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**What Is, and What Is Not, Imperialism?**

Initially presented as a series of lectures at Oxford in February 2003 as the US prepared to invade Iraq, David Harvey's *The New Imperialism* is a rich, provocative, and extraordinarily wide-ranging account of capitalist imperialism in its most recent forms. In order to set the stage, the author offers an interpretation of imperialism in its classic phase between 1884 and 1945, which is intended to constitute the theoretical-cum-historical foundation for all that follows. Against this background, he explains the rise of the US to a position of unprecedented world power in the post-World-War-II era and delineates the nature of its hegemony. This provides the point of departure for Harvey's account of the new imperialism itself, which he views as a response to the fall in profitability and ensuing problems of capital accumulation in the capitalist core, from the late 1960s right into the present. Harvey's ultimate goal is to understand the relationship between this new neoliberal imperialism, which reached its culmination under Bush I and Clinton, and the hyper-imperial military-expansionist project of the Bush II administration.

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1 I wish to thank Vivek Chibber for his thorough reading of this text and his valuable criticisms and suggestions.
Imperialism in theory and practice: two logics?

Harvey seeks to found his understanding of imperialism in terms of two conceptually distinct, though historically inextricably connected, logics of power. There is what he calls the ‘territorial logic of power’, which is the logic of states, ‘long-lived entities’, which are as a rule ‘confined within fixed territorial boundaries’. This is pursued by state actors, statesmen and politicians, ‘whose power is based in command of a territory and the capacity to mobilize its human and natural resources’. There is also what Harvey calls the ‘capitalist logic of power’, manifested in the ‘molecular processes of capital accumulation’, which ‘flows across and through continuous space, towards or away from territorial entities’ through the daily practices of production, trade, capital flows, and so forth. This is pursued by capitalist firms, which ‘come and go, shift locations, merge, or go out of business’, in the process of individually, atomistically, seeking profits. To understand imperialism, says Harvey, ‘the fundamental point is to see the territorial and the capitalist logics of power as distinct from each other’. But, granting the distinction in a general way, how should we actually understand it and what exactly are its implications?

Harvey’s answer, at the most general level, is framed in terms of divergent interests, but is not all that clear. ‘To begin with’, he says, ‘the interests of the agents [of capital and the state] differ’. ‘The capitalist... will typically seek to accumulate more capital’, while ‘politicians and statesmen typically seek outcomes that sustain and augment the power of their own state vis-à-vis other states’. But the problem is that, although the ensuing logic of capitalist power is crystal-clear, that of territorial power is far from it. Individual agents of capital operating in a field of many capitals have an overriding interest in reinvesting their surpluses, because their survival in competition depends upon it. As a consequence, the logic of capital is readily grasped as expressed in ‘the dynamic of endless accumulation’ or ‘accumulation for its own sake’ – expanded reproduction leading to the growth of the labour force and, almost inevitably, the expansion of the geographical scope of the system. But it would be hard to argue that individual states operating in a field of many states face a parallel constraint and therefore have a corresponding interest qua

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2 Harvey 2003, pp. 26–7.
3 Harvey 2003, p. 29.
4 Harvey 2003, p. 27. Compare the following: ‘With regard to [state actors], I want to stress the political, diplomatic, and military strategies invoked and used by the state... as it struggles to assert its interests and achieve its goals in the world at large’ (p. 26).