

Geopolitics, the imperial system and socialist anti-imperialism: An interview with Claudio Katz

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Claudio Katz is a professor of economics at the University of Buenos Aires (Argentina) and a member of Economists of the Left. He is also the author of various [articles](#) and books on contemporary capitalism and imperialism, including [Bajo el Imperio del Capital](#) (Under the Empire of Capital), [Dependency Theory After Fifty Years](#) and his latest, [La Crisis del Sistema Imperial](#) (The Imperial System in Crisis). In this broad-ranging interview, Katz talks about the need to avoid looking at imperialism in purely economic terms, the rise of what he terms an “imperial system” and the complexities of anti-imperialism in the 21st century, with Federico Fuentes for *LINKS International Journal of Socialist Renewal*.

Is the concept of imperialism still relevant today? And, if so, how do you define imperialism?

We need to acknowledge that imperialism plays a decisive role in the functioning of capitalism and yet, at the same time, is not the same thing as capitalism. Imperialism cannot be equated with capitalism: the latter is the prevailing mode of production while the former is an instrument that ensures the survival of that system. Capitalism has always featured colonial or imperial modalities, and used varying forms of oppression to exert its dominance. Modern imperialism is part of this continuum. It is not a stage in capitalism, like 19th century liberalism or postwar state interventionism. Nor is it a form of state management, like Keynesianism or neoliberalism. These distinctions are important in order to contextualise what we are trying to define.

Imperialism ensures that capitalism works in three ways. In the economic sphere, it is a mechanism by which capitalists in core countries expropriate resources from periphery countries. In the geopolitical sphere, it is a mechanism for settling rivalries between competing powers over market

dominance. And in the political sphere, it is a mechanism that safeguards the oppressors' interests. To understand imperialism, we need to consider all three aspects. This means, first and foremost, distancing ourselves from the liberal approach that divorces the question of imperialist power from its capitalist roots. But we must also take distance from our own traditional Marxist approach, which tends to look at imperialism in purely economic terms while overlooking political and geopolitical dimensions.

In recent decades, there has been a major reevaluation of such simplified interpretations. Giovanni Arrighi's introduction of the concept of "two logics" was very important. It introduced a more precise understanding of geopolitics within the framework of imperialism. It laid the groundwork for better comprehending existing tensions between the US and China as more than just economic competition. I have sought to add another component: a third political dimension of imperialism that highlights how oppressors use it to dominate the oppressed. This subjugation is achieved through threats or force. Imperialism acts on a global scale to counter any popular resistance, rebellions and revolutions.

You have just published *The Imperial System in Crisis*. Why do you use the term imperial system and what do you mean by this?

I use this concept to specify the distinctiveness of modern imperialism. In my opinion, what we have today is an imperial system, one that first emerged in the mid-20th century. It has very unique characteristics that differentiate it from previous models.

The imperial system differs, first and foremost, from the traditional indistinct concept of an empire. Many scholars have used the term to describe different powers throughout history that acted in similar ways to control subjugated countries. Such a generic definition is inadequate if we want to reach meaningful conclusions. It disregards the fact that there have been various types of empires, each different from each other due to being based on different modes of production. The concept of the imperial system underscores this distinction. Modern imperialism varies greatly from the pre-capitalist empires of Rome, Greece, Persia, Spain, Portugal or Holland, which were driven by territorial expansion or trade ambitions.

The imperial system also differs from the more contemporary model of informal empire that emerged during the consolidation of capitalism between 1830 and 1870. The use of force was only a complementary aspect of British supremacy under this model. John A. Hobson highlighted this peculiarity and many writers since have used the concept to describe subsequent scenarios,

such as US domination after World War II. Other writers have used the same concept to describe US supremacy during the period of globalisation. I prefer the concept of imperial system because it emphasises that modern imperialism is a coercive structure underpinned by a network of military bases used to wage a wide variety of hybrid wars. The US does not act alone when invading; rather it acts as the head of this vast systemic network.

Finally, the concept of imperial system is different to the classical imperialism that Vladimir Lenin studied in the early 20th century, when great powers competed against each other in world wars. Those seeking to update Lenin's model and anticipating [the return of inter-imperialist wars](#), often present [China and Russia as imperialist powers](#) engaged in a struggle with the US and Europe for global supremacy. They believe the clash between Eastern and Western empires will be resolved on the battlefield. Ultimately, they see the end of globalisation as recreating tensions and scenarios that closely resemble World War I. In contrast, I point out that there are substantial differences between then and now. The most obvious is the absence of any wars between big capitalist powers since the mid-20th century. There have been no military conflicts between France and Germany or Japan and the US. Even heightened tensions with the Soviet Union, which were of a different nature, did not lead to direct armed confrontation. The presence of nuclear weapons poses the obvious threat that any generalised war could end humanity. Moreover, there is no existing rivalry between equal powers. Instead, there is a global power that safeguards the entire system through the military power of the Pentagon. The US is at the core of the imperial system. There are also significant economic differences between the capitalism of Lenin's time and capitalism in the 21st century. Attempts to study contemporary situations using Lenin's criteria ultimately lead to forced categorisations, especially regarding the status of Russia or China.

[The imperial system](#) emerged in the second half of the 20th century. All the institutions and instruments that, in one form or another, exist today emerged in that period. The US heads this system and operates as the custodian of capitalism, a role delegated to it by allied powers. The US played a leading role in crushing numerous revolutionary uprisings in Africa, Asia and Latin America. One could argue that the methods of US intervention have changed in the 21st century, but its role as the general prop of Western capitalism persists.

The imperial system has a hierarchy. The US stands atop a pyramidal structure that has rules regarding membership, coexistence and exclusion. Every region or nation that is part of this system has an assigned position within this structure. This determines the intensity of conflicts. A conflict between those within the imperial system does not take on the same proportions as a dispute

with those on its margins. Differences between the US and Europe over the euro/dollar exchange rate (or the supremacy of Boeing over Airbus) are of a completely different nature to disagreements with China and Russia. These take on a different scale because they involve powers outside the imperial system.

Europe is the US' main partner within the system, though several European powers reserve a high degree of operational autonomy from Washington. As a result, they hold the status of alter-imperial power. France, for example, pursues its own imperialist policy towards its former African colonies. However, it typically asks permission, allies with or seeks advice from the US before taking any significant international steps. Other partners operate at a different level within the system. This is the case with Israel, Australia and Canada. Their interests are intertwined with US interests and they carry out specific co-imperial roles in different regions of the world.

It is also important to acknowledge that the imperial system has reshaped relationships between states and dominant classes, but these continue to exist on a national scale. This contradicts the expectations of Toni Negri or [William I Robinson](#), who envisioned imperialism evolving into a global empire with transnationalised states and classes operating within a more uniform world order. These expectations have been disproven by the end of the globalisation euphoria and the rise of geopolitical rivalry between the US and China. This conflict confirms the complete absence of any meaningful intertwining between the classes or states of the world's two major powers. The imperial system helps us understand the current situation.

What relative weight do the mechanisms of imperialist exploitation have today, as compared to the past?

These mechanisms have been extensively researched in studies on the economics of imperialism. They are an essential aspect of the system because the primary objective of this structure is to extract profits from subjugated periphery countries. There is fierce competition between powers for profits derived from extracting resources out of Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, the Arab world and most of Asia. In the economic sphere, the imperial system operates as an international mechanism that transfers resources from the periphery to the core. This exploitation is possible because certain powers exercise control over other countries that have had their sovereignty curtailed, neutralised or stripped from them. Obviously, periphery nations do not participate in the imperial system or in the disputes over profits extracted from the periphery.

The economics of imperialism was extensively studied in the 1960s and 1970s. There were various discussions on the dynamics of uneven exchange and the various methods employed to drain value from the periphery to the core. [Several researchers](#) highlighted how more capital-intensive economies absorb surplus value from more dependent economies. This principle explains the objective economic logic of imperialism. It is crucial to resolving the mysteries surrounding this issue. But it is evident that there are various mechanisms by which resources are transferred from the periphery to the core. There are productive mechanisms, such as the *maquilas* and export processing zones set up in periphery nations; there is the unequal exchange that occurs when manufacturing or high-tech services are traded for basic commodities; and there are financial mechanisms of transfer such as external debt. It is crucial to take account of this multiplicity of mechanisms, in contrast to those who solely focus on the productive sphere or are solely interested in the world of finance. The transfer of resources from the periphery to the core occurs along multiple routes.

Several authors have explored how these processes differ to those of the past century. The dominant current within these studies is closely tied to [Marxist dependency theory](#), which can be viewed as a branch within the economics of imperialism. These authors present several promising paths of investigations, but that nevertheless require some comments.

Proponents of this approach correctly emphasise the current forms of value transfers from less to more developed economies. But we need to be more precise when defining actors. For example, we should use caution when referring to the Global South: who belongs to this conglomerate of nations, and who belongs to the opposite pole, the Global North? Does the latter include all core nations and the former all periphery nations? If so, where does China fit in? [If we place China in the South](#), it becomes very difficult to explain how value transfers operate today.

My approach also seeks to highlight the unique characteristics of intermediate economies. There is a monumental gap separating Brazil from Haiti, Turkey from Yemen and India from Mali. Recognising this is key to noting the varying means by which value is drained, retained or absorbed within the dynamics of capitalist accumulation.

I also see the idea of [globalised production](#), where surplus value is exclusively generated in the South and confiscation by the North, as too simplistic. This view disregards the fact that surplus value is generated worldwide. What distinguishes the core from the periphery is not the generation of surplus value, but who benefits most from the value expropriated from workers.

Exploitation of labour power occurs everywhere; the difference lies in the greater capacity that capitalists in the core have to profit from it.

The concept of [super-exploitation](#) must also be used carefully, and not simply applied to periphery economies. This method of remunerating labour power below its value exists in the most impoverished sectors of all economies. The primary difference between core and periphery countries is not the existence of super-exploitation, but rather that central powers capture the bulk of the value it created in this manner.

I also think we should be careful with these issues and controversies. It is important to not lose sight of the forest while discussing each tree. The main issues regarding the theory of imperialism can not be resolved in the economic sphere. Studying super-exploitation, the law of value or financialisation will not, for example, provide us with clarity on China's current status.

In recent years, there seems to be changes within the imperial system. While the US was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan, Russia has invaded Ukraine, China continues to rise, and nations such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, among others, have deployed military power beyond their borders. Broadly speaking, how do you explain these changing dynamics within the imperial system?

The US remains the head of the imperial system. This means we must constantly examine the leading power when studying modern imperialism. [Assessing the state of the US](#) can tell us, in large part, where the imperial system is heading. The main lingering enigma continues to be the scale of the country's economic decline. It is clear that the US finds itself mired in a serious and long-term structural economic downturn. The evidence for this is clear. It can be seen in the loss of its companies' competitiveness and the certain degree of de-dollarisation occurring globally. This decline has fostered domestic conflicts between two powerful US economic groups: the globalists based on the coasts and the Americanists in the interior.

China is making important progress in its challenge for global domination, but the US is a long way from being defeated. For the moment, it has no answers to Beijing's challenge. I agree with those who distance themselves from predictions of the US economy's inexorable decline. Its productive apparatus undergoes periodic recompositions, which while not restoring US supremacy counteract the idea of an irreversible decline.

More importantly, we should not view this global dispute as simply an economic fight. The US has engaged in large-scale military actions to influence the outcome of this struggle. That is why the imperial system is an

indispensable concept when it comes to formulating accurate diagnoses. The leading power's main strategy is offsetting its economic decline through use of its military force across the globe. It resorts to this to try to rebuild its leadership, in the process raising the risk of war and, with it, the prominence of the military-industrial complex. The military-industrial complex remains the main driver of technological innovation. The Pentagon has been crucial to the US-led information revolution. Innovations developed in the military arena are transferred to the civilian sphere to guarantee competitiveness.

But in trying to halt its economic decline through military action, the US has fallen into the trap of military hypertrophy. This only makes matters worse and undermines efforts to fix its struggling economy. It turns out that the cure is worse than the disease. With productivity suffering, disputes between military and civilian sectors emerge, exacerbating unproductive spending. Contractors' interests clash with those of corporations seeking profits. Disagreements within the ruling class increase in regards to priorities; for example, over whether to blindly back Israel's expansionist ambitions or seek to maintain Saudi backing for the US dollar's global dominance. The State Department is constantly plagued by these unresolved tensions, which persist both in times of victory (such as the bombing of Yugoslavia), or defeat (such as in Afghanistan and Iraq). Military gigantism magnifies economic decline and reproduces the tensions eroding US society.

The main issue lies in the qualitative difference between the current modern imperial system and its 20th century model. In the latter half of the 20th century, the US led a system that had a solid economic base. Today, the US is still in control, but it no longer has that same economic dominance. It seeks to compensate with increasing hostile actions.

Biden's recent attempted counter-offensive exemplifies this. On the one hand, he provoked the Ukraine war through his support for initiatives to draw Ukraine into NATO's missile network system. He sought to lure Russia into a trap and repeat the nightmare of the Soviet Union's defeat in Afghanistan. However, a year on, all sides remain bogged down in a conflict that so far has no clear winner. The US has certainly achieved some objectives: it has managed to impose a bloodletting without having to deploy its own troops; it has breathed new life into NATO; and it has obtained Finland and Sweden's incorporation into the organisation. It has also been able to transfer the economic, humanitarian, social and political costs of the war onto Europe. However, the anticipated Russian defeat seems unlikely to happen anytime soon. Results on the other battlefield also remain uncertain. The US has sent troops to the China Sea to stir up tensions and justify setting up a Pacific NATO

with Japan, South Korea and Australia. It has successfully ratcheted up the conflict's intensity, but failed to position itself as the clear leader in the fight.

Biden is combining domestic Keynesianism and aggressive foreign policy to revive a new Cold War and restore US centrality within the Western alliance. It is noteworthy that this strategy is similar to the one it followed in the second half of the 20th century. The counteroffensive in Ukraine and the China Sea are a reaction to the challenges faced in Afghanistan and Iraq. This shows that the US is using military action to attempt to halt, or at least slow down, its economic decline.

What then can you tell us about the role of China and Russia?

Let's start with [Russia](#). The traumatic period following the collapse of the Soviet Union is over, and capitalism now reigns supreme. This means Russia meets the first requirement for imperial status: a capitalist economy. However, its economy is still weak and dependent on raw materials exports. It faces many challenges in terms of productivity and there is still a significant technological gap between its military and industrial sectors. That these imbalances play out within the context of a capitalist economy does not completely settle the question of Russia's status.

Russia's status is influenced by the unique duality of being an oppressed and oppressor state. Russia is oppressed while also engaging in its own external interventions. It faces a contradictory situation. On the one hand, the US, via NATO, aggressively harasses Moscow. Washington relentlessly pursues its aim of dismembering the former adversary. Boris Yeltsin (and, initially, Vladimir Putin) tried to ease this pressure with offers to integrate Russia into the imperial system, but the US vetoed all such moves. Russia's neoliberal elite — with its layer of internationalised oligarchs that invest in England, vacation in Florida and educate their children in New York — continuously sought assimilation into the West. Even this was not enough for the US to water down its ambitions of breaking up Russia. Continued pressure led Putin to spearhead a defensive reaction, based on state regulation and the exercising of state authority to prevent the country's disintegration. The US has an aggressive obsession with Russia for an obvious reason: it is very hard to command the imperial system when confronted with an enemy with such a large arsenal of nuclear weapons. To exercise effective dominance, the Pentagon needs to disrupt its enemy. This is what it sought to do with all the incursions that preceded and paved the way for the Ukraine war.

But Russia is not just a victim of the imperial system. It is also a very active power, especially in its periphery, where it exercises a policy of domination

and protection of shared interests with Moscow-allied elites. Kazakhstan was an example of this. There, the Kremlin dispatched troops to protect business interests that it shared in common with its local partners. Russia's status needs to take into consideration its dual role as aggressor and victim. To me, its current status is that of a [non-hegemonic empire in gestation](#). Non-hegemonic because it operates outside the imperial system and in gestation due to the embryonic character of its new status. Russia does not demonstrate the same level of stability as other empires. The Ukraine war will, most likely, determine whether it consolidates its imperial status or faces a premature decline. The concept of non-hegemonic empire in gestation allows us to differentiate Russia from other imperialist powers. It diverges from those placing [Russia on the same level as the US](#). It also challenges the opposite notion that Russia is [nothing more than a target of US aggression](#). While NATO missiles encircle Russia, Russia continues to deploy troops to Syria and export mercenaries to Africa. Outside the imperial system and occupying a subordinate economic position, Russia seeks to assert its position within the global order through the use of force. This adds a layer of complexity when it comes to defining Russia's status.

[Characterising China](#) is easier. Like Russia, China is outside the imperial system and a target of US aggression. But, unlike Russia, capitalism has not been completely restored in China. Although capitalism is present, it does not control the Chinese economy or society. This unique quality explains the country's exceptional development in recent years. China succeeded in merging its old socialist foundations with market mechanisms and capitalist parameters. This combination enabled China to retain its surplus via a different system to neoliberalism and financialisation. China could not have achieved its remarkable development if it was just another capitalist country. The main difference between China and Russia (and other Eastern European countries) lies in the political realm and has to do with the restrictions placed on the capitalist class. This sector undoubtedly exists and has an important weight, but it does not control the state or hold political power. In China, we have a mode of production partly anchored in old socialist traditions and a bureaucracy that manages the state along very different lines to capitalists.

China's foreign policy shares none of the characteristics of imperialist powers. It refrains from sending troops overseas, steers clear of military conflicts and exercises great geopolitical caution. Beijing adopts a defensive approach, favours the weakening of its US rival, and prioritises pressure on Taiwan as a means to reaffirm the legitimate status of "One China". Characterising this new power in imperial terms is therefore incorrect. This does not mean I agree with those who view [China as part of the Global South](#). Beijing profits from the periphery, absorbs surplus value from the most backward economies and often

establishes relations of economic domination with most of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This is the prevalent trend, though if periphery countries negotiated with the Asian giant in a different way, they could possibly achieve a more shared development.

What about those smaller nations, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, that are now flexing military power beyond their borders. How do you view the status of these countries?

There are some nations that have become increasingly important on the global stage. These regional players have had an unexpected impact. Just look at BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). China has created several partnerships with these nations to ensure energy supplies, secure sea routes and contest for control over Africa's resources.

There are two useful concepts that help explain the status of these countries. The first is the notion of semi-peripheral economies introduced by Immanuel Wallerstein to denote that within the global division of labour there is more than just a few core economies with everyone else in the category of periphery. There is also a group of countries in the middle. Unable to ascend to the top level, they do not face the same levels of powerlessness and dependency as more backward economies. The other helpful concept is Ruy Mauro Marini's notion of sub-imperialism. This refers to developing economies that are able to resort to force in order to challenge for regional dominance. The most recent example of such a conflict is the tripartite competition for economic dominance in the Middle Eastern between Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

A lot of diversity exists among these intermediate countries. Within the same group we have dependent economies (such as Argentina), and others (such as South Korea) capable of competing globally within certain industries but have little political influence. There are also emerging economies that have a significant geopolitical presence but a weak economic base (such as Turkey), and countries that have an important influence on both terrains (such as India). It is a complex and unfolding situation that requires carefully, fine-tuned interpretations.

Saudi Arabia, for example, is a great enigma. It no longer operates as simply a passive monarchy controlled from the outside by the US. Although a key ally of the imperial system, it has not directly participated in it. For many years, it has supplied the oil rents that global financial markets use to sustain the dollar's supremacy. But in recent years, the Saudi monarchs have maintained a certain autonomy from the US in some policy areas. They have carried out adventures that have raised serious questions over how they plan to manage those oil

rents that sustain the dollar. The Saudis have also emerged as a significant client for China's Belt and Road Initiative, receiving colossal investments. The explosive consequences of these events are obvious, but the State Department is struggling to respond to them. It is concerned about a future de-dollarisation, but has no plan to prevent it.

What do you think of the concept of multipolarity promoted by some sectors of the left?

I think the concept of the imperial system is a much clearer way of understanding the global situation than ideas such as multipolarity. This term, along with unipolarity and bipolarity, are essentially just descriptive. They allude to a certain degree of stability within different configurations of the world order. There have been extensive debates in the field of International Relations over whether multipolarity or unipolarity is better when it comes to seeking equilibrium among powers.

The existing multipolar context indicates a dispersion of power commensurate with the crisis of the imperial system. The neoconservative dream that emerged after the Soviet Union collapse, of forging a "New American Century" under Washington's lead, has been seriously undermined by the US' military defeats and geopolitical failures. The shift towards multipolarity can be seen as positive compared to the previous unipolar context if it means a weakening of imperialism's aggressive capacity.

But multipolarity should not be conflated with anti-imperialism. The leaders of all the governments in conflict with the US and its allies seek to enhance the power of their ruling classes or bureaucracies. None seeks to neutralise imperialism as a means to create a new society. Therefore, I do not share the fascination or naïve idealisation that many on the left have towards multipolarity. Such praise is especially misguided when it whitewashes the more conservative and right-wing figures at the forefront of the multipolar movement.

Late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez's proposal for a project of socialist pluripolarity is much better. This project is not counterposed to multipolarity, but differs from it as it seeks to involve popular programs and forces that have a shared aim of forging a post-capitalist future. This concept was put forward at various social movement and left party meetings, especially in Latin America. It follows in the same trajectory as the forums hosted by the anti-globalisation movement. I believe the seeds of a counter-hegemonic movement were sowed in Seattle and Porto Alegre in the 1990s. Unfortunately, these efforts did not know how or simply failed to converge with those of the

more radical governments of Latin America's "Pink Tide", which led to the internationalist movement's decline.

We now confront a particularly complex situation due to the consolidation of a strong far-right current. With its reactionary discourse and behaviour, this new force has been able to channel significant amounts of popular dissatisfaction. Faced with this challenge, it is important to shore up our own left project, with its egalitarian goals and socialist aspirations.

Given all this, what should 21st century anti-imperialism look like?

First of all, we need to go back to our roots. Karl Marx began this legacy by distancing himself from his initial belief that the European working class would forge a socialist revolution that would drag the periphery with it towards a world without exploiters or exploited. Only later did he notice the importance of popular resistance in the periphery. He saw it first in Ireland, then in China and India, and later extended this vision to other regions. Consequently, he proposed a fight against capitalism that combined anti-colonial uprisings with working-class action in the industrial core.

This thesis was further developed by Lenin, who emphasised the positive feedback that exists between social and national struggles in the fight against capitalism. He defended the right to self-determination in Eastern Europe, polemicising against abstract internationalism that opposed any such convergence of struggles. Furthermore, when the dynamic of the revolution shifted to the East, Lenin strongly advocated for cooperation with revolutionary nationalism behind a project of socialist anti-imperialism. This concept was subsequently validated by the successful revolutions in China, Vietnam, and Cuba.

Clearly, the world has changed in the 21st century, though there continue to be many anti-colonialist struggles. Palestine is the most notable example. Traditional anti-imperialism has also reemerged in former French colonies in the African Sahel. Analysts have noted the rise of a kind of radical Chavism in this region. Classic anti-imperialism — which, with the exception of Latin America, seemed to have been on the wane at the beginning of the century — is once again gaining momentum.

But we should look at current dynamics with our eyes wide open, and acknowledge that anti-imperialism today is more complex, diverse and intricate than in the past. There are, first of all, numerous battles against imperialism that are no longer led by nationalist, progressive or left forces. Instead, they are being led by explicitly reactionary currents, such as the

Taliban in Afghanistan, who managed to defeat the US without consummating a victory for the people. It is obvious that the oppressive regime installed in Kabul is the very antithesis of a progressive project. This situation differs greatly from the anti-imperialist victories of the second half of the 20th century.

The Ukraine war has also raised a different question: Which side is the anti-imperialist camp in this conflict? How should one position oneself with regards to this conflict? In my opinion, primary responsibility for the war lies with the US, which deliberately sought to provoke a war by encircling Russia with missiles, promoting Kyiv's accession to NATO, manipulating the Maidan revolt, supporting right-wing provocations in the Donbas and rejecting Russia's proposals for a negotiated settlement. But it is equally true that Putin perpetrated an unjustified invasion. He had no need to resort to such an incursion. To make matters worse, he arrogated to himself the right to decide who should rule Ukraine. His invasion created panic among the population and hatred towards the occupier, generating a negative situation for the peoples of the region. For this reason, any military outcome will have negative political consequences: if Zelensky and NATO win, there will be an immediate strengthening of the imperial system; if Putin wins, it will leave a dramatic wound in Ukraine and create conditions for a prolonged and unresolvable confrontation between peoples. I disagree with left-wing currents that justify Russia's invasion and their opponents who exonerate NATO (and, in the most bizarre cases, advocate for supplying arms to Ukraine). The best solution in this adverse scenario is resuming talks on an armistice. This is the positive outcome promoted by many progressive leaders and left-wing movements.

More generally, I see anti-imperialism as a principle that maintains extreme validity in the current context of aggression, slaughter, tragedy and war. But it is not as clear cut as in the 20th century. As such, it might be useful to go back to Marx to find a strategic compass. Marx lived through a time of intense warfare. He opposed the anarchist simplification that regards all participants in such bloodshed as equivalent forces. He also rejected liberal pacifism, which opposed war on ethical grounds while ignoring its political logic and capitalist roots. Marx suggested several principles for either taking sides or opposing both in a war. He looked at who was the aggressor, who was raising just demands and who was the main enemy of sovereignty and democracy. In particular, he assessed the extent to which the outcome of any conflict would favour the defeat of the most powerful and the subsequent development of a socialist process.

Adapting these guidelines to the current situation may help us find some guiding criteria for anti-imperialist internationalism and overcome two

problems on the left: evaluations of conflicts in purely geopolitical terms (between declining and rising or regressive and progressive powers); and simplifications that advocate opposing all sides equally. I think we need to combine our assessments. This means characterising the meaning of any confrontation between powers or governments. At the same time, we need to also observe how these conflicts tie in with the aspirations of popular forces. We need to pay attention in the conflict to what is occurring above while looking at the action occurring below. This was the synthesis that all previous revolutionary socialist leaders sought. We should seek to follow in the footsteps of this tradition in our present struggles.