

# FORUM



# American imperialism? “The current runs swiftly”

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*Abstract:* This essay is concerned with where the current of global political and economic events runs. It addresses this concern by erecting an argument in three stages. First, a string being theory (SBT) is outlined. Second, this theory is used to formulate an SBT approach to imperialism, one that might be imagined as Lenin by alternative (theoretical) means, emphasizing the role of violent force. The ‘seven deadly sirens’—generalizations that predict the exercise of violent force under different conditions in imperial systems—are introduced. Third, certain post-1945 US government uses of violence are analyzed in terms of their fit with the seven sirens’ predictions. Oil depletion is considered as contributing to systemic crisis in capital accumulation, and its role in Gulf War II is explored. It is concluded that US government violence is consistent with the sirens’ predictions. The essay terminates with speculation about where the current runs.

*Keywords:* imperialism, post–World War II US military affairs, power, string being theory, war

“Civilization ... the action or process of civilizing or being civilized, a developed or advanced state of human society” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

“The brown current runs swiftly out of the heart of darkness, bearing us down towards ...” (Joseph Conrad, *The heart of darkness*).

People like to know how stories end. Conrad’s *The heart of darkness* has Marlow tell the story of Kurtz to some friends. Marlow has been around. He knows civilization and its dark places. So he knows the score, and his good buddies—the director of companies, the lawyer, and the accountant—want to know it too. Marlow’s tale tells of where the ‘current’ is taking ‘us’. This essay continues Conrad’s narrative by other, theoretical means.<sup>1</sup>

Imperialism made empires, and empires were civilizations. Civilizations, as the first above

quotation specifies, were ‘advanced’ or ‘developed’. However, there has been another view. Since the end of the nineteenth century, certain Marxists insisted that the fate of civilization was part and parcel of the advance of imperial states, organizations gratifying the desires of the dominating classes. However, from this standpoint, in the third quarter of the twentieth century things began to look up for civilization.

Empires announced that they were giving up the great game, and declared that their domi-

nated were now postdominated. Jubilant Western intellectuals proclaimed that it was *After imperialism* (Brown 1963). Some ungrateful African intellectuals, out in the postcolonies, insisted that the situation was not so different, and they grumbled about a neo-imperial world (Nkrumah 1966). Leftists agreed (Amin 1977; Emmanuel 1972; Galtung 1971; Magdoff 1969). But, by 1990, even some lefties had declared imperialism dead (Hardt and Negri 2000; for a critique of this position, see Reyna 2002a). Everybody took a deep breath. The fate of civilization would not be settled by imperialism. Then on a pleasant early fall morning, out of a clear blue sky, came the attack on the World Trade Center, followed by the US assault on Afghanistan, followed by Gulf War II. Since that time, as the title of one article makes clear, everybody has been “reinventing imperialism in the wake of September 11” (Bowden 2002).

This essay argues that the fate of civilization answers to logics of imperialism. However, a new ‘Lenin by other means’ view of imperialism is proposed, which, emphasizing violence, comes from the standpoint of a string being theory (SBT). Such theory regards imperial structures as those weaving stately strings of violent force that help to connect dominated to their dominators. The argument is made in three sections. Rudiments of SBT are presented in the first. Then, in the second section, imperialism is rethought in terms of this theory. The third section applies this view of imperialism to the US since 1945, seeking an explanation of why President Bush in 2003 attacked Iraq in a fiery war of ‘shock and awe’. Finally, the analysis’ conclusion, offers an assessment of where the current runs.

## Eight generalizations

SBT rests upon an ontological claim. Social reality is a monism composed of two spaces: interior space (I space), structures of the brain that perform the functions of the mind, and exterior space (E space), different social forms. This is a monism because brains are in persons and persons are in social forms. SBT explains what

happens in this monism. Eight generalizations help in this explanation. Readers desiring fuller explication of these should consult Reyna (2001, 2002b, 2003).

### *Strings, logics, forces, and powers*

Events happen. An event is an “outcome ... of anything” (Random House Dictionary 1967: 494).

A social event involves people. A,

(1) ‘string’ is direct observation at low levels of abstraction and high levels of particularity of social events as they occur over time.

Logics are abstract and general representations of strings. Hence,

(2) ‘logics’ are statements high in generality of abstract classes of strings.

Logics are inferred from strings. They can be identified spatio-temporally and in terms of their powers. ExxonMobil may be said to have the world on a string of gasoline sales if it sells a trillion dollars of gasoline globally in 2002 to make a two hundred million dollar profit, and, then, uses some of that income to sell 1.2 trillion dollars of gasoline the next year to make even more profit. This string exhibits a logic whose power is capital accumulation and whose spatio-temporal order is represented by Marx’s famous:  $M > C > M$ .

This brings us to the notion of ‘possibilities’, alternative strings of the same logic. The logic of capital accumulation includes Chadian market women and ExxonMobil. The former is a petty capitalist and the latter a multinational possibility of the logic of capital accumulation.

Some logics are simple; others are complex. The ‘length’ of a string refers to the number of events in it. ‘Knotting’ is the connection of one string with another. Simple logics have few, short strings, with little knotting. For example, the practice of dentistry is a relatively simple logic, one of the powers of which is dental extraction. Strings knotted in particular manners are ‘webs’.

Ultimately, it will be argued that imperialism is an exceptionally complex web of strings from which certain logics are inferred.

Strings occur in 'fields', the spaces and times in which human social forms and the strings that they produce operate. Stringing events together in fields are different groups. Every enduring group has its strings. The stringing together of events by groups is a matter of force and power. This dyad is understood in a Hobbesian manner in SBT, which means that the two are analyzed as the operation of causation in the fields of social life. Specifically,

(3) 'force' is capacities immanent in social forms that allow them to be antecedent events that cause subsequent ones.

Force so understood is to be distinguished from one of its manifestations, violence. Force is any ability to cause something. Violence is a particular force. Power is what causes do, which is to have particular effects. Hence,

(4) 'power' is the subsequent outcomes of force in social events.

Violence is a particular force. Power is what causes do, which is to have effects. In such a standpoint, no force, no causes, and, if no causes, there can be no effects or powers. Force and power make events happen; without them, there is no history.

### *Making and connecting events*

How is it that force has the power to make events and, then, to make connections between events, thereby making strings? This question will be answered in two steps. First, it will be explained how force and power create events and, second, how they connect events. A 'resource' is something material, including the actors themselves, which changes over space and time to get something done. There are four important resources: instruments, actors, culture, and authority. Instruments are tools, inanimate things that people use to make things happen. Oil is an instrument

of special importance in current fields. Actors are people who perform practical or discursive action. 'Practical' action is the use of the body, often with tools, to get something done. 'Discursive' action is the use of the body to speak or write.

The final two resources choreograph the two former resources. 'Culture', learned and shared information, tells people what is and what to do about it. 'Cultural choreography' specifies what the resources are to be employed by groups, how they will be utilized, and in what temporal sequence. 'Perceptual' culture identifies what is to be used when the events of strings are to occur. 'Procedural' culture identifies how and in what temporal order resources are to be used.

'Authority' is formally sanctioned rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis instruments, actions, and cultural information. A 'sanctioned' resource is one that has other resources added to it to augment the force of which it is a component. A 'formally' sanctioned resource is one made explicit by written laws or policies that have been formulated by some procedure (a vote or administrative decision). So authoritative resources are culture with clubs of formal sanctions.

Utilization of resources is an 'exercise of force'. Such exercises might be anything that has an outcome. Remember an event is "an outcome ... of anything". In SBT 'anything' is an exercise of force that has an 'outcome', causes power. Thus, events are structures with two parts. The first part is its force; the second part is the power caused by the exercise of its force. This is a 'force/power' dyad. Having grasped how events are constituted, it is time to consider how force has the power to connect events. A notion of reflexivity is now introduced.

Reflexivity bonds events. It is particular brain-produced cognitive skills of actors that allow them to represent in various neural networks past events to formulate plans for future ones. Specifically, actors observe antecedent events and, on the basis of their culture and/or their authority, choreograph resources to make subsequent events. Hence,

(5) 'reflexivity' is the neurological processes of actors whereby they observe antecedent events

to select actions based upon their desires that choreograph force resources to make subsequent events.

The notion of desire needs to be presented. Simply stated, ‘desire’ is the information and emotions of procedural culture and/or authority stored in the neural networks of actors’ brains. Desire tells you how you should feel about an antecedent event and what to do about it, with it being recognized that you feel good about doing what your culture and authority intends you to do, and bad about doing what is culturally or authoritatively taboo. *Délires* are the desires of actors who have authority over large stores of force resources. They have the authority to guide logics and their possibilities. Humans are driven by quirky desire and *délire*.

Private desires and *délires* are those stored in I space in the actors’ brain. Public desires and *délires* are procedural culture and/or authority, plus emotions associated with these, which are outside of actors; they are in E space when expressed verbally or in written texts. Each position in each institution is likely to have its own public desires and *délires*, which occupants of the position internalize. Private desires and *délires* result from the imbedding of public ones in neural tissues. Readers should recognize that the exact nature of the neurological processes involved in reflexivity is debated. It is time to consider different types of force, their relative strengths, and domination.

### *Varieties and strengths of force in fields of domination*

Varieties of forces can be distinguished in terms of the resource combinations they exercise to achieve their powers. The first of these is ‘political force’, which results from exercises of resources authorized by governmental institutions. Political force has greater powers if it is sanctioned by violent force. ‘Violent force’ results from exercise of resources termed the means of destruction—instruments, actors, cultures, and authorities that destroy bodies. Violent force causes powers because people strongly

desire to avoid such force. ‘Economic force’ is a third type of force, and is exercise of resources using the factors of production and/or distribution of goods and services. ‘Cultural force’ is a fourth force type, and is the exercise of the force of the means of production and distribution of cultural information. It causes power because it makes public desires and *délires* private. Institutions that specialize in these different forces may be said to be ‘constellations’. Institutions that exercise force in a roughly similar way in a constellation are said to be a ‘sector’. Thus, one can speak of the religious and educational sectors of the cultural constellation. ‘Trumping’ is the ability of one force to be stronger than another, and an SBT generalization is:

(6) *ceteris paribus*, violent force trumps political, economic, and cultural force.

Because violent force normally trumps other force, there is a tendency to change other forces into it. Changing one thing into another is what alchemists aimed at when they did their ‘transmuting’, and so this term will be given to the transformation of one force into another. Successful states are good at transmuting economic into violent force. They also are adept at domination. It is time to consider this topic.

‘Domination’ involves strings where one category of actors in the groups of fields has the power, because of previously accumulated force, to permanently dominate another category of actors. ‘Dominate’ here means that A has power over B so that B produces F for A, with it being understood that A and B refer to categories of actors, that F refers to force resources, and that A can and B cannot accumulate much F. Thus conceptualized, logics of domination produce and reproduce ‘relations of domination’—structures where one category of powerful ‘dominators’ accumulate force at a particular rate, while another category of actors, the ‘dominated’, act to make that force. States have been the most powerful modes of domination in history. Further, two logics of domination operate in contemporary states. In the private sector, the key logic is one of economic force accumulation; in the public

sector, it is violent force accumulation. This suggests a further generalization of SBT:

(7) the greater the economic force accumulation, the greater the ability to transmute economic into violent force, with the greater the power to trump all other forces and to dominate, gratifying the *délires* of the powerful.

Systemic crises happen when structures become dysfunctional. This suggests a generalization concerning the relationship between systemic crisis and violence in structures of domination:

(8) when logics of economic force accumulation are threatened, and non-violent exercises of force to respond to these threats appear unworkable, then the *délires* of the powerful will initiate logics of violent force to restore economic accumulation.

It is time to develop an SBT approach to empires and imperialism. The argument doing this will be that of Lenin by other (theoretical) means.

### Lenin by other (theoretical) means

“[T]his summary proves that imperialist wars are absolutely inevitable under such an economic system” (Lenin, preface to the French and German editions, *Imperialism* 1977).

*Imperialism* was a busy document: racing from one textual goal to another—trying to be original scholarship and a ‘popular’ advertisement for the political position implied by the scholarship. Interpretations of *Imperialism* tend to be economic because Lenin himself defined imperialism as ‘the monopoly stage of capitalism’, a stage exhibiting five attributes: firstly, “concentration of production into monopolies”; secondly, emergence of “finance capital”; thirdly, “export of capital”; fourthly, “formation of international monopolists capitalist associations which claim the whole world among themselves”; and finally, “territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers” (1977: 700). Lenin

was aware of his economic emphasis, explaining to readers in the Prefaces to *Imperialism* that he did “not” treat “non-economic aspects of imperialism” because “observations of politics” were made in “allegorical language”, owing to “censorship” (ibid.: 642). So *Imperialism* was a political economy sans politics. The SBT view of imperialism formulated below, adds some bruising politics.

This is possible because Lenin’s text contains a fragmentary argument linking the economics of imperialism with a violent politics. The linkage is stated in the quotation which began this section. Here Lenin was forewarning readers what his position ‘proves’. Proven was that wars were ‘absolutely inevitable’ under such an economic system. Of course, the economic system he was referring to was ‘monopoly capitalism’ (ibid.: 636). Thus, the view of imperialism as monopoly capitalism is but one part of a larger theoretical assertion: wars are ‘absolutely inevitable’ under monopoly capitalism. Let us term this generalization that of the ‘imperialism/war nexus’. A concern is whether Lenin convincingly theoretically and/or empirically demonstrated this inevitability.

Let us begin with the empirical warrant. *Imperialism* contained no systematic evidence from a sample of wars fought between monopoly capitalist states. Additionally, no systematic evidence was adduced showing that monopoly capitalism in some way caused wars. Thus, the imperialism/war nexus appears at risk empirically. On the other hand, hovering over the entire position was a ‘thousand pound gorilla’ in US slang: anything that is extremely important. World War I appears to be just such a pongid, marching empirically arm in arm with Lenin. Unsurprisingly, certain commentators have sought to torpedo the assertion that the occurrence of World War I supports Lenin’s position (see Brewer 1991). However, monopolies, finance capital, and overseas capital investment all did emerge among the warring states prior to World War I. So, even if Lenin did not strongly document his version of an imperialism/war nexus, the position remains afloat due to the comradely assistance of the thousand pound gorilla.

Lenin's theoretical justification of his position is based upon two propositions. The first might be called a 'competition thesis'. Both Hilferding (1981) and Luxemburg (1968) had emphasized that imperialism involved increasing competition. Lenin takes up this theme stating that "finance capital added to the struggle for the sources of raw materials, for the export of capital, for spheres of influence" (1977: 727). 'Struggle' is Lenin's term for competition, which "when the whole world had been divided up", produced a situation where "there was inevitably ushered in the era of monopoly possession of colonies and, consequently, of particularly intense struggle" (ibid.: 727). The phrase 'particularly intense struggle' may be an example of Lenin's 'extreme caution' vis-à-vis the censor. So it is not entirely clear what Lenin meant in the preceding quotation. One interpretation might be that finance capital intensifies competition between capitalist states so much that events become 'particularly intense', i.e., violent. But the theoretical problem it poses is that Lenin needs to explain why intensifying competition must 'inevitably' lead to intracapitalist state war. This explanation is simply lacking in *Imperialism*.

The second of Lenin's theoretical theses might be termed that of 'unequal development'. Everybody, Marxists and non-Marxists, knew that capitalism developed at unequal rates among states. Lenin believed this had implications for war. He made his case by asserting how different capitalist states might divide their areas of imperial influence:

"[T]he only conceivable basis under capitalism for the division of spheres of influence ... is a calculation of the strength of those participating, their general economic, financial, and military strength, etc. And the strength of these participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for even development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries is impossible under capitalism" (Lenin 1977: 723-4).

Having made this assertion, Lenin concluded that "alliances ... are inevitably nothing more

than a 'truce' in periods between wars" (ibid.: 724). Lenin appears to be proposing a syllogism:

1. Unequal development occurs under monopoly capitalism.
2. Therefore, wars inevitably occur under such capitalism.

This syllogistic dog just does not hunt: missing is a proposition, or a number of propositions, that account for the 'therefore'. Why is it that unequal development inevitably leads to wars? Lenin has no answer to this question. So the 'unequal development thesis' does not theoretically account for the inevitability of war under imperialism. This means that neither the competition nor the unequal development theses are especially compelling. It does not mean that it is impossible to formulate theory explaining the imperialism/war nexus. This justifies an SBT account of why imperialism and war are interrelated, which is—if you will—arguing Lenin by other (theoretical) means. Let us begin this argument first by defining empires and imperialism, next by specifying different properties of different sorts of empires, and finally by introducing the seven deadly sirens—generalizations alerting readers to the onset of imperial violence.

### *Empires and their logics*

The notion of empire is a particular way of conceptualizing the state in terms of the distribution of economic force. Empires are a particular organization of state structures of domination where there is a flow of economic force from the dominated to the dominators. However, insistence that all states were, and are, empires is so broad that it conflates Luxemburg with nineteenth-century Great Britain.

'Victoria's Secret'<sup>2</sup>—in the sense of the foundational garments of empire—is what distinguishes Luxemburg from the Queen's UK. This garment is 'imperium', and is the space where dominators in one state extract economic force from the dominated in places other than the dominator's state. In imperiums, 'core' states are places where the dominators live and their institutions are involved



in strings of events that bring in economic force. 'Peripheral' places may include non-state or state areas. The hinterland of Canada during the seventeenth century was a non-state periphery of the French empire. The Dominion of Canada was a state periphery of the nineteenth-century British empire. Victoria's Secret, her imperium, sucked economic force from a periphery.

'Imperialism' in this optic is a system of structures that accumulate economic force. Three logics make such a system work (see table 1). First, there are logics of 'economic force accumulation' (Log ea). Capitalist accumulation (Log cap a), discussed in the previous section, is of course the most important such logic in modern empires. However, there needs to be a second sort of logic that sets up the lingerie store initially or allows it to be maintained after some alteration to it. 'Logics of economic force constitution or reconstitution' (Log c or rec) are any logic operating to create or reconstitute economic force flows. There are two major types of non-violent or violent Log c or rec. 'Non-violent logics of economic force constitution or reconstitution' (NV Log c or rec) are any logic operating to create or reconstitute existing economic force accumulation that does not utilize strings of violent events. A web of events knotting strings incorporating a firm, finding workers and a plant, etc. are all parts of a NV Log c. 'Violent logics of economic force constitution or reconstitution' (V Log c or rec) are any logic operating to create or reconstitute existing economic force accumulation that does utilize strings of violent events.

Additionally, if empires are going to exercise violent force to constitute and reconstitute economic accumulation, they need to transmute

economic force resources into their violent counterparts. In modern states such transmutation involves fiscal institutions which take economic resources out of institutions in the economic constellation and move them to the political constellation, where the military sector transforms them from economic to violent resources (by using taxes to buy weapons and pay soldiers). 'Logics of transmutation' (Log trans) are any logic that turns one force resource into another. Logics of the transmutation of economic into violent force (Log trans e→v) have been especially important in empires in the constitution and reconstitution of imperiums.

It is possible now to offer a formal definition of 'empires' as state structures of domination occupying fields with imperiums exhibiting logics of economic force accumulation, economic force constitution and reconstitution, as well as those of the transmutation of economic into violent force. Let us explore imperial differences.

### *Imperial difference*

These differences include those between premodern and modern empires and organizations of imperial fields, especially of formal and informal empires. Let us begin with the premodern/modern distinction.

*Premodern and modern imperialism:* premodern imperialism was found in empires where the economic constellations were dominated by food producers. Log ea involved fiscal accumulation that involved, more or less, direct extraction from agrarian producers of their economic force resources, usually labor or agricultural products, by government officials

**TABLE 1** Logics and their abbreviations

Log ea	Logic(s) of economic force accumulation
Log cap a	Logic(s) of capital accumulation
Log c or rec	Logic(s) of economic force constitution or reconstitution
NV Log c or rec	Non-violent logic(s) of force constitution or reconstitution
VLog c or rec	Violent logic(s) of force constitution or reconstitution
Log trans	Logic(s) of transmutation
Logtrans e→v	Logics of transformation of economic into violent force

who usually were military officials. The dominators were Schumpeter's (1951) military aristocracy and the dominated were food producers in these relations of domination. Modern logics of imperialism operate in states where the institutions in economic constellations have differentiated from those in governmental constellations. What developed in Western European economic constellations were increasingly capitalist institutions—first in the sector of commerce, followed by that of manufacturing—so that modern imperialism is distinguished by capitalist economic constellations, where the key logic is Log cap a.

Modern imperialism utilizes logics of violent force by officials in the governmental constellation to assist capitalists in the economic constellations to execute logics of capital accumulation. This means that in states with modern imperialism there is a cross-constellational transmutation of force. First, force flows to capitalist institutions, next it flows on to government ones, so there are two classes of dominators—capitalists and officials. It further means that in the growth phase of such empires there are dual logics of accumulation: capitalists accumulate economic force, especially capital. Officials accumulate tax revenues that they can transmute into violent force. Violent force has been used in modern imperialism to help capitalists in a state, or coalition of states, to help them acquire economic force resources, including, but not restricted to, cheap labor, scarce, strategic raw materials, access to markets, and access to financial and/or manufacturing opportunities. Thus, the dual logics of accumulation work so that the exercise of violent force (in the political constellation) helps accumulate economic force (in the economic constellation) and, then, accumulated economic force, through the fiscal system, helps to accumulate violent force (in the political constellation).

*Modern imperial fields:* there has been lively debate as to whether global fields are better conceptualized as world systems, hegemonies, or empires. I am for imperial fields because I concur with the conservative economic historian Ferguson (2003) that hegemonic systems are imperial ones. However, there is a need for a notion of hegemony, as will be seen below.

Modern imperial systems are 'fluid' in the sense that component empires are continually waxing and waning in force and power. So that at any point in time there may be 'multipolar' fields, where there are a number of component empires, roughly equal in power: bipolar fields, dominated by two empires, roughly equal in power, and hegemonic fields, where one empire is clearly the most powerful. Usually, this involves a mutual assistance with regard to each particular empire's logics of capitalist accumulation. Less powerful empires are said to be 'subordinate'; more powerful ones are 'superordinate'. Imperial systems are flexible because their component states are continually adapting their logical possibilities by acquiring different policies with different authorizations to better accumulate force. Thus, modern imperial fields are dynamic places, empires within empires, fluidly and flexibly going about domination. Further, there are formal and informal empires in these fields.

*Formal and informal imperialism:* modern empires, like that of England, could be 'informal' (Gallagher and Robinson 1953). 'Formal' imperialism occurs where, as a result of Log c or rec, usually VLog c or rec, there is explicit addition of regions to an empire's periphery. Formal here means that additions follow authorized legal and political processes that make a region into an administrative unit (i.e., a colony) that is part of the empire. 'Informal' imperialism occurs where, as a result of Log c or rec in an area, powers are established over the populations and the resources there that make possible economic force accumulation.

Peripheral spaces in formal empires can be called 'colonies'. Such spaces in informal empires have often recently been called 'satellite' or 'client' states. Some clients have empires. Thus, from 1945 onward the French have been (reluctantly) part of the US empire; however, they have been a client with their own declining formal and fluctuating informal empire. The political and economic actors who operate the logics of the core state in the colony, usually are from the core state, and may be called 'colonial officials'. The actors who operate these same logics in a client state may be said to be 'compradors',

actors from the periphery in service of the core, to implement domination logics within the satellites. Core governmental constellations will go to considerable lengths to maintain 'good' and eliminate 'bad' compradors.

Informal imperialism allows the core state to exercise force in a region when power appears needed. Formal imperialism commits a core state to permanently maintaining power. This includes security, administration, health, and education expenses. Core states in informal imperialisms avoid these costs. However, informal empires do have some costs that are largely absent in their formal counterparts. These are the expenses of maintaining 'good' client states and eliminating 'bad' ones. A formal empire can rely on its colonial administration to impose its power. Such an administration is lacking in an informal empire. So if those in the periphery will not do what you want them to do, then the recourse is to trump them with violent force, suggesting that informal empires rely considerably upon violent force to have power over their clients. So they must specialize in V Log c and rec, which means that core states in informal empires tend to be militaristic. Further, when the need for violent force increases the economies of informal empire evaporate. The concept of 'imperial overreach' was introduced by Paul Kennedy (1989) to denote situations where expenses of empire exceeded the ability of the empire to meet the costs. Because many of the costs of informal empire are military ones, and because such costs can be exceptionally high due to the expense of violent force, it is plausible that informal empires spike toward imperial overreach more often than their formal counterparts. Formal imperialism is more 'visible' in the sense that the various elements of domination are displayed publicly. There are the imperial administrators, the capitalists or their compradors, and the police, military, and judges, all privileged and dominating. This affects the desires of the dominated. Many loath their dominators and learn from them how to revolt.

Informal empire became more technologically feasible in the twentieth century in part because of a 'space-time compression' (Harvey 1988). The ability of governments to communicate instantly,

to know what was happening quickly, and to move various forms of economic and/or violent force rapidly to areas of the world where they had an interest was a space-time compression. This space-time compression technology made informal empires the preferred sort because they were, and are, more nearly invisible: hence, less susceptible to rebellion. It is time to suggest when there is likely to be violence in the stately fields of empire. This involves getting *délire-ious*

### *Getting délire-ious: the seven deadly sirens of imperial violence?*

What follows is not a complete account of the violences in imperial fields, but only of those provoked by powerful dominators. I call them the seven theoretical sirens—generalizations that set racing the dominators' violent *délires* driving them and others to perish on the rocks of war. The seven sirens might be thought of as a family of generalizations with a God Father Law supported by six thuggish generalization offspring. The God Father is the underlying reason why there is dominator organized violence in empires. The offspring are the different conditions when dominators are likely to be *délire-ious* about doing violence.

Empires are about the accumulation of economic force in imperiums. We already have generalization 8 from SBT which explains what happens when such accumulation is threatened, expressed in the terminology just developed as:

(1) When Logs ea are threatened, and NV Logs c or rec response to these threats appear unworkable, then the *délires* of the dominators will initiate V Logs c or rec to have the power of causing Logs ea.

This is the God Father Law: sometimes if you want empire you have to make war. Let us explore more precisely the *délires* of dominators. Dominators' desire for violent logics depends upon authorities whose procedures serve as *délires* motivating the exercises of violent force to constitute or reconstitute imperiums. The second siren, then, is:

(2) The exercise of violence in V Log c or rec is dependent on the existence of public *délire*s that come with intentional plans and emotional support for constituting or reconstituting imperiums.

Generally speaking, if non-violent logics of constitution or reconstitution are effective and not especially costly, then these logics are likely to prevail. However, if such logics for any reason are not practical, then it is likely that non-violent logics will be utilized. Under these conditions, dominators' desire for violence in imperialism is positively related to how much economic force it can yield. 'How much' can be imagined in terms of the ratio of how much violent force has to be exercised to accumulate how much economic force. This means that the exercise of violence in imperialism has its 'costs'. It also means, the exercise of violence in imperialism has its 'benefits': the amount of economic force acquired as a result of the exercise of a certain amount of violent force, with it accepted that when the amounts of violent force exercised to produce a particular amount of economic force decrease, then the benefits to imperialism are said to rise. The preceding implies two generalizations.

(3) The exercise of violence in V Log c or rec is less a *délire* for dominators when the costs of exercising violent force are high and/or the economic force received by the violence is low.

This situation prevailed for Great Britain vis-à-vis India in the late 1940s. India demanded independence. India was a huge, powerful colony. This meant that the costs of exercising violent force to hold India would be very steep. British dominators were not delirious about meeting such costs.

(4) The exercise of violence in V Log c or rec is more a *délire* for dominators when the cost of exercising violent force is low and/or the economic force added by the violence is high.

This situation generally prevailed in the early modern period for the Iberian states. Then a small bit of fighting could win for lucky conquistadores large chunks of the New World. However,

situations may arise that threaten the existence of imperial systems. If violent force appears to have the power of relieving these situations and, thus, saving the entire imperial project, then, the exercise of a violent logic is predicted. This suggests another generalization:

(5) The exercise of violence in V Log c or rec is an urgent *délire* for the powerful, regardless of cost/benefit proportions, when an imperial system is in crisis.

The preceding poses the question, what is likely in capitalist states to produce systemic crisis? This leads us to Marx. Systemic crisis was largely in Marx's view the result of a capital accumulation, whose contradictions led to a declining rate of profit that, in SBT terms, raised in powerful capitalists the *délire* to continually immiserate labor, driving the system to its limits and crisis. However, also discussed in *Kapital*, but not especially emphasized, was what happened to raw materials during capital accumulation. In SBT terms, raw materials are instances of the force resource, instruments. *Kapital* (volume one) had a section on 'Large scale industry and agriculture'. Here a more ecological Marx analyzed environmental effects of capitalism and concluded that "[c]apitalist production" over time "disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth", in a way that is "simultaneously undermining of the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker" (Marx 1976: 637–8; see Foster 1999). 'Metabolic interaction' is Marx's term for people/land relations: capitalist production, resulting in capital accumulation, 'disturbs' by 'undermining' both the soil and the worker, i.e., raw materials and labor. Now it is a real crisis for the farmer when the soil is so disturbed that crop cultivation is no longer possible. The preceding suggests a generalization that accounts for what is likely to produce systemic crisis:

(6) Capital accumulation increasingly disturbs people/land relations by decreasing supply of finite raw materials, thereby threatening Log cap a and producing systemic crisis.

Generalization 6 explains what produces systemic crisis, logics of capital accumulation. Generalization 5 explains what systemic crisis produces (violent logics). Thus, if the two generalizations are combined, a more complete account of the occurrence of violence in imperial systems is possible. This account asserts:

(7) As capitalist accumulation increases, finite raw material supply decreases, driving production toward systemic crisis, engorging the *délires* among dominators for violent logics, and war.

In sum, the first, God Father generalization lays down the overarching logic: violence perpetrated by dominators occurs to start, or restart, what empires do, which is accumulate economic force. The remaining six generalizations account for when this logic will be enacted. Together the seven sirens explain why and when there is an imperialism/war nexus and, thus, are Lenin by other (theoretical) means. Let us seek their empirical warrant among the webs of knotted strings of US post-World War II foreign affairs.

### The fist

Thomas Friedman, a *New York Times* editorialist, revealed to readers at the end of the twentieth century that capitalism works with a 'hidden fist'. 'Fist' is the journalist's term for violent force. Actually, much of the fist is not so hidden. According to the Defense Department's annual 'Base Structure Report' for 2003 the Pentagon owns or rents 702 overseas bases in 130 countries, with another 6,000 bases in the US and its territories. I explore the 'fist' to establish, whether, or not, its use is consistent with what the seven sirens predict, and begin this analysis by specifying certain characteristics of the post-World War II global field.

Since World War II there has been a single global, imperial field, which has had two variants. Roughly between 1945 and 1990 the field was bipolar, divided between US and Soviet empires. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the US assumed the role of hegemon in a field

of hegemonic empire. Both the US and Soviet empires were, and are, informal, thus explaining the vast spread of US military bases. The US empire has included subordinate empires, such as parts of Western Europe and Asia. Thinkers who conceptualize the US purely in hegemonic terms tend to emphasize the economic benefits of subordinates to their superordinate. It is certainly true that Japan, Germany, and others in the US empire have economically benefited from participation in the empire (see Johnson 2000). However, the powerful in the US empire know their *délires*. Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Advisor, once famously let slip: "[T]he objective of the US should be to maintain our vassal states in a state of dependency" (in Mertens 2003: 4). Military alliances (e.g., NATO, the US-Japan Defense Pact) and economic, monetary, fiscal institutions and policies (including US multinationals, IMF, World Bank, GATT, WTO) reinforce the US's superordinate position among its 'vassals' (Bacevitch 2002; Hudson 2003). So in Gulf War II, the English 'poodle' fought in support of US *délires*. Let us turn to the state of the economy in this imperial field.

During the post-World War II period there have been two patterns of economic growth. From 1945 through 1972, there was a "rate of expansion of the capitalist world economy" that was "exceptional by historical standards" (Arrighi 2000: 298). This was especially true in the advanced capitalist states of the US empire where "GDP and GDP per head grew almost twice as fast as any period since 1820" (Glyn et al. 1991: 42). However, since that time world economic growth has been more problematic. There has been growth but, especially in the advanced capitalist states of the US empire, it has been slower than in the previous period. The US's economic position has noticeably deteriorated (cf. Duboff 2003: 2). Given the preceding, it makes sense to investigate the relevance of the seven sirens for explaining post-1945 US government violence during two periods, that of competition between the US and Soviet empires and that after the competition, during the economically worse times.

### *Containment and rollback: 1945–90*

Following 1945, a web of strings of diplomatic and military events authored by the Soviet Union led to the Soviet empire's rapid growth. Eastern Europe and China had all become communist by 1950. At that time much of the rest of the world, especially the developing world, appeared to be moving in the same direction. Otherwise put: capitalist accumulation was at risk due to the loss of territory in which capitalism was permitted. This meant—because the logic of capitalist accumulation was threatened by Soviet expansion—that the condition existed for the testing of the God Father Law: did war occur to address this threat? Let us begin by noting whether public *délires* were created for the reconstitution of imperium, evidence consistent with siren two.

Public *délires* concerning US military doctrine took shape in the 1940s based upon perception of rapid Soviet empire growth. Harry Truman, President at the time, complained that he was “[t]ired of babysitting the Soviets who understand only the strong fist” (in Kreis 2000: 1). The US government would develop ‘the strong fist’ in a 1950 policy paper called National Security Council 68 (NSC-68). The NSC was authorized by Congress in 1947 to formulate presidential security policy in the form of reports. Some NSC reports are specific. NSC-4 in 1947 authorized US government overseas covert operations. Other NSC reports offer broad guidelines that become the authority choreographing US domination logics. NSC-68 was one of these later reports, and has shaped public *délires* for much US international violence since 1950. NSC-68 was created to address problems the US was having with its informal empire in the face of the Soviets.

A strategy for creating an informal empire had been defined during World War II by Secretary of State Cordell Hull (1933–44). Hull was a disciple of President Wilson's ‘Open Door’ policy of a world integrated by free trade. Of course, free trade meant that US firms would be free to enter previously closed markets and to compete with other firms there. But, because US firms would be especially strong, coming as

they did from the world's strongest economy, this competition would not be especially fair. American firms could invest in foreign places, take over the economies, and send profits back to accumulate in the US core. The Open Door policy was a logical possibility of a NV Log c. It opened a global door to informal US empire. Soviet expansion threatened to slam that door shut.

Dominators in the US government grew reflexive over this situation. One of these in 1947 was George F. Kennan, a former ambassador to Russia, and director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. Kennan wrote anonymously in the journal *Foreign Affairs* a text called the ‘X article’. Expressed here, for the first time, was the policy of containment, which the US State Department reports “remained the basic strategy of the US throughout the Cold War” (State Department 2004). However, the problem was how to implement this strategy. Kennan saw implementation largely in economic and propaganda terms, that is, Soviet expansion could be contained by US economic support for its clients and psychological warfare against its Soviet opponent.

A web of events in 1947 and 1948 led to implementation of Kennan's approach. In early 1947, the British government informed their American counterparts that they would stop supporting the Greek state after March 31 of that year. This was ominous because the Greek government was engaged in a civil war with its communists. US government analysts feared that Greece's fall into communist hands would have a domino effect, spreading Soviet power throughout the Middle East. President Truman responded to this threat by requesting USD 400 million from Congress to aid both Greece and Turkey. Known as the Truman Doctrine, it meant that it was in US interest to provide economic assistance to resist communist expansion. Of course, from an SBT perspective, what the US was doing was committing itself to a NV Log rec to maintain its client states in informal empire. The Truman Doctrine which officially applied to only two countries in 1947 was expanded in the following year to cover all of Europe, with the Congressional vote to authorize the Marshall Plan. The X Article,

the Truman Doctrine, and the Marshall Plan authorized 'containment' logical possibilities of NV Log rec.

However, in 1949, the Soviet Union detonated the atomic bomb. *Délires* became fixated upon how to address the USSR militarily. Paul Nitze, who had succeeded Kennan as director of the Policy Planning Staff, prepared NSC-68 in 1950 to tackle this question. NSC-68 emphasized that the US and Soviet Union were the two greatest powers, but that the Soviets "unlike previous aspirants to hegemony" were "animated by a fanatic new faith, antithetic to our own" that drives them to "impose ... absolute authority over the rest of the world. Conflict has, therefore, become endemic and is waged ... by violent and non-violent means". This was a perceptual cultural interpretation of US official dominators that violent force was 'endemic' to the imperial system. Given this perceptual culture, NSC-68 authorized a procedural cultural solution:

"[O]ur position as the center of power in the free world places a heavy responsibility on the US for leadership. We must organize and enlist the energies and resources of the free world in a positive program for peace which will frustrate the Kremlin design for world domination."

If by 'the free world' is understood clients within the orbit of the US empire, then NSC-68 calls upon the US to 'organize' its subordinates to 'frustrate' the Soviet empire's 'design for world domination', which, given the fact that the US was running the only other big empire, would result in America's world domination. This was to occur, again according to the NSC-68 text, by "a rapid and concerted [military] build-up of the actual strength of both the US and other nations of the free world". Note, however, how NSC-68 imagines empire building in terms of the entire empire, not just the US.

Furthermore, the "build-up ... will be superior" to that which "can be brought to bear by the Soviet Union and its satellites". However, NSC-68 rejects the use of violence in a preemptive war, saying: "It goes without saying that the idea of a 'preventive' war—in the sense of a

military attack not provoked by a military attack upon us or our allies—is generally unacceptable to Americans." The explicit language of NSC-68 concerns how to control the Soviets. Its implicit logic is that if the Soviets can be militarily controlled then there is 'world domination'. Let us consider NSC-68 in terms of the second siren. Remember this siren is that the V Log c or rec depends upon the existence of public *délires* underwriting the violence. NSC-68 was just such a public *délire*. It authorized US dominators to bear a 'heavy responsibility' to contest 'fanatic' Soviet competitors in a field of empires where 'violence' was 'endemic'. Thus, the existence of NSC-68 is evidence consistent with the second siren. It provides a public *délire* to choreograph military confrontations of Soviet disruptions of the American empire.

From 1945 through 1990 a series of economic and military policies further authorized US governmental foreign policy practices consistent with NSC-68. However, the Soviet Union possessed a huge land army and ample nuclear weapons by 1950, so direct exercise of violent force against the Soviet Union was always an enormously costly venture for any possible benefits. Let us explore this in terms of siren three. Consider, for example, the Cuban missile crisis, which occurred two years after Castro's successful (1959) Cuban revolution. This was the closest the world has come to Great Power nuclear war. Though Castro was a leftist, he was not initially hostile to the US. However, Cuba, due to unremitting US antagonism, would be a Soviet client within two years. Cuban exiles, with CIA support, invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. The invasion failed. A year later on 14 October 1962, a US spy plane overflew western Cuba conducting photoreconnaissance. Its photographs revealed 'MEBM sites'. This was a perceptual cultural understanding that there were medium-range ballistic missiles, carrying atomic warheads, only ninety miles from the US mainland. This was a calamity because the missiles further diminished the ability of US capital to flourish in the region. Cuba-style revolution, inspired by Castro's military commander Che Guevara, seemed to be spreading in Latin America.

A V Log rec was envisioned by President Kennedy and his top advisors to reconstitute US imperial stability. On 17 October 1962: “The president is briefed ... that should the US aggressively attack Cuba, it would likely lead to World War III” (Cuban History Archive 2000). The cost/benefit ratio of nuclear war over Cuba was too ghastly to contemplate by the president and his officials, especially measured in terms of forgone capital accumulation due to economic disruption consequent upon a nuclear exchange. These perceptual cultural interpretations—of Soviet missiles in Cuba and nuclear holocaust in case of US aggressive attack—prompted a procedural interpretation of what to do. This was made public in a radio and television address on 22 October 1962, in which Kennedy told the country that “[a]cting under the authority entrusted to me”, he would quarantine Cuba, place it under surveillance, and do a number of other things, all short of exercising violence (J. F. Kennedy 1962). Finally, he ended his address with a plea to the Soviets, calling on them to “abandon their course of world domination” (ibid.). There is a string of events here: E1 (discovery of the missile sites), E2 (quarantine), E3 (surveillance), and E4 (plea to the Soviets). E1 was connected to the other events by the presidential *délire* to do something decisive against the USSR, but not something violent. Siren three predicts no V Log rec if there is an unfavorable cost/benefit ratio. Such a ratio existed. There was no war. Thus, siren three is supported by the evidence. In fact, the cost/benefit ratio of direct violence with the Soviets became grimmer as nuclear weapons became ever more deadly throughout the Cold War. There never was a direct conflict between the USSR and the US during this time, further evidence consistent with siren three.

However, there developed a policy of indirect violent conflict that aimed at ‘rollback’ (Bodenhimer and Gould 1998). This used covert agencies such as the CIA to exercise violent force to in some way reconstitute—i.e., rollback—capitalist losses. The covert agencies provided violent force resources to compradors in subordinate empires or clients to exercise violence. A useful documentation of certain covert operations

during this period can be found in Blum (1995) and Chomsky (2000). Two illustrative cases of this were in Indonesia in the 1960s and Chile in 1973. A point of these two cases is that victory came cheap. The US, through the CIA and other covert operators, provided the force resources for compradors to do the job, and the job involved big prizes—entire countries won for capitalism. Hence, such logics of covert violence are consistent with the fourth generalization: small costs, big payoff. Let us term the webs of knotted strings of this violence an ‘indirect’ logical possibility of V Log rec. Other logical possibilities for more direct violence became possible after the fall of the USSR in 1990.

#### *“It’s crazy”: gathering systemic crisis*

“The oil price is very high, it’s crazy. There is no additional supply” (Pumomo Yusgiantoro, OPEC president, 2004).

The years between 1990 and 2003 lead from the Cold War, when peace seemed to have broken out, to Gulf War II, when it was clear it had not. Central to this evolution was a gathering crisis. Let us contemplate crisis. Immanuel Wallerstein predicts a ‘systemic crisis’ that will produce disintegration of our existing historical social system within 25 to 50 years (2003a). In case readers were wondering just what ‘social system’ Wallerstein had in mind, he told them in a later article that it was one including an imperialist, capitalist US (2003b). Now capitalism has been a volatile economic system. Why should one think that the present ‘long down turn’ (Brenner 1998) was anything other than this normal volatility? This brings us to oil and, frankly, “It’s crazy”, as OPEC’s president put it one warm summer day in 2004 when oil prices rose to record highs.

Oil is the key scarce, strategic resource needed for almost all capitalist production. It is not renewable (Klare 2002; Yergin 1993). One concern of those studying oil has been how to conceptualize its supply. M. King Hubbert suggested in the 1950s that it might be imagined as a bell curve; it would have an ascending



slope as output increased, a highest point before decrease set in, and a descending slope as output decreased. The high point has come to be known as ‘Hubbert’s Peak’. Hubbert’s work allowed yearly projections of what the oil supply bell curve would look like. In 1956 he correctly predicted US oil production would peak around 1970 and decline thereafter. His simulation methods have been improved and found to be reliable (Campbell 1997; Deffeyes 2001; Heinberg 2003). Thus, the approach helps answer two questions: What years will be those of Hubbert’s Peak? Thereafter, how quickly will production subside? There is no consensus on the first question, except a growing belief that those years may be soon. Speculation concerning the rate of decline of oil output is equally vigorous. However, conservative projections indicate the end of the oil era to fall between the twenty-first and the twenty-second centuries.

This, then, is a central fact of our times: oil is gone within a century or so. Its replacement is theoretically possible, though not currently economically or technically feasible. In SBT terms, the force ‘resource energy’ necessary for capital accumulation will be increasingly scarce, making it harder to choreograph energy with other force resources, making more problematic the stringing together of events that are part and parcel of capitalist accumulation, the logic at the heart of the current imperial system. This is systemic crisis. Under such conditions, according to one observer: “If the US controls the sources of energy of its rivals—Europe, Japan, China and other nations aspiring to be more independent—they win” (Dayaneni and Wing 2002: 2). Two periods—one of good times (1945), the other of bad times (1973–2003)—can be distinguished concerning the US government’s relationship to global oil supplies.

First the good times: US policy makers recognized during World War II that “control of the Middle East ... was ... absolutely essential for the economic, military, and political control of the globe—not the least of all because it was the repository of most of the world’s proven oil reserves” (Editors 2002: 1–13). In order to secure this control in the Near East,

“[t]he US thus began a long series of overt and covert operations in the region in the 1950s, the foremost of which was the 1953 overthrow of the democratically elected Mossadegh government in Iran, which nationalized foreign-owned companies. The success of the US drive was clear. Between 1940 and 1967, the US companies increased their control of Middle East oil reserves from 10 percent to close to 60 percent” (ibid.: 1–13).

The good times continued in the years immediately following 1967. US control over Middle East oil reserves increased. Three countries in the Middle East have the largest reserves: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq. Two of these, known as the ‘Twin Pillars’, Iran and Saudi Arabia, were safely ensconced as clients in the US empire in exchange for military assistance in maintaining their regimes. The preceding is evidence consistent with the fourth siren. Costs of covert operations and military assistance were modest, the gain to US logics of capitalist accumulation was indexed by the growth of oil reserves from 10 to 60 percent of all those in the Middle East.

Nothing is forever, the good times with regard to oil were about to end. In part, the bad times, as the title of a recent book by Wallerstein (2003a) suggests, are due to the decline of American power. The decline that Wallerstein and even the CIA (NIC 2004) are describing is economic, and it is largely relative. No one is saying that absolutely the US economy has fallen behind that of any other country. Rather, what is asserted is that relative to other areas of the world, those areas are catching up. The GNP of Europe already exceeds that of the US. Japan is a serious economic competitor. The greatest concern is that the Chinese economy, newly capitalist, is growing at rates faster than any other area of the world and promises to surpass the US in GNP within half a century. This unequal development, in the context of overcapacity and overproduction, is leading to increased competition between the different economies within and beyond the US empire. This is a situation of overcapacity and intensifying imperial competition that Lenin, were he

alive, might recognize as having existed prior to World War I.

There have been problems for US capital accumulation specifically linked to events in the oil sector. The first of these was the Oil Embargo of 1973. Kissinger termed this “one of the pivotal events in the history of this century” (in Dreyfuss 2003)—“pivotal” in the sense that oil price inflation adversely influenced balance of payments, employment, and price stability in ways that hindered capital accumulation in the US empire. Military action was contemplated to counter the price increases. Kissinger, in a 1975 interview in *Business Week*, delivered a thinly veiled threat to the Saudis, musing about bringing oil prices down through “massive political warfare” (ibid.: 2). War did not occur, in part because the US was distracted elsewhere by the end of the Vietnam War.

The OPEC price hikes were accompanied by the loss of Iran as a US client. The shah of Iran was overthrown in 1979, and replaced by a fundamentalist theocratic regime opposed to US interests. The problem was not only that US control over oil prices was at risk, as was the case with OPEC regulation of prices, but now control over access and distribution of oil was problematic. Iran might, and indeed did, deny US oil companies access to Iranian oil. Iran might and did determine to whom oil was distributed. Such loss of power over oil obliged Washington to seek another Middle Eastern client to replace the shah, and in the 1980s US officials tried Iraq. Saddam Hussein would be their comprador. He was encouraged, armed, and directly supported in his eight-year war with Iran (1980–8). This included US support for Iraq’s use of chemical weapons (Dobbs 2002). Unfortunately, Saddam would prove to be a difficult comprador.

What is the situation of the remaining pillar of US Middle Eastern domination? This is Saudi Arabia, the greatest prize of all with the largest oil reserves in the world (35 percent). As early as the 1940s, the US recognized the Saudi’s special significance. In 1945, an agreement was struck. The US would guarantee the Saud lineage’s rule over Saudi Arabia in exchange for access to Saudi oil. This relationship has continued through the

present. However, within Saudi Arabia there has been increased opposition to the House of Saud over the years. As Said Aburish puts it: “The only thing keeping Saudi Arabia from disintegrating or falling to an Islamic group is the absence of a cohesive force capable of replacing the royal family.... But (such groups) are gaining strength at a rapid rate” (1996: xvi). The royal family’s legitimacy steadily decreased in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Clinton White House was “desperately trying to stop Saudi Arabia’s decline into chaos” (ibid.: xvi). The second of the twin pillars perilously teetered at the beginning of the third millennium.

Let us return to Saddam Hussein and his imperial *délires*. If Saddam had defeated Iran and seized control of its oil, he would have had control over 29 percent of the world’s oil reserves—enough to make him a regional power on the level of Saudi Arabia, but one with a far more effective military. Then, he had only to conquer Saudi Arabia, and he would control 64 percent of the oil reserves. US officials could do the arithmetic, and toward the end of the Iran-Iraq War, they began supplying military assistance to the Iranians, preventing Iraqi victory.

The end of this war left an economically depleted Iraq in need of a quick financial and fiscal fix. The fix would be had by annexing the former province of the Ottoman Iraq, Kuwait, with 13 percent of the world’s oil reserves. So in 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait, it supposed with the connivance of Washington. However, from the vantage of George Bush I’s regime, Saddam was again the comprador who did not know his place. If Saddam won, he was again on the road to a regional imperial system in the Middle East. Bush I organized a coalition, crushed Saddam’s forces, and left in place punitive sanctions designed to drive him from power. These sanctions, ranging from frequent aerial bombardment to prohibitions upon military supplies, over a decade led to severe degradation of Iraq’s military (Everest 2004). Gulf War I, though far more expensive than the previously discussed wars, nevertheless is evidence supporting siren four. This is because, though the costs were great, the benefits were greater because what was

at stake was power over Gulf oil resources. The war contributed to reconstituting that control. (Additionally, the US government was able to induce its clients in the Middle East, Germany, and Japan to pay for the costs of the conflict.) Nevertheless, two points should be clear. First, the 1990s, though appearing to boom, foreshadowed real systemic crisis due to the impending disappearance of oil. Second, the 1990s continued a trend that began in the 1970s of weakening US control over oil due to the rise of OPEC, the fall of the Shah, increasing disaffection with the House of Saud, and the imperial pretensions of Saddam. What happened to the US public *délires* underlying V Log c during this period?

The fall of the Soviet Union made explicit what had been implicit in US military doctrine. Officials were emboldened to make public a strategy for military supremacy. As was exposed in an article in the *New York Times* (March 8, 1992), under President Clinton, the Pentagon's Planning Guidance for the fiscal years 1994–9 defined US military doctrine as follows: “Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival” capable of “challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order”. Additionally, as presented in Clinton's *National Security Strategy* of 1996 (NSS-1996), it was claimed that “[o]ur national security is ... based upon enlarging the community of market democracies” by working “to open foreign markets” and spurring “global economic growth” (NSS-1996). This might be thought of as a ‘supremacist’ military strategy, where it is openly stated that the US violent force should be supreme and in support of “global economic growth”, which, of course, is that of the empire's capital accumulation.

A further aspect of Clinton's military strategy needs elaboration. This is the Clinton Doctrine, which rides a high moral road. The doctrine encourages use of US military force to assist peoples harmed by their governments in failed, rogue states, for example, protecting Rwandans from their own government's militias. However, the high moral road of the Clinton Doctrine turns out to be a public *délire* advocating preemptive war, because as both the Left (Chomsky

in Chowkwanyun 2004) and the Right (Horowitz 2003) point out, implicit in the Clinton Doctrine was authorization of the right to use military force to attack states even if they had done no harm to the US. All that had to be done to justify war was to label a state a ‘bad’ rogue. Indeed, the US did attack both the Sudan and Serbia during Clinton's administration, neither of which had attacked the US. Thus, the Clinton Doctrine effectively repudiated NSC-68's taboo on preemptive war.

Clinton's military policy made explicit—US insistence upon military supremacy—something implicit in NSC-68. Bush II's military policy made explicit—preemptive war—something implicit in the Clinton Doctrine. The Bush Doctrine was formally presented in September 2002 in *The National Security Strategy of 2002* (NSS-2002). Thomas Donnelly, writing for the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute, sees the Bush Doctrine as continuing “a tradition” that goes back to NSC-68 (2003: 2). What is traditional in the Bush Doctrine is that it continues the goal of military supremacy needed for US global imperial domination. However, there is a rupture that occurs because Bush II's military doctrine has been considerably formulated by neoconservatives. Important among these in think tanks outside the administration are William Kristol and Robert Kagan, and within the administration are Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Douglas Feith. Neoconservatives are on occasion referred to as ‘chickenhawks’, people of civilian background, with no personal experience with war, who favor aggressive military strategy (Mann 2004). Their commitment to violent force is striking. Dick Cheney, the vice-president, for example, has said that “the US need not blush for being a great power. It has the duty to use force in order to create a world in the image of the US” (in Mertens 2003: 5). When Cheney uses the word ‘force’ he means ‘violent force’, and the exercise of violence is for him a ‘duty’, just like praying to God. Borrowing a line from the gangster Al Capone, Donald Rumsfeld, secretary of defense, insisted: “You get more with a nice word and a gun, than you get with a nice word” (ibid.: 5).

Rumsfeld says it in a light-hearted way—but both he and Cheney seem delirious in their desire for violence.

NSS-2002, a decidedly neocon document, states that “our best defense is a good offense” (2002: 6). This means that “[w]hile the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right to self-defense by acting preemptively” (ibid.: 6). Preemptive or preventive war is attacking an enemy who has not attacked you. It was what the Japanese did to America at Pearl Harbor. The chickenhawks, writing from *The Project* to ‘opinion leaders’ and commenting upon the Bush Doctrine after it was issued, believed war was not so much a ‘danger’ as an ‘opportunity’ (Schmitt and Donnelly 2002: 1). The Bush Doctrine, like Clinton’s Pentagon Planning Guidance in the 1990s, is evidence for siren two, the renewal of public *délirés* for V Log c to reconstitute the US imperium. Let us return to that imperium as Hubbert’s Peak approached.

Projections in the growth of oil production and demand have predicted for a while that there will not be enough oil to fuel the needs of East Asian, European, and US capital accumulation. US military planners are aware of this situation, as it has been openly discussed in scholarly journals concerned with defense planning and strategy since the 1990s. The demand problem is especially important in China. Rapid economic growth has made China an importer of oil. By 2020, 60 percent of its oil will be imported (Downs 2000: xi) Further, Chinese analysts have warned their government that the US, Japan, and other European powers “may seek to limit China’s access to Middle Eastern oil out of fear that there is not enough to go around” (ibid.: 48). In order to address this eventuality, China had established by 2000 its “closest bilateral relationships ... with Iran and Iraq” (ibid.: 49). The implications of this for the US as Hubbert’s Peak loomed at the millennium were obvious: further loss of control over Middle East oil. This was recognized widely. Consider, for example, the following quotation from a Korean source, entitled “Global energy war looms”:

“China is putting all efforts into securing a supply of energy from across the world.... All these moves make the US uneasy.... A government sponsored energy policy group in the US estimated that US’s dependence on foreign oil, which rose to 50 percent in 2003 from 30 percent in 1985, will reach 70 percent by 2020.... This is why the US sees China’s search for stable energy resources as a challenge to its world hegemony” (Kim and Park 2004: 1).

How the US government responded to this threat of ‘energy war’ is indicated by one report designed to set policy in Bush II’s presidency. The US Council on Foreign Relations and the Baker Institute of Public Policy issued a report in April 2001 concerning US energy strategy entitled, *Strategic Energy Policy Challenges for the 21st Century* (SEPC 2001). The report was commissioned by Vice-President Dick Cheney, who along with Bush II has extensive and long ties to the oil industry. The report singled out ‘spare capacity’ as a key concern. This is the amount of oil available at any time above that needed for consumption. The report noted that OPEC spare capacity stood at 25 percent of global demand in 1985 and 8 percent of demand in 1990, and was projected at only 2 percent in 2001. The report interpreted this rapid decline as follows:

“[T]he world is currently precariously close to utilizing all of its available global oil production capacity, raising the chances of an oil supply crisis with more substantial consequences than seen in three decades” (in Everest 2004: 252).

As a result, it concluded that

“the United States remains a prisoner of its energy dilemma, suffering on a recurring basis from the negative consequences of sporadic energy shortages. These consequences can include recession, social dislocation of the poorest Americans, and at the extremes, a need for military intervention” (SEPC 2001: 34).

Decline in spare capacity seems an indicator of Hubbert’s Peak. Note the language here: “it’s

crazy”, there is a “crisis”, the US is a “prisoner”, there is “a need for military intervention” (the last phrase echoes prophetically). A year later, the US would be bombing Iraq in a military campaign of ‘shock and awe’. Why?

In part this results from a change in the logical possibility concerning violent force operative in the Middle East. Prior to the 1970s the logical possibility had been the one of indirect exercise of violent force. However, especially following the Shah’s fall, it seemed clear that “indirect rule through distant surrogates was untenable” (Harvey 2003: 21). President Carter enunciated his Carter Doctrine (1980), that the US would under no circumstances allow interruption of Gulf oil, and that it would use military force to prevent this. This led to establishment of a permanent military presence in the region, plus creation of a Rapid Deployment Force to be sent there on a few days notice. During the 1990s, with the Soviets no longer a consideration, President Clinton deployed 20,000 military personnel to the region, together with military equipment to fight a war. It is time to pull together the strings that led to Gulf War II.

There were, and are, strings involving palpitations of advanced capitalist accumulation. The situation is not unlike that preceding World War I. There were, and are, strings concerning increased competition between rising and declining capitalist empires, which will eventually involve struggle over Middle Eastern oil, whose disappearance in a century or so is today manifest as declining spare capacity. This will lead to the disintegration of capitalist accumulation as it now occurs. So though the US recognized the centrality of this oil to its national interests with the Carter Doctrine, it has since 1973 decreased control over it. There have been strings of events authorizing US military supremacy and the use of that violent force to defend capitalism, to the point of authorizing preemptive war to do so. A direct V Log c or rec has been developed in the Near East. According to one source, the Bush II cabinet agreed in April 2001 that Iraq remained a destabilizing influence to the flow of oil to international markets “which justified military intervention” (Gendzier 2003: 24). These strings

are empirical manifestations of a gathering systemic crisis to the global field of empire.

Sometimes approaching storms are deceptive. You see them coming, and they do not hit. You do not see them coming, and wham!—they strike. The planes struck on 11 September 2001, out of a clear blue sky. Perhaps, as the twin towers were incinerating in lower Manhattan, the chickenhawk dominators in Bush II’s regime came to feel they *themselves* were in the midst of a fiery, escalating inferno. This was a conflict that Secretary Colin Powell declared to be a “war against civilization” on 11 September (Espo 2001: 1). Four days later, at a press conference Bush II rambled on about how “we’ll get em”, “we’re gonna get em”, “we’ll do what it takes”, “we’re at war”, “a group of barbarians declared war” (BBC 2001). Perhaps, this rambling about ‘barbarism’ and ‘civilization’ was an expression of these dominators’ *own* terror. *Their* world was coming apart. There was a crisis in *their* civilization. The barbarians were at *their* gates. Of course, civilization was the US imperial system, and their *délires* obligated them to proceed militarily to defend the system. Such an interpretation is consistent with the seventh siren: capital accumulation had increased, oil supply was decreasing in the US, and their *délires* were set at razor’s edge with the authorization of global military supremacy to defend the system. So they went to war, first in Afghanistan to get Al-Qaeda, and then in Iraq to get Iraq because it is reported that by April 5, 2002, Bush II had told Tony Blair: “I made up my mind that Saddam needs to go” (Bush 2002: 1). What warrant is there for the seven deadly sirens?

The second siren states that the exercise of violence in V Log c or rec is dependent upon the existence of public *délires* that choreograph the violence. NSC-68, Clinton’s Pentagon Planning Guidance, and the Bush Doctrine authorized the US government to seek military supremacy and to use it to advance US interests, which include those of supporting capital accumulation. This is evidence in support of siren two. Siren three asserts that the exercise of violence in V Log c or rec is less a *délire* for dominators in unfavorable cost/benefit situations. A direct attack on

the Soviets during the Cold War would have had devastating costs, so that even when provoked, as during the Cuban missile crisis, the US military refrained from directly engaging that of the USSR, evidence consistent with siren three.

Siren four predicts the exercise of V Log c or rec under favorable cost/benefit situations. There are a number of instances of conflict discussed in the essay consistent with this siren's prediction. The first of these was that of the CIA's destabilization of Mossadegh. The actual costs of these covert operations were small. The benefits to US capital accumulation were considerable: entrance into the profitable Iranian oil industry. Similarly, the CIA's covert operations in Chile and Indonesia were also inexpensive and secured whole counties for capitalism in which it was threatened. The US military support for the Twin Pillars is also consistent with siren four. Military supplies and training for the House of Saud and the Shah were expensive, yet the assistance kept the two states reliable clients, assuring US power over Near Eastern oil, assuring capital accumulation throughout its empire.

The contemporary conjuncture is one where the US imperial system is threatened with destruction because you cannot run an empire without oil, and oil is soon gone. Sirens five through seven address what happens to violence under such conditions. Siren five states the relationship between public *délires* and systemic crisis. Siren six considers what has the force to cause systemic crisis. Siren seven integrates the two preceding sirens explaining that capital accumulation leads to decreasing raw material supply, leading to systemic crisis that increases the *délires* for violence leading to war. Capital accumulation has led to rapid oil depletion, the raw material upon whose supply capital accumulation depends. This has produced systemic crisis, which is just beginning, whose manifestations from the vantage of dominators in the US empire are those of a decreasing spare capacity. This sharpened chickenhawk private *délires* to have power over oil to the point that they attacked Iraq. Consider the following findings: (1) capital accumulation had pushed the capitalist system to crisis by 2000, (2) the *délires* of dominators in

the US empire after 2001 were for the exercise of V Log c or rec after 2001, and (3) V Log c or rec was exercised in war that might give the US increased power over the cause of the crisis in 2003. Such findings are consistent with sirens five through seven. This is evidence in support of the God Father Law, that is, when logics of economic accumulation are threatened in imperial systems, then logics of violence will be used to reconstitute those systems. This, then, is empirical warrant for understanding the direction of the knotted strings of current events. It is time to contemplate, as did Conrad's friends a century ago, which way the "current runs".

### Which way the "current runs"

"The ... current runs swiftly ... bearing us towards ..." (Joseph Conrad).

"We're an empire now, and ... we create our own reality" (aide to Bush II, in Suskind 2004).

Where *does* the current run? The globe is a field of informal empire where the weakening hegemon is the US. The current in this field runs in the direction of intensifying imperial crisis. Crisis has meant that non-violent logics of the exercise of force do *not* appear to resolve the situation. Oil production nears Hubbert's Peak, and "it's crazy". Dominators in Washington announce, "[W]e're an empire now", so we "create ... reality"; reality is a "war against terror"—a fight between civilization and barbarism. The horror is that civilization appears caught in imperial strings whose heart of darkness is the exercise of violence. How does this story end? The fate of civilization is barbarism, and it is plausible that after the conflict is over there will be peace for many—that of the grave.

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## Notes

1. This article was presented on 24 June 2004, to the Gellnerovsky Seminar, the CEELI Institute, Prague (Czech Republic).
2. Victoria's Secret is an American store chain that sells women's foundational garments.

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