

Independence and Self-Determination: Weapons for

Empire Building or National Liberation?

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Introduction

Since World War II most of the world's conflicts have revolved around struggles for independence against Western and Japanese colonial/imperial regimes

Following formal independence, a new type of imperial domination was imposed – neo-colonial regimes, in which the US and its European allies imposed vassal rulers acting as proxies for economic exploitation. With the rise of US unipolar global domination, following the demise of the USSR (1990), the West established hegemony over the East European states. Some were subject to fragmentation and sub-divided into new NATO dominated statelets.

The quest for a unipolar empire set in motion a series of wars and ethnic conflicts in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Baltic States, North Africa, Asia and Western Europe – leading to ethnic cleansing and the global mass refugee crises.

The break-up of nation states spread across the globe as the rhetoric and politics of '*self-determination*' replaced the class struggle as the flagship for social justice and political freedom.

Many of the prime movers of empire-building adopted the tactics of dividing and conquering adversaries – under the liberal pretext of promoting ‘*self-determination*’, without clarifying who and what the ‘*self*’ represented and who really benefited.

Sectional, regional, cultural and ethnic identities served to polarize struggles. In contrast ‘*central*’ regimes fought to retain ‘*national unity*’ in order to repress regional revolts.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and discuss the national and international forces behind the slogans of ‘*self-determination*’ and the larger international and regional consequences.

Basic Concepts: Ambiguities and Clarification

One of the striking aspects of the process of globalization and national development is ‘*uneven and combined development*’ (ICD). This takes several forms – uneven development between regions, within and between countries, and usually both.

Imperial countries concentrate industries, commerce and banking while colonized/neo-colonized countries are left with export-linked, resource-based enclaves and low-wage assembly plants. Frequently, the capital cities of colonized and de-colonized countries concentrate and centralize political power, wealth, infrastructure, transport and finance while their provinces are reduced to providing raw material and cheap labor by subject people. Infrequently political power and administration – including the military, police and tax collection agencies – are concentrated in economically un-productive central cities, while the wealth-producing, but politically weaker regions, are economically exploited, marginalized and depleted.

Combined and uneven development on international and national levels has led to class, anti-imperialist and regional struggles. Where class-based struggles have been weakened, nationalist and ethnic leaders and movements assume political leadership.

'Nationalism', however, has two diametrically opposing faces: In one version Western backed regional movements work to degrade anti-imperialist regimes in order to subordinate the entire nation to the dictates of an imperial power. In a different context, broad-based secular nationalists struggle to gain political independence by defeating imperial forces and their local surrogates, who are often ethnic or religious minority rent-collecting overlords.

Imperial states have always had a clear understanding of the nature of the different kinds of *'nationalism'* and which serve their interests. Imperial states support regional and/or *'nationalist'* regimes and movements that will undermine anti-imperial movements, regimes and regions. They always oppose *'nationalist'* movements with strong working class leadership.

Historical Experience

Imperial Perfidious Albion, the United Kingdom, slaughtered and starved millions of people who resisted its rule in Asia (India, Burma, Malaya and China), Africa (South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, etc.) and Europe (Ireland).

At the same time, British imperialists promoted regional conflicts arming Muslims to fight Hindus, Sikhs to fight Muslims, Gurkas to oppress Malays and create various warring religious, ethnic and linguistic groups throughout the Indian subcontinent, Burma and Malaya.

Likewise the UK promoted conflicts among religious, secular nationalist and conservative groups throughout the Middle East.

The imperial powers naturally operate through the strategy of '*divide and conquer*', labeling their adversaries as 'backward' and 'authoritarian' while praising their surrogates as 'freedom fighters' which they claim are 'in transition to Western democratic values'.

However, the strategic issue is how imperial states define the kind of self-determination to support or repress and when to change their policies: Today's allies are dubbed 'democrats' in the Western press and tomorrow they can be re-assigned the role of 'freedom's enemies' and 'authoritarian', if they act against imperial interests.

The Two Faces of Self-Determination

In contrast to the imperial practice of shifting policies toward dominant regimes and separatist movements, most of the 'left' broadly support all movements for self-determination and label all opponents as 'oppressors'.

As a result the left and the imperialist regimes may end up on the same side in a massive '*regime change*' campaign!

The libertarian left cover-up their own fake 'idealism' by labeling the imperial powers as 'hypocrites' and using a 'double-standard'. This is a laughable accusation, since the guiding principle behind an imperial decision to support or reject 'self-determination' is based on class and imperial interests. In other words, when 'self-determination' benefits the empire, it

receives full support. There are no abstract historical, moral precepts, devoid of class and imperial content determining policy.

Case Studies: The Myths of the “Stateless Kurds” and “Ukraine’s Liberation”

In the Twentieth Century, the Kurdish citizens of Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran have made claims of ‘self-determination’ and fought against established nation-states in the name of ‘ethnic liberation’.

But who defines the real ‘self’ to be liberated?

In the case of Iraq in the 1990’s, Kurds were sponsored, armed, funded and defended by the US and Israel in order to weaken and divide the secular-nationalist Iraqi republic. Kurds, again with US support, have organized regional conflicts in Turkey and more recently in Syria, in order to defeat the independent government of Bashar Assad. Leftist Kurds cynically describe their imperial allies, including the Israelis, as ‘*progressive colonialists*’.

In brief, the Kurds act as surrogates for the US and Israel: They provide mercenaries, access to military bases, listening and spy posts and resources in their newly ‘*liberated* (and ethnically cleansed) *country*’, to bolster US imperialism, which ‘their warlord leaders’ have chosen as the dominant ‘partner’. Is their struggle one of national liberation or mercenary puppetry in the service of empire against sovereign nations resisting imperial and Zionist control?

In the Ukraine, the US hailed the cause of self-determination when it engineered a violent coup to oust an elected regime, whose crime was its commitment to independence from

NATO. The coup was openly funded by the US, which financed and trained fascist thugs committed to the expulsion or repression of ethnic Russian speakers, especially in the eastern Donbas region and Crimea with the aim of placing NATO bases on Russia's border.

The overwhelmingly Russian-speaking people of Crimea opposed the coup and exercised their right to self-determination by voting to rejoin Russia. Likewise the industrialized Donbas region of eastern Ukraine declared its autonomy, opposing the oppressive and grossly corrupt US installed regime in Kiev.

The violent US-EU sponsored coup in Kiev was a blatant form of imperial annexation, while the peaceful vote in Crimea and the militant Eastern Ukraine (Donbas) exercise of self-determination presented a progressive response by anti-imperialist forces. Thwarted in its project to turn Eastern Ukraine and Crimea into NATO launching pads for aggression against Moscow, US/EU condemned this response as 'Russian colonization'.

Tibet and the Uighurs in China's Xinjiang Province

Separatist groups have been actively engaged in armed uprisings for many decades in Tibet and Xinjiang, Western China. While they claimed to be 'independent', their feudal warlords have long been hostile to the positive advances of the Chinese revolution (including the abolition of slavery in Tibet, as well as opium trade and bride price and the extension of universal education in feudal Moslem regions). They collaborated with the US and expansionist India (where the Dalai Lama established his palace and camps of armed supporters, trained and armed by Western imperial agencies).

While the West advertises the Dalai Lama as a peace-loving holy man giving platitudinous speeches to adoring crowds, this saint never condemned the genocidal US wars against fellow Buddhists in Vietnam, Korea or elsewhere.

The well-funded Western pro-Tibet and pro-Uighur celebrity/victim circuit has ignored the links between the Dalai Lama and his imperial patrons, which ultimately defines the operational meaning of '*self-determination*'.

Kosova: Self-Determination by Terrorist White Slavers

After World War II, Yugoslavia, liberated from its vicious Nazi collaborators by the Communist partisans, embarked on becoming a peaceful self-managed, multi-ethnic socialist society. But in the 1990's, the overt military intervention of NATO forces deliberately engineered the violent break-up of Yugoslavia into 'independent' statelets. The experiment of a multiethnic socialist state in Europe was destroyed. After massive ethnic cleansing of its non-Albanian populations, a new NATO puppet-state, Kosova, came under the control of an internationally recognized terrorist, white slaver, narco-US vassal Hashim Thaci and his Kosovo Liberation Army thugs.

With the massive US bombing campaign against Belgrade and other Yugoslav cities and with NATO military support, Kosova achieved '*self-determination*' - as a huge land-based US aircraft carrier and 'R&R' center (Camp Bondsteel) with discounts at KLA-run brothels for the GI's. Because Kosova serves as a mercenary outpost run by vassal thugs, Washington and Brussels endorsed its claims as a 'liberated independent state'. It has also served as an international discount depot for the gruesome trade in human organs for transplant. Viewing

the ethnically cleansed mafia state of Kosovo, then NATO commander, Canadian General Lewis MacKenzie, later admitted: *'We bombed the wrong side'*.

The break-up of Yugoslavia, led to multiple separatist mini-states, each of which fell in line with EU-economic domination and US military control. In Western jargon this was dubbed 'democratic self-determination' – the ugly reality is that of massive ethnic cleansing, impoverishment and criminality.

Catalunya's Independence and Neo-Franco Spain

Spain is under the rule of a regime descended from the fascist dictator Francisco Franco. President Mariano Rajoy and his misnamed 'Popular Party' (PP) and his royal sidekick, King Felipe VI, have engaged in massive corruption scandals, money laundering and fraudulent multi-million euro public-private building contracts. Rajoy's neo-liberal policies significantly contributed to a financial crash which resulting in a 30% unemployment rate and an austerity program stripping Spanish workers of their collective bargaining power.

In the face of Catalunya's pursuit of self-determination via free and democratic elections, Rajoy ordered a police and military invasion, seizing ballots, breaking heads and asserting total control.

The Catalans' peaceful exercise of self-determination via free elections, independent of imperial manipulation, was rejected by both the EU and Washington as 'unlawful' -- for disobeying Rajoy and his neo-Franco legions.

Self-Determination for Palestine and US Backed Israeli Colonization and Subjugation

For a half-century, Washington has supported brutal Israeli occupation and colonization of the Palestinian ‘West Bank’. The US consistently denies self-determination for the people of Palestine and its millions of displaced refugees. Washington arms and finances Israeli expansion through the violent seizure of Palestinian territory and resources as well as the starvation, incarceration, torture and assassination of Palestinians for the crime of asserting their right of self-determination.

The overwhelming majority of US Congressional officials and Presidents, past and present, slavishly take their cues from the Presidents of the 52 Major Jewish (Israeli) Organization who add billions to the coffers of colonial Tel Aviv. Israel and its Zionist surrogates inside the US government manipulate the US into disastrous wars in the Middle East against the self-determination of independent Arab and Muslim nations.

Saudi Arabia: Enemy of Yemen’s Self-Determination

Saudi Arabia’s despotic regime has fought against self-determination in the Gulf States and Yemen. The Saudis, backed by US arms and advisers, have dispossessed millions of Yemeni civilians and killed thousands in a merciless bombing campaign. Over the past decade the Saudis have bombed and blockaded Yemen, destroying its infrastructure, causing a massive plague of cholera and threatening starvation for millions of children in an effort to defeat the Houthi-led Yemeni liberation movement.

The US and UK have provided over a hundred billion dollars in arms sales and give logistical support, including bombing coordinates to the Saudi tyrants while blocking any UN-sponsored diplomatic action to relieve the immense suffering. In this grotesque war crime,

Washington and Israel are the Saudi Monarchy's closest associates in denying self-determination to the oppressed people of Yemen who have long resisted Saudi control.

Conclusion

The US imperialist state, like all aspiring empire-builders, represses or supports movements for self-determination according to their class and imperial interests. To be clear: Self-determination is a class-defined issue; it is not a general moral-legal principle.

Imperialism's selective use and abuse of self-determination is not a case of 'hypocrisy' or 'double standards', as their left-liberal supporters complain. Washington applies a single standard: Does this movement advance Empire by securing and buttressing vassal regimes and their supporters? The language of '*liberation*' is a mere gloss to secure the allegiance of vassals opposed to independent states.

For decades, Eastern European, Balkan and Baltic countries were encouraged to struggle for '*self-determination*' against the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, only to later embrace the yoke of vassalage under the command of NATO, the EU and Washington. In many cases their sovereignty and standard of living collapsed followed by ethnic cleansing, including the mass expulsion of Serbs from Croatia and Kosovo and the cultural-linguistic repression of ethnic Russians in Latvia and Ukraine.

The Kurdish 'freedom fighters', followed ethnic warlords who were funded by the US and Israel, and took over town, cities, oil resources and territory to serve as imperial military bases against the sovereign governments of Iraq, Iran and Syria.

In this context, the Kurdish warlords and oligarchs are loyal vassals and an integral component of the long-standing US-Israeli policy aimed at dividing and weakening independent allies of Palestine, Yemen and genuine liberation movements.

Clearly the criteria for deciding whose claims of self-determination are valid require identifying whether class and anti-imperialist interests are advanced.

Beyond the immediate conflicts, many independent regimes, in turn, become oppressive rulers of their own minorities and native critics. 'Self-determination' ad infinitum can ultimately lead to schizoid individuals – extolling their mythical people while oppressing others. Today, Zionism is the ultimate parody of 'self-determination'. Newly independent countries and rulers frequently deny minorities of their own right to self-determination - especially those who sided with the previous power.

To the extent that the 'national' struggle is limited to political independence it can lead to a mere 'changing of the guard' - maintaining oppressive class exploitation and introducing new forms of cultural-ethnic and gender oppression.

In some instances the new forms of class exploitation may even surpass their previous conditions under imperial vassalage.

Kurds, Tibetans, fascist Ukrainian nationalists, Uighurs and other so-called freedom fighters turn out to be military Sepoys for aggressive US incursion against independent China, Iran and Russia. Leftist backers of these dubious 'liberation movements' tag along behind the empire.

Capitalist 'globalization' is today's greatest enemy to authentic self-determination.

Imperial globalization supports fragmented statelets – all the better to convert them into new vassals with their own flag and anthem!