

The Fallacy of the Inter-Imperialist Analysis

The following is an ICL submission to the Meeting of Internationalist Forces scheduled for May.

Since Trump has returned to office, he has imposed tariffs on most of the world, bombed Iran, bombed Nigeria, supported the genocide in Gaza, kidnapped the president of Venezuela, threatened Mexico, Greenland and Colombia (to name only these) and is literally starving Cuba. As we write, the U.S. and Israel are bombing Iran, threatening a major war. Then there is China, focused on selling cheap EVs and solar panels.

Is this what a period of rising inter-imperialist rivalries looks like? One side on the offense while the other barely does anything in response? If China is challenging the U.S. for hegemony, why isn't it using its huge military power to seriously protect its allies? Why is it barely using its economic power against the U.S.?

The answer is simple: *China is not vying for world domination*, and the world situation is not defined by inter-imperialist rivalries. Rather, it remains defined by the erratic and aggressive attempts by the U.S. to maintain its global empire.

What Does Trump Want?

There has been much talk about the National Security Strategy of the Trump administration and how it supposedly proves that the U.S. is no longer world hegemon. Sure, the document states that the U.S. will no longer interfere in every inch of the globe. But it says this only so that resources can be better focused on stopping major competitors.

Trump's "Donroe" doctrine does not limit U.S. power to the Western Hemisphere. It proposes to focus on Latin America because it sees it as a weak link in China's growing reach. Meanwhile, it wants a Middle East dominated by Israel, a political realignment in Europe on the terms of the American right (not a break with the trans-Atlantic alliance!) and to maintain U.S. primacy in the Pacific. Hardly an isolationist policy.

Trump is very clear that his aggressive foreign policy is aimed at *shoring up U.S. power* and *reversing U.S. decline*. Beyond maybe parts of Africa and Eastern Ukraine, there is no area of the world where the U.S. is

agreeing to pull back for other powers to take over. If the Trump foreign policy proves anything, it is that the U.S. will not let go of its global empire without a rabid fight causing untold devastation.

Peaceful Imperialism?

There is no doubt that China has huge economic interests around the world. There is also no doubt that China's foreign and economic policies are guided by the interests of Chinese capitalists and the bureaucrats of the Communist Party of China (CPC). But these factors alone do not make China an imperialist power. No empire in the history of the world existed on the basis of economic strength alone. Imperialism needs military force like fire needs air.

But China has not been at war since 1979! We are supposed to believe that China became an imperialist world power after 1992 without firing a single shot. How is this possible? Has imperialism become pacifist? Or are the Marxist theoreticians of "Chinese imperialism" maybe mistaken? To ask the question is to answer it.

If China were imperialist, surely it would use its military to defend its foreign interests, like every other imperialist power has always done. Yet it did nothing when Venezuela, China's closest partner in Latin America, to whom it has loaned 100 billion dollars, was attacked by the U.S. It also did nothing when Iran, a BRICS+ partner and a key supplier of oil, was attacked in the 12-day war. What about Pakistan? What did China do when the U.S. orchestrated the removal of President Imran Khan in favor of an American pawn? Nothing. And despite the growing number of countries defaulting on their debts, there are no signs of the Chinese military or secret services being used to collect.

Why does an "imperialist power" show such extreme reluctance to use force to defend its foreign economic interests? How do the Marxists who consider China imperialist explain this? Easy, they ignore the question.

The Case of Taiwan

It is true that in the case of Taiwan, the CPC does threaten intervention. But this has nothing to do with the classic model of colonial expansionism. Remember,

Taiwan's official name remains the *Republic of China*. This name was not imposed by Beijing; it was chosen by the founding father of modern Taiwan and butcher of the Shanghai proletariat, General Chiang Kai-shek. Taiwan exists as a separate state only because it was the last refuge of the counterrevolutionary forces of the Guomindang in 1949 and because it has been useful to the U.S. as an anti-Communist bastion.

True, most of the population in Taiwan today does not want to join the People's Republic of China (PRC)—largely because of the reactionary rule of the CPC bureaucracy. But this does not change the fact that the Taiwan-PRC conflict is an *unfinished civil war*; it is not driven by imperialist economic interests. The proof is that nothing fundamental has changed in the CPC's policy toward Taiwan between the time when there were no capitalists at all in mainland China and now. The problem with the CPC's policy is not that it seeks reunification. It is that it does so through bureaucratic means that conciliate the capitalists and alienate the workers of Taiwan.

Where Is the Chinese Empire?

We do not say that the CPC will never use force to defend its interests—it certainly does so to suppress its population and to intimidate Filipino fisherfolk. We argue that *there is no Chinese empire*. The PRC has no real vassals and no real zone of influence beyond its borders and a few rocks in the sea.

Moreover, the actions of the CPC bureaucracy cannot be explained through the prism of an aggressively expanding imperialist bourgeoisie. Rather, they must be understood as coming from a Stalinist bureaucracy that seeks peaceful coexistence with imperialism in order to build “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Above all else, the aim of China's economic, foreign and military policy is to make sure that never again will it be at the mercy of foreign imperialism.

Clearly, China is not acting like Germany, Japan or the U.S. in the early 20th century, as they were vying for their place in the sun. But we don't need to go that far. Just look at last year! It is absurd to argue that the U.S. and China play the same fundamental role on the world scene. Beyond an obvious analytical mistake, equating the two represents a real capitulation to the propaganda of Western and Japanese imperialism.

Russian Expansionism?

If China is reluctant to use military force, the same cannot be said of Russia. In Georgia, Syria and Ukraine, Russia has deployed its armed forces beyond its borders to defend the interests of its ruling class. This being said, Russia does not play a significant role in the syphoning off of surplus value on a global scale. Russia's important political weight in the world stems mainly from its military force and its resistance to U.S. expansionism.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is the U.S. and its allies that have been expanding in Eastern Europe, bringing NATO to the very border of Russia. No one can deny this. The Ukraine conflict started because the EU and NATO attempted to push Russian influence out of Ukraine. This does not justify Russia's invasion. But it shows it is false to view the conflict simply as the

result of Russian expansionism. The U.S. expanded to the East until it bit off more than it could chew. This is the fundamental cause of the Russia-Ukraine war.

However, Western propaganda about “Russian imperialism” blinds many leftists to the realities of this conflict. The Ukraine war is *not* a just war of national liberation. The Ukrainian armed forces are directly controlled by NATO and subordinated to Western interests. But more than that, the national dimension of the conflict has *two sides*. Yes, if Russia wins it will mean national oppression for Ukrainians. But if Ukraine wins, it is the millions of Russians living in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine and beyond who will be nationally oppressed. Neither outcome advances the working class.

Again, it is entirely false to place the U.S. and Russia on the same scale in terms of their role in world politics. The first has dominated the capitalist world since 1945, has hundreds of bases around the world, and continues to control all the main levers of imperialist finance capital. The second is a strong capitalist military power which has decisive weight in its immediate periphery. The first oppresses workers on a global scale, the second on a regional scale.

Fight the U.S. Empire, Unify the Workers Movement

The failure to identify the U.S. as the main support for the world imperialist order is the greatest source of disorientation and capitulation in the revolutionary movement. All the theories about inter-imperialist rivalries only serve to downplay and deny what everyone can see before their eyes: the U.S. is the main agent of chaos and misery in the world.

To recognize this does not mean becoming a vulgar campist, embracing any force that stands up to the U.S. No. We must oppose precisely the likes of Putin, Khomeini and Xi because the oppression of their own people and nationalist strategies *undermine the fight* against U.S. global tyranny.

The task of communists at this historic juncture is clear. *We must build an internationalist proletarian pole against the downward spiral in which U.S. imperialism is dragging human civilization*. Only from this strategic starting point can we begin to untangle the complex knots of regional and national conflicts and unite the working class. Only from this starting point can we forge a true, revolutionary working-class party. ■

