

Geopolitical chaos and its implications: introductory notes for collective thinking

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Climate chaos is a new structural situation caused by atmospheric warming of human (in fact capitalist) origin. The current geopolitical chaos also seems to be a new structural situation caused by capitalist globalization and the choices imposed by the traditional imperialist bourgeoisies. Because chaos exists, and its causes are deep.

From 2003 (at least) [1], we tried to perceive the consequences in all fields of capitalist globalization, but today, it is necessary to try more systematically to take stock of the causes of geopolitical chaos and the dynamics of the ongoing crisis, as well as updating our necessary responses to a world situation which is new in many aspects. These notes aim to tackle these questions so as to encourage and nourish collective thinking. They do not claim to be exhaustive – other elements are dealt with in other texts written by other comrades. They are often based on already shared analyses, but try to push further the discussion on their implications: we cannot be satisfied with repeating what we said before. For this purpose, with the risk of over-simplifying complex realities, they “purify” the ongoing, often unfinished, developments, to emphasize what appears to be new.

Long term and short term imperialism and changes of context

The initial debates of reference on imperialism go back to the beginning of the 20th century, to the time of the completion (in the West) of the formation of nation states and colonial empires – and the inter-imperialist war aiming to modify the division of the world. All the definitions of imperialism systematized at the time reflect this geopolitical context. They can serve as useful “benchmarks” (including as a basis for measurement of changes), but certainly not as a “standard”. [2]

The revolutions following the First and Second World Wars upset the geopolitical framework, with a new more complex configuration combining the opposition of revolution and counter-revolution, “blocs” of West and East (not simply identical with the previous opposition), decolonization and zones of more or less exclusive influence, inter-bureaucratic (USSR/China) and inter-imperialist competition within this framework

The implosion of the USSR, then China's entry into the world capitalist order modified the situation once again. We will return to this. The point that I want to underline here is that the "organic development" of capital does not explain everything, far from it. Exogenous factors played a key role in the reorganization of the world. It is necessary to take account of this to understand the choices made by the imperialist bourgeoisies after the implosion of the USSR in 1991 (capitalist globalization).

In the short run (from the 1990s until today), there was also a rather radical change. Initially, the (traditional) imperialist bourgeoisies and states were veritable conquerors, with penetration of the markets of the East, intervention in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) and so on. Then there was military stagnation, the financial crisis, the emergence of new powers (China), the Arab revolutions and so on, with all of this leading to a loss of geopolitical initiative and control. Washington reacts today more on an emergency basis than in planning the imposition of its order. We need to assess the link between the post-1989 (long term) turn and the turn which took shape in the mid-2000s (short term), so as to distinguish what is conjunctural and what is structural in the present situation.

When the imperialist bourgeoisies become emancipated from politics

Let us say that after the implosion of the USSR, the imperialist bourgeoisies believed that they were free to realize their dream; namely a worldwide market with uniform rules allowing them to deploy their capital at will. The consequences of capitalist globalization could consequently only be very deep - and accompanied by developments that, in their euphoria, the aforementioned imperialist bourgeoisies had not wanted to envisage.

1. The classical schema of North-South or Centre-Periphery relationships (the North exporting goods and the South raw materials) was upset with production chains internationalizing and the countries of the South becoming the major exporters of industrial goods (in particular in Asia: China, the "workshop of the world"). Even if the economic domination of the "centre" continues by other means (high technology, status of the US dollar, financialization, the military capacity of the United States and so on), these modifications obviously have considerable implications for the workers' movement, but also for the imperialist bourgeoisies: it contributes to reducing the significance of their countries of origin and facilitates their emancipation from politics.

2. Constituting a "standardized" worldwide market indeed implies becoming emancipated from politics. The "appropriate modes" of bourgeois domination produced by the specific history of countries and areas (historic compromise of the European type, populisms of the Latin-American type, official state intervention of the Asian type, redistributive populism of multiple types and so on) are gradually illegalized, because all of them establish specific relations with the worldwide market, and are therefore obstacles to the free deployment of imperialist capital. However, abandoning these "suitable" modes of domination necessarily leads to crises of legitimacy, even of ungovernability more especially as aggressive neoliberal policies tear the social fabric in a growing number of countries. What is striking is that the imperialist bourgeoisies do not seem to care about this, insofar as their access to raw materials, production centres, the means and nodes of communication and so on, remains assured. At the time of the empires, it was necessary to ensure the stability of the colonial possessions - also (although to a lesser extent) the zones of influence at the time of the cold war. Let us say that today, this depends on the place and the moment. The relationship with the territory changes. We can say that if the states continue to support "their" transnationals, the latter no longer feel dependent on their country of origin: the relationship is more "asymmetrical" than ever.

3. The relationship to the territory changes; and thus to the state. Governments are for example no longer the co-pilots of large scale industrial projects (see the development of nuclear power over one decade in France) or of social infrastructures (education, health and so on). They must contribute to founding the rules universalizing the mobility of capital, open all sectors to the appetites of capital (health, education, pensions and so on), destroy social rights and keep the population compliant. A head of state is a simple major-domo today. Of course, certain countries remain more equal than others and the United States allows things which they do not authorize elsewhere. The US state maintains global regal functions that others no longer have - or no longer have the means to have.

4. Capitalist globalization thus leads to crises for various reasons, of which one occupies a particular place: a class cannot durably dominate a society without social mediations, compromises, legitimacy (of historical, social, democratic, revolutionary or other origin). The imperialist bourgeoisies are liquidating centuries of "savoir faire" in this field in the name of the freedom of movement of capital; but the dream of the financier is unrealizable. It leads ultimately to a permanent state of crisis. This is already the case in entire regions.

The specificity of globalized capitalism is thus that it seems to accommodate crisis as a permanent state: it becomes consubstantial with the normal functioning of the new total system of domination. If this is the case, it is necessary to deeply modify our vision of "the crisis", as one particular moment between long periods of "normality" - and we have not finished measuring them or undergoing the consequences of them.

New Fascisms

One of the first consequences of the phenomenal destabilizing power of capitalist globalization is the spectacular rise of new fascisms with a (potential) mass base. Some take relatively classical forms, like Golden Dawn in Greece, situating themselves in new xenophobic and identity-based reflexes. But the phenomenon now dominant is the assertion of fascist currents with religious references (and no longer the triptych "people/state, race, nation"). They appear in all the "great" religions (Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and so on). They now pose a considerable threat in countries like India or Sri Lanka. The Muslim world thus does not have the monopoly in this field; but it is certainly there that it has taken on a particular international dimension, with "trans-border" movements like Islamic State or the Taliban (see the situation in Pakistan) and networks which are connected more or less formally from Morocco to Indonesia, even (potentially only?) in the south of Philippines.

One can discuss the definition of the concept of fascism. These movements are not organically related to "big capital" as in Nazi Germany, but they exert terror of a fascist type, including in daily life. Where they exist, they occupy the "political niche" of fascism - and they pose new political problems (for our generations) of anti-fascist resistance on a large scale.

The term political Islam covers a broad range of currents which all are not included in the same category, far from it. But not such a long time ago, a significant part of the international radical left considered that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism (such as Talibanism) had a progressive and anti-imperialist character. However, even when it confronts the United States, it represents a frightening counter-revolutionary force. With the aid of experience, the currents which maintain these positions are rarer today, but "campism" remains present in this field, like a Pavlovian reflex: satisfied for example to condemn imperialist intervention in Iraq and Syria (which it is certainly necessary to do), but without saying what Islamic State represents or calling to resist it.

This kind of position prohibited us from clearly posing the tasks of solidarity *as a whole*. To point out the historical responsibility of imperialism, to the intervention of 2003, the unavowed objectives of

the current intervention, to denounce one's own imperialism are not enough. It is necessary to think through the concrete tasks of solidarity *from the point of view of the needs of the victim peoples and the movements in struggle*. Let us take a controversial example: from this point of view, one can be *against* the imperialist intervention and *for* the supply of weapons of high power by our governments to the Kurdish forces – this is to answer an insistent and repeated call by Kurdish organizations: why refuse it? I do not seek to take refuge behind an argument of authority, but I find the text of Leon Trotsky written in 1938 [3] really interesting and useful to our debates of yesterday (the Malvinas war, for example) and today.

New (proto) imperialisms

The traditional imperialist bourgeoisies thought after 1991 that they would penetrate the markets of the former so-called “socialist” countries to the point of subordinating them naturally – wondering even if NATO still had a function with respect to Russia. This assumption was not absurd as shown by the situation of China in the turn of the 2000s and the conditions of membership of this country in the WTO (very favourable to international capital). But things turned out differently – and this does not seem to have been initially or seriously considered by the established powers.

In China, a new bourgeoisie was constituted *inside* the country and the regime, mainly by the “bourgeoisification” of the bureaucracy, the latter auto-transforming into a *possessing class* by mechanisms which we know well [4]. It was thus reconstituted on a basis of independence (the legacy of the Maoist revolution) and not as a bourgeoisie organically subordinated to imperialism from the start. Is China a new imperialism? As with the concept of fascism, it is necessary to specify what one understands by imperialism *in the present world context*. For my part, I use the formula of imperialism in constitution (or in the making) (without any guarantee of success) [5] It is enough to say for the moment that China has become a *capitalist power* to understand that the geopolitics of the contemporary world are quite different from fifty years ago. We will return to this point in the report on the situation in Eastern Asia.

The BRICS have tried to play in concert in the arena of the worldwide market, without much success. The countries which compose this fragile “bloc” do not all play in the same court. China hopes to play in the court of the largest. Russia, also a permanent member of the Security Council and official holder of nuclear weapons, would like this also, but with much less means.

Brazil, India, South Africa can probably be qualified as sub-imperialisms – a concept which goes back to the 1970s – and regional gendarmes, but with a notable difference: they profit from a much greater freedom to export capital than in the past. See the “great game” opened in Africa with competition between the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, India, Brazil, South Africa, China and so on.

Two conclusions here:

1. Competition between capitalist powers has also revived with the assertion of China especially, but also Russia in Eastern Europe. This definitely amounts to conflicts between *capitalist* powers, thus qualitatively different from the previous period. In the past, without ever aligning ourselves with Beijing's diplomacy, we defended the People's Republic (and the dynamic of the revolution) against the US-Japanese imperialist alliance – we were in this sense in its camp. We will see (Asia report) to what extent regional geopolitics have changed, which implies for us a different “anti-campist” position.

2. More generally, concerning the freedom of movement of capital, the bourgeoisies (even

subordinate) and transnationals of the “South” can use the rules conceived after 1991 by the traditional imperialist bourgeoisies *for themselves*, making competition on the worldwide market more complex than in the past .

Capitalist expansion and ecological crisis

The rehabilitation of the Sino-Soviet “bloc” in the worldwide market has allowed an enormous capitalist expansion on which the optimism of the imperialist bourgeoisies is based. It is also the basis a dramatic acceleration of the ecological crisis. I do not want to expand on this question, but to stress:

1. It is impossible in this context to pose the question of the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions only in the North - it must also be raised in the South.
2. The payment of the ecological debt in the South should not favour world capitalist development capitalist and benefit either Western-Japanese transnationals established in the South, or the transnationals of the South (such as Brazilian agro-industry), which would do nothing but feed ever more social and environmental crises.
3. There is always the need for “North-South” solidarity, for example in defence of the victims of climate chaos. However, more than ever, it is a common “anti-systemic” struggle which is on the agenda in “North-South” relations from the point of view of the popular classes: i.e. a united struggle for an anti-capitalist alternative, another conception of development in “North” and “South” (I put quotation marks everywhere, because the heterogeneity of “North” and “South” is today such that these concepts can be misleading).
4. If the starting point is the socio-environmental struggle “to change the system, not the climate”, it has as basis social movements more than specific coalitions on climate. It seems to me that it would thus be necessary to discuss again the articulation between the two. If we do not “ecologize” the social struggle (following the example of what can be done in peasant or urban struggles), the numerical expansion of “climate” mobilizations will remain on the surface of the things.
5. The effects of climate chaos are already felt and the organization of the victims, their defence and their self-defence are also part of the basis of the ecological struggle. The effects of the Haiyan super-typhoon in Philippines exceed in width what we had already been warned about. The predicted future became part of the present. That has destabilizing consequences which go well beyond the directly affected areas and cause a chain of tensions (see the refugees of Bangladesh and the conflicts with India on the question of the migrants).

A world of permanent wars

My assumption is that we are not going towards a Third World War on the model of the First and Second, because there is not a conflict for *territorial* division of the world in the sense that there was in the past. But the factors of war are very deep and varied: new conflicts between powers, competition on the worldwide market, access to resources, decomposition of societies, the rise of new fascisms escaping the control of their progenitors, chain effects of climate chaos and humanitarian crises of great breadth.

That means that we have now entered on one level a world of permanent wars (in the plural). Each war must be analysed in its specificities. However we need “points of stability” to keep a compass in

a very complex geopolitical situation: class independence against imperialism, militarism, fascisms and the rise of “anti-solidarity” identity-based movements (racist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic, xenophobic, caste-based, fundamentalist and so on).

In this context, the “campist” legacy is particularly dangerous. It results in lining up in the camp of a regime (Assad and so on) against a good part of the people or a capitalist power (in East Asia, the USA in the name of the Chinese threat or China in the name of the US threat) (Russia or the West in the case of the Ukraine). Each time we abandon some of the victims (which are on the wrong side), we feed aggressive nationalism and sanctify the borders inherited from the era of the “blocs” precisely when we must erase them.

We remain tributaries of this legacy more than we think. When, in France, we speak about Europe, that means in fact the European Union or at best a widened Western Europe - and it is within this framework that we work out alternatives. But Europe is also Russia and alternatives must be thought through that include the two sides of the Russo-West-European border (even the Mediterranean). This question is particularly important in Eurasia, because it is the only continent that has been at this point fashioned by the revolution/counter-revolution and face-to-face confrontation of the “blocs”.

Limits of the super power

The United States remains the only super power in the world - and yet, they lose all the wars they are engaged in, from Afghanistan to Somalia. This point is astonishing! The fault is probably with neoliberal globalization which prevents them from consolidating (in alliance with local elites) temporary military gains.

This is perhaps also a consequence of the privatization of the armies, firms of mercenaries playing a growing part, as well as armed “non-official” bands in the service of private interests (big companies or families and so on). Decidedly, the state is not what it used to be.

It is also the case that this power, super though it is, does not have the means of to intervene randomly under structural conditions of instability. It needs secondary imperialisms able to shoulder the burden. But the constitution of a European imperialism has fallen through; France and Great Britain now have only a very limited ability; Japan must still break civic resistance to its complete remilitarization.

Wars are thus there to last, under multiple faces. We should thus again interest ourselves in the way in which they are carried out, in particular by popular resistances, to better understand the conditions of a struggle, the reality of a situation, the concrete requirements of solidarity and so on.

Who says wars should say anti-war movement. The wars being very different from each other, the constitution of anti-war movements in synergy is not easy. The position in (Western) Europe on this question gives rise to pessimism, inasmuch as “campism” has corroded and rendered impotent the principal campaigns engaged in this area. But there are anti-war movements, in Asia in particular - and in Eurasia, transcending the borders inherited from the era of the blocs will be focused in particular on this question, it seems to me

Pierre Rousset

P.S.

* Translation IVP. www.internationalviewpoint.org

Footnotes

[1] See the resolution of the 15th World Congress on ESSF (article 39761), [Alep : « Je veux vivre libre et dignement. Et ça c'est un crime pour le régime de Bachar » - L'expérience sinistre de Grozny se répète:](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article39761)
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article39761>].

[2] For a presentation of this question, see in particular Michel Husson, [“Notes sur l'impérialisme contemporain - Théories d'hier, questions d'aujourd'hui”](#).

[3] Available on ESSF (article 32792), [“An article on concrete internationalism in times of war: Learn To Think - A Friendly Suggestion to Certain Ultra-Leftists”](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article32792):
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article32792>

[4] See In Loong Yu, “China’s Small channel: Strength and Stability”, Merlin Press, Resistance Books, IIRE, 2012

[5] See on ESSF (article 32582), [Chinese ambitions - An imperialism in formation:](http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3468)
<http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3468>].