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Peter Gelderloos
Geopolitics for 2024
on the probabilities of state power or revolution
7 February 2024

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specific question, want me to elaborate on something, drop a comment, and I'll respond if I'm able.

Additionally, something I'm less able to contribute to: Black and Indigenous anarchisms need more space and more support. To be truly successful, any revolutionary approach needs to be multiple, it needs to be anticolonial, and it needs to understand the origins of oppression. The specific historical lineage of anarchism that was born in Europe is not sufficient, not for those of us trapped within whiteness and certainly not for everybody else.

For more on these directions, check out Klee Benally's *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred*

Modibo Kadalie, *Intimate Direct Democracy*

Zoe Samudzi and William C. Anderson, *As Black As Resistance*

and William C. Anderson, *The Nation on No Map*

Finally, here is a thought-provoking article about solidarity with both the Kurds and the Palestinians—two peoples facing genocide—and a call for internationalism from below rather than an internationalism that privileges state actors.

Ozlem Goner, "Internationalism beyond the Geopolitics of States and Solidarity in 'Complex' Situations"

chances. Vanguards, authoritarian parties, and reforms betrayed the strongest social movements of the last 100 years. They do not deserve any more chances.

- Abolition already happened, but because it was partial, it only changed the institutions of oppression without ending oppression itself. Meaningful abolition needs to identify the shared root of exploitation and white supremacy (many of today's abolitionists are already preparing the groundwork for a second major defeat-in-victory).
- Decolonization already happened. But because it was political, it only spread the colony, training the colonized to act like their colonizers. To destroy colonialism, its beginning points and the vehicles for its adaptation need to be destroyed.
- A revolution needs to enact solidarity between all people, but people need to be honest about where they are coming from. People who bear a middle class culture need to unlearn it, as it manifests in a politics of comfort: building informal social power, flattening contradictions, and avoiding conflict. Currently, its crusade is to destroy practices of transformative justice—and the difficult experiences those practices come from—in favor of the kind of attitudes (simultaneously fragile and vicious) that flourish on social media.
- Revolution is a question of organization, but nearly everyone who poses it this way is already limiting themselves to a counterrevolutionary idea of organization.
- There is another way of organizing ourselves, of making plans, of taking strategic steps. And there always has been.

I've been trying to develop these arguments in my writing, and it is a major focus of my forthcoming projects. But if you have a

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so we can no longer turn to revolution as a meaningful concept because barely anyone knows how to imagine a revolution anymore.

Once we get through the early moments of revolution in which we can carry ourselves solely on passion, spontaneous intelligence, and our own tactical innovation, we have not imagined what steps to take next. So, we do not take them. We either become passive, or exhausted, or we try repeating the exact same dance moves that brought us to that place. Or we try an opposite set of dance moves (which usually bring us to a much worse place).

This is unfortunate because we have the most latitude to build a revolution in a moment like this, when one world system is falling apart, and before it rejuvenates itself or before the next system has the chance to fully animate the replacement.

To not squander our chances, though, we need to remember a great many things:

- Democracy is our enemy. Supporting democracy only turns us into innovative designers for the rejuvenation of the American project.

- The Right and the Left are the two hands of the State, equally dangerous. The real line of conflict runs between above and below. However, Right and Left are not the same. The followers of the Left are mostly sincere. We need to be present to them to help spread meaningful forms of revolt, and we need to show them the true nature of their leaders. As for the Right, we must always attack its lies and paranoias. The key is to leave the door open for followers of the Right to betray authority, but never accommodating their anxieties. We need to build power based on expansive solidarity to show them what that could look like, but they need to take the step of abandoning identities based on oppression.

- Marxism betrayed the strongest revolutionary movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. It does not deserve any more

India will not fall apart after Modi. but Russia could easily fall apart after Putin. With China, it's hard to say, because earlier administrations of the CCP lacked Xi's political acumen, his ability to make aggressive calculations that hone in on how the Chinese state could increase its power without accepting any of the options on the table (e.g. neither Maoism nor a new Open Door Policy).

In other words, Xi and his advisers can think in a new paradigm, a quality necessary for being able to design a new world system. But part of Xi's system of governance has required an intolerance for any disobedience or dissent, which will make an effective succession much more difficult when Xi is gone. The critical question is, does robust debate happen in secret at the upper and intermediate levels of the CCP, with a projection of consensus and unity in public? Or does Xi's governing method breed a culture of acquiescent bureaucrats who cannot challenge a bad idea? If the latter, China might be able to help launch a new world system while Xi is in charge, but they might not remain the dominant member of the system's central alliance.

Talking bout a revolution

Honestly, the only reason I gave a bump to the probability of a successful global revolution is because global power systems are facing more friction and becoming unable to project stability. Not because we're getting stronger.

And the main reasons we are not getting stronger under our own steam is because we have lost *memory* and *imagination.*

We rarely know how to achieve any continuity from one generation to the next within the alienation and scarcity of capitalism, so we commit the same mistakes again and again. And under the colonial spirituality of rationalism we have forgotten that the real world cannot exist without imaginary worlds. We let capitalism do all our imagining for us until our imaginations become atrophied,

I'm in bed today, chemosick, too foggy to work on my book, and too achy to take a hike on this beautiful sunny day after Imbolc [okay, after editing it's half a week later]. But maybe I can put together a newsletter, a more composed contemplation of the topic I took up in the tongue-in-cheek "The Year Ahead in 2024"

Skip the first section if you want to go straight to the conflicts and changes I think we should be paying attention to. And please keep in mind, analyzing geopolitics requires analyzing the actions of major states and capitalists from the perspective of their own interests, which is a pretty gross headspace to get into. I'm going to make this caveat once to avoid clogging up the whole essay: "good for the US" and "good for investors" means bad for life, bad for the planet.

Geopolitics for anarchists?

Geopolitics tends to be a field of analysis for experts and journalists interested in the competing fortunes of nation-states, their alliances and institutions. They bring to it a level of strategizing similar to sports commentators at Sunday football: they understand the repertoire of plays, they can suss out strengths and weaknesses, but they will never deconstruct the history of the game, ask about the relationship between the bench and the field, the coach and the owner, the spectators and the players (that is, beyond a democratic spectacle: do they get along? are the fans happy with their team?). They will not dissect the architecture of the stadium or the commercial break, and they certainly will not wonder, *is there another kind of game we could be playing?* They need the game to go on forever. If the game stops, they disappear.

Some anarchists might think, if we want to abolish all nation-states, why engage with their irrelevant strategy games? Why understand them on their own terms?

It is absolutely true that anarchists will never show up as a player on the Risk board of geopolitics. We have entirely been

drawn off that map. And that is as it should be. If we are anarchists, we are approaching strategy and power from a completely different place, and with completely different desires and methods.

But currently, it is the geopolitical system of states and capitalism that is most active in producing the future we are forced to inhabit. Knowing what range of futures are likely helps us understand the system we are up against and it helps us prepare.

If you think the zombie apocalypse—or really any apocalypse movie—presents a realistic scenario for what systemic collapse looks like, then you will be engaged in the wrong kind of preparation.

Over the last two decades, I've seen numerous anarchists make serious predictions about where we were headed, and what dangers we faced. This is a bold thing to do, and a good thing, because it allows us to test our theories. All the predictions I remember have turned out to be wrong.

- Trump did not launch a coup: in fact, John Bolton was speaking from experience when he said a coup requires a great deal more organization.
- Fascists are not close to taking over: they are primarily a danger for people at the street level and in the way they push the center rightward in terms of acceptable policy for a democratic government to enact.
- Promoting antifascism in the midst of a growing antiracist movement was a mistake, a step backwards. As it did in its previous iterations, antifascism decentered questions of whiteness and colonialism and allowed the Left to gain ground in what had previously been anti-state movements: it left us flatfooted when real fascism faltered but the democratic State plowed forward.
- Democracy is facing a crisis, but it still poses the biggest danger to us: spreading this awareness more generally might

gun distancing itself from the US and keeping the doors open for good relations with China.

An important change that might tilt the scales could be the US defaulting on its debt in a future recession, or any continuation of unhinged US military aggression around the world, without a matching commitment to its historical allies.

The new alliance would begin among a self-selecting group of countries, but it would open itself up globally and quickly eclipse the UN and IMF in legitimacy, functionality, and resources.

What early tensions would such a world system face? Not that the Paris Agreement or UN are having any effect on mitigating planetary disaster, but the BRICS emphasis on using "sovereign resources" (fossil fuels) to fund development and pay for an energy transition directly block any real alternatives for the planet. This means accelerated and catastrophic climate change would be the backdrop of the new world system. Weather changes are proving most catastrophic for middle latitude countries, but these are the very countries that have to pull the weight of inaugurating a new world system.

Chinese and Indian investment in Africa would likely retain an overtly colonial character (moreso, for example, than Brazilian investment in Latin America), preventing the new system from benefiting from a change in branding or an increased legitimacy.

Power struggles among the most powerful members of the alliance could prove destabilizing, especially as India (a rightwing democracy) overtakes China in economic growth. As the resistance movement in Hong Kong demonstrated, China, as an autocracy, has fewer options for incorporating rebellion. If they could not repress a subversive movement with police force, CCP leadership might split and the system would crack.

Also, dictatorial power arrangements rarely survive strong leaders. Granted, Xi is not a dictator in the way that Hitler and Franco were. There is a very strong party apparatus behind him and he has consolidated his power in the Party over the last decade.

they can be trusted with independence. Quality of life, however, can be a point of common ground between diplomats working for a political order based on absolute state sovereignty, and technocrats and investors working to achieve economic growth through infrastructural investment. Promising a higher quality of life can also be an effective strategy for pacifying potentially threatening popular movements.

Both the paradigm and the resources that BRICS has to offer are proving attractive. Just this year, Iran was one of multiple new countries to join BRICS, flaunting US attempts to isolate Tehran.

What would the tipping point look like, heralding the beginning of a new world system?

BRICS wouldn't necessarily be the vehicle for the new world system, especially since it was designed as an economic and political counterweight within the current world system. But similar to the relation between the League of Nations and the United Nations, it gives a good indication of what the new system would look like.

It could easily kick off as an alliance or treaty after a global recession and the spread of one or two regional wars. The treaty or alliance would include language around a respect for borders and the internal sovereignty of states, and a commitment to mediation instead of warfare. It could be cast as a win-win (rather than the negative sum game of open war) if it were the expansion of an already existing, successful alliance between economic powerhouses. This alliance would open an invitation to all other countries, requiring a recommitment to free trade while announcing major investments as an incentive. Rather than the predatory lending of the IMF, this investment would be putatively designed to modernize infrastructure around the world and increase quality of life.

Original signatories to this alliance would probably have to include China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Egypt, maybe Argentina and Saudi Arabia, and—critically—the European Union, or at least Germany and France. As noted, the EU has already be-

have saved some of our most powerful movements—in Chile and in Greece—from falling into fatal strategic dead ends. It would also have improved the initial framing of the Occupy and 15M movements, allowing them to develop in far more radical directions.

- "Late capitalism" or "the final stage of capitalism" were declared after WWI and it's still chugging along. Discarding Marxism would allow us to more clearly see capitalism's vital strategic, state-driven element: states and their institutions proactively open up new territories to ensure capitalist expansion.
- Being on the look-out for these new frontiers would have given us a head start in identifying the mainstream climate movement and green energy as the biggest threats to life on this planet. Now, we have to play catch up.

It worries me immensely that, as far as I have seen, people who made false predictions didn't own up to their mistakes. Doing so would have been brave, honest, and it would have strengthened us immensely, giving us more chances to sharpen our theoretical tools, to hone our strategic intuition.

And I think that ego, that headlong retreat from our mistakes, has been a major factor shunting radicals around the world into even bigger mistakes, obvious mistakes. Frustrated, would-be revolutionaries are turning to single-issue activism, municipal democracy, or the latest Stalinist cults with robustly defined organizations, a carefully curated prole machismo, but no actual engagement or relevance to social conflict.

Which way the world system?

To summarize, a world system is a system that understands itself as global and that mediates political conflict and the flow of

resources and information in accordance with a certain logic. Each successive world system has a leading state, but that leader does not have the power to control everything that happens in the world system: rather, they are the architect who at a critical moment achieves the power and legitimacy, the hegemony, to design a new world system that all the relevant players agree to take part in.

After World War II, the US took over from the UK and became the architect of the next world system, centered around a putatively universal order of states governed by the UN, headquartered in New York, and a capitalist regime of free trade and investment overseen by the Bretton Woods institutions like the IMF.

The US and its closest allies are no longer the main motors of economic growth, and the share of new investments they capture is diminishing. Politically, the NATO bloc had been expanding its web of alliances into territory that had long belonged in the Russian sphere of influence. Russia is pushing back in Ukraine, but divisions within NATO and the EU have recently immobilized those alliances, so that while Russia continues to receive armaments and financial support from its allies, critical funding for Ukraine has stalled.

Elsewhere, Russia has suffered humiliating defeats, as in its inability to support Armenia against the expansionism of Azerbaijan, which is backed by Turkey. When Turkey joined NATO during the Cold War, this was a major victory for the military alliance as it constituted a partial encirclement of Russia. But now, Turkey is acting on a strategic level like a non-aligned country, even as it continues to wield the ability to block consensus within NATO.

In the Cold War, the non-aligned countries consisted of states that were far weaker economically and militarily than the US and Russia, but that could incrementally improve their position by keeping their doors open to both blocs, essentially seeing who would give them a better deal.

So Turkey is effectively pursuing its own interests, against both the US/EU and against Russia, as well as other mid-weight rivals to

as a very nationalist socialist, China does not place emphasis on the nation-state, per se, as an organizing principle globally. The far more important principle is state sovereignty: within its borders, a state has the legitimacy to do whatever it wants. It can impose ethnic homogeneity to constitute itself as a nation, it can do away with ideas of nation entirely. It isn't anyone else's business. Presumably, disagreement around existing borders between sovereign states should be settled through bilateral diplomacy. Also presumably, as their military power grows, the Chinese ruling class will support coups and regime change in weaker countries throughout Asia, Oceania, Latin America, and Africa, but they will need to find an effective way of governing or justifying these exceptional actions.

infrastructural investment: China will continue to support the global discourse of free trade, walking the usual balance between giving strategic support to important domestic companies and ensuring the possibility for governments to attract investment from anywhere in the world, the right of investors to invest anywhere in the world. But unlike a focus on pure profit, as under the US system, there may be a real shift towards promoting sustained economic growth, initially achieved through major infrastructural "improvement" in post-colonial countries. In other words, China—and India, and Brazil—will likely seek to achieve an expansion in real production, not just domestically, but around the world.

quality of life: given their technocratic background, the Chinese ruling class is likely to favor an emphasis on quality of life over one on human rights. Quality of life, according to the capitalist religion, is something that can be measured quantitatively, unlike human rights. And promoting (this view of) quality of life dovetails with increased investment in advancing infrastructure, whereas the figure of human rights encourages violations of other states' sovereignty. Human rights is a holdover from the paternalism of colonial, Christian countries who need to make sure colonized people have learned how to recite the proper dogmas before

independence would only be granted once the former colonizers and the US decided that a new (local) ruling class was ready. Thus, most oppressive power dynamics from the colonial era carried over after decolonization.

neoliberalism: the IMF and WTO pushed world economies away from protectionism and towards a liberalization of monetary policy, so that in theory, capitalists anywhere in the world could invest anywhere else in the world. The concept of a "free market" was pure mythology, though, as large investments in poorer countries tended to have monopolistic characteristics, and powerful countries could wreck the currencies of less powerful countries. Furthermore, investments in formerly colonized countries tended to achieve profit in a purely speculative, financial way, and/or by reinforcing single export/extractivist/plantation economies.

democracy and human rights: the US pushed for universal democracy and guaranteed human rights. However, these proved the most imperfect of all the organizing principles. Investors often found it more expedient to work with dictatorships, especially when their goal was quick profit or the construction of highly destructive megaprojects. And the US, British, French, Dutch, and Belgian political elite were too jealous of their hold on power to countenance free elections if it meant a government gained power that was less docile or didn't give favoritism to the right investors. As such, these NATO states in particular engaged in coups and supported dictatorships across the world, respectively in "America's backyard" or in former colonies across Africa and Asia. As for human rights, it has proven to be a largely meaningless concept in hierarchical societies that produce vast inequality.

I would love to see a better analysis, but I believe the organizing principles being promoted by China can be summarized as the following.

state sovereignty: though China engages in a great deal of ethnic cleansing and should be qualified as a settler state in at least half its claimed territory, and Xi himself could accurately be described

its south and east, for example in the way it has weaponized Sunni fundamentalist groups related to the Islamic State against both Iran and the Kurds.

Futures

When a world system is faltering, the general options are:

a. the system successfully renovates and reinvents itself, with the old leader launching a reformed architecture

b. a new leader secures the power and legitimacy to win adherence to a new architecture, beginning a new world system

c. people increase their ability to fight back against the State and we win a global revolution, destroying the world system and preventing a new one from taking its place

d. the current world system remains in place, corroding and descending increasingly into civil war until eventually option a, b, or c occurs.

A New American Century

I'm making this reference to the Project for a New American Century, the group of neoconservative intellectuals who backed Bush II and believed they had the strategic plan for revitalizing the US as the undisputed world leader, ironically. The reason is that no player has done more than the US to undermine US hegemony.

The foreign and economic policy championed by Bush II and carried on in some ways by Trump and in other ways by Biden, has probably destroyed any chance the US has of restoring the global architecture that it put in place on the heels of its triumph over the Nazis.

The fact that no one in the US or British political elite seem aware of this fact only reconfirms it. And though the level of self-defeating ignorance is astounding, it should not be surprising, as capitalists usually only understand capitalism at a superficial level, and statists usually only understand the State at a superficial level, similar to sports commentators going over the latest plays.

When the US was at its most powerful, in the late '80s and '90s, immediately after winning the Cold War, the hubris of the neoconservative movement in the political class, and the unbridled avarice of the neoliberal technocracy amongst the financial institutions, directly destroyed the basis for US hegemony.

The IMF, G7, and the whole circus of humanitarian NGOs and international investors were blatant in the ways they benefited from corruption, authoritarian regimes, and internecine civil wars in recently decolonized countries; how by "development" they meant absolute dependence on a single export commodity, so that every poor country was not only completely vulnerable to political pressure from the US and Europe, they might also be plunged into starvation based on the vagaries of the currency market; and how, after the '70s, what they were most interested in was making cutthroat profit on the basis of sheer financial speculation rather than any productive growth that, from a capitalist standpoint, could be seen as sustainable. In other words, the entire Lawrence Summers crowd didn't hide the fact that they were absolute vampires who didn't even believe their own dogma, and the entire Rumsfeld and Bolton crowd *couldn't* hide how ignorant they were about the world, about politics, and about the countries they believed they could dominate.

US power was not masked any better on the political stage.

The US and UK could have accepted occasional disappointments, not always getting their favored outcomes in international conflicts. This theater of "playing fair" could have generated widespread faith in and reliance on the United Nations framework. And this would have buttressed US power in the long run, since

Both the UN and IMF were founded inside the US (with the first UN General Assembly convening in the UK, the closest US ally). The main US rival, the USSR, was included in the UN, since the purpose was to be a universal body for all modern states, but the US consistently used the UN to constrain its rivals, or immobilized the UN when it couldn't get its way. And the USSR was not initially included in the IMF and similar financial institutions, though over time they were invited and integrated. In other words, the US system purported to be universal, just in ways that subtly benefited the US and its allies.

BRICS, on the other hand, is pursuing a different strategy. The alliance gives itself the possibility of being counterhegemonic by not pretending to be universal. It is very explicitly a *counterweight* to the dominant economic institutions and alliances (the G7 and IMF). And yet, it offers more meaningful collaboration. Especially at its founding in 2009, China was the economic powerhouse of the alliance. China has ongoing political and economic rivalries, as well as border disputes, with both Russia and India. Yet both of those countries were invited to form the ground floor, and the founding summit was held not in China but in Russia (though, not without significance, in Yekaterinburg, which is in Asia).

There is nothing revolutionary about the Chinese-authored system. It is absolutely a continuation of the global system of capitalism that has ruled the world with a tighter and tighter grip since the 1500s.

It does demonstrate some different organizing principles, though. We can identify the following principles in the US-led system.

national decolonization: the US distinguished itself from Great Britain, the biggest colonizer in world history, by championing the cause of decolonization… within a certain framework. Every nation-state should have a government along Western lines, but colonized populations were not allowed to self-define. The borders were usually defined by the former colonizers, and

enough of a military threat that no other state would directly attack China or the smaller countries that China considers to be in its primary zone of influence, more on this in a moment. Stabilization operations would require China to project force internationally to protect the flow of commerce and protect major investments. Its bases in Eastern Africa are well positioned to help it police the Red Sea and Suez Canal route through which a great deal of commerce flows between Europe and Asia.

Taking this analysis further, though, would be making the mistaken assumption that one state alone needs to be the sole military and economic powerhouse to launch a new world system. From the Westphalia system to the United Nations, all previous world systems relied on a strong degree of cooperation (between nation-states), and if not consensus, then at least consent.

We can see this more clearly when we look at BRICS, which is the most likely vehicle currently prefiguring a new world system. BRICS, together with the New Development Bank and other linked institutions, provide a counterweight to the G7 and the IMF. They are organized by the powerhouses of the so-called developing world: Brazil, Russia, India, and China starting in 2009, with South Africa added a year later. Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates joined at the beginning of this year.

Clearly, BRICS is achieving important growth, with the original five constituting 45% of the world's population and 33% of the world's GDP (or 27% if not adjusted for purchasing power parity). Compare that to NATO (which is a military alliance and not an economic alliance like BRICS), with 31 members who account for 55% of global military spending, 12% of the world population, and over a third of the world's GDP.

Meanwhile, the New Development Bank, headquartered in Shanghai, has total capital of $100 billion, with $34 billion in authorized lending annually. This is much less than the $932 billion that make up the IMF's total resources, but is still nothing to sneeze at.

the UN was authored by the US and it headquarters global politics in New York City. But instead, they misunderstood the hegemonic and relational nature of power, and thought that having an unprecedented amount of power meant that they could act unilaterally without undermining the basis of that power.

This would be like if Apple had gotten everyone in the world to use Apple computers, but then didn't let people produce any media on an Apple computer that was critical of Apple. What does it matter if you trash talk X, if the only forum to do it on is X?

By unilaterally invading Iraq twice and killing millions of people, by flagrantly overthrowing social democratic (but capitalist!) regimes that didn't favor a handpicked list of Western investors, by protecting Israel from any slightest slap on the wrist to the point where nearly the entirety of Israeli society now feels entitled to commit genocide—not out of view, the way the US sometimes does, but in front of the cameras, and they're the ones holding the camera, smiling and cracking jokes—the US and UK have destroyed the legitimacy and functionality of their own political instrument. The US (and under its protection, Israel) flagrantly ignores UN resolutions whenever it wants. It acts like a "rogue state" within the interstate system that it designed, and designed to its advantage. And this cowboy attitude has always characterized US foreign policy (except, arguably, under FDR), but it accelerated under Reagan and especially Bush II.

Trump aped the arrogance of it with several unilateral moves, increasing blank check support to Israel, for example, and retreating from the very question of strategy with a non-interventionist tendency that left key US allies in the lurch. The Biden administration, meanwhile, has tried to press a reset button on strategic thinking, but they're acting like it's 1996.

Israel was once an important military laboratory for the US and a nuclear option in the world's key oil producing hub, at a time when a pan-Arab alliance posed the threat of controlling both the oil and the Suez canal. Now, Israel is largely a liability; Saudi Ara-

bia, Turkey, and Iran are all aggressively trying to redraw power lines in West Asia and none of them rely exclusively on the US as a patron; Yemen is effectively threatening shipping through the Suez canal; and most West Asian oil is exported to India and East Asian economies, primarily China.

As Israel carries on with its blatant genocide against Palestinians, the UN is even proving inept at delivering humanitarian aid and barely even registers as a potential mediator. The only actors able to target Israel with any real consequences are Hizbollah, the Houthis, and Revolutionary Guard-linked militias. The chief actor in the mediation process is Qatar. In other words, all the actors who are gaining in legitimacy and power are allies of Iran, which is the only one of the three regional powers that the US has no leverage or alliance with.

Meanwhile, the US is damaging its relationship with European governments. Trump in particular showed the EU and NATO that they could not assume the US would always be reliable, and this is a direct result of the dysfunction of democracy as the world system falls apart. Democratic mechanisms still provide an important release mechanism that can pacify and incorporate resistance movements before they become revolutionary. But in the US, Brazil, Hungary, Poland, and the UK, rightwing populist electoral victories have shown that actually, democracy is dangerous to power because it *is not* total bullshit. Up until now, electoral promises were all rubbish because no new political administration endangered the underlying economic policies of neoliberalism. The technocrats didn't have to worry: their machine would keep humming along.

Even progressive electoral victories in Greece, Brazil, Argentina, and elsewhere let the capitalists know: nothing to worry about here. And the democratic states have proved capable of dismantling *actually* fascist movements like Golden Dawn in Greece before they proved too much of a threat. But the rightwing white populists like Trump, Bolsonaro, Orbán, and Johnson not

growth, leaving out the non-quantifiable factor: strategic planning and power contests by states.

Japan could not possibly be the next global architect because it had never won a war against the old leader, the US, so it had no bubble of autonomy within which to begin creating a new design. Once Japan challenged the US—at a purely economic level—in the '80s, US planners simply turned off the faucet. After the Korean War, though, China did have that military victory, and with it a bubble of regional autonomy.

So could China be the architect of the next global system, and what would that look like?

For starters, China does not appear to have the military strength that earlier world system architects enjoyed. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the British had the most powerful fleet, giving them a global military reach, and at the end of World War II the US had the most effective military, the largest carrier fleet, nuclear bombs, long range bombers, and military bases with runways large enough for these bombers, all across the world.

Today, China has advanced technology but only recently achieved a blue water fleet, and only recently went intercontinental, setting up military bases in eastern Africa. However, this distinction may not be as important as it was in the past.

There is no state that the Chinese government needs to overthrow or conquer in order to take its place as a global architect (Taiwan comes close to holding this status, although for reasons far more relevant to Chinese ruling class ideology than to China's stature on the world stage; Taiwan, in fact, could become China's Israel). In the current system, open warfare has shown diminishing returns. No major powers have gone head-to-head since 1945, and all the greatest interventions of the two world powers (Vietnam, Afghanistan, Afghanistan, Iraq) cost them more than they gained.

The only military capacity China would likely need to take on the role of global leader is the capacity for deterrence and for stabilization operations. Deterrence simply means that they pose

A BRICS road

At this juncture it seems unlikely that the US could rescue its project of global dominance, but until an effective new world leader steps forward with a convincing new architecture, that means the current system will drag on, descending increasingly into conflict, civil war, and even a neofascist regimes in a few regions, until a decisive change occurs in one direction or another.

In the essay, "Anarchy in World Systems," the argument is made that that next global architect would probably be China, or potentially India.

Before exploring those possibilities, let's take a look at a feature of this theoretical framework we're using, the world system. The most relevant theorist is Giovanni Arrighi, who was combining a largely materialist analysis of global economic flows with a largely anarchist analysis of power and social design under the modern state. He doesn't credit the anarchists of course, but he's an academic, so that's to be expected.

In the first edition of the book published in 1994, Arrighi does that bold thing: he makes a prediction. And he gets it completely wrong, saying that Japan will be the architect and leader of the next world system. In a later edition of the book, however, he does the decent thing and acknowledges that he was wrong and that it would likely be China. He doesn't, however, offer a convincing analysis of what flaw in the theory led him to make that mistake.

"Anarchy in World Systems" argues that his mistake comes from Arrighi favoring the materialist side of his own theoretical tool over the anarchist side. Capital accumulation is not the driving force of the world system. It is a necessary fuel, but capital accumulation does not happen without the architecture and the strategic planning of states. We can realize how obvious this should be if we let ourselves see, in hindsight, how ridiculous the prediction was that Japan would be the number one global power. This prediction was based on statistics for Japan's economic

only eroded the functionality of democratic governance, they also threatened the stability of the technocratic status quo, scaring the hell out of investors who had been living in a Candyland made just for them, and they burst the assumed durability of key political formations like the European Union or the US-European alliance.

Europe—long a valuable container for cultural and political legitimacy, given the white supremacy at the heart of the world system—has for the first time in nearly a century had to consider its separate interests, and this is already showing up in a markedly different approach towards China. In the US, the political elite already consider China an adversary worthy of a new Cold War, whereas in Europe, China is considered a partially reliable strategic partner. If something does not change quickly, the US will be relegated to the same status.

And without reliable US support, the EU will have to bring itself up to war readiness, able to dissuade Russia from further invasions. In order to find a balance that Russia won't risk upsetting, that may mean abandoning Ukraine to a permanent partition.

From the perspective of US power, none of this looks good. To have any chance of renovating the world system it authored, the US would need to make grand gestures in order to expiate their rotten brand:

- supporting Palestinian statehood and breaking Israeli public support for its current ruling class by wrecking the Israeli economy
- normalizing relations with China and Iran but ensuring favorable investment and trade deals with putative democracies like India, Taiwan, and South Korea
- making a convincing, substantial pitch for rebranded international investment that distinguishes itself from the mercenary monetary policy of the IMF by assuring more autonomy

for "sustainable development" directed by the local ruling classes of formerly colonized countries, etc.

- unveiling a convincing plan for a global transition to green energy that accelerates the current wave of profitable investment, extraction, and production, while also including a "global justice" element that gives meaningful resources to poor countries to participate in the transition and improve their economic standing

And internally:

- co-opting abolition for the second time (the first time being in 1865) by decriminalizing drugs, eliminating prison for all nonviolent offenders, and expanding the use of unarmed neighborhood patrol cops
- instituting universal healthcare.

The likelihood of this happening, however, seems minuscule, given how little awareness the current ruling class has of all the ways they are sabotaging their own power. They even seem to think that *projecting force* is the way for them to stay in control. But no one is contesting that the US has the strongest military in the world. They don't need to. All rivals need to show is that the US military is not effective at creating the outcomes desired by its ruling class. That was demonstrated in Afghanistan. The question was brought to a costly standstill in Iraq. And now the US is stomping up and down the Red Sea and the Mediterranean firing missiles into Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, puffing out its chest and demonstrating that *if you hit me with a straw I'll hit you with a hammer* but what they're actually showing is their ineffectiveness, their willingness to destabilize the region out of pure hubris, and their permanent contempt for any other country's sovereignty, even that of their allies. This seriously damages faith in the US as a potential world

leader because one of the key changes from the British world system to the American world system was decolonization, and in the wake of World War II the US positioned itself as a champion of freedom from dictatorship and freedom from aggression.

US force is irrelevant. For two years, Ukraine has fought Russia to a standstill, the second strongest military in the world, destroying million dollar Russian tanks with thousand dollar drones. The Houthis are now using drones to threaten shipping in one of the most important commercial waterways in the global economy. The effectiveness of multibillion dollar US missile defense systems is moderate. Meanwhile, US missile strikes from bases, ships, and planes all across the region are worse than ineffective, because they are strengthening rivals and forcing nonaligned countries to realign themselves at a more cautious distance from both the US and Israel.

Instead of projecting force, the US needs to be projecting intelligence, creating solutions to the many crises pummeling the world system. The current US ruling class does not see the actual problems, and is not proposing any real solutions. The chance of a change of guard that pushes the US and European elite in a more intelligent direction is extremely low, based on a glance at the electoral map.

From the Trumps, throwing gasoline on the fire at home and abroad, to the Bidens, trying the same old techniques and hoping for different results, the political mainstream is at war with itself. Politicians, technocrats, and investors would receive the kind of proposals actually needed to save the current world system like some bizarre mix of treason, progressive nonsense, and socialistic revolution.