

displayed violently and with unadulterated physical force” so that its power be “engrained ... in the consciousness of the occupied nation ... at the receiving end of the Leviathan’s wrath.” That’s a bit odd, given the fact that the US imperialism had always tried to portray itself as a benevolent benefactor. What made the US take such drastic measures?



On March 19, 2003 the U.S. began a massive airstrike on the city of Baghdad, bombing government buildings and marking the beginning of a brutal war.

It goes back to my answers to the previous questions. Benevolence was exactly rooted in the Enlightenment notion that the “west” was destined to free the world. When you take a look at the racist language surrounding the wars of the young USA, against the Philipinnes in the 19th century but also later in Vietnam, there is this Enlightenment notion that freedom needed to be exported by all means necessary. This particularly expansionist ideology was presented to the natives as a favour, the burden of the “White Men” as Kipling put it, a burden that the US would carry in order to free the lesser people, if necessary at the barrel of the gun. It was not benevolence in the sense of Convivencia in al-Andalus in Muslim Spain, or the human statutes comprised in the Cyrus Cylinder. It was benevolent exactly in a racist sense.

■ ■ In your juxtaposition of “neo-imperialism, sanctions, war” where you discuss current US-Iran confrontation, you observe that “sanctions simply don’t work.” If they don’t work, as you claim, why have they become the arrow of choice in the US quiver in many instances of its international confrontations?

There are three reasons that I see: First, the desperation that coups don’t work anymore. The US sanctions those states that it can’t change: Cuba, Venezuela, Iran. They tried regime change and in many ways they failed, so the sanctions policy is the only option left to signal that the independence of these states is a punishable offense. Second, the US is aware that these key countries position themselves as models. Henry Kissinger was right: Iran is a cause. Sanctions are meant to signal to the world, and in particular the people of the regions that these countries appeal to, that these causes for independence and self-sufficiency are not successful. Be like country A that does what we say, the message seems to be, and you will be part of Team America. If not, we will bully you. In simple terms this is exactly why “causes” such as Cuba, Venezuela and Iran are punished. But in the end, they survive exactly because they are “causes”, the prize for the common people, though is foreseeably high and this is tragic. The third reason is to skew

the economic market. Sanctions are the hidden hand that intervenes in everything, from the prize of resources, the currency market to real estate. So the government of the United States uses sanctions also as an economic tool to weaken macroeconomies and to make them more amenable to economic and political manipulation.

■ ■ In several cases, you refer to the importance of Ali Shariati in theorizing and advocating a locally relevant version of anti-imperialism in Iran. How was his influence on the ultimate anti-imperialist discourse which was one of the definitive components of the 1979 revolution?



Maryam Zandi  
Revolutionaries hold up giant pictures of Ali Shariati and Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh.

Ali Shariati, too, was a child of his time imbued with all the paradoxes of Iranian modernity that turned his generation into revolutionaries. His hybridity can be gauged from the references in his book. A bit of Sartre, some Iqbal, certainly some Shia theology from his father, all wrapped up in a revolutionary Molotov cocktail that was meant to destroy the status quo. It was the age of revolutions, don’t forget. Ayatollah Khomeini, Shariati, al-e Ahmad lived during the same period as John Lennon, Mohammad Ali and Malcolm X. A new history of this era will discover the connections of these disparate figures, as they all had one thing in mind: Radical change - it is just that they used different languages to that end and it was the syntax of the language that determined the outcome. There is a Persian saying that ‘beshin’, ‘betamarg’ and ‘befarmain’ all mean “sit down”, but each of them solicit very different reactions as the last option (befarmain) is a very kind and courteous invitation, rather than a command. It is this emphasis on agonism, compromise and dialog that is by definition absent from revolution as politics (Ayatollah Khomeini) versus revolution as poetry (Lennon). Shariati was in between those two poles. The perfect paradox of recent Iranian history.

■ ■ How does the new version of imperialism of the last few decades, mostly driven by a neoliberal globalization of capitalism, differ from its predecessors?

The biggest difference is the massive caesura that AI technology is bringing about. This is the Fourth Industrial Revolution that will change everything. It is so phantasmal that we will need a separate interview to delve into its repercussions for the future of all of us.

