

Clifton D'Rozario (CPIML Liberation, India): 'Modi's Hindu supremacist and pro-US foreign policy have greatly set back regional cooperation'

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Clifton D'Rozario is a Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation leader and All India Central Council of Trade Unions national secretary. In this interview with Federico Fuentes for LINKS International Journal of Socialist Renewal, D'Rozario discusses Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's role as a global far right leader and the impact of US-China tensions on South Asian politics and struggles.

After the Cold War's end, global politics seemed dominated by US imperialism. More recently, however, a shift appears to be taking place. While the US was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan, we have seen China's rise, Russia invade Ukraine, and even smaller nations, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, flexing military power beyond their borders. How do you understand these dynamics within global imperialism?

All these developments point to a multidimensional global crisis and waning US hegemony. The US-led imperialist core, despite its military debacles, continues expanding its clout through covert and overt operations and alliances across the world. But current dynamics mark a transition within global power structures, with traditional Western dominance being challenged by rising powers. This creates a more complex and competitive international landscape in terms of domination of weaker nations.

Regardless of the internal character of competing global powers, a multipolar world is more advantageous for progressive forces and movements seeking to reverse neoliberal policies and advance social and political transformations. Inter-imperialist rivalries in the early 20th century not only produced World War I but facilitated the Russian revolution, which snapped the imperialist chain at its weakest link.

Despite its severe internal distortions and subsequent degeneration, the Soviet Union succeeded in overpowering fascism and ending World War II on a victorious note for anti-colonial struggles and revolutionary movements. Even as the Soviet Union stagnated in later decades and trapped itself in an unsustainable arms race between superpowers, its existence as a countervailing force to US domination helped many Third World countries and movements pursue their own course with a considerable degree of relative autonomy from imperialist control.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the US has sought to unite liberal democracies from the Global North (such as Britain, Germany and Australia) in the name of defeating autocracies and totalitarian regimes, including by military means. But the US always uses these claims in justifying

endless wars, brutal occupations and coups (including against elected governments) to install puppet rulers and dictators. Israel's genocide in Gaza, aided and abetted by "liberal democracies" and "authoritarian regimes" such as India, further exposes the fallacy of this argument.

Yet the space being opened by this emerging unstable "multipolar world" has largely been filled by right-wing, authoritarian regimes, such as Modi's. What role does Modi play in regional and global politics? More generally, what threat does the global far right pose today?

We stand at a critical moment in history. Fascism is on the rise globally, through the consolidation of fascist regimes accompanied by intense resistance movements in several countries. This is a direct result of increasing contradictions in the international capitalist system and the tragic destruction caused by neoliberalism. This global crisis of capitalism — which is also a climate crisis — has led to deep insecurity and deprivation, creating fertile ground for fascist and authoritarian forces. The working class must defeat these forces.

These forces blame minorities and immigrants for inequality and insecurity, rather than neoliberal policies. In power, their regimes have been characterised by: organised racial and/or communal violence by fascist groups; attacks on dissent, civil liberties and freedom of speech; intensified anti-feminist politics and assaults on women's and LGBTI rights; the use of fake news to whip up hatred and prejudice; and personality cults and centralisation of power in a single powerful leader. The ideologies of most of these right-wing regimes are rooted in racial supremacy, religious politicisation and the construction of the nation on a singular identity.

Unsurprisingly, there is ongoing collaboration between right-wing regimes. But these same regimes are being legitimated by the international order. It is worth remembering that for a long period after the 2002 Gujarat genocide, Modi, who was Gujarat state Chief Minister at the time, was denied a visa by several Western countries, including the US and Britain. But given right-wing authoritarianism's growing ascendancy in global politics, Modi, as prime minister, now receives strong support from the West — even after [former radical right US president Donald] Trump left office. This too is an undeniable reality of the emerging multipolar world.

Modi has played his role in all this, given Indian fascism has perhaps been in power longer than any similar regime in the world today. Modi has sought domestic and global support by combining Hindu supremacist hyper-nationalism with a pro-US foreign policy. His aim is to leverage global attention for the Indian market, deepen corporate India's integration with global capital, and secure India's strategic role as a close ally of the US and Israel. Under Modi, India's strategic subservience to US global hegemony has greatly increased. His lack of support for Palestine, even in the face of genocide, is a product of his regime's growing strategic partnership with Israel.

Modi portrays a measure of autonomy from the US-led West by being part of BRICS [the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa alliance] and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, where India shares a platform with Russia and China. But the real direction of Modi's foreign policy is the opposite. Modi's refusal to condemn [Russian president Vladimir] Putin's unjust war on Ukraine is due to India's dependence on Russia, which is India's largest weapon supplier and a major energy source.

Growing tensions between the US and China are of great concern. What is behind US military strategy in the region? How should we view China's role and its relations with neighbours such as India? What role has Modi played in regional tensions?

China's rise as a major economic powerhouse has seen the US-led imperialist bloc search for new

avenues to counter China, in its attempt to maintain and strengthen a unipolar world order. In this context, India has stepped up military relations with the US, becoming a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) alongside Japan and Australia. The Quad forms part of the US' regional military alliances aimed at countering China in the Indo-Pacific region. It is also an attempt to deploy US military personnel and assets in India against China. We condemn India's involvement in the Quad, which goes against the sovereign interests of the country.

The growing identification between India's foreign policy and US strategic priorities has led to a worsening of India's relations with, and growing isolation from, almost all its neighbours. The recent past has seen border clashes between China and India, with reports of Chinese incursion into areas under Indian control. Modi has refused to come clean about the actual state of affairs in the border region, preferring to step up anti-China rhetoric for domestic political calculations, even as imports from China reach record highs and India's trade deficit surges.

More generally, India's regional hegemonic ambitions, growing promotion of Indian corporate interests in the region, and attempts to define Indian nationalism in Hindu supremacist terms have created deepening mistrust and tension in South Asia. *Hindutva's* [Hindu nationalism] transnational spatial ambition, with its claims on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka as parts of its strategic vision of *Akhand Bharat* (Undivided India), has further complicated matters.

All this has greatly set back prospects for regional cooperation and friendly ties with neighbours. Yet India's neighbours are important to our struggles, given historic connections and shared concerns arising from interconnected patterns of economic development and foreign policy factors.

What stance has the CPI(ML) Liberation taken on issues such as Ukraine and Taiwan?

The CPI(ML) categorically condemned Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, and has insisted on restoring peace in a way that guarantees Ukrainian sovereignty. We have condemned Russian chauvinism and its expansionist Eurasianism, which sees Ukraine as an integral part of Russian territory and culture, and attributes Ukraine's sovereign existence to a "mistake" by [Russian revolutionary Vladimir] Lenin that needs correcting. We do not accept Russia's claims that NATO's eastward expansion justifies the war.

At the same time, while Ukraine and Russia bleed and much of the world pays a heavy price for this war, the US benefits the most despite not being directly involved. While claiming to help Ukraine defend its sovereignty, the US and corporate capital is busy effectively colonising Ukraine's economy, with vast swathes of land, state-owned enterprises and industries being transferred to corporations that are benefiting from deregulation and the slashing of labour laws [enacted by the Ukrainian government].

As for NATO, the US historically used it as a weapon to sustain its geopolitical and military domination during the Cold War and post-Soviet periods. There was no justification for NATO after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. But instead of dismantling NATO, the US expanded it from 12 member countries to now 30. This expansion aims not just to contain Russia and its growing cooperation with China, but to hold back the rise of Europe as a parallel power.

Regarding Taiwan, the US considers it a pawn in its imperialist designs for the region. It continuously seeks to maintain tensions between China and Taiwan through its military manoeuvrings. China and Taiwan have a complicated history, but it is for the Taiwanese people to decide their future course.

I would add that Ukraine is not the only war in the world today. We have, for example, the genocide

in Palestine. The forces of peace, justice and democracy must speak up against every unjust war of invasion and occupation, and every suppression and denial of democracy.

How have these global and regional dynamics impacted politics in India?

Global dynamics, particularly the rise of China, the US' shifting foreign policy, India's proximity to the US-led imperialist bloc, and its own regional power aspirations impact domestic politics and struggles in India.

Over the past decade, Modi's reference to India as the *vishwaguru* (spiritual mentor to the world) has become an overused figure of speech. The fact that India held the presidency of the G20 summit during 2023 served as a chance for Modi to domestically highlight India's self-proclaimed *vishwaguru* status. Also repeated *ad nauseam* is the refrain that Modi's reign has heralded a major change in India's image abroad, with the country emerging as a true global leader.

The hollowness of this claim is apparent, given the abject poverty facing most Indians on account of Modi's neoliberal economic measures and disastrous policy prescriptions, such as demonetisation, Covid lockdowns and imposing a GST. Even so, this discourse has found a willing audience among India's aspirational middle class and social and economic elites, who seek equal status with their counterparts from the Global North.

It has also found an audience among the diaspora, which for decades has been a focus of indoctrination and mobilisation by the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, of which Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is a political front]. This was particularly the case in the US and Britain, but is now true for most Global North nations with a significant Indian diaspora population. This has led to the formation of various supremacist organisations abroad, such as the Hindu American Foundation and Overseas Friends of the BJP, among others. These organisations play an instrumental role in whitewashing Modi's divisive ideology by organising huge rallies involving elements of the local political establishment.

An example was the "Howdy Modi" event in Texas in 2019, where Modi interacted with the diaspora alongside Trump. There was also an event in Sydney in 2023, where Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese heaped praise on Modi, likening him to US rockstar Bruce Springsteen in his cringe-worthy introductory speech. Such support from abroad and legitimacy from world leaders is crucial for Modi, given his deeply divisive, oppressive and controversial ideology and policies. Unsurprisingly, after the recent Lok Sabha [national parliament] elections, Modi once again took off on one of his countless foreign trips, this time flying to Italy for the G7 Summit.

A [statement](#) by South-East Asian left parties in 2022 raised the need to "promote and advance progressive regional peace initiatives as building blocks toward a common security policy to foster a more peaceful and cooperative global order." Looking at the situation in South Asia, what kind of peace initiatives do you think could help achieve this aim?

The Asia-Pacific region is witnessing a concerted effort by US imperialism to restore its waning global hegemony. The Australia-United Kingdom-United States trilateral security partnership (AUKUS), the Washington-designed Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) and the Quad are all part of its attempts to counter the strategic partnership between China and Russia.

In South Asia, we must seek closer and more effective links among progressive forces to counter these imperialist designs, and struggle for global peace and planetary survival. To this end, we must strengthen struggles against neo-colonial domination, imperialist intervention, military aggression,

environmental destruction and climate crisis. We must develop closer ties with Communist parties and progressive forces in South Asia and the world to strengthen international solidarity for peace, justice, freedom, democracy and human rights, and against fascism, war, terrorism, religious extremism, racism, Islamophobia, and the politics of hate and bigotry.

Do you see any chances to build bridges between anti-imperialist struggles, considering that national movements may have different powers as their principal enemy and therefore seek support from rival powers? Is it possible to advance a position of non-alignment with any of the competing blocs (neutrality) without abandoning solidarity? In sum, what should a 21st internationalism that is anti-imperialist and anti-fascist look like?

In the struggle for global peace and planetary survival, we must develop closer cooperation and coordination with all movements resisting fascism and predatory global capital. In this sense, we need to strengthen solidarity with the Palestinian struggle as well as the West Papuan and Kanak struggles [in Kanaky/New Caledonia].

While we see multipolarity as evolving for the better, India's position should be one of non-alignment and solidarity against imperialism, alongside maintaining good neighbourhood relations at the regional level as a means of undermining US imperialism.

The growing unsustainability of decaying capitalism, the renewed rise of fascist and authoritarian regimes, recurring calamities caused by the growing environmental and climate crisis, and dramatic uncertainties and vulnerabilities resulting from digital technology (especially the huge labour-displacing use of automation and artificial intelligence) are creating new challenges and opportunities for the international Communist movement and for socialist experiments in the 21st century. We need to be particularly attentive to any revival of socialist politics in the unfolding international situation.

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