

Global Encirclement and Prospects of Socialism in the 21st Century

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DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2023-21-4-96-122

Abstract

This article aims to contribute to the discussion about the ongoing transformation of the present unipolar, hegemonistic capitalist world order to a multipolar and fairer global system. The author claims that this transformation is taking place through the encirclement of the imperialist center by the developing and emerging countries of the global periphery. Previous waves of global encirclement are described and the reasons for its decline in the 20th century are analyzed. The paper also discusses the role played by China and Russia in the struggle for a multipolar world in the 21st century. The author argues that only a non-hegemonic multipolar world order can guarantee nations an independent choice of their path of socio-economic development and open the way for a socialism-oriented transformation in all countries.

Keywords: global countermovement, global encirclement, hegemony, imperialism, socialism, multipolarity, China, Russia.

This paper is an attempt to interpret the history of capitalism from the perspective of the underdeveloped, colonized and exploited developing countries that form the periphery and semi-periphery (the Global South) of the capitalist world order. It argues that this global periphery can overcome imperialism by means of a historical “global countermovement,” to paraphrase Karl Polanyi (1944), that is, by building up a step-by-step encirclement of the imperialist center (the Global North—North America, Western Europe, Japan, and their closest allies) with alternative socio-economic forms of the periphery, and deprive the center states of world capitalism of the natural and human resources of the periphery which they have been exploiting to become rich.

As is known, the classical analysis of capitalism was made by the political economy scholars of the past and perfected by Karl Marx in the scientific theory of socialism. This theory was rooted in the recognition of the economic reasons for alienation and the creation of profit by labor value. With the emergence of the neoclassical theory of economics in the 1870s, the resource of profit was swept under the carpet. However, this could not prevent capitalism from producing its inherent contradictions which fueled the resistance of the working class, further encouraged by the successes of the first socialist state—the Soviet Union. Capitalism could be rescued only through intellectual disarmament of the working class and so it needed a social theory that would be critical enough of the system to attract the working class, and pessimistic enough to discourage revolution.

Such a social theory began to evolve in the 1920s under the label of “Critical Theory” developed by the Frankfurt School. Despite its merits regarding the understanding of fascism, authoritarianism and cultural oppression under capitalism, the Critical Theory purged the concept of social classes and their struggle from analysis altogether and eventually led to pessimism, apathy and anticommunism of the working classes in the West. As Ingar Solty (2020) notes, “Horkheimer and Adorno thus became increasingly pessimistic with regards to the working class’s ability to overthrow capitalism. In other words, they became Marxist heretics.”

The Frankfurt School gave rise to the “neo-Marxist” Western Left (also known as the New Left and including Cultural Marxists) who never dealt with the dynamics of the world order that determined the diminishing revolutionary fervor of the Western proletariat. Nor did it devote due attention to the revolutionary capacity of the working classes (workers and peasants) of the Global South and their relationship with the Western proletariat. They blamed the failure of the revolutions after WWI on the cultural characteristics of the advanced capitalist European countries. Placing focus on alienation and negation, the Critical Theory gutted the revolutionary vein from the Marxist theory. Today, the Western Left theory completely ignores analysis of imperialism, international relations, geopolitics, and world economy. It concentrates solely on the socio-psychological and cultural features of Western societies.

Therefore, scholars adhering to the Western neo-Marxist traditions cannot be helpful in producing a world-scale analysis of the ongoing fundamental systemic changes. Such an analysis can be useful provided a scholar 1) frames its conception with regard to the world system in its contemporary form, that is, imperialism, 2) takes into account the economic factors and mechanisms that make this imperialist world system function, and 3) has a conviction that this world can be changed.

These are the authors who have never left the ground of Marx’s historical materialism, have applied it to concrete situations, as the Marxian scientific method requires, and have never turned their back on the revolutionary efforts of any nation, however violent and stumbling they (usually) are.

Regarding imperialism, the main guides for such scholars are Vladimir Lenin and his followers. For example, contrary to the Frankfurt School, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy (1966, p. 108) do not deny the self-destructing nature of capitalism, instead they claim that “the normal state of the monopoly capitalist economy is stagnation... Left to itself... monopoly capitalism would sink deeper and deeper into a bog of chronic depression.” They also recognize that the leading imperialist state, the United States, can reduce the exploitation of its

own workers by extracting surplus from the developing countries, and they state that foreign investment is “a method of pumping surplus out of underdeveloped areas” (Ibid, p. 105) Building upon Lenin’s categorization, Ervin Rozsnyai (2002) introduced the notion of ‘transnational monopoly capitalism,’ a new form of capitalism after the 1970s. Since then, imperialism has evolved even further.

Regarding transformation from capitalism to socialism my starting point is that in the age of globally super-organized capitalism (which I will describe below in more detail) the preconditions for socialism must be created first on the global level. As socialism can only prevail in independent countries, the first step towards it must be to eliminate the dominance of the imperialist center over the periphery. Only then an opportunity for a national class struggle may arise for individual countries. Below are a few remarks about the tasks and dilemmas of the long road to socialism on a national level.

First, transformation begins with the achievement of real national independence against a very strong opponent (organized forces of the neoliberal world order), continues with indigenous economic development oriented towards the needs of the population, and ends in an egalitarian state, where the people’s community consciousness is very high. To be successful, such a transformation project must have full-hearted support of the people and facilitated by friendly cooperation with other nations. Yet most important is a strong government able to lead the socialist transformation and protect it against imperialism militarily, economically, and ideologically. So, any criticism of the “party-state” of socialist-oriented or independence-seeking countries must be evaluated on this basis. Disregard of the need for a strong state in the initial—albeit quite lengthy—period of social transformation leads to contradictory views, which have more in common with the Critical Theory (and its creation, Cultural Marxism) than with the revolutionary practice. Alain Badiou (2006), for instance, who identifies himself as a communist, rejects the Stalinist-Maoist-Leninist party-states, which were, in fact, able to maintain power in the face of imperialism. Instead, he champions the Mexican Chiapas, Badiou’s own civil organization (L’Organisation Politique), and the

Polish dockworkers' Solidarność (Brancaleone, 2012) (incidentally, the former two have remained isolated, while the latter has proved to be a Trojan horse of the capitalist restoration in Poland).

Second, if socialist revolution takes place in a (semi)periphery country, the first task is accelerated development of the production forces. Deng Xiaoping, who introduced market reforms in China, emphasized that the fulfilment of the basic needs constitutes the foundation of a socialist orientation (Deng, 1984). Political rights come only second and can expand proportionally with the socio-economic and cultural empowerment of people. (After the Mao-era China's central government made efforts to revitalize self-governance in urban and rural areas and by the early 2000s, village committees had been established in about 80 percent of all villages (Chen et al., 2007; Chen, 2005)).

Third, the acceleration of economic development needs central planning. On the long road to socialism this can be combined with the use of market forces under the control of the socialist party-state. If left to themselves, market forces take control over society, and socialist transformation fails. The failure of Eastern European experiments, on the one hand, and China's state-party path, on the other, provide evidence of this principle in practice.

Socialist transformation is a very practical problem. So, rather than looking to arm-chair revolutionaries, it is better to rely on those scholars who had the closest possible involvement and connection with revolutions of their time. The most prominent of such theoreticians were Marx, Lenin, Mao, and, more recently, Samir Amin.

MAIN FEATURES OF CONTEMPORARY IMPERIALISM

The world has been living in an era of imperialism since the end of the 19th century. More than a century ago, Lenin identified monopoly capitalism as the essence of imperialism. Since then, imperialism has changed its form three times. After the Great Depression it became state monopoly capitalism, after the crisis of the 1970s, it emerged as transnational monopoly capitalism, and with the collapse of the Soviet Union it took the form of unipolar, hegemonic, transnational

monopoly capitalism (UHTMC) led by the United States. Samir Amin (2003) called this global system of capitalism “collective imperialism” of the “triad” (North America, Western Europe, and Japan), with the U.S. playing the hegemonic role.

This imperialist world order has been challenged by a recurring global countermovement that holds the potential for socialism. The theoretical pillars that help explain the reasons for and ways of this ongoing change can be found in Marx’s, Lenin’s, Mao’s, and Samir Amin’s ideas.

1. ***The long road.*** The road from capitalism to socialism is long, rugged, and paved with successes and failures (Marx, 1875; Lenin 1917a; Mao, 1957; Amin 1990). The struggle against the imperialist powers begins from unequal positions, which can be changed only slowly, requires the strength of the state and starts with state capitalism (Lenin 1921). As Mao said (1938a), this is “an arduous and protracted war.” How true these words are we can see today, in the hostile policy of the U.S.-led Global North against all rising and independence-seeking countries, which culminates in the escalating cold and hot wars between the U.S. and China, and the U.S. and Russia.
2. ***The weakest link.*** Every system is as strong as its weakest link. The revolutionary forces can break through the chain of ruling power at its weakest link (Lenin, 1917b). Russia was a semi-periphery country when the 1917 Proletarian Revolution broke out. China was even less developed, being a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country at the time of its peasantry-based socialist revolution. This implies that the change of the global system of capitalism inevitably starts in its semi-colonial, semi-feudal or even semi-tribal periphery, with anti-imperialist, national liberation struggles for independence.
3. ***“Delinking” by the working people.*** Independence inevitably means a break from the center, or “delinking” to use Amin’s term. It is essentially “the refusal to submit national-development strategy to the imperatives of ‘globalization’” (Amin, 1987, p. 435). The success of delinking requires a self-

sustaining economy, which is hard to build for dependent and underdeveloped countries amid hostile and selfish behavior of the center accustomed to living on the periphery's resources. So, genuine independence requires a strong state and increased effort of the working people (who are typically peasants in the periphery). The peasantry usually suffers from multiple forms of exploitation by the national feudalist lords, tribal chiefs as well as local and foreign capitalists in the periphery. They will not fight for national independence if they cannot hope for a better life from it. This makes land distribution a primary task in the revolution (Mao, 1927; Amin, 1977).

4. ***Encircling the cities from the countryside.*** Based on the experience of the Chinese people's fight against the Kuomintang and the Japanese imperialists, Mao (1937) elaborated the principles of the guerrilla war. That war had a clear political goal and relied on the revolutionary rural forces (the peasantry) fighting against the cities as the headquarters of more affluent counter-revolutionary forces. Due to its self-sustaining economy, the countryside was independent from the cities and could gradually encircle and finally occupy them. This "encirclement thesis" can also be applied to the international social struggle, where the anti-imperialist and revolutionary forces of the Global South—and those of the underprivileged in the Global North—play the role of "the countryside" able to reach self-sufficiency and independence, while the capitalists of the Global North and their allies play the role of "cities."
5. ***Nationalism for independence.*** Any struggle for independence is built on national feelings. Nationalism is bad if it attacks and oppresses other nations. However, if it aims at independence from the exploitation of the nation by foreign powers, nationalism—or patriotism—is progressive and serves the interests of the working people. Imperialist states have used nationalism for building and protecting their markets and subjugating other nations in order to continue capital accumulation on an ever-greater scale. Today the same

developed countries reject nationalism, thereby satisfying their own needs. The capitalist class of the center countries has become the capitalist class of the world whose current interest is to get access to all markets, destroying protection measures and erasing cultural differences to facilitate the free movement of goods, natural resources, and labor. It is obvious that the development of the periphery requires conditions similar to those that the center countries had at the time of their initial development. The nationalism of the periphery, if it is used for national independence, is different from the nationalism of the imperialist states. The struggle for independence is national in character, so class struggle must be subordinated to it. More precisely, as Mao (1938b) explained, class struggle takes on the form of the struggle for independence and “the demands of the national struggle (the need to resist Japan) should be the point of departure for all types of class struggle.”

FOUR THESES ABOUT THE DECAY OF IMPERIALISM

The above postulates lead us to four theses about the decay of imperialism.

***Thesis 1.** Applying delinking, the center capital (the global capitalist class) can be “suffocated,” that is, be deprived of its privilege to access the resources of the peripheries and use them for its own advancement and technological superiority, and for financing the relative wellbeing of its own population, including its working class. This suffocation is spreading together with the delinking of the periphery, i.e., with the decrease of the dependence of the countries of the Global South on the Global North.*

***Thesis 2.** On a global level, class struggle takes the form of the twin processes of delinking and suffocation, which are the essence of the encirclement of the Global North by the Global South. This also means that the global class struggle is in essence an anti-imperialist fight. This fight takes different forms, peaceful and military alike. It lasts as long as imperialism exists and until the resources of the Global South are reclaimed from the Global North.*

Thesis 3. The successes of the anti-imperialist fight of the Global South and the concomitant strengthening of the “*suffocation*” of the center capital will lead to a decline of the standard of living in the North that can open the eyes of its working classes to the real nature of capitalism, and thus may cause them to revolutionize. One could see elements of this awakening in March 2023, when the number and strength of the popular protests against the war mongering and U.S. sanctions policy was apparently increasing in Europe.

Thesis 4. *The global revolution progresses through waves of national, local and partial revolutionary changes, attacks and withdrawals, victories and defeats.* These are the concrete acts of the global class struggle, which has taken place since the 20th century with wavering success. It was first led by the Soviet Union, then strengthened by the collaboration of the developing countries in the Spirit of Bandung and in the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement. Now, in the 21st century, there is a new wave of encirclement by the leadership of China and Russia and their cooperation partners in the Global South within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or recently enlarged BRICS. This new wave has been accelerated by the boomerang effects of the sanctions that the Global North imposed on Russia because of its military operation in Ukraine and also because of the provocation of China by the U.S. over Taiwan.

Delinking, suffocation, encirclement, and global class struggle are different expressions used to name the same anti-imperialist process. To describe the dynamism of the present world I will use Karl Polanyi's terms 'global double movement' and 'global countermovement,' applying them on a global level. Polanyi introduced these terms in 1944 in his book *The Great Transformation: Economic and Political Origins of Our Time* (Ibid), in which he described the evolution of free market capitalism over the period from the Industrial Revolution in England in the late 18th century until the rise of fascism. In his view, the transformation of feudalism to capitalism was a movement that worked for spreading the free market (“disembedding” the economy) and prevailed over the countermovement that tried to hinder the process by protecting society.

Polanyi also showed that these opposite developments were an organic feature of capitalism, and that the countermovement was inevitable and involved very different actors—the working class, civil organizations, the state, and even certain business circles.

Essentially, the global dominance of the market over society is UHTMC (unipolar, hegemonic transnational monopoly capitalism—the present form of imperialism) and the global form of the countermovement is anti-imperialism. Similar to what Polanyi found, there are also very different actors in the global anti-imperialist countermovement: left-wing workers' parties, trade unions, civil organizations, states and even national capitalist classes and governments, which feel to be oppressed by the transnational capital and its superstructure. However, history shows that the countermovement cannot be successful if it is led by national capitalists. If the free market or the countermovement against it is not powerful enough, fascism arises and breaks with both the free market and democracy. In Polanyi's time, fascism reached its peak in German Nazism. Today, in the age of UHTMC, the same role is performed on the global level by global networks and international institutions of the transnational corporations, as well as NATO led by the United States.

WAVES OF THE GLOBAL ENCIRCLEMENT

The nature and instability of capitalism were obvious from the very beginning. The enslaved people in the colonies could only be kept under control with violence, and the situation of the working class in the colonial powers was only slightly better. The racist notion of “white [European/North American] supremacy” was promulgated by the colonizers to justify the rightfulness of the enormities committed by white colonizers against the black people in developing countries. The “Western culture” and the “European values” have been discredited by these practices forever. As Frantz Fanon wrote, “every time Western values are mentioned they produce in the [African] native a sort of stiffening or muscular lockjaw. ... when the native hears a speech about Western culture, he pulls out his knife—or at least he makes sure it is within reach” (Fanon, 1963 [1961], p. 43).

The social alternative emerged at the very historical moment when the international regime of capitalism—the Westphalian system of the contesting nation states—consolidated. In 1871, the working class of Paris grabbed power and attempted to create a society that favored working people. Although the Paris Commune was defeated, the danger it posed to the capitalist order forced the bourgeoisie to make some concessions to the working class. The fear of a recurring revolution inspired the social policy legislation, first in Bismarckian Germany and later in other European countries, while the oppression of the colonies remained intact.

The Paris Commune was the first and last action of the working class of the global center that proved its ability to surmount, even if only for a while, the capitalist class. From the mid-19th century, the working class of the center, fed by the exploitation of the global periphery, slowly evolved to a global “labor aristocracy.” Engels realized this already in the 1850s: “...the English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that the ultimate aim of this most bourgeois of all nations would appear to be the possession, alongside the bourgeoisie, of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat. In the case of a nation which exploits the entire world this is, of course, justified to some extent” (Engels, 1858, p. 343). In the 1910s, Lenin developed this thesis further while explaining the roots of opportunism and reformism and applying his “weakest link” theory to the revolution (Lenin, 1917b and 1919; see also Hobsbawm, 1970).

Indeed, the next successful experiment to overthrow capitalism that came from the periphery—Russia in October 1917—proved to be much more durable. Just before the Russian revolution, capitalism had transformed into imperialism that could only be overcome on a global level. The young proletarian state had to defend itself not only against its own domestic feudal-capitalist classes but also against the troops of fourteen capitalist nations. The alliance of the Russian proletariat and peasantry was not only able to protect their power but also to defeat fascism in WWII. By doing so, the Soviet Union facilitated liberation wars of the colonies and the spread of the socialist idea all over the world. This was the first wave of the global encirclement of the center,

the headquarters of global capitalism, by the periphery, that was open to socialism.

The eventual failure of the first wave of encirclement was due, partly, to the perpetual attacks of imperialism, and partly to the mistakes made by the vanguard party of the USSR. The latter were rooted in the difficulties and contradictions that all resource-poor peripheries must face on the long road to socialism. During such a fundamental social change, when politics must enjoy priority over economy, the committed, audacious, and theoretically prepared leadership is of utmost importance. This leadership must be ready for reforms and changes but never lose sight of the ultimate goal, and never deny its historical predecessors in the revolutionary fight for socialism.

Imperialism has only presented its nature when struggling against socialism, but the mistakes of the socialist parties of Eastern Europe were avoidable. The inflection point in the progress of socialism in the Soviet Union and, consequently, all over the world, was rooted in the destalinization launched by Nikita Khrushchev. His policy, built on the condemnation of the mistakes and crimes committed in the first decades of the USSR and on disregard for the difficulties of that period, resulted in the rise of revisionism, including the opportunistic idea of peaceful coexistence with imperialism. This led to a turn towards Western markets, increased technological dependency upon them, and weakened the country's self-reliance. The balance between the opposing movements of the free market and the countermovement against it shifted in favor of the former. Free market rules were applied without the enforcement of limits set by solid theoretical considerations. On the other hand, Soviet leaders wasted the scarce resources on the arms race, particularly after U.S. President Ronald Reagan launched the Star Wars project (Strategic Defense Initiative) in 1983.

These developments gave capitalism an opportunity to expand and recover, just when the fall of the rate of profit accelerated during the crisis of the 1970s (Brenner, 2006, Basu, et al., 2022, Roberts, 2022). The fall of profits forced the Global North to intensify its efforts to exploit the resources of the Global South and smash the anti-imperialist movements there. The USSR, under its revisionist leadership, looked

the other way, and left the forces of the global countermovement unorganized. This allowed the imperialist center to regain its strength by forcing the spread of neoliberal ideology throughout the world. The free market prevailed.

The 1970s disrupted the self-organization of the Global South, and the debt crisis of the 1980s ruined its economy. The era of the “disillusionment of the Left” (Dwyer and Zeilig, 2012, p. 10) arrived. The failure of the Eastern European socialist experiment in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 killed the hope of socialism, and the political Left integrated into pro-capitalist individualism and neo-liberalism. Under the unipolar, hegemonic, transnational monopoly capitalism, the world became a much more unstable and dangerous place, inequalities soared, and many countries were destroyed by imperialism parading under the pretext of protecting democracy. The capitalist center was now free to assert its interests worldwide.

In these circumstances, the resistance took mostly local and civilian forms, and led to the foundation of the World Social Forum in 2001. This tide lasted until the 2008 crisis, after which the austerity policies and the suppression of the popular protests burned out the energy of the masses for a while. But the victory of capital proved to be a pyrrhic one. The 2010s brought a new wave of protests (Arab Spring, riots in London, Los Indignados movement in Spain, Occupy movement in the U.S. and elsewhere, etc.)

With the emergence of transnational corporations in the 1980s and the collapse of the USSR in 1991, capitalism reached its zenith in the form of UHTMC. The prophetic words of the Communist Manifesto became a true reality: “The bourgeoisie ... compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image” (Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848).

In the era of super concentrated and centralized—unipolar and hegemonic—transnational monopoly capitalism, when digitalization pushed up the organic composition of capital and pushed down the rate of profit, the accumulation of capital had no real sense anymore.

This was reflected in the irrational growth of the financial sector and the over-accumulation of financial assets. As the 2008 crisis dragged on, the Global North was unable to launch a new production cycle with a powerful recovery. At this stage capitalism entered the phase of senility, “which could open a new era of massacre”—warned Samir Amin (2012).

The fall of the profit rate forced the leaders of global capitalism to seek additional cheap natural resources and speed up the war machine. This led to the U.S. provocation of Russia in 2013-2014, which eventually developed into Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine (Baud, 2022, Dunford, 2023). On one side, there is the United States waging a proxy war in Ukraine against Russia and on the other side, there is Russia waging an anti-imperialist war against U.S.-led imperialism in a (proto-)fascist country (Artner, 2023). This clash is a turning point in the history of imperialism since it has forced and accelerated the delinking processes in the Global South, including Russia. The sanctions policy and delivery of weapons to Ukraine by the West have forced the countries of the Global South to step up trade and financial, technological, and security cooperation among themselves. Suffice it to say that dozens of countries have applied for BRICS membership officially or informally and six of them—Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—will become full members from January 1, 2024. A further enlargement of BRICS is also on the way. The opposition between the old and new forces of the world order has been further aggravated by the United States when it sent House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in August 2022. China’s response was firm and comprehensive. It broke economic and technical cooperation with the U.S. and launched a comprehensive military drill around Taiwan that simulated an attack against the island. Pakistan, a nuclear power, has expressed its support for China.

The Ukraine war has revealed the deepest contradictions of the present world order and has given an impetus to the global encirclement of the center of the capitalist world by the global periphery. UHTMC has been challenged by the forces of a multipolar world, and the global double movement has intensified. The awakening of the people

around the world can initiate a new wave of popular anti-imperialist emancipation movements. Such a move, together with independence-seeking governments from the Global South, can lead to a coalition of the powers of the global anti-imperialist countermovement and, ultimately, to a multipolar world.

WHY GLOBAL ANTI-IMPERIALIST COUNTERMOVEMENT LOST MOMENTUM IN THE 1970S

The global encirclement through the self-organization of the Global South began in the 1950s in Asia, continued with the intensification of Afro-Asian relations, and quickly spread in the 1960s to Latin America, a continent that added a more radical revolutionary strand to the movement. However, in the 1970s, this self-organization lost momentum. This section briefly discusses the reasons for this decline, with a focus on the failures and difficulties of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries.

NAM was successful in the first fifteen years of its existence because it represented the objective interests of the Global South: to get free from the limits imposed on them by the arms race of the superpowers, and to ensure their right to independent development. NAM brought this agenda to the international level, supported the anti-colonial struggle everywhere around the world, facilitated cooperation in the Global South, and successfully forced the establishment of nuclear-free zones. To date, five nuclear-free zones have been established and four of them cover the entire Africa and Latin-America (ACA, 2022). This was a strong anti-imperialist global countermovement.

However, NAM proved unable to go beyond its initial limits (national capitalist development) and could not improve the situation of the Third World. This could have been possible with a more radical social project aimed towards socialism. However, the socialist perspective was disqualified in the 1980s, partly because of attacks from imperialism, but mainly due to the unfavorable internal class relations in the Global South. These factors hindered a breakthrough towards socialism—apart from a handful of “self-styled ‘Marxist’” (Amin, 2006, p. 178) countries such as China, Cuba, Vietnam, and North Korea.

Real independence cannot be achieved in the absence of a genuine socialist perspective. This is because real independence itself is revolutionary. It is unfeasible without delinking, that is, establishing stable economic self-reliance that enables a country to choose its own social-political system and steadily improve the lives of its people (Amin, 1977, 1985 and 1987). The ruling elites of the Global South did not treat the livelihood of their people as a top priority and were afraid of mobilizing people's energy. Also, they failed to boost economic and social cooperation between nations with similar ambitions of independence, although it could have helped them achieve the desired collective delinking and self-sufficiency. The oil crisis of the 1970s showed that without self-reliance, all periods of "catching up" by the peripheries are inevitably disrupted by the crises of the Global North (a phenomenon that bourgeois economics knows as the "middle income trap").

In the absence of delinking, the neo-liberal course after the 1970s swiftly swept away the results of the national development policies of the Global South. Upon closer examination six Catch 22s can be identified, which the Global South was not able to overcome.

Catch 22 No.1. ***The trap of import-substitution.*** Indigenous development means import substitution. The latter requires industrialization for which an underdeveloped country must import machines, equipment, spare parts, and know-how from the center countries. Imports must be counterbalanced by exports that serve the needs of their destination countries. An underdeveloped country can meet these requirements only with the goods it has—raw materials and agricultural products. In doing so, the scarce resources of the underdeveloped country are invested in the economic branches that are favorable for the export markets, instead of the branches that the indigenous socio-economic development would demand. The conditions of underdevelopment are reproduced.

Catch 22 No. 2. ***The trap of the burden of people-friendly development imposed on the people.*** The Global North can fuel its development with natural and human resources from other countries. The Global South does not have the same possibility. A social-system-

changing country can rely only on its own land and its own working people. Revolutionary governments, aiming towards indigenous development, are forced to demand extra efforts of those people, whom they want to lift out of their exploited working-class position. Forced industrialization, which is a must to fulfill people's needs, imposes a burden on the environment as well. All this can lead to severe contradictions between the working people and the independence-seeking government.

Catch 22 No. 3. *The trap of scarce resources.* To lessen the burden and satisfy the needs of the working population, the efficiency of production must rise. However, in the beginning, in the absence of high technology, only the laborers—industrial workers and peasants—can improve efficiency through their hard work, expertise, and intelligence. To prepare people for this task, they must be educated. However, in an underdeveloped country there are not enough properly educated teachers who can perform this task.

Catch 22 No. 4. *The trap of state bureaucracy.* The previous problem is very similar to state bureaucracy, which has the task of managing indigenous development. Bureaucrats who are well educated belong to the old regime's elite and are usually not very keen to build a new society. However, officials who were part of the previously oppressed classes (and might be more eager to forge a new society) have only limited expertise and are likely to be less productive and to make more mistakes. This might work against the interests of the population and destroy people's trust in their state and their readiness to go along the chosen developmental path.

Catch 22 No 5. *The trap of bourgeois nationalism.* The national liberation struggle is built inevitably on nationalism. Nationalism can be turned against imperialism and developed further to aim towards socialism. This has happened in some cases, like China, Vietnam, Cuba, and North Korea, and can happen in other countries that are led by socialist governments (e.g., Venezuela and Colombia). Similar development can also be possible in the case of Russia in the coming years, or probably in some Eastern European countries, such as Serbia. However, in most cases the elites of the Global South used nationalism only to

ensure their rule and access to the sources of wealth, while maintaining and serving the interests of foreign companies. This bourgeois nationalism has prevented NAM-countries and European semi-periphery countries, for example Hungary, from left-wing radicalization and from achieving real independence from the Global North.

Catch 22 No 6. *The trap of strong leadership without communists.* The previously discussed traps can only be overcome by strong political leadership (party and government). This does not exclude, but inevitably limits, democracy and lessens people's trust in their government, at least in the beginning, when the population's general level of education is low. The precondition for turning nationalism in a progressive, society-changing direction and engaging people in this difficult task is the existence of a communist party. Whenever a national liberation struggle has been led by a less radical coalition of anti-imperialist forces, the efforts towards independence resulted in neo-colonial status and oppression of people.

International cooperation based on the solidarity of peoples can mitigate these problems by distributing the burden in the historic process of eliminating colonialism. Such cooperation underlies the potential of NAM. To exploit this potential, NAM must be open to emancipatory movements and organizations of the people and must integrate them in its consultative and executive activities both on the national and international levels. Additionally, the NAM countries must provide all peasants with access to land and seek to achieve stable food production independent from world market speculation. Furthermore, the NAM countries must forge closer links with the biggest non-NAM countries of the Global South, first of all China, Russia, and Brazil. Close economic and financial cooperation with BRICS—which would need to be enlarged with NAM and non-NAM members—would be very beneficial as well.

CHINA'S AND RUSSIA'S ROLE IN THE 21ST-CENTURY GLOBAL ENCIRCLEMENT

Among the countries wishing to move towards a multipolar world, China and Russia stand out.

In the late 1970s, when global capitalism changed its mode of functioning by releasing market forces to the detriment of the global working class, China made a similar, albeit controlled, turn with the opposite result. From Deng Xiaoping's marketization reforms to Xi Jinping's increased state control over rapidly expanding Chinese private capital, the Communist Party of China drew a developmental curve that lifted China's status from a poor country to a global power, where national poverty has disappeared, and the livelihood of the population has improved considerably. This is similar to and even more successful and lasting than the Soviet Union's achievements in the 20th century.

The Chinese solution to underdevelopment is what they call "socialism with Chinese characteristics," that is, state capitalism under the control of the Communist Party. The key sectors of the economy, such as mining, energy, transport equipment, basic materials, and banking are dominated by state-owned companies that are regulated by central planning. This system ensures a stable and high level of fixed investments and a crisis-free business environment for private enterprises, demonstrating exceptional performance.

The acceleration China's economic growth coincided with the expansion and deepening of its international, political and economic relations (for example, the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization together with Russia in 2001, the launch of the Go Global strategy in 2002 aimed at increasing Chinese investments abroad, the growing number of strategic cooperation agreements since 2004, the Belt and Road Initiative launched in 2013, wide cooperation with ASEAN, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, etc.). Today, China has 24 different types of partnership with major regional African, Asian, and European organizations and 78 countries (Li and Ye, 2019). China is a more significant partner to most of the countries in the Global South than the United States is.

Furthermore, China did not fall into recession either in 2008 or during the COVID-19 crisis; moreover, it survived the latter with only three deaths per million people. China donated a substantial number of vaccines to the developing countries, while the Global North was too slow to deliver on its promises of help (Shumei and Yuwei, 2021).

Today, China has both the ability and the will to create strong development-friendly relations with the countries of the Global South. Most of the latter welcome this opportunity. This is clearly seen in the United Nations, where these countries consistently vote identically with China and against U.S. anti-China policies on issues concerning Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea (Ross, 2021).

China has pursued active foreign economic diplomacy, particularly since Xi Jinping's rise to power. Infrastructure is the basis of economic development and since the launch of the Belt and Road initiative, Chinese infrastructure projects have been rapidly expanding in the Global South, particularly in Africa. Colonialist countries adjusted infrastructures in their colonies according to their own needs for natural resources. In contrast, China has been involved in many urbanization and road-network projects which, through their multiplier and accelerator effects, have contributed to the economic growth and structural upgrading of many African countries. Since 2011, China has been the biggest infrastructure developer in Africa. By doing so, the Asian giant has built its own socio-economic development infrastructure and now, hopefully, it will help Africa follow the track. This is, however, no easy task. In China, the fast growth of infrastructure, industrialization and urbanization were facilitated by public ownership of land. This is not the case in Africa, where the internal class relations hinder land reforms.

Although there is much criticism of the Chinese direct investment abroad because of poor employment conditions and the increased public debt placed upon the host countries, the overall opinion of China among Africans is positive. Firstly, because China prefers intergovernmental contracts while not demanding changes in the host countries' policies or institutions, and, secondly, because the Chinese infrastructure projects have obvious positive developmental effects. African governments believe that China, being a developing country like themselves, is led by more unselfish motivations than the countries of the Global North. The "debt trap" allegations have proved to be false since the Chinese loans to the poor African countries are usually interests free, and, in 2022, China even forgave \$10 billion worth of

loans to 17 African countries (Onukwue, 2022). As far as the African people are concerned, they are aware that the Global North has been exploiting them and they have suffered the condescending attitude of the ex- and neo-colonizing powers which have always held the belief that their society and culture is superior to those of Africa. This relationship is in contrast to their relations with China, a country which seeks win-win deals. The Africans also feel that Chinese culture is closer to their own than that of the Global North (Pigato and Tang, 2015, Cheng, 2022).

Russia's economy is smaller and less developed than China's. That is why now Russia's role in the global encirclement and the transformation of the world is largely of military nature. Russia, once again in history, has taken upon itself the burden of fighting against the imperialist forces in the proxy war in Ukraine.

Economically, Russia is forced to "delink" from the UHTMC center as a result of the Western sanctions. This makes the Russian government put greater emphasis on domestic production and self-reliance by speeding up industrialization and technological innovation and raising the standard of living. Thus, the poisoning sanctions may well prove to be a medicine for overcoming the country's economic and social structural weaknesses. Generous allocations from public funds to investment and social projects show that this process is underway (Devonshire-Ellis, 2023, TMT, 2022). If implemented, this policy will elevate the country to a higher level of development and strengthen its role as a global player in the global economy.

The Ukraine crisis has boosted Russia's international cooperation with the Global South, above all with China. In March 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin met in Moscow and declared that they would jointly work to create a more just multipolar world order and expressed their will to build a Greater Eurasian Partnership through cooperation agreements in many fields. Other examples of the deepening cooperation in the Global South are the 7,200-km-long multimodal network of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) that connects India, Afghanistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia up to the Baltic Sea, and the Shanghai

Cooperation Organization (SCO) which includes Russia, China, and many Asian countries. It covers a huge, resource-rich territory with fabulous oil and gas reserves and symbolizes the way in which a new multipolar world should be built. Importantly, the SCO is “a historically unique alliance of five non-Western civilizations—Russian, Chinese, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist—and, because of that, it is capable of evolving into the basis for a collective security system in Eurasia” (Escobar, 2009). New members and dialogue partners (including Iran and Belarus) have joined the SCO since Russia started its military operation in Ukraine. Similarly, in the summer of 2022, the five littoral Caspian states (Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan) reiterated their commitment to forbid armed forces that do not belong to the littoral states to be deployed in the region (TNA, 2022). Also, at that time, the Eurasian Economic Union (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia), and ASEAN (ten South-East Asian nations) continued strengthening their cooperation. BRICS has recently expanded to include six new members that made BRICS+ not only considerably larger than the G7 in terms of GDP, land and population but also a major energy and food supplier with 44.35% of global oil reserves and about half of the global total harvest of wheat and rice. BRICS+ is working to establish a common currency that could challenge the global dominance of the U.S. dollar. The Second Russia-Africa Forum held in July 2023 in St. Petersburg was smaller in the number of participants but stronger in terms of agreement than the first forum held in 2019. The recent Western African anti-neocolonial coup d'états in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Guinea, and Gabon show their will to get rid of the relations with the ex-colonizer, France, and cooperate economically and militarily with Russia. The development of the INSTC has accelerated in the last few months. And these are not all efforts of the Global South to expand dialogue and cooperation with Russia.

To summarize, a new, promising wave of encirclement is unfolding. This time it is led by China and Russia and their growing connections with the Global South. With Russia's military power, enormous natural resources, and, hopefully, growing economy, as well as with

China's economic, technological, and social achievements, and the experience of both countries in building socialist societies, the Global South can gain enormous empowerment for its own development. The encirclement of the Global North, forcing imperialism back to build a multipolar world, becomes a tangible possibility.

* * *

The fight against capitalist exploitation is as old as capitalist production. The attempts of the “global villages” to surround the “cities” of global capitalism began more than a century ago, accelerated after the Second World War, fell back in the 1970s and seem to be evolving again today. The postulates of the greatest anti-capitalist theorist-revolutionaries—Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, and Amin, and their followers—seem to have become a reality today. The road to socialism can start only in places where exploitation is painful enough to revolutionize the people, namely in the global and internal peripheries. This road is long and filled with failures, but it will end in socialism if the journey is led by committed and theoretically prepared vanguards.

The Communist Party leads the transformation of China, and China leads the transformation of the Global South and the whole world, together with other resource-rich and militarily strong countries, above all Russia, followed by Brazil, India, Argentina, Turkey, Iran, and other resource-rich countries. Russia's fight against imperialism in Ukraine has awakened the sympathy of many oppressed nations. There are a growing number of anti-sanctions and pro-Russian demonstrations in the Global South from Serbia and Burkina Faso to Peru.

State capitalism is the first step on the long road to socialism. State capitalism requires a sovereign state, and sovereignty can only be guaranteed by a multipolar world, in which no country can oppress another.

Today, the strengthening of the Global South cooperation drives the encirclement of the Global North and begins to shape a multipolar world. This is not only a possibility but also an inevitability, as the short-sighted, anti-China, anti-Russia, neo-colonialist, warmongering and anti-communist strategy of the Global North leaves no room for people-friendly social development of the countries within its

system. Contemporary imperialism is very strong and will not give up its positions peacefully. It is only the solidarity and alliance of the peoples of the Global South that can resist the imperialist policies of the Global North, help developing countries detach themselves from its exploitative mechanisms, and use their national resources for their own development. In this way the imperialist countries can be deprived of the imperialist rent, from which the relative wellbeing of their people is financed. The decline of the living standard can induce the people of the imperialist states to get rid of their imperialist elites, who threaten humankind with annihilation in so many ways.

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