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This paper argues that the decline of the US empire produces specific forms of criminogenic blowback, both domestically and internationally, comprising a profile of criminality. This profile may be extrapolated from the causes and conditions of impending collapse. In transacting its foreign policy, the US has deployed rogue proxies and their terrorist violence. This has produced a blowback of illegitimacy and disorder. Specific expressive and instrumental crimes are expected to be observed. Instrumental crimes are characterised by the norm-stretching of sovereign executive actions aimed to maintain power. Elites in a failing empire become more insular and besieged, demanding a less democratic and liberal environment for speech and political assembly, thus producing new categories of political crime. Expressive crimes represent the street level take-up of the enemy threat nomenclature. Domestically, there are crimes associated with the unease of a failing ideological and economic enterprise, including hate crimes and accelerationist violence associated with ethno-nationalistic and settler colonial prejudices.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Gross economic inequality, militarism, repression, political corruption and insular nationalistic prejudices are associated with the crumbling edifice of empire. In the US in 2025, the persecution and arrest under anti-terrorism laws of popular political dissidents, a rising infant mortality, a bloated and overstretched military, a losing grip on domination of the international monetary system (the rise of BRICS+ and the

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation¹), a national debt juggernaut and the evacuation of meaningful civil society protections is evidence that the US is in a state of decline (Gordon 2021). Having fallen from this zenith, the US is not ‘going gently into that good night.’ It is relying, on punitive and coercive domestic and overseas measures, including a world-beating prisoner count (Statista 2025) draconian laws against speech and assembly (Keck 2024), so-called soft-power measures (sanctions, bribes, terrorism listings), and the threat of forceful regime change abroad (Jervis 2016) to balance the threat of emergency measures or martial law at home.

Imperialism refers to the relative intent and capacity by a state to extend power and dominion by economic or political levers beyond its borders and across world regions. The US seized the reins of the post WWII global order by means of moral authority or persuasion, its domination over international and transnational financial, justice and security instruments, its relatively superior economic heft and its ready resort to covert and overt force. At the zenith of its influence it drew fully on these instruments. Currently, the US empire is confronting or avoiding confrontation with its declining authority, and many scholars have speculated on how that decline will be registered (Zaalberg and Lutikhuis 2022). Is there a particular array of structural and cultural indicators that may be associated with regime and empire retrenchment, decline or collapse? What are the criminogenic features of a declining

¹ BRICS refers to an intergovernmental economic alliance consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, comprising just under 40% of the world’s GDP and 46% of the world’s population (Kanter and Jetschgo-Morcillo 2003); the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation refers to a Eurasian political, economic and security alliance established by China, Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan covering 42% of the world’s population.

empire in the 2020s and how might they manifest in the US and the West?

Increasingly, analysts review the West's foreign policy choices as a version of stratified political and economic imperialism in which the narrow, immediate interests of a well-positioned donor class is finessed to support interventions (Overton 2004). Liberal interventionists support interested economic elites by loosely justifying oligarchic advantage on slogans connected to liberal democratisation. The justificatory rhetoric includes reference to a cultural (eg LGBTQI+), economic (eg. US-centric trade) and political (eg. Western neoliberalism) worldview. The aim and/or effect is to support a supremacist narrative, and this is found in the documents of USAID, NED, the World Bank and the IMF, among other agencies (Blum 2004).

Since the 1990s, under the hypocrisy of human security and Responsibility to Protect (R2P), Western regimes have utilised a 'power politics that wears the garb of humanity and morality' (Moses 2024). The conflict between Israel and Palestine, Israel and Lebanon and increasingly all of Israel's neighbours has forced the US to be exposed as opposed to human rights at the UN (HRW 2025) which is also stripping it of international legitimacy (Center for Constitutional Rights 2024; Human Rights Watch 2009). Traumatized by generations of European and American colonial violence, the global south and east is today more unified in its opposition to US power and the colonial-settler, ethno-nationalist states it supports (Scott-Smith 2020; Moses 2024).

Also supportive and generative of this version of economic imperialism is elite circulation in the MICIMATT complex. The 'military-industrial-congressional-intelligence-media-academic-think tank' complex is an acronym coined by Ray McGovern (McGovern 2020) to update the one uttered in Eisenhower's farewell address warning. A narrow supremacist narrative is shared amongst careerist elites in these sectors, whose opinions are made powerful by invitation across private and public positions. Entry depends upon agreement with basic regime supportive

nostrums. Defence contractors, media pundits, political, corporate, academic, and intelligence experts, rise to prominence in a careerism that depends on and supports subservience to a supremacist establishment narrative (Chomsky 2008). For the US and the West, this narrative involves an Atlanticist vision of US-European relations that is asserted through NATO securitisation (Sachs 2023). It depends upon the productive sanction and demonisation of near-peer powers in Russophobia, Islamophobia, and Sinophobia. Drawing on Durkheimian and Marxist thought analysts have pondered tectonic ruptures as the consequence of macro-economic, cultural and economic phenomena (Courpasson, Younes and Reed 2021; Panitch and Gindin 2004). Sociologists and criminologists have reviewed crime and disorder as a reflection of structural and cultural determinants under Western late modernity (Garland 1993; Young 1999; Quinney and Sheldon 2018). Where finance capitalism depends upon the unsustainable practices of a financialised bubble economy and policies are structured on the metrics of neoliberal doctrine (Hudson 2010; Baker 2009), the acquisition and distribution of valued resources more or less follow on from co-requisite social or civilisational norms (Weber 2013; Elias 2011; Shvets 2024). In this regard, empires are conspiracies of expropriation and they configure the modern national security, (Neocleous 2006), surveillance (Lyon 2001) or penal or carceral state (Pratt 2001; Foucault 1979) beneath circumlocutions to mask increasingly inequitable and undemocratic expropriations. What has lately been exposed is a fatal rupture between the actual behaviour of the West and its normative foundation in a principled engagement with the legacy of the Enlightenment (Derrida 2003; Said 2023).

That being said, there is a notable absence in criminology of treatments that anticipate the specific cluster of crime that attends the decline of empire. In this paper, I will examine some obvious manifestations. The first consideration is perhaps the most glaring. For the most part, empires do not 'go gently into that good night;'

they ‘rage against the dying of the light.’² The means of expansion are overstretched and not well-suited to conservation. As elite profligacy becomes rampant, defrocked empire elites resort to non-normative means in their efforts to retain power and control and are disgraced. Relatedly, declining authority produces a diminishing capacity to keep the civilised garden of empire free from the criminal carnage it produces at its (post-) colonial edges. Blowback, instead of being held at bay, intensifies and spreads into, and upsets the core distinctions of value, beginning with that between the soldier, brigand, mercenary and terrorist. Third, alongside the rise of economic and political crime, there is a rise in expressive crimes of violence.³

II. DISGRACEFUL DECLINE

There is an argument that states may be prudent, retrench and decline gracefully. They ‘renounce risky ties, increase reliance on allies or adversaries, draw down their military obligations, and impose adjustments on domestic populations’ (McDonald and Parent 2011: 9). However, the prediction that even great powers facing acute decline are ‘less likely to escalate militarised interstate disputes’ (10) depends on the contention that the forces of conservation are greater than the forces of radicalisation. In any case, there is another argument that the bigger they are, the more gracelessly they fall. There may be an insufficient cohort of comparable others,⁴ but there may be common properties characterising regime collapse.

The hegemonic empire sees preventative war as the ‘primary means of resolving’ the problem of acute decline (Gilpin 1983: 194). It confronts its receding power and influence with self-deception and efforts to upset or disorder the table (for

others sitting at it), up to and including violence (Johnson 2000; Wertheim 2020). For example, in Rome there was a decline in civic virtue. This was expressed in increases in corruption, elite profligacy and extreme, expressive violence (Gibbon and Milman 2003). A culture of violence - including that from gladiatorial entertainment and arbitrary, discretionary and spectacular punishments (which may be associated with blowback) - turns from expressing awesomeness to telegraphing desperation. Scholars have noted that the Dutch empire was involved in exceptionally bloody wars of decolonisation in Indonesia during its violent end (Zaalberg and Luttikhuis 2022). The Belgian empire was bloody both in its colonisation and decolonisation (Thomas and Thompson 2021). With respect to the British empire, a relatively peaceful decline was consequent to the overstretching of its capacity to continue to govern over nearly a quarter of the world’s population. It was drained of resources during WWII, wilted under decolonisation movements and could not maintain the pace of the superior military and industrial powerhouses of the US and Soviet Union. It nevertheless has sought to maintain a particularly vicious security service as a legacy of its legacy (Machon 2005).

The decline of the Soviet Union was sudden but not necessarily less disgraceful. Its collapse was associated with the weakening of communism as an ideological and economic bedrock. Its disintegration left in its wake the oligarchs, a class of extremely wealthy elites, and an environment of profligate lawlessness. Its demise was attended by skyrocketing crime rates, the emergence of the Russian mafia, protection rackets and cartels, and the pilfering of formerly public resources by corrupt industry captains and politicians (Shelley 1995; Holmes 2012).

In the last two decades, scholars have pondered the rise of violence within and between states under a Western rubric (Pinker 2007). Is liberal civilisation a distinctive potpourri of social and political malaise (Naudé 2024)? Of interest is liberal interventionism’s disconnect from universal values (Cohen 2007; Moses 2024). The apocalyptic spectacle of destruction in Gaza, in

² Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used this phrase to end a speech in front of the United Nations General Assembly on September 27, 2024 to proclaim his country’s existential right to persist in what Abdo (2024) and many others refer to as a genocide, and/or the forced displacement of the Palestinians.

³ This argument draws from, and offers some modest updating in application of, Chalmers Johnson’s ground breaking work (Johnson 2000).

⁴ McDonald and Parent (2011) analysed 18 cases.

which daily horrors of murdered mothers and children are shared on social media throughout a long campaign of extermination, has made some analysts wonder if they are witnessing in this disgraceful carnage the kind of spectacular violence that also attended the decline of Rome.⁵

Relative US decline is also reflected in various international and transnational institutions, where US moral authority is diminishing. The meta-institution of the global rules-based order, also referred to as the international system, is predicated on universal human rights. It has been central to the claims-making of US hegemony. The relative decline of the United Nations, and the UNSC in particular, is a consequence of the legitimate charge that the United States, once its most ardent supporter, now acts with transparent hypocrisy, choosing narrow foreign policy interests over the equal application of international law norms in that and other bodies. The United States has over the past three or four decades, and particularly in its defense of Israel (Moses 2024), been stewarding over the decline of human rights institutions. It has chosen instead to view the UN as an arm of soft power manoeuvring. It has come to depend on a warfare economy (Naudé 2024: 2) and does not avoid the chaos and disorder of regime change wars (Blum 2004; Johnson 2000). It is universal rights that are suffering an end times moment (Hopgood 2015). There is a diminishment in material and ideational support for humanitarian action and the 'entire edifice of international humanitarian law' (Moses 2024) as the post WWII and post Cold War treaties, tribunals and institutions are evacuated of capacity.

III. DIMINISHING AUTHORITY AND BLOWBACK

If war is politics by other means, the crimes of war are not merely foreign policy choice-making. They impact on domestic preferences and interests. Much street crime may be associated with war and conflict that is traceable to the West's

⁵ Israel is not the US, but Israel's actions are directly supported by the entirety of the US political ruling class (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006), which has repeatedly expressed support 'without limits' (Walt 2024).

economic imperialism, its foreign and militarised interventionism and its war economy. Post-colonial economic practices or aspirations produce a non-normative and criminogenic circulation of people and goods. In the criminogenesis of the security and surveillance state there is blowback of various types: (a) domestic unrest and crime, (b) refugee and migration crises and phobias, (c) ideological radicalization (disillusionment with established institutions), (d) psychological trauma in war veterans.

As a declining regime loses its dominance of the instruments of authority, normative cohesion or consensus between institutional dimensions (legal, political, cultural) begins to fray. Dissent builds against the supremacist position; there is populist and government suppression of strong political anti-establishment counter-narratives. At the same time, assimilation of demonised enemies produces anti-immigration prejudices. In response to this, and as was on full display after 9/11, there is an increasing reliance on counter-immigration, -terrorism, -disinformation and -hate or bias crime legislation. Refugee and immigrant pressure on infrastructure (housing, transportation, public order, border services, social services) can also produce self-help and vigilante responses (Black 1980), as well as feeding ethnic divisions in street gangs and their crimes. Veterans of arguably illegitimate regime change wars may suffer from moral injury. Significant violent behaviour (MacManus et. al. 2015) and some recent domestic terrorist incidents are by veterans - eg. Timothy McVeigh.

In its current interface with the United Nations, the US has abandoned the so-called rules-based order (Moses 2024). Political leaders and parties resistant to US direction (or control) face US sponsored sanctions (Lavrov 2021). Regarding allocation of sovereign national resources and the posture of their diplomatic relations and connections, resistance to US authority invites regime change and influence operations (information and disinformation operations and psyops). These are delivered through soft (NED, USAID, World Bank, IMF, etc) and hard (CIA) measures (Blum 2004). During the Cold War

alone, the number of CIA-sponsored coups was 64 (O'Rourke 2019). Since the Cold War, there have been proportionately at least as many, with the total portion of US military interventions since 1999 being one third of the total since 1776 (Military Intervention Project, 2024). There were 251 military interventions between 1991 and 2022 (Military Intervention Project, 2024).

Blowback from US sponsored incursions or interventions in Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, to name a few, have spawned waves of refugees across Europe. This has put an assimilation burden on cultural and social resources in countries as far away as Sweden, England and Denmark. Where the pressure on foreign governments is short of covert operations, the policy preference that the US insists upon (disallowing peer or near-peer competitors to make gains) is capable, if not likely, of producing negative economic and social impacts in the target country, and this blows back across the region, producing human security crises that task international humanitarian institutions (e.g. Lee et al. 2023). At the time of writing, the US support for Israel's genocidal incursions on the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank (Nijim 2023) is producing a firestorm of outrage. Scenes of horrific violence meted out by the IDF are live-streamed daily, not only ensuring a generational hatred toward Israel and the US among a growing diaspora of displaced Palestinians, but a popular groundswell that is unseating the US and the West as champions of human rights. It also obligates alacrity in their absorption of concussion waves of refugees. In short, regime change operations produce blowback (Grier 2021; Kennard 2015).

The failure of that assimilation is associated with a vivification of militancy in restive nationalistic subpopulations. The reintegration into civilian life of combatants participating in regime change related conflicts is an attempt to tame the martialised disposition. Given how such conflicts invite unethical incursions on innocent, non-combatant populations, the moral injury to returning combatants tasked to implement that program is known to incur various maladies that

impact on domestic order (de Lint and Praino 2021).

The US economy under finance capitalism is another aspect of regime decline that is hypothesised to invite criminogenesis. In a variety of manifestations, the social and economic tumult that attends a declining industrial base puts unbearable pressure on the contradiction between discourses of wealth in liberal democratic parlance (which celebrates equality of opportunity) and the practices of wealth concentration (decreasing available through ascription (Piketty 2014)) and the availability of attractive labour opportunities.

A further cluster of criminogenesis consequent to regime decline concerns the release of restraints on elites. The bellicosity of a declining empire is a product of the interest to create precarious resources for exploitation by well-positioned political elites. There is a large body of criminology concerned with the ravages of Western colonialism, inclusive of genocide, widespread ecological destruction, the corruption of regulatory systems and the immobilisation of national resource (and other) stewards in target markets. According to a strong vein of criminology, elite actors in industry and government force the regulatory environment (rather than vice versa). This produces relative impoverishment of the public or common interest in political representation (eg. Tombs and Whyte 2003). This is elite impunity, and it is exacerbated in regime decline conditions, at least according to some analysis and previous evidence (Gilens and Page 2014; the Security Conference 2224). For instance, the war in Gaza is a settler colonial campaign by a well-financed elite within the US political donor class (The New Republic 2024), and the most widely contemporaneously publicised genocide in history is conducted with impunity (Abdo 2024).

For many observers, there is a resurgence of impunity associated with crime by elites (Pearson and Wang 2024). Financial elites circulate between Wall Street and regulatory agencies, including the Fed. There is a thesis that financial bubbles recur cyclically in capitalist economies as

an inherent feature (QUCEH 2020). Central banks, including the Federal Reserve, have pursued expansionary monetary policies that may fuel asset bubbles. Well-positioned elites are endowed with access to complex financial instruments and privileged information that support their risk transfer and obfuscate accountability under the ‘too big to fail’ mentality.

Elite impunity is supported through the governance of information technology. Technology is having an impact 3000 times as great as the industrial revolution (Shvets 2024) and general artificial intelligence is one of the technologies that has helped to disintermediate capital and labour (Shvets 2024). There is an intense preoccupation with social and alternative media in disinformation management as elite guidance of the ideological apparatus attempts to rhetorically extinguish the gap between popular and elite interests.

IV. A PREDICTIVE PROFILE OF END TIMES CRIME

Most current research on the decline of regimes focuses on the benefits to failing authoritarian or fascist states of democratisation and the support of civil society institutions (e.g. Jara 2014; Biggs and Carpenter 2009; Teorell 2010). As the material instruments of the US and West are increasingly deployed to buttress the ‘bad bets’ of its supremacist ideological discourse and pooled in bonanza offerings to favoured monopolists, they are detached from democratic or popular moorings. The general thesis is that the decline of the US is characterised by an accelerating diminishment in the efficacy of the production, exchange and distribution discourses that uphold a liberal capitalist political economy.

A declining empire criminogenesis is expressed in political, cultural and economic domains. As the US governing elite detaches from democratic feedback it strips equity into less productive and more arcane endeavors. This weakens the efficacy and legitimacy of its institutions and international reputation. As the US polity enters relative decline other powers centres rise, domestically

and globally, to challenge doctrine and practice. There are at least two elements of the response.

First, there is the attempt to finesse the levers of law, expertise and evaluation so that the relatively privileged position may be maintained. As expectations of service and resource advantages become perilous, intersectional elites who dominate the means of knowledge and accountability coalesce on common ground and batten down the hatches. Lawfare is a mild version of this result, but it is otherwise simply a return to a power competition among self-interested states. Elites are also preserved in authoritarian protections under the rubric of national security exceptions. These attempt to neutralise knowledge, speech and virtual and in-person assembly. Escobar’s idea that the United States and the West are now engaging in a ‘war of terror’ after its so-called ‘war on terror’⁶ is descriptive of a declining appetite to appeal to a human rights audience. Unleashed under weakened constitutional or justice protections, the vitality of the nation-state is drawn to illegalities in trade practices, the creative repression of internal and external political foes, the abuses of mass incarceration (Stiglitz 2013: 1) and a warring belligerence toward real and invented foes.

The consequence is a highly polarised society. As dysfunction in domestic governance is feared as signalling internal weakness, elite capacity to overwhelm a multiplicity or multitude (Hardt and Negri 2004) diminishes. A rise in nationalism and its expression in extremist or accelerationist violence is expected and observable.

As other power centres emerge and consolidate, the relative impotence of soft power efficacy, particularly following undemocratic foreign policy decisions, is a potential indicator of US imperial desperation. The US maintains significant military superiority globally, but prolonged conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, Iraq and Afghanistan strain resources and public support. At home and abroad, the US ‘weaponises’ economic levers to deploy and outlaw business and financial practices in a continuously weakening attempt to

⁶ <https://x.com/RealPepeEscobar/status/1836838805309186186>.

maintain control over the levers of monetary influence. Even before the Trump administration turbocharged economic warfare, in 2024 the US was imposing three times as many sanctions on adversaries than any other country (Stein and Cocco 2024).

4.1 A Rise in Political Crime Categories and Incidence

Political crime is defined as a betrayal of the political order or a challenge to political authority (Ingraham 2023: xi-xii). Forms of state-sanctioned or systemic criminality include human rights abuses, incidence of political crime or offences and the corruption of government offices and officials.

a. Human rights abuses:

- The use of torture and extraordinary rendition in the 'War on Terror' (Sadat 2006)
- Support for terrorism and terrorists in regime change operations (most recently Ahmad al-Sharaa of Syria) (Amnesty International 2025):
 - Civilian casualties in interventions like Iraq, Afghanistan, Gaza and Lebanon have raised concerns about adherence to international humanitarian law (UNRWA 2024; UNHCR 2025).
 - The extensive network of US military bases worldwide (estimated at over 800): associated with various human rights issues including; environmental damage and health risks to local populations (Vine 2019), incidences of impunity for sexual assault by US personnel against local civilians (Edwards 2021), and displacement of indigenous communities (Vine 2009).
- US interventions that bypass UN Security Council approval and/or obstruct UN accountability:
 - weaken the international legal framework for human rights protection (Human Rights Watch 2025).
 - Obstruction of UN investigations into its own potential human rights violations (Center for Constitutional Rights 2024; Human Rights Watch 2009).

Concerning political crime and violence, in the middle east the US is sponsoring the most violent war on the most excessively terroristic (and settler-colonial) grounds (Bacon 2018) in support of its most favoured ally, Israel (Bassil 2009; Choonara 2024). According to former US ambassador Chas Freeman, Israel is founded on and perpetuates itself through settler-colonial terrorism (Freeman 2024; Amira 2021). The spectacular asymmetry between combatants is reminiscent of the Roman gladiatorial games. As Israel escalates its violence, and avoids enacting UN resolutions with respect to Palestine, it urges the US into more egregious exceptions from international law (Moses 2024).

b. Political crime:

- High-profile charges and/or detentions of political 'dissidents':
 - eg. Scott Ritter, Medea Benjamin, Max Blumenthal). (Blumenthal 2025a; Tine 2024; Benjamin 2024).
- The criminalisation of anti-government speech and assembly:
 - US University administrators responded to 2024 anti-Israel protests by adopting anti-speech and assembly laws that define anti-Zionism with anti-semitism (Benedict 2024).
 - Betar US, the Anti-Defamation League and Canary Mission are among the pro-Zionist organisations that develop 'deportation lists' of pro-Palestinian activists that they have shared with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, White House homeland security adviser, Stephen Miller, and attorney general, Pam Bondi, among others (Betts 2025).
- Shadow banning or de-platforming or suspension of alternative political opinion:
 - The Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) collaborates with Israel to target and deplatform or shadow ban pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist online activities (Blumenthal 2025b).
 - The GrayZone itself has been targeted (Klarenberg and Blumenthal 2022).

It is at least a plausible hypothesis based on the above that as the declining empire reaches beyond its capacity, it exposes the centre to blowback from the margins or periphery. If there is a rise in political crime incidence, it references an existential anxiety concerning an anti-establishment threat at the ideological centre.

c. The influence of deep state machinations or deep crime on regime normativity and legacy.

One area of political crime that requires further mention is referred to variously as deep politics (Scott 1993), parapolitics (Wilson 2016) or apex crime (de Lint 2021). In this domain of activity, actors are guided by deniable executive orders that manifest a sovereign interest floating within and out of secure compartmented intelligence operations. According to a growing body of opinion, the 'deep executive' of the US government instrumentalises proxies in a competition over strategic direction and power resources. It is not only involved in foreign interventions, but also domestic domains. Strategic decision-making can be pushed along by events that are chosen and cultivated for their capacity to push or move public and institutional opinion-makers in a preferred direction. As 'intelligence crimes,' matters of concern are shaped by national security interest. The activity is covered by the impunity of the sovereign and a prohibition on publicity (de Lint 2021). Under a forensic sarcophagus a 'deep politics' crime scene is impenetrable and unreviewable. Such events are whitewashed by inquiries that are guided by carefully selected commissioners. Historical and recent candidate deep events:

- JFK and RFK assassinations (Youvan 2025)
- 9/11 (Scott 2017)
- Nord Stream pipeline bombing (Hersh 2023)

Over time and due in no small part to its lies and deception concerning the most serious imaginable crimes against the American people, successive US governments accrue a credibility problem. Confidence in US institutions is historically low at 28% (Brenan 2024). 65% of Americans think the Kennedy assassination involved a conspiracy

(Brenan 2022). Where the most significant political events involve, or in essence constitute, political crime, the centre of civil society is also weakened and made incapable of providing a strong centripetal force to hold the periphery and prevent implosion.

4.2 A Rise in Economic Crime Incidence

The decline of US supremacy is due to its inability indefinitely to fix the economic levers in maintaining its hegemony as the most dominant economy. It is widely held that the US gained its economic hegemony by way of the Washington Consensus, a set of financial institutions and monetary practices to promote 'neoliberal global capitalist governance' (Sheppard and Leitner 2010: 185). With the IMF and the World Bank, and through trading in the US dollar as the world's reserve currency, the US has been able to assert a global economic order that suits the interests of its industrial and financial enterprises. The US has also used economic sanctions and the outright theft of non-complying countries' sovereign resources (gold, money, natural resources) (Fitts 2011).

To avoid the risks and uncertainties of this growing sanctions archipelago and in the context of the declining legitimacy of US dominated rules based order (with its sanctions on speech and commerce), nation-states have sought alternative spheres of transaction. BRICS+ and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation have been consequential to 'a new determination to establish an alternative set of norms for international transactions outside of those maintained by the US-led post-WW II global order' (Scott-Smith 2020: 178).

In its relative economic decline the US faces some acute and chronic challenges that are related to criminogenesis. First, there is increased pressure on the US state department and Pentagon to provide the donor class with war spoils. These are in addition to the financial returns that are expected from global neoliberalism (Perkins 2023). This pressure invites actors to seek exploitable sovereign resources (Kennard 2015). The illegal blowing up of three of the four

Nordstream pipelines (Hersh 2023) is consistent with this and was foreshadowed by Rand in its articulation of the policy effort to redirect German energy dependence from Russia to the US (Roman and Anderson 2022; Morris et. al. 2019). Such an event, with its obvious and blatant disregard for international and environmental law, subtracts from US authority and influence in Europe (Bergmann 2025).

Second, the US debt and its servicing pushes both foreign and domestic actors into further criminogenesis. The need to service this debt creates pressure for aggressive financial practices (austerity), and encourages potentially risky or unethical behaviour in the financial sector. This was in evidence in the 2008 interest rate swap scandal (Muolo and Padilla 2010). It has also supported austerity programs, which increases income inequality and the defunding of welfare programs.

Third, as political and economic actors become increasingly distanced from the large body of the commonwealth, an elite morality comes to be immune from common and conventional ethical norms. The debt burden may incentivise political and financial actors elites to engage in corrupt practices to maintain economic stability or personal wealth. The "revolving door" between government and private sector positions blurs lines between public service and private gain. Campaign finance laws allow for significant corporate influence in politics, potentially leading to policy decisions that benefit elites at the expense of democratically expressed human rights concerns:

- The DNC was involved in perpetrating a false narrative concerning Russian interference in the 2016 US election campaign (Boyd-Barrett 2019);
- The FBI and the DoJ have experienced increased politicisation (Diesen 2023; Pearlstein 2024);
- The Trumps transactional exploitation of the presidency (Shear 2025).

Corruption, both domestic and in overseas operations, is identified by some scholars as a

potential factor in imperial decline, though not to the extent seen in the late Soviet period or during fast moving revolutions. This phenomenon is beyond mere systemic corruption; it discredits the basis of a common ground for the discovery of the behaviour as corrupt.

4.3 A Rise in (Accelerationist) Eschatological and Violent Crime Indices and Incidence

Public and scholarly debate in Europe has increasingly focused on the violence of empire (Zaalberg and Luttkhuis 2022). A small group of critical criminologists has drawn attention to the US as 'the greatest purveyor of violence' (Kramer 2018: 431). The Uppsala Conflict Data Program highlights a rapid rise in fatalities from organised violence that attends the spread of conflict between and across states (Davies, Pettersson, and Öberg 2023). Since 2001, as many as 4.7 million direct and indirect deaths are attributable to the so-called counter-terrorism wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Libya and Yemen (Watson Institute 2024).

In 2025, the US continues to provide military, economic and diplomatic support for wars in the Middle East and the Ukraine. US national security is understood as a manichean struggle against the claims of Russian, Chinese and non-aligned interests. These wars rely upon the dirty means of terrorism and terrorist organisations (ISIS, etc). Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, Palestinians and Russians have died. The US supported Israeli genocide in Gaza is also the bloodiest 'war' in the 21st century, although also the most one-sided in its carnage (Hasson, Haaretz 2024).

The rise of some conventional criminality may be linked to imperial decline. Although homicides are not (yet?) showing increases⁷, terrorist and hate or crime bias may, on the contrary, be on the rise. Although, both terrorism and hate crime

⁷ The US violent crime has declined in the past 30 years, falling by 71% between 1993 and 2022. Although clearance rates have also been declining, they have not done so sufficiently to erase this decline (Pew 2023).

incidence is difficult to quantify due to a lack of consensus assessment, some recent estimates have found that ‘the number of groups and individuals adhering to hate-based or extremist ideologies around the world has grown considerably in the last decade’ (Lafree and Schwarzenback 2021: 185 citing Blazak 2009; Desmarais et al. 2017; Sarma 2017); see also Freilich, Chermak, Simone 2009 and Gruenewald and Pridemore 2012). Interest in extremism, including extremist violence, terrorism and hate crime, has risen in the United States after the events of September 11, 2001, and in the West as a whole with the 2004 and 2005 Madrid and London bombings, and the attacks in 2015 and 2016 in Paris and Berlin (Lafree and Schwarzenback 2021: 184).

Structural change is expressed in the cultural sphere as existential unease and ontological anxiety. A nostalgic review of the nature of citizens, denizens, patriots and soldiers is conducted in a state of besiegement. This ontological angst is represented in the post-apocalyptic genre as a distinct set of propositions centred on a catastrophic or apocalyptic event, the fierce defence of a preferred identity, and extraordinary encroachment by internal and external others. ‘Western civilisation’ is challenged, and societal collapse must be avoided or steps taken for its maintenance or rebirth. In much of this romanticised narrative there is a trope concerning lawless disorder and the emergence of new social structures centred on a survival focus, and its moral challenges. Apocalyptic narratives and worldviews have fostered authoritarianism and fatalism (Davidson 2024) and influenced political extremists, extreme government actions and counter-terrorism mobilisations in the United States and elsewhere.

Political eschatology produces spectacular crimes of violence. These are terroristic (White 2001), in that the violence is deployed, often spectacularly, to reassert the besieged ethno-nationalistic value. White (2001:937) argues that ‘violent eschatology interacts with criminology in the sense that politicised religions produce criminal behaviour and, at times, terrorism.’ This is observable in the

expression of radical fundamentalist constructions of Christian, Jewish or Islamic identity. The siege and final assault on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco Texas, resulting in the death of between 76-82 people, is a double entendre on end times.

Another thread is ‘accelerationism.’ The Branch Davidians believed in end times, and Timothy McVeigh was influenced by the *Turner Diaries*, a blueprint for a post-apocalyptic society. In addition to the race war anxieties that derived from that book, as an exceptional soldier tasked to fight in unjust war (Operation Desert Storm in 1991), McVeigh was, to some accounts, influenced by anti-government disenchantment in right wing extremist to sentiment when he took part in the Oklahoma Bombing on the anniversary of the Waco debacle (Toobin 2024).⁸

According to Aarons (2023:261):

‘American far-right mass shootings of recent years cannot be adequately understood either as purely strategic acts of a coherent political-ideological movement, nor as expressions of a generic nihilism run amok, a “botched exit” from the despair, humiliation, and isolation of everyday life in the hell-world of late capitalism. This alternative between political and nonpolitical interpretations fails to offer a satisfying account of the prevailing motor of subjectivation that drives this culture of sacrificial murder. Even when responding to material conditions such as economic crises or pandemics, fascists prefer to think in terms of mythic narratives and imaginary forms that (as one recent study observed) are «always metaphysically clashing in a realm of pure strife, its images deeply freighted with feeling». While it is action that makes history and not disembodied ideas, the practice of accelerationist violence consciously inscribes itself within a highly symbolic and ritualized mythological framework with precise historical roots.’

⁸ McVeigh was one of the perpetrators of the Oklahoma City bombing, which killed 168 people and allegedly targeted the BFAT offices at the Alfred P Murray Federal Building, however the BFAT staff were not in their offices at the time of the bombing.

Extremist ideological violence (whether ‘terroristic’ or ‘hate’) has been on the rise in the US and Europe (Jones 2022: 1; Stevkovski 2015; Juergensmeyer 2017). Concerning hate crime, what is occurring in the West is that ‘a significant number of citizens empower potential perpetrators from the bottom–up and further legitimise hate crime from the top–down by championing violence-promoting political elites’ (Dancygier 2023: 1⁹). According to Piazza (2023: 476):

‘Affective partisan political polarisation fosters dehumanisation of opposing partisans, lends a moralistic and zero-sum nature to political life, and facilitates group mobilisation. These all produce an environment in which political violence is both more socially acceptable and more frequent....Democracies characterised by higher levels of affective partisan political polarisation are 34% more likely to experience frequent political violence.’

As pointed out by Dancygier (2023) we are seeing extremism in the centre of mainstream political thought. The support among Western leaders of Israel’s genocide in Gaza is only possible because Western elites of the MICIMATT still view the world in terms of Western supremacism and Orientalism (Said 2023). The proliferation of violence against opinion (Kundnani and Hayes 2018) is most strident when raw truth (such as a Western supported extermination campaign) is too undermining of elite, establishment discourse. Hate speech legislation is a weapon of lawfare aiming to normalise elite opinion extremism .

If after the Gulf War and the Oklahoma bombing US authorities began to uncover a dangerous subpopulation of radicalised ‘militiamen’ and white national ‘patriot’ supremacists,¹⁰ what might be expected in the US domestically in the aftermath of the US sponsored genocide in Gaza? The chasm between the peace-seeking views of a disenfranchised public and the warmongering

slogans in the opinion silo of elite rulers shades the ground for domestic unrest. In the context of continuing economic disenfranchisement, political disenfranchisement exacerbates a parlous disposition. It is no surprise, and it can be observed, that the US is experiencing a groundswell of anti-authoritarian, anti-government sentiment (NPR 2025).

Those in government and industry who have profited from the post-neo-colonial enterprise and aided and abetted the carnage may be expected to double down on authoritarian and even fascist response. They will mute or ban the multitude of oppositional voices as if to rage against the dying of their own light. Their spies will undermine a coherent, anti-establishment radicalisation, which at present is still nascent, furtive and disorganised. But this merely describes the precondition of end times criminogenesis; a terrain of dangerous transactability between resistance and response.

V. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In sum, what is anticipated with the decline of US hegemony and empire is a confluence of criminogenic events and incidence. Increasingly desperate gambits on the part of ruling or government elites may be expected to finesse political influence to maintain or discover new market bonanzas. This is expressed in dramatic apex crimes that are aided by covert operations, military interventions and sanctions. The US continues to seize sovereign funds, occupy foreign land and pump up precarious proxies in its effort to perpetuate its precarious supremacist position. As it abandons the rule of law, the criminal enterprise of US interventionism produces wide-scale disenchantment with the US-led normative project, and then blowback in normative and material population displacements. When the emperor no longer oversees order but is widely seen to head a chaotic criminal cartel (the Bushes, the Clintons, the Bidens, the Trumps), they can no longer appear in public with confidence that the regime they lead is not on the brink of collapse.

⁹ These authors are speaking about Germany but the point is transferable to US experience.

¹⁰ Between 1954-2000, the largest single group of terrorist perpetrators were committed by ‘White Racist/Rightist’ perpetrators (Hewitt 2003: 4).

Domestically, increasing income inequality and unpredictable boom-bust market volatility produce retreat or innovation among those capable, but also rebellion. That, together with the decline of regard for increasingly corrupt US (and Western) institutions (such as the free press, truth-seeking universities, and representative government), has precipitated, in the US and other Western liberal democracies, both an outpouring and an outlawing of dissent—effectively creating a large class of political criminals.. While ‘street crime’ is not directly cited as a cause of imperial decline, a rise of extremist, accelerationist violence domestically is associated with profligate, international-law-violations by the US state department (Murphy 2024; Moses 2024; ICJ 2024; ICC 2024). Normative behaviours on the street and among elites are recursively connected and may be evidence of end times criminality.

The US is experiencing imperial decline associated with economic, political, and geopolitical factors, with some forms of state-sanctioned or systemic criminality potentially contributing to, rather than resulting from, this process. The interconnected nature of the global economy means that the consequences of US decline will be felt differently compared to previous imperial declines. Of special consequence in this regard is the US relationship with Israel; in a compelling account, it is ‘occupied’ by Zionist interests (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006). In addition to donations and graft, some powerful legislators—including Senator Lindsay Graham and Representative Mike Johnson—interpret the US national interest and Mideast policy in ways that appease a minority constituency of evangelicals in their districts ‘who tie the physical existence of Israel to eschaton’ (Loughridge 2023), so that as pastor Robert Jeffress has said, ‘to attack Israel is to attack God himself’ (in Loughridge 2023). Armageddon in the Holy Land is not something to be prevented, but rather fondly anticipated as a precursor to the second coming of Christ.

The military, economic, intelligence and diplomatic support of Israel in its settler-colonial violence against the Palestinians and their

supporters has resulted in the deaths of 64,000 from traumatic injury between October 7, 2023 and June 2024 (Jamaludine et. al., 2025,) and over 180,000 deaths inclusive of other causes (Khalib, McKee and Yusuk 2024). As this is being published (a year after those calculations), the number is rising substantially. Based on the most recent UNHCR, IDMC, UNRWA, and Oxfam reports, as of May 2025 it is expected that nearly 10 million people will be displaced by the end of 2025: 2 million Palestinians; 100,000 Lebanese; over 7 million Syrians (Oxfam 2025; UNRWA 2024; UNHCR 2025; IDMC 2025). To this enormous toll may be added the millions of dead and displaced from the US’s war provocation in Ukraine (Horton 2024)¹¹. Given the illegalities and subterfuge behind both conflicts (Sachs 2023; Mearsheimer 2022), and the total war crimes that especially the Israeli violence encompasses (Moses 2024; ICJ 2024; ICC 2024), this latest iteration of great power machination is spawning conditions for uncountable criminogenic blowback.

Alongside economic, political, and social repercussions, the US approach to maintaining hegemony ultimately contributes to the empire's delegitimisation and decline. The United States is now an adversary of the ICC in its administration of accountability in international humanitarian law (PBS 2024). It is noted by Jeffrey Sachs that the US had an opportunity following the demise of the Soviet empire to take the lead in carving out a world that is less dependent on a zero-sum of militarisation (Sachs 2019). More than a third of a century later, the US is reaping the cost of opting instead to assert unipolarity in an ultimately failing policy of denying near-peer competition. This is a foreign policy blunder that has exacted a steep cost in the violence, disorder, chaos and criminality that springs both directly and indirectly from it.

In seeking to outlaw both internal and external opponents, successive governments have doubled

¹¹ Following the reneging of its non-expansionist NATO promise, the US has offered economic, military, intelligence and diplomatic support to Ukraine to support a war that has, predictably, resulted in the death and displacement of between 10 and 20 million Ukrainians (Sachs 2023).

down on escalating disorder and chaos. The US empire is not in graceful decline, and despite the Trump administration's grasping, rhetorical retreat from neoconservative doctrine (Sadler 2025), it is stumbling toward a hard fall that threatens to bring the house down.

In closing, this analysis has many limitations, but one in particular worth mentioning is the projected development and growth of generative artificial intelligence (AGI) and its potential to augment US power or alternatively displace human-centered systems. The US is seeking to maintain its global leadership by prioritising AI and AGI in its national strategies, executive orders, and export controls. There are arguments that predictive AI might mitigate financial crises and that AI-backed military systems may amplify military efficiency and that AI-backed surveillance systems in, for example, predictive policing will suppress dissent more effectively. On whether these will mitigate or exacerbate structural and institution collapse is an open question. The US will try to impose 'ethical AI' as a means of domination. However, according to DeepSeek's (2025) analysis authoritarian states will gain an advantage by 2030, AI systems will become self-sustaining by 2035, and a criminal/parasitic AI will dominate post-2040 (DeepSeek 2025). Even in grasping AI and AGI as a lifeline, the US is, according to this prediction, merely adding tilt to its fall.

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