

U.S. Imperialism, Europe, and the Middle East

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The analysis proposed here regarding the role of Europe and the Middle East in the global imperialist strategy of the United States is set in a general historical vision of capitalist expansion that I have developed elsewhere.¹ In this view capitalism has always been, since its inception, by nature, a polarizing system, that is, imperialist. This polarization—the concurrent construction of dominant centers and dominated peripheries, and their reproduction deepening in each stage—is inherent in the process of accumulation of capital operating on a global scale.

In this theory of the global expansion of capitalism the qualitative changes in the systems of accumulation, from one phase of its history to another, shape the successive forms of asymmetric centers/peripheries polarization, that is, of concrete imperialism. The contemporary world system will thus remain imperialist (polarizing) throughout the visible future, in so far as its fundamental logic remains dominated by capitalist production relations. This theory associates imperialism with the process of capital accumulation on a worldwide scale, which I consider as constituting a single reality whose various dimensions are in fact not separable. Thus it differs as much from the vulgarized version of the Leninist theory of “imperialism, the highest phase of capitalism” (as if the former phases of global expansion of capitalism were not polarizing), as from the contemporary postmodern theories that describe the new globalization as “post-imperialist.”

1. Permanent Conflict of Imperialisms with Collective Imperialism

In its globalized deployment, imperialism was always conjugated in the plural, from its inception (in the sixteenth century) until 1945. The

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permanent and often violent conflict of imperialisms has occupied as decisive a place in the transformation of the world as class struggle, through which the fundamental contradictions of capitalism are expressed. Moreover, social strife and conflicts among imperialisms are closely articulated, and it is this articulation that has determined the course of really existing capitalism. The analysis that I have proposed in this respect differs vastly from that of the “succession of hegemonies.”²

The Second World War ended in a major transformation in the forms of imperialism, substituting for the multiplicity of imperialisms in permanent conflict a collective imperialism. This collective imperialism represented the ensemble of the centers of the world capitalist system, or more simply, the triad: the United States and its external Canadian province, western and central Europe, and Japan. This new form of imperialist expansion has gone through various phases of its development, but it has been present ever since 1945. The hegemonic role of the United States must be located within this perspective, and every instance of this hegemony needs to be specified in its relation with the new collective imperialism. These questions pose problems, which are precisely those that I would wish to point out here.

The United States benefited enormously from the Second World War, which had ruined its principal contenders—Europe, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan. It was thus in a position to exert its economic hegemony, since more than half of global industrial production was concentrated in the United States, especially the technologies that would shape the development of the second half of the century. In addition, it alone possessed nuclear weapons—the new total weapon.

These dual advantages were nevertheless eroded in a relatively short period of time (within two decades) by dual recoveries, economic for capitalist Europe and Japan, and military for the Soviet Union. We must remember that this relative retreat of U.S. power resulted in lively speculation about American decline, contemplating even the ascent of possible alternative hegemonies (including Europe, Japan, and later China).

Gaullism was born at this time. Charles de Gaulle believed that the objective of the United States since 1945 had been to control the entire Old World (Eurasia). Washington had positioned itself strategically to divide Europe—which in de Gaulle’s view spanned from the Atlantic to the Urals including “Soviet Russia”—by invoking the specter of aggression from Moscow, a specter in which de Gaulle never believed. His analysis was realistic, but he found himself almost alone. To the Atlanticism promoted by Washington he envisioned a counterstrategy

founded on Franco-German reconciliation and the construction of a non-American Europe carefully excluding Great Britain, which he judged rightly to be the Trojan horse of Atlanticism. Europe could then open the way to reconciliation with “Soviet Russia.” Reconciling and drawing together the three big European populations—French, German and Russian—would put a definite end to the American project of dominating the world. The internal conflict specific to the European project can thus be summarized as the choice between two alternatives: Atlantic Europe, in which Europe is an appendage of the American project, or non-Atlantic Europe (integrating Russia). This conflict is still not resolved. But later developments—the end of Gaullism, Great Britain’s admission to the European Union, Europe’s expansion toward the east, the Soviet collapse—have combined to vitiate the European project by its dual dilution in neoliberal economic globalization and in the political-military alignment with Washington. Moreover, these developments reinforce the strength of the collective character of triad imperialism.

2. The Project of the U.S. Ruling Class: Globalize the Monroe Doctrine

The present U.S. project, overweening, even crazy, and criminal in its implications, did not spring from the head of George W. Bush to be implemented by an extreme right junta that seized power through dubious elections. This is the project the U.S. ruling class has unceasingly nurtured since 1945, even though its implementation passed through ups and downs and could not always be pursued with the consistency and violence demonstrated since the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The project always allocated a decisive role to its military dimension. Very quickly, the United States devised a global military strategy, dividing the planet into regions and allocating the responsibility for the control of each of them to a U.S. Military Command. The objective was not only to encircle the Soviet Union (and China), but also to secure the position of Washington as the ruler of last resort throughout the world. In other words, it extended the Monroe Doctrine to the entire planet, which effectively gave to the United States the exclusive right of managing the whole globe in accordance with what it defined as its national interests.

This project implies that the sovereignty of the national interests of the United States is to be placed above all other principles controlling legitimate political behavior; it engenders a systematic mistrust toward all supranational rights. Certainly, imperialisms of the past did not behave differently, and those who endeavor to minimize and excuse the

responsibilities—and the criminal behavior—of the present U.S. establishment make use of this argument and can readily find historical antecedents.

But this is precisely what one would have liked to see change in the history which began after 1945. It is because the horrors of the Second World War were produced by the conflict of imperialisms and the fascist powers' contempt for international law, that the UN was founded on a new principle proclaiming the illegitimate character of the previously established sovereign right to wage war. The United States, it could be said, not only identified itself with this new principle, but had been among the first powers to do so.

This good initiative—supported at the time by the people of the entire world—represented indeed a qualitative jump and opened the way for the progress of civilization, but never won the conviction of the ruling class of the United States. The authorities in Washington always felt ill at ease with the concept of the UN, and today brutally proclaim what they were forced to conceal up until now: that they do not accept even the concept of an international law superior to what they consider to be the exigencies of the defense of their own national interests. We cannot accept excuses for this return to a vision developed by the Nazis, which accompanied the destruction of the League of Nations. The plea in favor of international law, developed with talent and elegance by French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin at the Security Council, is not a nostalgic look toward the past but on the contrary a reminder of what the future must be. On that occasion it was the United States which defended a past that all decent opinion had definitively proclaimed obsolete. The implementation of the U.S. project necessarily went through successive phases, shaped by the particular power relations that defined them.

Immediately after the Second World War American leadership was not only accepted but even solicited by the bourgeoisie of Europe and Japan. For while the menace of a Soviet invasion could convince only the feeble-minded, its invocation rendered good services to the right as well as to social democrats hounded by their adversary communist cousins. One could then believe that the collective character of the new imperialism was only due to this political factor and that, once their backwardness in relation to the United States was overcome, Europe and Japan would seek to get rid of Washington's cumbersome and henceforth useless supervision. That was not the case. Why?

My explanation appeals to the rise of the national liberation move-

ments in Asia and Africa—during the two decades following the 1955 Bandung Conference which gave birth to the movement of nonaligned nations—and to the support they enjoyed from the Soviet Union and China (each in its own way). Imperialism was then forced to make do, thus not only accepting peaceful coexistence with a vast area which largely escaped its control (the socialist world) but also negotiating the terms of the participation of the Asian and African countries in the imperialist world system. The collective alignment of the triad under American leadership seemed useful for managing the North-South relationships of the epoch. This is why the non-aligned nations found themselves confronted with a practically indivisible Western bloc.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the smothering of the populist nationalist regimes born from national liberation movements permitted the imperial project of the United States to be deployed with extreme vigor in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. True, the project remains in the service of collective imperialism, at least up to a certain point (which I will try to clarify later). Its expression has come to be the economic government of the world on the basis of the principles of neoliberalism, implemented by the G-7 and the institutions at its service (the WTO, World Bank, and IMF), and the structural readjustment plans imposed on the suffocating third world. Even on the political level, it is clear that initially the Europeans and Japanese aligned themselves with the U.S. project. They accepted the marginalization of the UN for the benefit of NATO at the time of the 1991 Gulf War and the 2002 wars in Yugoslavia and Central Asia. This stage is still not over, even if the 2003 war on Iraq revealed some cracks in the facade.

The ruling class of the United States proclaims openly that it will not tolerate the reconstitution of any economic and military power capable of questioning its monopoly of domination over the planet, and for this purpose, it gave itself the right to wage preventive wars. Three principal potential adversaries are targeted here.

In the first place is Russia, whose dismemberment, after that of the USSR, constitutes henceforth a major strategic objective of the United States. The Russian ruling class does not appear to have understood this yet. It seems convinced that after having lost the war, it could win the peace, as had been the case for Germany and Japan. It forgets that Washington needed the recovery of these two former adversaries precisely to face the Soviet challenge. The new situation is different; the United States no longer has a serious competitor. Their first option is then to destroy the ravaged Russian adversary permanently and com-

pletely. Will Putin understand this and initiate the process of weaning the Russian ruling class of its illusions? In the second place is China, whose growth and economic success worry the United States. The U.S. strategic objective is to dismember this large country.

Europe comes third in this global vision of the new masters of the world. But here the North American establishment does not appear anxious, at least so far. The unconditional Atlanticism of a few (Great Britain, as well as the new servile powers of the East), the quicksand of the European project (a point to which I will return), and the converging interests of the dominant capital of the collective imperialism of the triad, all contribute to the effacement of the European project. It remains the European wing of the U.S. project as the diplomacy of Washington has managed to keep Germany obedient. The reunification and the conquest of Eastern Europe even seemed to reinforce this alliance. Germany was encouraged to reclaim its tradition of thrust toward the east, and the part played by Berlin in the dismemberment of Yugoslavia by the hasty recognition of Slovenian and Croatian independence was its expression. For the rest, Germany has been induced to navigate in Washington's wake. Is there any change in progress? The German political class appears hesitant and may well be divided as far as its strategic choices are concerned. The alternative to the Atlanticist alignment is a reinforcement of the nascent Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis, which would then become the most solid pillar of a European system independent of Washington.

Our main question can now be reconsidered, that is, the nature and potential strength of the triad's collective imperialism, and the contradictions and weaknesses of its leadership by the United States.

3. Collective Imperialism of the Triad and Hegemony of the United States: Their Articulation and Contradictions

Today's world is militarily unipolar. At the same time, some fissures seem to have appeared between the United States and some of the European countries with regard, in theory at least, to the political management of a global system united on the principles of liberalism. Are these fissures only temporary and limited, or do they proclaim some lasting changes? It will be necessary to analyze in all their complexity the logics of the new phase of collective imperialism (North-South relationships in the current language) and the specific objectives of the U.S. project. In this spirit I will approach succinctly and successively five sets of questions:

Concerning the Evolution of the New Collective Imperialism

The formation of the new collective imperialism finds its origin in the transformation of the conditions of competition. Only a few decades ago, the large firms fought their competitive battles essentially over national markets, whether that of the United States (the largest national market in the world) or those of the European states (in spite of their modest size, which handicapped them in relation to the United States). The winners of the national contests could perform well on the world market. Today the size of the market necessary for gaining an upper hand in the first cycle of competition encompasses some 500–600 million potential consumers. The battle must thus be launched straight-away on the global market and won on this ground. And those who dominate this market then assert their power over their respective national terrains. Thorough internationalization becomes the primary setting of the activities of the large firms. In other words, in the pair national/global, the terms of causality are reversed: earlier the national power commanded the global presence and today it is the reverse. Therefore the transnational firms, whatever their nationality, have common interests in the management of the world market. These interests are superimposed on the various mercantile conflicts, which define all the forms of competition specific to capitalism, irrespective of what they are.

The solidarity of the dominant segments of transnationalized capital of all the partners in the triad is real, and is expressed by their rallying to globalized neoliberalism. The United States is seen from this perspective as the defender (militarily if necessary) of these common interests. Nonetheless, Washington does not intend to share equitably the profits of its leadership. The United States seeks, on the contrary, to reduce its allies into vassals and thus is only ready to make minor concessions to junior allies in the triad. Will this conflict of interests within dominant capital lead to the break-up of the Atlantic alliance? Not impossible, but unlikely.

Concerning the Place of the United States in the World Economy

A common opinion has it that U.S. military power only constitutes the tip of the iceberg, extending the country's superiority in all areas, notably economic, but even political and cultural. Therefore, submission to the hegemony to which it pretends would be impossible to avoid.

I maintain, to the contrary, that in the system of collective imperialism the United States does not have decisive economic advantages. The

U.S. production system is far from being the most efficient in the world. In fact, very few of its sectors would be certain of beating competitors in the truly free market dreamt of by liberal economists. The U.S. trade deficit, which increases year by year, went from 100 billion dollars in 1989 to 500 billion in 2002. Moreover, this deficit involved practically all areas of production. Even the surplus once enjoyed by the United States in the area of high-technology goods, which stood at 35 billion in 1990, has now turned into a deficit. Competition between Ariane rockets and those of NASA, between Airbus and Boeing, testifies to the vulnerability of the American advantages. The United States is faced by European and Japanese competition in high-technology products, Chinese, Korean, and other Asian and Latin American industrialized countries in common manufactured products, and by Europe and the southern cone of Latin America in agriculture. The United States probably would not be able to win were it not for its recourse to extra-economic means, violating the principles of liberalism imposed on its competitors!

In fact, the United States only benefits from comparative advantages in the armaments sector, precisely because this sector largely operates outside the rules of the market and benefits from state support. This advantage probably brings certain benefits for the civil sphere in its wake (the Internet being the best-known example), but it also causes serious distortions that handicap many sectors of production.

The North American economy lives parasitically, to the detriment of its partners in the world system. "The United States depends for 10 percent of its industrial consumption on goods whose import costs are not covered by the exports of its own products," as Emmanuel Todd recalls.³ The world produces, and the United States (which has practically no national saving) consumes. The *advantage* of the United States is that of a predator whose deficit is covered by loans from others, whether by consent or force. Washington has employed three primary means to compensate for these deficiencies: repeated unilateral violations of liberal principles; arms exports; and a search for greater profits from oil (which presupposes systematic control over the producers—one of the real reasons for the wars in Central Asia and Iraq). The fact is that the essential part of the U.S. deficit is covered by contributions of capital from Europe, Japan, and the South (from oil-rich countries and comprador classes of every country of the third world, the poorest included), to which are added the additional sums brought in from servicing the debt that has been forced on almost all the countries on the periphery of the world system.

The growth of the Clinton years, flaunted as the result of a liberalism that Europe was unfortunately resisting, was in fact largely fake, and in any case, nongeneralizable, depending on capital transfers that meant the stagnation of partner economies. For all sectors of the real production system, U.S. growth was not better than that of Europe. The American miracle was fed exclusively by a growth in expenditure produced by growing social inequalities (financial and personal services, legions of lawyers, and private police forces). In this sense, Clinton's liberalism indeed prepared the conditions for the reactionary wave, and later the victory of Bush Junior.

The causes of the weakening of the U.S. production system are complex. They are certainly not conjunctural, and they cannot be corrected by the adoption of a correct rate of exchange, for example, or by putting in place a more favorable balance between salaries and productivity. They are structural. The mediocrity of general education and training systems, and a deep-rooted prejudice systematically in favor of the private to the detriment of public services, are among the main reasons for the profound crisis that U.S. society is going through.

One should, therefore, be surprised that the Europeans, far from drawing the conclusions that observation of the deficiencies of the U.S. economy forces upon one, are actively going about imitating it. Here, too, the liberal virus does not explain everything, even if it fulfills some useful functions for the system in paralyzing the left. Widespread privatization and the dismantling of public services will only reduce the comparative advantages that "Old Europe" (as Bush qualifies it) still enjoys. However, whatever damage these things will cause in the long term, such measures offer dominant capital, which lives in the short term, the chance of making additional profits.

Concerning the Specific Objectives of the U.S. Project

The hegemonic strategy of the United States is within the framework of the new collective imperialism.

Conventional economists do not have the analytical tools necessary to understand the paramount importance of these objectives. They are heard repeating *ad nauseam* that in the new economy the raw materials coming from the third world are destined to lose their importance and thus the third world is becoming more and more marginal in the world system. In counterpoint to this naive and hollow discourse we have the *Mein Kampf* of the Bush administration,⁴ and surely it must be acknowledged that the United States works hard for the right to seize all the

natural resources of the planet to meet its consumption requirements. The race for raw materials (oil in the first place, but other resources too—water in particular) has already been resumed in all its virulence. All the more since these resources are likely to become scarce not only by reason of the malignant waste inherent in Western consumerism, but also by the development of the new industrialization of the peripheries.

Moreover, a respectable number of countries from the South are destined to become increasingly important industrial producers as much for their internal markets as for their roles in the world market. As importers of technologies, of capital, also as competitors in exports, they are destined to disturb the global economic equilibrium with an increasing weight. And it is not a question only of some East Asian countries (like Korea), but of immense China and, tomorrow, India and the large countries of Latin America. However, far from being a factor of stabilization, the acceleration of capitalist expansion in the South can only be the cause of violent conflicts—internal and international. The reason is that this expansion cannot absorb, under existing conditions, the enormous reserve of labor force that is concentrated in the periphery. In fact, the peripheries of the system remain the zone of tempests. The centers of the capitalist system thus need to exert their domination over the peripheries and to subject the world's population to the pitiless discipline that the satisfaction of their priorities requires.

Within this perspective, the American establishment has perfectly understood that, in the pursuit of its hegemony, it has three decisive advantages over its European and Japanese competitors: control over the natural resources of the globe; its military monopoly; and the weight of the Anglo-Saxon culture by which the ideological domination of capitalism is best expressed. The systematic manipulation of these three advantages reveals many aspects of U.S. policy: the systematic efforts that Washington exerts for the military control of the oil-producing Middle East; its offensive strategy with regard to China and Korea—taking advantage of the latter's "financial crisis"; and its subtle game aiming at perpetuating divisions in Europe—by mobilizing its unconditional British ally while preventing any serious rapprochement between the European Union and Russia. At the level of global control over the resources of the planet, the United States has a decisive advantage over Europe and Japan. Not only because the United States is the sole international military power, and thus no strong intervention in the third world can be led without it, but more because Europe (excluding the ex-USSR) and Japan are by themselves largely devoid of essential

resources for their economy. For example, their dependence in the energy sector, in particular their oil dependence with regard to the Persian Gulf, will persist for a considerable time, even if it were to decrease in relative terms. By militarily seizing control of this region through the Iraq war, the rulers of the United States have demonstrated that they were perfectly conscious of the utility of this type of pressure, which they bring to bear on their (allied) competitors. Not long ago the Soviet Union had also understood this vulnerability of Europe and Japan, and certain Soviet interventions in the third world sought to remind them of it, so as to induce them to negotiate on other grounds. It was clear that the deficiencies of Europe and Japan could be offset in the event of a serious rapprochement between Europe and Russia (the “common home” of Gorbachev). This is the very reason that the danger of this construction of Eurasia remains Washington’s nightmare.

Concerning the Conflicts between the United States and its Triad Partners

If the partners in the triad share the common interests in the global management of collective imperialism implied in their relationship with the South, they are nonetheless in a serious potentially conflictual relationship.

The American superpower sustains itself due to the capital flow that feeds the parasitism of its economy and society. This vulnerability of the United States constitutes, therefore, a serious threat for the Washington project.

Europe in particular and the rest of the world in general will have to choose one of the following two strategic options: either invest the surplus of their capital (that is, savings) so as to provide for the continuing financing of the U.S. deficit (consumption, investments, and military expenditures) or conserve and invest this surplus at home.

The conventional economists are ignorant of the problem, having made the senseless hypothesis that since globalization has supposedly abolished the nation-state, the primary economic factors (saving and investment) cannot be managed any more at national levels. But however foolish, the notion of the identity of saving and investment at the world level is indeed useful to justify and promote the financing of the U.S. deficit by others. Such nonsense is a fine instance of tautological reasoning, where the conclusions at which one wishes to arrive are implied in the very premise.

Why then is such ineptitude accepted? No doubt, the teams of schol-

arly economists who encircle the European (and also Russian and Chinese) political classes of the right as well as of the electoral left are themselves victims of their economic alienation, which I term the liberal virus. Besides, through this option the political judgment of large transnational capital is expressed. That judgment is that the advantages attained by the management of the globalized system by the United States on behalf of collective imperialism prevail over the disadvantages—the tribute which must be paid to Washington to ensure stability. What is at issue, after all, is a *tribute* and not an *investment* with a good guaranteed return. There are some countries qualified as *poor* indebted countries that are always constrained to service their debt at any price. But there is also a *powerful* indebted country that has the means to devalue its debt if considered necessary.

The other option for Europe (and the rest of the world) would thus consist in putting an end to this transfusion in favor of the United States. The surplus could then be used locally (in Europe), and the economy revived. The transfusion requires the Europeans to submit to, in the misleading language of conventional economics, “deflationary policies” that I term *stagnationist*—so as to release a surplus of exportable saving. It makes a recovery in Europe—always mediocre—dependent on artificial support from the United States. The mobilization of this surplus for local employment in Europe would permit the simultaneous revival of consumption (by rebuilding the social dimension of the economic management devastated by the liberal virus), investment (particularly in new technologies and research), and even military expenditure (putting an end to the advantages of the United States in this field). To choose this response would imply a rebalancing of the social relationships in favor of the laboring classes. In Europe this remains a possible option for capital. The contrast between the United States and Europe does not fundamentally go against the interests of the dominant segments of their respective capitals. It results above all from the difference of political cultures.

Concerning Questions of Theory Suggested by the Preceding Reflections

Complicity and competition between the partners in collective imperialism for the control of the South—the plundering of the natural resources and submission of its people—can be analyzed from different angles of vision. I will make, in this respect, three observations, which appear major to me.

First, the contemporary world system that I describe as collective imperialist is no *less* imperialist than its predecessors. It is not an “Empire” of “post-capitalist” nature.

Second, I have proposed a reading of the history of capitalism, globalized right from its origin, centered on the distinction between the various phases of imperialism (of center/periphery relationships).

Third, internationalization is not synonymous with unification of the economic system by the deregulated opening up of markets. The latter—in its successive historical forms (the freedom of trade yesterday, the freedom of firms today)—always constituted only the project of the dominant capital of the time. In reality this project was almost always forced to adjust to requirements that are not the concern of its exclusive and specific internal logic. It thus could never be implemented except in some short moments of history. The “free exchange” promoted by the major industrial power of its time, Great Britain, was effective only during two decades (1860–1880) and was succeeded by a century (1880–1980) characterized by the conflict between the imperialists and the strong de-linking of the socialist countries and the more modest de-linking of the populist nationalist countries (in the era of Bandung from 1955 to 1975). The current moment of the reunification of the world market inaugurated by neoliberalism since 1980, extended to the whole planet with the Soviet collapse, is probably not destined to experience a better fate. The chaos that it generates testifies to its character as the “permanent utopia of capital,” the phrase by which I have described this system since 1990.

4. The Middle East in the Imperialist System

U.S. Regional Dominance after the Fall of the USSR

The Middle East, henceforth to be considered together with the bordering areas of the Caucasus and ex-Soviet Central Asia, occupies a position of particular importance in the geostrategy and geopolitics of imperialism, and particularly of the U.S. hegemonic project. It owes this position to three factors: its oil wealth; its geographical position in the heart of the Old World; and the fact that it constitutes the soft underbelly of the world system.

The access to oil at a relatively cheap price is vital for the economy of the dominant triad, and the best means of ensuring this guaranteed access consists in securing political control of the area.

But the region also holds its importance equally due to its geographical position, being at the center of the Old World, at equal distance

from Paris, Beijing, Singapore, and Johannesburg. In the olden times control over this inevitable crossing point gave the Caliphate the privilege of drawing the chief benefits from that epoch's long distance trade. After the Second World War the region, located on the southern side of the Soviet Union, was crucial to the military strategy of encircling Soviet power. And the region did not lose its importance with the collapse of the Soviet adversary. U.S. dominance in the region reduces Europe, dependent on the Middle East for its energy supply, to vassalage. Once Russia was subdued, China and India were also subjected to permanent energy blackmail. Control over the Middle East would thus allow an extension of the Monroe Doctrine to the Old World, the objective of the hegemonist project of the United States. But the continuous and constant efforts made by Washington since 1945 to secure control over the region, while excluding the British and French, has not been so far crowned with success. One recalls the failure of the attempt to attach the region to NATO through the Baghdad Pact, and the fall of one of their most faithful allies, the Shah of Iran.

The reason is quite simply that the project of Arab (and Iranian) nationalist populism entered headlong into conflict with the objectives of American hegemonism. This Arab project hoped to force the Great Powers to recognize the independence of the Arab world. The non-aligned movement formulated in 1955 at Bandung by the ensemble of liberation movements of Asian and African people was the strongest current of the time. The Soviets quickly understood that by giving their support to this project they could set back the aggressive plans of Washington.

This epoch came to an end, in the first instance because the populist nationalist project of the Arab world quickly exhausted its potential for transformation, and the nationalist powers sank into dictatorships empty of either hope or plans for change. The vacuum created by this drift opened the way for political Islam and the obscurantist autocracies of the Persian Gulf, the preferred allies of Washington. The region has become one of the underbellies of the global system, vulnerable to external intervention (including military) that the current regimes, for a lack of legitimacy, are incapable of containing or discouraging. The region constituted, and continues to constitute, a zone of the first priority (like the Caribbean) within the American geomilitary division of the entire planet—a zone where the United States is granted the “right” of military intervention. Since 1990, they are not deprived of anything!

The United States operates in the Middle East in close cooperation

with their two unconditional faithful allies—Turkey and Israel. Europe is kept away from the region, forced to accept that the United States is defending the global vital interests of the triad, that is to say its oil supply. In spite of signs of obvious irritation after the Iraq war, in this region the Europeans by and large continue to sail in Washington's wake.

The Role of Israel and the Palestinian Resistance

Israel's colonial expansionism constitutes a real challenge. Israel is the only country in the world that refuses to recognize its borders as definite (and for this reason ought not to have the right to be a member of the United Nations). Like the United States in the nineteenth century, it claims the right to conquer new areas for the expansion of its colonization and to treat the people who had lived there for thousands of years like "redskins." Israel is the only country that openly declares itself not bound by the resolutions of the UN.

The war of 1967, planned in agreement with Washington in 1965, was in pursuit of several goals: to start the collapse of the populist nationalist regimes; to break their alliance with the Soviet Union; to force them to reposition themselves on American terms; and to open new grounds for Zionist colonization. In the territories conquered in 1967 Israel set up a system of apartheid inspired by that of South Africa.

It is here that the interests of dominant capital meet up with those of Zionism. A rich, powerful, and modernized Arab world would call into question the right of the West to plunder its oil resources, which are necessary for the continuation of the waste associated with capitalist accumulation. Therefore, the political powers in the countries of the triad—all faithful servants of dominant transnational capital—do not want a modernized and powerful Arab world.

The alliance between Western powers and Israel is thus founded on the solid basis of their common interests. This alliance is neither the product of European feelings of guilt for anti-Semitism and Nazi crime, nor that of the skill of the "Jewish lobby" in exploiting this sentiment. If the Powers thought that their interests were harmed by the Zionist colonial expansionism, they would quickly find the means of overcoming their guilt complex and of neutralizing this lobby. This I do not doubt, not being among those who naively believe that public opinion in the democratic countries, such as it is, imposes its views on these Powers. We know that opinion also is manufactured. Israel is incapable of resisting for more than a few days even moderate measures of a blockade such as the Western powers inflicted on Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Cuba. It would

thus not be difficult to bring Israel to its senses and to create the conditions of a true peace, if it were wanted, which it is not.

Shortly after defeat in the 1967 war, Egypt's President Anwar Sadat stated that since the United States held "90 percent of the cards" (his expression), it was necessary to break with the Soviet Union and reintegrate with the Western camp. He claimed that by doing so, one could get Washington to exert sufficient pressure on Israel to bring it to its senses. Beyond similar strategic ideas peculiar to Sadat—whose incoherence has been proven by events—Arab public opinion remained largely incapable of understanding the dynamics of the global expansion of capitalism, and even less capable of identifying its true contradictions and weaknesses. Is it not still said that "Someday the West will understand that its long run interest is to maintain good relations with the two hundred million Arabs and will choose not to sacrifice these relations for unconditional support for Israel?" This is implicitly to think that the "West" in question, which is the imperial center of capital, wishes a modernized and developed Arab world rather than wanting to maintain the Arab world in impotence, for which support for Israel is manifestly useful.

The choice made by the Arab governments—with the exception of Syria and Lebanon—which led them by way of the negotiations of Madrid and Oslo (1993) to subscribe to the American plan of the so-called definitive peace, could not yield results other than those which it has yielded: encouraging Israel to solidify its expansionist project. By openly rejecting the terms of the Oslo contract today, Ariel Sharon demonstrates merely what was already clear—that it was not a matter of a project for definitive peace, but of opening a new phase in Zionist colonial expansion.

Israel and the Western powers supporting its project have imposed a state of permanent war in the region. In its turn, this state of permanent war reinforces the autocratic Arab regimes. This blockage of any possible democratic evolution weakens the chances of an Arabic revival, and thus reinforces the alliance of the dominant capital with the hegemonist strategy of the United States. The circle is completed: the Israeli-American alliance serves perfectly the interests of the two partners.

Initially the system of apartheid deployed after 1967 gave the impression of being capable of achieving its ends—the management of everyday life in the occupied territories by the fearful elites and commercial bourgeoisie, seemingly with the acceptance of the Palestinian people. From its remote exile in Tunis the PLO, removed from the region after

the invasion of Lebanon by the Israeli army (1982), appeared no longer able to call the Zionist annexation into question.

The first Intifada exploded in December 1987. It expressed the sudden emergence of the popular classes and remarkably of its poorest segments confined in the refugee camps. The Intifada hamstrung Israeli power by the organization of systematic civil disobedience. Israel reacted with brutality, but managed neither to restore its effective police power nor to place the fearful Palestinian middle classes back in the saddle. On the contrary, the Intifada called for the mass return of exiled political forces, the constitution of new local forms of organization, and the adherence of the middle classes to a committed fight for liberation. The Intifada was provoked by the youth, *chebab al Intifada*, initially not organized within the formal networks of the PLO, but by no means a hostile competitor to them. The four components of the PLO (Fatah, devoted to its chief Yasser Arafat, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Communist Party) threw themselves into the Intifada and for this reason gained the sympathy of the major part of the *chebab*. The Muslim Brotherhood, sidelined by their inactivity during the preceding years despite some actions by Islamic Jihad (which made its appearance in 1980), yielded its place to a new expression of struggle—Hamas, constituted in 1988.

As the first Intifada gave signs of running out of breath after two years, and with Israeli repression becoming more and more violent (including the use of firearms against children and closing the green line to block nearly the only source of income for Palestinian workers), the scene was set for “negotiation.” The initiative was taken by the United States, leading first to the Madrid talks (1991), and then to the so-called Oslo Peace Agreements (1993). These agreements allowed the return of the PLO to the occupied territories and its transformation into a Palestinian Authority.

The Oslo agreements imagined the transformation of the occupied territories into one or more Bantustans, definitively integrated into the Israeli region. Within this framework, the Palestinian Authority was to be only a false state—as that of the Bantustans—and in fact to be the transmission belt of the Zionist order.

Returning to Palestine, the PLO—now the Palestinian Authority—managed to establish its order, but not without some ambiguities. The authority absorbed in its new structures the major part of *chebab*, which had coordinated the Intifada. It achieved legitimacy by the electoral consultation of 1996, in which the Palestinians participated en masse (80

percent); an overwhelming majority elected Arafat the president of the authority. The authority remained nevertheless in an ambiguous position: would it agree to fulfill the functions that Israel, the United States and Europe allotted it—that of government of a Bantustan, or would it align with the Palestinian people who refused to submit?

As the Palestinian people rejected the Bantustan project, Israel decided to denounce the Oslo agreement, although it had dictated its terms, and substituted the use of pure and simple military violence. The provocation at the Jerusalem holy places engineered by the war criminal Sharon in 1998 (but with the help of the Labor government that furnished the tanks), and the triumphal election of this same criminal at the head of the Israeli government (and the collaboration of the doves like Simon Peres with this government), were the cause of the second Intifada, which is in progress.

Will this succeed in liberating the Palestinian people from submission to Zionist apartheid? It is too early to say. In any event, the Palestinian people now have a true national liberation movement. It has its own specificities. It does not follow the one party style of homogeneity (though the reality of single party states was always more complex). It has components that conserve their own personality, their visions of the future, including their ideologies, their militants and clientele, but which appear to know how to cooperate in leading the struggle.

The U.S. Project for the Middle East

The erosion of the regimes of populist nationalism and the disappearance of Soviet support gave the United States the opportunity to implement its project for the area.

The control of the Middle East is certainly a cornerstone of Washington's project of global hegemony. How then does the United States imagine securing control? It is already a decade since Washington took the initiative of advancing the curious project of a "Common Market of the Middle East" in which some countries of the Persian Gulf would have supplied capital, while other Arab countries supplied cheap labor, and reserving for Israel technological control and the functions of the privileged and grateful intermediary. Accepted by the Gulf countries and Egypt, the project was confronted nevertheless with the refusal of Syria, Iraq, and Iran. It was thus necessary to knock down these three regimes for the project to advance. Now that has been done for Iraq.

The question then is what type of political regime must be set up in

order to be able to sustain the project. Washington's propagandistic discourse is about "democracies." In fact, Washington is busy doing nothing but substituting the so-called Islamic obscurantist autocracies for the worn-out autocracies of outmoded populism (covering the operation with drivel about its respect for the cultural specificity of the communities). The renewed alliance with a so-called moderate political Islam (one that is capable of controlling the situation with sufficient efficacy to prohibit the terrorist drifts—defining "terrorist" as threats directed against, and only against, the United States) now constitutes the axis of Washington's political choice. It is within this perspective that reconciliation will be sought with the antiquated autocracy of the Middle Eastern social system.

Confronted with the deployment of the U.S. project, Europeans invented their own project, baptized as the "Euro-Mediterranean partnership." A decidedly cowardly project—encumbered with incoherent prattling which, of course, also proposed to reconcile the Arab countries with Israel. By excluding the Gulf countries from the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue it was conceded that the management and control of these latter countries was the exclusive responsibility of Washington.

The sharp contrast between the bold audacity of the American project and the debility of the European project is a good indicator that really existing Atlanticism has no place for a shared responsibility and association in decision making that would place the United States and Europe on an equal footing. Tony Blair, who has made himself the advocate of the construction of a unipolar world, thinks he is able to justify this option because Atlanticism would be founded on this supposed sharing. Washington's arrogance every day reveals this hope to be illusory, if it has not from the beginning been a bad faith effort to fool European opinion. The realism of Stalin's statement that the Nazis "did not know where it was necessary to stop" is precisely applicable to those who control the United States. Blair appeals to hopes that resemble only those placed in Mussolini's supposed capacity to assuage Hitler.

Is another European option possible? Has it begun to take shape? Does Chirac's speech opposing the "unipolar Atlantic" world (which he seemingly well understands to be in fact synonymous with the unilateral hegemony of the United States) announce the construction of a multipolar world and an end to Atlanticism? For this possibility to become a reality, it would first be necessary that Europe free itself of the quicksand in which it slips and sinks.

5. The European Project: Mired in Liberal Quicksand

All the governments of the European states have been won over to the theses of liberalism. This regimentation of the European states means nothing less than the obliteration of the European project by its double dilution, economic (the advantages of the European economic union are dissolved in economic globalization) and political (European political and military autonomy disappears). There is not, at the present time, any European project. A North Atlantic project (or eventually of the triad) under American command has been substituted for it.

After the Second World War, Western Europe managed to make up for its economic and technological backwardness vis-à-vis the United States. After 1989, the Soviet threat was gone as were the violent adversities that had marked European history during the past century and a half: the three major countries of the continent—France, Germany, and Russia—are reconciled. All these developments are, in my opinion, positive and rich with still more potential. Certainly they are superimposed upon an economic base restructured by the principles of liberalism. Yet this liberalism was tempered until the 1980s by the social-democratic historical compromise that forced capital to adjust itself to the demands of social justice expressed by the working classes. Afterwards, the deployment continued in a new social framework inspired by American-style, antisocial liberalism.

This last turn has plunged the European societies into a multidimensional crisis. Essentially it is the economic crisis, nothing more and nothing less, immanent in the liberal choice. The crisis was aggravated by the European countries falling into line with the economic requirements of U.S. leadership: Europe consenting up to now to finance the latter's deficit to the detriment of its own interests. Then there is a social crisis, which is accentuated by the rise of resistances and the struggles of the popular classes against the fatal consequences of the liberal option. Finally, there is the beginning of a political crisis—the refusal to align, at least unconditionally, over the U.S. demand for an endless war against the South.

The made-in-USA wars have certainly stirred up public opinion (the latest Iraq war has had that effect globally) and even certain governments, initially that of France and then those of Germany, Russia, and China, too. The fact remains that these same governments have not called into question their faithful alignment over the needs of liberalism. This major contradiction will have to be overcome in one way or another, either by their submission to the requirements of Washington, or by

a true rupture putting an end to Atlanticism.

The major political conclusion that I draw from this analysis is that Europe cannot pass beyond Atlanticism as long as political alliances defining the blocs in power remain centered on dominant transnational capital. It is only if social and political struggles manage to modify the content of these blocs, and to impose new historical compromises between capital and labor, that Europe would be able to distance itself from Washington, permitting the eventual revival of a European project. Under these conditions Europe also could—even ought to—become engaged at the international level in its relationships with the East and the South, on a path other than that traced by the exclusive requirements of collective imperialism. Such a course would begin its participation in the long march beyond capitalism. In other words, Europe will be of the left (the term *left* being taken seriously) or will not be at all.

Notes

1. Samir Amin, *Class and Nation* (New York: NYU Press, 1981); Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989); Samir Amin, *Obsolescent Capitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2003); Samir Amin, *The Liberal Virus* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 2004).
2. The “succession of hegemonies” reading is “Western-centric” in the sense that it considers that the transformations operating at the heart of the system command the global evolution of the system in a decisive and almost exclusive manner. The reactions of the people of the peripheries to the imperialist deployment should not be underestimated. The independence of the Americas, the great revolutions made in the name of socialism (Russia and China), and the reconquest of independence by the Asian and African countries, were provocations to the system *from* the peripheries. And I do not believe that one can account for the history of world capitalism without accounting for the adjustments that these transformations imposed even on central capitalism itself. Then also because the history of imperialism appears to me to have been shaped more through the conflict of imperialisms than by the type of order that successive hegemonies have imposed. The apparent periods of hegemony have been always extremely short and the said hegemony very relative.
3. Emmanuel Todd, *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
4. Office of the White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, September 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>.

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