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GEOSTRATEGY OF CONTEMPORARY IMPERIALISM

The US Imperialism and the Middle East

The analysis that I propose regarding the importance of the Middle East in the global imperialist strategy of the United States is inscribed in a general historical vision of the capitalist expansion that I have developed elsewhere. (1) Within this vision, capitalism has always been, since its inception, a polarizing system by nature, i.e., imperialist. This polarization - i.e. the concomitant construction of dominant centres and dominated peripheries, and their reproduction deepening in each stage – is immanent in the process of accumulation of capital operating on a global scale, founded on what I have called "the law of globalised value".

In this theory of global expansion of capitalism, the qualitative transformations of the systems of accumulation from one phase of its history to another shape, in their turn, the successive forms of asymmetric centres/peripheries polarization i.e. of concrete imperialism. The contemporary world system will thus remain imperialist (polarising) throughout the visible future, in so far as the fundamental logic of its deployment remains dominated by the capitalist production relations. This theory thus associates imperialism with process of capital accumulation on a worldwide scale, which I consider as constituting only one reality whose various dimensions are in fact not dissociable. Thus it differs as much from the vulgarised version of the Leninist theory of "imperialism, the highest phase of capitalism" (as if the former phases of global expansion of capitalism were not polarizing), as from the contemporary post-modern theories that describe the new globalisation as "post imperialist" (2).

1. Permanent conflict of imperialisms with collective imperialism

In its globalised deployment, imperialism was always conjugated in plural, since its inception (in the XVth century) until 1945. The conflict of imperialisms, permanent and, often violent, too has occupied in fact a decisive place in the transformation of the world as class struggle, through which fundamental contradictions of capitalism are expressed. Moreover, social fights and conflicts of the imperialisms are closely articulated and it is this articulation that determines the course of really existing capitalism. I also point out that the analysis that I have proposed in this respect differs vastly from that of the "succession of hegemonies".

The Second World War ended in a major transformation with regard to the forms of imperialism: the substitution of the multiplicity of imperialisms in permanent conflict by collective imperialism combining the ensemble of the centres of the world capitalist system (simply, the "triad": the United States and its external Canadian province, Western and central Europe, Japan). This new form of imperialist expansion went through various phases of its development, but it remained all the time present. The eventual hegemonic role of the United States, whose bases will have to be specified as the forms of its articulation with the new collective imperialism, must be located within this perspective. These questions pose problems, which are precisely those that I would wish to point out here.

The United States drew a gigantic benefit from the Second World War, which had ruined its principal combatants - Europe, Soviet Union, China and Japan. It was thus in a position to exert its economic hegemony, since it concentrated more than half of the global industrial production and had specialty in the new technologies that would shape the development of the second half of the century. In addition, they possessed a specialty in the nuclear weapon - the new "absolute" weapon. This is why I situate the break announcing the end of war not at Yalta as what is often told (at Yalta the United States did not have the weapon yet) but at Potsdam (a few days before the bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). At Potsdam the American tone changed: the decision to engage what was going to be the "cold war" was made by them.

This double absolute advantage was nevertheless eroded in a relatively short period of time (within two decades), by double recovery, economic for the capitalist Europe and Japan, military for the

Soviet Union. It will be remembered that this relative retreat of the US power provided at the time a flowering of the discourse on "American decline", and even an ascent of alternative hegemonies (Europe, Japan, later China...).

It is the moment when Gaullism is born. De Gaulle considered that the objective of the United States since 1945 had been to control the entire Old World ("Eurasia"). And that Washington managed to position itself, breaking Europe – the "true" Europe, from Atlantic to the Urals, i.e. including "Soviet Russia", as he said – stirring the spectre of an "aggression" from Moscow, which he never believed in. His analysis was, in my opinion, realistic and perfect. But he was almost alone in saying so. The counter-strategy that he envisaged as a counterpoint to "Atlanticism" promoted by Washington, was founded on Franco-German reconciliation, on whose base the construction of "non-American Europe" could be conceived, carefully keeping out Great Britain, judged rightly as the Trojan horse of Atlanticism. Europe in question could then open the way to reconciliation with "(Soviet) Russia". Reconciling and drawing together the three big European populations - French, Germans and Russians – would put a definite end to the American project of dominating the world. The internal conflict specific to the European project can thus be summarized as the choice between two alternatives: the Atlantic Europe, which is the European wing of the American project or non-Atlantic Europe (integrating Russia in this perspective). This conflict is still not resolved. But later developments – the end of Gaullism, Great Britain's admission in Europe, its extension towards the East, the Soviet collapse – have until now supported together what I call "an obliteration of European project" and its "dual dilution in neo-liberal economic globalisation and in the political-military alignment with Washington" (3). Moreover, this development reinforces the strength of the collective character of the triadic imperialism.

Does it thus stir a "definitive" (non-conjunctural) qualitative transformation? Does it inevitably imply a "leadership" of the United States in one way or another? Before trying to answer these questions it is necessary to express with more precision in what the "project" of the United States consists.

2. The project of the ruling class of the United States: to extend the Monroe doctrines to the whole Planet

This project, which I will describe without much hesitation as overweening, even crazy, and criminal by what it implies, did not come out of President Bush Junior's head, to be implemented by an extreme right junta, seizing power through dubious elections.

It is the project which the ruling class of the United States unceasingly nurtured since 1945, even though its implementation evidently passed through ups and downs, encountered a few vicissitudes and was here and there put to check, and could not be pursued with consistency and violence that this implied in certain conjunctural moments like ours, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The project always rendered a decisive role to its military dimension. It was conceived after Potsdam, as I pointed out, founded on nuclear monopoly. Very quickly, the United States conceived a global military strategy, dividing the planet into regions and allocating the responsibility for the control of each of them under a "US Military Command". I refer to what I wrote on this subject even before the collapse of the USSR, and on the priority position occupied by the Middle East in this global strategic vision. (4) The objective was not only "to encircle the USSR" (and China), but as well to draw up means making Washington the ruler in the last resort of all the regions of the planet. In other words, it extended the Monroe Doctrine to the whole planet, which effectively gave the exclusive right of managing the ensemble of the New World to the United States in accordance to what it defined as its "national interests".

The project implies that the "sovereignty of the national interests of the United States" is placed above all the other principles controlling the political behaviours that we regard as "legitimate" means; it develops a systematic mistrust towards all supranational rights. Certainly, imperialisms of the past did not behave differently and those who endeavour to lighten the responsibilities - and the criminal compartments - of the US establishment at the present moment, and find "excuses" for them (5), continue with this same argument, of indisputable historical antecedents.

But this is precisely what one would have liked to see changing in the history and which begun after 1945. It is because the conflict of imperialisms and the contempt for international law by fascist powers producing the horrors of the Second World War, that the UNO was founded on a new principle

proclaiming the illegitimate character of the war. The United States, it could be said, not only have made this principle its own, but also moreover has been largely its early initiator. Soon after the First World War, Wilson advocated to re-found the international politics precisely on principles different to those which, since the treaty of Westphalia (1648), have rendered sovereignty to the monarchical States and then to the nations more or less democratic, given that this absolute character was questioned by the disaster to which it had led the modern civilization. It does not matter if the vicissitudes of the domestic policy of the United States have deferred the implementation of these principles. F. Roosevelt, and even his successor H. Truman, played a decisive role in defining the new concept of multilateralism and the condemnation of war that accompanies it, which is the basis of the United Nations' Charter.

This good initiative – supported at the time by the people of the entire world – that represented indeed a qualitative jump and opened the way for the progress of civilization, however never won the conviction of the ruling classes of the United States. The authorities of Washington felt always ill at ease in the concert of the UNO and today brutally proclaim what they were forced to conceal up till now: that they do not accept even the concept of an international law higher than what they consider to be the exigencies of the defence of their own "national interests". I do not believe that it is acceptable to find excuses for this return to the vision, which the Nazis had developed in their time by requiring the destruction of the League of Nations. The plea in favour of the law, developed with talent and elegance by Vilepin at the Security Council, is not, in this sense, a "nostalgic look towards the past" but on the contrary a reminder of what the future must be. It was the United States that, on that occasion, defended a past that had been proclaimed definitively outmoded.

The implementation of the project necessarily went through successive phases, shaped by the facts of particular power relations that defined them.

Immediately after the war, the American leadership was not only accepted, but even solicited by the bourgeoisie of Europe and Japan. For if the reality of a menace of the "Soviet invasion" could convince only the feeble minded, its invocation rendered good services to the Right as well as to the social democrats hounded by their adversary communist cousins. One could then believe that the collective character of the new imperialism was only due to this political factor and that, once their backwardness over the United States is made up, Europe and Japan would seek to get rid of Washington's cumbersome and henceforth useless supervision. That was not the case. Why?

My explanation appeals here to the rise of the national liberation movements in Asia and Africa - the era of Bandung 1955-1975 (6) - and to the support that the Soviet Union and China provided them (each one in its own way). The imperialism was then forced "to make up", thus not only accepting the peaceful coexistence with a vast surface which largely escaped it ("the socialist world") but also negotiating the terms of the participation of the Asian and African countries in the imperialist world system. The collective alignment of the triad under the American leadership seemed useful for managing the North-South relationships of the epoch. This is why the Non-Aligned found itself then confronted with a "Western block" practically impeccable.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the suffocation of the populist nationalist regimes born out of the national liberation obviously permitted the project of the United States to redeploy itself with an extreme vigour, in the Middle East, together with elsewhere in Africa and Latin America. The fact remains that the project stays in the service of collective imperialism, up to a certain point at least (which I will try to clarify later). The economic government of the world on the basis of the principles of neo-liberalism, implemented by G-7 and the institutions at its service (WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF), the structural re-adjustment plans imposed on the breathless Third World have come to be the expression. Even on the political level, it will be witnessed that initially Europeans and Japanese agreed to be part of the alignment with the US project, at the time of the wars in the Gulf (1991), then in Yugoslavia and Central Asia (2002), accepting the marginalisation of the UNO for the benefit of NATO. These initial times are still not passed, even if some signs indicate its possible cracking up from the time of the war on Iraq (2003).

The ruling class of the United States proclaims openly that it "will not tolerate" the reconstitution of any economic and military power capable of questioning its monopoly of domination over the planet,

and for this purpose, it gave itself the right to lead "preventive wars". Three principal potential adversaries are targeted here.

In the first place is Russia, whose dismemberment, after that of the USSR, constitutes henceforth a major strategic objective of the United States. The Russian ruling class does not appear to have understood this till now. It seems convinced that after having "lost the war", it could "win peace", as what had been for Germany and Japan. It forgets that Washington needed the recovery of these two adversaries in the Second World War, precisely to face the Soviet challenge. The new conjuncture is different, the United States not having more serious competitor. Their option is then to permanently and completely destroy the ravaged Russian adversary. Will Putin understand this and initiate Russia in coming out of its illusions?

In the second place China, whose expanse and economic success worry the United States, whose strategic objective remains here too to dismember this large country. (7)

Europe comes in the third place in this global vision of the new masters of the world. But here the North-American establishment does not appear anxious, at least so far. The unconditional Atlanticism of a few (Great Britain, as well as the new servile powers of the East), the "quicksand of the European project" (the point on which I will come back), the converging interests of the dominant capital of the collective imperialism of the triad, contribute in the effacement of the European project, maintained in its status of "European wing of the US project". The diplomacy of Washington has managed to keep Germany on its trail, the reunification and the conquest of Eastern Europe even seemed to reinforce this alliance: Germany would be encouraged to reclaim its tradition of "thrust towards the East" (the part played by Berlin in the dismemberment of Yugoslavia by the hasty recognition of the Slovenian and Croatian independence was its expression (8)) and, as for the rest, induced to navigate on Washington's trail. Is there a reversing of steam in progress? The German political class appears hesitant and could be divided as far as its strategic choices are concerned. The alternative to the Atlanticist alignment - which seems to have wind in its sails - calls, in counterpoint, a reinforcement of Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis, which would then become the most solid pillar of a European system independent of Washington.

Our main question can be reconsidered now: nature and potential strength of the triad's collective imperialism, contradictions and weaknesses of its leadership by the United States.

3. Collective Imperialism of the triad and hegemonies of the United States: their articulation and their contradictions

Today's world is militarily unipolar. At the same time, some fissures seem to become apparent between the United States and some of the European countries with regard to the political management of a global system so far united on the principles of liberalism, in theory at least. Are these fissures only conjunctural and of limited range, or do they proclaim some lasting changes? Thus, it will be necessary to analyse in all their complexity the logics that command the deployment of the new phase of collective imperialism (North-South relationships in the current language) and the specific objectives of the US project. In this spirit I will approach succinctly and successively five series of questions.

- *Concerning the nature of evolutions which have led to the constitution of the new collective imperialism*

I suggest here that the formation of the new collective imperialism finds its origin in the transformation of the conditions of competition. Only a few decades ago, the large firms fought their competing battles essentially over the national markets, whether it is the matter of the United States' (the largest national market in the world) or even those of the European States (in spite of their modest size, which handicapped them in relation to the United States). The winners of the national "matches" could perform well on the world market. Today, the size of the market necessary for gaining an upper hand in the first cycle of matches approaches some 500-600 million "potential consumers". The battle

must thus be launched straightaway on the global market and won on this ground. And those who perform over this market assert then more over their respective national terrains. Thorough internationalisation becomes the primary setting of the activity of the large firms. In other words, in the pair national/global, the terms of causality are reversed: earlier the national power commanded the global presence and today it is the reverse. Therefore the transnational firms, whatever is their nationality, have common interests in the management of the world market. These interests are superimposed on the permanent and mercantile conflicts, which define all the forms of competition specific to capitalism, irrespective of what they are.

The solidarity of the dominant segments of the transnationalized capital of all the partners in the triad is real, and is expressed by their rallying to globalized neo-liberalism. The United States is seen from this perspective as the defender (military if necessary) of these "common interests". Nonetheless, Washington does not intend "to equitably share" the profits of its leadership. The United States seeks, on the contrary, to reduce its allies into vassals and, thus is only ready to make minor concessions to junior allies in the Triad. Will this conflict of interests within dominant capital lead to the break-up of the Atlantic alliance? Not impossible, but unlikely.

• *Concerning the place of the United States in the world economy*

General opinion has it that US military power only constitutes the tip of the iceberg, extending the country's superiority in all areas, notably economic, but even political and cultural. Therefore, submission to the hegemony that it pretends would be impossible to circumvent.

I maintain, in counterpoint that, in the system of collective imperialism the United States does not have decisive economic advantages; the US production system is far from being "the most efficient in the world". On the contrary, almost none of its sectors would be certain of beating competitors in the truly free market dreamt of by liberal economists. The US trade deficit, which increases year by year, went from 100 billion dollars in 1989 to 500 billion in 2002. Moreover, this deficit involved practically all areas of production system. Even the surplus once enjoyed by the US in the area of high-technology goods, which stood at 35 billion in 1990, has now turned into a deficit. Competition between Ariane rockets and those of NASA, between Airbus and Boeing, testifies to the vulnerability of the American advantages. Faced by European and Japanese competition in high-technology products, by Chinese, Korean and other Asian and Latin American industrialised countries in competition for banal manufactured products, by Europe and the southern cone of Latin America in agriculture, the United States probably would not be able to win were it not for the recourse to "extra-economic" means, violating the principles of liberalism imposed on its competitors!

In fact, the US only benefits from comparative advantages in the armaments sector, precisely because this sector largely operates outside the rules of the market and benefits from state support. This advantage probably brings certain benefits for the civil sphere in its wake (the Internet being the best-known example), but it also causes serious distortions that handicap many production sectors.

The North American economy lives parasitically to the detriment of its partners in the world system. "The United States depends for 10 per cent of its industrial consumption on goods whose import costs are not covered by the exports of its own products", as Emmanuel Todd recalls (9). The world produces, and the United States (which has practically no national saving) consumes. The "advantage" of the US is that of a predator whose deficit is covered by loans from others, whether consenting or forced. The means put in place by Washington to compensate for deficiencies are of various kinds: repeated unilateral violations of liberal principles, arms exports, search for greater profits from oil (which presupposes systematic control over the producers – one of the real reasons for the wars in Central Asia and Iraq). The fact is that the essential part of the American deficit is covered by contributions of capital from Europe, Japan and the South (from oil-rich countries and comprador classes of every country of the Third World, the poorest included), to which are added the additional sums brought in from servicing the debt that has been forced on almost all the countries on the periphery of the world system.

The growth of the Clinton years, vaunted as the result of a "liberalism" that Europe was unfortunately resisting, was in fact largely fake, and in any case, non-generalisable, depending on capital transfers that meant the stagnation of partner economies. For all sectors of the real production system, US growth was not better than that of Europe. The "American miracle" was fed exclusively by a growth in expenditure produced by growing social inequalities (financial and personal services: the legions of lawyers and private police forces, etc). In this sense, Clinton's liberalism indeed prepared the conditions for the reactionary wave, and later victory of Bush Junior.

The causes of the weakening of the US production system are complex. They are certainly not conjunctural, and they cannot be corrected by the adoption of a correct rate of exchange, for example, or by putting in place a more favourable balance between salaries and productivity. They are structural. The mediocrity of general education and training systems, and a deep-rooted prejudice systematically in favour of the "private" to the detriment of the public service, is one of the main reasons for the profound crisis that the US society is going through.

One should, therefore, be surprised that the Europeans, far from drawing the conclusions that observation of the deficiencies of the US economy forces upon one, are actively going about imitating it. Here, too, the liberal virus does not explain everything, even if it fulfils some useful functions for the system in paralysing the left. Widespread privatisation and the dismantling of public services will only reduce the comparative advantages that "Old Europe" (as Bush qualifies it) still benefits from. However, whatever damage these things will cause in the long term, such measures offer dominant capital, which lives in the short term, the chance of making additional profits.

- *Concerning the specific objectives of the project of the United States*

The hegemonic strategy of the United States is within the framework of the new collective Imperialism.

The "(conventional) economists" do not have the analytical tools enabling them to understand the paramount importance of these objectives. They are heard repeating ad nauseam that in the "new economy" the raw materials coming from the third world are destined to lose their importance and thus it is becoming more and more marginal in the world system. In counterpoint to this naïve and hollow discourse, the *Mein Kampf* of the new administration of Washington (10), it is acknowledged that the United States works hard for the right to seize all the natural resources of the planet to meet in priority its consumption requirements. The race for raw materials (oil in the first place, but as much for other resources too – water in particular) has already recovered all its virulence. All the more since these resources are likely to become scarce not only by the exponential cancer of the wastage of Western consumption, but also by the development of the new industrialization of the peripheries.

Moreover, a respectable number of countries from the South are destined to become increasingly important industrial producers as much for their internal markets as in the world market. As importers of technologies, of capital, also competitors in exports, they are destined to push down the global economic equilibrium with an increasing weight. And it is not a question only of some East Asian countries (like Korea), but of immense China and, tomorrow, India and the large countries of Latin America. However, far from being a factor of stabilization, the acceleration of capitalist expansion in the South can only be the cause of violent conflicts, internal and international. Because this expansion cannot absorb, under the conditions of the periphery, the enormous reserve of labour force, which is concentrated there. In fact the peripheries of the system remain the "zone of tempests". The centres of the capitalist system thus require exerting their domination over the peripheries, to subject their people to the pitiless discipline that the satisfaction of its priorities requires.

Within this perspective, the American establishment has perfectly understood that, in the pursuit of its hegemony, it has three decisive advantages over its European and Japanese competitors: the control over the natural resources of the globe, the military monopoly, the weight of the "Anglo-Saxon culture" by which the ideological domination of capitalism is expressed preferentially. A systematic bringing into play of these three advantages clarifies many aspects of the US policy, in particular the

systematic efforts that Washington exerts for the military control of the oil-producing Middle East, its offensive strategy with regard to Korea – taking advantage of this country's "financial crisis" – and to China, its subtle game aiming at perpetuating divisions in Europe – while mobilizing to this end its unconditional British ally - and at preventing any serious rapprochement between the European Union and Russia. At the level of the global control over the resources of the planet, the United States has a decisive advantage over Europe and Japan. Not only because the United States is the sole international military power, and thus no strong intervention in the Third World can be led without it. But more because Europe (excluding ex-USSR) and Japan are, themselves, divested of essential resources steadily from their economy. For example, their dependence in the energy sector, in particular their oil dependence with regard to the Gulf, is and will remain for a considerable long time, even if it were to decrease in relative terms. By militarily seizing the control of this region through Iraq war the US has demonstrated that they were perfectly conscious of the utility of this pressure medium, which it brings to bear on its allied-competitors. Not long ago the Soviet power had also understood this vulnerability of Europe and Japan; and certain Soviet interventions in the Third World had had as an aim of reminding it to them, so as to induce them to negotiate on other grounds. Evidently the deficiencies of Europe and Japan could be compensated in the event of a serious Europe-Russia rapprochement ("the common home" of Gorbachev). It is the very reason for which the danger of this construction of Eurasia becomes Washington's nightmare.

• *Concerning the conflicts that place the United States and its partners in the Triad opposite each other within this framework*

If the partners in the Triad share common interests in the global management of collective imperialism implied in their relationship with the South, they are certainly not less in a serious potential conflictual relationship.

The American superpower sustains itself due to the capital flow that feeds the parasitism of its economy and society. The vulnerability of the United States constitutes, therefore, a serious threat for the project of Washington.

Europe in particular, and the rest of the world in general, will have to choose one of the following two strategic options: to invest the "surplus" of their capital ("of saving") from which they arrange for financing the US deficit (consumption, investments and military expenditures); or conserve and invest this surplus at home.

The conventional economists are ignorant of the problem, having made the hypothesis (which is not anything, but a nonsense) that "globalisation" having abolished the nations, the economic grandeurs (saving and investment) cannot be managed any more "at national levels". It is a matter of a tautological reasoning where the conclusions at which one wishes to arrive are implied in the very premises: to justify and accept the financing of the US deficit by others since, at the world level, one finds indeed the saving-investment identity!

Why thus such ineptitude is accepted? No doubt, the teams "of scholarly economists" who encircle the European (and also, Russian and Chinese) political classes of the right as well as of the electoral left are themselves victims of their economic alienation, which I term as the "liberal virus". Besides, through this option in fact the political judgment of the large transnational capital is expressed which considers that the advantages got by the management of the globalised system by the United States on behalf of collective imperialism prevail over its disadvantages: the tribute which is needed to pay Washington for ensuring permanence. Because it was a tribute after all and not an "investment" with a good guaranteed return. There are some countries qualified as "poor indebted countries" which are always constrained to ensure the servicing of their debt at any price. But there is also a "powerful indebted country" which has the means enabling it to devalue its debt if it considers necessary.

The other option for Europe (and the rest of the world) would thus consist in putting an end to the transfusion in favour of the United States. The surplus could then be used on the original spot (in Europe) and the economy be revived. Because the transfusion requires a submission of Europeans to "deflationary" policies (improper term of the language of conventional economics) that I call as "stagnationist" – so as to release a surplus of exportable saving. It makes a recovery in Europe –

always mediocre – dependent on an artificial support from that of the United States. The mobilization of this surplus in opposite direction for local employment in Europe would permit the simultaneous revival of consumption (by rebuilding the social dimension of the economic management devastated by the liberal virus), investment - and particularly in new technologies (and financing their research), even military expenditure (putting an end to the "advantages" of the United States in this field). The option in favour of this challenging response implies a rebalancing of the social relationships in favour of the labouring classes. National conflicts and social struggles are articulated in this way. In other words, the contrast between the United States and Europe does not fundamentally oppose the interests of dominant segments of the capital of various partners. It results above all from the difference of political cultures.

• *Concerning the questions of theory that the preceding reflections suggest*

Complicity-competition between the partners in collective imperialism for the control over the South – the plundering of its natural resources and submission of its people – can be analysed from different angles of vision. I will make, in this respect, three observations, which appear major to me.

First observation: the contemporary world system that I describe as collective imperialist is not "less" imperialist than its precedents. It is not an "Empire" of "post-capitalist" nature. I have proposed elsewhere a criticism of ideological formulations of the "disguise" that feeds this fashionable dominant discourse (11).

Second observation: I have proposed a reading of the history of capitalism, globalised right from its origin, centred on the distinction between the various phases of imperialism (of centres/peripheries relationships). There exist of course other readings of this same history, in particular that which is articulated around the "succession of hegemonies" (12).

I have some reservations with regard to this last reading.

Primarily and essentially because it is "western-centric" in the sense that it considers that the transformations operating at the heart of the system, in its centres, command the global evolution of the system in a decisive, and almost exclusive, manner. I believe that the reactions of the people of the peripheries to the imperialist deployment should not be underestimated. For they are provoked, it would only be the independence of Americas, the great revolutions made in the name of socialism (Russia, China), the re-conquest of independence by the Asian and African countries, and I do not believe that one can account for the history of world capitalism without accounting for the "adjustments" that these transformations imposed even on central capitalism itself.

Then because the history of imperialism appears to me having been made more through the conflict of imperialisms than by the type "of order" that successive hegemonies have imposed. The apparent periods "of hegemony" have been always extremely short and the said hegemony very relative.

Third observation: internationalisation is not synonymous with "unification" of economic system by "the de-regulated opening up of the markets". The latter – in its successive historical forms ("the freedom of trade" yesterday, the "freedom of firms" today) – always constituted the project of the dominant capital only. In reality this project was almost always forced to adjust with exigencies that are not the concern of its exclusive and specific internal logic. It thus could never be implemented except in some short moments of the history. The "free exchange" promoted by the major industrial power of its time – Great Britain – was effective only during two decades (1860-1880) which was succeeded by a century (1880-1980) characterized at the same time by the conflict between the imperialists and by the strong de-linking of the countries known as socialist (starting from the Russian revolution of 1917, then that of China) and more modestly the populist nationalist countries (the era of Bandung for Asia and Africa from 1955 to 1975).). The current moment of reunification of the world market (the "free enterprise") inaugurated by neo-liberalism since 1980, extended to the whole planet with the Soviet collapse, probably is not destined to experience a better fate. The chaos which it generates - term by which I have described this system since 1990 - testifies to its character "of permanent utopia of capital" (13).

4. Middle East in the imperialist system

1. The Middle East, henceforth with its extension towards Caucasus and ex-Soviet Central Asia, occupies a position of particular importance in the geo-strategy/geo-politics of imperialism and

singularly of the US hegemonic project. It owes this position to three factors: its oil wealth, its geographical position in the heart of the Old World, and the fact that it constitutes henceforth the "soft underbelly" of the world system.

The access to oil at a relative cheap rate is vital for the economy of the dominant triad; and the best means of ensuring this guaranteed access consists in, of course, securing political control of the area.

But the region also holds its importance equally due to its geographical position, being at the centre of the old World, at equal distance from Paris, Beijing, Singapore, Johannesburg. In the olden times the control over this inevitable crossing point gave the Caliphate the privilege to draw the best of benefits from the internationalisation of the epoch (14). After the Second World War the region, located on the southern side of the USSR, occupied in fact a prime place in the military strategy of encircling the Soviet power. And the region did not lose its importance, in spite of the collapse of the Soviet adversary; while settling in there the United States would simultaneously succeed in reducing Europe to vassalage, dependent for its energy supply, and in subduing Russia, China and India with a permanent blackmail coupled with threats of military interventions if necessary. The control over the region would thus allow indeed an extension of the Monroe doctrine to the old World, which constitutes the objective of the hegemonist project of the United States.

The efforts made with continuity and consistency by Washington since 1945 to secure control over the region – and in excluding the British and the French – had not been so far crowns of success. One remembers the failure of their attempt to associate the region to NATO through the pact of Baghdad, as later, one of their most faithful allies, Shah of Iran's fall.

The reason is quite simply that the project of the Arab (and Iranian) nationalist populism entered headlong into conflict with the objectives of the American hegemonism. This Arab project had certain ambition to impose the recognition of the independence of the Arab world by the Powers. It was the direction of "non-alignment", formulated in 1955 at Bandung by the ensemble of liberation movements of Asian and African people, which was on a roll. The Soviets quickly understood that, by giving their support for this project, they would render a setback to the aggressive plans of Washington.

The page of this epoch is turned, initially because the populist nationalist project of Arab world quickly exhausted its potential of transformation; the nationalist powers were sunk into dictatorships without program. The vacuum created by this drift opened the way for Political Islam and the obscurantist autocracies of the Gulf, the preferential allies of Washington. The region became one of the underbellies of the global system, producing conjunctures allowing external intervention (including military) that the current regimes are incapable of containing – or discouraging – any more for a lack of legitimacy in the opinion of their people.

The region constituted – and continues to constitute – in the American geo-military apportionment covering the entire planet, a zone considered as that of first priority (like the Caribbean) i.e. a zone where the United States is granted the "right" of military intervention. Since 1990, they are not deprived of anything!

The United States operates in the Middle East in close cooperation with their two unconditional faithful allies - Turkey and Israel. Europe is kept away from the region, accepting that there the United States defends only the global vital interests of the triad, that is to say its oil supply. In spite of the signs of obvious irritation after the Iraq war, the Europeans by and large continue to sail in the region on Washington's trail.

2. Israel's colonial expansionism constitutes a real challenge. Israel is the only country in the world that refuses to recognize its definite borders (and for this reason would not have the right to be a member of the United Nations). As the United States in the 19th century, it considers that it has the "right" to conquer new areas for the expansion of its colonization and to treat the people inhabiting there after thousand years if not anymore like some Red Skins. Israel is the only country that openly declares not to be considered bound by the resolutions of the UNO.

The war of 1967, planned in agreement with Washington in 1965, pursued several goals: to start the collapse of the populist nationalist regimes, to break their alliance with the Soviet Union, to force them to reposition itself on the American trail, to open new grounds for Zionist colonization. In the territories conquered in 1967, Israel thus set up a system of apartheid inspired by that of South Africa.

It is here that the interests of dominant capital meet up with those of Zionism. Because a rich and powerful modernised Arab world would call in question the guaranteed access of the Western countries to the plundering of its oil resources, necessary for the continuation of waste associated with capitalist accumulation. The political powers in the countries of the Triad such as they are - i.e. faithful servants of dominant transnational capital - do not want a modernized and powerful Arab world.

The alliance between Western powers and Israel is thus founded on the solid base of their common interests. This alliance is neither the product of a guilt feeling of Europeans, responsible for anti-Semitism and Nazi crime, nor that of the skill of the "Jewish lobby" to exploit this sentiment. If the Western powers thought that their interests were harmed by the Zionist colonial expansionism, they would quickly find the means of overcoming their "complex" and of neutralizing the "Jewish lobby". I do not doubt it, not being among those who naively believe that the public opinion in the democratic countries, as they are, imposes their views on these Powers. It is known that opinion "is manufactured" too. Israel is incapable of resisting more than a few days even moderate measures of a blockade if imposed on it as the Western powers inflicted on Yugoslavia, Iraq and Cuba. It would thus not be difficult to bring Israel to senses and to create the conditions of a true peace, if it were wanted. It is not wanted.

Soon after the defeat of the 1967 war, Sadat stated that since the United States held in their hand "90% of the cards" (that was his very expression), it was necessary to break with the USSR, to reintegrate with the Western camp and that, by doing so, one could get Washington to exert sufficient pressure on Israel to bring it to its senses. Beyond similar "strategic idea" peculiar to Sadat – whose inconsistency the suite of events has proved – the Arab public opinion remained largely incapable of understanding the dynamics of the capitalist world expansion, even more of identifying the true contradictions and weaknesses there. Do not we hear it being said and repeated that “the West would understand in the long run that their proper interest was to maintain good relations with the two hundred million Arabs – their immediate neighbours – and not to sacrifice these relations for their unconditional support for Israel”? This is implicitly thinking that the "West" in question (i.e., the dominant capital) wish a modernized and developed Arab world, and, not understanding on the contrary that they want to maintain it in impotence and that for that their support for Israel is useful.

The choice made by the Arab governments – with the exception of Syrian and Lebanese - which led them through the negotiations of Madrid and Oslo (1993) to subscribe to the American plan of the so-called “definitive peace”, could not yield results other than those which it has yielded: encouraging Israel to position itself in its expansionist project. By openly rejecting the terms of "Oslo contract" today, Ariel Sharon demonstrates merely what was already understood – knowing that it was not a matter of a project of “definitive peace”, but of opening a new phase in the Zionist colonial expansion.

The state of permanent war that Israel and the Western powers supporting its project imposed in the region constitutes in its turn a powerful reason allowing the autocratic Arabic systems to be perpetuated. This blockage of a possible democratic evolution weakens the chances of an Arabic revival and thus makes a deal with the deployment of the dominant capital and the hegemonist strategy of the United States. The loop is looped: Israel-American alliance serves perfectly the interests of the two partners.

Initially this system of apartheid deployed after 1967 gave the impression of being capable of achieving its ends, the fearful management of everyday life in the occupied territories by the elites and the commercial bourgeoisie seeming accepted by the Palestinian people. The PLO distant from the region after the invasion of Lebanon by the Israeli army (1982) appeared to have no longer the means of calling into question the Zionist annexation from its remote exile of Tunis.

The first Intifada burst in December 1987. Explosion of "spontaneous" nature, it expresses the sudden emergence of popular classes on the scene, and remarkably of its poorest segments, confined in the refugee camps. The Intifada boycotted the Israeli power by the organization of a systematic civil disobedience. Israel reacted with brutality; but managed neither in restoring its effective police power nor getting the fearful Palestinian middle classes back in the saddle. On the contrary, the Intifada called for the return of exiled political forces in mass, the constitution of new local forms of organization and the adherence of middle classes to the committed fight for liberation. The Intifada was provoked by the youth, Chebab Al Intifada, initially not organized within the formal networks of the PLO, but not

at all any hostile competitor to them. The four components of the PLO (Fatah, devoted to its chief Yasser Arafat, the DFLP, the PFLP, the Communist Party) surged themselves in the Intifada and for this reason gained the sympathy of the major part of these Chebab. The Muslim Brotherhood outmoded by their activity during these preceding years despite some actions of Islamic Jihad making its appearance in 1980 yielded its place to a new expression of struggle – Hamas, constituted in 1988.

As the first Intifada gave signs of breathlessness after two years of expansion with the Israeli repression becoming violent (use of firearms against children, closing of the "green line" for the Palestinian workers, almost exclusive source of income for their families, etc.), the scene was mounted for a "negotiation" whose initiative was taken by the US, driving to Madrid (1991), then the so-called Oslo Peace Agreements (1993). These agreements allowed the return of the PLO in the occupied territories and its transformation into a "Palestinian Authority".

The Oslo agreements imagined the transformation of the occupied territories into one or more Bantustans, definitively integrated into the Israeli region. Within this framework, the Palestinian Authority was to be only a false State – as that of the Bantustans – and in fact to be the driving belt of the Zionist order.

Returning to Palestine, the PLO turned Authority managed to establish its order, not without some ambiguities. The Authority absorbed in its new structures the major part of Chebab, which had coordinated the Intifada. It achieved legitimacy by the electoral consultation of 1996, in which the Palestinians participated in mass (80 %), while an overwhelming majority elected Arafat the President of that Authority. The Authority remained nevertheless in an ambiguous position: would it agree to fulfil the functions that Israel, the United States and Europe allotted it - that of "government of a Bantustan", or would it align with the Palestinian people who refused to submit?

As the Palestinian people rejected the project of Bantustan, Israel decided to denounce the Oslo agreements, whose terms nevertheless it had dictated, by substituting them by the use of pure and simple military violence. The provocation from the top of mosques, engineered by the war-criminal Sharon in 1998 (but with the help of the Labour government that furnished the tanks), the triumphal election of this same criminal at the head of the Israeli government (and the collaboration of the "doves" like Simon Peres with this government), were thus the cause of the second Intifada, which is in progress.

Will this succeed in liberating the Palestinian people from the perspective of its planned submission by the Zionist apartheid? It is quite early to say so. In any case, the Palestinian people now have a true national liberation movement. It has its own specificities. It is not of the "unique party" style, of "unanimous" and homogeneous appearance (if not in reality). It has components that conserve their own personality, their visions of future, including their ideologies, their militants and clienteles, but which, apparently, know how to get on to lead the struggle together.

3. The erosion of the regimes of populist nationalism and the disappearance of the Soviet support supplied the United States the opportunity to implement its "project" for the area, without obstacles which were capable of curbing it till now.

The control of the Middle East is certainly a cornerstone of the Washington's project of global hegemony. How then the United States imagines securing control? It is already a decade since Washington took the initiative of advancing the curious project of a "Common Market of the Middle East" in which some countries of the Gulf would have supplied capital, other Arab countries cheap labour, reserving for Israel the technological control and the functions of the obliged intermediary. Accepted by the Gulf countries and Egypt, the project was confronted nevertheless with the refusal of Syria, Iraq and Iran. It was thus necessary to knock down these three regimes in order to advance. Now that is done today for Iraq.

The question is then to know which type of political regime must be set up in order to be able to sustain the project. Washington's propagandistic discourse talks about "democracies". In fact, Washington is busy in nothing else but substituting the worn-out autocracies of outmoded populism by the so-called Islamic obscurantist autocracies (obliged by the respect for the cultural specificity of the "communities"). The renewed alliance with a so-called moderate political Islam (i.e. capable of controlling the situation with sufficient efficacy to prohibit the "terrorist" drifts – those directed against the United States and, of course, only against it) constitutes the axis of Washington's political

choice, becoming the unique choice. It is within this perspective that the reconciliation with the antiquated autocracy of the system will be sought.

Confronted with the deployment of the US project, Europeans invented their own project, baptized as "Euro-Mediterranean partnership." A decidedly coward project, encumbered with incoherent prattling, of course, which too proposed "to reconcile the Arab countries with Israel", while by excluding the Gulf countries from the "Euro-Mediterranean dialogue", these same Europeans recognized consequently that the management of these latter countries concerned the exclusive responsibility of Washington (15).

The seizing contrast between the bold audacity of the American project and the debility of the European is a good indicator that the really existing Atlanticism ignores "sharing" (shared responsibilities and association in decision-making, placing on equal footing the United States and Europe). Tony Blair, who is made the advocate of the construction of a "unipolar" world, thinks he is able to justify this option because Atlanticism, which would allow it, would be founded on "sharing". Washington's arrogance refutes each day more this hope illusory, if it is not quite simply the means of fooling the European opinions. The realism of Stalin's statement rendered at the time of Nazis that they "did not know where it was necessary to stop", is applicable to its letter for the junta controlling the United States. And the "hopes" that Blair intends to reanimate resemble only to what Mussolini placed in his capacity of "assuaging" Hitler!

Is another European option possible? Does it take shape? Does Chirac's speech opposing the "unipolar Atlantic" world (which he seemingly understands well as being in fact synonymous with unilateral hegemony of the United States, reducing the European project to nothing more than the European wing of Washington's project) announces the construction of a "multi-polar" world and an end of Atlanticism?

So that this possibility becomes a reality, it still would be necessary that Europe manage to leave the quicksand on which it slips.

5 Quicksand of the European project

All the governments of the European States until now are won over to the theses of liberalism. This lining up of the European States thus does not mean anything less than the obliteration of the European project, its double dilution, economic (the advantages of the European economic union are dissolved in economic globalisation) and political (European political and military autonomy disappears). There is not, at the present time, any European project. A North-Atlantic project (or eventually of the Triad) under the American command has substituted it.

The "made in USA" wars have certainly stirred the public opinions - everywhere in Europe against the latest, that of Iraq - and even certain governments, initially that of France, but then those of Germany, Russia and beyond that, of China, too. The fact remains that these same governments have not called into question their faithful alignment over the needs of liberalism. This major contradiction will have to be overcome in one way or another, either by their submission to the requirements of Washington, or by a true rupture putting an end to Atlanticism.

The major political conclusion that I draw from this analysis is that Europe cannot leave Atlanticism as long as political alliances defining the blocs in power rest centred over the dominant transnational capital. It is only if the social and political struggles manage to modify the content of these blocs and to impose new historical compromises between capital and labour that then Europe will be able to distance itself from Washington, allowing the revival of an eventual European project. Under these conditions Europe also could - even ought to - be engaged at the international level, in its relationships with the East and the South, on a path other than that traced by the exclusive requirements of collective imperialism, thus initiating its participation in the long march "beyond capitalism". In other words, Europe will be of left (the term left being taken here seriously) or will not be at all.

To reconcile the adherence to liberalism and the assertion of a political autonomy of Europe or the States constituting it remains the objective of certain fractions of European political classes anxious to preserve the exclusive positions of the large capital? Will they be able to manage that? I strongly doubt it.

On the other hand, will the popular classes in Europe, somewhere at least, be able to overcome the crisis that they confront? I believe it possible, precisely for the reasons signifying that the political culture of certain European countries at least, different from that of the United States, could produce this rebirth of the left. The obvious precondition is that it releases itself from the virus of liberalism.

The "European project" was born as the European wing of the Atlanticist project of the United States, conceived just after the Second World War, implemented by Washington in the spirit of the "cold war", the project to which the European bourgeoisies – both weakened and apprehensive with regard to their own working classes – practically adhered unconditionally.

However the deployment of this project itself – of doubtful origin – gradually modified some important facts about the problem and the challenges. Western Europe managed, or has the means, "to make up for" its economic and technological backwardness vis-à-vis the United States. In addition, "the Soviet threat" is not there any more. Moreover, the project's deployment erased the principal and violent adversities that had marked the European history during a past century and half: the three major countries of the continent - France, Germany and Russia - are reconciled. All these evolutions are, in my opinion, positive and rich with still more potential. Certainly this deployment is inscribed over the economic bases inspired by the principles of liberalism, but of a liberalism which was tempered until the 1980s by the social dimension taken into account by and through the "social-democratic historical compromise" forcing the capital to adjust itself to the demands of social justice expressed by the working classes. Afterwards, the deployment continued in a new social framework inspired by "American-style", anti-social liberalism.

This last turn has plunged the European societies in a multi-dimensional crisis. Essentially, it is the economic crisis nothing more and nothing less, immanent in the liberal choice. A crisis was aggravated by the alignment of the European countries over the economic requirements of the North American leadership, Europe consenting until now to finance the latter's deficit with the detriment of its own interests. Then there is a social crisis, which is accentuated by the rise of resistances and the struggles of the popular classes against the fatal consequences of the liberal option. Lastly, there is the beginning of a political crisis - the refusal to align, at least unconditionally, over the US' choice: the endless war against the South.

How will the European people and states face this triple challenge?

The Europeanists are divided into fairly three different groups:

- Those who defend the liberal choice and accept the US leadership, almost unconditionally
- Those who defend the liberal choice but would wish an independent political Europe, outside the American alignment.
- Those who would wish (and fight for) "social Europe" i.e. a capitalism tempered by a new social compromise between capital and labour operating on an European scale, and simultaneously, a political Europe practising "other relations" (implying friendly, democratic and peaceful) with the South, Russia and China. The general public opinion throughout Europe has expressed, during the European Social Forum (Florence 2002), as well as at the time of the Iraq war, its sympathy for this position on principles.

There are certainly others, the "non Europeans", in the sense that they do not think any of the three pro-European options possible or even desirable. They are still at the moment minorities but certainly called to strengthen themselves. They need to strengthen upon one of the two fundamentally different options:

- A "populist" option of right, refusing the progress of political powers - and including economic-supranationals, except obviously for those of the transnational capital! –
- A popular option of left, national, citizen, democratic and social.

On what forces is based each one of these tendencies and what are their respective chances?

The dominant capital is liberal, by nature. In fact it is logically inclined towards supporting the first of the three options. Tony Blair represents the most coherent expression of what I have qualified as "the collective imperialism of the triad". The political class reunited behind the star-studded banner is disposed, if necessary, "to sacrifice the European project" – or at least to dissipate any illusion about it – by maintaining it in the original shackles: to be the European section of the Atlanticist project. But

Bush, like Hitler, does not conceive allies other than unconditional aligned subordinates. This is why important segments of the political class, including the right – and although in principle being the defenders of the interests of dominant capital – refuse to line up with the United States as yesterday they did with Hitler. If there were a possible Churchill in Europe it would be Chirac. Will he be so?

The strategy of the dominant capital can be accommodated in an "anti-Europeanism of right", which would be satisfied with demagogic nationalist rhetoric (mobilising, for example, on the theme of the immigrants, of course) while being subjected in fact to the requirements of a not specifically "European", rather globalised, liberalism. Aznar and Berlusconi constitute the prototypes of these allies of Washington. Likewise are the servile political classes of Eastern Europe.

In fact I believe the second option difficult to hold. It is however that the choice of the major European governments - France and Germany. Does it express the ambitions of a capital sufficiently powerful to be capable of emancipating itself from the US supervision? It is a question to which I do not have an answer: perhaps possible, but intuitively I would say highly improbable.

This choice is nevertheless that of allies facing the North-American adversary constituting the principal enemy of the whole humanity. I say clearly allies because I am persuaded that, if they persist in their choice, they will be driven to leave the submission to the logic of the unilateral project of capital (liberalism) and to seek alliances on the left (the only ones which can give force to their project of independence vis-à-vis Washington). The alliance between two and three groups is not impossible. Just as the great anti-Nazi alliance.

If this alliance takes form, then shall it and will it be able to operate exclusively within the European framework, all the Europeanists being unable to renounce the priority given to this framework? I do not believe it, because this framework, such as it is and will remain, systematically favours only the pro-American first group's choice. Will it then be necessary to fracture Europe and renounce its project definitively?

I do not believe it either necessary, or even desirable. Another strategy is possible: that to leave the European project "fixed" a while at its present stage of development, and to parallelly develop other axes of alliances.

I would give here a very first priority to the construction of a political and strategic alliance between Paris, Berlin and Moscow stretched to Beijing and Delhi if possible. I say clearly political with the objective to restore to international pluralism and to the UNO all their functions; and strategic, in the sense of constructing military forces to the stature of the American challenge. These three or four powers have all the means, technological and financial, reinforced by their traditions of military capacities in front of which the United States is pallid. The American challenge and its criminal ambitions compel it. But these ambitions are disproportionate. It should be proven. To constitute an anti-hegemonist front has today the similar priority, as in the past it was to constitute an anti-Nazi alliance.

This strategy would reconcile the "pro-Europeans" of the second and third groups and the "non-Europeans" of left. It would thus create favourable conditions for the later revival of a European project, integrating even probably a Great Britain liberated from its submission before the United States and an Eastern Europe relieved of its servile culture. Let us be patient, this will take much time.

There will be no progress possible of any European project as long as the US strategy is not routed.

6. Europe vis-à-vis its Arab and Mediterranean South

The Arab world and the Middle East occupy a decisive place in the hegemonist project of the United States. The response that the Europeans render to the US challenge in the region will be one of the decisive tests for the European project itself.

The question is thus to know if the residents of the Mediterranean and its extensions – Europeans, Arabs, Turks, Iranians, countries from the Horn of Africa - are oriented or not towards a representation of their safety differing from what is directed by the primacy from the American world hegemony's safeguards. The pure reason should make them move in this direction. But so far Europe has not given any active indication in this sense. One of the reasons that could explain the European inertia, is that the interests of the partners of the European Union, even if not divergent enough, are at least laden with a range of relative priorities extremely different from one country to the other. The Mediterranean

front is not central in industrial polarizations of developed capitalism: the fronts of the North Sea, of Atlantic American North-East and of central Japan have an incomparable density. For Northern Europe - Germany and Great Britain - a fortiori for the United States and Japan, the danger of chaos in the countries located on the South of the Mediterranean does not have the same gravity as for the Italians, the Spaniards and the French.

Various European powers until 1945 had Mediterranean policies suitable for each one of them, frequently conflictive. After the Second World War, the West European states did not have practically any Mediterranean and Arab policy, neither particular, nor common, other than what the alignment with the United States implied. The fact remains that, even within this framework, Great Britain and France, who had colonial possessions in the region, carried out rearguard battles to preserve their advantages. Great Britain renounced Egypt and Sudan in 1954 and, after the defeat in the adventure of the tripartite aggression of 1956, proceeded to a heart-rending reversal, and finally in 1960s abandoned its influence in the coastal countries of the Gulf. France, eliminated from Syria in 1945, finally accepted the independence of Algeria in 1962, but preserved a certain nostalgia for its influence on Maghreb and Lebanon, encouraged by the local ruling classes, at least on Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon. At the same time, the European construction did not substitute for the withdrawal of the colonial powers any common policy operating in this sense. One remembers that when, after Israel-Arab war of 1973, the oil prices were readjusted, the communitarian Europe, surprised in its sleep, rediscovered that it had "interests" in the region. But this awakening did not cause any important initiative on its part, for example, concerning the Palestinian problem. Europe remained, in this field as well as in others, irresolute and finally inconsistent. Some progress towards an autonomy with respect to the United States nevertheless were recorded during 1970s, culminating with Summit of Venice (1980); but this progress was not consolidated and rather eroded eventually during 1980s, finally disappearing with the alignment with Washington adopted during the Gulf crisis. Also the European perceptions concerning the future of the relationships between Europe and Arab-Iranian world must be studied basing on analyses appropriate for each European State.

Great Britain does not have a Mediterranean and Arab policy specific to it any more. In this field like elsewhere the British society in all its political expressions (Conservative and Labour) made the choice of an unconditional alignment with the United States. It is a fundamental historical choice, amply outmoding the conjunctural circumstances and reinforcing considerably the European submission to the requirements of the American strategy.

For some different reasons Germany too does not have any specific Arab and Mediterranean policy and will probably not seek to develop one in a visible future. Handicapped by its division and its status, the F.R.G. devoted all its efforts on its economic development, accepting to hold a low political profile on the simultaneous and ambiguous trail of the United States and "the Europeanism" of the E.E.C. Initially the reunification of Germany and its re-conquest of a full international sovereignty did not modify its behaviour rather, on the contrary, accentuated these expressions. The reason is that the dominant political forces (conservatives, liberals and social democrats) chose to give the priority to the expansion of German capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe, reducing the relative importance of a common European strategy, as much as on the political level as on that of economic integration. It remains to be known if this tendency is reversed today, as the attitude of Berlin on Iraq War seems to suggest.

French stances are much more balanced. Being at the same time Atlantic and Mediterranean country, inheritor of a colonial Empire, classified among the winners of the Second World War, France did not renounce being expressed as power. During the first decade after the war successive French governments tried to preserve the colonial positions of their country by the means of an anti-Communist and anti-Soviet Atlanticist build-up. Washington's support therefore was not sincerely acquired, as the US attitude demonstrated at the time of the tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956. The Mediterranean and Arab policy of France was then, by force of circumstances, simply retrograde. De Gaulle broke with these paleo-colonial and pro-American illusions simultaneously. He conceived then the triple ambitious project of modernizing the French economy, of leading a process of decolonisation making it possible to substitute a flexible neo-colonialism for henceforth outmoded old formulas and of compensating for weaknesses intrinsic to any average country like France by European integration. Within this latter perspective De Gaulle conceived an Europe capable of being

autonomous with respect to the United States not only on the economic and financial plain, but also at political and even, in the long term, military level, just like he conceived, also in the long run, the association of the USSR with the European construction ("Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals"). But Gaullism did not outlive its founder and, since 1968, the French political forces, both the traditional right as well as the socialist left gradually returned to their former attitudes. Their vision of European construction narrowed down to the dimension of the "Common Market", between France and Federal Germany (so much so that when the German unification was realised, people were somewhat surprised and anxious in Paris...) and with the pressing invitation to Great Britain to join EEC (forgetting that England would be the Trojan horse of the Americans in Europe). Naturally, this slide implied the abandonment of any French Arab policy worthy of name, i.e. any policy going beyond the simple defence of immediate mercantile interests. On political level, France behaved objectively in the Arab world as in sub-Saharan Africa, as an auxiliary complementary force of the strategy of American hegemony. It is in this framework that we must put the Mediterranean discourse, that calls the countries of Maghreb to associate with the European tank (in the same manner in which Turkey was associated in today's crisis), which amounts to breaking the prospect of a unitary Arab rapprochement, giving up Mashrek to the Israeli-American intervention. No doubt, the Maghrebi ruling classes are themselves responsible for sympathies, which they showed for this project. Nevertheless, the Gulf crisis gave a serious blow to this project, the popular masses of North Africa having affirmed forcefully on this occasion their solidarity with Mashrek, as that was foreseeable.

Italy, due to its geographical position, is strongly sensitive to the Mediterranean problems. That does not mean that it has - in fact - a real Mediterranean and Arab policy and, even less, that it has efficacy or autonomy. Marginalized for a long time in the capitalist development, Italy was forced to inscribe its Mediterranean ambitions in the wake of a forced alliance with other more decisive European powers. Since it achieved its unity in the middle of the last century until the fall of Mussolini in 1943, it always hesitated between alliance with the masters of the Mediterranean - i.e. Great Britain and France - or with those who could contest the Anglo-French positions, i.e. Germany.

Atlanticism, which is exercised in Italy in a vision implying a low profile foreign policy under the tutelage of the United States, has dominated the action and choices of the Italian governments since 1947. It is also dominant, although still in a more ideologised vision, in certain sectors of the secular bourgeoisie (the Republicans and Liberals, certainly socialists). Among the Christian Democrats, it is tempered by the pressure of universalism of the catholic tradition. Characteristically, papacy often took in fact less retrograde positions with regard to the Arab people (in particular on the Palestinian question) and the Third World than those of many Italian and Western governments, in general. The slide of a section of the Catholic Church towards the left, under the influence of the Latin American liberation theology, today reinforces this universalism whose secular versions are found in the pacifist, ecologist and third-worldist movements. The current Europeanist "mittel" (half) has its roots in the 19th century Italy and the North-South divide that the Italian unification did not surmount. Hooked to the interests of big Milanese capital, it suggests giving priority to the economic expansion of Italy towards the European East, in close association with Germany. Within this framework, Croatia constitutes an immediate objective today so much so that certain analysts pinpoint here the Italian expansionist aims in direction of Dalmatia. Of course, this choice would imply that Italy pursues the tradition of low international profile and above all edges out its relationship with the residents of the south of the Mediterranean. A parallel choice of Spain would further isolate France in the European concert, reducing the range to its lower common denominator. The Mediterranean current, which is always weak, in spite of the contribution which universalism could bring it, is expressed, for this reason, in a "Levantine" version: it is a matter of "making deals" here or there without being concerned with the framework of political strategy in which they are inscribed. For another, nobler, consistency, associating Italy to economic openings being inscribed within a perspective of reinforcement of its autonomy and that of its Arab partners to take shape, it would be necessary that a convergence is achieved between this project and the universalist ideals, in particular of a part of the Italian left - Communist and Christian.

The Italian right, reunified under the leadership of Berlusconi in power, has opted for enlisting under the tutelage of the Washington-London Atlantic axis. The behaviour of the police forces at the time of G-8 of Genoa (July 2001) expresses this choice clearly.

Spain and Portugal occupy an important place in the geo-strategy of world hegemony of the United States. The Pentagon considers indeed that the Azores-Canaries-Gibraltar-Balearic Islands axis is essential for monitoring the North and South Atlantic and sealing the entry in Mediterranean. The United States forged its alliance with these two countries immediately after the Second World War, without feeling least embarrassed of their fascist character. On the contrary, even the fanatical anticommunism of the dictatorships of Salazar and Franco served the US hegemonist cause well permitting the admission of Portugal in NATO and establishing on Spanish soil some American bases of prime importance. In return the United States and its European allies helped Portugal without reservation until its final defeat in its colonial war.

The democratic evolution of Spain after Franco's death was not the occasion of bringing into question the country's integration with American military system. On the contrary, even the formal adhesion of Spain with NATO (in May 1982) was an object of a real electoral blackmail implying that the participation in E.E.C. required this adhesion, to which the majority opinion was opposed.

Since then, the lining up of Madrid with the positions of Washington has been without reservation. In return, the United States would have, apparently, intervened "to moderate" the Moroccan claims on Ceuta and Melilla and even try to convince Great Britain on the subject of Gibraltar. Over this account, we can doubt the very reality of these interventions. The fact remains that the Atlanticist alignment reinforced on Madrid resulted into radical changes in the organization of Spanish armed forces, qualified by the analysts as a "swing towards the South". In Spanish tradition indeed, the army was disseminated throughout the country. Conceived furthermore - after Franco in an obvious manner - as an internal police force more than a deterrent force directed against outsiders, the Spanish army remained rustic and, in spite of the marked attention that Madrid's supreme power paid to the body of the generals and officers, it had not been an object of a true modernization, as were the case with the armies of France, Great Britain and Germany.

The socialist governments and then of right proceeded to a reorganisation of Spanish forces for facing an eventual "southern front", as they engaged in a program of modernization of the Army, aviation and navy. This swing, required by Washington and NATO, is one of the many manifestations of the new American hegemonist strategy substituting the South for the East in the "defence" of the West. It is accompanied, in Spain, by a new discourse that poses in evidence a "hypothetical enemy coming from the South", whose identification does not leave any place for doubt. Curiously, this discourse of Spanish democratic (and socialist) milieus draws on the old tradition of the Reconquista, popular in Catholic circles of the army. The change in Spanish armed forces is thus the sign of a determination of Spain to play an active role within NATO, in the framework of the reorientation of the Western strategies in forecasting a forceful intervention in the Third World. . Already the Iberian peninsula constitutes the first post of Washington-Tel Aviv axis, the principal European bridgehead of the American Rapid Deployment Force (which played a decisive part in the Gulf War), supplemented by the bases of Sicily (which too were never used until the operations directed against the Arab World: Libya, Israeli bombardment of Tunisia, etc.) and, curiously, by the facilities granted by Morocco. Of course, this Western choice empties the "Euro-Arab" discourse of all serious content. The new democratic Spain, pretending to stimulate a policy of friendship towards Latin America and the Arab world, started its movement rather in a direction opposed to the exigencies of its proclamations in principle.

The rightist government led by Aznar has confirmed this Atlanticist alignment of Madrid. Even more than Italy, Spain refuses to capitalize its Mediterranean position for the benefit of a new European policy towards the Arab world, Africa and the Third World, distancing from the requirements of the American hegemony. The French idea of a Mediterranean group in the heart of the European Union remains, in fact, suspended in the air, without any serious base of operations. Besides, on the economic level, the Spanish capital, heir to the Francoist tradition, put its principal hope of expansion in the development of agreements with Germany and Japan, invited to participate in the modernization of Catalonia.

As long as it existed, the line of East-West confrontation passed through the Balkans. The obliged affiliation of the local states in the region either to Moscow, or to Washington - the only exception being that of Yugoslavia since 1948, then of Albania since 1960 - had then toned down the local nationalist quarrels which made Balkans an European powder keg.

Turkey was placed in the western camp since 1945, after having hastily putting an end to its rather benevolent neutrality with regard to Hitlerite Germany. The Soviet claims on Kars and Ardahan in Caucasus and concerning the right to passage in the Straits, formulated by Stalin just after the victory, were warded off by Ankara thanks to Washington's decisive support. In return Turkey, a member of NATO, in spite of its little democratic political system, accommodated the American bases closest to the USSR. There is no place to doubt that the Turkish society remains that of the Third World, even if, since Ataturk, the ruling classes of this country proclaim the Europeanism of the new Turkey, knocking the door of the European Union, which does not want it. Being a faithful US ally and of its European partners, does Turkey wish to reintegrate its past and to play an active part in the Middle East, making the West pay for the services that it could render them in this region? It seems that the handicap of its Kurdish question, whose very existence it refuses to recognize, has made it hesitate in making this choice until now. It is the same for a possible Pan-Turkish option – suggested just after the First World War in certain Kemalist milieus was relegated thereafter to the museum of the history of the origins. But today the decomposition of the ex-USSR could constitute an invitation for the power of Ankara to take towards the direction of a Turcophone bloc, which dominates Central Asia from Azerbaijan to Sinkiang. Iran always expressed its real fear of such an evolution, which not only would call in question the status of Iranian Southern Azerbaijan but also the safety of its long North Asian border with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Greece did not enlist even in the anti-Soviet camp. It was constrained and forced by the British intervention superseded in 1948 by the United States. In conformity with Yalta agreements, the USSR, as we all know, abandoned to its fate the Greek resistance, led by the Communist Party, which however, in this country as in Yugoslavia and Albania, had liberated the country and conquered in fact a large majority of popular support. In this manner, the West was obliged to support the successive repressive regimes and finally a dictatorship of fascistic colonels, against this popular movement without seeing a major contradiction within its discourse, according to which NATO protected the "free world" against the "totalitarian" Satan. The return of Greece to democracy, by the electoral victory of Pasok in 1981 was likely - under these conditions - to call in question the fidelity of this country to NATO. The communitarian Europe then came to help Washington, as in the case of Spain, binding Greek candidature to the EEC with maintaining its participation in Atlantic alliance. This integration in the EEC moreover was itself still strongly discussed in the Greek opinion of the epoch. The choice of Papandreou to rejoin despite everything, after some hesitations and in spite of the option of Pasok's third-worldist and neutralist principles, seems to have initiated an irreversible evolution even at the level of mentalities, flattering the aspirations of the Greek people with modernity and Europeanism. However, the new European partners of Greece do not have great thing to offer to this country, called to remain for a long time the poor relative of the communitarian construction.

The fidelity of Athens to the Euro-American West was not even worth of a real support in its conflict with Turkey. The fact remains that, even if the Greek dictatorship had a determined responsibility in the Cypriot tragedy of 1974, the open Turkish aggression (the Attila operation) and the subsequent creation of a "Turkish republic of Cyprus", in frank violation of the island's status, were not only accepted, but probably were in agreement with the services of the Pentagon before which Europe yielded once more. It is obvious that, for the United States, the friendship of Turkey, a considerable regional military power, surpasses that of Greece, even if henceforth democratic.

In 1945, the whole of Balkan-Danubian region (Yugoslavia, Albania, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) had entered in the bosom of Moscow, either by the fact of the Soviet military occupation and the consent of the partners of Yalta, or by the fact of their own liberation and the choice of their people in Yugoslavia and Albania.

The Titoist Yugoslavia, isolated in the years 1948-1953 at the same time by the ostracism of Moscow and the Western anticommunism, had pursued successfully a strategy of construction of a "non-aligned" front, which highlighted its friendship with the Third World, particularly starting from the Bandung Conference (1955). The analysts of the Yugoslav geo-strategic thought of the time show nevertheless this curious fact that this thought was not very sensitive to the Mediterranean dimension of their country. Perhaps Italy's abandonment of its traditional ambitions regarding Dalmatia (and Albania) and the solution found in 1954 to the thorny problem of Trieste were the essence of this "historical lapse of memory". Yugoslavia since then lived itself as a State preoccupied above all by the

problems of the equilibrium of its Danubo-Balkan regional relationships and above all by those of the global equilibrium between the Super-Powers. Because in the first place, it had managed to capitalize on its benefit of double attraction – Nordist and Danubian of Croatia-Slovenia and Russian-Balkan of Serbia. The rapprochement initiated by Khrushchev and continued by his successors, recognizing the positive role of Titoist neutralism in the global arena, like the easing of the Warsaw Pact regimes as from 1960s and above all in 1970s, once guaranteed the Yugoslav security which had ceased feeling as the object of any regional conflict. The Yugoslav diplomacy could then be spread in the international arenas, giving this country a weight, out of proportion with its size. But if this diplomacy had incontestably won some points in Asia, Africa and even in Latin America, it made no progress in Europe where its calls to widen the neutralists' front never found favourable echoes. However, vis-à-vis Europe of NATO, from north till the south of the continent, between the two adverse military pacts, Sweden, Finland and Austria could have envisaged some common positive initiatives deviating from the spirit of the cold war. Later Pasok's Greece tried to widen this neutral European camp outlining in 1982 a proposal of a co-operation for de-nuclearisation of the Balkans, addressing itself simultaneously to certain member countries of one or other of the two alliances (Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria) or to the neutrals (Yugoslavia and Albania). These proposals did not find any support.

The decomposition of South-East Europe, since 1989, upset the facts of the problem. The erosion, and then the collapse of the legitimacy of these regimes - which was founded on a certain development, whatever being its limits and negative aspects – shattered the unity of the ruling class whose fractions in desperate straits tried to re-forge their legitimacy over nationalism. The conditions were met not only to allow the offensive of savage capitalism supported by the United States and the European Union, but also so that Germany retakes the initiative in the region, throwing oil on fire - by the hasty recognition of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, that the European Union itself ratified – thus accelerating the fragmentation of Yugoslavia and the civil war. Curiously, the Europeans tried to impose on Bosnia the coexistence of the communities whose separation they preached elsewhere! If it is possible that the Serbs, Croatians and Moslems coexist in this small Yugoslavia, that is Bosnia, why then they could not have coexisted in large Yugoslavia? Obviously, a strategy of this kind hardly had chances of success, which made it possible for the United States to intervene in its turn, at the heart of Europe! In the strategy of Washington, Balkans - the Caucasus - Central Asia axis extends to the Middle East.

From the analyses suggested above concerning the political-strategic choices of the countries of northern bank of the Mediterranean, I draw an important conclusion: the majority of these countries, yesterday faithful partners of the United States in the East-West conflict, remain today aligned over the strategy of American hegemony with regard to the Third World, and singularly with regard to the Arab countries and other countries of the Red Sea -Gulf region; the others (Balkan and Danubean countries), implicated yesterday in one or other manner in the East-West conflict, have ceased being active agents in the permanent North-South conflict, and has become passive objects of the Western expansionism.

Conclusion: the Empire of chaos and the Permanent war

The project of the US domination – the extension of Monroe doctrines to the entire planet - is disproportionate. This project, that I qualified for this reason as the Empire of chaos since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, will be fatally confronted with the rise of growing resistance of the nations of the old world not ready to be subjected to it. The United States then will have to behave like a "Rogue State" par excellence, substituting the international law with a recourse to the permanent war (starting with the Middle-East, but aiming beyond that, to Russia and Asia), slipping on the fascist slope (the "patriotic law" has already given powers to the police force, equal to those of Gestapo, with regard to foreigners – “aliens”).

Will the European States, partners in the system of collective imperialism of the triad, accept this drift placing them in a subordinate position? The thesis that I have developed on this question does not stress so much on the conflicts of interests of the dominant capital as on the difference that separates the political cultures of Europe from that which characterizes the historical formation of the United

States and sees in this new contradiction one of the principal reasons for the probable failure of the US project (16).

Notes

- (1) Samir Amin, *Class & Nation: Historically & in the Current Crisis*, New York: New York University; Samir Amin (1989), *Eurocentrism*, New York: Monthly Review Press; Samir Amin, *Au delà du capitalisme sénile: pour un XXI ème siècle non américain*, PUF 2001
- (2) For the critique of post-modernism and Negri's theses see Samir Amin (1997), *Critique de l' air du temps*, Paris: Harmattan; Samir Amin (2004), *The Liberal Virus*, New York: NYU Press.
- (3) Samir Amin (2000), *L'hégémonisme des Etats Unis et l'effacement du projet européen*, Paris: Harmattan
- (4) Samir Amin et al (1992), *Les enjeux stratégiques en Méditerranée* Part 1, Paris Harmattan 1992
- (5) As for example: Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin (2003), *America is back*, Paris: Bayard
- (6) Samir Amin (1989), *La faillite du développement*, Paris: Harmattan
- (7) Samir Amin (1996), *Les défis de la mondialisation*, Paris: Harmattan
- (8) Samir Amin (1994), *L 'ethnie à l'assaut des nations*, Paris: Harmattan
- (9) Emmanuel Todd (2003), *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Empire*, New York: Columbia University Press
- (10) The National Security Strategy of the United States 2002
- (11) Chiefly note 2
- (12) Samir Amin (1996)
- (13) Samir Amin (1992), *Empire of Chaos*, New York: MR Press
- (14) Samir Amin (1996)
- (15) Samir Amin and Ali El Kenz (2003), *Le monde arabe: enjeux sociaux, perspectives méditerranéennes*, Paris: Harmattan
- (16) Samir Amin (2004), *The Liberal Virus*, New York: New York University Press; Samir Amin (2003), The American Ideology, *Al Ahram Weekly*, 15-21 May 2003