

MILITARISED ACCUMULATION

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Commentators were quick to blame the global economic meltdown of 2020 on the Coronavirus, as stock markets and global commerce went into free-fall starting in March of that year. Yet, the economic calamity the pandemic unleashed was a chronicle foretold. The virus was the spark that ignited the combustible of a global economy that never fully recovered from the 2008 financial collapse and has been teetering on the brink of renewed crisis ever since. The ruling groups shifted the burden of the crisis and sacrifice that the pandemic required onto the working classes by pushing policies to exploit every aspect of the outbreak for private profit (Robinson 2020a). Governments around the world turned to massive bailouts of capital with only very modest relief, if at all, for the working classes. In the first few months of the pandemic, the United States and European governments promised private corporations at least US\$8 trillion in loans and subsidies, roughly equivalent to all their profits over the previous two years, in what *The Economist* (2020: 8) called ‘the biggest business bailout in history.’¹ The ultra-wealthy elite in the US saw their net worth surge by \$931 billion from March to October 2020 (Americans for Tax Fairness, 2020: 1), while worldwide, billionaires’ wealth rose by 27.5 percent, to 10.2 trillion, from March to July 2020 (Neate, 2020: 1).

As these trillions of dollars accumulated at the very top, the pandemic left in its wake more inequality, political tension, militarism and authoritarianism. As the ruling groups and capitalist states turned to expanding a global police state (see below) to contain social upheaval, the

¹ All monetary values in the remainder of this article are denoted in US Dollars.

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post-pandemic world was likely to be even less hospitable to democracy than it was before the outbreak. Yet, a vast new round of worldwide militarisation and repression, led by the US, was already underway several decades before the virus hit. On the eve of the pandemic in 2019, the US Congress approved a budget that allocated \$1.48 trillion to military spending over a two-year period, the single largest military allocation in US history and a full 55 percent of the entire government budget (Johnson 2019). That same year, the influential Council on Foreign Relations issued a report on national security in the US, calling for the accelerated incorporation of new digital technologies into military capabilities and an expanded role for corporate capital in the military and intelligence complex (Manyika *et al.* 2019).

Analysts typically attribute the recent escalation in militarisation to US competition with China or efforts by Washington to offset declining US hegemony (see, for example, Targ 2019). While geopolitics is unquestionably a part of the story, in this article we want to focus on the underlying structural processes that drive militarisation by building on the concept of *militarised accumulation* first introduced by Robinson (Robinson 2020b, 2018, 2014). In this regard, we analyse militarisation, war and repression as a search for new outlets for capital accumulation in the face of long-term stagnation in the global economy. Long before COVID-19, global capitalism has been mired in an organic crisis that is as much structural as it is political. Politically, the system faces a crisis of capitalist hegemony and state legitimacy. The level of global social polarisation and inequality is unprecedented. In 2018, the richest one percent of humanity, led by 36 million millionaires and 2,400 billionaires, controlled more than half of the world's wealth while the bottom 80 percent had to make do with just 4.5 percent of this wealth (Oxfam 2018). Such savage global inequalities are politically explosive and, to the extent that the system is simply unable to reverse them or to incorporate surplus humanity, it turns to ever more violent forms of containment to manage immiserated populations. As popular discontent has spread, the dominant groups have imposed expanding systems of mass social control, repression and warfare – from mass incarceration to deadly new modalities of policing and omnipresent systems of state and private surveillance – to contain the actual and potential rebellion of the global working class and surplus humanity.

It is this imperative of social control that, in the first instance, brings forth a global police state (Robinson 2020b) and threatens to undermine what

remains of democratic institutions. By ‘global police state’, we mean more than what we typically associate with a police state – police and military repression, authoritarian governments, the suppression of civil liberties and human rights. While this is certainly part of the story, ‘global police state’ here refers to three interrelated developments. First are the systems of mass social control and repression to contain the oppressed. Second is how the global economy is itself based on the development and deployment of these systems of warfare, social control and repression simply as a means of accumulating capital in the face of stagnation. Third is the increasing move towards political systems that can be characterised as ‘Twenty-First Century fascism’ or even ‘totalitarian’. These three dimensions help us identify the emerging character of the global economy and society as a repressive totality that cannot be disentangled from one another. We want to recall at all times that systems of warfare and repression are as *politically profitable* to the ruling groups as they are economically profitable. In this article, however, we focus on the second of these three dimensions, with the understanding that it can only be understood as part of this larger totality.

Overaccumulation and state military spending

To explain militarised accumulation, we need to focus on the structural dimension of the crisis: that of overaccumulation. Overaccumulation originates in the circuit of capitalist production, yet it becomes manifest in the sphere of circulation, that is, in the market, as a crisis of overproduction or underconsumption. The polarisation of income and wealth is endemic to capitalism. As inequalities escalate, the system churns out more and more wealth that the mass of workers cannot actually consume. Capitalist competition and class struggle push capital to reduce costs and/or increase productivity by increasing the organic composition of capital, which leads to the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. This tendency, which Marx (1993 [1939]: 748) called the ‘most important law’ of political economy, is expressed as overaccumulation crises. As capitalists compete with one another, strive to control labor and reduce labor costs, they raise productivity through organisational and technological innovations in the production process. This means that ever less labor is required to produce ever more wealth.

However, labor is the source of all surplus value, that is, of profits. Overaccumulation refers to how enormous amounts of capital are accumulated, yet this capital cannot be reinvested profitably and becomes stagnant or, in Marx' words, 'the capitalist would have won nothing by his own exertions but the obligation to supply more in the same labor time, in a word, more difficult conditions for the augmentation of the value of his capital' (Marx 1978: 214). Overaccumulation *appears* at the level of the market as a problem of 'overproduction' or 'underconsumption', insofar as the gap grows between what is produced and what the market can absorb. If capitalists cannot actually sell (or 'unload') the products of their plantations, factories and offices, then they cannot make profit. Escalating inequalities originate in, yet also recursively fuel, capitalism's chronic problem of overaccumulation: the transnational capitalist class (TCC) cannot find productive outlets to unload the enormous amounts of surplus it has accumulated, leading to chronic stagnation in the world economy.

The Great Recession arising in 2007/08 – the worst crisis since the 1930s – marked the onset of a deep structural crisis of overaccumulation. As uninvested capital accumulates, enormous pressures build to find outlets for unloading the surplus. Capitalist groups pressure states to create new opportunities for profit-making. As productive outlets dry-up for unloading accumulated surplus in the context of the Recession, the TCC has turned to several mechanisms to continue accumulating in the face of stagnation. One of these is frenzied financial speculation in the global casino, which has led to one bubble after another and an ever-wider gap between the productive economy and 'fictitious capital.' Another is the reconfiguration of state finance to reduce or even eliminate the state's role in social reproduction and expand its role in facilitating transnational capital accumulation through austerity, bailouts, corporate subsidies and state debt as governments transfer wealth directly and indirectly from working people to the TCC. A third is an expansion of credit to consumers and governments as continued growth becomes dependent on public and private debt that has reached unprecedented levels. These mechanisms are all temporary fixes. None of them can sustain the economy and, indeed, end up aggravating the crisis of overaccumulation in the long run.

Hence the mechanism of militarised accumulation plays a heightened role in sustaining the global economy as the system becomes increasingly dependent on the development and deployment of systems of warfare, social control and repression simply as a means of making profit and continuing to accumulate capital in the face of stagnation. It is evident that

unprecedented global inequalities can only be sustained by ubiquitous systems of social control and repression. Yet, apart from such political considerations, it has become equally evident that the ruling groups have acquired a vested interest in war, conflict and repression as a means of accumulation. As war and state-sponsored violence become increasingly privatised, the interests of a broad array of capitalist groups shift the political, social, and ideological climate towards generating and sustaining social conflict, such as in the Middle East, and in expanding systems of warfare, repression, surveillance and social control. The so-called 'wars' on drugs and terrorism, the undeclared wars on immigrants, refugees and gangs (and poor, dark-skinned and working class youths more generally), the construction of border walls, immigrant detention centers, prison-industrial complexes, systems of mass surveillance, and the spread of private security guard and mercenary companies, have all become major sources of profit-making.

The concept of 'militarised accumulation' helps us identify how transnational capital has become increasingly dependent on a global war economy that, in turn, relies on perpetual state-organised war-making, social control and repression. The circuits of militarised accumulation coercively open-up opportunities for capital accumulation worldwide. The generation of conflicts and the repression of social movements and vulnerable populations around the world has become a strategy that conjoins profit-making with political objectives and may even trump those objectives as the driver of militarisation and repression. The events of September 11, 2001 marked the start of an era of a permanent global war in which logistics, warfare, intelligence, surveillance and even military personnel are ever more the privatised domain of transnational capital. Criminalisation of surplus humanity activates state-sanctioned repression that opens-up new profit-making opportunities for the TCC.

War profiteering, far from new, is as old as war itself. All wars are for the appropriation of surplus in the broadest sense; beyond outright plunder, for the creation, defense and reproduction of the conditions under which surplus can be generated by some groups and appropriated by others. What requires analysis is the *mode* of this appropriation through warfare and violence, and the role that it plays within the larger political economy. Among others, the German socialist, Rosa Luxemburg, analysed over a century ago the centrality of violence and militarism as a 'province of accumulation' (Luxemburg, in Hudis and Anderson 2004: Ch. 1). In their classic 1966 study, *Monopoly Capitalism*, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy

argued that the capitalist system needed rising levels of military spending as an outlet for ever greater amounts of accumulated surplus. The concept of military Keynesianism in the post-War period thus referred to expanding military budgets to offset stagnation in the capitalist economy, in the same way that Keynesian policies more generally sought to create demand and stimulate the economy. While the old-style military Keynesianism of the post-WWII period is still in place, the concept of militarised accumulation points to the more expansive role that generating war, repression, and systems of transnational social control now play as they move to the very center of the global economy. The Austrian economist, Joseph Schumpeter (1943), coined the term ‘creative destruction’ in reference to how capitalism constantly ‘creates and destroys’ in its cycles of development. Now ‘creative destruction’ appears to drive the logic of militarised accumulation. Permanent war involves endless cycles of destruction and reconstruction, each phase in the cycle fueling new rounds and accumulation, and also resulting in the ongoing enclosure of resources that become available to the TCC.

The Pentagon budget increased 91 percent in real terms between 1998 and 2011 and, even apart from special war appropriations, it grew by nearly 50 percent in real terms during this period. *Worldwide*, total defense outlays grew by 50 percent from 2006 to 2015, from \$1.4 trillion to \$2.03 trillion (Robinson 2017), although this figure does not take into account secret budgets, contingency operations and ‘homeland security’ spending. According to the Homeland Security Research Corporation, the global market in homeland security reached \$431 billion in 2018 and was expected to climb to \$606 billion by 2024 (CISION 2019). In the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the average stock price of private military companies listed on stock exchanges jumped some 50 percent in value (Singer 2003: 232). In the decade from 2001 to 2011, military industry profits nearly quadrupled (Robinson 2017). In total, the US spent a mind-boggling nearly \$6 trillion from 2001 to 2018 on its Middle Eastern wars (O’Connor 2018), which by 2015 had killed some four million people (Nafeez 2015). As spin-off effects of this military spending flow through the open veins of the global economy – that is, the integrated network structures of the global production, services and financial system – it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between military and non-military dimensions of a global war economy. Military expansion around the world has taken place through parallel, and often conflictive, processes, yet all show the same relationship between state

militarisation and global capital accumulation (Robinson 2020b). In 2015, for instance, the Chinese government announced that it was seeking to develop its own military-industrial complex modelled after the US, in which private capital would assume the leading role (Yang 2017).

It is difficult to track the scale of militarised accumulation relative to capital's multiple circuits – that is, to measure a magnitude for the significance of the global police state to the global economy as a whole. Worldwide, official state military outlays in 2015 represented about three percent of the gross world product of \$75 trillion (this does not include state military spending not made public). But militarised accumulation involves vastly more than activities generated by state military budgets. There are vast sums involved in state spending and private corporate accumulation through militarisation and social control, and other forms of generating profit through repressive social control that do not involve militarisation *per se*, such as structural controls over the poor through debt collection enforcement mechanisms or accumulation opportunities opened up by criminalisation (Soederberg 2014). Given how thoroughly entangled they are to one another in the global economy, it is difficult to separate out distinct sectoral circuits of accumulation in our analysis. For instance, it becomes nearly impossible to separate such sectors as fossil fuel production, mining and agribusiness, from the militarised and repressive dimensions of these activities. Oil and gas, to take one example, represent some three percent of gross world product (*Investopedia* 2018), a percentage similar to state military spending. Yet, it is simply impossible to disentangle this sector from the Middle East wars and other conflicts around the world, so much so that it is stitched into the emergent global police state, as are other extractive industries.

In what follows, we examine some of the dimensions of militarised accumulation worldwide, with an emphasis on the role of the US as the predominant world power and as the axis around which the circuits of militarised accumulation spread across the world.

The privatisation of war and repression

The German sociologist Max Weber famously defined the state as that institution that exercises a legitimate monopoly of violence over a given territory. If this held true for much of the modern era (since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648) it is no longer so. The state attempts to sustain

accumulation by contracting out the exercise of this violence to transnational capital. This is a two-way street, insofar as capital pressures the state to open-up opportunities for unloading surplus and generating profit through militarisation and state-sanctioned repression. The more state policy is oriented towards war and repression, the more opportunities are opened-up for transnational capital accumulation.

The various wars, conflicts and campaigns of social control and repression around the world involve the increasing fusion of private accumulation with state militarisation. In this relationship, the state facilitates the expansion of opportunities for private capital to accumulate through militarization, such as the state facilitation of global weapons sales by military-industrial-security firms. This latter mechanism dates back to the onset of military Keynesianism, but the amounts now involved were simply unimaginable in the earlier era. In 2017, for instance, the US government signed a deal for private firms to supply \$350 billion in arms to the Saudi regime (David 2017). Between 2003 and 2010 alone, the developing world bought nearly half a trillion dollars in weapons from arms dealers. Global weapons sales by the top 100 weapons manufacturers and military service companies increased by 38 percent between 2002 and 2016. These top 100 companies across the globe, excluding China, sold \$375 billion in weapons in 2016, generating \$60 billion in profits, and employing over three million workers (Fleurant *et al.* 2017: 1 and compiled from pp. 2-5, Table 1; Halper 2015: 193).

Yet, the relationship between the state and private capital in militarised accumulation is more than state spending to pay contractors for military hardware. The function of the capitalist state is to secure the overall conditions under which capitalist development proceeds. This involves, among other things, the state's capacity to keep private capital in motion in accordance with prevailing conditions, political opportunities and the correlation of social and class forces in particular historical circumstances. In what concerns us here, the capitalist state increasingly turns over the very design and execution of war, repression and security to the TCC. The US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, opened enormous opportunities for private military and security firms, precipitating the explosion in private military and police contractors around the world deployed to protect the TCC and global capitalism. Private military contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan during the height of those wars exceeded the number of US combat troops in both countries, and

outnumbered US troops in Afghanistan by a 3-to-1 margin (Shane 2016; Miller 2007).

Beyond the US, private military and security firms have proliferated worldwide, with their deployment not limited to the major conflict zones in the Middle East, South Asia and Africa. In his study, *Corporate Warriors*, Singer (2003) documents how private military forces (PMFs) have come to play an increasingly central role in military conflicts and wars. 'A new global industry has emerged,' noted Singer. 'It is outsourcing and privatisation of a Twenty-First Century variety, and it changes many of the old rules of international politics and warfare. It has become global in both its scope and activity' (2003: 9). Beyond the many based in the US, PMFs come from numerous countries around the world, including Russia, South Africa, Colombia, Mexico, India, the EU countries, and Israel, among others.

Beyond wars, PMFs open-up access to economic resources and corporate investment opportunities – deployed, for instance, to mining areas and oil fields – leading Singer to term PMFs as 'investment enablers.' Effectively constituting one branch of the TCC, the PMFs accumulate capital by opening-up opportunities for other branches of the TCC – for instance, energy, mining and agribusiness conglomerates – to accumulate capital. Put differently, the PMFs make profit by carrying-out direct violence that facilitates enclosure, so that other transnational corporations may profit through the structural violence of dispossession and exploitation. PMF clients include states, corporations, landowners, non-governmental organisations, even the Colombian and Mexican drug cartels.

From 2005 to 2010, the Pentagon spent \$146 billion on private military contractors for the Iraq-Afghanistan war theater (Schwartz and Swain, 2011), contracting some 150 firms from around the world for support and security operations in Iraq alone (Engbrecht 2011: 18). In the wake of the September, 2001 attacks, private contractors received roughly half of the entire US defense budget each year (Porter 2018). By 2018, private military companies employed some 15 million people around the world, deploying forces to guard corporate property, provide personal security for TCC executives and their families, collect data, conduct police, paramilitary, counterinsurgency and surveillance operations, carry-out mass crowd control and repression of protesters, manage prisons, run private detention and interrogation facilities, and participate in outright warfare (Langewiesche 2014; Singer 2007).

These firms were increasingly integrated into the transnational corporate and financial networks of the TCC, while their boards of directors and advisors, notes Phillips (2018: 216), ‘represent some of the most powerfully connected people in the world, with multiple socio-political links to governments, military, finance, and policy groups’. The leading global financial corporations are so thoroughly invested in the well-known military-industrial-security corporations of the Twentieth Century – such as Lockheed-Martin, Northrop Grumman, Boeing and Raytheon – that what appears is a fusion of the traditional military-industrial complex with transnational finance capital. To this we must add the tech sector, as these same financial conglomerates are heavily invested in the tech giants. As the fate of Silicon Valley and Wall Street become tied to that of warfare and repression, this Silicon Valley-Wall Street nexus becomes interlocked with the military-industrial-security complex.

Meanwhile, the private security (policing) business, a subset of the privatisation of war and security, now dwarfs public security around the world. The private security business is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in many countries, Singer noted in his 2003 study. The amount spent on private security in that year was 73 percent higher than that spent in the public sphere, and three times as many persons were employed in private forces as in official law enforcement agencies. Indeed, he noted that private security personnel within Britain (roughly 250,000) actually outnumbered the British army! In parts of Asia, the private security industry grew at 20 percent to 30 percent per year. Even in China, some 250,000 guards were employed by the private security industry. Perhaps the biggest explosion of private security was the near complete breakdown of public agencies in post-Soviet Russia, with over 10,000 new security firms opening since 1989 (Singer 2003: 69). G4S, the world’s largest private security firm, has become the third largest private employer in the world (after Walmart and Foxcomm), with 660,000 employees and annual revenue of over \$10 billion (IBT 2012). There were some 20 million private security workers worldwide in 2017, and the industry was expected to be worth over \$220 billion by 2020. In half of the world’s countries, private security agents outnumber police officers.

Silicon Valley and surveillance capitalism

Computer and information technology has revolutionised warfare, the modalities of state and private violence, and the instruments of social control. The so-called ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ (RMA) commenced in the late Twentieth Century; but with the application of more advanced digital and fourth industrial revolution technologies, this revolution appears to be entering a new stage. Virtually every new technology becomes employed in various combinations with traditional armed, police and intelligence forces, and involves an inter-operability of all ways to conduct warfare, social control surveillance and repression.

This RMA has opened-up new possibilities for ruling groups to exercise what, in military jargon, has been referred to as ‘full spectrum dominance,’ or ‘total battlespace awareness.’ This battlespace becomes all-encompassing: traditional physical space (land, sea, air), cyberspace, political systems, ‘the information environment,’ the electromagnetic spectrum, social media, and so on (for discussion, see *inter-alia* Engdahl 2009). All of global society becomes a highly surveilled and controlled, *and wildly profitable* battlespace. We must not forget that these technologies of the global police state are driven as much, or more, by the compulsion to open up new outlets for accumulation as they are by strategic or political considerations. The rise of the digital economy and the blurring of boundaries between the military and civilian sectors appear to fuse several fractions of capital around a combined process of financial speculation and militarised accumulation. The market for new systems made possible by digital technology runs into the hundreds of billions. The value of the global biometrics market, for instance, was expected to jump from \$15 billion in 2015 to \$35 billion by 2020 (National Immigrant Project 2018: 58).

As the first wave of digitalisation took-off in the 1990s, the emerging tech industry was conjoined at birth to the military-industrial-security complex and global police state. Over the years, for instance, Google has supplied mapping technology used by the US Army in Iraq, hosted data for the Central Intelligence Agency, indexed the National Security Agency’s vast intelligence databases, built military robots, co-launched a spy satellite with the Pentagon, and leased its cloud computing platform to help police departments predict “crime”. ‘And Google is not alone,’ notes Levine. ‘From Amazon to eBay to Facebook [...] Some parts of these companies are so thoroughly intertwined with America’s security services that it is

hard to tell where they end and the US government begins' (Levin 2018: 5).

In her study, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Zuboff (2019) shows how data extraction and analysis has reached a height of ubiquity unimaginable only a few years ago. Zuboff is correct in seeing Google and the other tech corporations as driven by the vast new opportunities for profit-making offered by big data, observing that 'this new market form is a unique logic of accumulation in which surveillance is a foundational mechanism in the transformation of investment into profit' (Zuboff 2019: 53). But 'this new market form' is, in turn, hitched to the global police state. Then-CIA director, Michael Hayden, was quite candid in 2013 when he explained that in the years following September 11, 2001, the Agency 'could be fairly charged with the militarisation of the world wide web' (Peterson 2013). Insofar as we are concerned here with militarised accumulation, it has become clear that the difference between commercial and military profiling and data mining is illusory. The same platforms and services that Google deploys to monitor people's lives and collect their data is put to use running huge swaths of the US military and spy agencies and police departments, as well as corporations of the military-industrial-security complex.

At the turn of the century, a more advanced integration commenced between Google and the rest of Silicon Valley, the apparatus of the US military and national security state, and more traditional companies of the military-industrial complex such as Raytheon, Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin. The behemoth of the Internet companies, Google, led the way, partnering with these traditional military contractor companies and with 'just about every major military and intelligence agency,' with the State Department, the FBI and other federal agencies. 'Google didn't just work with intelligence and military agencies but also sought to penetrate every level of society, including civilian federal agencies, cities, states, local police departments, emergency responders, hospitals, public schools, and all sorts of companies and nonprofits.' And it does not stop at Google. Among the Internet giants, Amazon, Paypal, Facebook and eBay, in conjunction with numerous smaller companies, also signed contracts worth billions of dollars with the CIA, the NSA, the Pentagon, local police stations, and so on (Levine 2018: 178, 180).

Criminalisation and the war on immigrants and refugees

If criminalisation is a mechanism to facilitate the repression of dissent and social control of surplus humanity, it is also a method that the state uses to create special dedicated markets for private profit. It is the most clear-cut method of accumulation by repression. This type of criminalisation activates 'legitimate' state repression to enforce the accumulation of capital, including by institutionalizing diverse mechanisms of market exploitation through the coercive apparatuses of the state. In turn, the state turns to private capital to carry out repression against those criminalised.

There has been a rapid increase in imprisonment in countries around the world – led by the US, which has been exporting its own system of mass incarceration. In 2019, the US was involved in the prison systems of at least 33 different countries. The US led the way in mass incarceration, with 2.3 million prisoners, followed by China (1.65 million), and then Brazil, Russia, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico and the Philippines. While the global prison population grew by 24 percent from 2000 to 2018, the population in Oceania behind bars increased by 86 percent, in the Americas by 41 percent, in Asia by 38 percent, and in Africa by 29 percent (by contrast, it decreased by 22 percent in Europe) (Walmsley 2018).

This carceral state opens up enormous opportunities at multiple levels for militarised accumulation. Gilmore shows in her oft-cited 2007 study, *Golden Gulag*, how in California – the epicenter of mass incarceration in the US – prisons provided an opportunity for investors to offload surplus capital by purchasing the lease-revenue bonds that financed the boom of prison construction in the state. Prison construction, in turn, created profitable opportunities for wealthy landlords in rural areas, who sold their less valuable and useful land at an inflated price to the state for prison siting.

In 2001, there were nearly 200 privately operated prisons on all continents and many more 'public-private partnerships' that involved privatised prison services and other forms of for-profit custodial services, such as privatised electronic monitoring programs. The countries that were developing private prisons ranged from most member states of the EU, to Israel, Russia, Thailand, Hong Kong, South Africa, New Zealand, Ecuador, Australia, Costa Rica, Chile, Peru, Brazil and Canada. The companies running these private prisons were themselves giant transnational corporations – including the US-based but globally traded

Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), Geo Group, and Management and Training Corporation, and the UK-based G4S and Serco – linked, in turn, to the financial industry (Mason 2013; Sassen 2014: 68-9). Since 2000 the number of people in private prisons in the US increased by 47 percent compared to an overall rise in the prison population of 9 percent. Since government agencies paid private companies per prisoner, it is in the interests of these companies and their investors to expand the prison population as much as possible, to hold prisoners as long as possible and, by extension, expand the methods of criminalisation.

The carceral state also provides capital with a ready supply of captive and super-exploitable labor. In 2017, some 15 percent of inmates in federal and state prisons performed work for such companies as Boeing, Starbucks and Victoria's Secret, while migrants detained for violating immigration laws are one of the fastest growing segments of prison labor. 'For Private business, prison labor is like a pot of gold,' note Goldberg and Evans (2012: 13). 'No strikes. No union organising. No unemployment insurance or workers' compensation to pay. New leviathan prisons are being built with thousands of eerie acres of factories inside the walls. All at a fraction of the cost of "free labor"'. On top of this, more prisons are charging prisoners for basic necessities, from medical care to toilet paper and even 'room and board' charges.

Those criminalised include millions of migrants and refugees around the world. The massive displacement unleashed by capitalist globalisation, state and private violence, and military conflict has resulted in an unprecedented wave of worldwide migration in recent years. In 1960, there were some 75 million immigrant workers (workers who have left their country of origin) worldwide and 100 million in 1980. The International Labor Organisation (ILO undated) put the figure for 2017 at 258 million. As this worldwide migrant population increases, borders around the world are militarised, states are stepping up repressive anti-immigrant controls, and native publics are turning immigrants into scapegoats for the spiraling crisis of global capitalism.

This migrant population serves global capitalism well. It provides an almost inexhaustible labor reserve for the global economy. Transnational labor mobility has made it possible for the TCC to reorganise labor markets around the world and recruit a transient workforce that is disenfranchised and easy to control. Repressive state controls over the migrant population and criminalisation of non-citizen workers makes this

sector of the global working class vulnerable to super-exploitation and hyper-surveillance. In turn, this self-same repression itself becomes an ever more important source of accumulation for transnational capital in a dual sense. First, every phase in the war on immigrants has become a wellspring of profit making – from private, for-profit detention centers and the provision of services inside public detention centers such as healthcare, food and phone systems, to other ancillary activities of the deportation regime, such as government contracting of private charter flights to ferry deportees back home, and the equipping of armies of border agents. In the US, the Department of Homeland Security issued more than 344,000 contracts for border and immigration control services worth \$80.5 billion between 2006 and 2018 (Chen 2019). Second, if this war opens vast new outlets for unloading surplus, it also provides capital with the opportunity to intensify exploitation; to drive down black and informal market wages, and to place more general downward pressure on wages.

The war on immigrants in the US provides a textbook case-study on militarised accumulation and accumulation by repression. By one estimate, the border security industry was set to double in value from approximately \$305 billion in 2011 to some \$740 billion in 2023 (Chen 2019). The day after Donald Trump's November 2016 electoral victory, the stock price of Corrections Corporation of America (CCA, which later changed its name to CoreCivic) – the largest for-profit immigrant detention and prison company in the US – soared 40 percent, given Trump's promise to deport millions of immigrants. Earlier in 2016, CCA's CEO, Damon Hiniger, reported a five percent increase in first quarter earnings as a result of 'stronger than anticipated demand from our federal partners, most notably Immigration and Customs Enforcement,' as a result of the escalating detention of immigrant women and children fleeing violence in Central America (Yu Shi Lee 2018). The stock price of another leading private prison and immigrant detention company, Geo Group, saw its stock prices triple in the first few months of the Trump regime (the company had contributed \$250,000 to Trump's inauguration and was then awarded with a \$110 million contract to build a new immigrant detention center in California) (Le 2017). Hundreds of private firms from around the world placed bids to construct Trump's infamous US-Mexico border wall (The Economist 2017: 59). Given that such companies as CoreCivic and Geo Group are traded on the Wall Street stock exchange, investors from around the world may buy and sell their stock and, in this way, develop a stake in immigrant repression quite removed from – if not entirely

independent of – the more pointed political and ideological objectives of this repression.

By the end of the Twentieth Century, the US-Mexico border was already one of the most militarised stretches of land in the world, with 10 guards for every mile for the length of the 2,000-mile border. Many stretches along the frontier are akin to a war zone. Mexican researcher, Juan Manuel Sandoval (2017: 93), traces how the border region has been reconfigured into a ‘global space for the expansion of transnational capital’. This is centered around high-tech military and aerospace related industries, military bases, and deploying other civilian and military forces to combat ‘immigration, drug trafficking, and terrorism through a strategy of low-intensity warfare’ on the US side, along with expansion of maquiladoras (sweatshops), mining and industry on the Mexican side under the auspices of capitalist globalisation and North American integration. He thereby shows how the border region has become a single integrated site of intensive militarised accumulation that is, in turn, integrated into the larger worldwide circuits of global capitalism.

The private immigrant detention complex is a boom industry. Undocumented immigrants constitute the fastest growing sector of the US prison population and are detained in private detention centers and deported by private companies contracted out by the US state. As of 2010, there were 270 immigration detention centres that, on any given day, caged over 30,000 immigrants and annually locked up some 400,000 individuals, compared to just a few dozen people in immigrant detention each day prior to the 1980s (CIVIC 2017). Some detention centers housed entire families, so that children were behind bars with their parents. Since detainment facilities and deportation logistics are subcontracted to private companies, capital has a vested interest in the criminalisation of immigrants and militarisation of control over immigrants – and more broadly, therefore, a vested interest in contributing to the neo-fascist anti-immigrant movement.

In 2010, the Arizona legislature passed the *Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighbourhoods Act* (*‘SB1070’*) which, at the time of passage, was one of the most all-encompassing and severe anti-illegal immigration measures passed in the US. A month after *SB1070* became law, Wayne Calabrese, the President of Geo Group, held a conference-call with investors and explained his company’s aspirations. ‘Opportunities at the federal level are going to continue apace as a result of what’s happening,’ he said, referring to the Arizona law. ‘Those people coming across the

border being caught are going to have to be detained and that, to me at least, suggests there's going to be enhanced opportunities for what we do' (Sullivan 2010). The 2005 annual report of the CCA stated with regard to the profit-making opportunities opened up by the prison-industrial complex:

Our growth is generally dependent upon our ability to obtain new contracts to develop and manage new correctional and detention facilities [...] The demand for our facilities and services could be adversely affected by the relaxation of enforcement efforts, leniency in conviction and sentencing practices or through the decriminalisation of certain activities that are currently proscribed by our criminal laws (Alexander 2012: 231).

By the second decade of the Twenty-First Century, over 350,000 immigrants were going through privately run prisons for the undocumented each year, and record numbers were being deported, even though the absolute number of immigrants had declined.

The tech sector in the US has become heavily involved in the war on immigrants, as Silicon Valley plays an increasingly central role in the expansion and acceleration of arrests, detentions and deportations. As their profits rise from participation in this war, leading tech companies have, in turn, pushed for an expansion of incarceration and deportation of immigrants, and lobbied the state to expedite the use of its social control and surveillance technologies in anti-immigrant campaigns. Tech innovation and infrastructure allow immigration enforcement to rely on policing through huge databases, computer programs, tech employees analysing big data, and shareable cloud-based storage. Immigration enforcement and detention is now big business for Silicon Valley, noted one report:

ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement], DHS [Department of Homeland Security], and many other law enforcement agencies spend billions of taxpayer dollars on procuring and maintaining these new systems. A handful of huge corporations, like Amazon Web Services and Palantir, have built a 'revolving door' to develop and entrench Silicon Valley's role in fueling the incarceration and deportation regime (National Immigration Project 2018).

Amazon and other tech and military-industrial companies – such as Adobe, IBM, Oracle, Salesforce, Lockheed Martin, Symantec and Raytheon – are involved in supplying 'border security' in several dozen countries across Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Americas. Following the lead of the

giant tech companies, hundreds of small to mid-sized corporations compete to build information-sharing platform and software programs for advanced data collection and biometric tracking systems for DHS and ICE, while transnational tech companies based abroad have also been contracted – among them, the French-based IDEMIA and Tokyo-based NEC Corporation.

In Europe, the refugee crisis and European Union's program to 'secure borders' has provided a bonanza to military and security companies providing equipment to border military forces, surveillance systems and IT infrastructure. As in the US, these companies – far from passive beneficiaries of the crisis – have been behind the push to expand so-called securitisation. In 2007, the leading companies from Europe's military-industrial-security complex established the European Organisation for Security to lobby governments to militarise borders and implement sweeping securitisation programs. At the same time as these companies were benefitting from the multi-billion dollar border security contracts in Europe, they were granted licenses by EU member states to sell nearly \$100 billion in arms to Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries from 2005 to 2014. The MENA regimes used the spike in arms sales to crack down on popular uprisings during the 2011 Arab Spring and fuel armed conflicts.

The budget for the EU border security agency, Frontex, increased a whopping 3,688 percent between 2005 and 2016, while the European border security market was expected to nearly double, from some \$18 billion in 2015 to approximately \$34 billion in 2022. Major transnational corporations that have both pushed for and profited from the securitisation campaign include, among others, military supply, aerospace and technology conglomerates Airbus, Finmeccanica, Thales and Safran, as well as the technology giant Indra Systems – all companies publicly traded on global stock markets. By the end of the second decade of the century Europe's borders increasingly resembled those of the US-Mexico border, with concrete walls, virtual walls, military patrols, monitoring and sniper towers, cameras, land radars and wireless telecommunication infrared surveillance, drones, carbon-dioxide probes, biometric identification systems, and immigration databases.

Conclusion: A pushback from below?

We have been limited here, given space constraints, to undertake a brief survey of a few circuits of militarised accumulation around the world. We must remember that militarised accumulation is driven by a dual logic of providing outlets for overaccumulated capital in the face of stagnation, and of social control and repression as capitalist hegemony breaks down. The Italian communist, Antonio Gramsci, developed the general concept of ‘hegemony’ to refer to the attainment by ruling groups of stable forms of rule based on ‘consensual’ domination of subordinate groups. Gramsci’s notion of hegemony posits distinct forms, or relations, of domination: specifically, *coercive domination* and *consensual domination*. Hegemony may be seen as a relationship between classes or groups in which one class or group exercises leadership over other classes and groups by gaining their active consent. Hegemony is, thus, rule by consent, or the cultural and intellectual leadership achieved by a particular class, class fraction, strata, or social group, as part of a larger project of class rule or domination. All social order is maintained through a combination of consensual and coercive dimensions – in Gramsci’s words, hegemony is ‘consensus protected by the armor of coercion’ (Gramsci 1971: 263).

We can note by way of conclusion that the global order, as a unity, is increasingly repressive and authoritarian, in which coercive domination and violent exclusion may increasingly prevail over consensual incorporation as the system sheds the pretense to democracy. The more the global economy comes to depend on militarisation and conflict, the greater the drive to war and the higher the stakes for humanity. There is a built-in war drive to the current course of capitalist globalisation. Historically, wars have pulled the capitalist system out of crisis while they have also served to deflect attention from political tensions and problems of legitimacy. The breakdown of hegemony, in turn, points to the political dimensions of global capitalist crisis.

Some have argued that militarised accumulation is not in the long-term interests of the TCC and that a new round of digitalisation and ‘green capitalism’ could push the global economy away from reliance on militarised accumulation. It is certainly plausible that digitalisation or a Green New Deal will unleash a new round of capitalist expansion that could temporarily offset the crisis of overaccumulation and, thus, provide an alternative to militarised accumulation. However, such expansion would not necessarily push back the threat of a global police state. For that

to happen, it would have to involve a worldwide redistribution of wealth downward that could diminish global inequalities, exclusion and immiseration, thereby attenuating the system's imperative of expanding repression and militarised accumulation. In other words, the likelihood of an entrenched global police state – driven by the twin imperatives of social control and militarised accumulation – is contingent on the outcome of the struggle among social and class forces and their distinct political projects.

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