

Imperialism, Great Power rivalry and revolutionary strategy in the twenty-first century

Saturday 30 September 2023, by [FUENTES Federico](#), [PRÖBSTING Michael](#) (Date first published: 1 September 2023).

Austrian Marxist Michael Pröbsting has spent much of the past two decades researching the important changes that have occurred within the global imperialist system and its implications for revolutionary strategy today. The results of these studies have been captured in two books, *The Great Robbery of the South* and *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry*, as well as many articles across various publications. Pröbsting, who edits [thecommunists.net](#), discussed his views on twenty-first century imperialism with Federico Fuentes for *LINKS International Journal of Socialist Renewal*.

Following the end of the Cold War, global politics seemed dominated by wars that sought to reinforce US imperialism's role as the sole global hegemon. However, in more recent years, a shift appears to be taking place. While the United States has been forced to withdraw from Afghanistan, we have seen Russia invade Ukraine and nations such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia flexing their military power beyond their borders. In general terms, how do you understand the current dynamics at play within global capitalism?

First, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss with you the theory of imperialism — a crucial issue for all Marxists in present times.

Your question is a comprehensive one which touches on a number of issues. In the context of such an interview I have to limit myself to formulate a few theses, but I have dealt with these questions in more detail in a [recent debate](#) with [Claudio Katz](#), a progressive professor at the University of Buenos Aires. Basically, one has to understand the current developments in their historical context, which means the combination and interaction of several trends.

The hegemonic role of the US within the capitalist world was the result of the outcome of World War II, where other imperialist powers were either defeated (Germany and Japan) or became allies in a subordinate position (Britain and France). Washington's domination was reinforced by the fact that all imperialist states had no alternative but to accept US leadership in order to wage their Cold War against the Stalinist states. When the latter collapsed and became capitalist in 1989-91, the collective enemy disappeared, but US hegemony — particularly in the military and financial realm — remained. This provided Washington with a unique opportunity where it could play, to a certain degree and only for a limited period, the role of a global hegemon. This was the heyday of "globalisation", an exceptional and atypical period in the epoch of imperialism.

However, before I continue to discuss the role of the US, we need to place the above-mentioned developments within the greater context of the evolution of the capitalist world economy. As is well-known, the period of the post-war "Long Boom" — which, by the way, also helped to consolidate US hegemony within the imperialist camp — ended in the late 1960s and early '70s. This opened an era

in which world capitalism was increasingly characterised by a long-term tendency towards stagnation, which basically meant the cyclical upturn phases became weaker and the phases of crisis more severe. Of course, this period of decline has been a contradictory process, but there can be no doubt about such a secular trend reflecting the long-term tendency of productive forces to stagnate.

This development was caused by the fundamental inner contradictions of capitalism that Karl Marx pointed out in *Capital*. He showed the law of capitalist accumulation results, in the long term, in a change of the organic composition of capital, where the value-creating component (living labour or variable capital) becomes increasingly smaller in relation to the component that does not create additional value (dead labour or constant capital). The result of such a process is that the share of surplus value in relation to total capital decreases, which is the basis for what Marx called “the tendency of the profit rate to fall”. This fundamental process inevitably accelerates the crisis-ridden character of capitalism. Contemporary Marxist economists like Esteban Ezequiel Maito, Michael Roberts, Andrew Kliman, Guglielmo Carchedi and Alan Freeman have demonstrated the validity of these Marxian laws with much empirical evidence. I have also [recently compiled](#) some statistics that empirically demonstrate this trend.

This tendency of the productive forces towards stagnation had various consequences. It pushed monopoly capital to search for new areas for profitable investment. One crucial result of this process has been a major shift of capitalist value production from the old imperialist metropolises (North America, Western Europe, Japan, Australia) to the so-called Global South and ex-Stalinist states. In the early 2010s, about three-quarters of all wage labourers lived outside of the Western imperialist countries. If we just take the industrial working class, which creates the vast bulk of capitalist value, this share is even larger — about 85.3% (or more than 617 million). Most of these industrial workers are living in Asia. Today, this share is most likely even larger than a decade ago.

Ten years ago, I published *The Great Robbery of the South* in which I defined this trend as a “shift to the South” and, in particular, as a “shift to Asia”. This is a profound development with many consequences, both for world political developments and for socialist strategy. But at this point, I want to limit myself to the consequences that are relevant for the subject of this interview. Among these are the following.

First, such a “shift to the South” has massively undermined the hegemony of Western powers since these no longer create the bulk of capitalist value. Second, and related to this, some semi-colonial countries in the South — the so-called “emerging markets” — have strengthened their global position, albeit this is a highly contradictory process. Generally, these countries have ultimately remained semi-colonies (albeit advanced industrialised ones); that is, they remain in a dependent, subordinate position given foreign capital continues to play a dominant role in their economies. I have published several studies about such semi-colonial countries, including [India](#), [Greece](#), [Türkiye](#) and [Ukraine](#). In the view of my Korean comrades and myself, [South Korea](#) is an exception, and became an imperialist state in the 2000s, but dealing with this would go beyond the subject of this interview.

Third, such a shift played a crucial role in creating the basis for a rapid process of capital accumulation in China that, ultimately, resulted in its formation as an imperialist Great Power. Fourth, because of these developments, Western powers — and, most importantly, the US as their hegemon — have been pushed to intensify their political and military interventions in the South to ensure that globalisation serves Western interests. This was the objective background for the global “War on Terror” that Washington launched in 2001. It was an attempt to avoid the geopolitical consequences (the decline of the West) of the economic process of outsourcing capitalist value production.

However, such a desire by imperialist powers to “defend” their global interests is not limited to the US or Western powers. It also pushes new Great Powers, such as Russia and China, to intervene more actively in world politics. The drive by imperialist powers to increasingly intervene abroad has intensified even more since 2019, when the beginning of the Great Depression opened a new era of crises and catastrophes.

Before continuing, it might be important to resolve a terminological issue to avoid confusion. Over the past century, we have seen the term imperialism used to define different situations and at other times be replaced by concepts such as globalisation and hegemony. Given this, what value remains in the concept of imperialism and how do you define imperialism today?

It is true that the category “imperialism” has been used in different contexts and with different meanings. In fact, this is not a new development. Even the very term imperialism was originally invented by non-Marxist writers in the late nineteenth century to describe the politics of expanding colonial empires such as Britain.

However, for Marxists the term imperialism has a scientific meaning that is associated with Vladimir Lenin’s analysis of monopoly capitalism at the beginning of the twentieth century. In my view, it is the duty of Marxists to defend this, as well as other concepts, if they remain valid. There is no reason to make concessions to the ever-changing Zeitgeist according to which this or that theory, this or that category, is more or less “in vogue” — and, anyway, all too often people forget which views they held a few years ago.

However, at the same time, this does not mean that we should not further develop the theory of imperialism (or other Marxist concepts) in order to integrate and explain new developments. My works on the above-mentioned “shift to the South” of capitalist value production or on the emergence of China and Russia as new imperialist powers are attempts to contribute to such necessary theoretical work.

To briefly comment on the two concepts you mentioned. Globalisation did not replace imperialism but was rather a specific phase of imperialism under peculiar conditions. I once tried to characterise it with the formula: “Globalisation = Internationalisation + Monopolisation”. Such a process was only possible by opening up the world market under a single political order, which naturally requires a single hegemon. To a certain degree, US imperialism was capable of playing such a role for a certain period of time. The process of globalisation was prepared by the austerity offensive and IMF dictates of the 1980s, came to full fruition in the “Black Days” of the 1990s, came increasingly under attack in the 2000s, began to decline after the Great Recession in 2008/09, and ended when China and Russia entered the world stage as aggressive global players, resulting in trade wars, sanctions and protectionism.

Hegemony — understood in a proper way, without neo-Gramscian metaphysics — is also a concept that is a natural part of the Marxist theory of imperialism. As mentioned above, the US was able to play a hegemonic role within the imperialist camp for some time because of specific historic constellations in world politics. However, this period has already ended. What we have seen for some time — to make a historical analogy — is a return to “classic” imperialism as it existed from the late nineteenth century till the mid-twentieth century. By this I mean a period where no dominating single hegemon exists, but rather several Great Powers rivalling for global hegemony.

Given this, how much of Lenin’s analysis remains relevant today and what elements have been superseded by subsequent developments?

As I said before, in my opinion, Lenin's theory of imperialism remains highly relevant to understanding capitalism in the twenty-first century. Other Marxist theoreticians, such as Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin, also made valuable contributions to the Marxist theory of imperialism. Some refute this theory because they do not properly understand the essence of Lenin's concept. They take Lenin's analysis as a kind of checklist and if one criterion does not exist anymore, or does not exist in the same form, they conclude the theory is no longer valid. This mistaken approach also usually makes it impossible to recognise the imperialist nature of China and Russia.

To summarise the essence of Lenin's theory in a sentence, I would say that it characterises imperialism as a specific historic stage of capitalism in which a small number of monopolies and Great Powers politically dominate and economically super-exploit the rest of the world. Most of the features that Lenin outlined remain in place, such as the domination of monopolies and a few Great Powers, the relevance of capital export and finance capital (as a fusion of industrial and financial/money capital), and the geopolitical struggle between the Great Powers for spheres of influence.

However, this does not mean that nothing has changed since the days of Lenin and Trotsky. The Cold War between the West and the Stalinist states temporarily, and to a certain degree, pushed the rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers into the background. Furthermore, in the first half of the 20th century, large parts of the South were colonies directly ruled by imperialist powers (albeit semi-colonies like China, countries in Latin America and Türkiye existed already at that time). However, in the past 50-60 years, only a few colonies remain, while most countries of the Global South are capitalist semi-colonies. Hence, imperialist domination in the political sense is much more indirect in the South.

Another important difference — maybe the most important one — between imperialism in Lenin's times and today is the above-mentioned shift of capitalist value production to the South. In the past, the dominant world powers simultaneously produced the bulk of capitalist value. This is no longer true with regard to the old imperialist powers of the West. This is, of course, different in the cases of China, South Korea and, to a lesser degree, Russia. In reality, the shift of capitalist value production to the South is even larger than official figures of bourgeois economists indicate. The reason for this is that categories such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), particularly in the age of outsourcing and "global value chain", do not accurately reflect the share of capitalist value produced in different parts of the world. Marxist economist [John Smith](#) and others have analysed this issue in much detail.

Such a shift to the South has also had important implications for the forms of imperialist super-exploitation. As I discussed in *The Great Robbery of the South*, certain forms of super-exploitation have become much more important than they were 100 years ago. The most important forms of value transfer from the South to the North are via capital export as productive investment, via capital export as money capital (loans, currency reserves, speculation etc.), via unequal exchange and via migration.

The last one is particularly interesting since migration from countries of the South to Northern metropolises existed to a much lesser degree in Lenin's time. As I have [elaborated](#) in [some works](#), migration represents a unique form of value transfer from the South to the North. In this case, capital in the imperialist metropolises uses various forms of national oppression via which they gain from low wages for migrant workers (below the value of their labour force); from no or only limited costs for their education, since migrants are often educated in their home country; and from having to pay either no or reduced costs for the migrants' pension and social security.

The original imperialist powers built their wealth and military might on colonial conquest

and pillage of pre-capitalist societies. How have the economic foundations of the newer imperialist forces been set in place and what specific features allowed them to join the camp of imperialist powers?

It is true that, initially, most imperialist powers either possessed colonial empires, for example Britain and France, as well as Spain, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands and, at a later point, Japan; had vast internal colonies, such as Habsburg Empire and Russia; or were settler states built on the pillage of pre-capitalist societies, such as the United States. There were also exceptions, most importantly Germany, which only had a few colonies that did not play a relevant role in its formation as an imperialist power. This is a useful example of why Marxists must not imagine that there is only one possible road for a country to become imperialist. This was neither the case in the past nor today.

Your question touches on a crucial point in the current debate about the Marxist theory of imperialism. Those who deny the possibility that new imperialist powers can emerge lack a dialectical understanding of Lenin's conception. Friedrich Engels, in [Anti-Dühring](#), pointed out: "Motion is the mode of existence of matter. Never anywhere has there been matter without motion, nor can there be." But what does motion mean? It means, among others, the possibility of transforming a given phenomenon from one form to another — a process which allows for the transformation of the essence of such a phenomenon. Hence, Engels praised as a major contribution of Hegel that "for the first time the whole world, natural, historical, intellectual, is represented as a process, i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development."

From a Marxist point of view, it is nonsense to deny the possibility that some imperialist states could become semi-colonies or that the reverse could also occur. To give an analogy: no serious Marxist would deny the possibility that a worker could become a capitalist, or vice versa. Of course, each case has to be discussed concretely, but to deny such possibility in principle is sheer dogmatism without an inch of dialectic. Portugal seems to me to be an example of a backward state that lost its imperialist character in the 1970s with the collapse of its colonial possessions in Africa. China and Russia, on the other hand, have become imperialist powers. How did this happen? Again, I have to limit myself to a brief summary of the analysis that I have elaborated in my works on this issue.

Russia was already an imperialist power before the October Revolution, as Lenin and the Bolsheviks pointed out. While its capitalist character disappeared after 1917, Stalinism soon reconstituted a tradition of Great Russian chauvinism. While this did not make Russia capitalist or an imperialist power, it helped to conserve an ugly tradition that would later — after the collapse of the Soviet Union — contribute to the quick reconstitution of the imperialist-chauvinist *Russkij Mir* (Russian World) ideology. Also, the successful Stalinist policy of building heavy industry with a modern military laid the foundation for later developments, despite the economic collapse after 1991. I would not characterise Russia in the chaotic 1990s as an imperialist power. However, with the consolidation of Russian capital (which, in contrast to Eastern Europe, and despite all the pro-Western capitulationism of Boris Yeltsin, avoided the sell-out of its economy to Western corporations); with Putin coming to power in 1999; and with the simultaneous launch of the Second War against Chechnya, Russia regained its imperialist status.

Lenin once [noted](#) "that in its economic essence imperialism is monopoly capitalism." There is no doubt that Russia's economy has been dominated for many years by domestic — not foreign — monopolies. In fact, I showed in an [article](#) that Russia's economy has an even higher degree of monopolistic concentration than Western countries.

Critics often refer to the fact that Russia is economically weaker than the US or other Western Great Powers. However, being weaker does not necessarily mean being non-imperialist. It just means

being a weaker imperialist power in economic terms. Nevertheless, Russian monopolies have undertaken substantial capital export to Eastern European and Central Asian countries for many years now. Also, it has gained massive extra profits via super-exploiting cheap migrant labour coming from poorer countries (mostly from Central Asia) and from its internal colonies.

Moreover, Russia's economy has clearly become stronger. Various economists have rightly pointed out that categories like GDP or distorting calculations based on the US dollar tend to underestimate Russia's global economic weight. In my view, this has become particularly obvious in the past year and a half. Despite imposing unprecedented sanctions against Russia, Western powers failed to bring down the economy of its Eastern rival. In fact, several European countries, including Germany, experienced less growth this year than Russia. As the English say, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." The escalation of the economic war between Western powers and Russia since February 2022 has [proven](#) beyond [doubt](#) that [Russia](#) is also an [imperialist power](#) in [economic terms](#).

Finally, in the Marxist understanding, the category of imperialism includes political, economic and military aspects. Hence, one has to view a given country in its totality and not pick out only the economic aspect.

Briefly on China. This country became an imperialist state against a different background and in a different manner. In contrast to Russia, China was a capitalist semi-colony before Mao took power in 1949. Nevertheless, one must not forget that before the "century of humiliation", that is, until the mid-nineteenth century, China was a powerful empire for many centuries that expanded and oppressed other peoples (for example the Uyghurs, Tibetans, Koreans and Vietnamese). This is not a historical anecdote but constitutes a crucial aspect of the country's ideological concept of *Tianxia* (Under Heaven) and its official view of history as the Middle Kingdom.

Here too, Stalinism succeeded not only in ending China's dependency on imperialism but also laid the foundation for building a national industry. Equally important, it created a centralised bureaucratic state apparatus that managed to smash the workers' and youth rebellion in May-June 1989 and gradually introduced capitalist reforms. As such, the Chinese regime — in contrast to its Russian counterpart — avoided a collapse. It retained a strong and effective state apparatus, which was essential for a type of capitalist restoration that created a relevant domestic bourgeoisie, a disciplined and exploitable labour force and a strong state-capitalist sector.

Observers are often baffled by the rapid economic growth of China. The Stalinist friends of Beijing even take this as proof of its successful road towards "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" — though they have little to say about similar periods of long-term growth rates in capitalist countries such as Japan, South Korea or Taiwan in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. In contrast, I argue that such a period of rapid growth of China's economy — which seems to be coming to an end — can be explained by a combination of the following factors.

First, the stable Stalinist regime — which became a Stalinist-capitalist regime — created the conditions for a long-term process of primitive capital accumulation. This process took place on the basis of a country with a huge population and a vast potential domestic market. Such a Stalinist-capitalist regime also allowed it to manage substantial foreign (imperialist) investment without losing control of its economy.

Furthermore, the regime utilised the so-called *hukou* system, according to which residents were not allowed to work or live outside the administrative boundaries of their household registration without approval of the authorities. Through this system, the regime created a huge layer of hundreds of millions of "migrants" (as they are called in China) who have been employed as super-exploited workers in the wealthiest regions. These migrant workers have produced a substantial portion of the

surplus value for domestic and foreign capitalists in recent decades.

After the Great Recession in 2008/09, it was clear that China had become an emerging imperialist power. I have [shown](#) in several [studies](#) that the Middle Kingdom is now a [top country](#) in the [world economy](#) in every [relevant aspect](#). It is a leading if not the leading nation when it comes to share in global GDP, industrial output, world trade, capital export and global leading corporations and billionaires. China has become the most important imperialist challenger to the US.

Some argue that because they fail to meet all five features of Lenin's imperialism or their place in the global hierarchy of countries, China and Russia are not imperialist, preferring to characterise them as semi-periphery or, in some cases, sub-imperialist. How do you view countries such as Russia and China fitting into the global imperialist system and the concept of multipolarity promoted by those on the left who conclude China and Russia are not imperialist?

It is true that a number of self-proclaimed Marxist writers deny China's and Russia's imperialist character. This is based on a mistaken view of Lenin's theory of imperialism. Lenin (as well as Trotsky) never approached the class character of a state by taking the five criteria as a checklist and, on the basis that one criterion was not fulfilled, refused to call a country imperialist. Such an approach would have made it impossible for Lenin to characterise relatively backward countries such as Russia, Japan, the Habsburg Empire or Italy as imperialist. Lenin did not have a narrow view of imperialist states but rather looked at the totality of political, economic and military factors that characterised the relations of such Great Powers both to oppressed nations and their imperialist rivals.

As you indicate, an influential trend today among left-wing theoreticians is the so-called "world-system theory", which goes back to US sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein. Contemporary supporters of this approach consider the "collective West" as a united force under the total domination of the US. They dogmatically exclude the possibility of Russia and China becoming imperialist and view these rather as "semi-periphery". Such an approach is empirically wrong since the political and economic facts of China's and Russia's strength as globally influential Great Powers speak for themselves. It is also — as I explained in my debate with Claudio Katz — a dangerous approach.

Usually, those who deny China's and Russia's imperialist character also tend to view these powers as a "lesser evil" or even as a "progressive" alternative to the old Western powers. Such an approach is often combined with the reactionary program of a "multipolar world order". Among those who advocate such a concept are various Stalinist-Putinist parties or the populist and social democratic forces in the Progressive International (whose most prominent figures have been Bernie Sanders, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Yanis Varoufakis and Jeremy Corbyn).

These forces claim that a "multipolar world order" would be superior to a "unipolar world order" and that socialists should advocate a global situation characterised not by US/Western domination but by the existence of several conflicting Great Powers. In other words, they advocate a world order in which eastern Great Powers such as China and Russia have an equal say as the US, Western Europe or Japan. In my view, this is a reactionary program. In reality, a multipolar world order does not and can not mean equality for the countries of the Global South; it means, and can only mean, "equality" of a few new Great Powers with the old hegemon. It is a program advocating "multi-imperialism", that is, the parallel existence of several rival imperialist powers. However, as history has demonstrated since the late 19th century, such a situation inevitably leads to conflicts and, ultimately, world war. Objectively, [advocacy](#) of a multipolar world order is the program of [pro-Eastern social-imperialism](#), as it supports the interests of China and Russia against those of the Western powers.

Socialists should oppose all Great Powers: those in the West as well as the East. They should neither advocate for a multipolar or unipolar world order, but for international unity of the workers and oppressed on the basis of anti-imperialist and socialist struggle.

The supporters of the so-called theory of sub-imperialism have a different approach. The originator of this theory was the Brazilian socialist Ruy Mauro Marini; Patrick Bond and Ana Garcia are among the most prominent contemporary advocates of this concept. In contrast to the Stalinist-Putinists and multipolarists, they avoid any whitewashing of the regimes in Moscow or Beijing. Still, as I have [elaborated](#) elsewhere, I consider this theory flawed. Basically, "sub-imperialism" is a halfway-house category that avoids a clear class characterisation of the states under discussion. Worse, it mishmashes all kinds of different countries under such a category. To give an example, the tradition of Tony Cliff, in which the British Socialist Workers Party is the most prominent force, has advocated the theory of sub-imperialism for decades. Alex Callinicos, their leading theoretician, has characterised the following countries as sub-imperialist: "Israel, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Turkey ... India, Vietnam, South Africa, Nigeria, Brazil and Argentina."

As a consequence, advocates of such a theory attach an imperialist characteristic to countries that are essentially capitalist semi-colonies. On the other hand, when states like China and Russia are designated as sub-imperialist, such a categorisation suggests these are less imperialist compared to the US, Japan or Western Europe. Such theoretical confusion can easily result in political confusion. Supporters of this theory can either fail to defend a supposed "sub-imperialist" (but effectively semi-colonial) country against an imperialist aggressor. Or they might side with a supposed "sub-imperialist" (but effectively imperialist) state against an imperialist rival. I am aware, and appreciate, that not all supporters of the theory of sub-imperialism draw such tactical conclusions for the class struggle. But I think that such dangerous and wrong-headed conclusions are implicit in this theory.

Do you see any possibilities for building bridges between anti-imperialist struggles internationally, taking into consideration that local movements might seek support (and even military aid, such as in the case of Ukraine) from different imperialist countries? Can the left advance a position of non-alignment with blocs (neutrality) without abandoning solidarity? In sum, what should twenty-first century internationalist anti-imperialism look like?

I see both the necessity as well as possibility of building such bridges. Of course, I do not want to deny the difficulties. My comrades and I have collaborated for more than three decades with various migrant communities, mostly coming from Arab and Muslim countries. It happens sometimes that those who fight against a pro-Western regime (for example Iraq or Egypt) have sympathy for "the enemy of my enemy", that is, for Russia and China. And those who fight against a pro-Eastern regime (for example Syria, Chechnya, Uyghurs in China and Sudan) have opposite sympathies. However, many activists have learned that the Great Powers of East and West are "all worse". On various occasions, it has been possible to bring activists from different backgrounds together on the basis of internationalism and anti-imperialism.

Furthermore, I consider it important to win socialists to such a consistent internationalist and anti-imperialist program. In fact, the possibility for such a rapprochement of socialists has greatly improved in the recent past. I remember how it was a decade ago when we argued that China and Russia were imperialist powers. We were pretty isolated and found very few people who agreed with us. This has changed in the past years. In particular, the Ukraine War has been such an obvious and barbaric imperialist aggression that more and more people recognise the imperialist nature of these powers.

I think it is possible and necessary to avoid a “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” position. Socialists need to analyse each conflict in a dialectical and concrete way. Some disputes have a clear character as a conflict between different imperialist states (for example the trade war between the US and China or the sanctions between NATO and Russia). In such cases, one must, in my view, oppose both camps and advocate a revolutionary defeatist position against both (“dual defeatism”). This means socialists should advocate strict opposition against both camps and try to use the war to advance the class struggle against each government. In other cases, it might be a conflict between an imperialist power against a semi-colonial country or an oppressed nation. Examples for this are Russia’s war against the Chechen people in 1999-2009 or the US invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). Here, socialists should unambiguously defend the latter against the imperialist aggressor.

However, there are also conflicts that have a combined or dual character. In the case of the Ukraine War, the Western powers support Ukraine with military aid. However, this has — at least for now — not qualitatively changed the character of the war; that is, it remains, first and foremost, a just war of national defence by Ukraine against Russian imperialism that socialists have to support. Likewise, the conflict between Israel/US and Iran or between the US (and/or South Korea) and North Korea has a similar contradictory character. In such conflicts, I think it is necessary to defend semi-colonial countries such as Iran or North Korea against the imperialist aggressor (and its proxy). Naturally, such defence does not imply any political support for the bourgeois and dictatorial regimes of these countries or for the Great Powers supporting these countries.

Such support needs to go [hand in hand](#) with strict opposition against *all* Great Powers. Hence, one has to reject any support for sanctions, protectionism or armament of one Great Power against its rivals that might be imposed in the context of such conflicts (think, for example, about Western sanctions against Russia). In my opinion, such an approach could constitute the basis for an anti-imperialist internationalism in the 21st century — a program on which socialists from all quarters of the world could and should unite.

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