

■ ■ **Quite a lot has changed since you wrote your book. Almost a quarter century later, I wonder, if you were to publish a revised version of ‘Twentieth Century Imperialism’, and you could only add one chapter to it, what would that chapter be about? Why?**

You have asked a common but a difficult question to answer. It became a common question because by all standards, including intellectual as well as commercial, the book did very well in spite of its theoretical orientation. I can answer this question by briefly stating what I wrote in 1997, what changes I have witnessed in the career of capitalism/imperialism ever since and how I will incorporate them in the revised version of the book.

At the outset let me state humbly that the book was well structured and situated within the context of the last century. In a strict sense, it began with an analysis of J.A. Hobson’s seminal theorisation of imperialism published in 1902 and ended with my work that appeared in 1997. It was an overview of major theories and concepts on imperialism that were significant within the realm of radical writings. Normatively, the radical writings aimed at building exploitation free and egalitarian world. I had argued that imperialism signifies asymmetrical relationship of interdependence between materially advanced and backward societies. However, even though the book covered a large number of theoretical, epistemic and empirical developments in the twentieth century imperial-

Iran etc. too have become significant in world politics in their own ways.



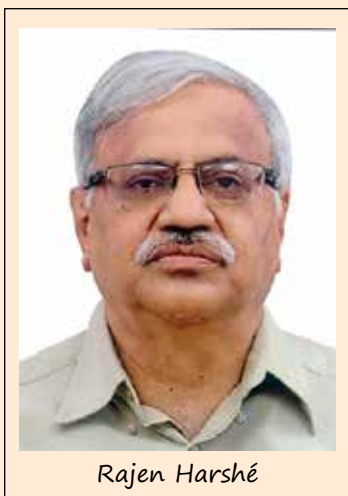
Denis Balibouse (Reuters)  
A logo is pictured on the World Trade Organization headquarters (WTO) in Geneva, Switzerland, on March 4, 2021.

Imperialism has to be located and understood within these complex and ever-changing realities. Besides, although the state is primary and influential actor in world politics, the global politics is replete with multiple influential state actors. Indeed, there were times when the world capitalist economy had a single hegemonic power such as Britain in the late nineteenth century or the US from 1965-67 in the post war period. In the absence of hegemonic power, during the interwar period there were also inter imperialist rivalries. However, in the post-Cold War phase we are living in a multi power/polar world because even among the states there are several major power

■ ■ **In your book, you frequently describe Third World states as “objects of imperialism.” To me, that’s a deliberate choice of words to also imply the ‘objectification’ function of imperialism, highlighted by some scholars, which allows it to disregard the humanity of affected peoples. Could you please elaborate how imperialism achieves objectification in that sense?**

You have understood me correctly. I must, however, underline that I take a rather differentiated view of the Third World. There are some countries such as India and South Africa which are relatively developed among developing countries and developing among the developed countries. Nevertheless, most of the Third World countries have post-colonial states and societies. They were objects in the sense they were denied their past, made to feel inferior and forced to be part of unequal exchange in terms of international trade ties. The economic, military, political and cultural violence that was inflicted on them certainly objectified them and even dehumanised them. 3. In your book, you argue that the Shah’s Iran was a ‘sub-imperial’ state in that the US empowered it to “play a regionally dominant role” in order to serve “the interests of US imperialism.” In that light, to what extent do you think Iranian Revolution was a truly anti-imperialist movement in its conception?

A sub-imperial state is one which is regionally dominant and linked to the main centre of imperialism. Nixon doctrine of the 1970s tried to build such



Rajen Harshé

## US-led invasions in Middle East had imperial purposes

*Founder and former vice chancellor of the Central University of Allahabad, the president of the African Studies Association of India from 2005 to 2011, and author of ‘Africa in World Affairs: Politics of Imperialism, the Cold War and Globalization’, published by Routledge in 2019 and ‘Twentieth Century Imperialism: Shifting Contours and Changing Conceptions’, published by Sage in 1997.*

ism, the activities of imperialism obviously spilled over into this century. In fact, some of the incipient developments of the last century began to develop gradually during this century with the accelerated pace of globalisation. Obviously, imperialism has assumed rather different economic, political, cultural, sociological and ideological forms/ trajectories as it operates under globalisation. Globalisation itself is yet another phase in the development of capitalism. As the dominant mode of production and a world system capitalism has enveloped almost the entire world. Imperialism is integral to the development of capitalism. I had underscored an inextricable link between capitalism and imperialism in the last century in my book. I had also discussed the implications of the fall of the former Soviet Union in 1991 and the consequent lack of formidable developmental alternative to capitalism.

However, during this century power configurations in global politics have changed with the spectacular rise of China as the superpower in Asia and as a possible challenger to the USA’s erstwhile legacy as the sole military superpower. It could also be argued that owing to the prominence of the international regimes such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) it is also possible to explore possibilities of multilateral imperialism of the advanced industrialised world over the developing areas. Furthermore, in addition to several regional organisations, emerging powers such as Russia, India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia and

centres in world politics today. Just to cite a few examples, Russia is not free from imperial tendencies in the Euro-Asian region. In view of its ambitious projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and capacity to control weaker countries through debt traps characterising the nature of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) within the context of debates on imperialism also pose its own set of problems. Besides, the emerging countries or regionally dominant powers are also not free from imperial tendencies and states with liberal democratic regimes as well as authoritarian regimes have displayed imperial tendencies.

In addition to conventional state actors the role of multinational firms, banks and conglomerates that are in practice stateless and nationless has also expanded and warrants critical examination. The intra firm trade is growing. The last but not the least the digital revolution too has drastically changed the course of world politics and functioning of capitalism. Keeping the above realities in mind I would revise my work exploring the changing nature and nuances of capitalism and its relationship with imperialism, shed light on imperialism of liberal democratic regimes as well as authoritarian regimes, re-examine tools and categories of the Marxist, neo Marxist and liberal methods of analysing imperialism and their varying limitations depending on time and space, take a differentiated view of the erstwhile Third World and try to elaborate the role of developing countries vis a vis challenges posed by imperialism.

sub-imperial centres to counter the then Soviet Russia and serve its interest. Iran under Shah was linked to the USA in sub-imperial sense. By then Iran had already become powerful in the [Persian] Gulf region due to its rising oil revenues which the Shah of Iran used to develop agriculture, industry, manufacturing sector and infrastructure. Indeed, the Iranian revolution was certainly an anti-imperialist movement in religious-cultural sphere as the impact of the US/ Western culture was being slowly wiped out in Iran which decided to restore its indigenous traditions. Besides, Iran’s varying ties with the centre of the world imperialism such as the USA have constantly deteriorated under different US administrations. By building its own nuclear power plants Iran has become assertive and also tried to be self-reliant. I cannot field



AP  
Former US president Jimmy Carter and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, then Shah of Iran, review an honor guard upon Carter’s arrival in Tehran on December 31, 1977.