

New Era Of China-Saudi Ties Riles Iran



M.K. Bhadrakumar

The pomp and ceremony of the recent visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Saudi Arabia has drawn comparison with the banality and frigid atmosphere surrounding the U.S. President Joe Biden's trip to the kingdom in July. However, the main difference is that the Saudis organized three separate regional summits for Xi—aside the bilateral summit, a second summit with 21 Arab leaders and a third with seven rulers of GCC countries.

The “three-in-one” conveyed a big signal that Saudi Arabia stands at the heart of China's Arab world diplomacy. It is in sharp contrast with the transactional relationship that the historic U.S.-Saudi alliance has been reduced to.

Indeed, the nearly three dozen energy and investment deals during Xi's visit will preserve the core of the strategic interests of Saudi Arabia and China. They encompass frontier areas such as information technology, green energy, cloud services, infrastructure and health and inject a greater sense of alignment between Riyadh's economic diversification pivot (known as Vision 2030) and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)-driven development of smart industries and high quality infrastructure, including digital infrastructure, which has the potential to undergird regional connectivity in the coming decades.

As a Chinese commentator noted, Beijing's green hydrogen and solar energy investments are expected to complement Riyadh's clean energy push and together they “strengthen adaptive infrastructure in the Arab world.” Take, for example, the landmark agreement inked with Chinese tech giant Huawei, which

will open the doors to high-tech complexes in Saudi cities that mesh with China's 5G development cooperation in many Gulf states (eg., UAE, Kuwait, Qatar.)

As Saudi Arabia synchronizes its priorities in the energy sector with China's focus on bolstering supply chain resilience in the West Asian region, the kingdom is presenting itself as a regional center for the Chinese factories. This is "win-win," as stable energy supply chains are critical to growth and recovery prospects of many regional Arab economies.

Suffice it to say that even as new development synergies and the proposed multi-sector collaborations place the China-Saudi comprehensive strategic partnership in a different league, the Arab region as a whole will reap enormous benefits from the partnership's transformational impact.

The [joint statement](#) issued after Xi's visit speaks about the importance of expanding Saudi-Chinese relations "in their international framework and setting an example of cooperation, solidarity, and mutual gain for developing countries."

It says, "The Saudi side also stressed the importance of attracting international Chinese companies to open regional headquarters in the Kingdom and appreciated the interest of a number of companies in that regard as they are obtaining licenses to establish their regional headquarters in the Kingdom, to ultimately benefit from the exceptional Chinese experiences and capabilities for the benefit of the economies of the two countries." Clearly, the signing of a "harmonization plan" between Vision 2030 and the BRI is a game changer.

The first-ever China-GCC Summit and China-Arab League Summit stand out in the current international environment and create prospects of "collective cooperation" between China and Arab countries. They are pegged on joint action by Saudi Arabia and China to strengthen strategic partnership relations between the GCC States and China, conclude a free trade agreement between the GCC and China, and institutionalize the GCC-China Meeting of Ministers of Economy and Trade in a "6 + 1" format between GCC and China.

Equally, on the diplomatic side, the joint statement says, "The Chinese side commended the Kingdom's positive contributions and outstanding support for the promotion of regional and international peace and stability."

Particularly noteworthy is China's strong endorsement of the Saudi stance on

Yemen stressing the importance of supporting the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council.

Unsurprisingly, Xi's Saudi visit caused disquiet in Tehran. The web of regional alliances that Riyadh has woven for China's participation is exclusively of Arab countries. And what riles Tehran most is that Saudi Arabia and the Arab alliance will be the most crucial template of China's regional strategies in the West Asian and African regions.

Iran cannot possibly cope with the development as a rival power center. And it is happening at a time when Iran is surging ahead as the Gulf region's highflier and Saudi Arabia's pivotal alliance with the U.S. sank into hopeless disrepair.

The unkindest cut of all must be that although China is a participant in the JCPOA negotiations, the joint statement states that the two sides "called on Iran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency, maintain the non-proliferation regime, and emphasize respect for the principles of good-neighborliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of states."

Elsewhere, the joint statement says in a veiled reference to Iran, "Chinese side expressed support for the Kingdom in maintaining its security and stability and affirmed its opposition to any actions that would interfere in the internal affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and rejects any attacks targeting civilians, civilian facilities, territories, and Saudi interests."

However, Tehran has chosen to ignore all this and instead zeroed in on a particular passage in the China-GCC joint statement to vent its displeasure. The relevant formulation stated: "The leaders affirmed their support for all peaceful efforts, including the initiative and endeavors of the United Arab Emirates to reach a peaceful solution to the issue of the three islands; Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa, through bilateral negotiations in accordance with the rules of international law, and to resolve this issue in accordance with international legitimacy."

Prima facie, there is nothing explosive here, but Tehran took umbrage that Beijing ignored the Iranian stance that the issue is "non-negotiable" and concerns the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Iranian commentators and officials have alleged that "China appeared to be

taking sides in the dispute.” The Chinese ambassador was summoned to the Iranian foreign ministry and President Ebrahim Raisi has voiced displeasure mentioning China. (See the furious commentary in Tehran Times entitled [*China’s wrong move on the rotten rope of Persian Gulf Cooperation Council.*](#))

How far this histrionics is to be taken seriously is hard to tell at this point. Tehran’s real grouse could be two-fold: one, that China-Saudi relationship is acquiring gravitas and it may incrementally relegate Iran to a second tier in regional politics.

Of course, Iran has a promising partnership with Russia but that is quintessentially a geopolitical matrix with variables subject to the twists and turns of Moscow’s confrontation with the West under the conditions of sanctions. Meanwhile, the impasse in the nuclear negotiations in Vienna precludes Iran’s normalization vis-a-vis the “collective West.”

The joint statement only perfunctorily takes note of “their determination to develop cooperation and coordination in defense fields” and of the two countries “cooperating in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.” But defense ties and nuclear cooperation between China and Saudi Arabia have a long history. Nobody will be the wiser, as the Saudis and Chinese officials are known to be in discussion regarding payment mechanisms in local currencies for certain types of transactions.

In the final analysis, Iran can only blame itself. It took an early lead over Saudi Arabia with its much-vaunted 25-year \$400 billion road map for Chinese investments but lost the plot, and China likely would have weighed that Saudi Arabia has far more to offer as economic partner than Iran in the near and medium term.

The Saudis know how to put the money where the mouth is; they are not dogmatic; and, Vision 2030 is a honeycomb of mega projects. And in Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, they have a decisive leadership. As for China, its economy is slowing down and there is a pressing need to boost exports.

Indeed, the decision on holding biennial Chinese-Saudi summits ensures that the top-down approach of management, which is characteristic of both countries, is closely monitored and adjusted according to needs. Iran, on the other hand, can be an exasperating partner, given its multiple decision-making levels and

contrarian autarchic policies.

Most certainly, China is also attracted by Saudi Arabia's clout in the Arab world as a key factor with the potential to help advance the BRI regionally in the post-pandemic environment.

Tehran has reason to feel worried that the regional balance may shift in favor of Saudi Arabia. It cannot be lost on Tehran that the historicity of Xi's visit to Saudi Arabia lies in the recreation of the history playing out in West Asia since the secret meeting between the then U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and King Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia off Alexandria in 1945.

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

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Source: Globetrotter

EU Cracks A Gentle Whip At Iran



M.K. Bhadrakumar - Photo: YouTube

The European Union has returned to the ritual of sanctioning Iran to leverage its foreign and security policies. The highlight of the EU Foreign Affairs Council ministerial meeting in Brussels on Monday was the imposition of sanctions against Iran over a range of issues.

The issues were “the unacceptable repression of the ongoing protests and the worsening human rights situation” in Iran, Iran’s military cooperation with Russia, including delivery of drones deployed against Ukraine, the prospects of renewal of the JCPOA as well as regional security.

The Council added [20 individuals and one entity](#) to the EU’s existing Iran human rights sanctions regime plus four individuals and four entities for the development and delivery of drones used by Russia in Ukraine.

While imposing these sanctions, EU demands that those responsible for the killing of Mahsa Amini must be held accountable; Iranian authorities should ensure “transparent and credible investigations to clarify the number of deaths and arrests”, and release all non-violent protesters and provide due process to all detainees and lift restrictions on internet access and unblock instant messaging platforms.

The EU Council threatened that it “will consider all the options at its disposal” to address the situation arising out of the death of Mahsa Amini and the way Iranian security forces handled the demonstrations.

Those sanctioned include top executives of Iran Broadcasting, “which is notorious for being a regime mouthpiece,” Iran’s Deputy Minister of Interior and some IRGC commanders. Equally, Gen. Hamid Vahedi, Iran’s chief of air force, has been put on sanctions list for Iran’s “military support” for Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Ironically, while the EU Council meeting charged ahead on Iran sanctions, it failed to reach consensus on the expected 9th sanctions package on Russia, “against the Kremlin, for escalating its aggression against Ukraine.” Borrell said the Council of Ministers could not agree “to react to the latest escalation,” but he expected an approval of the new tough package during this week.

On the whole, Borrell was in a mellowed mood, though, claiming that the EU is making a careful distinction between punishing Iran on its human rights record and military support to Russia and the Iranian nuclear program.

As he put it, “You will understand that, in this situation the JCPOA is in a very difficult situation. But I think that we do not have a better option than the JCPOA to ensure that Iran does not develop nuclear weapons. This remains in our own interest.”

Borrell disclosed that he talks “quite often” with Iran’s foreign minister and “We share, we disagree, but, at least, we talk to each other. I think that diplomacy is here to keep the channels of communication open in any circumstances. I think that it was good that, before the Council took this [sanctions] decision today, [I could inform the Minister](#) and he could explain [to] me what is happening and I explain [to] him my concerns. And these concerns brought to these decisions.”

[Borrell said](#): “I want to make a clear difference between the nuclear deal... and the decision taken by the Foreign Affairs Council on the issue of human rights and supply of arms to Russia. They are two different things.

“Certainly, this does not create the best atmosphere to advance in any kind of issue in the relationship between the European Union and Iran. But the nuclear deal is not an issue of the relationship between the European Union and Iran: it is something that goes further, many others are involved. The JCPOA is not just the European Union and Iran.”

Unsurprisingly, Tehran has hit back by [announcing its own sanctions](#) on several EU and British officials and entities “over their deliberate support of terrorism and terrorist groups, and their incitement to terrorism, violence and hatred, which have caused unrest, violence, terrorist acts and violation of human rights against the Iranian nation.”

Looking ahead, the big question is whether Tehran accepts the “Borrell way” of selective engagement—even if he took his Iranian counterpart into confidence. The EU will selectively engage with Tehran on the JCPOA because it is in the interests of the collective West, especially the Biden Administration, which would like the door to be kept open to resume the negotiations with Iran in Vienna that were suspended in August.

The energy crisis in Europe is a compelling factor here. Nonetheless, the EU probably also shares the Biden Administration’s estimation that the current disturbances in Iran cannot be easily suppressed. On the other hand, Tehran cannot be expected to compromise on any perceived challenge to the regime.

Also, the EU may have acted excessively by sanctioning Imam Sayyid Ahmad Khatami, a senior cleric and influential conservative and principalist politician who also happens to be a member of the powerful Guardian Council as well as the Assembly of Experts, who was appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei as Tehran's "substitute" Friday prayer leader in 2005, a position he holds ever since.

In the final analysis, the trail of linkages outlined by Borrell ultimately leads to Moscow. Basically, the EU is messaging that JCPOA (lifting of western sanctions) will be conditional on Iran's willingness to roll back its deepening ties with Russia.

The drone part is only the tip of the iceberg; what really causes uneasiness in Washington and Brussels is that Russia may borrow from Iran's toolbox to undercut western sanctions. Iran's geography as well as its geopolitics makes it a unique partner for Russia today. (See my article [U.S. internationalizes Iran's unrest](#), Asia Times)

Tehran is unlikely to budge on its firm handling of the unrest in the country. Indeed, there is remarkable consistency in Iran's political history through the past 4 decades that there can be no compromises on the challenges to the fundamentals of the Islamic regime that came into existence through the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Clearly, the western powers are barking up the wrong tree—knowingly or unknowingly.

The [defiant remarks](#) of the Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Major General Hossein Salami recently—the stark warning by the general that Iran today has "achieved all the military technologies in the world"—should leave the Biden Administration in no doubt.

That said, on the resumption of the JCPOA talks with the United States, Tehran remains interested.

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Source: Globetrotter

The U.S. Egged On The Coup In Peru



Pedro Castillo
en.wikipedia.org

On December 7, 2022, Pedro Castillo sat in his office on what would be the last day of his presidency of Peru. His lawyers went over spreadsheets that showed Castillo would triumph over a motion in Congress to remove him. This was going to be the [third time](#) that Castillo faced a challenge from the Congress, but his lawyers and advisers—including former Prime Minister Anibal Torres—told him that he held an advantage over the Congress in [opinion polls](#) (his approval rating had risen to 31 percent, while that of the Congress was just about 10 percent).

Castillo had been under immense pressure for the past year from an oligarchy that [disliked](#) this former teacher. In a surprise move, he [announced](#) to the press on December 7 that he was going to “temporarily dissolve the Congress” and “[establish] an exceptional emergency government.” This measure sealed his fate. Castillo and his family [rushed](#) toward the Mexican Embassy but were arrested by the military along Avenida España before they could get there.

Why did Pedro Castillo take the fatal step of trying to dissolve Congress when it was clear to his advisers—such as Luis Alberto Mendieta—that he would prevail in the afternoon vote?

The pressure got to Castillo, despite the evidence. Ever since his election in July

2021, his [opponent](#) in the presidential election, Keiko Fujimori, and her associates have tried to block his ascension to the presidency. She worked with men who have close ties with the U.S. government and its intelligence agencies. A member of Fujimori's team, Fernando Rospigliosi, for instance, had in 2005 tried to [involve](#) the U.S. Embassy in Lima against Ollanta Humala, who contested in the 2006 Peruvian presidential election. Vladimiro Montesinos, a [former CIA asset](#) who is serving time in a prison in Peru, [sent](#) messages to Pedro Rejas, a former commander in Peru's army, to go "to the U.S. Embassy and talk with the embassy intelligence officer," to try and influence the 2021 Peruvian presidential election. Just before the election, the United States sent a former [CIA agent](#), Lisa Kenna, as its ambassador to Lima. She [met](#) Peru's Minister of Defense Gustavo Bobbio on December 6 and sent a denunciatory [tweet](#) against Castillo's move to dissolve Congress the next day (on December 8, the U.S. government—through Ambassador Kenna—[recognized](#) Peru's new government after Castillo's removal).

A key figure in the pressure campaign appears to have been Mariano Alvarado, [operations officer](#) of the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG), who functions effectively as the U.S. Defense attaché. We are told that officials such as Alvarado, who are in close contact with the Peruvian military generals, gave them the greenlight to move against Castillo. It is being said that the last phone call that Castillo took before he left the presidential palace came from the U.S. Embassy. It is likely he was warned to flee to the embassy of a friendly power, which made him appear weak.

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Source: *Globetrotter*

Noam Chomsky: “We’re On The Road To A Form Of Neofascism”



Noam Chomsky

Neoliberalism has reigned supreme as an economic philosophy for nearly half a century. But neoliberal policies have wreaked havoc around the world, reversing most gains made under managed capitalism after the end of the Second World War. Neoliberalism works only for the rich and the huge corporations. But the failures of neoliberalism extend beyond economics. They spread into politics as the processes of social collapse bring into play menacing forces with promises of a return to lost glory. This is the basic thrust of neofascist movements and parties in today’s world, and it is neoliberalism that has created the conditions for the resurgence of right-wing extremism, as Noam Chomsky explains in the exclusive interview below for *Truthout*. Meanwhile, protests have become far more widespread in the era of late capitalism, so the struggle for an alternative world is very much alive indeed!

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Philosophy at MIT and laureate professor of linguistics and Agnese Nelms Haury Chair in the Program in Environment and Social Justice at the University of Arizona. One of the world's most-cited scholars and a public intellectual regarded by millions of people as a national and international treasure, Chomsky has published more than 150 books in linguistics, political and social thought, political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy and world affairs. His latest books are *Illegitimate Authority: Facing the Challenges of Our Time* (forthcoming; with C. J. Polychroniou), *The Secrets of Words* (with Andrea Moro; MIT Press, 2022); *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of U.S. Power* (with Vijay Prashad; The New Press, 2022); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (with C.J. Polychroniou; Haymarket Books, 2021).

C. J. Polychroniou: Noam, since neoliberal policies were implemented more than 40 years ago, they have been responsible for increasing rates of inequality, destroying social infrastructure, and causing hopelessness and social malaise. However, it has also become evident that neoliberal social and economic policies are breeding grounds for right-wing radicalization and the resurgence of political authoritarianism. Of course, we know that there is an inherent clash between democracy and capitalism, but there is some clear evidence that neofascism emerges from neoliberal capitalism. Assuming that you agree with this claim, what's the actual connection between neoliberalism and neofascism?

Noam Chomsky: The connection is drawn clearly in the first two sentences of the question. One consequence of the neoliberal social-economic policies is collapse of the social order, yielding a breeding ground for extremism, violence hatred, search for scapegoats — and fertile terrain for authoritarian figures who can posture as the savior. And we're on the road to a form of neo-fascism.

The *Britannica* defines neoliberalism as an “ideology and policy model that emphasizes the value of free market competition,” with “minimal state intervention.” That is the conventional picture. Reality is different. The actual policy model threw open the doors for the masters of the economy, who also dominate the state, to seek profit and power with few constraints. In brief, unconstrained class war.

One component of the policies was a form of globalization that combines extreme protectionism for the masters with search for the cheapest labor and worst

working conditions so as to maximize profit, leaving decaying rust belts at home. These are policy choices, not economic necessity. The labor movement, joined by Congress's now defunct research bureau, proposed alternatives that could have benefited working people here and abroad, but they were dismissed without discussion as Clinton rammed through the form of globalization preferred by those conducting the class war.

A related consequence of "really existing neoliberalism" was rapid financialization of the economy enabling riskless scams for quick profits — riskless because the powerful state that intervenes radically in the market to provide extreme protections in trade agreements does the same to rescue the masters if something goes wrong. The result, beginning with Reagan, is what economists Robert Pollin and Gerald Epstein call a "bailout economy," enabling the neoliberal class war to proceed without the risk of market punishment for failure.

The "free market" is not missing from the picture. Capital is "free" to exploit and destroy with abandon, as it has been doing, including — we should not forget — destroying the prospects for organized human life. And working people are "free" to try to survive somehow with real wages stagnating, benefits declining and work being reshaped to create a growing precariat.

The class war took off, very naturally, with an attack on labor unions, the prime means of defense for working people. The first acts of Reagan and Thatcher were vigorous assaults on unions, an invitation to the corporate sector to join in and move beyond, often in ways that are technically illegal, but that is of no concern to the neoliberal state they dominate.

The reigning ideology was expressed lucidly by Margaret Thatcher as the class war was launched: There is no such thing as society, and people should stop whining about "society" coming to their rescue. In her immortal words, "I am homeless, the Government must house me!" and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families, and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first."

Thatcher and her associates surely knew very well that there is a very rich and powerful society for the masters, not only the nanny state that races to their rescue when they are in need but also an elaborate network of trade associations,

chambers of commerce, lobbying organizations, think tanks, and more. But those less privileged must “look to themselves.”

The neoliberal class war has been a grand success for the designers. As we’ve discussed, one indication is the transfer of [some \\$50 trillion to the pockets of the top 1 percent](#), mostly to a fraction of them. no slight victory.

Other achievements are “hopelessness and social malaise,” with nowhere to turn. The Democrats abandoned the working class to their class enemy by the ‘70s, becoming a party of affluent professionals and Wall Street donors. In England, Jeremy Corbyn came close to reversing the decline of the Labour Party to “Thatcher lite.” The British establishment, across the board, mobilized in force and climbed deep into the gutter to crush his effort to create an authentic participatory party devoted to the interests of working people and the poor. An intolerable affront to good order. In the U.S., Bernie Sanders has fared somewhat better, but has not been able to break the hold of Clintonite party management. In Europe, the traditional parties of the left have virtually disappeared.

In the midterm elections in the U.S., the Democrats lost even more of the white working class than before, a consequence of the unwillingness of party managers to campaign on class issues that a moderate left party could have brought to the fore.

The ground is well prepared for the rise of neofascism to fill the void left by unremitting class war and capitulation of the mainstream political institutions that might have combatted the plague.

The term “class war” is by now insufficient. It’s true that the masters of the economy and their servants in the political system have been engaged in a particularly savage form of class war for the past 40 years, but the targets go beyond the usual victims, now extending even to the perpetrators themselves. As the class war intensifies, the basic logic of capitalism manifests itself with brutal clarity: We have to maximize profit and power even though we know we are racing to suicide by destroying the environment that sustains life, not sparing ourselves and our families.

What’s happening calls to mind an [often repeated tale](#) on how to catch a monkey. Cut a hole in a coconut of just the right size for a monkey to insert its paw and put some delectable morsel inside. The monkey will reach in to grab the food but will

then be unable to extricate its clenched paw and will starve to death. That's us, at least the ones running the sad show.

Our leaders, with their similarly clenched paws, are pursuing their suicidal vocation relentlessly. At the state level, Republicans are introducing "Energy Discrimination Elimination" legislation to ban even release of information on investment in fossil fuel companies. That's unfair persecution of decent folks who are just trying to profit by destroying the prospects for human life, adopting good capitalist logic.

To take one recent example, Republican attorneys general have called on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to keep asset managers from purchasing shares in U.S. utility companies if the companies are involved in programs to reduce emissions — that is, to save us all from destruction.

The champion of the lot, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, [calls for investment in fossil fuels](#) for many years ahead, while showing that he is a good citizen by welcoming opportunities to invest in still fanciful ways to get rid of the poisons that are produced and even in green energy — as long as profits are guaranteed to be high.

In short, instead of devoting resources to escape from catastrophe, we must bribe the very rich to induce them to lend a hand in doing so.

The lessons, stark and clear, are helping to invigorate popular movements that are seeking to escape from the shambles of capitalist logic that shine through with brilliant clarity as the neoliberal war against all reaches its latest stages of tragicomedy.

That is the bright and hopeful side of the emerging social order.

With the rise of Donald Trump to power, white supremacy and authoritarianism returned to mainstream politics. But isn't it the case that the U.S. was never immune to fascism?

What do we mean by "fascism"? We have to distinguish what's happening in the streets, very visibly, from ideology and policy, more remote from immediate inspection. Fascism in the streets is Mussolini's Blackshirts and Hitler's Brownshirts: violent, brutal, destructive. The U.S. has surely never been immune

from that. The sordid record of “Indian removal” and slavery mutating to Jim Crow needs no recounting here.

A peak period of “street-fascism” in this sense just preceded Mussolini’s March on Rome. The postwar Wilson-Palmer, post-WWI “red scare” was the most vicious period of violent repression in U.S. history, apart from the two original sins. The shocking story is recounted in vivid detail in Adam Hochschild’s penetrating study *American Midnight*.

As usual, Black people suffered the most, including major massacres (Tulsa and others) and a hideous record of lynchings and other atrocities. Immigrants were another target in a wave of fanatic “Americanism” and fear of Bolshevism. Hundreds of “subversives” were deported. The lively Socialist Party was virtually destroyed and never recovered. Labor was decimated, not only the Wobblies but well beyond, including vicious strike-breaking in the name of patriotism and defense against the “reds.”

The level of lunacy finally became so outlandish that it self-destructed. Attorney-General Palmer and his sidekick J. Edgar Hoover predicted an insurrection led by Bolsheviks on May Day 1920, with feverish warnings and mobilization of police, army and vigilantes. The day passed with a few picnics. Widespread ridicule and wish for “normalcy” brought an end to the madness.

Not without a residue. As Hochschild observes, progressive options for American society suffered a severe blow. A very different country could have emerged. What took place was street fascism with a vengeance.

Turning to ideology and policy, the great Veblenite political economist Robert Brady 80 years ago argued that the whole industrial capitalist world was moving towards one or another form of fascism, with powerful state control of the economy and social life. On a separate dimension, the systems differed sharply with regard to public influence over policy (functioning political democracy).

Such themes were not uncommon in those years, and to a limited extent beyond both in left and right circles.

The issue becomes mostly moot with the shift from the regulated capitalism of the postwar decades to the neoliberal assault, which forcefully reinstates Adam Smith’s conception that the masters of the economy are the principal architects of

government policy and design it to protect their interests. Increasingly in the course of neoliberal class war, unaccountable concentrations of private power control both the economy and the political domain.

The result is a general sense — not mistaken — that the government is not serving us, but rather someone else. The doctrinal system, also largely in the hands of the same concentrations of private power, deflects attention away from the workings of power, opening the door to what are termed “conspiracy theories,” usually founded on some particles of evidence: the Great Replacement, liberal elites, Jews, other familiar concoctions. That in turn engenders “street fascism,” drawing on poisonous undercurrents that have never been suppressed and that can easily be tapped by unscrupulous demagogues. The scale and character is by now no small threat to what remains of functioning democracy after the battering of the current era.

Some are arguing that we live in a historic age of protests. Indeed, virtually every region in the world has seen a sharp increase of protest movements over the last 15 years. Why have political protests become more widespread and more frequent in the age of late neoliberalism? Moreover, how do they compare to the protest movements of the 1960s?

The protests have many different roots. The trucker’s strike that almost brought Brazil to a halt protesting the defeat of the neo-fascist Bolsonaro in the October election had some resemblance to January 6 in Washington, and may be reenacted, some fear, on the day of the inauguration of the elected President Lula da Silva on January 1.

But such protests as these have nothing in common with the remarkable uprising in Iran instigated by the death in police custody of Jina Mahsa Amini. The uprising is led by young people, mostly young women, though it is bringing in much broader sectors. The immediate goal is overturning the rigid controls on women’s attire and behavior, though the protesters have gone well beyond, sometimes as far as calling for overthrow of the harsh clerical regime. The protestors have won some victories. The regime has indicated that the Morality Police will be disbanded, though some doubt the substance of the announcement, and it barely reaches the demands of the courageous resistance. Other protests have their own particularities.

Insofar as there is a common thread, it is the breakdown of social order generally in the past decades. Commonalities with '60s protest movements seem to me thin.

Whatever the connection may be between neoliberalism and social unrest, it is nonetheless clear that socialism is still struggling to gain popularity with citizens in most parts of the world. Why is that? Is it the legacy of "actually existing socialism" that hinders progress toward a socialist future?

As with fascism, the first question is what we mean by "socialism." Broadly speaking the term used to refer to social ownership of the means of production, with worker control of enterprises. "Actually existing socialism" had virtually no resemblance to those ideals. In western usage "socialism" has come to mean something like welfare state capitalism, covering a range of options.

Such initiatives have often been suppressed by violence. The red scare mentioned earlier is one example, with long-lasting effects. Not long after, the Great Depression and World War evoked waves of radical democracy throughout much of the world. A primary task of the victors was to suppress them, beginning with the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Italy, disbanding the partisan-led worker- and peasant-based socialist initiatives and restoring the traditional order, including fascist collaborators. The pattern was followed elsewhere in various ways, sometimes with extreme violence. Russia imposed its iron rule in its own domains. In the Third World, repression of similar tendencies was far more brutal, not excluding church-based initiatives, crushed by U.S. violence in Latin America, where the U.S. army officially claims credit for having helped to defeat liberation theology.

Are the basic ideas unpopular, when extricated from the imagery of hostile propaganda? There is good reason to suspect that they are hardly below the surface and can burst forth when opportunities arise and are exploited.

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Peru's Oligarchy Overthrows President Castillo



Manolo De Los Santos

June 6, 2021, was a day which shocked many in Peru's oligarchy. Pedro Castillo Terrones, a rural schoolteacher who had never before been elected to office, won the second round of the presidential election with just over 50.13% of the vote. More than 8.8 million people voted for Castillo's program of profound social reforms and the promise of a new constitution against the far-right's candidate,

Keiko Fujimori. In a dramatic turn of events, the historical agenda of neoliberalism and repression, passed down by former Peruvian dictator Alberto Fujimori to his daughter Keiko, was rejected at the polls.

From that day on, still in disbelief, the Peruvian oligarchy declared war on Castillo. They made the next 18 months for the new president a period of great hostility as they sought to destabilize his government with a multi-pronged attack that included significant use of lawfare. With a call to “throw out communism,” plans were made by the oligarchy’s leading business group, the National Society of Industries, to make the country ungovernable under Castillo.

In October 2021, recordings were [released](#) that revealed that since June 2021, this group of industrialists, along with other members of Peru’s elite and leaders of the right-wing opposition parties, had been planning a series of actions including financing protests and strikes. Groups of former [military](#) personnel, allied with far-right politicians like Fujimori, began to openly call for the violent overthrow of Castillo, threatening government officials and left-leaning journalists.

The right-wing in Congress also joined in these plans and attempted to impeach Castillo on two occasions during his first year in office. “Since my inauguration as president, the political sector has not accepted the electoral victory that the Peruvian people gave us,” Castillo [said in March](#) 2022. “I understand the power of Congress to exercise oversight and political control, however, these mechanisms cannot be exercised by mediating the abuse of the right, proscribed in the constitution, ignoring the popular will expressed at the polls,” he stressed. It turns out that several of these lawmakers, with support from a right-wing German foundation, had also been [meeting](#) regarding how to modify the constitution to quickly remove Castillo from office.

The oligarchic rulers of Peru could never accept that a rural schoolteacher and peasant leader could be brought into office by millions of poor, Black, and Indigenous people who saw their hope for a better future in Castillo. However, in the face of these attacks, Castillo became more and more distanced from his political base. Castillo formed four different cabinets to appease the business sectors, each time conceding to right-wing demands to remove leftist ministers who challenged the status quo. He [broke](#) with his party Peru Libre when openly challenged by its leaders. He [sought](#) help from the already discredited

Organization of American States in looking for political solutions instead of mobilizing the country's major peasant and Indigenous movements. By the end, Castillo was fighting alone, without support from the masses or the Peruvian left parties.

The final crisis for Castillo broke out on December 7, 2022. Weakened by months of corruption allegations, left infighting, and multiple attempts to criminalize him, Castillo was finally overthrown and imprisoned. He was replaced by his vice president, Dina Boluarte, who was sworn in after Congress impeached Castillo with 101 votes in favor, six against, and ten abstentions.

The vote came hours after he announced on television to the country that Castillo was dissolving Congress. He did so preemptively, three hours before the start of the congressional session in which a motion to dismiss him for "permanent moral incapacity" was to be debated and voted on due to allegations of corruption that are under investigation. Castillo also announced the start of an "exceptional emergency government" and the convening of a Constituent Assembly within nine months. He said that until the Constituent Assembly was installed, he would rule by decree. In his last message as president, he also decreed a curfew to begin at 10 o'clock that night. The curfew, as well as his other measures, was never applied. Hours later, Castillo was overthrown.

Boluarte was sworn in by Congress as Castillo was detained at a police station. A few demonstrations broke out in the capital Lima, but nowhere near large enough to reverse the coup which was nearly a year and a half in the making, the latest in Latin America's long history of violence against radical transformations.

The coup against Pedro Castillo is a major setback for the current wave of progressive governments in Latin America and the people's movements that elected them. This coup and the arrest of Castillo are stark reminders that the ruling elites of Latin America will not concede any power without a bitter fight to the end. And now that the dust has settled, the only winners are the Peruvian oligarchy and their friends in Washington.

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The Global Push For Population Growth Shows We're Not Grappling With The Climate Crisis



Carter Dillard - Photo: YouTube

Progress is being undone by growth, especially as the climate crisis deepens.

In all of the news surrounding Vladimir Putin, it might have been easy to overlook that he had recently revived a Soviet-era policy [called the “Mother Heroine” award](#), which goes to women who bear 10 or more children, offering financial incentives and other benefits in a bid to spur population growth. He is not alone, with a host of men who perch atop pyramids of power—from [Elon Musk](#), to Iran’s Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei](#), to Hungary’s strongman [Victor Orban](#)—pushing women to have children as a means of growing the base of those power pyramids and further elevating the men at the top.

Corporations in the U.S., through targeted media, push for the same by

sensationalizing the idea of an [economic “baby bust”](#) that threatens the nation. Contrast the scant media coverage of studies showing the massive impact a universal ethic of [smaller families would have on the climate crisis](#), with the ubiquitous and not-so-stealthy [advertising](#) we see across popular media platforms. The rhetoric of the constant need for more workers, consumers, and taxpayers goes beyond just pushing women to have children and supports recent successful moves [to ban contraception and abortions](#).

It does not help that civil society organizations that purport to protect children, equity, animals, the environment, and human rights and democracy often ignore these issues, fearing the ugly framing of population issues from the past rather than pivoting towards the existential justice of socially and ecologically regenerative family reforms. In each one of these areas of need, progress is being undone by growth, especially as the climate crisis deepens.

Putin’s and others’ push for constant growth—and the silence of many nonprofits around the issue—reveals the lie at the base of the climate crisis: that population growth and the expansion of the Anthropocene is sustainable, or even desirable.

That lie is fundamental because it is existential, preceding more practical questions like how to limit emissions. The lie (and the growth it enables) is undoing attempts to limit emissions [as growth takes over](#). The lie encompasses an existential worldview that sees Earth as a human resource, children deserving of no particular level of welfare at birth (like those conditions that the United Nations [Children’s Convention](#) purports to provide), treats being born crushingly poor or ultra-rich as an act of god rather than a product of inequitable family planning policy, and treats democracy as more of an abstract concept than an actual process whereby people meaningfully [influence the rules under which they are forced to live](#).

That population growth is not sustainable should be painfully obvious now, as the [population-driven climate crisis](#) unfolds, killing people worldwide in [unprecedented heat waves](#).

[Some push back](#) on the connection between population growth and the climate crisis, but these analyses mistake population growth as simply a matter of numbers. Population growth entails exacerbating the unjust power relations described above—between parents and their children, between rich and poor,

between people and their political leaders, etc.—in which power flows top-down, rather than bottom-up, [as truly participatory human rights and democracy actually require](#). Population growth entails relatively few extracting wealth and power from the majority—again something that should be obvious as the ecological costs of our economic growth are slated to fall on the vulnerable majority: future generations.

Is growth, in and of itself, desirable?

Growth is enabled by not ensuring, through things [like family planning incentives](#), that all children have minimum levels of welfare. Is that desirable? Growth is enabled by [not ensuring children equal opportunities in life](#). Is that desirable? Growth is enabled by ignoring the value of participatory democracy and [scrapping any minimum level of connection](#) between democratic “representatives” and the people subject to their rules. Is that desirable?

The alternative to Putin’s and others’ pyramids—in which a few are empowered by disempowering the majority—involves reversing the flow of power, first and foremost by making family planning universally [a child-centric process](#). That move makes us—in the most basic way—truly other-regarding, and changes the direction of power so that would-be parents are not lording over future generations and the ecologies of our planet, but working together to ensure all children are born in social and ecological conditions that satisfy the requirements of the Children’s Convention. That act—of becoming fundamentally other-regarding—enables us to physically [constitute future communities as free and equal people](#), the ideal of consensual governance that many theorists have envisioned but rarely achieved.

Child-centric planning is the epitome of shifting the flow of power from the powerful down upon the vulnerable—which enables exploitation—towards a flow from the vulnerable up to the powerful, aligning children’s interests in conditions of birth and development in which they will thrive, with women’s interest in the elimination of [life-hobbling pronatalism](#), with the average person’s interest in more equal opportunities in life as well as smaller and more functional democracies where the average person is actually empowered, with nonhumans’ interest in the restoration of nonhuman habitat, restorative environmentalism, and more empathetic persons inclined to treat animals well (what nonhumans value most of all).

We might be inclined to resist such radical reforms because the majority of people alive today would support them, and there are good [reasons to defer to the majority](#). Given that the majority of persons are actually those vulnerable-to-us people who will live in the future, and this work would be saving them from the tyrannical minority that is those people alive today inflicting harm on the future, you should think the opposite.

We can do this work because being free, in terms of who we are, precedes being free in terms of what we do—including forming governments to assign property to wealth that was made by externalizing costs, [by not giving mothers and kids what they need](#).

Free people will fundamentally limit and decentralize the power (including subtle power like climate emissions and the impact of bad parenting on communities) others have over them through Fair Start family reforms like [climate restoration](#) and [#birthequity baby bonds](#) to [physically constitute democracy and consensual governance](#) where people are actually empowered to make the ultimate rules under which all must live. And there is only really one way to do that: Parental readiness policies that avoid things like parents [torturing their children to death](#), birth equity redistribution of wealth to [ensure true equality of opportunity](#), and a universal [ethic and default of smaller families](#).

Changing the flow of power in this way is fundamental, or existential, justice in action. It is the antithesis of Putin's move to grow and centralize Russian power by exploiting future generations (or the move Musk, Khamenei, or others are trying to make) and instead takes our most basic values and uses them to structure power relations for the future majority, ensuring that we begin to orient from a just and genuinely inclusive place.

Putin's policy shows us the lie, that growth is sustainable and desirable, at the base of the climate and so many other crises. The lie hides top-down power over the most vulnerable and has created the crises we face today. Let's unlearn that lie and reverse the flow.

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