

Networks of Empire and Realignments of World Power

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Imperial states build networks which link economic, military and political activities into a coherent mutually reinforcing system. This task is largely performed by the various institutions of the imperial state. Thus imperial action is not always directly economic, as military action in one country or region is necessary to open or protect economic zones. Nor are all military actions decided by economic interests if the leading sector of the imperial state is decidedly militarist.

Moreover, the sequence of imperial action may vary according to the particular conditions necessary for empire building. Thus state aid may buy collaborators; military intervention may secure client regimes followed later by private investors. In other circumstances, the entry of private corporations may precede state intervention.

In either private or state economic and/or military led penetration, in furtherance of empire-building, the strategic purpose is to exploit the special economic and geopolitical features of the targeted country to create empire-centered networks. In the post Euro-centric colonial world, the privileged position of the US in its empire-centered policies, treaties, trade and military agreements is disguised and justified by an ideological gloss, which varies with time and circumstances. In the war to break-up Yugoslavia and establish client regimes, as in Kosovo, imperial ideology utilized humanitarian rhetoric. In the genocidal wars in the Middle East, anti-terrorism and anti-Islamic ideology is central. Against China, democratic and human rights rhetoric predominates. In Latin America, receding imperial power relies on democratic and anti-authoritarian rhetoric aimed at the democratically elected Chavez government.

The effectiveness of imperial ideology is in direct relation to the capacity of empire to promote viable and dynamic development alternatives to their targeted countries. By that criteria imperial ideology has had little persuasive power among target populations. The Islamic phobic and anti-terrorist rhetoric has made no impact on the people of the Middle East and alienated the Islamic world. Latin America's lucrative trade relations with the Chavist government and the decline of the US economy has undermined Washington's ideological campaign to isolate Venezuela. The US human rights campaign against China has been totally ignored throughout the EU, Africa, Latin America, Oceania and by the 500 biggest US MNC (and even by the US Treasury busy selling treasury bonds to China to finance the ballooning US budget deficit).

The weakening influence of imperial propaganda and the declining economic leverage of Washington, means that the US imperial networks built over the past half century are being eroded or at least subject to centrifugal forces. Former fully integrated networks in Asia are

now merely military bases as the economies secure greater autonomy and orient toward China and beyond. In other words the imperial networks are now being transformed into limited operations' outposts, rather than centers for imperial economic plunder.

Imperial Networks: The Central Role of Collaborators

Empire-building is essentially a process of penetrating a country or region, establishing a privileged position and retaining control in order to secure (1) lucrative resources, markets and cheap labor (2) establish a military platform to expand into adjoining countries and regions (3) military bases to establish a choke-hold over strategic road or waterways to deny or limit access of competitors or adversaries (4) intelligence and clandestine operations against adversaries and competitors.

History has demonstrated that the lowest cost in sustaining long term, long scale imperial domination is by developing local collaborators, whether in the form of political, economic and/or military leaders operating from client regimes. Overt politico-military imperial rule results in costly wars and disruption, especially among a broad array of classes adversely affected by the imperial presence.

Formation of collaborator rulers and classes results from diverse short and long term imperial policies ranging from direct military, electoral and extra-parliamentary activities to middle to long term recruitment, training and orientation of promising young leaders via propaganda and educational programs, cultural-financial inducements, promises of political and economic backing on assuming political office and through substantial clandestine financial backing.

The most basic appeal by imperial policy-makers to the "new ruling class" in emerging client state is the opportunity to participate in an economic system tied to the imperial centers, in which local elites share economic wealth with their imperial benefactors. To secure mass support, the collaborator classes obfuscate the new forms of imperial subservience and economic exploitation by emphasizing political independence, personal freedom, economic opportunity and private consumerism.

The mechanisms for the transfer of power to an emerging client state combine imperial propaganda, financing of mass organizations and electoral parties, as well as violent coups or 'popular uprisings'. Authoritarian bureaucratically ossified regimes relying on police controls to limit or oppose imperial expansion are "soft targets". Selective human rights campaigns become the most effective organizational weapon to recruit activists and promote leaders for the imperial-centered new political order. Once the power transfer takes place, the former members of the political, economic and cultural elite are banned, repressed, arrested and jailed. A new homogenous political culture of competing parties embracing the imperial centered world order emerges. The first order of business beyond the political purge is the privatization and handover of the commanding heights of the economy to imperial enterprises. The client regimes proceed to provide soldiers to engage as paid mercenaries in imperial wars and to transfer military bases to imperial forces as platforms of intervention. The entire "independence charade" is accompanied by the massive dismantling of public social welfare programs (pensions, free health and education), labor codes and full employment policies. Promotion of a highly polarized class structure is the ultimate consequence of client rule. The imperial-centered economies of the client regimes, as a replica of any commonplace satrap state, is justified (or legitimated) in the name of an electoral system dubbed democratic - in fact a political system dominated by

new capitalist elites and their heavily funded mass media.

Imperial centered regimes run by collaborating elites spanning the Baltic States, Central and Eastern Europe to the Balkans is the most striking example of imperial expansion in the 20th century. The break-up and take-over of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc and its incorporation into the US led NATO alliance and the European Union resulted in imperial hubris. Washington made premature declarations of a unipolar world while Western Europe proceeded to plunder public resources, ranging from factories to real estate, exploiting cheap labor, overseas and via immigration, drawing on a formidable 'reserve army' to undermine living standards of unionized labor in the West.

The unity of purpose of European and US imperial regimes allowed for the peaceful joint takeover of the wealth of the new regions by private monopolies. The imperial states initially subsidized the new client regimes with large scale transfers and loans on condition that they allowed imperial firms to seize resources, real estate, land, factories, service sectors, media outlets etc. Heavily indebted states went from a sharp crises in the initial period to 'spectacular' growth to profound and chronic social crises with double digit unemployment in the 20 year period of client building. While worker protests emerged as wages deteriorated, unemployment soared and welfare provisions were cut, destitution spread. However the 'new middle class' embedded in the political and media apparatuses and in joint economic ventures are sufficiently funded by imperial financial institutions to protect their dominance.

The dynamic of imperial expansion in East, Central and Southern Europe however did not provide the impetus for strategic advance, because of the ascendancy of highly volatile financial capital and a powerful militarist caste in the Euro-American political centers. In important respects military and political expansion was no longer harnessed to economic conquest. The reverse was true: economic plunder and political dominance served as instruments for projecting military power.

Imperial Sequences: From War for Exploitation to Exploitation for War

The relations between imperial military policies and economic interests are complex and changing over time and historical context. In some circumstances, an imperial regime will invest heavily in military personnel and augment monetary expenditures to overthrow an anti-imperialist ruler and establish a client regime far beyond any state or private economic return. For example, US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, proxy wars in Somalia and Yemen have not resulted in greater profits for US multinational corporations' nor has it enhanced private exploitation of raw materials, labor or markets. At best, imperial wars have provided profits for mercenary contractors, construction companies and related 'war industries' profiting through transfers from the US treasury and the exploitation of US taxpayers, mostly wage and salary earners.

In many cases, especially after the Second World War, the emerging US imperial state lavished a multi-billion dollar loan and aid program for Western Europe. The Marshall Plan forestalled anti-capitalist social upheavals and restored capitalist political dominance. This allowed for the emergence of NATO (a military alliance led and dominated by the US). Subsequently, US multi-national corporations invested in and traded with Western Europe reaping lucrative profits, once the imperial state created favorable political and economic conditions. In other words imperial state politico-military intervention preceded the rise and

expansion of US multi-national capital. A myopic short term analysis of the initial post-war activity would downplay the importance of private US economic interests as the driving force of US policy. Extending the time period to the following two decades, the interplay between initial high cost state military and economic expenditures with later private high return gains provides a perfect example of how the process of imperial power operates.

The role of the imperial state as an instrument for opening, protecting and expanding private market, labor and resource exploitation corresponds to a time in which both the state and the dominant classes were primarily motivated by industrial empire building.

US directed military intervention and coups in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Chile (1973), the Dominican Republic (1965) were linked to specific imperial economic interests and corporations. For example, US and English oil corporations sought to reverse the nationalization of oil in Iran. The US, United Fruit Company opposed the agrarian reform policies in Guatemala. The major US copper and telecommunication companies supported and called for the US backed coup in Chile.

In contrast, current US military interventions and wars in the Middle East, South Asia and the Horn of Africa are not promoted by US multi-nationals. The imperial policies are promoted by militarists and Zionists embedded in the state, mass media and powerful 'civil' organizations. The same imperial methods (coups and wars) serve different imperial rulers and interests.

Clients, Allies and Puppet Regimes

Imperial networks involve securing a variety of complementary economic, military and political 'resource bases' which are both part of the imperial system and retain varying degrees of political and economic autonomy.

In the dynamic earlier stages of US Empire building, from roughly the 1950's - 1970's, US multi-national corporations and the economy as a whole dominated the world economy. Its allies in Europe and Asia were highly dependent on US markets, financing and development. US military hegemony was reflected in a series of regional military pacts which secured almost instant support for US regional wars, military coups and the construction of military bases and naval ports on their territory. Countries were divided into 'specializations' which served the particular interests of the US Empire. Western Europe was a military outpost, industrial partner and ideological collaborator. Asia, primarily Japan and South Korea served as 'frontline military outposts', as well as industrial partners. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines were essentially client regimes which provided raw materials as well as military bases. Singapore and Hong Kong were financial and commercial entrepots. Pakistan was a client military regime serving as a frontline pressure on China.

Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Gulf mini-states, ruled by client authoritarian regimes, provided oil and military bases. Egypt and Jordan and Israel anchored imperial interests in the Middle East. Beirut served as the financial center for US, European and Middle East bankers.

Africa and Latin America including client and nationalist-populist regimes were a source of raw materials as well as markets for finished goods and cheap labor.

The prolonged US-Vietnam war and Washington's subsequent defeat eroded the power of the empire. Western Europe, Japan and South Korea's industrial expansion challenged US industrial primacy. Latin America's pursuit of nationalist, import - substitution policies forced

US investment toward overseas manufacturing. In the Middle East nationalist movements toppled US clients in Iran and Iraq and undermined military outposts. Revolutions in Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Algeria, Nicaragua and elsewhere curtailed Euro-American 'open ended' access to raw materials, at least temporarily.

The decline of the US Empire was temporarily arrested by the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and the establishment of client regimes throughout the region. Likewise the upsurge of imperial-centered client regimes in Latin America between the mid 1970's to the end of the 1990's gave the appearance of an imperialist recovery. The 1990's however was not the beginning of a repeat of the early 1950's imperial take off: it was the "last hurrah" before a long term irreversible decline. The entire imperial political apparatus, so successful in its clandestine operations in subverting the Soviet and Eastern European regimes, played a marginal role when it came to capitalizing on the economic opportunities which ensued. Germany and other EU countries led the way in the takeover of lucrative privatized enterprises. Russian- Israeli oligarchs(seven of the top eight) seized and pillaged privatized strategic industries, banks and natural resources. The principal US beneficiaries were the banks and Wall Street firms which laundered billions of illicit earnings and collected lucrative fees from mergers, acquisitions, stock listings and other less than transparent activities. In other words, the collapse of Soviet collectivism strengthened the parasitical financial sector of the US Empire. Worse still, the assumption of a 'unipolar world' fostered by US ideologues, played into the hands of the militarists, who now assumed that former constraints on US military assaults on nationalists and Soviet allies had disappeared. As a result military intervention became the principle driving force in US empire building, leading to the first Iraq war, the Yugoslav and Somali invasion and the expansion of US military bases throughout the former Soviet bloc and Eastern Europe.

At the very pinnacle of US global-political and military power during the 1990's, with all the major Latin American regimes enveloped in the empire-centered neo-liberal warp, the seeds of decay and decline set in.

The economic crises of the late 1990's, led to major uprisings and electoral defeats of practically all US clients in Latin America, spelling the decline of US imperial domination. China's extraordinary dynamic and cumulative growth displaced US manufacturing capital and weakened US leverage over rulers in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The vast transfer of US state resources to overseas imperial adventures, military bases and the shoring up of clients and allies led to domestic decline.

The US empire, passively facing economic competitors displacing the US in vital markets and engaged in prolonged and unending wars which drained the treasury, attracted a cohort of mediocre policymakers who lacked a coherent strategy for rectifying policies and reconstructing the state to serve productive activity capable of 'retaking markets'. Instead the policies of open-ended and unsustainable wars played into the hands of a special sub-group (sui generis) of militarists, American Zionists. They capitalized on their infiltration of strategic positions in the state, enhanced their influence in the mass media and a vast network of organized "pressure groups" to reinforce US subordination to Israel's drive for Middle East supremacy.

The result was the total "unbalancing" of the US imperial apparatus: military action was unhinged from economic empire building. A highly influential upper caste of Zionist-militarists harnessed US military power to an economically marginal state (Israel), in perpetual hostility toward the 1.5 billion Muslim world. Equally damaging, American Zionist ideologues and policymakers promoted repressive institutions and legislation and

Islamophobic ideological propaganda designed to terrorize the US population. Equally important islamophobic ideology served to justify permanent war in South Asia and the Middle East and the exorbitant military budgets, at a time of sharply deteriorating domestic socio-economic conditions. Hundreds of billions of dollars were spent unproductively as “Homeland Security” which strived in every way to recruit, train, frame and arrest Afro-American Muslim men as “terrorists”. Thousands of secret agencies with hundreds of thousands of national, state and local officials spied on US citizens who at some point may have sought to speak or act to rectify or reform the militarist-financial-Zionist centered imperialist policies.

By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the US empire could only destroy adversaries (Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan) provoke military tensions (Korean peninsula, China Sea) and undermine relations with potentially lucrative trading partners (Iran, Venezuela). Galloping authoritarianism fused with fifth column Zionist militarism to foment islamophobic ideology. The convergence of authoritarian mediocrities, upwardly mobile knaves and fifth column tribal loyalists in the Obama regime precluded any foreseeable reversal of imperial decay.

China’s growing global economic network and dynamic advance in cutting edge applied technology in everything from alternative energy to high speed trains, stands in contrast to the Zionist-militarist infested empire of the US.

The US demands on client Pakistan rulers to empty their treasury in support of US Islamic wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, stands in contrast to the \$30 billion dollar Chinese investments in infrastructure, energy and electrical power and multi-billion dollar increases in trade.

US \$3 billion dollar military subsidies to Israel stand in contrast to China’s multi-billion dollar investments in Iranian oil and trade agreements. US funding of wars against Islamic countries in Central and South Asia stands in contrast to Turkey’s expanding economic trade and investment agreements in the same region. China has replaced the US as the key trading partner in leading South American countries, while the US unequal “free trade” agreement(NAFTA) impoverishes Mexico. Trade between the European Union and China exceeds that with the US.

In Africa, the US subsidizes wars in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, while China signs on to multi-billion dollar investment and trade agreements, building up African infrastructure in exchange for access to raw materials. There is no question that the economic future of Africa is increasingly linked to China.

The US Empire, in contrast, is in a deadly embrace with an insignificant colonial militarist state (Israel), failed states in Yemen and Somalia, corrupt stagnant client regimes in Jordan and Egypt and the decadent rent collecting absolutist petrol-states of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. All form part of an unproductive atavistic coalition bent on retaining power via military supremacy. Yet Empires of the 21st century are built on the bases of productive economies with global networks linked to dynamic trading partners.

Recognizing the economic primacy and market opportunities linked to becoming part of the Chinese global network, former or existing US clients and even puppet rulers have begun to edge away from submission to US mandates. Fundamental shifts in economic relations and political alignments have occurred throughout Latin America. Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia and

other countries support Iran's non-military nuclear program in defiance of Zionist led Washington aggression. Several countries have defied Israel-US policymakers by recognizing Palestine as a state. Trade with China surpasses trade with the US in the biggest countries in the region.

Puppet regimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan have signed major economic agreements with China, Iran and Turkey even while the US pours billions to bolster its military position. Turkey an erstwhile military client of the US-NATO command broadens its own quest for capitalist hegemony by expanding economic ties with Iran, Central Asia and the Arab-Muslim world, challenging US-Israeli military hegemony.

The US Empire still retains major clients and nearly a thousand military bases around the world. As client and puppet regimes decline, Washington increases the role and scope of extra-territorial death squad operations from 50 to 80 countries. The growing independence of regimes in the developing world is especially fueled by an economic calculus: China offers greater economic returns and less political-military interference than the US.

Washington's imperial network is increasingly based on military ties with allies: Australia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan in the Far East and Oceania; the European Union in the West; and a smattering of Central and South American states in the South. Even here, the military allies are no longer economic dependencies: Australia and New Zealand's principle export markets are in Asia (China). EU-China trade is growing exponentially. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are increasingly tied by trade and investment with China ... as is Pakistan and India.

Equally important new regional networks which exclude the US are growing in Latin America and Asia, creating the potential for new economic blocs.

In other words the US imperial economic network constructed after World War II and amplified by the collapse of the USSR is in the process of decay, even as the military bases and treaties remain as a formidable 'platform' for new military interventions.

What is clear is that the military, political and ideological gains in network-building by the US around the world with the collapse of the USSR and the post-Soviet wars are not sustainable. On the contrary the overdevelopment of the ideological-military-security apparatus raised economic expectations and depleted economic resources resulting in the incapacity to exploit economic opportunities or consolidate economic networks. US funded "popular uprisings" in the Ukraine led to client regimes incapable of promoting growth. In the case of Georgia, the regime engaged in an adventurous war with Russia resulting in trade and territorial losses. It is a matter of time before existing client regimes in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines and Mexico will face major upheavals, due to the precarious bases of rule by corrupt, stagnant and repressive rulers.

The process of decay of the US Empire is both cause and consequence of the challenge by rising economic powers establishing alternative centers of growth and development. Changes within countries at the periphery of the empire and growing indebtedness and trade deficits at the 'center' of the empire are eroding the empire. The existing US governing class, in both its financial and militarist variants show neither will nor interest in confronting the causes of decay. Instead each mutually supports the other: the financial sector lowers taxes deepening the public debt and plunders the treasury. The military caste drains the treasury in pursuit of wars and military outposts and increases the trade deficit by undermining commercial and investment undertakings.

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