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China

China - capitalist superpower?

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In this brief interview with the Dutch magazine *Grenzeloos*, Gilbert Achcar discusses whether China will achieve the kind of global superpower status that would enable it to challenge the United States.

What do you think of predictions that in a few decades China will be a superpower challenging the US on a global scale?

These predictions are usually based on projections of the current Chinese rates of growth, whereas it is far from certain that China will be able to sustain such rates for decades, not to mention that no one could bet on the social stability of the Chinese state at a time when increasing inequalities are producing increasing tensions.

[<http://internationalviewpoint.org/local/cache-vignettes/L320xH240/shanghai-6336f.jpg>]

Besides, the gap in military expenditure between the US and China is increasing year after year, not decreasing. The US outspends now the rest of the world, and keeps a close eye on all its potential rivals, including China, with the objective of maintaining its "full-spectrum dominance". Predictions like those you mentioned are actually useful only to Washington and the Pentagon as they are used in order to justify the huge US military budget.

But the truth of the matter is that there is only one "hyperpower" nowadays (with many vassal states), and that is the US, which is on an aggressive imperialist course, harmful to the whole of humankind.

What are the implications of China's integration into the global capitalist economy for its geopolitical importance?

There are several implications. Let's just mention a few crucial ones: on the one hand, the more China plays a key role in the world capitalist market the more this market becomes dependent on the state of the Chinese economy and the more global capitalism will have a stake in the stability of China.

China has become a huge market as well as a huge exporter: it thus belongs to a completely different category than Iran, for instance. Washington would be quite happy with a destabilization of Iran, which would not necessarily affect Iranian oil exports, whereas a seriously destabilized China would usher into a very dangerous crisis for the global capitalist economy.

On the other hand, China is increasingly dependent not only on the US market, but also on the good standing of the US economy, as it holds already considerable amounts of US dollars, bonds and obligations, and is starting to move into the US stock market.

This means also that the Chinese government will act more and more in solidarity with the global capitalist system — contrarily to the illusions of those who believe that China will be the next USSR in a renewed global bipolarity. In reality, China deserves much more than Russia to be on the G summit of rich countries.

What are the implications of the increased US presence in the Caspian Sea area and Central Asia for US-China relations?

Actually, the prospect that I have just described is jeopardized only by the very behaviour of the US: the Chinese

have a very acute sense of national pride and resent continuous US encroachments on what they regard as their sovereign rights, including the issue of Taiwan.

They resent Washington's behaviour as "hegemonist", and rightly so. They have the feeling — very much warranted — that the US is in the business of encircling them: US military presence in Central Asia since the Afghanistan war, on the northwestern flank of China looks very much, seen from Beijing, as the western jaw of a vice around China, with US forces in Japan and South Korea representing the eastern jaw.

Moreover, US military presence in Central Asia stands in the center of the landmass connecting the European heart of Russia to China, and is clearly intended to deter the military cooperation between Beijing and Moscow that has been established since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Last but not least, US presence in the Caspian Sea area adds to US direct control of Arab-Persian Gulf oil in securing Washington's grasp over China's key sources of hydrocarbons, thus increasing China's vulnerability with regard to US dominance.

If China is making a transition to a capitalist power with (at least regional) imperial ambitions, what difference should it make to internationalist socialists what the outcome is of US-Chinese rivalry?

For the time being, it would be very wrong to put China in the same "imperial" category where the US stands dominant, even if this "imperialism" is reduced to the regional scale. China's territorial claims are essentially — at least in Chinese eyes — matters of national sovereignty: China has a bitter history of oppression at the hand of Western powers in the 19th and 20th centuries, and still sees itself in the process of redeeming that past.

Whatever one thinks of Taiwan, and the right of its population to self-determination, it should be obvious to every socialist that, whereas the legitimacy of China's claim on the island could be discussed, this issue is definitely none of Washington's business.

In a US-Chinese confrontation over Taiwan, Beijing would be convinced of acting to recover sovereignty over its usurped territory whereas Washington would be upholding its claim to global imperial hegemony. Anti-imperialists cannot be neutral in such a case, but should act to stop the US as their major priority.