

# How The US Supreme Court Became An Arm Of The Republican Party



*Professor Khiara M. Bridges worked with students from the Reproductive Rights and Justice seminar she taught last semester on an amicus brief for an abortion rights case the U.S. Supreme Court will hear in March.*  
*Photo: law.berkeley.edu*

*The court is making decisions based on the GOP platform, not the Constitution, says legal scholar Khiara M. Bridges*

The U.S. Supreme Court, whose current ideological leanings are extremely reactionary, has spearheaded a broad national regression on human rights. Indeed, the United States is a global outlier on multiple fronts (the only wealthy nation without a universal health care system and number one in firearms per capita, to name just a few), and some of the latest Supreme Court rulings (on abortion, guns and affirmative action) are turning the country into “[a global pariah](#).”

How do we make sense of these utterly dangerous developments? First of all, why is the Supreme Court acting like the executive committee of the Republican Party? Are there even clean legal arguments upon which its rulings are based? In this exclusive interview for *Truthout*, renowned law professor and anthropologist Khiara M. Bridges, who specializes in the intersection of race, class, reproductive justice and law, shares her insights into the issues raised above and offers some

legal remedies that she believes will help achieve racial justice and equality in the 21st century.

Bridges is a professor of law at UC Berkeley School of Law. Her scholarship has appeared in scores of prestigious publications, including the *Harvard Law Review*, the *Stanford Law Review*, the *California Law Review*, the *NYU Law Review* and the *Virginia Law Review*. She is the author of *Reproducing Race: An Ethnography of Pregnancy as a Site of Racialization* (2011), *The Poverty of Privacy Rights* (2017) and *Critical Race Theory: A Primer* (2019). On July 12, 2022, Bridges testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee about the fallout from the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

*C. J. Polychroniou: Race, class and gender have functioned as organizing principles in the development of U.S. society and culture from the very beginning and continue to shape social identities to this day. Your own work, as a professor of law and an anthropologist, focuses on the relationship between race, class and gender in the context of reproductive rights and law. Can you briefly discuss this relationship and explain what intersectionality has to do with efforts to create a more equitable and just world for ourselves and future generations?*

*Khiara M. Bridges:* I will try to answer your question by explaining why I was drawn to the study of the intersection of race, class and gender in the context of reproductive rights and law.

When I was in law school, I was struck by the way pregnancy and motherhood were described in Supreme Court cases. On the whole, the court talked about pregnancy and motherhood in celebratory terms. They were conceptualized as good for the pregnant woman, her family, her community and the nation as a whole. Language idealizing pregnancy and motherhood could be found even in cases in which the court protected the right to terminate a pregnancy. For example, in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, in which the court affirmed its holding in *Roe v. Wade* that the Constitution protected the right to terminate a pre-viability pregnancy, the court writes:

'As with abortion, reasonable people will have differences of opinion about these matters. One view is based on such reverence for the wonder of creation that any pregnancy ought to be welcomed and carried to full term no matter how difficult it will be to provide for the child and ensure its well-being. Another is that the inability to provide for the nurture and care of the infant is a cruelty to the child

and an anguish to the parent.'

Here, even in its defense of the constitutional right to abortion, the court speaks about pregnancy and motherhood in radiant terms. In this framing, the abortion right deserves recognition and protection because when pregnancy occurs during a disadvantageous time in a person's life — when they do not have the means to provide for the child's emotional and material needs — it is "cruel" to the infant and causes the parent "anguish." In my reading, the court still conceptualizes pregnancy as a blessing. The court recognizes a constitutional right to abortion simply because this blessing may occur at a bad time.

The fairly laudatory presentation of pregnancy and motherhood in the court's jurisprudence sits in diametrical opposition to the way that *some* people's pregnancies are spoken about in political discourse. When I was in law school, the nation had just spent the two immediately preceding decades talking about "welfare queens" — implicitly Black women who were imagined to have babies solely to increase the size of their welfare checks. "Welfare queens" were decidedly *bad* for the nation; they drained public finances while producing children that were the country's future criminals and "welfare queens" themselves. I was in law school during a period of time in which politicians were arguing that welfare beneficiaries should be required to take long-acting reversible contraception, or to undergo sterilization, in order to receive financial assistance from the state. Essentially, politicians were talking about poor people's reproduction as if it were a social *problem* that needed to be solved. This was, again, the complete inverse of the way that the court spoke about pregnancy and motherhood.

I was fascinated by the inversion. And race and class explain the opposition. They explain why some people's procreation is celebrated, and other people's procreation is denigrated. And that's really the lesson of intersectionality. Intersectionality offers a framework for understanding the complexity of social life. It recognizes that power is exerted along many different axes in the U.S. — race, class, sex, gender identity, sexuality, ability, immigration status, religion etc. And intersectionality simply submits that privilege or subjugation will look different at the various intersections of those axes of power. So, for example, sexism when it intersects with race privilege will look different than the way it looks when it intersects with race un-privilege. The form that sexism, patriarchy and misogyny have taken for affluent white women is the command to reproduce

at all costs. The form that sexism has taken for Black women, especially when they are poor, is the demand that they avoid reproduction at all costs.

And so, intersectionality cautions that as we engage in efforts to create a more equitable and just world, we have to be careful not to allow one group's experiences with an axis of power to stand in for everyone's experience with that axis of power. If we do, our efforts will be liberatory only for some.

*Critical race theory was developed in the 1980s but has become a hot-button political issue for today's conservatives in the U.S. What is it about critical race theory that has become such an obsession for Republicans, and why is it coming up now?*

You are absolutely correct to note that critical race theory was developed in the 1980s. It was created by law professors who were trying to figure out how it came to be that dramatic racial inequality endured even though the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s had forced the nation to bestow formal racial equality onto people of color. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 both had been passed. These were monumental pieces of legislation. Nevertheless, when these incipient critical race theorists looked around at the social landscape in the 1980s, they saw that people of color were still at the bottom of most measures of social well-being. Black people, particularly, were incarcerated at higher rates than white people; they were poorer than white people; they were sicker than white people; they died earlier than white people. So, the law professors who created critical race theory wanted to think about how this dramatic racial inequality could coexist with formal racial equality. That is what critical race theory sets out to do. It is an advanced legal theory that attempts to think through the relationship between law and continuing racial injustice in a post-civil rights era.

Of course, this is not what the Republican Party is talking about when they invoke "critical race theory." Conservative pundits and politicians say that critical race theory is being taught in K-12 schools. They say that it is "Marxist." They say that it proposes that all white people are racist and all Black people are oppressed. Essentially, their description of critical race theory bears absolutely no relationship to *actual* critical race theory — the advanced legal theory that law professors began developing in the 1980s. Essentially, the Republican Party has co-opted the term, and they are using the struggle to rid so-called critical race

theory from public life to accomplish the goal of silencing any talk that suggests that racial inequality remains a problem and that race still matters in the U.S. today.

I think that it is important to keep in mind precisely when the Republican Party began talking about critical race theory. The GOP's fixation began in fall 2020 — right after the country had a long, hot summer of racial protests in the wake of George Floyd's murder. If you recall, optimists that summer were saying that the country was having a "racial reckoning." Then, in the fall, the Republican Party began claiming that critical race theory was being taught *everywhere* — to federal employees, kindergartners and everyone in between. The timing is no accident. It seems pretty obvious that the Republican Party created a bogeyman out of critical race theory to stop whatever racial reckoning that was happening at the time and to undo any gains — legislative, political, discursive — that racial justice advocates had managed to achieve that summer.

Finally, it is important to understand the *intentionality* behind the creation of "critical race theory" as a bogeyman. Most scholars thinking through the Republican Party's co-optation of the term "critical race theory" credit Christopher Rufo, a conservative activist, with putting so-called critical race theory on the Republican Party's radar. In March 2021, [Rufo tweeted](#):

'We have successfully frozen their brand — "critical race theory" — into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category.

The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think "critical race theory." We have decodified the term and will recodify it to annex the entire range of cultural constructions that are unpopular with Americans.'

Very rarely do the villains explicitly and publicly reveal their nefarious plans. In this case, the villain did just that.

*The Supreme Court's Republican-appointed majority has issued a series of ultra-reactionary rulings on a number of critical issues such as voting rights, affirmative action, gerrymandering, abortion, gun control and campaign finance. Are these rulings based on clear legal arguments, or are they in fact driven by*

*political preferences and ideological biases? For example, there seems to be very little consistency in the Supreme Court decisions on guns and abortion.*

I think that it is hard for anyone to say with a straight face that the court's recent decisions are based on clear, consistent legal principles. I believe that anyone paying attention sees that the court has been issuing decisions that are consistent only in the sense that they consistently align with the Republican Party's political platform.

First, we have to keep in mind that the court creates its own docket; it decides which cases it wants to hear. So, it is not just some odd coincidence that in the last two terms alone, the court has decided to hear cases that touch on the most hot-button political issues of our time: abortion, gun rights, voting rights, affirmative action, LGBTQ rights, the free exercise of religion etc. The court has *chosen* to hear these particular cases because with six conservative justices presently sitting on the bench, it has the power to organize American society in the way that the Republican Party wants.

Second, it really is impossible to reconcile the court's decisions with one another. A search for a legal principle that unites the cases will turn up nothing. For example, in last year's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, in which the court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and permitted states to criminalize abortion, the court argued that in order to determine what any given provision of the Constitution does and does not protect, we have to look to what people were thinking at the time of that provision's ratification. This, the court said, is what originalism requires. The court said that when we are trying to figure out whether the Due Process Clause contained in the 14th Amendment protects the abortion right, originalism demands that we divine whether people in 1868, the year that the 14th Amendment was ratified, thought that the Due Process Clause protected abortion rights. The court in *Dobbs* looks at all the criminal abortion laws on the books in 1868 and answers in the negative: In 1868, people did not think that the 14th Amendment protected abortion rights. The fact that women were unable to vote until 1920 and, therefore, had no say in *any* of the laws on the books in 1868 is irrelevant to the court's analysis.

Fast forward to *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* [*SFFA*], which was decided earlier this summer. There, the court held that the race-based affirmative

action programs instituted at Harvard College and University of North Carolina violated the Equal Protection Clause contained in the 14th Amendment. Now, just last year in *Dobbs*, the court declared that originalism is the proper method for interpreting the Constitution. This would suggest that the court in *SFFA* would try to figure out whether people in 1868 thought that the 14th Amendment permitted race-conscious efforts to produce racial equality. Note that in 1868, the nation was just three years past the end of the Civil War, which was fought, in part, to end the institution of chattel slavery in this country. The 14th Amendment was added to the Constitution for the express purpose of making formerly enslaved people equal citizens of the nation. A court that believes that originalism is an inexorable command would have interrogated whether in 1868, people believed that this amendment that had just been ratified with the express purpose of making Black people equal citizens permitted race-conscious efforts to produce racial equality. The answer, clearly, is yes. Originalism leads to the conclusion that race-based affirmative action is constitutional. Perhaps that explains why the court says *nothing* about originalism in *SFFA*. Indeed, the majority opinion in that case is perfectly originalism-free. No legal principle explains why originalism is relevant when the court is deciding whether a constitutional right to abortion exists and irrelevant when the court is deciding whether race-based affirmative action is permissible. It is results-oriented reasoning all the way down.

I should mention that in *SFFA*, Justice Thomas authored a concurring opinion that endeavors to provide an originalist defense of the court's holding that race-based affirmative action is unconstitutional. The opinion is entirely unconvincing. Historians will shudder when reading it. Perhaps that explains why no other justice, including his conservative colleagues who preached the gospel of originalism in *Dobbs*, signed on to it.

*Why is the U.S. obsessed with abortion, and what does the overturning of Roe v. Wade say about U.S. credibility with regard to human rights?*

The nation's current obsession with abortion makes it hard to believe that abortion has not always been a partisan issue. Indeed, as recently as the mid-1980s, abortion was not very politically charged. Only in the last 40 years or so has the Republican Party built its platform around the criminalization of abortion and the Democratic Party offered itself as the party that favors abortion rights and access.

The reversal of *Roe v. Wade* positions the U.S. as an outlier on the world stage. Most countries are liberalizing their criminal abortion laws. Five years ago, Ireland, a deeply Catholic country, voted to repeal its abortion ban. In 2020, Argentina changed its laws to permit legal abortion up until the 14th week of pregnancy. And in 2021, the Supreme Court in Mexico ruled that the country's constitution prohibited the criminalization of abortion. So, we are witnessing the expansion of abortion rights in countries across the globe. These countries are changing their laws to allow their citizens access to safe and legal abortion because they recognize that the ability to terminate a pregnancy safely and legally is necessary if people are to control the content and trajectory of their lives. These countries have come to the realization that governments that force their citizens to continue pregnancies and to give birth against their will deny their citizens' dignity and treat them inhumanely.

The reversal of *Roe*, then, reveals the U.S. to be deeply regressive on this issue, and devastatingly so.

*One final question: What legal remedies would you recommend to achieve racial justice and equality in the 21st century?*

Perhaps it's because I am a constitutional law scholar that when I think of legal remedies, I think of Supreme Court cases that should be reversed. The court has handed down some truly terrible decisions. These are decisions that, if they had come out the other way, would have helped to make the nation more racially just. There are too many cases to name here. But one decision that I repeatedly come back to is *Washington v. Davis*, which was decided in 1976. The case concerned a standardized test that the District of Columbia had been using to make hiring decisions for the district's police force. Black applicants did not perform as well on the test. As a result, very few Black people were getting hired as police officers. A Black applicant challenged the District of Columbia's use of the test, arguing that because the test disproportionately burdened Black people, and because it did not do a particularly good job of identifying which candidates would be competent, effective police officers, the government's use of the test violated the Equal Protection Clause. In the course of upholding the constitutionality of the test, the court announced the rule that a law will be struck down as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause only if there is a finding that lawmakers had the *intent* to discriminate against a racial group when passing the law.



A different outcome in *Washington v. Davis* would have allowed the court to strike down laws that do not mention race explicitly, but nevertheless have the effect of burdening people of color. Note that this is exactly how critical scholars define institutional or structural racism: We understand institutional/structural racism to be what happens when institutions and structures operate in a race-neutral manner that nevertheless perpetuates historical racial disadvantage and produces new forms of racial disenfranchisement. Essentially, a different outcome in *Washington v. Davis* would have allowed the federal judiciary to address structural racism. It would have upheld race-neutral laws that are racially burdensome only if the government could show that there is no other way to accomplish the goal that it set out to accomplish with the law. So, for example, in *Washington v. Davis*, the District of Columbia would have been able to use the test that worked to disproportionately prevent Black people from being hired onto the police force only if it showed that this particular test was the *only* way to identify people who would be effective police officers. Few laws would survive such a standard. Accordingly, the federal judiciary would have been able to diminish structural racism — perhaps even significantly.

So: What legal remedies would I recommend to achieve racial justice and equality in the 21st century? I would begin by reversing *Washington v. Davis*.

I will end just by noting that *Washington v. Davis* was decided close to 50 years ago. I think a lot of people believe that the Supreme Court has only recently become anti-democratic, obviously partisan, uninterested in human rights etc. But nothing could be further from the truth. The court's recent decisions are part of a *longue durée* in which the court has demonstrated a patent hostility to racial justice and equality.

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different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

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## What's Happening In Niger Is Far From A Typical Coup



Vijay Prashad

On July 26, 2023, Niger's presidential guard moved against the sitting president—Mohamed Bazoum—and [conducted](#) a coup d'état. A brief contest among the various armed forces in the country ended with all the branches agreeing to the removal of Bazoum and the creation of a military junta led by Presidential Guard Commander General Abdourahamane "Omar" Tchiani. This is the fourth country in the Sahel region of Africa to have experienced a coup—the other three being Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. The new government [announced](#) that it would stop allowing France to leech Niger's uranium (one in three lightbulbs in France is powered by the uranium from the field in Arlit, northern Niger). Tchiani's government [revoked](#) all military cooperation with France, which means that the 1,500 French troops will need to start packing their bags (as they did in both Burkina Faso and Mali). Meanwhile, there has been no

public statement about Airbase 201, the U.S. facility in Agadez, a thousand kilometers from the country's capital of Niamey. This is the [largest drone base](#) in the world and key to U.S. operations across the Sahel. U.S. troops have been told to remain on the base for now and drone flights have been suspended. The coup is certainly against the French presence in Niger, but this anti-French sentiment has not enveloped the U.S. military footprint in the country.

### *Interventions*

Hours after the coup was stabilized, the main Western states—especially France and the United States—[condemned](#) the coup and asked for the reinstatement of Bazoum, who was immediately detained by the new government. But neither France nor the United States appeared to want to lead the response to the coup. Earlier this year, the French and U.S. governments worried about an insurgency in northern Mozambique that impacted the assets of the Total-Exxon natural gas field off the coastline of Cabo Delgado. Rather than send in French and U.S. troops, which would have polarized the population and increased anti-Western sentiment, the French and the United States made a [deal](#) for Rwanda to send its troops into Mozambique. Rwandan troops entered the northern province of Mozambique and shut down the insurgency. Both Western powers seem to favor a “Rwanda” type solution to the coup in Niger, but rather than have Rwanda enter Niger the hope was for ECOWAS—the Economic Community of West African States—to send in its force to restore Bazoum.

A day after the coup, ECOWAS [condemned](#) the coup. ECOWAS encompasses fifteen West African states, which in the past few years has suspended Burkina Faso and Mali from their ranks because of the coups in that country; Niger was also suspended from ECOWAS a few days after the coup. Formed in 1975 as an economic bloc, the grouping decided—despite no mandate in its original [mission](#)—to send in peacekeeping forces in 1990 into the heart of the Liberian Civil War. Since then, ECOWAS has sent its peacekeeping troops to several countries in the region, including Sierra Leone and Gambia. Not long after the coup in Niger, ECOWAS [placed](#) an embargo on the country that included suspending its right to basic commercial transactions with its neighbors, freezing Niger's central bank assets that are held in regional banks, and stopping foreign aid (which comprises forty percent of Niger's budget). The most striking [statement](#) was that ECOWAS would take “all measures necessary to restore constitutional order.” An August 6 deadline given by ECOWAS expired because

the bloc could not agree to send troops across the border. ECOWAS asked for a “standby force” to be assembled and ready to invade Niger. Then, ECOWAS said it would meet on August 12 in Accra, Ghana, to go over its options. That meeting was [canceled](#) for “technical reasons.” Mass demonstrations in key ECOWAS countries—such as [Nigeria](#) and [Senegal](#)—against an ECOWAS military invasion of Niger have confounded their own politicians to support an intervention. It would be naïve to suggest that no intervention is possible. Events are moving very fast, and there is no reason to suspect that ECOWAS will not intervene before August ends.

### *Coups in the Sahel*

When ECOWAS suggested the possibility of an intervention into Niger, the military governments in Burkina Faso and Mali [said](#) that this would be a “declaration of war” not only against Niger but also against their countries. On August 2, one of the key leaders of the Niger coup, General Salifou Mody [traveled](#) to Bamako (Mali) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) to discuss the situation in the region and to coordinate their response to the possibility of an ECOWAS—or Western—military intervention into Niger. Ten days later, General Moussa Salaou Barmou [went](#) to Conakry (Guinea) to seek that country’s support for Niger from the leader of the military government in that country, Mamadi Doumbouya. Suggestions have already been floated for Niger—one of the most important countries in the Sahel—to form part of the conversation of a federation that will include Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. This would be a federation of countries that have had coups to overthrow what have been seen to be pro-Western governments that have not met the expectations of increasingly impoverished populations.

The story of the coup in Niger becomes partly the story of what the communist journalist Ruth First called “the contagion of the coup” in her remarkable book, *The Barrel of the Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d’états* (1970). Over the course of the past thirty years, politics in the Sahel countries has seriously desiccated. Parties with a history in the national liberation movements, even the socialist movements (such as Bazoum’s party) have collapsed into being representatives of their elites, who are conduits of a Western agenda. The French-U.S.-NATO war in Libya in 2011 allowed jihadis groups to pour out of Libya and flock into southern Algeria and into the Sahel (almost half of Mali is held by al-Qaeda-linked formations). The entry of these forces gave the local elites and the

West the justification to further tighten limited trade union freedoms and to excise the left from the ranks of the established political parties. It is not as if the leaders of the mainline political parties are right-wing or center-right, but that whatever their orientation, they have no real independence from the will of Paris and Washington. They became—to use a word on the ground—“stooges” of the West.

Absent any reliable political instruments, the discarded rural and petty-bourgeois sections of the country turn to their children in the armed forces for leadership. People like Burkina Faso’s Captain Ibrahim Traoré (born 1988), who was raised in the rural province of Mouhoun, and Colonel Assimi Goïta (born 1988), who comes from the cattle market town and military redoubt of Kati, represent these broad class fractions perfectly. Their communities have been utterly left out of the hard austerity programs of the International Monetary Fund, of the theft of their resources by Western multinationals, and of the payments for Western military garrisons in the country. Discarded populations with no real political platform to speak for them, these communities have rallied behind their young men in the military. These are “Colonel’s Coups”—coups of ordinary people who have no other options—not “General’s Coups”—coups of the elites to stem the political advancement of the people. That is why the coup in Niger is being defended in mass rallies from Niamey to the small, remote towns that border Libya. When I traveled to these regions before the pandemic, it was clear that the anti-French sentiment found no channel of expression other than hope for a military coup that would bring in leaders such as Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, who had been assassinated in 1987. Captain Traoré, in fact, sports a red beret like Sankara, speaks with Sankara’s left-wing frankness, and even mimics Sankara’s diction. It would be a mistake to see these men as from the left since they are moved by anger at the failure of the elites and of Western policy. They do not come to power with a well-worked out agenda built from left political traditions.

The Niger military leaders have formed a twenty-one-person cabinet headed by Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine, a civilian who had been a finance minister in a previous government and worked at the African Development Bank in Chad. Military leaders are prominent in the cabinet. Whether the appointment of this civilian-led cabinet will divide the ranks of ECOWAS is to be seen. Certainly, Western imperialist forces—notably the United States with troops on the ground in Niger—would not like to see this torque of coups remain in place.

Europe—through French leadership—had shifted the borders of their continent from north of the Mediterranean Sea to south of the Sahara Desert, suborning the Sahel states into a project known as G-5 Sahel. Now with anti-French governments in three of these states (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) and with the possibility of trouble in the two remaining states (Chad and Mauritania), Europe will have to retreat to its coastline. Sanctions to deplete the mass support of the new governments will increase, and the possibility of military intervention will hang over the region like a famished vulture.

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# Oppenheimer Paradox: Power Of Science And The Weakness Of Scientists



*Prabir Purkayastha - Photo:  
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The new blockbuster film on Oppenheimer has brought back the memories of the first nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima. It has raised complex questions on the nature of the society that permitted such bombs to be developed and used and the stockpiling of nuclear arsenals that can destroy the world many times over. Did the infamous McCarthy era and hunting for reds everywhere have any relationship with the pathology of a society that suppressed its guilt over the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, substituting it instead with a belief in its exceptionalism? What explains the transformation of Oppenheimer, who had emerged as the “hero” of the Manhattan Project that built the atomic bomb, to a villain and then forgotten?

I remember my first encounter with American guilt over the two atom bombs dropped on Japan. I was attending a conference on distributed computer controls in Monterey, California, in 1985, and our hosts were the Lawrence Livermore Laboratories. This was the weapons laboratory that had developed the hydrogen bomb. During dinner, the wife of one of the nuclear scientists asked the Japanese professor at the table if the Japanese understood why the Americans had to drop the bomb on Japan. That it saved a million lives of American soldiers? And many more Japanese? Was she looking for absolution for the guilt that all Americans carried? Or was she seeking confirmation that what she had been told and believed was the truth? That this belief was shared even by the victims of the bomb?

This is not about the Oppenheimer film; I am only using it as a peg to talk about why the atomic bomb represented multiple ruptures in society. Not just at the level of war, where this new weapon changed the parameters of war completely. But also the recognition in society that science was no longer the concern of the scientists alone but of all of us. For scientists, it also became a question that what



they did in the laboratories had real-world consequences, including the possible destruction of humanity itself. It also brought home that this was a new era, the era of big science that needed mega bucks!

Strangely enough, two of the foremost names of scientists at the core of the anti-nuclear bomb movement after the war also had a major role in initiating the Manhattan Project. Leo Szilard, a Hungarian scientist who had become a refugee in England first and then in the United States, sought Einstein's help in petitioning President Roosevelt for the United States to build the bomb. He was afraid that if Nazi Germany built it first, it would conquer the world. Szilard joined the Manhattan Project, though he was located not in Los Alamos but in the University of Chicago's Metallurgical Laboratories. Szilard also campaigned within the Manhattan Project for a [demonstration of the bomb](#) before its use on Japan. Einstein also tried to reach President Roosevelt with his appeal against the use of the bomb. But Roosevelt died, with [Einstein's letter unopened on his desk](#). He was replaced by Vice-President Truman, who thought that the bomb would give the United States a nuclear monopoly, therefore, help subjugate the Soviet Union in the [post-War scenario](#).

Turning to the Manhattan Project. It is the scale of the project that was staggering, even by today's standards. At its peak, it had employed 125,000 people directly, and if we include the many other industries who were either directly or indirectly produced parts or equipment for the bomb, the number would be close to half a million. The costs again were huge, \$2 billion in 1945 (around [\\$30-50 billion today](#)). The scientists were an elite group that included Hans Bethe, Enrico Fermi, Nils Bohr, James Franck, Oppenheimer, Edward Teller (the villain of the story later), Richard Feynman, Harold Urey, Klaus Fuchs (who shared atomic secrets with the Soviets) and many more glittering names. More than [two dozen Nobel prize winners](#) were associated with the Manhattan Project in various capacities.

But science was only a small part of the project. The Manhattan Project wanted to build two kinds of bombs: one using uranium 235 isotope and the other plutonium. How do we separate fissile material, U 235, from U 238? How do we concentrate weapons grade plutonium? How to do both at an industrial scale? How do we set up the chain reaction to create fission, bringing sub-critical fissile material together to create a critical mass? All these required metallurgists, chemists, engineers, explosive experts, and the fabrication of completely new



plants and equipment spread over hundreds of sites. All of it is to be done at record speeds. This was a science “experiment” being done, not at a laboratory scale, but on an industrial scale. That is why the huge budget and the size of the human power involved.

The U.S. government convinced their citizens that Hiroshima, and three days after that, the Nagasaki bombings led to the surrender of Japan. Based on archival and other evidence, it is clear that more than the nuclear bombs, the Soviet Union [declaring war against Japan](#) was what [led to its surrender](#). They have also shown that the number of “one million American lives saved” due to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as it avoided an invasion of Japan, had no basis. It was a number created entirely for propaganda purposes.

While the American people were given these figures as serious calculations, what was completely censored were the actual pictures of the victims of the two bombs. The only picture available of the Hiroshima bombing—the mushroom cloud—was the one taken by the gunner of Enola Gay. Even when a few photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were released months after the nuclear bombings, they were only of shattered buildings, none of actual human beings.

The United States, basking in their victory over Japan, did not want it to be marred by the visuals of the horror of the nuclear bomb. The United States dismissed people dying of a mysterious disease, what the United States knew was radiation sickness, as propaganda by the Japanese. To quote General Leslie Groves who led the Manhattan Project, these were “[Tokyo Tales](#)”. It took seven years for the human toll to be visible, and only after the United States ceased its occupation of Japan. Even this was only a few pictures, as Japan was still cooperating with the United States in the hushing up of the horror of the nuclear bomb. The full visual account of what happened in Hiroshima had to wait till the sixties: the pictures of people vaporized leaving only an image on the stone on which they were sitting, survivors with skin hanging from their bodies, people dying of radiation sickness.

The other part of the nuclear bomb was the role of the scientists. They became the heroes who had shortened the war and saved one million American lives. In this myth making, the nuclear bomb was converted from a major industrial scale effort to a [secret formula discovered by a few physicists](#) which gave the United States enormous power in the Post War era. This was what made Oppenheimer a

hero for the American people. He symbolized the scientific community and its godlike powers. And also the target for people like Teller, who later on combined with others to bring Oppenheimer down.

But if Oppenheimer was a hero just a few years back, how did they succeed in pulling him down?

It is difficult to imagine that the United States had a strong left movement before the 2nd World War. Apart from the presence of the communists in the workers movements, the world of the intelligentsia— literature, cinema and the physicists—also had a strong communist presence. As can be seen in the Oppenheimer film. The idea that [science and technology can be planned](#) as Bernal was arguing in the UK, and should be used for public good was what the scientists had embraced. That is why the physicists, at that time at the forefront of the cutting edge in sciences—relativity, quantum mechanics—were also at the forefront of the social and political debates *in* science and *on* science.

It is this world of science, a critical worldview collided with the new world where the United States should be the exceptional nation and the sole global hegemon. Any weakening of this hegemony could only happen because some people, traitors to this nation, gave away “our” national secrets. Any development anywhere else could be only a result of theft, and nothing else. This campaign was also helped due to the belief that the atom bomb was the result of a few equations that scientists had discovered and could therefore be easily leaked to enemies.

This was the genesis of the McCarthy era, a war on the U.S. artistic, academic and the scientific community. For a search for spies under the bed. The military industrial complex was being born in the United States and soon took over the scientific establishment. It was the military and the energy—nuclear energy—budget that would henceforth determine the fate of scientists and their grants. Oppenheimer needed to be punished as an example to others. The scientists should not set themselves up against the gods of the military industrial complex and their vision of world domination.

Oppenheimer’s fall from grace served another purpose. It was a lesson to the scientific community that if it crossed the security state, no one was big enough. Even though Rosenbergs—Julius and Ethel—were executed they were relatively minor figures. Julius had not leaked any atomic secrets, only kept the Soviet

Union abreast of the developments. Ethel, though a communist, had nothing to do with any spying. The only person who did leak atomic “secrets” was Klaus Fuchs, a German communist party member, who escaped to the UK, worked in the bomb project first in the UK and then in the Manhattan project as a part of the British team there. He made important contributions to the nuclear bomb triggering mechanism and shared these with the Soviet Union. Fuchs’ contribution would have shortened the Soviet bomb by possibly a year. As a whole host of nations have shown, once we know a fissile bomb is possible, it is easy for scientists and technologists to duplicate it. As has been done by countries as small as North Korea.

The Oppenheimer tragedy was not that he was victimized in the McCarthy era and lost his security clearance. Einstein never had security clearance, so that need not have been a major calamity for him either. It was his public humiliation during the hearings when he challenged the withdrawal of his security clearance that broke him. The physicists, the golden boys of the atomic era, had finally been shown their true place in the emerging world of the military industrial complex.

Einstein, Szilard, Rotblatt and others had foreseen this world. They, unlike Oppenheimer, took to the path of building a [movement against the nuclear bomb](#). The scientists, having built the bomb, had to now act as conscience keepers of the world, against a bomb that can destroy all humanity. The bomb that still hangs as a Damocles sword over our heads.

*Byline:*

[Prabir Purkayastha](#)

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This article was produced in partnership by [Newslick](#) and [Globetrotter](#).

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*Source:*

Globetrotter

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# U.S. Leaders Are Split On China Policy



*Richard D. Wolff -*

*Photo: YouTube*

On the one hand, U.S. policy aims to constrain China's economic, political, and military development because it has now become the United States' chief economic competitor and thus enemy. On the other hand, U.S. policy seeks to secure the many benefits to the United States of its companies' trade with and investments in [China](#). U.S. debates over "decoupling" the two countries' economies versus the milder version of the same thing—"de-risking"—exemplify, on both sides, U.S. policy's split approach to China.

The difficult reality for the United States is economic dependence on the world's number two economy that deepens with China's relentless march toward becoming the world's number one. Likewise, China's stunningly rapid growth over recent decades entangled it in a complex economic codependence with the U.S. market, the U.S. dollar, and U.S. interest rates. In stark contrast, neither the Soviet Union nor Russia ever offered the U.S. economic opportunities or competitive challenges comparable to what China now does. In this context, consider World Bank [2022 data](#) on GDPs in Russia, Germany, China, and the United States: \$1.5 trillion, \$3.9 trillion, \$14.7 trillion, and \$20.9 trillion, respectively.

The political right wings of both major U.S. political parties and the military-industrial complex have long prevailed in shaping how U.S. mainstream media

treat the country's foreign policies. Over the last decade especially, the media has increasingly accused China of aggressively expanding its global influence, of authoritarianism at home, and of policies targeting the United States. Over recent decades, big business interests promote a quite different U.S. foreign policy prioritizing profitable coexistence between the United States and China. U.S. policy splits and oscillates between these two poles. One day Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan Chase bank and U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen go to Beijing to support mutuality of interests while at the same time, President Biden labels Xi Jinping a "dictator."

The history and legacy of the Cold War accustomed U.S. media, politicians, and academics to traffic in hyperbolic denunciations of communism plus parties and governments they link to it. Right-wing political forces have always been eager to update anti-Soviet, Cold War logics and slogans for use against China's government and Communist Party as continuing villains. Old (Taiwan and Hong Kong) and new issues (Uyghurs) mark an ongoing campaign.

Yet as the Cold War wound down and then collapsed with the USSR's demise, Nixon and Kissinger reconnected with a China already launched on an economic development surge that never stopped. Capitalists from the system's old centers in the G7 (Western Europe, North America, and Japan) poured investments into China to profit from its relatively much lower wages and its rapidly growing internal market. Over the last 50 years, consumer goods and capital goods flowed out of factories in China to markets around the world. China became deeply entangled in global supply chains. Exports from China brought an inflow of payments in U.S. dollars. China lent many of those dollars back to the U.S. Treasury to fund its growing budget deficits. China joined Japan as the two major creditor countries of the United States, the world's greatest debtor country.

China's investment of its accumulating dollars in U.S. Treasury bonds helped to enable the fast-rising U.S. national debt over the last half-century. That helped keep U.S. interest rates low to fuel U.S. economic growth and its recoveries from several economic crashes. China's relatively low-priced exports reflected its low wages and active government development supports. Those exports to the United States helped prevent inflation over most of those years. In turn, low prices reduced pressures from employees for higher wages and thereby supported U.S. capitalists' profits. In these and still other ways, U.S.-China connections became deeply embedded in the functioning and success of U.S. capitalism. Cutting those

connections would risk very adverse economic consequences for the United States.

Moreover, many proposals favoring such cutting are ineffective and ill-informed fantasies. If the U.S. government could force United States and other multinational corporations to close up shop in China, they would most likely move to other low-wage Asian locations. They would not return to the United States because its wages and other expenses are too high and thus non-competitive. Where they do go will entail sourcing inputs from China, already their most competitive producer. In short, forcing capitalists to leave China will help the United States minimally and hurt the Chinese minimally as well. Closing off the China market for U.S. microchip-makers is likewise a faulty fantasy. Without access to the booming Chinese market, U.S.-based companies will be uncompetitive with other chip-makers based in countries *not* closed out of the Chinese market.

U.S. capitalism needs the inflow of most Chinese exports and needs inclusion in China's markets. U.S. megabanks need access to China's fast-growing markets or else European, Japanese, and Chinese banks will eventually outcompete the U.S. banks. Even if the United States could force or maneuver G7 banks to join a U.S.-led exit from China, China's banks and those of its allies in India, Russia, Brazil, and South Africa (the BRICS) would control access to the profitable financing of China's growth. In terms of aggregate GDPs, the BRICS are already a bigger economic system, taken together, than the G7 taken together, and the gap between them keeps widening.

Were the United States to pursue its resumed Cold War crusade against China—economically, politically, and/or militarily without nuclear warfare—the results could risk major dislocations, losses, and costly adjustments for U.S. capitalism. With nuclear warfare, of course, the risks are still larger. Other than extreme parts of the U.S. right wing, no one wants to take such risks. The United States' G7 allies surely do not. Already they are imagining their desired futures in a bipolar world split between falling and rising hegemonies and perhaps counterhegemonic groupings of other nations. Most of the world recognizes China's relentless growth and expansion as the major dynamic of today's world economy. Most likewise see the United States as the major antagonist tilting against China's rise into a global superpower position.

What many observers of the China-U.S. clash miss are those of its causes and shapers located in the extreme tensions and contradictions besetting the employer-employee class conflicts within both superpowers. Those class conflicts in the United States respond to this basic question: whose wealth, income, and social position will have to bear the major burden of accommodating the costs of declining hegemony? Will the redistribution of wealth upward across the last 3-40 years persist, be stopped, or be reversed? Are rising labor militancy across the United States and the quasi-fascistic resurging U.S. right wing foretastes of struggles to come?

China's remarkable ascension rapidly transformed a rural, poor, agricultural economy into an urban, middle-income, and industrial economy. The parallel transformation in Western Europe took centuries and occasioned profound, bitter, and violent class struggles. In China, the transformation took a few decades and was likely the more profoundly traumatic for that reason. Will similar class struggles erupt there? Are they building beneath the surface of Chinese society already? Might the Global South be where global capitalism—the system defined by its employer-versus-employee productive core—goes finally to play the endgame of its profit-maximization fetish?

Both the United States and China display economic systems organized around workplace organizations where a small number of employers dominate a large number of hired employees. In the United States, those workplace organizations are mostly private enterprises. China displays a hybrid system whose enterprises are both private and state-owned and operated, but where both types of workplace organizations share the employer-versus-employee organization. That organization typically features the employer class accumulating far more wealth than the employee class. Moreover, that wealthy class of employers can and usually does buy dominant political power as well. The resulting mix of economic and political inequality provokes tensions, conflicts, and social change.

That reality is already well established in both the United States and China. Thus, for example, the United States has not raised its federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour since 2009. Both major political parties are responsible. Yellen gives speeches bemoaning the deepening inequalities in the United States, but the deepening persists. In the tradition of blaming the victim, American capitalism tends to fault the poor for their poverty. Xi Jinping also worries openly about deepening inequalities: likely more urgent in nations calling themselves socialist.

Even though China has taken significant steps to reduce its recently extreme economic inequalities, they remain a serious social problem there too. The U.S.-China clash depends as much on each nation's internal class conflicts and struggles as it depends on their policies toward one another.

China adjusts to the twists and turns in the United States' split policy approach. It prepares for both eventualities: cutthroat competition abetted by intense economic nationalism possibly including military warfare or a conjointly planned peaceful economic coexistence. As China awaits the United States' decisions on which way to guide the United States' economic future, China's growth will likely continue, matching and then surpassing the United States' global economic footprint. China's stunning economic growth success across the last 30 years secures China's remarkable hybrid economy of private and state enterprises supervised by and subordinated to a powerful political party. An anxious world awaits the next chapter in capitalism's always dangerously uneven mix of class and national struggles.

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*Source:*

Independent Media Institute

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# Niger Is The Fourth Country In The Sahel To Experience An Anti-Western Coup



Niger – wikipedia.org

At 3 a.m. on July 26, 2023, the presidential guard [detained](#) President Mohamed Bazoum in Niamey, the capital of Niger. Troops, led by Brigadier General Abdourahmane Tchiani closed the country's borders and declared a curfew. The coup d'état was immediately condemned by the [Economic Community of West African States](#), by the [African Union](#), and by the [European Union](#). Both France and the United States—which have military bases in Niger—said that they were watching the situation closely. A tussle between the Army—which claimed to be pro-Bazoum—and the presidential guard threatened the capital, but it soon fizzled out. On July 27, General Abdou Sidikou Issa of the army released a [statement](#) saying that he would accept the situation to “avoid a deadly confrontation between the different forces which... could cause a bloodbath.” Brigadier General Tchiani went on television on July 28 to [announce](#) that he was the new president of the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie or CNSP).

The coup in Niger follows similar coups in Mali (August 2020 and May 2021) and Burkina Faso (January 2022 and September 2022), and Guinea (September 2021). Each of these coups was led by military officers angered by the presence of French and U.S. troops and by the permanent economic crises inflicted on their countries. This region of Africa—the Sahel—has faced a cascade of [crises](#): the desiccation of the land due to the climate catastrophe, the rise of Islamic militancy due to the 2011 NATO war in Libya, the increase in smuggling networks to traffic weapons, humans, and drugs across the desert, the appropriation of natural resources—including uranium and gold—by Western companies that have simply not paid adequately for these riches, and the entrenchment of Western military forces through the construction of bases and the operation of these armies with impunity.

Two days after the coup, the CNSP [announced](#) the names of the 10 officers who lead the CNSP. They come from the entire range of the armed forces, from the army (General Mohamed Toumba) to the Air Force (Colonel Major Amadou Abouramane) to the national police (Deputy General Manager Assahaba Ebankawel). It is by now clear that one of the most influential members of the CNSP is General Salifou Mody, former chief of staff of the military and leader in the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, which led the February 2010 coup against President Mamadou Tandja and which governed Niger until Bazoum's predecessor Mahamadou Issoufou won the 2011 presidential election. It was during Issoufou's time in office that the United States government [built](#) the world's largest drone base in Agadez and that the French special forces [garrisoned](#) the city of Irlit on behalf of the uranium mining company Orano (formerly a part of Areva).

It is important to note that General Salifou Mody is perceived as an influential member of CNSP given his influence in the army and his international contacts. On February 28, 2023, Mody met with the United States Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley during the African Chiefs of Defense Conference in Rome to [discuss](#) “regional stability, including counterterrorism cooperation and the continued fight against violent extremism in the region.” On March 9, Mody visited Mali to [meet](#) with Colonel Assimi Goïta and the Chief of Staff of the Malian army [General Oumar Diarra](#) to strengthen military cooperation between Niger and Mali. A few days later on March 16, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [visited](#) Niger to meet with Bazoum. In what many in Niger

perceived as a sidelining of Mody, he was [appointed](#) on June 1 as the Nigerien ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. Mody, it is said in Niamey, is the voice in the ear of Brigadier General Tchiani, the titular head of state.

### *Corruption and the West*

A highly informed source in Niger tells us that the reason why the military moved against Bazoum is that “he’s corrupt, a pawn of France. Nigerians were fed up with him and his gang. They are in the process of arresting the members of the deposed system, who embezzled public funds, many of whom have taken refuge in foreign embassies.” The issue of corruption hangs over Niger, a country with one of the world’s most lucrative uranium deposits. The “corruption” that is talked about in Niger is not about petty bribes by government officials, but about an entire structure—developed during French colonial rule—that prevents Niger from establishing sovereignty over its raw materials and over its development.

At the heart of the “corruption” is the so-called “joint venture” between Niger and France called Société des mines de l’Aïr (Somaïr), which owns and operates the uranium industry in the country. Strikingly, 85 percent of Somaïr is owned by France’s Atomic Energy Commission and two French companies, while only 15 percent is owned by Niger’s government. Niger [produces](#) over 5 percent of the world’s uranium, but its uranium is of a very high quality. Half of Niger’s [export receipts](#) are from sales of uranium, oil, and gold. One in three lightbulbs in France are [powered](#) by uranium from Niger, at the same time as 42 percent of the African country’s population [lived](#) below the poverty line. The people of Niger have watched their wealth slip through their fingers for decades. As a mark of the government’s weakness, over the course of the past decade, Niger has lost over \$906 million in only 10 arbitration cases brought by multinational corporations before the [International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes](#) and the [International Chamber of Commerce](#).

France stopped using the franc in 2002 when it switched to the Euro system. But, fourteen former French colonies continued to use the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA), which gives immense advantages to France (50 percent of the reserves of these countries have to be held in the French Treasury and France’s devaluations of the CFA—[as in 1994](#)—have catastrophic effects on the country’s that use it). In 2015, Chad’s president Idriss Déby Itno [said](#) that the CFA “pulls African economies down” and that the “time had come to cut the cord that prevents Africa from developing.” Talk now across the Sahel is for not only the

removal of French troops—as has taken place in [Burkina Faso](#) and in [Mali](#)—but of a break with the French economic hold on the region.

### *The New Non-Alignment*

At the 2023 Russia-Africa Summit in July, Burkina Faso's leader, President Ibrahim Traoré wore a red beret that echoed the uniform of the assassinated socialist leader of his country, Thomas Sankara. Traoré reacted strongly to the condemnation of the military coups in the Sahel, including to a recent [visit](#) to his country by an African Union delegation. "A slave that does not rebel does not deserve pity," he [said](#). "The African Union must stop condemning Africans who decide to fight against their own puppet regimes of the West."

In February, Burkina Faso had hosted a meeting that included the governments of Mali and Guinea. On the agenda is the creation of a new [federation](#) of these states. It is likely that Niger will be invited into these conversations.

*Byline:*

[Vijay Prashad](#) and [Kambale Musavuli](#)

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*Source:*

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# A Brief Neocolonial History Of The Five UN Security Council Permanent Members



*John P. Ruehl*

*Understanding the actions and justifications behind territorial colonial behavior by the UN Security Council since 1945.*

One of the underlying principles of the UN Charter is the protection of the sovereign rights of states. Yet since 1945, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (Soviet Union/Russia, France, UK, U.S., and China) have consistently used military force to undermine this notion. And while acts of seizing territory have grown rare, ongoing military domination allows imperialism to further manifest through economic, political, and cultural control.

[System justification theory](#) helps explain how policymakers and the public defend and rationalize unfair systems through the surprising capacity to find logical and moral coherence in any society. “[Reframing](#)” neocolonial policies to reinforce system-justifying narratives, often by highlighting the need to defend historical and cultural ties and maintain geopolitical stability, has been essential to sustaining the status quo of international affairs.

Naturally, the five UNSC members have often accused one another of imperialism and colonialism to deflect criticism from their own practices. Yet prolonging these relationships in former colonies or spheres of influence simply perpetuates dependency, hinders economic development, and encourages instability through inequality and exploitation.

*France*

In response to comments made by Russia’s foreign ministry in February 2023,

[which singled out France](#) for continuing to treat African countries “from the point of view of its colonial past,” the French foreign ministry [chastised Russia](#) for its “neocolonial political involvement” in Africa. The previous [June](#), French President Emmanuel Macron meanwhile accused Russia of being “one of the last colonial imperial powers” during a visit to Benin, a former French colony that last saw [an attempted coup](#) by French mercenaries in 1977.

Independence movements in European colonies grew substantially during World War II, and [Paris granted greater autonomy](#) to its possessions, most of them in Africa, in 1945. Yet France was intent on keeping most of its empire and became embroiled in independence conflicts in [Algeria](#) and [Indochina](#). Growing public sentiment in France, since referred to as “[utilitarian anti-colonialism](#),” meanwhile promoted decolonization, believing that the empire was actually holding back France economically and because “the emancipation of colonial people was unavoidable,” according to French journalist Raymond Cartier.

France left Indochina in defeat in 1954, while [in 1960](#), 14 of France’s former colonies gained independence. And after Algeria won its independence in 1962, France’s empire was all but gone. But like other newly independent states, many former French colonies were unstable and vulnerable to or reliant on French military power. France has [launched dozens of military interventions and coups](#) since the 1960s in Africa to stabilize friendly governments, topple hostile ones, and support its interests.

French military dominance has been able to secure a hospitable environment for [French multinational companies](#) and preferential trade [agreements and currency](#) arrangements. More recently, the French military has consistently intervened in Côte d’Ivoire [since 2002](#), as well as in the countries of the Sahel region (particularly Mali) since 2013, and the Central African Republic (CAR) since 2016. The French-led campaigns have received [significant U.S. help](#). Speaking in 2019 on the French deployments, [Macron stated](#) that the French military was not there “for neo-colonialist, imperialist, or economic reasons. We’re there for our collective security and the region.”

But [growing anti-French sentiment](#) in former colonies in recent years has undermined Paris’ historical military dominance. Closer relations between Mali and Russia saw France pull the last of its troops out of the country [in 2022](#), with Russian private military company (PMC) forces replacing them. A similar situation

occurred in the CAR [months later](#), and in 2023, French troops pulled out of Burkina Faso, with Russian PMC liaisons having reportedly been [observed in the country](#).

Frustration with the negative effects of France's ongoing influence in former colonies has also been [directly tied to problems in immigrant communities living in France](#). The fatal shooting of a North African teenager by police in the suburbs of Paris in June 2023 caused nights of rioting, with Russia and China [accusing France of authoritarianism](#) for its security response.

## UK

Shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson denounced the Russian president for still believing in "[imperial conquest](#)." Yet like France, the UK has often been accused of using military force to help promote British interests in its former empire, including the dominant role of [British banks and financial services](#) and other [firms](#), for decades.

As the only European colonial power not defeated by Nazi Germany, British forces were sent to secure [Indochina](#) and [Indonesia](#) before French and Dutch forces could return after World War II. But London's focus soon turned to protecting its own empire and emerging independent states. British forces helped suppress a communist insurgency in [Malaysia](#) from 1948-1960, fought in the [Kenya Emergency](#) from 1952-1960, and [intervened across](#) former colonies in Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Pacific islands.

Additionally, British, French, and Israeli forces invaded Egypt in 1956 after the Egyptian government nationalized the Suez Canal before diplomatic pressure from the U.S. and Soviet Union forced them to retreat. [Over the next few decades](#), almost all former British colonies were steadily granted independence, and by 1980 the rate of British military interventions abroad had slowed.

Nonetheless, the 1982 Falklands War somewhat reversed the perception of the UK as a declining, imperial power. The successful defense of the Falkland Islands' small, vulnerable population against Argentinian aggression enhanced the perception of the UK as a defender of human rights and champion of self-determination. [Additionally](#), Britain's focus on naval power "was important to the self-image of empire" as naval strength is often perceived as less threatening than land armies. Prominent British politicians such as former Prime Minister David



Cameron have similarly restated Britain's commitment to [protecting the islands from Argentinian colonialism](#).

More recently, the British military intervened in the Sierra Leone Civil War [in 2000](#) and was also a crucial partner for the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. And alongside ongoing [official deployments](#), British Special Forces have meanwhile been active in 11 countries secretly from 2011-2023, a report by [Action Against Armed Violence revealed](#). The residual presence of the British military has often made it difficult to embrace the “new and equal partnership” between Britain and former colonies, championed by former British Foreign Minister William Hague [in 2012](#).

The domestic perception of Britain's colonial legacy continues to play a divisive role in British politics and society. Winston Churchill, the winner of a [2002 BBC poll](#) on the top 100 Great Britons, was “cited as a defender of an endangered country/people/culture, not as an exponent of empire.” Yet during anti-racism [protests in the UK in 2020](#), a statue of the former prime minister was covered up to avoid being damaged by protestors. Believing him to be a figurehead of the cruelty of British colonialism, the covering up of Churchill's statue shows the contrasting and evolving domestic views of British imperialism.

### *Soviet Union/Russia*

After 1945, Soviet troops were stationed across the Eastern Bloc to deter NATO and suppress dissent. Several military operations in support of communist governments against “counterrevolutionary” protestors were approved in East Germany ([1953](#)), Hungary ([1956](#)), and Czechoslovakia ([1968](#)). Soviet forces also took part in a decade-long conflict to prop up Afghanistan's government from [1979-1989](#).

In [Asia](#), [Africa](#), and [Latin America](#), however, the Soviet Union presented itself as the leading anti-colonial force. It proclaimed an ideological duty to financially, politically, and militarily support numerous pro-independence/communist movements and governments, tying these efforts to confronting the colonial West.

The Soviet collapse forced Moscow to prioritize maintaining Russia's influence in former Soviet states. But even today, [many Russians](#) do not see the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire as empires, as [Russians insist](#) that they lived alongside their colonized subjects through a “[Friendship of Peoples](#),” unlike the British or



French. This sentiment drives much of the rhetoric defending Russia's ongoing dominance across parts of the former Soviet Union.

On the eve of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin once again [called into question Ukrainian statehood](#). Ukraine, like [other former Soviet states](#), has often been labeled an artificial creation by Russian politicians. Alongside [the necessity of military force to protect](#) Russian speakers/citizens, Russian officials have justified conflict and exploitation of fragile post-Soviet borders in separatist regions of [Georgia](#), [Moldova](#), and [Armenia/Azerbaijan](#) since the early 1990s.

Russia has also worked to maintain a dependency on its military power in former Soviet states. The Kazakh government's reliance on the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) military alliance was clearly demonstrated during the CSTO intervention during protests [in January 2022](#). Prominent Russian politicians such as Sergey Lavrov have consistently compared the CSTO favorably to [NATO](#), but the lack of support from CSTO member states (except for Belarus) for Russia in its war with Ukraine has demonstrated its limitations.

The Russian military has also been active in Syria since 2011, while dozens of Russian private military companies have increased operations [across Africa](#) over the last decade. The Kremlin is increasingly tying these conflicts, as well as [Russia's war](#) in Ukraine, to reinforce Moscow's traditional role as an anti-colonial power. Russia has performed significant [outreach to Africa](#) since the start of the war, and at the annual St. Petersburg economic forum in 2023, Putin declared the "[ugly neo-colonialism](#)" of international affairs was ending as a result of its war.

By amplifying criticism over the domination of global affairs by the "[Golden Billion](#)" in the West, the Kremlin believes it can blunt foreign and domestic criticism over its war in Ukraine, as well as over its approach to other post-Soviet states.

## USA

The USA, born out of an anti-colonial struggle, has naturally been wary of being perceived as a colonial power. U.S. Presidents voiced support for decolonization after World War II, [particularly John F. Kennedy](#). But because "[anti-communism came before anti-colonialism](#)," Washington often supported neocolonial practices by European powers to prevent the spread of Soviet influence and secure Western

interests.

The U.S. has also been criticized for its own imperial behavior toward Latin America since 1823 when the Monroe Doctrine was first proclaimed. The United States's sentiment that it had a special right to intervene in the Americas increased during the Cold War as Washington grew wary of communism. U.S. military forces intervened in Guatemala in [1954](#), Cuba in [1961](#), the Dominican Republic in [1965](#), Grenada in [1983](#), and Panama in [1989](#) to enforce Washington's political will.

The U.S. War on Drugs, launched in 1969, also [destabilized much of Latin America](#), while other instances of covertly [fostering instability](#) have prevented the emergence of strong sovereign states in the region.

Major foreign conflicts involving U.S. forces since 1945 meanwhile include the Korean War (1950-1953), Vietnam War (1955-1975), the Gulf War (1990), intervention in the Yugoslav Wars (1991, 1999), and the War on Terror (2001-present). U.S. forces also intervened in Haiti in [1994-1995](#) during "Operation Uphold Democracy" and again [in 2004](#), while leading international interventions in Libya (2011) and Syria (2014). These interventions have often been criticized for perpetuating instability and weakening local institutions.

Nonetheless, the global U.S. military presence has continued to grow. [Since 2007](#), United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) has seen the U.S. expand its military footprint across Africa and today, [750 known military bases](#) are spread across 80 countries. U.S. special operations forces are meanwhile estimated to be active [in 154 countries](#). The U.S. global military presence also gives Washington considerable control over transportation routes, with the U.S. Navy routinely [seizing ships](#) violating trade restrictions.

U.S. officials have continued to lean on the country's history as a former British colony to highlight solidarity with other countries and propose greater cooperation. [In 2013](#), for example, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry stated that the Monroe Doctrine, which allowed the U.S. "to step in and oppose the influence of European powers in Latin America," was over. And in a 2023 address from the White House briefing room proclaiming the start of Caribbean-American history month, [President Biden noted](#) how the U.S. and Caribbean countries are bound by common values and a shared history of "overcoming the yoke of colonialism."

But [domestic divides over Washington's](#) role in global affairs have increased calls for the U.S. to return to its early foreign policy of isolationism. While this will not be enough for the U.S. to retreat on the global stage, it has helped prevent the U.S. military from committing to new major conflicts in recent years.

### *China*

The conclusion of the Chinese Civil War in 1949 marked the end of China's "[Century of Humiliation](#)" at the hands of European powers, the U.S., and Japan. The victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) allowed Beijing to consolidate power and look toward expanding China's borders. This included launching the "peaceful liberation" of both [Xinjiang](#) in 1949 and [Tibet](#) in 1950, steadily bringing these regions under China's control—though China only took Taiwan's seat at the UN in 1971.

China's history of exploitation by foreign powers has [frequently been cited](#) by Beijing to increase solidarity with other countries which suffered from Western imperialism. Key to this messaging was fighting [against U.S.-led forces](#) in the Korean War, as part of a "[Great Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea](#)" and opposing wider Western neocolonialism, while Chinese forces also engaged in border clashes with the [Soviet Union](#) as relations between Moscow and Beijing soured in the 1960s.

But Chinese forces have also been involved in clashes with former European colonies. This includes confrontations [with India](#), as well as China's launch of a major invasion of northern Vietnam [in 1979](#). Tens of thousands of casualties were recorded on both sides during the month-long operation, while continued border clashes between Chinese and Vietnamese forces continued until relations were normalized in 1991.

Since 2003, Chinese officials have instead placed great emphasis on China's "[peaceful rise](#)," which has seen the country drastically increase its power in world affairs without having to resort to military force. But while large-scale Chinese military operations have not materialized, China has [rapidly increased](#) the construction of ports, air bases, and other military installations to enforce its territorial control over the South China Sea over the last decade, at the expense of several Southeast Asian countries. Chinese President Xi Jinping has [justified these developments](#) because the islands "have been China's territory since ancient times."

China's extensive [maritime militias and civilian distant-water fishing](#) (DWF) fleets have also been accused of asserting Chinese maritime territorial claims while blurring the lines between civilian and military force. Additionally, there is also fear that China's growing economic and military might will be enough to force countries in Central Asia [to accept the Chinese position](#) on various territorial disputes.

While China has avoided any major military operations this century, it has used its growing economic and military might to pressure other countries into accepting its territorial claims. To offset criticism, Chinese officials have turned their attention toward ongoing and historical imperialism by the West. Following British criticism over China's handling of pro-democracy protests in 2019, China criticized the UK for acting with a "colonial mindset," and, in support of Argentina, accused the UK of practicing [colonialism in the Falklands in 2021](#). These claims help sustain domestic support for China's policies, help to increase solidarity among other countries which have suffered from Western imperialism, and put China's geopolitical rivals on the defensive.

### *Conclusions*

It is true that the U.S. military provides necessary security deterrence to numerous countries, and has also proven essential to [responding to natural disasters](#) and other emergencies. But like other major powers, the use of U.S. military force has consistently been abused since 1945. The historical legacy of Western imperialism and interventionism has helped explain why Western calls for global solidarity with Ukraine have [often fallen on deaf ears today](#).

Additionally, some of the consequences of the war in Ukraine, including rising energy and food prices, are being [most acutely felt](#) in poorer countries, while the [growing dominance](#) of Western firms in crucial Ukrainian economic sectors has also undermined the West's messaging over Ukraine further.

Honest accountability by major powers for the historical and ongoing exploitation of weaker countries remains rare. But public, government-funded initiatives, such as the U.S. [Imperial Visions and Revisions](#) exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC, documents the beginning and justification behind empire-building in the U.S., and is an important step to addressing past and contemporary wrongdoing, as envisioned by the UN Charter in 1945. [In 2018](#), French President Macron meanwhile commissioned a report that discovered that

“around 90 to 95 percent of African cultural heritage” was located abroad, prompting the French parliament to pass a bill in 2020 allowing these artifacts to be returned.

The promotion of actual history and accountability may also remove barriers to more selfless assistance to weaker countries by major powers. This approach could, in turn, invite greater cooperation and positive repercussions than costly military interventions, and would also serve as an example for weaker states grappling with their own legacies of violence, exploitation, and suppression.

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