CHAPTER 2

A Marxist Theory of International Relations

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter intervenes in the third wave of debates on theories of imperialism (Anievas 2010; Ashman 2006; Callinicos 2007, 2009; Colás 2008; Colás and Pozo 2011; Harvey 2003; Pozo-Martin 2006, 2007). Two events triggered much intellectual frenzy that ultimately led to a comprehensive academic discussion. The first event was the publication of Michael Hardt and Tony Negri’s book *Empire* (2000). Among other things, this work ambitiously confined the state and concepts like imperialism and inter-imperial rivalries to the dustbin of history. The second and much more dramatic event was represented by the US occupation of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) which followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The tension between the two triggers could not be more tangible. The territorialism and militarism that characterized the War on Terror challenged the very *raison d’être* of Hardt and Negri’s book. This stimulated literary production on the left camp of academia. Such tension was further compounded by the fact that Marx never produced a fully fledged, systematically organized theory of the state and of International Relations (IR). In the words of one contributor, the state in theories of imperialism has become a ‘Gordian knot’ (Pozo-Martin 2006).

Demand for such a theory not only stemmed from the specific events that triggered the third wave of debates on imperialism. The termination of the Cold War and slogans such as the ‘end of the state,’ the
end of history,’ and the ‘end of the geography’ appear distant from
the contemporary world, both in time and from an empirical view-
point. Nationalist identities and economic and military multipolarity have
increasingly become defining features of IR since the Great Recession in
2008. What stands out is a tangible techno- and geopolitical competition
for regional if not global hegemony between the United States and China.
The bottom line is that if the world order appears less homogeneous and
more fragmented, a Marxist theory of imperialism would benefit from
sharpening further its theoretical tools. The aim is to overcome a Marxist
tendency to generalize—a mistake that different strands of the theory of
imperialism have in common, from Lenin and Bukharin to Hardt and
Negri—and to over-rely on economic as opposed to political analyses. In
this regard, Marxism has remained for too long a ‘lame duck’ vis-à-vis
mainstream IR theories. The lack of a systematic Marxist theory of the
state has not only resulted in a proliferation of Marxist accounts of the
state and of imperialism—this in itself is actually a very positive develop-
ment, but it has also meant a neglect—until recently—of the role that
human agency performs within the foreign policymaking process.

To avoid the temptation of echoing realism in order to explain conflict
in the international, this chapter cuts out a space for Marxism in IR
and offers a new perspective building on previous scholarly contributions.
This aim is achieved by developing an interdisciplinary framework situated
between Marxist International Political Economy (IPE), IR theory, and
Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). In particular, the chapter aims to demon-
strate that a materialist theory of imperialism can incorporate elements
from other theories of the international and that some commonly used IR
concepts should not be the exclusive prerogative of mainstream theories.

The chapter is organized in the following sections: Sect. 2.1 provides
an overview of the context from which the classical Marxist theory of
imperialism emerged. It highlights that this was a very diverse but not
a particularly rigorous intellectual experience, considering the differences
between the protagonists of that first wave of discussions.

Section 2.2 unpacks these theories further along the fault line of
capitalism and imperialism as a catalyst for peace or war.

Section 2.3 engages with Kenneth Waltz’s and Robert Gilpin’s critique
of the theory of imperialism. Although the chapter disagrees with some
of the issues raised by Waltz, it finds that he touched upon important
questions—especially on the validity of the theory with regard to a US-
led, post-WWII order. While accepting some of the limits of the theory of
imperialism, it is noted that this is a flexible theory. It offers a comprehensive framework for analysis that brings together economic and geopolitical levers of power and it is open to further refinement.

Section 2.4 of this chapter engages with contributions from the third wave of debates. It endorses the thesis of those Marxists who have defined imperialism as an intersection of economic and political interests and who have launched proposals for further research in this area. In particular, the chapter praises David Harvey’s thesis but it also acknowledges that he did not stretch the theory of imperialism far enough into the realm of agency.

Section 2.5 puts forward a proposal for facilitating the interaction between a materialist theory of imperialism and foreign policymaking. Drawing on James N. Rosenau’s blueprint for a ‘pre-theory’ of foreign policy based on multiple levels of analysis, the chapter looks at the relationship between structure and agency through the lenses of space (the systemic or external environment level), state-capital relations (the societal-governmental level), and political elites’ strategic worldviews (the idiosyncratic or individual level). The relationship between politics and economics is then deconstructed along these three levels of analysis and through the fault line of capitalist unevenness. The subsection on space and the systemic level retrieves an overlooked aspect of Henri Lefebvre’s writings that invites the merging of the geoeconomic understanding of space, common in Marxist geography, with the political spatiality of states. Here, it is maintained that capitalist production of space compels the state to intervene in economic matters in order to manage the consequences of the uneven development of capitalism. Although the state operates within the boundaries of capitalism, it does so by maximizing its geopolitical leverage and through its (geo)political means. The subsection on state-capital relations draws on the Miliband-Poulantzas debate but it seeks to move away from the discord on state autonomy, arguing that by virtue of the functions it performs the state retains legitimacy and control of foreign policy decisions. A successful capitalist economy requires a diplomatically and geopolitically assertive state and in general capitalist interests will benefit from this. However, short-term political and strategic decisions may not be the ones favored by the ruling class and could have collateral effects across the geoeconomic space. The subsection on the ideological space suggests that the unevenness of capitalism does not only affect geoeconomic and institutional processes, but also ideological ones. Drawing on The German Ideology (1974) and Sebastiano Timpanaro’s work, the subsection endorses Lefebvre’s argument that space is social,
but also physical, and above all, mental. It points out that in addition to economic and institutional unevenness one should also consider ideological unevenness. At the ideological level policymakers will seek strategic synthesis accordingly to their worldviews, therefore it would be useful for a theory of imperialism to develop an operational code of political elites. This, it is argued, opens a space for dialogue with theories such as strategic culture, among others.

2.2 One or Many Marxist Theories of Imperialism?

It is widely believed that Marx ‘did not use’ the word ‘imperialism’ (Brewer 1990, 25). This is only partially true. He did mentioned the ‘i’ word at least once in a letter addressed to Friedrich Engels (MECW Volume 40, 72). However, Marx never integrated this concept into his work, neither did he engage with ‘a generic term to describe the rule of a more advanced nation state over a more backward area’ (Brewer 1990, 25). As Marx never produced a theory of imperialism the early twentieth century was the ground for several contributions in this regard. These theories did not arise out of the work of a coordinated research network. Lenin and others were not academics and did not feel the need to build a rigorous theory (Callinicos 2009, 25–6). The classical Marxist theory of imperialism is a multitude of different works and experiences which developed in the run up to, during and after WWI. Its authors came from a variety of professional and ideological backgrounds. Ironically, with Marx dying too early to put together the puzzle of his many intuitions, great credit for putting forward the vital elements of the classical Marxist theory of imperialism does not go to a Marxist but to a liberal dissatisfied with the socio-economic conditions of his time, John Atkinson Hobson. Another major contributor was Rudolf Hilferding—an Austro-Marxist—who later became the intellectual leader of Eurocommunism and the New Left, and the Austrian experience inspired the policies of governments of the UK Labour Party and Scandinavian Social-Democrats. A further and decisive development occurred with what Alex Callinicos called the ‘Lenin-Bukharin’ synthesis. Differences also existed between the two comrades, particularly because Nicolay Bukharin’s work is more comprehensive and accurate than Vladimir Lenin’s. For the latter, Imperialism (1939) was an opportunity to publish in the legal press. The pamphlet resulted from a commission by the ‘legal Russian “Parus”’ (Sail)
Publishers in Petrograd.’ The official purpose was to write a booklet for the popular ‘Pre- and Post-War Europe’ series, giving a general characterization of the new epoch. To write ‘a popular outline’ meant using a certain style of communication, and to write something ‘with an eye to the tsarist censorship’ required, in Lenin’s words, the use of ‘slavish tongue’ (Lenin 1939, 7–9). Thus, writing a theory of imperialism was also functional to Lenin’s political aspirations and his proselytising action, before anything else (Arrighi 1978, 19–21). Furthermore, the pamphlet fulfilled the purpose of writing something ‘scathing’ about ‘Marxists like Kautsky’ whose analyses in Lenin’s view were too kind to capitalism (Kiely 2010, 59). These writers were intellectuals and militants, but they came from different experiences—Hilferding was a pediatrician turned minister, Hobson an economist and journalist, Lenin a revolutionary leader and Bukharin a journalist and communist intellectual. Their views ranged from (what later became) Keynesianism and different forms of Marxism. Their ideas for action were different. Hobson, Hilferding, and Kautsky had a reformist approach in contrast to the unequivocally revolutionary character of the other three: Rosa Luxemburg, Bukharin, and Lenin. They had different national origins and even though they had the shared context of WWI in common, their political experiences which shaped their intellectual outlook were different.

With such a multifaceted picture, why should one use the label of ‘classical Marxist theory of imperialism’? In spite of the above-mentioned differences, some extensive commonality existed. These thinkers lived roughly at the same time and all of them noted a change in capitalism. Between 1870 and 1900, world GDP rose exponentially. Despite the Long Depression of the 1870s, heavy industry overtook light industry, becoming a central feature of industrial production, while the revolution in the technical base of production also brought a rapid increase in the size of enterprises. Hilferding, Bukharin, and Lenin wrote around the time of the start of WWI and all of them acknowledged two aspects. On the one hand, they noted ‘the formation of monopolies on a national basis and the intensification of competition on a world scale between national groupings of capital’; on the other hand, ‘they predicted an acceleration of capitalist development in backward areas of the world’ (Brewer 1990, 20). As Eric Hobsbawm put it, industrialization and depression were slowing the rate of profit and turning national economies into rivals, as ‘the gains of one [country] seemed to threaten the position of others’ (1987, 42). Contrary to previous forms of imperialism, interstate rivalry
was increasingly the product of capitalist economy (Hobsbawm 1987, 60; Wood 2003). Hilferding, Bukharin, and Lenin all noted that state institutions and big capital mergers were tied together in a symbiotic relationship. Although the growing transnationalization of economics was an important feature in the decades leading up to WWI, even multinational corporations needed to ‘attach themselves to a suitably important national economy’ (Hobsbawm 1987, 42, 54). These thinkers provided an instrumentalist perspective in that their theories highlighted the primacy of economic over political interests. Like many who came after them, they never engaged in a study of distinctive national peculiarities or of political elites. The classical Marxist theory of imperialism was flawed by its attempt at extrapolating a universal theory from the particular (Callinicos 2009, 10).

2.3 Capitalism and Imperialism: Peace or Rivalry?

Although Marx never described himself as a space theorist, he portrayed a world where capitalism was transforming the global space. He lived in the mid-nineteenth century when the world economy was being made and remade at such a fast pace, a time that historian Eric Hobsbawm called *The Age of Capital* (1975) and Jules Verne daydreamed about traveling *Around the World in Eighty Days* (2008). Technologies of transport led the change and Marx spoke of ‘annihilation of space through time’ (1973, 538–9). This view dramatically informed Marx and Engels’ *The Communist Manifesto* (1967), in which they illustrated the inexorable rise of a world bourgeoisie. The ‘age of capital’ was revolutionary by definition, according to the two comrades, as it swept away older modes of production and levelled economic conditions across (some) nations, changing the way millions of people lived: ‘the bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of productivity, by the immensely facilitated means of communications, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization’ (Marx and Engels 1967, 8). Anticipating narratives of globalization by at least one century, the *Manifesto* portrayed the fragmentation of sociopolitical barriers to trade with adjectives such as ‘world-market’ formation, ‘technology’ diffusion, ‘connections,’ ‘globe,’ ‘cosmopolitan,’ ‘new industries,’ and the ‘interdependence of nations’.\(^5\) Neil Smith described this trend as a ‘drive toward spacelessness,’ that is ‘an equalization of conditions and levels of production’ (1990, 94).\(^6\)
This understanding of capitalist spatiality was central to one of the
two main strands in the early twentieth-century debate on imperialism.
Some authors saw in the globalizing tendency of capitalism a systemic
thrust toward interstate peace and economic integration. For Eduard
Bernstein ‘[t]he most industrially developed countries are simultaneously
competitors and customers of one another; ... the era in which peoples
attempted to subjugate one another is finished in Europe’ (Howard and
King 1989, 92). Heinrich Cunow stated that because ‘imperialism is
present-day capitalism; the development of capitalism is inevitable and
progressive; therefore imperialism is progressive; we should grovel before
it and glorify it!’ (Kumbamu 2010, 135). Karl Kautsky noted that WWI
was leading to ‘a federation of the strongest, who renounce their arms
race, ... a phase of ultra-imperialism, ... of ... world peace’ (Kautsky 1970,
46).7 For Kautsky, concluded Lenin, imperialism amounted to no more
than a ‘striving for annexations.’ To Lenin this sounded ‘very incomplete’
(1939, 90). Like others in the German debate, Rosa Luxemburg believed
that capitalism was ‘destined’ to reach globally. Eventually, it would have
to implode after running out of non-capitalist space, so important to its
expanded reproduction. This was a theory of inevitable capitalist over-
stretch: ‘capitalism, as a result of its own inner contradictions, moves
towards a point when it will be unbalanced, when it will simply be impos-
sible’ (Luxemburg 2003, 24). Luxemburg however, was not a Kautskyite.
Although she envisioned a global capitalist order she insisted that capi-
talism is a ‘spasmodic expansion’ that violently attacks people, nature, and
previous modes of production (Luxemburg 2003, 352).8

As far as this book is concerned, these ideas implied a less proactive role
of states in the international arena. This was not the case on the other
side of the spectrum of the theory of imperialism. Hobson found that
the ‘taproots of imperialism’ lie in the overproduction that ‘forced Great
Britain, Germany, Holland, France to place larger and larger portions of
their economic resources outside the area, ... and ... to take in the new
area’ (1902, 85–6). This statement puts Hobson in line with more radical
thinkers such as Lenin and Bukharin. Nonetheless, because of his liberal
views he remained an ambiguous figure. He sounded more Schumpete-
rian when he blamed imperialism on the corrupt modus operandi of rich
elites such as ‘Messrs, Rockefeller, Pierpont Morgan, and their associates’
(Hobson 1902, 82–3, 100). Finance was the villain and imperialism the
violent arm of a restricted plutocracy (Hobson 1902, 60, 66–7).9
Rudolf Hilferding brought some clarity to this ambiguity, stating that ‘capital can pursue no other policy than that of imperialism’ (1981, 366). The rise of finance capital (Finanzkapital) had led to a shift in the ownership of wealth and the ‘dependence of industry on the banks’ (Hilferding 1981, 225). Here lies Hilferding’s originality. However, he did not develop this insight into a theory of interstate competition, even though he acknowledged that capitalism pushes for a maximization of territory (Hilferding 1981, 326).

Nonetheless, Hobson’s novelty laid in his focus on the rivalry-prone tendency among capitalist states. Reporting on the Second Boer War (1899–1902) Hobson described two political-industrial blocs fighting to grab South African mines, one sponsored by Britain and the other by Germany. Lenin—who acknowledged the influence of Hobson’s work in his theory of interstate rivalry (1939, 7)—argued that ‘a monopoly, once it is formed and controls thousands of millions, inevitably penetrates into every sphere of public life, regardless of the form of government’ (1939, 58). But Lenin went beyond this observation and reflected on the implications that capitalism might have on the international balance of power:

As long as capitalism remains what it is, surplus capital will be utilized … for the purpose of increasing profits by exporting capital abroad to the backward countries. In these backward countries profits are usually high, for capital is scarce, the price of land is relatively low, wages are low, raw materials are cheap. (1939, 63)

The implications of this viewpoint are that capitalism, by its very nature, does not lead to an equalization of economic conditions and geopolitical harmony. Rather, it produces unevenness across the international space. Attacking Kautsky’s idea of ‘ultra-imperialism,’ Lenin explained the geopolitical consequences of the uneven development of capitalism in the following passage

... the only conceivable basis under capitalism for the division of spheres of influence, interests, colonies, etc., is a calculation of the strength of those participating, their general economic, financial, military strength, etc. And the strength of these participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for the even development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries is impossible under capitalism. Half a century ago Germany was a miserable, insignificant country, if her
capitalist strength is compared with that of Britain of that time; Japan compared with Russia in the same way. Is it “conceivable” that in ten or twenty years’ time the relative strength of the imperialist powers will have remained unchanged? It is out of the question. (1939, 118–9)\(^{13}\)

Ultra-imperialism, Lenin argued, cannot be durable and the rise of Germany and Japan proves it. With this argument Lenin anticipated the concept of ‘balance of power’ and the idea of ‘the rise and fall of great powers’ that are central to contemporary realist theory.

Bukharin’s perspective was more articulated than Lenin’s. Drawing on Hilferding he noted a degree of ‘transfusion of capital from one “national” sphere into the other,’ a process of ‘internationalisation’ (Bukharin 1972, 28, 35, 39, 40, 41). For Bukharin, this internationalization rather than leading to ultra-imperialism increased competition between cartels which turned to their states for (geo)political support (1972, 40–52, Ch. 2, 3). Because of such competition, Bukharin argued, capitalists seek state help and this leads to a ‘tendency to “nationalize” capitalist interests, to form narrow “national” groups armed to the teeth and ready to hurl themselves at one another any moment’ (1972, 107). This, substantially, is an ‘economic policy of the cartels as formulated by the state’ where ‘at some point the trust cedes power to state’ (1972, 75, 125). Unequivocally, Bukharin stated that

the bourgeoisie as a whole is more tolerant regarding monopolistic interference by the state power. … The interests of the state and the interests of finance capital coincide more and more. On the other hand, a maximum of centralisation and a maximum of state power are required by the fierce competitive struggle on the world market. (1972, 155)

Ultimately, Hobson, Hilferding, Lenin, and Bukharin made a crucial point for later debates on imperialism. Internationalization and the consequences of uneven development of capitalism tie states and the capitalist ruling class to a shared destiny of fortunes and misfortunes. Powerful and organized political leadership is necessary for monopolies to achieve economic objectives, although the political solutions devised by governments could lead to short-term contradictions and intra-elites tensions.\(^{14}\)
2.4  Waltz’s and Gilpin’s Critique of the Theory

Kenneth Waltz provided a useful critique of the theory of imperialism but some areas he touched upon require clarification. The theory of imperialism is certainly not a flawless theory. Yet, one should not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Indeed, the theory with all its imperfections provides a flexible framework that can be improved and adapted to current times. Toward this end it is useful to provide some clarification.

Waltz, like many others, associated Lenin’s theory to World System and Dependency theories. These were described as an ‘effort to save Lenin’s thesis’ (Waltz 1979, 34). More to the point, he posited that the focus of the theory is ‘the baleful influence of the strong over the weak’ (Waltz 1959, 36). However, as it was evident from the previous section of this chapter, imperialism in the classical Marxist theory means ‘primarily, rivalry between major capitalist countries’ (Brewer 1990, 88–9). In addition, Waltz argued that the theory is at odds with a post-colonial world where great powers tend not to engage in territorial conquest. He asked ‘how’ could one ‘salvage’ Lenin’s theory given the lack of ‘colonial policies’ and pointed out that ‘empires without colonies … were unimaginable to Lenin’ (1979, 28). This is a fair point which, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, remains central to the debate on whether the United States is an empire or a hegemony and continues to divide Marxist students of imperialism. Both Lenin and Bukharin considered this possibility even though they were too ideologically averse to capitalism to really believe in this scenario. They predicted the rise of a ‘Kautskyian moment’ characterized by economic integration and political peace under the dominance of a powerful cartel. In his introduction to Bukharin’s book, Lenin acknowledged that the ‘development is going in the direction of a single world trust that will swallow up all enterprises and all states without exception’ (Bukharin 1972, 14). However, he also believed that ‘before a single world trust will be reached, … imperialism will inevitably explode’ (Bukharin 1972, 14). Bukharin instead, by focusing on the internationalization of capital, came very close to predicting the kind of world order the United States and its Western allies were able to set up after WWII, and even more so after 1989. He imagined that the capitalist ruling class could find an international ‘solidarity of interests’ in ‘the common ownership of securities’ and ‘collective property’ that could bring to ‘the formation of a golden international’ or ‘an all-embracing power which had conquered all the others’ (1972, 62, 142). But much
like Lenin, Bukharin believed that this tendency could be ‘counteracted by a still stronger tendency of capital towards nationalization’ and ‘the forces that are hostile to imperialism’ (Bukharin 1972, 138, 142).

The most stimulating point raised by Waltz—from the viewpoint of this book—is that Lenin’s theory of imperialism is not political enough—if at all. He stated that ‘the assumptions of the Hobson-Lenin theory will be economic, not political’ and this makes it a ‘reductionist’ theory, ‘inadequate for the construction of international-political theory’ (1979, 20, 36). He added that for Marxists ‘there are no good international-political reasons for the conflict and the warring of states’ (Waltz 1979, 36). In fairness, Waltz was not rejecting the idea that capitalism can lead to aggressive state behavior. Rather, he was pointing out that a theory that only focuses on the domestic sphere is flawed (Waltz 1979, 26). Although considering capitalism a domestic factor is equal to putting a straitjacket on the concept itself, Waltz’s critique hit a vulnerable spot in the Marxist theory of imperialism. The latter tends to neglect factors that can explain national specificities. Waltz suggested that ‘[e]xternal conditions must be part of the explanation since the variety of conditions internal to states is not matched by the variety of their external behaviours’ (Waltz 1979, 26). Meeting this challenge is central to the intellectual effort of this book, that is, stretching the classical Marxist theory of imperialism. Nonetheless, this author takes issue with Waltz’s accusation of ‘reductionism.’ If the theory of imperialism is focused on capitalism, it still entails a tangible interest in geopolitics. Waltz stressed that Lenin’s theory was disproved because imperial powers ‘exported little capital to their own colonies’ (Waltz 1979, 24). Similarly, Fieldhouse maintained that Hobson ‘had in no sense proved’ the relation between foreign investments and expansionism (2006, 128). But Hobson himself admitted that

recent annexations of tropical countries procured at great expense, have furnished poor and precarious markets, that our aggregate trade with our colonial possessions is virtually stationary, and that our most profitable and progressive trade is with rival industrial nations. (1902, 76)

Hobson’s words offer a very geopolitical picture. While economic calculations remained central to imperial political elites, territorial expansion—like diplomacy and trade policy—was a solution for states that wanted to
acquire geopolitical leverage against rival states. Eric Hobsbawm maintained that disputes over seemingly worthless territories such as the ‘Congo basin’ or a ‘Pacific atoll’ could provide a country’s economy and its monopolies access to natural resources, potential markets, or economic deals (1987, 66). Hobson and Lenin did not consider colonies as the ‘Eldorado’ (Hobsbawm 1987, 67). Rather, these (may have) served as bargaining pawns, assets for negotiating with rivals or blackmailing them. In this regard, Lenin wrote that

an essential feature of imperialism is the rivalry between several great powers in the striving for hegemony, i.e., for the conquest of territory, not so much directly for themselves as to weaken the adversary and undermine his hegemony. (emphasis added, 1939, 91–2)

Andrew Linklater has endorsed this argument, maintaining that if ‘capitalist development was the dominant logic’ in the theory of imperialism, few observers noticed that the theory of imperialism allows for ‘interplay’ between different ‘domains’ of power (Linklater 1990, 87). Indeed, ‘the traditional reading of Lenin’s essay has often replaced Lenin’s imputed economism with a similarly “one logic” explanation of the colonial epoch’ (Linklater 1990, 88). Linklater took this even further than many Marxists did, arguing that the economic logic of the Marxist theory

served as a foil for realists … [who] overlooked the main contribution of Lenin’s analysis of international relations … its attempt to understand the relationship between the process of capitalist development … and the increased propensity for violence between nation states. (Linklater 1990, 83)

In this regard, Robert Gilpin appeared more generous to Lenin than Waltz was. He acknowledged Lenin’s insight into the geopolitical implications of the uneven development of capitalism and sympathized with the idea that Marxism could theorize the ‘international balance of power,’ although he remained skeptical about the possibility of ‘predict[ing] political outcomes’ (1981, 48, 76–7). For Gilpin ‘the struggle for power and the desire for economic gain are ultimately and inextricably joined’ (1981, 67). His viewpoint is informed by the belief that ‘economic factors and motives are universal elements in the behavior of states’ (1981, 67). This has to be welcomed in a theory of imperialism, as is the statement
that ‘groups and states seek to control and organize economic relations and activities in ways that will increase their own relative shares of this surplus,’ even though Gilpin drew this conclusion from a rational choice model (1981, 67–8). On the other hand, for Gilpin international politics is determined by ‘universal elements’ (1981, 68). From this viewpoint he echoes Waltz’s argument about the existence of imperialism before capitalism (1979, 25). Marxists do not question the fact that imperialism predated capitalism (Wood 2002, 147–52). However, ‘capitalism did not put an end to old imperial practices … it created new reasons, new needs, for pursuing some of them with even greater gusto … new forms of appropriation and exploitation’ (Wood 2002, 151–2). To an extent Gilpin shared this view when acknowledging that ‘economic interests … are of greater consequence in the modern era’ compared to ‘religious and political passions’ and that ‘no two hegemonic conflicts are alike’ (Gilpin 1981, 49, 67–8; Waltz 1979, 25). Yet, to him the state remains the ultimate source of power:

The economy and economic activities are subordinate to the perceived security and economic interests of the state and the ruling elite. A major function of economic exchange is to enhance the war-making capability of the state. (Gilpin 1981, 112)

While some of Gilpin’s observations are inspiring for a review of the theory of imperialism, by its very nature Marxism cannot accept Gilpin’s idea that economic power is subordinate to ‘war-making.’ Marxism rejects the claim that history is a product of ‘power drives … and the outstanding personalities’ and that technological and economic forces are ‘geared to imperialist drives, contrary to their inherent tendencies, by statesmen’ (Kemp 1972, 17).

### 2.5 The Contemporary Debate on Imperialism

Interest in neocolonialism, dependency, and world-system theory has been a constant since the crisis of empires and the end of WWII (Arrighi 1978; Palma 1978; Wallerstein 1979, 2007, 2011; Warren 1973). However, the debate on the classical theory of imperialism and interstate rivalries stalled. Yet, the end of the Cold War and the apparent triumph of globalization inspired (new?) ideas on the relationship between capitalism, imperialism, peace, and rivalry. The debate was
reopened by two highly provocative contributions. William I. Robinson noted that if the national state was once controlled by the bourgeoisie, nowadays the transnational state (TNS) performs similar functions but in the interest of a transnational elite. To him, ‘a transnational institutional structure has played an increasingly salient role in coordinating global capitalism and imposing capitalist domination beyond national borders’ (2007, 17). From a spatial viewpoint, the TNS is not structured in a hierarchical fashion, but on a horizontal set of ‘multi-layered’ and ‘multi-functional’ institutions which are networked with each other (2002, 213). Although this sounds to this book’s author a rather Kautskyian approach, Robinson rejected the accusation. He responded that his theory ‘emphasizes that conflict among capitals is endemic to the system but that such competition takes on new forms in the age of globalization not necessarily expressed as national rivalry’ (Robinson 2007, 10). Through this lens, conflict in the international has to be seen as ‘less a campaign for US hegemony than a contradictory political response to the crisis of global capitalism’ (2007, 21).

Hardt and Negri, meanwhile, maintained that state power has surrendered to a ‘new logic and structure of rule’ centred on commoditization of life and by doing so they endorsed O’Brien’s narrative on the ‘end of geography’ (1992). In their view, ‘capital seems to be faced with a smooth world order’ which arose with the ‘passage from industrial to informational economy,’ or, from Fordism to Toyotism (Hardt and Negri 2000, xiii, 294; Colás 2007, 174). With the end of the nation-state, world regions ‘infuse one another, distributing inequalities and barriers along multiple and fractured lines’ (Hardt and Negri 2000, 335). From this, they inferred that ‘the history of imperialist, inter-imperialist, and anti-imperialist wars is over’ (2000, 189). To Hardt and Negri, the ‘state does not, and indeed no-nation-state can today, form the centre of an imperialist project,’ while conflict appears more as ‘police action’ exerted by the United States rather than as nineteenth-century conflicts (2000, xiv, 10, 12).

Hardt and Negri’s thesis has been widely debated and criticized. Yet, as far as this book is concerned, the current historical conjuncture—and the new Cold War between Beijing and Washington in primis—does not resemble a world order where interstate rivalries have disappeared. If anything, it seems to be the contrary. This is one of the reasons why their provocative arguments together with Bush’s War on Terror stemmed into
the third-wave theory of imperialism, echoing some of the contrapositions of the first wave of imperialism debates.

On the opposite side of the spectrum compared to Hardt and Negri sits David Harvey, who intervened in the debate on the new imperialism by seeking ‘a connection between processes of capital and expansionist political-military projects – such as the Project of the New American Century that has inspired the US War on Terrorism and the invasion of Iraq’ (Arrighi 2006, 201). But for Harvey these ‘two logics’ that form the engine of imperialism are in ‘a contradictory fusion’ (2003, 26). To him, this contradiction rests on the difference between the ‘two logics,’ since the ‘logic of territory’ is driven by statesmen’s interests to ‘sustain or augment the power of their own state vis-a-vis other states’ while the ‘logic of capital’ chases opportunities ‘wherever profits can be had’ (2003, 27). More importantly, Harvey specified that the statesman, contrarily to the capitalist, pursues a collective advantage and is constrained by the political and military situation of the state and is in some sense or other responsible to a citizenry or, more often, to an elite group, a class, a kinship structure, or some other social group. (2003, 27)

This is a key—though undeveloped—point that suggests where research into the relative autonomy of policymakers should be pursued, as this chapter does in its final section.

Harvey’s contribution sparked a decennial discussion, as mentioned at the start of this book, that includes widespread critiques. In this author’s view, there are two interrelated problems with Harvey’s theory of imperialism and both concern the way Harvey thinks about the relationship between capital and state.

From a presentational point of view, Harvey’s work ended up in an impasse similar to that of Lenin, who argued that states’ imperialist expansion leads to attempts to ‘weaken the adversary and undermine his hegemony,’ without developing this important point any further (1939, 92). Similar to Lenin, Harvey did not scrutinize the (geo)political sphere as much as he did with capitalist development. For Harvey, the ‘two logics’ are ‘distinct from each other’ (2003, 29). This is highly problematic for Marxism—as discussed in the following point. Yet, it is even more confusing if for Harvey ‘it is also undeniable that the two logics intertwine in complex and sometimes contradictory ways’ (2003, 29). Indeed,
he refers to the ‘relation between these two logics … as problematic and often contradictory (that is, dialectical) rather than as functional or one-sided’ but it takes the reader no further (2003, 30). So, the reader is left alone to make sense of a relation between two forces that are ‘distinctive but intertwined’ while Harvey himself admits—correctly—that there is a ‘difficulty’ in ‘keep[ing] the two sides of this dialectic simultaneously in motion and not to lapse into either a solely political or a predominantly economic mode of argumentation’ (2003, 30). This, from this author’s viewpoint, justifies Ellen Meiksín Wood and Robert Brenner when they maintained, respectively, that ‘it is not clear precisely which distinction … he [Harvey] really has in mind’ when he illustrates his point about the ‘two logics,’ and that the theory ‘is not all that clear’ (Wood 2006, 11; Brenner 2006, 80). This author’s interpretation of such criticisms is that the theory, with regard to the political sphere, is not articulated enough compared, for instance, to other contributions below. Nonetheless, this part of Harvey’s book remains a work in progress which has paved the way to much intellectual discussion.

From a conceptual viewpoint, even if Harvey’s theory has nothing to do with realism—those who made that accusation fired a cheap shot—the most obvious flaw of his theory is that the ‘logic of territory’ is presented as external to capitalism; this is unacceptable to Marxism because ‘to counterpose a “territorial” to a “capitalist” logic implies that the former is noncapitalist,’ but ‘given the inevitably capitalist nature of the state in capitalist society’ this is highly unlikely (Anderson 2005, 11). How exactly Harvey sees the ‘logic of territory’ autonomously dealing with the ‘logic of capital’ is not spelt out in detail. Simply put, in the The New Imperialism (2003) the problems debated in long-standing discussions about the capitalist state within the Marxist tradition appear—unwarrantedly—to be beyond Harvey’s focus. From this viewpoint, while the logic of territory in Harvey’s account does not necessarily lack its ‘raison d’etre,’ Brenner is not unfair when arguing that it is ‘drop[ed] like a hot potato’ (2006, 81, 83). This book’s author seeks to address this flaw in the next section of this chapter by claiming that it is the unevenness of capitalist development conceived at every level of social and human life that opens a space for conceptualizing the actions of agencies which are unquestionably socialized within capitalism but which are not—for professional and intellectual reasons—fully subsumed by capitalism.

Nonetheless, this author believes that the flaws of Harvey’s theory do not necessarily invalidate his assumptions, which are, in Wood’s words,
that an ‘ever-expanding capital accumulation must be accompanied by an ever-expanding political power and command over territory’ (2006, 13). Indeed, Wood’s argument that ‘the specificity of capitalist imperialism lies in the unique capacity of capital to impose its hegemony without expanding its territorial political power’ probably relies on an overly narrow or old-fashioned definition of geopolitical power and territorial control (2006, 13). This is confirmed by Wood’s misconception about the US empire, described as ‘the first truly capitalist empire precisely because it is the first imperial hegemon to possess the kind of economic power needed to dispense with territorial ambitions’ (2006, 13). This is a misconception to the extent that the lack of US colonies—a historically problematic point anyway—is not synonymous with the lack of nationally informed coercion and control of territory. Similarly, Brenner’s point that Harvey ‘never tells us why he expects the territorial logic of power and the capitalist logic of power to come into conflict’ is unfair since Harvey has in mind, among other examples, the economy-security conundrum of US policymakers who deal with China (2006, 81).

If Harvey’s intervention was exciting enough to stir an international academic discussion, the lack of refinement to some aspects of his theory also deserves some credit for keeping the discussion on imperialism alive. There are several competing approaches that have challenged Harvey’s theory on the relationship between the ‘two logics’ but this book does not provide an exhaustive account of them.

Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin situated themselves somewhere between Hardt and Negri, on the one hand, and Harvey, on the other hand. Indeed, they did not argue that the state has withered, rather they argue that it remains ‘at the center of the search for an explanation of the making of global capitalism’—because it contributes by ‘maintaining property rights, overseeing contracts, stabilizing currencies, reproducing class relations, and containing crises’ (2012, 1, 4). Yet, they drew on Nicos Poulantzas’ concept of ‘relative autonomy’ (2012, 4). From the viewpoint of this book’s author, such a choice defines the strengths and weaknesses of their approach. The ‘relative autonomy’ solution is a highly astute escamotage in that it moves away from the conception of the state as a puppet of the bourgeoisie and shifts its attention to the long-term stability of capitalism. In other words, Poulantzas abandoned the economy of the ruling class—the realization of direct interests—and analyzed the politics of capitalism and the planning of long-term solutions to the structural limits of profitability. The state is portrayed as a
referee which maintains social order—even if this means going against individual, short-term bourgeois interests—but whose policies in the long term help prevent social and economic crises—the modus operandi of the Federal Reserve’s interest rates policy is a good example of this. Indeed, in Poulantzas’ account the state ‘sets the limits’ to curb capitalism’s greedy, self-destructive nature (1973, 187). The state’s purpose is to ‘disorganize the dominated classes politically, and at the same time to organize the dominant classes politically’ (1973, 189). For Poulantzas, the state’s autonomy is ‘relative’ to the extent a government ‘does not directly represent the dominant classes’ economic interests’ but is the ‘organizing agent of their political struggle’ (1973, 190).

The concept of ‘relative autonomy’ however remains problematic. Although this may sound like a semantic matter, Poulantzas managed to go beyond what he called ‘economism’ in the sense that the state is not directly controlled by individual capitalists. But ‘instrumentalism’ remains because the state is still a machine which serves the ruling class. Poulantzas’ rejection of this accusation sounds too tautological:

It is true that the political and economic struggles of the dominated classes impose this on the capitalist state. However, this simply shows that the state is not a class instrument, but rather the state of a society divided into classes. (1973, 191)

In addition, the concept ‘relative autonomy’ leaves open the question on why the state works toward the interests of capital if the state and the bourgeoisie are not tied into the kind of relationship described by Miliband, for instance. Ultimately, it appears unfair to limit US power to the ‘managing and superintending [of] capitalism on a worldwide plane’ (Panitch and Gindin 2012, 1).

Scholars drawing on theories of Uneven & Combined Development (U&CD) contribute to a major agenda that goes beyond Harvey, the debate on the new imperialism, and even Marxism—indeed, the relation between studies in U&CD and Marxism is also debated.21 Nonetheless, this family of writings has offered several intriguing contributions. Although there is a vast literature on U&CD, it seems fair to maintain that this approach studies society and geopolitics from a longue durée perspective, taking into account the influence of earlier ‘forms of social existence’ on the present and focusing principally on history (Rosenberg 2010, 186).22
U&CD has produced fascinating studies but this book’s author finds that it remains ‘limited’—so to speak—by its broad and overly comprehensive focus, at least concerning the subject of discussion in this book. Indeed, individual authors have their own personal agendas and focus on different areas but if taken as a whole U&CD presents itself as a social theory of history, to such an extent that Ernest Mandel calls it ‘a universal law of human history’ (Mandel 1962, 91). While this is an extremely ambitious endeavor, it is neither the objective of this book nor was it the objective of classical Marxist theories of imperialism, in this author’s view. If anything, this book’s author sees the true challenge of the debate on imperialism as narrowing the scope of analysis in order to theorize the behavior of agencies. Indeed, while Anievas, for instance, is on the lookout for a theory of international history that does ‘capture the distinctive but in no way autonomous dimensions of social development in terms of their mutual entailment,’ this book is interested in the way the domestic level processes both internal and international factors (2014, 34). Developing a law of history seems a gargantuan task. Adding on the top of this an enquiry into individual agencies and foreign policymaking may lead to a theoretical overstretch.

The ‘problem’ above-mentioned can be seen in a work by Alexander Anievas and Richard Saull (2020) that, compared to other U&CD writings appears much closer in focus to this book. Although they argue that ‘hegemony is a highly dynamic state of affairs, always provisional and frequently unstable’ which necessitates ‘the active (and continuous) agency of the ruling classes and state to reproduce the conditions of its existence through mobilizing subaltern (and dissenting) layers,’ they do not unpack the working mechanisms of what they call ‘provisional’ and ‘unstable’ (Anievas and Saull 2020, 376). In a conclusive passage, indeed, they cite Gramsci and refer to the complexity that characterizes the amalgam of hegemonic blocs, arguing that ‘[m]ultiple ideological tendencies and different iterations of hegemonic projects can exist within a single bloc’ (391). This, however, sounds too much like Harvey. More specifically, it suggests that U&CD may not be a theory for foreign policy agencies as other theories are, as Teschke (2008) argued. Surely Anievas is right in his defence that U&CD offers ‘an explanation of the sociologically differentiated forms that agency takes’ (2014, 48). Yet, the purpose of this book is to go beyond sociology.

Two additional approaches dissected the relationship between material structures and agencies and did so through the prism of dialectic.
Andreas Bieler and Adam Morton (2018) sought to explain through a materialist lens the ‘upheavals of developmental “catch up” and interstate rivalry shaped by global capitalism as well as the causes and consequences of global war’ in the twenty-first century (2018, 4). Alongside other contributors to this debate they wanted to correct IR scholarships’ tendency to treat ‘material content and ideational form, agency and structure … ontologically as dualisms, often as discrete or at best as interacting separate elements’ (2018, 7). Indeed, the way to unpack ‘inner connections of Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis’ is by theorizing the international through a philosophy of internal relations that ‘makes explicit a conception of capital through which connections are maintained and contained as aspects of a self-forming whole’ (2018, 7, 9).

In particular, what is of major interest to the argument made in this book is how Bieler and Morton attempt to explain ‘the way ideas are internally related to material structures through the “material structure of ideology”’ (2018, 17). To them this happens in four steps. Yet, for Bieler and Morton, the hegemony of capitalist class relations is still the catalyst to ideology, which means that the political remains a manifestation of the economic, even if the authors cleverly draw a distinction between ‘differentiation’ and ‘separation’ (2018, 17). In fact, Bieler and Morton treat ideas as ‘material social processes’ and describe hegemonic ideas as those gaining status of ‘common sense’ (2018, 53, 72). This book’s argument instead is less focused on ideas as the dominant ideas and more on how individual worldviews help elites to filter and process information and to develop strategies.

The approach that has possibly most challenged Harvey but, at the same time, has taken seriously his invitation to open up the sphere of policymaking is Political Marxism. Benno Teschke and Hanne Lacher questioned Harvey’s idea of economic-political inter-imperialist blocs:

[w]hy was/is the capitalist state a national state? Why did capitalist class relations and accumulation strategies find expression in a territorial political framework to begin with? (Teschke and Lacher 2007, 567)\(^{24}\)

Noting that capitalism arose after the nation-state—not the other way around—they absolved the former from responsibility for interstate rivalries (2007, 574). That is, the genesis of geopolitical competition was already matured prior to the making of capitalism. To this,
Wood’s discourse added that national rivalries are ‘self-defeating’ from an economic viewpoint (Wood 2003, 156–7).

This point was countered by Alex Callinicos, who drawing on Marx’s work argued that because pre-capitalist and capitalist economic forms coexist, ‘[w]hy shouldn’t the state system be conceived analogously, as a social form that develops prior to the dominance of capitalism but that is incorporated into and adapted to the capitalist mode?’ (2009, 80). Also to this book’s author Political Marxism raised an intelligent argument. Indeed, one should not forget that while competing, the United States and China are also cooperating thanks to the economic interdependence that characterizes this relationship. Yet, while several individual businesses will find interstate tension detrimental to their interests, being tied to a geopolitically influential state has its benefits in the long run. Moreover, there are some questions that could be further explored in relation to Teschke and Lacher’s work.25 On the one hand, twentieth-and twenty-first-century globalization has failed to transform the international order into a truly transnationalized entity. The rise of nationalism, the persistence of mercantilist foreign economic policies, the return to military multipolarity, and the (lack of) a transnational crisis management system on migration, financial crises, and coronavirus show a fairly uneven picture. On the other hand, one should look beyond Europe. Giovanni Arrighi showed that the Asia-Pacific region enjoyed a ‘five hundred years peace,’ interrupted by sporadic clashes, hosting a geopolitical order which did not come to know systemic conflict as in the Old Continent. The rise of territorial tensions in the South China Sea since capitalism spread across the region deserves more attention in this regard.

Regardless, Teschke and Cemgil (2014) have rightly focused on how to integrate FPA into a materialist framework. The raison d’être of their approach is a rejection of other Marxist approaches guilty of reducing foreign policy to the ‘epiphenomenal,’ that is ‘to capitalist imperatives or other overriding sociopolitical determinations in structural-functionalist terms’ (2014, 607). Indeed, in this critique they included classical Marxist theories of imperialism and those of neo-Leninists, neo-Kautskyians, neo-Gramscians, post-leninists, and neo-trotskyists—approaches covered in this chapter. To them, they all failed to treat foreign policy as an ‘object of analysis in its own right—the active drawing together and purposive re-articulation of multiple influences from the domestic and the foreign.’ Indeed, in each of these approaches foreign policy remains a ‘derivative
phenomenon, deduced from deeper social forces, if it is not declared aprioristically as un-theorisable.’ Simply put, for Teschke and Cemgil there is no IR in their Marxist theories of International Relations (2014, 608).

Teschke and Cemgil’s contribution to this debate is as cleverly argued as others, offering a ‘particular understanding’ of dialectics, according to which ‘all social categories, including capitalism, the state, and foreign policies, remain historically open and subject to change, rather than theoretically closed and fixed’ (2014, 608). Consistent with the assumptions of Political Marxism, their argument is based on the belief that capitalism originates from ‘inter-subjective conflicts’ and in ‘relation to other macro-phenomena (state, inter-state system, foreign policy) as an ongoing social construction—and not as a self-reproducing totality or system’ (2014, 615). More to the point, they use dialectics as ‘an epistemological procedure that re-converts social phenomena as abstractions into their inter-subjectively constructed concretions’ (2014, 615).

For Teschke and Cemgil, applying a truly dialectic approach to FPA means ‘identifying how contradictory relations between social agents are resolved, reconciled, or set aside’ (2014, 620). That is equal to saying that ‘there cannot be a singular concept of capitalist international relations’ because in an international system of states foreign policy is the product of the ‘sui generis character of successive inter-subjectively constructed foreign policy encounters, contextualised but not purely derivable from or reducible to contexts, which should move centre-stage’ (2014, 621). This is what they call the ‘unintended quality’ of interstate relations (2014, 621).

Teschke and Cemgil’s approach offers the benefit of applying a materialist methodology to a realm that has remained unexplored in other accounts, that of foreign policy. Furthermore, it incorporates geopolitical competition to the extent it shows that a state’s foreign policy is also the consequence of other states’ strategies. Although the authors do not say it, de facto they have developed a sort of two-level game, where domestic interests are shaped by the diplomatic will of external actors. From this viewpoint, Teschke and Cemgil’s approach is not different from the one made in this chapter; this book’s author seeks to incorporate into a Marxist theory of IR agential behaviors that are shaped by capitalist structures but, at the same time, cannot be exclusively explained with a systemic approach. Rather, they are the product of how different policymakers in a capitalist society seek to resolve the complex puzzle of geopolitical competition. While the mindset remains capitalist, capitalist
structures do not provide politicians with prêt-à-porter solutions to the Rubik’s cube of geopolitics. These have to be made up with an increasing need for creativity.

2.6 A Multidimensional Theory of Imperialism

So far this chapter has showed that the Marxist theory of imperialism from the first to the third wave contains several imperfections. Most importantly, the theory can benefit from accounting for national differences and human agency with more accuracy. However, the chapter has also argued that it still offers a malleable framework that could satisfy Waltz’s demand for a ‘useful nonreductionist, … theory’ and incorporate a ‘variety of conditions’ stretching the analytical reach of the theory (Waltz 1979, 26, 37). As Andrew Linklater put it, the problem for the theory of imperialism ‘may not be whether strategic factors were more important than economic factors, or vice versa, but how these phenomena interacted so as to produce the international conflict which Lenin attempted to describe’ (Linklater 1990, 84). Therefore, going back to Callinicos’ statement about the intersection of geopolitical and economic competition, one should ask what laws operate the strategic synthesis between these two forms of competition. Answering this question will allow us to overcome what has been accurately described as the Marxist theory of imperialism’s tendency to ‘unit homogenization’ (Anievas 2014, 32).26

As a solution to this problem this author proposes to build on recommendations that emerged from three contributions. David Harvey suggested that ‘[s]trategic decisions of sometimes immense import (and not a few sometimes startling unintended consequences) are arrived at and implemented in the rough and tumble of the political process where variegated interests and opinions clash’ (2003, 28). Alex Callinicos pointed out that a Marxist theory of IR ‘requires a critical engagement with the main theoretical ideologies of the international … and … incorporation of valid elements of these ideologies’ such as liberalism and constructivism, in addition to realism (2009, 82–3). Gonzalo Pozo-Martín’s contribution called for Marxist scholarship to familiarize itself with the ideologies of imperialism by understanding what the views are of each section of capital (2007, 561).27 These recommendations lead toward further enquiry into how political elites, informed by their worldviews, seek to translate the economic pressures of capitalist economy in a coherent foreign policy that goes beyond the direct, individual interests of the capitalist ruling
class. Can Marxism venture into this unfamiliar territory without drifting off into Weberian or realist accounts of state power? The way forward suggested in the rest of this chapter requires the reader to view imperialism as the product of hierarchically ordered, self-reinforcing but at times contradictory, interconnected determinations of power. This description of imperialism opens up to the study of imperialism as the intersection of different levels of analysis across the structure-agency spectrum. To do so, this chapter draws on James Rosenau’s blueprint for a multidimensional model of FPA. This approach was originally aimed at a ‘general theory’ that could scrutinize foreign policies not in isolation but through the intersection of ‘idiosyncratic, role, governmental, societal, and systemic variables’ (1966, 32). Because Rosenau did not say ‘which set of variables contributes most to external behaviour’ or ‘how to treat each set of variables relative to the others,’ this book seeks to infer that using a materialist lens (1966, 43–4). Therefore, from the perspective of this work the ‘systemic’ is observed through the lens of the geopolitical world order and the uneven development of capitalism; the ‘societal’ and the ‘governmental’ relate to the state-capital nexus and to how the ruling class influences—but also demands help from—the state’s strategy makers; what Rosenau calls the ‘idiosyncratic’ is intended here as state managers’ worldviews. Drawing on the concept of uneven development, the argument raised here is that the relationship between socio-economic base and political superstructure is dominated by capitalism only unevenly, and that unevenness remains an important feature at the level of space, state-capital relations, and ideology. The concept of uneven development is derived from Marx’s description of it in Grundisse (1973), while in the final part, this chapter also considers two passages within The German Ideology (1974) which more explicitly link uneven development to the ideological sphere. In Grundisse, Marx refers to ‘uneven development of material production relative to e.g. artistic development,’ which for him entailed dissecting ‘how relations of productions develop unevenly as legal relations’ (1973, 109). In fairness, this is the only time he calls it uneven development of capitalism and this is found in the Introduction. Nonetheless, he returns to this concept on at least two occasions. Firstly, when he explains that ‘the new forces of production and relations of production do not develop out of nothing, nor drop from the sky, nor from the womb of the self-positing Idea; but from within and in antithesis to the existing development of production and the inherited, traditional
relations of property’ (Marx 1973, 278). Then, he goes back to this when talking about ‘dissolution’ (Marx 1973, 497–8).

This section therefore deconstructs the relationship between political and economic power along these three levels of analysis.

2.6.1 Space and the Systemic Level

The Marxist tradition has treated space and its transformation as ‘socio-technical practices’ seeking to step away from the ‘realist trap’ and a definition of territory as ‘spatio-political first cause’ (Painter 2010, 1093, 1096). Contrary to mainstream IR, in Marxist geography space is a dynamic entity that is constantly produced and reshaped by the way ‘value’ is defined in capitalist society. Lefebvre asked ‘if space embodies social relationships, how and why does it do so? And what relationships are they?’ (1991, 27). He answered that value is generated by ‘the flow of energy, the flow of raw materials, the flow of labour, the flow of information, and so forth’ and through ‘networks of banks, businesses, and great centres of production … highways, airports, and information networks’ and the ‘city’ (Lefebvre 2009, 186–7). Ultimately, space is both a source as much as an infrastructure ‘to produce surplus value’ (Lefebvre 2009, 186–8). Geoeconomic flows, however, are dictated by excessive volatility and at times irrationality by which capitalism spreads economic, social and environmental fortunes and misfortunes across the global space. As noted in Lenin’s theory of imperialism, this unevenness on an international scale leads to a shifting balance of economic and geopolitical power. For instance,

Of the global decline in FDI inflows of US$300 billion, from US$1.6 trillion in 2011 to an estimated US$1.3 trillion in 2012, almost 90% is accounted for by developed countries. FDI declined sharply in both Europe and the United States, while Belgium and Germany saw large declines in FDI inflows. (SPE) (UNCTAD 2013, 4)

This trend has been paralleled by a steep increase in the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) toward developing countries, which ‘accounted for more than half of global FDI again in 2013, as their inflows reached a new high, at an estimated US$759 billion,’ while the growth of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation members and BRICS countries was
remarkable, as their share of global FDI has risen to ‘twice that of their pre-crisis level’ (UNCTAD 2013, 5, 7–8).

Such geoeconomic unevenness is a Sword of Damocles on state managers. The competitive struggle between ‘mobile’ and borderless capitals out to grab the constantly changing opportunities of spatial openness inevitably calls into question the role of states both as advocates of capital and as keepers of ‘fixed’ sovereign borders and public wealth, with consequences at the level of interstate relations. In other words, as state institutions are harnessed to regulate the uneven geographies of political-economic life, they engage continuously in the production and transformation of places, regions, territories and scalar hierarchies. (Brenner 2004, 111)

While capitalist production exerts pressure on states to regulate flows across space, it can only determine the modus operandi of political institutions to an extent. States act under capitalist pressure but do so through a political logic. While corporate interests and pressures on politicians may appear as quite obvious, it is not necessarily obvious how those demands are met, or what political solutions to the limits of capital are found. As one author noted with reference to WWI,

in the cabinet room, as well as in the field, decisions had finally to be made by politicians, proconsuls and military chiefs who had no direct contact or necessary sympathy with the monopoly capitalists, the magnates of heavy industry and the bankers and stock-jobbers who personified the new forces of capitalism. (Kemp 1972, 24)

Although largely overlooked, such dynamics were considered by Lefebvre when he offered ‘more political’ observations about space. For him ‘state and territory interact in such a way that they can be said to be mutually constitutive. … state officials … seem to administer, to manage, and to organize a natural space’ (Lefebvre 2009, 228). Paraphrasing a classic Weberian definition of the state, Lefebvre admitted that without space there is no state: ‘born in and with a space, the state may also perish with it’ (Lefebvre 2009, 224). Space for Lefebvre conflates three subdimensions such as ‘social space,’ ‘natural territory,’ and ‘mental space’ (italics in original; Lefebvre 2009, 224–5). These spatialities inform the way in which the state ‘serves as a tool of thought and of action … a
means of control, and hence of domination, of power’ (Lefebvre 1991, 26). The state level in Lefebvre’s view is ‘the level at which strategic thoughts are located’ and these are applied ‘consciously or unconsciously, well or badly’ and at times with a great deal of contingency (Lefebvre 1973, 79). While these scattered insights on state and space do not amount to a systematic theory, they highlight that Lefebvre advocated for a multidimensional understanding of space.²⁸ More to the point, what these words suggest is that rather than focusing on state autonomy, one should reflect on the fact that states operate a strategic synthesis that through processing and contingency adds a degree of complexity to mere economic interests. Such strategic synthesis may happen within a state that is not autonomous of capitalist interests. Yet, the very process of strategic synthesis and of dealing with geopolitical challenges by default grants (capitalist) policymakers room for autonomy.

### 2.6.2 State-Capital Relations

Lefebvre’s insights are inspiring for those who see the state as more than a ‘committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie’ (Marx and Engels 1967, 5). Marx’s masterpiece contained similar flaws that appear in Miliband’s work on the state and recent research on elites’ networks (Miliband 1969; Domhoff 2006, 217–24; van Apeldoorn and De Graaff 2015). While these perspectives provide a rock-solid picture of the context within which policymakers operate, they are limited by correlation-causation deductions. Looking at the state through the lenses of *cum hoc ergo propter hoc* and *post hoc ergo propter hoc* does tell us that big corporations have formal and informal channels for influencing political leaders and bureaucrats. Such an approach is extremely insightful when it comes to, for instance, understanding the relationship between capitalist interests and American grand strategy. However, this does not help to resolve the problem of ‘unit homogenization’—if anything, it only makes it worse. Nor does it contribute to ‘explaining why state X made a certain move last Tuesday,’ that is, differentiating between long-term strategies and tactical choices (Wivel 2005). While economic interests remain central to imperialism, politico-ideological logics determine the modalities that policymakers adopt to achieve these goals. Any attempt by state managers to maximize their or their state’s power could only be framed within the boundaries of capitalism. This is because there is a ‘tacit equation of unlimited economic growth and political power’ which
in a capitalist world order becomes a matter of survival (1987, 318). If state managers want to acquire the capabilities to defend their enterprises, they can only do so by increasing their state’s political leverage which in turn is tied to corporate success. In contrast to realism, the politician’s interest in consolidating the power and success of his or her state remains entangled in the ‘expand-or-perish’ logic of capitalism. This is the sense of a ‘capitalist geopolitical logic’ (Pozo-Martin 2006, 556). The most efficient and viable way for state managers to develop a strategy that maximizes their state power can only be obtained by pursuing policies that increase the state GDP. Furthermore, state managers perform a different job from that of corporate managers as they have long-term and structural concerns (Harvey 2003). This leads to a vicious circle: a strong state can better support its capital; the latter is more successful *vis-à-vis* its market competitors; this guarantees the state’s solid economic growth and resources essential for projecting geopolitical influence and defending capitalist interests. There is in other words a ‘structural interdependence’ where state and capital cooperate (Harman 1991; Mazzucato 2013).29 Within this relationship, the state gains leverage as the inability of economic constituencies to overcome political obstacles in the international arena increases the degree of power; respect also increases for national political elites who not only need legitimacy but are also compelled to devise solutions for their national economic stakeholders. At the same time, this ‘structural interdependence’ is imperfect as it can turn into a forced cohabitation or problematic interlocking. Given the high degree of complexity in the international arena, the strategic synthesis devised by state managers may not remain confined to capitalist ‘normality,’ that is, to actions that directly reflect the interests of the ruling class. Rather, geopolitical calculations can be prioritized over economic interests.30 The relationship between ‘logic of capital’ and the ‘logic of territory’ is ‘a problematic and often contradictory (that is, dialectical)’ one and should not be conceived as ‘functional or one-sided’ (Harvey 2003, 30). Political power—and above all military power—can become a barrier to economic interests, particularly because it will have to be deployed in suboptimal conditions given the constraints imposed by rival states.31
2.6.3 The Ideological Space

As Joel Wainwright put it when commenting on Marx’s concept of uneven development and dissolution, ‘[i]t takes time for everything [pre-capitalist social relations] to dissolve, so to speak’ (2008, 884). This captured well Marx’s stance on uneven development contained in *The German Ideology*. Here, Marx further confirmed that the superstructure is a reflection of the base only to an extent. Furthermore, he portrayed this concept with an eye on human consciousness confirming once again that capitalism does not only develop unevenly at the spatial and institutional level, but also at the ideological level. That is, ideas are manifestations of capitalism and capitalist interests only in so far capitalism has overcome pre- or non-capitalist formations. In this regard, Marx noted that

> the first fact to be established is the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature. … The writing of history must always set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of men. (1974, 42)

This could be interpreted either as a eulogium to path dependency, therefore to the persistence of pre-capitalist or non-capitalist elements—whether political or cognitive—of human and social life, or as a eulogium to nature itself, that is, awareness of the influence that natural elements like (control of) territory and resources exert on policymakers. Consistent with this, Marx added that

> Consciousness is at first, of course, … consciousness of nature, which first appears to men as a completely alien, all-powerful and unassailable force, with which men’s relations are purely animal and by which they are overawed like beasts; it is thus a purely animal consciousness of nature (natural religion) just because nature is as yet hardly modified historically. (1974, 51)

Although these insights do not amount to a theory of agency, they serve two purposes for this book. Firstly, they support the argument that capitalist unevenness has to be envisioned at every level across the structure-agency spectrum. Secondly, such ideological unevenness is hardly overcome. Timpanaro has added to this by pointing out two crucial issues: that materialism could be defined broadly and that the past continues to have an effect on the present:
This abstract discussion allows us to better appreciate that in every strategic synthesis operated by state managers there is a higher degree of complexity than the one acknowledged by economic accounts of imperialism. Logics of individual profit and economic calculations do not influence the full-spectrum of human beings’ worldviews. As a neurologist pointed out in his study on the biology of nationalism, ‘humankind’s best and worst moments arise from a system that incorporates everything from the previous second’s neuronal activity to the last million years of evolution (along with a complex set of social factors)’ (Sapolsky 2019, 42). Economic interests therefore have to ‘compete’ with the influence of history and geography, in addition to the cognitive world, before taking full control of individual political agendas. The chaotic combination of these factors—compounded by challenges stemming from the international arena—take an ideological shape as ideology is ‘an indispensable guide to an infinitely complex and otherwise bewildering present’ (Hunt 2009, 12). Ideology is necessarily a coherent tool, which is used to provide order.

Conceptualizing the possibility of relating state managers’ ideologies to a Marxist theory of imperialism in this way, it provides a platform for dialogue with mainstream theories of the international. There may be several interlocutors here. One could be Spykman’s realist strategic studies, a tradition that ‘depended on the influence of the natural environment that can be changed by human land use and technology’ (Ashworth 2011, 294). Another arena for cooperation appears to be possible with constructivism, from which the theory of imperialism could adopt the concept of worldviews and strategic cultures. Despite world politics seeming increasingly shaped by the aterritorial and economic logic of neoliberalism, national ‘elites socialized in different strategic cultures [and faced by different challenges] will make different choices when placed in similar situations’ (Johnston 1995, 35).Caught between competing pressures, these elites will attempt to produce strategic syntheses between political and interests/constraints in their foreign policies, relying, among other things, on a shared ‘perception of the national historical experience’
Indeed, as this book’s case study will demonstrate, state managers ‘approach international politics with an already quite comprehensive and elaborate appreciation of the world, of the international system and of the place of their state within it’ (Weldes 1996, 280). In particular, understanding the worldviews of state managers would allow the theory of imperialism to account for differences between elites in the same country and for tactical discontinuities between different administrations. This could be further refined as an ‘operational code.’ The advantage of drawing on this concept is twofold (George 1969). Firstly, it provides more accuracy compared to that of strategic culture. Secondly, it allows a Marxist theory of imperialism to create its own tailored lens, its own code. When looking at the operational code of state managers, the theory of imperialism should consider a different set of questions related to its own levels of analysis. With regard to the systemic, it is useful to understand leaders’ appreciation of global geopolitical and geoeconomic issues, considering how elites would answer questions such as: what are the geoeconomically strategic areas?; what are the current and future geoeconomic trends?; what is the main geopolitical challenge to my country?; what are the geopolitical chokepoints and geographical strengths and weaknesses of my state? At the societal-governmental level, the operational code should reveal political elites’ views about what is the most strategic national industrial sector and what are the main threats to the national economy. Finally, the ideological level should explore political leaders’ definition of success, power and of the current and desired international standing of their country, wondering about political leaders’ views on what relationships between human beings are like: conflictual or cooperative? Or asking questions like: what is power?; how can my administration best achieve political solutions and success?; how do I obtain what I want?; what are the consequences for losing or not gaining international standing?; what are the positive and negative implications for international leadership? Breaking the ideological with such codification offers a chance to explore unevenness at the level of elites’ worldviews as well.
2.7 Conclusion

This chapter had two objectives. Firstly, it introduced the reader to important debates in the making of theories of imperialism that took place in the early twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Both discussions were triggered by international events and in particular by interstate competition and wars. On both occasions, similar tensions and viewpoints emerged but each time the root cause of discussion and disagreement was the fact that Marx had not produced a rigorous theory of the international. Secondly, when presenting these debates to the reader, the chapter also sought to make sense of the diversity within the classical Marxist theory of imperialism, its strengths and flaws, and critiques. Indeed, the chapter suggested a new possibility for a Marxist theory of imperialism to engage with mainstream theories of IR. This is very important for two reasons. On the one hand, it makes the theory of imperialism better equipped to understand foreign policy and interstate rivalries. On the other hand, it increases the space of dialogue between Marxism and mainstream theories of IR. IR theories tend not to respect Marxism as a theory of the international, while Marxists see mainstream IR as a superficial lens on the world. From this viewpoint, this chapter’s proposal sought to open a space for a productive dialogue between two distant worlds in the hope that future theoretical discussions will continue to seek synergies as opposed to divergences and sectarianism.

In order to achieve these two goals, the chapter touched upon different aspects of the theory of imperialism. The first section sought to draw attention to the multifaceted and unrigorous theorization of the theory of imperialism. The second section instead unpacked first-wave debates by comparing thinkers who saw in capitalism the roots of inter-imperial rivalries and thinkers who predicted the rise of an ultra-imperial world order. In the third section, the chapter engaged with Waltz’s and Gilpin’s critique of the theory of imperialism—especially, Lenin’s version. Here, it was argued that Waltz’s critique provides a chance to further reflect on how to improve the classical theory of imperialism. Furthermore, it was noted that Gilpin’s interpretation of the theory appeared to be more sympathetic and constructive. Ultimately, it emerged that while the classical Marxist theory of imperialism has several limits, it still provides a framework that can be shaped and improved. The fourth section of the chapter scrutinized the third wave of debates on capitalist imperialism which developed during the first decade of this century, showing that
some of the issues dividing scholars are not so different from those of the first wave of debates one century ago. From this section it emerged that the chief objective of any Marxist theory of international relations should be to integrate national specificities and an understanding of political agencies. Carrying out this task by focusing on the potential of policy-making and ideology appeared to be a viable solution to these authors. Therefore, this chapter met the challenge and sought to expand on those recommendations.

Drawing on James N. Rosenau’s approach to foreign policy this part of the book developed a framework based on three analytical levels that touch upon the systemic geopolitical context of a foreign policy, the relationship between state—political elites—and capitalist ruling classes—and foreign policymakers worldviews. It was argued that in order for a Marxist theory of imperialism to integrate political elements within its framework without betraying its historical materialist essence it needs to conceive of capitalist development as uneven at every level of analysis—geopolitical, societal-governmental, and ideological. This opens up a space for Marxism to interact with branches of realism and constructivism, among other theories. More to the point, the chapter argued that a Marxist theory of imperialism would benefit from developing an ideological operational code of political elites that deconstructs how these elites interpret the geopolitical context they face, capitalism and the ruling class, power, the role of their state in the international arena, and the style of their foreign policy. This way, the theory of imperialism maintains its economic roots while not necessarily becoming a theory based on economic determinism.

As far as the case study is concerned, this framework allows the book to consider US foreign policy from Obama to Trump by looking at three areas. Firstly, Chapter 4 considers how the uneven development of capitalism has led to a transition of the geopolitical world order and how this transition has required the United States to adjust its financial priorities and geostrategic focus based on a changing environment. Secondly, Chapters 5 and 6 provide a picture of Obama’s and Trump’s views of capitalism, relations with the capitalist ruling class, and operational code. Then it analyzes Obama’s and Trump’s policies toward the Middle East, Europe, Russia, and Asia and it demonstrates that between the two presidents there was a great deal of strategic continuity and tactical changes.
Notes

1. Marx did not link imperialism with a tendency toward monopoly capitalism that he noticed in the development of limited liability corporations (LLC) and discussed in Chapter 23 of *Capital*, Vol. III (2013).

2. Based on the 1872–75 French edition of *Capital*, Vol. I (Ch. 24), Lucia Pradella argued that Marx had already drawn a ‘relationship between his crisis theory and the phenomenon of modern imperialism’ (2013, 124).

3. See Donald Sassoon’s definition of Austro-Marxism in his voluminous work on twentieth century Western Marxism (2010, 70). For a more comprehensive work on Austro-Marxism, see Bottomore (1978).

4. In the classical Marxist theory of imperialism ‘monopoly’ is defined broadly. Hobsbawm noted that although there was a ‘tendency towards monopoly or oligopoly … in the heavy industries,’ it is ‘too simplistic’ to use the word monopoly (1987, 44). As Mandel pointed out ‘Marxists have never pretended that there was only one firm producing all (or almost all) products in each industry’ (emphasis in original; Mandel 1966). Pure monopoly is ‘practically nonexistent,’ rather it describes firms which have enough ‘monopoly power’ to manipulate the market in their favor (Foster and McChesney 2012, 66).

5. This is still a must-read for understanding late twentieth-century globalization, according to David Harvey (2010, 19).

6. According to Shlomo Avineri, for Marx and Engels ‘[c]apitalist society is universalistic in its urges and it cannot change internally until it encompasses the whole world’ (1969, 3–4). In the more fashionable language of neoclassical economics this means a condition where ‘interest rates, profit rates, wages, and incomes in general would be converging as would rates of growth and productivity’ (Berger and Dore 1996, 8). Marx pointed out that ‘[t]he country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future’ (Sutcliffe 2008, 144–5). Marx saw this transformative action of capitalism in colonialism, which he described as an ‘unconscious tool of history’ that triggered the development of peripheral regions (MECW Volume 12, 125).

7. He was later attacked vehemently by Lenin for not considering imperialism an outcome of capitalism, but a policy (1939, 90). Kautsky had a Schumpeterian view of imperialism since he did not blame capitalism itself but human beings’ atavistic forces. Schumpeter defined imperialism as ‘non-rational and irrational’ (Callinicos 1994, 18). Before Kautsky, Hobson had already expressed a similar concept when stating that a division of the world in empires potentially ‘would offer the best hope of permanent peace on an assured basis of inter-Imperialism’ (1902, 351). Indeed, Lenin accused Kautsky of copying from Hobson: ‘[u]ltra-imperialism, or super-imperialism, [was] what Hobson, thirteen years
earlier, [had] described as inter-imperialism. Except for coining a new and clever catchword, replacing one Latin prefix by another, the only progress [that] Kautsky has made, in the sphere of “scientific” thought, is that he gave out, as Marxism, what Hobson, in effect, [had] described as the cant of English parsons’ (Lenin 1939, 117).

8. For Luxemburg, ‘militarism in all its forms … can only be overcome with the destruction of capitalism’ (1911, 447).

9. Hobson’s disappointment toward high finance might have stemmed from his anti-Semitism. He wrote that ‘Johannesburg is the new Jerusalem’ and ‘the gold-mines of the Rand, are almost entirely in their [Jewish community] hands’ (1900, 190–1).

10. See also Hilferding (1981, 315). Hilferding saw in this phase a political opportunity when he stated that ‘[t]he socializing function of finance capital facilitates enormously the task of overcoming capitalism’ (1981, 367; Sassoon 2010, 51).

11. Lapavitsas (2013, 67–8) has questioned Hilferding’s argument about the fusion between banking and the industrial sector. See also Harvey on the fusion between managers and shareholders and the consequent interest in boosting stock asset value as a way of financing (2005, 32). Nowell has argued that retail companies have their own financing, undermining Hilferding’s claim (2009, 324).

12. ‘A few of the financial pioneers in South Africa have been Englishmen, like Messrs, Rhodes and Rudd; but recent developments of Transvaal gold-mining have thrown the economic resources of the country more and more into the hands of a small group of international financers, chiefly German in origin and Jewish in race. By superior ability, enterprise, and organization these men, out-competing the slower-witted Briton, have attained a practical supremacy which no one who has visited Johannesburg is likely to question’ (Hobson 1900, 189).

13. This quote undermines Spyros Sakellaropoulos and Panagiotis Sotiris’ argument that Lenin’s theory is based on Uneven & Combined Development (2015, 89–90). Lenin added that once the world economy had been divided, the only way to overtake these politically determined limits was to redivide the world, especially ‘if the relation of forces changes as a result of uneven development, war, bankruptcy, etc.’ (Lenin 1939, 70).

14. This was followed by a great expansion of the state’s military power (Bukharin 1982, 16, 22). Bukharin refers to Prime Minister Lloyd George and the legislation ceding full power to the government (1972, 151).

15. Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher argued that British imperialism in Africa was driven by strategic stakes (Robinson and Gallagher 1961, 2, 465). Arthur Eckstein criticized Lenin’s theory for its ‘chronology; locale; causation’ (1991, 299).

16. Waltz here is drawing on Michael Barratt Brown. For Barratt Brown ‘monopoly and finance capital were not the chief cause of the outward
pressure into empire, at least for Britain, … and that the imperial tribute never played so important a role in Britain’s life’ (1970, 13). However, he admitted that Lenin was right about Germany before the Great War and ‘the whole capitalist world in the 1930s and 1950s’ (1970, 453). Others have highlighted the importance of India for the British Empire (Callinicos 1994, 24; Arrighi 2005, 64–5).

17. For a critique see Teschke (2003, 16–27).
18. An exception was *Marxism and the New Imperialism* (Callinicos et al. 1994).
19. Similarly, Callinicos argued that ‘there is, necessarily, a realist moment in any Marxist analysis of international relations’ (Callinicos 2007, 542). He articulated this further explaining that rather than two separate logics one should see capitalist imperialism as ‘the intersection of economic and geopolitical competition’ (2009, 72).
20. For accusations against Harvey for having turned to realism, see Paul (2007, 52).
21. Justin Rosenberg, who relaunched the theory in the late ‘90s made three points that describe well such a theory. Firstly, it entails transhistorical relations of interdependence between societies. Secondly, throughout history it has resulted in the interdependence of the social, material, and cultural realms of these societies. Thirdly, it is as Trotsky intended—as a process of hybridization of different modes of production (Rosenberg 2006, 324–5). For Rosenberg, international relations do not exist—particularly, in the way realists think of them. He advocates for a ‘sociological definition of the international’ (2006, 324).
22. This approach, however, is better suited for explaining European and Asian history. Kamran Matin has provided a highly theoretical illustration of U&CD (2007, 427). For U&CD applied to the causes of WWI see Anievas (2013).
23. For a critique, see Smith (2006) and Rioux (2015).
24. See also Callinicos (2009, 70). For a critique of Political Marxism, see Callinicos (1990), and Anievas and Nisancioglu (2014).
25. Regardless, Teschke’s and Lacher’s analysis rests on a fascinating scholarly exercise that cannot be dealt with here (Teschke 2003).
26. Linklater suggested that this could be done by incorporating realism and Marxism ‘within a historical sociology of international relations’ (Linklater 1990, 95).
27. See also Pozo-Martin (2006, 239).
28. Lefebvre polemicized against ‘certain sociologists’ who portrayed the state ‘as subject, as superior consciousness able to maintain and support its own conditions’ (1973, 9). Indeed, this book is not advocating for that fetishization of territory typical of classical geopolitics and which Bukharin called ‘childish prattle’ (Bukharin 1936, 564).
29. Capitalists ‘have influenced and been influenced by the state structures in which they have found themselves … The state and the individual capitals are intertwined, with each feeding off the other’ (Harman 1991).

30. Trump’s tariff war against China is a case in point.

31. This passage provides an excellent picture of the kind of tension between Donald Trump and sections of the American ruling class triggered by the issuing of trade tariffs against China.

32. Crucially, Timpanaro asked ‘[h]as this second nature, this “artificial terrain” (as Labriola called it), entirely absorbed within itself the first nature?’ (1975, 16, 45, 48–9).

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