

GEOPOLITICS OF CONTEMPORARY IMPERIALISM*

SAMIR AMIN**

THE ANALYSIS I propose is inscribed within an overall historical view of the expansion of capitalism, which I can not develop here¹. In this view, capitalism has always, since its origins, been a polarizing system by nature, that is, imperialistic. This polarization –in other words, the concomitant construction of dominant centers and dominated peripheries and their ever deeper reproduction at each stage– is inherent in the process of accumulation of capital operating on a worldwide scale, founded on what I have called “the globalized law of value.”

In this theory of the worldwide expansion of capitalism, the qualitative transformations of the systems of accumulation between one phase and another in its history construct the successive forms of the asymmetrical, centers/peripheries polarization, that is, of concrete

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** Since 1980, Director of the Third World Forum, African Bureau, Dakar, and President of the World Forum for Alternatives.

1 I suggest consulting Amin (1981, 2001) and Amin & Anderson (1992).

imperialism. The contemporary world system will, consequently, continue to be imperialistic (polarizing) in any possible future, so long as the fundamental logic of its deployment continues to be dominated by capitalist relations of production. This theory associates imperialism with the process of capital accumulation on a worldwide scale, an event that I regard as one sole reality with different dimensions, which are, in fact, inseparable. It differs from the vulgarized version of the Leninist theory of “imperialism as the higher phase of capitalism” (as if the previous phases of the worldwide expansion of capitalism hadn’t been polarizing) and from contemporary post-modernist theories that term the new globalization “post-imperialistic².”

From the permanent conflict among imperialisms to collective imperialism

In its worldwide deployment, imperialism was always conjugated in plural form, from its origins in the nineteenth century until 1945. The conflict among imperialisms played a decisive role in the transformation of the world through the class struggle, by which the fundamental contradictions of capitalism are expressed. Social struggles and conflicts among imperialisms were closely articulated and this articulation is what has ruled the history of really existing capitalism. I point out in this regard that the proposed analysis differs markedly from that of the “succession of hegemonies.”

The Second World War triggered a greater transformation as regards the form of imperialism: the substitution of a collective imperialism, associating the group of centers of the capitalist world system (for simplicity’s sake, the “triad”: the United States and its Canadian outside province, Western and central Europe and Japan) for the multiplicity of imperialisms in permanent conflict. This new form of imperialist expansion underwent diverse phases of development, but is still present. The eventual hegemonic role of the United States, about which it will be necessary to specify its foundations and the ways in which it articulates with the new collective imperialism, must be situated within this perspective. These issues underline problems which are precisely the ones I would like to treat below.

² For the criticism of post-modernism and Negri’s thesis, consult the following works Amin (1997 chapter VI; 2003 [a]; 2004).

The United States obtained a gigantic benefit with the end of the Second World War: the main combatants –Europe, the Soviet Union, China and Japan– were ruined and America was in a condition to exercise its economic hegemony, since it concentrated more than half the industrial output of the world at that time and had exclusivity over the new technologies that guided development in the second half of the century. Additionally, the United States had exclusivity over nuclear weapons –the new “absolute” weapon. At Potsdam the American tone changed; days after the bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki it already wielded nuclear armament.

This twofold absolute advantage –economic and technological– turned out to erode in a relatively brief time (two decades) through a double recovery, economic for capitalist Europe and Japan, military for the Soviet Union. We will thus recall how this relative pullback of American power nourished an entire era in which there flourished the discourse about the “American decline” and alternative hegemonies even waxed (Europe, Japan, and later China).

Gaullism corresponds to this stage. De Gaulle considered that the goal of the United States after 1945 had been control over the entire Old World (“Eurasia”), and that Washington had managed to make its pawns advance, destroying Europe –the real Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, that is, including “Soviet Russia,” as he used to say– by raising the specter of an “aggression” from Moscow in which he did not believe. His analyses were, from my point of view, realistic and perfect. But he was almost the only one to do this. The counter-strategy that he proposed in the face of the “Atlantism” promoted by Washington was based on Franco-German reconciliation as the basis for conceiving the construction of a “non-American Europe,” careful to keep Great Britain out of the project, since it was regarded, and justly so, as the Trojan Horse of Atlantism. Europe could then open towards a reconciliation with (Soviet) Russia. Reconciling and bringing together the three great European peoples –French, German and Russian– would put a definitive end to the U.S. project of world domination. The inner conflict inherent in the European project can be reduced to the choice between two options: an Atlantic Europe, the American project, or a non-Atlantic Europe (integrated, within this standpoint, with Russia). But this conflict hasn’t yet been resolved. Ulterior developments –the end of Gaullism, the admission of Great Britain into Europe, the growth of the East, the Soviet collapse– have hitherto favored what I term the “suppression of the European proj-

ect” and its “double dissolution in neoliberal economic globalization and in the political and military alignment with Washington” (Amin, 2000). This evolution additionally nurtures the solidity of the collective nature of the imperialism of the triad.

Is this a “definitive” (not circumstantial) transformation? Will it necessarily imply a United States “leadership” in one form or another? Before attempting to answer these questions it is necessary to explain with greater precision what the United States project consists of.

The project of the U.S. ruling class

The undertaking of extending the Monroe doctrine to the entire planet didn’t spring, in all its insane and even criminal enormity, from the head of President Bush Junior, to be put into practice by an extreme right-wing junta that achieved power by a kind of coup d’état as a consequence of dubious elections.

This is the project which the U.S. leadership class conceived after 1945 and from which it has never deviated, although its enactment has, quite obviously, undergone diverse vicissitudes. When on the verge of failure it has only been possible to put it into practice with the necessary consistency and violence at certain moments marked by specific circumstances, such as ours as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The project has always allocated a decisive role to its military dimension. Conceived at Potsdam, as I have earlier argued, this project was grounded on the nuclear monopoly. Very quickly, the United States launched a global military strategy, splitting the world into regions and delegating responsibility for control over each of them to a U.S. Military Command. I here again recall what I wrote before the collapse of Soviet Russia regarding the priority assigned to the Middle East is this global strategic vision (Amin and others, 1992). The goal wasn’t only to “encircle the USSR” (and China likewise) but also to obtain the means to make Washington the absolute ruler of all regions of the planet. Put differently, to extend the Monroe Doctrine to the entire planet –the doctrine that in fact gave the United States the exclusive “right” over the New World in pursuance of what it defined as its “national interests.”

In this way, “the sovereignty of the national interests of the United States” was placed above all the other principles that frame the

political behavior that is regarded as a “legitimate” means, developing a systematic mistrust with regard to any supra-national right. Certainly, the imperialists of the past had not behaved differently, and those who seek to mitigate the responsibilities –and criminal behavior– of the United States leadership at the present time, seeking “excuses³,” must consider the same argument: that of indisputable historical precedents.

We would have liked to see history change as appeared to be the case after 1945. The conflict among imperialisms and the contempt for international law, given the horrors that the Fascist powers caused during the Second World War, were the elements that led to the U.N. being founded on a new principle that proclaimed the illegitimate nature of wars. The United States, we might say, did not endorse this principle; rather it has, in addition, widely overridden its early initiators. The day after the First World War, Wilson espoused founding international politics anew on different principles than those which, since the treaty of Westphalia (1648), had given sovereignty to monarchic states and later to more or less democratic nations, given that this absolute character had been put into question by the disaster to which it had led modern civilization. Little does it matter that the vicissitudes of domestic policy in the United States should have postponed the launching of these principles, since for example Franklin D. Roosevelt, and even his successor Harry S. Truman, played a decisive role in the definition of the new concept of multilateralism and in the condemnation of war that went with it –the basis of the United Nations Charter.

This beautiful initiative –one that was backed by the peoples of the entire world of that time, and which indeed represented a qualitative jump towards the progress of civilization– never enjoyed the conviction or the support of the leadership classes in the United States. The authorities in Washington always felt ill at ease within the U.N. and nowadays brutally proclaim what they had been forced to hide up to this time: they do not accept even the concept of an international law higher than what they consider to be the demands of the defense of “their national interests.” I do not consider that it is acceptable to find excuses for this return to the vision that the Nazis had developed in their day when demanding the destruction of the League of Nations. Preaching in favor of the law with as much talent and ele-

3 Such as, for example, Chaliand & Arnaud Blin (2003).

gance as was done by Dominique de Villepin before the Security Council is, unfortunately, only a “nostalgic look at the past” instead of constituting a reminder of what the future should be like. On this occasion the United States has defended a past that we thought had been definitively left behind.

In the immediate postwar period American leadership was not only accepted but requested by the bourgeoisies of Europe and of Japan. Because although the reality of a threat of “Soviet invasion” could only convince the weak in spirit, invoking it benefited not only the right but the social democrats, with their adversarial cousins the communists. It was possible to believe that the collective nature of the new imperialism was only due to this political factor, and that once Europe and Japan recovered their development they would seek to unencumber themselves from the bothersome and useless tutelage of Washington. But that wasn’t the case. Why?

My explanation requires going back to the growth of the national liberation movements in Asia and in Africa –the Bandung era, 1955-1975 (Amin, 1989)– and the backing given to them by the Soviet Union and China (each one in its own manner). Imperialism then found itself forced to act, not only accepting peaceful coexistence in vast areas that were wholly denied to it (“the socialist world”), but also by negotiating the terms of the participation of the countries of Asia and Africa in the imperialist world system. The alignment of the triad collective under American leadership seemed to be useless for dominating the North-South relations of the period. That is the reason that the Non-Aligned found themselves facing a “Western bloc” that was virtually seamless.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the vanishing of the national-populist régimes born of the national liberation struggles evidently made it possible for the United States’ project to be put vigorously into practice, especially in the Middle East, but also in Africa and Latin America. Economic rule over the world on the basis of the principles of neoliberalism, put into practice by the Group of 7 and the institutions at its service (WTO, World Bank and IMF) and the structural readjustment plans imposed on the Third World, are the expression of this. At the political level, we can verify that at the initial moment Europeans and Japanese accepted to align themselves with the United States’ project, during the Gulf war (1991) and later in those in Yugoslavia and Central Asia (2002), acquiescing in the sidetracking of the U.N. to the benefit of NATO. This initial moment

hasn't yet been surpassed, although some signs indicate a possible ending as of the Iraq war (2003[a] and [b]).

The American ruling class proclaims without a shade of reticence that it will not "tolerate" the rebuilding of any economic or military power capable of questioning its monopoly of domination over the planet and, to this end, assigns itself the right to lead "preventive wars." Three potential adversaries can be made out.

In the first place Russia, whose dismemberment constitutes the United States' greatest strategic objective. The Russian ruling class doesn't appear to have understood this to date. Rather, it seems to have convinced itself that, after having "lost the war," it could "win the peace," just as happened with Germany and Japan. It forgets that Washington needed to help those two adversaries of the Second World War, precisely to face the Soviet challenge. The new circumstances are different; the United States has no serious competition. Its option then is to definitively and utterly destroy the defeated Russian adversary. Could it be that V. Putin has understood this and could Russia beginning to dispel its illusions?

In the second place China, whose mass and economic success worry the United States, the strategic objective of which is to dismember that great country (Amin, 1996: chapter VII).

Europe ranks third in this global vision held by the new owners of the world. But in this case the American leadership doesn't appear to be concerned, at least not up to the moment. The unconditional Atlantism of some (Great Britain and the new servile powers), the "quicksand of the European project" (a point to which I shall return) and the converging interests of the dominant capital in the collective imperialism of the triad, contribute to the vanishing of the European project, kept within its status as the "European mode of the United States project." Washington's diplomacy has managed to keep Germany in its place and the reunification and conquest of Eastern Europe have, apparently, reinforced this alliance: Germany has been emboldened and is taking its tradition of "Eastward expansion" up again. Berlin's role in the dismemberment of Yugoslavia by virtue of the recognition given to the independence of Slovenia and Croatia was an expression of this (Amin, 1994), and, for the rest, it has been invited to navigate in Washington's seat. Nevertheless, the German political class appears hesitant and may be divided as to its strategic options. The option of a renewed Atlantic alignment has, as a counterpart, a strengthening of the Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis, which

would turn into the most solid pillar of a European system independent from Washington.

We can thus return to our central issue: the nature and eventual solidarity of the collective imperialism of the triad and the contradictions and weaknesses of its leadership by the United States.

The collective imperialism of the triad and the hegemony of the United States

The world of today is militarily unipolar. Simultaneously, fractures appear to be outlined between the United States and certain European countries, as regards the political handling of a globalized system, aligned –in the first instance– as a whole under the principles of free trade. Are these fractures only circumstantial and of limited scope or do they announce lasting changes? It would be necessary to analyze, in all its complexity, the logic that guides the deployment of the new phase of the collective imperialism (North-South relations in ordinary language) and the objectives inherent in the United States' project. It is in this spirit that I will succinctly and successively broach five series of questions.

The nature of the evolution that contributes to the setting up of the new collective imperialism

I suggest in this subsection that the constitution of the new collective imperialism has its origin in the transformation of the conditions of competition. Some decades ago, large corporations generally waged their competitive battles in domestic markets, be they the United States (the biggest national market in the world) or the European states (despite their modest size). The victors of the national matches could situate themselves advantageously on the world market. At the present time, the size of the market needed to reach the first cycle of matches is close to 500/600 million “potential consumers.” And it is those who achieve such a market who prevail in their respective national territories. A thorough globalization is the first framework of activity of the large corporations. Expressed differently, in the domestic/worldwide duo the terms of causality have been reversed: previously, the domestic power commanded a world presence; nowadays it's the other way around. In this way, transnational firms, whatever

their nationality, have common interests in the handling of the world market. These interests are superimposed on those permanent and mercantile conflicts that define all the forms of competition inherent in capitalism, whichever they be.

The solidarity of the dominant segments of transnational capital with all members of the triad is real, and is expressed in their affiliation with globalized neoliberalism. Within this perspective the United States is considered the defender (militarily if necessary) of their “common interests.” This doesn’t mean that Washington considers that it must “equably share” the profits of its leadership. The United States is bent, on the contrary, on treating its allies as vassals and is only disposed to allow minor concessions for its underlings in the triad. Will this conflict of interests in the dominant capital reach the point of entailing a rupture in the Atlantic alliance? It is not impossible, but it is unlikely.

The place of the United States in the world economy

The generalized opinion is that the military potential of the United States only constitutes the tip of the iceberg that extends its superiority in all domains, economic, political, cultural. Submission to the U.S. hegemony will thus be inevitable. I consider, on the contrary, that in the system of collective imperialism the United States doesn’t enjoy decisive economic advantages, given that its productive system is far from being “the most efficient in the world,” since almost none of its segments would win against its competitors in a truly open market such as is imagined by neoliberal economists. Witness to this is the worsening of its trade deficit. In virtually all segments of its productive system, including high-technology goods, profits have given place to a deficit. The competition between Ariane and NASA’s rockets and between Airbus and Boeing is witness to the vulnerability of the American advantage. Against Europe and Japan in high-tech production, against China, Korea and other industrialized countries of Asia and Latin America as regards manufactured products of a banal nature, and against Europe and the Southern Cone as regards agriculture. The United States would not win the competition if it did not resort to “non-economic” means that violate the very principles of free trade imposed on its competitors!

The United States only has well-established comparative advantages in the arms sector, precisely because the latter escapes markedly from the rules of the marketplace and benefits from government support. Undoubtedly, this advantage brings others with it in the civilian sphere (the Internet is the best-known example) but it is equally the cause of severe distortions and constitute handicaps for many productive sectors.

The United States exists as a parasite to the detriment of its partners in the world system. "The United States depends for ten percent of its industrial consumption on goods whose import isn't covered by exports of domestic products" (Todd, 2002). The world produces, the United States (whose national savings are virtually nil) consumes. "The advantage" of the United States is that of a predator whose deficit is covered by the contributions of others, with their consent or by force. The means put into practice by Washington to compensate for its deficiencies are of a diverse nature: repeated unilateral violations of the principles of free trade, arms exports and search for oil profits (which presupposes the agreement of its producers, one of the real motives for the wars in Central Asia and Iraq). The main part of the American deficit is met by capital contributions originating in Europe and Japan, the South (wealthy oil countries and the purchasing classes in all the countries of the Third World, including the poorest ones), to which we might add the bleeding imposed in the name of servicing the debt imposed on virtually all countries on the periphery of the world system.

The growth of the Clinton years, glorified as the product of a "free-trade policies" that Europe unfortunately resisted, is fictitious and cannot become generalized, because it rested on capital transfers that implied the encumbrance of its partners. In all segments of the real productive system, U.S. growth has not been better than Europe's. The "American miracle" fed exclusively on the growth in expenditure caused by the worsening of social inequalities (financial and personal services: legions of lawyers and private security forces, etc.) In this sense, Clinton's free-trade approach provided a good grounding for the conditions that allowed the reactionary takeoff and ultimate victory of Bush Junior.

The causes that originated the weakening of the United States' productive system are complex and structural. The mediocrity of the general educational and training systems, and the tenacious prejudice that favors private services to the detriment of public services,

are among the main reasons of the profound crisis that American society is undergoing.

It should therefore surprise us that Europeans, far from reaching these conclusions that become manifest on verifying the insufficiency of the economy of the United States, should strive to imitate it. The liberal virus doesn't explain everything either, although it has some roles that are useful to the system, such as that of paralyzing the left. Privatization to the hilt and the dismantling of public services will only manage to reduce the comparative advantages which the "Old Europe," as Bush calls it, still benefits from. But whatever the damages they will cause over the long term, these measures offer the dominant capital, which lives on the short term, the occasion for supplementary profits.

The goals of the U.S. project

The hegemonic strategy of the United States is situated within the framework of a new collective imperialism.

(Conventional) economists lack the analytical tools that would allow them to understand the full importance of the first of these goals. Don't we hear them repeat to exhaustion that in the "new economy" the raw materials provided by the Third World will lose their importance and that, consequently, the latter will be ever more marginal within the world system? Against this naive and empty discourse, the *Mein Kampf* of the new Washington administration⁴ confesses that the United States considers it has the right to appropriate all the natural resources of the planet to satisfy its consumers first. The rush for raw materials (oil, water and other resources) is already before us in all its virulence. Especially so in the cases of resources that are running out, not only because of the exponential cancer triggered by wasteful Western consumption, but also because of the development of the new industrialization in the peripheries.

At the same time, a respectable number of the countries of the South are destined to turn into ever more significant industrial producers, both within their domestic markets and on the world market. Importers of technology, of capital, but also competitors in exports, they will be present with increasing weight in the world equilibrium.

4 | refer to *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, announced in 2002.

This doesn't involve only some countries in east Asia (like Korea), but the immense China and, tomorrow, India and the big countries of Latin America. Now then, far from this being a factor of stability, the acceleration of capitalist expansion in the South can only be the cause of violent conflicts, internally and internationally. Because this expansion cannot, under the conditions in the periphery, absorb the enormous labor force that is concentrated there. In this sense, the system's peripheries are "tempest areas." The centers of the capitalist system experience the need to exercise their domination over the peripheries and to subject their people to the ferocious discipline demanded for the satisfaction of their priorities.

Within this perspective, the American leadership has understood perfectly that, to preserve its hegemony, it enjoys three decisive advantages over its European and Japanese competitors: control over the natural resources of the globe, the military monopoly and the weight exerted by "Anglo-Saxon culture, through which the ideological dominance of capitalism is preferentially expressed. The systematic application of these three advantages explains many aspects of United States policy, especially the systematic efforts carried out by Washington for control over the oil-producing Middle East, its offensive strategy vis-à-vis Korea –taking advantage of that country's "financial crisis"– and vis-à-vis China, and the subtle maneuvering that seeks to perpetuate divisions in Europe (mobilizing Britain, its unconditional ally, to this end), and hindering a serious rapprochement between the European Union and Russia. At the level of global control over the planet's resources, the United States enjoys decisive advantages over Europe and Japan. Not only because it is the only world military power, for which reason no strong intervention in the Third World can be carried out without it, but because Europe (excluding the former USSR) and Japan lack the resources essential for the survival of their economies. For example, their dependence in the energy area will be considerable for a long time, even though it decrease in relative terms. Taking control –militarily– over this region with the war in Iraq, the United States has demonstrated that it is perfectly conscious of the usefulness of this means of pressure vis-à-vis its allies-competitors. Previously, Soviet power had understood this vulnerability of Europe and of Japan and certain Soviet interventions in the Third World had had the aim of reminding them of it, in order to lead them to negotiate in some other field. Evidently, the above-mentioned deficiencies might have been compensated via a serious

European-Russian rapprochement (Gorbachov's "common house"). That is the reason why the danger of that construction in Eurasia was experienced by Washington as a nightmare.

The conflicts that pit the United States against its partners in the triad

Although the partners in the triad share common interests in the worldwide management of collective imperialism in their relations with the South, they also have a potentially serious conflictive relationship.

The American superpower exists thanks to the capital flows that feed the parasitism of its economy and of its society. The vulnerability of the United States constitutes, in this sense, a serious threat to Washington's project.

Europe, in particular, and the rest of the world, in general, will have to choose between one of the two following strategic options: to employ the "surplus" capital (from "savings") it possesses to finance the United States deficit (vis-à-vis consumption, investment and military expenditure), or to conserve these surpluses and invest them in themselves.

Conventional economists ignore the problem, on the basis of a (senseless) hypothesis by which "globalization" will suppress nation-states, and it won't be possible to manage economic greatnesses (savings and investments) at an international level. This is a tautological reasoning which in its very premises implies the conclusions at which we seek to arrive: to justify and accept the financing of the United States' deficit by the others because, at world level, we shall find equality between savings and investment!

Why is this ineptness accepted? Undoubtedly, the teams of "of wise economists" that exist in the European political classes (and in others, such as those in Russia and China) from the electoral right and left wings are themselves the victims of the economicist alienation that I call the "liberal virus." Furthermore, this opinion expresses the political judgement of large transnational capitals, which consider that the advantages obtained from the management of the globalized system by the United States on behalf of the collective imperialism override its disadvantages: the tribute that must be paid to Washington to ensure its own permanence. Because it constitutes tribute and not a business with guaranteed good profitability. There are

countries ranked as “indebted poor nations” that are forced to ensure the service on their debt at any price. But there are also “indebted powerful nations” that enjoy all the means that would allow them to devalue their debt if they considered it necessary.

The other option for Europe (and the rest of the world) would consist in putting an end to the transfusion in the United States’ favor. The surpluses could then be put to use in the places of origin and the economies be relaunched. Because the transfusion demands the submission of the Europeans to “deflationary” (an incorrect term employed by conventional economics and that I would replace by “sentenciary”) policies, so as to be able to produce a surplus of exportable savings. This slows down the progress, always mediocre, of Europe with regard to the artificially sustained progress of the United States. Conversely, the mobilization of this surplus for local employment would make it possible to simultaneously relaunch consumption (through the reconstruction of the social dimension of an economic management devastated by the liberal virus), investment –particularly in the new technologies (and the financing of its research)– and even military expenditure (putting an end to the American “advantages” in that sphere). A choice in favor of this response to the challenge implies a new balance in social relations in favor of the working classes. Conflicts among nations and social struggles are articulated in this manner. In other words, the United States/Europe contrast doesn’t pose a fundamental opposition between the interests of the dominant segments of capital of the various partners but is the result, above all, of the differences in their respective political cultures.

The theoretical problems suggested by the preceding reflections

The complicity/competition among the partners in the collective imperialism for control over the South (sacking of its natural resources and subjection of its peoples) may be analyzed from various different angles and viewpoints. In this regard, three observations seem essential to me.

First observation: the contemporary world system, which I term collective imperialism, isn’t “less” imperialist than the preceding ones. It isn’t an “Empire” of a “post-capitalist” nature. I consequently pro-

pose a criticism of the ideological formulations of the “disguise” that is nurtured by this “à la mode” dominant discourse⁵.

Second observation: it is worth while to give a reading to the history of capitalism, globalized from its outset, anchored in the distinction among the various phases of imperialism (relations among centers/peripheries). Of course, there exist other readings of this same history, especially if they are articulated around the “succession of hegemonies” (Amin, 1996: chapter III). Personally I harbor some reservations with regard to the latter. For a start, and in essence, because it is “West-centric,” in the sense that it considers that the transformations that take place in the heart of the system, at its centers, decisively –and almost exclusively– govern the global evolution of the system. I believe that the reactions of the peoples of the peripheries in the face of imperialist deployment must not be underestimated because they caused the independence of America, the great revolutions undertaken in the name of socialism (Russia and China), and the reconquest of the independence of the Asian and African countries, and because I don’t think we can account for the history of world capitalism without taking into account the “adjustments” that these transformations have imposed on the central capitalism itself. The history of imperialism, it seems to me, has been constructed more by the conflicts of the imperialisms than by the type of “order” that the successive hegemonies have imposed. The periods of apparent “hegemony” have always been very brief and the hegemony in question is a very relative thing.

Third observation: globalization is not a synonym of “unification” of the economic system by means of the “unregulated opening of markets.” The latter –in its successive historical forms (yesterday’s “free trade,” today’s “free enterprise”)– has only been a project of the dominant capital. In actual fact, this program has almost always been forced to make adjustments in the face of demands that do not form part of its internal, exclusive and own logic. It has only been possible to put it into practice at brief moments of its history. The “freedom of commerce” promoted by the greatest industrial power of its period –Great Britain– was only effective over two decades (1860-1880) which were followed by a century (1880-1980) characterized by conflict among the imperialists and by the strong disconnection of the so-called socialist countries (as of the Russian revolution in 1917, and later that in China, and the more modest one of the countries of

5 Cf. Note 2.

national populism (Asia and Africa, 1955-1975). The current moment of reunification of the world market (“free enterprise”), inaugurated by neoliberalism starting in 1980, has extended to the entire planet with the Soviet collapse. The chaos that the latter has generated testifies to its character as a “permanent utopia of capital,” phrase I applied to it in *Empire of Chaos* (Amin & Anderson, 1992).

The Middle East in the imperialist system

The Middle East, with its ancient extensions into the Caucasus and the formerly Soviet Central Asia, occupies a position of particular importance in the geostrategy/geopolitics of imperialism and, singularly, in the hegemonic project of the United States. This position is due to three factors: its oil wealth, its geographical position at the heart of the Old World and the fact that it currently constitutes the “belly” of the world system.

Access to relatively inexpensive oil is vital to the economy of the dominant triad and the best means to see that this access is guaranteed consists, properly understood, in ensuring political control over the region.

But the region likewise owes its importance to its geographical position, at the same distance from Paris, Beijing, Singapore and Johannesburg. In other times, control over this inescapable thoroughfare gave the Caliph the privilege of extracting the greatest profits from the globalization of his time (Amin, 1996: chapters I and II). After the Second World War the region, located on the southern flank of the USSR, occupied, owing to this fact, an important position within the strategy of encircling Soviet power militarily. And the region has not lost its importance despite the collapse of the Soviet adversary, because by setting itself up there, the United States could simultaneously reduce Europe to vassal status and subject Russia, China and India to a permanent blackmail born of military intervention if it were necessary. Control over the region thus effectively allows the extension of the Monroe doctrine to the Old World, which constitutes the objective of the American hegemonic project.

The efforts continuously and constantly deployed by Washington since 1945 to ensure control over the region –shutting the British and French out– hadn’t been crowned with success up to the moment. Let us recall the failure of the attempt to associate the region

to NATO through the Baghdad Pact, and later the fall of the Shah of Iran, one of its most faithful allies.

The reason was simply that the project of Arab (and Iranian) nationalist populism was in conflict with the goals of the American hegemony. This Arab project had the ambition to force the powers to recognize the independence of the Arab world. That was the meaning of the “non-alignment” formulated in Bandung in 1955 by the set of liberation movements of the peoples of Asia and Africa which had the wind in their sails. The Soviets quickly grasped that by providing their support to this project they would keep Washington’s aggressive plans in check.

But history turned this page over, basically because the national populist project of the Arab world quickly exhausted its potential for transformation and because the nationalist powers turned into dictatorships without a program. The vacuum created by this state of drift cleared the path for political Islam and for the Gulf’s obscurantist autocracies, preferential allies of Washington’s. The region turned into one of the bellies of the global system, producing situations that allowed foreign interventions (including military ones) that the régimes in power were unable to contain –or even discourage– owing to their lack of legitimacy vis-à-vis their peoples.

The region constituted –and constitutes– within the American geomilitary map that covers the entire planet an area considered of top priority (as does the Caribbean), i.e., an area where the United States has invested itself with the “right” to intervene militarily. And since 1990 it hasn’t foregone doing so!

The United States operates in the Middle East in close cooperation with Turkey and Israel, its faithful and unconditional allies. Europe has remained outside the region, accepting that the United States act alone in defense of the triad’s vital global interests, namely, their oil supply. Despite the evident signs of irritation after the Iraq war, Europeans continue as a group to navigate in the region in Washington’s wake.

At the same time, Israel’s colonial expansionism constitutes a real challenge. Israel is the only country in the world that refuses to recognize definitive borders (and therefore lacks the right to be a member of the United Nations). As did the United States in the nineteenth century, Israel considers it has the “right” to conquer new areas and to treat the peoples that inhabit the new territories, colonized for

thousands of years, like Redskins. Israel is the only country that openly declares not to consider itself involved by the resolutions of the UN.

The war of 1967, planned together with Washington since 1965, obeyed diverse aims: to dampen the collapse of the national-populist régimes, break their alliance with the Soviet Union, force them to reposition themselves under American orders and open new lands for Zionist colonization. In the territories conquered in 1967 Israel put into practice a system of apartheid inspired in that of South Africa.

And it is at this point that the interests of the dominant world capital come together with those of Zionism. Because a modernized, rich and powerful Arab world would question the guaranteed access of Western countries to the sacking of their oil resources, a necessary condition for a continuation of the wastefulness associated with capitalist accumulation. The political powers of the countries of the triad, faithful servants of the dominant transnational capital, do not want a modern and powerful Arab world to exist.

The alliance between the Western powers and Israel is thus founded on the solidity of their common interests. This alliance is neither the product of a feeling of guilt among the Europeans, responsible for anti-Semitism and the Nazi crime, nor of the skill of the “Jewish lobby” in exploiting that feeling. If the Western powers thought that their interests weren’t aligned with those of the Zionist colonial expansionism, they would speedily find the means to overcome their “complex” and neutralize the “Jewish lobby.” I am not one of those who naively believe that public opinion in democratic countries imposes itself on the powers. We know that opinion is “manufactured” too. Israel would be incapable of a lengthy resistance against blockade measures (even moderate ones), such as the Western powers have imposed on Yugoslavia, Iraq and Cuba. It would then not be at all difficult to make Israel be reasonable and to create the conditions for a true peace, if this were desired. But it isn’t.

The day after the defeat of 1967, Sadat declared that since the United States held “ninety percent of the cards” in its hands (that was the expression he used), it was necessary to break with the USSR and realign with the Western bloc, and that, thanks to this, it would be possible to obtain from Washington the concession that would exercise sufficient pressure on Israel to force it to be reasonable. Beyond this “strategic idea” of Sadat’s –the inconsistency of which was proven by subsequent events– Arab public opinion remained widely incapable of understanding the dynamics of world capitalist expansion, and

much less of identifying its real contradictions and weaknesses. Don't we hear it said and repeated that "Westerners would over the long term understand that it was to their own interest to maintain good relations with the two hundred million Arabs—their immediate neighbors—and not sacrifice those relations over an unconditional support for Israel?" This implies considering implicitly that the "Westerners" in question (that is, the dominant capital) wish there to be a modernized and developed Arab world, and not understanding that, on the contrary, they wish to maintain it in impotence, and that to this end, support for Israel is useful to them.

The choice made by the Arab governments (save for Syria and Lebanon) of backing the American plan of a pretended "definitive peace" could not lead to different results than the ones it did: emboldening Israel to make its pawns advance in its expansionist project. Now openly rejecting the terms of the "Oslo Accords" (1993), Ariel Sharon only demonstrates what we should have understood earlier—that it wasn't a project for "definitive peace," but the starting point of a new stage of the Zionist colonial expansion.

The state of permanent war that Israel, along with the Western powers that back its project, impose on the region, constitutes a powerful reason that allows the autocratic Arab systems to perpetuate themselves. This blockage, vis-à-vis a possible democratic evolution, weakens Arab opportunities for renewal and allows the deployment of the dominant capital and the American hegemonic strategy. The knot is tied: the American-Israeli alliance perfectly suits the interests of both partners.

Initially, the apartheid system launched after 1967 gave the impression of being able to achieve its goals. The scared handling of daily affairs in the occupied territories by the notables and by the trading bourgeoisie seemed to be accepted by the Palestinian people. The PLO, removed from the region following the invasion of Lebanon by the Israeli army (1982), seemed to lack the means—from its faraway exile in Tunis—to question the Zionist annexation.

The first Intifada burst out in December 1987. An explosion of apparently "spontaneous" appearance, it expressed the irruption into the scene of the popular classes, and particularly of its most impoverished sectors, confined in the refugee camps. The Intifada boycotted Israeli power via the organization of systematic civic disobedience. Israel reacted brutally, but was unable to restore either its police power efficaciously or that of the Palestinian middle classes. On the

contrary, the Intifada called for a mass return of the exiled political classes, the setting up new local forms of organization and the espousal by the middle classes of the unleashed liberation struggle. The Intifada was triggered by youths, initially not organized within the formal networks of the PLO (Fatah, devoted to its chief Yasser Arafat, the DFLP, the PFLP, the Communist Party) which immediately joined the Intifada and won the sympathy of the majority of its Chebab. The Muslim Brotherhood, left behind due to the weakness of its activities during the preceding years, despite some actions by Islamic Jihad, made its appearance in 1980, and gave way to a new expression of struggle: Hamas, constituted in 1988.

As this first Intifada, after two years of expansion, exhibited signs of exhaustion, given the violent repression of the Jews (use of firearms against children, closure of the “green line” to Palestinian workers, the almost exclusive source of income for their families, etc.), the scene was set for a “negotiation” initiated by the United States that led to the Madrid agreements (1991) and later to the peace calls in Oslo (1993). These agreements allowed the return of the PLO to the occupied territories and their transformation into a “Palestinian Authority” (1994).

The Oslo accords imagined a transformation of the occupied territories into one or several Bantustans, definitively integrated into Israel’s space. Within this framework, the Palestinian Authority should only be a false State –like those of the Bantustans– and, in actual fact, be the transmission belt of the Zionist order.

Having returned to Palestine, the PLO, transformed into an Authority, managed to establish its order, not without some ambiguities. Within its new structures, the Authority absorbed the majority of the Chebab that had coordinated the Intifada. It achieved legitimacy through the election of 1996, in which the Palestinians participated massively (eighty percent), while Arafat caused a plebiscite to confirm him as president of that Authority. The Authority remained, nevertheless, in an ambiguous position: would it accept the role that Israel, the United States and Europe invested it with, that of the “government of a Bantustan,” or would it align itself with the Palestinian people that refused to submit?

As the Palestinian people rejected the Bantustan project, Israel decided to repudiate the Oslo agreements, which it had nevertheless dictated the terms of, to substitute them by the employment of military violence pure and simple. The provocation at the Mosques, carried out

by the war criminal Sharon in 1998 (but with the support of the Labor government that provided him with the means for the assault), and the triumphal election of this criminal at the head of the government of Israel (with the cooperation of the “doves” against Shimon Peres), were the cause of the second Intifada, currently underway.

Will the latter manage to liberate the Palestinian people from the outlook of subjection planned by the Zionist apartheid? It is too soon to say. In any case, the Palestinian people now have at their disposal a true national liberation movement with its specific characteristics. It isn't in the “sole party” style, with the appearance (rather, the reality) of “unanimity” and homogeneity. It has components that preserve their own personality, their visions of the future, even their ideologies, their militants and their clients, but which, apparently, are able to reach a mutual understanding to carry out the struggle jointly.

Control over the Middle East is certainly a key piece within Washington's project for world hegemony. How does the United States therefore imagine it will ensure control? Ten years ago Washington had already taken the initiative of moving forward with the curious project of a “Middle Eastern common market,” in which the Gulf countries would have contributed the capital, and the other countries the cheap labor, reserving for Israel the technological control and the role of forcible intermediary. Accepted by the countries of the Gulf and Egypt, the project faced the rejection of Syria, Iraq and Iran. In order to move forward it was thus necessary to topple those three regimes. Now then, this has already been done in Iraq.

The problem then is knowing what type of political régime must be imposed that will be capable of maintaining this project. Washington's propagandistic discourse speaks of “democracy.” In reality, Washington only busies itself in substituting autocracies born of an outdated populism with obscurantist, allegedly “Islamic” autocracies (compelled by respect for the cultural specificity of the “communities”). The renewed alliance with a political Islam described as “moderate” (i.e., capable of keeping the situation in hand efficiently enough to forbid any sliding into “terrorism” –that which is aimed against, and only against, the United States, of course) constitutes the axis of Washington's political option, remaining as the only possible option. It is within this perspective that reconciliation with the archaic autocracy of the system will be sought.

Faced with the deployment of the American project, Europeans invented their own project, calling it a “Euro-Mediterranean society.”

A bold project, filled with talk, but which likewise proposed to “reconcile the Arab countries with Israel.” At the same time that they excluded the Gulf countries from the “Euro-Mediterranean dialogue,” the Europeans recognized that handling them was exclusively Washington’s responsibility (Amin 2003 [d]).

The contrast between the reckless audacity of the American project and Europe’s weakness is a beautiful indicator that the Atlantism that actually exists ignores any sharing (the splitting of responsibilities and association in decision-taking, placing the United States and Europe in equal conditions). Anthony Blair, who considers himself the advocate of the construction of a “unipolar” world, believes he can justify this option because the Atlantism that would be allowed would be founded on sharing. Washington’s arrogance undercuts this vain hope further every day, even though it may serve simply to deceive European opinion. The realism of the intention of Stalin, who had said at the time that the Nazis “didn’t know where to stop,” is applicable to the junta that governs the United States. And the “hopes” that Blair attempts to revitalize resemble those that Mussolini placed on his ability to “calm down” Hitler.

Is another European opinion possible? Does Chirac’s discourse, opposing the “unipolar Atlantic” world (apparently understanding well that the United States’ unilateral hegemony reduces the European project to being solely the European mode of Washington’s project) against the construction of a “multipolar” world, announce the end of Atlantism?

For this possibility to become a reality, it would still be necessary for Europe to be able to emerge from the quicksand on which it skids.

The quicksand of the European project

All European governments up to now have allied themselves with the thesis of liberalism. This alliance means nothing other than the end of the European project, its double dissolution, economic (the advantages of the European economic union being dissolved within economic globalization) and political (Europe’s political and military autonomy disappears). There no longer exists, at this time, any European project. It has been substituted by a North Atlantic project (or potentially that of the triad) under American command.

The “made in U.S.A.” wars have certainly awakened public opinion and even certain governments (in the first place that of France, but

also those of Germany, Russia and China). Nevertheless, these governments haven't put into question their faithful alignment with the demands of liberalism. This major contradiction must be overcome in one way or another, be it by submitting to Washington's demands, be it through a real break that puts an end to Atlantism.

The most important political conclusion I extract from this analysis is that Europe won't be able to emerge from Atlantism as long as the political alliances that define its power blocs remain centered on the dominant transnational capital. Only if social and political struggles should manage to modify the content of these blocs and impose new historic compacts between capital and labor will Europe be able to take some distance with respect to Washington, an event that would, in consequence, allow the rebirth of an eventual European project. Under such conditions Europe might –indeed should– commit itself equally at the international level, in its relations with the East and with the South, to another path, different from the one set out by the exclusive demands of collective imperialism, thus dampening its participation in the long march “beyond capitalism.” Stated differently, Europe will be leftist (the term “left” here being employed most seriously) or it won't be Europe.

Conciliating an adherence to liberalism with the affirmation of a European political autonomy is the goal of certain fractions of the European political classes concerned with preserving the exclusive positions of big capital. Will they be able to achieve it? I strongly doubt it.

In counterpoint, will the European popular classes be able to overcome the crisis they face? I believe it possible, precisely for the reasons that cause the political culture of certain European countries, at least, to be different from that of the United States, and a renaissance of the left could take place. The condition is evidently that they free themselves from the virus of liberalism.

The “European project” was born as the European mode of the Atlantic project of the United States, conceived the day after the Second World, within the spirit of the “Cold War” launched by Washington –a project with which the European bourgeoisie, simultaneously weakened and fearful of its own working classes, aligned itself in a practically unconditional manner.

Nevertheless, the deployment itself of this project –of doubtful origin– has progressively modified important aspects of the problem and of its challenges. Western Europe managed to put an end to its economic and technological backwardness with respect to the United

States. At the same time, the Soviet enemy is no longer there. The deployment of the project brought together the main adversaries that for a century and a half had marked European history: the three biggest countries on the continent –France, Germany and Russia–achieved mutual reconciliation. All this evolution is, from my point of view, positive, and is filled with an even more positive potential. Certainly, this deployment is inscribed within economic bases inspired by the principles of liberalism, but a liberalism tempered until the 1980s by the social dimension taken into consideration by and through the “historic social-democratic commitment,” which forced capital to adjust to the demands for social justice expressed by the working classes. Afterward the deployment continued within a new social framework, inspired by an “American-style,” utterly anti-social liberalism.

This last turn has hurled European societies into a multidimensional crisis. For a start there is the economic crisis of the neoliberal option. A crisis worsened by the alignment of the European countries in the face of the economic demands of their American leader, the former consenting to finance the latter’s deficit to the detriment of their own interests. Then the social crisis, heightened by the growth of the resistance and of the struggles of the popular classes against the fatal consequences of the conservative option. Lastly, the attempt at a political crisis –the refusal to align themselves, at least unconditionally, with the United States option in the endless war against the South.

How will the European peoples face this triple challenge?

Europeans are divided into three different groups:

- Those who defend the neoliberal option and accept the leadership of the United States, virtually without conditions.
- Those who defend the neoliberal option, but would wish for a politically independent Europe, outside the American alignment.
- Those who would wish for (and struggle for) a “social Europe,” that is to say, capitalism tempered by a new social commitment between capital and labor operating on a European scale, and simultaneously a political Europe practicing “other relations” (friendly, democratic and peaceful) with the South, Russia and China. The overall public opinion in all Europe has, during the European Social Forum (Florence 2000) and on the occasion of the war against Iraq, expressed its sympathy for the principles

of this position.

There are certainly others, the “non-Europeans,” in the sense that they do not think that any of the pro-European options are possible or desirable. These are still in a minority, but are certainly called on to become strengthened within one of two fundamentally different options:

- A right-wing “populist” option, which rejects the progression of supranational political –and even economic– powers, with the obvious exception of those of transnational capital.
- A popular left-wing, national, citizen-based, democratic and social option.

What are the forces on which each of these tendencies lean and what are their respective chances of success?

The dominant capital is liberal by nature. In this sense, it logically supports the first of these three options. Anthony Blair represents the most consistent expression of what I have termed the “collective imperialism of the triad.” The political class, gathered behind the star-spangled banner, is ready, if it becomes necessary, to “sacrifice the European project” –or at least to dispel any illusion in that regard– employing contempt for its origins: being the European mode of the Atlantist project. But Bush, like Hitler, does not conceive any allies other than unconditionally aligned subordinate ones. That is the reason why significant segments of the political class, including the right –even though the latter is, in principle, the defender of the interests of the dominant capital– reject aligning themselves with the United States as they yesterday did with respect to Hitler. If there is a possible Churchill in Europe, he would be Chirac. Will he be?

The strategy of the dominant capital may reach accommodation within a “right-wing anti-Europeanism,” which would be content with demagogic nationalist rhetoric (wielding the issue of emigrants, for example) while submitting in actual fact to the demands of a liberalism that isn’t specifically “European,” but globalized. Aznar and Berlusconi constitute the prototypes of these allies of Washington’s. The servile political classes of Eastern Europe are equally so.

In this regard, I believe that the second option chosen by the most important Europeans (France-Germany) is hard to sustain. Does it express the ambitions of a sufficiently powerful capital to be able to

emancipate itself from the tutelage of the United States? I have no answer save to indicate that intuitively I see it as rather unlikely.

This option is, nevertheless, that of the allies in the face of an American adversary that constitutes the main enemy of all humanity. I am persuaded that, if they persist in their choice, they will have to face the logic of the unilateral project of that capital (liberalism) and to seek alliances on the left (the only ones that might strengthen their project of independence vis-à-vis Washington). The alliance among sets two and three is not impossible. Just as was the case with the anti-Nazi alliance.

If this alliance takes shape, will it have to operate exclusively within the European framework if they are all incapable of renouncing the priority given to that framework? I don't think so, because this framework, as constituted, systematically only favors the option of the first, pro-American group. Would it thus be necessary to cause Europe to burst apart and definitively renounce its project?

I don't consider that necessary either, or even desirable. Another strategy is possible: that of allowing the European project to "lie dormant" for some time in its current stage of development, and in a parallel manner build other alliance axes.

A first priority, then, is the construction of a political and strategic Paris-Berlin-Moscow alliance, extended to Beijing and Delhi if it were possible. And I say specifically political with the aim of giving it the international pluralism and all the roles they ought to have within the United Nations. Strategic, in the sense of building up military forces capable of meeting the American challenge. These three or four powers have all the means (economic, technological and financial), reinforced by their military traditions, alongside which the United States pales. The American challenge and its criminal ambitions are imposed by virtue of their unrestrained character. Building an anti-hegemonic front is currently as high a priority as in the past it was to build an anti-Nazi alliance.

This strategy would reconcile the "pro-Europeans" with groups two and three and with the "non-Europeans" on the left. Favorable conditions would be created for later taking up a European project again, which would probably also incorporate a Great Britain freed from its subjection to the United States and an Eastern Europe that has cast off its servile culture. We must be patient because this will take quite some time.

No progress of a European project will be possible insofar as the American strategy isn't deflected from its course.

Europe in the face of its own Arab South and the Mediterranean

The Arab World and the Middle East occupy a decisive spot in the hegemonic project of the United States. The response that the Europeans offer to the American challenge in the region will be one of the decisive tests that the European project itself will face.

The problem consists in knowing if the coastal people of the Mediterranean and its prolongations –Europeans, Arabs, Turks, Iranians and the people of the countries of Africa– will or will not orient themselves towards a representation of their security that differs from that which is guided by the primacy of the preservation of America's world hegemony. Pure reason ought to cause them to evolve in that direction. But up to the moment Europe has given no sign of going that way. One of the reasons that might partly explain the European inertia is that the partners in the European union, albeit not too divergent, bear a coefficient of relative priorities that differs greatly from one country to the next. The Mediterranean façade isn't central to the industrial polarization of developed capitalism; the façades of the North Sea, of the American Atlantic Northeast and of central Japan have a density lacking a common denominator. For the people in Northern Europe –Germany and Great Britain– the danger of chaos in the countries located to the South of the Mediterranean does not loom as seriously as it does for Italians, Spaniards and Frenchmen.

The diverse European powers each had, until 1945, Mediterranean policies of their own, often conflicting ones. After the Second World War, the states of Western Europe had practically no Mediterranean or Arab policy, whether individually or in common, beyond that which was implied in the alignment demanded by the United States. Within this framework, Great Britain and France, which had their colonial possessions in the region, fought to preserve their advantages. Great Britain gave up Egypt and Sudan (1954) and, after their defeat in the adventure of the tripartite aggression (1956), a violent change of direction ensued which, in the late '60s, implied the abandonment of their influence in the coastal countries of the Gulf.

France, eliminated since 1945 from Syria, finally accepted the independence of Algeria (1962), but preserved a certain nostalgia for its influence in the Maghreb and in Lebanon, emboldened by the local ruling classes, at least in Morocco, Tunis and Lebanon. In parallel fashion, the construction of Europe did not substitute the withdrawal of the colonial powers by a new common policy operating in this sense. Let us recall that, after the Israeli-Arab war of 1973, the prices of oil were readjusted and the European Community, startled in its dreams, discovered it had "interests" in the region. But this awakening did not trigger any significant initiative on its part, for example with regard to the Palestinian problem. Europe, both in this domain and in others, continued to vegetate and ultimately to be inconsistent. Some progress in the direction of autonomy vis-à-vis the United States was seen in the '70s, but after the Venice Summit (1980) it was eroded during the '80s, to finally disappear with the alignment alongside Washington that was adopted during the Gulf War. It's for this reason that European perceptions regarding the future of the relations between Europe and the Arab and Iranian World must be studied on the basis of analyses pertinent to each one of the European states.

Great Britain has no Mediterranean or Arab policy that is specific to it. In this domain, and in others of British society in all its political expressions (Conservatives and Laborites), the option has been an unconditional alignment with the United States. It is, in this case, a fundamental historical choice, which far surpasses specific circumstances and that considerably reinforces the submission of Europe to the demands of American strategy.

For different reasons, Germany has no specific Arab or Mediterranean policy either and will probably not attempt to develop any in the near future. Weakened by its division and its Status, the FRG devoted all its efforts to its economic development, accepting having a low and ambiguous political profile with regard to the United States and the Europe of the EEC. In an initial instance, the reunification of Germany and its reconquest of full international sovereignty did not modify this behavior; rather, on the contrary, they accentuated the expressions of it. The reason is that the dominant political forces (conservatives, liberals and social democrats) chose to give priority to the expansion of Germanic capitalism in central and eastern Europe, reducing the relative importance of a common European strategy, both on the political level and on that of economic integration. It

remains to be seen if this trend has currently been reversed, as seems to be suggested by Berlin's attitude in the face of the Iraq War.

France's positions are more nuanced. A both Atlantic and Mediterranean country, the heir of a colonial Empire, classed among the victors of the Second World War, France did not give up expressing itself as a power. During the first postwar decade, succeeding French governments attempted to preserve the colonial positions of the country through anti-Communist and anti-Soviet Atlantist positions. Nevertheless, they did not gain Washington's support, as was demonstrated by the position of the United States during the tripartite aggression against Egypt (1956). The Mediterranean and Arab policy of France was simply retrograde. De Gaulle simultaneously broke with paleo-colonial and with pro-American illusions, and conceived the triple project of modernizing the French economy, leading a decolonization process that would allow its substitution by neocolonialism in the face of the old formulas, and compensating the weaknesses intrinsic to any medium-sized country like France through European integration. Within this last perspective De Gaulle conceived a Europe capable of being autonomous, not only at the economic and financial level, but also at the political level and even, ultimately, at the military level, just as he conceived, over the long term, the association of the USSR with the construction of Europe ("the Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals"). But Gaullism did not survive its founder and, starting in 1968, French political forces, both of the classic right and of the socialist left, gradually returned to their previous attitudes. Their vision of the construction of Europe became reduced to the sole dimension of a "common market" between France and Federal Germany (at the moment when German reunification occurred, in Paris they were a bit surprised and uneasy...) and to the invitation, employing pressure, made to Great Britain to join the EEC (forgetting that Britain would be the Americans' Trojan Horse in Europe). Naturally, this change implied the abandonment of any Arab policy worthy of the name of France, that is to say, a policy that went beyond the simple defense of immediate mercantile interests. At the political level, France objectively behaved, both in the Arab world and in sub-Saharan Africa, as a supplementary force in support of the American strategy of hegemony. It is within this framework that one must place the Mediterranean discourse, which calls for tying the Maghreb countries to the European chariot (in the same way that Turkey, now in crisis, was tied), which implied breaking the prospect of a unitary Arab

approach and abandoning the Mashrek in the face of Israeli-American intervention. Undoubtedly, the Maghreb's ruling classes bear responsibility, given the sympathy they demonstrated for this project. Nevertheless, the Gulf Crisis dealt a strong blow to this project, and the popular masses of Northern Africa expressed, on this occasion and strongly, their solidarity with the Maghreb, a totally foreseeable event.

Italy is, including because of its geographical position, a country that is very sensitive to Mediterranean problems. This does not mean that it has a real Mediterranean and Arab policy, and much less that the latter has efficacy and autonomy. Because of its marginal capitalist development, Italy was forced to inscribe its Mediterranean ambitions within European tutelage in an alliance with other powers in the area, more decisive than it is itself. Since its unity was achieved in the middle of the last century with Mussolini's fall in 1943, Italy hesitated between an alliance with the owners of the Mediterranean –i.e., with Great Britain and France– or with those able to contest Anglo-French positions, namely the Germans. Atlantism, which is exercised in Italy within a vision that implies a foreign political profile under the tutelage of the United States, has been dominant in the actions and options of Italian governments since 1947. It is equally dominant, albeit from an even more ideological standpoint, among certain sectors of the lay bourgeoisie (the republicans and liberals, and some socialists). Because among the Christian Democrats there exists the pressure of the universalism of the Catholic tradition. For this reason it is significant that the Pope has, often, adopted more retrograde positions vis-à-vis the Arab peoples (particularly on the Palestinian problem) and the Third World than that of the numerous Italian and Western governments in general. The step to the left by part of the Catholic Church, under the influence of Latin America's Theology of Liberation, currently reinforces this universalism, of which we find lay versions in pacifist, ecologist and pro-Third World movements. The "mittel" European current has its roots in the Italian nineteenth century and in the North-South split that Italian unity hasn't managed to mitigate. Allied to the interests of large Milanese capitals, it proposes bestowing priority on the economic expansion of Italy toward the European East, in close association with Germany. Within this framework, Croatia currently constitutes an immediate objective. Properly understood, this option would imply that Italy continue the tradition of a low international profile, and above all remain marginal in its relations with the Mediterranean South. A par-

allel option by Spain would isolate it even further from the European concert, reducing it to its lowest common denominator. The Mediterranean current, which is still weak, despite the contribution that universalism could entail for it, is, for this reason, expressed in a “Levantine” version: it is a question of “doing business” here or there, without worrying about the framework of political strategy in which the latter are inscribed. To acquire another, more noble consistency, associating Italy to economic openings that are inscribed within a perspective of reinforcing its autonomy and that of its Arab partners, it would be necessary for a convergence to be achieved between this project and universalist ideas, particularly those of part of the Italian left, communist and Christian. The Italian right, for its part, reunited under the leadership of Berlusconi in power, has opted to be inscribed under the tutelage of the Washington-London Atlantic axis. The behavior of the police forces during the G8 meeting in Genoa (July 2001) clearly expresses this option.

Spain and Portugal occupy an important spot in the geostrategy of world hegemony of the United States. The Pentagon considers, in fact, that the Azores-Canaries-Gibraltar-Balearics axis is essential for keeping watch over the North and South Atlantic and looking after the entry into the Mediterranean. The United States forged its alliance with those two countries immediately after the Second World War, without exercising the least concern over their fascist nature. On the contrary, in fact, the anti-communism of the Salazar and Franco dictatorships served the American hegemonic cause well, making it possible for Portugal to be admitted into NATO and to establish American bases of prime importance on Spanish soil. In counterpart, the United States and its European allies backed Portugal unreservedly until the end of its failed colonial war.

The democratic evolution of Spain after Franco’s death was not the occasion for a questioning of the country’s integration into the American military system. On the contrary, in fact, the formal accession of Spain to NATO (in May 1982) was the object of real electoral blackmail that made it out that participation in the EEC demanded that accession, which was opposed by the majority of Spanish public opinion.

Afterward, Madrid’s alignment with Washington’s positions has been unreserved. In counterpart, the United States may apparently have intervened to “moderate” Morocco’s claims and even to attempt to convince Great Britain with regard to Gibraltar. In this sense, we

may doubt the actual reality of these interventions. The reinforced Atlantist alignment of Madrid translated into radical changes in the organization of the Spanish armed forces, described by analysts as a “movement toward the South.” In the Spanish tradition, in fact, the army was spread out over the country’s entire territory. Additionally conceived –with Franco, in an evident manner– as a domestic police force more than as a force aimed outward, the Spanish army continued to be rustic and, despite the marked attention that the supreme power in Madrid bestowed on the cadres of generals and officers, had not been the object of a true modernization, as was the case with France, Great Britain and Germany.

The socialist governments, and afterwards those on the right, proceeded to a reorganization of Spanish forces to combat on a potential “Southern front” and committed themselves to a modernization of the land army, of the aviation and of the navy. This change, demanded by Washington and NATO, is one of the numerous manifestations of the new American hegemonic strategy, substituting the South for the East in the defense of the West. This is accompanied in Spain by a new discourse that brings into evidence a “hypothetical enemy coming from the South,” the identification of which leaves no room for doubt. Curiously, this discourse of the democratic (and socialist) Spanish media recalls the old tradition of the Reconquest, very popular among the Catholic circles of the army. The change in the Spanish armed forces is thus the sign of a determination on Spain’s part to exercise an active role in the midst of NATO, in the framework of the reorientation of Western strategies, foreseeing interventions in the Third World. For some time now, the Iberian Peninsula constitutes the first stopover on the Washington-Tel Aviv axis, the principal European bridgehead of the American Rapid Deployment Force (which had a decisive role in the Gulf War), completed with bases in Sicily (which, likewise, had never seen service until the operations against the Arab World such as Libya, the Israeli bombardment of Tunis, etc.) and, curiously, the facilities awarded by Morocco. Evidently, this Western option empties the “Euro-Arab” discourse of any serious content. The new, democratic Spain, which pretends to activate a policy of friendship in the direction of Latin America and the Arab World, has actually directed its steps in an opposite direction from that of the demands of its proclamation of principles.

The right-wing government led by Aznar has confirmed this Atlantist alignment of Madrid’s. Even more than Italy, Spain rejects

capitalizing on its Mediterranean position to the benefit of a new European policy aimed at the Arab World, Africa and the Third World, and to distance itself from the demands of the American hegemony. The French idea of a Mediterranean group in the midst of the European Union remains, for these reasons, suspended in mid-air and without serious points of support. At the same time, in the economic sphere, Spanish capital, the heir of the Francoist tradition, has placed its main hopes for expansion on the development of agreements with Germany and Japan, invited to participate in the modernization of Catalonia.

While it existed, the line of East-West confrontation passed through the Balkans. The compulsory alignment of the states of the region with Moscow or Washington –with the sole exception of Yugoslavia since 1948 and of Albania as of 1960– had placed a damper on the local nationalist disputes that had turned the Balkans into the European backyard.

Turkey placed itself in the Western camp since 1945, after having put an end to its neutrality with regard to Hitler's Germany. The Soviet claims to the Caucasus formulated by Stalin following victory were rejected by Ankara thanks to Washington's resolute support. In counterpart, Turkey, a member of NATO, despite its less than democratic political system, housed the American bases closest to the USSR. There is no doubt that Turkish society continues to be part of the Third World, although after Atatürk the country's ruling classes have proclaimed the European part of the New Turkey, knocking on the door of a European Union that doesn't want it. A faithful ally of the United States and of its European partners, will Turkey wish to reclaim its past and play an active role in the Middle East, making the West pay for the services it might provide for it in that region? It appears that the problem of the Kurds, whose very existence it fails to recognize, has hitherto led it to hesitate in the adoption of this option. The same applies to a potential pan-Turanian option, suggested by certain Kemalist circles, and later consigned to the historical museum. But currently, the breakup of the USSR might constitute an invitation for the power of Ankara to take the leadership of a Turkish bloc that, from Azerbaijan to Sinkiang, would dominate Central Asia. Iran always expressed its fears with regard to a development of this type, which would not only question the status of Iran's southern Azerbaijan but also the security of its vast northern Asian border with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Greece did not enlist in the Soviet camp. It was compelled and forced by the British intervention of 1948 to align with the United States. In conformity with the Yalta Agreements, the USSR, as we all know, abandoned the Greek resistance to its fate, a resistance led by the Communist Party which, nevertheless, in that country as in Yugoslavia and Albania, had freed the nation and for that reason conquered majority popular support. In this way, the Westerners were forced to give their support against that movement to successive repressive regimes and, lastly, to a dictatorship of fascist colonels, without seeing this as a major contradiction with its discourse, according to which NATO would protect the "free world" against the totalitarian "Satan." The return of Greece to democracy, through PASOK's electoral victory (1981), risked, under these conditions, questioning the country's fidelity to NATO. The European Community then came to Washington's support in order, as in the case of Spain, to link the Greek candidacy to the EEC with its continuing participation within the Atlantic alliance. This integration into the EEC was strongly discussed by Greek public opinion at the time. Papandreou's choice to join despite everything, after some hesitation and in spite of the Third World and neutralist principles of PASOK, appears to have unleashed an irreversible evolution even at the level of mindsets, flattering the Greek people's aspirations towards modernity and Europeanism. Nevertheless, Greece's new European partners haven't offered that country much, keeping it all the time in the position of poor relative in the construction of the community.

Athens' faithfulness to the Euro-American West hasn't earned it real support in its conflict with Turkey. Indeed, even though the Greek dictatorship bore a measure of responsibility in the Cypriot tragedy (1974), the open Turkish aggression (operation Attila) and the later creation of a Turkish Republic of Cyprus, in clear violation of the island's status, not only have been accepted, but probably also endowed with the services of the Pentagon, in the face of which Europe once again gives way. It is evident that, to the United States, friendship with Turkey, a considerable regional military power, ranks far above Greece, however democratic the latter may be.

The Balkans-Danube region as a group (Yugoslavia, Albania, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) in 1945 came under Moscow's aegis, be it through Soviet military occupation and acceptance by the Yalta partners, or through their own liberation and the choice of that option by the people of Yugoslavia and Albania.

Tito's Yugoslavia, isolated during the years 1948-1953, between Moscow's ostracism and Western anti-Communism, had successfully achieved a strategy of construction of a "non-aligned" front, which earned it a friendship with the Third World, particularly after the Bandung Conference (1955). Analysts of the period's geostrategic thinking curiously point out that this approach was not very sensible given the country's Mediterranean dimension. Perhaps Italy's abandonment after the Second World War of its traditional visa requirements and the solution found in 1954 to the difficult problem of Trieste were the reasons for this "historical forgetfulness." Yugoslavia lived after that as a state concerned above all with the problems of balance in its regional relations and, especially, by that of the world balance between the superpowers. Because, in the first place, it had managed to capitalize on the double Northward and Danubian attraction of Croatia and Slovenia and the Russian and Balkanic one of Serbia. The rapprochement initiated by Khrushchev and continued by his successors, recognizing Tito's neutrality as positive in the world arena, as well as the weakening of the régimes of the Warsaw Pact as of the '60s and especially in the '70s, for a time guaranteed Yugoslavia's security, which had ceased to be regarded as the crux of any regional conflict. Yugoslavia's diplomacy was then able to deploy in the international arena, giving the country a disproportionate weight in regard to its size. But, although this diplomacy had undoubtedly gained points in Asia, in Africa and in Latin America, it failed in Europe, where its call for an expansion of the neutrals' front never found a favorable echo. Nevertheless, vis-à-vis the Europe of NATO, from the North to the South of the continent, between two adversarial military pacts, Sweden, Finland and Austria might have been able to seek positive common initiatives that differed from the spirit of the Cold War. Later, the Greece of PASOK attempted to expand the European neutral field, this idea leading in 1982 to the proposal for cooperation toward the de-nuclearization of the Balkans, aimed, simultaneously, at certain member countries of the two alliances (Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria) or at neutrals (Yugoslavia and Albania). These proposals also found no echo at all.

The decomposition of Southeastern Europe as of 1989 changed the entire problem. The erosion and then the collapse of the legitimacy of the régimes –founded on a specific development, whatever their limitations and their negative aspects may have been– caused the bursting apart of the unity of the leading class, the fractions of which attempted to found their legitimacy on nationalism. The conditions were pro-

vided not only for allowing the offensive of savage capitalism underpinned by the United States and the European Union, but also for Germany to take up the initiative in the region again, throwing fuel into the fire –through its recognition of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, which the European Union itself reaffirmed– and consequently accelerating the splitting asunder of Yugoslavia and the civil war. Curiously, the Europeans attempted to impose in Bosnia the coexistence of the communities that they had insisted on separating! If it is possible for Serbs, Croats and Muslims to coexist in the tiny Yugoslavia that Bosnia turns out to be, why couldn't they have coexisted in the large Yugoslavia? Evidently, a strategy of this type would not have had any success, which allowed the United States to intervene in the very heart of Europe. In Washington's strategy, the Balkans-Caucasus-Central Asia axis is a prolongation of the Middle East.

From the analyses proposed above and which concern the political and strategic options of the countries of the Northern Coast of the Mediterranean I extract an important conclusion: the majority of these countries, yesterday faithful backers of the United States in the East-West conflict, continue aligned with the American strategy of hegemony vis-à-vis the Third World, and particularly vis-à-vis the Arab countries and those of the Red Sea-Gulf region. The other countries (Balkan and of the Danube), yesterday involved in some manner or another in the East-West conflict, have ceased to be active agents in the permanent North-South conflict, and have turned into passive objects in the face of Western expansionism.

Conclusions: the Empire of Chaos and the permanent war

I have termed the project of dominance of the United States –the extension of the Monroe doctrine to the entire planet, particularly since the collapse of Soviet Russia (1991)– the Empire of Chaos. The growth of the resistance of the nations of the Old World announces that they will not accept submitting so easily. The United States will be called on to substitute international law by recourse to permanent warfare (a process that has begun in the Middle East, but which already points toward Russia and Asia), slipping down the fascist slope (the “Patriot Act” has already given its police powers with regard to foreigners –“aliens”– that turn out to be similar to those the Gestapo had).

Will the European states, partners in the system of collective imperialism of the triad, accept this drift that will place them in subordinate positions? The thesis which I have developed places the accent not so much on the conflicts of interest of the dominant capital as on the difference that separates the political cultures of Europe from that which characterizes the historic shaping of the United States, and finds in this new contradiction one of the main reasons for the probable failure of the United States' project⁶.

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6 See Amin (2004; 2003 [b]).