

Neo-Colonialism, Imperialism and Resistance in the 21st Century

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The power balance in the world is still clearly the master-slave relationship that was seen in the heyday of colonialism in the 19th century.

The US-NATO-Israel triangle is attempting to gain large amounts of influence over the nations of the Middle East. Simultaneously, the US is engaged in the Asia Pacific region, along with its South Korean ally, in attempting to coerce North Korea into ending its nuclear weapons program, and to maintain the ceasefire with South Korea.

In terms of China, the US is attempting to surround them with an Asian version of NATO made up of US allies to contain what is viewed as a threat to US hegemony.

In the past, the imperial powers were those of Europe and many of them advocated direct imperialism, sending in soldiers and administrators to directly run and colonize a country. Other nations have used an indirect form of colonialism by controlling a country through groups or individuals that would obey the colonial power. National independence movements took place in Africa, Latin America and Asia in the 1950s and 60s, and it seemed like colonial domination was over, yet it wasn't. Even today, imperialism still rears its ugly head; however, unlike in previous times, people are actually able to resist the imperial power that is the United States and its allies.

Firstly, we must establish a definition of what imperialism is. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, imperialism is defined as, "The policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas." [1]

The main goal of imperialism today is to ensure that the former imperial states still maintain economic dominance over their former colonies. This is accomplished in the form of neo-colonialism. When neo-colonialism first took hold, political scientists were unable to formulate a concise definition. After independence, many assumed that the newly liberated nations would begin to "to develop very rapidly, politically and economically." [2] However, when that did not come to fruition, political scientists looked again at the dependency theory and added a second part. This new addition acknowledged that underdevelopment in the newly liberated countries continued due to highly developed countries dominating underdeveloped economies "by paying low prices for agricultural products and flooding those economies with cheap manufactured goods." [3] Because of this, the post-colonial countries would be unable to industrialize their economies, and thus would remain at the mercy of their former colonizers.

Also, the colonial powers used debt to keep their former colonies in check. One example is the odious debt, which is defined as “unjust debt that is incurred as rich countries loaned dictators or other corrupt leaders when it was known that the money would be wasted.” [4] In loaning out this money, it served the colonial powers in two ways. One, they could use the debt to keep the nation(s) under their control, and two; they made money off the high interest rates.

When it comes to loaning money there has been complete hypocrisy between developed and developing nations. One example is after WWII, when the US loaned the U.K. at low interest rates, and the Allies cancelled most of Germany’s debt. In both cases, it was intended to enable the developed nations to rebuild in the wake of World War II. Yet, when it comes to third-world nations, double standards prevail. Many sub-Saharan African countries are being forced to pay back debt at rates “three to five times the level that Britain or Germany paid after World War II.” [5]

In addition to insuring dependency of the former colonized nations on their old masters, the colonial powers also encouraged their companies to move in and take full control of the economy of developing countries. This was presented to the public as “economic liberalization.” In this process, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was the tool used.

One tragic case of IMF intervention is Jamaica. After the island nation’s economy crashed in the early 1970s, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, Michael Manley, giving into pressure from the IMF and the conservative People’s National Party, came up with an initiative that “included many elements of democratic socialism as it called for disengagement from international capitalism, socializing the means of production and exchange, increasing Jamaica’s self-reliance, and diversification of foreign economic relations.” [6] The conservative People’s National Party was not pleased with this idea of “democratic socialism,” and thus went to the IMF for aid. This was disastrous for Jamaica. They were lent the money in 1977, but had to agree to “pension and wage [cuts and] the removal of price controls” [7] and by 1980, “the economy in Jamaica was in worse condition than before the IMF loan. Thirty percent of the island’s workforce was unemployed and the foreign exchange deficit was significantly higher than in 1977.” [8] The freeze on pensions and wages were beneficial to the foreign corporations, who later moved in as they were now able to fully exploit the Jamaican people without having to worry about any minimum wage or labor laws.

We can see that the IMF being used by the European Central Bank to protect the interests of the economic elite in the situation of Ireland’s debt crisis. This is also evident in Greece, where the banks are being bailed out at the expense of the working class, sending them into crushing austerity measures. However, the populations of Ireland and Greece, realizing what is at stake, are determined to resist. They will not take this oppression lying down. Instead, they actively protest the acts of their government and demand that they not be held responsible for the incompetent acts of the powerful economic elite.

Even though the United States and its allies constitute a power force, a resistance movement is in the making. In the future, we may see developing nations wielding influence over their own domestic affairs; and neo-colonialism, much like the direct colonialism that preceded it, could become a thing of the past.

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Notes

- 1: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imperialism>
- 2: <http://science.jrank.org/pages/7920/Neocolonialism.html>
- 3: Ibid.
- 4: <http://www.globalissues.org/issue/28/third-world-debt-undermines-development>
- 5: Ibid.
- 6: <http://science.jrank.org/pages/7920/Neocolonialism.html>
- 7: Ibid.
- 8: Ibid.
- 9: <http://www.sectsko.org/EN/show.asp?id=69>
- 10: <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2010/0211/Peaceful-Palestinian-resistance-is-paying-off>
- 11: Ibid.

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