

US imperialism weakened nation-states through a combination of interventions

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■ ■ How, if at all, is the 21st century brand of imperialism characteristically different from its former versions, especially those which defined later decades of the 20th century?

What really makes the current brand of imperialism distinctive is its organizing logic, which lends a certain degree of structure and coherence to US hegemony as the key to the effectiveness of the imperialist system. This “neoliberal” logic, as it came to be called, draws its sources from a US-patented policy framework driven by certain political imperatives such as free trade, financial liberalization, privatization, and deregulated labor markets. At this point, it would be helpful to recall that neoliberalism took root in the 1970s as a result of efforts to reverse the relative decline of US hegemony, which was faced with the crisis of Keynesianism, not to mention the rise of working-class movements, progressive nationalism, and other anti-imperialist movements. Indeed, the post-Cold War period provided a favorable environment for the fuller implementation of neoliberalism under a seemingly “unipolar” world order. It was hoped that neoliberalism would resolve the existential crisis of US hegemony and bring greater stability to the imperialist system by taking advantage of the Digital Revolution. In the end, this globalist framework only served to accelerate and legitimize the globalization of Western multinationals, while subduing developing countries under the combined effect of structural adjustment programmes, military interventions, and new forms of cultural colonialism. There is no denying that increasing capital mobility and financialization succeeded in demobilizing the working-class movements. At least for a time, US imperialism also ensured the allegiance of developing countries by weakening nation-states through a combination of over-indebtedness, foreign interventions, privatizations, free trade, and external support for particularistic ideologies (i.e. terrorism, separatism, and extremism).

■ ■ Defects and shortcomings of a neoliberal logic, which you defined as “maximizing monopoly profits at massive societal costs,” have been becoming increasingly clear, especially after the bursting of the subprime bubble in 2007. But a real alternative seems to be elusive. How do you see the way forward?



Oli Scarff (Getty Images)

On September 29, 2010, the second anniversary of Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy, the firm put their artwork up for auction at Christies.

From what I observed, the post-2007 era has exposed the unsustainability of neoliberalism as the organizing logic of the imperialist system. The general trend is now towards a polycentric, or multipolar order, which is primarily shaped by the growing demand of developing countries for state-guided, auto-centric, and more inclusive alternatives. This trend is particularly evident in the mushrooming of alternative cooperation schemes that challenge the monopoly of Western-dominated neoliberal governance institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. What I call “post-hegemonic” cooperation schemes include the BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Most of these initiatives are erected on the “Asian Values”, as was originally formulated by the SCO. They prioritize state-guided development and sovereign democracy rather than Western-centric values of liberal democracy, human rights, and supranationalism. If this framework can be fully implemented, this would create an environment that limits the power of Western multinationals and interventions.

Asia constitutes the mainstay of global resistance against imperialism. Therefore, building a real alternative to neoliberalism is possible if the Asian Values can gain widespread acceptance in the region. The real challenge today is to create a “community of common destiny” on the path towards an “Asian Century”, but the long-term sustainability of this project is contingent on developing a stronger sense of mu-

tual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, and respect for cultural diversity. I should also add that much of the responsibility lies on the shoulders of China, Russia, Iran, and Turkey as the leading Eurasian countries. The ultimate outcome will depend on their ability to redress their competition in a peaceful and institutional framework, while prioritizing regional cooperation based on the Asian Values.

■ ■ In regards to military imperialism, you observe that the US military-industrial complex has been neoliberalized. However, one may argue that it's a bit far-fetched because the US military is still by far a state-run enterprise that, despite “the rise of private armies” to whom some more menial functions of the army are outsourced, is not left to



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American guns for hire.

free market forces. How do you respond to that?

One thing to keep in mind here is that neoliberalism is and has always been a state-driven phenomenon where structural adjustment principles are used, not just to render the developing countries vulnerable to Western capitalism, but also to consolidate state power in imperialist metropolises. An empowered state apparatus enables Western capitalism to increase its capacity to deploy strong policy instruments to manipulate the markets, impose the neoliberal principles on the developing world, and restrict the competition in the markets for sales, raw materials, cheap labor, and capital investments. Indeed, military interventions assume a particular importance in this respect. A strategic priority of imperialist interventionism is to prevent the emergence of potential rivals (e.g. China, Russia, Iran) that would challenge US global