

A [recent poll by YouGov](#) found that between 40 and 55% of people in 5 key EU countries and the US think WW3 is likely within the next 5-10 years. While most see Russia as the key threat, it is significant that the danger of a US-Europe conflict was also predicted. Although events will not develop in a straight line, these fears combined with a deep-seated revulsion at the role of imperialism especially in Palestine, are causing radical changes in consciousness particularly of the youth.

30 years ago, the imperialist powers said that “never again” would such events as the Rwanda genocide and Srebrenica massacre be allowed, yet now the same imperialist powers are complicit in the genocide against Palestinians. Only as the heart-rending pictures of starving children have hit the media, have some leaders been forced under pressure of ‘public opinion’ to take token measures to pressurise Netanyahu to back off. Trump continues his unwavering support for Netanyahu.

As the horrors of Gaza are unfolding, the list of other conflicts across the world is also growing. The war in Ukraine continues relentlessly, and the fighting continues in Sudan, DRC, Rwanda and another 25 African regions. Syria too is sinking back into conflict as Israel and the US seek to redraw the map of the Middle East, attacks on Lebanon and Yemen continue. The declaration by Myanmar’s military of the end of the ‘state of emergency’ proved empty as it was quickly reimposed in 9 of the 14 regions.

While it is completely undialectical to analyse the current world situation as defined solely and finally by the relationship between the US and China, it would also be wrong to dismiss the competition and conflict between the two largest imperialist forces as an important defining factor today. But in today’s world this clash is entwined with all aspects of the polycrises.

The greenwashing policies of the imperialist powers are doing incomparable damage. As they struggle for control over rare earth metals and minerals they are laying waste to whole new regions. Land appropriation in the name of conservation, and to build wind and solar farms is leading to forced population displacements with indigenous populations facing the brutality of state and private security forces. The ever-increasing consequences of climate change are creating many new potential conflicts.

At the same time the turn away from neoliberalism in favour of state intervention, deglobalisation and protectionism is failing to restore the health of global capitalism. The key imperialist powers all face serious economic difficulties, and it is their struggle to maintain markets that leads to the protection of national industries and bourgeois nationalism, together with their striving to build influence and control in other parts of the world that demand the strengthening of military might.

Adjusted for inflation [Global military expenditure](#) grew in the 2000s from its post cold-war low by an annual average of 5.5% to finance the ‘war on terror’, Iraq and Afghan wars to reach \$2

trillion in 2010, and since has grown by 2.5% a year to reach \$2.7 trillion in 2024. It is forecast to grow by 5% annually to reach \$3.5 trillion in 2030. Policies based on preparations for war are not in themselves, as the ISA recently stated, what drives the retreat from neoliberalism, but on the contrary, it is the adoption of national and protectionist policies and the inter-imperialist conflict that is driving militarisation. But the increasing military expenditure distorts national economies, and in turn demands increasing protectionism, due to the need for supply chain security and secrecy.

Trump's second term demonstrates the depth of the crisis facing US imperialism. It reflects the serious undermining domestically of the traditional parties and institutions. And while a significant section of the US elite has swung behind Trump, it is split albeit with the defeated anti-Trump wing impotent in opposing his policies.

The trade war is aimed at restoring the dominance of the US economy, which during the neo-liberal epoch has experienced considerable deindustrialisation, combined with a \$1 trillion trade deficit and overvalued dollar. That this policy will not succeed is clear.

The imposition of tariffs globally has driven another large nail into the neoliberal coffin, which was based on unlimited free trade. The US withdrawal from the WHO, UN Human Rights body, the slashing of USAid, and a review of the US's role in the World Bank, IMF and WTO will further increase these bodies' impotence in implementing the 'rule of law'. The decades-long approach of US imperialism combining 'soft diplomacy' by building multilateral alliances to protect the common interests of the imperialist powers with naked aggression against countries that step out of line, has now been replaced by naked aggression using both economic and military means with US interests placed above all else.

The advent of Trumpism has given a boost to right-populist and authoritarian forces across the world, and also demonstrated the fallacy that the world is divided into two well consolidated blocks. The European Union, Canada, and even Japan have been staggered at the way in which the US now dismisses their interests and bullies them into accepting Trump's approach.

Modi, who is promoting the traditionally US friendly India as a world power is under pressure to stop importing Russian oil, and to downplay involvement in BRICS. The imposition of the 50% tariff on India is in danger of pushing it closer to China, and contrasts to the 19% levy on Pakistan, China's traditional ally, after it promised Trump hydrocarbon exploration rights.

Trump's "disorder" is designed to force the realignment of the world to ensure partners who are no longer "equal", but prepared to unconditionally follow the US's lead. EU leaders are recognising they can no longer rely on the US for defense as NATO's previous 'consolidated unity' has been broken. The QUAD (Australia, Japan, India and US) military and diplomatic alliance to oppose China and the 2021 AUKUS (Australia,UK,US) pact intended to build nuclear-submarine capacity to defend the Indo-Pacific and QUAD were hailed by ISA as proof of

the consolidation of the US Cold War bloc. Now AUKUS has been reduced to the Australia-UK pact and this year's QUAD summit is threatened by the growing US-India tension.

In the Cold War, the west feared the "domino effect" in which one after another country would reject capitalism. Now Trump has thrown all the dominos in the air and we wait to see what patterns are formed as they fall. This has offered Chinese imperialism opportunities to expand its own influence globally contrasting its "multilateral partnerships" to that of naked American domination. It is doing so in part by expanding its production facilities abroad - in energy, research, healthcare - a strategy that will enable its 'localised production' to ease the effect of sanctions.

Trump's strategy is to reach a trade deal with China, and at the same time try to deepen the rift between China and Russia. China has a strong hand to deal with as it mines 70% of the world's rare earths, and controls 90% of their processing. While Trump imposed a further 25% tariff on India for buying Russian oil, he ignored China, which buys more. At the same time the US based Nvidia Corporation has been given the green light to sell to China Nvidia H20 and AMD chips, which are widely used in AI, including in the arms industry, and in Russian weapons.

The Chinese elite is considering its geo-political strategy. As it tackles its own domestic polycrises it currently needs global stability. It worries that a victory for Russia would leave it in an arrogant mood, ready to move further into Central Asia, and even causing problems along their huge joint border. A Russian defeat however would strengthen the US, and leave a highly unstable country dominating Eurasia. For these reasons China would probably prefer the status-quo or a frozen conflict.

Xi continues to argue that eventually Taiwan should be reunified with China aware, after watching Russia's performance in Ukraine, of the difficulties of a direct military occupation. Alongside the military difficulties, any threat to the island's chip production plants would throw the global economy into a decades' long recession. A key section of China's ruling elite prefer an approach based on taking Taiwan over by stealth, propagandising the 'inevitability' of a merger, supporting pro-Chinese politicians and forces with the hope that the Taiwanese people will eventually succumb to the pressure, and thus avoiding a direct military intervention by the US in response. In the current global situation though, that strategy could be cut across by any sudden change in position by any of the sides.

Neither side can win a complete victory in Russia's imperialist war against Ukraine. The Kremlin is severely weakened internationally, not least in Syria and with its traditional partners such as Azerbaijan and even Belarus. Recent leaks reveal distrust in both China and Russia with the other.

Without military production, the Russian economy would be in a severe recession, with growing reports of discontent at the front. In Ukraine opposition to the occupation is still very strong, yet

war-weariness has set in, increased by the slow-down of weapon supplies and support from western imperialism. Kyiv has been shaken by widespread anti-corruption protests. While Trump is struggling to force Putin to accept a ceasefire, at some stage an agreement is likely to freeze the conflict, ready at a later date to break out again at a higher level.

While the Ukraine war has retreated in the consciousness of workers and youth, in part due to Zelensky's reliance on Western imperialism, the new move to take control of Gaza city, and brutal assassination of the Al-Jazeera journalists could potentially provoke an even stronger global protest in opposition. For the first time serious splits are appearing within the Israeli ruling elite with warnings the move will lead to a mass insurrection within Palestine. Gaza solidarity actions can be sharply radicalised and threaten a new insurrectionary wave across the Middle East and North Africa.