

## **Mapping Trump's Empire: Assets and Liabilities**

**James Petras**

**February 2018**

The US empire spans the globe; it expands and contracts, according to its ability to secure strategic assets, willing and able to further military and economic power to counter emerging adversaries.

The map of empire is a shorthand measure of the vectors, reach and durability of global power and wealth. The map of empire is changing -- adding and subtracting assets and liabilities, according to the successes and retreats of domestic and overseas power centers. While the US empire has been engaged in intense conflicts in the Middle East, the imperial map has been enlarge elsewhere at lower cost and greater success.

### Enlarging the Empire

The US empire has substantially increased its scope and presence in several regions, especially in Latin America. The additions and enlargements include Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Central America, Peru and the Caribbean. The most important asset redrawing the empire in Latin America is Argentina. The US has gained military, economic and political advantages. In the case of Argentina, political and economic advances preceded military expansion.

The US provided ideological and political support to secure the election of its client Mauricio Macri. The new Argentine President immediately transferred over \$5 billion dollars to the notorious Wall Street Vulture speculator, Paul Singer, and proceeded to open the floodgates for a lucrative multi-billion dollar flow of financial capital. President Macri then followed up by inviting the Pentagon and US intelligence services to establish military bases, spy stations and training operations along its borders. Equally important, Argentina embraced the US directives designed to overthrow the government of Venezuela, undermine Bolivia's nationalist government under Evo Morales and pursue a policy of US-centered regional integration.

### Argentina: A Client without an Economic Patron

While Argentina is a useful political and military addition to the US empire, it lacks access to the US market -- it still depends on China - and has failed to secure a strategic trade agreement with the European Union. Washington has enlarged its military presence with a one-legged client.

Colombia and Mexico, long time US client states, have provided springboards for enlarging US influence in Central America, the Andean region and the Caribbean. In the case of Colombia, the US has financed its war of extermination against anti-imperialist insurgents and their peasant and working class supporters and secured seven military bases as launch pad for Washington's destabilization campaign against Venezuela.

Mexico has served a multitude of military and economic functions - from billion dollar manufacturing platforms to multi-billion dollar laundering of narco-profits to US banks.

Brazil is the new addition to the empire with the ousting and arrest of the leaders of the Workers Party. The shift in political and economic power has enhanced US influence through its leverage over the wealthiest country in the continent. In sum, the US has enlarged imperial influence and control via its acquisition of Latin America. There is one caveat: At least in the cases of Brazil and Argentina, the US advance is tentative and subject to reversal, as it lacks firm economic and political foundations.

If Latin America reflects an enlargement and upsurge of US imperial influence, the rest of the global map is mostly negative or at best contradictory.

The empire-building mission has failed to gain ground in Northeast Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. In Europe, the US retains influence but it appears to face obstacles to enlarging its presence.

The key to the enlargement or decline of empire revolves around the performance of the US domestic economy.

### Imperial Decline: China

The determination of the US in remapping the global empire is most evident in Asia. The most notable shift in US political and economic relations in the region has taken place with China's displacement of the US as the dominant investment, trading infrastructure building and lending country in the region. Moreover, China has increased its role as the leading exporter to the US, accumulating trade surpluses of hundreds of billions of dollars each year. In 2017, China's trade surplus reached \$375 billion dollars.

Against the relative economic decline of the US, Washington has compensated by widening the scope of its maritime-military presence in the South China Sea, and increased its air and ground forces in South Korea, Japan, Australia, the Philippines and Guam. As to how the bolstering of the US military presence affects the US 're-mapping' of its imperial presence, it depends on the dynamics of the US domestic economy and its ability to retain its existing principal military clients - South Korea, Japan, Australia and the Philippines. Recent evidence suggests that South Korea shows signs of slipping outside of the US economic and military orbit. Seoul has trade issues with the US 'protectionist agenda' and opportunities to expand its trading links with China. Equally important, South Korea has moved toward reconciliation with North Korea, and downgraded the US military escalation. As goes South Korea, so goes the US military power base in northern Asia.

The US military strategy is premised on sustaining and expanding its client network. However, its protectionist policies led to the rejection of a multi-lateral trade agreement, which erodes its economic ties with existing or potential military partners. In contrast to Latin America, the US remaking of the imperial map has led to economic shrinkage and military isolation in Asia. US military escalation has poured even more deadly strategic US arms into the region, but failed to intimidate or isolate China or North Korea.

#### Re-mapping the Middle East

The US has spent several trillion dollars over the past two decades in the Middle East, North Africa and West Asia. US Intervention from Libya and Southern

Sudan, Somalia, across to Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan has resulted in enormous costs and dubious advances. The results are meagre except in terms of suffering. The US has spread chaos and destruction throughout Libya and Syria, but failed to incorporate either into an enlarged empire. The Middle East wars, initiated at the behest of Israel, have rewarded Tel Aviv with a sense of invulnerability and a thirst for more, while multiplying and unifying US adversaries.

Empires are not effectively enlarged through alliances with with armed tribal, sectarian and separatist organizations. Empires, allied with disparate, fractured and self-aggrandizing entities do not expand or strengthen their global powers.

The US has waged war against Libya and lost the political leverage and economic resources it enjoyed during the Gaddafi regime. It intervened in Somalia, South Sudan and Syria, and has gained enclaves of warring self-serving 'separatists' and subsidized mercenaries. Afghanistan, the US' longest war in history, is an unmitigated military disaster. After seventeen years of warfare and occupation, the US is holed up in the walled enclaves of the capital, Kabul. Meanwhile, the puppet regime feeds on multi-billion dollar monthly subsidies.

Iraq is a 'shared' imperial outpost -- the result of fifteen years of military intervention. Kurdish clients, Sunni-Saudi warlords, Shia militia, Baghdad kleptocrats and US contractor-mercenaries all compete for control and a larger piece of the pillage. Every square meter of contested 'terrain has cost the US five hundred million dollars and scores of casualties.

Iran remains forever under threat, but retains its independence outside of the US-Saudi-Israeli orbit. The US geo-political map has been reduced to dubious alliance with Saudi Arabia and its micro-clients among the Emirate statelets - which are constantly fighting among themselves - as well as Israel, the 'client' that openly revels in leading its patron by the nose!

Compared to the period before the turn of the millennium, the US imperial map has shrunk and faces further retrenchment.

[The US-NATO-EU Map](#)

Russia has reduced and challenged the US pursuit of a uni-polar global empire following the recovery of its sovereignty and economic growth after the disaster of the 1990's. With the ascent of President Putin, the US-EU empire lost their biggest and most lucrative client and source of naked pillage.

Nevertheless, the US retains its political clients in the Baltic , the Balkans and Eastern and Central European regimes. However, these clients are unruly and often eager to confront a nuclear-armed Russia, confident that the US-NATO will intervene, in spite of the probability of being vaporized in a nuclear Armageddon.

Washington's efforts to recapture and return Russia to vassalage have failed. Out of frustration Washington has resorted to a growing series of failed provocations and conflicts between the US and the EU, within the US between Trump and the Democrats; and among the warlords controlling the Trump cabinet.

Germany has continued lucrative trade ties with Russia, despite US sanctions, underscoring the decline of US power to dictate policy to the European Union. The Democratic Party and the ultra-militaristic Clinton faction remains pathologically nostalgic for a return to the 1990's Golden Age of Pillage (before Putin). Clinton's faction is fixated on the politics of revanchism . As a result, they vigorously fought against candidate Donald Trump's campaign promises to pursue a new realistic understanding with Russia. The Russia-Gate Investigation is not merely a domestic electoral squabble led by hysterical 'liberals.' What is at stake is nothing less than a profound conflict over the remaking of the US global map. Trump recognized and accepted the re-emergence of Russia as a global power to be 'contained', while the Democrats campaigned to roll-back reality, overthrow Putin and return to the robber baron orgies of the Clinton years. As a result of this ongoing strategic conflict, Washington is unable to develop a coherent global strategy, which in turn has further weakened US influence in the EU in Europe and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the intense Democratic onslaught against Trump's initial foreign policy pronouncements regarding Russia succeeded in destroying his 'pivot to realism' and facilitated the rise of a fanatical militaristic faction within his cabinet,

which have intensified the anti-Russia policies of the Clintonite Democrats. In less than a year, all of Trump's realist advisers and cabinet members have been purged and replaced by militarists. Their hard core confrontational anti-Russia policy has become the platform for launching a global military strategy based on vast increases in military spending, demands that the EU nations increase their military budgets, and open opposition to an EU-centered military alliance, such as the one recently proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron.

Despite President Trump's campaign promises to 'pull-back', the US has re-entered Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria in a big way. The Trump shift from global containment and realism to 'rollback and aggression' against Russia and China has failed to secure a positive response from past and present allies.

China has increased economic ties with the EU. Russia and the EU share strategic gas and oil trade ties. Domestically, the US military budget deepens the fiscal deficit and drastically threatens social spending. This creates a scenario of increasing US isolation with its futile aggression against a dynamic and changing world.

### Conclusion

The Trump remaking of the global empire has had uneven results, which are mostly negative from a strategic viewpoint.

The circumstances leading to new clients in Latin America is significant but has been more than countered by retreats in Asia, divisions in Europe, turmoil domestically and strategic incoherence.

Remaking global empires requires realism - the recognition of new power alignments, accommodation with allies and, above all, domestic political stability balancing economic interests and military commitments.

The key shift from realism toward a recovered Russia to militarization and confrontation has precipitated the breakdown of the US as a unified coherent leader of a global empire.

The US embraces prolonged losing wars in peripheral regions while embracing destructive trade wars in strategic regions. It budgeted vast sums on non-

productive activities while impoverishing state and local governments via sweeping tax 'reform' favoring the oligarchs.

Global remapping now involves a volatile and impulsive US-driven empire incapable of succeeding, while emerging powers are immersed in regional power grabs.

There is no longer a coherent imperial empire controlling the fate of the globe. We live in a world of political maps centered on regional powers and unruly clients, while the most incompetent, gossip-mongering politicians in Washington compete with an arrogant, benighted President Trump and his fractured regime.