

# Internationalist Papers



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## **IN THE CHAOS OF INTERIMPERIALIST DISORDER**

(a special supplement)

## IN THE CHAOS OF INTERIMPERIALIST DISORDER

### *Yesterday*

It seems an eternity since, amidst the smoking ashes of the Berlin Wall and, soon afterwards, the wave of euphoria and enthusiasm accompanying the implosion of the constellations surrounding the ex-USSR, world capitalism celebrated "the end of history" through the most authoritative of its apologists. Second-rate chroniclers competed to celebrate the pomp and splendour of the "best of all possible worlds", to the accompaniment of orgiastic odes to Democracy, Liberty and – naturally – eternal Peace. Throughout the western world, the Party Stalinists and official trade unionists belonging to the "legalist" and "democratic" opposition, scrambled to cast off their old habits and, in order to re-locate as quickly as possible in the sphere of the institutions responsible for controlling and stultifying the proletariat, even ventured a little further: they remembered that in their younger days they had all been a little "American" and – goodness, gracious! - how could one fail to notice the thread leading from the Normandy landings to Tex Willer and Kennedy, from John Wayne to the moon landing and consumer liberalism "made in the USA", all icons of a "way of life" that made it possible to win the Cold War?... Class war became a discarded tool, "obsolete" according to the grammar of Monsieur le Capital. Indeed, social classes themselves would soon disappear, buried under toxic mountains of luxury consumer products and the end of a hard economic cycle that would, as if by magic, yield to permanent well-being. In all fields of science, the attack on deterministic concepts went hand in hand with the same old patter about the defeat of the materialistic concept of history and the death of Marxism, inaugurating a season of new idealisms and exasperating a range of manifestations of an existentialist nature, public and private, religious and non-religious.

But it was written – in the cast-iron necessity of the laws regulating the evolution of the modes of production and capitalism in particular – that this unfortunately vast mass of over-paid servants and useful morons would very soon be plunged back into insecurity and panic. Despite the pretty stories (carefully dictated, by the way), that the numerous hucksters busied themselves selling to the highly acclaimed "public opinion", the reasons for the collapse of the

false socialism on the far side of the iron curtain were not ideological but tremendously material: they sprang from its capitalist economic basis which, as it opened up increasingly to the world market, had suffered the consequences of heavy counter-blows, starting with the 1974-75 crisis (a crisis of overproduction) which had shaken the entire world economy, then concentrated substantially in the West and in Japan). It was the inevitable result of the inexorable laws of capitalism which, thanks to the second imperialist slaughter, had forced it into a mad, as well as blind, race to accumulate<sup>1</sup>. Too many goods and too much capital at the heart of capitalism meant a continuous reduction in the rate of self-expansion of capital and could not help producing devastating effects in outlying areas, where mechanisms of compensation (and robbery) were inadequate to deal with the consequences. The exaggerated development of the second post-war period, whilst laying the foundations for the rise of new powers in Asia, such as China or India, had led to the revival of old powers, like Germany and Japan, which had begun to compete with American economic supremacy, an aspect highlighted by the crisis generated by excess production, with the need to strengthen competitiveness (and more support from the state) and to fight in order to secure sources of raw materials and markets for goods. This is why the American bourgeoisie was obliged, as early as this, to make plans for endeavouring to maintain its supremacy through diplomatic and military policies aimed at securing a position (both financial and territorial) that would guarantee its control of the fluxes feeding the economy of the imperialist countries constituting the biggest threats to American leadership, and the rent connected to this leadership.

### *The 1991 war*

When the opportunity presented itself, the Gulf War was the further, explicit declaration and demonstration of this policy. Not by chance was it followed by the well-known declarations of Bush Senior on the "New World Order" which – rather than to Saddam or any other down-at-heel "dictator" – were mainly addressed to Germany and Japan. In the National Security Strategy, which came one year after "Desert Storm", and even more clearly in the Defence Planning Guidance six months later, it was stipulated that the prime objective of American foreign policy was to prevent "the re-emergence of a new rival". After having sustained "the integration of Germany and Japan in a system of collective security guided by the United States", it was empha-

sised that, in order to pursue the established aim, the United States would have to work "in order to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources, if strictly controlled, would be sufficient to generate a world power. These regions include Western Europe, East Asia, the territory of the ex-Soviet Union and Southwest Asia." They would strive to "take sufficient account of the interests of the industrialised nations, as to dissuade them from challenging our leadership or endeavouring to overturn the constituted economic and political order"<sup>2</sup>. American policy, confirmed by two World Wars, has always been to prevent the emergence of a rival power in Europe and Asia. The control of Eurasia, where 70% of the world population and 2/3 of known energy sources are concentrated, and which Brzezinsky defines "the chess board on which the competition for global supremacy continues to be played," becomes the exposed nerve ending of the stars and stripes empire: this is the area where it is necessary to dispute the demands for re-distribution that the dynamics of capitalist economic development (which – we should not forget – is essentially unequal and therefore alters the respective power conditions of individual national capitals competing for the planet) necessarily impose on the various imperial powers that have grown strong thanks to post-war accumulation.

The 1991 war represented a turning point in the pattern of relationships between the imperial powers. Generated by the necessities that the crisis of economic supremacy imposed on American foreign and military policy, it was a requiem for the old system of alliances inherited from the world war and joint Russian-American dominion of the world. Entirely financed by the Gulf monarchies (which thus purchased their security and political survival), by Japan and Germany, it was also – in the eyes of "allied" diplomacy – proof of the US determination to anticipate and hinder her closest rivals, those whose economic power had approached that of the USA. It was also the proof of their aspiration to succeed in applying independent home policy on the world chess board, as well as being proof of their appetites.

By means of the Gulf War, in a single move, the USA managed to downsize Iraq as an emerging regional power and reference point for the Middle-East, obtain direct control of the power supply to Germany and Japan (which import mainly from the countries around the Persian Gulf) and secure a military position aiming at the control of the Persian Gulf by creating a network of bases with their cen-

tral point (at least up until the war in Afghanistan) in Saudi Arabia, for decades their special ally amongst the petrol-monarchies of the Gulf.

### *The next ten years*

The ten years that follow are years of economic and financial crisis and recurrent wars (duly discussed at the time in this newspaper), all linked to the dynamics of a system whose convulsions are an expression of the urgent need to overthrow it and are all based on the underlying material conditions of a mode of production where the ownership of the means of production stands out against the producers of the whole world output - contradictions that are exacerbated by the condition of imperialism, as it represents the supremacy of financial capital as the means of control and distribution of the world's plus-value, extorted from the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Despite its "experts" and its "strategists", the bourgeoisie is unable to understand the nature of the crises and imperialist wars generated by capitalism, since it is now an entirely useless and parasitic class, which can only seek to conserve itself at the price of huge social wastage of resources and people. This is the reason for the terror of the bourgeoisie, but above all of the cowardly middle-class, when faced with present disorder and the search – futile and fuelled by the media – for a "guilty party", in the person of This or That Person, of a certain government leader rather than another. A vain and illusory attempt: Marxism has always maintained – and hard facts must be the proof – that violence is perfectly "involuntary", i.e. necessary, and determined by the mode of production and that every historical event is the result of a clash of forces that are historically determined. "Statesmen" are unaware that they are basically acting according to the material conditions that have been determined and which arise from a specific capitalist economic terrain that they must sustain. In this process, the different superstructural factors, including the sphere of political and religious convictions, may affect the form the struggles assume at a historical level and even their progress: but they cannot affect the outcome, which, in the end will derive from the tendencies of movements and laws that are the expression of the economic substrata.

If American capital now insists, through its governing bodies, on the necessity of a long-term "war" to defend "American values", after a decade of hypocritical verbal acrobatics to justify "peace-keeping operations" and "humanitarian wars", this is the expression and indication of the gravity of the crisis

and its acceleration towards an acute phase in the contrasts between imperialist powers. This is a phase dictated by the need to redefine, each to his own advantage, shares in the world market and the sources of plus-value. It highlights the greater "awareness" and consistency of the American bourgeoisie compared to their European and Japanese counterparts (here, too, China is an exception, as is summed up in the now famous publication by the two high-ranking military leaders on "war without limits")<sup>3</sup>. However, there is a big difference between this and talk of a "world war now in operation": it is best not to play around with striking phrases and slogans, coined perhaps in a comfortable living room, so as not to create confusion between an ongoing process, the management of which is closely linked to that of the crisis (and which may continue for decades), and the time when an open and officially declared military clash between imperial brigands will present the Party and the international proletariat with very different tasks. At the same time, to superimpose an open imperialist war fought out between the powers onto a given form of the inevitable struggle between these same powers, according to a pattern devoid of breaking points and qualitative changes, would mean to be ignorant of the ABC (not to mention the whole sequence of the alphabet!) of the dialectics between economy and politics, crises and wars and revolutions, on which the whole of Marxist theory is based. Open warfare between imperialisms (**imperialisms**) develops in specific conditions, produced by a number of factors, linked to its dual significance as a "regulator" of relations between imperial powers corresponding to changes in the economic basis and hierarchies, and as the ideal tool for conserving the system of bourgeois dominion over a superior mode of production and the proletarian class that represents it.

#### *Rotten imperialism*

The chaos and disorder pervading bourgeois society today are none other than the reflection – and most evident demonstration – of the parasitic nature of modern capitalism, as well as of the peak of decay reached by that phase of imperialism that represents the "highest point" of capitalism – the phase in which the basic conditions that make up its DNA (and that are based on the material aspect of world economic relations between the classes) reach their logical conclusions and are destined to fester. This "global disorder" reigns both in the economic sphere and in the political sphere of relations

between States: the former cannot fail to spill over into – and affect – the latter and the forms assumed by the "competitive struggle" for the defence or procurement of adequate spaces for exploiting the capital that each of these States represents and "organises", from the biggest to the smallest and whatever form of government it assumes or whatever coalition may at a given time assume the management of the capitalistic machine that is the bourgeois State. In order to explain the present international situation (apart from referring to the methodology and contents of Marxist theory and, in particular, to a small work by Lenin with a significant title that past and present "theoreticians" from the bourgeois camp try in vain to exorcise: *Imperialism*), it is necessary to start from the crisis that has the whole of capitalism in its grip and that has progressively worn away any balance between imperialist powers established at Yalta to sanction the divisions made at the end of the Second World War. The dynamics of accumulation in the second post-war period brings the American crisis to the forefront (as the US can no longer deviate it outside the country onto competitors or allies) and – with this – the crisis of the system of alliances which align into competing factions. According to Lenin's analysis in his text on imperialism, the economic subdivision and, through this, the "right" to take possession of shares of the world's plus-value, is proportional to the strength, and thus to the capital, of individual powers, and this strength changes as economic and political development changes. World order after the war was upheld by undisputed American hegemony and was based on the following material conditions: 1) the USA flooded the market with goods, 2) it became the world's "creditor" and ultimate financier of the system, 3) the dollar, which could still be converted into gold, was the currency used as a unit of calculation, a means of payment and international reserve in the system of payments.

These conditions, which were the expression of the USA's "capitalist power" (further supported by military power) compared to other countries, began to waver with the growth of Japan and Germany and later other countries, right up to the China of today. It is the rate at which these countries accumulate capital that is closing the gap and making the political "constrictions" corresponding to the old balance of power increasingly intolerable. The usurious role of the dollar allowed the USA to establish its value quite apart from concerns with the balance of payments. America's trade balance registers a deficit for the first time in 1971 and from 1974 onwards

grows steadily; the net result of international investments, which gives the measure of the balance of international investments, registers a deficit for the first time since 1914 – in 1985. From this date onwards, the USA becomes net debtors a situation which worsens from 1990 onwards, until it is the world's most indebted country. Moreover, with regard to the balance of payments, starting in 1973 the USA records a deficit every year with the exception of 1979, 1982, 1985, 1989, 1998.

As the basic economic conditions deteriorate, the dollar – which allows the USA to “produce” paper money and oblige the rest of the world to produce those goods that American currency can afford, actually buying “on credit” and allowing a spread of the monetary basis which is thus able to finance consumption and investments without generating inflation – also sees its hegemony challenged: and to balance international relations the USA is obliged to make increasing use of military force to preserve its supremacy as a real *rentier* State. The present decadence of American imperialism is implicit in its role as the net “absorber” of foreign capitals. The USA has seen the deficit in its trade balance double from 1999 (291 bill. dollars) to 2003 (550 bill. dollars), with a 2004 forecast set at 610 billion. The total foreign debt comes to over 18 000 billion dollars (and this consists increasingly of bonds, which are short-term and easy to sell), while the balance of payments, which recorded a 1999 deficit of 124 billion, now has a deficit of 374 billion (an estimate that rises to 462 for the current year).

Thus the dollar, until now the unchallenged lever of the American economy's parasitic role, by means of which it has managed to drain from abroad the capital necessary to finance its own needs and maintain its consumer levels and leading position in the hierarchy of the empires, is suffering more frequent blows due to the pressure of the figures previously quoted and to competition from the commercial and financial area set up around the euro on the one hand and the surplus of Chinese and Japanese capital (the latter possessing a considerable share of the American debt) on the other. The latter countries could well become the pole of attraction for an antagonistic Asian block.

In this situation, where 20% of international reserves are already quoted in euros, the USA could certainly not permit the Iraqi example (dating back to autumn 2000) of quoting oil prices in euros, to be imitated internationally. Not by chance, the first measure passed by the new Iraqi administration, set up in place of the “hostile régime” of the ex-ally,

Saddam Hussein, was to re-establish quotations and invoices for oil prices in dollars.

The greater instability of capitalism over the past decade has thus arisen from the radical change to the economic basis of relations between the various imperialist powers. The constant trade disputes (over steel, agriculture or service industries) and the return of more or less heavily disguised protectionist policies, secret diplomatic manoeuvres, such as the search for new military bases, in order to guarantee a quicker and more effective projection of power onto the areas of conflict or for reasons of control or deterrence, the increase in military expenditure (recently increased to 401.3 bill. dollars), re-structuring of political and military alliances, are all ingredients used by the USA to try and defend the status quo and, thereby, its own parasitical position and control over the biggest shares of world production and world profit. It is undeniable that this is preventive action on America's part; however, the objectives are not the so-called rogue states, but China, Japan, Germany, Russia, France and anyone else who might upset their plans.

In the previously quoted articles in this newspaper, we emphasised and provided ample documentation to show how the race towards Euroasia and for the control of the oil lines linking the Mediterranean to Asia represents a crucial aspect in the present phase of clashes between empires. In the age of domination by financial capital, the control and occupation of a territory or a geographical area are not important in themselves but inasmuch as they make it possible to weaken the adversary.

The “war on international terrorism” is one of the tools used in this game. One of the leading theoreticians of American imperialism, Z. Brzezinsky, who elsewhere has expressed very well the need for US power to keep its allies in the role of vassals, concerned that, despite US global power, the “patterns of social change” might threaten its leadership on the world chess board, wrote in 1993: “History teaches us that a superpower cannot remain such for long, if it fails to spread, confidently and emphatically, a message of importance to the world... But the message must originate from an inner moral code and define a standard of behaviour, standing as an example to others...”<sup>4</sup> The American reference to the “nation chosen by God” or to the “historical task of being an example to the world” is neither casual nor simply cunning rhetoric: in defence of “values” (i.e. the present consumer levels) and above all of “national interests”, all available resources are mobilised; and what better than to declare war on

“terror” in order to map out the Middle East to American advantage, occupying Central Asia with a dense and closely linked system of military bases – as had already happened after the Balkans wars – so as to maintain, thanks also to all this, the control of the world financial system?

*The “war on terrorism” and the clash between the USA and Europe*

The objective of the US “war against terrorism” is to seal their control of an area that is of strategic importance to the productive system of their more direct competitors and, by means of this control, re-align and re-design to their own advantage, the system of alliances between states. In addition, we should not underestimate the need to re-locate military bases abroad, in line with the new directives regarding the projection of power and control of US imperialism: this relocation was one of the most important direct consequences of the “Enduring Freedom” operation launched against Afghanistan. Following recent settlements in the ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia, the USA can now count on military bases in 130 countries, through which they secure a network of control over all the crisis areas. These, and not pacifist or humanitarian sentiments towards the afflicted Arab masses, are the concerns – obviously not homogeneous or unequivocal – of the European bourgeoisie – like its Russian, Japanese, Chinese or Iranian counterparts, to quote a few. As a columnist in the daily journal of Italian capitalists *Il Sole - 24 Ore* pointed out: “If the United States succeed in doing in Baghdad what they have done in Kabul, i.e. replace a hostile régime with a friendly one, they will make the Middle East and Asia into a single geo-strategic area, a vast zone under their direct influence and a straitjacket which none of the oil-producing countries, not even the Iran of the ayatollah, will be able to escape.”<sup>5</sup> The exploitation of the “nebulous” Al Qaeda and of reactionary Islamic fundamentalism, produced by the failure of Arab unity due to bourgeois influences, are part of this “hidden” but all-out fight between imperial powers. “The basic characteristic of modern terrorism,” wrote a French author on military affairs in 1992, whilst commenting on the transition ‘from the order of Yalta to the disorder of nations’, “lies simultaneously in the internationalisation of the phenomenon (international terrorist networks exist), in its banal nature (the high frequency of attacks) and in the links between terrorist groups (whatever their objectives are...). These characteristics explain why international terrorism – i.e. terrorism manipulated by dif-

ferent States – is, and doubtless will be, one of the necessary transitions in the power relations amongst nations – and therefore a necessary transition phase in the planet’s geo-political revolution”<sup>6</sup>

In *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany*, Engels pointed out that “Generally speaking the difficulty of giving full expression to political opposition creates a sort of religious opposition [...] the profane and dangerous opposition to temporal power is concealed behind the most sanctified and apparently disinterested struggle against spiritual despotism.” The Frankenstein created by the Americans, first to deal with the Russians, drawn into the trap of Afghanistan in December 1979, and later to regulate, to their own advantage, the whole of the central Asian area and attempt to disturb Russia and China within their own borders, has turned against its creator: not for the widely announced and demagogic aim of restoring the caliphate, but because of the eminently material dispute over power in Saudi Arabia, one of the strategic axes of American policy in the Middle East up until September 2001, together with Israel, Turkey and Egypt. On 11 March 2003, in the infamous slaughter of proletarians in Madrid, the “hand” of fundamentalism gave Europe its own “11 September” to act as a catalyst. The pantomime following the attack, with the Spanish government miscalculatedly eager to take advantage of it to settle its accounts with the ETA, demonstrates just how hypocritical are the bourgeois tears shed over these episodes (how can we forget the fake slaughter at the Racak market, which sparked off the war in Bosnia?). Here again an episode of mass killing, “these explosions of panic, moreover with no precise aim, directed against no-one in particular,” (to use the words with which Engels firmly condemned as anti-proletarian the dynamite attacks of January 1895 in London), made its timely appearance, even though it is too early to argue that it may turn out to be in favour of the “American side” or the “European”, and thus the ‘hand’ may have acted as the voluntary or involuntary agent of American imperialism or of its rivals in Europe.

The fact remains that the clash between the United States and Europe (guided by France and Germany) is becoming increasingly severe and global and it should come as no surprise that, as well as being concerned about Chinese growth<sup>7</sup>, American strategies should take into account the possibility “that the alliance between the USA and Europe may collapse, due to an intensification of trade wars and competition for leadership regarding questions of

security.”<sup>8</sup>

And we must not forget that as early as 1997 one of the most highly regarded “consultants” of the American administration’s economic staff declared to the *Sole 24 Ore* that the introduction of the euro might lead to “disagreement and war within Europe”, even “to war between Europe and the United States.”

The process of European unification, conditioned by inevitable divergences of interests within the EU, as well as American interference – also strongly based on interests – is constantly seeking a common foreign and military policy capable of supporting the single currency, yet this is a vain attempt without a political centre which cannot be obtained peacefully. The present situation, in which both the larger and smaller European imperialists seem to be moving as one, is very soon destined to crack under the force of material pressure that will force German capital to expand and the reactions that this will lead to amongst the old and new members. Meanwhile, since the Madrid attack, after which the EU attempted to accelerate its controversial common defence plan and voted a “mutual aid pact” against terrorism (which smacks very much of legislation aiming at the use of military force for internal purposes, against the proletariat – you never know...), a new terrain of conflict with the USA has opened up with regard to settling the situation in the Middle East. Given the legitimacy of the fresh blood shed by the dead in Madrid, the EU responds to the American proposal for a “great Middle East” with democracy imposed on it from above by American “values” and missiles, with its own “vision of stability”, centering on the proposal of “intense consultation”, of a strategic partnership with the countries of northern Africa and Middle East, and, obviously, a more important role by the UN, to support democratic reforms in the area. This European ‘recipe’ means none other than a greater determination to pursue independent spaces for the expansion of European capital (first and foremost that of Germany) and greater negotiating power for the control of a territory of prime importance for supplying energy.<sup>9</sup>

In the age of imperialism, Lenin reminded us, peace is a preparation for war and no more than a pause between wars: for the working class to forget this lesson, pursuing the “sirens” of pacifism and reform, coming, perhaps, from a bourgeoisie temporarily weakened in terms of military force, means preparing its own destiny as “meat for slaughter” in the fight between powers for which the conditions

are already being assembled. The only possible answer is to break the bars of cross-class politics, resuming the out-and-out struggle to defend our own material living conditions, opposing all exhortations to social peace and to the higher principle of defending the “supreme good” of the country, up to the point where the conditions for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat are prepared, under the guidance of the Communist Party. Only Communism, a mode of production based on a classless society and on the harmonious development of the Human Species, can put an end to imperial wars and become the historical alternative to the barbaric chaos of decadent capitalism.

The International Communist Party (ICP)

#### Notes

1. “The Course of Capitalism in Russia”, *il programma comunista*, no. 7 – 8/1999
2. This, and other recent and less recent documents published by the American administration, have frequently been mentioned in previous articles appearing in our Italian newspaper “il programma comunista”, including, amongst others: “The Battle for Central Asia in the pattern of conflict between empires” (no.2/2002); “The crisis of American imperialism and the competition for Central Asia” (no.6/2002); “USA-Iraq. Bourgeois hypocrisy on war and peace” (no.7/2002); “The evolution of military policy by hegemonous American imperialism, reflected in the increasingly acute nature of clashes between empires” (no.1/2003) and “Post-war Iraq. A new test of power in the conflict between empires” (no.3/2003).
3. Q. Liang – W. Xiangsui, *Guerra senza limiti (War without Limits)*, Italian version, Libreria Editrice Goriziana. See also various articles published in no. 23 of *Aspenia*, “Il tempo della Cina” (“The age of China”).
4. *Il mondo fuori controllo (A World Out of Control)*, Longanesi, p. 96.
5. Alberto Negri, *Il greggio iracheno sulla scacchiera americana (Iraqi oil on the American chessboard)*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 17/9/2002.
6. Pierre Lellouche, *Il nuovo mondo (The New World)*, Il Mulino, p. 560.
7. See the document *Vision 2020*. For reasons of space, a new article will deal with the other critical area of the planet, extending from Asia and the Pacific to the Indian Ocean.
8. See: *Global Trends 2005*, quoted by Di Francesco-Dinucci, “L’impero americano d’occidente” (“The western American Empire”), *Il Manifesto*, 26/5/2002.
9. See: “In Medio Oriente e Iraq una ricetta europea” (“A European recipe for the Middle East and Iraq”), *La Stampa*, 27/3/2003.