

Positive Thoughts on Dark Times

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There is no question that over the past decade and a half, Europe, the US and Israel have engaged in a series of bloody wars, inequalities have increased throughout the globe, economic crisis has become endemic and, more recently, right-wing military and civilian regimes have swept to power throughout Asia, North Africa, Europe and Canada.

Yet, despite this generally gloomy picture, important positive developments have emerged raising the possibility of fundamental changes to reverse the current reactionary wave. I will proceed by outlining these positive developments, taking account of the retrograde context in which they occur.

Reaction and Progress in Asia

The macro-political-economic picture in Asia could not be darker: Right-wing regimes rule in all the major countries. There is a military junta in Thailand and a military-civilian regime in Pakistan. In Japan, a right-wing Prime Minister is committed to re-arming and expanding its military power. Right-wing rulers have taken power in Australia, Indonesia, South Korea and India. In China, inequalities intensify while the number of billionaires and millionaires will soon exceed those in the US. Regimes in Afghanistan and Pakistan support US military intervention and drone attacks within their territory.

In the face of this reactionary setting, there is the rising class struggle of millions of Chinese workers, who have secured major gains in salaries and wages in the course of the last decade, averaging over 10% per year. The cumulative gains have led to the doubling of monthly wages. The main reason worker wages have increased can be found in their willingness to engage in strikes, demonstrations and other forms of militant class action.

Rising wages in China have enormous positive global consequences. Many corporations have relocated from the coastal cities to the interior, thus 'proletarianizing' the provinces and widening and deepening the scope for militant labor action. Meanwhile, many foreign and Chinese corporations have relocated their factories to low wage countries like Cambodia, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Laos, bringing intensified class struggle. In recent years, militant strikes and violent protests have broken out in Cambodia, Vietnam and Bangladesh.

There are indications that US capitalists may be 'on-shoring' their investments, i.e. re-locating factories and business back to the US, as wages and militancy rise in China and decline in the US. With the drying up of China as the world's reserve pool of passive, cheap workers, the global labor market tightens increasing the capacity of workers to successfully struggle for better working conditions and wages.

Chinese outflows of capital this year will exceed inflows, for the first time. These

outflows include speculative investments in high-end real estate in the West and greater investments in extractive sectors in Africa, Latin America, Oceania, Asia, Southern Europe and Ukraine. This expansion of productive investments will expand the working class and lead to more workers struggles.

In summary, the sharp and sustained rise in Chinese wages, resulting from the class struggle, has world historical significance as it ripples through the global economy by setting in motion a chain of positive socio-political movements.

The Larger Significance of the Afghan War

The prolonged US war in Afghanistan, now in its 13th year, and Washington's defeat and retreat in the face of an unconquered Taliban national resistance, has enormous consequences for US empire-building, as well as domestic public opinion and nationalist resistance movements worldwide.

First and foremost the war has turned the vast majority of Americans against new military interventions, especially those involving ground troops. The "*Afghan Syndrome*" (replacing the '*Vietnam Syndrome*' of the 1970's and 1980's) has become an obstacle to the launching of new military empire-building projects.

Obama's '*humanitarian*' intervention in Libya was confined to bombing cities and infrastructure while unable to send American ground troops to effectively occupy the country, set up a secure puppet government and seize the valuable oil fields. As a result, its flimsy puppet government in Tripoli has collapsed and Libyan oil production is minimal. Libya is a fragmented 'failed state' ruled by tribal armies with its once modern infrastructure in ruin.

Likewise the US is forced to wage war against the secular nationalist government in Syria via proxy jihadi mercenaries, as the "*Afghan Syndrome*" blocks greater and more direct US troop involvement.

Despite enormous pressure on the US President and Congress to launch a war against Iran from Israel's fifth column, the so-called '*Israel Lobby*', the '*Afghan syndrome*' has limited Washington to rely on economic sanctions. The uncontrolled, violent deterioration in the Middle East caused by US overt and covert wars has forced an opening for diplomatic negotiations with Teheran – to the fury of militarists in Tel Aviv and their US agents. In other words, the defeat of the US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, as well as the enormous and destructive cost of a prolonged occupation to the US economy, has weakened the capacity of the US Empire to invade, occupy and pillage resource-rich adversaries, today and in the near future.

How Middle East Wars for Israel Weaken the US Presence in Latin America and Asia

Washington has thrown away trillions of dollars of public money and suffered major casualties in pursuit of endless wars in the Middle East, which were vigorously promoted by the domestic Zionist power configuration at the behest of Israel.

Because of this influential power configuration, the US has lost significant economic, political and diplomatic influence in its traditional spheres of control in Latin America and Asia. US market shares in both regions have declined. New regional organizations, excluding the US,

have proliferated throughout Latin America. China has expanded its own lucrative trade relations throughout both regions, further eroding US hegemony.

While Zionist influence over US policy is pernicious, eroding domestic sovereignty and undermining democracy within the US, the focus of US policy on the interests of Israel has clearly undermined the US presence in Latin America and Asia.

As long as the US continues to intervene in the Middle East, it will be unable to effectively intervene against popular uprisings and center-left governments in Latin America. By channeling its resources to prop up hereditary tyrants in the Gulf and Egypt's brutal military junta, the US has not been able pursue its more traditional role in Latin America.

The US has plenty of regional allies and clients in the Middle East and North Africa, but they lack popular legitimacy and rule through terror and repression. In Turkey, mass protests have erupted against the Erdogan regime, including important sectors of the militant Turkish working class. Kurds, Islamists and leftists have gained influence inside Turkey and along its borders. Meanwhile, Turkey's regional trading partners, such as Iraq, are in turmoil and trade has collapsed. While Prime Minister Erdogan may win elections, his legitimacy among the population is tarnished and his ambition to be a major regional leader is severely diminished.

Israel continues to extract billions of dollars in annual US aid (tribute) while dispossessing and starving the Palestinians. Nevertheless the growing international boycott and divestment movement is undermining the power of Tel Aviv's overseas "lobbies" to direct US and EU policy. Israel has never been so isolated, feared and despised in the eyes of the world's people. International public opinion polls have repeatedly ranked Israel's policies as a major source of war and instability in the world today.

In the US and EU, more voices than ever are speaking out against Israel's crimes against humanity, despite the campaigns by major Zionist organizations to blacklist, threaten and punish critical voices. Increasingly the power of the Israel lobby relies on its numerically small Zionist power elite – the millionaires and billionaires who own the mass media and who bankroll its political campaigns. The leaders of major Jewish organizations in the US are facing a significant decline in membership especially among young generations of American Jews, unwilling to commit their energies and resources to a militarist, racist Israel.

The Gulf States: Precarious Clients, Dubious Allies

The Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, have offered "paper" support for US wars in the Middle East at a cost. Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Bahrain rule over their restive populations by coercion. Majorities are demanding democratic freedom and, in some cases, have engaged in large-scale protests despite brutal repression. US military bases in the region will be vulnerable when these pro-democracy majorities finally overthrow the family-based monarchic dictatorships.

Moreover, the Gulf regimes are playing a dangerous double game: They publicly support the US while secretly funding the Sunni Islamist terrorists opposing US proxies, (the 'moderate' rebels) in Syria and the puppet government in Iraq. The Gulf States financed the bloody 'regime changes' in Egypt and Libya, while the US may have been content (and

better served) to arrange power-sharing agreements. The Saudi monarchy has joined with Israel in trying to sabotage any US negotiations with Iran. While, on paper, the US may have 'clients and allies' throughout the Middle East, these lack legitimacy, stability and trust . . . weak foundations from which to project US power. They are a constant drain on financial resources and have no public sympathy among the US electorate.

Europe: Crisis, Expansion and Resistance

While the European Union expands its territory with the de-facto annexation of the western Ukraine and Moldavia, and NATO stations its military facilities on the frontiers of Russia, the EU's economy is suffering from the longest and deepest period of recession and stagnation since the Great Depression.

After six years of crisis with no end in sight, objective reality refutes any remaining notions of capitalism in Europe as a 'self-rectifying' system capable of sustaining growth and prosperity. On the contrary, with inequalities widening and wages, salaries and the social safety net in sharp decline, class polarization is growing. All the objective conditions for a revival of class struggle are present.

With even harsher retrograde measures ("*austerity*") imposed on the populations by oligarchs in Brussels, workers and salaried employees, in both the public and private sectors, are showing uneven and sporadic signs of mass resistance. This will lay the groundwork for more general and systematic confrontations in the not too distant future.

Even as the European Union overextends itself, seizing control of the western Ukraine via a repugnant and brutal proxy putsch regime, it has ignited a partisan revolt in the industrial eastern Ukraine. Workers and employees have set up a popular democratic republic and are engaged in a war of national resistance against the EU collaborator junta in Kiev.

The EU and the US threats of harsher sanctions against Russia have provoked furious criticism from major sectors of the capitalist class in Germany, France, the US, Italy and elsewhere. The US National Association of Manufacturers and the US Chamber of Commerce have published editorials and full-page ads in all the influential financial media, arguing that new sanctions against Russia will lead to losses of billions of dollars in trade and investments and cost hundreds of thousands of US jobs.

The significance of this current break between the capitalist class and the imperial state clearly highlights the conflict between Washington based-militarists and market-based producers and investors. If and when this conflict deepens, there will be the potential for a broad-based, well-financed coalition opposed to the militarist vision of 'globalization'

In the meantime, Russia and China have moved toward a new political, economic and military alliance in response to sanctions. Trade in rubles and renminbi (instead of dollars and euros) is expanding. The domestic economy is becoming the motor force of China's new growth model. Local industry is replacing European imports via "import substitution" in Russia.

In sum, Washington and Brussels' sanctions and bellicose threats against Russia and China are having a boomerang effect. They are costing Western manufacturers and exporters significant market shares in large dynamic countries and fomenting deep internal

divisions within the ruling classes in the US and EU.

Rising Class and National Struggles in the EU

Class struggle from below intensifies in the EU. In Greece, the leftwing party *Syriza*, controls the municipal governments in Athens and throughout Attica, and currently leads in the national polls. In France, the neo-liberal, militarist, so-called “*Socialist*” regime of President Francois Hollande has lost credibility and hovers at 19% public support. It wallows in economic stagnation with double-digit unemployment and an unending series of scandals. The popular revolt against “*austerity*” and the Brussels dictatorship grows . . . So far, unfortunately, this public anger has been most effectively capitalized by the nationalist Right, but hopefully, the nationalist left will be re-energized by the crisis, intensify class contradictions in the near future and seize the opportunity to organize and lead.

In Spain, the nationalist left movements in the Basque country and Catalonia are challenging the Rightist regime in Madrid and the ‘neo-liberal nationalists’ in Barcelona and Bilbao. A state crisis looms, where the vast army of unemployed youth (50%) could play a major role in radicalizing the independence movement.

Latin America: The Center-Left, the Right and the Left

Into the second decade of the 21st century, many of the illusions of the Left and its fears about US Empire have faded. So-called ‘*21st century socialism*’, has not ‘socialized’ any economies while the US has not succeeded in orchestrating regime change and installing its neo-liberal clients in any major South American countries. The exception is Honduras, a nation in shambles, with tens of thousands of refugees fleeing the US-installed military-civilian junta – including thousands of Honduran children crowding US deportation camps.

What has emerged is a *triangular struggle* between established center-left regimes backed by electoral majorities, US-backed rightist parties and leftist-backed social movements and trade unions.

The US has secured support for its new *Trans-Pacific Alliance* from Colombia, Chile, Peru and Mexico. However, this has not undermined the independent regional trade and cooperation organizations, which exclude the US, such as UNASUR and ALBA. Both Chile and Peru, close US ‘allies’, depend far more on their trade with China than with the US.

Over the past decade, Washington has succeeded in orchestrating two coups – Honduras and Paraguay – both marginal and in decline. But it has so far failed in three much larger and vibrant nations: Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador.

Washington maintains seven military bases in Colombia, but Bogota has signed trade, military and political agreements with Venezuela to end cross border military incursions and mutually respect their political sovereignty.

The center-left has consolidated political power in Uruguay and Bolivia, and to a lesser degree in Brazil and Ecuador. Nevertheless, the center-left’s dependence on agro-mineral exports and foreign finance capital has caused domestic economic stagnation. This has led to the growth of right-wing electoral parties and violent coup-attempts in some countries while promoting the growth of significant left-led social movements and direct

action in others. In Venezuela, the right has engaged in election violence, bloody attacks by hired thugs, destructive street demonstrations with the burning of clinics and power stations, as well as an elite-orchestrated campaign to sabotage the economy. In the midst of double-digit inflation, political street violence and a crime wave, the center-left's popular base has been eroded in Venezuela.

Washington has used its courts to attack Argentina by ruling in favor of the so-called 'vulture' capitalists or speculative investment funds which had purchased Argentine debt after its severe economic crisis and are now pushing the country toward defaulting on its current foreign debt or depleting its foreign reserves to reward the 'vultures'.

President Obama continues the US half-century boycott against Cuba in splendid isolation at home and abroad, in spite of both international and domestic opinion in favor of normal relations with Havana. The growing violent right-wing opposition against the center-left in Venezuela and Argentina has polarized their political systems. As the right-wing advances and the governments give way, popular movements and mobilizations intensify and increase political volatility. While the danger of right-wing takeovers is growing, so are opportunities for the Left to gain significant support from the traditional mass base of the Center-Left.

Africa: The Historic General Strike in South Africa

While the former-nationalist rulers in South Africa, Angola, and Mozambique continue to pillage the treasury and enrich themselves in partnership with the US-EU-Chinese mining corporations, South African mine workers are creating a potentially radical alternative. For five months, the South African platinum miners have been engaged in the longest, most disciplined and most successful strike in the history of Africa. Despite the brutal massacre of 39 miners by the ruling black bourgeois regime (African National Congress), the opposition of the biggest global mining companies in Africa and the sellout leadership of the trade union confederation, the miners have held fast. Following their success, trade union militants are organizing a new trade union confederation and a new workers' party. Their leaders have introduced a new spirit of hope and struggle among millions of poor, unemployed and marginalized black Africans.

The United States: Small Victories Can Lead to Big Movements

It is tempting to be pessimistic about progressive change in the United States with its anemic and politically irrelevant trade union federation and co-opted peace movement; the decline of independent grass-roots organizations; the co-optation of Black and Latino politicians by the Wall Street-dominated Democratic Party and the successful State crackdown on the "*Occupy Movement*".

At the international level the Obama regime has increased its support for direct and proxy intervention in Syria, Iraq and the Gulf region. Washington has given over 2 billion dollars in military aid to the brutal Egyptian military junta. Obama has released another five hundred million dollars in aid to the armed mercenary forces invading Syria. Hundreds of US Special Forces and thousands of armed 'contractors' have been sent to Iraq and one thousand US Marines are ready 'off-shore'...

On the other hand there are signs of hope on the horizon. Over 80% of the US public have rejected Obama's war mongering, especially his ambitions to 're-enter' Iraq.

It was US public opinion and letters to their Congressional representatives that blocked Obama's plan to bomb Syria. His callous embrace of the Egyptian coup and dictator has alienated the vast majority of secular democrats and moderate Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East.

Obama's spineless support of Israel's settler land grabs and the 'business-as-usual' complicity of US corporations with radical Jewish colonists in the West Bank are increasingly opposed by the European Union, leading Christian churches (the US and Canadian Presbyterians, among others) and by the growing world-wide Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement.

In local US elections, we have seen a real, consequential socialist elected to the Seattle City Council. The Chicago teachers union is leading a massive city-wide struggle, based in the Black and Mexican-American neighborhoods, against the draconian school closures and teacher lay-offs initiated by the ex-Wall Streeter, former Obama 'Chief of Staff', US-Israeli dual citizen, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel. A broad trade union - community based coalition has formed to challenge Emmanuel's corrupt money machine and austerity policies in the forthcoming mayoral elections.

Alternate media web sites, critical of politicians pandering to Wall Street and deeply opposed to new wars, now inform millions of American citizens as they seek their place in popular movements.

For the first time, the two principle business lobbies, the National Manufacturers Association (NAM) and the US Chamber of Commerce (USCC) have come out in public opposition to Washington's sanctions against Russia. The fact that big and small, local and international businesspeople recognized that US military interventions, economic sanctions and boycotts hurt their profits, limit their access to markets and cost thousands of domestic jobs is a major political breakthrough. For over two decades, US business interests, especially Big Oil, have been bullied into silence, while Israel's thuggish "Lobby" has successfully pushed for sanctions against Iraq and then a full-scale invasion, and then more sanctions targeting Iran, Syria and Lebanon. The recognition that this has hurt US investors, cut access to international markets, eliminated hundreds of thousands of US jobs and caused the price of fuel to soar for hundreds of millions of US consumers has finally been brought home. The current push for sanctions against Russia does not have the rabid support of the pro-Israel lobby and US businesses interests are effectively finding their courage to face the politically-isolated militarists in Washington and certain sectors of the military-industrial complex. Nevertheless, this might not bode well for the Zionist push for future wars and sanctions in the Middle East.

Our hope is not a Panglossian dream.

The institutional power of the warmongers and the Wall Street-Washington revolving door is a major entrenched force in the US. But we also should recognize that we can win and we have won elections at the local level through new community-based organizations. We constitute *'the mainstream'* in our opposition to the new wars in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere.

The enemy, "*capitalism*", is powerful, but it has manifestly failed to generate new well-paying jobs needed to sustain a decent, stable standard of living for the '99%'. It cannot provide efficient, quality health care and educational opportunities for US citizens. It cannot fund an adequate national pension system or protect and build secure communities and

jobs. No one buys into the capitalist “*success stories*” any more, stories that bamboozled our parents and grandparents from the 1940’s – 1990’s. The main picture of capitalism today is one of economic breakdowns, home foreclosures, Wall Street swindles, impunity for corporate criminals, rampant corruption, prolonged crisis, declining living standards, stagnation and cut backs in vital social services.

Only in their splendid isolation, far from the American public, can the overpaid academic economists and financial media mouth-pieces boast of the victory of capitalism – but they are counting only the soaring profits and increasingly concentrated wealth of the top 1% while ignoring the impoverishment of the 99%.

We are united with the majority on the economy and in opposition to the launching of more wars abroad. We share a clear understanding of the current oligarchical nature of the US political system. When we move from our shared vision to effective organizing, from protest to politics, from narrow to broad issues, from Democratic Party hacks to genuine, independent grass-roots leaders, we can join the rest of humanity fighting with dignity for a better world. We can find allies and inspiration among the hundreds of millions of Chinese workers successfully doubling their wages every seven years, among the courageous armed workers in Eastern Ukraine fighting for democracy and self-determination, among the militant miners in South Africa, among the majority of democratic socialists in Greece, among the left nationalists in the Basque and Catalan nations and the popular democrats in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq and elsewhere.

We are deeply aware of the obstacles, the human costs and the long road ahead. Nothing is inevitable or pre-determined. Progress depends on personal commitment and intervention. We are not alone, we are gaining adherents and we are advancing. Each of us has a particular national and cultural context, but we all share the universal values of freedom, social justice and solidarity. In the last analysis, it is the struggle for freedom that gives meaning to our everyday life.

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