CHAPTER 8

Networks of Empire and Realignments of World Power

Imperial states build networks that link economic, military and political activities into a coherent mutually reinforcing system. This role is largely performed by the various institutions of the imperial state. Thus imperial action is not always directly economic, as military action in one country or region is necessary to open or protect economic zones. Nor are all military actions decided by economic interests if the leading sector of the imperial state is decidedly militarist.

Moreover, the sequence of imperial action may vary according to the particular conditions necessary for empire building. Thus, state aid may buy collaborators; military intervention may secure client regimes followed later by private investors. In other circumstances, the entry of private corporations may precede state intervention.

In either private or state economic- or military-led penetration, in furtherance of empire building, the strategic purpose is to exploit the special economic and geopolitical features of the targeted country to create empire-centred networks. In the post-Eurocentric colonial world, the privileged position of the US in its empire-centred policies, treaties, trade and military agreements is disguised and justified by an ideological gloss, which varies with time and circumstances. In the war to break-up Yugoslavia and establish client regimes, as in Kosovo, imperial ideology utilized humanitarian rhetoric. In the genocidal wars in the Middle East, anti-terrorism and anti-Islamic ideology is central. Against China, democratic and human rights rhetoric predominates. In Latin America, receding imperial power relies on democratic and anti-authoritarian rhetoric aimed at the democratically elected Chávez government.

The effectiveness of imperial ideology is in direct relation to the capacity of empire to promote viable and dynamic development alternatives to their targeted countries. By that criteria imperial ideology has had little persuasive power among target populations. The Islamophobic and anti-terrorist rhetoric has made no impact on the people of the Middle East and alienated the Islamic world. Latin America's lucrative trade relations with the Chavist Maduro regime and the decline of the US economy has undermined Washington's ideological campaign to isolate Venezuela. The US human rights campaign against China has been totally ignored in the EU, Africa and Latin America, and by the
500 biggest US MNCs (and even by the US Treasury busy selling treasury bonds to China to finance the ballooning US budget deficit).

The weakening influence of imperial propaganda and the declining economic leverage of Washington, means that the US imperial networks built over the past half century are being eroded or at least subject to centrifugal forces. Former fully integrated networks in Asia are now merely military bases as the economies secure greater autonomy and orient toward China and beyond. In other words the imperial networks are now being transformed into limited operations’ outposts, rather than centres for imperial economic plunder.

**Imperial Networks: The Crucial Role of Collaborators**

Empire-building is essentially a process of penetrating a country or region, establishing a privileged position and retaining control in order to secure (i) lucrative resources, markets and cheap labour; (ii) establish a military platform to expand into adjoining countries and regions; (iii) military bases to establish a choke-hold over strategic roads or waterways to deny or limit access of competitors or adversaries; and (iv) intelligence and clandestine operations against adversaries and competitors.

History has demonstrated that the lowest cost in sustaining imperial domination in the long term is by developing local collaborators, whether in the form of political, economic and/or military leaders operating from client regimes. Overt politico-military imperial rule results in costly wars and disruption, especially among a broad array of classes adversely affected by the imperial presence.

Formation of collaborator rulers and classes results from diverse short and long term imperial policies ranging from direct military, electoral and extra-parliamentary activities to middle-to-long term recruitment, training and orientation of promising young leaders via propaganda and educational programs, cultural-financial inducements, promises of political and economic backing on assuming political office and through substantial clandestine financial backing.

The most basic appeal by imperial policy-makers to the ‘new ruling class’ in emerging client states is the opportunity to participate in an economic system tied to the imperial centers, in which local elites share economic wealth with their imperial benefactors. To secure mass support, the collaborator classes obfuscate the new forms of imperial subservience and economic exploitation by emphasizing political independence, personal freedom, economic opportunity and private consumerism.

The mechanisms for the transfer of power to an emerging client state combine imperial propaganda, financing of mass organizations and electoral