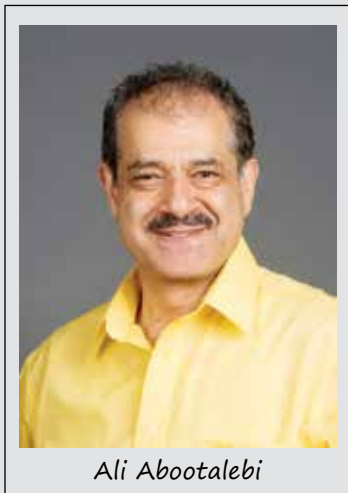
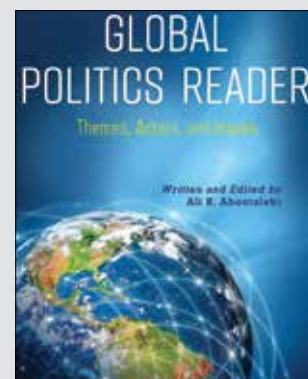


Imperialism has had severe, negative consequences for much of the humanity



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■ ■ Is imperialism still a theoretically relevant idea in understanding international relations? Or we should rather treat it as a matter of the past which is worthy of contemplation because of its historical significance?

Imperialism, neo-imperialism, and colonialism are often used interchangeably to signify, broadly, the domination of one territory by another. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines colonialism as “domination of a people or area by a foreign state or nation; the practice of extending and maintaining a nation’s political and economic control over another people or area.” In modern times, colonialism is “sometimes considered to encompass non-state forms of influence and domination, as by corporate or religious entities, in general use it is more typically understood as an extension of state power.” Imperialism in recent times, contrary to its classical meaning of an empire and imperial rule, connotes “western hegemony in Africa and Asia from the 18th through the 20th centuries and with the spreading cultural influence of the United States, via cultural imperialism, media imperialism, and economic imperialism.” Merriam-Webster has no definition for neo-imperialism!

Our understanding of modern international relations goes back to events in Europe and the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 after thirty years of religious/political wars, leading to the separation of the church and the state. The rise of the nation-state as the ultimate source of power and authority since then has witnessed drastic changes in the economic, social, and political arenas in Europe and much of the globe. The arrival of mercantilism, industrial and commercial capitalism, and political democracy also meant the death of absolute monarchism and feudalism in Europe. Earlier, the invention of ocean-sailing ships by mid-1450s allowed European powers to sail the oceans, the discovery of the Americas, and access to the horn of Africa, the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, India, and the Far East. The simultaneous sociopolitical and economic changes in Europe and its military domination and acquisition of territories in Africa,

Asia, and the Americas accelerated the rise and the domination by Europe in the international arena.

The historical evidence demonstrates that colonialism/imperialism was a product of a specific period in human history but with severe, negative consequences for much of the rest of humanity that has persisted to the present time. The European and the American-dominated international system of capitalism spread throughout the world via colonialism and military and political imposition and introduced the notion, if not in its Weberian mechanics and form, of the modern state to the rest of the vanquished world. The European-dominated states first subjugated the rest of the globe through colonialism and later competed for the control of territories and the domination of international systems, e.g., 1648-1789; 1789-1945; 1945-1989; and 1989-present. The rivalry and open warfare among major European countries concomitant with the presence of a militant but declining non-European power, the Ottoman Turks, the rise of Asian power, Japan, by the late 1800s, and the rise of communism and fascism as rival ideological and political challenges.



Gandhi leading the famous 1930 Salt March

The post-World War I and II opened some space for the formerly colonized areas to push for independence and national development. The Dependency and Modern World System theories offer some insights by the grouping of countries into three types, the core (rich, metropolis, or dominant), the periphery (poor, satellite, or dominated), and the semi-periphery (in-between) countries. There are disagreements among scholars over the extent of the dependency of the periphery on the core and prospects for national development within a dominant capitalist mode of production. Regardless, the later dependency and world system theorists agreed that there is mobility in the

capitalist-dominated international system; countries can develop or regress from their position in the Periphery, semi-periphery, and core continuum. South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, India, and China are examples of diverse countries, with varying historical and cultural backgrounds, to successfully break the periphery, semi-periphery, and core barrier. There are academic debates as to how to measure and categorize countries in such a continuum and need not detain us here. What remains central is the role of politics and political leadership in any of these countries in the struggle for national development. True, the cold war international system helped with the national development of some countries, e.g., South Korea, Taiwan, and hurt others, e.g., Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Cuba, Nicaragua, or had a mixed impact, e.g., Indian, China, Chile, Iran, and Egypt, among others.

The reaction to external domination and exploitation has differed across time and place and with differing outcomes. External domination implies the subjugation of ‘dominated peoples’ whose liberation may occur through resistance and national awareness, opening prospects for national liberation and development equal or even superior to their former dominator. What seems central to the success or the failure attempt at national development within the existing international system is the ability of the state in the mobilization of human and material resources in the service of national interest. National development may occur only through systemic, planned, organized, deliberate, and institutional attempts within a legitimate political system. A confident Political system and leadership are instrumental in national development, regardless of historical and cultural ethos and background. The Asian Tigers and mini-tigers, Brazil, Chile, and China tell the stories of such successes, despite historical subjugation to foreign powers and facing tremendous odds and barriers during and after the cold war.

■ ■ Perhaps one of the most traumatic imperial interventions in Iran was overthrowing the democratically elected government of Mosaddeq. Atul Kohli, author of ‘Imperialism and the Developing World’ (Oxford University Press, 2020), argues that this case shows “how a short-term American victory turned pyrrhic over a longer time frame.” Looking at the decision made in retrospect, do you think American statesmen regret doing that?