



African Communist

First Quarter 2025

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**Hands Off
South Africa!**



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A global inflexion point – Trump

Coverage of Trump's return to the Oval Office often focuses on his scattergun, shooting from the hip style, his assumed irrationality and his odious personal traits along with those of his right-wing circle of oligarchs like the former South African, Elon Musk. This kind of focus can too easily mask the fact that the Trump phenomenon is not so much a personal accident, as a product and symptom of declining US-led global hegemony.

Over the past 80 years, we can broadly distinguish two major phases of US-led imperialism – 1945-1990 (a Cold War two bloc, US/Soviet Union global reality), and 1990 to roughly 2020 (unipolar US-imperialist hegemony). It is now possible to speak of a third, emergent phase of US imperialism. Of course, these phases are not located in separate, water-tight compartments. Old and new elements intermingle. Nevertheless, there are clear inflexion points, and we are now in the midst of just such an inflexion point.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s had marked the end of the two-bloc global system established after the end of World War 2. Between 1945 and 1990 US-led imperialism was counter-balanced by the existence of a Soviet bloc of countries, the result of the Red Army having carried the greatest burden in defeating fascism. This reality offered some space for manoeuvre and, in relatively progressive cases, for 'non-alignment' in what we then called the 'third world'.

With powerful and escalating nuclear arms build-ups, the US- and Soviet-led blocs possessed the capacity to mutually obliterate each other, hence a 'cold' war which could not be allowed to erupt into full-blown direct conflict between the US and the Soviets. But if the war was a 'cold' stand-off across the front line that ran through Germany, it was 'hot' in the Global South – not least here in southern Africa where over a million people died as the US and its proxies (including the apartheid regime) waged wars against national liberation struggles.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and its socialist bloc, the US emerged as a relatively uncontested global hegemon. The end of history was supposed to have arrived as we entered into a unipolar globe in which the entire world was supposedly marching towards "Western liberal democracy" and neoliberal economic orthodoxy. There were, we were told, no alternatives.

This was the global reality in which as South Africans we finally achieved our democratic breakthrough. Through struggle, the democratic dispensation that we won went far beyond (at least on paper) the limits of 'Western liberal democracies'. Our eminently progressive constitution enshrined justiciable collective social and economic rights. Far from providing unlimited rights to private capitalist property, for instance, the Bill of Rights allows for the state to expropriate private property to achieve "the nation's commitment to land reform, and to reforms to bring about equitable access to all South Africa's natural resources."

Our constitutional settlement opened the prospect for a wider national democratic advance. But this prospect was immediately checked and throttled by the other pillar of the US-led unipolar imperial order of the day – the strait-jacket of neoliberal macroeconomics. With the 1996 adoption of GEAR, our own self-imposed shock therapy, the aspirations embedded in our new Bill of Rights, and in the promises we made in successive election manifestos, were starved of oxygen. In 2025 we are still living in this reality, though even worse now, with the ANC in government speaking the left language of national democratic transformation, while an ANC-led Treasury chokes it off with mindless austerity of right-wing neoliberal policies, talking left and acting right.

How do we understand our challenges in the context of this new inflexion moment in global politics of which Trump 2.0 is both an expression and a symptom? It is a destructive and distracting force, yet decisive and globally impactful: Trump signed over 200 decrees within six hours of his inauguration. This further exposed the illusions of Western liberal democracy as nothing but a sham. In Trump's Maga call to "Make America Great Again" the "again" is a self-recognition of this decline. Even the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* proclaimed "America is Back" in its 25 March cover, which showed Trump pissing on a downcast Zelensky at the recent chaotic Oval Office press conference.

However, while the decline is incontestable, the US remains, for the moment, the most powerful economic and military state. The US dollar remains supreme in global trade and the US retains over 700 foreign military bases around the world. In its decline, there are positive openings for a progressive advance to a more multipolar world. There is an imperialist crisis with major internal contradictions. But Trump's Maga and its "drill baby drill" also hold many dire threats to humanity at large, including a headlong, profit-driven, race into planetary destruction. In short, the decline is relative and a progressive politics requires thoughtful but determined responses both domestically and multilaterally.

From 1990 through the presidencies of Bush senior, Bill Clinton, Bush junior, Obama, Trump 1.0 and Biden the US sought to consolidate its global hegemony through its domination of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, and military alliances, notably the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato). What Samir Amin called the "imperialist triad" (North America, Western Europe, and Japan) with the US at its centre constituted a unipolar hegemony. Under the domination of this imperialist core, global inequality deepened, earlier developmental advances in the Global South were reversed, hunger, poverty, social and political instability increased.

This has been spurred on by the sometimes overt funding of reactionary forces and weak governments like South Africa to consolidate destructive neoliberal policies and turn them into official national policies articulated by the comprador elites instead of our country developing its own organic policies.

Ideologically the imperialist core presented itself as the 'freedom world', 'liberal democracies'. Any country seeking a degree of sovereign independence was, by contrast, liable to be labelled 'authoritarian', 'terrorist', part of the 'axis of evil'. Those

so designated suffered sanctions, blockades, US-fomented 'colour revolutions' (as in Ukraine in 2014), or military destruction (Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, etc).

There have also been soft power electoral victories over naive governments and movements like ours, through capital funding new political parties to dominate the electoral terrain and weaken the liberation forces. This has also, for example, been demonstrated by the European Solidarity Centre, which coordinates coalitions of pro-market forces - through local foundations and pumps huge sums of money into this project, as mentioned in the IEC report on party electoral funds. In South Africa, capital has not blinked; it has openly entered politics. This is one of several reasons why the disaster of the Government of National Unity was both naive and a betrayal of the masses by its easy capitulation to the forces of capital, coordinated by the Democratic Alliance.

There is a huge hypocrisy in this imperialist narrative of 'liberal democracies' defending 'freedom' against 'authoritarian regimes'. Many of the countries so designated in the West may well be 'authoritarian', but US allies like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Turkey, not to mention Zionist Israel, were somehow exempt from any serious condemnation. The same can be said of the post-Assad Syrian regime's licence to commit blatant brutality and atrocities against the Syrian people, especially the alleged supporters of Assad, and there has been a surge in massacres of religious minorities such as Christians and ethnic cleansing, especially of the Alawite minorities, by the sectarian brutes of the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) terrorists. There has also been a further ban on all Syrian secular political parties, including the Communist Party and all socialist formations. Yet the new regime has been embraced by the European Union, which has softened its condemnation of the continuing atrocities and even invited it to the donor conference in Brussels. The lopsided way in which the International Criminal Court has until recently been able to find evidence of war crimes largely only in Africa speaks for itself.

But in the court of global public opinion, things have changed. Despite the disgraceful genocide denial by the Western political elite and their liberal media pillars - such as the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN and the BBC - the brutal ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the West Bank has been streamed in real time in all of its barbarity for the whole world to witness. The imperial mask of civility has slipped. Trump, no friend of the Palestinians, is simply throwing away the mask. The emperor is naked - his atrocities out in the open.

The failure of the US-Nato anti-Russia proxy war in Ukraine is another reputational blow and a clear indicator of the decline of the transatlantic West. Trump 2.0 is cutting Ukraine loose, blaming Biden for the defeat, threatening Nato's very existence, while dumping erstwhile West European allies who, as one researcher notes, are now "charging around banging the drum of war, threatening to mobilise armies and they do not possess"¹. Trump is in effect conceding to the success of the Russian special military operation and a Russian sphere of influence beyond its own borders and hence a degree of global multi-polarity, perhaps in an attempt at finding a global balance that serves his own interests. This is especially true in view of the increased cooperation between China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran and Russia. We

should remain vigilant against the imperialist machinations and manoeuvres and also note that Trump operates through tariffs, sanctions and military threats.

Trump's moves on Ukraine are partly a sober recognition of reality, partly an attempt to cut back on over US \$350-billion spent by the US and over €134-billion by the European Union expended on a losing war, and partly a response to growing domestic discontent with Washington's involvement in forever wars in faraway continents in the midst of a cost of living crisis faced by the US working class. But perhaps most importantly, for Trump the Ukraine war has diverted attention and resources from the main challenge to sustained US global dominance – the rise and rise of China. Trump is also seeking to refocus US resources on rebuilding its influence in line with the Monroe Doctrine and to fulfil his campaign promises.

While the increasingly financialised economies of most of the major capitalist powers are stuck in a prolonged stagnation or even in recession (Germany), China's GDP is growing nearly twice as fast as the US. As the Marxist economist Michael Roberts notes, China "is now the world's sole manufacturing superpower. Its production exceeds that of the nine next largest manufacturers combined...More electric vehicles are on the road in China than in the US, and China's semiconductor production is one quarter of global output compared to 16 percent in the US and 7 percent in Europe." ²

The critical reason for China's sustained success is its large state sector covering finance and key manufacturing and service sectors. While China also now has a large private sector mainly based in consumer goods and services sectors, it is the lead role of the state sector and the national plan putting public priorities above profit extraction that continue to drive China's sustained advance.

The recent story of the WTO provides an excellent barometer of the global inflexion point at which we have arrived. As mentioned earlier, US-dominated institutions like the IMF, World Bank and WTO were key instruments in asserting US unipolar dominance through the 1990s and 2000s. China joined the WTO in 2001 with the West hoping to use its membership to open up access to China's massive domestic market. But given its manufacturing dynamism the tables have been turned with the US running up a huge trade deficit with China. In an attempt to reverse this, Trump 1.0 and Biden imposed increasingly heavy tariffs on Chinese imports, flouting WTO rules.

When China challenged these within the framework of the WTO, the US simply blocked appointments of judges to the WTO's appellate body preventing a quorum, thus rendering a critical element of the WTO inoperable. In the face of its decline, the US is pulling the plug on its own, erstwhile hegemonic armoury. And now, flouting any pretence at observing basic WTO agreements, Trump 2.0 is launching trade wars against neighbours and allies, Canada, Europe.

These trade wars will cause damage to all, and they will also impact South Africa. Trump has stopped USAID funding for health programmes in South Africa and other parts of the world. He has also stopped the \$2.5-billion to South Africa for so-called democracy support – which should be probed for its regime change agenda. He threatened South Africa whilst supporting minority right wing groups seeking his

protection in their callous call against radical land reform process.

Trump's abrupt interference in the affairs of various countries as he consolidates US hegemony is extreme - changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico, building infrastructure for nuclear-capable aircraft at the US military base in Greenland as a deterrent, encircling Russia, threatening to retake the Panama Canal and wanting to rename it American Canal, threatening to incorporate Canada into the US – all these ideas have caused anxiety and tensions in the concerned countries and others. But these trade wars are most likely to hit Trump's own populist voter base most severely with a rising cost of living and emerging signs of possible US stagflation (stagnation plus inflation), which might provoke an even further drift into Trumpian neo-fascism. These are dangerous times that call for clear domestic and multilateral responses.

As South Africans we should not harbour any illusions about a return to a new two-bloc global order, an imperialist US bloc versus a socialist China bloc. Contrary to any imperialist propaganda (echoed here in South Africa by the likes of Ray Hartley and Peter Fabricius in the Daily Maverick), this, quite correctly, is not the agenda of China or of the Chinese Communist Party. Through a leading role in BRICS+, through numerous Belt and Road initiatives China is seeking to contribute to building a multi-polar world based on mutual respect and shared development. BRICS+ members and partners, for instance, are not an ideologically coherent group. India, for instance, under Modi is closely allied to the US, but India flouted Washington by increasing its trade with Russia, and stopping border hostilities with China, in this way refusing to be frog-marched into a US agenda of you are either with us or against us.

The South African government has played a noteworthy role in contributing to the struggle for a progressive, global multipolarity against the new phase of imperialist aggression. The highlight has been South Africa's lead role in condemning the genocide in Gaza through the ICJ and ICC. In a joint statement with the presidents of Spain (Pedro Sanchez) and Brazil (Lula da Silva), President Ramaphosa noted that 2025 will be a pivotal year for multilateralism. "The challenge before us – rising inequalities, climate change, and the financing gap for sustainable development – are urgent and interconnected." Addressing these issues, the joint statement notes, "requires bold, coordinated action – not a retreat into isolation, unilateral actions, or disruption."

Through their respective chairing of major international events this year - the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (in Spain), COP30 (in Brazil), and the G20 (in South Africa), the three presidents committed themselves to advancing this joint, multilateral agenda. These events should not be like other imperialist gimmicks of empty promises from the developed North to the countries of the South. Support for these developing countries has no economic consequences or benefits for the local economies except through the increase in business tourists.

These and other important initiatives undertaken by the South African government need to be carefully analysed and, where appropriate, used to advance the broader working-class struggles supported by progressive forces, not least the SACP. We should not be tied to the elite pacts of politicians and the bourgeoisie who use these forums to push through corporate state deals and more neoliberalism. We have seen South Africa's commitments to environmental protection against carbon emissions

and the consequent acceptance of climate mitigation loans, falsely called grants, with conditions that prohibit our energy security.

We should also remain vigilant to the contradictory elements within the imperialist camp and their internal crisis and disintegration, particularly between Europe and the US, driven by different strategies to regain the profitability of capital, having exhausted their economic tools to prop up their economies. Europe has opted for a war economy, hence the increase in re-armament, support for Ukraine and assertion of the bloc's collective strength, which is now chided by Trump 2.0. Trump is seeking profitability of capital through hard power, hard bargaining business deal making, tariff regimes, reversing developmental policies and programmes like a return to oil, shale gas, coal and reversing the US's environmental commitments, and security guarantees through investments in proxy countries.

Trump is also working to capture the digital technological production and development space and has brought their role forward, and even those that have once criticised him are now in his camp. They have halted the closure of Tiktok to make an American deal and courted Apple to make the single ever biggest investment commitment in the USA history of \$500 billion. This is backed by the digital tech oligarchs such as Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Larry Ellison, Sergei Brin, Bernard Arnault and others who occupied frontline seats at his inauguration.

At the same time, however, as long as our domestic crises continue to be exacerbated by a failed and senseless neoliberal austerity programme, South Africa's ability to effectively play its rightful role regionally and globally will be severely constrained. We should consolidate the broad front struggle against austerity measures, intensify the struggle for socialism and defeat capitalist barbarism! ●

1 Craig Murray, Substack, 8 March 2025, <https://savageminds.substack.com/p/ukraine-diplomacy-and-war>.

2 Michael Roberts, blog China versus the US, 26 January 2024, <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/01/26/china-versus-the-us/>

Consolidate and build a powerful socialist movement of the workers and poor

Declaration of the 5th Special National Congress of the SACP, held in Ekurhuleni, 11-14 December 2024

Honouring the legacy of Chris Hani

This decisive and successful Special National Congress, convened in memory of Martin Thembisile Chris Hani, stands as a resolute affirmation of our revolutionary commitment. Cde Chris Hani's unwavering dedication to the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) and socialism serves as an enduring beacon for our movement.

His sacrifice and vision for a socialist society compel us to intensify our struggle against racial and gender oppression, imperialism, and capitalist exploitation.

This congress, attended by over 570 SACP delegates representing more than 370,000 members and fraternal organisations, and guests, reaffirms the inseparability of the NDR from the struggle for socialism. The NDR remains the strategic, direct, and shortest route to achieving a socialist society. In honour of Cde Hani's revolutionary legacy, we renew our commitment to fight for the working class and to realise his vision of a society free from inequality and exploitation.

We also welcome the government's positive response to our long-standing call for an inquest into the assassination of Cde Hani, and to document his life and contribution to the struggle for national democracy and socialism.

The state of the NDR

Notwithstanding the political and social advances since 1994, years of neoliberal policies have reinforced the legacies of apartheid colonialism, entrenching racial and gender inequalities, deepening economic marginalisation, and perpetuating systemic poverty and unemployment. These policies have failed to dismantle the structural injustices of colonialism of a special type (CST) and have weakened the state's capacity to lead transformative development.

The 2024 electoral loss of the ANC-led liberation forces' majority represents a profound political setback for progressive forces. This outcome highlights dissatisfaction among the masses with the failure to address socio-economic crises, including unemployment, poverty, inequality, and the rising cost of living. It underscores the crisis of working-class representation in electoral politics, compounded by voter disillusionment with neoliberalism and state capture, which has fuelled a dangerous shift toward ethnic populism.

The coalition government with the neoliberal Democratic Alliance (DA), under the so-called Government of National Unity (GNU), represents a betrayal of the NDR's transformative objectives. This coalition prioritises austerity, financialisation and privatisation over the interests of the working class and the poor.

Decades of neoliberal economic policies—epitomised by Gear (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) and subsequent austerity measures—have entrenched poverty, inequality and unemployment while weakening state capacity to lead transformative development. These policies have failed to address environmental degradation, gender-based violence and femicide, and structural racism, deepening the socio-economic crises and threatening to derail the revolutionary content of the NDR.

Economic and social crises

South Africa's persistent economic and social crises underscore the structural failures of capitalism, which has proven incapable of addressing the needs of the majority. Chronic unemployment, consistently exceeding 30%, and even higher rates of youth unemployment, represent a structural crisis that condemns millions to economic exclusion. These crises are compounded by deindustrialisation, precarious informal work, and policies that prioritise profit over people's livelihoods.

Our health system remains one of the most unequal in the world. It is split into two tiers: a private healthcare system for the minority and a public system for the majority who are poor. The private system, serving less than 14% of the population, is well-funded and provides high-quality care for those who can afford it. Meanwhile, the public healthcare system, which serves the majority of South Africans, is underfunded, overcrowded, and struggling to meet basic needs. This inequality leaves millions of people with little or no access to adequate healthcare. It is a direct result of years of neoliberal policies that prioritise profits over people's health.

Meanwhile, inequality in wealth and income — already among the highest globally — continues to widen. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few perpetuates historical injustices and deepens the socio-economic divide. Essential public services, including education and infrastructure, face a high risk of collapse under policies of austerity and systemic corruption. Frequent power outages, water shortages, and crumbling infrastructure expose the failures of neoliberal governance, further eroding the dignity and quality of life for the working class and the poor.

We reaffirm that the choice before us is stark: socialism or barbarism. Capitalism has not only entrenched structural inequality and poverty but has also driven environmental degradation, gender-based violence and femicide, and rising social violence. Only through the socialist transformation of society can we dismantle these oppressive systems and build a future that prioritises equality and human dignity.

Resolutions of the Congress

1. Reaffirming the NDR as the strategic path to socialism

We reaffirm the NDR as the shortest and direct route to socialism in South Africa. This includes:

- **Grounding the NDR in the vision of the Freedom Charter** and the principles of socialism to address socio-economic crises, environmental degradation, and the structural legacy of CST;
- **Mobilising urban and rural workers**, as well as the poor, around a common programme to ensure working-class leadership in advancing the NDR and socialism;
- **Rejecting narrow nationalist and bourgeois reformist agendas** that derail the working class from its historic mission.

2. Building a socialist axis and Popular Left Front

The formation of a left axis for socialism, anchored by the SACP and Cosatu, in partnership with progressive political organisations, trade unions, and social movements, is essential for building working-class power and advancing the revolutionary content of the NDR. The SACP recommits to:

- Establishing broad sectoral fronts to address critical societal issues, such as youth development, environmental justice, and gender-based violence and femicide.
- Advancing campaigns that prioritise state-led industrialisation, public employment programmes, and community-driven economic development.
- Promoting African unity and solidarity, resist imperialism, and foster cooperation among global progressive forces.

3. Contesting local government elections

The SACP's decision to independently contest the 2026 local government elections is rooted in the need to address the crisis of representation facing the working class and poor. This step is essential for:

- **Advancing working-class representation:** Ensuring that the voices and struggles of the working class and poor drive local governance.
- **Challenging neoliberal policies:** Confronting policies like austerity, privatisation, and outsourcing to restore public ownership and prioritise community-driven development.
- **Building people's power in our communities:** Empowering communities to take control of local governance through participatory structures such as street committees, co-operatives, and local forums.
- **Reconfiguring the Alliance on the ground:** Reconnecting the Alliance with grassroots struggles and aligning it with the revolutionary objectives of the NDR.

4. Promoting national dialogue through popular mobilisation and participation

The SACP welcomes the recent calls for a national dialogue involving all sectors of society to address the multiple capitalist crises facing the country. We understand this is not a once-off event but a process that should inspire millions of our people to actively shape its form and content. The SACP commits to help drive the mobilisation and participation of the workers and poor in this process.

5. International solidarity: Advancing the anti-Imperialist struggle

The SACP recognises that international solidarity is a cornerstone of our movement's efforts to build socialism and resist imperialism. We reaffirm our commitment to standing with oppressed peoples and progressive movements worldwide in their struggles against exploitation, imperialism, and neo-colonial domination.

Strengthening solidarity in Africa

The SACP is acutely aware of the escalating humanitarian crises and persistent conflicts across Africa, exacerbated by neo-colonialism, imperialism, and local governance failures. The SACP recommits to:

- **Supporting Sudan:** Highlight the urgent humanitarian crisis in Sudan, where over 11 million people have been displaced by conflict, food insecurity, and the near-collapse of health services. The SACP calls for immediate international intervention to address mass killings, curtailed humanitarian aid, and skyrocketing food prices that are driving millions into hunger.
- **Expressing solidarity with the people Swaziland:** Renew efforts to push the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to prioritise the long-delayed National Dialogue in Swaziland, supporting the people's demands for democracy and social transformation.
- **Expressing solidarity with Western Sahara:** Reaffirm the SACP's unwavering support for the Saharawi people's right to self-determination and national independence. The SACP condemns Morocco's illegal occupation and calls for the isolation of Morocco until it complies with international law, including UN resolutions.

Resisting US imperialism and neo-colonialism

The SACP notes the increasingly aggressive actions of US imperialism in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and beyond, aimed at destabilising governments, exploiting resources, and undermining sovereignty. We recommit to:

- Standing with nations at the forefront of resisting US aggression, including Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Bolivia.
- Strengthening the Southern Africa Progressive Forum to nurture ideas, alliances, and platforms to counter imperialism and neo-colonialism.

Focus on the Middle East and the Axis of Resistance

The SACP expresses its steadfast support for the Axis of Resistance, encompassing nations and movements standing against imperialist aggression in the Middle East. We condemn the ongoing attacks on Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Iran by imperialist forces and their regional proxies, including Israel and Turkey.

- **Palestine:** Reaffirm support for the Palestinian struggle against apartheid and occupation, endorsing South Africa's leadership in pursuing accountability for Israeli war crimes at the International Court of Justice. The SACP calls for expanding the "Red Card Israel" campaign and mobilising global participation in the annual

“Week 4 Palestine.”

- **Syria:** Condemn the imperialist-driven collapse of Syria’s sovereignty, backed by the US, Israel, and Turkey, which aims to shift the balance of forces in the Middle East.
- **Iran:** Recognise Iran’s critical role in resisting imperialism in the region and opposing destabilisation efforts by the US and its allies.

Latin America: Strengthening ties with socialist allies

The SACP celebrates the resilience of socialist governments in Latin America despite sustained imperialist aggression. We recommit to:

- **Deepening solidarity with Cuba,** supporting its recovery from Hurricane Oscar and calling for the immediate lifting of the inhumane US blockade.
- **Supporting Venezuela** in its fight against US-imposed sanctions and recognise President Nicolás Maduro’s re-election as a reaffirmation of the Venezuelan people’s commitment to socialism.
- Promoting annual solidarity campaigns such as “Hands Off Cuba” and “Venezuela Solidarity Week” to raise awareness and mobilise resources for these nations’ socialist advancements.

Revitalising progressive alliances

The SACP underscores the importance of revitalising class-conscious organisations to confront imperialism and neo-colonialism. We commit to:

- **Reviving the African Network for an Enlarged Left Forum (ANELF)** to provide a platform for strategic analysis and coordination.
- **Strengthening ties with African trade unions** to rebuild their independence, refocus on worker struggles, and counter co-optation by elites.
- **Encouraging the formation and growth of Communist Parties** across the continent to advance ideological clarity and revolutionary praxis.
- **Exploring lessons from international popular fronts contesting elections** to inform strategies for building alliances that challenge imperialism and advance working-class power in South Africa.

This Congress takes place at a decisive moment for our country and the working class. In the name of Cde Chris Hani, we rededicate ourselves to defending the gains of the NDR and advancing the struggle for socialism. With renewed determination, we commit to confronting the socioeconomic crises of our time, challenging neoliberal policies, and building a future of equality and dignity for all.

Socialism or Barbarism!

Victory to the Working Class!

Towards the implementation of our 5th SNC elections resolution

The SACP's resolve to contest local government elections independently must not be reduced to irritations with the ANC but must be rooted in a Leninist analysis of prevailing realities, writes **Jeremy Cronin**

The Party's 5th Special National Congress (SNC) in December 2024 passed many important resolutions. Predictably it was the resolution to participate independently of the ANC in the 2026 local government elections that received the most public attention. It was also what provoked most interest and debate within the SACP itself.

But how exactly will the Party take part in the 2026 local government elections? A key sentence in the SNC's resolution on the issue reads: "the Party's preferred [electoral] contestation is a wall-to-wall (all municipalities) contestation (...)". But this does not mean that the SACP will in the local government election immediately be able to put up candidates in every ward. Which party does?

We need a Leninist approach to elections, rooted in an analysis of the prevailing conjunctural "conditions and realities". We need to guard against what Lenin describes polemically as a childish disorder where wishes are mistaken for real revolutionary possibilities ("voluntarism"). So, what are the prevailing conditions and realities?

We should pose this question not to undermine the resolution for the Party to take part independently of the ANC in the 2026 elections, but precisely to refine how most effectively this should be done.

In seeking to understand these conditions and realities we must bear in mind that they are not static. Much could still change favourably or negatively as the 2026 elections draw nearer. What is more, in part, changes can occur as a result of our own effective positive interventions or mistakes.

On the subjective front, regarding the capacity of the SACP and more broadly of our key working-class constituency, the SNC's resolution on "Party Building and the 2026 local government elections" provides honest, if sobering, pointers. It speaks of many "administrative shortcomings" in the Party, "poor implementation" abilities, and "leadership gaps". It also notes a lack of Party capacity to effectively influence the trade union movement. Critically, from the perspective of local government elections, the SNC further notes that "branches of the Party, the basic organisational units, lack visibility and integration into working-class communities."

Hopefully over the coming year concrete steps to begin to address these subjective challenges will be made. But we need to be realistic: these are not new issues, they have been noted in organisational reports for many years now.

In addition to these realities, and directly contributing to them, are the Party's financial challenges. It is a mark of honour that, unlike many other South African parties, the SACP is not the beneficiary of hundreds of millions of rands worth of corporate sponsorship, not to mention of ill-begotten gains from the plundering of public resources. But of course, honour aside, the lesson of multi-party elections in capitalist-dominated societies is that money plays a huge and often dominant role.

In addition to these sober but necessary acknowledgements of subjective, inner-Party challenges, the SNC in its resolution quite correctly underlines a key feature of the present situation impacting on the subjective capacity of the working class itself. Decades of neoliberal austerity with its ensuing, mass unemployment have negatively impacted the capacity of the motive force of the Party's key constituency. As the SNC resolution puts it – "the current neoliberal agenda, supported by the state and corporate structures, continues to weaken the material and social conditions of the working class." The trade union movement, for instance, no longer has the capacity or coherence it had thirty years ago.

In short, there are multiple challenges for the SACP whether on the electoral front or more broadly. So does this mean that things are futile?

Surprisingly, while flagging serious challenges, the relevant SNC resolution insufficiently highlights the many positive or at least potential assets that the SACP possesses on the electoral front. The SACP has been an active participant in all elections, national, provincial and local since 1994. Unlike some of the pop-up parties of recent years, we are collectively not newcomers to electoral politics. And we underline 'collectively' – because the Party is not grounded in an unstable and momentary personality cult. Independently through Red Brigades and jointly with the alliance, tens of thousands of Party cadres have been active in all areas of electoral work. Currently, there are hundreds of Party members who are elected local councillors, and dozens are mayors. Many thousands more are former councillors. There is, then, a vast store of collective knowledge and experience within our ranks.

But, of course, all these current and former councillors who are Party members serve (or have served) as ANC councillors (with the minor exception of Metsimaholo). All were elected on ANC electoral lists. Which means that this major potential Party electoral asset has its own complexities. What happens next year in the run-up to the local government elections? Do popular and effective SACP members currently serving as ANC councillors or even mayors decline to stand on ANC lists, or do they remain? Will the ANC expressly exclude them? Or, alternately, will the threat of them standing on a Party list increase the ANC's anxiety to keep them on their list?

These questions cannot be answered in general or abstractly. Much will depend on local realities and dynamics. The fact that there will be considerable diversity of realities at the local level is not necessarily a negative factor for the Party – local government elections are essentially local. For a party with limited cadre, organisational and especially financial resources, the local character of these elections means that we can strategically target working-class wards mobilising around local issues where we have a proven Party capacity and support.

Aspirational talk of the Party contesting “wall-to-wall” in every ward and municipality, apart from over-estimating our own resources, ignores the persisting class and racial spatial legacies left by a century of segregation and decades of apartheid. There are wards where even a broad church ANC can only scrape together a handful of votes.

Then there are other local realities which will require somewhat different approaches within the framework of the resolution. For instance, if the ANC’s decision to go into a GNU with the DA was one of the triggers for our decision to contest independently, what will the Party’s position be in a province like Gauteng where the provincial ANC leadership has openly defied the national leadership in refusing to replicate an ANC-DA tie-up?

Much will also depend on how the SACP conducts itself over the coming months – which raises the question: Why have we now decided on contesting elections independently? And how do we effectively communicate this to our Alliance partners and to the wider working class and public?

There is a danger that our resolution on standing independently gets reduced to irritations with the ANC, that we are an aggrieved “battered” partner and not a revolutionary party. There are many good reasons for the Party to be upset at the way in which the ANC leadership has treated us around proposals on reconfiguring the Alliance, or on consultations around the formation of a government of national unity. While these issues all have an impact on the class struggle, on their own they are essentially in the domain of palace politics. They are not the basis of a popular electoral platform for instance (we are not suggesting that anyone believes them to be). We have always asserted that we will not win or even effectively influence these palace politics decisions without having effective power on the ground.

Dwelling excessively, irritably and publicly on these matters runs the danger of suggesting that we are against the entire ANC leadership collective. What happened at the ANC’s 2025 Khayelitsha January 8th rally is a warning light. In the absence of both the SACP’s general secretary and chairperson, our deputy chairperson, Cde Thulas Nxesi, delivered the Party’s official message. While our two top officials may well have had good reasons for the unprecedented absence of at least one of them, this inevitably sent a signal.

When Cde Nxesi began to speak he was booed by sections of the crowd, another unprecedented occurrence. All of this may have been orchestrated by a small anti-communist faction and might be of little long-term relevance. But as the Party we must also be self-reflective, and we must guard against creating a groundswell of ANC supporters turning against us, something that, of course, rabid anti-communists (which the majority of ANC members and supporters are not) and the capitalist class more broadly will actively encourage.

And this is why the SNC resolution correctly states that: “The contestation of elections must not necessarily be seen as a contest against the movement or the ANC, but a consolidation of a [presumably NDR] platform for its full ideological identity and aspiration, which has never been contested by the ANC.”

Certainly, we must, to the very best of our ability, ensure that our electoral contesting

is necessarily not seen as against the movement or the ANC. While the formulation in the SNC resolution here is clumsy – the general sentiment is right. What is more, across the movement and within the ANC (and within the state it leads) there is very fertile soil for the SACP to campaign as a vanguard upholder of the objectives of the NDR.

Take just a few recent developments. The tragic death of 14 SANDF soldiers involved in peace-keeping in the DRC highlighted the massive and prolonged under-funding of our defence force – a fact now widely recognised across the board. In January the Pretoria high court ruled in favour of two NGOs (with whom the SACP has been working) that the Department of Social Development (under pressure from Treasury) was acting unconstitutionally in not making the Special Relief of Distress Grant available to all 18,3 million South Africans living under the poverty line.

What was notable in this case is that leading officials in the DSD were implicitly in favour of the NGO case and Treasury had to step in to defend itself. It is Treasury that has now taken the ruling on appeal. It is also Treasury that repeatedly contradicts President Ramaphosa's public commitments – for instance, to expand his own Presidential Employment Stimulus programme. Then there are the heavy cuts to teacher numbers, openly opposed by most provincial educational departments. Across a wide spectrum of fronts, there is simmering discontent against Treasury's obstinate (and failing even on its own terms) neoliberal austerity.

Back in 2017, the ANC was paralysed into inaction in dealing with state capture corruption. It was the SACP that played a vanguard role in speaking up for millions of ANC members and supporters, not from the margins, but from inside the ANC-led movement itself. Can the SACP now play a similar role in rolling back, self-defeating neoliberal austerity? In the run-up to the 2026 local government elections, let us marginalise the neoliberal hard-liners – not ourselves. ●

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The Just Energy Transition – an avenue for structural change or imperialism in a new bottle?

Ayabonga Cawe examines the monopoly capitalist interests of ‘green’ imperialism and suggests alternative strategies to counter them

Capitalism, as demonstrated by world economic history, requires not just the immediate possession and subordination of land, animals and raw materials, but importantly the labour power of those who work. These are the nucleus of its existence. The creation of the planetary conditions for the accumulation of capital goes through three distinguishable phases as Rosa Luxemburg suggested.

The first, *being a struggle against the natural economy* (and its institutions such as the common ownership of land, a feudal distribution system and other non-capitalist features), the second a struggle against the *commodity economy* and the third, *a competitive struggle of capital on the international stage*. While avoiding oversimplifying the notion of a ‘natural economy’, it is however clear that in the current phase, there exists a discourse and politics focused on waging a ‘rearguard’ offensive against the ecological and social impact of the subordination of ‘nature’ (land, labour, minerals, and animals) and its commodification as a pre-condition for capitalist accumulation.

This discourse develops within a competitive struggle of capital in the international stage. The politics and its scientific foundation, as reflected in the discourse on climate change, recognise that real environmental and ecological limits on current forms of accumulation have rendered certain parts of the world uninhabitable. This has triggered a planetary crisis, complicated further by competition for the limited resources required for human social reproduction.

While there is a scientific consensus across the political spectrum on the impacts of climate change, the proposed responses are fraught with all the contradictions inherent in a commodity economy. These include competition, unequal exchange and dominant-subordinate power relations between nations, regions, firms, and peoples. Accepting this, allows us to contend with whether the politics of climate change are ‘imperial’ in the traditional sense or present an opportunity for meaningful structural change for formerly colonised nations.

Are the politics of climate change imperial?

The politics surrounding climate change and ecological conservation have had a complex history within both the Left and the Right ideologies. Currently, it is indisputable that substantial taxpayer and other resources are being geared towards climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. So too among sections of the hard Right in the US and Europe is there a rejection of the scientific and political validity of climate politics as captured in the Trumpian “drill, baby, drill” rhetoric.

Notwithstanding this resistance, the integration of climate change language, discourse, and tools into the strategies of global economic institutions (multilateral financial institutions, global production networks, private asset managers and multinational corporations) has been notable. These changes in the economic sphere have concentrated on investment in renewable energy technologies, electric mobility, and their associated raw materials and technological requirements (such as raw materials or advances in semiconductor technology).

The \$135 billion (R2.6 trillion) from the US Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Chips Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act under the Biden administration, along with China's nearly R700 billion spent on electric mobility subsidies since 2009, and the EU's efforts to secure raw materials for renewable energy and battery vehicles, represents this shift. These actions link climate ambitions to the resolution of security and geopolitical risks in managing economic, technological and political relationships with other nation states. As could be recently seen in the furore and market panic following the DeepSeek AI launch, this phase is also with its own distinct class and national conflicts both among and within many of the capitalist superpowers' own countries.

Below, I examine how shifts towards technological and industrial activities for climate mitigation, adaptation, and digital transitions have reproduced rather than subverted capitalist contradictions. Importantly, to what extent can these pursuits be characterised as imperialist?

Imperialism and the colonial question : the search for raw materials and external profits

Lenin argued that imperialism represents a specific stage with fundamental characteristics in the development of capitalism. These characteristics included a tendency towards monopoly. Capitalist conglomerates subvert 'free competition' by concentrating production and capital in cartels, syndicates and trusts, merging agricultural and industrial capital with banks. This expansion aims to address the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in the home market through the export of capital, seeking monopoly profits in the colonies or subordinate nations ².

This gives rise to "acute, intense antagonisms, frictions, and conflicts" between the monopolies and their nation states. It was Kalecki who later fashioned the connection between "the division of existing foreign markets and the expansion of colonial empires" with the pursuit of 'external profits' or trade surpluses as the mercantilist root of wars, usually financed by budget deficits. Precisely because of this link, these wars tie together both the capitalist firm and the sovereign state in the colonisation and (in some cases) expansion of settler occupation.

These conflicts between monopolies and superpowers are linked with the partition of the world among themselves in the hunt for sources of raw materials. This is the historical process that gave rise to the 'partition' of the world in the late 19th century into dominant nations and subordinate colonies, prompting Lenin to note that in a competitive struggle for raw materials, capitalism develops further, widening the scope of accumulation, "the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt".

Lenin further noted that in the colonial market it is easier to employ monopoly methods

to eliminate competition, ensure supplies and secure the necessary connections. The Berlin Conference that ended in 1885 created conditions where further 'sharing out' of colonies would involve conflict over already annexed colonies, rather than passing ownerless territory to a [new] owner. This was the case with Namibia after the First World War (1914-1918), where control of what was then German South West Africa moved to the Union of South Africa until 1990.

Keynes, aligning with Lenin's defence of mercantilism, argued that colonialism and the scramble for raw materials made superpowers' prosperity dependent on finding new markets and industrial goods. This competitive drive for resources and territorial control³ was linked to technological development, increasing demand and ultimately shortages of raw materials, at the centre of the uses and applications of the new technology, thus intensifying global economic conflicts. Defining imperialism as Lenin did, European strategies to secure minerals for EV batteries, China's restriction of gallium and germanium exports, and the US 'friend-shoring' of supply chains crucial for military and energy technologies exhibit imperial characteristics.

These conflicts involve direct and proxy battles for territories to acquire raw materials like uranium in the case of the Franco-Russian contest for control in the Sahel; or the deluge of European, American and Chinese agreements and partnerships with countries like the DRC, Chile, Namibia and Zambia to secure uranium, cobalt, lithium, and copper supplies crucial to existing and future technological choices. The interactions between public policy and corporate strategy give these wars a particularly imperial character.

Former White House Security Advisor Jake Sullivan highlighted the competitive nature of the new race for minerals. He observed that critical minerals, which were the backbone of the clean energy sector, suffered from supply risks due to the concentration of processing facilities in a single location.

"Today, the United States produces only 4 percent of the lithium, 13 percent of the cobalt, 0 percent of the nickel and 0 percent of the graphite required to meet current demand for electrical vehicles. Meanwhile, more than 80 percent of critical minerals are processed by one country, China."⁴

Sullivan further argued that clean energy supply chains could be weaponised similar to the natural gas shortages experienced after Russia's isolation due to the war in Ukraine, or the oil disruptions during the OPEC crisis in the 1970s, which had significant impacts on the global economy and spurred conflicts through to the end of the 20th century. I doubt he would have anticipated that supply chains reliant on 'rare earths' would be literally weaponised by the Trump administration to 'transactionally' put up a minerals deal as the sine qua non for continued military aid to Ukraine. This should not be surprising when one considers the US net import reliance on key materials for its industrial, military and technology firms⁵.

The economic form of green imperialism: technology, 'aid' and overcoming a crisis of profitability

The extension of concessional lending (including some grant funding) to developing nations like South Africa and Indonesia to facilitate energy transitions is part of the approach to overcome the crisis of profitability confronting European-led firms producing key technologies crucial to the transition. This lending combines loans and grants through programmes such as the JET-IP.

These initiatives aim to phase out fossil fuel energy generation operations and the expansion of renewable energy and electric mobility. This is to focus interventions on municipal and provincial distribution infrastructure, as in Mpumalanga, in the case of South Africa's JET-IP implementation plan. This generosity of largely European donors towards South Africa can also be read alongside the recent Pan-European Growth and Competitiveness Plan that was published by former Italian Prime Minister, Mario Draghi.

Draghi notes in the plan that the Eurozone is a world leader in clean technology – wind turbines, electrolysers and low carbon fuels, and notwithstanding Chinese dominance, a fifth of all known clean and sustainable technologies worldwide have been developed in that common market. Thus, European statecraft in this phase involves not only the coordination of preferential trade agreements and investment across the world that secures raw materials and supply chains but also to engage in the geo-technological struggle over 'quality' productive forces linked to the climate and energy transitions.

The poor performance of European wind energy firms indicates the crisis of these firms as they look to expand beyond Europe in close competition with Asian capabilities. Nordex, a Danish wind turbine maker candidly suggested in its 2018 report that many firms rely on the global transition to renewable energy production for future profitability. However, by 2023, Nordex's orders from North America dropped from 22% to 5%, with stagnant orders from the Global South (save for Brazil). This forced European markets to absorb the slack, resulting in wind turbines and components sold at a loss.

Recent earnings results from Siemens Gamesa, Vestas and Nordex all show a wind sector reeling from lower order volumes, rising raw material prices, high interest rates and fierce Chinese competition. Overcoming the crisis of profitability in the wind sector requires expanding renewable energy projects beyond Europe and securing stable income from long-term maintenance and servicing agreements associated with the turbine infrastructure installed. The urgent push for coal plant decommissioning and milestone payments under JET-IP is driven not by environmental altruism but by the need to resolve the sector's profitability crisis.

What is the structural location of Africa in these politics?

As discussed, earlier imperialism through its multinational monopolies and enabling states overcame the crises of profitability 'at home' through technological improvement and the export of capital to the colonies and later among developed nations. These changes, as observed by Nkrumah, gave rise to a growing demand for raw materials

produced outside of the developed countries, leading to the carving out of regions in the world producing raw materials to secure the supply of these minerals ahead of any rivals. Africa found itself at the centre of this colonial process, and the anti-colonial politics that emerged in response in the 20th century had to contend with the continuities of this process following independence. Nkrumah argued that neocolonialism, as the last stage of imperialism, was merely reproducing the same unequal and extractive features of economic exchange by creating among the formerly colonised “small non-viable states” through marshalling “the archaic enmities of [our] fathers”⁶. This was to balkanise regions endowed with raw materials in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These “small non-viable states” were compelled to sell their primary commodities as ‘price-takers’ in markets dominated by developed nations and their firms, to in turn import final wage and industrial goods at prices fixed by the same developed nations. To the extent observable, many have suggested that the transition presents possibilities of ‘escape’ from the structural traps of unequal exchange within this global division of labour. Or does it present a particular episode in the same story?

The just transition in the developed world and a neocolonial turn?

The transition as seen by many developed nations is both an ecological and technologically ‘political’ project. Any ambition signalled on most platforms implies the acquisition of particular capabilities. If we consider Europe’s Critical Raw Materials Act and Beijing’s strategies, these highlight that capitalist superpowers are not only seeking raw materials but also boosting their own processing and refining activities. By 2030, Europe can only meet a tenth of its mineral needs from local sources like Finland’s lithium. Therefore, deals are necessary to secure raw materials and ensure processing facilities have sufficient inputs.

The memorandum of understanding signed by Zambia and the DRC with the US in late 2022 aims to encourage cooperation in feasibility studies, consultancies, and competitive tenders. The goal is to promote industrial growth through the construction of electric vehicle precursor plants for producing materials like nickel, cobalt, and manganese used in EV batteries.

The extent to which these activities will reduce dependence on Chinese electric mobility supply chains in the US and contribute to industrial development in the DRC and Zambia remains uncertain. Without plans from the source countries to invest in local refining and processing, and to capture greater value within the producing nations, the strategies of developed nations may continue the economic relationship observed by Nkrumah.

The recent increase in coups and instability in parts of Africa is closely tied to the economic relationships between African states and their former colonial masters. Consider Niger, the seventh-largest uranium producer in the world, accounting for 5% of global output. This resource is crucial to not only France’s nuclear energy strategy but also that of the entire Europe, as France accounts for a quarter of the supply of uranium to the Eurozone according to the European Atomic Energy Agency. France aims to establish a nuclear alliance in Europe and has recently announced a research and training program exceeding 100 million euros into nuclear energy. Additionally, following the renationalisation EDF (Électricité de France), its national utility, the

situation in Niger poses a significant risk to France's plans to launch a new nuclear strategy.

A further complication makes the prospect of this transition facilitating structural change remote. That is the indebtedness of many nations rich in the raw materials that power the technologies of the transition. This makes the role of South African advocacy on multilateral debt reform crucial during our presidency of the G20. The recent cases of Zambia and Ghana defaulting on their sovereign debt further highlight the role of financial vulnerability and its linkage to primary commodity prices, weakening exchange rates and rising interest rates. The response of the creditor nations (almost exclusively developed countries) is evidenced by the draft agreement between Zambia and the representative of the Official Creditor Committee (OCC). In there, they avoided a debt write-down, opting rather for an extension of debt maturities by 12 years (to 2043) and a three-year grace period on principal payments. they further lowered interest to around 1% for the next 14 years. If the Zambian economy outperforms forecasts and its debt-carrying capacity improves, the final maturity date can be brought forward to 2038.

This scenario is only plausible because of Zambia's copper bounty, referred to in a recent Brookings Institute article which saw tripling copper production as a 'way out of the debt crisis' ⁷. Rather than 'take an entire haircut', the creditors would rather take a 'shave' because Zambia's copper might not only mean earlier repayment of the outstanding debt but also serve as a perfect hedge if the evolution to electric mobility and other copper use-applications meets expectations. If we accept that all of these as objective developments that require progressive forces to respond, the question becomes, are there spaces of possibility that are open?

What possibilities should shape our political and policy responses?

Considering what is possible requires examining the notion of policy space. Policy space recognises that political, policy and other forms of action within integrated and mutually dependent global environment are subject to particularly real and perceived constraints. Policy decisions occur in an environment constrained by rules and 'power (im)balances' that influence possibilities, appropriateness and desirability of any economic strategy or policy action at any particular moment.

Power (im)balances, influenced by dominant-subordinate relations, unequal exchange, path dependence and rules; shape power relations between and among nation states or between policymakers within a nation state and power brokers within the global production networks and value chains.

I consider below four areas of possibility that can navigate and ultimately subvert the imperialist and neocolonial character of the changes unfolding around us:

1. Industrialisation as a decolonial economic strategy

Economic history is littered with multiple episodes of how countries develop. The recurring ingredient is a shift to higher value-added activities in the global matrix of production. To move from mining and ferrying chrome to making stainless steel products of gradually rising complexity and value. For example, Indonesia's use of export restrictions on raw materials to incentivise the location of processing and

refining of bauxite, cobalt and tin within the archipelago, though necessary, remains insufficient.

This includes complementing export restrictions with access to the know-how and knowledge connections to the licensing of intellectual property, investments in research and development (R&D), and other activities that can expand the scope and complexity of the use of the finite minerals in question. In the case of South Africa the existence within its National System of Innovation by institutions such as the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and Mintek alongside a vibrant scientific community, requires that it deepens these connections. While securing greater supply partnerships of the raw materials within the region through mutually beneficial agreements with our neighbours. This may include for instance consideration of the extension of the exploration tax allowances to South African-owned mining firms to undertake exploration activities within the region. Or the incorporation of wider raw material recognition across Southern Africa, for tax benefit within the production incentives contained in South Africa's evolving auto-industrial policy.

2. Non-alignment as a driver of co-ordinated foreign policy

The language of nonalignment in such a polarised global order, rather than appearing neutral, is in principle, helpful in the resolution of disputes by peaceful means, and the pursuit of economic independence and mutual cooperation based on equality and mutual benefit. Furthermore, the pursuit by the non-aligned nations of the reform of multilateral and rules-making institutions in the global arena presents possibilities for ensuring that technological change and scientific advance are aligned to the national and regional plans and objectives of African nations and those of the Global South. As Nkrumah noted, "non-alignment is based on co-operation with all states whether they be capitalist, socialist or have a mixed economy" following a national plan of any country. This, rather than the expedient substitution of one 'master' for another, is the true path to change.

3. Borrow in your own currency where you can and manage the cost of capital

Without one's own savings or those willing to back a national plan on mutually beneficial terms, many African nations are stuck in debtor-creditor relations that expose them as price-takers for the commodities they produce and the cost of money, all this to significant vulnerability as the case of Ghana and Zambia above shows. The use of the dollar as a global currency ties all central banks to the US Federal Reserve's policy decisions. This means high interest rates affect all economies, even if their inflationary conditions differ from those in the US.

This seemingly 'objective constraint' imposes limits on the use of borrowed money meant for infrastructure, productivity improvement and growth. Global South nations not only need the reform of multilateral financial institutions but better use of policy instruments to restrict footloose hot money flows and incentivise the productive allocation of long-term firm and household savings.

4. Cultural struggle against the new phase of neo-colonial green imperialism

Political Economy does not hold all the answers. Nkrumah recognised that subtle and varied mechanics of neocolonialism move beyond economics and extends to "political, religious, ideological and cultural spheres" ⁸. CLR James noted that, "it is on colonial peoples without the means of counter-publicity that imperialism practices its basest arts" ⁹.

Arundhati Roy has implored us to lay siege to the empire with our art, our music and our literature ¹⁰. They all recognise that countering a hegemonic power under shifting conditions requires not just reversing the psychological and intellectual assault on alternatives but assisting us to dream of different futures but within the belly of the beast.

This requires alternative visions and narratives regarding current developments, not as value-neutral shifts, but as changes enmeshed in the enmities, conflicts and contests that are as old as humanity. In such a fight, we need our policy tools as much as we need the solidarity of our friends, the power of our pens and paintbrushes, and the loudness of our microphones. We need a politics grounded in a vision of a different and more just world. ●

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1 See Grove, R. *Green Imperialism : Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 9780521565134

2 See Lenin, V.I. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Part VII*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch07.htm>

3 Keynes, J.M. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, 1936

4 Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Renewing American Economic Leadership at the Brookings Institution. April 2023, Biden White House Archives, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov>

5 In the case of South Africa, commodities like fluorspar, manganese, gemstones, titanium and platinum, the United States exercises a near total (>85%) reliance on imports. The list can be seen on page 7 of the US Mineral Commodity Summaries 2025 - <https://pubs.usgs.gov/periodicals/mcs2025/mcs2025.pdf>

6 Mandela, N.R. *South Africa's Future Foreign Policy*, 1993. Foreign Affairs

7 See the referenced article here - <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/tripling-zambias-copper-production-a-way-out-of-the-debt-crisis/>

8 Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism – The Last Stage of Imperialism*, pp. 239

9 CLR James *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 294

10 Arundhati Roy, *War Talk*, South End Press, 2003

Towards a vision and strategy for African development in the accelerating transition to a low-carbon economy

Vested interests and interstate rivalry shape the global climate agenda, but there is scope for progressive climate strategies that support the development needs of the Global South, writes **Rob Davies**

There is an urgent need for Africa to develop a comprehensive vision and strategy to guide the way it seeks to position itself in the accelerating transition to a lower carbon economy that is now well underway. This transition will impact on many aspects of social and economic life and will require a comprehensive cross-cutting strategic response that is not confined to, though includes, coordinating positions at the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC).

The current dominant global climate agenda is filtered through the prism of powerful vested interests in the advanced industrial countries. This has resulted in it being largely reduced to a process of technological change driving an accelerating transition to a lower carbon economy. This transition has fuelled and is fuelling intensified competition between firms both to develop and produce low-carbon products, technologies, and 'solutions' and to demonstrate 'green credentials' in whatever activity they may be involved in.

In a world undergoing a deeply contested transition from unipolarity to greater multipolarity, this firm-level competition is spilling over into interstate rivalry, that is leading countries in the Global North to implement both ambitious Industrial policies and protectionist trade measures. Justified in the name of both 'climate policy' and 'national security', these are leading to significant unilateral departures from the neo-liberal playbook the very same countries themselves ruthlessly promoted and enforced over the past three decades. It follows from this that not everything that is presented as 'green' or climate-justified is driven by a disinterested desire to save the planet from catastrophic climate change.

Under such circumstances, Africa's engagement both with what now passes as the global climate agenda and a range of other issues operating at the nexus between it and other policies, such as trade, development and industrial policies, needs to advance way beyond the seeking of additional resources to support the continent in making a 'just transition' to a new reality largely shaped by others. It needs significantly to enhance its own capacity to engage in shaping the emerging transition in ways that advance its developmental interests while resisting and opposing measures that undermine these.

In addition, national, regional and African Union/African Continental Free Trade Area (AU/AfCFTA) level strategies need to be developed to identify and deploy a range of industrial and trade policy tools to support the building of Regional Value Chains that can enable the continent to position itself in a lower carbon economy not just as a supplier of raw materials but also as a producer and exporter of value-added products.

A climate agenda increasingly shaped by vested interests in the Global North

To understand the global climate agenda as it currently stands, it is necessary to begin with a brief recap of the consensus position of climate science before examining the ways in which recommendations arising from the 'scientific consensus' have been re-shaped and modified through pressures of profit-seeking interest groups and governments responding to these mainly in the Global North.

There is a growing consensus among climatologists and environmental scientists that the 1950s witnessed a transition from a geological epoch called the *Holocene* to a new era termed the *Anthropocene*¹. The Holocene was a 12,000-year epoch of climate and environmental stability, during which agriculture developed and human civilisation emerged. Climate scientists argue that pivotal events underpinning the transition to the Anthropocene epoch included nuclear explosions and the growing use of hydrocarbons.

Progressively and incrementally, as the Anthropocene has unfolded "planetary boundaries" have been crossed taking the planet outside of the "safe zone" for the development of human civilisation that existed during the Holocene. To date, six of the nine such planetary boundaries have been crossed. These are: land use (the reduction of that portion operating according to the norms of the natural world); biodiversity (with growing threats of extinction of both plant and animal species); biochemical flows contaminating and polluting eco-systems; freshwater consumption and usage undermining the global hydrological cycle; and climate change.

On climate change, the scientists agree that it is imperative to contain average global warming to less than 2 degrees centigrade by the end of the century (the preferred target of 1,5 degrees agreed at COP 21 in Paris in 2015 is now widely seen as out of reach). Failure to achieve this target risks creating irreversible, exponential, and catastrophic global warming that could render large parts of the planet uninhabitable, lead billions of people to become climate refugees and ultimately undermine the ability of human civilisation to survive at anything remotely resembling existing population levels.

Even if that target is met, and most scientists argue we are not on track to achieve that yet², there will still be a proliferation of "extreme weather events" caused by global warming already locked in. Africa, which is the part of the world least responsible for emissions of greenhouse gases, will, climate science tells us, be disproportionately affected by global warming – with many parts of the continent experiencing temperature rises well above the global average.

In response to the increasingly evident threat of catastrophic climate change, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 established a Framework Convention on Climate Change (UN FCCC). To date the UN FCCC has held 28 Conventions of Parties (COPs) to address this challenge. Among the

principles agreed at these COPS are that there should be “common but differentiated” responsibilities, in terms of which developing countries least responsible for causing climate change take lesser obligations that also allow them to develop and that the developed world should transfer resources to assist developing countries in both “mitigation” (measures to contain global warming) and “adaptation” (steps taken to cope with new realities created by global warming already “locked in”). Member states have also tabled Nationally Determined Contributions committing themselves to various measures to mitigate the threat of climate change, while COPs have agreed on a series of common norms and standards with a progressively increasing level of ambition.

To guide these processes the United Nations has also established an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) drawing in hundreds of climate scientists from across the world whose mandate is both to assess the state of the climate crisis and make recommendations of what needs to be done to avert a catastrophe.

How recommendations from this scientific panel have been modified and reshaped tells us much about the way the currently dominant Global Climate Agenda is one that is filtered through the prism of vested commercial interests. For example, the ‘scientific consensus’ contained in the initial draft of the 6th IPCC report tabled in 2021 argued that containing global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius would require major cross-cutting ‘transformational change’ in the way human activity interacts with the climate and planetary environment as a whole.

Authored by 278 scientists from 65 countries and drawing on some 18 000 scientific studies, this report argued that such transformational change required a combination of a rapid and ambitious phase-out of fossil fuels (both coal and oil); significant changes in consumption patterns including an overall reduction in demand, particularly in the developed world; and the explicit pursuit of greater equality, including acting to curb excesses of the ‘super rich’ (where it was indicated, for example, that the richest 1% were responsible for 50% of all emissions from air travel).

This draft was, however, heavily redacted in engagements with governmental representatives, leading commentators to remark that the final version embodied a ‘governmental consensus’ that differed significantly from the ‘scientific consensus’ of the earlier draft. This ‘governmental consensus’ of course reflected the power relations in the global system, meaning that it was largely shaped and reshaped by the interventions of the Global North responding to the demands of ‘interest groups’ and constituencies in their own national states. Among other things, the final redacted version omitted most references to the imperatives to change consumption patterns or promote greater equality and curb the excesses of the super rich, thus reducing the recommendations largely to the implementation of technological change involving a shift to low carbon emitting products and processes³. These recommendations were then further redacted in the decisions of COPs.

What this points to is the way in which “political realities”, largely reflecting the influence of powerful interest groups particularly in advanced industrial countries, have shaped and reshaped perspectives on combatting the threat of catastrophic climate change. They have eschewed any significant ‘transformational change’ in the current

unequal world economy, instead reducing the 'climate agenda' to an accelerating transition to a lower carbon economy. Such interests have been both defensive and offensive. Some defensive interests have been able to slow the pace of decarbonisation to a rate more compatible with their interests.

A prominent example of one such influential defensive vested interest is the case of the multi-national oil and petroleum industry which has been able to carve out much more space for it both to continue its existing activities and reposition itself to claim 'green credentials' than has been the case with the coal sector. But, as the imperative to make more than marginal adjustments has become increasingly apparent in the face of a looming mega-crisis, other interests have identified offensive commercial and profit-making opportunities from the development and production of new low-carbon products and technologies.

These were initially spearheaded by developers and producers of renewable energy and new energy vehicles. They have been joined by developers and producers of 'green' hydrogen and other chemicals, 'green steel' and many other real or purported low-carbon products. In the service sector, an expanding army of consultants and advisors are now making good business by advising a range of enterprises on how to build 'green credentials' or implement 'sustainable environmental practices'. In some cases, these may have real content, but in many others, they amount to little more than greenwashing.

In addition, fragmented and diffuse carbon measuring and trading systems have created lucrative commercial opportunities for carbon traders and speculators as well as for accreditors and advisers offering 'solutions' to corporations on ways to 'offset' carbon emissions through often problematic investments in supposedly sustainable projects across the world⁴. Such interest groups, located mainly in the advanced industrialised countries, have through the intermediation of their governments been able to shape a new narrative effectively reducing the main content of humanity's efforts to avert the threat of catastrophic climate change to a process of technological change taking place within the existing unequal and uneven global order and it is this that is the driving thrust of a wide-ranging and major new reality – an accelerating transition to a lower carbon economy.

Not surprisingly this transition has led and is leading to intensified competition and contestation. This begins as competition between individual firms to develop, produce and market 'green' products, technologies and 'solutions'. There is also increasing competition between firms in many sectors and industries and to demonstrate and market their "green credentials" in whatever operations they undertake. So widespread has this become that even petroleum multinationals are now re-branding themselves as (becoming) 'green energy' suppliers.

In a world undergoing a highly contested transition from unipolarity to a more multipolar order, this is in turn fuelling increasing interstate contestation. This is most evident in the contestation between countries and blocs of the Global North and China, which has developed an early technological and manufacturing lead in batteries, solar panels and other solar energy equipment, and new energy vehicles building on the lead it has already established in areas of digital technologies and products. In some cases, this contestation spills over into 'economic warfare' as developed countries

identify establishing and maintaining a technological lead in some of these areas as matters of 'national security' requiring them to act to 'contain' the advance of their rival(s).

Another aspect of this intensified competition/contestation is a scramble for access to the raw material inputs required for the production of low-carbon products. The new low-carbon technologies depend to an increasing extent on a mix of raw material inputs that differs from those used in the production of the higher-carbon products and technologies they seek to replace. The search for supplies of such critical minerals, as well as for exclusive mining rights, supplier contracts and tenders is an increasing focus of activity. This is coupled with a related scramble to find export markets for "green" products, technologies, and 'solutions' across the world, including the African continent.

This environment of heightened competition/contestation is further leading to the lower carbon transition increasingly being calibrated not by the "common but differentiated responsibilities" agreed to at UNFCCC COPs, but by the commitments made by developed and several middle-income countries to achieve 'net zero' carbon emissions by 2050. It is important to note that 'net zero' is not the same as zero. Net zero commitments all allow for some level of continued carbon emissions, provided that these are priced and 'offset' by approved investments in carbon-reducing projects located not just in the home country but also in different parts of the world. Fragmented and unregulated carbon pricing and trading systems have spawned an 'industry' of accreditors and traders, with increasing evidence that many approved 'offset' projects do much more to enhance 'green credentials' than to actually reduce carbon emissions.

Achieving 'net zero' commitments in a context where China has a manufacturing and technological lead in some areas is leading to the introduction in the Global North of ambitious Industrial Policy initiatives as well as trade policy measures directed both at 'protecting' nascent domestic industries against competitive imports as well as 'defending' domestic firms against perceived unfair competition from higher carbon imports, including from developing countries.

These measures are increasingly involving significant unilateral departures from existing trade rules and practices even as the Global South continues to be told to keep following them. Justified in part on 'national security' grounds, the reduction in the dominant discourse of combatting climate change to the production of low-carbon products and technologies also means that such departures are often justified in the name of combatting climate change.

All of the above has increased pressure on developing countries to decarbonise quicker and more broadly than envisaged in their 'common but differentiated' Nationally Determined Contributions made at UNFCCC COPs – many of which were conditional on receipt of resource transfers. Meanwhile, finance for 'just transitions' is falling far below even the \$100-billion per annum 'pledged' by developed countries nearly a decade ago. What 'climate finance' is available and envisioned is, moreover, almost entirely restricted to funding approved mitigation-related measures and is increasingly taking the form of loans denominated in foreign currency (meaning the real value of the transfer from developed to developing world is only part of announced 'packages').

Implications for African Development

Africa is among regions contributing least to global warming, but among those most affected by it. Temperatures will rise in Africa by more than the global average, and a dedicated part of IPCC reports has identified the threats of floods, droughts and sea rises specific to the continent's various sub-regions ⁵. These are not just future possibilities. The continent is already experiencing more frequent extreme weather events, causing more human misery and more loss and damage – worse hurricanes and floods, longer and more severe droughts etc.

For Africa, the existence of climate refugees is also much more than a future risk. It is a current reality, not all taking the form of cross-border migration, but also manifest in increasing numbers of people fleeing climate-devastated rural areas for mushrooming towns and cities, increasingly unable to provide sustenance or livelihood to expanding populations. This phenomenon is evident across the continent, but is particularly evident in the Sahel, where desertification is advancing exponentially.

Africa has thus an immediate interest in rolling out ambitious “adaptation” measures to defend itself against already impacting “extreme weather events”, but it also cannot ignore the accelerating transition to a lower carbon economy, whose impact will be inescapable.

There can be no doubt that this transition will be disruptive to several existing activities - particularly those dependent on the coal value chain and eventually those dependent on oil and petroleum. There will be losers, but the transition will also bring new opportunities to the continent. Those most commonly identified by external parties include:

- **Supply of Critical Minerals.** The new low-carbon products and technologies will require an increased supply of what are called critical minerals. These include cobalt, lithium, graphite, chromite, manganese, and platinum. According to the World Bank, an additional 3-billion tonnes of such minerals will be needed to underpin the low-carbon transition over the next decade or so ⁶. The African continent has significant reserves of many of these and it is widely suggested that the continent could be on the cusp of a minerals boom. Seeking access to such resources is, of course, the main driver of the contemporary 'green' scramble for Africa – the other being the quest to market renewable energy technology and equipment.
- **Production of Green Hydrogen.** The continent's abundance of sunlight is seen as creating an opportunity for it to emerge as a significant producer of 'Green Hydrogen' – obtained by using solar power to electrolyse water.

The imperative for Africa to occupy key higher value-added niches

While it is in the continent's interest to realise whatever benefits it can from its resource endowment, this does not mean that it must do so merely by remaining a producer and exporter of raw materials. Documents of the OAU/AU have long recognised that the fundamental development challenge facing the continent is to 'break from the apron strings' of its colonially-created role as producer and exporter of primary products used in industrial processes elsewhere by moving to higher value-added

production and industrialising ⁷. This understanding needs also to be central to the continent's strategies in relation to the transition to a lower carbon economy. Various opportunities or advantages to use the low carbon transition to boost the continent's industrialisation efforts have been identified. They include:

- The reality that Africa has relatively limited 'stranded capital' linked to historical high carbon-emitting industrial production has been identified as creating a historic opportunity for the continent to more rapidly position itself as a sustainable and low carbon producer and exporter of a range of manufactured and smart agriculture products ⁸.
- Complementing the trend to relative nearshoring with a shift to sustainably produced fibres has been identified as creating a major opportunity for the creation of a globally competitive textile and clothing value chain targeting the supply of European markets as well as the more integrated African market that will emerge from the implementation of the African Continental free Trade Area (AfCFTA) ⁹.
- Parts of the continent already have capacity to manufacture fuel cells as well as Hydrogen fuel cell-driven public transport and underground mining vehicles. Green Hydrogen produced on the continent as well as Platinum used as a catalyst in Hydrogen fuel cells could lay the foundation for a significant Green Hydrogen and fuel cell regional value chain ¹⁰.
- Acting to insist on higher levels of beneficiation of the continent's abundant critical minerals before export could also become an important lever to promote the African value-added production of various low-carbon products. For example, it is suggested that such a stance could enable the continent to emerge as a manufacturer of batteries for new energy vehicles – something that would be unlikely without a specific beneficiation intervention.

In addition, it is also important to identify and seize opportunities in the immediate focus of the lower carbon transition – renewable energy. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) estimates that the rollout of renewable energy and addressing the continent's 'energy gap' will require a doubling of investment in electrical energy from the current US \$30-billion per annum to between US \$40 and \$65-billion by 2030 ¹¹.

A key question that arises in this regard is whether this will be spent merely on imported technology and equipment, or will it be directed to boost manufacturing capacity on the continent (which already has capacity to produce many of the components in wind and solar as well as hydro-power generation).

In a similar vein, Africa needs to identify its role in Green Hydrogen value chains as more than using its sunlight to electrolyse water and produce the fuel that is frozen and exported to the Global North and/ or supplying of the raw material used as catalyst in fuel cells (platinum). It needs also to become a significant manufacturer of both fuel cells and products using them, including transport equipment and energy generators as indicated above.

Beyond this, the continent needs to calibrate its 'green energy' transition to its own resource base and capabilities not to the marketing interests of external purveyors

of particular products and technologies. The potential of hydro-power tends to be underestimated in many external assessments of an African transition to renewable energy, whereas actually realising the untapped potential of a project like Inga Falls would literally be a game changer both in terms of increasing supply of energy and in reducing the emissions content of the continent's electricity generation.

What is certain is that these opportunities will not be realised automatically'. The fundamental lesson of economic history ¹² is that any significant industrialisation process will need to be driven by the development and implementation of Industrial, Trade and Technology (ITT) policies. While these varied country by country in the cases of those who have succeeded in becoming industrialised, they have generally included:

- Public investment in both infrastructure and manufacturing;
- The acquisition of foreign technology, and “continuously improving” this to create new competitive products;
- Public support for Research and Development;
- Deployment of subsidies (incentives) and/or duty drawbacks on inputs for export products;
- Localisation (local content) requirements; and
- Alignment of macro-economic policy to the goals of supporting ITT policies.

Applying ITT strategies in shaping an African low-carbon transition will benefit greatly, and indeed to a large extent be dependent on, seizing the opportunities to build Regional Value Chains that will be created by the larger continental market emerging from the AfCFTA. Promoting industrialisation must indeed become a central component of the continent's efforts to ensure that the transition to a lower carbon economy is not highly 'unjust', with more losers than winners.

At the same time, the continent faces an enormous challenge of adapting to the inevitable more frequent extreme weather events that climate science tells us are an inescapable consequence of global warming already locked in. Adaptation programmes are not at present commanding much support from international funders. Yet the threat posed by inevitable and predictable future extreme weather events is real and needs to be responded to, *inter alia*, with massive programmes to climate-proof existing infrastructure and build new more climate-resilient infrastructure. If this is not done proactively, it will have to be done after costly disasters with loss of life. Many climate-proofing and climate resilience building projects are susceptible to New Deal-type public employment programmes that could also create demand for inputs and materials, many of which can be locally manufactured.

Alternative progressive perspectives

It was suggested at the outset that the mainstream Global Climate Agenda is filtered through the prism of vested interests mainly in the advanced industrialised countries and is also shaped by intense competition and interstate contestation in a world undergoing a transition from unipolarity to greater multi-polarity. There have also

been a number of alternative progressive perspectives, that have sought to promote greater inclusivity and are sensitive to the developmental needs of the Global South.

Many of these have been cast in the form of a call for a Global Green New Deal (GGND). One of the most comprehensive and Global South-focussed of these are the perspectives developed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In its 2017 *Trade and Development Report* ¹³, UNCTAD called for a Global (Green) New Deal (GGND) with a focus on policy issues required to promote a developmental, inclusive “green” transition. In broad terms, many of the perspectives advanced by UNCTAD’s GGND would create a more facilitative global environment for Africa to pursue a developmental and inclusive approach to the challenges of transition to a lower carbon economy. Thus:

- UNCTAD’s call for enhanced public investment with a strong caring dimension would speak, inter alia, to the imperative to develop programmes to ‘climate proof’ Africa’s economic and social infrastructure;
- Its call to move ‘beyond austerity’ with a different approach to both fiscal and monetary policy speaks to creditors, donors and international finance institutions being more supportive and tolerant, in particular by moving beyond the imposition of strict conditionalities based on the application of a one size fits all ‘ready reckoner’ based on financial ratios;
- The calls for reform of the international financial architecture hold out the prospect of releasing more and different forms of funding to support the developing world in making its transition to a lower carbon economy;
- The call to crack down on tax havens and Illicit flows of funds could on its own significantly increase funding available to the continent for development – a recent study found illicit capital flows from Africa greater than both FDI and ODA flows to the continent; and
- The call for policy space is fundamental to the development of Industrial Policy necessary for Africa to ensure that the transition to a lower carbon economy supports industrialisation – and would imply that such efforts are not impeded by restrictive trade and other rules on inter alia localisation, investment, Intellectual Property or notification requirements.
- At the same time a progressive GGND perspective would be strengthened by a greater reflection on African-specific issues – including a greater focus on adaptation, on the imperative to ensure equitable industrialisation and on the continent’s regional integration efforts, particularly the AfCFTA.

The global environment

While the pursuit of the transformations outlined in inter alia UNCTAD’s GGND needs to be an important focus of Africa’s international engagement on climate related issues, the current global environment needs also to be realistically assessed.

As indicated earlier, a seismic shift from the unipolar world order established at the end of the Cold War to one that is more multipolar is underway. This transition is highly contested, with the erstwhile uncontested global hegemon transforming

itself into what some commentators are calling a “New Economic Security State” in which “the definition of security has expanded beyond issues related to warfare and terrorism, as previously disregarded economic and environmental problems such as food insecurity, energy shortages, inflation and climate change have moved to the “very core of the US National Security Strategy”¹⁴.

At the same time, the world economy and global order are now recognised as enmeshed in multiple intertwined crises (often called a poly-crisis). The dimensions of this include a world economy entrapped in a crisis of stagflation (economic stagnation coexisting with high inflation); numerous security crises and wars in both Ukraine and Israel/Palestine with several other ‘hot spots’ on horizon; a crisis of widening inequality and alienation from the established political and global order; and the climate crisis and threat of catastrophic climate change – none of which look likely to be easily resolved within the existing architecture any time soon¹⁵.

While there is an objective need in the face of this poly-crisis for a new kind of multilateralism that is more inclusive and explicitly seeks to find equitable and development-orientated answers to key challenges, the fact is that multilateralism has become weaker and is increasingly being complicated by bloc formation and consolidation, heightened inter-bloc rivalry as well as by unilateralism on the part of ‘New Economic Security States’ of the Global North. The way this is impacting the so-called global climate agenda is examined through some recent examples of climate-justified unilateralism in the next section.

Unilateralism: the case of the EU’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

The European Union’s CBAM¹⁶ is ostensibly a measure to “avoid carbon leakage” by pegging the emissions content of imported products to levels set for domestic equivalences as part of the EU’s ‘net zero’ programme. The CBAM entered into force in October 2023, with an initial requirement that importers of aluminium, cement, electricity, fertilisers, iron and steel report in detail on the greenhouse gas emissions involved in their production. Where no acceptable information is available default values will be applied

From 2026 CBAM certificates will have to be purchased at a price set in European Trading System (ETS) auctions for imports of designated products that exceed the internal EU threshold. This requirement applies equally to products from all countries, with no “special and differential treatment” for developing or least developed countries. Although the initial iteration covers only a relatively short list of specified products, the list is clearly seen as expandable with the goal of eventually covering all products imported into EU.

Complying with the EU’s standards will require costly investments and take developing country suppliers way beyond the nationally determined commitments made at UN FCCC COPs. Failure to meet them will require the purchase of CBAM certificates. While the purchase of CBAM certificates is not strictly a tariff, it will have the same impact and reduce the benefit of the various Economic Partnership Agreements or Everything but Arms arrangements the EU applies to products entering its market from African countries. It will also reduce the scope of Most Favoured Nation tariff

bindings made by the EU in WTO processes.

A Study commissioned by African Climate Foundation used different scenarios to assess the impact of the CBAM on African economies based on possible values for the carbon price set in the ETS and CBAM's product coverage. This study found that even with the 'lightest' scenario (with lowest carbon price and narrowest coverage) "Africa's economy will be negatively affected...with exports declining by 4%" and that continent will be worse affected than any other region". With a higher carbon price and wider product coverage, the study found that exports could decrease by 5,75% and GDP by 1,12% all while having an insignificant impact on reducing global carbon emissions¹⁷. CBAM's impact, moreover, will be unevenly spread across different countries. Mozambique (a LDC) that exports smelted aluminium could suffer a 1,5% decline in GDP¹⁸.

Another important EU initiative is its Green Deal Industrial Plan adopted in February 2023. This simplifies rules and fast tracks permits for the roll out of green technologies, and allocates €225-billion (US 4,245-billion) for loans and €20-billion in grants to support EU green technology companies. The Industrial Plan also signals the EU's intention to establish a European Sovereignty Fund, table a Net Zero Industry Act prescribing targets to be reached by 2030, and develop internal rules as well as work with allies to counter what it considers unfair subsidies by others¹⁹.

Unilateralism: The Case of the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 is a US Federal Law with several sections and chapters dealing with subjects ranging from measures to combat prescription drug price gouging to the imposition of a minimum tax rate for large companies (to combat tax avoidance) and to strengthen the Internal Revenue Service. Its relevance for present purposes is that it authorises a significant federal low carbon Industrial Policy that provides sizable financial incentives and localisation policies that amount to a major departure from the spirit and probably the letter of several WTO rules.

The 'climate related' financial incentives in the IRA, which include funding for drought resilience in the Western States (adaptation) and a section authorising financial incentives for 'clean energy' and electric vehicle manufacturing total some US \$391-billion. This points both to the 'deep pockets' of the US and the determination of its authorities to match or outpace China in low-carbon products and technologies. Although less than provided for bailouts of banks during the Great Recession, the sum is just short of the GDPs of Africa's largest economies (South Africa being US \$419 bn in 2021 and Nigeria \$440,8 bn in the same year). In addition, the IRA offers a tax credit of up to \$15,000 to US consumers who buy electric vehicles with a battery manufactured in the US²⁰.

The consumer tax credit provision of the IRA appears at face value to be incompatible with the WTO's Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMs), whose 'illustrative list' of prohibited measures includes imposing local content requirements on private sector transactions. Following a threat by the EU to mount a challenge in the WTO, the two sides agreed to "immediately begin negotiations on a targeted critical minerals agreement" to ensure that minerals extracted or processed in the EU would count for clean vehicle tax credits under the IRA. This would amount to an unprecedented

arrangement in which localisation requirements implemented by one WTO member would be extended to cover inputs from selected other WTO members as well.

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The emasculation of Syria in the new imperialist expansion in West Asia

Reneva Fourie discusses the manipulation of the changes in Syria to make the country another Western foothold in the region

The complex process of the intersection of neoliberalism and fundamentalism in Syria, involving a range of actors and ideologies, including Western imperialism, Islamic extremism and Zionism, culminated on 8 December 2024, with the capture of Damascus by the Islamic extremist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. Each of these forces contributed distinctly to the dynamics of regime change in Syria, often intersecting and reinforcing one another in significant ways.

Syria is a significant cultural landscape that has given rise to some of the foundational achievements of civilisation, such as urban life and the invention of the alphabet. The country is home to a remarkable array of historic cities, including Bosra, Palmyra, Aleppo, and Latakia, each offering valuable insights into the evolution of humanity, culture, architecture, religion, and civilisation itself. However, the standout marvel is Damascus, Syria's capital and most populous city. Often referred to as the 'pearl of the east' because of its lush beauty, Damascus is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, dating back to about 2500 BC. As a secular state, Syria was among the pioneering Arab countries that granted women the right to vote, and in 1948, Alice Kandalaft became the first Arab woman to represent her country at the United Nations.

After coming to power in 1963, the Syrian Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party exercised significant state control over critical sectors of the economy, preventing the full implementation of neoliberal policies. In addition, the party played a role in the 'axis of resistance', a coalition that grew stronger over time following the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon, and later the emergence of factions in Iraq and Yemen. This axis of resistance evolved into a prominent geopolitical bloc, united by a common commitment to oppose Western interests and Zionist interventions in the region.

Upon succeeding to the presidency in 2000, Bashar al-Assad initiated neoliberal reforms that brought private investment into state-owned industries in line with World Bank recommendations. The bourgeoisie and foreign investors, particularly from the Gulf monarchies and Turkey, were the main beneficiaries. The general population, which had enjoyed significant support from the state, was neglected, creating fertile ground for political instability. Syria was one of the countries impacted by the Arab Spring, which resulted in regime change in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen. What began as peaceful protests in 2011 quickly devolved into a protracted war. Ironically it was the very beneficiaries of reform, supported by Western nations, that destabilised

the country, including through funding extremist groups. Attacks against culture, humanity, and, particularly, women in Syria escalated.

In late 2014, the US, in collaboration with the Syrian Free Army and the YPG (People's Defence Units)-led Syrian Democratic Forces, officially commenced its occupation of Syria's oil-rich regions, securing control of over 90 per cent of the country's oil resources. Although the stated purpose of this presence was to combat terrorism, it ironically facilitated the growth of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS/Daesh), especially in areas like Palmyra, as well as groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra in Idlib. In response to the US presence, Russia intervened to support the Syrian government in late 2015. However, by the end of 2019, Syria had managed to achieve a certain level of stability, and the government had initiated a comprehensive infrastructure rehabilitation programme, even amidst intensified sanctions imposed by the US.

On 17 June 2020, the US implemented the Caesar Civilian Protection Act, which had been enacted the previous year. This legislation extended sanctions to encompass all foreign entities and countries trading with the Syrian government – a challenge given that it was still largely socialist. Before the onset of the war, the exchange rate of the Syrian Pound (SYP) was about SYP 47 to the US dollar. However, by December 2024, the currency had dramatically devalued to around SYP 12,900. This severe depreciation has been a significant factor in the alarming rise in poverty levels. According to the World Bank, the multidimensional poverty rate in Syria was 5.5% in 2010, but by 2024, it had soared to over 90%.

On 27 November 2024, hostilities in Syria escalated markedly as Jabhat al-Nusra, now operating under the rebranded name Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), initiated a military operation titled Detering Aggression. This operation, which originated in the western countryside of Aleppo, was not a spontaneous event but rather a meticulously planned military endeavour.

Equipped with advanced weaponry and sophisticated drone technology, these extremist factions received substantial military and financial support from various foreign countries, including Turkey, Israel, Ukraine and others. They executed a series of coordinated assaults from multiple fronts, and reports indicated that a significant proportion of the attacking forces comprised foreign fighters, many of whom communicated in Turkish and Ukrainian.

This underscores the transnational nature of the threats the Ba'ath administration faced and the explicit involvement of foreign powers in proxy warfare. Additionally, the ongoing aggression by Israel had diminished the operational capabilities of Palestinian resistance groups and Lebanon's Hezbollah, complicating resupply efforts from Iran. Meanwhile, Russia's engagement in Syria had notably relaxed due to its focus on the war in Ukraine.

Faced with a war-weary population and economic hardship resulting from sanctions, the Syrian government capitulated in under two weeks due to a lack of resources, including cash, fuel and military assets. Typically, air defence systems would protect the Syrian populace from Israeli airstrikes, but amidst the turmoil in the capital, Israel initiated a robust bombing campaign that severely depleted Syria's military capabilities. Concurrently, Israel expanded its military presence in southern Syria.

The general Syrian population initially viewed the political changes with cautious optimism, hoping for increased stability and relief from their ongoing hardships. The group HTS received a favourable response from Western countries. Its leader and now self-proclaimed president of Syria, Ahmed al-Sharaa, also known as Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, transformed to improve his public image after being designated a terrorist by the US, the UK and others. Just days earlier, there was a bounty of \$10 -million on his head. He adopted a more polished appearance to reshape this perception, trimming his beard and wearing Western-style suits.

In a significant move to secure US interests in the region, particularly the retention of control of oil resources, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken prioritised a meeting with al-Jolani shortly after the regime change. Following this meeting, the US relaxed its energy sanctions against Syria, marking a notable shift in policy. This change also allowed for Syria's participation in the 2025 World Economic Forum, making it a historic first for the country. Additionally, on 24 February, the European Union approved lifting extensive sanctions on critical industries, including energy, transport, and finance, further signalling a new phase in Syria's international relations.

Despite these significant developments, conditions for the Syrian people have worsened. Initial media reports showed celebrations throughout the country, the release of political prisoners, some severely tortured, and the breaking open of prison facilities to release prisoners who were allegedly trapped underground. What the media failed to report was the wide-scale looting, the harrowing sectarian-based executions and the persecution of many of the people associated with the former Ba'ath administration. The justification is that they are fighting the remnants of the Ba'ath administration. The reality is that there is sectarian incitement, particularly against the Alawites, resulting in widespread massacres.

Millions of people remain affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis, with displaced populations enduring severe conditions and facing limited access to aid. The economy is in a shambles. The situation has never been as dire, even in the worse days of the former government. Food prices now are even higher than before 'liberation'. The price of bread, the common food item for the poor in Syria, which was heavily subsidised by the Ba'ath administration, has tripled in the last three months.

Furthermore, time revealed that no such underground prison facilities existed, that the vast majority of those detained were criminals and some of the 'tortured' prisoners miraculously overcame their injuries. Public administration and the rule of law in Syria collapsed. Furthermore, despite al-Jolani's assurances that they have no interest in conflict with Israel, Israeli aggression continues unabated, and the US, Turkey, and Israel still occupy significant parts of Syria.

By the end of January, the new administration had ordered the dissolution of several political entities, including the Syrian Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, the Unified Syrian Communist Party and the trade union movement. This decision contradicted the promise of the new administration to protect all public freedoms. These organisations represented a potential source of resistance to neoliberal reforms and foreign domination. By dismantling these structures, the new ruling authorities in Syria are ensuring that there will be little opposition to the imposition of neoliberal policies and the integration of Syria into the global capitalist system.

Therefore, their exclusion from the much-promoted National Dialogue on 25 February is unsurprising. The preparatory phase for the dialogue faced significant criticism, primarily regarding the composition of the supervisory committee. Concerns were raised about the lack of transparent criteria for member selection, with six conservative Sunni supporters of President al-Sharaa dominating the committee, alongside a single female Christian member included merely to present an appearance of inclusiveness. Additionally, there was no clear agenda for the dialogue, and the process for inviting participants to preliminary regional-based discussions remained opaque.

The most pressing criticism, however, was not of the procedural aspects but rather the outcomes of the regional dialogues. Participants expressed their opinions passionately and sometimes contradictorily, articulating decades-long suppressed political views before concluding their sessions and departing. Notably, the supervisory committee failed to document these differing opinions, seek common ground, or produce a summary statement reflecting the outcomes of the sub-meetings. They merely listened, expressed gratitude to the participants, and exited.

The invitations for the main event, the Syrian National Dialogue, were sent out a day before the scheduled meeting. Many opposition leaders residing abroad received their invitations simultaneously with supporters of President al-Sharaa within Syria. Consequently, it was unsurprising that many could not attend. Additionally, numerous individuals who had been vocal during earlier regional dialogue sessions were notably excluded.

Significant absences included representatives from political parties, including those opposing the former government, as well as non-governmental organisations, civil society groups and any form of collective representation. Instead, invitees were chosen one-to-one without a transparent selection process, leading to the understanding that each member of the seven-person supervisory committee invited their acquaintances.

From a religious and sectarian standpoint, Christians and Druze were reasonably represented. However, Shiites and Alawites were conspicuously absent, alongside civil servants from previous Syrian governments before the fall of Bashar al-Assad. The exclusion of representatives from North-East Syria further highlighted that this gathering did not constitute a genuinely national forum but rather a dialogue platform primarily for those aligned with the new regime.

Despite criticism surrounding the modalities and procedures of the national dialogue, the final communiqué can be viewed as a positive step in Syria's political process. It notably condemned the Israeli "acts of aggression", in contrast to the new regime's silent stance regarding Israeli incursions into Syrian territory. Whether this statement will influence President al-Sharaa and the transitional government he is expected to establish remains to be seen.

However, some aspects of the communiqué were not well-received by civil society activists, including those who participated in parallel sessions and were not allowed to engage or vote on any part of the communiqué during the plenary session. The mention of a forthcoming 'appointed' transitional legislative assembly and an interim constitutional charter to be 'announced' in the near future left many participants feeling frustrated.

The situation in Syria and the broader West Asia is characterised by significant uncertainty. The involvement of both regional and international powers complicates the situation, as competing interests shape military and political strategies. Meanwhile, Trump is rapidly advancing his plans to transform Gaza into a resort destination while rallying support for the Abraham Accords. Israel continues its aggressive actions against Palestinians and Lebanese despite existing ceasefire agreements, demonstrating a blatant disregard for diplomatic efforts. Iran, on the other hand, remains vulnerable to the looming threat of a Western or Israeli attack. As the region navigates these complexities, the future remains uncertain and unpredictable. ●

TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA	
Date	Event
2000	Bashar al-Assad ascends to power in Syria, begins some neoliberal reforms
2011	Syrian uprising begins, marking the start of a prolonged conflict
2014	US military intervention in Syria under 'Operation Inherent Resolve'
2015	Russia comes to Syria's defence
2020's	Relative stability and significant reconstruction
2020	Enforcement of the Caesar' Civilian Protection Act of 2019
2024	Collapse of the Assad regime
2024	Ba'ath Party, trade union federation and the Communist Party activities are frozen
2025	Ba'ath Party, trade union federation and the Communist Party officially dissolved by Syrian interim leadership
2025	Syrian Communist Party banned by transitional government

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Anti-imperialism is needed now more than ever

Ben Martins on why robust anti-imperialist African unity is needed to end conflicts on the continent and counter Zionist efforts to eradicate the Palestinian people

Unity and continuity in historical change refer to how events change over time. The post-1884-1885 Berlin Conference scar lines on the African continent, which delineated state borders, were products of European colonisation based on rivalry between European states. The Berlin Conference, however, continues to cast a long dark shadow over Africa today.

Why, one may ask, is the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) one of the most resource-rich countries in the world, but also one of the poorest, plagued by conflict and never-ending war? The root of the current civil war, instability and conflict in the DRC can be traced back to the decisions made by European imperialists and the consequences of their economic, military and geopolitical interests, which did not take into consideration the impact of the division of indigenous people.

As a result of the arbitrary delineation of countries, members of the same family, clan or tribe ended up split across different countries, as happened in the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda. In January 2025, military engagement between the Republic of Congo security forces and militant groups led by the March 23 Movement (M23) escalated rapidly, culminating in M23's capture of Goma, the regional economic hub of the eastern DRC on the Rwandan border.

Rwanda, the primary backer of the M23 group, supported its offensive in the eastern DRC. As Goma fell, thousands of locals, many of whom were already internally displaced, fled the region. Between 900 people and 2,000 people, by United Nations and Congolese estimates, were killed in the offensive on Goma. M23 is the latest in a series of Rwanda-backed militant groups that have been vying for territory and valuable national resources in the eastern Congo since the late 1990s.

The first Congo War (1996 -1997) began in the wake of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, during which ethnic Hutu extremists killed an estimated one million minority ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda, DRC's neighbour to the east. During and following the genocide, some two million Hutu refugees crossed the border, mostly settling in refugee camps in the North Kivu and South Kivu provinces. A small number of those Rwandans who entered the DRC were Hutu extremists who began organising militias within the Congo. Pressure mounted and intensified as Tutsi militias organised against the Hutu groups in turn and foreign powers began taking sides in the conflict.

Following the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF's) victory against the genocidal Rwandan government, the new Tusi-led government began its involvement in the

DRC, then known as the Republic of Zaire. Rwandan troops, under the leadership of Paul Kagame, and Congo-based Tusi militias with Rwandan backing launched an invasion of Zaire, which was ruled by Mobutu Sese Seko. Kigali justified both efforts by arguing that Hutu groups in eastern DRC were still a threat to its Tusi population and that the Mobutu regime was harbouring Hutu extremists who had fled across the border.

Rwanda waged the First Congo War against Zaire with the help of Uganda, Angola and Burundi. The Rwandan coalition's invasion was coordinated with the assistance of Zaire's then-opposition leader, Laurent Kabila. On Mobutu fleeing Kinshasa, the Kagame-Kabila coalition won the First Congo War in 1997. Laurent Kabila was installed as president of Zaire and changed the country's name back to the DRC. In 1998, the Second Congo War broke out following the deterioration of relations between Kigali and Kinshasa. In a reversal of alliances, Kabila ordered all foreign troops out of the Congo and allowed Hutu armed groups to organise at the border of Rwanda.

Rwanda's response was to invade in 1998 again. Kigali's stated aim was to create a zone in the DRC-Rwanda border lands controlled by its own troops to ensure more distance from Hutu groups in eastern DRC. Amidst the war, Laurent Kabila was assassinated in a 2001 coup d'état attempt. Kabila's son, Joseph Kabila, took power and the Second Congo War was ended in 2002.

Over the past two decades, other flashpoints have arisen in states on the Congo-Rwanda border. A major complication for peace efforts in the DRC has been the proliferation of mining operations. The DRC is endowed with some of the world's largest reserves of metals and rare earth metals used to produce advanced electronics. As the world has become more reliant on cobalt, copper, zinc and other minerals, local and external groups have become more and more incentivised to get involved in the Congolese conflict.

US companies once owned vast cobalt mines in the Congo. Most of these companies were sold to Chinese companies during the Obama and the first Trump administrations. Chinese companies control the majority of foreign-owned cobalt, uranium and copper mines in the DRC, and the Congolese army has several times been deployed to mining sites in the eastern DRC to protect Chinese assets.

Currently, the DRC is embroiled in an ongoing political and military confrontation with Rwanda yet again. Kigali accuses Kinshasa of supporting Hutu extremist militias such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

Kwame Nkrumah's vision for a united Africa was to create a United States of Africa. He held the view that Africa should be a self-reliant member of the world community. He saw the necessity of the restoration of African dignity that was undermined as a result of slavery and colonialism. Nkrumah deemed its restoration as necessary to enable Africans to function freely in the world as equals. He supported and funded the independence struggles of African countries, then still under colonial rule, which included Namibia and South Africa.

Many decades later, in 2025, Africa is still far from realising Nkrumah's vision but has come nearer to it by many a long and bitter march. The yoke of colonialism has been

largely cast away, except in areas like Western Sahara, where the Saharawi people are fighting the Morocco-Israel axis for independence. History is being progressively shaped by anti-imperialist struggles. The grip of neo-colonialism is being shattered as can be seen in the Sahel region of Africa, where popular coups d'état in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger toppled incumbent leaderships that were propped up by French political and socio-economic neocolonial interests.

Niger's General Abdourahmane Tchiani, Burkina Faso's Captain Ibrahim Traor, and Mali's Colonel Assimi Goita's examples continue to inspire and represent beacons of progress and hope. These leaders signed a confederation treaty, as a step towards greater integration of the three countries. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are showing signs of safeguarding their newly acquired independence and charting the road to social progress, through the pursuit of self-determination, national democracy and determining their own destiny.

In Zimbabwe on the other hand, the ruling ZANU-PF, which has historically positioned itself as pro-Palestine has recently made overtures to seek closer ties to the Zionist state of Israel in the hope of securing more investment and doing away with sanctions. One of the Zimbabwe government's recent moves to improve relations with Israel has been the appointment last year of the Israeli national, Ronny Levi Musan, as honorary consul of Zimbabwe to Israel. It is reasonable to surmise that Israel aims to get Zimbabwe to follow the example of Malawi which announced plans to open an embassy in Jerusalem.

Without progress towards greater African unity, there will be failure and collapse of people's liberty. Turning focus to the US: Under President Joe Biden's administration, the world witnessed a US-backed televised genocide by Israel in Gaza. Arthur James Balfour was the author of the Balfour Declaration, which approved the establishment in Palestine of a 'national home' for the Jewish people. The Balfour Declaration foreshadowed the formation of a Zionist state and preordained that the indigenous Palestinians would be made stateless and consigned to a political prison.

Malcolm X in 1964 stated: "The situation in Palestine serves as a brutal reminder of the consequences of colonialism and the ruthless dispossession of indigenous people. It is an agonising reminder that the struggle for justice knows no borders and we must stand united and in solidarity with all oppressed peoples, anywhere around the world." The tempo of Zionist ethnic cleansing is today still being intensified in the West Bank, premised upon hatred and a superiority complex of religion, language and culture. The past months have shown that the ceasefire in Gaza is being used by Israel as an extension of its scorched earth policy.

Under US President Donald Trump's administration, diplomacy and multilateralism are under attack and siege. Minute by minute, hour by hour instability, uncertainty, rants, threats and the wanton abuse of presidential prerogatives have become the order of the day. Presidents Biden and Trump are but two sides of the same coin. Their decisions have hollowed out the multilateral foundation and global authority of the United Nations. President Trump has boldly ushered in the ascendancy of oligarchs and right-wing technology billionaires into key positions in the US government.

The revolutionary upsurge demanding independence from colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism by the oppressed peoples of the world is a fire that must be fanned and kept alive. ●

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