**[Why do they hate Trump?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1821558/why-do-they-hate-trump)**

[Anis Shivani](https://www.dawn.com/authors/4435/anis-shivani) Published March 15, 2024

IT has become rank heresy in liberal circles to define Donald Trump as anything but the second coming of Hitler, or at least Mussolini. Fascist or ethno-nationalist motives are evoked to explain Trump’s appeal to the white working class. Yet, during Trump’s first presidency, no new major wars were started, a first for any administration since the onset of the national security state 80 years ago.

In evaluating Trump from the Global South perspective, we must ask which parts of the critique stem from a liberal defence of empire, in order to shun these as counterproductive to a human rights perspective looking beyond the interests of American hegemony.

Trump was not a fascist when in power. He refused to exercise dictatorial powers when Covid offered him a rare opportunity to do so. His anti-elitist America First movement is essentially the same as what used to be called isolationalism during both World Wars, boasting a legitimate intellectual pedigree going back to the founding of the American republic. As late as Pearl Harbour, the isolationists had a strong hand to play against Franklin Roosevelt’s liberal interventionists.

The most benign interpretation of the Trump movement is that it is a voluntary disbandment of empire.

The ‘deep state’ — which stalwart liberals once called the military-industrial complex — cannot trust Trump to be in charge of fighting wars, not that Trump has shown the slightest inclination towards such a project.

On the cusp of the 2020 election, I feared the restart of the forever wars under a newly empowered neoliberal regime, which is exactly what has happened. Russia was provoked into a war which was primarily a test case to sort out alliances for the end game of empire, which is confrontation with China across a range of events spanning the next decade. Would the genocidal Israeli [assault](https://www.dawn.com/news/1805128) on Gaza have happened anyway, even if Trump had been re-elected? I doubt it, because it would be naïve to presume Israeli independence in such matters.

Meanwhile, a reign of political persecution quite familiar to people in Pakistan — precisely the abomination for which liberals castigate Trump, but which he never showed the least interest to pursue against his own opponents when in office — seeks to disable Trump outside the ballot box.

‘Lawfare’ against the former president has always lacked genuine legal foundations, and becomes more farcical by the moment. In essence, Trump’s free speech rights are being criminalised, as are business procedures that are par for the course for organisations like his. It is as if the discrediting of the Russiagate hoax never happened, and neither did the failed multiple impeachment drives.

In the Georgia ‘election interference’ case, what is being criminalised is the right of a politician to question the integrity of an election — something Democrats themselves have done frequently over the last two decades when Republicans won, as certainly they have every right to do so. The porn star hush-money payment [case](https://www.dawn.com/news/1814549) in New York City, which was the first in the salvo against him, is beyond ludicrous.

The so-called Jan 6 insurrection case relies on novel legal theories that have never been applied before in such circumstances. And in the classified documents misplacement case, Joe Biden was exonerated by a special counsel in similar circumstances; besides, Trump is right that the proviso against handling classified documents does not apply to the president himself.

In addition, the legal machinery has been empowered in nakedly partisan terms to levy absurd fines to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars, exacting personal bankruptcy as the price for Trump’s audacity in not giving up politics. The neoliberal state is mobilising these extra-constitutional means to vanquish an ideological movement towards which it has never sought to make the least concession.

The white working class eventually had enough and channelled its legitimate anger through Trump. No doubt there is an element of xenophobia in the America First movement, as is true of other nationalist-populist movements, but neoliberals brought the crisis to hapless migrants by never making an honest case for continued migration, and by persisting in denying them full human rights.

What to call the Trump movement itself comes with ideological freight that analysts in the Global South should weigh carefully. The so-called alt-right, like the phantom of pervasive white supremacy, was mostly an illusion. Likewise, ‘authoritarian populism’ has already been distorted to neoliberalism’s benefit, vetoing the legitimate aspects of populism that the global left should actually care about.

For four years, the neoliberals in power have implemented lawfare, unprecedented censorship, and wholesale demeaning of political opponents, all the while undermining democracy in order to protect democracy. Upon Trump’s re-election, the Global South should hope for an abrupt cessation of the forever wars, as was true the last time around, when IS suddenly disappeared from news prominence along with international terrorism.

The most benign interpretation of the Trump movement is that it is a voluntary disbandment of empire from those lacking identitarian privilege, because of sheer exhaustion from within. The fact that the world community has not been able to direct this generally praiseworthy impulse into something beneficial for humanity and, instead, is doubling down on failed neoliberal war economics, is a damning verdict on the so-called resistance.

Arabs and Muslim Americans in crucial swing states like Michigan, as is true of younger voters in general, are already making up their minds that paranoid fear of what an alleged Trump dictatorship might do to their rights at home is no longer going to bring them out to vote for forces that support an actually existing genocide.

The same awakening, about what is really going on in the raging battle between America Firsters indisposed toward globalisation and all that it brings in its wake, versus a neoliberalism that has emptied itself of any persuasive content except a hypocritical identitarian one, needs to take place in the Global South.

*The writer’s political books include Why Did Trump Win? and a forthcoming book on neoliberal culture.*

*Published in Dawn, March 15th, 2024*