

Western Imperialism and its Zionist Enforcer¹

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In the aftermath of October 7, the US President, Joe Biden, spoke of his enduring commitment to the state of Israel. Repeating accusations that Hamas had ‘murdered babies’, ‘raped women’ and ‘paraded their victims like trophies’, Biden vowed to stand against what he termed the ‘pure evil of a terrorist organisation’.² The fact that these claims were subsequently debunked made no difference to Biden’s position. Neither has the deaths of 38,000 Palestinians, 16,000 of them children. To put this in context, the United Nations recently confirmed that more children were killed in the first four months of the Israeli assault than in every global conflict over the previous four years.³ This is hardly surprising given that the Israeli state, in the first three months of its attack, dropped the equivalent of three nuclear bombs on the most densely populated area in the world.⁴ Despite being just 25 miles long and six miles wide, the Gaza Strip is currently home to 2.3 million people. Dropping 65,000 tonnes of explosives into such a restricted area was bound to result in the mass destruction of human life and physical infrastructure.

Since October 2023, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have damaged or destroyed 370,000 homes, 31 of the Strip’s 36 hospitals and all of Gaza’s universities. It will take 14 years just to clear the rubble and more than 370 years to rebuild the civilian infrastructure at the rate of construction evident in the strip in the years before the Israeli assault.⁵ These are far from the worst statistics, moreover. Despite its promise to shield civilians, the IDF has repeatedly targeted those sheltering in refugee camps and UN facilities.

They have targeted schools and places of worship and even bombed their own ‘humanitarian safe zone’ in Al-Mawasi.⁶ A recent report in the *Lancet* estimates that the true number of deaths may be as high as 186,000 given that so many lie buried under the rubble – a shocking 8 percent of the population of Gaza.⁷ Their other tactic has been to starve the population into submission. As early as January 2024, the United Nations warned that everyone in Gaza was experiencing hunger and that a quarter of the population was experiencing malnutrition. Six months on, that disaster is now a catastrophe. According to the World Food Programme, half of Gaza’s population is living in famine-like conditions as the IDF systematically restricts food aid, while periodically targeting aid workers for assassination.⁸ Carpet bombing infrastructure and blockading aid amounts to state sponsored terror, designed to subject the Palestinians to a collective trauma that will haunt them for generations.

Indeed, the combination of bombing and displacing, terrorising and starving civilians has forced the normally conservative International Court of Justice, to rule that Israel may well be committing genocide and that it must comply with an international order to end its invasion of Rafah.⁹ Meanwhile, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has requested arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and for his Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, to face charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Members of the Israeli regime have reacted with fury to these charges, but why have

Western leaders – so quick to denounce terror when perpetuated by the Putin regime - been so slow to denounce it when committed by Israel? Why have they continued to send vast quantities of weaponry to Netanyahu’s regime knowing it is likely committing genocide? Why are they providing crucial political cover for a state that so frequently breaks international law? And why have they allowed the mass starvation of innocent civilians when they remain rhetorically committed to democratic freedoms and universal rights?

The answer to each of these questions lies in the unique role that Israel plays within global capitalism. Situated in the world’s most important geo-strategic region, Israel has, for generations, been America’s watchdog in the Middle-East – a region that contains 60 percent of the world’s known oil reserves and is responsible for 30 percent of global container shipping traffic.¹⁰ Controlling the Middle East is of vital strategic importance to the western ruling classes, but their relative remoteness from the region means that Israel is an essential partner in their pursuit of global hegemony. Israel matters more than any other strategic ally and it is this consideration that determines the way that western leaders respond to its behaviour. Joe Biden may occasionally signal the need for the IDF to show restraint, but he also insists that there are no red lines when it comes to Israeli atrocities.¹¹ He may occasionally withhold a delivery of weapons, but over the last eight months, the United States has increased its military support for Israel, provided essential diplomatic cover at the United Nations and allowed it to murder Palestinians with impunity. America’s real priorities are evident in what it does rather than in what Biden says, as the Palestinians

have always been collateral damage in a power play that begins with the regional superiority of the Israeli state and ends with calculations of US power in the Middle East vis-a-vis China and Russia.

A partnership in the making

At the end of the 19th century, Britain's interest in the Middle East centred on the Suez Canal. The canal opened in 1869 to facilitate trade between Europe and Asia and it immediately allowed Britain to link its most important colony - India - to its European markets. It was to secure this trade route that Britain successfully colonised Egypt in 1882, putting down a nationalist uprising known as the 'Urabi Revolt'. British interest in the Middle East soon shifted to Persia (modern day Iran) when oil was discovered there in 1908. Over the next thirty years, oil replaced coal as the most important source of global energy, as vast reserves were discovered in the region. Consequently, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed following World War One, Britain and France carved up the region to control the profits available through cheap oil and more integrated global trade. One response to this imperialist carve up was an Arab nationalism that sought to rid the region of western interference. Arab nationalists insisted that the Sykes-Picot Agreement - between Britain and France - partitioned a single Arab people into a series of artificial territories. Their aim was to build a single Arab State across the Middle East that would reflect their common identity, their common culture and their common language. For

Jewish nationalism, on the other hand, the Skyes-Picot Agreement offered the potential for a new partnership with the western powers via the logic of Zionism.

The roots of modern Zionism can be traced to the eighteenth century Jewish Enlightenment as a group of intellectuals sought to revive the Hebrew language at the same time as they sought to modernise Jewish education in line with the Enlightenment ideals of science and progress.¹² Out of this group emerged a smaller number who sought to link the revival of Jewish learning with Jewish nationalism. As Illan Pape explains, these proto-Zionists put forward two foundational ideas that were to become much more important in the centuries to come - the "redefinition of Judaism as a national movement and the need to colonise Palestine in order to return the Jews to the ancient homeland from which they had been expelled".¹³ Initially this ambition to transform Judaism along nationalist lines was only one, relatively marginal, expression of Jewish cultural life. Most Rabbi's resisted the transformation of their religion into a political movement while many secular Jews feared that Zionism would raise questions about their loyalty to their European nation states and increase the likelihood of anti-semitism.¹⁴

It was a sharp rise in anti-semitism during the late 19th century that convinced a growing number of Jews that Zionism represented their best chance to escape persecution. But for many others, the rise in anti-semitism was itself linked to a wider rise in class struggle as reactionary rulers

looked to divide their working classes by scapegoating minorities.¹⁵ For the most progressive Jews, it was this rise in class struggle that held the keys to a future without anti-semitism. By fighting together for international socialism, working people could create a society in which religious differences would never again be used to divide them. This was the logic of revolutionary Jews, including Rosa Luxembour, and Leon Trotsky, but it was antithetical to the Zionist Jews around Theodor Herzl.¹⁶ Reacting to the latest rise in European anti-semitism, Herzl concluded that there was no possibility for Jews to assimilate into the European nation-states.

He claimed that European Jews would always be discriminated against without a state to protect them and that they should look to Palestine as the long term solution to the 'Jewish Problem'.¹⁷ This was tantamount to accepting that anti-semitism was inevitable and that rather than fighting such vile racism it had to be skirted round - at a terrible cost to the Palestinians. This is because Zionism had little chance of creating such a state without external support. Zionism was a weak force in search of a sponsor and so Herzl proposed a counter revolutionary politics that would separate Jewish workers from their European counterparts while looking to the interests of European imperialism in the Middle East. Here is Chaim Weizmann, a future President of the World Zionist Organisation, on the possibilities that might develop for Zionists if Britain was to colonise Palestine after World War One.

We can reasonably say that should Palestine fall within the British sphere of influence, and should Britain encourage Jewish settlement there as a British dependency, we could have in twenty or thirty years, a million Jews out there, perhaps more; they would develop the country, bring back civilisation and *form a very protective guard for the Suez Canal (my emphasis)*.¹⁸

Much of this came to pass once Britain colonised Palestine in 1917. At the time, 80 percent of the population were Semitic Muslims, 10 percent were Semitic Jews, and the rest were Semitic Christians. Despite this, the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, confirmed that his government favoured a national home for Jewish people in Palestine.¹⁹ This was deemed important to Britain's regional interests and over the next thirty years, successive British governments worked with the leaders of Zionism to create a proto-Jewish state in the territory. The more the Palestinians resisted this, the more the British relied on Zionist militias to enforce their rule. In Europe, meanwhile, the rise of fascism was an important catalyst to the eventual creation of a Zionist state in the Middle East.

The defeat of European socialism meant that a powerful anti-Zionist tendency within the Jewish community had been defeated, but it was the horrors of the Holocaust that ultimately led to the creation of Israel. The fact that six million Jews had been butchered by the Nazis lent enormous weight to the Zionist claim that Jews would never be safe

in Europe and that they needed a state of their own. Palestine was deemed the perfect solution. It had already been home to Zionism for decades and was in the middle of world's largest oil reserves. Thus, when Britain gave up its Protectorate after World War Two, the UN responded to pressure by the European powers and the United States to partition Palestine into two sovereign states - Israel and Palestine. The leaders of Zionism promised Jews that they would never again be slaughtered by a foreign power but they themselves were soon involved in ethnic cleansing. In 1948, the embryonic Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) acted with a number of Zionist militias to clear nearly half of the Palestinian people – some 750,000 – from their lands. The Nakba (or Catastrophe) was the founding act of the new Israeli state; a state built on the brutal annexation of Palestinian land and a state that has oppressed the Palestinian people ever since.²⁰ Naomi Klein captures the complex interaction of 'victim and victimiser' associated with the early Israeli state in the paragraph below.

The Israelis who came to Palestine in the 1940's were survivors of genocide, desperate refugees, many of whom had no other options *and* they were settler colonialists who participated in the ethnic cleansing of another people. They were victims of white supremacy in Europe being passed the mantle of whiteness in Palestine.... Israelis are nationalists in their own right and their country has long been enlisted by the United States to act as a kind of

subcontracted military base in the Middle East. All this is true all at once.²¹

Zionism has traded cynically on the victims of the Holocaust ever since - even as it has butchered its own victims generation after generation. And the fallout from the Second World War was also important is a second sense. As British influence waned in the region, American power rose to replace it.

US Imperialism steps in

In 1945, the US State Department referred to Saudi Arabian oil as "a stupendous source of strategic power and one of the greatest material prizes in world history".²² But this prize was located in a sea of hostile Arabism particularly as national liberation movements grew across the Middle East.²³ Throughout the 1950's and 1960's Britain and France lost their influence in the Middle East as Arab Nationalism reasserted itself. In 1951, Mohammed Mossadegh led a coalition of nationalist and leftist forces to power in Iran, while in 1952 Gabel Abdel Nasser came to power in a nationalist revolution in Egypt. In response to this new threat from Arab nationalism the US made two important interventions. In 1953, they sponsored a military coup in Iran which overthrew the democratically elected government. Mossadegh had wanted oversight of state royalties from Anglo-Iranian oil (British Petroleum) and when this was not forthcoming the Iranian parliament voted to nationalise the company. In response, the US and the UK sponsored a military coup that elevated the Shah, Reza Pahlavi, into absolute power as an agent of the west.

In 1956, US power was once again on display, this time in Egypt. Following their successful revolution Nasser's government nationalised the Suez Canal as an essential component of the country's future economic development. This deprived the British of their major strategic asset in the region, and, anxious to regain it, a tripartite force of British, French, and Israeli soldiers invaded Egypt in October 1956. This was soon followed by one of the most embarrassing climbdowns in 20th century diplomacy, however, as the US and the USSR effectively told the waning European powers that they could no longer control the Isthmus of Suez. From that point on, the US became the dominant power in the region, projecting its influence through three central channels. To control the region's oil reserves, the US relied on their influence over Iran, alongside a relationship with the Saudi Arabian Royal family, who, in 1933, agreed to the establishment of the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) - a consortium of three US and one British oil companies.²⁴ To reduce the influence of the Soviet Union in the region, the Americans devised what became known as the 'Eisenhower Doctrine'.²⁵ This relied on bringing reactionary rulers into the US sphere of influence through a combination of preferential trade agreements, access to the western financial system, access to western expertise for oil exploration and the military hardware to oppose the spread of communism.²⁶

The third channel through which American power flowed was the state of Israel. In the summer of 1967, the IDF responded to a

threatened blockade of Israeli ships with a surprise attack on the Egyptian air force. This precipitated a major regional conflict, known as the 'Six Day War', in which Israel defeated the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and seized the Golan Heights, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Sinai Peninsula. Perhaps even more importantly, the scale of the Israeli victory convinced America that Israel now had the military capacity to become their primary agent in the region.²⁷ Hostilities recommenced in 1973 when Egypt attacked Israel in the Sinai Peninsula and Syria attacked them in the Golan Heights. The IDF successfully repelled the Syrian army, but they fought to a military stalemate with the Egyptians. And this, in turn, was to prove strategically important, as the US brokered a peace agreement - known as the Camp David Accords - in which Egypt regained the Sinai Peninsula, in return for recognising the State of Israel and moving out of the Soviet sphere of influence.²⁸

If the Camp David Accords represented a major strategic success against Arab Nationalism, the United States was about to lose a vital ally in the region when the Shah of Iran was overthrown in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This transformed Iran into one of America's most implacable enemies - but it simultaneously forged a stronger relationship between the American ruling class and the leaders of Zionism who each saw Iran as a dangerous new force they would have to reckon with. Arab Nationalism had begun to be tamed but the rise of Radical Islam meant that the region

would still need to be patrolled. After all, the Middle East continued to be the world's most important zone of imperialist activity, but it was also becoming more volatile and more difficult to control. In addition to the Iranian threat, the USSR remained geographically closer than their US rivals and continued to orientate towards Arab Nationalism to project Soviet influence throughout the Middle East.

Countering these dangers meant arming a powerful watchdog in the region with sharp enough teeth to periodically bite its Arab neighbours.²⁹ Over the last sixty years, Israel has become that watchdog, receiving more military and financial support from the US than any other state in the world.³⁰ Maintaining Israeli military superiority - along with important agreements with the ruling classes of Saudi Arabia and Egypt - has allowed the US to project its power in the Middle East without the burden of holding formal colonies. It has simultaneously helped the US to control both the world's major oil reserves and one of the major trading routes of global capitalism. But when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, it initiated a long period of defeat for American power in the region.

A New American Century?

During the 1980's the US sought to solidify its grip on the Middle East through the continued normalisation of relations between Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel. Using the Camp David Accords as their template, the US could resolve tensions between Israel and its most important Arab supporters, at the

same time as they provided Israel with military and financial superiority. For the Zionists, normalising relations with America's most powerful Arab neighbours was important in their own ability to decisively resolve the Palestinian question. The key to a fully Jewish state was to push the remaining Palestinians into Lebanon in the North, Jordan in the West, and Egypt in the South.³¹

The 'Apartheid One State Solution' has always been the goal of the Zionist leadership of Israel, but they need to ensure that this will not precipitate a wider regional conflict that would destabilise relations among America's most important regional backers. During the same period, the US supported Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran in 1980. A secular Arab Nationalist, Hussein was concerned at the destabilising impact of the Islamic Revolution, but he also saw an opportunity to assert Iraqi interests in the Persian Gulf, as Iran was perceived to have been internally weakened by the removal of the Shah and isolated from its previous backers in Israel and America.

For the Palestinians, the normalisation of Israeli-Arab relations constituted an existential threat to their goal of regaining their homeland. They were still living with the disastrous consequences of the Nakba, but also of the 'Six Day War', when 300,000 Palestinians were expelled from the West Bank and the illegal Israeli occupation expanded beyond the 1947 borders. The 1980s witnessed sporadic guerrilla attacks by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) until the First Intifada exploded in 1987. This was the moment when Hamas

first developed out of the Gazan wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, but it was also the catalyst for the Oslo Accords of 1993, when the Palestinian National Authority was established with limited sovereignty over parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Western powers immediately proclaimed Oslo as the pathway to a ‘Two State Solution’, but it was always a fig leaf to allow Israel to continue to annex Palestinian land, free from the gaze of potential critics. The rhetoric of compromise was designed to mask a strategy of continued domination, as the Zionists used the first decade of peace negotiations to annex more Palestinian land, to expand their illegal settlements and to increase the Jewish population in the West Bank from 115,000 to 203,000. As Yara M. Asi explains, the “Oslo Accords were not really about peace or justice at all... [instead, they] cemented occupation as a permanent form of governance, giving Israel almost complete control of Palestinian borders and the Palestinian economy”.³²

Edward Said spoke for many when he denounced the Accords as instruments of western domination designed to cement the occupation of Palestinian territory and ultimately deliver Palestinian surrender.³³ Israeli bad faith coupled with the deliberate corruption of the Palestinian National Authority led to a second Intifada in 2000, but for American strategists surveying the Middle East at the turn of the century, the overall picture must have looked favourable. They had managed to convince the world that there was a pathway to peace in Palestine; they had helped to weaken Iran through a near decade long war with Iraq;

they had roundly defeated Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait in 1990, and they had seen off their major imperialist rival when the USSR collapsed in 1991.

Frances Fukuyama famously proclaimed this period as ‘the end of history’, but for a number of ideologues on the right of the Republican Party it was actually the prelude to a New American Century. The Project for a New American Century (PNAC) first emerged in 1997 when a group of neo-conservatives founded an influential think-tank in Washington.³⁴ Core members included Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz and its central aim was to maintain American hegemony in a world in which the Soviet Union had been defeated but Chinese power was on the rise.³⁵

To maintain America’s status as the world’s preeminent superpower, the PNAC advocated strengthening alliances with America’s allies while actively targeting its enemies. They insisted that US power be projected through its overwhelming military superiority, but also through the claim that America should become the legitimate guarantor of freedom and democracy everywhere.³⁶ The PNAC called for a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity, that could shape the 21st century in ways that were favourable to America’s ongoing leadership.³⁷ To this end, PNAC members called for significant increases in military spending, but also the promotion of what they termed ‘political and economic freedom around the world’.³⁸ This was code for extending the presence of US capitalism down the barrel of a gun. It was code for strengthening the US military in

order to drive home the advantages that the American ruling classes were gaining from global neoliberalism.

‘Regime change’ as imperialism

As early as 1998, the PNAC began calling for regime change in Iraq.³⁹ Arguing that Saddam Hussein was building up ‘weapons of mass destruction’, the PNAC advocated removing him from power to impose a regime more favourable to US interests.⁴⁰ Their template may have been the Shah of Iran, but that success was largely achieved through an internal coup – this would have to be done through US forces on the ground. The attacks on 9/11 provided the neoconservatives with the opportunity they had been waiting for. Shortly after the attacks, the PNAC reiterated its calls for regime change in Iraq, but now a number of their most influential members were also members of the Administration of George W. Bush.⁴¹ When America invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, their strategic objectives were fourfold. They wanted to defeat ‘radical Islam’ under the auspices of the so-called ‘War on Terror’; they wanted to enrich the American ruling classes through a mixture of plundering Iraqi oil reserves and a longer term imposition of US dominated neoliberalism; they wanted to weaken and isolate Iran with the possibility of a future invasion of the Islamic Republic and they wanted regimes that were sufficiently favourable to US interests that America could pivot away from the Middle East to concentrate on China.

But the invasions were an unmitigated disaster. Following initial military success in both Iraq and Afghanistan, US forces quickly became bogged down in protracted insurgencies that drained the US of its strength in the region and ultimately strengthened the hand of its rivals.⁴² This was US overreach and it came back to haunt them. Their strategy was to completely smash the existing Taliban and Ba’athist regimes under the mistaken logic that they could then impose their own neoliberal alternatives. Particularly in Iraq, this meant initiating a game of divide and conquer in which America sought to monopolise Iraqi oil through a combination of bribery and corruption and by playing different religious factions against each other. Philip Marfleet captures their strategy below.

Following the invasion of 2003...the US in effect constructed a state of corruption in which bribery, nepotism and embezzlement were routine. Bolstered by new political structures based on sectarian identity, the system allocated resources and opportunities by means of confessional networks, excluding the mass of Iraqis of all ethno-religious affiliations.⁴³

During the first year of occupation US corporations obtained almost \$50 billion worth of construction contracts, or more than 80 percent of all of the major projects commissioned by the new regime. In the same period, Iraqi firms received just 2 percent of the contracts, heightening the

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realisation among ordinary Iraqis that removing Saddam was never about freedom and democracy but always about plunder and domination.⁴⁴

The chaos that ensued was the seedbed for both internal civil war and an insurgency that brought misery and violence to millions of people throughout the region.⁴⁵ Within a year, the Americans were losing in Iraq and despite a counterinsurgency in 2007, the result in both countries was eventual military defeat after long, bloody, and costly occupations. Imperialist war games, plunder and mass killings also triggered some of the largest anti-war demonstrations in the west since the Vietnam war. US hegemony was weakened in the region and this defeat has marked US foreign policy ever since.

34 Today the Taliban are back in power in Afghanistan, while Iraq is as likely to be influenced by Tehran as it is by Washington. America lost militarily, but it also lost much of its regional standing, as the Arab masses came to despise the naked injustice of the American-led-occupations and the Arab ruling classes witnessed a military reversal for American imperialism. The rise of ISIS also came directly out of the chaos created by the American invasion and their emergence was one reason why a Syrian regime favourable to Iran - and hostile to America - was able to survive the Arab Spring, thanks to the efforts of Putin's Russia.⁴⁶ America spent over a trillion dollars losing its wars and only succeeded in creating a far more fractious Middle East in which its major regional rival was strengthened and in which Russia once again became an influential player. Gilbert Achcar

explains the scale of the American defeat below,

The US defeat in Iraq had huge consequences.... rather than deterring its opponents, the United States actually emboldened them, especially in the Middle East. Iran vastly expanded its regional military involvement after 2011; the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) rebuilt itself in Syria and from there invaded huge parts of Iraq's territory; and Russia intervened massively in Syria starting in 2015.⁴⁷

When the Tunisian masses rose up against their government in 2011, followed by popular uprisings in Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Bahrain, what came to be defined as the Arab Spring represented new attacks on US-led imperialism. From the US perspective, the most decisive setback came with the overthrow of their key Egyptian ally, Hosni Mubarak, but the entire episode once again underlined the volatility and the unpredictability of the whole region.⁴⁸ Decades of neoliberal restructuring was the background to the Arab Revolutions, as the social contract, long established by Arab Nationalism, was undermined in favour of the free play of market forces. Led by the International Monetary Fund, and at the behest of western corporations, Arab states embraced the dictates of neoliberalism by cutting state subsidies for energy and food and by reducing employment in the public

sector. The global economic crash of 2008 only served to sharpen these tendencies, and as food prices spiked and austerity worsened, people rose up across the Middle East.⁴⁹ Western Imperialism got lucky when the Egyptian military successfully put through a counter-revolution in 2013, but the overall lessons of the period are worth underlining.

America entered the 21st century as the world's only superpower, but its defeats in Iraq and Afghanistan created a series of negative consequences for its standing in the region. Russian influence grew through its defence of Bashar al-Assad, as did Iranian power through its growing influence over Syria and Iraq. America now faces Arab populations that are deeply hostile to western imperialism and a group of Arab leaders that increasingly look to their own strategic interests, often using China as a counterweight to US power.⁵⁰ America still relies on its longstanding alliances with the ruling classes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, but as the majority in both countries are hostile to American interference, neither is as reliable as the Israeli state. It is only in Zionist Israel that American support is both economically and politically supported by the apartheid regime. And it is still primarily through this relationship that America maintains its dominant influence across the Middle East.⁵¹ Indeed, American defeats in Iraq and Afghanistan meant that its partnership with Israel took on an even greater significance, as a wounded imperialism leaned more heavily on a vigilant watchdog in the region.

The China problem

The Project for a New American Century sought to project US power in a particular set of circumstances. America has been the world's major military power since the Second World War. It maintains more than 800 military bases across seventy different countries and continues to spend more on its armed forces than the next ten countries combined.⁵² Yet the economy that pays for this military superiority is in relative decline. The US currently accounts for 40 percent of all military spending, but only around 25 percent of world GDP (down from 50 percent during the 1950s). In other words, its ability to maintain its global hegemony increasingly relies on its hard power and its ability to coerce. The PNAC was designed to leverage these advantages by aggressively asserting US interests around the world. American enemies could expect to be overthrown, while its 'friends' would be left in no doubt as to the remaining global superpower. This is one reason why its failures in Iraq and Afghanistan were so damaging. The limits of US power were exposed at the very time they needed to assert their military superiority, as China was rapidly emerging as a new challenger for global superiority.

Over the last 45 years, the Chinese economy has been transformed from a relative backwater into the second largest in the world.⁵³ Starting with Deng Xiaoping's 'Reform and Opening Up' process in 1978, the Chinese Communist Party has managed the largest continuous accumulation of capital in world history. Chinese GDP has grown from 6.5 percent of the US total to

roughly 76 percent, and this has been achieved whilst remaining outside the US sphere of influence. Recognising that China has been on a superior growth path for decades and that it has more than three times as many workers as the United States, American strategists have been struggling to deal with the China Problem. Some of them publicly define this challenge in terms of a Thucydidean rivalry – a rivalry in which China is actively intending to replace the US as the global superpower.⁵⁴

But in reality, China has neither the military capacity nor the financial or technological ability to replace the US in the short to medium term. Instead, it has skilfully pursued a strategy of soft power designed to challenge American dominance by presenting itself as a ‘non-interventionist great power’ that wants to build economic ties and diplomatic friendships.⁵⁵ Where the US favours a unipolar world in which it leads a coalition of its central allies, China favours a multipolar world in which it can gradually create bi-lateral alliances, particularly with countries in the Global South.

American strategists trace their country’s ability to replace Britain as the global hegemon to two crucial factors. On the one hand, the American economy had grown much more quickly than that of its rival in the decades around the turn of the 20th century, creating the material conditions for global leadership. On the other hand, Britain faced a second major rival to its dominance in the form of Germany and so had to choose which of its rivals to take on and which one to eventually support.⁵⁶ China may well

overtake America as the largest economic power by the middle of this century, meaning that America must maintain its military superiority alongside vital strategic alliances in three regions of the capitalist system – Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East.

In Europe, American power is secured through its leadership of NATO which has increased its power steadily since the collapse of the Soviet Union and rapidly since Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Putin’s attack has been a strategic success for America as one of its main rivals has been bogged down in a costly war, while European states increasingly look to the US for military protection.⁵⁷ In Southeast Asia, the US works through its longstanding relationships with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, but also through its military alliances with Australia, the Philippines and Thailand. Southeast Asia now accounts for 40 percent of the global economy, more than any other part of the capitalist system. It is also of vital strategic importance, with the US attempting to limit China’s influence over its neighbours at the same time as it bolsters its allies in the region.⁵⁸ Control of the South China Sea is particularly important in this regard, explaining why the US has deployed almost half (5 of 11) of its nuclear aircraft carriers there, to monitor the Chinese Navy but also to patrol the channels through which China exports vast commodities to the West. China has responded to this threat through its Belt and Road initiative (BRI) – a four trillion dollar infrastructure initiative designed to create alliances from East Asia to the Middle East at the same time as it provides an alternative land route for

Chinese exports.⁵⁹ This brings us to the Middle East itself – the most volatile of America’s three key zones of activity and one in which China has been making important in-roads.

Middle Eastern imperialism with Chinese characteristics

Recognising its potential vulnerability to western influence over the Suez Canal, China has used its Belt and Road initiative (BRI) to invest in more than 20 ports along the critical maritime passage that straddles the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).⁶⁰ They have put money into the Red Sea Gateway Terminal, for example, a joint venture between China’s COSCO Shipping Ports and Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund to develop and operate a container terminal at Jeddah Islamic Port.⁶¹ They have also invested in the TEDA area of the Suez Canal Authority and the operation of the new port terminal in Haifa Bay. China’s wider investment in the region has also been growing, with Middle Eastern countries receiving 23 percent of total BRI investment in 2022 up from 16.5 percent the previous year.⁶²

Alongside these strategic investments, the sheer weight of China’s trade with Middle Eastern countries is worth underlining. Over the last two decades, China has become the major consumer of Middle Eastern oil, with Saudi Arabia and Iran each relying on China for more of their petroleum exports than on any other country. Chinese-Middle Eastern trade flows have also grown rapidly, up from

\$265 billion in 2017 to \$507 billion in 2022.⁶³ This has allowed China to displace the European Union as the region’s most important trading partner, affording its rulers significant soft power which they use in two important ways. On the one hand, China uses its promise to ‘invest without interference’ to encourage Middle Eastern countries to nudge towards them politically. Here they rely on the self-interest of regional ruling classes who recognise their ultimate reliance on American power but would like a counterweight to American hegemony. Testifying to the US Congress recently, Jon Alterman explains this dynamic in the following way.

[Arab leaders] feel that a closer relationship with China would give them the ability to resist US hegemony and resist demands to reshape their domestic and foreign policy to reflect US preferences. Even US partners and allies felt that the US had enjoyed monopoly power in the Middle East for too long and that competition would benefit them.⁶⁴

The second way that China uses its influence is through its relationship with Iran. When America reimposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic in 2018, China continued to buy vast quantities of Iranian oil. For China this amounted to an important hedging exercise, given the possibility that America could use its influence over the Gulf states to threaten China’s future oil supply, but it also ensures that a main plank of US foreign policy is

blunted in its effectiveness. Iran and China have also signed a ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’ which is estimated to be worth 10 percent of the entire budget for the Belt and Road Initiative (\$400 billion).⁶⁵ The centre point of this deal is the joint development of the Port of Chabahar and a new oil terminal near the Jask port, south of the Strait of Hormuz. Another mark of China’s growing influence in the region was its ability to broker a détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia in 2023 – paving the way for improved relations among the region’s two most powerful states and potentially reducing Iran’s isolation in the region.⁶⁶ This underlines the point that though Saudi Arabia may be in the US sphere of influence, it moves with a relative independence that is unthinkable for Israel.

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None of this has gone unnoticed by America which has been countering these Chinese initiatives with initiatives of its own. The most important of these has been to normalise relations between Israel and its neighbours, first under the auspices of the Oslo Accords and latterly under the Trump inspired, Abraham Accords.⁶⁷ The Abraham Accords are a series of bilateral agreements brokered by America between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in September 2020. In return for formally recognising the Israeli state, the deal provides for greater security co-operation, technology sharing, and cross border investment among the signatories.⁶⁸ The US had simultaneously been working on a far more significant agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia, which appeared imminent at the end of 2023, only to be derailed by the

Hamas attack on October 7.⁶⁹ America will seek to resurrect this deal after the Israeli offensive and if it succeeds in normalising relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, the payoffs will be significant. A more unified set of regional allies would strengthen America militarily, potentially allowing it to pivot some of its forces to Asia; it would drive a wedge between Saudi Arabia and Iran and allow the US to increase their control over the Suez Canal and the region’s oil reserves – two essential factors in their overarching conflict with the Chinese.

As it stands, the US continues to rely on its Israeli watchdog to project its regional power far more successfully than China can over the coming period. Although China has increased its economic influence over recent decades it has not been able to impose itself militarily. China can offer important financial incentives to the region’s rulers; it can gain influence through its Belt and Road Initiative, and it can even challenge American power in low risk ways through its relationship with Iran. What it can’t yet do is protect its own massive investment in the region or fully secure its own future oil requirements, both of which continue to be decisively shaped by US power. Here it is important to remember that China’s own transformation has relied on its ability to produce cheap consumer goods destined for the West. They rely on trade routes through the Middle East for 60 percent of their European trade and receive most of the oil they import from Russia through the Middle East as well. Around 50 percent of China’s energy imports also come from the Gulf

states, making China particularly vulnerable to American decisions that could cripple their future capacity to produce – and cripple their future capacity to wage a war. Dale Aluf explains the hard power dilemmas facing the Chinese Communist Party below.

China currently lacks the regional hard power projection capabilities to provide adequate security for its vast interests in the Middle East...The Suez Canal is a key route for China's westward shipments of goods, including around 60 percent of its exports to Europe. For now, China continues to freeride on the US security umbrella to protect its interests in the Middle East. As tensions escalate, this arrangement will become increasingly untenable for Beijing and China may well look to increase its regional military presence in the medium to long term.

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While the shale revolution has made America less reliant on Middle Eastern energy than it used to be, the rise of China has meant that continued control of Middle Eastern oil – and trade through the Suez Canal – has become no less significant.⁷¹ Israel is the most important guarantor of these regional advantages for western imperialism; an ally that guarantees absolute loyalty in return for its own ability to oppress the Palestinians in their own land.⁷²

Conclusion - Is the guard dog off the leash?

This article has laid out the strategic partnership forged between the US ruling class and Zionism over the last sixty years. It has argued that Israel provides America with an advantage that is simply unavailable to its major rivals - a militarily sophisticated state that came into being to defend the interests of western imperialism. That said, over the past few months, America has become increasingly critical of the Israeli assault on Gaza. In December 2023, for example, Joe Biden publicly criticised their 'indiscriminate bombing' before insisting that the conflict must be followed by the resumption of talks for a 'Two State Solution' - an assertion that was immediately resisted by Netanyahu's government.⁷³ In March 2024, Biden again criticised Israel, this time for its continued failure to allow sufficient food aid into Gaza, and two months later, Biden threatened to withhold US weapons if the Israeli army went into Rafah.⁷⁴ The US did symbolically withhold a shipment of bombs when the Israelis ignored them but behind their public condemnations, Biden's administration actually increased the levels of military equipment it sent to the IDF. America has armed the IDF with \$6.5 billion worth of military equipment since October, but nearly half on this total – \$3 billion – was shipped in May alone.⁷⁵ In other words, America has radically increased its supply of military equipment in the month since the IDF began their assault on Rafah.

Although members of the American ruling class occasionally criticise Israel, they do so as senior partners in a brutal occupation,

anxious only to protect their own reputation and to avoid any spillover into regional conflagration. America was content with the slow and silent strangulation of Gaza that had been ongoing since Israel first blockaded the Strip in 2007. They were equally content with the slow and steady annexation of Palestinian land in the West Bank, while they set about organising a détente among their most important regional allies through the Abraham Accords.⁷⁶ It was this slow and steady strangulation that Hamas shattered on October 7, primarily to force the world to notice their plight, but also to sink the imminent peace agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel.⁷⁷

40 This was a significant setback for the US administration, but it has been an unmitigated disaster for Netanyahu's hard right administration. Zionism has always contained an inbuilt tendency to radicalise to the right as an oppressive settler-colonialism that must brutalise those that it oppresses. Israeli public opinion has consistently been encouraged to celebrate those most willing to dehumanise the Palestinians, with Netanyahu building his decades long career through his promise to keep his foot on Palestinian necks.

The security failure on October 7 shattered his reputation as Israel's great protector. He promised to keep Israelis safe even as he terrorised the Palestinians, but this promise was exploded when thousands of Hamas fighters broke through Israel's Iron Dome defences and killed more than a thousand people in Southern Israel. Netanyahu has been disgraced in his own state. He allowed the worst massacre of civilians since the

founding of Israel and now needs a fast and noisy slaughter to avoid utter humiliation. Short of annihilating the Palestinians or physically driving them into Egypt and Jordan, however, this latest act of brutality will create what it has always created among colonised and occupied populations: ongoing resistance and perpetual conflict. The severity of the attacks, coupled with the hypocrisy of the Western elites, is also radicalising new layers in Europe and America with millions marching against the violence and the starvation of the Palestinians. Instead of slow and deliberate strangulation, this hot and visible destruction is also causing the Democrats problems with Muslim voters they will need in November's Presidential Election, particularly in key swing states like Michigan.⁷⁸ A Trump victory would not be disastrous for the American ruling class but there are two dangers that they are concerned about.

The first is the potential for the Arab masses to rise in solidarity with their Palestinian brothers and sisters. Millions have already taken to the streets in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and the West Bank. While in Bahrain, one of the signatories of the landmark Abraham Accords, the regime has caved to mass pressure, expelling the Israeli ambassador. This is one of the reasons that the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, has visited the region no less than eight times since October. He wants to make sure that the Arab ruling classes in America's sphere of influence have the military and surveillance infrastructure they need to keep a lid on popular resistance.⁷⁹

Their second worry is destabilisation in the region that could strengthen America's rivals. Tensions have already ramped up between Israel and Iran while any peace agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia has had to be shelved.⁸⁰ Attacks by Houthi Rebels in the Red Sea also remind us that the US military is far from omnipotent, while the fallout from America's support for Netanyahu is pushing developing countries closer to China. One senior diplomat told the *Financial Times* that "we have definitely lost the battle in the Global South. All the work we have done with the Global South (over Ukraine) has been lost... They won't ever listen to us again."⁸¹ None of this means that America will abandon its watchdog in the region, however. The advantages are too significant, and the relationships too foundational, for the US to look for an alternative partner.

What it does mean is that the logic of Zionism is now making it more difficult for the US to achieve the stability envisaged by the Abraham Accords. It means that Netanyahu's domestic strategy is working against America's wider strategy - making it more difficult to envisage a coalition of Arab States normalising relations with Israel in the interests of American imperialism.⁸² The genocide also means that there are now billions of people who see the Israeli state for what it has always been, a brutal oppressor of the Palestinian people in order to be a brutal enforcer for the western ruling classes. These lessons won't easily be forgotten.

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