

Military Interventions: Progressive vs. Imperialist

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Wars have almost always been highly devastating affairs, with dire consequences in ruined and destroyed lives, as well as in the destruction of economies, farms, factories, housing and public infrastructure. While it cannot be said that all people at all times have considered wars to be best avoided, it is safe to say that the humanitarian case against war is overwhelming.

This essay is concerned, not with war in general, but with military interventions. To be sure, military interventions are often inseparable from wars, since they are often the causes of them. But not always. Some occur in the context of wars that are already underway. And some happen without provoking major resistance.

Today, on the left—and even the right—there are many activists who are committed to an anti-war position, but who are more properly said to oppose military intervention. Opposition to war implies, not only opposition to one country initiating a war against another (aggression), but also to using military means to repel an attack (self-defence.) Yet it is highly unlikely that people who say they are against war mean that they are against self-defence. It is more likely that they mean that a military response to a conflict must only occur for valid reasons, and that self-defence is the only valid one.

However, those who have adopted an anti-war position often stress other reasons for opposing military interventions. These include the ideas that:

- Democracy is senior to other considerations and that people should be allowed to resolve internal conflicts free from the meddling of outside forces.
- Institutions and ideologies cannot be successfully imposed on other people and interventions that seek to do so (e.g., bring democracy to another country) are bound to fail.
- International law is a legitimate basis for determining the validity of military interventions and countries ought to abide by it.

In this essay, the arguments will be made that: none of these principles are grounds to oppose military intervention; one of them is empirically insupportable as an absolute statement; the idea that military force ought to be used only in self-defence is indefensible; and that had these principles been adopted as inviolable, a number of interventions that are now widely regarded as progressive and desirable would never have occurred. A case will be made, instead, that some military interventions are valid and that validity depends on whose interests the intervention serves and whether the long-run effects are progressive. By these criteria, NATO interventions in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya are not valid, while France's intervention on the side of the United States in the American Revolution and the Union government's intervention in the states of the Confederacy in the American Civil War were valid. Also valid were the interventions of the Comintern on the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War

(1936-1938), the Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) interventions in Korea (1950) and Tibet (1959), Cuba's intervention in Angola (1975), and the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan (1979).¹

Democracy and Intervention

Opponents of interventions in civil wars, such as in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and Libya today, argue that the resolution of internal disputes must be accomplished internally by the people who live in the country in which the conflict occurs. Intervention in an internal conflict, no matter how bloody or one-sided the internal conflict is, amounts to an abridgment of the democratic rights of people to collectively control events within their sovereign national territory. Indeed, this principle is enshrined in international law, and can only be laid aside, in law, if an internal dispute threatens international peace and security.

This principle is invoked under other circumstances, too. For example, one argument that was raised against the US-British invasion of Iraq was that it was up to Iraqis to rid themselves of Saddam Hussein. If an outside force ousted the Iraqi leader, Iraqis would be denied the right to make sovereign decisions within their own territory. The same argument is used today to oppose NATO intervention in Libya. Libyans alone, it is said, should decide the fate of the Libyan leader, without massive assistance in the form of a NATO bombing campaign.

Related to this principle is the idea that an intervention is invalid if it is opposed by a majority of people within the country that is being intervened in. A case might be made that a majority of Iraqis was opposed to the United States and Britain attacking and then occupying their country, and that intervention was therefore invalid on democratic grounds. Similarly, a case could be made that the Libyan rebellion lacks majority support, and that intervention on behalf of the rebels is undemocratic and therefore illegitimate.

Similarly, interventions could be said to be invalid if they are without majority support within the intervening country. For example, US intervention in Afghanistan might be considered valid if it is supported by both a majority of US citizens and Afghans, but if majority support is lost, on either side, the intervention loses its validity.

But there is reason to argue that the matter of whether an intervention has majority support is irrelevant to the question of whether it is valid. For example, had a coalition of countries intervened in Nazi Germany to prevent Hitler from initiating a string of aggressions across Europe, would the intervention have been deemed invalid simply because, as we can reasonably suppose, a majority of Germans would have opposed it? Nowadays few would argue against such an intervention on grounds that it would have violated the democratic right of Germans to collectively control their own affairs. Likewise, we can be sure that a majority in the states of the Confederacy did not support Lincoln, but the

¹ A good deal of the analysis on the validity of military interventions presented here is based on the epilogue to Albert Szymanski's Class Struggle in Socialist Poland (Praeger, 1979.)

Union's intervention is not therefore judged to be invalid. And what of France's intervention on the side of the United States in the American Revolution? The validity of that intervention is not determined by whether it had majority support in France.

Many opponents of NATO military interventions invoke non-intervention as an absolute position, but had progressive forces in the past invoked the same position, powerful imperialist forces would have been free to intervene in a series of civil wars on the side of reaction. For example, had the Soviet Union not organized volunteers to defend the nascent Spanish Republic and furnished the Republican side with material assistance, the rebel forces, backed by German and Italian fascism, would have prevailed all the sooner. The PLA intervened in the Korean War after the forces of reaction, backed by a US intervention, threatened to destroy the progressive forces led by Kim Il Sung. Cuba's military intervention in Angola allowed revolutionary nationalism to repel an invasion backed by South Africa. And the Soviet Union's intervention in the civil war in Afghanistan on the side of a modernizing government against Mujahedeen reactionaries backed by the CIA, offered the underdeveloped country the promise of an escape from its unrelieved backwardness. Would those who invoke an absolute non-interventionist position have opposed the intervention of the International Brigades in Spain, the PLA's interventions in Korea and Tibet, Cuba's military interventions in southern Africa, and the Soviet Union's military assistance to the modernizing government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)?

What about military interventions intended to weaken forces of reaction? It is not widely known that Germany's invasion of Denmark and Norway in 1940 provoked Britain, assisted by Canadian troops, to invade and occupy Iceland to prevent that country from being used by the Germany Navy as a submarine base from which it could challenge the Royal Navy for domination of the North Atlantic. In 1942, the United States took over the occupation, and its troops remained—astonishingly--until 2006!

While the British and US invasion and occupation of Iceland has been largely effaced from memory, the Soviet Union's 1939 winter war with Finland and its occupation of the Baltics and invasions of Belarus and Western Ukraine have been the subjects of endless negative commentary, yet these interventions are no different from the British-US invasion of Iceland. Both were intended to deny Germany territories that could be used as springboards for aggression. The Soviet military interventions were provoked by Germany's invasion of Poland, and Hitler's well-known designs on the Soviet Union, which the Fuhrer had adumbrated in his *Mein Kampf*. Had the USSR not moved to exchange territory with Finland and recover territory it had lost in WWI, it is almost certain that the country would have quickly fallen to Germany and that the Nazis may have successfully conquered all of Europe. Had the Nazis defeated the Soviet Union, the repercussions would have been profound and hardly progressive.

Imposing Institutions and Ideologies

When Washington claimed that one of its missions in invading Iraq in 2003 and toppling its government was to bring democracy to the country, opponents of the aggression countered that democracy cannot be imposed; it has to be freely chosen and developed from the ground up. But democracy, if it means regular elections and two or more parties to choose from, can be imposed, and with little difficulty. This

is confirmed by the reality that both Iraq and Afghanistan have had a multi-party electoral regime imposed on them by their US invader and both countries have carried out elections. While the elections were deeply flawed, it is likely that if and when the countries are stabilized under the rule of neo-colonial regimes, that multi-party elections will be regularly carried out and accepted by the population as a whole. This is not to say that this will mark the efflorescence of a robust democracy or even that it will constitute democracy in the original or any meaningful sense of the word. But there should be little doubt that a multi-party electoral democracy can be imposed and that democracy, as it is understood in capitalist democracies, can be readily grafted onto a conquered society through military intervention.

Indeed, there are many examples from history of institutions and ideologies being imposed and successfully taking root. Christianity was imposed on the Slavs and upon black African slaves in the Americas. Today, Poles are no less Roman Catholic, and many blacks in the United States no less Christian, for having their religion imposed on their forebears. Christianity was mostly imposed by force, and yet it remains one of the world's major religions, even fanatically embraced by millions. The authority of the central government in Washington was imposed on the states of the Confederacy by force but the US government is no less popular today with southerners. Similarly, the constitution of West Germany was written by the United States and imposed on West Germans, but it was accepted by West Germans all the same. And the same can be said of Japan's constitution. It too was imposed, yet the Japanese hardly seem motivated to throw it off.

International Law

It is difficult to comprehend why opponents of NATO's military aggressions often base their objections on international law, when it is clear that international law carries no more material weight with powerful imperialist countries than playground rules carry in regulating the behaviour of the school principal who sets them. As has been eloquently pointed out elsewhere, international law is a spider-web; the powerful easily push through it, and only the weak get caught in it. In light of this, it might be concluded that international law has both an exoteric function (what its authors and proponents *say* its *raison d'être* is) and an esoteric function (what it *really* exists to accomplish.) Its surface function is to regulate the behaviour of all nations to prevent wars and violations of humanitarian law, but its esoteric function is that it is to be used as a cudgel against countries that do not wield a UN Security Council veto and are not ensconced in the imperial orbit of one of the countries that does.

International law has largely been authored by the victors of WWII, who created the United Nations, appointed themselves as permanent members of its Security Council, and awarded themselves veto authority. They comprise collectively the sole authority to enforce the provisions of international law, taking their authority from: (1) The UN Charter, which they authored; and (2) their control over the means of coercion, i.e., substantial military force, the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and whatever ad hoc tribunals they establish.

Unless one appeals to abstractions, such as God or public opinion or what is universally right at all times and in all places, there is, then, no authority higher in law than the Security Council. The implications are

twofold. First, since only the Security Council can enforce international law, it alone can compel its own obedience, which means it is no more bound by it than a dictator is bound by his own laws. If the Security Council decides to ignore its own charter, who is to stop it? There is, therefore, a double standard built into international law. The permanent members of the Security Council cannot be bound by it but any other country can be. In reality, satellites of permanent Security Council members are also free from the strictures of international law, since their protector can use its veto to exempt them from censure, sanctions or punitive military intervention. The United States' frequent use, actual or threatened, of its veto power to protect Israel is a case in point.

The second implication is that not only are the permanent members of the Security Council free as a collectivity from the jurisdiction of the international law they oversee, but so too by virtue of the veto power they wield is each individual permanent member free from whatever authority is exercised by all other permanent members. In this, the reality of international law codifies a reality of martial law, namely, that the permanent members of the Security Council each control sufficient military force that the actual or threatened use of violence to compel their compliance can be effectively countered by their own use, or threat, of military power, which all of them possess to a high degree. Veto authority, then, simply creates in law the reality that each of the permanent members, by virtue of its ability to inflict great harm on other permanent members, can choose to ignore what the other permanent members—or international law—demand. In other words, the permanent members have both *de jure* and *de facto* veto power.

All of this means that militarily powerful countries are in a position to marshal sufficient coercive force to achieve many of their goals over the objections of other countries and in violation of international law. Who, for example, is going to stop the United States, whose military budget is as large as that of every other country combined, from, say, bombing a country for over two months that has neither threatened it or its neighbours, as it did in Yugoslavia in 1999 – in flagrant violation of the UN Charter? The answer is: no one.

Some will say that the authority of popular opinion can compel compliance, but if so, there has yet to be an instance that can be pointed to that demonstrates this. Instead, there are innumerable disconfirming events that show the view to be nothing more than wishful thinking. The most salient recent disconfirmation was the pressing ahead of the United States and Britain with their 2003 invasion of Iraq, contra international law, in the face of the largest anti-war protests and mobilization of public opinion in history. Hundreds of millions of the world's people may have thought that George W. Bush and Tony Blair were two of history's great war mongers and international criminals but that did not stop US and British warplanes from dropping their bombs and the two countries' tanks from rolling into Iraq. So much for popular opinion.

The assassination of Osama Bin Laden by US Navy Seals was also a violation of international law, but pointing this out, along with Washington's numerous other violations, hardly shames the US government into compliance. Washington's innumerable transgressions have been exposed in various forums as often as they have happened, but the frequency with which the transgressions occur has not

diminished one iota. On the contrary, they now happen so frequently that complaining about them has become as pointless as complaining about snow in Ottawa in January. Both are forces of nature.

But the task here is not to note the contempt for international law of imperialist forces, but to ask whether international law contains within it a legitimate definition of when a military intervention is valid and when it is not. By the standards of the UN Charter, a military intervention is valid if it is approved by the UN Security Council and is undertaken to prevent a breach of, or to restore, international peace and security. But there is no cogent reason why the validity of an intervention should depend on the approval of the victors of WWII who comprise the permanent members of the Security Council, or why an intervention should be invalid if as few as one of them—wielding its veto power--disapproves.

That a handful of powerful countries has arrogated onto itself the authority to collectively decide whether an intervention is valid means that it is in a position to intervene at will in any country outside its exclusive club and to invoke international law as its authority. Basing the validity of military intervention on whether it has been approved by the Security Council therefore amounts to defining the validity of a military intervention on the basis of whether it serves the interests of one or more of the countries that make up the permanent membership of the Security Council. This hardly seems to be a sound basis for determining whether an intervention is valid.

No better example of how a military intervention can comport with international law and yet still be invalid is provided by the NATO intervention in Libya. This intervention is backed by a UN Security Council resolution authorizing all measures to protect Libyan civilians from Libya's military, and while the mission may appear on the surface to be progressive and therefore valid, there are a number of considerations which call its validity into question.

First, it is unclear that Libyan civilians were in as much danger as the UN Security Council alleged. While Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi threatened to show no mercy to rebels who launched an armed uprising in the eastern part of the country, he also offered amnesty to rebels who laid down their arms.²

Second, the intervention established the conditions for a prolonged civil war, whose danger to civilians may be greater than the danger civilians initially faced by the Libyan government's crackdown on rebel forces. NATO bombing raids also expose civilians to danger and harm (a point that should be clear from the numberless civilian victims of NATO bombing raids in Afghanistan.)

Third, while the countries which sponsored the resolution claimed to have acted to prevent a bloodbath in the rebel city of Benghazi, they did nothing more than issue a mild rebuke to the Khalifa government's violent crackdown on unarmed protesters in Bahrain, and did nothing to stop Saudi tanks and troops from entering Bahrain to assist in the violent suppression of the Bahraini revolt. It is hardly a coincidence that Bahrain's doors are wide open to Western banks, investors and corporations as a low-

² Alan. J. Kuperman, "False pretences for war in Libya?", The Boston Globe, April 14, 2011.

tax, investment-friendly sphere of exploitation—and home to the US Fifth Fleet—while Libya is denounced by business forces in the United States for its subsidies, tariffs, regulations and restrictions on foreign investment.³

Fourth, the intervening countries have repeatedly rejected proposals for a peaceful settlement, establishing the departure of the sitting government as a necessary condition for bringing the military intervention to an end. The goal of the intervention is not therefore the protection of civilians and restoration of peace, but coercing Gaddafi to step down.

Fifth, the forces on the ground, on whose behalf the intervention is effectively undertaken, are in no way progressive, and are, on the contrary, quite reactionary. The rebels comprise Islamic radicals connected to Al Qaeda, including the Libyan Islamic Fight Group (LIFG), established by Libyans who fought the PDPA and Soviets in Afghanistan. Members of the LIFG hold key positions in recruiting, training and leading rebel fighters.⁴ The rebel ranks also include royalists, as well as tribalists whose favoured position under King Idris I was brought to an end by the monarch's overthrow by Muammar Gaddafi. Both groups seek the restoration of the monarchy. The opposition also includes expatriates with connections to the CIA, including the key military commander Khalifa Hefir, a former Libyan army officer and CIA asset who operated an armed resistance out of Chad until the country's US-backed government fell in 1990. For two decades prior to his return to Libya in 2011 he resided in Virginia, seven miles from CIA headquarters.⁵

It must be acknowledged, however, as Muammar Gaddafi himself has, that while the military intervention in Libya had UN Security Council authorization, it was not entirely aligned with international law, since the Security Council exceeded its authority by intervening in a purely internal matter. But if we accept Gaddafi's position that the NATO intervention in his country is invalid because the UN Security Council over-stepped its authority by authorizing an intervention in an internal matter, then we

³ This is expanded upon and substantiated below.

⁴ Adam Entous, Keith Johnson and Charles Levinson, "Amid Libya rebels, 'flickers of Al Qaeda'", *The Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 2011; David Pugliese, "DND report reveals Canada's ties with Gadhafi", *The Ottawa Citizen*, April 23, 2011; Rod Nordland and Scott Shane, "Libyan shifts from detainee to rebel, and U.S. ally of sorts", *The New York Times*, April 24, 2011.

⁵ Rod Nordland, "As British help Libyan rebels, aid goes to a divided force", *The New York Times*, April 19, 2011; "Professor: In Libya, a civil war, not uprising", *NPR*, April 2, 2011. <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/02/135072664/professor-in-libya-a-civil-war-not-uprising>; Vijay Prashad, "America's Libyans", *Eurasia Review*, <http://www.eurasiareview.com/americas-libyans-oped-31032011/>

would declare as invalid the Comintern's intervention in the internal matter of the Spanish Civil War, the PLA's intervention in the internal matter of the Korean War, and the Soviet Union's intervention in the internal matter of the civil war in Afghanistan.

The withholding of UN Security Council approval for military intervention is not a sound basis, either, to declare an intervention to be invalid, even if anti-imperialists are apt to argue against such interventions on these grounds. For example, it is frequently pointed out by opponents of NATO wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan and the US-British war on Iraq that these interventions either did not have the blessing of the UN Security Council, or did, but that the body's imprimatur was only obtained after the fact, and that the interventions were therefore initiated in violation of international law. But failure to obtain Security Council authorization does not seem to be a sound basis to declare an intervention to be invalid. For example, an intervention to protect residents of the Gaza Strip from collective military punishment by Israel would never receive the blessing of the UN Security Council because the resolution seeking it would be vetoed by the United States and possibly by other permanent members of the Security Council. If the intervention went ahead all the same, in contravention of international law, would it be invalid?

Surely, Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait in August, 1990 was against international law, and the US-led military intervention of January 1991 to drive Iraqi forces from Kuwait, based on UN Security Council Resolution 678 authorizing all necessary means to effect this end, was consistent with it. And yet many of those who have criticized various subsequent US-led interventions for failing to comport with international law, also opposed this international law-compliant US intervention. It seems that while international law is often invoked as a standard to measure whether an intervention is valid, opponents of intervention have used the standard inconsistently.

When Is An Intervention Valid?

Rather than judging the validity of a military intervention on the basis of whether it has majority support, whether it seeks to impose institutions or ideologies, and whether it comports with international law, a sounder basis for deciding whether an intervention is valid depends on whether it:

- Is carried out to end exploitation and oppression.
- Directly brings about an advance in mass living standards.
- Opposes forces of reaction.
- Advances progressive forces.

A number of interventions will be examined below using these criteria.

NATO's Intervention in Kosovo, 1999

NATO's 1999 78-day campaign of bombing the former Yugoslavia appears to be valid on the surface because it was professedly undertaken to bring an end to the alleged oppression of ethnic Albanian residents of the then Serb province of Kosovo and to prevent what was said to be a genocide planned against them by the government of Slobodan Milosevic. However, while these were the professed reasons for the intervention, the behaviour of NATO forces, and subsequent events, have called into question whether these were the alliance's true motivations, and whether they were simply professed reasons, offered for public relations purposes.

It is now clear that stories of Serb forces slaughtering tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians and disposing of their corpses deep within the Trepca mines were gross exaggerations. The charge sheet against Slobodan Milosevic, who was tried by an ad hoc tribunal set up and controlled by the principal intervening countries, numbered only 391 deaths (well below genocide levels), and all of the crimes of which he was charged were committed *after* NATO began its bombing campaign.⁶ When the intervention was brought to a close after two and a half months, forensic pathologists rushed to the purported killing fields of Kosovo to unearth the tens of thousands of corpses NATO officials assured them would be scattered throughout the territory. What they found was consistent with a low-intensity civil war, not a campaign of genocide. About two thousand bodies were uncovered, some Albanians, others Serbs. Realizing they had been played for fools by NATO, many pathologists left in disgust.

While imperialist military interventions may be undertaken for a variety of claimed reasons, some or all of which the interveners may believe to be true, the interventions almost invariably have the consequence of expanding the interveners' sphere of exploitation. This is no less true of NATO's 1999 intervention. At the time, three-quarters of Yugoslavia's economy was publically owned and President Milosevic was being denounced by the US foreign policy elite for his "commitment to orthodox socialism" and "public ownership of the means of production...as the best guarantee for prosperity."⁷ It is a matter of some importance that Milosevic led a party that took the name socialist, that the party was the successor to Yugoslavia's communist party, and that its policies were of the sort that state officials in Western countries would consider to be socialist and certainly not friendly to free-enterprise. Some Marxists argue that Milosevic was not a true socialist and that in accepting an IMF-imposed austerity program of structural adjustment that he was an instrument of transnational capital and its neo-liberal program. But however much Milosevic was boxed in by the country's high-level of indebtedness and its need to seek a bail-out from the IMF with all its attendant indignities and pain for common people, Yugoslavia under Milosevic's stewardship was unwilling to give up public ownership of the economy as rapidly as suited the profit-making interests of Western banks and corporations. What the top members of the capitalist-dominated states of the leading NATO powers thought of Milosevic,

⁶ Michael Parenti. To Kill A Nation: The Attack On Yugoslavia. Verso. 2000. P. 186.

⁷ Michael Parenti, "The Demonization of Slobodan Milosevic," December 2003, Michael Parenti Political Archive, <http://www.michaelparenti.org/Milosevic.html>

and not whether some Marxists in the West thought he merited the designation socialist, is the key to understanding the reasons for NATO's intervention.

The pretext NATO ultimately used for its military intervention was Milosevic's rejection of the Rambouillet ultimatum. This ultimatum set out various conditions the Milosevic government would have to accept to avoid war, most of which it was willing to accede to. But there were some conditions that would represent such a flagrant violation of the country's sovereignty that they were likely introduced with the express purpose of eliciting a rejection and thereby handing NATO a justification to intervene militarily. The offending conditions effectively allowed NATO forces free run of the country, in effect, a military occupation. Milosevic rejected the conditions, and NATO warplanes almost immediately went into action. But there were curious elements of the ultimatum, little remarked upon in the mainstream media, which revealed NATO's true motivations. One was that the bountiful Trepcia mines, worth at least \$5 billion, would be removed from public ownership and placed in the hands of private investors. The other was that the Kosovo economy would be made-over to work in accordance with "free market principles."⁸

After the ousting of Milosevic in September 2000, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) government embarked on a program of dismantling the country's socialism, removing trade tariffs and subsidies and privatizing publically-owned enterprises, including telecommunications and small- and medium-size firms. Today, The Wall Street Journal and Heritage Foundation laud Serbia's low, flat tax rates and "flexible employment regulations" which allow employers to dismiss employees easily and inexpensively. Foreign investment is no longer screened, most sectors of the economy are open to foreign investment, and domestic firms are expected to compete against larger foreign firms without assistance from the state. The rate of unemployment is high and household incomes are stagnant. Because IMF conditions prohibit the government from using fiscal policy to stimulate the economy and the government's commitment to low-inflation has removed monetary policy as an option for doing the same, the Serb economy is stagnant.⁹

As for Kosovo, it has been broken off from Serbia, and is run now as what amounts to a NATO colony, and home to a large US military base, Camp Bondsteel. The country's prime minister, Hashim Thaci, was the political leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). At the time of the NATO intervention, it was pointed out that the KLA was a criminal organization as much as it was a guerilla outfit. The guerrillas were said to be involved in drugs and prostitution. An inquiry carried out by the Council of Europe in 2010 found these allegations to be true.¹⁰

⁸ Michael Parenti. To Kill A Nation: The Attack On Yugoslavia. Verso. 2000. pp. 110-111.

⁹ 2001 Index of Economic Freedom; CIA World Factbook.

¹⁰ Doreen Carvajal and Marlise Simons, "Report names Kosovo leader as crime boss", The New York Times, December 15, 2010.

If we judge the 1999 NATO military intervention in Yugoslavia on the basis of the criteria set out at the beginning of this section, the first conclusion is that while it was cleverly presented as progressive, in the sense of preventing a genocide in progress, this turned out to be pure war propaganda, intended to rally public support for the intervention. It was true that there was a civil war in progress, but as civil wars go, it was fought on a small-scale. Government forces were locked in combat with a guerrilla army that was supported by NATO powers and which partly financed its activities through organized crime. That the KLA was backed by NATO, even before NATO's intervention, suggests that the alliance acted to inflame tensions in Kosovo in order to create conditions that would provide it a pretext to intervene.

While it cannot be said with complete certainty that the transfer of publically-owned enterprises into the hands of private investors would not have happened had NATO not intervened militarily, it seems very likely that the process has at least been accelerated as a consequence. Western powers may have found other ways to hurry Milosevic and his successors along the path to dismantling Yugoslavia's socialism, but it is clear that the DOS coalition, which NATO powers largely created and supported, was committed to a capitalist make-over of Yugoslavia. The coalition's accession to power was in no small way assisted by NATO's decision to intervene militarily.

US-NATO Intervention in Afghanistan, 2001

The US military intervention in Afghanistan in late 2001 followed upon and was in direct response to the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The 9/11 attacks were planned and carried out by mainly Saudi and Egyptian nationals, but Afghanistan was the home base of Al Qaeda, the organization led by Saudi-born Osama Bin Laden. The group seeks to bring the historically Islamic regions of Northern Africa and Western and Central Asia under Islamic control, by liberating these regions from: Zionism in historic Palestine; Western military bases; and Arab puppet governments of the United States. With a goal so utterly inimical to US domination of the Middle East, it is no surprise that Al Qaeda has provoked the fierce enmity of the United States. The organization was founded on the belief that if Mujahedeen guerrillas could drive the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, then committed Islamic "freedom fighters" can drive the United States, and its Zionist protégée—what Al Qaeda calls the Crusaders and the Jews—from Islam's holy sites.

US military interventions are often accompanied at home by a program of demonization in which hatred is whipped up against a single individual. These wars, in the way in which they are sold to the public, are understood to be carried out against singularly evil men and never against whole populations. Bin Laden, with his long beard and swarthy complexion, looked to Westerners the perfect spit of Satan himself, though his Semitic features bore a closer resemblance to what Jesus Christ probably looked like than does the blond-haired, blue-eyed depiction favoured in Europe and the Americas. US president George W. Bush made sure that US citizens understood that Bin Laden hated them and "their freedoms." (What Bin Laden really hated was the presence of US troops, puppet governments and Zionist settlers in the Middle East.) Yet only two decades earlier, at a time Bin Laden was helping the United States mire the Soviet Union in its "own Vietnam," the future Qaeda leader and his Mujahedeen comrades were lauded by US state officials and newspaper editorial writers as "freedom fighters," and

not hated as enemies of “America’s freedoms,” as many of them were to become when they turned against their momentary ally.

Pinning blame for the 9/11 attacks on Bin Laden, Washington demanded that he be turned over to the United States. The fundamentalist Islamic rulers of the country, the Taliban, were agreeable, or said they were, so long as the United States could provide evidence that Bin Laden was behind the attacks. Washington refused, either because it had no evidence, or because it did not want to establish the principle that a Third World country could establish conditions for complying with US demands, or both. In any event, when the Taliban failed to yield to Washington’s ukase, the Pentagon went into action, subjecting Afghanistan to a fierce bombing campaign and ground invasion.

The proffered reasons for the intervention, now in its tenth year, have shifted. All have had a necessary surface plausibility, but none has stood up to scrutiny. At first, the capture of Bin Laden was said to be the aim of the intervention, but with the Qaeda leader’s summary execution by US Navy Seals, the fact that the NATO mission in Afghanistan carries on exposes the reason as false. Another aim was said to be the denial of a “safe haven” from which Al Qaeda could operate, but the movement can operate anywhere and planning for Qaeda operations has taken place outside of Afghanistan.

The promotion of democracy and protection of women’s rights have sometimes been said to be the intervention’s goals, but Washington’s unflagging support of absolute monarchies, chief among them Saudi Arabia, calls this into question. An extreme form of misogyny is practiced in Saudi Arabia. The country is the only place in the world where women are not allowed to drive automobiles. And the lives of women are subjected to severe restrictions and indignities. Yet, the United States remains on excellent terms with the Saudi monarchy, and has no intention of intervening in the country militarily or otherwise to topple its monarchical dictatorship or to liberate women from its misogynistic backwardness. Indeed, far from threatening Saudi Arabia militarily, the United States is about to sell the country’s despots \$60 billion worth of armaments.

Moreover, as the backers of fundamentalist Islam’s war against the modernizing government of the PDPA in the late 1970s and 1980s, Washington has shown that it has no antipathy to forces of Islamic reaction and is willing to tolerate and indulge them if there is an advantage in doing so.

It may be, however, that the intentions of US state officials in intervening militarily in Afghanistan had nothing whatever to do with any progressive aims, but all the same, some progressive outcomes have come about. For example, it could be said that the representative democracy Washington has imposed on Afghanistan is an advance over the preceding obscurantist rule of the Mullahs. However, while this may be so, we should not exaggerate the degree to which it is an advance. It is clear from the punishment the United States, the European Union, Israel and some Arab satellites of Washington have meted out to Palestinians in the form of an initial financial blockade and continuing physical blockade of the Gaza Strip for the 2006 election of Hamas, that the United States is only prepared to accept a multi-party democracy that produces outcomes it deems acceptable. Time and again, when an election abroad has either produced an outcome not to Washington’s liking, or has threatened to do so,

Washington has deployed a series of manoeuvres to steer foreign voters along a more acceptable path, and where that has failed, has sought to overturn the outcome of the election itself. The US-engineered coup against Chile's president Salvador Allende on the other 9/11, the one in 1973, was a manifestation of this imperialist tendency, as was interference in post WWII Western European elections with the aim of blocking Communist electoral victories. Letting it be known that the *contras* would continue their war in Nicaragua if Nicaraguans voted for the Sandinistas, is another example of Washington subverting in other countries the exercise of the electoral democracy it claims insincerely to hold so dear.

On top of Washington's blocking and overturning election results it does not approve of, is a legitimate concern that elections in Afghanistan have not been carried out honestly, and that there has been a fair degree of vote rigging and other forms of fraud which have benefitted the current president. Washington and US mainstream journalists endlessly criticize the elections of foreign leaders who Washington disapproves of for the alleged corrupt and fraudulent nature of the elections that have brought them to, or keep them in, power, but have far less to say about corrupt and fraudulent, and often absent, elections in some satellite countries. The difference, as we will see, between the Third World countries Washington brands its enemies and those it calls friends and allies, is that the former are unwilling to accept US free enterprise in their country and the latter welcome, cultivate, and invite it. The US attitude to these countries has nothing whatever to do with how they carry out their elections or even with whether they have any.

It should also be said that the prospect of any progressive outcome following upon the US and NATO military intervention in Afghanistan is dim indeed considering that Washington and its European allies have been working toward a peace agreement that would see the Taliban brought into Afghanistan's government. Many Taliban figures are already working with the current Afghan government, including Mullavi Qalamuddin, who, as head of the Taliban's religious police, was responsible for enforcing many of the movement's misogynistic practices.¹¹ Unless the communists return, it is very unlikely that the modernizing effort that the Marxist-Leninist-inspired PDPA began in Afghanistan in the 1970s—and that the United States helped derail—will resume.

US-British Military Intervention in Iraq

The United States had carried out a long military campaign against Iraq before launching a ground invasion and occupation in 2003, one stretching back to 1991. The professed trigger for the initial US military intervention was Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which Iraq let the US ambassador, April Glaspie, know ahead of time that it intended to undertake. Glaspie's reply, "We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait,"¹² led Iraqi officials to assume their

¹¹ Rod Nordland, "Afghans want sanctions lifted on Taliban figures", The New York Times, June 4, 2011.

¹² Elaine Sciolino and Michael R. Gordon, "Confrontation in the Gulf; US gave Iraq little reason not to mount Kuwait assault", The New York Times, September 23, 1990.

invasion would be met by Washington's indifference. They soon discovered that they had seriously miscalculated and had possibly stepped into a trap. Rather than issue a mild rebuke for Iraq's affront to Kuwait's sovereignty, Washington reacted vigorously, organizing a meeting of the UN Security Council within hours of the invasion, at which Iraq's actions were condemned and the immediate withdrawal of troops from Kuwait was demanded. Soon after, economic sanctions were imposed, and a naval blockade was organized to enforce the sanctions.

The Iraqi government was not unwilling to negotiate an exit from Kuwait, but some of the conditions it presented for withdrawal were designed more to expose US hypocrisy than to initiate a serious discussion. For example, Baghdad proposed to end its occupation of Kuwait if all other occupations in the region were ended simultaneously. This would have necessitated Israel's withdrawals from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Lebanon and the Golan Heights. The chances of the US agreeing to these conditions were nil, but US rejection exposed Washington's double standards. Iraq proposed other conditions as well and it can be argued that had Washington been sincerely interested in peace some kind of mutually agreeable arrangement could have been worked out, but Washington insisted that concessions could not be made, otherwise Iraq would be rewarded for its "bad" behaviour.

Since Washington continues to refuse to negotiate with certain countries on the grounds that to do so would reward their bad behaviour, it is worthwhile to consider this further. North Korea has repeatedly entreated Washington to formally end the Korean War and normalize relations, but just as often has been rebuffed. To accommodate Pyongyang's request for a permanent peace would, according to successive US administrations, reward Pyongyang for its "bad" behaviour. While Washington is prepared to cite numerous categories of north Korean bad behaviour, from alleged human rights violations to alleged terrorism and alleged military provocations, the country's "bad" behaviour mostly centers on its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and subsequent development of a nuclear weapons capability. Pyongyang's nuclear activities, however, are a direct response to what could be more fittingly called *Washington's* bad behaviour, namely, targeting north Korea with strategic nuclear missiles at a time Pyongyang was still a member of the NPT and did not have a nuclear weapons capability--and then continually subjecting the country to threats of invasion. The most conspicuous of these threats was the post 9/11 listing of north Korea as a member of an axis of evil and the warning issued by a US official to Pyongyang that the appropriate lesson be drawn from the invasion of Iraq.

In reality, Washington's refusals to negotiate on grounds that to do so would reward bad behaviour is simply a way of avoiding negotiations when it has the upper hand. Washington is perfectly willing, on the other hand, to reward the bad behaviour of leaders who have acted to promote US interests. For example, the United States was prepared to offer financial incentives to Yemen's president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who gave the United States *carte blanche* to pursue Al Qaeda rebels in his own country through various military means, including through the use of predator drones, after Saleh refused to step down in response to the demands of a popular uprising.¹³ Many Yemenis could cite chapter and verse on

¹³ Neil MacFarquhar, "Protesters in Yemen rejoice as leader goes to Saudi Arabia", The New York Times, June 5, 2011.

Saleh's bad behaviour, and so too, one suspects, could the US State Department, but all the same, Washington was prepared to reward Saleh's bad behaviour. Another example of Washington rewarding bad behaviour is its approval of \$60 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia, a country whose record of bad behaviour toward its own people, not least its women, could fill a mighty tome. Add to this record its recent deployment of tanks and troops to Bahrain to put down a peaceful uprising against an absolutist monarchy—and recalling that Saudi Arabia itself is an absolutist state—it is clear that Washington unquestionably does reward bad behaviour.

To return to the conflict between the United States and Iraq, as late as December 1990, Iraq proposed to withdraw from Kuwait so long as the United States agreed not to attack its retreating forces and to eliminate weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East, including those of Israel. The United States rejected the offer.

In November of 1990, the Security Council gave Iraq until January 15, 1991 to withdraw from Kuwait and authorized the use of all necessary means to force Iraq to comply. On the eve of the deadline, France put forward a resolution in the Security Council chamber to convene an international conference to address problems in the region, including the "Arab-Israeli" conflict, in return for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait. The United States and Britain would not agree to the proposal. Three days later, the United States began an aerial bombardment of Iraq, followed by a ground assault a little over a month later.

Iraq's public infrastructure was devastated by the aerial bombardment, including water sanitation and sewage systems. This brought about a series of epidemics, all of which the US government had foreseen but was prepared to accept.¹⁴ On top of this, Iraq was required to pay war reparations to Kuwait, despite the former's financially depleted circumstances. Indeed, one of the reasons Iraq invaded Kuwait was because a war with Iran, which US officials had encouraged, had left it in straitened circumstances, and Iraqi officials believed Kuwait was driving down oil prices through overproduction, undermining in Baghdad hope of repairing Iraq's battered finances. On top of this, Iraq was required to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction. To see that it complied, the UN, at the urging of the United States and its allies, subjected Iraq to a cruel program of sanctions, which over the decade it lasted, led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands, if not over one million, Iraqis. Asked about a UN estimate that sanctions had killed 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five, then US secretary of state Madeleine Albright said infamously, "It's a hard choice, but I think, we, think, it's worth it."¹⁵

Throughout the 1990s the United States and Britain controlled the skies over Iraq, frequently raining down bombs upon its cities. The country was battered, broken down, unable to rebuild, and a threat to no one. Still, Washington accused Baghdad of refusing to fully comply with the UN resolution mandating the complete dismantling of Iraq's chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Iraq was expected to prove

¹⁴ Thomas J. Nagy, "The secret behind the sanctions: How the U.S. intentionally destroyed Iraq's water supply", *The Progressive*, September, 2001.

¹⁵ 60 Minutes, May 12, 1996. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbIX1CP9qr4>. Retrieved June 19, 2011.

that it no longer had these weapons, which is to say, to prove a negative. Since it was impossible for Iraq to prove that it did not have weapons of mass destruction (a feat tantamount to proving God does not exist), it could always be said that Iraq had not fully complied with UN demands that it disarm, and this could be used as grounds for continuing to subject the country to crippling sanctions. It seems very likely that Washington hoped the miserable conditions it had created in Iraq would be blamed on its president, Saddam Hussein, and that the people of Iraq would rise up against him and sweep him from power. At that point, it can be safely assumed, Washington would step in with massive assistance to rebuild the country, on condition that it opens itself to US free enterprise.

Washington and its British junior partner stepped up their aerial assaults on Iraq and launched a ground invasion in March, 2003, following a high profile propaganda campaign based on evidence that purported to show that Baghdad had retained stores of chemical, biological and radiological weapons. It was fairly clear to anyone with a modicum of scepticism that the evidence was contrived, or “sexed-up”, as it was later said to be. And as events subsequently showed, Iraq had indeed completely disarmed (at least no weapons of mass destruction were ever found). Washington almost certainly knew that there was a high probability that Iraq had destroyed its banned weapons. Rather than deterring an invasion, this knowledge made one all the more likely, since it meant that US and British forces would meet no resistance that could not be easily overcome.¹⁶

Once Washington’s search for Iraq’s illicit weapons came up blank, US forces should have been withdrawn from the country, if forcing Iraq’s compliance with the relevant UN resolutions had been the true reason for the intervention. But Washington simply changed the pretext for its occupation of Iraq. The world had to be spared a vicious dictator and conditions had to be established to ensure that he, or his followers, or someone like him, did not seize power again; multi-party electoral democracy had to be brought to Iraqis; the US needed to remain in the country for some time to rebuild it and set it right; an

¹⁶ North Korea, which Washington had counted with Iraq and Iran as part of an “axis of evil” was urged by a US state official to draw the appropriate lesson from the invasion of Iraq. It did. The country developed a nuclear weapons capability, drawing the appropriate lesson that Third World countries that wish to guard their independence from imperialist agendas should not disarm, and, in fact, should do quite the opposite. Indeed, the only guarantee that Third World countries have of safeguarding their independence from military intervention by imperialist powers is to build some manner of armed deterrent capability that is strong enough that it will be clear to potential aggressors that an intervention will likely not go smoothly, or will elicit retaliatory blows that will inflict an unacceptably high level of harm on the aggressor. Gaddafi’s government learned this lesson too late. The Libyan leaders’ son Saif al-Islam Gaddafi told Russia Today (“US looks on Libya as McDonald’s—Gaddafi’s son” RT.COM, July 1, 2011) that Libya’s relinquishing its long range missiles had been an error. “Many countries, Iran and North Korea are among them, told us it was our mistake to give up, to have stopped developing long-range missiles and to become friendly with the West. Our example means one should never trust the West and should always be on alert – for them it is fine to change their mind overnight and start bombing Libya. One of our biggest mistakes was that we delayed buying new weapons, especially from Russia, and delayed building a strong army. We thought Europeans were our friends; our mistake was to be tolerant with our enemies”.

army had to be trained that would be able to defend the country's borders; an open economy had to be created to promote Iraqi prosperity; and so on.

It could be said that the 1991 intervention by the United States, Britain and a "coalition of the willing" was valid because it was aimed at upholding the concept of national sovereignty and was authorized by the UN Security Council and was therefore legal under international law. But national sovereignty ought not to be considered inviolable under all conditions and at all times. And therefore interventions meant to uphold it are not valid *ipso facto*.

While national sovereignty is desirable, for a socialist the advance of working class interests is a senior consideration, and therefore interventions which advance working class interests can be valid, even if they violate national sovereignty.

The second objection to the validity of the 1991 US-led intervention in Iraq to uphold the concept of national sovereignty, concerns the questions of whether this was really the aim. While it was certainly put forward as the ostensible motivation for the intervention, the claim does not stand up to scrutiny.

There are two grounds on which the claim can be contested. First, the United States has made clear on several occasions that its foreign policy and use of military force is not restrained by the idea that national sovereignty is inviolable at all times and in all places. One need look no further than the already mentioned US interventions in Iceland in WWII and the US-led 1999 NATO military intervention in Yugoslavia. Both were clear violations of the territorial integrity of other countries. Second, the United States has tolerated flagrant violations by its satellites and allies of the territorial integrity of other countries on a number of occasions, and has gone so far as to arm the violators and protect them from rebuke and punishment. Israel has violated the territorial integrity of Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and bombed an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 and an alleged nuclear reactor site in Syria in 2007. Ethiopia's 2006 invasion of Somalia, carried out at Washington's request, is another example of a blatant unpunished violation of another country's territorial integrity by a US vassal.¹⁷

Hence, the US record of violating the territorial integrity of other countries, either by its own forces or through proxies, as well as its facilitating violations carried out by allies, undercuts Washington's claims to have launched the 1991 intervention against Iraq to uphold the principle of territorial integrity. So why does the United States intervene?

Who Rules in Capitalist Democracies?

Thorstein Veblen remarked that: "The chief—virtually sole—concern of the constituted authorities in the democratic nations is a concern about the profitable business of the nation's substantial citizens."¹⁸

¹⁷ Stephen Gowans, "US fomenting war in Somalia," December 15, 2006, what's left, <http://gowans.blogspot.com/2006/12/us-fomenting-war-in-somalia.html>

¹⁸ Quoted in Ralph Miliband. The State in Capitalist Society. Merlin Press, Fernwood Publishing. 2009. p.55.

This is not far off the contention of Marx and Engels that the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of privately-owned businesses.¹⁹

But Veblen's and the Marxist conceptions of the state clash strongly with the more widely held view that while a class of ultra-wealthy bankers and shareholders may have considerable influence over the political process in capitalist democracies, they do not dominate the state, that power is diffused through a series of checks and balances, and that what matters is who is elected, and elected representatives, while sometimes wealthy capitalists, are not always or even often so. How can the state be but a committee for organizing the common affairs of privately-owned businesses, when in a democratic society, the mass of voters are not business owners?

The answer is that the act of voting is only one part of a much larger political process, and in terms of how policy is shaped, a very minor one. However, voting is important to the ideological maintenance of the system, and it is important in two significant ways. First, it is the only part of the political process in which, because each person has one vote, all people are formally equal. Second, voting is portrayed, in the public mythology, as the essence of the political process. Casting ballots, and the actions of those who have been elected, *is* the political process—or so we misunderstand it to be. The result of this misunderstanding is that politics in a capitalist democracy is believed to be a process based on equality. However, while each citizen may have an equal say at the ballot box it is not the case that each citizen has an equal say in the political process. Some people have a much larger say than others, and obscuring this inequality by elevating voting to the paramount element of capitalist democracy, acts to invest the system with a legitimacy it does not deserve.

Who has more say and how is it that they do? The answer is that the ultra-wealthy have the greatest say and do so because they have command of more considerable resources than other people have to spend on political campaign contributions, to lobby governments, to buy mass media and hire public relations firms to manage public opinion, to establish think-tanks to propagate their views, and to endow chairs at universities and bestow research grants on scholars to shape the direction of academic inquiry. They are the top level owners and managers of income-producing property--the capitalist class.

Parties of business always have more money to spend on elections compared to their working class counterparts, because they can draw on the deep reservoir of resources the wealthy own and control. And businesses have vastly superior resources for creating and distributing pro-capitalist propaganda compared to the resources that parties and organizations committed to advancing the interests of labour and transcending capitalism have for creating and distributing pro-socialist propaganda.

The ultra-wealthy also dominate the mass media through their ownership of newspapers, broadcast companies, movie studios and publishers, and the mass media are a platform of considerable reach and

¹⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The Manifesto of the Communist Party. In Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy. Lewis S. Feuer (Ed.). Doubleday. 1980. Their exact words are: The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

persuasiveness for disseminating capitalist ideology and bamboozling the public into believing that the specific interests of the owners and managers of capital are equal to the interests of all.

Business also has superior resources for lobbying governments compared to groups that represent labour and ordinary citizens. Individual corporations lobby governments to ensure their individual interests are represented in public policy, and handsomely-funded sectional and business-wide lobbying groups press the state to advance the interests of individual industries and the common interests of businesses as whole. Moreover, the top-level executives of the most powerful corporations are able to meet with presidents, prime ministers, and cabinet members directly. This is a privilege unique to the capitalist class. And no other class, section or interest in capitalist society lobbies with such intensity, force, and pervasiveness as does business.

The idea that presidents, prime ministers and cabinet members represent all citizens may be good rhetoric but it is poor political sociology. The chances that high elected officials will shape public policy in ways that accord with a class's interests are proportional to the class's financial contribution to politicians' electoral campaigns. A class's votes are important, but far more important are the generous campaign contributions it can provide to run the expensive and high-profile marketing campaigns that constitute elections in capitalist democracies. Since the ability to deliver the resources needed to run successful campaigns is usually much greater in the case of the capitalist class, the owners and managers of capital have a vastly greater influence over the political life of a country than its subordinate classes do. This can be glimpsed in the re-election campaign of US president, Barack Obama. A "few weeks before announcing his re-election campaign, President Obama convened two dozen Wall Street executives, many of them longtime donors, in the White House's Blue Room. The guests were asked for their thoughts on how to speed the economic recovery, then the president opened the floor for over an hour on hot issues like hedge fund regulation and the deficit."²⁰ It's highly unlikely that Obama, or any other president, has convened two dozen ordinary citizens to the White House and thrown open the floor to them for even 10 minutes.

The ease with which business lobbies governments is due in part to the reality that key positions in the state are linked to the business world through the interchange of personnel. Top corporate leaders often serve in key cabinet positions and in important diplomatic posts, while top public servants often find their way into top-level corporate jobs. The Wall Street firm Goldman Sachs and the US Treasury Department are so closely linked at the top levels through the exchange of personnel that it is only a mild exaggeration to say they are practically one and the same.

Politicians and top functionaries of the public service are well aware of the lucrative opportunities that await them in the corporate world if they play their cards right and many of them step easily into positions on corporate boards when their public service careers have drawn to a close. This cannot help but shape their views and motivate them to be diligent in the pursuit of business interests while in public service.

²⁰ Nicholas Confessore, "Obama seeks to win back Wall St. cash", The New York Times, June 12, 2011.

Corporations also have a network of public relations firms whose sole function is to shape public opinion to mesh with the interests of corporations and their owners and top-level managers. On top of this, a handful of ultra-wealthy families and top corporations fund dozens of think tanks whose raison d'être is to recommend policy positions to governments. These capitalist class think-tanks also offer up "experts" for commentary and analysis to the mass media. The "experts"—hired guns for the capitalist class--interpret the world from the perspective of what is best for corporations and their top-level managers and owners and so help to infuse the mass media with capitalist class bias and policy positions that serve business interests.

Above all, government leaders want their country to be prosperous, and prosperity in capitalist society means creating conditions for businesses to accumulate profits at a rate that supports continued investment. In foreign affairs, this means securing opportunities for businesses to freely sell their goods and services abroad and removing obstacles that prevent the ultra-wealthy from taking advantage of potentially profitable investment opportunities in other countries.

The mechanisms by which top-level owners and managers of corporate property dominate the state and the political process

- 1 Funding of political parties and candidates
- 2 Funding of public policy think tanks (e.g. the Council on Foreign Relations)
- 3 Dissemination of capitalist ideology and promotion of business interests through business's ownership of the mass media
- 4 Lobbying
- 5 Funding of a network of public relations firms to shape public opinion
- 6 Post-political career opportunities as incentives to politicians and top public servants to protect and promote business interests
- 7 Interchange of personnel between the corporate and political worlds
- 8 The power to exert economic pressure by refusing to invest and threatening to relocate production to other jurisdictions

One can contest the claim that any or all of the mechanisms discussed above actually operate to allow the capitalist class to dominate the state, but one cannot deny that the state in capitalist society is staffed in its most important positions by people who are implicitly committed to the capitalist system and the defence and promotion of business interests. And one cannot deny that the state in capitalist society acts, in the main, to defend and promote capitalist interests. To be sure, socialists and on occasion even communists have held posts in the capitalist state, but to suppose that this is evidence

that the state is not staffed to an overwhelming degree by people who are implicitly committed to capitalist ideology and business interests is mistaken.

First, the state is more than the executive and legislative branches of government, in which socialists and communists have sometimes served. It includes importantly, the public service, the judiciary, the police and the military. A government committed to bringing about radical change would have to contend with the almost certain opposition of these branches of the state.

Second, social democrats long ago came to terms with capitalism, and have sought only to eke out reforms within the capitalist system, if they have done even that, and have never sought to radically transform or overthrow capitalist society or enact policies that promote the interests of labour at the expense of undermining business confidence and profits. And while communists have, on occasion, held cabinet posts in some capitalist-democratic countries, they have usually been shuffled off to junior portfolios where they can do little harm.

Third, socialists and communists who have held important elected positions have always sought to work within the framework of the capitalist system and to seek reforms within it, not to radically transform it. Their ambitions have never been revolutionary, and their reformist aspirations, though they may be considerable at first, quickly become tamed by the realities of the capitalist context in which they have chosen to operate. For operating within the capitalist system has invariably meant leaving the means of production, the means of persuasion (the mass media and schools), and the means of coercion (the police, military and law) in the hands of the very same conservative forces that are committed to undermining the reforms that socialists and communists who are prepared to work within the system seek to undertake. With the means to erect barriers to reforms and the motivation to do so, conservative forces are able to prevent a left-wing government from going very far. The context includes the hostility of the privately-owned mass media, which is very likely to be proportional to the degree to which proposed reforms encroach upon the interests of the mass media's ultra-wealthy owners. With the hostility of the media comes a very high likelihood that public opinion will turn against the government, either forcing it to back down from its reforms or to go down to defeat in the next election. Businesses may also refuse to invest, either as a means of deliberately undermining the government or because government policies have advanced employees' interests far enough that businesses are no longer able to earn a sufficient profit. This in turn will touch off an economic crisis that could compel voters to toss the architects of the crisis out at the next election or to force the government to retreat from its program. The possibility of a coup or destabilization organized from outside cannot be discounted; these outcomes have attended efforts to undertake left-leaning reforms before, infamously in Chile under the Allende government, and in Venezuela, under Hugo Chavez.

It could be countered that the above is unduly pessimistic and that Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution is proof that radical reforms can be carried out despite the overwhelming influence of the capitalist class. This is indeed true. But the revolution is not complete and what progress has been made could be undone. More importantly, the point of the discussion above is to illustrate not that the capitalist class always wins but that its economic position and superior resources compared to those of labour and

ordinary citizens allows it to dominate the state and political process. The result is that the capitalist class wins more often than it loses, though it by no means always wins and sometimes does lose. The principal reason for making this point is to show that if the state is dominated by a class of ultra-wealthy owners and managers of capital, that the foreign policy of the state is very likely to reflect its interests.

The capitalist class is especially dominant in the realm of foreign policy because it faces little opposition in this domain from other classes. Knowledge of foreign affairs among the general public is spotty at best, and few people have enough involvement in matters overseas to care much about their governments' foreign policy decisions. By contrast, the decisions of the state on matters of domestic policy often have profound consequences for the jobs, wages, taxes, educations, health and prospects of common people, and these decisions, if unfavourable to their interests, are likely to elicit pressure from below. But decisions about foreign affairs, even far-reaching ones about whether to go to war, nowadays have little direct effect on ordinary citizens.

There is no better illustration of this than the following from Elisabeth Bumiller's July 24, 2010 New York Times' article on how the US public is largely insulated from the effects of the decision of the US state to wage war on Afghanistan and Iraq.

"The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost Americans a staggering \$1 trillion to date, second only in inflation-adjusted dollars to the \$4 trillion price tag for World War II, when the United States put 16 million men and women into uniform and fought on three continents.

"A second look at the numbers shows another story underneath. In 2008, the peak year so far of war spending for Iraq and Afghanistan, the costs amounted to only 1.2 percent of America's gross domestic product. During the peak year of spending on World War II, 1945, the costs came to nearly 36 percent of G.D.P.

"'The army is at war, but the country is not,' said David M. Kennedy, the Stanford University historian. 'We have managed to create and field an armed force that can engage in very, very lethal warfare without the society in whose name it fights breaking a sweat.' The result, he said, is 'a moral hazard for the political leadership to resort to force in the knowledge that civil society will not be deeply disturbed.'

"A corollary is that taxes have not been raised to pay for Iraq and Afghanistan — the first time that has happened in an American war since the Revolution, when there was not yet a country to impose them. Rightly or wrongly, that has further cut American civilians off from the two wars on the opposite side of the world."²¹

²¹ Elisabeth Bumiller, "The war: A trillion can be cheap", The New York Times, July 24, 2010.

This is not to say that ordinary people do not carry the burden of massive spending on war. Taxes spent on fielding military operations abroad and on buying new weapons and replacing old ones are taxes that are not spent in other ways, such as in the provision of public services. Moreover, because much of the funding for the United States' wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has come from taking on debt, debt repayment will compete with future expenditures on public services and may well lead to tax increases. But the pain of tax increases is more acutely felt than the opportunity cost of foregone public services, and the prospect of future austerity is more easily borne than austerity today. It is true that a sophisticated analysis will show that ordinary people will eventually bear the costs of these wars (as they always do) and that a tiny elite of high-level managers and owners of productive property will reap the rewards, but the sophisticated analysis is only beginning to be done and has not been articulated and widely presented. An example of an emerging awareness of how the costs of war are being borne by ordinary people in the United States is offered in the argument of the United States Conference of Mayors that "American taxes should be paying for bridges in Baltimore and Kansas City, not in Baghdad and Kandahar." The organization, which called for an end to the Vietnam War in the 1970s when war spending squeezed out transfers to municipalities, asked the US Congress to end the US military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and to divert funding of these wars "toward urgent domestic needs."²²

However, so far the public has been largely insulated from the effects of an aggressive foreign policy and the capitalist class has, as a consequence, had space to use its enormous influence to press the state to intervene militarily abroad to secure new markets and investment opportunities, with little opposition at home. Were common people conscripted and pressed into war, opposition might arise, but most rich countries now rely on professional militaries and there is no conscription to galvanize opposition. Were wars of aggression funded out of tax increases levied on ordinary people, an opposition might arise, but onerous war-induced tax increases have not been placed on the shoulders of common people – at least, not yet. Were the retaliatory blows of the countries that have been attacked to cause great disruption, destruction and horror, an opposition might arise, but nowadays rich countries choose their victims carefully, targeting only weak countries that cannot strike back in any significant way. The consequence is that despite the United States and its NATO allies going to war frequently, life carries on at home much as it would were the countries at peace, and few people, as a proportion of the larger population, are agitated by their countries' wars of aggression, or are prepared to express an opposition to them, even in the mildest forms. Thus, so long as an aggressive foreign policy is aimed at countries that are incapable of striking back in any meaningful way, the capitalist class has *carte blanche* to press the state to use its military to pry open foreign markets and secure investment opportunities abroad.

Before leaving this, it should be pointed out that the view that capitalist democracies are dominated by the super-rich is not as heterodox as may be imagined. Consider the following passages from liberal economist Paul Krugman's New York Times' columns:

²² Helene Cooper, "Costs of wars a rising issue as Obama weighs troop levels", The New York Times, June 21, 2011.

“You see, the rich are different from you and me: they have more influence. It’s partly a matter of campaign contributions, but it’s also a matter of social pressure, since politicians spend a lot of time hanging out with the wealthy. So when the rich face the prospect of paying an extra 3 or 4 percent of their income in taxes, politicians feel their pain — feel it much more acutely, it’s clear, than they feel the pain of families who are losing their jobs, their houses, and their hopes.

“And when the tax fight is over, one way or another, you can be sure that the people currently defending the incomes of the elite will go back to demanding cuts in Social Security and aid to the unemployed. America must make hard choices, they’ll say; we all have to be willing to make sacrifices.

“But when they say ‘we,’ they mean ‘you.’ Sacrifice is for the little people.”²³

Krugman again:

“...assured paychecks for the ideologically loyal are an important part of the system. Scientists willing to deny the existence of man-made climate change, economists willing to declare that tax cuts for the rich are essential to growth, strategic thinkers willing to provide rationales for wars of choice, lawyers willing to provide defenses of torture, all can count on support from a network of organizations that may seem independent on the surface but are largely financed by a handful of ultrawealthy families.”²⁴

In another of his New York Times’ columns, Krugman seeks to explain why Washington has “no political will to do anything about...America’s job drought.” He lands on the following explanation: “policy makers are catering almost exclusively to the interests of...those who derive lots of income from assets.” The “only real beneficiaries” of government economic policy, concludes Krugman, are “bankers and wealthy individuals with lots of bonds in their portfolios.”

“And that explains why creditor interests bulk so large in policy; not only is this the class that makes big campaign contributions, it’s the class that has personal access to policy makers — many of whom go to work for these people when they exit government through the revolving door.”²⁵

²³ Paul Krugman, “The angry rich”, The New York Times, September 19, 2010.

²⁴ Paul Krugman, “Fear and favor”, The New York Times, October 3, 2010.

²⁵ Paul Krugman, “Rule by rentiers”, The New York Times, June 9, 2011.

Creditor interests bulk large in more than domestic economic policy. They bulk large in foreign policy, too; indeed, they bulk even larger in this sphere of state policy given the virtual absence of pressure from below on matters of foreign relations.

What Makes Some Countries Targets?

The attitudes of high-level owners and managers of significant private business enterprises in the West and Japan toward the governments of other countries depend on the degree to which these governments are willing to open their economies to foreign capital and exports. It is Washington's view that goods and services produced by US firms should be able to flow freely into foreign countries; US corporations should be able to set up shop abroad and be treated like domestic firms; and US investors should enjoy the same freedoms they enjoy in the United States. Better yet, governments should impose low taxes, manage a low-wage labour market, and eschew regulations. Berlin, London, Paris, Tokyo, and state decision-makers in other rich countries share the same goals for their country's bankers, investors and corporations.

Poor countries satisfy the expectations of rich countries in this regard to varying degrees – some totally, others not at all. And to the degree that they do not satisfy these expectations they increase the likelihood of becoming the targets of US interventions of various types, including military ones. But this is not to say that this is the only factor that governs the probability of US military intervention. Another significant consideration is the degree to which a foreign country can inflict an unacceptably high level of retaliatory harm on the United States and its allies. The greater a country's power to retaliate, the less likely it is that the United States will lead a military intervention against it. Countries that are able to deter US aggression are said by Washington to be threats to the United States, and this is true, but the threat they pose is one of self-defense against the predations of the US corporate class.

The probable victims of US military intervention, then, are militarily weak countries whose governments are opposed to their economic domination from abroad and whose leaders believe the system favoured by the United States and other rich countries of free trade, free enterprise and free markets is based on parasitism and whose maintenance is a major obstacle to their economic development.

Of the close to one dozen countries the United States has either waged war against in the last two decades, threatens to wage war against, or has placed under the unceasing menace of imminent invasion, all posed or pose major threats to the opportunities for profit-making of Western investors and corporations, either directly or indirectly. The list includes: the former Yugoslavia; Iraq (under Ba'athist rule); Afghanistan (under the Taliban); Libya; Iran; Sudan; north Korea and Cuba. While Washington has neither attacked Venezuela nor Zimbabwe nor overtly threatened to do so, the chances that either of these might happen someday are far from trivial. Moreover, both countries have been targets of US destabilization efforts. As a consequence, they too can be added to the list.

That all these countries are poor in comparison to the West is significant in two respects. First, they are no match militarily for the United States and its allies. Were they rich countries, with large militaries and therefore the potential to inflict unacceptably high retaliatory harm, they would not be such inviting

candidates for intervention. Second, owing to their underdevelopment, they are far more likely than affluent countries to attempt to pursue economic policies that build protective walls around their national economies to incubate infant industries and which therefore shut out investors and exporters from rich countries. Protective tariffs, subsidies to domestic firms, state-ownership – measures aimed at building enterprises at home that can serve the home market, and perhaps, compete on an international scale later on – are very likely to characterize the economic policies of Third World countries that face US-led military interventions.

One measure of the degree to which countries are regarded as building economic climates that do or do not comport with the profit-making interests of Western bankers, investors and the owners and managers of large corporations is provided by the Wall Street Journal's and Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom. Every year these two important capitalist organizations rank the world's countries on:

- How closely each country regulates businesses that operate within them;
- Whether they have erected trade barriers to hobble foreign competitors;
- How low their corporate taxes are;
- How much of their economy is removed from the sphere of private ownership;
- Whether their central bank pursues a low-inflation policy;
- Whether foreign investment is welcome and treated the same as domestic investment;
- Whether private property rights are protected;
- How easy it is to hire and fire workers;
- Corruption.

Governments that welcome foreign investment; treat foreign corporations as they would domestic ones; maintain a low corporate tax regime; keep regulations to a bare minimum; keep inflation low (regardless of the effects on employment levels); shun state-ownership and maintain an open door to private investment in all sectors of their economy; and give businesses maximal flexibility to fire workers and decide their conditions of work and pay, score the highest. Governments that keep strategic parts of their economy (or all of it) under state-control; limit foreign investment and impose conditions on what foreign investment is allowed; maintain trade barriers in order to protect strategic domestic enterprises from foreign competitors; expropriate private productive property (including farmland) for redistribution or state ownership; regulate businesses closely; and establish minimal standards of working conditions and pay, are found at the bottom.

Below are the countries at the bottom of the 2011 list, working backward from the lowest ranked, and showing each country's major sin against the interests of Western bankers, investors and corporations, as judged by the Wall Street Journal and Heritage Foundation.

- North Korea (centralized planning and state control of the economy);
- Zimbabwe (indigenization, i.e. placing ownership of the country's land and mineral resources in the hands of the indigenous population);
- Cuba (limited private entrepreneurship);
- Eritrea (a strict command economy in which most private investment has been eliminated);
- Venezuela (burdensome tax rates; land and other private holdings can be expropriated);
- Myanmar (business activity is concentrated in state-owned enterprises);
- Libya (foreign investment does not receive national treatment, and new investment is screened by the government; the government has the power to renationalize any property that has been privatized. Foreign companies are especially vulnerable, and the government has a history of expropriation);
- Democratic Republic of Congo (too unstable and corrupt to support profitable investment);
- Iran (foreign investment is restricted or banned in many industries, including banking, telecommunications, transport, oil, and gas; it is difficult to fire employees.)

It is instructive to compare the economic policies of Libya and Bahrain, the former subjected to NATO bombing because, according to NATO powers, the Gaddafi government used force to try to quell an armed rebellion, while the latter faces no sanctions, despite using force, backed by Saudi tanks and troops, to put down peaceful protests.

Bahrain is ranked number 10 of 179 countries on the Wall Street Journal and Heritage Foundation list, next to the United States. Regionally, Bahrain is top ranked in North Africa and West Asia, while Libya, ranked 173 over all countries, falls dead last in regional rankings. Bahrain's higher ranking is based on an array of government policies aimed to please foreign businesses. Property ownership is secure and expropriation is unlikely, whereas in Libya foreign companies are vulnerable to expropriation. Bahrain welcomes foreign investment and allows new businesses to be 100 percent foreign owned and controlled, while Libya screens foreign investment, imposes performance requirements on foreign investors that domestic investors are not required to meet, and demands that Libyans have a 35 percent stake in foreign companies that operate in the country. And while Bahrain imposes no restrictions on repatriation of profits, Libya does.

On trade, Bahrain imposes few restrictions on imports, while Libya maintains a variety of tariff and non-tariff barriers to help local firms develop. With the exception of oil companies, businesses that operate

in Bahrain pay no corporate tax. By contrast, businesses in Libya are subject to a tax rate as high as 40 percent. Personal income tax is extremely low in Bahrain, but can reach as high as 90 percent in Libya. And while Bahrain provides businesses maximal flexibility in dealing with employees, even allowing them to pay desperation-level wages, Libya provides protection for workers on pay and working conditions.

In 2004, the hostility of the United States to Libya eased, as the Gaddafi government renounced the development of nuclear weapons and Washington lifted sanctions. This has been cited by some people on the left as evidence that the Gaddafi government had thrown in its lot with the imperialists and that anti-imperialist solidarity with Gaddafi is misplaced. But while Gaddafi may have worked out what he thought was a *modus vivende* with the West, he did not go so far as to renounce economic nationalism. A 2008 US State Department cable complained that “Labor laws were amended to ‘Libyanise’ the economy, and oil firms were pressed to hire Libyan managers, finance people and human resource directors.”²⁶ Gaddafi’s sin, then, was that he did not allow the Libyan economy to become “Americanized.”

“By November 2007, a State Department cable noted ‘growing evidence of Libyan resource nationalism.’ It noted that in his 2006 speech marking the founding of his regime, Gaddafi said: ‘Oil companies are controlled by foreigners who have made millions from them. Now, Libyans must take their place to profit from this money.’ His son made similar remarks in 2007.

“Oil companies had been forced to give their local subsidiaries Libyan names, the cable said. Eni, for example, became Mellita, and the Spanish firm Repsol became Akakoss.

“Those who dominate Libya’s political and economic leadership are pursuing increasingly nationalistic policies in the energy sector that could jeopardize efficient exploitation of Libya’s extensive oil and gas reserves,’ the cable concluded.”²⁷

In short, the Bahraini monarchy runs a foreign-investment- and import-friendly regime that puts foreign interests first, while Libya’s nationalist “Libyanized” economic policies insist that domestic interests not be ignored. A government in Tripoli that was more like Bahrain’s, and less like Gaddafi’s, would unquestionably be congenial to foreign business interests, and it is clear that such a government is what Washington, London and Paris seek, and that achievement of this goal is the impetus for NATO’s military intervention in Libya.

Libya is, however, only the latest of a string of cases in which the US has led military interventions in countries whose economic policies have either denied or limited Western bankers, investors and

²⁶ The Washington Post, June 11, 2011, cited in Brian Becker, “Why the NATO powers are trying to assassinate Moammar Gaddafi”, ANSWER, June 13, 2011.

²⁷ Steven Mufson, “Conflict in Libya: U.S. oil companies sit on sidelines as Gaddafi maintains hold”, The Washington Post, June 10, 2011.

corporations the opportunities they seek to expand their capital. That the political process of the capitalist democracies that are at the core of the interventions are dominated by the high-level owners and managers of capital is significant, for it points to a capitalist expansionary logic as the basis for the military interventions undertaken by these countries.

On top of this, it should be acknowledged that the production of the equipment that militaries use to intervene in other countries--warships, warplanes, tanks, missiles, and so on-- is a source of significant profits. Were this not so, the drive to use military force might not be as prized as it is. This is not to say, however, that countries would not intervene militarily in other countries were there no profits to be derived from arms manufacturing. The benefits to capitalist societies in securing previously inaccessible spheres of exploitation are too compelling for these societies not to rely on their militaries to secure markets and investment opportunities from weak countries that attempt to deny or limit them, whether arms manufacturing is lucrative or not.²⁸ But the additional opportunities for profit-making that arms manufacturing provide are certainly an incentive to the capitalist class to pressure governments to maintain large militaries, and the maintenance of the capability to exercise overwhelming military force has two significant effects. First, it establishes war-making as a readily accessible and powerful tool of achieving political goals. When she was US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright was reputed to have asked then head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell: "What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking about, if we can't use it?"²⁹ Second, a significant expenditure from the public purse on the military establishes an incentive to press the military into service to justify the expenditure. It would be difficult to defend large-scale expenditures on the military against demands on the public purse for healthcare, education, public pensions, and so on, were the expenditures not seen to be justified. Accordingly, the state in capitalist societies has invented a series of justifications for swollen military budgets to support massive militaries which are maintained at an inflated size as both a tool for intervention and a profitable sphere for investment in arms.

One justification for inflated spending on arms is provided by the dishonest amplification of minor threats into major and imminent ones. For example, the threat posed by Ba'athist Iraq to the United States and Britain was, in reality, approximately zero, but it was distorted by the executive branch of these two countries to build Iraq and its leader, Saddam Hussein, into a significant threat that had to be eliminated by military means. Seven years after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the director general of

²⁸ Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, the Libyan leader's son, wondered whether France's taking a leadership role in the NATO military intervention in his country was related to the Gaddafi government's refusal to buy Dassault-built warplanes from France. David Smith, "Gaddafi's son claims Nato wants deal with Libya", *The Guardian* (UK), July 4, 2011.

²⁹ Michael Dobbs, "With Albright, Clinton accepts new U.S. role", *The Washington Post*, December 8, 1996.

Britain's domestic intelligence agency at the time of the invasion, Lady Manningham-Buller, confessed that Iraq had posed little danger, and that the invasion itself created a threat by radicalizing Muslims.³⁰

Similarly, no end of effort has been exerted to build north Korea, a small country with a tiny military budget, into a dire military threat. What little threat north Korea does pose to the United States and the Western world is entirely a reaction to Washington's own sabre-rattling. North Korea would almost certainly never have left the NPT and embarked on the development of nuclear weapons had the United States not targeted its own nuclear missiles on north Korean sites. Washington's virtual declaration of war on the east Asian country in declaring it to be part of an axis of evil has only reinforced north Korea's resolve to build a nuclear arsenal and develop missiles capable of delivering a nuclear payload. But even the addition of this deterrent capability to the north Korean armamentarium makes the country far less of a threat than the febrile warnings of Western politicians, media pundits and think-tank "experts" would lead one to believe. North Korea would be incinerated in an instant if it attacked the United States or invaded south Korea. Its crude nuclear weapons give it the capability to inflict serious harm on an aggressor, but not the firepower to secure territorial gains or neutralize the United States. The country's nuclear weapons are, therefore, purely defensive.

Another way in which large military budgets have been justified is by invoking the spectre of threats to "our" interests abroad as the reason budgets large enough to station troops and military hardware throughout the world need to be maintained. The phrase "our interests" is used by government officials and journalists to suggest that the interests are national ones. However, they are none other than the interests of the top-level owners and managers of capital. That this is so is apparent, for example, in how the decision of the Zimbabwe government to expropriate farmland acquired illegitimately by European settlers, and to do so without compensation, is characterized by the US government. The expropriation of farmland in a sub-Saharan African country is hardly a threat to the vast majority of US citizens, an infinitesimal fraction of whom, if even that small number, owns farmland in Zimbabwe, and it is not a threat to the physical safety of anyone in the United States, yet it is recognized formally by Washington as a threat to the foreign policy of the United States, and is the justification for the actions of representatives of the United States on world banks to deny credit to the government in Harare. Whether expropriation of productive property is a threat depends on whether one has any, and inasmuch as the bulk of people in rich countries do not, expropriation stands as a threat to a minority alone. For an elite of capitalists, the principle of expropriation is intolerable, and without compensation much more so. That a government should be able to get away with so blatant an affront to the principle that private productive property must never be expropriated is not a development that a state dominated by the owners and managers of private productive property is prepared to accept. Consequently, Washington declares the actions of the Zimbabwe government to constitute a threat to the United States and vilifies its leadership and squeezes the country economically to force it to recant.

³⁰ Sarah Lyall, "Ex-Official says Afghan and Iraq wars increased threats to Britain", The New York Times, July 20, 2010.

Military intervention is not the only way in which rich countries seek to expand opportunities in poor countries for their high-level owners and managers of capital. Establishing conditions for loans and foreign aid that profit the creditor country's bankers, investors and corporations has long been used as a means of securing investment opportunities and new markets for the creditor country's capitalist class. While misunderstood as a hand-out to the poor, foreign aid is often used as a method of expanding markets abroad. Poor countries receive loans to buy goods and services which must be purchased from the creditor country. The creditor insists on being re-paid in full with interest, while its corporations reap the bounty of increased sales. Foreign assistance, then, is not a hand-out to poor countries, but a hand-out to the high-level managers and shareholders of corporations in rich countries to which foreign assistance credits are directed. The effect in the country that receives the aid is to stifle the development of its local industry. George W. Bush's strategy to combat AIDS in Africa involved \$5 billion in loans to African countries to purchase drugs from US pharmaceutical concerns, rather than from generic drug manufacturers closer to home. The benefits accrue to US pharmaceutical companies, not African ones. In addition, aid is often made contingent on the recipient country satisfying other conditions. These may include treating foreign investment the same as domestic investment; lowering corporate taxes; gutting regulation of businesses; privatizing state-owned enterprises; increasing labour market flexibility; buying arms from the creditor country's arms manufacturers; and allowing the creditor country to establish military bases within one's borders.

Another way in which rich countries seek to expand opportunities in poor countries for their investors, bankers and corporations is to install a local ruler in power and provide him the security apparatus and diplomatic and other support he needs to govern. In exchange, the protégé runs his country as a sphere of exploitation for his backers' bankers, investors and corporations. He removes barriers to trade, lifts restrictions on foreign investment, keeps corporate taxes low, ensures low-wage labour is available for exploitation, and cooperates militarily with his imperialist masters. There are more than a few such protégés of Washington, many of them Arab tyrannies.

Afghanistan

Even Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai, whose accession to power owes everything to the US-led intervention in Afghanistan, could not long conceal the intervention's true nature. The countries that comprise the coalition cobbled together by the United States to dominate Afghanistan are "here for their own purposes, for their own goals, and they're using our soil for that,"³¹ complained Karzai. The US ambassador, Karl Eikenberry, fired back that US citizens do not like to "hear themselves compared with occupiers, told that they are only here to advance their own interest and likened to brutal enemies of the Afghan people."³² Significantly, Eikenberry did not contest Karzai's claim that NATO powers are

³¹ Ray Rivera and Ginger Thompson, "U.S. ambassador responds to Karzai's criticisms", The New York Times, June 19, 2011.

³² Ibid.

occupying Afghanistan to further their own interests. He only noted that US citizens do not like to be told so.

It is certainly true that the United States and its NATO underlings are in Afghanistan to pursue their own interests, and only the weakly naive would believe that vast sums of money have been spent for selfless and humanitarian reasons. More realistically, if foreign policy is overwhelmingly influenced by the profit-making interests of bankers, investors and corporations, it might be expected that the agenda pursued by NATO in Afghanistan has some connection, even if distant, to profit-making. There are a good many reasons to suppose it has.

First, Washington's claim can be accepted at face value that one of its reasons for invading Afghanistan and leading a war against the Taliban has been to weaken Al Qaeda. Some have argued that Al Qaeda is simply a pretext Washington has used to occupy Afghanistan, but it must be recalled that the Islamist organization is dedicated to thwarting a principal US foreign policy goal: domination of the Middle East. It is not unreasonable to expect that Washington would use military force to counter this threat, considering that the Middle East is a rich source of profits for US investors and businesses.

No matter how much Al Qaeda's program is dressed up in religious language, at root, it is anti-imperialist, in the sense of struggling against political domination from without. In Bin Laden's view, the United States is an enemy because it "...has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorising its neighbours, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples."³³ As Pape has noted "...every suicide campaign...has had as a major objective—or as its central objective—coercing a foreign government that has military forces in what they see as their homeland to take those forces out."³⁴ In other words, Al Qaeda works to topple the United States from its position of ascendancy in the Middle East.

The link to US-led military operations in Afghanistan is that the organization's principals had taken up residence in the country, and the Taliban had showed no commitment to facilitate US efforts to undermine Al Qaeda. Agreeing to hand over Bin Laden if evidence could be produced that he was involved in the 9/11 attacks does not amount to facilitating the destruction of an organized force against US domination of the Middle East. It is simply an offer to assist a criminal prosecution, if a case for it exists. It is very unlikely that criminal charges against Bin Laden were even possible in connection with the 9/11 attacks. Bin Laden did not fly the airplanes that struck the World Trade Center and Pentagon or plan the attacks, and it has sometimes been pointed out that the FBI charge sheet against the Qaeda leader listed a number of operations, but not 9/11. But convicting Bin Laden of a specific act was likely to have been of little concern to Washington against the larger goal of destroying his organization and

³³ Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No.3, August 2003.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

ending its efforts to drive the United States from a part of the world that is teeming with profit-making opportunities.

Second, Afghanistan is a potential source of vast profits for mining, pipeline and oil companies. US officials estimate that there are \$1 trillion to \$3 trillion in untapped mineral deposits in Afghanistan, including gold, iron, uranium, copper, coal, coltan (used in the manufacture of cell phones and computers), marble, gemstones, rare earths and niobium (a soft metal used in producing superconducting steel.) Afghanistan could eventually become one of the most significant mining centers in the world and a source of vast profits for Western mining companies.³⁵ On top of its vast mineral deposits, Afghanistan also has enough oil to meet its own needs with enough left over for export.³⁶ Plus, the country could become a pipeline route for pumping the vast petroleum resources of the Caspian basin to port for shipment to Western Europe, bypassing Russian pipelines.³⁷ It is important to Western investors and mining, oil and pipeline companies that a stable and secure environment be created to allow them to take advantage of Afghanistan's rich opportunities. Achieving this end means eliminating the disruptive force of Al Qaeda and bringing a trustworthy local ruler to power who is prepared to open his country to exploitation by Western capital.

Third, control of Afghanistan allows the United States to tighten its circle around Iran. Iran is charting an independent course that denies Western investors, banks and corporations a number of investment and export opportunities and accordingly is on the US radar for regime change. A US-led military presence in Afghanistan to the immediate east, along with one in Iraq to the immediate west, and with the US Fifth Fleet headquartered in Bahrain to the south, means that Iran is surrounded by hostile forces on three sides. Hence, military intervention in Afghanistan offers the United States a way of closing its circle around Iran—and enclosure contributes to the project of ousting an economically nationalist government that limits US free enterprise and rejects free trade.³⁸

³⁵ Socialist Project, E-Bulletin, No. 113, June 14, 2008; Joshua Partlow, "Afghan minister accused of taking bribes," *The Washington Post*, November 17, 2009; James Risen, "U.S. identifies vast riches of minerals in Afghanistan", *The New York Times*, June 12, 2010; James Risen, "World's mining companies covet Afghan riches", *The New York Times*, June 17, 2010.

³⁶ Ernesto Londono, "Cautious optimism as Afghan oil starts pumping", *The Washington Post*, December 14, 2010.

³⁷ "One of our goals is to stabilize Afghanistan, so it can become a conduit and a hub between South and Central Asia so that energy can flow to the south ...", said Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs in 2007. Talk at the Paul H. Nitze School for Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC, September 20, 2007, cited in William Blum, *The Anti-Empire Report*, December 9, 2009.

³⁸ As an example of the opportunities that Iran's nationalist policies deny investors and corporations of rich countries, consider the country's automobile industry. It operates behind steep tariff walls which allow two domestic firms to absorb 97 percent of all automobile sales in the country. Sales reached 1.6 million units last year. ("Iranian car lines keep rolling despite sanctions", *Reuters*, June 29, 2011.) Were Iran's doors pried open, US, European and East Asian automobile manufacturers could add handsomely to their bottom lines.

Fourth, Afghanistan offers a captive market for sales of US arms. From 2005 through 2008 alone Washington agreed to buy more than \$10 billion in arms from US arms manufacturers for Afghanistan.³⁹

Iraq

The advantages that accrue to the dominant class of the United States in the country's invasion and conquest of Iraq are similar to and in other respects different from those that accrue to the same class from the invasion of Afghanistan. Consistent with military intervention in Afghanistan, the intervention in Iraq positions US military forces on Iran's borders. While neither Iraq nor Afghanistan may ever be used as launching pads for a ground invasion of Iran, the very presence of US troops, along with sanctions, financial isolation and a program of destabilization, exert considerable pressure on the Iranian government to capitulate to US demands. Also, like Afghanistan, Iraq is a treasure trove, mainly of oil.⁴⁰ The country boasts proven reserves of 115 billion barrels.⁴¹ An Iraq that is amenable to exploitation by Western oil companies on highly congenial terms holds out the promise of a bonanza of profits for an important section of the US ruling class, namely that part of it connected to major oil companies. And Iraq, no less than Afghanistan, is a captive market for sales of US arms.⁴²

Ba'athist Iraq was different from Afghanistan, however, in having an economy that held out few opportunities for private ownership of major assets, while Afghanistan had few developed assets. This, along with Iraq's relative military weakness, made the country an attractive target for military intervention to bring about a change in regime. Military intervention in Iraq created opportunities to turn a largely centrally planned economy that was dominated by state-owned enterprises, into a model of free enterprise, free markets, and free trade—the paradigm Washington favours as the best model for accommodating the profit-making interests of US investors, bankers, and corporations. Soon after the Pentagon took control of Iraq, the US proconsul, Paul Bremer, undertook to turn the Iraqi economy into a wet dream for Wall Street, dismissing public servants, imposing a flat tax, and placing state-owned enterprises on the auction block. But the dismantling of the state-owned economy turned too many military-aged men out of work, swelling the ranks of the resistance. Washington deliberately reversed course, to keep as many men employed as possible, so that they would not, in their idleness, take up arms against the occupation. But it is clear that Washington's long-term goal for Iraq is to fulfil the

³⁹ The New York Times, September 13, 2008.

⁴⁰ On his first visit to Iraq as US Defence Secretary, Leon Panetta remarked: "This damn country has a hell of a lot of resources." Elisabeth Bumiller, "With blunt, salty talk, Panetta era begins", The New York Times, July 13, 2011. A day earlier he told US troops in Iraq that the US military would have "an enduring presence" in the Middle East. Elisabeth Bumiller, "Panetta presses Iraq for decision on troops", The New York Times, July 12, 2011.

⁴¹ Timothy Williams, "Warily moving ahead on oil contracts," The New York Times, June 26, 2009.

⁴² Iraq has begun negotiations to buy as many as 36 F-16 fighters from the US firm Lockheed-Martin, as well as air-defence systems, worth billions of dollars. Adam Entous, Ben Lando and Nathan Hodge, "U.S. set to sell fighters to Iraq," The Wall Street Journal, July 12, 2011.

agenda it has for all countries it intervenes in militarily: to create business-friendly environments that provide lucrative opportunities for US capital.

The Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan

The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan on behalf of the Marxist-Leninist-inspired PDPA government is understood in some circles to have been an invasion, comparable to the US invasion of South Vietnam. To be sure, the PDPA government and the Soviet Union had no more support among Afghanistan's rural population than the South Vietnamese government and the United States had among South Vietnam's rural population, and in this sense, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan can be understood to have represented an invasion.

It would be wrong, however, to regard the PDPA government as a puppet of the Soviet Union, in the way the South Vietnamese government was a puppet of the United States. And it would be just as wrong to suppose that the Soviet decision to intervene in Afghanistan was made unilaterally by Moscow. On the contrary, the Afghan government repeatedly requested Soviet military assistance and was repeatedly turned down.

Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Malcolm Byrne point to documents posted at the National Security Archive which show that the Soviet Union intervened only after it was asked 11 times to do so and that the PDPA beseeched the Soviets to stay when the Soviets eventually decided to withdraw their forces.⁴³

Soviet interventions were very different from those of advanced capitalist societies. The typical pattern of capitalist imperialist interventions is to overthrow popular governments and install right-wing comprador regimes. Once installed, the new government lifts restrictions on foreign investment, eliminates tariffs and subsidies, privatizes state-owned enterprises, and invites the investors, banks and corporations of the intervening forces to set up shop in their country. Consistent with this pattern, on one of her visits to Afghanistan, US secretary of state Hilary Clinton "ticked off a list of accomplishments in Afghanistan under (the puppet president Hamid) Karzai, including the fact that Kabul now has its own American Chamber of Commerce."⁴⁴ This, according to The New York Times, was a reason for smiles all around.

By contrast, Soviet interventions did not pave the way for the economic exploitation of the countries the USSR intervened in, and the Soviet Union after 1953 did not own productive property in other

⁴³ Soviet Military Command in Afghanistan on the Withdrawal of Soviet Troops, February 14, 1989, cited in Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Malcolm Byrne, "Afghanistan and the Soviet Withdrawal 1989: 20 Years Later," MRZine, February 15, 2009.

⁴⁴ Mark Landler, "Karzai visits Washington with smiles all around", The New York Times, May 11, 2010.

countries.⁴⁵ Soviet relations with Eastern European countries were more like that of Third World countries to advanced capitalist countries, with the Soviets exporting raw materials to Eastern Europe in return for manufactured goods. Soviet satellite countries benefited more economically from their relationship with the Soviet Union than the USSR did with them. Likewise, Third World countries were the net beneficiaries of their relationship with the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ The opposite is true of the United States' relationship with its satellites and the Third World; it is US bankers, investors and corporations that benefit most from these relationships.

Soviet interventions in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968) were defensive, while capitalist imperialist interventions are rarely so. The Soviets were highly motivated to maintain the Warsaw Pact as a bulwark against a possible Western attack. Eastern Europe had twice been used by Germany in the 20th century to launch attacks on the Soviet Union and these attacks had wrought unspeakable destruction on an unfathomable scale. The Nazi attack destroyed 1,700 cities and towns, 70,000 villages, 31,000 factories, 98,000 collective farms, thousands of miles of roads and railways, 17 million cattle, 20 million hogs, 27 million sheep and goats and 7 million horses⁴⁷, not to mention 25 million Soviet citizens. The Soviets, then, insisted that countries on their Western border be governed by friendly regimes and Moscow refused to tolerate any possible breach of the Warsaw Pact. Ultimately, the Soviet intervention in Hungary was triggered by Hungary's decision to withdraw from the Warsaw alliance and adopt a position of neutrality. Discussions within Czechoslovakia about improved relations with the West and with West Germany in particular aroused Soviet fears of a possible Czech withdrawal from the defensive alliance. These fears were strong enough to precipitate the Soviet decision to intervene.⁴⁸

Violence

Valid military interventions may be objected to on grounds that, not only do they involve the use of violence, they initiate its use, and are therefore acts of aggression. It might be argued, then, that military interventions are intrinsically invalid, even if they seek to end oppression and exploitation, directly raise mass living standards, advance progressive forces, and set back reactionary ones. This argument, however, fails on a number of grounds.

⁴⁵ The Soviets did expropriate enterprises in some Eastern European countries in the years immediately following WWII as compensation for its war losses but later returned to them.

⁴⁶ Albert Szymanski. Is the Red Flag Flying? The Political Economy of the Soviet Union Today. Zed Press. 1979, pp. 120-182.

⁴⁷ Melvyn P. Leffler, The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953. Hill and Wang. New York. 1994; Geoffrey Roberts, "Last men standing", The Irish Examiner, June 23, 2011.

⁴⁸ See Albert Szymanski. Is the Red Flag Flying? The Political Economy of the Soviet Union Today. Zed Press. 1979.

First, it elevates the avoidance of violence above all other goals. It is more important, in this view, that oppression and exploitation continue, than that these scourges be ended through the use of violence.

Second, it fails to recognize that violence on a smaller scale may be used to terminate violence on a larger one. Mark Twain's observations on the use of terror during the French Revolution are fitting.

“Why, it was like reading about France and the French before the ever memorable and blessed Revolution, which swept a thousand years of such villainy away in one swift tidal wave of blood—one: a settlement of that hoary debt in the proportion of half a drop of blood for each hogshead of it that had been pressed by slow torture out that people in the weary stretch of ten centuries of wrong and shame and misery and the like of which was not to be mated in hell. There were two ‘reigns of Terror,’ if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon ten thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the ‘horrors’ of the minor Terror, the momentary Terror, so to speak, whereas what is the horror of swift death by the ax compared with life-long death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heart-break? What is swift death by lightning compared with death by slow fire at the stake? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror which we have all been taught to shiver at and mourn over, but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror—that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves.”⁴⁹

Violence, while destructive, is not an evil in itself. Under some circumstances, its use can be desirable. Consider the case of amputation. While amputation is destructive, it can be used to stop the spread of gangrene. It can also be used to punitively maim. No one would denounce amputation as intrinsically invalid, simply because it is destructive. Whether it is good or bad, depends on what it is being used to accomplish and whether its benefits preponderate its costs. Likewise, few people would denounce the use of violence by the police to subdue a person who is a threat to himself or others.

Third, those who denounce the use of violence as an intrinsically invalid method of achieving progressive political goals often advocate the use of economic sanctions as a non-violent alternative. But sanctions can be as destructive as violence, if not more so. Fewer people may die in the horror of swift death by war than in a prolonged death from hunger, cold, and starvation caused by sanctions. Consider how many people died through various uses of weapons of mass destruction throughout history.

“The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki together killed more than 100,000 people, and a high estimate suggests that some 80,000 died from chemical weapons in World War I. If one adds the deaths from later uses of chemical weapons in war or warlike situations...as well as

⁴⁹ Mark Twain. A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, quoted in Herbert Aptheker. The Nature of Democracy, Freedom and Revolution. International Publishers. New York, 2001. pp. 112-113.

deaths caused by the intentional or accidental use of biological weapons and ballistic missiles, the resulting total comes to well under 400,000.”⁵⁰

And yet at least 500,000 people died in Iraq because of non-violent economic sanctions. In other words, more have died from what has been considered a non-violent, and therefore desirable, alternative to war, than from all the uses of weapons of mass destruction in history.

To be sure, military interventions have great costs in terms of loss of life and human suffering, and therefore should be undertaken only when the benefits outweigh the costs. But it is important to recognize that under some circumstances the benefits *do* outweigh the costs, and that military intervention is not therefore intrinsically invalid. Its validity depends on its outcomes. Are they progressive? Do they set back forces of reaction? Do they directly advance mass living standards?

At the same time, it should be recognized that non-violent interventions are not intrinsically valid and desirable simply because they are non-violent, as some people on the left suppose. The validity of non-violent interventions, like that of military interventions, depends on whose goals they serve and what outcomes they produce. Reactionary and imperialist goals have, in recent years, been pursued through movements that tout their commitment to non-violent direct action. Some people have believed that these movements’ renunciation of violence has made them, *ipso facto*, progressive. This is a misperception. Whether a movement is progressive or reactionary has nothing whatever to do with the methods of struggle it chooses, but with the goals it hopes to achieve. The non-violent overthrow of a progressive government does not make the outcome progressive because it was accomplished non-violently. Likewise, the achievement of progressive goals is not reactionary simply because it relies on the use of violence.

This is not to say that violence is always justified by the ends. Non-violent means of achieving the same goal are always preferable to violent ones (assuming the non-violent ones produce less harm, which, as in the case of sanctions, is not always true.) The goal ought to be to achieve the greatest benefit at the least cost in terms of loss of life and human suffering. Sometimes, the way to maximize the ratio of benefit to harm is through violence; at other times, it is not.

Conclusion

For military interventions to be considered valid, they must be carried out to end exploitation and oppression; to directly advance mass living standards; to oppose forces of reaction; to advance progressive forces; or to accomplish some combination of the above. The military interventions of the United States and its NATO allies in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya are not valid, for they have satisfied none of these conditions. On the contrary, these interventions have been undertaken for entirely antithetical reasons: not to end exploitation and oppression, but to enlarge it; not to directly advance mass living standards, but to expand the capital of the owners and managers of it; not to

⁵⁰ John Mueller and Karl Mueller, “Sanctions of Mass Destruction”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 3, May/June 1999.

oppose forces of reaction, but to install them in power and protect them; and not to advance progressive forces, but to overthrow them.

Rich countries are driven to intervene militarily and in other ways in poor countries that are unable to defend themselves. They do so in order to enforce a global system of free trade, free enterprise and free markets—a system of which they are at the apex and from which they disproportionately benefit. They are driven to do this because they are, from top to bottom, profit-making societies, whose high-level business owners and managers, bankers and investors are forever on the look-out—indeed, must always be on the look-out—for opportunities to expand their capital. As the ultra-wealthy owners and managers of productive property they have at their command vast resources far superior to those of labour and ordinary citizens which they use to dominate the state. Their pre-eminent position allows them to press the military, the intelligence services, and the diplomatic corps into service to carve out new markets and investment opportunities in push-over countries that have denied or limited access to foreign capital and exports. Countries that are intervened in, apart from being too poor and too weak to defend themselves, have rejected the global system of free trade, free enterprise and free markets as parasitical and inimical to their economic development. Consequently, they run up against the interests of the economically powerful in capitalist imperialist countries who, as cogs in a capitalist system, are under a compulsion to smash down all barriers to the expansion of their capital.

This is not to say, however, that all military interventions undertaken by capitalist imperialist countries must be of this sort, although the successful pursuit of profit-making will play at least a distant role. The intervention of Britain and the United States on the side of the Soviet Union in WWII was valid because it opposed the reactionary forces of fascism and defended the progressive force of the Soviet Union. But neither Britain nor the United States entered the war to oppose fascism nor defend the USSR. These outcomes were collateral products of other motivations. Britain declared war on Germany to press Hitler to reverse his decision to enter into a non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union, and to encourage Germany to renew its push to the East to destroy the USSR and socialism. When Hitler turned his aggressions toward the West and only later attacked the Soviets, Britain struck an alliance with Stalin against Germany. This was an alliance Stalin had pleaded for before the war, but to no avail. So long as Hitler appeared to be intent on marching to the East while leaving the West in peace, the British were uninterested. The United States, for its part, was content to sit tight and allow its capitalist class to amass a fortune arming Britain, and did not enter the war in Europe until Hitler declared war on the United States.

While reference to international law and questions of democracy are often used to call military interventions into question, neither criterion should be used to judge their validity. Doing so often becomes an exercise in double-standards, where some military interventions that comport with international law are denounced (e.g., NATO's intervention in Libya), while others can be conceived of that would not accord with international law but which would be considered to be valid nonetheless (e.g., an intervention to protect Palestinians from collective punishment by Israelis or to free them from the oppression of Zionism.) Likewise, the idea that a military intervention is invalid because it is opposed by a majority of citizens in the country or region that is intervened in, condemns the Union's

intervention in the states of the Confederacy during the US Civil War as invalid, yet few today would regard it as such. The related idea that people must be left alone to resolve their own conflicts, and that intervention is an intolerable breach of another country's sovereignty, condemns as invalid the Comintern's organizing of volunteers to intervene on behalf of the Republican side in the Spanish Civil war; the PLA's intervention in the Korean civil war and in Tibet; Cuba's intervention in southern Africa; and the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan. If we regard these interventions as valid, we cannot question the legitimacy of interventions we do not like on grounds that they deny people of other countries the sovereign right to resolve their own conflicts. Many of the people who are opposed to NATO's intervention in Libya condemn Gaddafi, but insist that Libyans alone, without outside interference, must oust him. Hitler, too, was condemned, but no one, in hindsight, would say that had a pre-emptive attack on Germany been proposed that it should have been rejected because it was up to Germans alone to deal with Hitler. The violation of Libyan sovereignty cannot be a valid reason for opposing NATO's military intervention in Libya.

The validity of a military intervention ought to be judged on the basis of whether it advances progressive forces and outcomes, or whether it sets back reactionary ones, or both. Admittedly, this is dissatisfying, for one question (what is progressive?) simply replaces another (when is a military intervention valid?) To use the NATO intervention in Libya to illustrate, some would argue that a rebel victory in Libya is progressive, because it would end a dictatorship and replace it with a liberal democracy, and liberal democracy, despite its many drawbacks and limitations, is better than the dictatorship of one man. Others would contend that a rebel victory would be reactionary, because the government that would follow would almost certainly be a protégé of the West, and like other protégés, it would govern in the interests of capitalists in the United States, Western Europe and Japan, and would end Libya's course of independent economic development. Since Libya's independent economic development, and not a transformation of the country into a sphere of exploitation for Western bankers and oil companies, holds out the greatest promise of directly raising mass standards of living, NATO's military intervention in Libya ought to be opposed. Whether NATO's intervention in the country is valid, therefore, becomes a question of whether nationalist rule is more progressive than the rule of a neo-colonial puppet regime.

The prospect of Gaddafi's replacement by a liberal democratic political system yoked to the imperialist West may be considered progressive by some parts of the left but not others. Social democrats, who as a whole have an affinity with liberal democracy, and are not shy about supporting imperialism, are likely to view the prospect of Gaddafi's ouster as an outcome to be welcome. Some Marxists also welcome the possibility of Gaddafi's overthrow, hating the Libyan leader because he is not a socialist, because he is a dictator, and because they believe he is responsible for atrocities for which there is not a shred of evidence.⁵¹ Without question, Gaddafi's nationalism is less progressive than a proto-socialist regime

⁵¹ These include accusations that Gaddafi: ordered his troops to engage in mass rapes; recruited mercenaries from sub-Saharan Africa; and pressed his air force into service to strafe protestors. See Patrick Cockburn, "Amnesty questions claim that Gaddafi ordered rape as weapon of war," *The Independent* (UK), June 24, 2011. Concerning leftists who have fallen for the war propaganda and have had a hand in spreading it, see for example Patrick Bond, "Mubaraking' Muammar, Maliki, Mugabe and more", *Z-Net*, February 28, 2011. Bond repeats the baseless claim

committed to working toward a socialist future. But the analysis of some Marxists is circumscribed by a refusal to consider the realistic alternatives to Gaddafi. The alternative is not the rebel uprising turning into the equivalent of the Bolshevik Revolution, as some romantically and naively expect, but its ushering in to power in Tripoli a government of acquiescence to NATO imperialism. These same people, had they been in Churchill's place, would have ardently refused a temporary alliance with the Soviet Union in WWII, refusing to cooperate with a regime that would have represented all they hated. The result may well have been Britain's complete destruction, just as, if the wishes of some Marxists are realized today, all hope for Libya's independent development free from exploitation by bankers, investors and corporations of the principal NATO countries will be dashed.

Future US-led wars of intervention are sure to happen. The overwhelming military might of the United States all but guarantees that the country will again reach for the most formidable tool in its arsenal of political solutions – the combined forces of the US Army, US Navy, US Marines, US Air Force and the CIA. At the same time, the reality that a tiny elite at the apex of the capitalist system dominates the political process in the United States is a guarantee that political problems will be defined with its overwhelming input and in accordance with its interests. And if a political problem can be solved through military intervention, and in a manner which arouses little public opposition, it is almost certain to be solved in this way. Given this context, then, it is highly unlikely that US-led military interventions will ever meet the standard of advancing progressive forces and directly and equitably raising the material standards of the mass of people – that is, of being valid. Instead, they will almost certainly be directed at expanding the spheres of exploitation available to an ultra-wealthy class of capitalists. Still, there may be instances where military interventions are undertaken for all the wrong reasons but nevertheless advance the interests of progressive forces, or set back reactionary ones, or both, and it should be recognized that while these cases are improbable, they are nevertheless possible.

Reducing the chances that invalid military interventions will be undertaken means orchestrating pressure against them, which in turn, means developing and putting forward analyses which explain how military interventions affect ordinary people. Without understanding, action is absent. The approach of the United States Conference of Mayors in opposing US wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, while limited and not based on a sophisticated analysis, nevertheless is a step in the right direction in focussing the debate on bread and butter issues, rather than moral ones. While it may be possible to arouse people intellectually by appealing to the moral case for opposition to invalid military

that Gaddafi recruited black African mercenaries. He writes: "Gaddafi may try to hang on, with his small band of loyalists allegedly bolstered by sub-Saharan African mercenaries – potentially including Zimbabweans, according to Harare media – helping Gaddafi for a \$16,000 payoff each." It is difficult to comprehend how Gaddafi is able to hang on in the face of NATO bombing and a rebel assault with only a "small band of loyalists." On this, as on so much else, Bond is an inexhaustible font of misinformation.

interventions, a visceral appeal to their immediate material interests is more likely to galvanize opposition of the sort that presses governments to back down. But this is only a rearguard action. What is needed all the more is a way of ensuring that invalid military interventions never occur. And that can only happen by addressing the problem at its roots.

The root of the problem is two-fold. First, the necessity of profit-making in a capitalist society compels the high-level owners and managers of capital to smash down barriers to the expansion of their capital. And second, their ownership and control of capital gives them enormous influence to shape public policy to achieve this goal. It follows, therefore, that an attack on the roots of the problem means, first, replacing profit-making as the economy's organizing principle. The obvious alternative is need, which is to say, that the economy should be reorganized, not to produce profits, but to produce goods and services to satisfy the requirements of the community. An attack on the roots of the problem also means reconstituting society on a truly democratic basis, where ownership and control of the economy is not concentrated in the hands of a few, but is under the control of the people who make the economy work. This, to be sure, is a vision of the radical restructuring of society along socialist lines, and while the propaganda of conservative forces has led to a good deal of scepticism about socialism, its validity as a solution to the problem of invalid military interventions—and much else--remains undiminished.

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