

The Eleventh Newsletter (2018): Opening The Doors of Hell



Dear Friends,

US President Donald Trump has withdrawn the United States from the multi-state deal on Iran's nuclear energy programme. Two hours after he did so, Israel bombed Iranian assets inside Syria. Forces inside Syria retaliated against Israeli military positions on the Golan Heights, Syrian territory occupied illegally by Israel since 1967. Will the United States and its regional allies – Israel and Saudi Arabia – escalate their warmongering? If they strike Iran, Iran will certainly strike the US bases in Bahrain and perhaps Qatar, while Iran's allies in West Asia will hit Israel, Saudi Arabia and US troops in the region. The doors of hell, already ajar in the region, will open wider.

Please read my report for *Alternet* on the withdrawal and the auguries of war. It is **here**.

My report ends with the following assessment:

All eyes are on Moscow. Israel's leader Benjamin Netanyahu has flown today to Moscow on a lightning trip. He says he is in Moscow to talk about Syria, but in fact he will be asked about U.S. and Israeli intentions against Iran. Russia relies on Iran for its project in Syria. Moscow cannot afford a U.S.-Israeli war on Iran. Would the Russians send in missile defence systems as a message to the United States? Would Russian military aircraft land in Tehran as they did in Damascus in September 2015? Would the Russian shield around Iran muffle the American drums of war?

The question of Moscow is central to the events in West Asia. When Russia intervened in Syria in September 2015, it stopped any possibility of regime change in that country. Will Russia (or even China) intervene to prevent a war against Iran?

There is bewilderment in our understanding of the aggression that comes from Washington against Iran. But this is not merely Trump or Bush, but a general policy followed by the United States. Obama is being praised for the 'Iran deal,' but it was under Obama that a Japanese and Honduran government was brought down. Each US administration has aggressively intervened to try and shape the world in its interests.

This extra-territorial use of violence is nothing other than imperialism, a term that sends a shiver through well-educated readers. They assume that this is merely the sloganeering of an anachronistic radical. How else to explain this run of wars that began against Panama in 1989 and runs to the present? At *Newslick*, I have a short essay on contemporary imperialism. You can read it **here**.

The picture above is from one of my favourite Iranian American artists – Shiva Ahmadi. The picture is called *The Wall*.



The essay at *Newslick* ends with a consideration of Venezuela. The Venezuelan people go to the polls on May 20. At **Tricontinental**, our fourth dossier is on the Venezuelan election. Written by our office in Buenos Aires, with inputs from across the continent, the dossier is a fine document that lays out the main issues that confront Venezuela. You can download it **here** (it is free).

The dossier is illustrated by photographs taken by the Brazilian photographer Rafael Stedile. They depict the Venezuelan people as they go about their business, including the business of politics. We, at **Tricontinental**, hope that the Venezuelan people will be allowed to exercise their franchise. Economic sabotage and political intimidation has taken a toll. It does not help that outside powers continue to suggest that the elections will be fraudulent. There is little evidence for this, not in past elections or in the future. Such rumours serve to dent the morale of the people. They are themselves deeply undemocratic.



Meanwhile, south of Venezuela, in Brazil, Lula remains in prison. He is still the front-runner in Brazil's October election. Our **Tricontinental** office in *São Paulo* is currently preparing the fifth dossier, which will be on the Brazilian elections. I look forward to that.

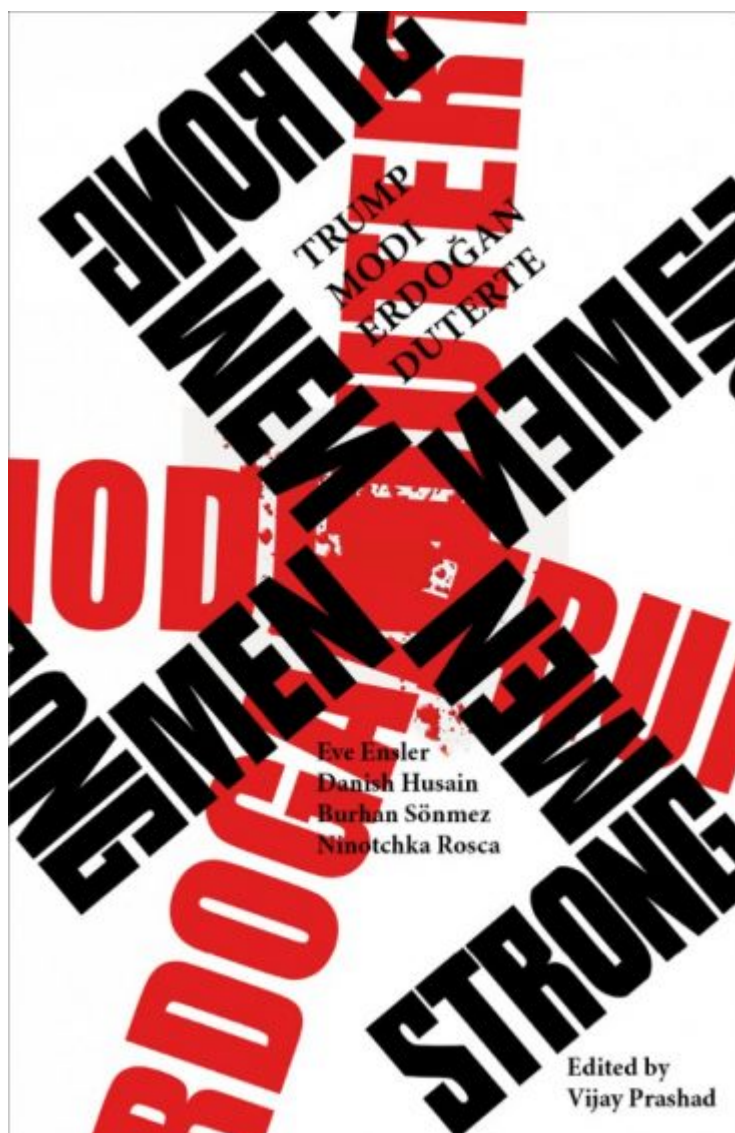
I was in *São Paulo* ten days ago for a meeting of our **Tricontinental** offices in Buenos Aires and São Paulo. While there, I took some time off to visit two of the city's wonderful museums as well as was fortunate to talk to João Pedro Stedile – one of the leaders of the MST (Landless Workers Movement) – about his family history, the MST's agricultural work and Lula. You can read my *São Paulo* diary, which begins with Lula and ends with grape juice, in the current issue of *Frontline* [here](#).

The picture above is by Maria Auxiliadora de Silva, an Afro-Brazilian artist who died young but left behind an incredible legacy.



I write to you from South Africa, where there continue to be protests of one kind or another against the narrowness of economic policy. People want homes and lives. They do not want rhetoric alone. The South African Trade Union Federation led a major strike against terrible policies by this government against strikes. You can read about those strikes in urban areas [here](#) and in rural areas [here](#). Both stories are written by Dennis Webster of *New Frame*, the new periodical that covers movements in South Africa.

At the other end of the African continent, in Egypt, the situation remains intolerable. I remember well the confidence produced by the mass unrest after January 25, 2011 in the country. That energy is now largely pilfered by a historical dynamic that has swung backwards into the darkest time of Hosni Mubarak. Amnesty International has released an important report on the deplorable situation in Egypt's prisons, which you can read [here](#). It is a metaphor for the state of the country's political aspirations (the Egyptian government has responded to Amnesty [here](#)).



Planetary war edges across our horizon. Yet the extraordinary courage of ordinary people must never be underestimated. It is what gives us hope. On May 8, Turkey's strongman Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that if the people of Turkey said *tamam* (enough), then he would resign. Over a million people took to social media to say *tamam*. Enough of that strongman (there is a wonderful essay by the Turkish novelist Burhan Sonmez about Erdoğan in our LeftWord volume called *Strongmen*, with Eve Ensler on Trump, Danish Husain on Modi, Ninotschka Rosca on Duterte and Burhan on Erdoğan. You can order it [here](#)).

Enough of that strongman. And of the others, including Trump. *Tamam* to Trump.

Warmly, Vijay.