

Imperialism and Imperial Barbarism

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Imperialism, its character, means and ends has changed over time and place. Historically, western imperialism, has taken the form of tributary, mercantile, industrial, financial and in the contemporary period, a unique 'militarist-barbaric' form of empire building. Within each 'period', elements of past and future forms of imperial domination and exploitation 'co-exist' with the dominant mode. For example, in the ancient Greek and Roman empires, commercial and trade privileges complemented the extraction of tributary payments. Mercantile imperialism, was preceded and accompanied initially by the plunder of wealth and the extraction of tribute, sometimes referred to as "primitive accumulation", where political and military power decimated the local population and forcibly removed and transferred wealth to the imperial capitals. As imperial commercial ascendancy was consolidated, manufacturing capital increasingly emerged as a co-participant; backed by imperial state policies manufacturing products destroyed local national manufacturers gaining control over local markets. Modern industrial driven imperialism, combined production and commerce, both complemented and supported by financial capital and its auxiliaries, insurance, transport and other sources of "invisible earnings".

Under pressure from nationalist and socialist anti-imperialist movements and regimes, colonial structured empires gave way to new nationalist regimes. Some of which restructured their economies, diversifying their productive systems and trading partners. In some cases they imposed protective barriers to promote industrialization. Industrial-driven imperialism, at first opposed these nationalist regimes and collaborated with local satraps to depose industrial oriented nationalist leaders. Their goal was to retain or restore the "colonial division of labor" - primary production exchanged for finished goods. However, by the last third of the 20th century, industrial driven empire building, began a process of adaptation, "jumping over tariff walls", investing in elementary forms of 'production' and in labor intensive consumer products. Imperial manufacturers contracted assembly plants organized around light consumer goods (textiles, shoes, electronics).

Basic changes in the political, social and economic structures of both the imperial and former colonial countries, however, led to divergent imperial paths to empire-building and as a consequence contrasting development performances in both regions.

Anglo-American financial capital gained ascendancy over industrial, investing heavily in highly speculative IT, bio-tech, real estate and financial instruments. Germany and Japanese empire builders relied on upgrading export-industries to secure overseas markets. As a result they increased market shares, especially among the emerging industrializing countries of Southern Europe, Asia and Latin America. Some former colonial and semi-colonial countries also moved toward higher forms of industrial production, developing high tech industries, producing capital and intermediate as well as consumer goods and challenging western imperial hegemony in their proximity.

By the early 1990's a basic shift in the nature of imperial power took place. This led to a profound divergence between past and present imperialist policies and among established and emerging expansionist regimes.

Past and Present Economic Imperialism

Modern industrial-driven empire building (MIE) is built around securing raw materials, exploiting cheap labor and increasing market shares. This is accomplished by collaborating with pliant rulers, offering them economic aid and political recognition on terms surpassing those of their imperial competitors. This is the path followed by China. MIE eschews any attempt to gain territorial possessions, either in the form of military bases or in occupying "advisory" positions in the core institutions of the coercive apparatus. Instead, MIEs' seek to maximize control via investments leading to direct ownership or 'association' with state and/or private officials in strategic economic sectors. MIEs' utilize economic incentives in the way of economic grants and low interest concessionary loans. They offer to build large scale long term infrastructure projects-railroads, airfields, ports and highways. These projects have a double purpose of facilitating the extraction of wealth and opening markets for exports. MIEs also improve transport networks for local producers to gain political allies. In other words MIEs like China and India largely depend on market power to expand and fight off competitors. Their strategy is to create "economic dependencies" for long term economic benefits.

In contrast imperial barbarism grows out of an earlier phase of economic imperialism which combined the initial use of violence to secure economic privileges followed by economic control over lucrative resources.

Historically, economic imperialism (EI) resorted to military intervention to overthrow anti-imperialist regimes and secure collaborator political clients. Subsequently, EI frequently established military bases and training and advisory missions to repress resistance movements and to secure a local military officialdom responsive to the imperial power. The purpose was to secure economic resources and a docile labor force, in order to maximize economic returns.

In other words, in this 'traditional' path to economic empire building the military was subordinated to maximizing economic exploitation. Imperial power sought to preserve the post colonial state apparatus and professional cadre but to harness them to the new imperial economic order. EI sought to preserve the elite to maintain law and order as the basic foundation for restructuring the economy. The goal was to secure policies to suit the economic needs of the private corporations and banks of the imperial system. The prime tactic of the imperial institutions was to designate western educated professionals to design policies which maximized private earning. These policies included the privatization of all strategic economic sectors; the demolition of all protective measures ("opening markets") favoring local producers; the implementation of regressive taxes on local consumers, workers and enterprises while lowering or eliminating taxes and controls over imperial firms; the elimination of protective labor legislation and outlawing of independent class organizations.

In its heyday western economic imperialism led to the massive transfer of profits, interest, royalties and ill begotten wealth of the native elite from the post-colonial countries to the imperial centers. As befits post-colonial imperialism the cost of administering these imperial

dependencies was borne by the local workers, farmers and employees.

While contemporary and historic economic imperialism have many similarities, there are a few crucial differences. For example China, the leading example of a contemporary economic imperialism, has not established its “economic beach heads” via military intervention or coups, hence it does not possess ‘military bases’ nor a powerful militarist caste competing with its entrepreneurial class in shaping foreign policy. In contrast traditional Western economic imperialism contained the seeds for the rise of a powerful militarist caste capable, under certain circumstance, of affirming their supremacy in shaping the policies and priorities of empire building.

This is exactly what has transpired over the past twenty years, especially with regard to US empire building.

The Rise and Consolidation of Imperial Barbarism

The dual processes of military intervention and economic exploitation which characterized traditional Western imperialism gradually shifted toward a dominant highly militarized variant of imperialism. Economic interests, both in terms of economic costs and benefits and global market shares were sacrificed in the pursuit of military domination.

The demise of the USSR and the virtual reduction of Russia to the status of a broken state, weakened states allied to it. They were “opened” to Western economic penetration and became vulnerable to Western military attack.

President Bush (senior) perceived the demise of the USSR as a ‘historic opportunity’ to unilaterally impose a unipolar world. According to this new doctrine the US would reign supreme globally and regionally. Projections of US military power would now operate unhindered by any nuclear deterrence. However, Bush (senior) was deeply embedded in the US petroleum industry. Thus he sought to strike a balance between military supremacy and economic expansion. Hence the first Iraq war 1990-91 resulted in the military destruction of Saddam Hussein’s military forces, but without the occupation of the entire country nor the destruction of civil society, economic infrastructure and oil refineries. Bush (senior) represented an uneasy balance between two sets of powerful interests: on the one hand, petroleum corporations eager to access the state owned oil fields and on the other the increasingly powerful militarist zionist power configuration within and outside of his regime. The result was an imperial policy aimed at weakening Saddam as a threat to US clients in the Gulf but without ousting him from power. The fact that he remained in office and continued his support for the Palestinian struggle against the Jewish state’s colonial occupation profoundly irritated Israel and its zionist agents in the US.

With the election of William Clinton, the ‘balance’ between economic and military imperialism shifted dramatically in favor of the latter. Under Clinton, zealous zionist were appointed to many of the strategic foreign policy posts in the Administration. This ensured the sustained bombing of Iraq, wrecking its infrastructure. This barbaric turn was complemented by an economic boycott to destroy the country’s economy and not merely “weaken” Saddam. Equally important, the Clinton regime fully embraced and promoted the ascendancy of finance capital by appointing notorious Wall Streeters (Rubin, Summers, Greenspan et al.) to key positions, weakening the relative power of oil, gas and industrial manufacturers as the driving forces of foreign policy. Clinton set in motion the political ‘agents’ of a highly militarized imperialism, committed to destroying a country in order to

dominate it ...

The ascent of Bush (junior) extended and deepened the role of the militarist-zionist personnel in government. The self-induced explosions which collapsed the World Trade Towers in New York served as a pretext to precipitate the launch of imperial barbarism and spelled the eclipse of economic imperialism.

While US empire building converted to militarism, China accelerated its turn toward economic imperialism. Their foreign policy was directed toward securing raw materials via trade, direct investments and joint ventures. It gained influence via heavy investments in infrastructure, a kind of developmental imperialism, stimulating growth for itself and the "host" country. In this new historic context of global competition between an emerging market driven empire and an atavistic militarist imperial state, the former gained enormous economic profits at virtually no military or administrative cost while the latter emptied its treasury to secure ephemeral military conquests.

The conversion from economic to militarist imperialism was largely the result of the pervasive and 'deep' influence of policymakers of zionist persuasion. Zionist policymakers combined modern technical skills with primitive tribal loyalties. Their singular pursuit of Israel's dominance in the Middle East led them to orchestrate a series of wars, clandestine operations and economic boycotts crippling the US economy and weakening the economic bases of empire building.

Militarist driven empire building in the present post-colonial global context led inevitably to destructive invasions of relatively stable and functioning nation-states, with strong national loyalties. Destructive wars turned the colonial occupation into prolonged conflicts with resistance movements linked to the general population. Henceforth, the logic and practice of militarist imperialism led directly to widespread and long-term barbarism-the adoption of the Israeli model of colonial terrorism targeting an entire population. This was not a coincidence. Israel's zionist zealots in Washington "drank deeply" from the cesspool of Israeli totalitarian practices, including mass terror, housing demolitions, land seizures, overseas special force assassination teams, systematic mass arrests and torture. These and other barbaric practices, condemned by human rights organizations the world over, (including those in Israel), became routine practices of US barbaric imperialism.

The Means and Goals of Imperial Barbarism

The organizing principle of imperial barbarism is the idea of total war. Total in the sense that (1) all weapons of mass destruction are applied; (2) the whole society is targeted; (3) the entire civil and military apparatus of the state is dismantled and replaced by colonial officials, paid mercenaries and unscrupulous and corrupt satraps. The entire modern professional class is targeted as expressions of the modern national-state and replaced by retrograde religious-ethnic clans and gangs, susceptible to bribes and booty-shares. All existing modern civil society organizations, are pulverized and replaced by crony-plunderers linked to the colonial regime. The entire economy is disarticulated as elementary infrastructure including water, electricity, gas, roads and sewage systems are bombed along with factories, offices, cultural sites, farms and markets.

The Israeli argument of "dual use" targets serves the militarist policymakers as a justification for destroying the bases of a modern civilization. Massive unemployment, population displacement and the return to primitive exchanges characteristic of pre-modern

societies define the “social structure”. Educational and health conditions deteriorate and in some cases become non-existent. Curable diseases plague the population and infant deformities result from depleted uranium, the pre-eminent weapon of choice of imperial barbarism.

In summary the ascendancy of barbarous imperialism leads to the eclipse of economic exploitation. The empire depletes its treasury to conquer, destroy and occupy. Even the residual economy is exploited by ‘others’: traders and manufacturers from non-belligerent adjoining states. In the case of Iraq and Afghanistan that includes Iran, Turkey, China and India.

The evanescent goal of barbarous imperialism is total military control, based on the prevention of any economic and social rebirth which might lead to a revival of secular anti-imperialism rooted in a modern republic. The goal of securing a colony ruled by cronies, satraps and ethno-religious warlords – willing givers of military bases and permission to intervene – is central to the entire concept of military driven empire building. The erasure of the historical memory of a modern independent secular nation-state and the accompanying national heritage becomes of singular importance to the barbarous empire. This task is assigned to the academic prostitutes and related publicists who commute between Tel Aviv, the Pentagon, Ivy league universities and Middle East propaganda mills in Washington.

Results and Perspectives

Clearly imperial barbarism (as a social system) is the most retrograde and destructive enemy of modern civilized life. Unlike economic imperialism it does not exploit labor and resources, it destroys the means of production, kills workers, farmers and undermines modern life.

Economic imperialism is clearly more beneficial to the private corporations; but it also potentially lays the bases for its transformation. Its investments lead to the creation of a working and middle class capable of assuming control over the commanding heights of the economy via nationalist and/or socialist struggle. In contrast the discontent of the ravaged population and the pillage of economies under imperial barbarism, has led to the emergence of pre-modern ethno-religious mass movements, with retrograde practices, (mass terror, sectarian violence etc.). Theirs is an ideology fit for a theocratic state.

Economic imperialism with its ‘colonial division of labor’, extracting raw materials and exporting finished goods, inevitably will lead to new nationalist and perhaps later socialist movements. As EI undermines local manufacturers and displaces, via cheap industrial exports, thousands of factory workers, movements will emerge. China may seek to avoid this via ‘plant transplants’. In contrast barbaric imperialism is not sustainable because it leads to prolonged wars which drain the imperial treasury and injury and death of thousands of American soldiers every year. Unending and unwinnable colonial wars are unacceptable to the domestic population.

The ‘goals’ of military conquest and satrap rule are illusory. A stable, ‘rooted’ political class capable of ruling by overt or tacit consent is incompatible with colonial overseers. The ‘foreign’ military goals imposed on imperial policymakers via the influential presence of Zionists in key offices have struck a mighty blow against the profit seeking opportunities of American multi-nationals via sanctions policies. Pulled downward and outward by high military spending and powerful agents of a foreign power, the resort to barbarism has a powerful effect in prejudicing the US economy.

Countries looking for foreign investment are far more likely to pursue joint ventures with economic driven capital exporters rather than risk bringing in the US with all its military, clandestine special forces and other violent baggage.

Today the overall picture is grim for the future of militarist imperialism. In Latin America, Africa and especially Asia, China has displaced the US as the principal trading partner in Brazil, South Africa and Southeast Asia. In contrast the US wallows in unwinnable ideological wars in marginal countries like Somalia, Yemen and Afghanistan. The US organizes a coup in tiny Honduras, while China signs on to billion dollar joint ventures in oil and iron projects in Brazil and Venezuela and an Argentine grain production. The US specializes in propping up broken states like Mexico and Columbia, while China invests heavily in extractive industries in Angola, Nigeria, South Africa and Iran. The symbiotic relationship with Israel leads the US down the blind ally of totalitarian barbarism and endless colonial wars. In contrast China deepens its links with the dynamic economies of South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Brazil and the oil riches of Russia and the raw materials of Africa.

James Petras latest book is War Crimes in Gaza and the Zionist Fifth Column in America (Atlanta:Clarity Press 2010)

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