

# The Infrastructure of Imperialism:

## A Strategic Weakness

*Imperialism (n): the policy of forcefully extending a nation's authority by territorial gain or by the establishment of economic and political dominance over other nations.*

In the years since the declaration of a “War on Terrorism,” criticism has increasingly centered on the imperialistic patterns of US foreign policy. The US has been rightly accused of waging wars to secure access to critical resources like petroleum, and of propping up authoritarian regimes that assist its regional and global goals.

What has often been overlooked is the critical strategic importance of globalized infrastructure, and the way that the US and other First World nations regularly steal and murder in order to establish and protect this infrastructure. Just as importantly, preventing the expansion of this infrastructure provides a specific and effective way to hamper the Empire's power and decrease its ability to impose violence and terror on the rest of the world.

### Oil Barrels and Gun Barrels

The power of any empire is based on controlling the resources of subordinate states and cultures. In the modern day, the lifestyle of First World nations depends upon a steady stream of cheap raw materials, products and labor from poorer countries. Cheap labor, of course, means forcing people into poverty and keeping them there; cheap materials means turning living ecosystems into dams, mines and two-by-fours. If the people of these countries resist this destruction, then the armies are sent in.

But all of this control would be meaningless without *infrastructure* — the transportation, electrical and communications networks required for the extraction and movement of resources. Specific examples of infrastructure include highways, railways, ports, dams, mines, oil and gas pipelines, power plants, power lines and telecommunications cables. Until this groundwork is laid, resources can be neither extracted nor shipped. Iraqi or Colombian oil cannot get out of the oil fields without wells and pipelines, nor can it be exported without ports, highways, railways and the like.

Even the US invasion of Afghanistan — widely attributed to a desire to capture Osama bin Laden — has been linked to paving the way for the Trans-Afghanistan Natural Gas Pipeline. When the US decided that the Taliban was no longer a source of regional stability in 1998, US company Unocal dropped its plans for the pipeline. The plans were revived in 2002 and approved by the US-installed government of Hamid Karzai.



These globalized infrastructure projects are colonialism, plain and simple, designed to guarantee

a supply of cheap materials and labor to wealthy countries at the expense of local communities. By no coincidence, they are overwhelmingly slated for territories of indigenous or subsistence peoples. Even in North America, indigenous and rural communities continue to bear the brunt of infrastructure expansion.

These territories hold two powerful attractions for modern colonialists, just as they always have. First of all, Earth-based cultures tend to live in highly biodiverse areas, where there are still “resources” to be exploited (intact forests for lumber; intact land above oil or minerals; intact, undammed rivers). The second advantage is just as important: If members of traditional societies can be forced off their land by highways, dams or other such projects, they instantly become a cheap work force.

Of course, none of the supposed benefits of these projects flow to local communities. To give just one example, the power generated by several planned dams in southern Mexico and Central America is meant to be integrated into a massive electric grid and then sold to the southwestern US.

### The Empire's Weakness

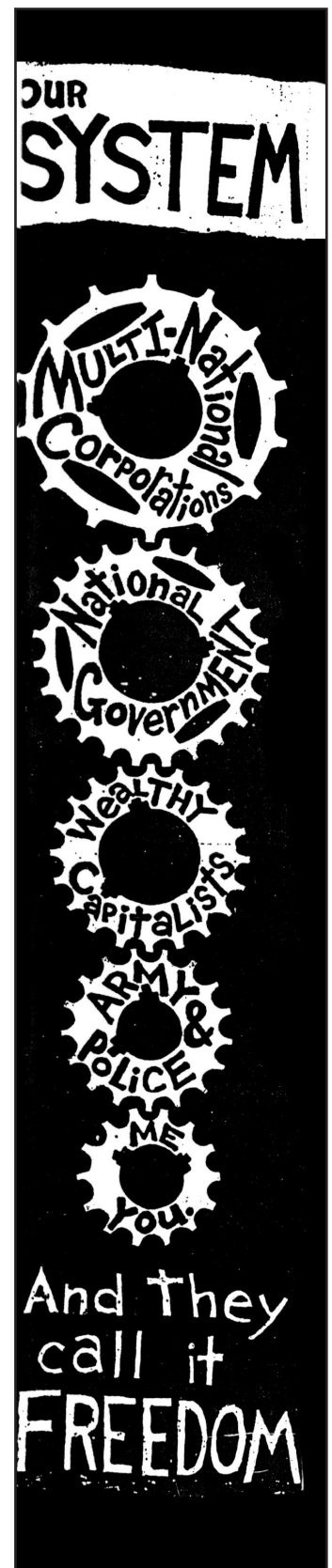
The good news is that the Empire's very dependence on infrastructure is a critical weakness. The very fact that the US is willing to wage wars over infrastructure projects, and that governments around the world routinely resort to intense repression against communities that resist them, highlights just how critical these projects are.

With resources running out and consumption increasing, the First World's reliance on imports is only going to keep increasing. But existing infrastructure is simply insufficient for the massive trade volume that *already exists*, let alone that projected from new free trade agreements and increasing demand. That's why expanding “international trade infrastructure” is one of the top priorities for business and political leaders throughout the Americas.

If we prevent these projects from being built — including domestic ones like Atlantica, Pacifica, the CANAMEX Corridor and the Corridors of the Future highway program — we cut off the empire's access to the resources it needs to maintain its power.

The irony of the empire's situation is that the warplanes sent to steal Iraqi oil are themselves dependent on oil. This is just as true for other critical resources like copper or steel. Without sufficient resources and the infrastructure to process them, the empire will be forced to contract its reach.

Opposing infrastructure expansion provides us with a strategic way to undermine the empire, to act in solidarity with communities fighting foreign control and to defend the communities and ecologies in our own bioregions through which these projects would pass. It provides us with a path toward our dream of a world based on local communities exercising sustainable control over their own resources, and an end to imperialist wars waged for the benefit of the rich.



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## demolishing colonialism at its foundations