



hegemony. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the US Department of Defense has become the world's single largest employer and the US is a country with the world's largest military expenditure by far.

The other side of the same coin is the unprecedented rise of private military contractors in the post-Cold War era, with US imperialism dominating the global market. This is due, not only to the restructuring of the US military after the Cold War, but also the growing popularity of neoliberal principles such as subcontracting and the requirements of irregular warfare to dismantle the potential US rivals from within. There are many instances in which the number of private military contractors surpass regular troops operating in hostile environments. Speaking of irregular warfare, I should emphasize that asymmetric threats can only be countered with a holistic approach that also includes asymmetric defense. The recent rise of private military contractors in Eurasia is in large part attributable to the threat of US private military contractors in the region.

■ ■ Since at least three decades ago, many Iranian critical theorists came up with various conceptions such as “cultural incursion” and “cultural surprise attack” to describe the increasing presence of western (most notably, American) cultural ideas and symbols in our social settings. To what extent do you think a war discourse might be warranted in explaining cultural imperialism?

What I understand by “cultural imperialism” has a close resemblance to the “cultural incursion” hypothesis. In ‘Imperialism after the Neoliberal Turn’, I examine the basic institutional structures underlying the phenomenon of cultural imperialism by reference to two structural dynamics: “media-industrial complex” and “nonprofit-corporate complex”.

The media-industrial complex describes the interlocking of interests between giant media conglomerates and imperialist states. In the present day, the markets for the production of media content, media platforms, and media infrastructures are mostly dominated by US media and informational and communication technology (ICT) conglomerates. It is also important to keep in mind that the US market currently accounts for almost half of the global audiovisual trade. Indeed, the Third and Fourth Industrial Revolu-

tions have greatly contributed to the growth and globalization of media empires (and ICT conglomerates). These developments have considerably expanded the ability of Western media empires, not only to stigmatize the so-called “rogue states” and justify military interventions, but also to colonize the hearts and minds of those living in the developing world, manipulate their tastes and consumption patterns, and control their political agenda. Therefore, it would be safe to conclude that Western media empires have become the building blocks of today's capitalist-imperialist system.



Similar to how the media-industrial complex weaponizes media and ICT, the media-industrial complex is an underlying institutional structure of imperialism that weaponizes civil society. US assistance disbursed through various channels such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy, the Open Society Foundations, and the Fulbright Program serve to coopt, not only journalists and scholars, but also civil society groups in line with imperialist interests. Overall, I can say that the nonprofit-corporate complex is characterized by a close interlocking of monopoly and imperialist interests, which explains the global influence of philanthrocapitalism such as the Rockefeller, Ford, and Bill and Melinda Gates foundations. As far as the nonprofit-corporate complex is concerned, it is equally difficult to ignore the role of Western-supported non-governmental organizations in “color revolutions”.

■ ■ In the current version of Imperialism with which we are dealing, what role do you attribute

to huge, multinational corporations? Can they be considered appropriate examples of “stateless powers” which Manuel Castells predicted would be taking control vis-à-vis “powerless states”?

Globalist arguments on “powerless states” had gained currency in the 1990s and the early 2000s. For the most part, these arguments were fueled by a widespread perception about the ultimate victory of a so-called “unipolar” world order. However, the late 2000s helped to invalidate such baseless accounts in the context of growing multipolarity. Globalists had believed that globalization eroded the power of nation-states and opened a new era of so-called “transnational” capitalism, where even the Chinese and Russian economies would be absorbed by Western transnationals. On the contrary, growing multipolarity helped many to finally realize that neoliberal globalization as an imperialist project serves nothing but to empower Western states, while dismantling nation-states in the developing world. Indeed, Western-based multinationals assumed a key role in pillaging developing nations' natural and human resources with the strong backing of Western armed forces, economic sanctions, and subsidies. One of the strongest and most recent cases that exemplify the power of state-supported multinationals is the US-led trade war against China, where Chinese information and communication firms are being denied to Western markets. The idea here is to retain the competitiveness of Western-based multinationals.

■ ■ More specifically, how do you analyze the role of gigantic, mostly American, Big Tech companies, which have presumably provided the US government with unimaginable tools of mass surveillance, market monopoly, and public opinion manipulation? They seem to be prime examples of a combination, if not the culmination, of military, cultural, and economic imperialism.

Digital monopolies, otherwise known as “Big Tech”, are among the building blocks of contemporary imperialism. Thanks to the digital revolution and neoliberal policies that encourage corporate mergers, their control extends beyond personal computing, entertainment, and online advertising to have a significant impact on global technological infrastructure, data ownership, and surveillance. An important detail to keep in mind is that the Pentagon and the CIA are among the clos-