

Are National Interests Outdated in the World Order?

In order to deal with our topic of the contemporary challenges facing national interests, we have first to consider whether national interests actually exist. In the affirmative, we must go on to define them and identify the stakeholders of national or anti-national interests, which is the aim of this brief research paper.

My proposal is that the current world order dislikes nations, States and peoples as much as it delights in globalisation, borderless finance, political interference and military intervention. In the West, many politicians, publishers and academics share the mainstream view that national interests no longer really exist.

Is our world ultimately an order or a disorder, and for whom? To what extent is such an “order” sustainable?

The *Infowar* in fact begins with the use of certain words in preference to others, and assertions (Margaret Thatcher’s famous “There is no alternative¹) matched with injunctions.

1. The “Liberal Empire” Dropped Democracy

Governance vs. Democracy

Samuel Huntington’s publication, 40 years ago, was more discreet than his later *Clash of Civilizations*. He was indeed the major author of the Trilateral Report *The Crisis of Democracy*², which acted as a roadmap for the decades to follow. It proposed depriving the people of their legitimate right to take decisions and replacing it with submission to the will of an elite. *Governability* and *governance* are the expression of this system of exclusion. Basically, governance dissolves the will of the people, normally expressed by the public authorities: “*Governance is a triangle involving public authorities, private interests, consumer and user civil society. (...) Clearly, this means that during a vote, none of the three categories has the sole majority. The public authorities no longer hold the role of unique representative of the common interest.*”³ The mercantile market democracy dislodges the democracy of the people. The NAFTA project, among others, is a clear example of this process.

¹ This won her the nickname “Mrs. TINA”

² *The Crisis of Democracy: On the Governability of Democracies*, M. Crozier, S. Huntington, J. Watanaki. New York University Press, 1975. The Trilateral Commission was founded in 1973 by David Rockefeller, directed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, and promoted by President Carter.

³ « La gouvernance est un triangle où se côtoient les pouvoirs publics, les intérêts privés, la société civile des consommateurs et des usagers (...) En clair, cela signifie que lors d’un vote, aucune des trois catégories n’a à elle seule la majorité. Les pouvoirs publics sont désinvestis du rôle de représentant Unique de l’intérêt général » Michel Camdessus, Bertrand Badré, Ivan Chéret, Pierre Frédéric Ténière-Buchot, *Eau*, Robert Laffont, 2004.

Dissociating the elite from their own respective nationals simultaneously reinforces the international solidarity of the groups in power.

Part of Huntington's programme was to be implemented from the seventies in several nations in Europe within the framework of the European Community, known at the time as the European Union. The argument was to declare "the European national state a somewhat obsolete entity."⁴ The economic (i.e. monetary, industrial, financial) crises proved to be levers for reshaping the national and international order, both domestically and abroad. Demonising the Nation-State enabled emerging classes and groups to lose "touch with the people. The unreal, artificial character of our politics reflects their insulation from the common life..."⁵.

The collapse of communism in the USSR and Eastern Europe made it possible to implement the rest of the programme, once any political and military counterweight had disappeared. The situation also opened new markets and gave NATO the opportunity to expand⁶. Zbigniew Brzezinski's dream was beginning to come true⁷. Who were the beneficiaries of the new situation?

Violence of the Markets & Markets of Violence

Violence is a facet of *power*, namely non-institutionalised power. The institutions contain violence through constraint, what certain authors like Johan Galtung call "structural violence". The ruling groups impose, propose or negotiate the legitimacy of their policy, placing the *State* at the crossroads of groups of interests⁸ rather than as the pure expression of a single-class interest, as traditional Marxists would have it. The State witnesses and confirms the balance of power between the groups and the classes. As from the seventies, the popular classes began losing their influence to the benefit of a neo-bourgeoisie gathered around the emerging financial elite and their clerks.

Physical strength is no longer the major characteristic of structural violence. Economic power, for one, could be considered as the violence of the markets, despite the fact that it actually boils down to the connection between *market* and *capital: market capitalism* or the *commodification* of life and societies. This economic power, violence of the markets or commodification, is basically divided into *wage ratio* (employer-employee dependence), *major inequalities*, *mass unemployment* and *restricted common or public services* due to *capital flight*, *limited taxes* and subsequently *impoverished elected political authorities*. The State, as such, vanishes, surrounded by and dissolved in private interests. This is why Robert Cox uses the term "state/society complex": "*I have used in preference to "state" the more cumbersome term "state/society complex."*⁹

⁴ *The Crisis of Democracy*, p.18.

⁵ Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites*, W. W. Norton Company, New York London 1995. P.3-4.

⁶ "The United States will press forward on enlarging NATO, she (Madeleine Albright) said, "to integrate new democracies, defeat old hatreds, provide confidence in economic recovery and deter conflict."
<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/albright.htm>

⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, 1997.

⁸ Namely according to Jean Jaurès and Nikos Poulantzas.

⁹ Robert Cox, *The Political Economy of a Plural World*, Routledge, 2002, p.32.

In exploring the process of “economic empowerment”, Michel Aglietta and André Orléan amplified their work in 1998 with *Monetary Sovereignty: “Economic empowerment, the instrumentalisation of collective forms, and the primacy of power relationships over forms of authority do not draw a coherent social model, which, on the contrary, supposes the subordination of power relations to an authority. The authority is a set of collective values in whose name the coherent society is confirmed. (...) One can say that authority subordinates power for what it is worth. Power is dominance, based on the possession of means of production allowing certain individuals to dictate to others how they should conduct themselves.”*¹⁰ Let us call “oligarchs” the persons who possess this economic power, and *eligarchs* (the former “elite” who were concerned about the common interest and then, most often, turned into a separate class having lost touch with the people) the politicians, academics, journalists and so forth who join and support the oligarchs. The solidarity between oligarchs and eligarchs typically characterises “crony capitalism.” They come from the same milieu, attend the same business schools, intermarry, cross interests and share a similar cosmopolitan vision of the world.

Aglietta and Orléan distinguish economic *power* from the “*authority*,” “a set of collective values,” to be expressed in political decisions. This has two consequences. First, the market works through merchants, the genuine actors of the social complex. Second, the withdrawal of the State automatically means the increased influence of the merchants, leading to a privatisation of violence including the private security contractors. On August 15, 1971, President Richard Nixon staged an “international coup” by declaring the end of the convertibility of the U.S. dollar into gold, thus ending the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates. The “Nixon Shock” opened the door to the financialisation of capitalism, accelerated by information technologies and the reign of speculators.

Marc Guillaume qualifies the brutal economic order as a “state of war”: “*Of this order, I will first remember an aspect that illustrates the capacity it has to distort values that seemed assured: it is the acceptance, and even the exaltation, of a permanent state of war as a normal, indeed ideal, situation. This state of war is, of course, the economic war waged by companies and nations, a war considered legitimate, despite the misery and tragedy it imposes on the poorest countries and, increasingly, on the industrialised countries themselves. The economic order is fundamentally an endless mobilisation, a war order, idealised or euphemised into a competition model.*”¹¹

The extension of the violence of the markets involves the rise of the markets of violence. “Markets of violence” (Gewaltmärkte) is primarily an expression coined by Georg Elwert¹² and later developed by his former students¹³. “Markets of Violence,” however, has an anthropological as well as an economic connotation, where the former includes the latter.

“In its conceptual meaning, the term “markets of violence” refers more directly to anthropology than to economics: the market is a culturally registered place of exchange. Applied to rationalities of exchange in war zones, it opens on a theory that gives a better

¹⁰ M. Aglietta et A. Orléan, *La monnaie souveraine*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1998, p.11.

¹¹ Marc Guillaume, « L’héritage de l’histoire ambiguë » in Pierre Dockès, (dir.), *Ordre et désordres dans l’économie-monde*, 2002, p.41.

¹² <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.537.3680&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

¹³ Martin Kalulambi Pongo et Tristan Landry, *Terrorisme international et marchés de violence*

understanding of a society's ability to manage its conflicts, as well as its aptitude for state-building. The theory of markets of violence focuses on the strategic action of the social actors, who are not only older politicians controlling local institutions, but also young men generally ignored by studies centred on the elite. In a gerontocratic society, as are many societies in the developing countries, they choose the "AK47" option, i.e., they seek in the markets of violence the possibility of building up social and economic capital."¹⁴ The arms trade – the primary source of corruption according to a SIPRI report – is the perfect symbiosis between the violence of a market and a market of violence.

Empires in Territories and Networks¹⁵

It is doubtful whether the President of the United States is the genuine ruler of this empire.

The new empire is constituted by the entanglement of *territories*, which are politically-militarily dominant, and of *networks* woven by large commercial, financial and informational companies. *"But this empire of the liberalised market is not only (...) a socially disembodied, abstract monster. Substantially, it identifies itself with dominant nations (...) and, within these nations, with social layers that have never been in such a favourable situation. This empire constitutes in fact a system of alliances between elites on a global scale. (Underlined by GG). It strengthens the implantation of capitalism in certain areas, excluding the others, but the great difference with the past is that its border is not geographical; it has become social.*¹⁶ The United States are still the predominant head of this untypical empire because they control many territories – and more decisively, the major networks – through their companies, their armies, their norms and their technologies.

The "Liberal (also "postmodern") Empire" is an expression used by Robert Cooper, former counsellor of Anthony Blair, and later advisor to the European Union High Representative, Javier Solana. Cooper writes: *"What is needed then is a new kind of imperialism, one acceptable to a world of human rights and cosmopolitan values. We can already discern its outline: an imperialism which, like all imperialism, aims to bring order and organisation but which rests today on the voluntary principle.*

Postmodern imperialism takes two forms. First there is the voluntary imperialism of the global economy. This is usually operated by an international consortium through International Financial Institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank - it is characteristic of the new imperialism that it is multilateral. These institutions provide help to states wishing to find their way back into the global economy and into the virtuous circle of investment and prosperity. In return they make demands which, they hope, address the political and economic failures that have contributed to the original need for assistance. Aid theology today increasingly emphasises governance. If states wish to benefit, they must open themselves up to the interference of international organisations and foreign states (just as, for different reasons, the postmodern world has also opened itself up.)

¹⁴ Ibidem, p.2-3

¹⁵ <http://www.gipri.ch/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Les-empires-en-territoires-et-r%C3%A9seaux-version-russe-sign%C3%A9e.pdf>

¹⁶ Edgar Morin et Sami Naïr, *Pour Une politique de civilisation*, Arléa, 1997, p.42.

*The second form of postmodern imperialism might be called the imperialism of neighbours. Instability in your neighbourhood poses threats which no state can ignore. Misgovernment, ethnic violence and crime in the Balkans pose a threat to Europe.*¹⁷

This empire indeed combines the various elements of power: the military, the commercial, and the hard and soft power that make up “smart power.” Cooper considers US leadership of the empire a lesser evil.

The bodies of the empire are political authorities, national or international agencies, financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, the European Commission or the boards of major companies. Alain Joxe points out “the sovereignty of the companies” within the “global empire.”¹⁸

David Harvey¹⁹ considers that the “new imperialism” follows a two-pronged strategy focusing on business interests on the one hand and political domination on the other. The goal is to maintain economic and political domination. In Iraq, the military occupation was only the latest, if most overt, phase of that strategy.

The peoples abroad are the further victims of the empires.

2. Towards Partnerships between Sovereign Nations

The world is run by a transnational eligarchy, certainly not really cohesive, but united against their respective peoples, who demand more independence, respect and solidarity. The scission of the eligarchies is both horizontal (micro-nationalisms such as Catalonia²⁰) and vertical (opposing the rich and the poor). The eligarchies divide the nations vertically and horizontally.

It is worth noting that several U.S. authors, be they radical (Blum, Johnson²¹, Chomsky) or moderate (Barber), denounce the imperial stance of their country. Benjamin Barber, former Counsellor of William Clinton, notes that the U.S.A. tend to confuse the promotion of democracy with the defence of their own markets or interests.²²

To briefly outline the major thrusts of a desirable world order, some feasible directions or ways to favour multilateralism are worth noting:

- 1.1. First, the strict implementation of the United Nations Charter, starting with the respect for the *sovereignty* of the States (which are equal in terms of rights) and *non-interference*.²³ The Charter also poses the principle of negotiation as

¹⁷ “The New Liberal Imperialism” <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/07/1> and “Why we still need Empires” <http://observer.theguardian.com/worldview/story/0,11581,680117,00.html>

¹⁸ Alain Joxe, *Les guerres de l'empire global*, 2012

¹⁹ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 2003.

<http://eatonak.org/IPE501/downloads/files/New%20Imperialism.pdf>

²⁰ Gabriel Galice, “Des micronationalismes en Europe : “identité”, pouvoir et appropriation en Ecosse et en Savoie”, in *L'Europe à la recherche de son identité*, (Edit. Christiane Villain-Gandossi), Paris, 2002.

²¹ Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*, 2004.

²² Benjamin Barber, *Fear's Empire – War, Terrorism and Democracy*, 2004.

²³ <http://www.gipri.ch/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/States-of-War-and-Proxy-Wars-rev.pdf>

opposed to force.²⁴ The respect of the principle of non-interference implies the acknowledgement of a plural, multilateral order, contested by those in power but advocated by the developing or emerging nations, including Russia.

- 1.2. Second, giving priority to the *development* (in economic and social terms of education, welfare, and so on) of nations rather than to business and private companies.²⁵ The case of the drug industry, torn between WTO and WHO, is a shining example²⁶. The food industry is a similar case, as are other services such as education. Use value or exchange value?
- 1.3. Third, the dismantling of the existing military alliances (above all NATO) and reconstruction on the basis of the existing OSCE. Articles 46 and 47 of the United Nations Charter, stipulating the establishment of a Military Staff Committee to advise and assist the Security Council, should be implemented. NATO should cease to be considered as the strong arm of the UN.²⁷
- 1.4. Fourth, the reinforcement of States and nations instead of their dismantling. "Nowadays, the political force of a nation lies precisely in its capability to strengthen the link between the people and the State."²⁸ The reinforcement of nations is underpinned by the enhancement of participatory democracy, backed by the new technologies. This is the very opposite direction of that indicated by Huntington in 1975 in favour of the Trilateral Empire.²⁹
- 1.5. A fifth measure is the building of regional co-operative (rather than competitive) unions between neighbouring countries.³⁰
- 1.6. A sixth means is opening the status of permanent member of the Security Council to additional major countries, notably emerging nations.
- 1.7. Keeping in mind the close relationship between peace, development and justice and acting accordingly. Prof. Roy Preiswerk promoted positive and dynamic peace through an adequate method.³¹

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²⁴ <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2015/06/GALICE/53103>

²⁵ Christian Comeliau, *L'économie contre le développement ? 2009* and *La croissance ou le progrès ?*, 2006.

²⁶ Gabriel Galice, *Santé et profit - l'industrie pharmaceutique*, 1974.

²⁷ The secretaries-general of NATO and the United Nations, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and Ban Ki Moon, signed a joint declaration in September 2008.

²⁸ Gabriel Galice, *Du Peuple-Nation*, 2002, p.37.

²⁹ "A value which is normally good in itself is not necessarily optimized when it is maximized. We have come to recognize that there are potentially desirable limits to economic growth. There are also potentially desirable limits to the infinite extension of political democracy. Democracy will have a longer life if it has a more balanced existence." Samuel Huntington, Chap. III, "The United States", *The Crisis of Democracy*, p.115.

³⁰ Jean-Marc Siroën, « Régionalisme contre multilatéralisme ? », *Les Cahiers Français*, n° 269 sur l'économie mondiale, janvier-février 1995 and <http://www.dauphine.fr/siroen/acr2.pdf>

³¹ Preiswerk (Roy), "Que faut-il entendre par « Recherche pour la paix ? »"
<http://www.gipri.ch/institut/fondation>