
A New Totalitarianism

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identification documents bearing photographs of some of his co-conspirators. I loved that—Ramzi Yousef kept all his plots on the C drive of his Toshiba laptop! One should have no illusions, though. The super-empowered angry men are out there, and they present the most immediate threat today to the United States and the stability of the new globalization system. It's not because Ramzi Yousef can ever be a super-power. It's because in today's world, so many people can be Ramzi Yousef.

So, we are no longer in some messy, incoherent “post–Cold War world.” We are in a new international system, defined by globalization, with its own moving parts and characteristics. We are still a long way from fully understanding how this system is going to work. Indeed, if this were the Cold War, the year would be about 1946. That is, we understand as much about how this new system is going to work as we understood about how the Cold War would work in the year Churchill gave his “Iron Curtain” speech.

Nevertheless, it's time we recognize that there is a new system emerging, start trying to analyze events within it, and give it its own name. I will start the bidding. I propose that we call it “DOScapital.”

A NEW TOTALITARIANISM

by Ignacio Ramonet

We have known for at least ten years that globalization is the dominant phenomenon of this century. No one has been waiting around for Thomas Friedman to discover this fact. Since the end of the 1980s, dozens of authors have identified, described, and analyzed globalization inside and out. What is new in Friedman's work—and debatable—is the dichotomy he establishes between globalization and the Cold War: He presents them as opposing, interchangeable “systems.” His constant repetition of this gross oversimplification reaches the height of annoyance.

Just because the Cold War and globalization are dominant phenomena in their times does not mean that they are both systems. A system is a set of practices and institutions that provides the world with a practical and theoretical framework. By this right, the Cold War never constituted a system—Friedman makes a gross error by suggesting otherwise. The term “Cold War,”

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coined by the media, is shorthand for a period of contemporary history (1946–89) characterized by the predominance of geopolitical and geostrategic concerns. However, it does not explain a vast number of unrelated events that also shaped that era: the expansion of multinational corporations, the development of air transportation, the worldwide extension of the United Nations, the decolonization of Africa, apartheid in South Africa, the advancement of environmentalism, or the development of computers and high-tech industries such as genetic engineering. And the list goes on.

Furthermore, tension between the West and the Soviet Union, contrary to Friedman's ideas, dates from before the Cold War. In fact, that very tension was formative in shaping the way democratic states understood Italian fascism in the 1920s, Japanese militarism in the 1930s, German rearmament after the rise of Adolf Hitler in 1933, and the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939.

Friedman is right, however, to argue that globalization has a systemic bent. Step by step, this two-headed monster of technology and finance throws everything into confusion. Friedman, by contrast, tells a tale of globalization fit for Walt Disney. But the chaos that seems to delight our author so much is hardly good for the whole of humanity.

Friedman notes, and rightly so, that everything is now interdependent and that, at the same time, everything is in conflict. He also observes that globalization embodies (or infects) every trend and phenomenon at work in the world today—whether political, economic, social, cultural, or ecological. But he forgets to remark that there are groups from every nationality, religion, and ethnicity that vigorously oppose the idea of global unification and homogenization.

Furthermore, our author appears incapable of observing that globalization imposes the force of two powerful and contradictory dynamics on the world: fusion and fission. On the one hand, many states seek out alliances. They pursue fusion with others to build institutions, especially economic ones, that provide strength—or safety—in numbers. Like the European Union, groups of countries in Asia, Eastern Europe, North Africa, North America, and South America are signing free-trade agreements and reducing tariff barriers to stimulate commerce, as well as reinforcing political and security alliances.

But set against the backdrop of this integration, several multinational communities are falling victim to fission, cracking or imploding into fragments before the astounded eyes of their neighbors. When the three federal states of the Eastern bloc—Czechoslovakia, the USSR, and

Yugoslavia—broke apart, they gave birth to some 22 independent states! A veritable sixth continent!

The political consequences have been ghastly. Almost everywhere, the fractures provoked by globalization have reopened old wounds. Borders are increasingly contested, and pockets of minorities give rise to dreams of annexation, secession, and ethnic cleansing. In the Balkans and the Caucasus, these tensions unleashed wars (in Abkhazia, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh, Slovenia, and South Ossetia).

The social consequences have been no kinder. In the 1980s, accelerating globalization went hand in hand with the relentless ultraliberalism of British prime minister Margaret Thatcher and U.S. president Ronald Reagan. Quickly, globalization became associated with increased inequality, hikes in unemployment, deindustrialization, and deteriorated public services and goods.

Now, accidents, uncertainty, and chaos have become the parameters by which we measure the intensity of globalization. If we sized up our globalizing world today, what would we find? Poverty, illiteracy, violence, and illness are on the rise. The richest fifth of the world's population owns 80 percent of the world's resources, while the poorest fifth owns barely .5 percent. Out of a global population of 5.9 billion, barely 500 million people live comfortably, while 4.5 billion remain in need. Even in the European Union, there are 16 million people unemployed and 50 million living in poverty. And the combined fortune of the 358 richest people in the world (billionaires, in dollars) equals more than the annual revenue of 45 percent of the poorest in the world, or 2.6 billion people. That, it seems, is the brave new world of globalization.

Beware of Dogma

Globalization has little to do with people or progress and everything to do with money. Dazzled by the glimmer of fast profits, the champions of globalization are incapable of taking stock of the future, anticipating the needs of humanity and the environment, planning for the expansion of cities, or slowly reducing inequalities and healing social fractures.

According to Friedman, all of these problems will be resolved by the “invisible hand of the market” and by macroeconomic growth—so goes the strange and insidious logic of what we in France call the *pensée unique*. The *pensée unique*, or “single thought,” represents the interests of a group of economic forces—in particular, free-flowing international capital. The arrogance of the *pensée unique* has reached such an extreme that one can,

without exaggerating, call it modern dogmatism. Like a cancer, this vicious doctrine imperceptibly surrounds any rebellious logic, then inhibits it, disturbs it, paralyzes it, and finally kills it. This doctrine, this *pensée unique*, is the only ideology authorized by the invisible and omnipresent opinion police.

The *pensée unique* was born in 1944, at the time of the Bretton Woods Agreement. The doctrine sprang from the world's large economic and monetary institutions—the Banque de France, Bundesbank, European Commission, International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and

Development, World Bank, and World Trade Organization—which tap their deep coffers to enlist research centers, universities, and foundations around the planet to spread the good word.

Almost everywhere, university economics departments, journalists (such as Friedman), writers, and political leaders take up the principal commandments of these new tablets of law and, through the mass media, repeat them until they are blue in the face. Their dogma is echoed dutifully by the mouthpieces of economic information and notably by the “bibles” of investors and stockbrokers—the *Economist*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Reuters, and *Wall Street Journal*, for starters—which are often owned by large industrial or financial groups. And of course, in our media-mad society, repetition is as good as proof.

So what are we told to believe? The most basic principle is so strong that even a Marxist, caught offguard, would agree: The economic prevails over the political. Or as the writer Alain Minc put it, “Capitalism cannot collapse, it is the natural state of society. Democracy is not the natural state of society. The market, yes.” Only an economy disencumbered of social speed bumps and other “inefficiencies” can steer clear of regression and crisis.

The remaining key commandments of the *pensée unique* build upon the first. For instance, the market’s “invisible hand corrects the unevenness and malfunctions of capitalism” and, in particular, financial markets, whose “signals orient and determine the general movement of the economy.” Competition and competitiveness “stimulate and develop businesses, bringing them permanent and beneficial modernization.” Free trade without barriers is “a factor of the uninterrupted development of

Dazzled by the glimmer of fast profits, the champions of globalization are incapable of taking stock of the future.

commerce and therefore of societies.” Globalization of manufactured production and especially financial flows should be encouraged at all costs. The international division of labor “moderates labor demands and lowers labor costs.” A strong currency is a must, as is deregulation and privatization at every turn. There is always “less of the state” and a constant bias toward the interests of capital to the detriment of the interests of labor, not to mention a callous indifference to ecological costs. The constant repetition of this catechism in the media by almost all political decision makers, Right and Left alike (think of British and German prime ministers Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder’s “Third Way” and “New Middle”), gives it such an intimidating power that it snuffs out every tentative free thought.

Magnates and Misfits

Globalization rests upon two pillars, or paradigms, which influence the way globalizers such as Friedman think. The first pillar is communication. It has tended to replace, little by little, a major driver of the last two centuries: progress. From schools to businesses, from families and law to government, there is now one command: Communicate.

The second pillar is the market. It replaces social cohesion, the idea that a democratic society must function like a clock. In a clock, no piece is unnecessary and all pieces are unified. From this eighteenth-century mechanical metaphor, we can derive a modern economic and financial version. From now on, everything must operate according to the criteria of the “master market.” Which of our new values are most fundamental? Windfall profits, efficiency, and competitiveness.

In this market-driven, interconnected world, only the strongest survive. Life is a fight, a jungle. Economic and social Darwinism, with its constant calls for competition, natural selection, and adaptation, forces itself on everyone and everything. In this new social order, individuals are divided into “solvent” or “nonsolvent”—i.e., apt to integrate into the market or not. The market offers protection to the solvents only. In this new order, where human solidarity is no longer an imperative, the rest are misfits and outcasts.

Thanks to globalization, only activities possessing four principal attributes thrive—those that are planetary, permanent, immediate, and immaterial in nature. These four characteristics recall the four principal attributes of God Himself. And in truth, globalization is set up to be a kind of modern divine critic, requiring submission, faith, worship, and new rites. The market dictates the Truth, the Beautiful, the Good, and the Just. The “laws” of the market have become a new stone tablet to revere.

Friedman warns us that straying from these laws will bring us to ruin and decay. Thus, like other propagandists of the New Faith, Friedman attempts to convince us that there is one way, and one way alone—the ultraliberal way—to manage economic affairs and, as a consequence, political affairs. For Friedman, the political is in effect the economic, the economic is finance, and finances are markets. The Bolsheviks said, “All power to the Soviets!” Supporters of globalization, such as Friedman, demand, “All power to the market!” The assertion is so peremptory that globalization has become, with its dogma and high priests, a kind of new totalitarianism.

DOSCAPITAL 2.0

by Thomas L. Friedman

Ignacio Ramonet makes several points in his provocative and impassioned anti-globalization screed. Let me try to respond to what I see as the main ones.

Ramonet argues that the Cold War was not an international system. I simply disagree. To say that the Cold War was not an international system because it could not explain everything that happened during the years 1946 to 1989—such as aerial transport or apartheid—is simply wrong. An international system doesn’t explain everything that happens in a particular era. It is, though, a dominant set of ideas, power structures, economic patterns, and rules that shape the domestic politics and international relations of more countries in more places than anything else.

Not only was the Cold War such an international system, but France had a very comfortable, unique, and, at times, constructive niche in that system, bridging the two superpower camps. Now that this old order is gone, it is obvious France is looking for a new, singular, and equally comfortable niche in today’s system of globalization. Just as in the Cold War, France, like every other country, will have to define itself in relation to this new system. The obsession with globalization in the pages of *Le Monde diplomatique* is eloquent testimony to the fact that this search is alive and well in France.

Ramonet says that I “forget to remark that there are groups from every nationality, religion, ethnicity, etc., who vigorously oppose . . . globalization.” In my book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, however, I have five separate chapters dealing with different aspects of that backlash. The penultimate chapter, in fact, lays out why I believe that globalization is not