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THE MEANING OF WAR:
A HETERODOX PERSPECTIVE
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Por James Petras

Introduction

This paper will discuss the social, political, economic, psychological and ideological causes and impacts of war in contemporary history. Obviously we cannot explore all of these dimensions in detail; instead we will focus on what we consider the most important dimensions of these general categories.

The first question that requires clarification is “what wars?” There are at least four kinds of war which have global significance. First and most significant in terms of the present and future configuration of inter-state relations are imperialist wars – such as the US invasion of Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq, leading to the forced imposition of direct or indirect colonial rule, military bases and appropriation of strategic resources and/or water or overland routes.

The second type of war is “separatist-ethnic conflicts” such as the Albanian seizure of Yugoslav Kosovo, or the Kurdish seizure of Northern Iraq. While separatist conflicts are played out within the larger Imperial strategic framework, the local participants bring their own “historical claims” to justify their war on the existing central government.

The third type of war is the “colonial-territorial” wars, best exemplified by the Israel expulsion of Palestinians, the arbitrary appropriation of land and resources, their denial of self-government and the settlement of Jews on Palestinian land seized through armed force.

The fourth type of war is “regional wars”, found mainly in Africa and Asia, where aggressive regimes invade neighboring countries especially adjoining territory – usually containing precious metals. This is the issue in Southern Africa, where Rwanda has occupied a significant swathe of Eastern Zaire.

While each of these wars has its specificities – the question arises as to whether these wars are linked to the empire building projects of the US, European Union (EU) or other emerging imperial powers? The answer is complex and contingent on the level of analysis at which the problem is posed. Many of these conflicts predate current empire building efforts by the US; in many cases, local elites visualize war as a source of class, personal or national enrichment. We can speculate that conflicts of this sort will continue

at some (distant) future in a “post-imperial” period, as local satraps attempt to seize ‘fragments’ of a declining world empire.

Nevertheless whatever the ‘historical claims’ and local interests involved, all these contemporary wars are linked in specific ways with the ongoing empire building of the US and the EU. The US has consistently supported separatist ethnic-based movements, like the Kosova Liberation Army or the Chechen terrorists to weaken national-states (Yugoslavia, Russia) which Washington targeted. As a consequence Washington secures a new client regime, major military bases and strategic geopolitical advantages while undermining an enemy to its uni-polar pretensions. The US provides arms and financial aid to Israeli colonial expansion and war against Palestinians and Arab countries. This has both weakened the Arab states opposed to US empire building and provoked greater mass popular resistance. The ideological influence and political and financial power of the pro-Israeli organizations and individuals inside and outside the government have reinforced the most bellicose and militarist wing of the US empire builders, especially in the Middle East, often times at the expense of US multi-national corporations seeking to enter in agreements with local regimes.

US imperialism has a contradictory relationship with the separatists and colonial states: on the one hand they undermine anti-imperialist nationalists and on the other hand, their territorial claims threaten to undermine imperial ties with client regimes (as in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan and the Republic of Turkey). Moreover the imperial strategy of supporting Islamic nationalists against secular leftists (as in the case of Afghanistan and Yugoslavia) has led to new violent confrontations between the empire and former Islamic ‘allies’ as Washington attempted to use and discard them for more docile neo-liberal puppet regimes.

Under conditions in which US and European empire building is driven by a doctrine of permanent wars, there are few if any regional, local or separatist wars which are purely local – in their causes or consequences.

II: Driving Force of War: Inter-Imperial Collaboration and Competition

The key to the accelerated pace of empire building over the past decade is the “open spaces” resulting from the demise of the collectivist states (USSR, Eastern Europe and

Asia) and their overseas dependencies and allies in Africa and elsewhere. Both the US and the EU successfully incorporated these 'ex-collectivist' countries into their sphere of domination - militarily, economically and culturally. Europe gained control of strategic resources, cheap skilled labor and major industries, incorporating these countries as subordinates within the European Union. The US secured similar economic advantages but also established military bases and recruited mercenary military forces for its imperial invasions (in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq) and political supporters in the United Nations. Washington backed the illegal seizure of power by Yeltsin and then provided backing for his corrupt, destructive, oligarchic regime that literally destroyed the Russian economy and society. In the course of supporting Yeltsin, the US financial system received hundreds of billions of dollars in illegal transfers by US backed oligarchs. Europe and the US joined in partnership with the oligarchs to plunder Russia's oil and gas resources. The US secured world military supremacy and proceeded to construct an "arc of encirclement" around the weakened Russian state via its new client states incorporated into NATO. From the Baltic States through Central-Eastern Europe to the Balkans and across the Caucasus to Central and Southern Asia, Washington has established local armies and military bases under US command.

Europe, concentrating on economic dominance, penetrated these same regions, relying on aid and financing of their multi-nationals and the corruption of the new capitalist politicians.

The 'co-operative' joint conquest by the US and the EU of Eastern Europe, Balkans and Baltic countries was based on "shared decisions and shared division of the spoils of conquest". This re-division of the world between the US and the EU however came to an end with the most recent wave of imperial wars, beginning with the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Washington decided to act unilaterally in order to monopolize decision-making and the colonial occupation of these countries, relegating Europe to a subordinate role under US command and with few claims on the spoils of conquest. The two leading EU powers, France and Germany, conceded US supremacy in Afghanistan but balked over the US monopoly of Iraqi oil wealth. The US-EU conflict over Iraq illustrates inter-imperialist competition in the re-division of the world's wealth and neo-colonies. The EU imperial states, relying mostly on their economic instruments – banks,

multi-national corporations, state-sponsored trade and investment agreements – was challenging US attempts to establish regional and world supremacy and subordination of Europe via a monopoly of energy resources.

In Iran, Iraq, Libya, Russia, the Caucasus and Latin America, EU multi-national oil and gas companies have secured long-term energy supplies via direct investments or state-to-state agreements. The architects of US global power decided to undercut stiff economic competition from the EU by relying on Washington's "comparative advantage" in military power – to unilaterally launch the Iraq invasion, to monopolize Iraq's oil wealth and to prepare for future oil wars in the Middle East (Iran and others) and elsewhere (Venezuela).

Washington's permanent war doctrine was in strategic opposition to the EU's doctrine of 'economic imperialism' and selective and limited military intervention. Despite the significant differences in the Middle East, both the EU and the US still find room to cooperate in imposing spheres of joint influence in several countries and regions, namely in Afghanistan, Haiti and in Africa. Co-operation and conflict between the great imperial powers in re-dividing the world into spheres of colonization, domination and influence are the key to understanding the meaning of war in the late 20th century and into the new millennium.

Erosion and "Reversal of Historical Memory"

The re-emergence of colonial wars and colonial rule in the 21st century and the growth of national liberation movements and anti-colonial resistance reflects the erosion of historical memory in the imperial countries, among Western intellectuals as well as sectors of the masses (especially in the US) and the elites.

The "erosion of historical memory" was evident in Europe between the two world wars, as Germany re-armed and prepared to conquer and colonize Europe. Germany's pacifist, and even revolutionary, anti-military consciousness immediately following World War I lasted at most 15 years, after which the Nazis were able to launch Germany into a new frenzy of re-armament and territorial conquest. In the post-WWII period, US mass anti-war sentiment reflecting the horrors of death and disability have been of short duration: A brief 5-year period after World War II (1945-49) before launching war on the

Korean peninsula (1950-53); followed by mass “anti-war” sentiment from 1953-1963; the US invasion of Indo-China and the 12-year war (1963-1975) led to the re-emergence of very extensive mass anti-war sentiment which continued for 15 years till the First Gulf War. During the 1990’s, US anti-war sentiment temporarily re-emerged just prior to the Second Gulf War (January-February 2003) and then virtually disappeared, at least from the streets. “Mass historical memory”, history teaches us, can be a temporarily powerful sentiment in imposing restraint on the militarist side of imperialist expansion, but history also demonstrates that “memory” can be eroded and overcome over time (shorter or longer) by determined imperial decision-makers and propagandists.

“Historical memory” plays a positive role in limiting imperial wars under certain conditions and within a limited time frame. Memory of large scale deaths and casualties among imperial soldiers, deep economic crises resulting from military spending and loss of commercial markets, profound internal political conflicts and instability, demoralization and discontent among soldiers impose serious, but time-bound, constraints on imperial war-making capacity. The mass anti-war syndrome is anathema to imperialist ideologues, policymakers and international corporations. As a consequence, a conscious deliberate process of erosion is set in place. “Historical Memory” is modified by a cumulative set of events, ambiguous ideological pronouncements and small-scale military actions which over time lead to the resurgence of pro-war mass sentiment and the eclipse of historical memory.

“Historical memory” is strongest among those who most closely experienced and lived through the devastating consequences of a ‘losing imperialist war’. The high point of “memory” is the moment immediately following a destructive, costly, imperial war. Subsequently, the memory erodes over time, as a new generation emerges and ideology overcomes experiences and beliefs transmitted between generations.

The US experience following the imperial defeat in the Indo-Chinese war is illustrative of the mechanisms of “memory erosion”.

The first steps toward erosion took place right after the end of the Vietnam War during the presidency of James Carter (1976-80). Carter developed the doctrine of human rights intervention – selectively applying “humanitarian” rhetoric to attempt to re-legitimate US ‘intervention’ at a time in which mass consciousness was deeply opposed

to new imperialist wars but responsive to appeals for human rights. Secondly Carter financed and backed a series of surrogate terrorist movements and regimes in Central America (Nicaragua, Southern Africa and Afghanistan) which allowed Washington to continue its quest for empire building. Thirdly Carter provoked a major confrontation with Iran by providing asylum to the deposed and despised Shah – leading to the seizure of the US Embassy. Carter used the incident to reverse the decline in military spending. Fourthly, the Carter Administration, with financial backing from Saudi Arabia and logistical support from Pakistan, recruited and armed tens of thousands of Islamic fundamentalists to join forces with indigenous Afghan landlords, warlords and mullahs in an attack on the secular, reform-minded pro-Soviet Afghan regime. The Carter regime’s purpose was to provoke large-scale Soviet military assistance to the beleaguered Afghan regime, as a pretext for re-launching a “Second Cold War” – and accelerate the re-militarization of the US Empire. Through propaganda moves and indirect military engagement, Carter began the gradual process of gaining adherents for imperial wars and foremost eroding the powerful ‘historical memory’ of opposition to war.

President Reagan extended and deepened this process by accelerating the arms build-up, engaging in a mercenary war against Nicaragua, and deepening the surrogate wars in Afghanistan and Southern Africa. Under Reagan and subsequently Bush (father) the US launched imperial wars against Grenada and Panama – weak, small countries – which Washington succeeded in conquering with a minimum of casualties. Given the ‘low costs’ in US lives lost and the rapid and successful outcomes, mass historical consciousness was ‘modified’—to accept or acquiesce once more in the use of war to establish US power, in specific circumstances. Yet historical memory was still a majoritarian sentiment in the lead up to the first Gulf War: most of the US public was opposed to the Gulf War in 1990 until it began. Once again the overwhelming military triumph and the minimum loss of US lives led to a dramatic shift toward mass support for the war.

President Clinton continued the aerial war against Iraq and the military occupation of Northern Iraq. Historical memory was eroding. Clinton faced no opposition to the aerial war but when he sent US troops to Somalia and nearly two-dozen US soldiers were killed, “memories” re-emerged and Clinton quickly withdrew forces.

One of the greatest blows to ‘historical memory’ and an event which cleared the way for the subsequent imperial wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, was Clinton’s war against Yugoslavia. Clinton, aided by a massive falsification propaganda campaign, declared that the Yugoslav government was practicing genocide against the Bosnian Moslems and the Kosovo Albanians. Hence the imperialist war was transformed into a “humanitarian war”. Cities, hospitals, factories, radio stations and civilian population centers were bombed and the US/NATO alliance broke up Yugoslavia into client mini-states. Once again there was mass public support, as humanitarian” imperialism, the small number of US casualties and an early quick victory eroded the last traces of historical memory. The ideological and political basis for mass-backed imperialist policies were in place – but lacked a “trigger event”.

The events of September 11, 2001 provided the Second Bush Administration, composed of extremists civilian militarists and Zionist fanatics, the pretext to launch the first in a series of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and to enunciate the totalitarian doctrines of permanent wars, preventive wars and the extraterritoriality of US imperial laws. The best evidence available suggests that the Bush Administration was deeply complicit in the 9/11 events leading up to the final destruction of historical memory.

However unlike other recent imperialist wars, the Iraq War is a prolonged peoples war (there are no quick and easy victories) resulting in large-scale death and casualties of US soldiers and out of control spending with no end in sight. A new “historical memory” may be in the making based on the new realities in Iraq.

IV - War: Political Institutions and Social Movements

Historical consciousness is embodied by activists sustained by political organizations. Based on historical experience, we can say that social movements have great capacity to ‘create’ the memory in the course of dynamic mobilizations and memorable mass meeting, but it is political institutions which will sustain or erode that historical memory.

The principle political institutions (particularly in the United States), including the mass media, have consistently worked to dissolve historical consciousness of the death and destruction caused by imperialist wars. While they claim to “honor the dead soldiers” they do so only in so far as they served the empire, their “heroism” is praised in

sacrificing their lives to further the global reach of imperial institutions. The electoral process is not used to advance an anti-militarist agenda but to eliminate independent mass mobilizations which act directly against the instruments of imperial wars.

As anti-war activity moves toward electoral politics, it is absorbed by the established electoral parties and politicians, who opportunistically tip their hat to anti-war sentiment in exchange for diluting anti-war consciousness. The electoral process involves anti-war social movements making deep compromises with the pro-war financiers of campaigns, with politicians articulating ambiguous and inconsistent positions and with political parties having long-time, large-scale allegiances to imperial policies and interests. Such is the experience in the US and elsewhere: Established political institutions bend sufficiently to question an unpopular war in order to attract the mass opposition, and once capturing their allegiance, return to re-building the military capacity for imperial wars. The moment in which the movements dissolve into established political parties, competing in electoral campaigns through “dissident” politicians, “historical consciousness” is severely eroded.

The original impetus for organizing mass anti-war movements came precisely through the recognition that existing political parties and ‘normal political processes’ are deeply immersed and corrupted by their structural ties to imperial interests. By returning to these institutions, with new personalities and slogans, mass consciousness lost sight of its historical insights into the nature of imperial power.

In contrast “historical consciousness” emerged with great power when masses of people moved into direct collective action, taking local initiatives and linking the economic and political institutions directing imperial wars. Action and knowledge grew into collective anti-militarist consciousness which over time evolved from awareness of everyday present-day destruction (“empirical consciousness”) into “historical consciousness”, understanding of the systemic pillage by imperialism over time and space.

Direct action movements bypass the distorting influence of the “political guardians” (conventional politicians, accepted ideologues and media pundits) and directly articulate the anti-war ideas and anti-militarist interests of the mass of the people. Movements acted directly against the militarist policies which negatively impacted on the populations

-conscription, forced and extended war duties - and against the policy-makers who sent hundreds of thousands to death and disability.

In this conflict between the anti-war movements and pro-war political institutions, the pre-eminence of the former was most evident in time of imperial defeat, soldier discontent, and political leaders in disgrace for lies and broken promises. These are crucial moments, but they are short-lived. Pro-war political institutions, that outlive and/or overcome the crisis of imperial war, re-group, absorb the ‘best’ of their adversaries in the anti-war opposition and return to pursue the policy of imperial war – until the next crisis -- ultimately asserting a dominant position. Historical consciousness becomes a “footnote” to conventional history of “Great Wars”.

“Historical consciousness” of anti-imperialist wars retains continuity when it leads to a large-scale, long-term transformation of the political institutions. The continued process of struggle links generations, and the transmission of anti-militarist ideas. This continual renewal of historical consciousness depends on, in part, the active role of anti-imperialist intellectuals.

War and Intellectuals

Left intellectuals have been fervent critics of war in general, until they face the reality of their country engaging in war – and then opposition gives way to evasive statements, ambiguous moral temporizing and, among the most “courageous”, a condemnation of the violence of the aggressor and as well as the victim. Even worst, many left and progressive intellectuals have argued for, defended and propagated the doctrine of “humanitarian intervention (imperialism)”. This moral betrayal was evident during the US invasion and destruction of Yugoslavia, and support for the terrorist Kosovo Liberation (sic) Army and the “ethnic cleansing” of hundreds of thousands of Serbs from Kosovo, Croatia and elsewhere. US progressive intellectuals were conspicuously silent. The “progressive intellectuals” repeated their performance: providing tendentious political justifications for the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq -- though in the latter case, up until the start of the war, a minority of intellectuals condemned the war and the victimized regime. Even those progressive intellectuals, who criticized the imperialist

wars, refused to support the anti-colonial resistance and many opposed the immediate withdrawal of the colonial armies.

The question of war and peace is a momentous issue. In the events leading up to an imperialist war, all the propaganda machinery is set in motion, the mass media dramatize the righteousness of the imperial cause and the evil of the country which is to be invaded. Repressive legislation (“security measures”) is enacted by large congressional majorities. Publicists, religious notables, demagogues, statesmen, and respectable leaders of civil society find lofty moral purposes to laud “this war”. The latent chauvinist “instincts” of the masses are aroused. The progressive intellectuals become fearful; the repressive legislation may ruin a career and undermine everyday routines – their classes, seminars and completion of their latest article or book. Their professional colleagues eye them with suspicion unless they openly pledge allegiance – “beyond any criticism in other times, in time of our survival, we must join forces” – with the military invaders. It is not merely fear of material losses or disruption of everyday routines which causes our progressive intellectuals to embrace the war or remain silent or (in the case of the most courageous minority) to condemn both sides, but the sense of being left out of national history, of being shunned by neighbors and colleagues, of having to accept the consequences of living in a savage imperial civilization that thrives on war, especially a successful war. The progressive intellectuals respond far more often to the pressures of their milieu than to the suffering of the colonized people.

The commitment of the progressive intellectual is not fixed in stone – they change with the conditions of their milieu and the strength and fortunes of the imperial government. With the colonial occupation, and the graphic visuals of death and destruction of the colonized countries, the progressive intellectuals argue for a humanitarian mission, to correct the excesses of the war. They even raise their voices a few decibels before the abuse and torture of certain prisoners in certain prisons. But rarely do progressive intellectuals dare to transgress the colonial frontiers to publicly support the anti-colonial resistance. They claim that to commit to the resistance would call into question their “moral credentials” with the moderate imperial institutional power wielders.

Since the end of the Vietnam War, Western intellectuals have not expressed solidarity with the popular resistance to any of the imperialist invasions. Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon, the imperial wars are numerous, but the list of committed intellectuals is short.

The principle reason that many of the intellectuals oppose prolonged imperialist wars is because of the casualties to US soldiers and the cost to the US treasury. There is a kind of political narcissism in the slogan “Bring our boys home” in which the center of attention is on the invading troops not on the anti-colonial resistance. Even in “opposition” the Western intellectuals derive their politics from an ethno-centric view of the world.

At a deeper level this political narcissism is also a way of making concessions to the chauvinist fever which grips much of their countrymen: “We too share your concern, for our imperialist country – but let’s not spend “our boys” lives on this”. Of course if and when the imperial rulers recruit mercenaries, client regimes and local collaborators to murder resistance fighters – nothing will be said of any consequence because “our boys” will be home safe...

The historical shift of intellectuals from opposition to pro-war politics and support of imperial candidates is not simply a “pragmatic choice” of the lesser evil against the greater evil. The transformation is the result of fear, fear of those in power -- even as they face no real threat to their lives, careers or living standards. But intellectuals imagine a threat, and they concoct wild scenarios of “fascist” repression to hide their moral cowardice. This imagined fear is magnified by the possible threat to personal safety, security, and property if the imperial force is defeated and the rulers “take their revenge” against internal critics. Supporting the war or “opposing both sides” as the moral hypocrites prefer it, is insurance for the future. In the black fantasy world of intellectuals, when the imagined state investigation takes place, they can always present as evidence in their favor, their articles and speeches condemning the “moral barbarians” who attacked “our boys”.

But if there is one universal truth about our progressive intellectuals it is that they do no “stand in one place” – they move with the times – they gauge the changing winds of political fortune.

When those suffering the war, the “average people” turn against the war, when the imperial regime is split with elite conflicts, when the soldiers question their orders, their officers, the war, the president and the generals, then our moral intellectuals concoct a new set of moral imperatives, adding their voices to the multitudes who question the war. Once it is safe, once the ravages of a losing imperial war have torn asunder the tissues of official lies, out bold progressive intellectuals step up, seize the center stage and proclaim their opposition to war. Intellectuals never sell-out, they are rented to the strongest party, the rising new political configuration. As opposition to the imperial war grows our progressive intellectuals become bolder.

In the war of words, the ideological warfare in the cultural sphere, our progressive intellectuals take on the neo-conservatives, they expose the lies of the mass media, they become the self-promoted “face of the opposition” to the outside world, even if their claims have little merit.

Even as the intellectuals diagnose the sources of wars, they overlook the specific and concrete configurations of power in favor of focusing on easy targets, ones which offer no threats to their professional careers and intellectual acceptance.

War and Oil

Let us turn to a specific imperialist war, the US invasion and colonial occupation of Iraq to illustrate how the progressive intellectual opposition to the war is profoundly influenced by a unique set of political allegiances.

Conventional wisdom among progressive intellectuals argues that the US invasion of Iraq is driven by US multinational oil companies seeking to control that country’s oil resources. A more sophisticated version of this hypothesis argues that the war is directed by a strategic policy to monopolize oil as a weapon and hence dominate its imperial rivals in Europe and Asia. In both cases, the economic and strategic hypothesis, fail to take account of the political loyalties of the specific policymakers who designed the war, propagandized in favor of the war and became its most fanatical and influential executioners. Few if any of the progressive intellectuals examined the political loyalties of the key militarist policymakers.

The hypothesis that “oil” and the US petroleum multinationals were the main force behind the Iraq war fails every empirical test. If we examine the policy statements of the major oil companies and their public spokespeople in the five years leading up to the war we find no systematic political and propaganda campaign in favor of war. One looks in vain through all the major financial and specialized petroleum journals for evidence of organized pro-war politics. The reason is that the major oil companies were doing quite well with the status quo: profits and prices were reasonably high, investments were relatively secure, anti-imperialist sentiment was extensive but not intense and, most of all, opportunities for important new investments were opening in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya and possibly (via third parties) in Iraq.

The US war in Iraq and Afghanistan reversed the picture creating a very hostile environment, increasing dangers of destructive attacks, insecurity of Western personnel, and augmenting the power of OPEC against the major private US companies. Only a very few oil-related companies can be said to have benefited from the war – Haliburton, for example –most of which had direct ties to Vice President Cheney. They are the exception that proves the rule. The oil industry as an investor, producer and seller have not really benefited from the war. Even after the colonial occupation of Iraq, (and even after the illegal privatization of Iraq’s state oil companies) the predominant sentiment among oil companies is at best ambivalent: while future opportunities may have increased so have the present threats to supply and transport.

The war has created greater volatility, favoring speculators over long-term oil investors. Moreover, rising prices prejudice the overall performance of the imperialist economies, adding costs, increasing trade imbalances and making the oil companies conspicuous targets of public ire. Moreover the unconditional support for Israel within the Bush Administration in the context of the Iraq war, has created a difficult climate for high level negotiations between the petroleum CEO’s and the oil-rich Arab leaders.

In summary, there is no empirical evidence that the major oil companies drove US war policy either before or after the colonial occupation.

The second hypothesis argues that the war was part of a strategic policy to monopolize oil supply toward establishing the US as the undisputed world power, and subordinating Europe and Asia to its command. A corollary to this argument is that in the

recent past US political and military triumphs, had been accompanied by a policy of sharing the spoils of imperial victories with their European and Japanese allies. The new US military doctrine of unilateral offensive wars (euphemistically referred to as “preventive wars”) was designed to seize strategic advantage and claim exclusive control over the spoils of war: petroleum, military bases and trade routes. Imperialist strategic planners miscalculated, presuming an easy military victory over “the Arabs” and a rapid seizure and privatization of public enterprises and unhindered exploitation of oil wealth.

This hypothesis has a lot of merit in explaining some of the motivations – especially by focusing on the importance of the political decision-makers within the imperial state apparatus. However there are several important weaknesses in this hypothesis. For one, there was and is sharp differences between different power centers in the imperial state apparatus and even within each “center”. For example, many of the top professional military commanders were opposed to the war, as were members of the State Department. CIA analysts did not share the assumptions that the colonized people would welcome the imperial armies. Numerous former high military, CIA officials, and United Nations weapons inspectors challenged the pretext put forth by the pro-war sectors of the US imperial state, that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and posed a threat to the United States.

If the imperial state itself was divided and some sectors were not convinced of the need to go to war, which group was able to overcome that resistance, by-pass established intelligence channels (and create its own circuit), fabricate its own “intelligence and successfully lead the US to war? If war was not promoted by and in the interests of the US oil companies, and contrary to military doctrine of fighting two wars simultaneously, in whose geo-political interests was the war?

The War and the Israel-Zionist Hypothesis

The hypothesis which most fits the data is the Israel hypothesis – specifically that the principal architects and theoreticians of US world supremacy and the principal promoters of sequential wars, particularly in the Middle East, were influential Zionists in the top echelons of the Pentagon, National Security Council and in well-connected research

centers “advising” the government while acting on behalf of the expansionist interests of the State of Israel.

The key author of the strategic doctrine of undisputed US world power was Wolfowitz, back in the first Bush Administration (1991). He joined with other influential Zionists like Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and a host of pro-Israel extremists to prepare a strategy paper for the Israeli state (1996) in which the Palestinians were to be physically driven from all of Palestine and Israel would become the regional power in the Middle East. Both Feith and Wolfowitz, early in their public careers were accused and chastised for turning US government documents over to the Israeli government. For at least twenty years they have been actively collaborating over Israeli policy and, in and out of government, they have worked intimately with Israeli officials in the United States and Israel.

The Zionist influentials, even before securing high positions in the Pentagon and State Department, were strong proponents of US military attacks against Israel’s Middle East adversaries, which included Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia and, of course, Iraq. Their militarist advocacy was independent of how such wars would affect US oil interests, regional stability, relations with Europe, the Muslim countries or the rest of the world. The Pentagon Zionists were among the first to link Iraq with the events of 9/11 in an attempt to manipulate US public anger against the secular Iraqi state. They were responsible for fabricating the story that Iraq was importing uranium from Niger for the purposes of developing nuclear weapons. Wolfowitz admitted that he promoted the false pretext that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction to create a “consensus” to go to war – and every major Zionist writer and ‘expert’ pushed the same line.

The principal pro-Israeli lobby in the US, AIPAC, worked intensely and closely with the State of Israel, and the key Zionists in the Pentagon and their advisory groups in pushing for the US invasion of Iraq. Major Jewish organizations and influential propagandists in the mass media promoted the war, demonizing Iraq and fabricating stories of imminent threats.

The only major beneficiary of the US war in Iraq is the State of Israel: The war destroyed a major supporter of the Palestinian Intifada and Israel got a free hand in its terror and territorial colonization Palestinian land.

The US, isolated from almost all the major European powers and Islamic countries, because of its pro-Israel agenda, took on the pariah status of the Israeli clerical colonial regime. All the predictions and assumptions of the pro-war, anti-Arab Zionists were proven false. The Iraqi Arabs did not submit to the US occupation – they formed a potent resistance which engages the US in an increasingly prolonged war of attrition. The US intervention did not secure an oil monopoly; it has jeopardized its supply of oil in the Middle East by intensifying instability in Saudi Arabia. The war has soured US oil dealings in the Caucuses and resulted in speculative oil price increases, increasing the US trade deficit. Equally significant while the US is immersed in the Iraq War, China, India and Japan secure strategic oil and gas contracts in Asia and Latin America.

The Zionists were wrong in envisioning that the US would proceed to a series of successful wars with Israel's other enemies in the Middle East – Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. The Iraq invasion has tied down the vast majority of US active ground troops in a losing war with high casualties, thus at least, temporarily limiting its capacity to start new wars on behalf of the Empire or Israel. This has not prevented the Pentagon Zionists and their AIPEC allies from pushing for a new military attack on Iran and Syria.

Apart from England, Israel has been the major supporter and ally in the US conquest of Iraq for good reason: They are the principle beneficiaries.

The Pentagon Zionists and their zealous ideological allies have weakened the US economy by widening the trade deficit (via higher oil prices) and increasing the budget deficit (because of war spending). Israel has not suffered at all -- on the contrary military sales to the US increased as well as revenues from the Pentagon for military advisory and training, missions to Iraq and elsewhere.

The US war in Iraq has several particularities as well as common characteristics with other wars. In the first place it demonstrates how a highly organized, ideologically coherent, financially powerful minority with highly placed co-thinkers in the top policy-making institutions of the imperial state can twist policy to suit the needs of a foreign power over and against established economic interests. Secondly the decisions about imperialist wars, though they usually serve the long-term interests of the dominant sectors of the capitalist class, are “made” by politicians, who have their own agendas,

ideological and political loyalties which may or may not benefit (or prejudice) the ruling class.

The war in Iraq is a clear case in which the loyalties of the key architects of the war were distinct from those of the ruling class, who were barely taken into account, let alone consulted. The ruling ideology of the architects of war was 'Israel First, Last and Always'. To cover the Israel-centered war plans, the Zionists fabricated a series of "threats" to US interests which were made to parallel those faced by Israel: threats of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and Muslim fundamentalism. Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate literature circulated in the mass media, in influential journals and talk shows as an army of Zionists ideologues went into an ideological frenzy –infecting the US body politic– and setting off a secondary wave of vituperative froth from fundamentalist Christians, neo-conservative allies and liberal congress-people.

The generalized attack by the Zionists against Arab states and people was directed toward the strategic goal of extending Israeli domination beyond Palestine ("Greater Israel") not through direct colonization but via a series of client regimes beholden to the US – a US whose major foreign policy institutions would be subject to Zionist influence. The ideological formulae adopted to promote US-Israel dominance in the Arab world was "A Middle East Common Market" based on a campaign to "democratize the region". Both formulae served as the ideological basis for permanent war in the Middle East, the installment of dual purpose puppet regimes willing to serve both US energy interests and Israel's market penetration.

The Zionist ideologues' manipulation of "free market" and "democratic" rhetoric resonated widely among liberal and conservative imperialists, even as the US imperial state and Israel was denying Iraqi and Palestinians their elementary democratic rights and domestic markets. The tactics of the influential Zionists and their extensive networks in the US were directed at fusing Israeli expansionist interests with US imperialist goals, in order to legitimate their pursuit of Israeli state policies – a position echoed by President-elect Bush.

In the real world however, as the US continued to suffer heavy casualties in Iraq and the war debt grew by billions of dollars a day, and as its 'coalition partners' abandoned the war, the Zionist influentials inside and outside of the government intensified their

pressure on the US to escalate its troop commitments in Iraq and to engage in new Middle East wars. The acid test of Zionist loyalties to Israeli interests is found in the fact that they pursued the war policy even as it weakened the US strategic global position, heightened discontent in the military and in elite civilian circles and increased the probability of an economic crisis resulting from the war deficits and weakening dollar. The Zionists in power are so embedded in the Israeli matrix, that they are totally impervious to the effects which their policies have on the US Empire, domestic economy or civil society.

In effect the US imperial attack of Iraq can be understood as a surrogate war for a regional power, designed and executed by influential policy-makers whose primary allegiance is to defend the interests of the regional power. The Zionist zealots have incorporated the same pathological style of mass paranoid politics prevalent in Israel to the US: the politics of permanent terrorist threats, of pervasive fear, of a hostile world, of unreliable allies... The Zionist zealots have led the ideological charge poisoning relations with France and other European countries which fail to respond favorable to the bloody repression of occupied peoples. No policy group has done more to weaken the sustainability of the US Empire than the Zionist zealots in government and the massive well-financed pro-Israel networks through the US. The Congress, the Executive branch, state and local governments, and national and local media have all come under the influence of the Jewish “lobby’s” pro-Israel agenda to the point that none or few dare to criticize Israel or its US representatives.

The overweening power of the pro-Israel power configuration has inevitable provoked opposition – mainly from non-elected officials. The FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) is preparing to indict several high official from AIPEC, the most powerful representative of Israel’s interests in the US, for spying on the US for Israel. Almost all the major Jewish organizations are preparing to defend AIPEC and its practice of twisting US policy toward the “Israel First” agenda. By early 2005, it was clear that the Zionist power structure had paralyzed the investigation. Numerous retired military and CIA officials have denounced Zionist power in designing and promoting the interests of Israel over US imperial interests. Meantime the Zionists along with the neo-conservatives successfully purged or “neutralized” independent analysts in the CIA, Defense and State

Department who questioned the doctrine of sequential wars against Israel's adversaries in the Middle East. The Second Bush administration is completely controlled by the neo-conservative-Zionist extremists.

The conventional wisdom which perceives world imperial powers dictating policy to lesser regional powers clearly fails to deal with the US Middle East Wars. The reason why this common sense notion is inadequate is because it fails to deal with a series of unique (at least in modern history) phenomena affecting the policy-making structure of the US Empire – the active role of a privileged and influential minority deeply embedded in the decision-making structure and whose primary loyalty is to another state. It is as if the State of Israel has 'colonized' the main spheres of political power in the imperial state. These 'colons' however are not exactly transplants or emigrants from their "mother country". Rather they have mostly grown up and have been educated in the imperial center, they have pursued lucrative careers in the US and have, in most instances, been strong supporters of US imperial expansion and militarism. They have risen to and influenced the highest spheres of political power. They have not been discriminated against, nor have they suffered any economic, social or political exclusion. They have not been marginalized - they are integrated in the centers of power. Yet they have set themselves apart from the rest of the US citizens and conceive of themselves as having a special mission -- of being first Jews who unconditionally support the State of Israel and all of its international projections of power. How can we explain this irrational embrace of a militarist state by a set of individuals who only vicariously share its life and destiny?

War in the 21st Century: Atavistic Behavior

Schumpeter in his book, Imperialism and Social Class, written shortly after the First World War, attempted to square his argument that capitalism is opposed to war by citing the re-emergence of residual "atavistic" traits, embedded in previous feudal warrior societies, as the cause of war. While I do not share Schumpeter's view of the peaceful evolution of capitalism, particularly in the face of a series of imperialist wars in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe, his concept of atavistic behavior is useful in explaining the irrational embrace of Israel by otherwise affluent, educated and highly influential Jews. Their embrace of Israel is certainly not for reasons of monetary

remuneration, though Israel financially rewarded American-Jewish spies like Jonathan Pollard. What causes a modern or post-modern elite group to exhibit patterns of fanatical loyalty to a foreign militarist colonial power engaged in ethnic cleansing?

The Jewish-led and financed Zionist movement and its influential and wealthy supporters and leaders are a highly cohesive and disciplined group which exhibits zero tolerance against any Jewish dissidents or other critics of the warrior state or of their supporters anywhere in the world. What accounts for the apparent anomaly of highly educated professors, doctors, lawyers, investment bankers, media moguls and billionaire real estate tycoons giving unconditional support to a state engaged in primitive vindictive acts, of mass torture of prisoners, of collective punishment and guilt (destroying family homes of guerrilla suspects, taking family members hostage), systematically destroying farmland and uprooting hundreds of thousands of farmers, communities for almost six decades? They embrace ancient land claims and the vindictive and gratuitous humiliation of subjugated people based on mythological religious beliefs. The primitive belief in a “superior” or special people used to justify blood crimes harks back to the ritual barbarities of ancient tribal justice. This atavistic behavior is, however, tied to the most modern military technology in the hands of highly trained technical experts. The combination of tribal cohesion, religious mythology, high-tech weaponry and an overweening desire to exercise power on behalf of a military state based on ‘racial-religious’ exclusivity, is a potent concoction for US Zionists to inhale. Yet there are immense psychological satisfactions from being part of a powerful closed in-group, with a vision or fantasy of the revival of a lost ‘kingdom’, a sense of being part of superior people, members of a survivalist culture which has endured a unique suffering, and therefore possesses the righteousness to commit violence and use power to strike down adversaries anywhere and not to be bound by conventional international laws which only serve to limit the prerogatives of a ‘righteous people’.

Tribal loyalties have tight rules of conduct for all who are considered members, whether they are active practitioners of Zionist politics or even critics of the State of Israel – home of the chosen people. Tribal rules are interpreted in different ways by different segments of the Jewish Diaspora. For the Presidents of the Major Jewish Organizations and their functionaries there are Five Commandments: (1) ‘thou shalt not

criticize any action by any Israeli leader at any time, no matter how heinous the crime, nor how often it is repeated, irregardless of how vast or intense world opprobrium’, (2) ‘Thou shall not allow any others to criticize or act contrary to Jewish State interests or to organizations which embrace the Zionist ideal,’ (3)‘Every weapon, financial, physical, psychological, ideological and economic can be legitimately wielded to weaken, isolate, discredit or stigmatize critics of the Tribal Homeland or any of the overseas Tribal Organizations,’ (4)‘Thou shall raise funds from all sources (legal or illegal), public, social or private to finance the military machine of the Tribal leaders – tribute secured from lesser “others” must enhance the security and living standards of the chosen people’ and (5)‘Thou shall declare loyalty first and foremost to the tribal identity, then to the powers which support “our tribe” and lastly to “universal values”’.

Despite sharp criticism from a minority of dissident Jews, both in Israel, the US and elsewhere, there are certain unstated codes which are observed even by the most critical commentators. One is to never criticize or identify the power of the Jewish organizations in the US and their influence in the government. Jewish progressives de facto denial of Jewish power in shaping US war policy in the Middle East severely restricts the effectiveness of the anti-war movement by exonerating one of the key ideological props of the imperial war machine. The second unstated code followed by the “observant” progressive Jewish intellectuals is a denial that Israel has an important influence on US Middle East and global policy via its tribal loyalists in the US. Jewish progressives deliberately and systematically exclude any mention of Jewish power and influence in shaping US policy in the Middle East by focusing exclusively on “oil interests” or “neo-conservative ideologues” (who just coincidentally are mostly tribespeople and their camp-followers). In deference to or more precisely because they share a deep underlying identity with the tribe – they refuse to include any systematic study of the very obvious and blatant exercise of power in every branch of government, electoral processes and media reports. Likewise with the Middle East, Israel is considered by progressive Jews as an “instrument” of US imperialism even as the instrument cuts both ways – as Israel uses the US to savage its adversaries, to build up its military machine and to manufacture its commercial weapons systems to sell even to US competitors (i.e. China).

The emergence of atavistic behavior and its extension among the Zionist elite is a relatively recent development (over the past two decades) and goes contrary to the universalistic, secular and socialist values and practices as well as the traditional religious and communal practices and beliefs of many Jewish communities during previous centuries. The embrace of imperial power, the turn from religious communitarian values toward the embrace of the militaristic state of Israel, the shift from internationalism and socialism toward an unconditional embrace of a narrow exclusivist ideology has activated the latent atavistic behavior associated with vengeful killing of adversaries and blind singular loyalty to the idea of Israeli supremacy in the Middle East. Translated into the US context, it means virulent pro-war propaganda, advocacy of concentration camps for Islamic believers (as proposed by Daniel Pipes and others) and collaboration with Mossad agents in promoting Israel's strategic military, economic and political goals; by utilizing all the instruments of power within the US and with its overseas clients (Kurdish regions of Iraq, for example).

Atavistic behavior secures its goals through the shrewd manipulation and artificial inflation of "fears" emanating from Israel's enemies. The purpose is to create mass support in the US for wars on Israel's behalf. US Zionist ideologues, drawing heavily on the self-induced political isolation which the Israeli State has brought upon itself through its savage destruction of Arab Palestine, have elaborated and preached a paranoid view of the world, in which all international organizations (the UN, the World Court etc.) and forums, international opinions surveys, Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa are accused of "anti-Semitism" because they recognize and condemn Israel's violation of Palestinian political and human rights.

The greater the "justifiable" violence of Israel, the wider the condemnation of its behavior, the more hysterical and strident the vituperation emanating from the major Zionist centers, the greater the concerted efforts to discredit the international bodies and to heighten US support. Just as an imaginary Neanderthal might bellow loudly and grab a heavy club when others protest his trespass of territory, so too do the Zionists reach for the club of US military power to pummel those who challenge Israel's transgressions.

"Atavistic behavior" is not confined to affluent Zionists, it is found among civilian militarists, Christian Zionists and other religious fundamentalists, who are defenders and

practitioners of unrestrained violence and permanent imperial wars. Under the veneer of civilized discourse and moderate tonalities, is the barely restrained lust for unlimited power, total warfare and uncompromising savage torture. Atavistic behavior increasingly threatens to overwhelm the rational basis of economic calculation. The civilian militarist who may have originally been seen by many capitalists as one tool among others for conquering markets and seizing strategic resources have gradually taken a life of their own, subordinating capitalist interests to their raging quest for unlimited power. Atavistic behavior is both the apogee of US imperial power and its ultimate regress to the dark ages.

Contemporary and future wars in the Middle East cannot be explained merely by reciting an inventory of economic resources and matching them with imperial strategic designs. This rationalist-economistic reductionism fails to take account of specific ideological, irrational political determinants which have demonstrated greater explanatory power.

Privatization and War

One of the strategic goals of imperialist policy-makers is the privatization of public resources as an “end” in itself and as a means of securing political, social, economic and cultural control over a country in order to enhance empire-building.

Privatization strategies are pursued by political as well as military means, either through military invasions or via military coups by surrogate military juntas. Privatization is a first step toward de-nationalization and re-colonization of the economy and state.

De-nationalization of the economy usually follows the imposition by imperial lending agencies of a macro-political strategy dubbed structural adjustment policies which include among other measures privatizations of public enterprises – especially strategies sectors such as energy, petroleum, metals, telecommunications, finance and banking. The move toward de-nationalization follows one of two paths – either the direct purchase by foreign companies of national assets or a two-step process, whereby the nationalist capitalists first buy the public enterprise and then re-sell it to foreign capital.

Whether directly or indirectly, privatization means foreign control over essential economic decisions (investment, marketing, transfer of profits etc) in strategic sectors of the economy. Foreign control of strategic industries means the power of decision over local industries and exploitation of natural resources.

Beyond the economic consequences of privatization/de-nationalization (P/D), it is a political instrument of empire-building strategies:

1. P/D involves the recruitment of ‘national executives’, financial officers, publicists, managers, economists who become an active political base in backing and promoting deeper and more extensive colonization as well as political submission to imperial power.
2. The chief executive officers of P/D enterprises play a leading role in influencing and directing sectoral organizations (automobile and parts manufacturers, banking associations, mine-owners’ consortiums, etc.), thus “hegemonizing” the national capitalists within the associations and securing their acquiescence in imperial-colonial projects.
3. P/D firms can work in tandem with the imperial state to pressure a regime to follow imperial policies by decreasing economic production or by dis-investing. For example, in the 1960’s the State Department ordered the US-owned oil refineries to refuse to process Cuban oil imports from Russia in order to overthrow the Castro government.
4. The US government frequently plants ‘agents’ (CIA and FBI) in US-owned multi-national corporations (MNCs). The MNCs provide a “legal cover” for intelligence agents involved in destabilization campaigns, espionage and recruitment of local business and trade union leaders to serve imperial interests.
5. P/D firms provide imperialist policy-makers with additional leverage to pressure a regime to submit to IMF policies and to support colonial rule via ALCA.
6. P/D provide a pretext for imperial intervention and conquest, using the excuse that the invaders are “protecting the property rights of US citizens.
7. P/D provide a “beach head” for multiplying privatization using local allies and political influence, following the initial takeovers. P/D have a “falling dominoes” effect, leading to cumulative power, from enterprise to enterprise, from sector to sector, from economy to media, from economy and media to political control. P/D has a catalytic

effect in strengthening imperial policy-makers and forcing the hand of any recalcitrant regime.

The Dialectics of Privatizations/De-nationalization and War

Wars are motivated by and result in the privatization and de-nationalization of publicly owned properties. Likewise, privatizations lead to war in order to protect and prevent the re-nationalization of strategic industries. Privatizations are frequently accompanied or followed by the granting of military bases, thus strengthening the colonial presence and weakening the sovereignty of Third World countries. At a minimum, privatizations almost always are accompanied by military “co-operative agreements” and “mutual defense agreements” which, in effect, allow for the presence of US military advisers in the Ministries of Defense, the indoctrination and training of military officials and a “legal formula” allowing US military intervention if and when a client regime is threatened. In other words, privatization and de-nationalization weakens the Third World state – deprives the state of economic resources, revenues and levers of power, while severely restricting its sovereignty. Weakened clients often supply mercenary soldiers for future imperial wars and colonial occupation, such as in Iraq, Afghanistan and Haiti.

Colonial Wars in the 21st Century

In the 21st century, imperial wars, especially multiple colonial wars requiring military occupation of a colonized country, can only be sustained by recruiting mercenary soldiers from client regimes. The US imperial armed forces are incapable of sustaining a colonial occupation in the face of a prolonged peoples war without large-scale mercenary support from client regimes. This is very evident today in Iraq (and Afghanistan), where the US colonial officials and their puppet regime are desperately trying to assemble an army of Iraqi and Afghan mercenaries to take the brunt of “security duties” (repression of the colonized people). The US colonial army, particular the Army Reservists, is demoralized and has experienced a sharp decline in re-enlistment.

Given the imperialist involvement in two countries (Iraq and Afghanistan), Washington turned to recruiting military mercenaries from its Latin American client regimes to provide several thousand officers and soldiers to prop up the US puppet

regime in Haiti. Since the imperial strategists particularly the neo-conservatives and Zionists have made military conquest the centerpiece of imperial expansion, it is the military which has paradoxically become the “weakest link” in the imperial chain which extends from imperial war to colonial occupation and control, to P/D to economic pillage.

In the past the US imperial state engaged in external and internal wars to P/D strategic industries. The US overthrow of the Arbenz regime in Guatemala (1954), the Mossadegh regime in Iran in 1953, the failed effort to invade Cuba in 1961, the CIA engineered coup in Chile (1973), the US Contra-War in Nicaragua (in the 1980’s) were all directed toward P/D of the economies as well as serving imperial geo-political strategies.

In recent years however, the imperial state has increasingly relied on financing civilian electoral politicians and pressure from the international financial institutions to implement P/D. Only in the Middle East where Zionist-Israeli power is factored in has military invasion become the policy of choice. The reliance on war to privatize and colonize continues to operate where imperial-financed civilian electoral strategies have failed. Two recent cases come to mind.

The US ‘internal’ war in Venezuela, where a US-financed and directed coup briefly (48 hours) overthrew the elected President Chavez is a case in point. In that short period of time, the puppet Carmona regime immediately broke relations with Cuba, withdrew from OPEC and began to draw up plans to privatize the state petroleum company before popular power restored Chavez and rescinded the decrees. The US-sponsored coup and subsequent ‘bosses lock-out’ in the oil industry were part of an internal war strategy designed to circumvent an unfavorable setting for a manipulated electoral outcome.

Likewise in Yugoslavia, the US, in alliance with European imperialism, launched an unprovoked military invasion, using Croatian and Kosovar terrorists to destroy the Yugoslav nation and set up mini-states in which former self-managed enterprises were P/D’d, major military bases were established and mercenary troops were recruited for the Middle East colonial wars.

Privatization and de-nationalization whether it occurs through imperial wars or via subsidized client electoral politicians however entails inter-imperialist competition and conflict over which the imperialist states will seize the most lucrative ex-public firms. The experience in Eastern Europe and Latin America suggests that US political successes

resulted in European powers securing most of the privatized firms and most lucrative oil, telecommunication and financial enterprises. Similarly in the Yugoslav break-up, the Europeans secured influence and control over the richest mini-states, Croatia and Slovenia, while the US colonized the poorest, mafia-states – Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia.

The turn to unilateralist imperialist wars reflected this reality of unequal benefits from co-operative US-EU imperial wars. The US unilateral invasion of Iraq was designed to maximize US control of the forthcoming privatization and de-nationalization of Iraqi oil industry and to undercut European benefits from the post-war “reconstruction” as well as to privilege Israeli interests in the Middle East.

If imperialist expansion is linked to P/D, the competition and conflict between US and EU imperialism shapes the forms and methods through which that expansion takes place. The US resort to unilateral (forms) and military (means) is related to its “comparative advantage” in military weaponry and the predominance of militarist civilian decision-makers. The doctrines of “total war”, “offensive wars”, and unipolar world supremacy were all designed and implemented by a special elite of political ideologues, with specific set of political attributes – they lack direct ties to the traditional military hierarchy and have demonstrated contempt for the military and intelligence commands. These civilian militarists conceive of themselves as an elite chosen to carry out the mission of terrorizing real or imagined adversaries overseas and punishing, expelling or silencing traditional military and intelligence rivals within the state. Their extremist militarism is directly related to their distance from the actual “blood and guts” of mass killing of civilians and ground level military casualties and their proximity to the Israeli State.

Their arrogance in exercising power is matched by their abject ignorance of the political and economic conditions and consequences of their decisions. Their blind subservience to serving Israel’s interests led them to “miscalculate” the massive degree of Iraqi opposition to the war and occupation. Their quest for world domination led to unsustainable multiple military invasions, leading to the weakening of the US Empire. Their militarist logic revealed their abysmal ignorance of the enormous destruction of lucrative Iraqi assets and the cost of war of war to the US economy. These policies forced sharp divisions within the imperial state. In response, the extremists in the Pentagon have

seized control over intelligence functions and special forces operations, involving clandestine operations. The Second Bush administration is more extreme and even more aggressive than the first. The political conflict within the State is extending into civil society where over half of the population opposes the plans for new wars. Instead of adopting an empire-building strategy mixing economic, political and diplomatic pressures with selective wars, the civilian militarists have, in the Middle East, relied exclusively on military strategies. Even within this one-sided military approach, they have chosen the most extreme measures, unilateral permanent wars, as opposed to coalitions (and joint colonial spoils) and limited wars (in time and place). Military extremism in pursuit of unsustainable colonial war is no virtue.

Israel's dirty little colonial war, despite its daily civilian assassinations, terror bombings and ritual torture and humiliation of the Palestinians has not succeeded in 60 years of warfare against 3 million Palestinians even with universal conscription and life-time military reservists. The civilian militarists in the imperial state have learned nothing from Israel's failures: For them Israel can do no wrong, it can never fail, it is their living ideological model of the military will to conquer. Our own civilian militarists, in their exalted hubris believe that 150,000 colonial forces could defeat 200,000 armed resistance fighters backed by over 20 million fellow citizens.

The Mind of the Civilian Militarists

One of the key aspects of the civilian militarists' rise to power has been their ability to apply organizational principles which further their political programs. Their procedures, while not usually spelled out in a written document, can be deduced from their organizational behavior. For brevity of space, we can spell out their modus operandi:

1. Precipitate war thus precluding public debate and systematic analysis of who benefits and who loses, and the tactical gains and strategic costs. Given that the civilian militarists came to power with an already fixed doctrine and a disciplined cohort, it was not difficult for them to impose their views over their fragmented and dispersed rivals and opponents within the military and government bureaucracy. Taking advantage of the notion of "civil supremacy" they were able to impose their extreme militarist war doctrines on their critics within the traditional military leadership, whom they attacked as

being “too bureaucratic and cautious”. In effect their ultra-voluntarism military doctrines conflicted with the more rational-calculated policies of the established military strategists.

2. Facilitating an apocalyptic event was an essential element in the ascendancy of the civil militarist in imperial policy-making positions and the seizure of war making powers. Massive documentation and critical analysis drawn from official intelligence sources reveal that the civilian militarists were knowledgeable and actively involved in facilitating the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. The civilian militarists, on the day of the terrorist event, set in motion their Middle East war agenda and proceeded to propound and implement their extremist “offensive war” agenda. They deliberately induced and magnified a paranoid style of politics which centered on an immediate world-wide terrorist threat to millions of defenseless civilians based on nuclear, biological and chemical warfare (despite that fact that 9/11 terrorist attack was carried out with cheap plastic box-cutters). This unprecedented bizarre ideological “terror campaign” orchestrated by the civilian militarists resonated strongly with the paranoid politics of the Israeli regime which urged a Judeo-Christian Crusade against a worldwide Islamic terrorist threat.

3. Messianic missions are a constant component of the civilian militarist mentality. These are partly cynical exercises in the manipulation of universal democratic ideals and partly the result of a fervor for US world supremacy. Messianic missionary zeal has the intended consequence of providing a self-justification for gross violations of human rights, international and domestic laws. The civil militarists know that their military invasions willingly destroy democratic rights of self-determination, that their advocacy of military occupation lead to the denial of the rights of democratic self-government, yet they proclaim their goal is to “democratize the Middle East”, a claim which is echoed in the mass media. Cynicism aside, the Messianic mission fuels the vituperative attacks against real or imagined critics which accompanies authoritarian repressive measures aimed at intimidating critics, and inciting arbitrary arrests, indefinite jailing and the use of torture against suspects.

4. Moralistic military campaigns have the virtue of not having to provide facts to justify violent assaults on peoples and nations. The issue for the civilian militarists is not

whether an attack or a military threat really exists. The essential element for them is that there is a self-defined world of “good” and “evil” -- a virtuous world power (US) united with its regional accomplice (Israel) against an evil “other” (Muslim, Third World, independent state) hostile to US empire building and Israeli colonization. Moral crusaders among the civilian militarists believe that the masses need to be deceived by a “Noble Lie”, because the masses are incapable of understanding the “higher truth” of the virtues of permanent war to secure US world supremacy and a “Greater Israeli” regional mini-empire. Many progressive critics have spilled gallons of ink refuting the lies of the civilian militarists regarding Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, Saddam’s links to Al Queda. This is a worthy enterprise but one which is irrelevant to the civilian militarists, because, for them “truth” is embodied in their (military) actions and not in the pretext (lies) that they expounded. Insofar as the lies “worked”, that is insofar as they were able to launch a war, prepare for other wars, terrorize the population into supporting war, and seize control of the levers of power, a “higher truth” became a reality: the beginning of permanent offensive warfare.

5. The doctrine of “living space” is intimately related to the civilian militarist practice of permanent war. In their paranoid voluntaristic vision, no place and no time is secure. Threats exist in a series of concentric circles from the Middle East Islamic people (surrounding Israel) outward toward Asia, North Africa, and Western Europe... Security threats are present among “Old European States” and Third World countries which refuse to subordinate themselves to US security forces. In order to achieve “living space” in the US and wherever its business interests, military bases and operation can (or should) have a dominant presence, the issue of “security” becomes a code word for perpetual overt or clandestine military, political and ideological warfare. Ultimately, for the civilian militarists, only a world in which the US exercises absolute supreme sovereign imperial power will result in secure living space.

To enhance their power in the imperial state, the civilian militarists have pursued a number of organizational reforms. For illustrative purposes we can cite at least three types of “reforms” and their stated rationale and real purpose:

1. Organizational decentralization: Civilian militarists argue that there are too many bureaucratic and political constraints on timely and efficient decisions in a time of

imminent threats of terror. In a time of national emergency, established “bureaucracy” becomes part of the threat rather than part of the solution. This is the formal rationale to disguise the real purpose which is to concentrate power in the hands of civilian militarists in the Pentagon elite and among the neo-conservatives in the National Security Council. The “reform” is designed to bypass existing lines of command until they can be purged and replaced by civilian militarist loyalists.

2. The establishment of non-traditional sources of information (intelligence): Civilian militarists argue that the traditional existing intelligence agencies are ineffective, inaccurate and cumbersome. They argue for “broadening” the basis of intelligence gathering, “diversifying” sources and by-passing cumbersome bureaucracies and securing “direct lines” from the field in order to take decisive action in a timely fashion. The real purpose of the civilian militarists is to create their own parallel “sources” to fabricate intelligence in pursuit of their permanent war doctrine.

3. Greater ‘cooperation’ with acknowledged friendly states with a long-term, in-depth experience in the area of terrorist warfare: The formal rationale for this “reform” advocating “special relations” with overseas experts is that the imperialist state can save time, build on existing expertise, avoid making mistakes through trial and error and duplication by creating new bureaucracies. In addition the civilian militarists, especially the Zionists, look at the Israeli “anti-terrorist” apparatus as a successful model, despite the fact that Israel is the most likely site of terrorist action. The real purpose is to strengthen ties with the State of Israel, to increase biased information and disinformation flows in order to mold US imperial policies around Israel’s Middle East interests. Since the Pentagon Zionists have the best and most intense relations with Israel who is better placed to facilitate joint cooperation than these very same ideologues

Conclusion

War, specifically US imperialist war, doctrine is made up of several sub-tests and key concepts such as a “unipolar world”, offensive, permanent wars and extra-territorial jurisdiction. The doctrine is based on the belief of imperial invincibility – based on mass media imagery of successful US warriors-supermen representing a righteous superpower.

The key to understanding the source and practitioners of these doctrines is found in the ascendancy of a “new class “ of civilian militarists (CM) and their think-tank auxiliaries and civil society supporters who have triggered catastrophic events to facilitate their dominant position in the imperial state. The ascent of the CM has not gone uncontested both from inside the imperial state and from without, especially from former traditional military and intelligence leaders.

In the new millennium a combination of circumstance and timing as well as calculated long-term positioning, has enabled a specific group of civilian militarists to achieve strategic positions in the imperial state – namely Zionist ideologues intimately involved in long-term relations with the state of Israel.

These ideologues and their civilian militarists cohort have pushed to the limit their psychological warfare designed to terrorize the mass of the population to follow their extremist doctrine and make the financial and human sacrifices for on-going wars.

This paper demonstrates that the decisions to launch imperial wars today are not simply the result of the economic interests of US multi-nationals (petroleum or otherwise). In the case of the Middle East, many of the decision-makers did not consult nor were they influenced by oil or other economic interests – most of the multinationals had on-going, lucrative and stable working relations with conservative oil producing Arab elites. At most some oil companies were promised future benefits via privatization of public oil facilities.

Imperial war was designed and driven by a set of policymakers with little interest in or no notion of the economic costs of war. The driving force for the war is found among civilian militarists who facilitated and capitalized on a catastrophic event (9/11) which allowed them to bypass traditional military and intelligence hierarchies. Internal consent for extremist militarism was induced through massive, intense and continuous fear propaganda fomented by the civilian militarists to consolidate their power. The psychological-ideological campaign allowed for vast expenditures of resources and civilian militarist monopoly over imperial policy. War took on a special meaning for the Zionist component of the civilian militarists – serving as a prop for enhancing Israel’s regional power.

While the ideological dominance and psychological control exercised by the civilian militarists over the masses is formidable it is profoundly vulnerable. The constant and irreversible defeats suffered by the US colonial army in Iraq have demonstrated that the US imperial army is not invincible. The incapacity for the US to move on to new ground wars has temporarily challenged the doctrine of permanent offensive wars. The mass discontent within the colonial army has undercut and exposed the irrationality of the civilian militarists. Their proposals for increasing troop levels in Iraq, augmenting the recruitment of soldiers, that is, deepening US involvement in an un-winnable war is leading to greater casualties, deeper discontent at home and greater resistance in Iraq, and severely straining the crisis-ridden US economy. Escalation of war to Iran based on irrational voluntarism will bring the civilian militarists into greater conflict with traditional economic and military power centers. Capitalist rationality, based on cost-benefit calculations, is likely to challenge the atavistic behavior of the civilian warlords, leading to greater internal divisions within the empire and without.

Inter-elite conflicts may serve to activate sectors of the ‘rational’ middle class concerned with the long-term, large-scale interests of empire against the civilian-militarists and their associated power worshipers. “Living space” security doctrines will continue to be played out but in more select locations and within the boundaries of imperial capacity to recruit clients and imperial allies. Wars, which endanger the military status of the imperial state, will be recast in terms of spheres of influence – in which big powers interests will marginalize the exaggerated and inflated role of Israel in world and regional politics. Today the future of the US Empire and particularly the future of its civilian militarists depend on how decisively the empire is defeated in the Middle East. As goes the war in the Middle East, so go the future methods of imperial expansion.

The total military debacle of the civilian militarists and their Zionist core in the Middle East will probably result in a rethinking of the meaning, purposes and goals of imperial wars. Most likely, the economic costs and benefits of imperial wars will return to the center of elite debate, without the bias of third countries interests. These elite debates will attempt to forge a new more limited and ‘rational’ model of world empire.

The issue of turning from empire toward a more ‘republican’ style of politics can only be taken up in another venue, within mass-based anti-imperialist movements which will

begin among the colonial subjects of imperial centers but may include the excluded and exploited within the imperial capitals.