

# Ballots or Bullets: Democracy and World Power

By [Prof. James Petras](#)

Global Research, October 31, 2014

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

*The principal reason why Washington engages in military wars, sanctions and clandestine operations to secure power abroad is because its chosen clients cannot and do not win free and open elections.*

*A brief survey of recent election outcomes testify to the electoral unattractiveness of Washington backed clients.*

*The majority of democratic electorates rejects candidates and parties which back the US global agenda: neo-liberal economic policies; a highly militarized foreign policy; Israeli colonization and annexation of Palestine; the concentration of wealth in the financial sector; the military escalation against China and Russia. While the US policy attempts to re-impose the pillage and dominance of the 1990's via recycled client regimes the democratic electorates want to move on toward less bellicose, more inclusive governments, which restore labor and welfare rights.*

*The US seeks to impose the unipolar world, of the Bush Sr. and Clinton era, failing to recognize the vast changes in the world economy, including the rise of China and Russia as world powers, the emergence of the BRIC and other regional organizations and above all the growth of popular democratic consciousness.*

*Failing to convince electorates by reason or manipulation, Washington has opted to intervene by force, and to finance organizations to subvert the democratic electoral process. The frequent resort to bullets and economic coercion when ballots fail to produce the "appropriate outcome testifies to the profoundly reactionary nature of US foreign policy. Reactionary in the double sense of ends and means. Pragmatically, the imperial centered socio-economic policies deepen inequalities and depress living standards. The means to achieve power, the instruments of policy, include wars, intervention, covert operations, are more akin to extremists, quasi-fascist, far right regimes.*

## **Free Elections and the Rejection of US Clients**

US backed electoral parties and candidates have suffered defeats throughout most of the world, despite generous financial backing and international mass media propaganda campaigns. What is striking about the negative voting outcomes is the fact that the vast majority of adversaries are neither anti-capitalist nor 'socialist'. What is equally striking is that all of the US clients are rightist or far-rightist parties and leaders. In other words the polarization is usually between center-left and rightist parties; the choice is between reform or reaction, between an independent or satellite foreign policy.

## **Washington and Latin America: Masters of Defeats**

Over the past decade, Washington has backed losing neo-liberal candidates throughout Latin America and then sought to subvert the democratic outcome.

### **Bolivia**

Since 2005, Evo Morales the center left leader favoring social reforms and an independent foreign policy has won three Presidential elections against Washington backed rightist parties, each time by a greater margin. In 2008, he ousted the US ambassador for intervening, expelled the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in 2008, USAID in 2013 and the Military Mission after foiling an aborted coup in Santa Cruz.

### **Venezuela**

The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and its predecessor have won every Presidential and Congressional election (over a dozen) except one over the past 15 years despite US multi-million dollar funding of neo-liberal opposition parties. Unable to defeat the Chavez led radical-reform government, Washington backed a violent coup (2002), a boss's lockout (2002/3), and decade's long paramilitary attacks of pro-democracy leaders and activists.

### **Ecuador**

The US has opposed the center-left government of President Correa for ousting it from the military base in Manta, renegotiating and repudiating some of its foreign debt and backing regional pacts which exclude the US. As a result Washington backed an abortive police led coup in 2010 that was quickly defeated.

### **Honduras**

During democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya's tenure in office, a center-left President, Honduras sought to pursue closer relations with Venezuela in order to receive greater economic aid and to shed its reputation as a US dominated "banana republic". Washington unable to defeat him at the ballot box, responded by supporting a military coup (2009) which ousted Zelaya and returned Honduras to the US fold. Since the coup Honduras has experienced more killings of popular leaders-200- than any country in Latin America.

### **Brazil**

The center-left Workers Party has won four straight elections against US backed neo-liberal candidates beginning in 2002 and continuing through the 2014 elections. The US propaganda machine, including NSA's spying on President Rousseff and the strategic state petrol company, Petrobras, and the international financial press went all out to discredit the reformist center-left government. To no avail! The voters preferred an 'inclusive' social liberal regime pursuing an independent foreign policy to an opposition embedded in the discredited socially regressive neo-liberal politics of the Cardoso regime (1994-2002). In the run-up to the 2014 elections Brazilian and US financial speculators attempted to strike fear in the electorate by betting against the currency (real) and driving the stock market into a precipitous fall. To no avail. Rousseff won with 52% of the vote.

### **Argentina**

In Argentina a massive popular revolt overthrew the US backed neo-liberal regime of De la

Rua in 2001 .Subsequently, the electorate elected the center-left Kirchner government over the rightist, US backed Menem candidacy in 2003. Kirchner pursued a reformist agenda imposing a moratorium on the debt and combining high economic growth with large scale social expenditures and an independent foreign policy. US opposition escalated with the election of his wife Cristina Fernandez. Financial elites, Wall Street, the US judiciary and Treasury intervened to destabilize the government, after failing to defeat Fernandez's re-election. Extra-parliamentary financial pressures were matched by political and economic support for rightist politicians in preparation for the 2015 elections.

Earlier, in 1976, the US backed the military coup and political terror that led to the murder of 30,000 activists and militants. In 2014 the US backed a "financial coup" as a federal judge sided with vulture funds, sowing financial terror in international markets against a democratically elected government.

## **Paraguay**

President Fernando Lugo was a moderate former Bishop who pursued a watered-down center-left agenda. Nevertheless, he raised issues that conflicted with Washington's extremist agenda, including Paraguay's membership in regional organizations that excluded the US (MERCOSUR). He appealed to the landless rural workers and he retained ties to other Latin American center-left regimes. He was deposed by Congress in 2012 in a highly dubious 'institutional coup', quickly supported by the White House and replaced by a straight-line neo-liberal, Federico Franco with tight links to Washington and hostile to Venezuela.

Globalizing US Threats to Democracy

US subversion of democracy when center-left political formations compete for power is not confined to Latin America - it has gone 'global'.

## **Ukraine**

The most egregious example is the Ukraine, where the US spent over \$6 billion in over a decade and a half. Washington financed, organized, and promoted pro NATO shock troops to seize power against an elected regime (President Yevtushenko) which tried to balance ties between the West and Russia. In February 2014, an armed uprising and mob action led to the overthrow of the elected government and the imposition of a puppet regime totally beholden to the US. The violent putschists met resistance from a large swathe of pro-democracy activists in the Eastern region. The Kiev junta led by oligarch Petro Poroshenko dispatched air and ground troops to repress the popular resistance with the unanimous backing of the US and EU. When the rightist regime in Kiev moved to impose its rule over the Crimea and to break its military base treaty with Russia, the Crimean citizens voted, by a large margin (85%), to separate and merge with Russia.

In both the Ukraine and Crimea, US policy was directed toward imposing by force, the subordination of democracy to NATO's drive to encircle Russia and undermine its democratically elected government.

## **Russia**

Following the election of Vladimir Putin to the Presidency, the US organized and financed a large number of opposition "think tanks", and NGO's, to destabilize the government. Large scale demonstrations by well-funded NGO's were given wide play by all the Western mass

media.

Failing to secure an electoral majority and after suffering electoral defeats in the executive and legislative elections, Washington and the EU, using the pretext of Russian “intervention” in the Ukraine, launched a full scale economic war on Russia. Economic sanctions were enforced in the hopes of provoking economic collapse and a popular upheaval. Nothing of the sort occurred. Putin gained greater popularity and stature in Russia and consolidated its ties with China and the other BRIC countries.

In sum in the Ukraine, Crimea and Russia, facing independent elected governments, Washington resorted to a mob uprising, military encirclement and an escalation of economic sanctions.

## **Iran**

Iran has periodic elections in which pro and anti-western parties compete. Iran has drawn the wrath of Washington because of its support for Palestinian liberation from the Israeli yoke; its opposition to the Gulf absolutist states; and its ties to Syria, Lebanon (Hezbollah) and post- Saddam Hussain Iraq. As a result, the US has imposed economic sanctions to cripple its economy and finances and has funded pro-Western neo-liberal opposition NGO’s and political factions. Unable to defeat the Islamist power elite electorally, it chooses to destabilize via sanctions in order to disrupt its economy and assassinations of scientists and cyber warfare.

## **Egypt**

Washington backed the Hosni Mubarak dictatorship for over three decades. Following the popular uprising in 2011, which overthrew the regime, Washington retained and strengthened its ties to the Mubarak police, military and intelligence apparatus. While promoting an alliance between the military and the newly elected President Mohammed Morsi, Washington funded NGO’s, who acted to subvert the government through mass demonstrations. The military, under the leadership of US client General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, seized power, outlawed the Moslem Brotherhood and abolished democratic freedoms.

Washington quickly renewed military and economic aid to the Sisi dictatorship and strengthened its ties with the authoritarian regime. In line with US and Israeli policy, General Sisi tightened the blockade of Gaza, allied with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf despots, strengthened its ties with the IMF and implemented a regressive neo-liberal program by eliminating fuel and food subsidies and lowering taxes on big business. The US backed coup and restoration of dictatorship was the only way Washington could secure a loyal client relationship in North Africa.

## **Libya**

The US and NATO and Gulf allies launched a war (2011) against the independent, nationalist Libyan government, as the only way to oust the popular, welfare government of Colonel Gadhafi. Unable to defeat him via internal subversion, unable to destabilize the economy, Washington and its NATO partners launched hundreds of bombing missions accompanied by arms transfers to local Islamic satraps, tribal, clan and other violent authoritarian groups. The subsequent ‘electoral process” lacking the most basic political guarantees, fraught by corruption, violence and chaos, led to several competing power centers. Washington’s decision to undermine democratic procedures led to a violent Hobbesian world, replacing a

popular welfare regime with chaos and terrorism.

## **Palestine**

Washington has pursued a policy of backing Israeli seizures and colonization of Palestinian territory, savage bombings and the mass destruction of Gaza. Israel determined to destroy the democratically elected Hamas government has received unconditional US backing. The Israeli colonial regime has imposed racist, armed colonies throughout the West Bank, financed by the US government, private investors and US Zionist donors. Faced with the choice between a democratically elected nationalist regime, Hamas, and a brutal militarist regime, Israel, US policymakers have never failed to back Israel in its quest to destroy the Palestinian mini-state.

## **Lebanon**

The US, along with Saudi Arabia and Israel, has opposed the freely elected Hezbollah led coalition government formed in 2011. The US backed the Israeli invasion in 2006, which was defeated by the Hezbollah militias. Washington backed the rightwing Hariri led coalition (2008 - 2011) which was marginalized in 2011. It sought to destabilize the society by backing Sunni extremists especially in Northern Lebanon. Lacking popular electoral support to convert Lebanon into a US client state, Washington relies on Israeli military incursions and Syrian based terrorists to destabilize Lebanon's democratically elected government.

## **Syria**

Syria's Bashar Assad regime has been the target of US, EU, Saudi and Israeli enmity because of its support for Palestine, its ties with Iraq, Iran, Russia and Hezbollah. Its opposition to the Gulf despotism and its refusal to become a US client state (like Jordan and Egypt) has been another source of NATO hostility. Under pressure from its internal democratic opposition and its external allies, Russia and Iran, the Bashar Assad regime convoked a conference of non-violent opposition parties, leaders and groups to find an electoral solution to the ongoing conflict. Washington and its NATO allies rejected a democratic electoral road to reconciliation. They and their Turkish and Gulf allies financed and armed thousands of Islamic extremists who invaded the country. Over a million refugees and 200,000 dead Syrians were a direct result of Washington's decision to pursue "regime change" via armed conflict.

## **China**

China has become the world's largest economy. It has become a leading investment and trading country in the world. It has replaced the US and the EU in Asian, African and Latin American markets. Faced with peaceful economic competition and offers of mutually beneficial free trade agreements, Washington has chosen to pursue a policy of military encirclement, internal destabilization and Pan Pacific integration agreements that excludes China. The US has expanded military deployments and bases in Japan, Australia and the Philippines. It has heightened naval and air force surveillance just beyond China's limits. It has fanned rival maritime claims of China's neighbors, encroaching on vital Chinese waterways.

The US has supported violent Uighur separatists, Tibetan terrorists and protests in Hong Kong in order to fragment and discredit China's rule over its sovereign territory. Fomenting

separation via violent means results in harsh repression, which in turn can alienate a domestic constituency and provide grist for the Western media mills. The key to the US countering China's economic ascent is political: fomenting domestic divisions and weakening central authority. The democratization which Chinese citizens favor has little resonance with US financed 'democracy' charades in Hong Kong or separatist violence in the provinces.

Washington's effort to exclude China from major trade and investment agreements in Asia and elsewhere has been a laughable failure. The principle US "partners", Japan and Australia are heavily dependent on the Chinese market. Washington's (free trade) allies in Latin America, name Colombia, Peru, Chile and Mexico are eager to increase trade with China. India and Russia are signing off on multi-billion dollar trade and investment deals with China! Washington's policy of economic exclusion miscarried in the first month!

In sum, Washington's decision to pursue confrontation over conciliation and partnership; military encirclement over co-operation; exclusion over inclusion, goes counter to a democratic foreign policy designed to promote democracy in China and elsewhere. An authoritarian choice in pursuit of unachievable Asian supremacy is not a virtue; it is a sign of weakness and decay.

## **Conclusion**

In our global survey of US policy toward democracy, center-left governments and free elections we find overwhelming evidence of systematic US hostility and opposition. The political essence of the "war on terrorism" is Washington's world-wide long-term pernicious assault on independent governments, especially center-left democratic regimes engaged in serious efforts to reduce poverty and inequality.

Washington's methods of choice range from financing rightist political parties via USAID and NGO's, to supporting violent military coups; from backing street mobs engaged in destabilization campaigns to air and ground invasions. Washington's animus to democratic processes is not confined to any region, religious, ethnic or racial group. The US has bombed black Africans in Libya; organized coups in Latin America against Indians and Christians in Bolivia; supported wars against Muslims in Iraq, Palestine and Syria; financed neo-fascist "battalions" and armed assaults against Orthodox Christians in the Eastern Ukraine; denounced atheists in China and Russia.

Washington subsidizes and backs elections only when neo-liberal client regimes win. It consistently destabilizes center-left governments which oppose US imperial policies. None of the targets of US aggression are strictly speaking anti-capitalist. Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina are capitalist regimes which attempt to regulate, tax and reduce disparities of wealth via moderate welfare reforms.

Throughout the world, Washington always supports extremist political groups engaged in violent and unconstitutional activity that have victimized democratic leaders and supporters. The coup regime in Honduras has murdered hundreds of rank and file democratic activists, farm workers, and poor peasants.

The US armed Islamic jihadist and ex-pat allies in Libya have fallen out with their NATO mentors and are at war among themselves, engaging in mutual bloodletting.



Throughout the Middle East, South Asia, North Africa, Central America and the Caucasus wherever US intervention has taken place, extreme right-wing groups have served, at least for a time, as Washington and Brussels principal allies.

Pro EU-NATO allies in the Ukraine include a strong contingent of neo-Nazis, paramilitary thugs and “mainstream” military forces given to bombing civilian neighborhoods with cluster bombs.

In Venezuela, Washington bankrolls terrorist paramilitary forces and political extremists who murdered a socialist congressional leader and dozens of leftists.

In Mexico the US has advised, financed and backs rightist regimes whose military, paramilitary and nacro-terrorist forces recently murdered and burned alive 43 teachers’ college students and are deeply implicated in the killing of 100,000 “other” Mexicans, in less than a decade.

Over the past eleven years the US has pumped over \$6 billion dollars in military aid to Colombia, funding its seven military bases and several thousand special operations forces and doubling the size of the Colombian military. As a result thousands of civil society and human rights activists, journalists, trade union leaders and peasants, have been murdered. Over 3 million small land -holders have been dispossessed.

The mass media cover-up the US option for right wing extremism by describing ruling mass murderers as “center-right regimes” or as “moderates”: linguistic perversions and grotesque euphemisms, are as bizarre as the barbarous activities, perpetrated by the White House.

In the drive for world power, no crime is left undone; no democracy that opposes it is tolerated. Countries as small and marginal as Honduras or Somalia or as great and powerful as Russia and China cannot escape the wrath and covert destabilization efforts of the White House.

The quest for world domination is driven by the subjective belief in the “triumph of the will”. Global supremacy depends entirely on force and violence: ravaging country after country, from carpet bombing of Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya to proxy wars in Somalia, Yemen, Ukraine to mass killings in Colombia, Mexico and Syria.

Yet there are limits to the spread of the “killing fields”. Democratic processes are defended by robust citizens’ movements in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. The spread of imperial backed terrorist seizures of power are stymied by emergence of global powers, China in the Far East and Russia in Crimea and eastern Ukraine have taken bold steps to limit US imperial expansion.

In the United Nations, the President of the United States and his delegate Samantha Power rant and rave, in a fit of pure insanity, against Russia as “the greatest world terrorist state” for resisting military encirclement and the violent annexation of the Ukraine.

Extremism, authoritarianism and political insanity know no frontiers. The massive growth of the secret political police, the National Security Agency, the shredding of constitutional guarantees, the conversion of electoral processes into elite controlled multi-billion dollar charades, the growing impunity of police involved in civilian murders, speaks to an emerging totalitarian police - state inside the US as a counterpart to the violent pursuit of

world power.

Citizens' movements, consequential center-left parties and governments, organized workers, in Latin America, Asia and Europe have demonstrated that authoritarian extremist proxies of Washington can be defeated. That disastrous neo-liberal policies can be reverted. That welfare states, reductions in poverty, unemployment and inequalities can be legislated despite imperial efforts to the contrary.

The vast majority of the Americans, here and now, are strongly opposed to Wall Street, big business and the financial sector. The Presidency and the Congress are despised by three quarters of the American public. Overseas wars are rejected. The US public, for its own reasons and interests, shares with the pro-democracy movement's world-wide, a common enmity toward Washington's quest for world power. Here and now in the United States of America we must learn and build our own powerful democratic political instruments.

We must through the force of reason contain and defeat "the reason of force": the political insanity that informs Washington's 'will to power'. We must degrade the empire to rebuild the republic. We must turn from intervening against democracy abroad to building a democratic welfare republic at home.

The original source of this article is Global Research  
Copyright © [Prof. James Petras](#), Global Research, 2014

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Prof. James Petras](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)