

# ICE Detainees on Hunger Strike Being Force-Fed Like Those at Guantánamo

Organizations ranging from the ACLU to Human Rights Watch condemn the practice as “inherently cruel, inhuman, and degrading,” writes A. Naomi Paik.



Protesters depicting detainees of the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

[\(AP Photo/Lefteris Pitarakis\)](#)

By [A. Naomi Paik](#), [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#)  
[The Conversation](#)

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, is [force-feeding nine detainees](#) who are on a hunger strike at a detention center in [El Paso](#), Texas.

The protesters are [mostly from India](#) and are being held in ICE custody while their asylum or immigration cases are

processed. Since the beginning of the year, they have been protesting their detainment and mistreatment by guards who they allege have threatened them with deportation and withheld information about their cases, according to the detainees' lawyers.

In mid-January, a federal court ordered ICE to force-feed the strikers. An ICE official stated: "For their health and safety, ICE closely monitors the food and water intake of those detainees identified as being on a hunger strike." ICE policy states that the agency authorizes "involuntary medical treatment" if a detainee's health is threatened by hunger striking.

Force-feeding involves tying a detainee to a bed, inserting a feeding tube down the nose and esophagus and pumping liquid nutrition into the stomach. ICE detainees have reported rectal bleeding and vomiting as a consequence of being force-fed.

As I write in my book "Rightlessness" and research published elsewhere, this is not the first time U.S. government agencies have force-fed people in its custody.

Since 2005, the U.S. military has force-fed detainees at the Guantánamo Bay naval base whenever they would go on a hunger strike to protest their indefinite detention.

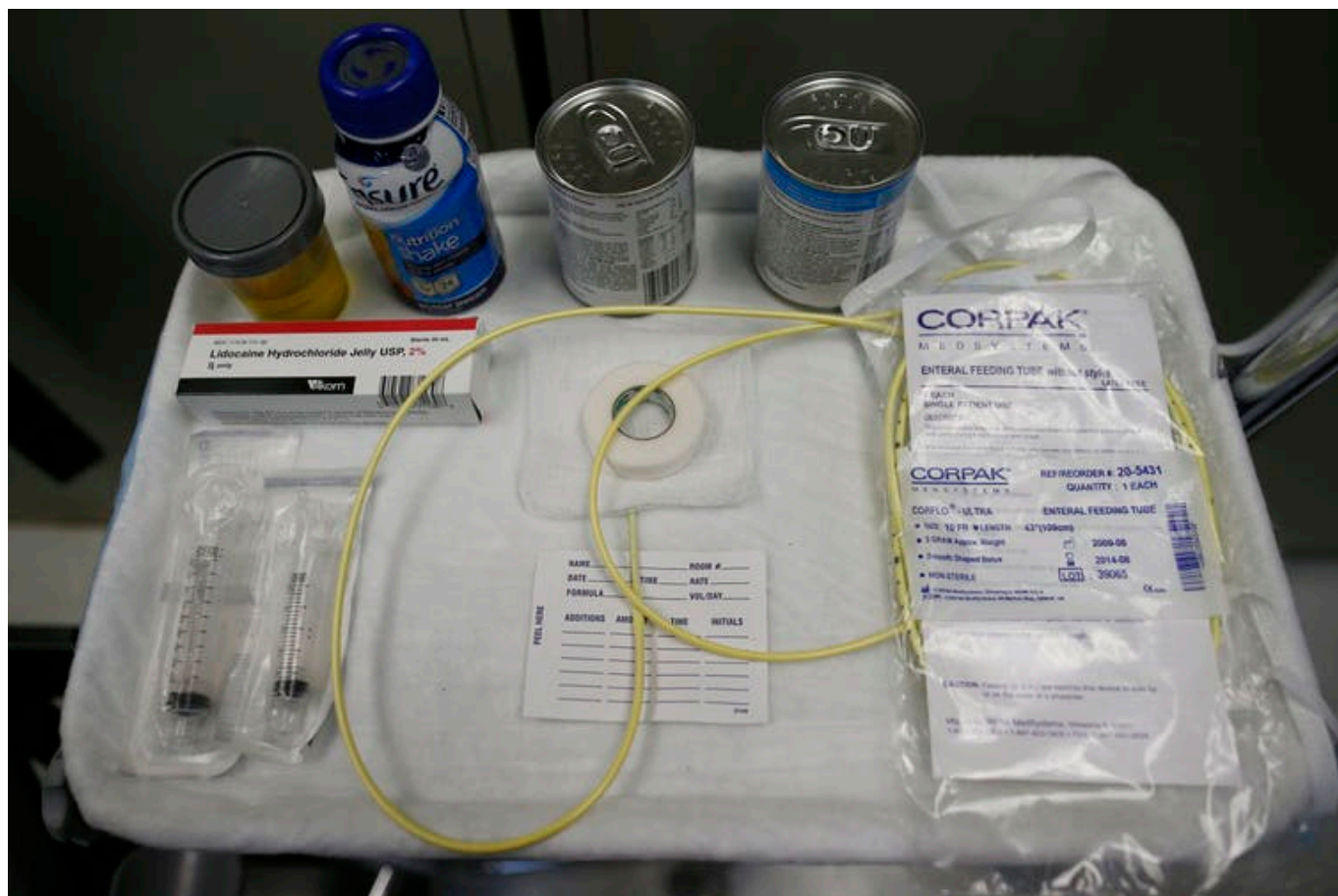
### **Force-feeding at Guantánamo**

The U.S. military has indefinitely detained individuals at Guantánamo in the "war on terror" since 2002.

Hunger strikes have plagued Guantánamo since it opened in 2002. In one of the largest hunger strikes to occur in a

U.S. detention facility, about 500 detainees stopped eating under the slogan “starvation until death” in late June 2005.

They began this strike to protest the conditions of their confinement, including alleged beatings, abuse of their religious freedom by mishandling the Koran and indefinite detention without trial.



Nutritional shakes, a tube for feeding through the nose, and lubricants, including a jar of olive oil, are displayed as force feeding is explained during a tour of the detainee hospital at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba.

(AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)

In response, military doctors authorized “involuntary intravenous hydration and/or enteral tube feeding” – in other words, IV treatment and force-feeding.

Prisoners found ways to get around the feedings, like making themselves vomit or siphoning out their stomachs by sucking

on the external end of the feeding tube.

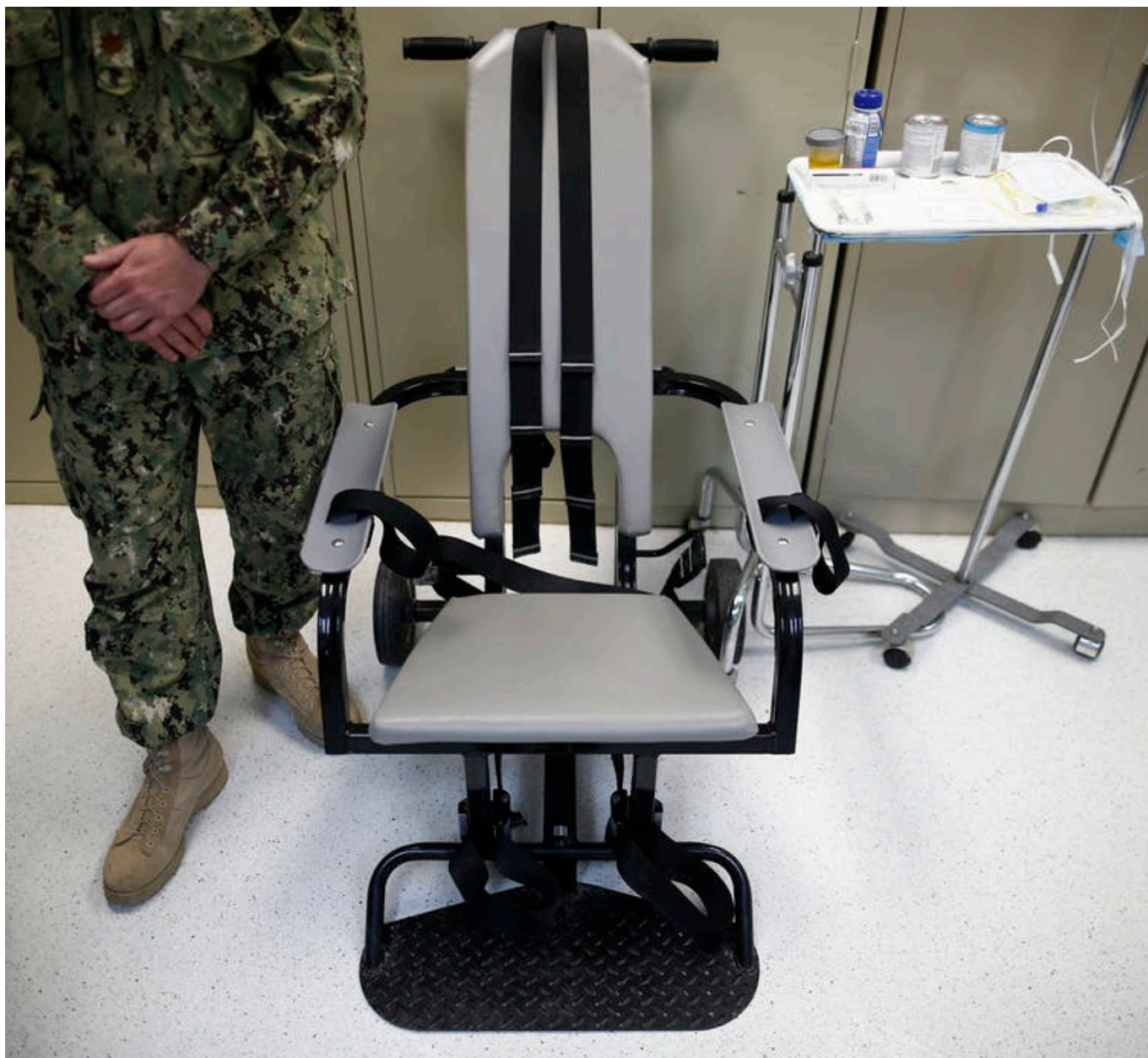
The strike overwhelmed camp commanders. In December 2005, they called in help from the Federal Bureau of Prisons, which had previously authorized force-feeding. The consultants observed as strikers were force-fed twice a day and recommended using the emergency restraint chair, a “padded cell on wheels.”

That requires strapping detainees down onto the chair, making it easier for guards to insert and remove a feeding tube. Detainees referred to it as the “execution chair.” This had the desired effect on the prisoners: Only a handful continued the hunger strike and it was over by February 2006. The camp ordered 20 more chairs.

## **A Painful Process**

In 2013, a widespread hunger strike again swept through Guantánamo – 106 of 166 prisoners participated. Forty-one detainees met the requirements for being force-fed: skipping nine consecutive meals or their BMI dropping below 85 percent of their intake weight.

One participant, Samir Najj al Hasan Moqbel, a Yemeni citizen detained for 11 years, told *The New York Times*, “I had never experienced such pain” as from the feedings.



A U.S. Navy nurse stands next to a chair with restraints, used for force-feeding at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba.

[\(AP Photo/Charles Dharapak\)](#)

Detainees who participated in the numerous strikes over the years have consistently described the force-feeding process, including having teams of five guards who hold down the prisoner, [as torture](#). Some reported being overfed to the point where they [vomited up](#) what was forced down their throats.

“I will not eat until they restore my dignity,” Moqbel said. He said he hoped “that because of the pain we are suffering

the eyes of the world will once again look to Guantanamo before it is too late.”

## Legal Challenges

Guantánamo hunger strikers filed lawsuits against the U.S. government for force-feeding prisoners and using the restraint chair.

Several judges ruled that force-feedings are legal. In one case, a judge wrote that it did not constitute a violation of the Eighth Amendment against cruel and unusual punishment. Rather, she wrote that administrators “are acting out of a need to preserve the life of the Petitioners rather than letting them die.”

This contradicts what many experts the medical and human rights professionals have said about force-feeding.

The World Medical Association, an international medical ethics organization, asserted that force-feeding is “unjustifiable.” Organizations ranging from the ACLU to Human Rights Watch condemn the practice as “inherently cruel, inhuman, and degrading.”

Another federal judge in a 2009 followed a Supreme Court ruling deciding that courts have no jurisdiction over Guantánamo – a camp physically located in Cuba but governed by the United States.

Similarly, federal courts have limited power to intervene on behalf of the ICE detainees because immigrant detention is not considered punishment and thus not protected by due process rights. In Wong Wing v. United States (1896), the Supreme Court ruled that “the Constitution does not apply to

the conditions of immigrant detention.”

While the courts can authorize interventions requested by the government such as force-feeding, immigrant detainees have [limited power to appeal](#) to courts about the conditions of their detention.

As with the Guantánamo detainees, migrants are risking starvation, but not because they want to die. As Amrit Singh, the uncle of two men being force-fed, [stated](#), “They want to know why they are still in the jail and want to get their rights and wake up the government immigration system.” Hunger striking offers one of few ways they can protest their prolonged confinement in pursuit of this goal.

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## How Not to Build a ‘Great, Great Wall’

Trump’s promise of an insurmountable barrier between the U.S. and Mexico is an exercise in proven futility, writes Greg Grandin in this guided tour of fortification efforts over several decades.

By [Greg Grandin](#)

[TomDispatch](#)



The point was less to actually build “the wall” than to constantly announce the building of the wall. “We started building our wall. I’m so proud of it,” Donald Trump tweeted. “What a thing of beauty.”

In fact, no wall, or certainly not the “big, fat, beautiful” one promised by Trump, is being built. True, miles of some kind of barrier –barbed wire, chain-link and steel-slat fencing, corrugated panels, and, yes, even lengths of what can only be described as concrete wall– have gone up along the U.S.-Mexico border, starting at least as far back as the administration of President William Taft, early in the last century. Trump has claimed repairs and expansions of these barriers as proof that he is fulfilling his signature campaign promise. Plaques have already been bolted onto upgrades in existing fencing, crediting him with work started and funded by previous administrations.

And yet Trump’s phantasmagorical wall, whether it ever materializes or not, has become a central artifact in American politics. Think of his promise of a more than 1,000-mile-long, 30-foot-high ribbon of concrete and steel running along the southern border of the United States as America’s new myth. It is a monument to the final closing of the frontier, a symbol of a nation that used to believe it had escaped history, but now finds itself trapped by history, and of a people who used to believe they were captains of the future, but now are prisoners of the past.

### **From Open to Closed Borders**

Prior to World War I, the border–established in the late



1840s and early 1850s after the U.S. military invaded Mexico and took a significant part of that country's territory – was relatively unpoliced. As historian Mae Ngai has pointed out, before World War I the United States “had virtually open borders” in every sense of the term. The only exception: laws that explicitly excluded Chinese migrants. “You didn’t need a passport,” says Ngai. “You didn’t need a visa. There was no such thing as a green card. If you showed up at Ellis Island, walked without a limp, had money in your pocket, and passed a very simple [IQ] test in your own language, you were admitted.”

A similar openness existed at the border with Mexico. “There is no line to indicate the international *boundary*,” reported *Motor Age*, a magazine devoted to promoting automobile tourism, in 1909. The only indication that you had crossed into a new country, heading south, was the way a well-graded road turned into a “rambling cross-country trail, full of chuck-holes and dust.”

The next year, the State Department made plans to roll “great coils of barbed wire... in a straight line over the plain” across the open borderland range where Texans and Mexicans ran their cattle. The hope was to build “the finest barbed-wire boundary line in the history of the world.” Not, though, to keep out people, as the border wasn’t yet an obstacle for the Mexican migrant workers who traveled back and forth, daily or seasonally, to work in homes, factories, and fields in the United States. That barbed-wire barrier was meant to quarantine tick-infested longhorn cattle. Both Washington and Mexico City hoped that such a fence would

help contain “Texas Fever,” a parasitic disease decimating herds of cattle on both sides of the border and leading to a rapid rise in the cost of beef.

As far as I can tell, the first use of the word “wall” to describe an effort to close off the border came with the tumultuous Mexican Revolution. “American troops,” announced the Department of War in March 1911 during Taft’s presidency, “have been sent to form a solid military wall along the Rio Grande.” Yes, Donald Trump was not the first to deploy the U.S. Army to the border. Twenty thousand soldiers, a large percentage of that military at the time, along with thousands of state militia volunteers, were dispatched to stop the movement of arms and men not out of, but *into* Mexico, in an effort to cut off supplies to revolutionary forces. Such a “wall” would “prove an object lesson to the world,” claimed the Department of War. The point: to reassure European investors in Mexico that the U.S. had the situation south of the border under control. “The revolution in the republic to the south must end” was the lesson that the soldiers were dispatched to teach.

The revolution, however, raged on and borderland oil companies like Texaco began building their own private border walls to protect their holdings. Then, in April 1917, the month the United States entered World War I, President Woodrow Wilson signed into law a set of sweeping constraints on immigration generally, including literacy tests, entrance taxes, and quota restrictions. From that point on, the border sharpened – literally, as lengths of barbed wire were stretched ever further on either side of port-of-entry customs houses.

What follows is a chronology of both the physical fortification of the U.S.-Mexico boundary and the psychic investment in such a fortification—the fantasy, chased by both Democrats and Republicans for more than half a century, that with enough funds, technology, cement, steel, razor ribbon, barbed wire, and personnel, the border could be sealed. This timeline illustrates how some of the most outward-looking presidents, men who insisted that the prosperity of the nation was inseparable from the prosperity of the world, also presided over the erection of a deadly run of border barriers, be they called fences or walls, that would come to separate the United States from Mexico.

## **A Chronology**

**1945:** The first significant physical barrier, a chain-link fence about five miles long and 10 feet high, went up along the Mexican border near Calexico, California. Its posts and wire mesh were recycled from California's Crystal City Internment Camp, which had been used during World War II to hold Japanese-Americans.

**1968:** Richard Nixon's "southern strategy" famously played to the resentments of white southern Democrats who opposed civil rights. As it turned out, though, the president had another southern strategy in mind as well, a "border strategy." As historian Patrick Timmons has written, running for president in 1968, Nixon promised to get tough on illegal drugs from Mexico —the "marijuana problem," he called it. Shortly after winning the White House, he launched "Operation Intercept," a brief but prophetic military-style, highly theatrical crackdown along the border. That operation created three weeks of

chaos, described by National Security Archive analyst Kate Doyle as an “unprecedented slow-down of all plane, truck, car and foot traffic— legitimate or not – flowing from Mexico into the southern United States.” That it would be run by two right-wing figures, G. Gordon Liddy and Joe Arpaio, should be a reminder of the continuities between the Nixon era and the kind of demagoguery that now rules the country. Arpaio would become the racist sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona, who gratuitously imposed humiliating, brutal and often deadly conditions on his overwhelmingly Latino prisoners. He would also become an early supporter of Donald Trump and would receive the first pardon of Trump’s presidency after a judge found him in criminal contempt in a racial-profiling case. Liddy, of course, went on to run Nixon’s “Plumbers,” the burglars who infamously broke into the Democratic National Committee’s headquarters at the Watergate Hotel, precipitating the president’s downfall. In his 1996 memoir, Liddy said Operation Intercept primarily wasn’t about stopping the flow of pot. Instead, its “true purpose” was “an exercise in international extortion, pure, simple, and effective, designed to bend Mexico to our will” – to force that country to be more cooperative on a range of policies.

**1973-1977:** The United States had just lost a war in Vietnam largely because it proved impossible to control a border dividing the two parts of that country. In fact, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, desperate to keep North Vietnamese forces from infiltrating South Vietnam, had spent more than \$500 million on 200,000 spools of barbed wire and 5 million fence posts, intending to build a “barrier” – dubbed the “McNamara Line” – running from the South China

Sea to Laos. That line failed dismally. The first bulldozed six-mile strip quickly became overgrown with jungle, while its wooden watch towers were, the *New York Times* reported, “promptly burned down.” It was as that war ended that, for the first time, rightwing activists began to call for a “wall” to be built along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Biologist Garrett Hardin, a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, was typical. In “Population and Immigration: Compassion or Responsibility?,” an essay in the *Ecologist*, he wrote: “We might build a wall, literally.” Hardin was an early exponent of what today is called “race realism,” which holds that, in a world of limited resources and declining white birth rates, borders must be “hardened.”

During these years, southern border conflicts were especially acute in California, where Ronald Reagan was then governor. As San Diego’s sprawl began to push against agricultural fields where migrant workers from Mexico toiled, racist attacks on them increased. Vigilantes drove around the back roads of the greater San Diego area shooting at Mexicans from the flatbeds of their pickup trucks. Dozens of bodies were found in shallow graves.

Such anti-migrant violence was fueled, in part, by angry Vietnam veterans who began to carry out what they called “beaner raids” to break up migrant camps. Snipers also took aim at Mexicans crossing the border. Led by the 27-year-old David Duke, the Ku Klux Klan set up a “border watch” in 1977 at the San Ysidro point of entry and received significant support from local Border Patrol agents. Other KKK groups soon set up similar patrols in south Texas, placing leaflets stamped with skulls and crossbones on the doorsteps of

Latino residents. Around this time, in the swampy Tijuana estuary, an area that border vigilantes began calling “Little ‘Nam,” U.S. border agents reported finding pitfall traps modeled on the punji traps the Vietnamese had set for American soldiers.

**1979:** President Jimmy Carter’s administration offered a plan to build a fence along heavily trafficked stretches of the border, but scuttled the idea as the 1980 presidential election approached.

**1980-1984:** “You don’t build a 9-foot fence along the border between two friendly nations,” Ronald Reagan said on a presidential campaign swing through Texas in September 1980. By taking a swipe at the Carter administration’s plans, he was making a play for that state’s Latino vote, 87 percent of which had gone to Carter four years earlier. “You document the undocumented workers and let them come in here with a visa,” Reagan said, and let them stay “for whatever length of time they want to stay.”

Then, four years later, President Reagan shifted gears. “Our borders are out of control,” he insisted in October 1984. As he ran for reelection, his administration started pushing the idea that the border could indeed be “sealed” and that the deployment of “high tech” equipment – infrared scopes, spotter planes, night-vision goggles – might provide just such effective control. “New stuff,” claimed a Border Patrol official, though some of the ground sensors being set out along that border were leftovers from Vietnam. In his second term, Reagan did get an immigration reform bill passed that helped more than 2 million undocumented residents obtain citizenship. But his administration, looking to appease a

growing caucus of nativists in the Republican Party, also launched Operation Jobs, sending federal agents into workplaces to round up and deport undocumented workers. In 1984, the Border Patrol saw the largest staff increase in its 60-year history.

**1989:** In March 1989, a few months before the Berlin Wall fell, the new administration of President George H. W. Bush proposed building a 14-foot-wide, 5-foot-deep border trench south of San Diego. Some likened it to a “moat,” since it would be filled with run-off rainwater. “The only thing they haven’t tried is mining the area,” quipped Robert Martinez, the director of San Diego’s American Friends Service Committee. Opponents called it an “inverted Berlin Wall,” while the White House claimed that the trench would solve both drainage and immigration problems. The idea was shelved.

**1992:** Richard Nixon’s former speechwriter Patrick Buchanan provided an unexpectedly strong challenge to a sitting president for the Republican nomination, calling, among other things, for a wall or a ditch – a “Buchanan trench,” as he put it – along the U.S.-Mexico border and for the Constitution to be amended so that migrant children born in the country couldn’t claim citizenship. Bush won the nomination, but Buchanan managed to insert a pledge in the Republican platform to build a “structure” on the border. It proved an embarrassment at a moment when there was an emerging post-Cold War consensus among Republican and Democratic Party leaders that a free trade agreement with Mexico had to be encouraged and the border left open, at least for corporations and capital. Bush’s campaign tried to

fudge the issue by claiming that a “structure” didn’t necessarily mean a wall, but Buchanan’s people promptly shot back. “They don’t put lighthouses on the border,” his sister and spokesperson Bay Buchanan said.

**1993:** Having passed the North American Free Trade Agreement in Congress, President Bill Clinton immediately started to militarize the border, once again significantly increasing the budget and staff of the Border Patrol and supplying it with ever more technologically advanced equipment: infrared night scopes, thermal-imaging devices, motion detectors, in-ground sensors, and software that allowed biometric scanning of all apprehended migrants. Stadium lights went up, shining into Tijuana. Hundreds of miles of what the Clinton White House refused to call a “wall” went up as well. “We call it a fence,” said one government official. “‘Wall’ has kind of a negative connotation.”

The objective was to close off relatively safe urban border crossings and force migrants to use more treacherous places in their attempts to reach the United States, either the creosote flatlands of south Texas or the gulches and plateaus of the Arizona desert. Trips that used to take days now took weeks on arid sands and under a scorching sun. Clinton’s Immigration and Naturalization Service commissioner, Doris Meissner, claimed “geography” as an “ally” – meaning that desert torments would work wonders as a deterrent.

The Clinton White House was so eager to put up a set of barriers that it barely paid attention to the actual borderline, at one point mistakenly running a section of the structure into Mexico, prompting a protest from that



country's government.

Another stretch, spanning 15 miles from the Pacific Ocean, would be built using Vietnam-era steel helicopter landing pads stood on end. Their edges were so sharp that migrants trying to climb over them often severed their fingers. As one observer noted, the use of the pads raised "the chilling possibility" that the U.S. might be able to "wall off the country" with leftover war matériel.

**2006:** The Secure Fence Act, passed by President George W. Bush's administration with considerable Democratic support, appropriated billions of dollars to pay for drones, a "virtual wall," aerostat blimps, radar, helicopters, watchtowers, surveillance balloons, razor ribbon, landfill to block canyons, border berms, adjustable barriers to compensate for shifting dunes, and a lab (located at Texas A&M and run in partnership with Boeing) to test fence prototypes. The number of border agents doubled yet again and the length of border fencing quadrupled. Operation Streamline detained, prosecuted, and tried migrants en masse and then expedited their deportation (mostly using an immigration reform law Clinton had signed in 1996). Agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (created after 9/11) seized children off school buses and tracked undocumented residents deep into liberal states, including in the exclusive Hamptons on New York's Long Island and in New Bedford, Massachusetts. All told, in his eight years in office, Bush deported 2 million people, at a rate roughly matched by his successor, Barack Obama.

**2013:** The Democratic-controlled Senate passed a bill in June 2013 that – in exchange for the promise of a one-time

amnesty and a long-shot chance at citizenship for some of the millions of undocumented residents in the country – offered more billions of dollars for policing, fencing, and deportations. According to the New York Times, with a winding down in Iraq and Afghanistan (however brief it would prove to be), defense contractors like Lockheed Martin were betting on a “military-style buildup at the border zone,” hoping to supply even more helicopters, heat-seeking cameras, radiation detectors, virtual fences, watchtowers, ships, Predator drones, and military-grade radar. The bill failed in the House, killed by nativists. But the Democratic Party would continue to fund “tough-as-nails” (in the phrase of New York Democratic Senator Charles Schumer) border security programs that amounted to years of up-arming the border in what was then referred to as a “border surge.”

No one really knows how many people have died trying to get into the United States since Washington began to make the border tough as nails. Most die of dehydration, hyperthermia, or hypothermia. Others drown in the Rio Grande. Since about 1998, the Border Patrol has reported nearly 7,000 deaths, with groups like the Tucson-based Coalición de Derechos Humanos estimating that the remains of at least 6,000 immigrants have been recovered. These numbers are, however, undoubtedly just a fraction of the actual toll.

**June 16, 2015:** Donald J. Trump descends an escalator in Trump Tower to the tune of Neil Young’s “Rockin’ in the Free World” to announce his presidential campaign and denounce “Mexican rapists.”

“I will build a great, great wall on our southern border,” he tells Americans. “And I will have Mexico pay for that wall.”

### **Show Me a 50-Foot Wall...**

“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,” poet Robert Frost once wrote.

Borders, not to mention walls, represent domination and exploitation. But they also symbolize the absurdity of political leaders taking the world as it is and trying to make it as they think it ought to be. However much people might curse border fortifications, they also enjoy subverting them -- even if the subversion only lasts a moment, as when citizens of Naco, Sonora, and Naco, Arizona, play an annual volleyball game over the border fence; or when an artist decides to paint “the world’s longest mural” on border fencing; or when families come together to gossip, tell jokes, and pass tamales and sweets between the posts; or when couples get married through the spaces separating the slats. As long as the United States keeps coming up with new ways to fortify the border, people will keep coming up with new ways to beat the border, including tunnels, ramps, catapults and homemade cannons (to launch bales of marijuana to the other side), and GoFundMe campaigns to pay for ladders.

As Janet Napolitano, former governor of Arizona and former director of Homeland Security, once said, “Show me a 50-foot wall, and I’ll show you a 51-foot ladder.”

**Greg Grandin, a TomDispatch regular, teaches history at New York University. His newest book, “The End of the Myth: From**

**the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America** (Metropolitan Books), will be published in March. He is the author of “Fordlandia,” shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, “The Empire of Necessity,” which won the Bancroft Prize in American history, and “Kissinger’s Shadow.”

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## US Opened Doors After Vietnam War and Can Do So Again

People from Central America, as well as those displaced by wars in the Middle East, should get the kind of U.S. welcome that the military helped provide to refugees from Indochina in 1975, writes Ann Wright.

## Exodus of 750,000 People

**By Ann Wright**



The thousands of people now trying to flee violence in Central America are small in number compared to those who were desperately trying to escape from Vietnam and other Indochina countries decades ago.

In the spring of 1975—with the U.S. either on the brink of pulling out of Vietnam, or already gone—over 131,000 South Vietnamese fled the country, some on the last planes out of Vietnam and other in flotillas of small boats. It was the beginning of a much larger exodus. All told, about 750,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos came to the United States between 1975 through 1986. They came under two resettlement initiatives established by Congress: the

Refugee Parole Program and the Orderly Departure Program.

After the U.S. signed a peace agreement with North Vietnam, U.S. military ships that were still off South Vietnam began picking up hundreds of people each day who had left South Vietnam on small boats. The vast majority had been on the U.S.-backed Southern side of the war and feared reprisal by the new communist government from the North. At worst they could be killed and at the least forced into re-education camps.

No equation of those refugees from the Vietnam War with people now and in recent years seeking refuge from widespread social instability in Central America—marked by gangs of drug cartels and linked to decades of covert U.S. operations—can be exact. But today's refugees from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, along with the millions of people displaced by U.S.-backed military interventions in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, deserve comparable consideration, given the U.S. role in disrupting their lives.

Instead, President Donald Trump is turning a hostile face on Central American migrants and refugees—by separating children from parents, by insisting on building a wall, by having people rounded up. Longstanding concerns about the conditions inside the U.S. detention centers were renewed by the Washington Post report of a 7-year-old girl dying of dehydration.

The U.S. has also shown indifference to refugees from Iraq and Syria by barely opening its doors. Admission numbers were already paltry under the Obama administration, when the

U.S. was only allowing [tens of thousands of refugees](#) a year. Now, under Trump, 2018 is on track to [hit a 40-year low](#), finds Global Citizen in an analysis of U.S. State Department data. More than 5 million Syrians are registered refugees, with Turkey hosting the highest number, followed by Lebanon and Jordan, according to [December data from the U.N. High Commission on Refugees](#). More than [6 million Syrians](#) have had to seek refugee inside their own country.

In a cruel backtracking of U.S. commitments, the Trump administration is once again signaling its intention to deport Vietnamese immigrants who 40 years ago fled retaliation and have lived in the United States for four decades, according to a Dec. 12 report by [The Atlantic](#). Those targeted for deportation have committed crimes in the U.S. but were still protected by a 2008 bilateral agreement between Vietnam and the U.S. assuring that Vietnamese citizens would not be subject to return if they arrived before July 12, 1995, the year diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the United States were resumed after the war. [John Kerry, a Vietnam veteran and former U.S. secretary of state, called the move despicable on his Twitter account.](#)

## **Mobilizing for Newcomers**

In 1975, the U.S. military mobilized to take care of newcomers while their paperwork was processed, after which the U.S. government sent them to communities all over the United States.

These measures were by no means a comprehensive attempt at redress. Many people seeking a way out of Vietnam were stranded. Some became part of the [huge wave of “boat](#)

people" in 1979, who overwhelmed refugee settlements in Asian countries and caused an international crisis. But it is safe to say the U.S. demonstrated a far more humane response than it does today.

And in 1980, the U.S. once again welcomed people in distress when 125,000 Cubans arrived as a part of the Marinel boat lift during the Carter administration. Another 15,000 Haitians arrived on the shores of Florida by boat that same year.

In 1975 I was one of thousands of U.S. military personnel who received the Vietnamese, first on military ships, later at military bases in the Philippines and then in Guam. Ultimately, I wound up volunteering at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, one of the five refugee camps set up in the continental United States. The others were at Camp Pendleton, California; Camp McCoy, Wisconsin; Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; and Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

At the time, I was attending law school at the University of Arkansas, 50 miles from the Fort Chaffee base and was in a U.S. Army Civil Affairs Reserve unit. The Army was notified on April 25, 1975, that the five military installations would be used and the Pentagon immediately sent out a call for reservists to help set up the military installations to receive and house up to 30,000 persons at a time.

The first refugees arrived at Fort Chaffee just seven days later, on May 2, on a plane carrying 70 people. Within 22 days, 25,812 refugees were at the base, making it the 11th-largest city in Arkansas. By June, 6,500 reservists had volunteered for active duty at Fort Chaffee.

At the peak of the airlift, as many as 17 flights a day landed at Fort Smith Municipal Airport with passengers bound for Fort Chaffee. All told, 415 refugee flights landed at the Fort Smith airport during the seven months that the base served as a refugee center. When the camp closed on Dec. 20, 1975, it had helped 50,809 people begin to regroup for life in the United States.

### **Fixing Up the Base**

With the exception of annual two-week training cycles for the U.S. Army Reserve and Arkansas National Guard, Fort Chaffee had not been used since the mobilization for the Korean War. The majority of the sprawling barracks, built during World War II and the Korean War, had been shut for over 20 years. Units of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and medical units from Fort Sill, Oklahoma—the closest active-duty U.S. Army installation—arrived in late April 1975 to open up the facilities.

Animals were driven out of the buildings, toilet facilities re-opened. Some barracks were partially renovated for use by families. Giant “mess halls,” or military cafeterias were set up. A small hospital was cleaned and equipped, along with office spaces for refugee placement agencies.

Once the refugees had arrived, an array of hosting demands arose. U.S. Army doctors and nurses tended to people with medical needs. The Army’s kitchen staff began cooking huge caldrons of rice and vegetables and boiling water for tea. Mess halls fed 6,000 people three meals a day and were open around the clock.

### **Rice Incident**



There was an incident over rice. The Vietnamese did not like the rice being served to them, which had been grown in the camp's host state. It was a diplomatic challenge to inform former President Bill Clinton, then the governor of Arkansas, that we would have to get a different type of rice produced in another state because the Vietnamese refugees were not eating Arkansas rice. (That did not go over well in a state where most residents, including myself, didn't know there were different kinds of rice.)

Lots of babies arrived with mothers who were so severely stressed that they had trouble producing milk. Any infant formula would have to be lactose-free because in Vietnam cow milk was not used in formulas. One of my jobs was to make this arrangement. Companies cooperated very quickly, turning trucks around from their original destinations and sending them to the military bases and ramping up production for a new lactose-intolerant demographic in the country.

Resettlement was swift. Within two weeks, hundreds were leaving the camps as refugee organizations expertly found communities and groups all over the United States who poured out support, eager to sponsor families and individuals. Churches and civic groups found housing, equipped the houses and found jobs for the people who were arriving.

As the summer of 1975 drew to a close, any refugees who had not been resettled were consolidated in one camp at chilly Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. The U.S. Army general in charge of Fort Chaffee called me into his office and assigned me to procure winter clothing. We wound up finding clothing in the warehouses of the Armed Forces Post Exchange System, which were delivered in September.

All of these stories are to say that the U.S. government today could do far more to alleviate the refugee crisis than it is doing. There is still plenty of room in U.S. society and its land mass for people fleeing violence. All that's missing today is political will.

**Ann Wright served 29 years in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves and retired as a colonel. She was also a U.S. diplomat and was in U.S. embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. government in March 2003 in opposition to the lies the Bush administration was stating as the rationale for the invasion, occupation and destruction of Iraq. She is the co-author of "Dissent: Voices of Conscience."**

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## Mexico's Solution to the Border Crisis

López Obrador's \$20 billion development plan gives Washington a chance to help rectify the historic damage it's done to the living conditions of people in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, writes Patrick Lawrence.

## **A Latin American Marshall Plan, at a Discount**

**[By Patrick Lawrence](#)**

*Special to Consortium News*



With President Donald Trump on Tuesday threatening to shut down the government if he doesn't get his wall, it's good that someone in a position of authority actually has a workable solution to the migrant crisis festering on the Mexican border with the U.S.

The day after Andrés Manuel López Obrador took office as Mexico's president on Dec. 1, his foreign minister flew to Washington to propose a \$20 billion development plan to make Central America a place for people to stay rather than flee. Three-quarters of the money would help create jobs and fight poverty. The rest would pay for border control and law enforcement.

The plan would be funded by Mexico, the U.S. and the three Central American that produce the most refugees and migrants, according to the size of their economies. The U.S. would pay most, which seems just given the decades of support—including millions in military assistance and police training—that Washington offered corrupt, anti-democratic dictators who oversaw the impoverishment of Central America. In addition, the U.S. backed the 2009 coup in Honduras that has directly led to an influx of refugees streaming towards the U.S. border.

At last there is a plan that addresses the causes, and not just the symptoms of Central America's migrant and refugee crisis: poverty, unemployment, drug trafficking, gang violence, police corruption, the world's highest murder rates. At last an implicit assertion that the U.S. bears some responsibility—and arguably the largest share—for the unlivable conditions of many Guatemalans, Hondurans and

Salvadorans appears to be at hand.

Marcelo Ebrard, Mexico's new foreign minister, met with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Washington on Dec. 1 as thousands of migrants from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador were marooned in Tijuana and other locations on the Mexican side of the border. Ebrard compared Mexico's proposal with the Marshall Plan, the 1948–51 program to rebuild Europe. In this case, however, the U.S. would spend far less. In today's dollars, adjusted for inflation, the U.S. contributed nearly \$100 billion to the Marshall Plan (an investment in both reconstruction and the advancement of U.S. business interests in Europe).

The State Department said little in its official response, merely acknowledging the two nations' "shared commitment to address our common challenges and opportunities." Ebrard said only, "I thank him [Pompeo] for his attitude and respect toward the new administration of President López Obrador."

Translation: Ebrard seems to have gotten nowhere. No surprise since the Trump administration has threatened to cut aid to Central American nations that don't stop the flow of migrants northward. But that flow won't stop until the conditions causing it are alleviated. But Central American nations need help to do that.

### **Signal Test**

This is a test for Trump, the right-wing populist, who said he could work with López Obrador, the left-wing populist.

López Obrador's commitment to alleviating poverty, crime and

underdevelopment in Central America was the theme that won him the presidency last year. On his inauguration day he signed a comprehensive Central American [development plan](#) with the presidents of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Their document [earned U.N. backing](#).

The U.S. entertained a similar development program not long ago.

In 2000, Vicente Fox proposed an infrastructure development plan for Central America soon after he was elected Mexican president. George W. Bush listened: When he was inaugurated a few months later, Bush declared Mexico Washington's highest foreign policy and national security priority.

Then came Sept. 11, 2001. The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria followed at a cost of [\\$5.6 trillion](#), according to a recent study by the Watson Institute at Brown University. That is 280 times the amount Marcelo Ebrard put on the table with Pompeo.

Would there be caravans of migrants heading north from Central America today had Washington partnered with Mexico to make relatively modest investments in regional development programs a couple of decades ago?

There is indeed a history to U.S. development aid to Latin America, and like the Marshall Plan, past efforts were centered on promoting U.S. business interests. President John F. Kennedy launched the Alliance for Progress, which was criticized as being intended mostly to help U.S. business interests, including in this 1968 NBC News report (at [14:37](#)).

Like the Marshall plan and the Alliance for Progress, any U.S. development deal today for Central America to keep Central Americans in Central America will likely have to provide an advantage for U.S. business interests there. With a businessman in the White House, it would be hard not to assume that Trump would use his leverage with Obrador to push for this in any deal, if he engages Obrador's proposal at all.

## **Global Context**

The Mexico proposal has a global context, given that continental Europe and the U.S. share variants of the same problem. Both face unmanageable waves of migrants and refugees from their underdeveloped and war-torn peripheries. Regrettably, both also focus on walls, fences, and other kinds of border security to the neglect of root causes.

U.S.-led interventions in Libya and Syria have driven Europe's refugee crisis. Continuing Western exploitation of African resources also contributes to the migrant crisis.

At a four-sided summit in Istanbul last month, the leaders of Germany, France, Turkey and Russia presented blueprints to restore Syria to a livable nation to which refugees and migrants could return. The U.S., the major foreign contributor to the Syrian tragedy, did not attend.

For those nations that did, the Istanbul gathering can be counted as no more than a first step. But it suggests how developed Western nations should respond to crises in underdeveloped and non-Western nations that they helped create and now amount to a global security problem. Climate change, which Trump denies, and two decades of neoliberal

economic policies, are also among the reasons caravans of Central Americans stream northward.

The West's role in creating many of the planet's migration and refugee crises—maybe the majority—needs to be acknowledged and policies should reflect this responsibility. The attendance by France and Germany at the Istanbul gathering gives the U.S. an example to follow towards Mexico and Central America.

**Patrick Lawrence, a correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the International Herald Tribune, is a columnist, essayist, author, and lecturer. His most recent book is *Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century* (Yale). Follow him @thefloutist. His web site is [www.patricklawrence.us](http://www.patricklawrence.us). Support his work via [www.patreon.com/thefloutist](http://www.patreon.com/thefloutist).**

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Future of Western Democracy Being Played

# Out in Brazil

Stripped to its essence, the Brazilian presidential elections represent a direct clash between democracy and an early 21<sup>st</sup> Century neofascism, indeed between civilization and barbarism, writes Pepe Escobar.

**By Pepe Escobar**

**in Paris**

*Special to Consortium News*



Nothing less than the future of politics across the West – and across the Global South – is being played out in Brazil.

Stripped to its essence, the Brazilian presidential elections represent a direct clash between democracy and an early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, neofascism, indeed between civilization and barbarism.

Geopolitical and global economic reverberations will be immense. The Brazilian dilemma illuminates all the contradictions surrounding the Right populist offensive across the West, juxtaposed to the inexorable collapse of the Left. The stakes could not be higher.

Jair Bolsonaro, an outright supporter of Brazilian military dictatorships of last century, who has been normalized as the “extreme-right candidate,” won the first round of the presidential elections on Sunday with more than 49 million votes. That was 46 percent of the total, just shy of a majority needed for an outright win. This in itself is a jaw-dropping development.

His opponent, Fernando Haddad of the Workers’ Party (PT), got only 31 million votes, or 29 percent of the total. He will now face Bolsonaro in a runoff on October 28. A Sisyphean task awaits Haddad: just to reach parity with Bolsonaro, he needs every single vote from those who supported the third and fourth-placed candidates, plus a substantial share of the almost 20 percent of votes considered null and void.

Meanwhile, no less than 69 percent of Brazilians, according to the



latest polls, profess their support for democracy. That means 31 percent do not.

## **No Tropical Trump**

Dystopia Central does not even begin to qualify it. Progressive Brazilians are terrified of facing a mutant “Brazil” (the movie) cum Mad Max wasteland ravaged by evangelical fanatics, rapacious neoliberal casino capitalists and a rabid military bent on recreating a Dictatorship 2.0.

Bolsonaro, a former paratrooper, is being depicted by Western mainstream media essentially as the Tropical Trump. The facts are way more complex.

Bolsonaro, a mediocre member of Congress for 27 years with no highlights on his C.V., indiscriminately demonizes blacks, the LGBT community, the Left as a whole, the environment “scam” and most of all, the poor. He’s avowedly pro-torture. He markets himself as a Messiah – a fatalistic avatar coming to “save” Brazil from all those “sins” above.

The Goddess of the Market, predictably, embraces him. “Investors” – those semi-divine entities – deem him good for “the market”, with his last-minute offensive in the polls mirroring a rally in the Brazilian *real* and the Sao Paulo stock exchange.

Bolsonaro may be your classic extreme-right “savior” in the Nazi mould. He may embody Right populism to the core. But he’s definitely not a “sovereignist” – the motto of choice in political debate across the West. His “sovereign” Brazil would be run more like a retro-military dictatorship totally subordinated to Washington’s whims.

Bolsonaro’s ticket is compounded by a barely literate, retired general as his running mate, a man who is ashamed of his mixed race background and is frankly pro-eugenics. General Antonio Hamilton Mourão has even revived the idea of a military coup.

Manipulating the ticket, we find massive economic interests, tied to mineral wealth, agro-business and most of all the Brazilian Bible

Belt. It is complete with death squads against Native Brazilians, landless peasants and African-American communities. It is a haven for the weapons industry. Call it the apotheosis of tropical neo-pentecostal, Christian-Zionism.

### **Praise the Lord**

Brazil has 42 million evangelicals – and over 200 representatives in both branches of Parliament. Don't mess with their *jihad*. They know how to exercise massive appeal among the beggars at the neoliberal banquet. The Lula Left simply didn't know how to seduce them.

So even with echoes of Mike Pence, Bolsonaro is the Brazilian Trump only to a certain extent: his communication skills – talking tough, simplistically, is language understandable to a seven-year old. Educated Italians compare him to Matteo Salvini, the Lega leader, now Minister of Interior. But that's also not exactly the case.

Bolsonaro is a symptom of a much larger disease. He has only reached this level, a head-to-head in the second round against Lula's candidate Haddad, because of a sophisticated, rolling, multi-stage, judicial/congressional/business/media Hybrid War unleashed on Brazil.

Way more complex than any color revolution, Hybrid War in Brazil featured a law-fare coup under cover of the Car Wash anti-corruption investigation. That led to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and Lula being thrown in jail on corruption charges with no hard evidence or smoking gun.

In every poll Lula would win these elections hand down. The coup plotters managed to imprison him and prevent him from running. Lula's right to run was highlighted by everyone from Pope Francis to the UN's Human Rights Council, as well as Noam Chomsky. Yet in a delightful historical twist, the coup plotters' scenario blew up in their faces as the front-runner to lead the country is not one of them, but a neofascist.

"One of them" would ideally be a faceless bureaucrat affiliated with the former social democrats, the PSDB, turned hardcore neoliberals addicted to posing as Center Left when they are the "acceptable" face

of the neoliberal Right. Call them Brazilian Tony Blairs. Specific Brazilian contradictions, plus the advance of Right populism across the West, led to their downfall.

Even Wall Street and the City of London (which endorsed Hybrid War on Brazil after it was unleashed by NSA spying of oil giant Petrobras) have started entertaining second thoughts on supporting Bolsonaro for president of a BRICS nation, which is a leader of the Global South, and until a few years ago, was on its way to becoming the fifth largest economy in the world.

It all hangs on the “vote transfer” mechanism from Lula to Haddad and the creation of a serious, multi-party Progressive Democratic Front on the second round to defeat the rising neofascism. They have less than three weeks to pull it off.

### **The Bannon Effect**

It's no secret that Steve Bannon is advising the Bolsonaro campaign in Brazil. One of Bolsonaro's sons, Eduardo, met with Bannon in New York two months ago after which the Bolsonaro camp decided to profit from Bannon's supposed “peerless” social engineering insights.

Bolsonaro's son tweeted at the time, “We're certainly in touch to join forces, especially against Cultural Marxism.” That was followed by an army of bots disgorging an avalanche of fake news up to Election Day.

A specter haunts Europe. Its name is Steve Bannon. The specter has moved on to the tropics.

In Europe, Bannon is now poised to intervene like an angel of doom in a Tintoretto painting heralding the creation of a EU-wide Right Populist coalition.

Bannon is notoriously praised to high heavens by Italian Interior Minister Salvini; Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban; Dutch nationalist Geert Wilders; and scourge of the Paris establishment, Marine Le Pen.

Last month, Bannon set up The Movement; at first sight just a

political start-up in Brussels with a very small staff. But talk about Boundless Ambition: their aim is no less than turning the European parliamentary elections in May 2019 upside down.

The European parliament in Strasbourg – a bastion of bureaucratic inefficiency – is not exactly a household name across the EU. The parliament is barred from proposing legislation. Laws and budgets can only be blocked via a majority vote.

Bannon aims at capturing at least one-third of the seats in Strasbourg. He's bound to apply tested American-style methods such as intensive polling, data analysis, and intensive social media campaigns – much the same as in Bolsonaro's case. But there's no guarantee it will work, of course.

The foundation stone of The Movement was arguably laid in two key meetings in early September set up by Bannon and his right-hand man, Mischael Modrikamen, chairman of the quite small Belgian Parti Populaire (PP). The first meeting was in Rome with Salvini and the second in Belgrade with Orban.

Modrikamen defines the concept as a “club” which will “collect funds from donors, in America and Europe, to make sure ‘populist’ ideas can be heard by the citizens of Europe who perceive more and more that Europe is not a democracy anymore.”

Modrikamen insists, “We are all sovereignists.” The Movement will hammer four themes that seem to form a consensus among disparate, EU-wide political parties: against “uncontrolled immigration”; against “Islamism”; favoring “security” across the EU; and supporting “a Europe of sovereign nations, proud of their identity.”

The Movement should really pick up speed after next month's midterms in the U.S. In theory, it could congregate different parties from the same nation under its umbrella. That could be a very tall order, even taller than the fact key political actors already have divergent agendas.

Wilders wants to blow up the EU. Salvini and Orban want a weak EU but they don't want to get rid of its institutions. Le Pen wants a EU

reform followed by a “Frexit” referendum.

The only themes that unite this mixed Right Populism bag are nationalism, a fuzzy anti-establishment drive and a – quite popular – disgust with the EU’s overwhelming bureaucratic machine.

Here we find some common ground with Bolsonaro, who poses as a nationalist and as against the Brazilian political system – even though he’s been in Parliament for ages.

There’s no rational explanation for Bolsonaro’s last-minute surge among two sections of the Brazilian electorate that deeply despise him: women and the Northeast region, which has always been discriminated against by the wealthier South and Southeast.

Much like Cambridge Analytica in the 2016 U.S. election, Bolsonaro’s campaign targeted undecided voters in Northeastern states, as well as women voters, with a barrage of fake news demonizing Haddad and the Workers’ Party. It worked like a charm.

### **The Italian Job**

I’ve just been to northern Italy checking out how popular Salvini really is. Salvini defines the May 2019 European Parliament elections as “the last chance for Europe.” Italian Foreign Minister Enzo Moavero sees them as the first “real election for the future of Europe.” Bannon also sees the future of Europe being played in Italy.

It’s quite something to seize the conflicting energy in the air in Milan, where Salvini’s Lega is quite popular while at the same time Milan is a globalized city crammed with ultra-progressive pockets.

At a political debate about a book published by the Bruno Leoni Institute regarding exiting the euro, Roberto Maroni, a former governor of the powerful Lombardia region, remarked: “Italexit is outside of the formal agenda of the government, of the Lega and of the center-right.” Maroni should know, after all he was one of the Lega’s founders.

He hinted however that major changes are on the horizon. “To form a

group in the European parliament, the numbers are important. This is the moment to show up with a unique symbol among parties of many nations.”

It's not only Bannon and The Movement's Modrikamen. Salvini, Le Pen and Orban are convinced they can win the 2019 elections – with the EU transformed into a “Union of European Nations.” This would include not just a couple of big cities where all the action is, with the rest reduced to fly over status. Right Populism argues that France, Italy, Spain, and Greece are no longer nations – only mere provinces.

Right Populism derives immense satisfaction that its main enemy is the self-described “Jupiter” Macron – mocked across France by some as the “Little Sun King.” President Emmanuel Macron must be terrified that Salvini is emerging as the “leading light” of European nationalists.

This is what Europe seems to be coming to: a trashy, Salvini vs. Macron cage match.

Arguably the Salvini vs. Macron fight in Europe might be replicated as Bolsonaro vs. Haddad in Brazil. Some sharp Brazilian minds are convinced Haddad is the Brazilian Macron.

In my view he is not. He has a background in philosophy and he's a former, competent mayor of Sao Paulo, one of the most complex megalopolises on the planet. Macron is a Rothschild mergers and acquisitions banker. Unlike Macron, who was engineered by the French establishment as the perfect “progressive” wolf to be released among the sheep, Haddad embodies what's left of really progressive Left.

On top of that – unlike virtually the whole Brazilian political spectrum – Haddad is not corrupt. He'd have to offer the requisite pound of flesh to the usual suspects if he wins of course. But he's not out to be their puppet.

Compare Bolsonaro's Trumpism, apparent in his last-minute message before Election Day: “Make Brazil Great Again,” with Trump's Trumpism.

Bolsonaro's tools are unmitigated praise of the Motherland; the Armed Forces; and the flag.

But Bolsonaro is not interested in defending Brazilian industry, jobs and culture. On the contrary. A graphic example is what happened in a Brazilian restaurant in Deerfield Beach, Florida, a year ago: Bolsonaro saluted the American flag and chanted “USA! USA!”

That’s undiluted MAGA – without a “B”.

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Jason Stanley, professor of philosophy at Yale and author of *How Fascism Works*, takes us further. Stanley stresses how “the idea in fascism is to destroy economic politics... The corporatists side with politicians who use fascist tactics because they are trying to divert people’s attention from the real forces that cause the genuine anxiety they feel.”

Bolsonaro has mastered these diversionist tactics. And he excels in demonizing so-called Cultural Marxism. Bolsonaro fits Stanley’s description as applied to the U.S.:

“Liberalism and Cultural Marxism destroyed our supremacy and destroyed this wonderful past where we ruled and our cultural traditions were the ones that dominated. And then it militarizes the feeling of nostalgia. All the anxiety and loss that people feel in their lives, say from the loss of their healthcare, the loss of their pensions, the loss of their stability, then gets rerouted into a sense that the real enemy is liberalism, which led to the loss of this mythic past.”

In the Brazilian case, the enemy is not liberalism but the Workers’ Party, derided by Bolsonaro as “a bunch of communists.” Celebrating his astonishing first round victory, he said Brazil was on the edge of a corrupt, communist “abyss” and could either choose a path of “prosperity, freedom, family” or “the path of Venezuela”.

The Car Wash investigation enshrined the myth that the Workers’ Party

and the whole Left is corrupt (but not the Right). Bolsonaro overextended the myth: every minority and social class is a target – in his mind they are “communists” and “terrorists.”

Goebbels comes to mind – via his crucial text *The Radicalization of Socialism*, where he emphasized the necessity of portraying the center-left as Marxists and socialists because, as Stanley notes, “the middle class sees in Marxism not so much the subverter of national will, but mainly the thief of its property.”

That’s at the center of Bolsonaro’s strategy of demonizing the Workers Party – and the Left in general. The strategy of course is drenched in fake news – once again mirroring what Stanley writes about U.S. history: “The whole concept of empire is based on fake news. All of colonization is based on fake news.”

### **Right Against Left Populism?**

As I wrote in a previous column, the Left in the West is like a deer caught in the headlights when it comes to fighting Right populism.

Sharp minds from Slavoj Zizek to Chantal Mouffe are trying to conceptualize an alternative – without being able to coin the definitive neologism. Left populism? Popularism? Ideally, that should be “democratic socialism” – but no one, in a post-ideology, post-truth environment, would dare utter the dreaded word.

The ascent of Right populism is a direct consequence of the emergence of a profound crisis of political representation all over the West; the politics of identity erected as a new mantra; and the overwhelming power of social media, which allows – in Umberto Eco’s peerless definition – the ascent of “the idiot of the village to the condition of Oracle.”

As we saw earlier, the central motto of Right populism in Europe is anti-immigration – a barely disguised variation of hate towards The Other. In Brazil the main theme, emphasized by Bolsonaro, is urban insecurity. He could be the Brazilian Rodrigo Duterte – or Duterte Harry: “Make my day, punk.”



He portrays himself as the Righteous Defender against a corrupt elite (even though he's part of the elite); and his hatred of all things politically correct, feminism, homosexuality, multiculturalism – are all unpardonable offenses to his “family values.”

A Brazilian historian says the only way to oppose him is to “translate” to each sector of Brazilian society how Bolsonaro's positions affect them: on “widespread weaponizing, discrimination, jobs, (and) taxes.” And it has to be done in less than three weeks.

Arguably the best book explaining the failure of the Left everywhere to deal with this toxic situation is Jean-Claude Michea's *Le Loup dans la Bergerie* – The Wolf Among the Sheep – published in France a few days ago.

Michea shows concisely how the deep contradictions of liberalism since the 18th century – political, economic and cultural – led it to TURN AGAINST ITSELF and be cut off from the initial spirit of tolerance (Adam Smith, David Hume, Montesquieu). That's why we are deep inside post-democratic capitalism.

Euphemistically called “the international community” by Western mainstream media, the elites, who have been confronted since 2008 with “the growing difficulties faced by the process of globalized accumulation of capital,” now seem *ready to do anything* to keep its privileges.

Michea is right that the most dangerous enemy of civilization – and even Life on Earth – is the blind dynamics of endless accumulation of capital. We know where this neoliberal Brave New World is taking us.

The only counterpunch is an autonomous, popular movement “that would not be submitted to the ideological and cultural hegemony of ‘progressive’ movements that for over three decades defend only the *cultural* interests of the new middle classes around the world,” Michea says.

For now, such a movement rests in the realm of Utopia. What's left is to try to remedy a coming dystopia – such as backing a real Progressive Democratic Front to block a Bolsonaro Brazil.

One of the highlights of my Italian sojourn was a meeting with Rolf Petri, Professor of Contemporary History at the Ca Foscari University in Venice, and author of the absolutely essential [\*A Short History of Western Ideology: A Critical Account\*](#).

Ranging from religion, race and colonialism, to the Enlightenment project of “civilization”, Petri weaves a devastating tapestry of how “the imagined geography of a ‘continent’ that was not even a continent offered a platform for the affirmation of European superiority and the civilizing mission of Europe.”

During a long dinner in a small Venetian trattoria away from the galloping selfie hordes, Petri observed how Salvini – a middle-class small entrepreneur – craftily found out how to channel a deep unconscious longing for a mythical harmonious Europe that won’t be coming back, much as petty bourgeois Bolsonaro evokes a mythical return to the “Brazilian miracle” during the 1964-1985 military dictatorship.

Every sentient being knows that the U.S. has been plunged into extreme inequality “supervised” by a ruthless plutocracy. U.S. workers will continue to be royally screwed as are French workers under “liberal” Macron. So would Brazilian workers under Bolsonaro. To borrow then from Yeats, what rough beast, in this darkest hour, slouches towards freedom to be born?

**Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is [2030](#). Follow him on [Facebook](#).**

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## Five Reasons Why the GOP Rushed to Confirm Kavanaugh

After Donald Trump nominated Brett Kavanaugh for the Supreme Court, Trump and

the GOP leadership mounted a full-court press to ram through his confirmation before October 1, the first day of the Court's new term, for five good reasons, says Marjorie Cohn.

**By Marjorie Cohn**

*Truthout*



Why the rush?

The Republican Party and Donald Trump wanted Brett Kavanaugh on the U.S. Supreme Court before the November 6 midterm elections because if the Democrats had achieved a majority in the Senate, there may not have been sufficient votes to confirm him.

But the real hurry to get Kavanaugh confirmed had more to do with the several cases on the Supreme Court's docket: Republicans are hoping to ensure the outcome of several hot-button cases, including those involving double jeopardy, immigration, age discrimination and the Endangered Species Act. Moreover, there is the possibility that the Supreme Court could also decide to take up additional cases affecting gerrymandering, gay and transgender rights, and the separation of church and state.

Below is an in-depth explanation of the top five reasons why the GOP rushed to confirm Kavanaugh in time for him to affect these cases currently on the Supreme Court docket.

## **1) Double Jeopardy**

Potentially most consequential for Trump is the case of *Gamble v. US*, which could affect his ability to pardon his associates, and even himself. On June 4, 2018, Trump tweeted, "I have the absolute right to PARDON myself."

The pardon power, located in Article II, section 2 of the Constitution, says, "The president ... shall have power to grant reprieves and pardons for offenses against the United States, except in cases of impeachment." It limits the president's pardon power to federal offenses.

In *Gamble v. US*, the justices will decide whether prosecuting a person in both state and federal courts for the same crime violates the Double Jeopardy Clause of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, which states, "No person shall ... be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb ..."

For 150 years, the Supreme Court has held that state and federal courts are separate sovereigns, so a person can be prosecuted in both jurisdictions. After the police officers who beat Rodney King were acquitted in state court, they were tried and convicted in federal court.

If the Court follows its long-standing precedent, Trump could exercise his pardon power in federal proceedings but not in subsequent state proceedings for the same offense. Even if Trump were to pardon Paul Manafort, who was convicted of fraud in federal court, New York and Virginia state prosecutors could still bring charges against him.

It is not settled whether a sitting president can be indicted for a criminal offense. A presidential self-pardon is unprecedented. But if Trump were charged in a federal prosecution and he endeavored to pardon himself, the state of New York could then file criminal charges against him regarding the same matter. Under current law, Trump would be powerless to pardon himself in the state case.

If the justices narrow the scope of the Double Jeopardy Clause, however, state authorities would not likely be able to file criminal charges after Trump had exercised his pardon power in a federal case regarding the same matter.

Kavanaugh has said a sitting president should not be “distracted” by having to answer to a civil or criminal case, notwithstanding the Court’s ruling in Clinton v. Jones. He has demonstrated extreme deference to presidential power and would likely vote to limit the criminal exposure of Trump and his associates.

## 2) Immigrants’ Rights

The justices will decide in Nielson v. Preap whether the government can detain immigrants for the duration of their deportation proceedings, without a hearing, because they have past criminal records.

Kavanaugh’s record demonstrates contempt for immigrants’ rights.

In Garza v. Hargan, Kavanaugh wrote in dissent that the majority was creating “a new right for unlawful immigrant minors in US government detention to obtain immediate abortion on demand.” He would have imposed an even longer waiting period on a 17-year-old undocumented immigrant who had fulfilled all state requirements to secure an abortion.

Kavanaugh voted in Agri Processor v. NLRB to annul the results of a union election, charging it was “tainted” by immigrants’ votes.

And in Fogo de Chao v. Department of Homeland Security, Kavanaugh ruled against

granting special visas to Brazilian workers in cases where US workers could perform the same jobs.

Kavanaugh would likely vote to uphold mandatory detention of immigrants in the pending case.

### **3) Age Discrimination**

In *Mount Lemmon Fire District v. Guido*, the Supreme Court will determine whether the Age Discrimination in Employment Act applies to state and local employers who have less than 20 employees.

After the Mount Lemmon Fire District in Arizona laid off John Guido and Dennis Rankin, the district's two oldest employees, the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) concluded that the district had engaged in employment discrimination. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with the EEOC, but since there is a split of authority among the courts of appeals on the parameters of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case.

Kavanaugh's employment decisions favor employers over employees. He would likely rule against Guido and Rankin in the case pending before the Supreme Court.

### **4) Endangered Species Act**

The first case argued before the Supreme Court on October 1 was *Weyerhaeuser Co. v. US Fish and Wildlife Service*. It pits the fate of the dusky gopher frog – an endangered species – against private property rights. The case also raises the issue of when courts should defer to rulings of government agencies.

Under the Endangered Species Act, the US Fish and Wildlife Service is charged with identifying species that are endangered and designating "critical habitats" that are "essential for their conservation."

In this case, the Service designated private property in Louisiana as a "critical habitat" for the endangered frogs. The land is owned by a group of companies, including Weyerhaeuser, which holds a long-term timber lease for the entire area. The designated land contains ephemeral ponds the frogs require in order to breed, even though they don't live there now. The designation could limit the development of the land and result in a substantial loss of profits, as the companies would be required to replace existing trees with different species, cease timber management activities, and permit the land to be managed and populated with frogs.

The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the Service's designation, relying on the long-standing "Chevron deference" – a doctrine requiring that when a law is ambiguous, courts must defer to an agency's reasonable construction of the statute. The question is whether the courts should defer to the Service's designation of "critical habitat" for the frogs.

Courts that have given deference to agency interpretations ensured essential protections, including deferring to:

- The National Labor Relations Board's reasonable determination that live-haul workers, who catch and transport live chickens, are employees entitled to protections of the National Labor Relations Act;

- The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) rule requiring states to reduce emissions from power plants that travel across state lines and harm downwind states;

- The Department of Labor's interpretation of portions of the Black Lung Benefits Act that make it easier for coal miners afflicted with black lung disease to receive compensation; and

- The EPA's revision of regulations under the Toxic Substances Control Act that provide more protection from exposure to lead paint.

Kavanaugh favors narrowing Chevron deference. He would likely rule against the frogs and in favor of the property owners.

## **5) Additional Cases on Gerrymandering and More**

The Supreme Court may also decide to hear cases involving gerrymandering, church-state separation, and employment discrimination against gay and transgender people.

Kavanaugh's record on voting rights does not augur well for his willingness to limit gerrymandering that restricts voting rights.

And Kavanaugh consistently scorns the separation between church and state.

Anthony Kennedy, whom Kavanaugh would replace, wrote the Court's landmark opinions upholding consensual homosexual conduct and same-sex marriage. During his confirmation hearing, Kavanaugh refused to say that *Obergefell v. Hodges*, in which the Court upheld the right of LGBTQ folks to marry, was correctly decided.

Republicans knew Kavanaugh would provide a reliable vote against immigrants, workers, voters, and gay and transgender people. He would deliver a dependable

vote for employers, private property and church-state bonding. The GOP can also rest assured that Kavanaugh will do his best to immunize Trump from criminal liability and enable him to continue their mean-spirited, right-wing agenda.

For these reasons, Trump and the Republicans wanted Kavanaugh to join the Supreme Court immediately.

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## For Italy, Trump Represents a ‘Populist’ Opportunity

The new Italian government is taking comfort in some of Trump’s positions, especially on migration, trade and Russia, says Andrew Spannaus.

**By Andrew Spannaus**  
**in Milan**

*Special to Consortium News*



During the 2016 United States election campaign, most of Italy’s political class and media adopted the standard line about how Donald Trump was a grave threat to the stability of the Western world.

Unlike previous Italian governments, which toed the pro-globalization line, the new government in Rome, supported by the anti-system Five Star Movement and the right-wing League, seems ready to view Trump as an opening, not a disaster.

For the new Italian leaders, Trump’s victory presents a number of opportunities for Italy. It has opened a way to potentially link the

anti-establishment vote in both countries and across Europe by addressing the negative effects of globalization on the middle and lower classes, as well as challenge disastrous “regime change” policies that breed instability.

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte began revealing his hand at the G-7 summit in Charlevoix, Canada in June, shortly after he was chosen by the two populist parties as a compromise figure to lead the government. At the summit, he was the only other leader to support Trump’s call to allow Russia to rejoin the group. Conte also refused to join with other European leaders in railing against the threat of tariffs wielded by Washington to obtain concessions on trade. During Conte’s visit to the White House on July 30, he confirmed this position, seeking ways the two countries could work more closely together.

### **The Libya Disaster**

The first common issue is how to deal with the chaos in Libya. In 2011, French President Nicolas Sarkozy—with the help of then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—successfully convinced President Barack Obama to launch a “humanitarian intervention” that led to the ouster and killing of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. What followed was a period of instability that persists to this day. For Italy in particular, the war has been disastrous on two fronts: it has hit its economic interests and increased human trafficking and the flow of refugees and migrants across the Mediterranean.

Italy is the Western country with the strongest ties to Libya, a former Italian colony. Italy has invested heavily there, including through the construction of transport, military and housing infrastructure in the form of reparations for colonialism under a 2008 agreement with Gaddafi. Ties are strong in the energy sector as well, as the Italian conglomerate Eni manages numerous oil and gas fields there, providing about 20 percent of the company’s overall hydrocarbon production.

When NATO bombs were unleashed in 2011, the French military had included Eni infrastructure among its targets, according to then



Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini. The Italian oil assets were apparently never hit. But armed groups continue to attack oil pipelines and hinder oil exports, including Eni's.

The targeting of Eni infrastructure has led to a belief in Italy that one goal of the Libyan war for France was to wrest control of Italy's Libyan energy resources. Corroboration has come from the Clinton emails published first by WikiLeaks, and subsequently released in part by the State Department itself. Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal sent intelligence assessments regarding Sarkozy's motives in attacking Libya, which included "a desire to gain a greater share of Libya oil production." Other emails show this meant cancelling existing oil concessions (such as those granted to Eni), and reassigning them to France's Total. (Another major goal was to stop Gaddafi from creating a new pan-African currency which would supplant the CFA, the French franc used in French-speaking African countries.)

Italy also has borne the brunt of the increase in immigration passing through Libya. The north African country has become a hub for migrant and refugee passage, with ruthless traffickers exploiting and torturing people who hope to make it to Europe.

The elimination of the Gaddafi regime contributed strongly to the wave of desperate humans trying to make it to Italy, with over 90 percent of them arriving from Libya.

The political result has been strong anti-immigrant sentiment in Italy that contributed significantly to the League's March election success. The new Italian government has sought to block all arrivals not controlled by its coast guard and force other European countries to share the burden of those who are granted entry. This has led to claims that Italy is ignoring the humanitarian needs of desperate people. The Italians counter that European neighbors are refusing to do their part, having closed their borders within Europe despite their obligations under the Schengen Agreement that guarantees free movement of peoples throughout the EU.

Not surprisingly, Trump has offered his support to Conte, praising the Italian government's approach and suggesting that Europe as a whole

should reintroduce strong borders. Trump's support on Libya can be of most help to Italy.

France continues to seek dominance in Western policy on Libya, while Italy aims to regain its leading role in the area, despite being seen as a second-tier power in Europe. After the bilateral meeting at the White House, sources told the Italian press that Italy could count on U.S. support for the Libya conference Conte is organizing in Rome this fall. Trump said: "We recognize Italy's leadership role in the stabilization of Libya and North Africa."

### **To Russia With Love**

Trump and the Italian government also see eye to eye on Russia. Few people in Italy appear to support continuing the sanctions and deploying additional military personnel and equipment toward the East. Many Italians also would seem to welcome a shift away from the New Cold War mentality, but without rupturing the Western alliance.

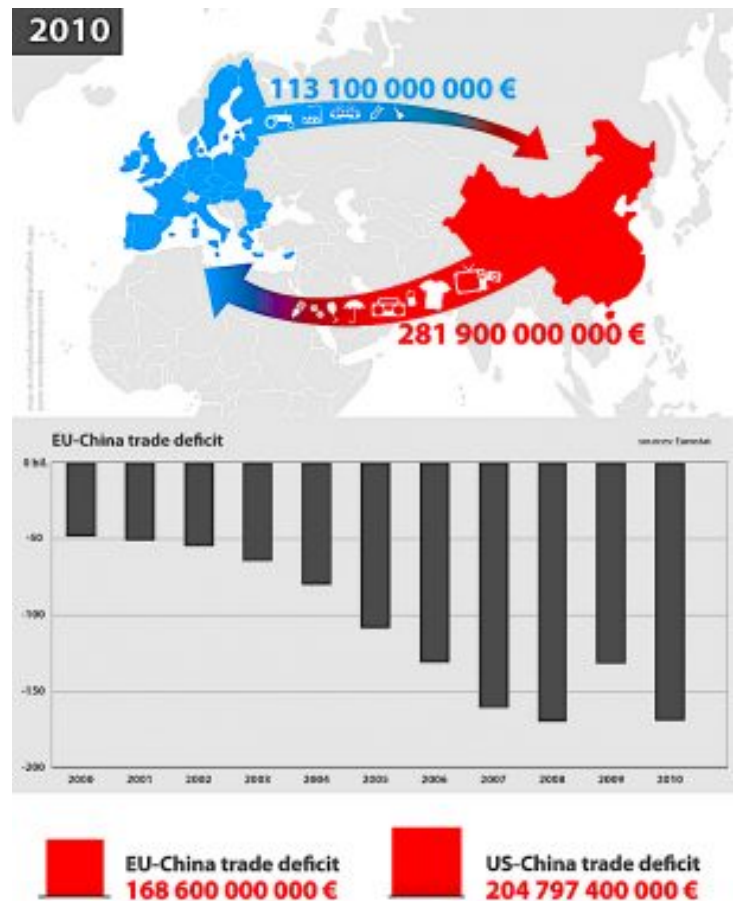
So far, Trump's openness to diplomacy with Russian President Vladimir Putin hasn't brought much actual change. In fact, last month's NATO summit produced a series of commitments for further NATO deployments toward Russia's borders. But Italy's desire for better relations with Russia, without alienating the U.S., is being facilitated by Trump's approach to Moscow.

Conte and Trump skirted the Iran nuclear deal, over which Italy and the U.S. disagree. Italy has long been a major economic partner of the Islamic Republic. Though there is debate within institutions in Rome over the best approach to Iran, there's no question many Italian companies stand to lose from Trump's decision to reimpose sanctions.

### **Trade With China**

On trade with Europe Trump has followed his usual method: talk tough and make threats, hoping to obtain concessions. The first shot was Trump's imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum, prompting Brussels to retaliate on a raft of American imports, including bourbon, motorcycles and numerous food items. Then Trump threatened 20 percent tariffs on European automobiles unless the EU reduced barriers

to U.S. products.



The European Commission responded with a threat of over \$300 billion in tariffs on American goods. Ultimately, a deal was reached in which the two sides committed to “work together towards zero tariffs.” The White House claimed victory after EU concessions in the energy and food sectors. More significantly, Europe appears to be siding with Trump over China on trade.

After his July 30 meeting with Trump, Conte agreed on the need to review the terms of China’s participation in the World Trade Organization. China still is accorded the status of a developing nation, which allows it to maintain higher tariffs and restrictions than its Western counterparts in many sectors. China has made great strides in improving living conditions for its population, but has a long way to go to deal with internal imbalances and inequality.

While the growth of the Chinese middle class represents an important opportunity for European industry, low-cost production from China and other developing nations has cost millions of jobs in developed

countries, supplanting many Western industries during the process of globalization in recent decades.

Italy maintains a competitive advantage in many advanced manufacturing sectors—as do other European countries, led by Germany—but that advantage is waning as other nations reach higher levels of development. Italy must compete on quality, not quantity, overcoming the negative effects of unbalanced competition with China with its low costs and disparities in rules and regulations.

### **Limits of the EU**

The populist Italian government is also seeking a more general challenge to the decades-old neoliberal economic system, which the Trump administration has supported. It is premature to think that Italy and the U.S. have established a new partnership, given uncertainty on both sides. Even on rare occasions when Trump pursues reasonable goals, he is inconsistent and must do battle with many sides in the U.S.—even within his own administration. The Italian government is in a similar situation, with the European establishment putting roadblocks in the way to prevent wholesale changes in economic policy.

Seeking U.S. support outside the confines of the EU is in Italy's interest, but raises concerns among those who look with disdain on Trump and his mistrust of supranational institutions. If EU countries act on their own, the idea of a common foreign policy loses credibility, strengthening the arguments of those who oppose further integration.

The problem is that the pro-EU forces so far have failed to address the issues leading to the populist revolt, whether economic or in foreign policy. Repeating the mantra that European nations must act as a bloc doesn't solve the fundamental problems facing the member states. If Brussels won't face its own failures, more conflict will be inevitable, and the alliance between populist forces will likely continue to grow.

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Italy. He was elected chairman of the Milan Foreign Press Association in March 2018. He has published the books “Perché vince Trump” (“Why Trump is Winning” – June 2016) and “La rivolta degli elettori” (“The Revolt of the Voters” – July 2017).

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## ‘Journey for Justice’ Caravan Launches Cross-Country Trek

The Trump administration is dismantling Temporary Protected Status, a program that protects people from deportations to countries destabilized by war, civil conflict, or natural catastrophe. One group is fighting back.

By **Dennis J Bernstein**



The Trump Administration, with Attorney General Jefferson Beauregard Sessions as its willing lightning rod, is in the process of dismantling key aspects of the United States political asylum program. To that end, the administration has begun to zero in on what is known as Temporary Protected Status (TPS). **TPS** was established by Congress in the Immigration Act of 1990. It’s a humanitarian program that mandates that the U.S. should suspend deportations to countries that have been destabilized by war, civil conflict, or natural catastrophe.

According to the National TPS Alliance, if the Trump administration manages to crush the program, over 450,000 people would face possible deportation, putting them in harm’s way, facing extreme violence and possible death.

In response, a national grassroots coalition of refugee and immigrants rights activists will caravan from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. Those who are directly affected by Trump’s extreme anti-immigrant policy—the TPS recipients themselves—will lead the Journey for Justice Caravan.

**The Caravan** will travel across the country to visit over 50 cities in a span of 12-weeks, kicking off the campaign from Los Angeles on Friday, Aug. 17. The movement to save TPS has greatly expanded in recent days and weeks in response to the Trump administration’s hard-line decision to terminate the life-saving program as part of his ongoing and unrelenting attacks against immigrant

communities from coast to coast.

The caravan will consist of over 50 TPS holders, from various countries that are currently designated TPS. "The goal of the caravan is to lift the collective voices against the termination of TPS," according to a recent press release. "The cruel dehumanization of families at the southern border and against the criminalization of immigrants throughout the United States. For 12 weeks, TPS families will ride a bus across the country, and throughout the way, the justice riders will participate in vigils, community assemblies, know-your-rights sessions, forums, roundtable discussions, concerts, demonstrations, leadership-development activities and meetings with political candidates and elected officials."

The National Day Laborer Organizing Network or NDLON is a key co-sponsor of the national action. NDLON is a coalition of worker-centered organizations across the country that defend day laborers from exploitation and extreme immigration enforcement, help people find jobs and recover wages, and train workers in health and safety.

I spoke with NDLON Executive Director Pablo Alvarado on Aug. 9 in Los Angeles about the reasons for the cross-country action to save TPS. Alvarado knows firsthand and up-close what violence looks like in El Salvador. Alvarado witnessed the death squad murder of his fifth grade teacher, before he fled the violence and the U.S.-funded military death squads that ruled El Salvador with a bloody iron fist. His own relatives in El Salvador continue to face death threats.

**Dennis Bernstein:** How would you assess the current administration's policy toward immigrants and undocumented people from Central America?

**Pablo Alvarado:** This action on the part of the Trump administration is not just an act of cruelty but also of hatred, of bigotry. This president decided to terminate an incredible program that has facilitated the immigration of thousands and thousands of migrants. Today, 30 percent of these people own homes, over 90 percent have jobs. And yet, in an act of cruel racism, this administration has decided to get rid of this program. Their motivation is very clear: to reduce the number of non-white immigrants. They are scared of the changing demographics in our country. This is their way of slowing down the emergence of a new majority. They are no longer just going after undocumented people. They are taking away the papers of people with documents.

**DB:** You are from El Salvador yourself. Could you talk a little bit about the kinds of violence that people fled during this period of U.S.-supported death squads?

**PA:** It is important to note how many times the U.S. has intervened in Central America. The latest case is our recognition of a president in Honduras that 80 percent of the Honduran people don't want. Honduras will continue to be in flames for months to come. Already, death squads are emerging, and activists have been disappeared and tortured. Children are being gassed while protesting. All of this will lead to even greater poverty and feed the cycle of migration. This is the same thing that the United States has done in El Salvador, in Nicaragua, and throughout the region. The widespread gang violence in El Salvador is something that was imported from Los Angeles.

I can tell you that my two brothers, who are teachers and make \$450 a month, are being extorted by gang members. Temporary Protected Status was introduced following the great earthquake, but the reality is that El Salvador has not yet recovered from that natural disaster. The country is still in dire circumstances. There are many villages that subsist on the remittances of family members who are here in the United States. This action by the Trump administration is going to lead to an even larger humanitarian crisis.

**DB:** Do you see this as a form of ethnic cleansing?



**PA:** It is clearly an effort, as I said, to slow down the emergence of a new majority. This has always been the strategy of the people around Trump. They refer to it as attrition through enforcement. This involves making the lives of immigrants so miserable that they will want to pack their bags and leave on their own. Ending TPS is essentially a step in that direction. It is interesting, right-wing pundits say, that it is the Democrats who want to allow these

immigrants to come because they want to turn them into Democratic voters. This is so ridiculous. These people are leaving their countries not to be able to vote here. They are fleeing violence and extreme poverty and persecution. Any country that respects human rights is going to want to provide safe haven to people fleeing such conditions.

**DB:** What kinds of actions are you planning to take now?

**PA:** We recently put together the National TPS Alliance, a coalition of about 50 committees of TPS recipients across the country who have come to Washington several times and are coming again in the first week of February. Prior to this recent decision, they were already doing lobbying work, trying to persuade politicians from both sides of the aisle of the seriousness of their plight. Out of those conversations, four legislative proposals have been introduced to

provide a permanent solution for TPS holders. The administration may want to see TPS fade away in 18 months, but we are determined to make these proposals a reality.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom*. You can access the audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net). You can get in touch with the author at [dbernstein@igc.org](mailto:dbernstein@igc.org).

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## How US Policy in Honduras Set the Stage for Today’s Mass Migration

U.S. policy in Honduras, particularly during the Obama administration, is directly responsible for part of the immigration crisis now gripping the U.S., argues Joseph Nevins.

By Joseph Nevins



Central American migrants – particularly unaccompanied minors – are again crossing the U.S.-Mexico boundary in large numbers.

Under the Obama administration In 2014, more than 68,000 unaccompanied Central American children were apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico boundary. There were more than 60,000 in 2016.

The mainstream narrative often reduces the causes of migration to factors unfolding in migrants’ home countries. In reality, migration is often a manifestation of a profoundly unequal and exploitative relationship between migrant-sending countries and countries of destination. Understanding this is vital to making immigration policy more effective and ethical.

Through my research on immigration and border policing, I have learned a lot about these dynamics. One example involves relations between Honduras and the United States.

### U.S. Roots of Honduran Emigration

I first visited Honduras in 1987 to do research. As I walked around the city of Comayagua, many thought that I, a white male with short hair in his early 20’s,



was a U.S. soldier. This was because hundreds of U.S. soldiers were stationed at the nearby Palmerola Air Base at the time. Until shortly before my arrival, many of them would frequent Comayagua, particularly its "red zone" of female sex workers.

U.S. military presence in Honduras and the roots of Honduran migration to the United States are closely linked. It began in the late 1890s, when U.S.-based banana companies first became active there. As historian Walter LaFeber writes in "Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America," American companies "built railroads, established their own banking systems, and bribed government officials at a dizzying pace." As a result, the Caribbean coast "became a foreign-controlled enclave that systematically swung the whole of Honduras into a one-crop economy whose wealth was carried off to New Orleans, New York, and later Boston."

By 1914, U.S. banana interests owned almost 1 million acres of Honduras' best land. These holdings grew through the 1920s to such an extent that, as LaFeber asserts, Honduran peasants "had no hope of access to their nation's good soil." Over a few decades, U.S. capital also came to dominate the country's banking and mining sectors, a process facilitated by the weak state of Honduras' domestic business sector. This was coupled with direct U.S. political and military interventions to protect U.S. interests in 1907 and 1911.

Such developments made Honduras' ruling class dependent on Washington for support. A central component of this ruling class was and remains the Honduran military. By the mid-1960s it had become, in LaFeber's words, the country's "most developed political institution," – one that Washington played a key role in shaping.

### **The Reagan Era**

This was especially the case during the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. At that time, U.S. political and military policy was so influential that many referred to the Central American country as the "U.S.S. Honduras" and the Pentagon Republic.

As part of its effort to overthrow the Sandinista government in neighboring Nicaragua and "roll back" the region's leftist movements, the Reagan administration "temporarily" stationed several hundred U.S. soldiers in Honduras. Moreover, it trained and sustained Nicaragua's "contra" rebels on Honduran soil, while greatly increasing military aid and arm sales to the country.

The Reagan years also saw the construction of numerous joint Honduran-U.S.

military bases and installations. Such moves greatly strengthened the militarization of Honduran society. In turn, political repression rose. There was a dramatic increase in the number of political assassinations, “disappearances” and illegal detentions.

The Reagan administration also played a big role in restructuring the Honduran economy. It did so by strongly pushing for internal economic reforms, with a focus on exporting manufactured goods. It also helped deregulate and destabilize the global coffee trade, upon which Honduras heavily depended. These changes made Honduras more amenable to the interests of global capital. They disrupted traditional forms of agriculture and undermined an already weak social safety net.

These decades of U.S. involvement in Honduras set the stage for Honduran emigration to the United States, which began to markedly increase in the 1990s.

In the post-Reagan era, Honduras remained a country scarred by a heavy-handed military, significant human rights abuses and pervasive poverty. Still, liberalizing tendencies of successive governments and grassroots pressure provided openings for democratic forces.

They contributed, for example, to the election of Manuel Zelaya, a liberal reformist, as president in 2006. He led on progressive measures such as raising the minimum wage. He also tried to organize a plebiscite to allow for a constituent assembly to replace the country’s constitution, which had been written during a military government. However, these efforts incurred the ire of the country’s oligarchy, leading to his overthrow by the military in June 2009.

### **Post-coup Honduras**

The 2009 coup, more than any other development, explains the increase in Honduran migration across the southern U.S. border in the last few years. The Obama administration played an important role in these developments. Although it officially decried Zelaya’s ouster, it equivocated on whether or not it constituted a coup, which would have required the U.S. to stop sending most aid to the country.

Then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in particular, sent conflicting messages, and worked to ensure that Zelaya did not return to power. This was contrary to the wishes of the Organization of American States, the leading hemispheric political forum composed of the 35 member-countries of the Americas, including the Caribbean. Several months after the coup, Clinton supported a highly questionable election aimed at legitimating the post-coup government.

Strong military ties between the U.S. and Honduras persist: several hundred U.S.

troops are stationed at Soto Cano Air Base (formerly Palmerola) in the name of fighting the drug war and providing humanitarian aid.

Since the coup, writes historian Dana Frank, “a series of corrupt administrations has unleashed open criminal control of Honduras, from top to bottom of the government.”

Organized crime, drug traffickers and the country’s police heavily overlap. Impunity reigns in a country with frequent politically-motivated killings. It is the world’s most dangerous country for environmental activists, according to Global Witness, an international nongovernmental organization.

Although its once sky-high murder rate has declined, the continuing exodus of many youth demonstrates that violent gangs still plague urban neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, post-coup governments have intensified an increasingly unregulated, “free market” form of capitalism that makes life unworkable for many. Government spending on health and education, for example, has declined in Honduras. Meanwhile, the country’s poverty rate has risen markedly. These contribute to the growing pressures that push many people to migrate, raising ethical questions about the responsibility of the United States toward those now fleeing from the ravages U.S. policy has helped to produce.

*This article was originally published on Oct. 31, 2016 on The Conversation.*

**Joseph Nevins received his Ph.D. in Geography from the University of California, Los Angeles. His research interests include socioterritorial boundaries and mobility, violence and inequality, and political ecology; he has conducted research in East Timor, Mexico and the United States-Mexico border region.**

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