

Imperialism

Dena Clamage

1969

“I believe that if we had and would keep our dirty, bloody, dollar-crooked fingers out of the business of these nations so full of depressed, exploited people, they will arrive at a solution of their own.”

—General David M. Shoupe, Commandant, U.S. Marine Corps. Retired

It's hard to believe that the war in Vietnam is still dragging on. The generals have already lost the war in the Vietnamese countryside and are now fighting a losing battle to hold on to the few cities and enclaves left to them.

The message of the Oct. 15 Moratorium is clear: the American people are fed up with the war and want the troops brought home.

But the murder of American and Vietnamese people continues and there's no end in sight. Even more incredible is the fact that in other countries throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America the U.S. is beginning the whole process again, starting with “advisors” and “Special Forces” and continuing on up the escalator.

It's time to start looking for an explanation. You can't fight your enemy until you know who he is. A big part of the U.S. “peace movement” has always been content to explain the war in Vietnam as a “special war,” an accident. But this doesn't really go very far as an explanation of Vietnam. And it's even thinner as an explanation of U.S. policy and actions all over the world.

To understand the whole thing you have to look beyond the immediate situation in one country or another and see the system that U.S. policy comes out of. This system is called imperialism.

Imperialism is the highest stage of the development of capitalism, the stage where capitalism is internationalized. It is the attempt to put the various economies of the world together into one economy dominated by the advanced capitalist countries and centered around their economic needs.

Capitalism, by its very nature, demands continual expansion. This includes expansion of markets, profitable investment opportunities, and sources of raw materials. As the chances for this expansion run out in the developed countries, these countries must turn to the “Third World,” the underdeveloped mass of Africa, Asia and Latin America and even parts of Europe.

To meet their needs the developed countries twist the economic and political systems of Third World countries into appendages of their own economies. This further stunts the growth of the underdeveloped countries so that they can't meet the needs of their own peoples.

According to the history books, empire always had to do with one country making another country into its colony. The whole thing was very open and direct, easily identified. In the case of America, the forms are different, but the domination is still very much the same.

Imperialism uses different methods of domination. In most cases, the economic power of capital and the political power which comes out of this are enough. However, when the people of the Third World take up arms against their oppression and exploitation, imperialism relies on its police force, the military, to suppress these rebellions. Vietnam is the sharpest example of this in the world today.

The connections between the war in Vietnam and U.S. imperialism are in many ways complex and obscure, but very real.

To begin with, the war in and of itself is profitable. War spending in the United States has been important in the growth and health of the U.S. economy since before the Second World War.

This is especially true in the powerful Southwest region of the U.S., which depends on Defense Department contracts in aerodynamics, missile and atomics production, electrical systems and transport. Because the war in Vietnam has given a big boost to development in these industries, the political defenders of these interests keep pushing for the war to continue.

Also, Vietnam has economic value for parts of the U.S. ruling class. The rich natural resources of Vietnam include oil, various minerals, and fertile land for agriculture, and this has already come to the attention of U.S. corporations looking for good investment opportunities.

Standard Oil, Caltex and Shell, for example, are building a \$19 million oil refinery in Vietnam. Other American corporations are exploring areas of Vietnam for natural resources which could be extracted for American use after the war—if the U.S. could win.

Preparations for post-war reconstruction along these lines are already being made. The harbor at Camranh Bay, which was built at a super-profit by American construction companies, can be quickly converted into a permanent port facility for U.S. corporations investing and trading in Vietnam.

American banks are very aware that a capitalist rebuilding of Vietnam would demand large investments of finance capital. Again, preparations for this are being made right now. About a year ago the Chase Manhattan Bank of New York, a bank which is deeply involved in the world finance scene, including heavy investment in fascist South Africa, opened its first branch in Saigon.

But to fully understand the importance of the war Vietnam has to be seen in a broader context. The U.S. ruling class sees Southeast Asia, plus Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines as a very important area for future economic expansion. According to their plans, this must be secured for the “Free World” immediately.

In Thailand, for example, there were 99 firms which had a substantial investment in 1966. Present U.S. investment there is estimated at \$195 million.

American firms have been mostly interested in Thailand’s raw materials. Tenneco and Union Oil have signed the first contract for exploration of the oil fields under the Gulf of Thailand. Standard Oil of Indiana has constructed at \$35 million an oil refinery. Union Carbide has invested \$4.8 million to extract tin concentrate, and Goodyear has built three tire plants to tap Thailand’s extensive rubber supplies.

Also, large U.S. banks, Manufacturer’s Hanover Trust, First National City, Morgan Guaranty and Banker’s Trust, are moving into Thai finance.

The U.S. has moved or is trying to move into the same relationship with other countries of Southeast Asia such as South Korea, Laos, Indonesia and Malaysia. In these countries, as in Thailand, local liberation struggles have been greatly encouraged by the example of the people of Vietnam, to the extent that these struggles now pose a serious threat to U.S. expansion.

In order to meet these threats, the U.S. is involving itself on a relatively small scale in military operations in Thailand and Laos. Between 1961 and 1967 the U.S. gave \$640 million in military aid to the military dictatorship of Thailand in order to put down the People’s Liberation Army of Thailand. Also, about 50,000 U.S. troops are now stationed in Thailand, only some of whom are engaged in air support and supply operations for Vietnam.

In a sense, President Johnson’s “domino theory” was true—the victory of the Vietnamese people has strengthened the struggle against U.S. imperialism all over the world. The war in Vietnam is an important example, because of the defeat in Vietnam, the U.S. position will be seriously weakened throughout Southeast Asia.

Besides limiting the direct expansion of the American economy into Southeast Asia, the weakening of the U.S. position has another very serious result. The key to U.S. strategy in Asia lies in U.S.-Japanese relations.

Japan is the second largest market in the world for American goods. It is also the largest market for U.S. agricultural goods and an important target for U.S. investors. It is clear that the economic and political situation in Japan is very important to the U.S. ruling class.

But the Japanese economy faces a big problem: because of its size and geography, Japan, even more than other capitalist countries, has to look outward for markets and for sources of raw materials. The logical place for it to look,

given its location, would be the Soviet Union and China. In the eyes of U.S. businessmen, this would obviously be a disaster.

One of the main reasons for U.S. involvement in Vietnam is to secure alternative markets and resource bases for Japan so that the profitable relationship between the two countries can continue.

In this sense, the war in Vietnam has often been called "proxy imperialism," as the U.S. would benefit indirectly, even more than directly, from economic domination of Southeast Asia. The U.S. defeat in Vietnam holds the threat that one of the countries most important to the U.S. economy will be lost to a competing economic sphere.

So the U.S. continues its impossible attempt to win in Vietnam. And when it is defeated there, it will go on to the next defeat. Because throughout all their planning and maneuvering, the imperialists always forget one factor which they can't control: the people of the countries they attempt to manipulate. The people, whose needs can never be met under the system of imperialism.

This is what Vietnam is really all about. And this is what Thailand is all about. And Bolivia. And South Africa. And all the other countries, developed and underdeveloped, where the people are rising up angry against the system which has kept them down for so long.

All power to the people!

fifth Estate

Dena Clamage
Imperialism
1969

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/91-october-30-november-12-1969/imperialism>
Fifth Estate #91, October 30-November 12, 1969

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)