

In defense of the Programmatic Theses of KO!

The concept of the "imperialist pyramid" and its critics.

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Summary in short theses:

- In the Programmatic Theses of KO we find (in broad outline) a clear orientation for the analysis of imperialism. The theoretical conception developed therein has now been rejected in a number of contributions to the discussion (Klara Bina, Alexander Kiknadze, to a lesser extent Paul Oswald).
- The assertion that the imperialist world system is characterized by a "unipolar world order" led by the USA cannot be confirmed by the available data. Both the economic and military balance of power at the top of the imperialist world order refute the picture of singular U.S. domination.
- Nor is it possible to confirm the idea that the imperialist world system is still characterized by the unrestricted domination of the "triad" of North America, Western Europe and Japan. A new constellation has emerged, mainly through the rise of China to the top of the imperialist hierarchy, but also through the rise of other powers to leading or elevated intermediate positions in the hierarchy.
- The view that only the highest countries in the imperialist hierarchy (the "handful of robbers") can be considered "imperialist" covers up the imperialist roles of countries in higher intermediate positions in the world system. As examples, Russia and Mexico are examined here in terms of their position in the imperialist world system. Particularly problematic are views from the tradition of dependency theory, which tend to absolutize dependency relations in the imperialist world system, to see them as one-sided and unchanging.
- This view also represents a break with Lenin's understanding of imperialism as monopolistic capitalism and thus as a new quality of capitalist relations of production and distribution. According to this false understanding, imperialism is no longer primarily understood as a relationship of domination rooted in monopolistic property relations - the tendency to export capital - but is unilaterally derived from the (supposed) balance of power between the leading imperialist countries.

- The correct analysis of imperialism, in contrast to these false conceptions, is one that understands the imperialist world system as a hierarchical order of mutual but asymmetrical dependencies, as an imperialist pyramid in which not only the top, but also the intermediate positions, to a decreasing degree towards the bottom, exhibit the characteristics of the imperialist epoch of capitalism and share in the division of the spoils. The conception of the "imperialist pyramid" is thus - contrary to the views of its critics - by no means a deviation from Lenin's conception of imperialism, but rather its application to today's world situation.

The struggle for the correct analysis of imperialism is not an academic question, but a highly political one. The analysis of imperialism is the analysis of the structure of domination of the capitalist system in which we live; it is the analysis of the interests and strategies of the exploiters we fight. There is no more important question.

The KO has already discussed and decided on an analysis of imperialism. This can be found in its Programmatic Theses. In it, the KO explicitly rejects the idea that *"imperialism is the domination of a few, "Western" or "Northern" states such as the USA, Western Europe and Japan. (...) It is wrong to ascribe to certain, relatively inferior imperialist poles within this system a principled capacity for peace or a progressive role. The fatal consequence of such misconceptions is that the working class rallies under the banner of alien interests, namely of one or another imperialist pole. Imperialism is a global system of social relations that encompasses all capitalist countries, not just the U.S., Japan and Western Europe. Even other states where (monopoly) capitalist relations exist, such as China, cannot assume an anti-imperialist character."* These words seem to have prophetic character from today's point of view: They are written as if they had foreseen certain positions now held by parts of our organization and tried to assure distance from them. This, of course, was not to be. Nevertheless, the formulations we chose at that time were very consciously chosen - they are the result of a discussion that had already taken place in the DKP and SDAJ, which was ultimately a decisive reason as to why part of today's KO decided to leave these organizations at that time. It may well be that the implications of this position were not clear to everyone involved at the time. However, it is a fact that KO has a clear position on this issue.

The KO did not develop this position in a vacuum, but was able to profit from the formulations and debates in the international communist movement. The confrontation with certain problematic views of imperialism is therefore not new and not limited to Germany; it was taken up first and foremost by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE).

The imperialist war in Ukraine has now brought existing dissensions in the communist movement in Germany to the surface and simultaneously to their breaking point. That this is so may be the "natural" consequence of a world-historical turning point that the war in Ukraine represents - but it is not pleasant. Instead of positioning ourselves on the social conflicts on the basis of a correct analysis, we now have to deal with ourselves and with fundamental debates. That we do so, however, is now unavoidable and therefore the right thing to do.

One shortcoming of many of the contributions so far, and I am referring in particular to those by Klara Bina¹, Paul Oswald² and Alexander Kiknadze³, is that they base their dissociation from the KKE's analysis of imperialism mainly on assertions that they hardly substantiate. There is (still) very little examination of the factual material; for example, the theses of the "unipolar world order" and "dependency" that are central to Klara Bina are not substantiated in concrete terms. In itself, this is understandable, since the discussion is being conducted under time constraints. However, it becomes problematic when the argumentation develops in a direction that, as will be shown here, no longer has much to do with real conditions.

For an analysis of today's imperialist world system it is of only very limited help to evaluate Lenin's texts in detail, as e.g. Paul Oswald does. It *is* correct to use the conceptual-theoretical tools developed by Lenin to analyze the situation of today's world. However, it is something else entirely (and something else entirely wrong) if, for lack of up-to-date analysis, the answers are sought solely within writings that are more than 100 years old. Lenin's work is of inestimable importance for us, but it is not a collection of beliefs. There is no getting around the analysis of objective reality. The fact that Klara and Paul in principle also formulate this claim is to be laudable, even if they do not actually follow it in their contributions. Therefore, this contribution shall dare a step in this direction and give some basic assessments of the constellation of today's imperialism.

From here on, the contributions of comrades Paul, Klara and Alexander will simply be quoted without footnotes for the sake of simplicity.

1. Overview of the debate

In the current discussion, three different analyses of contemporary imperialism seem to compete with each other.

This is, **firstly, what** Klara calls the "world system approach," which assumes a graded international hierarchy of asymmetric, yet interdependent, dependencies ("imperialist pyramid").

Second, an analysis that continues to be widespread, which could be called the "triad theory," and which still sees only Western Europe, the United States, and Japan (the "triad") as imperialist powers dividing the world among themselves. Inter-imperialist contradictions developed only between the members of the triad; the contradictions between the triad and the rest of the world, in turn, are seen as those between oppressive and oppressed states.

Third, a "superimperialism" thesis that denies even the Western European powers, Canada, and Japan their autonomy as imperialist actors and regards only the United States as a truly imperialist power.

The first position is, as I said, advocated by the KO in its Programmatic Theses. However, this position is now being questioned by a part of the organization, which tends toward the second (tending toward Klara) or third position (tending toward Alexander). The second and third positions are recognizably based in their assumptions on dependency theory, which characterizes the relations between "North" and "South" as relations of one-sided dependency. The first position, while acknowledging the strong asymmetry of dependencies in the imperialist world system, is critical of dependency theory in its various variants. Why this is so will hopefully become clear over the course of the article.

In what ways does the position contain arguments that fundamentally question the understanding of imperialism in the Programmatic Theses as well as that of the KKE? This position will be briefly described here. It is elaborated most extensively by Klara.

Klara has posed some "questions" on the analysis of imperialism, but in reality they are actually theses. Klara makes it very clear that she considers the position of the KKE and in general of the parties of the Leninist pole in the IKB to be fundamentally wrong - even more, in several places the "world-system approach" is even implicitly attributed to opportunism (e.g. "... because the world-system approach appears as a reaction to other (!) opportunist ideas on the imperialism question").

She herself believes that today's world is dominated by a "handful of robbers," by which she means not only a small number of monopolistic corporations but also a group of a few leading imperialist states. Here she refers to corresponding formulations from Lenin's writing "Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Capitalism". Lenin says *"unequivocally, and this runs like a red thread through the treatise on imperialism, that, first, there are great powers which are qualitatively different from the rest of the world; second, that these great powers dominate the world; third, that the contradiction between them lies in the way they divide the spoils among themselves."*

According to this, we live in a world *"where on one side there are the "handful of robbers" and on the other "the robbed", on one side "the oppressing", on the other "the oppressed". If this picture is no longer to be true, then, strictly speaking, it is no longer imperialism."* - because for Klara, the very essence of imperialism is that the world is sharply divided into oppressive and oppressed countries and nations.

For Klara, the fact that the KKE speaks of mutual rather than unilateral dependencies not only fundamentally contradicts *"very Lenin's ideas"*, it also borders on *"emptying the meaning of the term dependency."* She argues, on the other hand, that at a certain point, quantitative differences between countries must turn into a new quality, *"namely into unilateral dependence, which can go as far as total subjugation or even destruction of any remnants of independence."* In contrast, the imperialist states are able *"through the presence of immense sums of capital to cover and control the whole world with their capital."*

Dependency theories also assumed unilateral dependency. The contribution of Paul Oswald argues similarly: *"In my understanding, colonial oppression thus forms the core of imperialism"; "In my view, it is therefore not possible to speak of imperialism without having these two camps (of oppressing and oppressed nations, Th.S.) in the world in mind"*. Today, after decolonization, the role of "semi-colonies" is especially important. Alexander also goes very far here, asking the question: *"Is the USA only the top of the (...) imperialist pyramid or ARE they the pyramid, with their absolute worldwide military superiority and currency?"*

Alexander also writes that it becomes clear *"how weak our collective state of discussion is in the form of the Programmatic Theses. Diametrically different positions are derived in the assessment of the concrete situation."* Since in the Programmatic Theses imperialism is characterized as a world system encompassing all countries, it is difficult to understand how anyone can take the view that a view absolutely contrary to this is also a "derivation" from the Programmatic Theses. It is not at all, but rather, and this should be made quite clear, the analysis of imperialism represented in the contributions of Klara Bina, Paul Oswald and Alexander is explicitly a counter-position to the position of the Programmatic Theses.

Now, this statement does not say anything about it being correct or incorrect. Of course, it is conceivable that we could have been mistaken. If this should be the case, we should correct our analysis.

In order to answer whether the Programmatic Theses are fundamentally wrong in their analysis of imperialism, it will now be necessary to better elaborate the understanding of imperialism represented in the Programmatic Theses and to check it against reality. Here, a self-criticism of the entire organization would also be appropriate: The fact that we have not specifically addressed this question so far is a major shortcoming, which has now become our undoing. In order to recognize this problem earlier, however, it would have been necessary for those who hold our understanding of imperialism to formulate this clearer and earlier.

The question of whether or not the KO's and the KKE's understanding of imperialism actually deviates from Lenin's is left out of the first chapters and only taken up again at the end. Thus, the empirical analysis of the imperialist world system will first be carried out with the help of

the categories developed by Lenin, in order to then answer to what extent Lenin's theory is still suitable for analyzing imperialism today and whether the standpoint of the Programmatic Theses can be reconciled with that of Lenin (the answer to both questions is: Yes!).

Is it really the case that the Programmatic Theses are on the wrong track? I anticipate my answer already in the title - No! The imperialism understanding of the Programmatische Thesen is completely correct. It needs no "correction" or revision, but a more exact elaboration. We must undertake this and perhaps this article can already make a contribution to it.

2. Who dominates the world economy? On the hierarchy in today's imperialist world system

In order to show the imperialist character of a country, Lenin chooses above all the degree of concentration and centralization, i.e. the emergence of monopoly capital, as a fundamental criterion. Building on this and as a consequence of the emergence of monopoly capital, he also analyzes the emergence of finance capital and the tendency to export capital. This is still plausible today; for monopoly capital marks the transition to a new quality at the level of production relations. It ends the "free" competition of smaller capitals in large parts of the economy and replaces it with the competition of monopolies, which is fought out primarily not as price competition, but with other methods (e.g. advertising, high technological barriers and specialization, etc.). The accumulation of huge sums of capital as well as the simultaneous increased need for financing lead to the merging of banks and industry, the establishment of their own banks by industry, the tendency to displace the ownership of capital from functional capital to the shareholding system, etc. The over-accumulation of capital and constant hunt for new investment opportunities leads capital beyond national borders, it makes the export of capital necessary by law.

These phenomena - monopolization, finance capital and capital export - are therefore the main criteria for analyzing the imperialist character of the economy.

Klara's view of the present imperialist world system can be observed in various places within her text. For example: *"The idea that there would be an absolute autocracy of an empire is to be distinguished in this extreme form from the general and, in my opinion, also not incorrect representation of the present imperialism as unipolar rule"*.

Alexander is more explicit in this direction. The USA is *"still the nation that can dictate its policy to the whole world"*. The question is even raised: *"Is USA only the top of the imperialist pyramid founded by Aleka Papariga or ARE they the pyramid?"*. In the last two statements, the author should be aware that he is indulging in extreme exaggerations here - it is probably reasonably obvious that the U.S. cannot exactly "dictate its policies to the entire world" when, for example, it has failed for 63 years to overthrow the government of a Caribbean island in its immediate neighborhood. But let us take the thesis of the "unipolar world order", which is used to argue against the imperialism analysis of the Programmatic Theses and the KKE, seriously for once and confront it with the facts.

A first, very superficial approach can compare countries on the basis of their GDP. It makes sense to use GDP measured in purchasing power parity rather than nominal GDP (which is based on official exchange rates). This factors out the effect of inflation and is better suited to comparing countries with different living standards and very different purchasing power (such as the U.S., Russia and China) - GDP is calculated as if all countries' goods were sold in U.S. prices. Accordingly, the 10 strongest capitalist economies in the world:

Table 1: Economic output by purchasing power parity in US\$ billion, 2020

Country	GDP
China	23.020
USA	19.863
India	8.509
Japan	5.062
Germany	4.276
Russia	3.876
Indonesia	3.130
Brazil	2.989
United Kingdom	2.868
France	2.852

Source: World Bank.

Measured in terms of its absolute weight in the world economy, i.e. in terms of the goods and services produced in each case, China is now by some distance the largest economy on earth. The "old" economic superpowers, the USA, Japan, Germany, Great Britain and France, are no longer alone at the top of the world economy. Russia, whose imperialist character is doubted by some, is still in 6th place. To be thorough, we can also look at the list measured in terms of official exchange rates, the other usual way of measuring:

Table 2: Economic output at current prices in US\$ billion, 2020

Country	GDP
USA	20.953
China	14.723
Japan	5.058
Germany	3.846
United Kingdom	2.760
India	2.660
France	2.630
Italy	1.889
Canada	1.645
South Korea	1.638

Source: World Bank.

Here, the picture is somewhat different, but the essentials remain: Here, too, the old superpowers are no longer the undisputed leaders. China, India and South Korea are challenging them for the top spots. Russia and Brazil follow in 11th and 12th place.

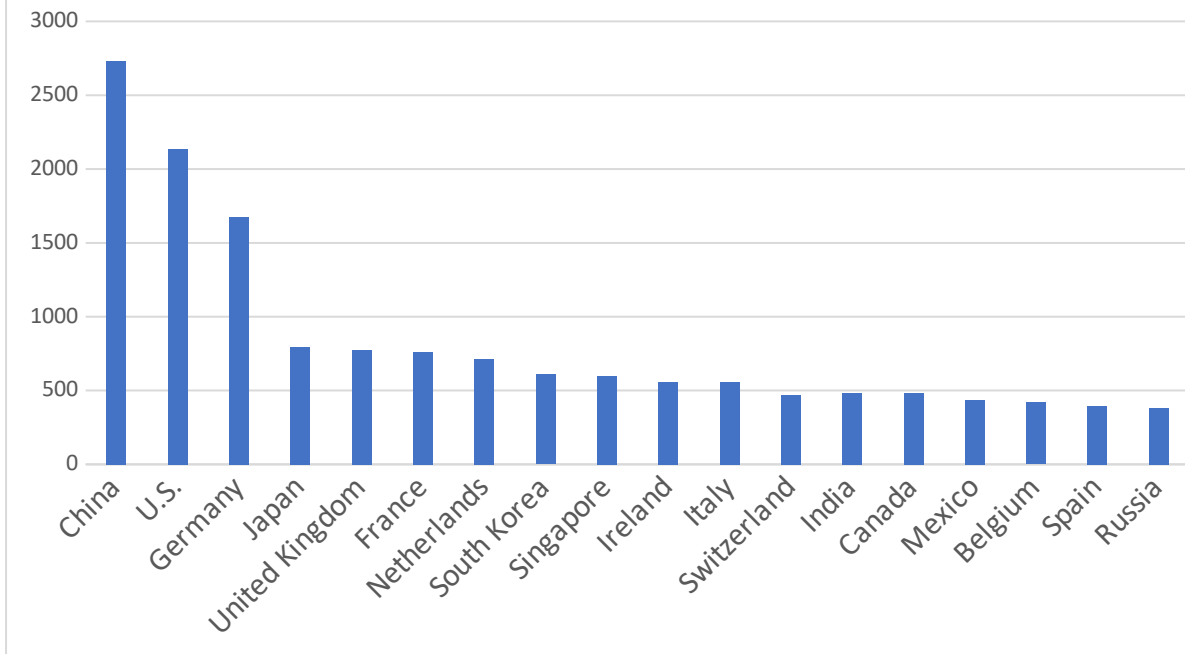
For a first look at the position of an economy within the capitalist world system, the comparison of the gross domestic product is helpful. However, this view allows only limited conclusions about whether a country plays a dominant or rather intermediate position in the hierarchy. For example, the sheer mass of India's population involved in economic activities of one kind or another makes its GDP greater than its relative position in the imperialist world system.

2.1 Mastering the international trade in goods

Another indicator of a country's economic weight is its exports. The following table shows the exports of the world's largest exporters.

Figure 1: World trade in 2020

Exports in US\$ billion, 2020



Source: World Bank.

Of course, the composition of these exports is also relevant. It makes a difference whether a country exports primarily high-value industrial goods or only unprocessed agricultural products. However, this distinction is already reflected in the fact that the former are sold at much higher prices and it is therefore hardly possible to join the ranks of the largest exporting countries without developed industry. Therefore, this data series also tells us something about the economic hierarchies: again, China is at the top, followed by some of the old imperialist powers, but South Korea, Singapore, Ireland, India and Mexico also occupy notable parts of the world market. But next, let's look at which countries lead in exports of manufactured goods, using the important sectors of motor vehicles, electronics, chemicals and machine tools as examples. Shaded in gray are countries that do not belong to the old imperialist "triad" (North America, Western Europe, Japan) (Ireland as a former quasi-colony should therefore not be counted as part of the "triad" either).

Table 3: The largest exporters of the industrial sectors automotive, electronics, chemicals, machine tools, in US\$ billion, 2020.

Rank	Cars	Electronics	Chemicals	Machine tools				
1	FRG	122	Hong Kong	154	China	72	FRG	6
2	Japan	81	Taiwan	123	USA	45	Japan	5,1
3	USA	46	China	117	Ireland	42	China	3,5
4	Mexico	40	Singapore	86	FRG	35	Italy	2,6
5	South Korea	36	South Korea	83	Switzerland	26	Taiwan	1,8
6	Belgium	33	Malaysia	49	Belgium	24	Switzerland	1,7
7	Canada	32	USA	44	Japan	22	South Korea	1,6
8	Spain	32	Japan	29	South Korea	21	USA	1,3

9	UK	27	Philippines	20	Netherlands	19	Belgium	0,7
10	Slovakia	24	Vietnam	14	India	19	Austria	0,7
11	Czech Republic	21	Germany	13	UK	16		
12	France	19	Netherlands	12	France	14		
13	Italy	15	Ireland	8	Singapore	12		
14	Hungary	11	Thailand	7	Saudi Arabia	12		
15	Sweden	11	France	7	Italy	10		

Sources: www.worldstopexports.com; Eurostat (for machine tools)

The countries of the old "triad" are still most likely to maintain their dominance in the automotive industry. In electronics, the largest of the industries listed here, dominance lies entirely in East and Southeast Asia. In the chemical industry and the comparatively small machine tools sector, the picture is mixed, but there is no undisputed Western dominance here either.

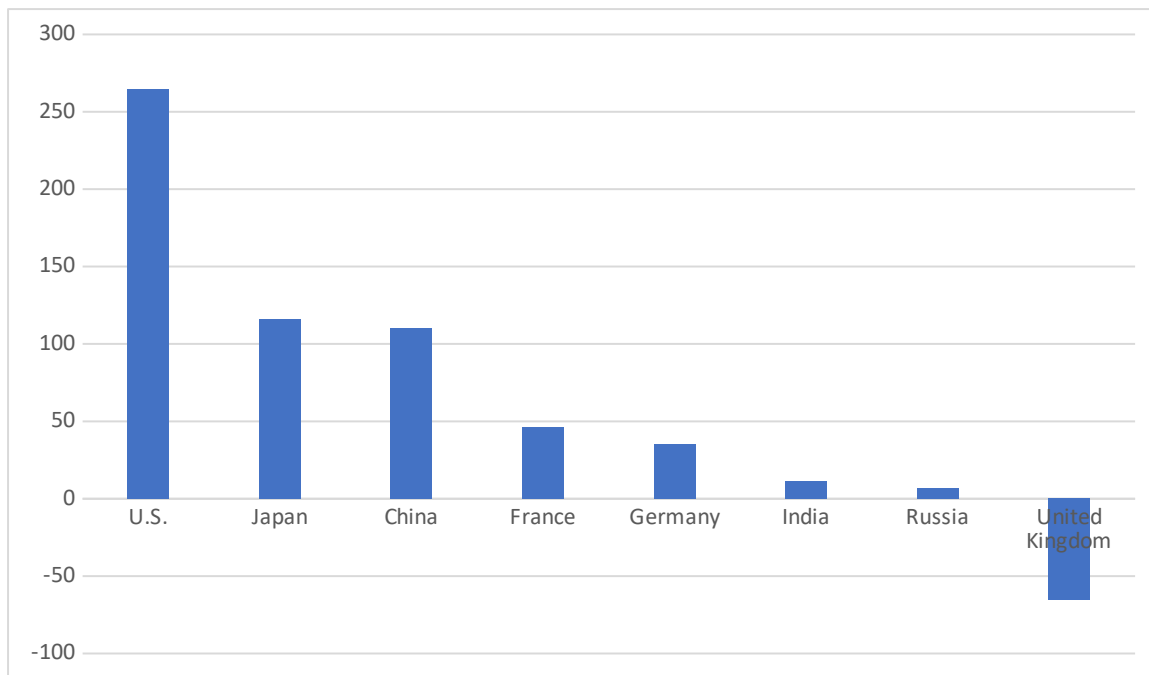
Certainly, one could object here that the matter depends on who controls this production. This objection is partly justified; of course it makes a difference whether certain countries only appear high up in the statistics because they have been chosen as the production location of a foreign industry which then repatriates its profits to the mother country, where it also pays most of its taxes. This certainly partly explains, for example, the high rate of car exports from Mexico, as well as those from Spain and the Czech Republic (Seat and Škoda as the largest car manufacturers are both owned by VW). We will therefore also take a look at which countries dominate the world economy with their corporations. However, the export statistics are nonetheless anything but meaningless. After all, the bourgeoisie of a production location that is dependent on foreign industrial capital also benefits indirectly from this constellation in the form of tax revenues, regional infrastructure projects, knowledge and technology transfer, and so on. As China, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and other countries show, this can certainly contribute to the independent development of a domestic monopoly capital that can even assume an international leadership role in the medium and long term. Therefore, it is justified to evaluate industrial exports as an indicator of position within the imperialist pyramid.

2.2 The export of capital

To determine the position within the imperialist hierarchy, the capital export of a country is also important, for its scale determines the extent to which the bourgeoisie - i.e. mainly (but not only) the monopoly capital of a country - is active with investments in other countries. Lenin writes: "*For modern capitalism, with the rule of the monopolies, the export of capital has become characteristic.*"⁴

Capital exports can take the form of direct investment (FDI) or portfolio investment (PFI), depending on the size of the equity stake acquired in a company. Since data for FDI are far more readily available, we will now look at capital flows from a few selected countries. These are not stock figures, but capital flows within one year:

Figure 2: Foreign Direct Investment (Flows) in US\$ billion, 2020⁵.



Source: OECD

As table:

Table 4: Foreign direct investment (flows) in US\$ billion, 2020.

Country	Foreign direct investment in US\$ billion
USA	264,8
Japan	115,7
China	109,9
France	45,9
Germany	34,9
India	11,1
Russia	6,8
United Kingdom	-65,4

Source: OECD

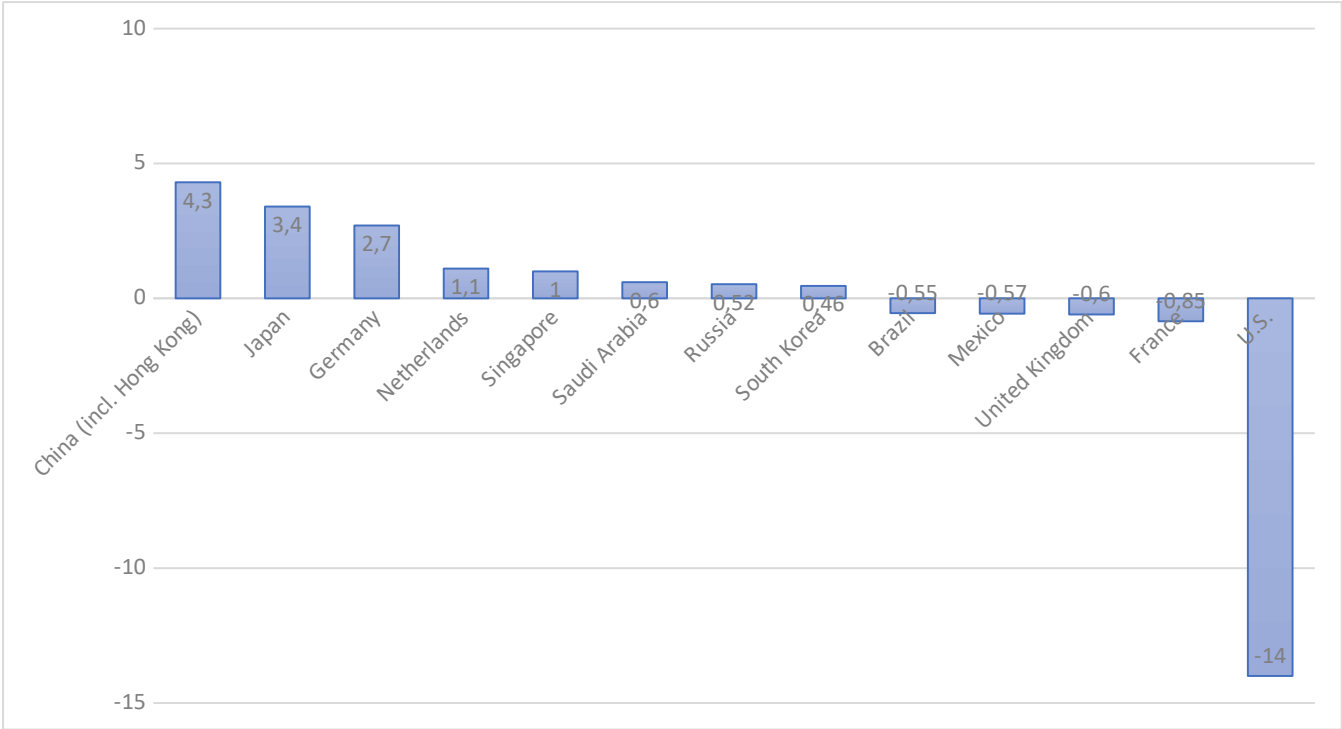
The informative value of direct investment with respect to real capital exports is limited, as is almost always the case with bourgeois statistics. The Marxist category of capital export, of course, does not exist in these statistics. Part of what appears in the statistics as FDI is not real investment, but operations that serve tax avoidance or similar purposes and are often accompanied by the same sum being transferred back and forth at least once⁶. However, since this phenomenon is not unique to the Russian economy, we can still use the data on FDI as a rough indicator of capital export.

Direct investment shows that the USA, Western Europe and Japan still occupy a relatively dominant position in outward capital flows. The only massive exception that has changed the picture significantly in recent years is China, which took third place in 2020, a short distance behind Japan. If China, Japan and the U.S. are in the "front row," then a second row of France, Germany and other countries that have been omitted for clarity (South Korea, Sweden, etc.) come in the second row. In the third row are Russia and India (also Belgium, Italy, Israel, Denmark, Australia, etc.). Most countries in the world, on the other hand, export

only small amounts of capital below the billion range. These can be placed in a fourth, fifth, and sixth row, and so on.

Another indicator of a country's capital export position is its net international investment position. This is the difference between the claims that a country's owners have on the rest of the world and the claims that the rest of the world has on that country. If this position is positive, it means that the country has extended more loans and holds more assets abroad than vice versa. This indicator also has limited explanatory power: for even if a country has a negative balance here, it cannot of course be deduced that it is not imperialist. It then only means that other imperialist countries invest more in this country than vice versa.

Figure 5: Net International Investment Position of Selected Countries in US\$ Trillions, 2020



Source: International Monetary Fund.

What do the data in table 5 show us? That China holds a leading creditor position in the imperialist hierarchy and that the U.S. faces the world primarily as a debtor. But also that in addition to China, other countries outside the traditional "triad" such as Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Russia and South Korea also hold significant positive foreign asset positions. The international expansion of capital is far from being limited to the "handful of robbers" from which it started at the beginning of the 20th century.

2.3 The large monopoly groups

Another important indicator of a country's position within the imperialist world system is the number of corporations, based in that country, which are among the world's largest corporations. The internationally operating corporations are the main carriers of the export of capital, international expansion and projection of economic power; their cross-border expansion is the crucible within which the profit interests of capital come into confrontation with each other globally and generate interstate conflicts.

Let's take a closer look at this indicator. As you know, Fortune magazine publishes an annual list of the 500 largest corporations in the world. It goes without saying that the 500 largest corporations in the world are all economic giants. The 500th corporation ranked still has a turnover of US\$24 billion. The mere affiliation of a company to this list proves a global monopoly position (monopoly in the Marxist sense, i.e. there may be other monopolies active in the same industry). The affiliation of a country to this list also serves to prove an elevated status in the imperialist hierarchy, although - as we will see - there are still very large differences to be considered here. Among these groups, industrial, commercial, and also purely financial groups are represented (not banks, however). According to Marxist understanding, however, in all cases it is a matter of monopolistic finance capital.

In 2021, these 500 megacorporations were spread across 31 countries. The number of 31 alone should be reason enough to question the assessment that imperialism is dominated by only a "handful of robbers". In any case, the expression "a handful" rather suggests a limited number of perhaps 5-7 countries.

But let's take a closer look at the data. Of the 500 largest corporations, 135 are headquartered in China, which ranks first on the world list. In second place, unsurprisingly, is the USA with 122 companies. Then Japan with 53, Germany with 27, France with 26, Great Britain with 22, and so on.

To see the concentration at the top of the Global 500, let's take a look at the largest 20 corporations on the list: Of these in 2021, eight were from the U.S., six from China, and one each from the U.K., Germany, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and the Netherlands.

Who is now number 1? China or the USA? China has now placed more corporations in the Top500, but still slightly fewer in the Top20. As another indicator, you can add up the sales of the largest corporations in both countries and compare them. The largest 10 Chinese corporations then have combined sales of 2.2 trillion. US dollars. The largest 10 U.S. corporations have a slightly higher figure: 2.8 trillion U.S. dollars. US dollars

To illustrate the shifts, it is worth comparing with an earlier historical point in time. The year 1995 is the earliest found in Fortune's online database and was therefore used here as a point of comparison. In 1995, the U.S. and Japan were tied with 148 corporations each. However, a look at the 20 largest corporations shows a clear dominance of Japan at the top of the mountain: 12 of the largest 20 corporations at that time came from Japan, and only half (i.e. six) from the USA.

Other major players in 1995 were the FRG with 42, the UK and France with 35 groups each, the Netherlands with 12 (plus one listed in the Netherlands Antilles) and Italy with 11. A more detailed list can be found in Table 6.

The following facts are striking:

Firstly, the entire Fortune Global 500 as well as its upper ranks continue to be dominated by three world regions, namely Western Europe, North America and East Asia.

But, and this is a very big "but": Secondly, unlike in the past, East Asia is no longer essentially represented by Japan in this respect. For one thing, Taiwan and South Korea also play an important role. Lastly, and this probably represents the decisive shift in the imperialist world system, the most important economic actor in East Asia is now no longer Japan, but China.

A third aspect becomes clear above all through comparison with earlier times: Distribution is tending more and more toward a "multipolar" constellation in the sense that no single country or imperialist pole holds clear economic dominance through its world-dominating corporations any longer. Taiwan and South Korea have already been mentioned, with 8 and

10 corporations on the list, respectively. Today, however, some Southeast Asian (Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand) and South Asian corporations (India) are also represented on the list. India accounts for seven of the listed groups, or eight if ArcelorMittal (more than 40% of which is owned by the Indian billionaire Mittal family, but which is listed in Luxembourg) is included. In Latin America, Brazil is the strongest player with six groups, followed by Mexico with two. Russia, like the other countries mentioned, plays an important economic role in the second tier and has four groups on the global list.

Meanwhile, most countries of the former "imperialist triad" (Western Europe, North America, Japan) have suffered significant losses. The USA fell from 148 to 122 corporations. Germany from 42 to 27, France and Great Britain from 35 to 26 and 22 respectively. Japan has fallen furthest down the imperialist rankings as a result of its decades-long stagnation crisis: From 148 corporations in the Top500 and 12 of the world's largest 20 corporations in 1995 to currently 53 in the Top500 list and only one in the Top20.

Table 6: Selected countries in the "Fortune Global 500" lists 1995 and 2021 (according to 2021 ranking, particularly drastic developments are highlighted in gray)

Country	Number in the top 500 1995	Number in the top 500 2021	Number in the top 20 1995	Number in the top 20 2021
China	2	135	0	6
USA	148	122	6	8
Japan	148	53	12	1
FRG	42	27	1	1
France	35	26	0	0
Great Britain	35	22	1 (brit-dutch)	1
Canada	5	12	0	0
Netherlands	12, of which 3 cooperations with B and GB + 1 in the Netherlands. Antilles	11	1 (brit-dutch)	1
South Korea	8	10	0	1
Taiwan	2	8	0	0
Spain	6	7	0	0
India	1	7	0	0
Italy	11	6	0	0
Brazil	1	6	0	0
Russia	0	4	0	0
Mexico	1	2	0	0

Source: Fortune Global500.

Let's take a complementary look at the ranking of the largest banks not included in the Fortune Global500.

Table 7: World's largest banks by assets, 2021

Rank	Name	Country	Capital in US\$ billion
1	Industrial & Commercial Bank of China	China	5,4
2	China Construction Bank	China	4,6

3	Agricultural Bank of China	China	4,4
4	Bank of China	China	4,1
5	JP Morgan Chase & Co	USA	3,7
6	Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group	Japan	3,3
7	BNP Paribas	France	3,2
8	Bank of America	USA	3,0
9	HSBC Holdings	UK	3,0
10	Crédit Agricole	France	2,7
11	China Development Bank	China	2,6
12	Citigroup	USA	2,3
13	Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group	Japan	2,2
14	Japan Post Bank	Japan	2,1
15	Mizuho Financial Group	Japan	2,0
16	Wells Fargo	USA	1,9
17	Barclays	UK	1,9
18	Postal Savings Bank of China	China	1,9
19	Banco Santander	Spain	1,9
20	Société Générale	France	1,8

Source: ADV Ratings.

A look at the banks shows even more clearly that there is no longer any semblance of U.S. dominance. The four largest banks in the world are now Chinese state-owned banks. In the second row are mainly banks from the USA, Japan and France. Germany, on the other hand, with its only major bank, Deutsche Bank, is no longer at the top.

2.4 The Special Role of the USA: The Dollar and Wall Street

Is the USA still by far the world's leading economic power? Based on the data cited, the answer to this question is clearly negative. Nevertheless, the USA still has a number of advantages over its biggest rival China. In the economic sphere, these are above all its continued central role in the world financial system and the role of the U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency.

The role of the USA in the financial system has already been put into perspective by the fact that Chinese banks are now at the top. The situation is different when one looks at where the majority of financial transactions are conducted. The following list shows that the vast majority of stock market transactions still take place on exchanges in the USA.

Table 8: The world's ten largest stock exchanges, 2021

Rank	Stock Exchange	Location	Market capitalization of listed companies in 2021 in trio. US\$
1	NYSE	USA	27,7
2	NASDAQ	USA	24,6
3	Shanghai Stock Exchange	China	8,2
4	Euronext	EU	7,3
5	Japan Exchange Group	Japan	6,6
6	Shenzhen Stock Exchange	China	6,2
7	Hong Kong Exchanges	Hong Kong	5,4
8	LSE Group	UK	3,8
9	National Stock Exchange of India	India	3,6

10	TMX Group	Canada	3,3
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Source: statista.com

However, these figures only show that the bulk of the infrastructure of the global capitalist financial system is located in the USA. They do not mean that U.S. imperialism can simply dispose of the sums mentioned. For example, the No. 1 stock on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE, the largest stock exchange in the world) is currently the Chinese corporation Alibaba.

The leading role of the USA in the financial system is a consequence of the fact that the monopoly capital of the USA was the global leader for a long time. To play in big business, big capitalists from other countries also went to New York, where most of the companies were listed and therefore where the most extensive opportunities for financial transactions were available. China, the EU and Japan continue to lag far behind in this area, although it is also evident that Chinese capitalism is catching up fast. This is due to the fact that, as the center of surplus value production shifts toward East Asia, or China in particular, the financial system will also gradually shift, albeit with some delay.

More concrete are the advantages that the U.S. derives from the role of the U.S. dollar as the international reserve currency. The dominance of the dollar as a reserve currency and in transactions (e.g., commodity trade) is undoubtedly an important advantage of U.S. imperialism in global imperialist rivalry. Specifically, dollar dominance means:

- That the income accruing to the Federal Reserve Board from money creation (seigniorage gains) is higher because more money can be created.
- That the U.S. Treasury can borrow in its own currency to a much greater extent because the central bank can create money to a much greater extent without causing demonetization in the U.S.
- That the U.S. gets additional opportunities for political influence because it can freeze the dollar reserves of other countries.
- That the U.S. dollar, as a much sought-after currency, is more stable than most other currencies. This minimizes exchange rate fluctuations, which is a great advantage for both trade in goods and the reliability of financial transactions.
- That the high demand for the US dollar tends to drive up its value. On the one hand, this has the advantage that the purchasing power of US capital increases internationally and imports of intermediate products for industry become cheaper. The disadvantage is that the cheapening of imports, like the higher prices for export goods due to the rising exchange rate, also undermine the international competitiveness of industry in the USA⁷.

All in all, these are major advantages that play an important role in shoring up the U.S. position at the top of the imperialist pyramid. That is why, for decades, the U.S. has tried everything to maintain dollar hegemony, for example by militarily attacking and overthrowing governments that sought to conduct oil trade in other currencies.

However, the dominance of the U.S. dollar is far from being a "magic bullet." It does not establish absolute and unchallengeable economic dominance. In the mid-1990s, it did not prevent Japanese monopoly capital from being ahead of the U.S. in many areas for a time. And it does not prevent Chinese monopoly capital today⁸ from overtaking the U.S. bourgeoisie on more and more levels. Nor does it give the U.S. the miraculous power to dictate oil and gas prices to Russia and other producers, as Alexander falsely claims. Dollar hegemony takes place on the basis of the laws of the capitalist mode of production, not outside it. Therefore, commodity prices are also ultimately formed through the market, even if there is considerable political intervention in the process - though not only by the U.S.: the

producing countries themselves also intervene to a great extent. After all, the oil-producing countries of OPEC have twice contributed to serious crises in the world economy by deliberately restricting production volumes.

The dominance of the US dollar is still very clear, but by no means unchallenged: The share of the U.S. dollar in global trade fluctuated roughly between 25% and 45% in 1999-2021, but is currently at roughly the same level as in 1999, i.e., about 35%. The U.S. dollar's share of global reserves in foreign currency has fallen from about 70% to about 60% over the same period. This was initially due to the creation of the euro, whose share mostly fluctuated between 20% and 30%, but seems to have fallen permanently to around 20% as a result of the crisis from 2009. The fact that the dollar hardly benefited from the euro crisis is mainly due to the rise of other, so-called "non-traditional" currencies (i.e. other than the dollar, euro, Japanese yen and British pound sterling). Here, of course, we should especially mention the Chinese renminbi, but above all a multitude of other currencies constitute this swing of balance, namely the Australian and Canadian dollars, the Swiss franc, the Korean won, the Swedish krona, the Singapore dollar, and so on. Balances held in "non-traditional" reserve currencies now amount to the equivalent of \$1.2 trillion. Regionally, other currencies often play a role, e.g. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan also hold high ruble reserves due to their close relations with Russia⁹.

Nor is the leading role of the U.S. dollar independent of the U.S. position in the imperialist world system, i.e., the material basis of that position in production and the ability of the U.S. to secure its position politically and militarily. With the economic and military dominance of U.S. imperialism in question, it is only a matter of time before the dominance of its reserve currency also erodes. The development of the renminbi into the leading reserve currency of the world economy is the declared goal of the Chinese government. As China is currently working at full speed to relegate the USA to second place in the imperialist pyramid, it is also creating the appropriate conditions for the rise of its currency.

3. Intermediate Positions and Ascension Processes in the Imperialist World System

As has already been shown, an analysis of imperialism cannot consist solely of looking at the top of the pyramid (all the less so if this top is equated with the USA in ignorance of the facts). There are also countries below the leading peak of the imperialist world system that play an important role in the structure of the world system. We will now explore the question of whether it is correct to call these countries imperialist. The criteria mentioned at the beginning, in particular the formation of monopoly capital, must also be used for this purpose.

The Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) warns that "*the tendency to establish such relations is not the same as the ability to establish such relations concretely. It is always the second criterion that applies to the definition of an imperialist country.*" (Thesis 7).

It is not only about the tendency to monopolize, to export capital, etc., which of course always exists in a capitalist society, but it is above all about the extent to which these tendencies also materialize - this is precisely what needs to be examined, which will be done here using two countries as examples.

The first of these countries is, of course, Russia, since it triggered the whole discussion. The dispute about whether Russia is imperialist at all has been smoldering in the Marxist spectrum for years, and has now, after the position on this was already clarified in the KO, reared its ugly head within our organisation again.

The second country, which is dealt with much more briefly, is Mexico. The Communist Party of Mexico holds a similar (or the same) analysis of imperialism as the KKE and assesses Mexico as a country in an intermediate position, i.e. with thoroughly imperialist characteristics. Mexico was also chosen because the question of whether it is imperialist is less obvious to answer in the affirmative than in the case of Russia. The point is to be able to derive fundamental statements about the nature of the imperialist pyramid.

Otherwise, however, it would be just as possible to draw from Brazil, India, Turkey, Thailand, Malaysia or a number of other countries, which of course will not happen now due to lack of space. Hopefully, it will suffice to examine the phenomenon in general and by way of example, so that it becomes easy to imagine that there are similar developments in many countries all over the world.

3.1 Russia's position in the imperialist world system

Alexander gives the following characterizations of Russia's status within the imperialist world system: 1) Russia was "*a colony from the time of the counterrevolution until Vladimir Putin came to power,*" whose main purpose was to supply raw materials to the West. 2) With the Yeltsin government, there was "no ideal total capitalist who politically organized accumulation and circulation." 3) Under Putin, Russia was in the process of freeing itself from this "colonial status" "step by step cautiously". 4) However, as Alexander repeatedly implied, Russia is not an imperialist state, even today.

This does not correspond to the assessment of KO in its Programmatic Theses, where Russia (also implicitly, but nevertheless clearly meant in this way) is counted among the "relatively inferior imperialist poles".

Who is right then?

Fortunately, we do not have to rely on working out the structure of Russian imperialism completely on our own, since a large number of works of different currents with Marxist pretensions already exist on this subject. Particularly noteworthy here is the work of five comrades of the Rksm(b) (the youth organization of the Russian Communist Workers' Party) from 2007¹⁰. Although this is older, it is highly topical and can be recommended without reservation.

Batov and comrades write about a current that existed in the Russian communist movement at that time: "*The denial of the existence of Russian imperialism, the idea of Russia as a colony has already ruined many communists who, criticizing U.S. imperialism and denying Russian imperialism, have taken the path of justifying the national bourgeoisie (...) and breaking with Marxism.*" The position of entering into alliances with Russia's ruling class on the basis of a (supposedly) "anti-imperialist" argument is also called "red Putinism" among Russian communists.

The comrades cite a variety of data demonstrating the concentration and centralization of Russian capital and its expansion into neighboring countries, especially the former Soviet republics, e.g. Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, the Baltic states, etc. Since these data are from 2007, they are not repeated here. However, they prove the independence of Russian capital, its high degree of concentration and centralization, and its export of capital to neighboring countries. They clearly refute the alleged "colonial" character of the Russian economy.

How has Russian capitalism developed since then?

One indicator of Russia's continued relative rise within the imperialist hierarchy has already been cited: While in 1995 Russia was not yet represented among the top 500 of the world's largest corporations, there are now at least four Russian corporations among them (Gazprom, Lukoil, Rosneft, Sberbank), with Gazprom ranking among the 100 largest corporations in the world.

Gazprom is Russia's largest monopoly group and the world's largest producer of natural gas. The majority of the group is held by the Russian state. The same applies to the oil company Rosneft, the second largest Russian state-owned enterprise. In addition, there are the oil and gas giants Lukoil and Surgutneftegas, with the former majority-owned by the capitalist Alekperov and the latter in free float. Exports of oil, gas and coal are the most important source of foreign currency for the Russian economy, which is thus heavily dependent on the development of world market prices for these raw materials. Production and processing of non-energy raw materials, especially in the metallurgical industries, also play an important role: Novolipetsk (steel), Rusal (aluminum), Norilsk Nickel etc. Does the dependence on the export of raw materials argue against characterizing the Russian economy as imperialist?

Certainly not. For the raw materials sector is an important battlefield of competition between the monopolies. The extraction, refining and sale of raw materials are organized by Russian conglomerates, which thus enhance the position of Russian capitalism in the imperialist hierarchy as a whole and participate in the struggle for extra profits. No Marxist would deny the importance of the oil corporations Shell, Total or Exxon as supporting pillars of the imperialist world system. Therefore, the same should not be done for the Russian corporations.

The strengths of Russian capital are by no means, as is often claimed, only in the export of oil and gas, even though these commodities naturally account for a large share of the Russian trade balance. The TKP correctly states in its analysis of Russian imperialism: "*The Russian economy has the capacity to break through, provided it overcomes its limitations on capital accumulation, with its industrial infrastructure inherited from the Soviet Union, its degree of self-sufficiency in terms of its basic industries together with its wealth of natural resources, as well as its leading position in the export of petrochemicals and its advantageous position in the high-technology sectors in terms of its advanced industries in defense, aeronautics and space. Therefore, the Russian economy cannot be captured by a simplified economic model based on the export of natural resources and, in particular, on the export of energy.*"¹¹ .

Russian capital also has comparative advantages in the defense sector (with the majority state-owned defense companies Rostec, OAK and the shipbuilder OSK) and in civil aviation (Aeroflot, one of the world's largest airlines). The financial sector is dominated by the majority state-owned Sberbank and VTB Bank and the private investment firm Sistema.

Russia, for example, is the world market leader in the production and export of nuclear reactors. Even though China is massively expanding its capacity in this field, Russia is by far the No. 1 on the world market with sales of its VVER1200 so far, some of them even landing in China itself¹² . The same is true for the production and export of space technology. The U.S. government notes with growing unease how its position in international space is dependent on Russian technology: "*America's satellite producers are increasingly turning to foreign suppliers of space propulsion (...). This is especially true of companies that produce geostationary satellites for various communications purposes. But it is also true of companies that produce satellites for NASA's civil space program and the military space program. (...) The industry is gradually moving to so-called electric propulsion technology, and in this area the primary foreign seller is Russia. Although Congress is putting pressure on the military to end its reliance on Russian rocket propulsion, America's satellites are becoming increasingly dependent on a type of space propulsion in which Russia is the world leader.*"¹³ .

In the field of armaments, Russia is one of the largest producers in the world; in 2020, Russia accounted for about one-fifth of all arms exports in the world, as Russian armaments are of high quality and are therefore readily purchased¹⁴.

The notion that Russia is simply a "dependent" economy that has nothing to offer except raw materials and therefore lacks the power to export significant capital has no basis.

It is striking that the Russian conglomerates show a high degree of state influence. Of course, this does not change the (monopoly) capitalist character of this capital. Like other monopolies, these corporations operate with the goal of profitability. But even though the state holds large shares in each case, a large part is also held by private investors. There are also numerous private corporate empires among the Russian conglomerates. The aluminum group Rusal is majority-owned by the Russian big capitalist (called "oligarch" in the West) Oleg Deripaska. The conglomerate Renova, which is active in numerous industries, belongs to Viktor Wekselberg, an "oligarch" who is close to Putin's government; Arkady Rotenberg, a close friend of Putin and a former teacher of Judo, is a co-owner of the Stroygazmontazh Group, the largest construction group in the Russian Federation; Mikhail Fridman owns a large share of the investment group Alfa Grupp; Vagit Alekperov owns the largest share of Lukoil, and so on. There is no fundamental difference between partially state-owned and private corporations. The private corporations owned by "oligarchs" also maintain close relations with the government, on which they are in fact also dependent. Because in Russia the capitalist class has emerged through a rapid process of barely concealed robbery of the people's property, and very often by criminal methods, the capitalists can be sure of their new property only if they have a secure relationship with the state apparatus through formal and informal institutions (including open corruption)¹⁵. The other reason for the massive role of the state is related to Russia's position in the world imperialist system, or more precisely, its relative inferiority to the West: The intention to consolidate Russia as an imperialist power against the resistance of the U.S. and its allies cannot be realized without protective measures against foreign competition because of the relative weakness of Russian capital. The state fulfills the role here of ensuring, on the one hand, that the representatives of the Russian bourgeoisie remain committed to Russia's overall capitalist interests (dissenters among the "oligarchs" such as Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky have accordingly been politically destroyed); and, on the other hand, of promoting the upgrading of Russia's position in the imperialist pyramid through supportive economic policy and foreign economic policy measures. That the state can play a central, guiding and supporting role in upgrading a country's position in the imperialist hierarchy is absolutely nothing new. It could be observed particularly strikingly in the past decades in countries like France, Japan, South Korea and currently China and Russia. Lenin describes "*how in the epoch of finance capital private and state monopolies intertwine with each other, and how the one as well as the other are in reality merely individual links in the chain of imperialist struggle between the largest monopolists for the division of the world*".¹⁶

In comparison with other developed capitalist economies, Russian capitalism is characterized by a very high concentration and centralization of capital. The strong "*monopolization and oligopolization of the economy*" is also noted by bourgeois economists who otherwise tend to avoid these terms: "*400 leading companies (with turnovers over 15 billion rubles, i.e. 700-750 mln. US\$ after purchasing power parity) produced 41% of GDP in 2014, and many of them were monopolies (Gazprom, Norulsky Nickel, Russian Railways, Aeroflot, Transneft) or leading oligopolies (Lukoil, Rosneft, Sberbank, Rostelecom, Megafon) in their industries. This leads to dominance of monopolies (oligopolies) and ineffectiveness of national anti-monopoly policy in Russia - even in comparison with other BRICS economies*"¹⁷.

This is a consequence of the particular emergence of Russian capitalism from a counterrevolution. The Russian bourgeoisie did not have to reach the monopolistic stage of

capitalism through long-term processes of concentration and centralization, but was formed through the privatization of the vast production complexes of the Soviet Union, transferring former national property into the hands of a few new capitalists, often illegally or semi-legally.

Next, let's look at Russia's capital exports:

Russia's stock of foreign direct investment rose from an actually rather negligible US\$20 billion in 2000 to US\$480 billion in 2013, according to data from the Central Bank of Russia, before falling back somewhat in subsequent years due to the economic crisis, Western sanctions, and falling oil prices¹⁸. However, the significance of these capital flows is very limited: Three quarters of outward-bound Russian direct and portfolio investments flow to countries such as Cyprus, the Netherlands or the British Virgin Islands, usually not to be productively invested there, but to avoid taxes, generate income through fictitious transactions, etc., and then mostly flow back to the home country¹⁹. This is certainly not real capital export in the Marxist sense. So is this data not an indication that Russia is not an imperialist country after all?

Rather the opposite. Such tendencies are quite typical for developed imperialist economies; from the USA, about 2/3 of their foreign capital flows go to such destinations²⁰. This is a consequence of the increasing separation of capital ownership from functioning capital in production and trade, as stated by Lenin: the emergence of the imperialist financial oligarchy, which concentrates vast sums of finance in its hands but has to constantly search for profitable investments for them due to limited productive investment opportunities, is the cause of the phenomenon. Bulatov also argues that it is precisely the very high degree of monopolization of Russian capital by international standards that sets enormous barriers to entry into many industries for smaller companies, which is why they move their over-accumulated capital to tax havens, etc.²¹.

Russian monopoly capital is, all in all, subordinated at the international level to the monopolies from the USA, China, Germany, Japan, South Korea, and so on. Unlike the Chinese monopolies, which are at the top of the imperialist hierarchy with those of the USA and challenge the domination of Western multinationals even in Europe itself, Russian capital can expand mainly in those countries where it has certain comparative advantages. This shows how enormously important the foreign policy and foreign economic policy of the state becomes in the imperialist age for the international expansion of capital. It is therefore no coincidence that the trends toward the export of capital described by Batov et al. have continued, especially to the republics of the former Soviet Union. This trend was also supported by the longstanding high prices of oil, gas and other raw materials, through which Russian monopoly corporations acquired huge financial resources, which they in turn exported as capital to neighboring countries²².

The Russian trade representative in Kazakhstan, Alexander Yakovlev (not to be confused with the leading representative of the counterrevolution in the USSR of the same name), reported in 2017 that Russian companies were investing in Kazakhstan to the tune of about US\$1 billion annually. Of 41,000 foreign companies in Kazakhstan, one-third, 13,000, were from the Russian Federation, he said²³.

In Armenia, in 2021, the GeoProMining group of the Russian billionaire Roman Trotsenko bought a majority share of 60% in the largest Armenian mining company ZCMC, which employs about 4000 workers in the southeast of the country and is one of the main sources of income for the government. Trotsenko immediately signed over shares worth 15% of the total stock to the Armenian government - certainly not a mere gesture of friendship, but a measure to expand political networking in the interest of future business²⁴.

In total, Russia invested in 139 different projects abroad in 2019 and 2020, about 30% of which were in former Soviet republics. Russian investments abroad were by no means limited to the gas and oil sector. On the contrary, this came only fourth after financial services (22% of total investments), communications and media companies (14.6%), and software and IT (9.8%), and was roughly on par with Russian investments in logistics and construction materials. The largest recipient of Russian capital export among ex-Soviet republics was Kazakhstan with 14 different projects, which accounted for 22.6% of total foreign investment in Kazakhstan. Following Kazakhstan were Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Belarus, and, since Crimea continues to count as Ukrainian in the statistics, Ukraine, in that order. In Tajikistan, more than 35% of foreign investments came from Russia in the mentioned period, and 25% in Turkmenistan. Russian investments in the post-Soviet world are accompanied by political influence and relationship building. It is certainly no coincidence that none of the main target countries of Russian investments voted for the UN resolution condemning the invasion of Ukraine²⁵.

However, Russian companies are also increasing their presence in Syria, where Russia has provided military support to the Syrian government against IS and other rebels for years. In 2019, for example, a contract was signed with two Russian companies (Mercury and Velada) for oil production. In addition, large investments were also announced by Russian companies in the port of Tartus, which serves as a naval base in the Mediterranean for the Russian Navy, and which will also be developed for the export of agricultural products from Russia²⁶.

Russia is also increasingly developing relations with Pakistan, which is increasingly cooperating with China and becoming a destination for Chinese capital exports. In 2019, a Russian trade delegation led by monopoly Gazprom announced plans to invest \$14 billion in Pakistan to build a pipeline and underground storage facilities. This will transport natural gas, some of which is produced by Russian companies in Iran or Turkmenistan, to India and China, among other countries²⁷.

In the formation of interstate alliances to facilitate and promote the international expansion of monopoly capital, the Western imperialist countries continue to lead the way (EU, EMU, NATO, NAFTA, etc.). However, Russia is also taking corresponding steps with the creation of imperialist economic, political and military alliances. Particularly worth mentioning are the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is primarily a military and security alliance (the most important member countries are China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan and Iran with observer status), but also increasingly realizes projects for economic cooperation. Regarding the EMU, again from the discussion article already quoted above: *"In 2011, Russia and a number of other states including Ukraine signed the creation of a free trade area within the framework of the EMU; in 2012, the Common Economic Space of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus was adopted, which provides for the "four freedoms" of capital, goods, services and labor between the three countries, following the example of the EU. Since so far mainly smaller and weaker economies have been part of the EMU, Ukraine's accession would have enormously upgraded this alliance. Russian monopoly capital, which is a leader in many areas within this union, could have strengthened its position as a result. In trade within EMU, the Russian ruble is by far the dominant currency, benefiting Russian banks and investment companies."*²⁸

On the economic, political and, above all, military levels, Russia's strategic alliance with China is gaining in importance. Since Xi Jinping took office in China in 2012, relations between the two countries have been strengthened. As early as 2013, Xi Jinping spoke of the strategic cooperation between the two countries having a long-term perspective - the basis of this new Russian-Chinese partnership is, above all, the common enemy: the United States and NATO. China has resisted all calls from the West to condemn the Russian war in Ukraine.

Western sanctions against Russia are leading to an even greater reorientation of Russia away from the West and toward China²⁹ .

In recent years, however, Russia has also increasingly politically and militarily intervened on its own as an important power in various conflicts. In Syria, Russia has intervened for years in the defense and pursuit of its geopolitical and economic interests, and has greatly increased its political influence in the country. In Libya, Russia has joined France in supporting the eastern Libyan civil war party of warlord Khalifa Haftar. In the Central African Republic, Russia has intervened since 2018 with arms deliveries, military advisors, and suspected private military companies. In Mali, the ruling military junta has recently been cooperating with Russia, which in turn has sent military trainers.

So is Russia an imperialist country?

There can now be no doubt about the answer: Yes. Russia is a country whose economic foundation is fully based on monopoly capitalism and which exports capital to a significant extent to its neighboring countries. It stands economically on an elevated intermediate position within the imperialist pyramid - quite different from the military sphere, as we will see below.

TKP states that Russia and China are "*imperialist countries whose intervention capacities are growing with their considerable economic potential, powerful monopolies, advanced military potentials, and long-standing political and diplomatic traditions.*"

Russia, with these capacities, exerts a "*disruptive influence (...) on the existing balance within the imperialist system*", it has the *potential to transform its regional influence into a global economic and political power* due to its "*strategic position in the middle of the most important energy resources of the world economy, its natural wealth and its economic structure*". "*Among the factors that determine Russia's position within the system, political, military and cultural factors outweigh economic ones.*"³⁰ .

We fully agree with these assessments.

3.2 Mexico's Position in the Imperialist World System

The Communist Party of Mexico (PCM) analyzes Mexico's position in the imperialist system as follows: "*While the relationship of the Mexican economy as a whole and that of its bourgeoisie as a whole can be described as one of dependence and subordination to the North American one, it is clear that in the monopoly fraction the relations are between equals, between business partners of equal rank who divide among themselves the high profit margins enjoyed by an economy like ours.*" Latin America, he said, is the "*natural hunting ground of Mexican capital, which controls a not inconsiderable sector of capitalist business, to the point of being a central force in the penetration of many countries and regions. Thus, the Mexican big bourgeoisie is a major investor of capital in Latin America with an advance led by Carlos Slim, whose América Móvil is the largest private company in the region, only behind the state oil companies.*"³¹

The last point is no longer correct: América Móvil is now ahead of the state oil company Pemex. Both companies are among the 500 largest on Fortune's list, ranked 237th and 257th respectively. It is no wonder that Carlos Slim was at times the richest man on earth and is still high on the list today.

Other Mexican corporations with multibillion-dollar revenues include the state-owned electricity company CFE, the beverage company FEMSA, the construction materials producer Cemex (the world's fifth-largest construction materials company in 2020), Grupo Bimbo in

the food processing sector, the Televisa Group (media and telecommunications), the chemical company Mexichem, and so on and so forth.

The concentration and centralization of capital continues in Mexico. In 2019, 312 mergers and acquisitions took place with a volume of US\$18.9 billion; in 2020, the volume collapsed to US\$13 billion due to the pandemic and recovered to US\$16.9 billion in 2021 (344 mergers and acquisitions)³². By comparison, Mexico's GDP in 2020 was just over US\$1 trillion. This means that Mexican corporations complete mergers and acquisitions are worth between 1% and 2% of the country's total economic output each year.

According to a Mexican newspaper, "*Mexico has consolidated itself as an industrial hub between the Americas, in addition to the great internal strength it has. Some industrial sectors are showing significant growth, such as automotive production, aerospace and information security.*"³³

Mexican capital is expanding around the world. Mexican companies invested a combined total of nearly US\$230 billion in direct investment abroad in 2012-2018³⁴. The international expansion of Mexican capital began to gain momentum in the 1990s, led by the cement company Cemex, which bought two Spanish cement companies in the early 1990s and then others in the United States and Latin America. Cemex is a world leader in building materials with global operations. América Móvil bought telecommunications companies in the U.S., the Netherlands and Austria³⁵.

Grupo Bimbo, for example, employs 134,000 workers in 32 countries in almost all continents³⁶. Mexichem is the largest manufacturer of plastic pipes in Latin America and is highly internationalized with over 120 production sites in 50 countries³⁷.

In 2014, Mexican corporations participated in seven of the 15 largest cross-border acquisitions made by Latin American companies. América Móvil, Grupo Bimbo, Mexichem, Asea, Finaccess and Alfa together bought over US\$9 billion in company shares that year. Other major "players" in the region are Brazil, Chile and Colombia³⁸.

A total of 32 major Mexican corporations have subsidiaries and branches abroad (as of 2016), 70% of which are in the U.S., which is also the main destination country for Mexican direct investment by far. Mexican capital prefers the U.S. market due to geographic proximity, numerous investment opportunities, but also due to the NAFTA free trade agreement, which greatly facilitates the export of capital. Many Mexican corporations also invest in Central and South America, such as América Móvil, which has risen to become the continent's largest mobile phone provider³⁹.

How is Mexico's position in the imperialist system to be characterized? It is obvious that the classification of the Mexican economy as "dependent" is correct, but in itself also very misleading. As great as the power differential is with the United States, it is also clear that Mexico itself plays an imperialist role in a subordinate fashion: It has a developed capital export industry, monopoly corporations with formidable international operations and global reach. As much as it is impossible to put Mexico on a par with its northern neighbor, it is equally impossible to put it on a par with its southern neighbors (Guatemala, Honduras, etc.). This is precisely what characterizes a country that is in an intermediate position in the imperialist pyramid.

4. The military balance of power: USA, China, Russia

The TKP writes in its theses on imperialism: "*Imperialism is not a fact observed only on the economic level, but a multidimensional world system that has political, ideological, military*

and cultural aspects. Therefore, imperialist domination and dominance should be analyzed not only on the economic level, but also taking into account its political, ideological, military and cultural dimensions" (Thesis 8).

This remark is important because it is not enough to look at imperialism from a purely economic point of view. The ability of (monopoly) capital to maintain and enforce its rule is largely dependent on the relations of capital to the state and the strength of that state. In order to assert imperialist interests in one's own geographic environment or even on other continents, a stable, assertive state with a strong military is a prerequisite. In determining a country's position within the imperialist hierarchy, military strength must therefore also be taken into account.

There is a methodological problem here: the relative military strengths of states are very difficult to compare directly. There are various indicators that can be used, but each of them has only very limited significance. For example, the personnel strength of an army says nothing about its equipment with modern technology, i.e., its capability for modern war. A state's armaments expenditure is also of very limited significance because the equipment of an army does not depend on this alone. Russia is the best counterexample here: as the heir to the Soviet Union, which undoubtedly had the strongest army in the world beside the United States, the Russian Federation inherited military equipment, know-how and facilities for military research, as well as experience, upon which the forced modernization of the Russian armed forces after the 2008 Georgian War could build. "*Russia inherited large inventories of major conventional weapons systems from the Soviet Union. A substantial portion of these systems remains in operational use by the Russian Armed Forces, while another portion is in storage.*"⁴⁰ .

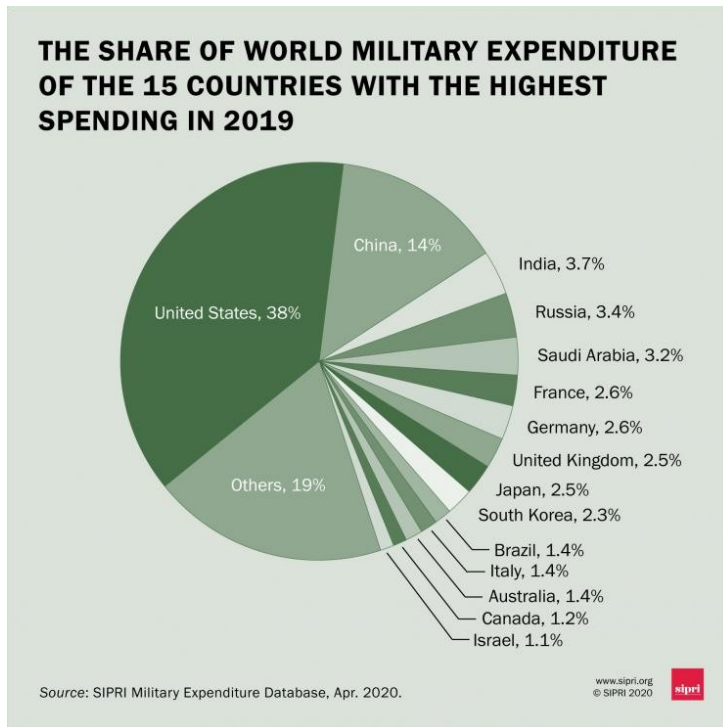
In addition, there is another decisive factor: Russia is able to produce its own defense equipment to a high degree due to its own strong defense industry and highly developed related industries (aerospace, nuclear technology, etc.) and thanks to corresponding efforts toward greater self-sufficiency, and is thus comparatively independent of defense imports. These assets are produced in Russia itself, at significantly lower costs than would be the case if they were produced in the USA or Germany. It is difficult to quantify this effect precisely, as there is no separate index for purchasing power parity for military equipment. However, costs in Russia are significantly lower for other reasons as well; for example, salaries for military personnel are lower than in Western countries. As a result of these two factors, the Russian army is far stronger than its defense spending would suggest compared to the U.S. or European countries (Ibid.).

The "strength" of an army cannot therefore be expressed in a simple number. In any case, it cannot be seen in absolute terms, but depends strongly on the conditions within which it is utilized. A ground offensive into neighboring territory (e.g., Russia in Ukraine) poses different challenges to an army than an overseas offensive (e.g., U.S. in Europe during World War II). A war fought primarily from the air (e.g., NATO in Yugoslavia) is different than a war on the ground. A naval war (e.g., potentially U.S. vs. China in the South China Sea) again requires very different capabilities, etc. This means that the fact that one country is militarily "stronger" than another does not allow simple conclusions that the stronger country would also defeat the weaker one in a real war (see e.g. the USA in Vietnam). The outcome of a war depends on a number of factors, each of which is decisive in its own right. Troop strength and military equipment are only one (important) factor - others include terrain, weather, fighting morale on both sides, the quality of supply lines and the attitude of the local population.

With all these limitations in mind, however, we can still attempt a comparison of the military capacities of different countries, because without including this factor, it is also not possible to correctly determine a country's position within the imperialist pyramid. A first look at

military spending shows that the U.S. spends by far the largest sums in the world on armaments. In 2020, the U.S. spent \$767 billion on its military, which is slightly less than the 2010 peak (\$865 billion) - certainly an enormous sum, but also a far cry from spending "in the trillions," according to Klara⁴¹ .

Figure 3: Distribution of defense spending among the largest countries, 2019



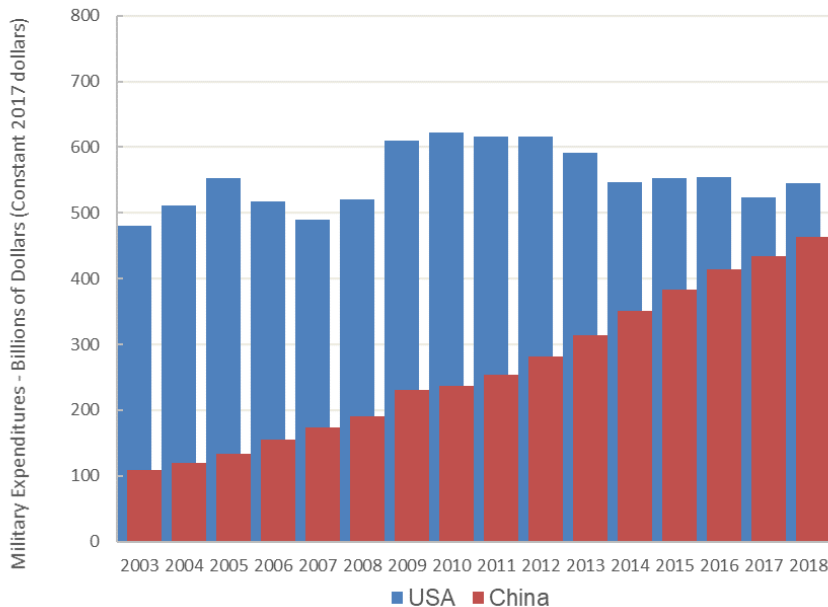
Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 2020.

The second-largest arms supplier is the People's Republic of China, itself a long way behind in third place. The unrivaled military spending of the U.S. is often used to prove the supposedly unchallenged military dominance of the United States. But how big is the gap between the USA and China really? This gap must be put into perspective. A huge portion of the U.S. military budget in recent years has been spent on the ongoing war operations of the U.S. military, especially the extremely expensive occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is easy to understand that this money thus did not serve to maintain military superiority over rivals (Russia and China). It did not go into developing new technologies, increasing the size of the arsenal, training troops, etc. A direct comparison of U.S. and Chinese spending in purchasing power parity shows that China has been steadily and rapidly increasing its military spending. If only the direct costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are subtracted, as of 2017 China had already nearly matched U.S. spending. James Stavridis, a four-star U.S. admiral, writes: *"China is spending its money very wisely. It is extremely focused - not only on offensive cyberweapons, but also on its operations in space, its hypersonic cruise missiles, and its stealth technologies. China has watched as the United States spent trillions of dollars, got involved in two expensive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and said, "We don't need all that. We're not going to participate in wars like that. We're going to use our spending very intelligently."*⁴² .

Figure 4: Military spending by the U.S. (minus the cost of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan) and China

US And China's Military Expenditures

2003-2018 United States Military Spending, Minus The Direct Costs of The Wars In Iraq and Afghanistan vs. Chinese Military Spending (PPP),



Source: "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>"; OECD (2019), Exchange rates (indicator), doi: 10.1787/037ed317-en; US spending less Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2019

What about Russia? In a direct comparison with the U.S., Russia appears at first glance to be a significant but not remotely competitive power based on its military spending: at \$65 billion in 2019, it ranked just fourth in the world, just behind India, while the U.S. spent 11 times more and China 4 times more. At 3.9% of GDP, however, the burden of defense spending on the Russian economy is already very high (Wezeman 2020).

It has already been stated above that Russia's military strength is disproportionately larger than these data suggest. If military spending is converted at the ordinary purchasing power parity index used in GDP conversion, Russian military spending in 2019 is equivalent to \$166 billion and Chinese to \$500 billion. The difference with the U.S. at \$732 billion is still large for Russia, of course, but this better explains why the Russian military is in many ways a very serious adversary for the U.S. (Ibid.).

Russia has begun a rapid modernization of its armed forces, with a particular focus on nuclear and missile technology, approximately since the 2008 war in Georgia. Russia spent a comparatively very high proportion of its military expenditure on the acquisition of new equipment (at 40% of military expenditure, this proportion is about twice as high as in Germany, France and Great Britain) (Ibid.).

But let's take a look at how the armies of the three strongest military powers in the world are positioned. Note: These figures refer to the entire inventory, i.e. not only to equipment that is actually in service at the moment (e.g. of the 20 aircraft carriers of the USA listed, "only" 11 are currently active). Nevertheless, the figures certainly give an insight into the approximate equipment of the three countries.

Table 9: Combat strength of the armies of the USA, China and Russia (figures partially rounded)

	USA	China	Russia
Land Forces			
Personnel strength	1.4 million	2.2 million	1.2 million
Reservists	850.000	8 million	2 million
Main battle tank	6.600	5.800	12.200
Armored vehicles	41.200	14.100	26.800
Artillery	4.200	7.100	18.500
Air Force			
Air superiority and interceptor fighters	461	1.049	792
Multi-purpose hunter	2.417	1.130	832
Bombers and close air support	566	120	880
Helicopter	4.741	1.355	1.724
Fleet			
Aircraft carrier	20	4	1
Destroyer	94	38	18
Frigates	0	54	11
Corvettes	22	73	83
Submarines	69	74	59
Nuclear			
Nuclear warheads	6.500	280	6.500

Source: armedforces.eu.

The closest thing to a reasonably clear superiority is the U.S. air force, which has more aircraft than the Chinese and Russian air forces and is also more modern. Russia and China predominantly continue to use fourth-generation fighters such as the MiG-29, MiG-31, Su-27 and Shenyang J-11 and J-16, respectively, Chengdu J-10, Xian JH-7, and only a few state-of-the-art 5th-generation stealth fighters (Su-57, Chengdu J-20). In contrast, the U.S. already has several hundred such aircraft (F-35, F-22) in service.

Of particular importance is the area of naval armament, because a potential war between the China and the U.S. would most likely take place at sea. In the crucial area of naval forces, China's fleet has already surpassed that of the U.S. in terms of the number of ships: At least 360 Chinese warships face 297 U.S. ones⁴³. Other lists arrive at different figures because they count or omit other elements, depending on the case.

The Russian and Chinese aircraft carriers, unlike those of the U.S., are all active (which is why the discrepancy in statistics appears greater than in reality), but two of the four Chinese carriers are only comparatively smaller "helicopter carriers," although they can also act as carrier ships for up to 30 combat aircraft⁴⁴. Aircraft carriers (including "helicopter carriers") are important primarily for global projection of military power. In other words, they are not needed for national defense in the event of an enemy invasion, but to be able to fight wars far away from one's own mainland.

The Russian fleet is also one of the strongest in the world: with admittedly only one aircraft carrier and 18 destroyers, 11 frigates, 83 corvettes and 59 submarines, it is not significantly smaller than that of the USA, except for in aircraft carriers. However, ship classes must also be taken into account in a direct comparison: The U.S. Navy relies primarily on destroyers - comparatively larger warships - while China and Russia tend to carry smaller ships (frigates

and corvettes). Thus, the combat power of the U.S. fleet is certainly higher than a comparison of just the number of ships would suggest. In terms of nuclear weapons, the U.S. and Russia are about equal, while some sources assume the slight numerical superiority of Russia. Russia is also a leader in the development of hypersonic missiles. These are missiles that fly at hypersonic speeds (above Mach 5) primarily within the atmosphere. Because of this and their non-ballistic trajectory, they are difficult for missile defense systems to detect and shoot down. Since they can also deliver nuclear warheads, this would leave the U.S. vulnerable in the event of a nuclear war. The U.S. and China are also investing heavily in the development of hypersonic weapons⁴⁵.

In any case, it is clear that overwhelming U.S. military superiority appears to be more of a rhetorical postulation rather than a real-world phenomenon. If a naval war between the U.S. and China were to be fought with conventional weapons, presumably in the vicinity of the Chinese mainland, China would certainly have a good chance of winning the war. Even in a hypothetical war on Russian soil or in Russia's immediate vicinity (e.g., in the Baltics), NATO's chances of victory would most likely be doubtful. While NATO has a much larger army than Russia, it would face a first-class adversary in Russia, which would have the advantage of better and shorter supply lines (while the U.S. would have to secure its supplies across the Atlantic and would be vulnerable to modern Russian anti-ship missiles there), a secure fuel supply, knowledge of the terrain, a supportive civilian population, and so on.

Russia and China have also deepened their cooperation militarily in recent years and held joint military exercises. With NATO on the one hand and the alliance of Beijing and Moscow on the other, there are now two major military blocs in the world that are increasingly hostile to each other. NATO's superiority is being seriously challenged in more and more areas or has already ceased to exist.

5. The dependency theory and its shortcomings

We have now looked at the rough structure and hierarchy of the world system on the basis of various data. Nevertheless, there are comrades, also in the international communist movement, who believe that they can analyze imperialism as a system of one-sided dependency - even more, that these dependency relations or even "colonialisms" (so e.g. Paul Oswald) are at the core of imperialism. These views are ultimately variants of dependency theory, which will therefore be briefly discussed here and examined for its validity.

Dependency theory arose with quite strong theoretical arguments in answer to the false and apologetically written claims of bourgeois modernization theory: This theory assumed that all countries developed linearly on the same path toward "modernity". According to this theory, the backwardness of large parts of the world, especially in southern Europe and North America, had nothing to do with capitalist development in the "North," but was simply due to outdated technologies and social structures. The political-ideological intention of this theory is obvious: colonialism, dependency relations, the transfer of resources and value to the leading imperialist countries, the aims and effects of imperialist predatory wars etc. etc. are to be concealed. The damned of the earth are not supposed to look for a way out of their misery in socialism, but to imitate the capitalist development of the North in order to be able to enjoy the same prosperity in some distant future (that this position does not even consider exploitation and social inequality in the richest imperialist countries to be all that noteworthy should not come as a surprise).

Economists and social scientists, especially but by no means only from countries of the so-called "Third World," objected to this reactionary theory. Dependency theory (or rather,

dependency theories) can be divided into a bourgeois current (e.g. Raúl Prebisch, Johan Galtung or the later Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso) and a current that attempted to grasp global economic dependencies with the help of Marxist concepts (e.g. Eduardo Galeano, Ernest Mandel, Theotônio dos Santos, Samir Amin, etc.).

The formulations in Eduardo Galeano's famous book "The Open Veins of Latin America" are impressive. Galeano emphasizes: "*Underdevelopment is not a phase of development, but its consequence*"⁴⁶. About his home continent of Latin America, he writes: "*For those who see history as a race, Latin America's backwardness and misery are nothing more than the result of its failure. But the history of Latin America's underdevelopment is a chapter in the development of world capitalism. Our defeat has always been an inseparable part of foreign victory; our wealth has always produced our poverty and served to approximate the prosperity of others: that of empires and their native overseers.*"⁴⁷. He establishes the close connection between poverty and wealth in the world capitalist system: "*Ultimately, even in our time, the existence of rich capitalist centers cannot be explained without the existence of poor and subjugated peripheral areas: One and the other belong to the same system.*"⁴⁸.

The decisive structural feature of the capitalist system on a global level is thus, similar to the views of Klara, Paul, etc., dependence. This is defined by dos Santos as follows: "*By dependence we mean a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of the economy of another country to which it is subjected*"⁴⁹. The mechanisms of this dependence have been analyzed differently by different authors of the theory. For some authors the "unequal exchange" is in the foreground, whereby value is constantly transferred from the periphery to the centers, for others the "structural heterogeneity" or the "dualism" of the production structures in the periphery, which prevents a uniform development of these countries. Others emphasize the role of foreign capital from the imperialist centers, whose activities in the periphery also contribute to blocking development.

Galeano again: "*These multinationals, however, do not belong to the numerous nations in whose territory they operate; they are multinational simply to the extent that they pump large streams of oil and dollars from all points of the compass into the centers of power of the capitalist system. (...) the profits that poor countries are deprived of not only go straight to the few cities where their main coupon cutters live, but are also partially reinvested to consolidate and expand the international business network. The cartel structure entails the domination of numerous countries and the infiltration of numerous governments; oil saturates presidents and dictators and exacerbates the structural deformities of the countries that are subject to it.*"⁵⁰. This has prevented an independent development of the bourgeoisie in Latin America: "*it (the bourgeoisie, Th.S.) reached the stage of decrepitude without ever having developed. Our bourgeois today are representatives or functionaries of the all-powerful foreign corporations*"⁵¹.

In addition, a center-periphery division is often stated within the countries as well: Thus, there is also a periphery in the center countries that is not integrated into the capitalist world market, just as there is a capitalistically integrated center in the periphery countries. Communication takes place mainly between the integrated sectors of the center and periphery countries, being much larger in the former than in the latter⁵². The penetration of the corporations of the imperialist centers, the orientation of production to export to the centers, the imposition of the value system of the centers led to a situation that "*not only prevents or limits the formation of a national entrepreneurial class, (...) but also that of a middle class (intellectuals, scientists, technicians, etc. included) and even that of a working class*"⁵³.

We see that the dependency theories were intended as a contribution to the analysis of imperialism. Imperialism was understood by them in different ways. The Norwegian peace researcher and dependency theorist Johan Galtung offers the following definition of

imperialism: "*Imperialism is a relationship between a nation at the center and a nation at the periphery which is of such a nature that: 1) harmony of interest exists between the center in the central nation and the center in the peripheral nation, 2) greater disharmony of interest exists within the peripheral nation than within the central nation, 3) disharmony of interest exists between the periphery in the central nation and the periphery in the peripheral nation.*"⁵⁴ .

This quote is interesting because it highlights several fundamental weaknesses of the dependency theory view of imperialism:

First, the assumption of a "harmony of interests" between "the center of the central nation" (i.e. the bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries) and "the center in the peripheral nation" (the bourgeoisie in the dependent country). This assumption can be definitively disproved by the developments of the last decades. The rise and development of a monopoly capitalist class in countries like India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, etc., shows that, on the contrary, the capitalists of these countries find themselves in a constant interplay of overlap and opposition, of conflict and cooperation, in their interests with those of the old "triad."

Secondly, the assumption of a fundamental opposition between the exploited of the ruling imperialist and the dependent countries. In reality, the class struggle at the national level is dependent on the balance of forces of the class struggle at the international level, which is why every victory of the working class in one country also helps the struggle in other countries.

Third, this analysis suffers from an absolutization of dependency, which is understood schematically and rigidly rather than as a dynamic relationship within a fundamentally hierarchical system. According to the undialectical center-periphery notion of dependency theory, a rigid division exists between these two spheres, much like the alleged division of the world into "oppressed" and "oppressing nations" highlighted by Klara and Paul. Certainly, the concepts of center and periphery as rough divisions, as two poles (similar to base and apex in the pyramid) are not wrong per se. However, it is absurd to approach all the countries of the world with this yardstick and then try to place them clearly in one category or the other. The data examined above have shown how much more complex, contradictory and graded the imperialist world system really is. Also, the position explicitly taken in dependency theory, that it is impossible for dependent countries to rise in the imperialist hierarchy, is patently false. This paper has presented a large body of data demonstrating the rise of a number of former "Third World" countries to exalted intermediate positions in the imperialist world system or even to the top segment of the system (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, China). The assumption that dependence and the activities of foreign capital necessarily block the development of modern, competitive production structures and a developed capitalist society has not been borne out. Rather, it has been shown that the effect of such dependencies must be viewed in a more differentiated way: how successful and in what form capital accumulation takes place, whether it is, for example, an accumulation of money capital in the hands of a narrow ruling class used for speculative purposes, or whether it actually leads to a development of the production system and sufficient concentration and centralization of capital, depends on many factors. Political stability and autonomy of the capitalist state, its foreign policy (including military assertiveness), inherited social structures, value orientations, traditions, the concrete historical form of the emergence of the bourgeoisie, etc., etc., may play a role. But to recognize the fact that it is quite possible to upgrade the position of a country within the imperialist hierarchy is equally as important as acknowledging that this hierarchy exists.

In defense of the dependency theorists, it must be said here that the theory was developed primarily in the 1960s and 1970s under the impression of a massive preponderance of U.S.

imperialism and the triad within the capitalist world, and is therefore hardly advocated in its pure form today, as the constellation has changed considerably. This is also acknowledged by Klara, who says that *"it is possible, but not so easy (to) get into the club of the robbers."* It is all the more difficult to understand, however, that on the other side arguments are made for maintaining this schematic division, as Klara also does with her absolutization of the distinction into "oppressive" and "oppressed countries".

Fourth, another crucial shortcoming of the dependency-theoretical analysis of imperialism is that it understands imperialism solely as a relationship between center and periphery (similarly, see Paul Oswald in his contribution). In reality, the contradictions between imperialists, which by no means arise only from conflicts over the division of "colonies," are at least as relevant for the developmental dynamics of the imperialist world system. But these contradictions also arise precisely (and even to a greater extent) from the interpenetration of the leading imperialist countries by means of their export of capital, with which they compete on each other's terrain. For example, the fundamental root of the conflict between Russia and NATO is to be found in the fact that the Russian bourgeoisie is striving for greater independence (economic, political, military) from the West and has partially broken the dependent position in which it found itself in the 1990s. A major point of contention between China and the U.S., and the root cause of the trade war, is that a powerful Chinese industry in the U.S. provides massive competition to capital there. Other examples could easily be found.

A fifth aspect, which is not expressed in Galtung's quote but is also typical of positions derived from dependency theory, can be formulated as follows: The view of dependency theory is problematic, *"Because it underestimates the bourgeoisies of the "dependent" countries as class forces in their own right with their own capitalist/imperialist ambitions and thus takes them out of the line of fire politically. Dependency theories thus have a class-neutral tendency, because they ultimately include the dominated classes of the "dependent" countries together with the bourgeoisie of these countries under the term "dependency." In Latin America, for example, this often manifests itself to this day in socialist forces effectively equating "imperialism" with the U.S. and not recognizing the domestic bourgeoisie as an adversary or even, especially if it seeks greater independence from the U.S., seeing it as an ally. In relatively developed capitalist countries like Brazil, Argentina, Mexico or Chile, "left" bourgeois governments (Kirchner in Argentina, Lula/Rousseff in Brazil, Bachelet in Chile, López Obrador in Mexico) were and are understood as part of a "progressive" or even anti-imperialist tendency"*⁵⁵ .

The TKP also develops a correct critique of the one-sidedness of dependency theory, which could also be applied to the position advocated by Alexander, Klara and Paul: *"Imperialism cannot be conceived as the domination of the developed capitalist countries over the underdeveloped countries. Moreover, imperialism can by no means be seen as the sole relationship or conflict between center and periphery or between developed and underdeveloped countries"* (Thesis 10). At the same time, they rightly warn against underestimating the hierarchical structure of these relations: *"One is well advised to avoid analyses which, while emphasizing the characteristics of imperialism as a system pervading the whole world and the imperialist roles assumed by each country at a particular stage of capitalism, trivialize the imperialist hierarchy itself"* (Thesis 18)

Dependency theory is ultimately inadequate to properly capture the essence of imperialism. This is not to say that it has not made many valuable contributions - its critique of the distorting portrayal of "development" in modernization theories was certainly justified, even if it goes to the other extreme and excludes catch-up development or advancement in the imperialist world system altogether. Dependency theories have also contributed to a better understanding of the mechanisms of dependency and persistent underdevelopment through structural heterogeneity, unequal exchange, the emergence of incoherent and monocultural

production structures, etc. We should benefit from these insights without necessarily adopting the many false assumptions of this theory.

6. Lenin's Understanding of Imperialism and the "Imperialist Pyramid"

At this point, we have looked at enough data to draw general conclusions for the analysis of imperialism. Is Lenin's theory still the appropriate tool to analyze imperialism today?

To answer this question, we must first understand this theory correctly.

Klara wants Lenin to be understood claiming "*that, first, there are great powers qualitatively different from the rest of the world, second, that these great powers dominate the world, third, that the contradiction between them is how they divide the spoils among themselves*"; "*Imperialism, according to Lenin, is the domination of the world by a few monopolies and their states.*"; "*This image **constitutively** implies that it is a world where on one side there are the "handful of robbers" and on the other "the robbed", on one side "the oppressing", on the other "the oppressed". If this picture is no longer to be true, then, strictly speaking, it is no longer imperialism.*"

Klara argues that Lenin's division of the world into a "handful of robbers" on the one hand and "the oppressed" on the other is part of the definition of imperialism. The first thing that must be said about this is that Lenin himself warned against a schematic application of such definitions of imperialism: one should not "*forget that all definitions at all have only conditional and relative significance, since a definition can never encompass the all-round interrelations of a phenomenon in its full unfolding*"⁵⁶ .

In order not to fall into this trap, one is well advised to first understand what is essential about Lenin's concept of imperialism. Lenin himself writes on this subject: "*If the shortest possible definition of imperialism were required, one would have to say that imperialism is the monopolistic stage of capitalism.*"⁵⁷ . In his famous more detailed definition, he then lists the five characteristics of imperialism: Monopolization, finance capital, capital export, international monopolistic capitalist associations and the division of the world among the great powers⁵⁸ . Thus, for him, the division of the world among the great powers is a characteristic of imperialism, but it is also clear that for him, as a Marxist, the fundamental development lies in the imposition of a new quality of capitalist relations of production, monopoly capital. Monopoly capital is accompanied not only by an enormous concentration of power in economic and political terms and a change in international interdependence, but also by a modification of the regularities of the capitalist mode of production: Price formation changes, systematic deviations of realized market prices from production prices (which Marx presents in the 3rd volume of Capital), and capitalism tends systemically to over-accumulation and therefore pushes for the global expansion of capital. There is no doubt that this fact alone was the essence of imperialism for Lenin.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries - that is, in Lenin's epoch - the world was divided among a handful of great powers, primarily in the form of colonial policy. That Lenin therefore writes of a "handful" should therefore not be surprising - it is simply a description of an obvious reality in his time. Lenin analyzed what he found and polemicized fiercely against people like Kautsky, who took refuge in the hypothetical fantasy world of peaceful "ultra-imperialism" through abstract reasoning. This also means that we must not understand his analysis as a ready description of today's world, but merely as a set of tools for classifying and analyzing what empirical material we find today. In Lenin's time, most of the world consisted

of colonies or semi-colonies with very limited sovereignty. The transition to monopoly capitalism created the economic basis for a rather one-sided domination of the colonial and semi-colonial countries by relatively few states: First and foremost the USA, Great Britain, France and Germany, while smaller or less developed states (Portugal, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Japan) were also able to acquire colonies.

But there is nothing to suggest that Lenin considered a specific number of imperialist countries to be an essential feature of the imperialist epoch. On the contrary, it is striking that he does not provide a definitive list of imperialist states in his work - which should be easy if he had assumed a rigid and absolute division between imperialist and oppressed countries.

For example, on a list of securities issues, he also lists Austria-Hungary, Russia, Italy, Japan, Holland, Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, etc., only to point out that the four largest (England, U.S., France, Germany) together control almost 80% of securities trading and that the rest must play "*the role of debtor one way or another*"⁵⁹. In a few other places he merely compares France, England and Germany. So did Lenin think that Russia, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, etc. were not imperialist countries? Quite the contrary! Lenin is very clear about this: "*The fusion of bank capital with industrial capital, in connection with the formation of capitalist monopolies, has thus also made enormous progress in Russia.*"⁶⁰. And in general he writes about the great imperialist powers: "*a considerable difference nevertheless remains, and among the six countries mentioned we find, on the one hand, young capitalist countries which have advanced unusually rapidly (America, Germany, Japan); on the other hand, countries of old capitalist development which have recently developed much more slowly than the former (France and England); and finally, a country which has lagged most behind in economic terms (Russia), in which modern capitalist imperialism is, as it were, covered with a particularly dense network of pre-capitalist relations.*"⁶¹. Even in Lenin's time, the imperialist world system was not a static structure in which the few great powers dominated the rest of the world absolutely unchallenged, but was characterized by uneven development: "*Capitalism is growing fastest in the colonies and overseas countries. Among these countries (!) new imperialist powers (Japan) are emerging.*"⁶².

About the imperialism of Italy, which hardly appears in his imperialism writing, Lenin writes in his notes during the First World War: "*The revolutionary-democratic, i.e.. revolutionary-bourgeois Italy, (...) the Italy of Garibaldi's time, is being definitively transformed before our eyes into the Italy that oppresses other peoples, that wants to plunder Turkey and Austria, into the Italy of a coarse, disgusting-reactionary, dirty bourgeoisie, whose mouth is watering with pleasure at the fact that they too have been allowed to share the spoils.*"⁶³.

Lenin had thus understood very well that even in the upper segments of the imperialist world system great differences prevailed, that one could not equate the USA, England and Germany with Russia, Italy or Japan, and that the latter were even clearly subordinate to the financial superiority of the main imperialist powers. Nevertheless, he saw Russia, Japan and Italy quite unmistakably as imperialist powers. He also recognized, through the example of Japan, the possibility of new imperialist states emerging from formerly subordinate and oppressed countries. For Lenin, they are nevertheless imperialist because the economic basis of imperialism, monopoly capital, prevails in them and because they are involved in the struggle for the redivision of the world. Lenin makes it clear what he is concerned with: "*The capital-exporting countries have, in a figurative sense, divided the world among themselves.*"⁶⁴. All countries whose capital expands internationally participate in the division of the world. It is obvious that with this understanding far more than only the five, six or seven largest capitalist economies are meant.

So we see that Klara's assertion that the KKE's view contradicts Lenin's cannot be confirmed at the very latest at second glance. But even if this were so, didn't Lenin always demand that

the truth be sought in the concrete facts? What would he have thought of a reading of his theory that, more than 100 years later, in a drastically changed world, prefers to cling to every single formulation of his writing instead of dealing with the facts?

Lenin knew: Capitalist development follows the capitalist laws of development. Among the most important of these laws are the interrelated tendencies toward concentration and centralization of capital. They lead to the emergence of monopoly capital not only in the leading countries of world capitalism, penetrating "*with absolute inevitability all spheres of public life*"⁶⁵, but in gradual gradation in more and more other countries, including the former colonies. It is a dogmatic misunderstanding of Lenin's theory to believe that a contemporary analysis of imperialism can dispense with taking these facts into account.

Due to the weakness of the world communist movement, it fell to the KKE to be the first to draw attention to the changes in the constellation of imperialism. It coined the image of the "imperialist pyramid" for this purpose. This image should serve to facilitate the understanding of what is at stake: namely, that in the imperialist system there are not only "above" and "below", but rather different positions on a ladder, in a hierarchy, whereby it is wrong to look for imperialism only in the top rung of the ladder. That the ladder exists - that it even belongs to the essence of imperialism in presenting itself as a strict hierarchy, is by no means denied by the image of the pyramid, but rather is emphasized.

Now, this image, because it is an image, a metaphor, and not a detailed representation of reality, should not be overused either. Unlike the stones of the pyramids of Giza, the elements of the imperialist pyramid are in constant flux - the lawfully uneven development and the constant struggles for redivision are expressed in relative processes of ascent and descent. In contrast to the step pyramids in Mexico, it is not always possible to determine exactly on which step one stands, because the determination of one's position in the imperialist world system depends on many factors and cannot be read off from a single list of economic key figures - to apply this to the matter at hand, we would like to refer once again to Russia, whose imperialist position is underestimated if one considers only the role of its monopolies in the international hierarchy, leaving its political and military power unobserved.

The decisive difference to the "triad" theory of imperialism, which of course already fails completely in the classification of China, is the understanding of "intermediate positions" in the pyramid. But even the characterization "intermediate position" is only a very general classification and can mean very different things in individual cases. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that both the CP of Mexico and the CP of Greece see their countries as being in an intermediate position, although Mexico tends to be on a higher rung. These terms are therefore only very rough instruments and must be filled with content by a more precise analysis.

If we try to determine precisely the ranking between imperialist countries, we encounter a problem: the position of a country in the pyramid expresses the relationship of that country or its capital to the other countries and to the world system as a whole. Is it able to shape the structure of the world system or not?⁶⁶

Thus, it is not just a matter of how far a country's economic base is already advanced in the formation of monopoly capitalist, imperialist structures. It is obvious, for example, that for India and China the sheer size of their economies also (but by no means only) plays a role in determining the role of these countries in the international imperialist hierarchy. In both countries, especially China, a powerful monopoly and finance capital has emerged, but there are also large parts of the country that remain severely underdeveloped. The Netherlands or Switzerland, on the other hand, are undoubtedly much more advanced in their imperialist

development; they are (over)mature imperialist societies. But just as undoubtedly, they rank below China and, depending on the indicator, below India in the pyramid.

For the understanding of imperialism of the "imperialist pyramid" this does not create a fundamental problem: Both, or in this example all four countries, are of course imperialist and participate in the struggle for the redivision of the world. The position of a country in the pyramid is not a direct derivation of its social structures, but the result of the interaction of several factors (political, economic, military, sometimes cultural). However, even imperialist countries which, because of their limited size, are not in a position to pursue an imperialist power policy on their own, are pushed by the laws of development of their economic base to behave as imperialist powers - they are then dependent on pursuing their interests in alliance with other imperialists.

There is a fundamental problem here, however, with Klara's "triad" model. For in her model, the question of whether a country is imperialist really depends essentially on the relationship that this country has with other countries. So the question is: Are there other countries that are stronger?

On this basis, she concludes: *"But if one assumes that the adjective 'imperialist' in relation to a country/state means the real political-economic (that includes military) potency to dominate the world, then Russia is not in the club of imperialists. This potency, in fact, depends not simply on 'monopolization' in a country, but on the degree of monopolization, which is expressed primarily in the strength of finance capital and capital exports, and in relation to other world-dominating states."*

Thus, however, imperialism is then no longer a characteristic of the society of a particular country, but only a description of the relationship of forces between different states. Thus it is precisely Klara who ultimately leaves the ground of the Marxist methodology of imperialism analysis developed by Lenin, because for Lenin the decisive moment was the transition of the relations of production and distribution into a new stage of capitalism. Those who want to recognize only the very strongest imperialists as imperialists at all inevitably lose sight of the fact that imperialism as a social order spans the entire globe, and that even the strongest "robbers" must constantly defend their position at the top of the pyramid against their weaker competitors.

In this article, we have looked mainly at the upper segments of the pyramid and two examples of countries in an "intermediate" position, with Russia overall higher in the hierarchy than Mexico. However, this does not mean that there is no imperialism below these countries. Those countries that do not have corporations in the top 500 are not therefore automatically "non-imperialist." They can also occupy an intermediate position and play a regional imperialist role through capital exports to their neighboring countries, especially if these are less developed. As a final example, consider Greece's role in the Balkans. Before the outbreak of the deep economic crisis, one could read the following in the newspaper "Kathimerini": *"Greek banks are turning the region of Southeastern Europe into their own backyard. Despite their small size compared to the European financial giants, and within a few years, they have managed to build a network of 3000 branches, while their market share in the Balkans is almost 20%. In fact, in certain markets such as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the share of Greek banks reaches up to 35%. (...) There were 15 acquisitions of Serbian banks in 2004-2007, five of which were made by Greek banks."*⁶⁷ . The crisis led to the great degradation of the role of Greek capital. But there is still hope for the Greek imperialists in the view of a 2021 newspaper commentator: *"Much needs to be done - the Greek economy needs to grow and European Union funds need to be put to good use - before Greece can return to the Balkans as the leading player it was at the beginning of the 21st century, when its banks had some presence in Bulgaria, northern Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Albania,*

Cyprus and even Turkey. For Greece to have a leading geopolitical role in Southeastern Europe, it must also have a strong economic presence and influence in the region."⁶⁸ .

Now we are still missing the countries at the bottom of the hierarchy. Most of them are formally-politically independent, i.e. no longer colonies. In the debate, the question was often raised (and then denied) whether it makes sense to call all the countries of the world imperialist. Does it make sense or not?

First of all, in a certain sense, it is quite possible to state that almost all countries of the world are in the imperialist stage of capitalism. All countries are part of the imperialist world system, i.e. they are subject to the laws of development of this stage of social development and to the expansion and policy of the monopolies.

Nevertheless, it is nonsensical to call countries like the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Afghanistan, Niger or Yemen imperialist states. These countries, which form the lowest layers of the pyramid, do not have their own internationally operating monopolies, they do not have any relevant capital export, the bourgeoisie in these countries consists either of foreign monopolies or small and medium capitalists in the cities.

One could now ask: So where is the limit above which a country is imperialist or below which it is no longer imperialist? But this question makes no sense and cannot be answered. For if we understand imperialism as a stage of development of capitalism with certain characteristics, then we can only examine how extensively (or not) these characteristics are developed in a country.

An important concept in almost all discussions of imperialism since Lenin is the term "dependence". Klara Bina is disturbed by the fact that the KKE speaks of "mutual dependencies" instead of unilateral ones. How can we understand the term dependence?

A useful definition would be: the dependence of one country on another consists in the fact that the development of the relations of production, the productive forces, the social structures and the political superstructure in one country is determined and limited by the economic and political factors of another country.

Under this condition, can we speak of "interdependence" as the KKE does? For example, are the U.S. and Mexico interdependent? The answer is undoubtedly yes: while Mexico's dependence on the U.S. needs no further explanation, Mexican monopolies are also expanding across the northern border. That this dependency relationship is strongly *asymmetrical* in favor of the U.S. does not change the fact that it is a *reciprocal* relationship. Recognizing that the dependency relationship is not a one-way street is an important advancement in the analysis of imperialism. Indeed, it prevents us from misunderstanding weaker imperialist countries as passive recipients of capital exports or political directives from the leading imperialist centers.

Of course, this also means that the further down the pyramid we go, the more one-sided the dependency relationship they have with the countries at the top of the pyramid becomes, to the point of completely one-sided dependency.

What about Lenin's division of the world into the "robbers" on the one hand and the "oppressed nations" on the other?

As should now have become clear, what is decisive about Lenin's statement is not that there is a sharp dichotomy within which all countries can be clearly placed in one category or another. What is decisive for Lenin is the hierarchy, i.e. that there is a relation of oppression on the international level (i.e. not only within a country the contradiction between capital and labor)

and that this relation of oppression is connected with the domination of certain states and their monopoly capital. Lenin, too, was already aware that there are gradations in this hierarchy both in the upper segments (e.g., Russia and Japan below the U.S., England, Germany) and in the middle and lower segments, where he himself already points to "*a whole series of transitional forms of state dependence*." ⁶⁹

The thesis of the "imperialist pyramid" is thus not a deviation from Lenin's theory of imperialism, but merely its application to today's conditions and insofar a further development of the theory, as the aspect of intermediate stages and interdependencies has been better elaborated on the basis of the capitalist developments of the past decades.

A deviation - both from Lenin's method and from reality - is more likely to exist among those who, like Klara or Alexander, want to see imperialism only in the leading countries of the pyramid or even only in the hegemonical leader of the hierarchy.

The occasion and starting point of the discussion is the war waged by Russian imperialism in Ukraine. If the essence of war is a confrontation between imperialist blocs, then from a Leninist perspective it is clear that the working class must not take sides with either, regardless of who the aggressor is. Enough has already been written here on Russia's role today in the world imperialist system. There can be no doubt about its imperialist character. It is significant that Lenin, following an obviously different understanding of imperialism than Klara and Alexander, already assessed Russia as imperialist at the beginning of the 20th century, due to the formation of monopoly and finance capital in this country (see above). Is the formation of capitalist monopolies, the subjugation of the whole society of Russia under the rule of these monopolies, likelier to be more or less advanced today than in Lenin's time, when the vast majority of the population still lived in pre-capitalist conditions in the countryside? Or even than in Japan and Italy at that time?

And if it is more advanced, is it not a complete absurdity to claim that Russia was already imperialist over 100 years ago and is not today?

Klara interjects that Russia is not part of the "club of robbers" that divide the world among themselves. Is that true? At first sight it seems so: Russia is not part of the G7, not part of NATO, it plays economically rather in the second or third row. However, the expulsion from the G8 was a political decision as a result of the growing confrontation. Does the fact that Russia is seen as an adversary by the Western imperialist alliances (EU, NATO, etc.) mean that Russia does not belong to the "club of robbers" in Lenin's sense? In other words, did the fact that the German Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire were shown their limits in their aspirations for great power by Great Britain as the still dominant imperialist power mean that Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire did not play an imperialist role in World War I?

Is the comparison of today's situation with the situation before the First World War as absurd as some comrades say? The differences that logically always exist when comparing two different historical points in time should not obscure what is fundamentally common: We are witnessing the formation of two rival imperialist blocs, with the U.S. and NATO on one side and Russia and China on the other, fighting with each other with increasingly dangerous tension over the division of the world. The fact that Russia (just like some countries of the Western bloc) has fewer opportunities to profit from the economic redivision does not change the fact that it is fighting to upgrade its position in the imperialist world system and, to this end, has allied itself with the imperialist power that is currently fighting for first place in the hierarchy.

7. The Wrong Compass: Where a Misguided Analysis of Imperialism Leads

At the beginning of the article there was the assertion that there is no politically more important question than the analysis of imperialism. What there is, however, are questions of equal importance. One of these questions is that of revolutionary strategy and practice.

It is easy to see that answering the imperialism question has consequences for practice and also for strategy.

Klara herself makes the fatal political consequences of her incorrect analysis more than clear. She demands from the communists a "*support of the military operation against the fascists in Ukraine*", but also in West Asia and Africa - in other words a general partisanship for all wars and military operations of the Russian Federation. However, this is not a full support of Russia, because it includes a "*criticism of the half-heartedness and the tardiness of the operation*". Klara does not want to criticize the killing that is currently taking place (also) by Russian soldiers on the orders of the Kremlin, but rather that it is not taking place with the necessary determination. It would be hard to show more clearly how taking sides with Russian imperialism leads to the abandonment of internationalist positions.

Taking sides in an inter-imperialist confrontation is a mistake on the level of strategy - it is not just a misguided slogan, a falsely elaborated demand, but a massive deviation from the revolutionary strategy of communists. The strategic character of this misdirection also derives from the fact that Russia's relative weakness, as well as its oppositional position to the West, are not short-term temporary features of the imperialist world system, but structural ones. The support for Russian imperialism derived from Russia's position of threat is therefore also long-term and strategic.

The empirically false thesis of the "unipolar world order" is used to advise communists against a revolutionary policy in countries that are enemies of the USA. The "main enemy" is now no longer considered to be the capitalists in their own country, but the supposedly monolithic superpower, the USA. Everything that could weaken the struggle against this newly defined "main enemy" is rejected. This is clearly formulated by Alexander: "*To orient the Russian working class toward the revolutionary overthrow of the government in this concrete situation of existential danger to Russia is also a dangerous undertaking.*" In 1916/17, Russia was not only potentially exposed to an "existential endangerment," but the Russian army was on the verge of military collapse in the largest war in history up to that time - As we know, in this situation the Bolsheviks did not propagate a truce with the tsar or the Provisional Government, but intensified the struggle for its revolutionary overthrow. Had they not undertaken the October Revolution, this "dangerous undertaking," we could not draw on the experiences of building a socialist society over seven decades. The fact that conditions for using imperialist war to seize power existed then, and don't today in most countries due to the weakness of our movement is irrelevant to the argument. For the greatest "danger" of external imperialist intervention or of the exploitation of the internal class struggle by imperialist forces exists precisely at the moment that a bourgeois regime is destabilized by a revolutionary attempt to overthrow it. Alexander's truce argument would therefore apply even moreso in a situation like November 1917. Of course, on the other hand, it is also very true that communists must always ask themselves how they can prevent their struggle against the state or justified popular protests in general from being harnessed and diverted by bourgeois forces (whether domestic or foreign) for their own purposes. But this cannot lead to abandoning the objective of revolutionary overthrow.

The orientation toward a truce with the ruling class (whether with one's own or a foreign one) means the end of the workers movement as an independent political factor which stands up

for the working class's interests and opposes all imperialist aspirations. It either makes the labor movement an accomplice of the imperialist murderers of its own government, as was the case with the SPD in 1914; or it places it objectively in the service of a foreign power, thus unnecessarily making it an even greater target of repression and discrediting it among the people. In both cases, the working-class movement becomes incapable of waging the struggle for the interests of the working class, namely, against imperialist war, for friendship among nations. And even in "peaceful" times, i.e., in the breaths of fresh air between war conflicts, this orientation is disastrous: in consequence, it orients the working class in Russia and other countries to a strategy in which the "defense of the fatherland" and against the external threat must come first, before socialism can be put on the agenda. But since the threat is permanent because of the inter-imperialist antagonisms, socialism is thus postponed until Judgement Day.

The rejection of the "world-system approach" (which is a misleading designation, since the position of the KKE has nothing to do with the well-known world-system theory) is thus a direct attack on our Programmatic Theses. If this criticism were correct, it would mean that we had taken the completely wrong direction in terms of content when we adopted the Programmatic Theses. Indeed, the question would then arise whether it was right to separate from the DKP at all, as the DKP would then have apparently been right on crucial points and we wrong. As has been shown, however, it is the other way around: we were right in our conception of imperialism and the DKP was or is wrong.

Stormy times lie ahead for the world. The inter-imperialist rivalries will not cool down permanently, but will escalate again and again, carrying with them the constant danger of major armed conflicts. The question of the correct position on these confrontations is one of the most important fundamental questions. If communists cannot answer it, or can only answer it grossly incorrect, the question arises as to what the working class needs them for.

Lenin answered this question correctly with regard to the First World War: No partisanship for one side of the imperialist slaughter. Partisanship for the working class of all countries and struggle against its own ruling class until its overthrow and the establishment of socialism.

We have answered this question in exactly the same way in the Programmatic Theses. Four years after they were adopted, the programmatic theses are still a very good basis. The answers they give us to the challenges we face are clear and correct. A change in the analysis of imperialism in the Programmatic Theses is therefore not necessary, and if it is, it should be a matter of further developing and deepening our correct approach and not of falling behind insights already gained.

Armed with the answers of the Programmatic Theses, the KO should enter the coming struggles in the spirit of internationalism and a true anti-imperialism, one which does not equate imperialism with the USA and the "West" - alongside the revolutionary wing of the world communist movement and not against it - for the creation of a communist party in Germany worthy of the name!

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- ³ Alexander Kiknadze: On Russia's Defensive Strike Against NATO, 10.4.2022, online: <https://kommunistische.org/diskussion-imperialismus/zum-defensivschlag-russlands-gegen-die-nato/>
- ⁴ Vladimir I. Lenin: Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Capitalism, LW 22, p. 244.
- ⁵ A negative value here means that more disinvestment than investment has taken place abroad, i.e. a net withdrawal of investment.
- ⁶ Alexander Bulatov 2017: Offshore orientation of Russian Federation FDI, Transnational Corporations, Vol 24, No. 2, p. 80.
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- ¹³ Loren Thompson, "US Growing Dependent on Russia for Satellite Propulsion Systems," Forbes, 9/14/2018.
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- ¹⁵ Ruslan Dzarasov 2014: The Conundrum of Russian Capitalism, Pluto Press: London, p. 10f.
- ¹⁶ Lenin, LW 22, p. 255.
- ¹⁷ Bulatov 2017, p. 84.
- ¹⁸ After Bulatov 2017, p. 76.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 77ff.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 78
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 84f
- ²² Karl Liuhto & Peeter Vahtra 2007: Foreign operations of Russia's largest industrial corporations, Transnational Corporations, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 118.
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⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 270f.

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⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 236.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 263.

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⁶⁸ Tom Ellis: Greek banks in the Balkans, Kathimerini (English version), 6.7.2021.

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