

Empire and Imperialism and the USA

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Modern empires and therefore imperialism which constructs them are ubiquitous: Whether through large-scale multinational corporations or through technologically advanced massive military power, the peoples and nations of the worlds confront the problem of great concentration of corporate and state power on an unprecedented scale. This stark reality and the evidence of US prolonged wars of conquest and occupation has forced a general recognition of the relevance of the concept of imperialism to understanding global power relations. Only a decade ago writers, intellectuals and academics discarded imperialism and empire in favor of 'globalization' – to describe the world configuration of power. But globalization with its limited focus on the movement of multinational corporations could not explain the centrality of the state in establishing and imposing favorable conditions for the 'movement' or expansion of multinationals. Corporate globalization could not explain wars of conquest, like the first Gulf War, or wars of occupation or colonization, such as the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Nor could globalization explain the large-scale, long-term expansion of Chinese public corporations throughout Africa and the vast extraction of raw materials and sale of finished goods. By the new millennium, the language of empire even entered the vocabulary of the Right, the practitioners and ideologues of imperialist power. Contemporary imperial conflicts had their effects: Imperialism and empire once again became common language on the Left, but in many cases poorly understood, at least in all of its complexities and structures.

This essay clarifies some of the basic theoretical and practical features of contemporary imperialism, which are poorly understood. There are at least five major aspects of the political economy of imperialism that focus our attention in this book:

(1) Imperialism is a political and economic phenomenon. The multinational corporations (MNC) operate in many countries, but they receive their political support, economic subsidies and military insurance from the imperial state (IS) concerned with the MNC. The IS negotiates or imposes trade and investment agreements favorable to the MNC. At the same time the IS uses the MNC to influence overseas regimes to concede military bases and submit to its sphere of influence. Imperialism is the combined forceful overseas expansion of state and corporations.

(2) There are multiple forms of empire building. While all imperial states possess military and economic apparatuses, the political and economic driving force behind the construction of a global empire vary according to the nature of the governing class of the imperial state. In the contemporary world there are essentially two types of empire building – the US military-driven empire building and the Chinese economic empire. The US governing class today is made up of a powerful militarist-Zionist ideological elite, which prioritizes war and military force as a way of extending its domination and constructing

client/colonial regimes. China and other newly aspiring economic empire builders expand overseas via large-scale, long-term overseas investments, loans, trade, technical aid and market shares. Obviously the US militarist approach to empire building is bloodier, more destructive and more reprehensible than market-driven empire building. However the structure of power and exploitation, which result from both types of empire, is a political-economic system, which oppresses and exploits subject peoples and nations.

(3) Imperialism has multiple interacting facets, which mutually reinforce each other: The mass media and culture in general are weapons for securing consent and/or acquiescence of the masses in pursuit of empire building which prejudices their material and spiritual existence. Imperialism cannot be isolated and reduced to simple economic reductionism. Economic exploitation is only possible under conditions of subjective subordination and that refers to education, entertainment, literature and art as terrains of class relations and class struggle linked to the empire.

(4) The social, ideological and political loyalties of the political elite, which direct the imperial state, determines the tactics and strategy which will be pursued in empire building. One cannot automatically assume that the political leadership will prioritize the interests of the MNCs in every region of the world at all times. When imperial leadership has divided loyalties with another state imperial policies may not coincide with the interests of the MNCs. Under these special circumstances of rulers with divided imperial loyalties, the 'normal' operations of the imperial state are suspended. The case of Zionist power in the US imperial state is a case in point. Through powerful and wealthy socio-political organizations, representation on powerful Congressional committees and strong presence in senior Executive offices (Pentagon, State Department, National Security Council, Homeland Security, Justice, Treasury) and the mass media, the Zionist elite dictates US Middle East policy. The US military serves Israeli colonial-expansionist interests even at the expense of the major US oil companies which are prevented from signing billion-dollar oil contracts with Iran and other oil-rich countries at odds with Israel .

(5) The world of competing imperial countries has created complex international organizations, which conflict, compete and collaborate. They operate on all levels, from the global to the cities and villages of the Third World . Imperialist powers enter and exploit through a chain of collaborator classes from the imperial center through international organizations to local ruling, economic and political classes. The imperial system is only as strong as its local collaborators. Popular uprisings, national anti-colonial struggles and radical mass movements, which oust local collaborators, undermine the empire. Anti imperialists attempt to establish diverse ties among imperial competitors and among the newly emerging powers to isolate the US military-centered empire.

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