

Some versions of cultural imperialism are coercive



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■ ■ Is imperialism a real thing in today's world?

Yes, it absolutely is a real thing. It is often assumed that nowadays we live in a world in which there's equality of nations, sovereignty of states, and a kind of equality of states in an international system. The only problem is that that doesn't account for the inequalities of power between states, and particularly in regards to powerful, major states, which have economic, financial, cultural, military power, which is often on a very wide scale and sometimes on a global scale. So, when you look at for example, the United States, which is the predominant imperial power today, it may not have colonies, that is territories that it occupies and controls against their will, but it has certainly many, many other instruments, which enables it to exert a very large amount of pressure.

■ ■ How does imperialism work today?



Stephen Jaffe (IMF)

The IMF Board of Governors meeting in 2017.

It partly works through economic means, that is, big multinational companies or transnational companies, which dominate economies. It can also operate through loans from rich states, like the US or European countries, also possibly China and Russia, where they give loans and thereby become very influential in the political government of the country that borrows the money. But it also operates as a result of international institutions, like the IMF or the World Bank, which often provide various forms of loans or aid, through which those countries' economies and governments and tax systems and even tax and social welfare policies can become heavily influenced. In short, imperialism does continue to work today in a variety of ways.

But American power has always tried to portray itself as a benevolent power.

It certainly has. And a large part of imperialism today also works through the provision of so-called foreign aid, often said to be to alleviate hunger, poverty, disease, or otherwise help in disasters or help with various kinds of development. So yes, the banner under which a lot of imperialism today takes place is through what would appear on the surface to be benevolence.

■ ■ Then, is this influence really a bad thing?

The key thing about foreign aid is, first, a large amount of the actual aid provided is in the form of contracts for the country which is actually extending the so-called aid itself. In other words, local corporations get a large number of contracts or supply goods and services to the so-called aid-receiving country. So a lot of the aid is spent at home.

The second thing is that the aid often is tied in various ways to certain forms of change within that society: Promoting certain forms of development, for example requiring the receiving government to apply free market mechanisms or to respond by decreasing the state sector. In fact, a very large amount of aid during the 1970s and into the 1980s was tied to free market reforms. Therefore, in order to receive the aid, they had to use the aid in particular ways.

The third thing is that the aid is often given to political or ideological allies in the recipient country, which then builds up patronage so that the middlemen, who receive a better part of the aid, are often able to take and use that aid for their own political or personal purposes. But they become their own patrons and loyal to the country, or agencies, which are supplying that aid. Then, they begin to have a vested interest in continuing to act in ways which serve the interests of that international organization, or corporate state, as opposed to the interests of their local people. It can

cause a great deal of corruption through that kind of patronage. We've seen historically the creation of what scholars sometimes call 'comprador elites', for example in India or Nigeria or Brazil, who receive a very large amount of foreign aid but are able to use that for their own personal empowerment and enrichment. That kind of aid that has a very large effect on the governance of the country, and the interests which are put first in the governance of the country, and the allocation of resources.

■ ■ What about the military aid?

The military aid is often put forward as aiding security. The military aid does the same with the armed forces of those countries. It also can enable and encourage a country to buy a lot of arms from the aid-giving country, and thereby spend a lot of resources on arms, when maybe helping the poor, or the local economy might be far better ways to spend the money. Moreover, they can use their local might, often with foreign assistance, to put down rebellions, which may want radical change in that country's governance, allocation of economic resources, degree of nationalism, or move towards democracy or socialism. So I would say that although benevolence and development is usually the language used, the fact is that it can have very, very negative effects on those societies, and can generally make them tied to those larger stronger powers as well.

When we're talking about imperialism today, are we specifically talking about the United States? or there are other imperial powers in today's war

The US is clearly the most powerful imperial state; there's no question about it. It's the richest, it's the greatest financial power and dollar Imperialism is extremely powerful. But the United States is not alone. If you look at the developed states in the West, many of them have Imperial features. So Britain, for example, remains an imperial state. It remains a state which invests lots of money abroad, it is totally invested in the liberal international system, and it is one of the big players in the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. It continues to have a military and a navy, which has fought wars and does fight wars in many parts of the world. It continues to have a military and naval presence in the Far East and in the Middle East. You will know that in Bahrain, they've built military and naval bases within the last few years. Canada is also a very rich country with very large investments abroad, as is France. France obviously comes out of the same colonial history as Britain, and it still has very large resources deployed militarily in Africa in particular, but in other parts of the world as well. And it still has very large foreign investments, foreign trade, finance loans, which they give abroad. And then the you got the European Union, which is in effect a club of mostly, though not entirely, really rich and powerful Western European nations. (Of course, it includes Poland and Hungary and other countries as well, but they don't exercise anywhere near a real influence within the EU, let alone outside of it.) So the US is the supreme imperial power, and you can see that in its level of military, economic, financial market, ideological, and media power. But there are many actual and potential others as well.



Matt Dunham (AFP)

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II talks with US President Donald Trump during a welcome ceremony at Windsor Castle, west of London, on July 13, 2018.

■ ■ The cultural side of the matter, the cultural Imperialism, is a little bit more difficult to pinpoint. Granted, I understand that many people are absorbing the values of the American society. But what is about it that makes it cultural imperialism?

Well, the key thing about Imperialism is that it actually is a