and Western countries favoring stronger IP protections—and the World Health Organization (WHO), [led by India and South Africa](#), pushing for broader vaccine access.

The [2022 waiver agreement](#), providing a “waiver of intellectual property (IP) protections for COVID-19 vaccine patents,” was widely seen as too limited and delayed, reinforcing perceptions that WIPO favored corporate and Western interests, even for [generic medicines](#). “[Evergreening](#),” for example, where pharmaceutical companies make minor modifications to extend patent life and block generic competition, has been a consistent controversy within WIPO. This practice has also raised [concerns](#) about aligning IP law with human rights objectives, especially to protect public interests in poorer countries.

[In 2013](#), WIPO launched its Green Marketplace to connect companies, researchers, and NGOs for green technology collaboration. This initiative followed the 2008 [Eco-Patent Commons](#), an IBM-led effort offering free public patents that struggled due to patent limitations, narrow scope, and low engagement. [WIPO's marketplace saw greater success](#) by more effectively building connections, tracking results, and providing funding, mediation, and other resources for long-term impact.

Ongoing digitization remains a key WIPO challenge, requiring constant updates. The 1996 WIPO [Internet Copyright Treaties](#) addresses online copyright issues, while the [Digital Access Service](#) (DAS), introduced in 2009, [streamlines](#) the international exchange of documents securely. [WIPO PROOF](#), a 2020 digital timestamping service for IP protection, was discontinued in 2022 [due to “poor demand,”](#) reflecting WIPO’s willingness to experiment despite occasional setbacks.

More than the WTO, WIPO has explored blockchain technology’s potential for securing IP rights by using an immutable, transparent ledger to track and verify asset ownership, and changes in real time. [In 2018](#), it launched a [Blockchain Task Force](#), followed by a [2020](#) white paper outlining [blockchain’s role in the entire IP lifecycle](#) and smart contracts—self-executing agreements that enforce terms automatically when conditions are met.

The strengthening of copyright and [corporate influence](#) in developing digital IP laws has raised objections, with critics arguing it prioritizes profit over public benefit. Copyright durations can be excessively long, often granting disproportionate control over fair use. [While most IP revenue](#) is made in the first few years, access can remain restricted for about a century. For example, streaming services like Spotify quickly generate substantial revenue, yet long-term copyright often undercompensates artists, as [WIPO noted in its 2021 report](#) on the expansion of copyright law concerning Spotify.

However, WIPO’s influence is limited, and its slow progress on broader copyright issues has created space for other models promoted by organizations like Creative Commons and the Open Knowledge Foundation to further [alternative licensing models](#). These models often include [free licensing](#), aiming to expand access to IP-protected works while allowing creators to retain some control over their use.

Concerns also surround 3D printing and AI. The ease of replicating physical objects with 3D printing [complicates IP enforcement](#), and WIPO offers [Alternative Dispute Resolution \(ADR\)](#) services, including mediation and arbitration, to help bring resolution. While WIPO [has attempted to bring clarity and guidelines](#) to 3D printing for more than a decade, [experts agree that additional efforts are needed](#).

AI similarly challenges IP by blurring ownership and originality. [WIPO’s 2020](#)

[convention](#) with AI stakeholders and [2024 Patent Landscape Report](#) on AI have aimed to help countries and businesses develop policies for AI-related inventions. However, as with 3D printing, WIPO struggles to keep pace with technological advances. The internet, as a global distributor, only accelerates unauthorized sharing, undermining the potential for effective oversight.

China Dominates the Tech Space

WIPO also faces the difficulty of managing disputes between China and the U.S. Its [Patent Landscape Report](#) reveals the increasing dominance of Chinese tech companies and research institutions. [In 2023](#), global patent filings reached about 3.6 million, utility models were at 3.1 million, and industrial designs were at 1.5 million. China dominated most categories, with the U.S. following.

However, while China submitted 1.46 million patent applications in 2022, less than 800,000 were granted, indicating many [were superficial or served limited purposes](#). Additionally, while China [leads in patent applications](#), most are for domestic use. In 2016, less than a fifth were invention patents (which protect innovative new inventions), with most being shorter-term utility or design patents covering mild alterations and were mainly for use in domestic markets.

China still [led in PCT \(international\) patents](#) in 2023, filing roughly 70,000 compared to more than 55,000 from the United States. However, the U.S. filed the most patents abroad (including PCT and direct applications to foreign IP offices with more than [242,000 filings](#) in 2023); with China in third place behind Japan at roughly 120,000 filings.

Nonetheless, China is surging ahead in other areas. [China filed 38,000 GenAI patents between 2014 and 2023](#), surpassing all others combined (the U.S. was second at 6,000). WIPO data also shows China accounted for [more than half of all blockchain patents](#) until 2017.

China's growing political influence in WIPO has become more evident. [In 2023](#), it blocked several mostly European Wikimedia affiliates from becoming official observers at WIPO's Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights, likely due to tensions over Taiwan. These growing rivalries are compounded by WIPO's non-binding framework and reliance on voluntary cooperation, limiting its enforcement power.

As global powers compete over IP protections, the high costs of filing,

maintaining, and enforcing IP rights can be beyond the reach of smaller, less wealthy countries. Issues such as litigation, patent trolling, and overly broad patents can further overwhelm the matter. [Vulnerable businesses can miss out on opportunities](#) by not understanding IP rules, while also risking litigation.

WIPO's Development Agenda, launched in 2007, has so far had [mixed success](#) in strengthening IP frameworks in the developing world. [In Liberia](#), little progress has been made despite decades of WIPO involvement. At the 2024 WIPO Assemblies of member states, [African countries](#) renewed calls for greater technology transfers, knowledge sharing, and capacity-building programs.

WIPO faces significant obstacles in enforcing IP rights, maneuvering rapid technological advancements, and addressing issues over the access, equity, and politicization of global IP infrastructure. Intensified geopolitical rivalries mean these hurdles are likely to grow.

Despite this, WIPO can point to its success in expanding global IP frameworks, dispute resolution, and record-high patent filings. IP theft will remain a constant concern, yet WIPO's adaptability and inclusive approach have helped it maintain its relevance and efficiency in a changing environment. Its role in the future of global IP governance will be determined by its ability to balance protecting innovation while promoting access to knowledge, technology, and essential goods.

By John P. Ruehl

Author Bio: John P. Ruehl is an Australian-American journalist living in Washington, D.C., and a world affairs correspondent for the [Independent Media Institute](#). He is a contributor to several foreign affairs publications, and his book, [Budget Superpower: How Russia Challenges the West With an Economy Smaller Than Texas'](#), was published in December 2022.

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Rethinking Rank And Privilege In Human Societies



*Carole Crumley - Photo:
University of North
Carolina*

02-05-2025 ~ By applying a concept widely used in mathematics and computer science, Carole Crumley has radically changed the way anthropologists see and study societies.

For two centuries, archaeologists, historians, and social scientists studied human societies in search of the origins of hierarchy—a layered structure where power and privilege are concentrated in the top layer. Realizing that this model failed to account for the real-life complexity of human relationships and communities, I proposed a term that would reflect the diversity and complexity of the human social organization: heterarchy, a concept that had already proved pertinent in mathematical, computational, and biophysical contexts. (I wrote the entry for “Heterarchy” in the [International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences](#).¹) Heterarchy is now regularly applied to the study of human societies and in many other contexts.

What Is Heterarchy?

Heterarchy addresses the diversity of relationships among elements in a system and offers a way to think about change in spatial, temporal, and cognitive

dimensions. A general-purpose definition that suits a variety of contexts is the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked, or when they possess the potential for being ranked in many ways, depending on systemic requirements.

The concept of heterarchy offers an arena for examining change in a system, organization, or structure.

Heterarchy and Complex Systems Science

Complex systems science is the study of dynamic nonlinear systems that are not in equilibrium and do not act in a predictable manner. A complex system is difficult to model because of the changing relations and dynamics among its elements. Some examples of complex systems include the human brain, global weather, and cities. Key features in complex biophysical systems correspond surprisingly well with key features of social systems.

A brain, an ecosystem, and a city all share the following elements: integration, communication, and system history and initial conditions. For example, the brain's elements (blood vessels, nerves, and neurons) are *integrated* within the whole; its parts *communicate* with each other through electrical and chemical signals; and *initial conditions* are shaped by experiences throughout the brain's development.

Similarly, a city's parts (residential, commercial, and industrial districts, parks, etc.) are integrated: communication occurs in terms of transportation and telecommunications, and each city has its own history where residents and events contribute to its configuration. In human societies, we might consider the holistic nature of culture and communication as knowledge-sharing through the senses, and the initial conditions of the society being shaped by formative traditions, structures and materials, strategies, and habits of the mind.

While several areas of complex systems research have potential for the social sciences, one of the most promising is the concept of heterarchy, which treats the diversity of relationships among system elements and offers a way to think about systemic change in spatial, temporal, and cognitive dimensions. For example, a society's changing imprint on the landscape and evolving political, social, and spiritual functions can be studied over the long term.

Definitions of heterarchy are remarkably consistent across disciplines, while the

work they do is extraordinarily diverse. The earliest definition describes the mind's ability to [hold conflicting values](#) as a "heterarchy of values determined by the topology of nervous nets."² In artificial intelligence and computer design, the organization of computer sub-routines that can call one another is [heterarchical](#).³ A mathematician defines heterarchy as a program in which there is [no highest level](#).⁴ A sociologist who studies corporations [defines](#) heterarchy as "an emergent organizational form with distinctive network properties... and multiple organizing principles."⁵ "A general-purpose [definition](#) contrasts hierarchies, the elements of which are ranked relative to one another, with heterarchies, the elements of which are unranked or possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways, depending on systemic requirements."⁶

Heterarchy Versus Hierarchy

Heterarchy does not stand apart from hierarchy; rather, the two forms are in a dialectical relationship. From a mathematical standpoint, heterarchy is the more general category and subsumes hierarchy as a special case. The concept's versatility permits its use as a physical structure, as an abstract model, or in a historical narrative. Heterarchy meets the requirements for robust social theory since the concept can relate the micro (individual) level to the macro (social) level, can relate the agency of social actors to the social structure in which they operate, and offers an explanation for discontinuous and fundamental changes in the social system as a whole.

Networks Versus Levels

Heterarchy is a corrective to the naturalized characterization of power relations, which conflates [hierarchy with order](#).⁷ Since archaeology's founding as an academic discipline in the 19th century, most interpretations have assumed a linear progression from small, early, "simple" societies to those that were more populous, later in time, and "complex." Such a definition of complex (having more administrative levels) contrasts with the definition of complexity in nonlinear systems (more richly networked). Political systems were assumed to have greater stability the more they tended toward tiered hierarchies of power. Yet powerful forces can manifest entirely outside the framework of state hierarchies and beyond their control. In nonlinear systems, this is chaos or surprise, and reflects the characteristic brittleness of very hierarchical societies rendered vulnerable by systemic barriers to information transfer and limited recognition of other dimensions of power.

Heterarchies in History

Archaeological, historical, and ethnographic evidence indicates that hierarchies and heterarchies of power coexist in all human societies, including states. Thus, biological diversity has a correlation in human societies: the toleration of differences in individuals and groups offers a reserve of knowledge for use in problem-solving, just as genetic and biological diversity increases ecosystemic resilience. Similarly, organizational flexibility (economic, social, and political) enables societies to adjust to changed circumstances. As in ecology, researchers must remain aware of the intensity, periodicity, and duration of relations; in human societies, this might be thought of as the range of powers an individual, a group, or an institution has, and the regularity and duration of roles. Heterarchy is a fundamental principle of social organization.

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By Carole Crumley

Author Bio: Professor of anthropology (emerita) at the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#), Carole Crumley is a founding scientist of the research strategy termed historical ecology. Her key concept of heterarchy is now applied to studies of societal and environmental change. She is the director of the [Integrated History and Future of People on Earth](#) (IHOPE) initiative, a global network of researchers based at Sweden's Uppsala University that unites the biophysical and social sciences and community voices to build a livable future.

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We Must Create A Broad Anti-Fascist Movement To Fight Back Against Trump 2.0



02-03-2025 ~ *The struggle against neofascism in the U.S. must be taken by all those whose rights are being targeted under the second Trump administration.*

A few years ago, [Noam Chomsky](#) warned about [the return of fascism](#) in contemporary capitalist societies. He pointed out that 40 years of neoliberal policies—a one-sided class war launched by the business class and its allies against the working people, the poor, the minorities, the young, and the old—had produced massive levels of inequality and increased social tension, “yielding a breeding ground for extremism, violence, hatred, search for scapegoats—and fertile terrain for authoritarian figures who can posture as the savior.” Thus, as he put it, “We’re on the road to a form of neofascism.”

However, it is specifically the economic and political repercussions of the financial crisis of 2007-08 that originated in the United States as a result of the collapse of the U.S. housing market and then spread to the rest of the Western world through linkages in the global financial system that became a catalyst for the revival of ultranationalism and the surge of authoritarianism and far-right parties and movements across advanced capitalist democracies. Parties that were either non-existent or struggling to gain political legitimacy and mass popularity were propelled into the political mainstream in record time. As has been pointed out, many of the most prominent far-right parties in Europe today, such as those in Germany and Italy, are “[children of financial crises](#).” The financial crisis of 2008 is also the primary factor behind the transformation of [Hungary](#) under Victor Orbán into the most far-right nation in Europe.

In the United States, it was the Obama administration with its big bailouts for financial institutions and broken promises that set the stage for the rise of Trumpism by breeding citizen disillusionment with the government. The pandemic

and the subsequent economic disruption, combined with the widespread protests over the death of [George Floyd](#) and President Donald Trump's own response to the crisis with threats to use the [military](#) against protesters, led to a Biden victory over Trump in 2020. Young voters and progressives helped former President Joe Biden win even though he campaigned with a centrist strategy and refused to back policies such as universal healthcare and a wealth tax, which were being advocated by Sens. [Bernie Sanders](#) (I-Vt.) and [Elizabeth Warren](#) (D-Mass.), respectively.

Yet, Biden's electoral victory in 2020 did not mean that Trumpism had been defeated. Trump had been spewing racism and hate from the moment he entered politics, and his promise to "drain the swamp" resonated with many voters who, like their counterparts across Europe, were fed up with politics as usual and were looking toward a public figure, a savior, who would confront the despicable elites. Unfortunately, citizens in contemporary capitalist democracies can be as easily duped, perhaps even more so, as those living under a dictatorship. But the Democrats lost the 2024 election not so much because of inflation but rather because of the disastrous [Kamala Harris](#) campaign in which she totally threw the working people under the bus. As a result, she helped Trump make gains among almost all demographic groups, including African American and Latino voters who have been traditional supporters of the Democratic party, and triumph in all the seven swing states. Her campaign confirmed the suspicions of many that the Democrats have become the party of the elites. Indeed, even voters who previously backed the Democrats see the party as unwilling to fight for people and "[overly focused on diversity and the elites](#)," according to new research by the progressive group Navigator Research.

Fed up with politics as usual and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, voters who have thrown their support behind far-right politicians appear not to be overly concerned with the drift of liberal democracies toward authoritarianism. For instance, [polling](#) shows that the majority of U.S. citizens support mass deportations of undocumented immigrants. European countries have also been adopting deadly border policies as many of the continent's citizens demand stronger border controls. In Germany, for instance, the conservatives even worked together with the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) in passing a non-binding motion calling for drastic restrictions on migration. Thankfully enough, the German parliament [rejected](#) the immigration bill by 350 votes to 338,

with five abstentions.

What the drift toward authoritarianism says about the state of liberal democracy in the Western world is hardly encouraging news. Neoliberal capitalism has weakened in enormous and profound ways both the institutions and the culture of a democratic polity. Under neoliberal capitalism, liberal democracy has lost its capacity to respond to the needs of the working people. Economic liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and the dictatorship of finance capital (reinforced in the Anglo-Saxon context through the ideological prism of social Darwinism) have forced social democracy on the retreat across the Western world. In its turn, popular mainstream media reinforces the neoliberal ideology in multiple ways, such as by what [Noam Chomsky](#) calls “the strategy of distraction” and by “treating the public like children.”

For the past 40 years, neoliberal capitalism has been hard at work in making people think not like citizens but rather like consumers. A citizen is one who participates in the affairs of the polity and is concerned for the well-being of his or her community and the weak and most vulnerable among us. A consumer is one whose identity and values are with reference to the self and has surrendered power to the market and to those who make the ultimate decisions for his or her wants and needs. The first is active while the latter is passive. The [nearly 90 million eligible U.S. voters](#) who did not vote in the 2024 presidential election are consumers or what people in the classical city-state of Athens called *idiotes*—that is, the private individuals who did not hold office and did not participate in public affairs. Incidentally, it is from the Greek word *ἰδιώτης* that we get the contemporary English word “idiot.”

Indeed, one could credibly argue that the U.S. is now on track to having a full-fledged neofascist regime because nearly 90 million eligible voters opted to skip the 2024 presidential election, while millions who did vote for Trump did so out of pure ignorance as to what Trump represents. Acting like an emperor and engaging in colossal acts of cruelty toward the weak and the vulnerable surely gives enormous pleasure and satisfaction to those racists and bigots that make up such a huge part of the MAGA movement, but this fact alone also reveals the rather exceptional fragility of U.S. democracy, since it rests on a political culture that is obviously incapable of escaping its racist roots. Trump’s efforts to end diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs are deeply rooted in racism and will only make U.S. society less tolerant toward the “Other” and thus even more

racist.

Ultimately, the most critical question is how we fight back against neofascism in the U.S. right now. Fascism is not inevitable. It reared its ugly head in the past and was ultimately defeated everywhere by people who refused to subordinate themselves to a brutal and hateful form of politics. But the fact that it is still rearing its ugly head all over the Western world today is clear proof that neoliberal capitalism has failed to keep fascism at bay. Increased protectionism, chauvinism, jingoism, and repression are objectively necessary for a system that thrives on exploitation and by widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots, all the while engaging in a vicious assault on the public sector.

Trump 2.0 is an unmistakably neofascist administration that will be run by highly dangerous and unqualified cabinet appointees. A left resistance to Trump's neofascist regime is vital but must be based on a political struggle that merges with every other struggle. The anti-fascist movement that must emerge against the tactics of the Trump 2.0 presidency should build strong alliances between workers, women, minorities, and environmentalists. The struggle for workers' rights, women's rights, minority rights, and LGBTQ rights are all part of the same struggle against 21st-century neofascism, a movement that wishes to turn back the clock.

Thus, creating an anti-fascist mass movement that merges different struggles is of the utmost importance. We should not forget that fascism in the past came to power after assuming the character of a mass movement. It is the same now. Trumpism is a reactionary social movement, and we may not be that far away from becoming a witness to the emergence of an army of modern blackshirts, especially since the pardoning of Capitol attackers has sent a clear message to white supremacists across this country that the current government is on their side.

As the renowned communist and feminist leader [Clara Zetkin](#) argued more than 100 years ago, fascism was "an expression of the decay and disintegration of the capitalist economy..."

The same can be said today in reference to the rise of neofascism. It is an expression of the inherent political, economic, and social contradictions of capital accumulation under a neoliberal regime.

Zetkin saw “fascism as the strongest, most concentrated, and classic expression... of the world bourgeoisie’s general offensive.” Accordingly, she concluded that “the struggle against fascism must be taken up by the entire proletariat.”

The same goes today. The struggle against neofascism in the U.S. must be taken by all those whose rights are being targeted under the second Trump administration. And the strategy to do so is the united front, as Clara Zetkin would surely have advocated if she were alive today.

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Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/create-anti-fascist-movement>

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His latest books are *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (A collection of interviews with Noam Chomsky; Haymarket Books, 2021), and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (Verso, 2021).

Settler Colonialism: ‘It Ends With Us’ In Palestine And Israel



Richard D. Wolff

01-30-2025 ~ My birth emerged from European capitalism's fascistic catastrophe in the 1920s-1940s. That catastrophe also produced Israel's experiment with settler colonialism in Palestine. This article refers to both these incidents to analyze the current Palestine-Israel catastrophe.

My reasons or qualifications to write such an article start with the fact that my maternal grandmother and grandfather were killed at the Nazis' Mauthausen concentration camp. My father's sister was killed in Auschwitz. My mother and her sister spent years in different concentration camps. Because of these events, my parents fled Europe and started a family in the United States. Like some other descendants of victims who witnessed such atrocities, I have tried to understand their victimization and the complex effects this had on my life directly and indirectly.

Descendants differ in their responses to what happened. Some turn inward seeking safety in a survival-focused disengagement from the larger world and its history. Some try for comfort by believing that part or all of the world has moved beyond the conditions that produced fascism's victimizations. Some suffer long-simmering mixtures of impotence, rage, and fear that it will happen again. Among them are those who fight fascism wherever they see it reemerge and also those who perpetrate further cycles of victimization against others. Still others try to work out an understanding by writing articles and books.

Israel tried to operate settler colonialism on the pattern of earlier European settler colonialisms established around the world. That effort linked to me indirectly in a remarkably personal way. Without grasping why, I chose to participate in a program for Harvard and Radcliffe undergraduates that took 20 of us to East Africa in the early 1960s as volunteers for a summer of teaching. I began to learn there what settler colonialism meant. Further studies grew into my doctoral dissertation later at Yale based on research in the records of London's Colonial Office and the British Museum. My resulting book, *The Economics of Colonialism: Britain and Kenya, 1870-1930* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974), tried to analyze Kenya's settler colonialist economy.

Britain had expelled the native population and reserved the nation's fertile highlands for a few thousand of its white émigrés. In addition to land and police protection, Britain provided its émigrés with coffee seeds, transport, and a market to operate a Kenya-grown coffee export economy. The millions of Kenyan Blacks

forcibly relocated into constricted reservations found them to be inadequate to sustain their lives. Their survival thus required them to do low-wage labor on the coffee plantations of the white settlers. Taxes on those low wages helped finance the British colonial government that enforced a ruthlessly exploitative settler colonial system. This economic and racialized apartness in Kenya paralleled the better-known apartheid in South Africa.

Such economic systems provoke constant resistance ranging from desperate individual and small group acts to mass movements to organized rebellions. These acts of resistance occurred in Kenya, South Africa, and elsewhere too. Britain routinely repressed them. In Kenya, eventually, organizers gathered around Jomo Kenyatta and mobilized the so-called Kenya Land and Freedom Army to rebel. Their fight widely came to be known as the 1950s Mau Mau uprising against the British government. That uprising's death counts included 63 British military officers, 33 settlers, more than 1,800 native policemen and auxiliary soldiers, and the widely held guesstimate of more than 11,000 Kenyan rebels. The British repressed the rebellion, imprisoned Kenyatta, and loudly declared victory.

Britain's victory, however, sounded the death knell for its Kenya colony. Mau Mau showed the British the rising levels of resistance and rebellion they would face indefinitely from the settler colonies they had created. British politicians saw these as mushrooming costs of the colonies they could not afford. Since the end of World War II, European colonialisms had been dissolving almost everywhere. British leaders could not escape accommodating the historical reality. Shortly after Mau Mau, Britain acknowledged Kenya's national independence, freed Kenyatta, and accepted him as Kenya's new leader. Independence ended Kenya's settler colonialism.

The Kenya lesson in settler colonialism deeply impacted British leaders but proved one that Israeli leaders refused to learn from. Given the particular histories of Zionism and European Jews, most Israeli leaders were determined to impose settler colonialism on the Palestinian people and to preserve it by force.

Israeli leaders' declaration of independence in May 1948 provoked immediate Palestinian and Arab resistance that has continued to this moment. Mass movements and broad rebellions have punctuated that resistance and enjoyed increasing external support (from Arab, Islamic, and other sources). The demise of previous European settler colonialisms left a legacy of immense difficulties for

Israeli efforts to erect and sustain another.

One crucial aspect of their response to those difficulties was to form an alliance with a world power that could help defend its settler colonialism. The resulting close alliance with the United States positioned Israel as its front-line agent in the Middle East, the United States's dominant military extension to where major global energy resources were located. Undercutting Israel's early socialist, collectivist, and kibbutzim components was facilitated by the alliance with the United States. Most Zionist leaders willingly paid the price of this alliance. Another price was Israel's military, economic, and political dependence on the United States. Finally, Israeli leaders cultivated strong cultural and family connections to financially and politically influential partner communities inside the U.S. and Europe. In these ways, Israeli leaders hoped that settler colonialism might survive and grow despite many examples in history that proved otherwise.

For some decades it seemed, to many inside and outside Israel, that its leaders' strategy and connections might secure its settler colonialism. But then what happened in Kenya began to repeat itself in Israel (each in different conditions). Palestinians resisted, mass movements followed, and finally, powerful, organized rebellions arose. Israeli victories over each in turn proved to be mere preludes to later, higher forms of opposition with ever more global support. Israeli victories resembled those achieved by their British counterparts in Kenya.

It is equally clear now in Israel and Palestine that the prospect of endless warfare into the future is going to likely cost ever more lives and injuries, physical and psychological damages, and economic and political losses. The victims who survived Israel's extreme violence in Gaza are already surfacing more motivated, better trained, and with more effective weapons to take up their fight. The children of those victims will likewise include many determined to end Israel's settler colonialism.

History, and now time itself, is on the Palestinians' side. Even a staunch Israeli supporter like former Secretary of State Antony Blinken had to admit a stark reality (although he neither admitted its historic meaning nor its political implications). He [said](#), "Indeed, we assess that Hamas has recruited almost as many new militants as it has lost. That is a recipe for an enduring insurgency and perpetual war."

Britain's dying empire forced its acceptance of Kenya's independence in 1963 and the end of its settler colonialism. The current decline of the United States empire is forcing something similar in Israel. After the latest and the worst Gaza war, Israel's crucial ally is inching closer to the conclusion Britain reached in Kenya after the Mau Mau uprising.

For growing numbers of United States leaders, the risks and costs of its alliance with Israel are rising faster than the benefits. Many have been persuaded, including United States citizens, that providing Israel with funds and weapons rendered the United States "[complicit in a genocide](#)" and, therefore, isolated globally. The ceasefire imposed by Donald Trump has followed. Whether and how it functions and how Israel resists and evades the ongoing criticism will matter far less than the more basic trajectory underway now. History suggests that Benjamin Netanyahu or his successors will eventually be disconnected from the United States. Their lost alliance will hasten the end of Israel's settler colonialism.

By Richard D. Wolff

Author Bio: Richard D. Wolff is professor of economics emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a visiting professor in the Graduate Program in International Affairs of the New School University, in New York. Wolff's weekly show, "Economic Update," is syndicated by more than 100 radio stations and goes to millions via several TV networks and YouTube. His most recent [book with Democracy at Work](#) is *Understanding Capitalism* (2024), which responds to requests from readers of his earlier books: *Understanding Socialism* and *Understanding Marxism*.

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A New Military Strategy Of French Neocolonialism In Africa: Reorganizing Under The Cover Retreat



01-27-2025 ~ *Left parties of West Africa warn that announcements of withdrawal of troops by France-backed regimes in its*

former African colonies are an attempt to deceive the anti-imperialist movement by hiding its military presence from public view.

In his New Year's address, Alassane Ouattara, president of Ivory Coast since 2010—when he took power with the aid of French military intervention—[announced](#), “We have decided on the coordinated and organized withdrawal of French forces” from the country.

However, his address didn't mention terminating the 1961 military agreements with France. These “agreements are at the root of the problem. As long as these agreements exist, France will be able to use them to carry out military maneuvers or intervene at the request of its servants in power in Ivory Coast,” general secretary of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Ivory Coast (PCRCI), Achy Ekissi, told Peoples Dispatch.

The only concrete commitment made by Ouattara in his speech was that “the camp of the 43rd BIMA, the Marine Infantry Battalion of Port-Bouët, will be handed over to the Ivorian Armed Forces as of January 2025.”

Originally known as the 43rd Infantry Regiment, and established in 1914 as a detachment of the French colonial army in Ivory Coast, this battalion served France “during both world wars, the Indochina War, and the Algerian War. In 1978, it was renamed the 43rd BIMA without altering its primary mission: safeguarding imperialist interests, particularly those of France, monitoring neocolonial regimes, and intervening militarily when necessary to uphold the neocolonial order,” PCRCI said in a statement.

Directly under French command, this battalion “is one of the visible faces of French domination in Ivory Coast,” which the former colonial power needs to invisibilize to salvage the last few military footholds it has left in its former colonies in the West African region.

France Reorganizing Toward ‘A Less Entrenched, Less Exposed Model’ of Military Deployment

“We have bases in Senegal, Chad, Ivory Coast, and Gabon. They are located in capital cities and sometimes even within expanding urban areas, making their footprint and visibility increasingly difficult to manage. We will need to adapt our base structure to reduce vulnerabilities, following a less entrenched, less exposed model,” General Thierry Burkhard, Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, [reckoned](#) in January 2024.

By then, France had lost its major bases in the region. Amid a wave of protests against France’s continued economic and military domination of its former colonies, the regimes it had backed in Mali, Burkina Faso, and [Niger were removed by coups](#), supported by the anti-colonial movements.

The popularly supported military governments replacing them ordered the French troops out. Enduring sanctions, threats of a France-backed military invasion, and attacks by terror groups it allegedly supports, the three neighboring countries united to form the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

Reenergized by their success, the popular movements in other countries listed by Burkhard were growing, posing an increased threat to the French bases and its allied regimes, increasingly perceived as French puppets in the region.

Less than three months after the general had stressed the need for a “less entrenched, less exposed model” of French military deployment in this region, Macky Sall, who was then Senegal’s France-backed president, was ousted by popular vote in the March 2024 election. Promising to free Senegal from the yoke of French neocolonialism, the then-opposition leader Bassirou Diomaye Faye won the election, despite preelection violence and a crackdown by Sall’s government.

“Senegal is an independent country, it is a sovereign country and sovereignty does not accept the presence of [foreign] military bases,” President Diomaye [told](#) AFP in late November 2024. French military foothold in Senegal, the first in General Burkhard’s list of four former colonies where the last of its military bases

were to be salvaged, is all but lost. Diomaye announced in his [New Year speech](#) that he had instructed his defense minister to draft a new policy ensuring the withdrawal of all foreign troops in 2025.

Electoral Threat to French Interests in Ivory Coast

“France does not want to find itself in a situation like in Senegal, where the pro-imperialist camp was wiped out by Pan-Africanists” in the election, Ekissi [explains](#). Ivory Coast’s former President Laurent Gbagbo, who was bombed out of office by the French military in 2011 to bring Ouattara to power, is challenging Ouattara in the presidential election due in October 2025.

Ekissi described Gbagbo as a socialist who was “sometimes anti-imperialist and Pan-Africanist, but hesitant in directly combating French interests” during his presidency from 2000 to 2010. Anti-imperialism directed against France was not a part of the populist politics in the early years of his rule. Such politics was mostly limited to the small Communist Party, which was founded in 1990. But that was about to change.

Soon after Gbagbo took office in 2000, the Socialist Party-led coalition running the French government lost power in 2002. “The liberal wing of French imperialism, which had come to power, could not allow Gbagbo, a socialist, to lead the most important French neocolony in West Africa,” [added](#) Ekissi.

Civil War

Taking advantage of the discontent that had been brewing in the Muslim north, which had for decades felt marginalized by the Christian south, France helped Ouattara organize an armed rebellion in 2002.

After serving as the prime minister during the last three years of the one-party France-backed dictatorship of Félix Houphouët-Boigny—president of the country since independence in 1960 until his death in 1993—Ouattara had been marginalized in the succession race within the ruling party, which he then lost to Gbagbo in the 2000 election.

Following a five-year stint in the IMF as its deputy managing director from 1994 to 1999, Ouattara returned to domestic politics by starting a civil war in 2002 and dividing Ivory Coast’s army.

In the meantime, French troops “positioned themselves between the two armies,

splitting Ivory Coast into two.” Repressing anti-French protests with massacres that killed hundreds in 2002 and again in 2004, French troops positioned themselves to become the key player in the crisis, which ended with the ouster of Gbagbo in 2011.

The election in 2010, in which Ouattara contested against Gbagbo, was “manipulated by France,” Ekissi maintained. Defecting to Ouattara’s base at a hotel in the capital Abidjan, guarded by French troops under the UN’s cover, the election commission’s president announced that Ouattara had won with 54.1 percent of the vote.

However, the country’s Constitutional Council declared the announcement as “invalid” as it was made after the deadline had expired. It thus reversed the verdict in favor of Gbagbo, citing “irregularities” in the results submitted by the election commission.

French Bombardment of Ivory Coast’s Presidential Palace

In the months after Gbagbo’s swearing-in ceremony in late 2010, French troops, operating mainly from the 43rd BIMA, killed thousands of soldiers and protesting civilians defending Gbagbo, Ekissi recalled. Finally bombing the presidential palace in April 2011, France helped Ouattara’s forces capture Gbagbo.

Accused of crimes against humanity, Gbagbo became the first former head of state to be tried at the time in the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Hague. Almost eight years after his arrest, he was [acquitted in 2019](#). The prosecutors’ appeal against his acquittal did not succeed. The ICC [upheld his acquittal](#) in 2021, following which he returned to Ivory Coast.

In March 2024, Gbagbo declared his candidacy for the presidential election in October 2025. The popular support he enjoys today is “unequivocal,” [said](#) Ekissi. And the popular movement against France is today stronger than ever before.

In the early years of Gbagbo’s administration, after the civil war broke out in 2002, “people had already come to understand the full extent of France’s ruthlessness, criminality, and manipulations,” Ekissi [explained](#).

The anti-imperialist politics had begun to spill out of the confines of the left and consciously pan-Africanist organizations and into the populist domain. But the “hesitant leaders” of Gbagbo’s party “had not allowed it to flourish.”

'A Rallying Cry of the Ivorian People'

However, after 2011, following France's bombardment of the presidential palace and killing of Ivory Coast's soldiers and civilian protesters, "the call for the unconditional withdrawal of French troops from Ivory Coast has become a rallying cry of the Ivorian people," [maintained](#) the PCRCI.

"Pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist victories in the AES countries have further galvanized the movement against France in Ivory Coast," [added](#) Ekissi. Ouattara's "imprisonment of human rights activists visiting Mali, Burkina Faso, or Niger for up to six months," has not succeeded in quelling the growing domestic popularity of the AES example. "Today, even the right wing or so-called centrist parties, historically opposed to any emancipatory struggle, dare not openly attack" the AES countries.

The demand for French withdrawal, initially championed only by the communists and Pan-Africanists, is now being raised by all major opposition parties. After Gbagbo emerged as a credible electoral threat to Ouattara's regime, the government barred him from contesting.

The stated reason was that, months after his acquittal by the ICC, the Ivorian judiciary had convicted him in absentia in 2019 of robbing the Central Bank, which he had nationalized. Arguing that he was "unfairly" convicted, Ekissi pointed out that "the Central Bank had never filed a complaint" against Gbagbo.

Relying on several legal arguments, his party has nominated him despite the government taking his name off the electoral roll. Other opposition parties are also growing increasingly assertive in their demand that the election must be "inclusive."

With the prospect of the electoral defeat of Ouattara by a Pan-Africanist coalition on the horizon, France has been unable to find a replacement for him, Ekissi [explained](#). "It could accompany Ouattara in his madness to win these elections in blood. But this is a big risk, against which Senegal's result is a warning."

Feigning a Retreat to Confuse the Sovereignty Movement

Instead, France is feigning a retreat in an attempt to "confuse the sovereignty movement, while waiting for an opportunity to reposition itself in the 'center,'" camouflaging its military presence in the meantime, Ekissi [argued](#).

This decision, in line with the strategy articulated by Burkhard, requires France to get rid of its direct command of the 43rd BIMA, the country's most visible and provocative structure of neocolonialism.

It was not Ouattara's decision to expel French troops from this base, the Communist Party maintained, arguing that it was rather France that decided to hand over this "land asset" to the army of Ivory Coast to get rid of its visible presence.

But "there are light bases in Assini, Bouaké, and Korhogo," Ekissi [pointed out](#), adding that U.S. troops expelled from AES countries have also set up a base in the Odienné region along the borders with Mali and Guinea.

The French army has also established an international counter-terrorism school in the coastal town of Jacqueville. It is a part of the NATO countries' effort "to prepare destabilization operations to target the AES countries, and carry out surveillance and 'neutralization' of supposed Russian advances in the region," he [said](#).

By merely receiving command of the 43rd BIMA, while retaining other smaller foreign military bases, training schools, and the 1961 military agreements with France, Ouattara is only helping "to hide its army from public view," Ekissi [said](#).

"The imperialist power, sensing its end, is trying to protect its military power in the region with a new strategy," involving a "minimal physical troop presence" scattered over "small mobile bases," while "multiplying its training schools" and increasing "assistance operations," [added](#) Ekissi.

Tried and Tested in Benin

"Since February 2023, Benin has served as the testing ground for this new military strategy," the Communist Party of Benin (PCB) [said](#) in a statement. The increasing number of French troops arriving that year after their expulsion from the AES countries set up camp next to the Beninese military base in the Kandi region in the country's north.

After this provoked a public backlash, the French presence was downsized in the region. French troops still operate from Kandi late at night, flying "military equipment and personnel to the airport constructed in the W National Park, located at the intersection of Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger." But they are fewer

in number, and do not maintain a high visibility in Kandi anymore, PCB's first secretary Philippe Noudjenoume [told](#) Peoples Dispatch. "Another more discreet base has been constructed further inland near Ségbana."

New camps, which the Beninese government calls "advanced posts," have been cropping up "along the borders with Niger and Burkina Faso." French troops have been dispersed across Beninese camps "to direct military operations and intelligence," while officially masquerading as "instructors," Noudjenoume explained.

"The objective" of such dispersal "is clear: to conceal the presence of French forces, whose previous concentration in military bases inflamed local patriotic sentiments, by making them less visible," [reads](#) PCB's statement.

This posture has allowed Benin's President Patrice Talon to claim that there are no French military bases hosted in the country. "While technically true—there are no autonomous French military camps—the reality is different," the statement [added](#). French military personnel, in collaboration with the European Union, are not only training and equipping the Beninese military but are also directing its ostensible counter-terror operations.

AES countries, on the other hand, have accused France of using such border bases in Benin and Ivory Coast to support terror operations aimed at destabilizing its popular governments that ordered French troops out.

Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger are "closely monitoring the deceptive maneuvers initiated by the French junta, which pretends to close its military bases in certain African countries, only to replace them with less visible mechanisms that pursue the same neocolonial ambitions," the AES [said](#) in a statement in December 2024.

'France Itself Has Engineered Its Retreat'

This statement followed the announcement of French troops' withdrawal by Chad's government in late November 2024, soon after Senegal's president indicated in interviews that the continued presence of French troops was unacceptable.

However, unlike Senegal, Chad is not ruled by a Pan-Africanist movement-backed leader who came to power by defeating a France-backed incumbent in an election. Chad's President Mahamat Déby is a second-generation French loyalist,

whose military coup to inherit power after his dictator father's death in April 2021 was backed by France.

Repressing anti-French protests with massacres, mass arrests, and custodial torture, Déby has since maintained his power through brute force.

With his main opponent from the Socialist Party Without Borders (PSF) being gunned down by his security forces and other serious opposition candidates being barred from contesting the election, Déby won the presidential election in May 2024, with his own prime minister playing the opposition candidate.

However, his grip on power had become increasingly insecure, with mass protests aching to break out again at the slightest opening of democratic space, amid murmurs of discontented sections of the army ready to back the anti-France protest movement against Déby.

His government's announcement of French troops' withdrawal in this backdrop was met with skepticism, despite affirming, unlike in the case of Ivory Coast, that it had scrapped its military agreement with France.

"All the African governments that have successfully expelled French troops from their territories have popular support, unlike Chad, where the people have endured unprecedented repression under Déby's rule backed by France," PSF's Ramadan Fatallah told Peoples Dispatch.

Other sections of the anti-French movement who initially believed in the slightest credibility of the announcement by Déby's government are also now increasingly skeptical.

Mahamat Abdraman, secretary general of the Rally for Justice and Equality of the Chadians (RAJET), [said](#) that "France itself has engineered its retreat" from Chad. It has "adopted a new method of colonization," requiring a smaller presence of its troops while embedding itself within African militaries and government. Déby's security adviser and former director of his political police, along with his foreign minister and two of his wives, are all French nationals, he pointed out.

While continuing to exercise control through subtler means, France is "orchestrating" a formal withdrawal from Chad. Such a posture will allow it to deny responsibility for more domestic atrocities Déby's regime may commit in the

future and evade being openly implicated in any acts it may undertake to destabilize neighboring Niger at France's behest, Abdraman [told](#) Peoples Dispatch.

The fact that France is compelled to cover up its tracks in the region with such maneuvers is a testimony to the "weakening" of its neocolonial power, [said](#) Ekissi. And "no amount of imperialist maneuvering can halt the inevitable collapse of French colonialism in Africa," PCB's statement concluded.

By: [Pavan Kulkarni](#)

Author Bio: Pavan Kulkarni is a journalist with Peoples Dispatch.

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We Have Entered The Era Of 'Global Boiling'—Marine Wildlife, Ecosystems, And Economies Are Being Devastated



01-27-2025 ~ *Marine heat waves are causing record-breaking ocean temperatures that kill animals and impact ocean-based industries.*

The [ocean absorbs 90 percent of the excess heat](#) generated by burning fossil fuels and deforestation. Climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions is the

primary driver of long-term global warming. Today, humanity is officially in uncharted waters. According to the Copernicus Climate Change Service, in February 2024, the average global sea surface temperature (SST) reached 21.06 degrees Celsius, the [highest level ever recorded](#) by the service. The previous record of 20.98 degrees Celsius was set in August 2023.

Overall, 2023 saw [record-breaking marine temperatures](#), and the likely culprit is human-caused climate change. The extraordinarily high sea surface temperatures recorded in 2023 provide a frightening glimpse into the planet's future. A [study](#) by researchers at the University of Reading and Imperial College London, published in March 2024 in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, found that temperatures in the top 100 meters of ocean basins around the world have steadily increased since 1980. The Atlantic basin, in particular, has experienced substantial heat amplification since 2016.

They [concluded](#) that extreme sea surface temperatures in the North Atlantic during 2023 “lie at the fringe of the expected mean climate change for a global surface-air temperature warming level (GWL)” of 1.5 degrees Celsius and closer to the average of 3.0 degrees Celsius GWL. If this scenario is attained globally, it would have [catastrophic consequences](#), including the eventual collapse of ice caps. This would lead to an uncontrollable rising sea level that would consume low-lying cities and contaminate water sources with seawater worldwide.

Marine heat waves are also a factor in extreme weather events, as the energy of warm surface water leads to hurricane formation. In August 2023, [Hurricane Idalia](#), sitting over unusually warm surface water in the Gulf of Mexico, intensified quickly. It strengthened from 80 mph winds to a Category 3 storm, gaining 40 mph in less than 24 hours. The warm water was like rocket fuel for the approaching storm.

The year 2024 did not see much relief from the heat. In August 2024, the Arctic Ocean's mean sea surface temperatures—a critical measure of the intensity of the ice-albedo feedback cycle during a summer sea-ice melt season—were between [2 and 4 degrees Celsius warmer](#) than mean values in most Arctic Ocean marginal seas in August of any year between 1991 and 2020, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. We have entered a new era of elevated marine temperatures, which is of great concern.

According to Mercator Ocean International, a nonprofit scientific research organization based in Toulouse, France, the monthly mean sea surface temperature in the Mediterranean Sea reached [26.42 degrees Celsius](#) in September 2024, a record high that surpassed the previous records set in 2020 and 2022. At a global level, September 2024 was the second-warmest month on record (after August 2023), with a sea surface monthly mean temperature of [20.87 degrees Celsius](#).

Impact on Marine Wildlife

Extreme heat in the oceans devastates coral reefs, which thrive in a narrow range of temperatures. [Warm water](#) is best for corals and their symbiotic algae, ideally between 23 and 29 degrees Celsius. If it gets much hotter, the algae that coexist with and provide food for the tiny coral polyps will be expelled, and the corals will bleach. Corals can die if the ocean water doesn't cool quickly or if bleaching events happen repeatedly. Between 1950 and 2021, the ocean reefs have [lost half of their capacity to provide ecosystem services](#).

Ocean temperatures of 38 degrees Celsius in the Florida Keys could harm coral and cause problems for all marine life, as evidenced by previous marine heat waves.

The so-called "[Blob](#)," a persistent marine heat wave in the northeast Pacific Ocean from 2014 to 2016, caused a [chain of events](#) that upended entire aquatic ecosystems. It greatly impacted organisms, large and small, throughout the food chain. [High surface temperatures caused](#) krill populations to decline, and a harmful algal bloom spread in shellfish from Alaska to Southern California, shutting down the clam industry.

In February 2024, researchers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration completed a mission to assess the impact of the 2023 marine heat wave on corals in the Florida Keys Marine Sanctuary. Their [preliminary findings](#) are worrisome. The scientists found extreme heat killed nearly 80 percent of the approximately 1,500 staghorn coral (*Acropora cervicornis*), which provide critical habitat for a host of other marine life.

"The findings from this assessment are critical to understanding the impacts to corals throughout the Florida Keys following the unprecedented marine heat wave," [said](#) Sarah Fangman, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

superintendent. “They also offer a glimpse into coral’s future in a warming world. When the ecosystem experiences significant stress in this way, it underscores the urgency for implementing updates to our regulations, like the [Restoration Blueprint](#), which addresses multiple threats that will give nature a chance to hold on.”

In recent years, extreme heat has forced wildlife to feed closer to shore, [entangling whales in fishing gear](#) and [stranding](#) thousands of California sea lions. Tens of thousands of [seabirds have also died](#) due to extreme temperatures.

Impact on Fisheries

Heat waves have also caused fishery disasters, [affecting populations of sardines](#)—a key feeder fish for larger marine species—and causing the collapse of select salmon and cod fisheries.

Between 2014 and 2016, the marine region along the Pacific coastline of the Baja California Peninsula in Mexico experienced an unprecedented period of intense and prolonged marine heatwaves that impacted local marine ecosystems. A team of scientists from Stanford University published a [study](#) in *Nature* in November 2024 in which they calculated that during this period of elevated sea temperatures, lobster, sea urchin, and sea cucumber fisheries suffered a 15 to 58 percent decrease in aggregate landings, particularly impacting small-scale fisheries.

“In the face of extreme environmental shocks such as marine heatwaves, small-scale fisheries operating near biogeographic transition zones are among the most vulnerable,” [they write](#).

The Era of Global Boiling

Warmer ocean temperatures have long-term impacts on the environment. This includes a reduction in the ability of the ocean to take up carbon dioxide. Warm water holds less gas, including carbon dioxide—the most important greenhouse gas—than cool water. So, as the ocean warms, less heat-trapping gas is removed from the air, and more stays in the atmosphere. It’s a vicious cycle: as the ocean warms, less carbon dioxide is absorbed, and more remains in the air, which causes the planet to heat up even more.

Marine heat waves are parallel to heat waves on land, as evidenced by 2023’s record-setting terrestrial heat waves in the [southeastern United States](#), [Southern](#)

[Europe](#), and [China](#). Studies of these heat waves reveal that they would have been “[virtually impossible](#)” without human-caused climate change. In July 2023, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres [declared](#), “The era of global warming has ended; the era of global boiling has arrived.”

Still, there is some good news. In 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act was passed, which directs [\\$369 billion in investments](#) toward modernizing the U.S. energy system. This includes reducing climate pollution by 40 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. While this is not enough, it’s an essential first step.

When we first recognized climate change as a serious concern [many decades ago](#), there were no clear solutions or answers to the enormous challenges that climate scientists projected. However, with the [falling cost of solar and wind energy](#), better [battery storage](#), and crucial [gains in energy efficiency](#), viable solutions that are much [less expensive than burning fossil fuels are available](#).

Exceptionally warm global waters will not disappear. However, we can avoid the worst impacts of climate change and even hotter water temperatures by taking rapid action to strengthen local, state, and national climate policy initiatives.

By David Hastings

Author Bio: [David Hastings](#) is a climate scientist and retired professor of oceanography.

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