

**Guy Mettan<sup>1</sup>**

## THE GLOBAL WORLD AND THE NEW WESTERN EMPIRE

This is about empire and resistance. Remember the US movie saga Starwars produced in Hollywood by George Lucas: the famous emperor without a face and his evil lieutenant Darth Vader were fighting for universal hegemony against an improbable coalition of rebels supported by the wise Jedi knights. The corrupted galaxy republic was divided by internal struggles for power and a ferocious competition for trade markets ; its ambitious chancellor Palpatin, exploiting the greed of the merchants of the powerful Federation of Commerce, had organized designed a plot for seizing legally the supreme power and transform the decaying Republic into an Empire.

This is a metaphoric story of what is happening now in our present small earthly world.

Since the end of WWII, and especially since the collapse of the USSR, the imperial Republic has gained control over three quarters of the planet, building 600 military bases all around the world, concluding defense and trade agreements with almost every country, reducing its allies – European countries, Japan and partly Latin America – into mere vassals, imposing its ideology to virtual-

ly everybody, including its strongest opponents. The free market and free trade ideology, the so-called modern capitalism or neo-liberalism, is reigning from North to South and East to West without real counterweight since communist China has also adopted it as its economic framework. On the sunny side, empire has been able to promote positive values such as democracy, human rights, individual and minorities empowerment, indisputable economic capacities, technologic and scientific successes as well as an undeniable cultural power of attraction. All these are providing a large public support despite desperate and violent reactions largely concentrated in the Arab-Islamic countries and the surge of far-right or far-left populist parties in western countries.

Let us examine the whole picture more in detail.

In order to better understand the present situation, it is necessary to make a flashback to the history of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire. After winning the last Punic War against its traditional emblematic enemy, Carthago, Rome had been expanding fast in the whole Mediterranean basin, conquering Africa, Spain, Greece, as well as present Turkey, France and Egypt. All this in less than a century, which was incredibly quick in a time of walking, riding and slow sailing.

Using military means as well as a sly diplomacy, bribery, trade agreements, backhand alliances and all soft power tools, the Roman Republic became suddenly the center of a huge set of territories, accumulating incredibly high

<sup>1</sup> President of the United Chamber of Industry and Commerce “Switzerland – Russia and CIS States”, Executive Director of the Swiss Press Club (Geneva). Deputy of the Grand Council (Parliament) of the canton of Geneva from the Christian Democratic People’s Party of Switzerland. Author of several books on socio-political subjects and international relations, including “Russie-Occident: une guerre de mille ans” (The West vs Russia: a Thousand Year Long War), “A Western View: Russophobia from Charlemagne to the Last Olympic Games in Rio”, and others.

amounts of wealth and financial resources, and transforming its old sober elites into greedy plutocrats. The conquest of Ancient Greece is a model of political smartness. Greece has been the cradle of the Roman Republic, providing its values, its philosophy, its vocabulary, and even its gods and deities to the young Roman Republic. The great Greek-roman historian Polyb told the story of the conquest and showed how the divisions of the Greek cities, skilfully managed by the Romans, have finally led to the victory of Rome against a divided Greece, which was submitted in a few decades only and was never able to recover.

This is exactly what happened in the 20th century between the United States and both Europe and the Soviet Union. Thanks to the divide between Europeans and the 1914 and 1939 wars in Europe, the United States of America were asked by some European threatened states to intervene in their affairs and to submit their former enemies – first Germany than later Japan too, and transformed their former allies – i.e. Great Britain and France – into vassals. The two Europeans wars, like in the Roman-Carthagean history, were followed by a third one, the so-called Cold War, against the Russian USSR, this time. So in 1991, the United States became the winner of the last war against the last “Punic” soviet challenger. Taking advantage of two hot and one cold wars, the American imperial Republic succeeded in becoming the hegemonical power on the planet in less than eight decades. What an outstanding performance!

But these tremendous successes obviously aroused a lot of frustration, discontent and anger outside and inside the empire.

Outside, the enforcement of modernity, western values and cultural change has caused a deep shock in the Arab and Muslim world, triggering social and political unrest and upheaval against their often corrupted political regimes and creating a revival of Islamic djihadism financially supported by the conservative petromonarchies which were looking for leverage in their regional struggle for domination. Bloody and chaotic western military interventions in former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Irak, Libya, Syria, Côte d’Ivoire and Mali have created permanent disorder and the surging of a terrorist crescent in the whole Islamic peripheric belt of the empire, from Mauritania to Central Asia, Europe (in the Balkans) and even in Russia (in the Caucasus).

This belt of violence is providing the empire with its most powerful justification. As exposed by the famous Muslim thinker Ibn Khaldun, the strength of an empire relies on its capacity to ensure inner protection (security, defense) and a relative prosperity to its subjects. To achieve this, the empire has to exploit its periphery and to expel its internal violence to the outskirts of its core territories. Economic and security order is its motto and its survival kit. In that perspective, the casual terrorist attacks and other “war on terror” such as the one declared by former President Bush are appropriate tools to justify a perpetual “état d’urgence” (state of emergency) and a high level of police and defense expenditures in order to keep the inner populations under control, i.e. under the close scrutiny of a massive intelligence surveillance apparatus.

That way, inside the empire, the peoples are more or less under control. Nevertheless, the lower classes, kept aside from prosperity by the increasing wealth and power concentration in the hands of the upper elites, are deeply unsatisfied. They react and try to keep the last chance to influ-

ence the rules of the game giving their voices to so-called “populist” leaders from the right – in USA, France, Great Britain and Northern Europe – or from the left in Southern Europe, as in Spain and Greece. In that sense, the Trump victory is a sign that “populism” can even win in the heart of the empire. But in no way does it mean a shift in the imperial policy. Many critics of the US and European hegemony do hope that Trump will open a new era and, being an isolationist, will change the imperial way of thinking and doing. That’s a huge mistake. Trumpism only means a turnover of the dominating elites, with the new ones somehow less free-trade oriented and more in favour of a national recovery. Trump’s slogan “Make America great again” can be understood both ways: America has been weakened by Obama and Clinton “socialism” and must therefore be cured in order to regain its strength as the supremacist power in the world. It’s a divergence of priorities: democrat and neo-con elites think that the main goal of western policy is to conquer new markets and control outer territories without consideration for the heartland and the suffering of their own left-aside citizens while Trumpists think it’s more important to restore first the country rotten infrastructures and poor finance with the support of the lower classes and to ask the allies to take their share of the burden (i.e. NATO members for defense expenditure and the winners of the exportation game like Germany) before going ahead with new external wars for new markets.

And don’t forget that a billionaire will never share his fortune with the poorest and never make a revolution. As in the late Roman Republic, oligarchs are always the best supporters of an emerging empire. It is even so if the pretenders to the imperial throne are sometimes relying on the lower classes in order to prevail over their main competitors, who belong anyway to the same social class.

The critics of the West and the opponents to US-western hegemony are hoping that “America” is now declining, that Trump will change the course and open a new era of a multipolar world. That’s a deep mistake and reflects a misunderstanding of the situation. This feeling is caused by the apparently chaotic state of our current world. In fact, we are just in the middle of a huge transition: the transition between an imperial republic and an imperial state. The well-known imperial republic is still in place with its ritual and media-scenographed elections, its democratic face, its cult of individual virtues and its still self-declaring veneration of freedom. But the word freedom has already been turned into a large but ineffective set of countless “freedoms”, freedom of trade, freedom of circulation, freedom of capital, freedom of goods and services, freedom of all kind of minorities. Freedoms are booming but the freedom of the human being is not improving at all. Even political freedom is more and more restrained. Let us see the US elections: only billionaires can compete, billionaires with their own personal fortune like Trump, or with a borrowed fortune like Hillary Clinton. Is this real democracy? Is it not the return of selective suffrage, poll-tax based democracy, and of a new aristocracy, with emerging dynasties claiming for the power, first Bush I and Bush II, and more recently Mr Clinton and Mrs Clinton?

In fact, what is considered as a decline of the USA is only a transition phase between two different imperial states: the imperial republic with its democratic forms is slowly but surely entering into an empire with a huge con-

centration of power in the hands of an imperial cosmopolitan elite almost completely separated from common people. Step by step the democratic institutions are emptied of their content and tend to become only formal: elections give the impression that peoples can choose their leaders. In fact, all are making the same policies, from the supposed leftist Tony Blair to the supposed rightist Sarkozy or Merkel, all are implementing the policies of the empire: same values, same inequalities, same free-market and free-individual ideology, abolition of the traditional defense based on general conscription of the young citizens in favour of a professional army much more obedient to the power. The era of the republic is over, long live postdemocracy!

This having been said, the invisible trend toward a fully imperial state is obviously not quiet and peaceful. Social, political and cultural tensions are accompanying this process of transformation. Peoples try to resist to this change. But as we have seen, the so-called "populism" is not an appropriate answer because populist leaders are all ready to compose with the system. Most of them share the free-market ideology and will only try to alleviate its consequences by giving more national or social protection to the lower classes who are threatened or weakened by the concentration of wealth and power and by the harsh competition resulting from the opening of the borders to cheap labour forces coming from outside and attracted into the empire by its relative prosperity. Populisms can at their best slow down the movement toward the empire but by no mean prevent it. And if they succeed, the empire, rejuvenated and re-boostered, will be stronger than ever and ready for trying new adventures.

One other characteristic of the Empire is that it never has fixed and controlled borders. Its borders are always uncertain, with peripheral territories fighting to be in or to be out, like Eastern European or Balkanic countries, Turkey, South Korea, Philippines, south-east Asia, Israel or Latin America. Some are lucky enough to be official allies like Israel, with all the rights to bomb or invade whom they want. Others are pure vassals like Panama. Most of them are both allies and vassals like Western Europe, Japan, South Korea or Saudi Arabia. A few are full enemies, members of a so-called Axis of Evil, like Iran or North Korea, or have a special status of "friend-enemy" like Russia, China or India. Too big to be treated like the small North Korea but too strong to be considered as good friends. This characteristic, along with the obligation of expelling violence outside its core, explains why empire implements a strategy of chaos in their peripheries. They need enemies as well as markets and resources and are constantly in hot or cold war.

Until, some day, their enemies succeed to unite and form a coalition.

Just a few words as a conclusion. What are the main challenges of the present emerging empire? As drafted by former president Obama and underlined by new President Trump, the main challenge is not anymore the Middle East Islam or the Islamic terror, neither is it Europe or Russia: it is China. With a population of 1,5 billion people and a booming economy located in the heart of the Eurasian continent, China is clearly the next target of the empire. The shift of the US focus from Europe to the Pacific area by Obama is the sign of this new concern as were the last electoral declarations of new president Trump against China. But China is reacting skilfully, avoiding frontal fight, trying to build its "One Road, One Belt" project through the Eurasian continent and to defend free-trade policy with the support of the European Union. China is now too big to fail and the competition between both empires will require not only muscles but a lot of brain.

What about Russia? Russia, under her soviet mask, was long time considered as the arch-enemy, the modern Carthago of the modern American imperial republic. Lot of US think tanks and Washingtonian old elites are still considering Russia as the main threat for American hegemony. That was the democrats' and Obama-Clinton's motto. But Trump and the new republican forces are seeing the case of Russia slightly differently. If China becomes the main threat, it's important to have Russia on one's side rather than against. That's why Trump tried to open a window toward Russia. Trump prefers to have Russia behind him than in front of him. But this position is still a bit premature and old elites are noisily resisting it. And nobody knows who will win.

On the other hand, the USA have just raided Ukraine, which was a century-long dream of the Anglo-Saxon geopolitics. As aimed by Bzezinski and other neo-conservative thinkers, Ukraine is too important to be abandoned soon. That's the condition of US control over European Union and Eastern European countries. Unless Ukrainians will do a "counter-counter-revolution" of their own, the empire will resist as long as possible before leaving the grip on Ukraine. This is not in favour of a friendship between the USA and Russia and will not facilitate the lifting of the economic sanctions.

In fact the only condition for a reconciliation between the USA and Russia depends on the competition with China: if this results in increased tensions, the policy of opened hands to Russia will enter into force, reinforcing the role of Russia as a kind of "swinging" state for the US-western empire.