

Understanding Empire: Hierarchy, Networks and Clients

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Introduction:

The imperial system is much more complex than what is commonly referred to as the “US Empire”. The US Empire, with its vast network of financial investments, military bases, multi-national corporations and client states, is the single most important component of the global imperial system (1). Nevertheless, it is overly simplistic to overlook the complex hierarchies, networks, follower states and clients that define the contemporary imperial system (2). To understand empire and imperialism today requires us to look at the complex and changing system of imperial stratification.

Hierarchy of Empire

The structure of power of the world imperial system can best be understood through a classification of countries according to their political, economic, diplomatic and military organization. The following is a schema of this system:

- I. Hierarchy of Empire (from top to bottom)
 - A. Central Imperial States (CIS)
 - B. Newly Emerging Imperial Powers (NEIP)
 - C. Semi-autonomous Client Regimes (SACR)
 - D. Client Collaborator Regimes (CCR)

II. Independent States:

- A. Revolutionary
Cuba and Venezuela
- B. Nationalist
Sudan, Iran, Zimbabwe, North Korea

III. Contested Terrain and Regimes in Transition

Armed resistance, elected regimes, social movements

At the top of the imperial system are those imperial states whose power is projected on a world scale, whose ruling classes dominate investment and financial markets and who penetrate the economies of the rest of the world. At the apex of the imperial system stand

the US, the European Union (itself highly stratified) and Japan. Led by the US they have established networks of 'follower imperial states' (largely regional hegemons) and client or vassal states which frequently act as surrogate military forces. Imperial states act in concert to break down barriers to penetration and takeovers, while at the same time, competing to gain advantages for their own state and multinational interests.

Just below the central imperial states are newly emerging imperial powers (NEIP), namely China, India, Canada, Russia and Australia. The NEIP states are subject to imperial penetration, as well as expanding into neighboring and overseas underdeveloped states and countries rich in extractive resources. The NEIP are linked to the central imperial states (CIS) through joint ventures in their home states, while they increasingly compete for control over extractive resources in the underdeveloped countries. They frequently 'follow' in the footsteps of the imperial powers, and in some cases take advantage of conflicts to better their own position.

For example China and India's overseas expansion focuses on investments in extractive mineral and energy sectors to fuel domestic industrialization, similar to the earlier (1880-1950's) imperial practices of the US and Europe. Similarly China invests in African countries, which are in conflict with the US and EU, just as the US developed ties with anti-colonial regimes (Algeria, Kenya and Francophone Africa) in conflict with their former European colonial rulers in the 1950' and 1960's.

Further down the hierarchy of the imperial system are the 'semi-autonomous client regimes' (SACR). These include Brazil, South Korea, South Africa, Taiwan, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Chile and lately Bolivia. These states have a substantial national economic base of support, through public or private ownership of key economic sectors. They are governed by regimes, which pursue diversified markets, though highly dependent on exports to the emerging imperial states. On the other hand these states are highly dependent on imperial state military protection (Taiwan, South Korea and Saudi Arabia) and provide regional military bases for imperial operations. Many are resource-dependent exporters (Saudi Arabia, Chile, Nigeria and Bolivia) who share revenues and profits with the multi-nationals of the imperial states. They include rapidly industrialized countries (Taiwan and South Korea), as well as relatively agro-mineral export states (Brazil, Argentina and Chile).

The wealthy oil states have close ties with the financial ruling classes of the imperial counties and invest heavily in real estate, financial instruments and Treasury notes which finance the deficits in the US and England.

On key issues such as imperial wars in the Middle East, the invasion of Haiti, destabilizing regimes in Africa, support for global neo-liberal policies and imperial takeovers of strategic sectors, they collaborate with rulers from the CIS and the NEIP. Nevertheless, because of powerful elite interests and in some cases of powerful national social movements, they come into limited conflicts with the imperial powers. For example, Brazil, Chile and Argentina disagree with the US efforts to undermine the nationalist Venezuelan government. They have lucrative trade, energy and investment relations with Venezuela. In addition they do not wish to legitimize military coups, which might threaten their own rule and legitimacy in the eyes of an electorate partial to President Chavez. While structurally deeply integrated into the imperial system, the SACR regimes retain a degree of autonomy in formulating foreign and domestic policy, which may even conflict or compete with imperial interests.

Despite their 'relative autonomy', the regimes also provide military and political mercenaries to serve the imperialist countries. This is best illustrated in the case of Haiti. Subsequent to the US invasion and overthrow of the elected Aristide Government in 2004, the US succeeded in securing an occupation force from its outright client and 'semi-autonomous' client regimes. President Lula of Brazil sent a major contingent. A Brazilian General headed the entire mercenary military force. Chile's Gabriel Valdez headed the United Nations occupation administration as the senior official overseeing the bloody repression of Haitian resistance movements. Other 'semi-autonomous' clients, such as Uruguay and Bolivia, added military contingents along with soldiers from client regimes such as Panama, Paraguay, Colombia and Peru. President Evo Morales justified Bolivia's continued military collaboration with the US in Haiti under his presidency by citing its 'peacekeeping role', knowing full well that between December 2006 and February 2007 scores of Haitian poor were slaughtered during a full-scale UN invasion of Haiti's poorest and most densely populated slums.

The key theoretical point is that given Washington current state of being tied down in two wars in the Middle East and West Asia, it depends on its clients to police and repress anti-imperialist movements elsewhere. Somalia, as in Haiti, was invaded by mercenaries by Ethiopia, trained, financed, armed and directed by US military advisers. Subsequently, during the occupation, Washington succeeded in securing its African clients (via the so-called Organization of African Unity according to the White House's stooge, Ugandan Army spokesman Captain Paddy Ankunda) to send a mercenary occupation army to prop up its unpopular client Somali warlord ruler. Despite opposition from its Parliament, Uganda is sending 1500 mercenaries along with contingents from Nigeria, Burundi, Ghana and Malawi.

At the bottom of the imperial hierarchy are the client collaborator regimes (CCR). These include Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf States, Central American and Caribbean Island states, the Axis of Sub-Saharan States (ASS) (namely Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Ghana), Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Mexico, Eastern European states (in and out of the European Union), former states of the USSR (Georgia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Latvia, etc), Philippines, Indonesia, North Africa and Pakistan. These countries are governed by authoritarian political elites dependent on the imperial or NEIP states for arms, financing and political support. They provide vast opportunities for exploitation and export of raw materials. Unlike the SACR, exports from client regimes have little value added, as industrial processing of raw materials takes place in the imperial countries, particularly in the NEIP. Predator, rentier, comprador and kleptocratic elites who lack any entrepreneurial vocation rule the CCR. They frequently provide mercenary soldiers to service imperial countries intervening, conquering, occupying and imposing client regimes in imperial targeted countries. The client regimes thus are subordinate collaborators of the imperial powers in the plunder of wealth, the exploitation of billions of workers and the displacement of peasants and destruction of the environment.

The structure of the imperial system is based on the power of ruling classes to exercise and project state and market power, retain control of exploitative class relations at home and abroad and to organize mercenary armies from among its client states. Led and directed by imperial officials, mercenary armies collaborate in destroying autonomous popular, nationalist movements and independent states.

Client regimes form a crucial link in sustaining the imperial powers. They complement imperial occupation forces, facilitating the extraction of raw materials. Without the

'mercenaries of color' the imperial powers would have to extend and over-stretch their own military forces, provoking high levels of internal opposition, and heightening overseas resistance to overt wars of re-colonization. Moreover client mercenaries are less costly in terms of financing and reduce the loss of imperial soldiers. There are numerous euphemistic terms used to describe these client mercenary forces: United Nations, Organization of American States and Organization of African Unity 'peacekeepers', the 'Coalition of the Willing' among others. In many cases a few white imperial senior officers command the lower officers and soldiers of color of the client mercenary armies.

Independent States and Movements

The imperial system while it straddles the globe and penetrates deeply into societies, economies and states is neither omnipotent nor omniscient. Challenges to the imperial system come from two sources: relatively independent states and powerful social and political movements.

The 'independent' states are largely regimes, which are in opposition to and targeted by the imperial states. They include Venezuela, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Zimbabwe. What defines these regimes as 'independent' is their willingness to reject the policies of the imperial powers, particularly imperial military interventions. They also reject imperialist demands for unconditional access to markets, resources and military bases.

These regimes differ widely in terms of social policy, degree of popular support, secular-religious identities, economic development and consistency in opposing imperialist aggression. All face immediate military threats and /or destabilization programs, designed to replace the independent governments with client regimes.

Contested Terrain

The imperial hierarchy and networks are based on class and national relations of power. This means that the maintenance of the entire system is based on the ruling classes dominating the underlying population - a very problematical situation given the unequal distribution of costs and benefits between the rulers and the ruled. Today massive armed resistance and social movements in numerous countries challenge the imperial system.

Contested terrain includes: Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia, Somalia, Palestine, Sudan and Lebanon where armed resistance is intent on defeating imperial clients. Sites of mass confrontations include Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Iran where the imperial powers are intent on overthrowing newly elected independent regimes. Large scale social movements organized to combat client regimes and the imperial patrons have recently emerged in Mexico, Palestine, Lebanon, China, Ecuador and elsewhere. Inside the imperial states there is mass opposition to particular imperial wars and policies, but only small and weak anti-imperialist movements.

The Anomaly: Israel in the Imperial System

Israel is clearly a colonialist power, with the fourth or fifth biggest nuclear arsenal and the second biggest arms exporter in the world. Its population size, territorial spread and economy however are puny in comparison with the imperial and newly emerging imperial powers. Despite these limitations Israel exercises supreme power in influencing the

direction of United States war policy in the Middle East via a powerful Zionist political apparatus, which permeates the State, the mass media, elite economic sectors and civil society (3a). Through Israel's direct political influence in making US foreign policy, as well as through its overseas military collaboration with dictatorial imperial client regimes, Israel can be considered part of the imperial power configuration despite its demographic constraints, its near universal pariah diplomatic status, and its externally sustained economy.

Regimes in Transition

The imperial system is highly asymmetrical, in constant disequilibrium and therefore in constant flux - as wars, class and national struggles break out and economic crises bring down regimes and raise new political forces to power. In recent times we have seen the rapid conversion of Russia from a world hegemonic contender (prior to 1989), converted into an imperial client state subject to unprecedented pillage (1991-1999) to its current position as a newly emerging imperial state. While Russia is one of the most dramatic cases of rapid and profound changes in the world imperialist system, other historical experiences exemplify the importance of political and social changes in shaping countries' relationship to the world imperial system. China and Vietnam, former bulwarks as independent, anti-imperialist states, have seen the rise of liberal-capitalist elites, the dismantling of the socialized economy and China's incorporation as a newly emerging imperialist power and Vietnam as a semi-autonomous client regime.

The major transitions during the 1980's - 1990's involved the conversion of independent anti-imperialist states into imperial client regimes. In the Western hemisphere, these transitions include Nicaragua, Chile, Bolivia, Argentina, Jamaica and Grenada. In Africa, they include Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Algeria, Ethiopia and Libya, all converted into kleptocratic client regimes. In Asia similar processes are afoot in Indo-China. Because of the disastrous consequences of imperial-centered policies administered by client regimes, the first decade of the new millennium witnessed a series of massive popular upheavals and regime changes, especially in Latin America. Popular insurrections in Argentina and Bolivia led to regime shifts from client to semi-autonomous clients. In Venezuela after a failed coup and destabilization campaign, the Chavez regime moved decisively from semi-autonomous client to an independent anti-imperialist position.

Ongoing conflicts between imperial and anti-imperialist states, between client regimes and nationalist movements, between imperial and newly emerging imperial states, will change the structure of the imperial system. The outcomes of these conflicts will produce new coalitions among the principal forces, which compose the imperial hierarchy and its adversaries. What is clear from this account is that there is no singular omnipotent 'imperial state' that unilaterally defines the international or even the imperial system.

Even the most powerful imperial state has proven incapable of unilaterally (or with clients or imperial partners) defeating or even containing the popular anti-colonial resistance in Iraq or Afghanistan. The major imperial political successes have occurred where the imperial states have been able to activate the military forces of semi-autonomous and client regimes, secure a regional (OAS, OAU and NATO) or UN cover to legitimate its conquests. Collaborator elites from the client and semi-autonomous states are essential links to the maintenance and consolidation of the imperial system and in particular the US empire. A specific case is the US', intervention and overthrow of the Somali Islamic regime.

The Case of Somalia: Black Masks - White Faces

The recent Ethiopian invasion of Somalia (December 2006) and overthrow of the de-facto governing Islamic Courts Union (ICU) or Supreme Council of Islamic Courts and imposition of a self-styled 'transitional government' of warlords is an excellent case study of the centrality of collaborator regimes in sustaining and expanding the US empire.

From 1991 with the overthrow of the government of Siad Barre until the middle of 2006, Somalia was ravaged by conflicts between feuding warlords based in clan-controlled fiefdoms (3). During the US/UN invasion and temporary occupation of Mogadishu in the mid-1990's there were massacres of over 10,000 Somali civilians and the killing and wounding of a few dozen US/UN soldiers (4). During the lawless 1990's small local groups, whose leaders later made up the ICU, began organizing community-based organizations against warlord depredations. Based on its success in building community-based movements, which cut across tribal and clan allegiances; the ICU began to eject the corrupt warlords ending extortion payments imposed on businesses and households (5). In June 2006 this loose coalition of Islamic clerics, jurists, workers, security forces and traders drove the most powerful warlords out of the capital, Mogadishu. The ICU gained widespread support among a multitude of market vendors and trades people. In the total absence of anything resembling a government, the ICU began to provide security, the rule of law and protection of households and property against criminal predators (6). An extensive network of social welfare centers and programs, health clinics, soup kitchens and primary schools, were set up serving large numbers of refugees, displaced peasants and the urban poor. This enhanced popular support for the ICU.

After having driven the last of the warlords from Mogadishu and most of the countryside, the ICU established a de-facto government, which was recognized and welcomed by the great majority of Somalis and covered over 90% of the population (7a). All accounts, even those hostile to the ICU, pointed out that the Somali people welcomed the end of warlord rule and the establishment of law and order under the ICU.

The basis of the popular support for the Islam Courts during its short rule (from June to December 2006) rested on several factors. The ICU was a relatively honest administration, which ended warlord corruption and extortion. Personal safety and property were protected, ending arbitrary seizures and kidnappings by warlords and their armed thugs. The ICU is a broad multi-tendency movement that includes moderates and radical Islamists, civilian politicians and armed fighters, liberals and populists, electoralists and authoritarians (7). Most important, the Courts succeeded in unifying the country and creating some semblance of nationhood, overcoming clan fragmentation. In the process of unifying the country, the Islamic Courts government re-affirmed Somali sovereignty and opposition to US imperialist intervention in the Middle East and particularly in the Horn of Africa via its Ethiopian client regime.

US Intervention: The United Nations, Military Occupation, Warlords and Proxies

The recent history of US efforts to incorporate Somalia into its network of African client states began during the early 1990's under President Clinton (8). While most commentators today rightly refer to Bush as an obsessive war-monger for his wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, they forget that President Clinton, in his time, engaged in several overlapping and sequential acts of war in Somalia, Iraq, Sudan and Yugoslavia. Clinton's military actions and the embargoes killed and maimed thousands of Somalis, resulted in 500,000 deaths among

Iraqi children alone and caused thousands of civilian deaths and injuries in the Balkans. Clinton ordered the destruction of Sudan's main pharmaceutical plant producing vital vaccines and drugs essential for both humans and their livestock leading to a critical shortage of these essential vaccines and treatments (9). President Clinton dispatched thousands of US troops to Somalia to occupy the country under the guise of a 'humanitarian mission' in 1994 (10). Washington intervened to bolster its favored pliant war-lord against another, against the advice of the Italian commanders of the UN troops in Somalia. Two-dozen US troops were killed in a botched assassination attempt and furious residents paraded their mutilated bodies in the streets of the Somali capital. Washington sent helicopter gunships, which shelled heavily, populated areas of Mogadishu, killing and maiming thousands of civilians in retaliation.

The US was ultimately forced to withdraw its soldiers as Congressional and public opinion turned overwhelmingly against Clinton's messy little war. The United Nations, which no longer needed to provide a cover for US intervention, also withdrew. Clinton's policy turned toward securing one subset of client warlords against the others, a policy which continued under the Bush Administration. The current 'President' of the US puppet regime, dubbed the 'Transitional Federal Government', is Abdullahi Yusuf. He is a veteran warlord deeply involved in all of the corrupt and lawless depredations which characterized Somalia between 1991 to 2006 (12). Yusuf had been President of the self-styled autonomous Puntland breakaway state in the 1990's.

Despite US and Ethiopian financial backing, Abdullahi Yusuf and his warlord associates were finally driven out of Mogadishu in June 2006 and out of the entire south central part of the country. Yusuf was holed up and cornered in a single provincial town on the Ethiopian border and lacked any social basis of support even from most of the remaining warlord clans in the capital (13). Some warlords had withdrawn their support of Yusuf and accepted the ICU's offers to disarm and integrate into Somali society underscoring the fact that Washington's discredited and isolated puppet was no longer a real political or military factor in Somalia. Nevertheless, Washington secured a UN Security Council resolution recognizing the warlord's tiny enclave of Baidoa as the legitimate government. This was despite the fact that the TFG's very existence depended on a contingent of several hundred Ethiopian mercenaries financed by the US. As the ICU troops moved westward to oust Yusuf from his border outpost - comprising less than 5% of the country - the US increased its funding for the dictatorial regime of Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia to invade Somalia (14).

Despite the setbacks, scores of US military advisers prepared the Ethiopian mercenaries for a large-scale air and ground invasion of Somalia in order to re-impose their puppet-warlord Yusuf. Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian dictator, depends heavily on US military and police weaponry, loans and advisors to retain power for his ethnic 'Tigrayan' based regime and to hold onto disputed Somali territory. The Tigrayan ethnic group represents less than 10% of the Ethiopian multi-ethnic population. Meles faced growing armed opposition from the Oromo and Ogandese liberation movements (15). His regime was despised by the influential Amhara population in the capital for rigging the election in May 2005, for killing 200 student protesters in October 2006 and jailing tens of thousands (16). Many military officials opposed him for engaging in a losing border war with Eritrea. Meles, lacking popular backing, has become the US most loyal and subservient client in the region. Embarrassingly parroting Washington's imperial 'anti-terrorist' rhetoric for his attack on Somalia, Meles sent over 15,000 troops, hundreds of armored vehicles, dozens of helicopters and warplanes into Somalia (17). Claiming that he was engaged in the 'war

against terrorism' Meles terrorized the people of Somalia with aerial bombardment and a scorched earth policy. In the name of 'national security' Meles sent his troops to the rescue of the encircled war lord and US puppet, Abdullahi Yusuf.

Washington co-coordinated its air and naval forces with the advance of the invading Ethiopian military juggernaut. As the US advised-Ethiopian mercenaries advanced by land, the US air force bombed fleeing Somalis killing scores, supposedly in hunting 'Al Queda; sympathizers (18). According to reliable reports, which were confirmed later by US and Somali puppet sources, US and Somali military forces have failed to identify a single Al Queda leader after examining scores of dead and captured fighters and refugees (19). Once again the pretext to invade Somalia used by Washington and its Ethiopian client - that the ICU was attacked because it sheltered Al Queda terrorists - was demonstrated to be false. US naval forces illegally interdicted all ships off the coast of Somalia in pursuit of fleeing Somali leaders. In Kenya, Washington directed its Nairobi client to capture and return Somalis crossing the border. Under Washington's direction both the United Nations and the Organization of African 'Unity' (sic) agreed to send an occupation army of 'peace-keepers' to protect the Ethiopian imposed puppet Yusuf regime.

Given Meles precarious internal position, he could not afford to keep his occupying army of 15,000 mercenaries in Somalia for long (20). Somali hatred for the Ethiopian occupiers surged from the first day they entered Mogadishu. There were massive demonstrations on a daily basis and increasing incidents of armed resistance from the re-grouped ICU fighters, local militants and anti-Yusuf warlords (21). The US directed Ethiopian occupation was followed in its wake by the return of the same warlords who had pillaged the country between 1991-2005 (22).

Most journalists, experts and independent observers recognize that without the presence of 'outside' support - namely the presence of at least 10,000 US and EU financed African mercenaries ('peacekeepers') the Yusuf regime will collapse in a matter of days if not hours. Washington counts on an informal coalition of African clients - a kind of 'Association of Sub-Saharan Stooges' (ASS) - to repress the mass unrest of the Somali population and to prevent the return of the popular Islamic Courts. The United Nations declared it would not send an occupation army until the 'ASS' military contingents of the Organization of African Unity had 'pacified the country (23).

The ASS, however willing their client rulers in offering mercenary troops to do the bidding of Washington, found it difficult to actually send troops. Since it was transparently a 'made-in-Washington' operation it was unpopular at home and likely to set ASS forces against growing Somali national resistance. Even Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, Washington's subservient client, encountered resistance among his 'loyal' rubber-stamp congress (24). The rest of the ASS countries refused to move their troops, until the EU and US put the money up front and the Ethiopians secured the country for them. Facing passive opposition from the great majority of Somalis and active militant resistance from the Courts, the Ethiopian dictator began to withdraw his mercenary troops. Washington, recognizing that its Somali puppet, 'President Yusuf', is totally isolated and discredited, sought to co-opt the most conservative among the Islamic Court leaders (25). Yusuf, ever fearful of losing his fragile hold on power, refused to comply with Washington's tactic of splitting the ICU.

The Somali Invasion: the Empire and its Networks

The Somali case illustrates the importance of client rulers, warlords, clans and other

collaborators as the first line of defense of strategic geo-political positions for extending and defending the US empire. The Somali experience underlines the importance of the intervention by regional and client rulers of neighboring states in defense of the empire. Client regimes and collaborator elites greatly lower the political and economic cost of maintaining the outposts of empire. This is especially the case given the overextension of US ground forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and in their impending confrontation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Given the 'over-extension' of the US ground forces, the empire relies on air and sea assaults combined with regional mercenary ground forces to oust an independent regime with popular backing.

Without the Ethiopian invasion, the puppet Somali warlord Abdullahi Yusuf would have been easily driven out of Somalia, the country unified and Washington would no longer control the coastal areas facing a major maritime oil transport route. The loss of a Somali puppet regime would have deprived Washington of a coastal platform for threatening Sudan and Eritrea.

From a practical perspective however, Washington's strategic plans for control over the Horn of Africa are deeply flawed. To secure maximum control over Somali, the White House chose to back a deeply detested veteran warlord with no social base in the country and dependent on discredited warring clans and criminal warlords. Isolated and discredited puppet rulers are a fragile thread on which to construct strategic policies of regional intervention (military bases and advisory missions). Secondly Washington chose to use a neighboring country (Ethiopia) hated by the entire Somali population to prop up its Somali puppet. Ethiopia had attacked Somali as late as 1979 over the independence of Ogadan, whose population is close to Somalis. Washington relied on the invading army of a regime in Addis Ababa, which was facing increasing popular and national unrest and was clearly incapable of sustaining a prolonged occupation. Finally, Washington counted on verbal assurances from the ASS regimes to promptly send troops to protect its re-installed client. Client regimes always tell their imperial masters what they want to hear even if they are incapable of prompt and full compliance. This is especially the case when clients fear internal opposition and prolonged costly overseas entanglements, which further discredit them.

The Somali experience demonstrates the gap between the empire's strategic projection of power and its actual capacity to realize its goals. It also exemplifies how imperialists, impressed by the number of clients, their 'paper' commitments and servile behavior, fail to recognize their strategic weakness in the face of popular national liberation movements.

US empire building efforts in the Horn of Africa, especially in Somalia, demonstrate that even with elite collaborators and client regimes, mercenary armies and ASS regional allies, the empire encounters great difficulty in containing or defeating popular national liberation movements. The failure of the Clinton policy of intervention in Somalia between 1993-1994 demonstrated this.

The human and economic cost of prolonged military invasions with ground troops has repeatedly driven the US public to demand withdrawal (and even accept defeat) as was proven in Korea, Indochina and increasingly in Iraq.

Financial and diplomatic support, including UN Security Council decisions, and military advisory teams are not sufficient to establish stable client regimes. The precariousness of the mercenary-imposed Yusuf warlord dictatorship demonstrates the limits of US sponsored UN fiats.

The Somali experience in failed empire-building reveals another even darker side of imperialism: A policy of 'rule or ruin'. The Clinton regime's failure to conquer Somalia was followed by a policy of playing off one brutal warlord against another, terrorizing the population, destroying the country and its economy until the ascent of the Islamic Courts Union. The 'rule or ruin' policy is currently in play in Iraq and Afghanistan and will come into force with the impending Israeli-backed US air and sea attack on Iran.

The origins of 'rule or ruin' policies are rooted in the fact that conquests by imperial armies do not result in stable, legitimate and popular regimes. Originating as products of imperial conquest, these client regimes are unstable and depend on foreign armies to sustain them. Foreign occupation and the accompanying wars on nationalist movements provoke mass opposition. Mass resistance results in imperial repression targeting entire populations and infrastructure. The inability to establish a stable occupation and client regime leads inevitably to imperial rulers deciding to scorch the entire country with the after thought that a weak and destroyed adversary is a consolation for a lost imperial war.

Faced with the rise of Islamic and secular anti-imperialist movements and states in Africa and possessing numerous client regimes in North Africa and the ASS grouping, Washington is establishing a US military command for Africa. The Africa Command will serve to tighten Washington's control over African military forces and expedite their dispatch to repress independence movements or to overthrow anti-imperialist regimes. Given the expanded, highly competitive presence of Chinese traders, investors and aid programs, Washington is bolstering its reliable allies among the African client elites and generals (26).

-James Petras' latest book is The Power of Israel in the United States (Clarity Press: Atlanta). His articles in English can be found at the website - www.petras.lahaine.org and in Spanish at - www.rebellion.org.

Footnotes

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9. Clinton claimed the pharmaceutical plant was producing biological and chemical weapons – a story which was refuted by scientific investigators.

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