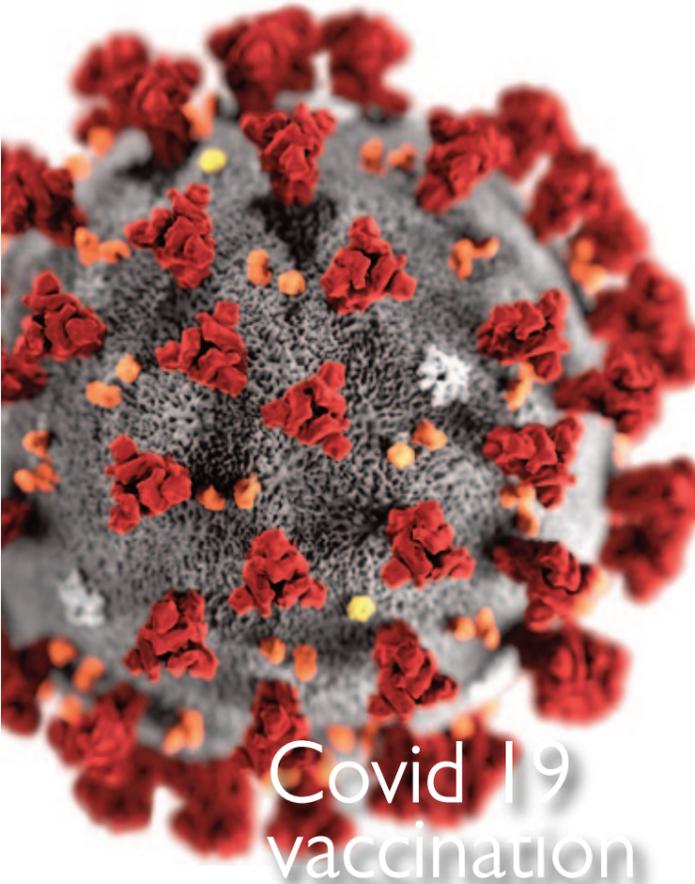




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# international bulletin



## Covid 19 vaccination global inequalities

In February the head of the World Health Organisation Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said it was not fair for younger, healthy people in richer nations to get injections before vulnerable people in poorer states. He said over 39 million vaccine doses had been given in 49 richer states - but one poor nation had only 25 doses.

Statistics for 25 March show US with 40 percent of its population vaccinated, EU with 15, Asia 4.7 and Africa 0.7. Poorer nations also pay far more for supplies. Chris Baraniuk writing in the British Medical Journal for 5 February reports that South Africa was paying double the price paid by the EU for supplies of AstraZenica. China has so far donated (free) supplies of Sinovac to 53 developing countries. This includes 600,000 doses to the Philippines and 50,000 to Lebanon. In Latin America Chile has managed to achieve a 42 percent vaccination rate largely as a result of 66m doses of Sinovac (Alison Shepherd, BMJ, 17 March 2021)



Protect the health and rights of the peoples

Joint statement of the world's communist and workers' parties

<https://tinyurl.com/stghk79>



## Indian farmers challenge Modi's privatisation agenda

**T**HE PROTEST Campaign by Indian farmers began in Punjab in November 2020 with a march to Delhi that was met with extreme violence by federal police when it reached the capital. Since then the protest has spread to almost all Indian states and culminated with a further blockade of Dehli on 6 March with contingents from across India. There has also been broader support. On 8 December 2020 an all-India solidarity strike took place involving 10 million workers, shopkeepers and artisans. As of March 2021 the dispute with the Modi government remains unresolved, mobilisation continues and its success has brought action by other sections in parallel fights against privatisation. On 16 March 2021 one million bank employees struck work against the privatisation of India's banks and on 17 March there was a similar strike by insurance workers against

the privatisation of insurance companies. The farmers' protests arise from the failure of the Modi BJP government to honour its election pledge to implement the government-commissioned 2012 Swaminathan Report on the extension of government price maintenance for agricultural products. Instead the Modi government passed a series of Acts in the summer of 2020 that ended the existing system of government regulated prices and purchasing (the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce Act and the Price Assurance Act) and created a 'free market' that would enable private companies to introduce a system of contract farming.

The two biggest Indian conglomerates (Adani and Ambani) moved to take advantage - in turn opening the way for big international

food conglomerates. 86 percent of Indian farmers are small-holders with no financial resources. They would quickly become locked into debt peonage with the big multinationals.

The farmers' action has halted this process. On 12 January the Indian Supreme Court ordered a stay in the implementation of the new Acts - although the farmers' movement rejected its proposal for a four person adjudication panel as taking control of the campaign out of their hands.

In Britain the TUC and all major unions have backed the demands of the farmers. So also have 100 MPs. The Association of Indian Communists has held demonstrations of protest across Britain and, jointly with the Communist Party of Britain, organised meetings in Coventry, Derby, Glasgow and London to mobilise support.

## AFRICA

Chagos Islands  
Liz Payne

Two years after the UN International Court of Justice (ICJ) determined, in February 2019, that Britain's continuing occupation of the Chagos Islands was unlawful, the British government shows no sign of closing the US-run military base on Diego Garcia and pulling out of the Islands altogether. Britain detached the Chagos from Mauritius when it 'granted' the latter independence in 1965, in contravention of international law expressly forbidding the break-up of any state during the decolonisation process (UN Resolution 1514). Now the archipelago in the Indian Ocean is the only remaining overseas colony on African soil and Britain remains defiant despite the ICJ's ruling being adopted by

the UN General Assembly in May 2019 by 116 votes to 6. Britain's continuing occupation, endorses other unlawful occupations, including those of Western Sahara, the north of Cyprus and Palestine. Intense pressure must be put on Britain to pull out and close a disgraceful chapter in its colonial history.

Specifically, the British government must close all civil and military installations throughout the Islands (its own and those of the US), return all occupied territory to the Republic of Mauritius and resource the repatriation of Chagossians who wish to return to their homeland, at the same time providing full compensation to all those forcibly expelled and their descendants.



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Communist Party of Britain

## China's economic importance for Britain: Economic consequences of British government action

**T**HE HOUSE OF Commons Library 2020 research paper 'Trade with China' (2020) shows China as Britain's sixth largest export market in 2019 (with 4.4 per cent of total exports); imports made up 6.8 per cent of the total. Exports to China increased from £23 billion in 2018 to £30 billion in 2019 – the fastest area of increase.

Britain's university sector is particularly dependent on Chinese students – especially its leading research universities. Universities dependent for over 20 per cent of their total income are Birmingham, Warwick, UCL, Manchester, Imperial, Sheffield, Liverpool and Glasgow (which received 31 per cent of income from Chinese student fees). University-based R&D makes up almost half of Britain's total R&D – and currently Chinese student fees pay for most of it. Former HE minister Jo Johnson, in a report commissioned by the government and released on 2 March, warned of the security risks arising from Chinese penetration of the university sector. He claimed that 30 per cent of all UK university research papers in automation, telecommunications and materials science involved a Chinese collaborator and called for an urgent review. The report estimates that fee income to UK universities from Chinese students was £3.7 billion.

This is to be set against the existing cost of banning Huawei which is estimated at around £2 billion to the British economy. The replacement contractors, Eriksson and Nokia, are both considerably more expensive. Professor Williamson of the Oxford University Judge Business School estimates that the government's decision will delay the completion of the 5G network by between three and five years and rob Britain of its previous lead in introducing the 'Internet of Things'.

Significant losses are also expected to result for British fashion retailers who have banned Chinese cotton from their products.

### Hong Kong Briefing Kenny Coyle

**T**he situation in Hong Kong has undergone dramatic change since initially peaceful protests against amendments to extradition law during 2019 turned into violent riots with a much broader political agenda

Two major changes in the past year are the extension of the People's Republic of China's national security legislation (NSL) to cover the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) (July 2020) and the reconstruction of the HKSAR's political structure (March 2021).

#### National Security Legislation

Far from rushing to impose the NSL, China allowed significant delays to its introduction in both the Hong Kong SAR and its sister SAR, Macau, a former Portuguese colony. Macau adopted its version of the NSL in 2009, 10 years after its return to China, without international interference or comment. In Hong Kong, though, domestic opposition to the NSL has been substantial and proposals to introduce NSL in 2003 were put aside after major protests. The Chinese government showed willingness to compromise and delay, even on such a critical issue as national security. So what changed?

Hong Kong has long been a region with considerable interference from US and Western-powers, who have sponsored anti-China political and trade union forces in Hong Kong. US funding and contacts with the "pan-democratic" groups has long been open knowledge.

Edward Snowden also revealed a decade ago that Hong Kong was targeted by specific spying programmes by the US National Security Agency. (<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/edward-snowden-and-hong-kong-crisis>). However, over the past few years this collaboration between the US and the "pan-democrats" reached a critical point.

Senior "pan-democratic" figures regularly visited Washington to lobby the Trump administration to impose sanctions on China and on Hong Kong. This was epitomised by their support for the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, drafted by right-wing Republicans but supported also by US democrats. Among other clauses, the Act demanded that Hong Kong allow the US to monitor and control its trade with other countries that were already sanctioned by Washington, eg Iran, Venezuela (both named in the Act) as well as other US targets such as



▲ From left to right Martin Lee, Nathan Law, Mak Ying-ting, and HKCTU chief Lee Cheuk-yan, urge the Trump administration to impose sanctions on Hong Kong and the rest of China

Cuba, including sending US personnel to HK ensure its implementation. In short, it meant turning Hong Kong into a US neo-colony.

Senior figures in the "pan-democratic" camp, Martin Lee, Lee Cheuk-yan, Joshua Wong etc., openly called on Trump to widen economic sanctions against China and the HKSAR. It should be noted that collaboration on the US Act pre-dated the controversy over the extradition amendments. China increasingly viewed these forces not as a domestic opposition but as a "Fifth Column", working quite openly with foreign powers to weaken and destabilise the HKSAR and the rest of China.

The second element was the adoption by the "pan-democrats" of a strategy dubbed "laam chau" ("Burn with us"). This was a 10-point strategy, first outlined by "pan-democratic" leader Benny Tai, to escalate the political crisis to such an extent that the HKSAR government would be entirely paralysed, protests would "lead Hong Kong society to a standstill", leading to bloodshed and where the Chinese central government would have to declare a state of emergency, effectively ending "One Country, Two Systems".

The 10th step would be the imposition of Western political and economic sanctions, with the implication that this would. (See <https://www.thestandard.com.hk/breaking-news/section/4/162727/Explainer:-what-is-Benny-Tai-%27s-%2210-steps-to-burn-with-us%22>). Tai was very clear that the strategy was specifically designed to provoke China into revoking HK's autonomy and to bring China into conflict with the West with unknown consequences.

The NSL was finally introduced to block this strategy of chaos and restore the HKSAR's social stability. It aims to expose and isolate the Washington-backed leadership and cut off their long-term collaboration with outside forces. This is the key point missing from Western coverage of the arrests of 47 "pandemocratic" figures over the past few months, who are implicated in carrying out the early stages of the 10 point plan.

The second factor is the reconstruction of Hong Kong's quasi-democratic political system, essentially disqualifying the most radically anti-China forces and individuals and promoting "patriots" (understood as all those genuinely committed to "One Country, Two Systems" not simply those who support the central government). This may be the subject of a further briefing note.

#### "Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong"

Some forces within the British labour movement are attempting to push campaigns for "solidarity" with Hong Kong trade unionists. A number of key points need to be understood.

1] The trade union movement in Hong Kong has never been homogenous or unified. Today, there are two main (and other minor) trade union alliances in Hong Kong. These are the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU) and the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU).

2] The FTU supports One Country, Two Systems, runs its own slate of candidates in elections but is generally supportive of the HKSAR government. FTU offices were repeatedly vandalised by anti-communist radicals during 2019 and its members threatened. The FTU is the largest union alliance in Hong Kong. (<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/kenny-coyle-based-interview-hk-trade-unionist-alice-mak>)

3] The HKCTU has its origins in varied labour groups initially connected to evangelical and other Christian denominations. It has been funded for years by the US National Endowment for Democracy, through the AFL CIO controlled Solidarity Centre. (<https://en.hkctu.org.hk/content/solemn-statement-hong-kong-confederation-trade-unions-besmirching-remarks>)

4] Lee Cheuk-yan, its general secretary, was embroiled in financial scandals in 2014, when it emerged that he had taken secret donations from right-wing media mogul Jimmy Lai for Lee's "Labour Party". (<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1563416/donation-jimmy-lai-was-transferred-labour-party-last-week-says-lee>)

5] Lee went on an all-expenses paid trip to Washington along with "pandemocratic" leaders in 2019 to give testimony to Marco Rubio's congressional committee calling on the Trump administration to impose sanctions: "I am very glad to hear that the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act is in the pipeline. I hope that it can be passed as soon as possible." (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-116hhrg37154/html/CHRG-116hhrg37154.htm>).

The British labour movement should not allow itself to be press-ganged into the New Cold War against China and needs to acknowledge that the HKCTU is not the sole nor even the majority voice of organized labour in the HKSAR.

#### Chinese foreign diplomacy

The Sino-US meeting in Anchorage, Alaska in March highlighted both the continuation of Washington's anti-China trajectory as well as Chinese self-confidence in resisting it.

The Chinese diplomatic team powerfully pushed back against the hectoring opening statement from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, much to the delight of the Chinese public and to the obvious discomfort of the US side. The single most telling remark was from Yang Jiechi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China responsible for Foreign Affairs, who rebuked Blinken with these words: "The US is not qualified to say it wants to speak to China from a position of strength."

The result was a major diplomatic embarrassment for the US, made worse by its decision to make the first session open to international media and to go beyond the normal diplomatic niceties.

By contrast, the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to China a few days later

to meet his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, displayed a high degree of unanimity on international issues.

Possibly one of the more important topics discussed was that Russia and China will intensify their collaboration on international payment systems, until now largely dominated by the US-controlled banking system known as SWIFT, based on the dominance of the US dollar in global trade settlements. A number of sanctioned countries, such as Iran and Venezuela, have called for alternatives to SWIFT and even the European Union has expressed dissatisfaction with US hegemony in this field.

Lavrov also signalled that Russian-Chinese relations were improving more rapidly in response to the deterioration of relations with the European Union. Lavrov told a press conference that EU sanctions and hostility toward Moscow "led to cooperation between Russia and China developing faster than what is left of relations with the European countries. Importantly, there are no relations with the EU as an organisation. The infrastructure was destroyed by unilateral decisions made by Brussels... all has been quiet on the Western front, whereas the East offers a very intense agenda, which is getting more varied every single year."

#### Xinjiang

The continued propaganda campaign over "forced labour" in the cotton-growing regions of China's Xinjiang province has been strongly rejected by China and there have already been proposals by Xinjiang companies to sue the "researchers" such as Adrian Zenz and the Australian military-funded think tank ASPI for damages.

However, the latest twist came when a number of Western multinational retail brands have stated that they would not use cotton from Xinjiang, citing "concerns" from the Swiss-based Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). There has been a rapid online and consumer backlash against brands, such as H&M, Nike and Adidas within China.

Chinese celebrities have severed ties with these companies, including one of China's most celebrated actresses, Dilraba Dilmurat, who is herself a Uyghur from Xinjiang, and probably the best-known Uyghur personality in the country. She first found fame in a Uyghur-language TV costume drama a decade ago called Anarhan, where she played the heroine a young Uyghur peasant girl who rebels against local landlords. A fact in itself that makes allegations of 'cultural genocide' particularly ridiculous.

In addition, the Chinese research arm of the BCI has stated categorically that: "Since 2012, the Xinjiang project site has performed second-party credibility audits and third-party verifications over the years, and has never found a single case related to incidents of forced labour." (Reuters, 26 March).

Hopefully these facts will allow a more reasoned debate about the actual situation in Xinjiang.

#### Commercial law prosecution cases initiated against Adrian Zenz

Global Times 9 March reported that several firms in Xinjiang province have initiated legal proceedings against Adrian Zenz, leader of the Washington-based World Uyghur Congress, for commercial losses arising from false reports regarding forced labour in their workplaces. If upheld by Chinese courts, these cases will be transferred to international commercial jurisdiction.

Adrian Zenz fronts a number of US government-funded organisations that disseminate fabricated stories to Western news media. Useful sources for rebutting these stories are provided by the Qiao Collective <https://www.qiaocollective.com/en/education/xinjiang> and the London Embassy website <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/PressandMedia/>

# MIDDLE EAST

## A look at aspects of Biden's foreign policy in relation to the Middle East

Navid Shomali

**If in terms of the US' domestic affairs, a shift has been effected - by the current dire economic conditions and consequent dissatisfaction of the masses, in conjunction with the renewed influence of the left within the Democratic Party - bringing the Biden administration's policy closer in to step with the US left's agenda, the same cannot be stated in regards to its foreign policy. In fact, owing to the coercion still exerted by Trumpist forces and the persistence of the "America First" in the public's consciousness, it is more than plausible to expect an aggressive and confrontational and aggressive foreign policy (certainly when compared with that of the Obama era) when it comes to the assertion of the US' hegemonic power.**

The Biden administration views Russia as 'Enemy Number 1'; a hostile power with the capability and will to assert its interests extraterritorially into the Middle East, both politically and militarily. Therefore, by means of a toughened sanction regime and heavy fines, Biden's administration would target Russia's relative economic weakness. This is one of the foremost common grounds between the Biden administration and several EU countries, and one that the US will seek to leverage in order to revert back to the US-EU relationship under the auspices of the NATO alliance, as was the case in the pre-Trump era.

In light of these heightened US-Russia hostilities, and their likely further escalation, we should consider the recent personal letter from Ayatollah Khamenei (Iran's theocratic Supreme Leader) to President Vladimir Putin in which he conveys the Islamist regime's assurance of, and desire for, closer links with the Russian Federation.

"We consider China not an enemy but a rival," said a US State Department spokesperson. However, the new US administration is very sensitive towards the expansion of China's regional trade relations, especially more recently

in relation to the Middle East - including the Gulf states (even Saudi Arabia) and Iraq. Any future interactions between China, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), and the Arab countries, could influence the decisions of the foreign policy of Iran's regime - and not necessarily in a way conducive to the US' interests in the region.

China has extended the hand of cooperation in the field of new technologies to resolve the looming climate crisis. And, it is here that the Biden administration's response will be crucial as it has been acknowledged that without China-US cooperation by 2030, this crisis will become critically acute. Thus, the Biden administration's decision in this regard is one of the more important benchmarks and pointers as to whether or not the world will in fact move towards a more dangerous confrontation between the US and China. And this will have consequences in the Middle East.

Trump has relentlessly, and with considerable success, portrayed the Obama administration's diplomatic outlook in the Middle East - as exemplified by the JCPOA deal with Iran - as rooted in weakness and representing a retreat from the hegemonic principle of US imperialism, and therefore un-American. To some extent, this will restrict Biden unless he can obtain significant concessions from the IRI. (According to one American diplomat, there is currently taking place a diplomatic dance between the US and the IRI.) One plausible scenario is that the US enters a deal with China and/or Russia by giving them certain concessions (e.g. a respite from US-engineered international pressure) in exchange for which they would exert pressure on the IRI to accept 'new terms' in addition to those already agreed under the existing JCPOA 2015, which Trump unilaterally nullified and withdrew from in May 2018. Under such a scenario, the IRI - by far the smaller and weaker entity - would be bullied and manipulated by the other three powers in order to achieve equilibrium amongst themselves in their interests as they pertain to the Middle East region. In any case, the Biden administration is seemingly in no hurry to revive the JCPOA as it stands - whereas time is really not on the side of the IRI regime.

It should be noted that, given the current context, the IRI does not have many viable options but to negotiate and ultimately reach a settlement with the US - whereby it would coexist with the US in the region - in order to ensure its own continuity and very survival. This is because over three decades of neoliberal orientation of Iran's national economy by the ruling regime, in line with IMF prescriptions, has reduced it to a dollar-based, import-oriented

the EU - with serious consequences for internal relations between the two major communities on the island.

It will also, said Vera, heighten the stakes in the battle for the control of the Eastern Mediterranean in terms of its oil and gas reserves and its critical position in terms of control of airspace governing access to Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Libya. This January the current right-wing government in Cyprus unveiled a joint project with the United States, under the terms of the US Rubio-Menendez Act, that will fund a major military and naval communications and logistics base, Cyclops, in Cyprus. This follows several years of close military cooperation between the right-wing government of Cyprus, Greece and Israel - with Israel also seeking control of the East Mediterranean gas reserves and a strengthening of its strategic potential against Syria, Iran and Russia (which has a naval base at Tartus on the Syrian coast just sixty miles from Cyprus).

A peace settlement on the terms laid out by the UN at Crans Montana would, said AKEL spokesperson, Stavri Kalopsidiotou, de-escalate this situation, restore the authority of a non-aligned Republic of Cyprus committed to inter-communal harmony and end external military occupation. Their failure is likely to lead a sharp deterioration of relations within the island, the formalisation of Turkish control of the north and the locking of a Greek Cypriot state more closely into dependence on the US and Israel.

All this made it all the more important that the British government used its position at the Geneva talks constructively to support existing UN proposals. Britain held a pivotal position. In this connection it was noted that the British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, in visiting both the government of Cyprus and the occupied northern territory earlier this month, had failed to explicitly commit to the Crans Montana proposals and that the British prime minister Johnson had commented that there was 'a range of solutions'. On 17 March three Conservative backbenchers

economy, and one solely relying on the export of cruel oil. As a result, Iran's economy is rendered even more vulnerable to being mal-affected and squeezed by US financial sanctions. It is important to note is that this weak, rentier-driven, and unproductive economy is dominated (economically-politically) by the powerful finance-mercantile capitalist class of Iran, tightly coupled with the political structures of the theocratic dictatorship. This powerful bourgeoisie needs to have much deeper and wider [dollar-based] ties with the global capital. And, given that the political economy of Iran under the ruling theocracy is fully dependent on this parasitic bourgeoisie, this in turn will have a significant effect on the final outcome of the aforementioned diplomatic dance between the US and the IRI.

In the Middle East and wider region, it is probable that Biden's administration will robustly confront some of the 'problematic' leaders. In this regard, the US' dealing with the hitherto unchallenged excesses of leaders such as Bin Salman, Netanyahu and Erdogan, are factors that could work in favour of the ruling regime in Iran and also shape the future developments in the next few years. This, however, would not qualitatively alter the strategic alliances the US has developed in the region.

On the issue of the Palestinian people, apart from some small adjustments that would work in favour of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, no opening or shift in tack can be seen on the horizon regarding the US' strategic support for Israel - this will continue under the Biden administration - and there will likely be little meaningful row-back on some of the damaging actions undertaken by his predecessor in office.

The policy of backing and facilitating the increasingly agitating Kurdish forces in the region, in line with the US' interests, will be maintained - especially in relation to Syria, and in countering and containing Erdogan's Turkey.

Although the Biden administration temporarily stopped the export of arms to Saudi Arabia and the UAE in order to facilitate a ceasefire in the bloody war in Yemen, the bloodshed is continuing. The contradictory policies of the US administration in relation to the war in Yemen expose the imperialistic nature of US foreign policy. The peace movement should keep the pressure on for an immediate end to the war.

It seems that the US' current positions towards Iraq and Afghanistan will continue, i.e. an overall reduction in troops and costs, while still seeking to influence strategic alignment through its maintaining of a military presence in both countries.

Theresa Villiers, Roger Gale and Matthew Offord, members of the All-Party Parliamentary Committee on Cyprus, had written to the government expressing their very serious concern at the failure of the government to explicitly support the Crans Montana terms. Chair of the CPB, Liz Payne, raised the wider dangers for world peace. She noted that any attempt by the British government to do side deals with Turkey, or to create a situation in which the US, Israel, Greek military axis became permanent, could precipitate a sharp escalation in tensions, further destabilise the Middle East and encourage Israeli military adventurism. Nothing could be more dangerous in current circumstances.

It was agreed that it was now urgent that these dangers be raised within the wider trade union and labour movement and peace organisations and, immediately, to mobilise cross-party opinion in the Commons in support of the Crans Montana terms. Emergency motions to union conferences would be required as well as the canvassing of MPs by local TUCs. A needs of the hour motion follows:

Conference notes the impending UN negotiations on the future of Cyprus at Geneva on 27-29 April at which Britain, as a guarantor power, will hold a pivotal position. Conference affirms its support for the terms of the agreement outlined by the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres by which a unified Cyprus would be created on the basis of a bi-zonal, bi-cameral federation, guaranteeing the equal rights of all citizens and the withdrawal of both Greek and Turkish troops, a proposal endorsed by the Government of Cyprus. Conference asks the British government to affirm its support for this proposal and do so in light of the serious consequences for peace in Cyprus if the talks fail - as well as more widely within the region and leading to an escalation of conflict between Greece, Turkey and Israel over territorial rights to the East Mediterranean's oil and gas reserves.

# Palestine

Evan Pritchard

The need for solidarity with the Palestinians remains unchanged in spite of an apparent change of direction by the US government following Trump's defeat.

Biden has made some apparently significant moves to reverse Trump's worst excesses pledging to restore aid and reopen the PLO office. But the US embassy will remain in Jerusalem.

While we should not dismiss any progress, nor should we have too many illusions that the change in leadership in Washington will see real change in direction, as suggested already by military attacks on Syria and an indication that the US will support Israel in refusing to recognise the authority of the International Criminal Court to investigate war crimes in Gaza.

Covid has hit the region, and there is clear evidence that the Israeli government has acted with characteristic discrimination both in the roll out of vaccinations to the Palestinian population in its own country and in failing in its legal responsibilities to the people of the territories it illegally controls.

Britain, as well as being complicit in US support for Israel, has its own historic blame and ongoing responsibility, notably through the arms industry, all of which make solidarity with the Palestinians a particular issue here.

We ask trade unionists and others to:

Affiliate to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and provide support to medical charities helping the Palestinians such as Medical Aid for Palestine.

Support the demands for:

- Justice for Palestinian refugees.
- An end to illegal settlements on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem; home demolitions and annexation of Palestinian land.
- The release of all Palestinian political prisoners
- Full recognition of a genuinely independent Palestinian state within pre 1967 borders,
- For boycott, divestments and sanctions (particularly in respect of the sale of arms) until meaningful progress is made.

## Belarus Spring delayed

On 4 March the Atlantic Council announced support for a Minsk Spring offensive to oust the President. On 24 March a call was issued by the opposition leader in exile Svyalana Tsikhanouskaya for 'Minsk Spring' demonstrations on 25 March to mark the 100th anniversary of the Belorussian People's Republic (the anti-Bolshevik puppet regime established under German-occupation in 1918). Reports were carried by Sky News, the US news service Politico and Radio Free Europe. No reports were carried on 26 March.

Statistics from the World Bank and the IMF indicate that Belarus's economy has performed relatively well during the Covid pandemic. The economy declined by 3 per cent in 2020 but is forecast to grow by 2.2 per cent in 2021 - largely as a result of the effective handling of Covid. The overall growth rate over the two years is therefore - 0.8 per cent as against a 5.9 decline in Britain, 5.4 in Spain and Italy and 1.6 in Germany. Covid mortality rates are some of the lowest in Europe at 23 per 100,000 as against 188 per 100,000 in Britain (23 March 2021). This appears to be largely as a result of Belarus's strong health service. There are 40 doctors per 10,000 of population as against 23 in Poland, 30 in Ukraine, 31 in Latvia and 28 in Britain. Infant mortality is also very low at 3.6 per thousand - as against 4.3 in Britain.

Belarus has a strongly developed service sector, with major strengths in IT, and a mechanised agriculture (world's 7th biggest exporter of butter, 8th of chicken and 12th of cheese). Unemployment stands at 1.1 per cent. Fuller briefing notes were issued in September 2020. These are still on the party web.

# AMERICAS

## United States Robin Talbot

After Trump, the United States Government's foreign policy agenda remains as warlike as ever. However, the Biden administration wishes to explore new means and do what is "most effective".

This will likely mean aggressive exploration of different strategies, in particular, non-military initiatives, sanctions and "coalition building". As noted in a White House speech on 4 February 2021, these will be linked to liberal "American values" in order to reinforce the legitimacy of this imperialist agenda at home.

Biden has signposted China and Russia as the major challenges. In his article in Foreign Affairs (23 January 2021), he stated the need for competition with China on domestic R&D and the building of a long-term economic and political "united front" against China on the global stage.

He announced a plan to host a global Summit for Democracy that would settle new agreements with nations in the fields of "corruption, authoritarianism and human rights".

On 25 February 2021, Biden directed his first bombing of facilities in Syria, purportedly used by "Iranian-backed militant groups". The Pentagon statement seemed to suggest that President Biden will act ruthlessly but will do so "deliberately" and in "consultation" with partners.

Biden has renewed the interest in Europe and against Russia, but the pursuit of strategies with European countries may take some time to work out due to the USA's complex relationship with the EU and now the United Kingdom as a non-EU partner.

The pivot to Asia and aggression against China will take on more global "diplomatic" and economic orientations. Finally, Biden will seek to engage nations in soft power partnerships, perhaps outside of the more "formal" institutions, that will promote US hegemonic interests.

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Bidens-Latam-Agenda-Is-No-Different-From-That-of-Past-Govts.-20210108-0008.html>

<https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2516518/us-conducts-defensive-precision-strike/>

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>

<https://www.ycl.org.uk/2021/01/21/ycl-statement-on-the-us-presidency/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-55945942>

## Venezuela Steven Johnson

Venezuela continues to be subject to attacks on her national sovereignty both by the United States and the European Union through sanctions and continued attempts to recognise Juan Guaido as the legitimate president despite his growing lack of support even amongst sections of the opposition. Recent attacks by the European Union include the body's Foreign Affairs Council imposing coercive measures against 19 officials of the country.

The sanctions imposed by the US have imposed great hardship leading to shortages in fuel and medicines. Venezuela has nonetheless begun a COVID vaccination drive receiving dozens of Russia's Sputnik vaccine and humanitarian medical aid from China. Despite the difficulties Venezuela has fared much better in relation to controlling COVID than neighbouring Caribbean countries with 137,000 cases and 1,325 deaths to date.

The legislative elections held on 6th December 2020 resulted in the coalition of parties supporting Maduro winning 68% of the vote and a majority in the National Assembly. Sections of the opposition including Guaido boycotted the election and predictably claims of fraud were being made even before the elections were held. There was however a section of the opposition who did participate and accepted the results. There is in fact no evidence of fraud. However, the boycott tactics did have an effect on the participation in the election with only 31% turnout.

The Communist Party of Venezuela participated in the elections as part of an alliance with other left-wing parties the Popular Revolutionary Alternative (APR). They received 3% of the vote but fought the election in order to put forward a left-wing critique of some of the economic policies of the Maduro government in respect of an increasing accommodation with domestic capital including dollarisation, privatisation and deregulating workplace conditions. This has in turn led to fierce attacks on the PCV from the PSUV and accusations of being aligned with imperialism. The PCV and the parties of the APR are quite clear however that on the international front they are united with the PSUV against US, NATO and EU imperialism. They do however have principled disagreements with the Maduro government in respect of the internal running and development of Venezuelan society.

It is important that we in Britain continue to express solidarity with Venezuela against imperialism whilst recognising the process internally will throw up differences and contradictions amongst progressive forces. These are however a matter for the Venezuelan people to resolve not the US, the EU or NATO.

## Brazil Abbie Rhodes

Brazil has been greatly affected by the spread of COVID-19, having maintained the second-highest death toll in the world throughout most of the pandemic with other 225 000 deaths as of 2 February 2021.

In mid-January, hospitals in Manaus, the largest city in the Amazon, ran out of oxygen in the accretion of continued strain on Brazil's struggling health sector. Emergency supplies were sent from Venezuela in a convoy. At the peak of the crisis, people lined up for hours to fill their oxygen tanks to take home, as they saw no point in taking their loved ones to overflowing hospitals.

Trade unions have called for President Jair Bolsonaro, who has previously dismissed the severity of the virus as "a little flu", to be impeached in light of the devastation to the population. On 20th January 2021, 87 caravans from at least 70 municipalities travelled across the five regions of Brazil to demand such action against Bolsonaro. 60 requests have been filed by critics to unseat him.

The recent Congress election, however, may for now dispel such criticism. Two allies of Bolsonaro were elected to head the Senate and lower house, an important victory as he looks towards re-election in 2022. Arthur Lira of the Progressives (PP) won in the first round of votes for speaker of the Chamber of Deputies by 302 votes out of 513. Earlier, the Democrats' (DEM) Rodrigo Pacheco was elected Senate speaker with 57 out of 81 votes.

Two hundred people protested on Sunday 31st January in Brasilia, holding signs and banners reading, "Bolsonaro Out" and "Impeachment Now". Other demonstrations were also held in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

## Guyana progresses on a tightrope Ben Lunn

Since the People's Progressive Party came into office in September, progress has been a difficult balancing act. Finding ways to advance the cause of the masses of Guyana while also addressing economic problems inherited from the previous government.

On the 5th February, Foreign Minister Hugh Todd went against US pressure and emphasised the nations commitment to the One China policy. However, this happened in conjunction with the diplomatic controversies surrounding the Esequibo Strip. Though not a new issue of contention, pressures have increased recently, arguably due to the changing of powers within Guyana and the US. Guyana remains committed that any negotiations on the region must go through the ICJ.

Internally, there has been increasing efforts from cabinet ministers to address issues of

'race politics' within Guyana. Hugh Todd highlighted that attempts by regressive forces are not being heard by the working class of Guyana and there is hunger to remedy this. The foreign minister also added that this should not be a problem which exists in this century.

## Nicaragua Wendy Emmott

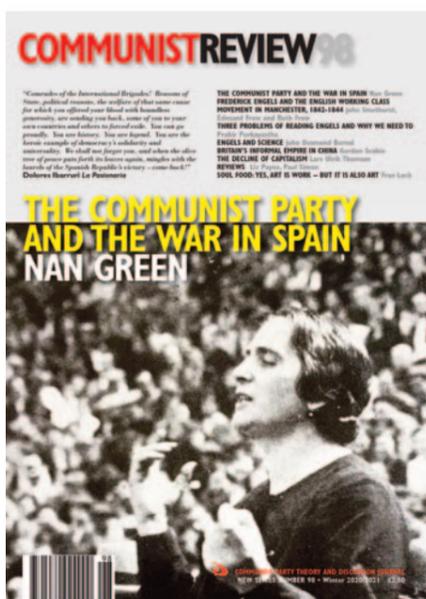
2021 is an important year for Nicaragua, with national elections due in November. According to polls carried out at the end of 2020, by an independent polling company, President Ortega and the FSLN are predicted to be re-elected with around 53.2% support with 8.9% for the opposition. These results indicate that the population are broadly in favour of the current administration.

Since Ortega was returned to power in 2006 after 16 years of neo-liberal government there have been significant changes, and the beginning of a radical transformation in Nicaraguan society. The privatisation of health and education were reversed, and the Government began to implement social and economic policies which were designed to benefit the most impoverished and vulnerable in society. 58% of the 2021 budget has been allocated for social spending, and health, education, housing and equality are regarded as human rights.

This is despite 2020 being a difficult year for Nicaragua. It not only faced the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the effects of two category 4 hurricanes in November. Measures taken by the government kept the coronavirus death rate one of the lowest in the world and the government responded quickly and efficiently to the hurricane, prioritising the safety of the most vulnerable.

Additionally, US aggression continues in Nicaragua, and illegal sanctions are part of the destabilisation project that began in 2018 with the attempted coup. After that failed coup, Biden lined up behind Nicaragua's right-wing opposition, and since then it appears that US policy is unlikely to change. The intention is to cut Nicaragua off from loans, to sabotage the elections and to create unrest and regime change. Trump also announced (November 2020) an extension of an executive order with respect to Nicaragua, stating that the country posed 'an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States' with implications of military intervention.

2021 should be a year of recovery for Nicaragua. Progressive forces around the world must redouble their solidarity efforts to ensure that Nicaragua survives and is allowed, without external interference, to preserve its sovereignty and its right to determine its own future.



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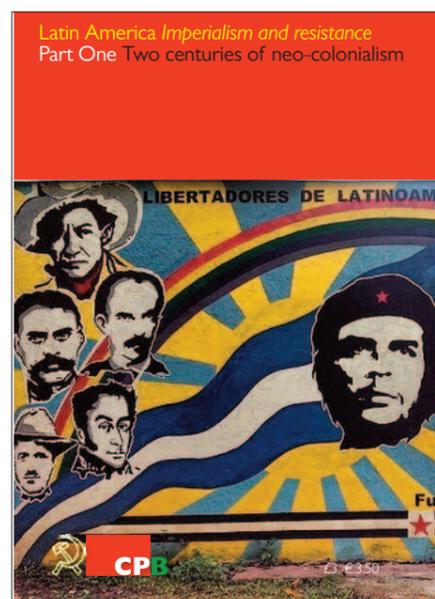
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