

A Superpower in Chaos

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Global Research, June 02, 2020

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Minneapolis could not have happened at a worse time for the US elites. While violence perpetrated against African Americans by White police officers has happened a number of times before, its occurrence right in the midst of a huge health emergency that has already claimed more than a 100,000 lives and a related massive economic disaster that has robbed 30 million people of their jobs, is truly unprecedented. The mayhem and chaos accompanying the violence have spread to a number of other cities right across the United States of America.

What has sparked outrage among thousands of Americans (and not just those of African descent) was the way in which an unarmed Black civilian, **George Floyd**, suspected of using a counterfeit banknote was killed by a White police officer. The officer had pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for 5 to 9 minutes forcing him to plead that he could not breathe until he went silent and limp. The officer has now been charged with third degree murder though a lot of the protesters are demanding that three other police personnel who were with him at the time of the incident should also be punished.

If there is a lot of anger among thinking, caring Americans about the Floyd incident, it is mainly because they know that discrimination against African Americans is still pervasive and is a manifestation of the larger marginalisation of the community. True, through education there has been some mobility for groups within this minority especially in the decades following the civil rights movement but large segments remain trapped at the bottom of the heap. The current economic devastation has underscored the vulnerability of these segments just as the coronavirus pandemic has also revealed how the poor and disadvantaged in the US and elsewhere are more likely to be the victims of the scourge than others.

That the US is not really able to protect the well-being of the poorer and weaker segments of society is obvious when we look at the situation of yet another minority, the Hispanics. In the last few decades their economic and social burdens have been exacerbated by an irrational fear of their alleged demographic challenge to the White majority. This fear was exploited successfully by candidate **Donald Trump** in the 2016 presidential election as it will be manipulated again in the forthcoming November 2020 election through issues such as building a wall to protect the US's southern border.

There is a third minority, better positioned than the first two, which is also the object of racist attacks from time to time. Broadly classified informally as 'Asians,' they are often equated with Americans of Chinese origin. Since the coronavirus crisis and president Trump's attempt to pin the blame upon China, the harassment of Chinese and Chinese looking Americans has escalated. Indeed, verbal and even physical abuse of members of the

community has been going on for a while given the constant negative targeting of China by some US elites on a variety of issues ranging from trade and technology to alleged human rights violations and suppression of minorities. Though independent research has shown that there is a great deal of distortion and exaggeration in these allegations, they appear to have impacted upon ordinary Americans through community and social media.

Why China is subjected to such vile treatment, it is not difficult to understand. The US elites and a section of the media see the ascendancy of China as a challenge to US dominance and control of the planet, or US hegemony, and are therefore determined to tarnish and subvert China. Other countries which are independent-minded and unwilling to submit meekly to US power are also often targeted. Sometimes, prejudice against a particular religion or specific ethnic communities — this is true of the prevailing attitude of certain segments of American society towards Islam and Muslims — tends to warp inter-community relations.

The US pursuit of global hegemony has affected adversely the rights and interests of millions of Americans in a number of ways. By spending so much on the military — in 2019 it was 732 billion US dollars — and maintaining some 800 military bases encircling the world, the US has sacrificed the essential needs of its people such as well-equipped hospitals and schools. Gross neglect of the economic and social rights of the people has emerged as a tragic reality for everyone to witness when the nation is confronted by a twin health and economic crisis of gigantic proportions.

Indeed, given its wealth, the US failure to enhance the rights of millions of its citizens including the underclass within the White majority is simply criminal. In the domestic arena, as in international politics, it is the height of hypocrisy of the US political elite to present itself as a champion of human rights and democratic rule. In fact, on a number of occasions in international politics — Iran 1953; Chile 1973; Palestine 2006; and Egypt 2013 — the elite had directly and obliquely participated in the suppression of democratic principles.

Today, through the two crises that have overwhelmed the superpower and the righteous anger vented in the streets of the nation by ordinary citizens of all shades — anger that stems from centuries of contempt and scorn heaped upon a people — the truth about the elites' lack of respect for human rights and human dignity is exposed for all to see. Will this lead to some sincere soul-searching especially among young Americans?

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