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By Manuel Raposo
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Which side are you on? U.S.-EU vs. Russia-China

Raposo, editor of jornalmudardevida.net, in which this article was published Jan. 26, refutes the conclusions of another article titled, “Putin and Xi Jinping, imperialism’s favorites,” arguing they are enemies who serve the goals of imperialism by giving the imperialists a pretext for attack. Raposo’s response serves to answer anyone on the left who tries to put an equal sign between Russia and China on one side and the U.S., European Union and Japan on the other. Translation: John Catalinotto.



Montenegrins protest regime’s decision to join NATO, 2017.

The world is being drawn into a new cold war. The escalating conflicts over Taiwan and Ukraine are evidence of this. The major powers are aligning forces, forging alliances and

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preparing for confrontations that go beyond mere economic competition and may spill over into military confrontation.

What attitude should the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist left have toward this issue? Is it possible to maintain a position of neutrality and equi-distance without trying to understand who attacks and who is attacked, who provokes conflicts and who defends themselves?

I would like to add a few notes — some objections to what you say and some other considerations — related to your article “Putin and Xi Jinping, the favorites of imperialism.”

The favorites

Not even ironically, I think, can it be said that [Vladimir] Putin and Xi Jinping are the favorites of imperialism.

Imperialism’s favorites are characters like Boris Yeltsin [Russia’s president in the 1990s], who practically destroyed Russia and sold it piece by piece; or the Chinese tycoon Jack Ma, who nurtures the ambition of opening the Chinese economy to stock market speculation, breaking state control over the Chinese financial sector, with the obvious consequence of handing it over to rapacious international finance.

In one case as well as the other, these characters’ goals have failed. In this, the imperialist West has lost a battle and must for now be content to support [Alexei] Navalny-type garbage from Russia or a defector like Ai Weiwei from China.

Russia has been getting back on its feet, after all, and rebuilding its national sovereignty. China keeps the most extreme gluttony of the big foreign and domestic capitalists in check for the time being. And both extend help to the dependent countries. These are the facts that panic the U.S.-EU-Japan imperialist troika (the Triad, as Samir Amin called it) for a well-known reason: They threaten the Triad’s hegemony over the world.

Aggressors and defenders

To condemn some (the U.S.) for pursuing imperialist plans and being hypocrites and, at the same time, condemn others (Russia and China) for being dictators and violators of human rights is a Solomonic attitude that does not address the problem that the world faces today and, in the face of which, the revolutionary left must take sides.

The U.S. and its allies are (always) on the offensive to constrain, undermine and, if possible, break up (politically and territorially) Russia and China. And the latter respond as they can to defend themselves from this siege. The former attack; the latter defend themselves from aggression.

Without making this distinction, nothing becomes clear; and the revolutionary left is unable to play a role in events, bypassing reality.

Ukraine and NATO

The Ukrainian issue began in 2014 with a coup promoted by the U.S. and the EU, based on Ukrainian fascist forces, which overthrew a formally legitimate president and put in power a Western agent. This was followed by the “request” of the new Ukrainian authorities for EU and NATO membership. The Russian reaction, whether in reclaiming Crimea, supporting the rebel republics of Donetsk and Lugansk or in applying military pressure now, is a response to this squeeze.

Moreover, the squeeze extends to Belarus and the recent “wishes” of Georgia, and even Finland and Sweden (see the coincidence?), to join NATO. Since 1990, despite the assurances given by Ronald Reagan and George H. Bush to the naïve [Mikhail] Gorbachev, 14 Eastern European countries have joined NATO. With Gorbachev we had another true favorite of imperialism.

Human rights

After President Jimmy Carter, in the late 1970s, pulled the “defense of human rights” out of the hat, imperialism started to practice the same acts of aggression as always, but under a new guise. And it has succeeded, it must be acknowledged, in neutralizing a large part of world public opinion, which has been stunned by crimes disguised as good “humanitarian” actions aimed at overthrowing “dictators” who mistreat “their own people.”

Do social problems in Belarus or Kazakhstan or elsewhere trigger popular protests? Certainly, and rightly so. But it would be very naïve not to see the interest (and intervention, overt or covert) of the imperialist West in these events. Obviously, the social problems within these countries cannot legitimize the political pressures, economic sanctions or military actions of imperialism.

Now, it has been under the guise of human rights, humanitarian aid, etc., that the Triad has invoked the right to intervene wherever it wishes, obviously doing so in a selective manner: seeking, whenever it can, to “change the regime” in countries that escape its obedience; and preserving the regimes of those within its sphere.

Using this criterion, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, Bolivia . . . are put under fire. And Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Brazil of Bolsonaro, Poland of the Kaczynski brothers . . . are kept under its wing.

To accuse the U.S. and its cronies of practicing “empty rhetoric” or holding protests “without practical significance” in the face of “trampled human rights” implies an inconsequence that these actions don’t actually have. And, if taken literally, such an accusation would force us to demand a consequence from them, that is, a greater and harsher intervention than they already carry out.

That would make sense if we take the humanitarian concerns of imperialism seriously. But it makes no sense at all if we understand the human-rights banner to be a mere tool to make moral gains with public opinion and thus get cover for interventions of force, from sanctions to military action.

Uighurs

I have no inside information about what is going on in the Chinese province of Xinjiang with the Uighur population. What you hear and read around here [Portugal] comes almost exclusively from Western governments and news agencies.

Just a few days ago, Human Rights Watch — created and based in the U.S., financed by rich donors — came out in support of the U.S. campaign to boycott the Winter Olympics in China, even pressuring the U.N. Secretary-General to go along with the campaign. And

here came the charges against the Chinese government about the “atrocities” allegedly committed against the Uighurs.

In this, as in other matters, I don’t disregard what the Chinese authorities say. Why should I believe Western agencies, who “saw” the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, rather than believe what the Chinese say, even though they are a concerned party?

And what they say, to me, makes some sense. The Turkmen- and Muslim-populated province of Xinjiang — on the border with the Central Asian countries and with Afghanistan and Pakistan — has been the target of terrorist attacks, with separatist goals, that killed hundreds of people between late 1990 and 2014. The terrorist operatives were trained by Al-Qaeda, particularly in Afghanistan. Part of the attacks were carried out by the Turkestan Islamic Party, an organization classified by the U.N. as terrorist.

The reaction of the Chinese authorities was to eliminate the terrorist groups, repress those suspected of collaborating with the separatists and promote actions to isolate those groups and suspects from the bulk of the population — namely by creating isolation camps, that the Chinese call “social reeducation centers” or “vocational training centers,” and that Westerners, for obvious reasons, call “concentration camps.”

Development

This is the repressive side of the answer. But the Chinese authorities did not stop there: They reinforced the region’s economic and cultural development plans to remove the basis for the protests and separatist vehemence.

Some figures: Xinjiang’s per capita income is \$7,868, while in the Indian region of Kashmir — also Muslim and also with a history of terrorism and separatism — it is \$1,342. From 2014 to 2019, Xinjiang’s GDP grew at an average annual rate of 7.2%. School attendance is 99.91%, and medical coverage is 99.7% (Maitreya Bhakal, RT, July 2021) Recently, China has declared extreme poverty eliminated in Xinjiang, as in Tibet.

Will this policy of repression-integration lead to the dilution of Uighur identity in China as a whole, as the well-meaning Western consciences lament? Perhaps it will. But this is an inevitable path for any country that cherishes its independence.

China's national integrity (political and territorial) is a key factor for its independent development, that is, development without imperialist tutelage.

To claim that a “genocide” is taking place in Xinjiang (the term was coined by Mike Pompeo, Donald Trump's Secretary of State) not only has no support in proven facts but has all the traits of another piece of the U.S.-led campaign to demonize China. If the opinion of the so-called international community counts for anything, the number of U.N. countries that have supported this China policy far outnumbers those that condemn it at the behest of the U.S. and the Europeans.

Hong Kong

The protests in Hong Kong have been given the status of a “people's struggle for democracy.” It remains to be asked what this “democracy” is all about. The social sectors that have engaged in the protests constitute a middle (and not so middle) class, clinging to the privileges afforded to it by Hong Kong's special status as essentially a territory of speculative capitalism, a banking center and world trade platform.

Hong Kong's service sector accounts for 86.5% of the territory's GDP and industry only 4%, which accounts for the social disposition of the nearly 8 million inhabitants. It is one of the richest areas in Asia and the world with a per capita GDP of \$37,191, compared to China's average of \$8,840 (2021).

Not surprising is the nostalgia for British colonization or the repeated call for U.S. intervention, which the protesters never hid. The movement was essentially a reaction against full integration of Hong Kong into China.

But beyond this internal origin, with its own motivations, there is something more. The extremes the protests reached would have been impossible without the encouragement given to the movement from outside, as was apparent. Still, the case was handled with restraint by the Chinese authorities, not least because they evidently did not want to turn the protesters into “pro-democracy” martyrs.

A figure above suspicion [of sympathizing with China], Portuguese General Garcia Leandro, former governor of Macau, said in 2019 (Portuguese News Agency Lusa), “Beijing has maintained a great deal of restraint.” He added: “You get the feeling that

there is a little hand from outside pushing there.” Suspects? “I don’t want to get into speculation, but it’s clear that there may be Taiwan there; there may be the United States there.”

Once again, to not see, or to devalue, the hand of the West in the matter — and to consider everything that happened as entirely genuine, spontaneous and “popular” — would be not only to ignore the facts, but also to ignore that practically all social movements, practically everywhere in the world, are inevitably overshadowed by the interests and hegemony of the Triad.

As comparisons also speak, the “heavy sentences” for the Hong Kong activists’ crimes of opinion are a far cry from the punishment of persecution, character destruction and possible life imprisonment meted out by the U.S. and its acolytes to Julian Assange — met with silence from almost the entire journalistic community and from the self-appointed defenders of human rights.

Smoke screens

I have no doubt that the revival of a revolutionary and internationalist workers’ movement would be the last thing the Western imperialist powers wish for. But is it this fear that leads them to make Putin and Xi Jinping their favorites? As much as the revolutionary left may wish for this revival, that is not the reality we are faced with.

The possibility that in the short term the international proletariat will have a say in world events is practically nil. Precisely because of this, imperialism can make Russia, China, Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, etc., the permanent targets of its attacks without fearing a massive, organized, international response from the peoples and workers. In the face of this weakness of the revolutionary forces, the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist left cannot invent pleasant future scenarios and evade taking a position in the face of present events.

What is at stake today is the imperialist offensive against the assertion of Russia and China for independence. This is vital not only because of these two countries in themselves, but because this opens up prospects of new directions for many of the dependent countries that until now saw no way of escaping imperialist tutelage.

The support of Russia for Syria, or China for African and South American countries (even with obvious economic interest on China's part), or both for Iran and Venezuela, are examples of this. It is this joint movement that threatens to reverse the world balance of power that has prevailed since World War II.

It is in the face of this conflict (and not another future, imaginable or desirable one) that the anti-capitalist left has to define itself. I see only one possible definition: Support anything that contributes to the sinking of Triad imperialism, particularly its head, the U.S. And this clearly implies supporting Russia and China (and the other resistant countries) insofar as their politics mean a fight against the hegemony of the Triad.

This definition is all the more obligatory since, I am convinced, it will be in the breaches opened by this confrontation that the anti-capitalist left will find the path to renew and re-energize the international revolutionary movement that the current epoch lacks.

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