

THE ROLE OF IDEAS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF ALTERNATIVES

PERRY ANDERSON*

MY SUBJECT tonight is centrally the role of ideas in the construction of alternatives. Well, if Marx was right, saying that the dominant ideas in the world are always the ideas of the dominant classes, it is very clear that these classes –in themselves– haven't changed at all over the last hundred years. In other words, the owners of the world continue to be the owners of the materials means of production, at a national and international level.

Nevertheless, it is equally obvious that the forms of their ideological dominance have indeed changed, and significantly so. I wish to begin my paper, then, with some observations regarding this point.

If we hark back to the world situation after the defeat of fascism in 1945, the international setting was polarized between capitalism and communism. The distinction may be made, however, that while in the East the Soviets employed the terms in the above-mentioned pair, in the Western counterpart, instead, the official concepts in the face-off were completely different. In the West, the Cold War was present-

* Professor of the History Department of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and editor of the *New Left Review*.

ed as a battle between democracy and totalitarianism. The Western bloc did not employ the term “capitalism” for self-reference, since this was considered basically as a term of the enemy’s, a weapon against the system rather than a description of it. The West expressed itself in the name of the “Free World,” not of the “Capitalist World.”

In this sense, the end of the Cold War led capitalism, for the first time in history, to begin to proclaim itself as what it was, an ideology that announced the arrival of an endpoint in social development, constructed on the assumptions of the free market, beyond which it was impossible to conceive substantial improvements. Francis Fukuyama gave the broadest and most ambitious theoretical expression to this view of the world in his book *The End of History*. But in other, more vague and popular expressions, the same message was also spread: capitalism is the universal and permanent fate of humanity. There is no longer anything outside this fulfilled destiny.

This is the nucleus of neoliberalism as an economic doctrine that is still massively dominant at government level all over the world. This swaggering boastfulness of a deregulated capitalism, as the best of all possible worlds, is a novelty of the current hegemonic system. Not even in Victorian times were the virtues and needs of the reign of capital so clamorously proclaimed. The roots of this historical change are clear: it is a product of the West’s clear victory in the Cold War. Let it be fully understood: not only the defeat but rather the complete disappearance of its Soviet adversary, and the consequent inebriation of the owning classes, who now no longer needed euphemisms or circumlocutions to disguise the nature of their domination.

That contradiction between capitalism and communism in the Cold War period had always been overdetermined by another global contradiction; I refer to the struggle between the Third World’s national liberation movements and the First World’s colonial and imperialist powers. On occasion both struggles fused or crisscrossed each other, as here in Cuba, or in China and Vietnam.

The result of a long history of anti-imperialist combat was the emergence around the world of national states that were formally emancipated from the colonial yoke and endowed with juridical independence, even enjoying a seat at the United Nations. The principle of national sovereignty many times violated in practice by the great powers, but never questioned, or, in other words, always affirmed by international law and solemnly inscribed in the United Nations Charter, has been the major conquest of this wave of Third World struggles.

But in their struggles against imperialism, the national liberation movements found themselves benefiting –objectively– from the existence and strength of the Soviet camp. Even when they lacked material or direct support from the Soviet Union, the mere existence of the communist camp kept the West, and especially the United States, from crushing those struggles with all the means at their disposal and without fear of resistance or reprisal. The correlation of global forces, after the Second World War, did not allow the extermination campaigns freely practiced (by France in Morocco, or Britain in Iraq) after the First World War. In fact the United States always tried to present itself before the countries of the Third World as an anti-colonialist country, being the product of the first anti-colonialist revolution on the American continent. The diplomatic and political competition between West and East in the Third World favored the national liberation movements.

With the disappearance of the communist camp there also vanished the traditional inhibitions that conditioned the North in its relations with the South, and this is the second great change in recent decades. Its expression in the field of the confrontation of ideas has been an increasing assault against the principle of national sovereignty. Here the decisive moment was constituted by the Balkan war (1999). The military aggression against Yugoslavia launched by NATO was openly justified as a historical transcending of the fetish of national sovereignty, in the name of higher values, that is to say, in favor of human rights. Since then, an army of jurists, philosophers and ideologues has built up a new doctrine of “military humanism,” seeking to demonstrate that national sovereignty is a dangerous anachronism in this period of globalization, and that it can and should be trampled on to universalize human rights, as these are understood by the more advanced and, of course, enlightened countries. Today, in Iraq, we see the fruit of this “apotheosis” of human rights.

Ideological innovations: “military humanism”

Thus, it can be said that in the field of ideas the new worldwide hegemony is based on two fundamental transformations with regard to the dominant discourse during the Cold War: (a) the self-affirmation of capitalism, declared as such, and not simply as a mere socio-economic system preferable to socialism but as the “sole” form of organizing

modern life conceivable for humanity from here to eternity; (b) the open annulment of national sovereignty as a key to international relations among states, in the name of human rights.

Let us briefly give an account of a structural connection between these two changes. The unlimited reign of capital presupposes the *de facto* cancellation of many of the classical prerogatives of a national state which, in consequences, loses faculties which used to pertain to it, such as controlling the exchange rate, the interest rate, its fiscal policy and lastly the very structure of its national budget. In this sense, the juridical annulment of national sovereignty –to the benefit of military humanism– completes and formalizes an already quite advanced process of erosion of the structure of the nation-state.

Now then, are these two ideological transformations enough for setting up a new worldwide hegemony? No, because a hegemony demands something more, demands the existence of a particular power that will organize and enforce compliance with the general rules of the system. In a word, there is no worldwide hegemony without a hegemonic state. A hegemonic power has to be a particular state –with a series of features that, by definition, cannot be shared by other states, since it is these peculiarities, precisely, that make it a superpower above the other states. A particular state capable, therefore, of performing a universal role as guarantor of the “proper operation” of the system.

We thus still need to mention the third and most unexpected of the changes underway. While neoliberalism offers a universal social and economic framework, “military humanism” proposes a universal political framework. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the radius of action of United States hegemony has extended enormously, for the first time turning truly global.

One may then ask oneself, how is this new U.S. high-handedness articulated with the ideological innovations of neoliberalism and of military humanism? Unfortunately, in a manner totally unthinkable only a few years ago. With a steady tread, imperialism has been fully and candidly rehabilitated as a highly valuable, modernizing and civilizing political system. It was Anthony (Tony) Blair’s advisor on national security affairs, Robert Cooper, who initiated this contemporary transvaluation of imperialism, giving as a touching example NATO’s assault on Yugoslavia. Afterwards, Lyndon Johnson’s grandson, the constitutional jurist and nuclear strategist Philip Bobbit, predicted in his –certainly enormous– book *The Shield of Achilles* the most

radical and ambitious theorization of the new United States hegemony. Today, articles, essays and books that celebrate the rebirth of the “American Empire,” typically embellished with lengthy comparisons with the Roman Empire and its civilizing role, cascade from the printing presses in the United States.

It must be stressed that this neo-imperialist euphoria isn't an ephemeral excess of the United States right; there are both Democrats and Republicans in its array of heroes. For every Robert Kagan or Max Boot, there is a counterpart like Philip Bobbit or Michael Ignatieff. It would be a serious mistake to believe that this is the work of one man alone. That Ronald Reagan or the Bushes –father and son– have been capable by themselves to give life and growth to these ideas. It is not so. James Carter and Bill Clinton, too, with their Zbigniew Brzezinskis and Samuel Bergers, have made their contributions, playing equally fundamental roles in the development of this political scene.

We could state it in the following manner: both neoliberalism and neo-imperialism have been politically bipartisan in the United States, as also in its closest ally, the United Kingdom. It is not that the role of the center-right and the performance of the center-left have been identical in their emergence and consolidation. Nevertheless, in both cases there was a brief but significant intervention in the path taken by this phenomenon. Thus, neoconservative monetarism began in the North under the governments of James Carter and Callaghan in the late 1970s; was enormously powered and expanded under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher; and finally consolidated by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. Analogously, the first boldly neo-imperialist initiatives were shaped in Afghanistan by Brzezinski; extended to Nicaragua, Grenada, Libya and other places by Casey and Weinberger; and normalized as part of the system in the Middle East and in the Balkans by Albright and Berger.

Now, if these are nowadays the main features of the new worldwide hegemony in the battlefield of ideas, where are the main clusters of resistance localized, and what specific forms do they take? If we look at the global political scene, we may identify three different geographical areas where adverse reactions to U.S. hegemony appear.

Foci of global resistance

At the beginning of 2003 Europe saw the biggest street demonstrations in its entire history against the war that was being readied in the

Middle East. In Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Britain, millions of people came out into the streets to express their opposition to the invasion of Iraq –even many United States citizens chose to demonstrate against this war. The center of gravity of the international pacifist movement has undeniably been European. How much hope may be placed on the reach of this major reaction by European public opinion? Could it have been a merely immediate and ephemeral impulse? What was undoubtedly influential was the undisguisable hostility vis-à-vis the policy of the White House, which continues to be reflected in all surveys following the war, as well as in a torrent of articles, manifestos and outpourings in the mass media of the main countries on the continent. A concrete aspect of this recent wave of anti-U.S. sentiment is the affirmation of a historical identity, pertaining to European societies and absolutely different from that of the United States. The philosopher J. Habermas and many other European intellectuals and politicians theorize these differences as a contrast in values. Europe continues to be more humane, more tolerant, more pacific and socially more responsible with regard to the people governed than its United States counterpart.

It is clear that the European capitalist model has, since the Second World War, been more regulatory and interventionist than that of the U.S., and that no European state, and the European Union even less so, enjoys a remotely comparable military power to that at Washington's disposal. But nowadays neoliberalism reigns in all European societies with the same watchwords as in the rest of the world in terms of reduction of government expenditure, reduction of social benefits, deregulation of markets, privatization of industries and public services. In this regard the structural differences between the European Union and the United States are ever smaller. What appears is a vague notion that alludes to the existence of a cultural difference between those political units, although, obviously, with every passing year European societies find themselves more subordinated to the products of Hollywood and of Silicon Valley. Nevertheless, this European distance or cultural reaction which we referred to constitutes a very weak basis in terms of a lasting political resistance to the United States. This is very clearly seen in the fact that the overwhelming majority of the demonstrators against the Iraq war should have fervently supported the war against Yugoslavia, whose justification and *modus operandi* were more or less identical. The main difference appears to center on the fact that at that time the president was Bill

Clinton, a sumptuous and effusive Democrat with whom so many Europeans identified themselves, and not the Republican George Bush, who reminds them of an unacceptably sullen and rustic cowboy. In other words, there is no opposition to neo-imperialism in principle; there only exists a “label aversion” against the figure of its current ruler. For this reason, it is no coincidence that after the conquest of Iraq the European pacifist movement finds itself in a situation of reflux, accepting the *fait accompli*, and without making any type of significant manifestation of solidarity with the national resistance to the occupation. To this is added the fact that the European governments that have initially opposed the invasion of Iraq (like Germany, France and Belgium) have quickly adapted to the conquest, seeking timidly to repair their relations with the White House.

Let us now position ourselves in the Middle East. Here, the setting is a totally different one, since combat is being offered, arms in hand, against the new worldwide hegemony. Both in Afghanistan and in Iraq, the lightning United States conquest was followed by a tenacious guerrilla resistance in the territorial space that still causes the U.S. serious difficulties. Additionally, there isn't the slightest doubt about the massive support of Arab public opinion in the entire region to these national liberation struggles against the occupiers and their puppets. It would be surprising if the Arab world did not react in this manner in the face of the U.S. aggressions, since these take place in a formerly colonial area that each day, with Washington's blessing, experiences the expansion of Israeli colonialism in the Palestinian territories. From the outset, this historical background separates the form in which the Arab opposition is carried out from that of the European opposition with regard to the new worldwide hegemony, and to this end it must be taken into account that some of the above-mentioned European powers were themselves the original colonizers of the region. But there are two further factors that differentiate the Arab from the European resistance. Here, too, a cultural contrast with the superpower comes into play – a much deeper contrast than the one examined above – because it is sustained by a millennial religion: Islam. Contemporary Islam is, with all its nuances, infinitely less permeable to the penetration of United States culture and ideology than the vague welfare-state identity which the Europeans boast. As we have repeatedly seen, the former is capable of inspiring acts of counterattack of unparalleled ferocity.

Additionally, this ancient religious faith melds with a modern nationalist feeling, rebelling against the miseries and humiliations of a region governed for decades by corrupt and brutal feudal or puppet régimes. The combination of the cultural and religious with the national endows the Islamic-Arab resistance with a strength that will not be easily exhausted. But at the same time, it has its limitations. It lacks the social aspect, a credible alternative vision of a modern society to that which the hegemonic power seeks to impose in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the diverse tyrannical and backward régimes of the region continue to oppress their peoples, all of them, without exception, being ready to collaborate with the United States, as has been demonstrated *ad libitum* by the Arab League and by the experience of the First Gulf War.

We have already mentioned two of the existing centers of resistance: Europe and the Middle East. Let us turn now to developing the third focus of resistance, located in Latin America.

Singularities of the Latin American resistance

In Latin America we find a much stronger and promising combination of factors than in Europe or in the Middle East. Here and only here, the resistance to neoliberalism and to neo-imperialism melds the cultural with the social and national. That is to say, it implies the emerging vision of another type of organization of society, and another model of relations among states on the basis of these three different dimensions. Of the three decisive features that distinguish this region from the previous ones, this is the first one to underline.

In the second place, Latin America is –and this is fact that is frequently forgotten– the only region of the world with a continuous history of revolutionary upsets and radical political struggles that extend for somewhat more than the last century. Neither in Asia, nor in Africa, nor in Europe do we find the equivalent of the succession of revolts and revolutions that have marked the specific Latin American experience. The twentieth century began with the Mexican Revolution that took place before the First World War. It was a victorious revolution, but also one that was “purified” as regards many of its popular aspirations. Between the two wars there was a series of heroic uprisings and political experiments that were defeated but deserve to be remembered: Sandinism in Nicaragua, the Aprist revolt in Peru, the

insurrection in El Salvador, the revolution of 1933 in Cuba, the rising in Brazil, the brief socialist republic and the popular front in Chile. With the Second World War, however, a new cycle began: first Peronism in its Jacobin phase in Argentina, the Bogotazo in Colombia and the Bolivian revolution of 1952. At the end of the decade the Cuban Revolution burst out. There followed a new wave of guerrilla struggles all across the continent, and lastly we cannot fail to mention the election of the government of Salvador Allende in Chile.

All these experiments were crushed with the cycle of military dictatorships that began in Brazil in 1964 and then cleared the way for Bolivia, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina in the leaden 1970s. By the middle of the decade, the reaction appeared to be victorious almost everywhere. Again, however, the fire of the resistance was lit with the triumph of the Sandinist revolution, the struggle of the Salvadoran guerrillas, and the massive campaign for direct elections in Brazil. This onslaught of popular insurgency, too, was mercilessly disarticulated. In the mid-1990s there reigned in almost all Latin American countries native versions of U.S. neoliberalism, installed or backed by Washington: the governments of Carlos S. Menem in Argentina, Alberto Fujimori in Peru, Fernando Henrique Cardoso in Brazil, Salinas de Gortari in Mexico, Sánchez de Losada in Bolivia, etc. Finally, with a restored, stable democracy, and excellent economic policies, the Department of State believed that Latin America had become a safe and quiet backyard of the global empire. However, soon the political landscape was to become radicalized once more. The most recent popular cycle, which began with the Zapatist revolt in Chiapas, has already witnessed the arrival of Chávez in power in Venezuela, the victories of Ignacio Lula da Silva and Néstor Kirchner in Brazil and Argentina respectively, the collapse of Sánchez de Losada in Bolivia, and repeated social outbreaks in Peru and Ecuador.

We still have to mention a third distinctive feature of the Latin American scene: here, and only here, do we find coalitions of governments and movements in a broad front of resistance to the new worldwide hegemony. In Europe, the pacifist and alterglobalist movement has been much more extensive than the diplomatic opposition by some governments to the war in Iraq. This asymmetry between the street and the palace has been one of the most significant features of the European situation, where the majority of governments –Great Britain, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Denmark and all of Washington’s new satellites in Eastern Europe– not only backed the

aggression against Iraq, but participated in the occupation, while the majority of their populations opposed the war. In the Middle East, this asymmetry between the virtually unanimous opposition of the street to the conquest of Iraq and the virtually unanimous complicity of the régimes with the aggressor is even more dramatic, or indeed total. In Latin America, in contrast, one sees a series of governments that to diverse degrees and in different fields try to resist the will of the hegemonic power, and a set of typically more radical social movements that fight for a different world, without diplomatic or ideological inhibitions; there one finds from the Zapatists in Mexico and the members of the Landless Movement (MST) in Brazil, to the coca growers and miners of Bolivia, the picketers in Argentina, the strikers in Peru, the indigenist block in Ecuador, and so many others. This constellation endows the resistance front with a repertory of tactics and actions, and with a strategic potential, superior to those of any other part of the world. In Asia, for example, there may be governments that are firmer in their opposition to United States economic and ideological commands –Mahathir’s Malaysia is an obvious case– but powerful social movements are lacking; and where such movements exist, the governments typically show themselves to be to a greater or lesser extent servile, as in South Korea, whose president now promises troops to help the occupation of Iraq.

Limits of the government-social movements articulation

Taking into account all that has been said up to this point, it is logical that the two most important initiatives for international resistance to the new worldwide hegemony should have been conceived and launched in Latin America. The first, of course, has been the emergence of the World Social Forum, with its symbolic roots in Porto Alegre; and the second, the creation of the G-22, in Cancún. In both cases, the notable aspect is a true intercontinental resistance front, which in very different ways encompassed movements in one case and governments in the other. Now then, both the Social Forums and the G-22 have concentrated their resistance efforts on the neoliberal sector of the enemy front, i.e. essentially on the economic agenda of the hegemonic power and its allies in the wealthy countries. Here, correctly, the central targets have been the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). In this battle of ideas

the notion of free markets, in other words, pure and autonomous systems of exchange of commodities, of labor and of capital, without political or other interference, have been ever more clearly exposed as mystification. All markets, at all times, are erected and regulated politically: the only pertinent question is what type of politics shapes and determines them. Neoliberalism seeks to impose its “Great Neoliberalism Transformation” (to employ the formula coined by Karl Polanyi). Like its predecessor, the Victorian state, this project on a global scale implies the imposition of trading rules that favor the interests of the metropolitan states and corporations to the detriment of the interests of the peripheral countries. Protectionism turns into a privilege reserved to the North, while in the South it is seen as an infraction of the fundamental laws of any healthy economy. Compared to this hypocrisy, the medieval idea of a fair price might seem like a model of enlightenment. The attack that was carried out in Cancún against the ideological arrogance and practical abuses of the hegemonic power and its allies hit the mark.

Nevertheless, and here the discrepancies between governments and movements stand out, resisting hegemonic pretensions in the trade area –for example, defending MERCOSUR against the FTAA– cannot lead to very encouraging results, if at the same time the IMF and the financial markets are docilely obeyed in matters as crucial as interest rates, the fiscal standards, the pension system, the so-called primary surplus, not to mention responses to the popular demand for an egalitarian redistribution of land. Here the role of social movements becomes decisive. Only their ability to mobilize the masses the peasants, workers, informal and precarious workers and employees who combat wavering and opportunistic governments –if necessary, without truce– can ensure more egalitarian and fair social policies. The democracy which the neoliberal governments of the last decade boasted of has always been a restricted and elitist affair, with low electoral participation and major interference by the power of money. A democracy that practices an effective resistance against the new worldwide hegemony is something different: it requires an exercise of power from below, the embryonic forms of which are being outlined in the “participative budget” of Porto Alegre, the Bolivian insurgency committees, the self-organization of the Venezuelan shanty towns, the MST’s land takeovers.

Who fights against neo-imperialism, and how?

We take due note of the existence of promising outbreaks of regional international resistance against neoliberalism. What is necessary now is to ask oneself about the current situation as regards the challenging of neo-imperialism. Here the setting becomes somber. The first Social Forums have carefully avoided the apparently too burning issue of the new United States bellicosity. In Europe there have been not a few people who, swallowing the idea of a military humanism in defense of human rights, backed the bombing of Belgrade. Among governments, naturally, one sees even less appetite for facing the hegemonic power in its strongest terrain, the military field. The reaction of the diverse Latin American governments to the invasion of Iraq could be encapsulated by the immediate repudiation to which the unfortunate Chilean ambassador to the United Nations was subjected by the social-democratic President Lagos, when in an unguarded moment during an informal chat he condemned the Anglo-U.S. aggression, and for this reason received a furious telegram from La Moneda in which he was ordered to rectify his *lapsus*. Chile didn't condemn the aggression; it regretted it. The other Latin American governments haven't demonstrated any greater courage: the only two exceptions were Cuba and Venezuela.

Now then, this resistance front against the new worldwide hegemony demands a consistent criticism of its key concepts. Here the battle of ideas for the construction of an alternative must concentrate its aim on two decisive points: human rights and the United Nations, which have currently turned into instruments of the global strategy of the hegemonic power. Let us first examine human rights. Historically, the declaration that introduced them to the world, in 1789, has been one of the great political feats of the French Revolution. But, as was to be expected, this notion, the fruit of the ideology of a great bourgeois revolution, lacked a philosophical basis to underpin it. A right is not an anthropological phenomenon; it is a juridical concept, which has no meaning outside a legal framework that institutes this or that right in a code of law. There cannot be any human rights in the abstract, which is to say, transcending any concrete state, in the absence of a code of law. To speak of human rights as if they could pre-exist beyond the laws that would bring them to life is mystification.

It was because of this that a classic utilitarian thinker, Jeremy Bentham, called them “follies” and Marx, whose opinion of the former was never high, did not hesitate to quote him on this regard.

The obvious fact is that there cannot be any human rights as if they were dictated by a universal anthropology, not only because their idea is a relatively recent phenomenon, but also because there is no universal consensus on the list of such rights. According to the dominant ideology, private property, naturally including that which concerns the means of production, is considered a fundamental human right, proclaimed as such, for example, in the war against Yugoslavia, when the U.S. ultimatum to Rambouillet that set off the NATO attack demanded not only freedom and security for the population of Kosovo, and the free movement of NATO troops through Yugoslav territory, but also blithely stipulated –I quote– that Kosovo must have a market economy. In fact, within the parameters of the dominant ideology in the United States, the right to decide is daily opposed to the right to life with regard to the issue of abortion. There is no rational criterion for discriminating among such constructions, since rights are by their constitution malleable and arbitrary, like any political notion: anybody can invent one according to his own whim. What they normally represent is interests, and it is the relative power of these interests that determines which of the rival constructions is predominant. The right to employment, for example, has no status in the constitutional doctrines of the countries of the North; the right to inheritance does. To grasp this does not imply any nihilistic position. Although human rights (but not legal rights) are a philosophical confusion, there exist human needs that indeed do without any juridical framework, and correspond in part to universal anthropological phenomena –such as the need for nourishment, for shelter, for protection against torture or abuse– and partly correspond to demands that are, in a Hegelian manner, the product of historical development, such as the freedoms of expression, entertainment, organization, and others. In this sense, rather than of rights, it is always preferable to speak of needs: a more materialist and less equivocal notion.

Let us now turn to our military humanism, the illustrated shield of human rights under the new worldwide hegemony. I have noticed that the Social Forum and more generally the alterglobalization movements have paid little attention to neo-imperialism, preferring to concentrate their fire on neoliberalism. Nevertheless, there is a very simple international mobilizing watchword that they might

adopt. This consists in demanding the closure of all foreign military bases around the world. Currently, the United States maintains such bases in over a hundred countries throughout the planet. We must demand that each of these bases be closed and evacuated, from the oldest and most infamous of all, here in Guantánamo, to the newest, in Kabul, Bishkek and Baghdad. The same for the British, French, Russian and other bases. What justification is there for these innumerable tumors on the flanks of national sovereignty, other than simply *la raison d'être* of the empire and its allies?

The United States military bases constitute the fundamental strategic infrastructure of the hegemonic power. The United Nations provide an essential superstructure for its new forms of domination. From the first Gulf War onwards, the UN has operated as a docile instrument of its successive aggressions, maintaining, for a decade, the criminal blockade of Iraq, which has caused between 300,000 and 500,000 deaths, most of them of children; consecrating the NATO attack on Yugoslavia, where it propitiated and continues to propitiate post-sale services to the aggressors in Kosovo; and now, cooperating with the occupiers of Iraq to set up a government of U.S. puppets in Baghdad, and collecting funds from other countries to finance the costs of the conquest of the country. Since the disappearance of the Soviet Union, Washington's command over the UN has become almost limitless. The White House directly, and without any shame, chose the current Secretary-General as its administrative butler in Manhattan, casting his predecessor aside as insufficiently servile to the United States. The FBI openly eavesdrops on all foreign delegations to the General Assembly. The CIA, without even denying its activities, which are public knowledge, penetrated the corps of the so-called inspectors in Iraq, from head to toe. There is no measure of bribery or blackmail that the Department of State does not employ daily to twist nations' representatives to its will. There are occasions, though they are ever rarer, when the UN doesn't explicitly approve the projects and decisions of the United States on which Washington unilaterally takes the initiative, and then the UN authorizes them post-facto, as a *fait accompli*. What never happens now is that the UN rejects or condemns a United States action.

The root of this situation is very simple. The UN was built up in the days of F.D. Roosevelt and Truman as a machine for the dominance of the big powers over of the other countries of the world, with a façade of equality and democracy in the General Assembly, and an

iron-fisted concentration of power in the hands of the five permanent members of the Security Council, arbitrarily chosen among the victors of a war that has no relevance today. This deeply oligarchic structure lends itself to any kind of diplomatic command and manipulation. This is what has led the organization –which in principle ought to be a bulwark of the national sovereignty of the poor countries of the world– to its current prostitution, converted into a mere mask for the demolition of that sovereignty in the name of human rights, naturally transformed in turn into the right of the hegemonic power to blockade, bomb, invade and occupy lesser countries, according to its whim.

What conceivable remedy is there to this situation? All projects for the reform of the Security Council have sunk on the grounds of the rejection by the monopolists of the veto to give up their privileges, which they also have the power to protect. All demands by the General Assembly for a democratization of the organization have been, and will be, in vain. The only plausible solution to this impasse would appear to be the withdrawal from the organization of one or several large countries of the Third World, which could de-legitimize it until the Security Council were forced to accept its expansion and a redistribution of real powers within the General Assembly. In the same way, additionally, the only hope for serious nuclear disarmament is the withdrawal of one or several countries of the Third World from the infamous Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty –which ought to be called Treaty for the Preservation of the Nuclear Oligopoly– to force the true, arrogant holders of weapons of mass destruction to renounce their privileges.

It is necessary to restore and promote any serious resistance to the new worldwide hegemony, Samir Amin has said here¹. I agree. I will only add that the principles of equality that are demanded and applied should be inclusive, that is to say, that they not be restricted to the economic and social fields within nations, but also be applied to political and military aspects among nations.

As I see it, we are still far from having achieved this order of things. How far, can be seen in the latest resolution of the Security Council, voted in this very month of October, and in which the supreme organ of the United Nations solemnly welcomes the puppet council of the occupation forces in Iraq, calling it the incarnation of Iraqi sovereignty, condemning the acts of resistance to the occupation, calling on all countries to assist in the reconstruction of Iraq under the

¹ See Samir Amin's article in this book.

designs of these same puppet forces, and naming the United States as recognized leader of a multinational force of occupation of the country. This resolution, which is nothing else than the UN's act of blessing for the conquest of Iraq, was unanimously approved. It was signed by France, Russia, China, Germany, Spain, Bulgaria, Mexico, Chile, Guinea, Cameroon, Angola, Syria, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and the United States. The supposedly Gaullist France, the supposedly popular China, the supposedly social democratic Germany and Chile, the supposedly Baathist Syria, the Angola once rescued by Cuba from its own invasion, not to speak of the other, more familiar clients of the United States, all of them accomplices in the recolonization of Iraq. This is the new worldwide hegemony. Let us combat it.