

Towards an “Alternative New World Order”

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Independent nations must move toward New World Order: Jean Bricmont

Prof. Jean Bricmont is a renowned Belgian intellectual, theoretical physicist, philosopher of science and a professor at the Université catholique de Louvain. A progressive author, he has cooperated with the leading American thinker Noam Chomsky on a variety of anti-war causes.

In 2007, he wrote an article in French discussing the possibility of a US invasion of Iran. One of his famous books is “Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals’ Abuse of Science” which he has co-written with Alan Sokal. In this book, they talk about a number of issues, including the allegedly incompetent and pretentious usage of scientific concepts by a small group of influential philosophers and intellectuals.

Bricmont’s articles have appeared on Counterpunch, Monthly Review, Voltairenet, Z Magazine, Global Research and other print and online publications.

He has proposed the theory of humanitarian imperialism and is strongly opposed to the U.S. military expeditions around the world and its unilateral attitude toward the independent nations. Bricmont believes that the Non-Aligned Movement countries can move toward establishing a new world order based on the communal interests of the member states.

What follows is the full text of my interview with Prof. Jean Bricmont to whom I’ve talked about a number of issues including the Western powers’ hypocrisy on the human rights issue, America’s wars and military expeditions around the world, the concept of “humanitarian intervention” and Israel’s war threats against Iran.

Dear Jean; in your article, “The Case for a Non-Interventionist Foreign Policy,” you write of the justifications the imperial powers come up with in order to rationalize their military expeditions around the world. Isn’t a hawkish foreign policy an advantage for the politicians in the Western world, particularly the United States, to attract the vote and supporting of the public? Will the American people elect a pacifist President who openly vows to put an end to all the U.S. wars and refrain from waging new wars?

I am not sure that it attracts the votes. In Europe, certainly not. The most hawkish politicians, Blair and Sarkozy were not popular for a long time because of their foreign policy. In Germany the public is systematically in favor of a peaceful foreign policy. As the American pacifist A. J. Muste remarked, the problem in all wars lies with the victor – they think violence pays. The defeated, like Germany, and to some extent the rest of Europe, know that war is not so rosy.

However, I think that, except in times of crisis, like the Vietnam or the Algerian wars, when

they turned badly for the U.S. or France, most people are not very interested in foreign policy, which is understandable, given their material problems and given the fact that it looks like being out of reach of ordinary people.

On the other hand, every U.S. presidential candidate has to make patriotic statements, “we are the best”, “a light at the top of the hill”, a “defender of democracy and human rights” and so on. That, of course, is true in all systems of power, the only thing that varies are the “values” to which one refers (being a good Christian or Muslim or defending socialism, etc.).

And, it is true that, in order to get the votes, one must get the support of the press and of big money. That introduces an enormous bias in favor of militarism and of support for Israel.

The imperial powers, as you have indicated in your writings, wage wars, kill innocent people and plunder the natural resources of weaker countries under the pretext of bringing democracy to them. So, who should take care of the principles of international law, territorial integrity and sovereignty? Attacking other countries at will and killing defenseless civilians recklessly is a flagrant parade of lawlessness. Is it possible to bring these powers to their senses and hold them accountable over what they do?

I think the evolution of the world goes in that direction; respect for the principles of international law, territorial integrity and sovereignty. As I said before, the European populations are rather peaceful, both inside Europe and with respect to the rest of the world, at least, compared to the past. Some of their leaders are not peaceful and there is a strong pressure from an apparently strange alliance in favor of war between human rights interventionists and neo-conservatives who are influential in the media and in the intelligentsia, but they are not the only voices and they are rather unpopular with the general public.

As for the U.S., they are in a deep crisis, not only economically, but also diplomatically. They have lost control of Asia long ago, are losing Latin America and, now, the Middle East. Africa is turning more and more towards China.

So, the world is becoming multipolar, whether one likes it or not. I see at least two dangers: that the decline of the U.S. will produce some crazy reaction, leading to war, or that the collapse of the American empire creates chaos, a bit like the collapse of the Roman Empire did. It is the responsibility of the Non-Aligned Movement and the BRICS countries to insure an orderly transition towards a really new world order.

What seems hypocritical in the Western powers’ attitude toward the concept of human rights is that they ceaselessly condemn the violation of human rights in the countries with which they are at odds, but intentionally remain silent about the same violations in the countries which are allied with them. For instance, you surely know that how the political prisoners are mistreated and tortured in Saudi Arabia, Washington’s number one ally among the Arab countries. So, why don’t they protest and condemn these violations?

Do you know any power that is not hypocritical? It seems to me that this is the way power functions in all places and at all times.

For example, in 1815, at the fall of Napoleon, the Tsar of Russia, the Austrian Emperor and the King of Prussia came together in what they called their Holy Alliance, claiming to base their rules of conduct “on the sublime truths contained in the eternal religion of Christ our Savior,” as well as on the principles “of their holy religion, precepts of justice, charity and peace,” and vowed to behave toward their subjects “as a father toward his children.” During the Boer war, the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, declared that it was “a war for democracy” and that “we seek neither gold mines nor territory”. Bertrand Russell, citing these remarks, commented that “cynical foreigners” couldn’t help noticing that “we nevertheless obtained both the mines and the territory”.

At the height of the Vietnam War, the American historian Arthur Schlesinger described U.S. policy there as part of “our overall program of international good will”. At the end of that war, a liberal commentator wrote in the *New York Times* that: “For a quarter of a century, the United States have tried to do good, to encourage political freedom and promote social justice in the Third World”.

In that sense, things have not changed. People sometimes think that, because our system is more democratic, things must have changed. But that assumes that the public is well informed, which it is not true because of the many biases in the media, and that it is actively involved in the formation of foreign policy, which is also not true, except in times of crisis. The formation of foreign policy is a very elitist and undemocratic affair.

Attacking or invading other countries under the pretext of humanitarian intervention may be legalized and permissible with the unanimity of the Security Council permanent members. If they all vote in favor a military strike, then it will happen. But, don’t you think that the very fact that only 5 world countries can make decisions for 193 members of the United Nations while this considerable majority don’t have any say in the international developments is an insult to all of these nations and their right of self-determination?

Of course. You don’t need unanimity actually, except for the permanent members. But now that China and Russia seem to have taken an autonomous position with respect to the West, it is not clear that new wars will be legal. I am not happy with the current arrangements at the Security Council, but I still think that the UN is, on the whole, a good thing; its Charter provides a defense, in principle, against intervention and a framework for international order and its existence provides a forum where different countries can meet, which is better than nothing.

Of course, reforming the UN is a tricky business, since it cannot be done without the consent of the permanent members of the Security Council, who are not likely to be very enthusiastic at the prospect of relinquishing part of their power. What will matter in the end will be the evolution of the relationship of forces in the world, and that is not going in the direction of those who think that they now control it.

Let’s talk about some contemporary issues. In your articles, you have talked of the war in Congo. It was very shocking to me that the Second Congo War was the deadliest conflict in the African history with some 5 million innocent people dead, but the U.S. mainstream media put a lid on it because one of the belligerents, the Rwandan army, was a close ally of Washington. What’s your take on that?

Well, I am not an expert on that part of the world. But I notice that the Rwandan tragedy of

1994 is often used as an argument for foreign intervention, which, it is claimed, would have stopped the killings, while the tragedy in Congo should be taken as an argument against foreign intervention and for respect of international law, since it was to a large extent due to the intervention of Rwandan and Ugandan troops in Congo.

Of course, the fact that the latter argument is never made shows, once more, how the discourse about humanitarian intervention is biased in favor of the powers that be, who want to attribute to themselves the *right* to intervene, whenever it suits them.

Just a few days ago, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon condemned Iranian leaders for their supposedly “inflammatory and hateful” remarks on Israel. However, I never remember him condemning the Israeli officials for their frequent repeating of dangerous war threats against Iran. What’s the reason behind this hypocrisy?

As you know, the hypocrisy with respect to Israel in the West reaches staggering proportions and Ban Ki-moon, although he is UN Secretary General, is very much on “pro-Western” positions. While I myself have doubts about the wisdom of the Iranian rhetoric about Israel, I think that the threats of military actions against Iran by Israel are far worse and should be considered illegal under international law. I also think that the unilateral sanctions against Iran, taken by the U.S. and its allies, largely to please Israel, are shameful. And, although the people who claim to be anti-racist in the West never denounce these policies, I think they are deeply racist, because they are accepted only because so-called civilized countries, Israel and its allies, exert this threat and those sanctions against an “uncivilized” one, Iran. This will be remembered in the future in the same way that slavery is remembered now.

There are people like you who oppose the U.S. militarism, its imposture and hypocrisy in dealing with the human rights and its attempts to devour the oil-rich Middle East, but unfortunately I should say, you’re in the minority. It’s the Israeli-administered Congress and hawkish think tanks such as the Council on Foreign Relations and National Endowment for Democracy that run the United States, not the anti-war, pro-peace progressive thinkers and writers like you. How much influence do the progressive thinkers and leftist media have over the policies which are taken in the United States?

Well, I think one has to make a difference between support for Israel and the desire to “devour” oil. The two policies are not the same and are, in fact, contradictory. As, I think, Mearsheimer and Walt have shown, the pro-Israel policies of the U.S. are to a large extent driven by the pro-Israel lobby and do not correspond to or help their economic or geo-strategic interests. For example, as far as I know, there would be no problem for our oil companies to drill in Iran, if it weren’t for the sanctions imposed on that country; but the latter are linked to the hostility to Iran from Israel, not from any desire to control oil.

The second remark is that the anti-war people are not necessarily on the left. True, there is a big part of the Right that has become neo-conservative, but there is also a big part of the Left that is influenced by the ideology of humanitarian intervention. However, there is also a libertarian Right, Ron Paul for example, that is staunchly anti-war, and there are some remnants of a pacifist or anti-imperialist Left. Note that this has always been the case: the pro and anti-imperialist position, even back in the days of colonialism, do not coincide with the Left-Right divide, if the latter is understood in socio-economic terms or in “moral” terms

(about gay marriage for example).

Next, it is true that we have very little influence, but that is partly because we are divided, between an anti-war Left and anti-war Right. I believe that a majority of the population is opposed to these endless and costly wars, mostly, in Europe, because of the lesson they drew from WWII, or from their defeat in the colonial wars, and, in the U.S., because of war fatigue after Afghanistan and Iraq.

What we do not have is a consistent anti-war movement; to build the latter one would have to focus on war itself and unite both sides of the opposition (Right and Left). But if movements can be built around other “single issues,” like abortion or gay marriage, that put aside all socio-economic problems and class issues, why not?

Although such a movement does not exist now, its prospects are not totally hopeless: if the economic crisis deepens, and if the worldwide opposition to U.S. policies increases, citizens of all political stripes might gather to try to build alternatives.

What’s your viewpoint regarding the U.S. and its allies’ war of sanctions, embargoes, nuclear assassinations and psychological operation against Iran? Iran is practically under a multilateral attack by the United States, Israel and their submissive European cronies. Is there any way for Iran to get out of the dilemma and resist the pressures? How much do you know Iran? Have you heard of its culture and civilization, which the mainstream media never talk about?

I do not know much about Iran, but I do not think I need to know very much about that country although I would certainly like to know more, in order to oppose the policies you mention. I was also opposed to Western interventions in former Yugoslavia or in Libya.

Some people think there are good and bad interventions. But the main issue for me is: who intervenes? It is never really the “citizens” or the “civil society” of the West, or even the European countries on their own, meaning without U.S. support, it is always the U.S. military, mostly its Air Force.

Now, one may of course defend the idea that international law should be disregarded and that the defense of human rights should be left to the U.S. Air Force. But many people who support “good” interventions do not say that. They usually argue that “we” must do something to “save the victims” in a particular situation. What this viewpoint forgets is that the “we” who is supposed to intervene is not the people who actually speak, but the U.S. military.

Therefore, support for any intervention only strengthens the arbitrary power of the U.S., which, of course, uses it as it seems fit, and not, in general, according to the wishes of those

who support “good” interventions.

And finally, would you please give us an insight of how the corporate media serve the interests of the imperial powers? How do they work? Is it morally justifiable to use media propaganda to achieve political and colonial goals?

The connection between “corporate media” and war propaganda is complicated, as is the relationship between capitalism and war. Most people on the Left think that capitalism needs war or leads to it. But the truth, in my view, is far more nuanced. American capitalists make fortunes in China and Vietnam now that there is peace between the U.S. and East Asia; for American workers, it is a different matter, of course.

There is no reason whatsoever for oil or other Western companies not to do business with Iran, and, if there was peace in the region, capitalists would descend upon it like vultures in order to exploit a cheap and relatively qualified labor force.

This is not to say that capitalists are nice, nor that they cannot be individually pro-war, but only that war, in general, is not in their interests and they are not necessarily the main force pushing for war.

People are driven to war by conflicting ideologies, especially when they take a fanatical form – for example, when you believe that a certain piece of land was given to you by God, or that your country has a special mission, like exporting human rights and democracy, preferably by cruise missiles and drones.

It is both sad and ironical that an idea that is largely secular and liberal, the one of human rights, has now been turned into one of the main means to whip up war hysteria in the West. But that is our present situation and a most urgent and important task is to change it.

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