

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.

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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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Of War And Peace The Truth Just Twists

[Rozenberg Quarterly](#)
The Magazine

These are, not for the first time, difficult times for a pacifist. The war that started with Russia's invasion of Ukraine illustrates once again that as an idealist, or utopian if you like, you are left empty-handed.

If we can learn anything from history, it is this: war is of all times, violence is a part of human existence. Most people will answer in the negative when asked if

they want war. For an idealist, that is a hopeful sign. They think they can draw the conclusion that humankind is naturally inclined to the good.

But alas, Stanley Kubrick is right: *You're an idealist, and I pity you as I would the village idiot.* An idealist has no weapons. They only have words and dreams. And those are no match for a hail of bullets. Hope is a bankrupt concept in times of war.

Nevertheless, Willem de Haan writes in his contribution (see below):

Pacifism is not a popular concept in times of war, but among the people who believed in it and practiced it were Jesus of Nazareth and Albert Einstein, John Lennon and Mother Theresa. Call them idealists, but the world would be a far worse place without them.

Kubrick would shake his head if he read this.

Still, it doesn't hurt to make these kinds of voices heard as well.

The shaking of my head a little pityingly happens to me too, however.

But I don't want to give up on all dreams.

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Dimitri Lascaris - One Handshake At A Time



Dimitri Lascaris

Dimitri Lascaris was one of Canada's [leading](#) plaintiff-side securities class action litigators, representing plaintiffs in class actions against multimillion dollar companies before he retired at the age of 52 to devote the remainder of his life to peace and social justice activism. Mr. Lascaris is a member of the Green Party of Canada, and in 2020, he finished second in the party's leadership race. In April 2023, Mr. Lascaris visited Moscow and Russian-occupied Crimea and engaged in a fact-finding expedition to better understand the views of Russians in the context of their country's recent invasion of Ukraine. Shortly after Lascaris returned to Canada, at the behest of the Canada-Wide Peace and Justice Network, he engaged in a nationwide peace tour, calling for his government to stop fueling the war in Ukraine. In this interview with Pitasanna Shanmugathas, Lascaris discussed the views of the Russians he spoke to and his experiences during his trip to Russia. He also explained why he subsequently engaged in a Canada-wide peace tour, shared his thoughts on the censorship and ridicule he faced for his decision to visit Russia and embark on the Canada-wide peace tour, and offered advice to the

social justice minded law students.

This interview has been edited for the purposes of flow and concision.

Pitasanna Shanmugathas: Mr. Lascaris, on April 1, 2023, you landed in Moscow for the first time in your life. Ten days later you were on a train heading to Russian-occupied Crimea. To readers who might be curious, explain why a Canadian born and educated man like yourself decided to visit Russia especially in the context of the country's recent invasion of Ukraine.

Why I went there was not for personal profit. I paid money out of my own pocket to travel there—I was not paid a dime for anything that I did or said while I was there or after I came back to Canada. All the articles I have written about my time in Russia, I do not even solicit donations on my [website](#), nor have I accepted any for the writing of those articles. I went there for one purpose and one purpose only: because I feel we are living through the most dangerous moment in human history. We are on course for a nuclear war. And by the way, a [poll](#) that just came out showed that most Canadians agree with me that we are on trajectory for a nuclear war with Russia. And I, as a matter of conscience, felt I had to do something to try to facilitate a dialogue with this country with which we are at war, and that's why I went. I don't purport to be able to solve this war; I am just one citizen; I am one voice. But I thought, I am in a position to go and try and stimulate some sort of a peace dialogue and if I can do that, I am going to do it.

What were some of the takeaways you had while in Moscow, as well as other parts of the country, in terms of the views Russians held with respect to their country's invasion of Ukraine? Are Russians supportive of Putin's invasion of Ukraine?

First, let me say, I didn't conduct any kind of a poll. I did speak with dozens and dozens of people from across the socioeconomic strata of Russia—people who were university professors, people who were journalists, volunteers in charitable organizations, just people I met on the ground. But, of course, I don't have any kind of scientific polling data to offer you. I can only relay to you what I heard. And, of course, it may be that some of these people didn't feel free to speak, although they were speaking to me in a private setting, not publicly. So, my feeling was that, for the most part, people were telling me how they really felt. What I heard consistently was that NATO is at fault for this, NATO constitutes an

existential threat to Russia, this war is an existential threat to Russia. This is not primarily a war between Russia and Ukraine; it is primarily a war between NATO and Russia which is being fought on Ukrainian soil.

The people doing the fighting and dying on behalf of NATO are overwhelmingly of Ukrainian origin, effectively [being used as] cannon fodder for a NATO war. That was the view expressed to me over and over again.

Interestingly, I never encountered hostility. No one expressed hostility to the peoples of the West. What they feel is that the governments of the West are acting in ways that are profoundly contrary, not only to the interests of the people in Russia, but [also to the interests of] the people of the West themselves. [They believe] this is going to end very badly if people don't come to their senses.

Overwhelmingly, I heard support for what the Russian Federation's government has done, which is reflected by the way in polls. You go to the polling of the [Levada Center](#) website, which is, by the way, very critical of Vladimir Putin, their polls show that currently support for the President is in excess of 80 percent in Russia. If there was criticism of Russian President Vladimir Putin, it is first and foremost that he should've acted sooner rather than wait until NATO built up the Ukrainian military into a formidable fighting force. And secondly, that the military under his command was not being aggressive enough in bringing this war to a rapid and successful conclusion for Russia.

I am sure there is anti-war sentiment in Russia. I am sure there are people there very critical of Vladimir Putin and do not support this invasion. But those people are frankly a minority based on everything I heard, everything I saw, and based upon the polling done.

During your trip to Russia were any of your preconceived notions about the country, in general, challenged?

I should say, I was born in the early 60s, so I am a child of the Cold War. The image that I had of Russia was a grey, drab, dilapidated country, unclean, heavy police presence, oppressive atmosphere, privation—grocery store shelves lightly stocked or not stocked at all, people standing in lines waiting for things—those are the images I grew up with of Russia—a very menacing country. I saw none of that when I was there.

I should preface what I am saying by acknowledging the limitations of my

experience. I was only in central Moscow and then I took a train from central Moscow to Crimea.

And I went all over Crimea but the vast majority of that vast country I did not see. So, I am just talking about what I saw. What I saw in central Moscow and Crimea is a society that is very well organized, clean, I saw very little police presence, uniformed police, the metro system in Moscow was world class, the traffic was very orderly, the buildings were majestic, the grocery store shelves were full, the department store shelves were full, I saw no signs of economic crisis, and people were friendly. I think I was bit of an oddity for them because there are so few people from the West in the country nowadays. People from the West are basically avoiding Russia like the plague—so it was unusual for a lot of people to suddenly find themselves sitting across the table from or meeting in the street somebody from North America and people were curious as to why I came to Russia in the current circumstances. But certainly, there was no hostility—which is something I anticipated, I would be met with at least some hostility, but they were very warm, very gracious, very open to talking about the situation in their country.

During your trip, you met some pretty interesting people such as [Sokol](#), a sniper within the Wagner PMC, a Russian-state funded paramilitary organization, as well as [Genadi](#), a Russian veteran of the Ukraine war. I imagine it takes a great deal of bravery to interact with such characters. Talk about what were some insights you gained from speaking with these military individuals.

They were two very different experiences. Genadi, this interview was setup for me by my translator, whom I hired in Crimea. She is a partner of an American documentary filmmaker by the name of Regis Tremblay, who now lives in Yalta, Crimea. She asked me if I wanted to interview somebody who volunteered and had gone to fight for the pro-Russian rebels in the southeast of Ukraine. I said, "Sure." So, I sat down with him for half an hour. The interview I conducted with him took place at a school for disabled children because his daughter is disabled. With the help of my translator, I asked him why he went to fight. He said, "I'm sixty years old. I served in the military decades ago, but I hadn't served in many years [since] the Soviet era." He said that when the invasion began in February of last year, he sat down with his wife and discussed how he could help. He underwent some military training and enrolled in the territorial defense force in the Donbass. He clarified that he didn't go right up to the frontline but was in the trenches, helping to defend the territory of the Donbass. He said, "I did this

because I feel that these people, to me, are Russians living in the southeast of Ukraine who are fighting against the Ukrainian military, and they are under threat. I felt I could help in some way. I don't regret having done it. I felt it was my duty, and it saddens me to see what is happening. I don't think there is any prospect of the Ukrainian military winning this war. I view Ukrainians as my brothers and sisters, but their comedian President [Zelensky] is bringing ruin upon their country, and I hope that stops." Interestingly, I asked him what he would say to the peoples of the West if given an opportunity to speak to them, and he said that people look at Russia as a threat since it has recovered economically and politically since the devastating Yeltsin era, but they shouldn't view Russia as a threat. "If Russians feel there is an existential threat on their border, they have no alternative but to act."

My experience with Sokol was a different experience. I was on a train travelling from Crimea to Moscow and wasn't anticipating it was going to be full of Russian soldiers.

For some 28 hours, I found myself on a train with Russian soldiers of all stripes and shapes and ranks. There was a dining car and I went into the dining car. I sat down in a booth designed for four people. There was one person sitting—a young man, late 20s maybe early 30s, he gestured at me to come sit down with him. He was drinking some Armenian brandy and looked kind of drunk. He started speaking to me in Russian. I can't speak a word of Russian. He got up, approached me, and whispered in my ear two words, [in English], Wagner and sniper. I did a sort of double take when he said that to me and then he sat back down. As soon as he sat down a young woman sitting two booths away from us, happened to speak fluent English and was Russian. I decided to interview him—and since the woman was fluent in English—I asked her if she would be prepared to translate if I interview this man. She said, "Yes."

I asked [Sokol] how he came to be in Wagner. He told me he was in the middle of serving a sixteen-year prison sentence in a Russian penitentiary for unspecified crimes he committed in the Russian mafia. One day last year Yevgeny Prigozhin, the titular head of Wagner, came to his prison and took the hardened criminals, gathered them in the courtyard, and there Prigozhin made him an offer. The offer was you can come and do six months of military service in Wagner, you might end up dead, you might end up wounded, or you might end up unscathed and leave a free man or you can stay in prison and serve out your sentence. If you come to

fight for Wagner, not only will you be a free man, but you will be paid well for your efforts and you will potentially be regarded as a hero and will have an opportunity to pay your debt to society in an honorable way. Sokol said that he took up the offer not only because he wanted to defend his country but also because the money was good—he was candid about that.

So, he said that he went to the front, was a sniper in Bakhmut. At that point in time, when I spoke to him, Bakhmut was on the verge of falling to the Russians. It has since fallen to the Russians, but it was still being heavily contested and, by all accounts, it has been to date the bloodiest battle of the war—unimaginable casualties and destruction has been visited by the combating sides in that particular battle. He said that what he saw there was unimaginably horrible—the violence and destruction were beyond his contemplation. He didn't want to tell me in much detail what he saw.

Although he did tell me one thing, which I have no way of verifying whether it is true, he told me that he had seen children whose throats had been slit by Ukrainian soldiers—I have no way of verifying whether this is true—but that was the one gruesome detail he was willing to share with me.

As I was talking to him and he was telling me all of this, there were four very large Russian soldiers sitting in the booth next to us, one of whom was apparently a senior officer in the Russian military, and they became agitated at the fact that I was speaking English and asking this man questions. One of them looked at Sokol and said to him in Russian, “You talk too much, shut up.” At that point, he stopped talking, and the conversation ended.

*Your decision to visit Russia, to engage in this fact-finding expedition, was met with a great deal of vilification and denunciation from a number of Canadians. Elizabeth May, the current leader of the Green Party of Canada, to which you belong, took to [Twitter](#) to denounce your decision to visit Russia, claiming it does not reflect the views of the Green Party. Additionally, *The National Post*, a prominent conservative publication in Canada, interviewed you and published [a front-page hit piece](#) about you and the nature of your visit to Russia. Talk about your thoughts on the vilification you faced from Canadians due to your choice to visit Russia.*

I saw that tweet by Elizabeth May. First of all, I don't speak for the Green Party, I never purported to speak for the Green Party. I speak for myself and only myself. Whenever I say something, some criticism of Canadian government foreign policy,

somebody from the mainstream or the right of the political spectrum will tag me on Twitter and often times say this man finished second in the Green Party leadership race in 2020, and immediately I will point out that I do not speak for the Green Party. I speak for myself and only myself. So, I have no problem with Elizabeth May saying that Mr. Lascaris does speak for the Green Party. I say that myself. But when she went onto say that we do not agree with him going to Russia at a time of war [my response to her](#) on Twitter was have you gone to the United States in the past twenty years? Of course, you have. You have probably gone there repeatedly. Did you think that you shouldn't go to the United States after Bush launched a criminal war of aggression in Iraq, engaged in torture at Guantanamo and in black sites around the world? And then Obama comes along and says I'm not going to hold any of these people accountable and himself embarks upon a murderous drone war where countless number of civilians, including children, were killed by American drones. She went to the United States, without question, she did that and so did millions of Canadians who would take a dim view of anybody who travels to Russia. So, this is the height of hypocrisy, there is no reason why you should get criticized for going to Russia at a time of war any more than a Canadian who goes to the United States when it is waging a war of aggression. I categorically reject that criticism.

What is really sad and troubling and alarming about the things being said about me in the media is that fundamentally what I am trying to impress upon my fellow Canadians is that we are at risk of nuclear Armageddon to a degree that is more worrisome than at any point during the nuclear era. And if we are truly interested in survival and the future of our children, we have to at least make an effort to find a negotiated solution to this war because it is spiraling out of control. There should be millions of people out in the street demanding an end to this war by negotiated solution. My message is fundamentally one of peace. You could disagree with my political analysis of the situation. You may say Lascaris is wrong to suggest that this war was provoked. You may say Lascaris is wrong to say Russians have some legitimate grievances. You may say Lascaris is overestimating the degree of nuclear danger but fundamentally nobody should contest that what motivates me to say these things is because I want peace. And why should anybody delivering a message of peace at an extraordinarily dangerous moment be subjected to the kind of abuse, vilification, and deplatforming I have had to endure?

Shortly after returning to Canada, at the behest of the Canada-Wide Peace and Justice Network, you made the decision to embark on a Canada-wide [speaking tour](#) titled “Making Peace with Russia One Handshake at a Time.” What did you hope to achieve by embarking on this tour?

It was about breaking a taboo. It is a taboo in the mainstream to say that Russia does have some legitimate grievances. Yes, the war and invasion were a violation of the UN Charter and as such it should be condemned but it was also provoked, and the war did not begin in February of last year but began in 2014 when the United States government [helped](#) to orchestrate the violent overthrow of a democratically elected Ukrainian President who was trying to maintain good relations with both Russia and Europe. These are things that cannot be said in the mainstream discourse, and somebody has got to break the taboo in order for these discussions to take place in our society and I happen to be well positioned to do that. Why am I well positioned to do that? Because I am essentially retired from the practice of law. I practiced law for over thirty years. I am financially secure, so I do not have to worry about the economic consequences such as losing my job over saying these things. Secondly, I am a litigator, and as such, I learned how to examine evidence and explain evidence, particularly complicated evidence, to people in ways that are readily comprehensible.

I know how to defend a position. I have a lot of experience in understanding Canadian foreign policy because I have followed it closely for many years, so I am in a position to help break these taboos and if we don't break these taboos, I am afraid we are all going to end up dead because of a nuclear war.

On July 4th, you formally concluded your Canada-wide speaking tour. Talk about what you learned while traveling across the country speaking to Canadians. Furthermore, how did the attendees of your speaking engagements respond to your presentations?

The Canadians I met were overwhelmingly receptive to the message of peace and deeply concerned about what was going on and highly skeptical about what they were being told, because they know Western governments have habitually lied to us about war—they lied to us about the Vietnam War, they lied to us about the Iraq War, they lied to us about the Afghanistan War and so forth. The media cannot be trusted to tell us the truth about war, that is something a lot of Canadians already understand.

In terms of how I was received, virtually every venue was either full, sold out, or closeto full. This is in circumstances where we had to be very careful about disclosing the location of the venue, and the identity of the venue, because we knew that people would pressure the venue to cancel us. Because of our limited budget, in terms of advertising for the tour, there was very little we could do. It was just word of mouth and social media. And the mainstream media completely ignored us—we put out multiple press releases in the hopes that somebody from the mainstream media would write about this tour. Despite this, we got extremely good turnout. In some venues, it was standing room only and sold out. The people who came out were, for the most part, highly appreciative of the presentation and felt it was an indispensable discussion that had to take place.

Over and over again, people were saying they didn't know a lot of the things I said in my presentation. When I made my presentation, I was very careful to rely on mainstream Western sources for things I am saying so I will pull up articles from Reuters, the Guardian, statistics from the World Bank, the IMF, and I did that deliberately because I didn't want anybody saying my sources are suspect.

Some people who showed up for my presentation were from the Ukrainian community, a minority of them were very supportive. Most of them were hostile. And they asked questions like anybody else, we didn't vet any questions, we conducted a vigorous Q&A. And we managed to engage with each other in a spirited manner.

During your speaking tour, you discussed six ways Canada should respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Talk about the six ways Canada should respond to the war.

1. Robust humanitarian aid for the innocent victims of this war—delivered to them, not through the Ukrainian government, which is hopelessly corrupt but through non-governmental independent organizations that do this kind of work.
2. Robust protection and sanctuary for people who have fled this war.
3. An arms embargo on both sides to the war. We should not be providing weapons, nor should we be providing real time battlefield intelligence, as we are doing for Ukraine, to either side of the conflict.
4. We should not impose sanctions on any country—whether it be the Russian Federation or any other country—that has not been approved by the UN Security Council
5. We should ban our citizens from participating in the war as combatants. We

have effectively done that for those who may wish to fight on the Russian side, for example, Canadians of Russian origin. But we have not banned people from fighting for the Ukrainian side—our government has encouraged that and there are Canadians fighting and dying for the Ukrainian side.

6. We should be offering our services as a mediator to try to bring the parties together to negotiate a mutually acceptable compromise. As long as we are in this war up to our necks, we are waging a war against Russia, we have no hope of being viewed by both sides to the conflict as a neutral mediator. If we want to do that, we have to adopt the first five steps I have outlined, in my view.

If you look at the Economist, which is virulently anti-Russian and strongly pro-NATO, its intelligence unit has developed a [map](#) which shows the countries that are sending weapons to Ukraine and which countries are imposing sanctions on Russia. Those countries are almost exclusively from the West. Almost nobody in Latin America is doing this, including Mexico, almost nobody in Africa, nobody in the Middle East, almost nobody in Asia—in other words, the vast majority of countries, representing the vast majority of the human population, are not arming Ukraine, are not sending people to fight on the side of Ukraine, and are not imposing sanctions on Russia. So, what I am suggesting is mainstream on a global level, it is only in the West the position I have articulated is arguably an outlier.

I agree with everything you have said principally. However, I would suggest modifying one of your points. Because it is kind of counterintuitive to call for sanctions only if they are implemented by the UN Security Council because Russia is a member of the UN Security Council, so they are going to veto any sanctions. Wouldn't a better modification be no sanctions at all and just pursue the track of diplomacy?

If the UN Security Council felt this was an appropriate step to take, I would support it.

But they wouldn't [support it] because Russia would veto it, right?

Of course, they would. But who has used the veto on the UN Security Council the most? The United States government. The United States has gone hog-wild on using the veto in order to protect its own nefarious agenda so the problem here is that the veto power enjoyed by a select group of states is obstructing the collective action to keep the global peace. If the UN Security Council would never

approve of sanctions because of the Russian veto, then we need to fix the UN Security Council. What we should not do is take the law into our own hands and start imposing potentially devastating economic sanctions to suit our own geopolitical agenda, which is what the West has been doing, in Cuba, Venezuela, they are doing it all over the world.

If we had a proper functioning Security Council, in other words, nobody has a veto, and it was just majority voting and they said we think this is an appropriate case for sanctions—I would support that. Absent that stamp of approval from the UN Security Council, we shouldn't be imposing sanctions—we are taking the law into our own hands, and when we do that, we invariably do it for the wrong reasons.

The venues which were set to host your speaking engagements in Winnipeg, Halifax, Montreal and Toronto cancelled your speaking engagement. I believe in Montreal and Toronto, the venues had to [cancel](#) your speaking engagement last minute because they were being pressured by a segment of the Ukrainian Canadian population. The venues [expressed](#) concerns about the potential for violence.

This is rare in modern Canada, the only other time I ever heard of such suppression of free speech, in an anti-war context, was in the 1950s when Canadians that were opposing their country's involvement in the Korean War were [stifled](#), partly due to the Cold War hysteria at the time. Could you please discuss the challenges and suppression you encountered during your speaking tour?

If you manage to whip the public up into enough of a hysteria, you can get them to tolerate a shocking degree of censorship. We are now in a position where the most fundamental right to free speech is under assault. It's not only about peace. If we manage to survive this war, which I think is highly questionable, given the trajectory we are now on—we need to go about the business of defending our right free speech and reviving the right to free speech because it is under assault, and we are on the verge of losing it.

We were canceled in Winnipeg, Halifax, Montreal and Toronto. Two venues canceled on us in Winnipeg. The local organizers were just amazing throughout this country.

They managed to find a third venue in Winnipeg at the 11 th hour, so the event did actually go ahead. In Halifax, Professor Judy and Larry Haiven, they are

professor emeriti at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, [organized an event at the university], and the President himself canceled on us eight hours after they made the booking.

There as well, the organizers managed to find an alternative venue. The Montreal venue was inundated with hostile messages, and they canceled at the 11th hour. We were fortunate enough, the weather was reasonably good, so we took all the attendees to a nearby park. I wasn't able to do my PowerPoint presentation, but I did a 45-minute presentation over the shouting and insults of pro-Ukrainian protestors who were about fifty meters away, separated from us by the police. The only place where the [organizers] weren't able to find an alternative venue was in Toronto. The President of the Ontario Public Services Union, JP Hornick, canceled us at the last minute. Even though the tour was scheduled to conclude on July 4th, the local organizers in Toronto were so determined to make it happen they said come back to Toronto we are going to get you a speaking venue at the Toronto Public Library. They got me a venue there and I spoke at the Toronto Public Library on July 8th.

Now that you have wrapped up your speaking tour, what lies ahead on the horizon for you in your mission for peace?

The first thing I am doing right now is writing an [article](#) about the de-platforming. I'm identifying the culprits, I have a pretty good idea who they are, how they went about doing this, I've been gathering the details diligently over the past several weeks and I will tell the story of how a message of peace was repeatedly put under an assault by the enemies of free speech.

After that, frankly, I just need a break.

You were one of Canada's [leading](#) plaintiff-side securities class action litigators, representing plaintiffs in class actions against multimillion dollar companies. Despite still being relatively young, you chose to retire early from that extremely lucrative career to devote yourself fulltime to the cause of peace. What is some advice that you have for law students who are social justice minded?

You are going to be tempted to sell your soul to the devil. And most people who enter the profession with the best of intentions end up selling their souls to the devil, that's just the sad truth. I will tell you a story about my first year on Wall Street, the firm I worked for, I was a brand-new lawyer, just learning the ropes, and I

took this job on Wall Street. Like many just out of law school, I had a desire to contribute to social justice, and the firm I was at, this is typical of big New York firms, they encouraged pro-bono work. They don't do this in Canada, by the way. In Canada, no significant law firm, to my knowledge, actively encourages pro-bono work for its lawyers, it is all about making money. I took on this pro-bono case with two other lawyers representing an inmate in New York state who had been beaten savagely by prison guards for no reason. And we took that case to trial, we brought it up under federal civil rights legislation, and we won after the trial. I put in 500 hours, and the lawyers I did it with were people who their entire adult lives pursued the cause of social justice and were determined to contribute to social justice as lawyers. These two lawyers, seven years later, were both partners in major Wall Street firms and were no longer committing themselves at all to social justice. They became completely committed to making as much money as possible. Once you get into the legal profession you will be tempted to, for example, not speak out about injustice in this world—like what is being done to the Palestinian people, or this crazy NATO proxy war that we are pursuing, and to abandon your commitment to social justice in deference to the God of money. I cannot stress enough to young people in law school today that you will be entering into a perilous moral universe, and it will be a challenge to maintain your commitment to social justice and peace in this world. This moral battle is one you will have to fight.

At the age of 52, I was in a position, because of the success I was fortunate enough to have as a class actions lawyer, I didn't need to make money anymore. So, I said to myself I have an obligation to give back now. I could not live with myself if I enjoyed the profits because of my success as a lawyer but wasn't committing myself passionately towards the cause of justice and peace in this world. I just couldn't live with myself.

Byline

Pitasanna Shanmugathas was born and raised in Canada. Pitasanna's interest in foreign policy first came from reading the works of progressive thinkers such as Noam Chomsky and Yves Engler. While completing his post-graduate education at the University of Toronto in global affairs, Pitasanna decided to embark on a three year documentary journey starting in 2019 to explore the role of Canada's foreign policy in the international arena. Pitasanna has also worked in multiple organizations advocating for peace and disarmament.

A Global Green New Deal Is The Best Way To Save The Planet



What is urgently needed is a political platform that embraces a sound climate stabilization plan which ensures a just transition, creates a plethora of new jobs, reduces inequality, and promotes sustainable growth.

Another summer is upon us and [heatwaves](#) are scorching many parts of the world, smashing thousands of temperature records. Even the world's [ocean surface temperature](#) is off the charts, reaching unprecedented levels, while [sea ice level in the Antarctic](#) has set a record low for the second year in a row.

Indeed, planet earth is screaming because "[climate change is out of control](#)" as U.N. General-Secretary António Guterres recently put it. Yet the global community's response to the greatest existential threat facing humanity continues to be not merely unacceptably slow but borders on criminal negligence.

We know the reasons why.

Fossil fuels supply about 80% of the world's energy, and contemporary politics is trapped in the short term, with little evidence that it can be repaired. Across the world, politicians continue to make enormous compromises to short term interests in the name of energy security. China and the U.S. are the world's biggest carbon polluters. Yet President Joe Biden has signed off on a series of major fossil fuel projects, and China is building more new coal plants than the rest of the world. This is even while both countries are also pursuing aggressive clean energy transition policies—indeed they are competing with one another on these.

To add insult to injury, governments continue to subsidize fossil fuel production. In 2022, subsidies worldwide for fossil fuel consumption rose above \$1 trillion, according to the [International Energy Agency](#). And the world's biggest banks have provided [\\$5.5 trillion](#) in finance to the fossil fuel industry over the past seven years.

As for global climate conferences, they have turned out to be not only ineffective but something of a cruel joke. They function in the absence of an "enforcement mechanism," and empty words and promises are their hallmark feature. [Greta Thunberg](#) was indeed right on the mark when she chastised global leaders at the [Youth4Climate](#) event in Milan for their failure to address the climate emergency, dismissing their rhetoric as "blah, blah, blah."

Moreover, data has shown that [fossil fuel lobbyists](#) attending the negotiations in climate conferences outnumber almost every national delegation. There were more than 500 fossil fuel lobbyists at the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, and more than 600 at the COP27 summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. As for COP28, which will take place this year from November 30 until December 12, the host is the United Arab Emirates, one of the world's major oil and gas producers, and will be presided by Sultan al-Jaber, the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Company. At this global climate summit, [fossil fuel companies are expected to have an even bigger voice](#). And their main focus is to promote carbon capture technologies. These technologies have yet to demonstrate their capacity at scale, while also offering their own dangerous side effects.

This is all pretty understandable. It's capitalism at work.

But we should also be asking ourselves an additional question: Why is it that populations are not motivated enough to address the climate crisis? Not only that, but far-right and right-wing populist parties, which are hostile to climate and carbon-low energy, are growing in prominence and influence. The rise of far-right movements is felt not only in Europe and the United States, but also in Eurasia and South Asia, while right-wing platforms remain popular across Latin America in spite of the fact that the region has shifted to the left over the past two decades.

The reasons for this unfortunate and disturbing development are a bit more complicated. Demagogues are the worst enemies of the laboring populations, yet

the working class and poor people are easy targets. In our own era, neoliberal policies (deregulation of the economy, privatization, suppression of wages, and shifting the orientation of the state as far away as possible from redistribution and a socially-based agenda) had led to extremely harmful consequences, including poverty, mass unemployment, income inequality, deficits in decent work and labor rights, social exclusion, and overall decline in the standard of living.

In Europe, home to the majority of the richest countries in the world, in 2022, more than 95 million European Union citizens, representing close to 22% of the population, were [at risk of poverty and social exclusion](#).

In the U.S., more than 51 million workers currently make less than \$15 an hour—nearly one-third of the workforce—according to data compiled by [Oxfam](#), and the [official poverty rate](#) with nearly 38 million people is considered by many experts to be based on a vastly inaccurate measurement of poverty in the United States. For example, the [MIT living wage model](#) uses a cost of living estimate that far exceeds the federal poverty thresholds.

At the heart of the neoliberal vision is a societal and world order based on the prioritization of corporate power and free markets and the abandonment of public services. The neoliberal claim is that economies would perform more effectively, producing greater wealth and economic prosperity for all, if markets were allowed to operate without government intervention. This claim is predicated on the idea that free markets are inherently just and can create effective low-cost ways to produce consumer goods and services. By extension, an interventionist or state-managed economy is regarded as wasteful and inefficient, choking off growth and expansion by constraining innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit.

However, the facts say otherwise. During the period known as “state-managed capitalism” (roughly from 1945-73, and otherwise known as the classical Keynesian era), the Western capitalist economies were growing faster than at any other time in the 20th century and wealth was reaching those at the bottom of the social pyramid more effectively than ever before. Convergence was also far greater during this period than it has been during the last 45 years of neoliberal policies. Moreover, under the neoliberal economic order, Western capitalist economies have not only failed to match the trends, growth patterns, and distributional effects experienced under “managed capitalism,” but the “free-market” orthodoxy has produced a series of never-ending financial crises,

distorted developments in the real economy, elevated inequality to new historical heights, and eroded civic virtues and democratic values. In fact, neoliberalism has turned out to be the new dystopia of the contemporary world.

Under the neoliberal socio-economic order and its effects, which provoke fear, insecurity, and indignation, it is not difficult to see why the laboring populations might fall under the spell of right-wing demagogues who know how to exploit societal divisions and resort to deception and manipulation with a political repertoire based on xenophobic nationalism and law and order. It is also not hard to see why concerns about climate breakdown might become far less of a priority for them when they are struggling to make ends meet. Putting food on the table, paying the rent, and fears of losing a job are what may keep average folks awake at night—not climate breakdown, even when they do recognize it as a major threat. Indeed, climate change, surely among U.S. voters, remains “a lower priority than issues such as strengthening the economy and reducing healthcare costs,” according to a recent [Pew Research Center](#) survey. And France’s “yellow vest” movement speaks volumes about the political risks of green taxes, in conjunction with tax cuts for the wealthy, while living standards are moving in the wrong direction.

This is where radical collective social and political action ought to come in, as it is the only hope we have for a sustainable future. But today’s left has failed so far to convince the laboring populations that it has a viable political agenda which can effectively address their immediate concerns as well as tackle the climate crisis. Today’s left, particularly in Europe, has an economic agenda which pays lip service to social transformation and lacks a concrete action plan for addressing the climate crisis through sustainable development strategies. Throughout the advanced industrialized world, existing climate plans remain insufficient and proceed alongside national plans to increase energy security through reliance on new oil, gas, and petrochemical infrastructure projects.

Make no mistake about it. “Oil and gas projects are back in a big way,” as a recent [New York Times](#) article put it. And climate protests alone cannot stop global warming. They do have a positive impact on public opinion, though “extreme action protests” can also backfire, [according to some studies](#).

Moreover, some bad ideas, such as that of degrowth, have begun to gain ground, distracting attention away from real solutions to the climate crisis and to the ills

of neoliberalism.

What is urgently needed is building long-term progressive power around a vision of left-wing politics that is energized by the pressing need to tackle the climate crisis by radically accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels while at the same time pushing for a structural transformation of present-day economies. In other words, a political platform that embraces a sound climate stabilization plan which ensures a just transition, creates a plethora of new jobs, reduces inequality, and promotes sustainable growth. Of course, this is what the [Green New Deal](#) (GND) is supposed to be all about, except that there are a number of different versions of a GND policy plan, including one adopted by the European Union. But Europe's green ambitions (they call it the "European Green Deal" and the aim is for the E.U. to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050) are contradicted by European countries' quest for new fossil fuel supplies. In addition, and this is typical of poorly formulated GND policy plans, the European parliament has voted in support of E.U. rules labeling natural gas and nuclear energy as green investments.

Even so, the movement for the Green New Deal is growing and is making a positive impact on several fronts. Several states and over 100 cities in the United States have committed to 100% clean energy. The Inflation Reduction Act may not qualify as a GND, but it is still a historical piece of legislation, especially given the existing political climate in the country.

Still, one might say that what we really need in order to save the planet is a comprehensive GND, formulated as a worldwide program. But we do have such a blueprint in place, courtesy of the American economist [Robert Pollin](#), and fully endorsed by the world's greatest intellectual alive, namely [Noam Chomsky](#).

Degrowth is not the answer. As Robert Pollin has argued powerfully and persuasively, cutting back on economic growth will have little to no impact on the task at hand, which is ["delivering a zero-emissions global economy."](#) More precisely, if we depend on reducing gross domestic product (GDP) to reduce emissions, then it follows that we can only reduce emissions by the same number we reduce growth. For example, if GDP shrinks by 10%—a massive global recession—it will succeed in cutting emissions by only 10%. We need emissions down to zero.

Moreover, the idea of shrinking rather than growing economies is, politically speaking, a self-defeating proposition. All that degrowth will accomplish is more pain for working class people and will most likely fuel further support for the far-right.

Of course, degrowth advocates argue that this is a project targeted at the Global North, not a path for the Global South. However, are we to assume on the basis of such claims that the developed countries are void of class inequalities and have somehow escaped the sort of socio-economic ills that accompany the implementation of ruthless neoliberal policies? Are we to believe that there is no need to improve living conditions, reduce poverty rates, and increase employment opportunities for the Western masses? Perhaps such notions do lie behind degrowth, which is why some, if not most, of its advocates reject the idea of economic planning and by extension of the GND. In this sense, I think it's quite fair to say that degrowth is in fact working in service of neoliberalism while doing nothing to stop global warming. Committed socialists should have nothing to do with degrowth policy proposals.

Pondering radical proposals for saving the planet and humanity from the effects of global warming should be welcomed as they may generate opportunities for creative forms of political and social action. But degrowth is neither a radical alternative nor is it based on sound economics. Furthermore, it is a rather dangerous political idea as it will hurt mostly the laboring classes and deliver them straight into the arms of the far-right.

For all practical intents and purposes, radical politics in the age of climate breakdown goes through a (global) Green New Deal—not through degrowth rhetoric, which is in full display in the current issue of [Monthly Review](#). It is up to the socialist left to embrace it and see that its vision turns into reality.

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Cuba Reaffirms Socialism While It Reckons With Its Private Sector



Manolo De Los Santos

Seventy years have passed since Fidel Castro and a daring group of young Cubans launched an assault on the Moncada Barracks in eastern Cuba, aiming to topple the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship. Despite the military failure of that attempt, it served as the catalyst for the revolution that has now held power in Cuba for more than 63 years. Today, a new generation of revolutionaries is grappling with the challenges of meeting the needs of the Cuban people while fostering a socialist project within a global economy marked by crisis. They are doing all this under an intense campaign of maximum pressure from the Biden administration.

The United States' agenda of global hegemony has [continually](#) clashed with Cuba's pursuit of independence and sovereignty and more intensely since the revolution's victory in 1959. The Kennedy administration [initiated](#) a blockade against Cuba in 1962, launching a relentless campaign of starvation and deprivation against the island's 11 million inhabitants. However, despite [enduring](#) the longest embargo in modern history, Cubans have managed to build world-renowned public education and health systems, as well as an innovative biotech

industry, and have [secured](#) a higher quality of life for its citizens than many developing countries.

Yet, the U.S. has intensified its blockade against Cuba over the past six years, starting with former President Donald Trump who implemented [243 new sanctions](#), reversing the normalization process [initiated](#) by former President Barack Obama in 2014. Despite campaign [promises](#) of a more balanced approach toward Cuba, President Joe Biden has amplified pressure on the nation.

In 2017, the U.S. [accused](#) the Cuban government of deploying sonic attacks against its embassy officials, a claim that was later proven false. However, this accusation served as a pretext to freeze relations with Cuba, causing a [collapse](#) in tourism and leading to revenue loss as more than 600,000 annual U.S. visitors [ceased](#) their travels to the island. Under Trump's sanctions, Western Union [halted](#) operations in Cuba in 2020, disrupting remittances. Visa services were suspended by the U.S. Embassy in Havana in 2017, sparking the [largest](#) wave of irregular migration since 1980.

Cuba's economy has suffered under this extensive blockade, with the country's GDP [shrinking](#) to a staggering 15 percent in 2019 and 11 percent in 2020 as the government and other entities found themselves unable to purchase basic necessities due to banking restrictions imposed because of the blockade. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, Cuba's robust health care system was pressured by the sanctions as the number of Delta variant cases surged and the country's only oxygen plant was rendered [nonoperational](#) due to its inability to import spare parts. Even as Cuban patients struggled to breathe, Washington refused to make exceptions, only offering U.S.-made vaccines after most Cubans had been [vaccinated](#) with domestically developed vaccines.

In his last week in office in January 2021, former President Trump [put](#) Cuba on the state sponsors of terrorism list, making it nearly impossible for Cuba to engage in normal financial transactions necessary for trade. During President Biden's first 14 months in office, the Cuban economy [lost](#) an estimated \$6.35 billion, preventing Cuba from making crucial investments in its aging energy grid or purchasing food and medicine. With the economy shrinking but the government persevering with its commitment to provide employment, inflation rocked the Cuban peso, devaluing what was already considered low government wages. While the country's rationing system provided everyone with a subsistence

diet, this was a level of deprivation that hadn't been felt by Cubans since the Special Period in the 1990s, with no immediate solutions in sight. The Cuban government turned to alternative avenues for growth and development.

In 2020, Cuba began relying more heavily on the private sector to meet its basic needs due to the increasing scarcity of goods. With the private sector on track to [import](#) \$1 billion of goods in 2023, and more than 8,000 small and medium-sized businesses having registered since 2021, the economy is slowly [growing](#) at a rate of 1.8 percent. The rise of the private sector introduces new challenges for any socialist project.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel [expressed](#) his vision for Cuba's future, emphasizing the government's commitment to providing essential services to its citizens but also nodding toward changes in the future. He argued that social justice is not merely about welfare or equality but also about a fair distribution of income, where those who contribute more earn more and those who are unable to contribute are assisted by the government.

In this journey, the Cuban government faces an uphill task. While the rise of the private sector has boosted supplies and provided badly needed goods, it in turn also creates new income disparities, which stands in contrast to Cuba's historic emphasis on equitable wealth distribution. Moreover, if the government's new policies succeed in bringing back economic growth and more efficiently delivering needed supplies via the private sector—at a time when the state is essentially blocked from doing so—it will create a new social counterweight to the state itself. This changing dynamic will define Díaz-Canel's second and final term as president as the government manages the balance between the private sector's growth and maintaining the socialist principles that are central to Cuba's identity.

So far, the leadership of the Cuban Revolution, while recognizing the necessity of wealth creation, has been committed to ensuring that the benefits of this wealth are shared among all its citizens. Díaz-Canel insists that the government will safeguard the socialist project—guaranteeing essential services, some free of charge and others at the lowest possible cost—while resisting the calls from friends and foes alike to embark on any major privatization efforts.

Over the years, Cuba has faced considerable economic and political challenges. Beyond an economic blockade, natural disasters such as Hurricane Ian [caused](#)

more than \$1 billion in damages and left more than 100,000 families without homes. The crises provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic eliminated tourism, the country's number one industry.

While Western governments never lose an opportunity to criticize Cuba on both economic and political grounds, many in the Global South continue to support it as an example of resilience and independence. Faced with numerous challenges, Cuba has chosen a path of resistance, continually adapting and innovating in the face of adversity rather than succumbing to external pressures.

Amid the challenges of a global economy marked by crisis, Cuba strives to maintain its socialist project, meet the needs of its people, and assert its independence. Despite facing the longest embargo in modern history, the nation has made significant strides in public education, health care, and sustainable development, outperforming many advanced economies. The future may be fraught with challenges, but Cuba's dedication to its people and its independent path shines as a beacon of hope in a world still unable to answer the many dilemmas of humanity. Indeed, that is why Fidel Castro's daring mission at the Moncada Barracks 70 years ago continues to have such a hold on the Cuban imagination. Despite the temporary setbacks, Cubans survive and live to fight the next battle.

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