

ANTI-IMPERIALIST

Myth Busting



The struggle for eco-socialism is inseparable from anti-imperialism.

Yet myths about imperialism continue to circulate on the left, obscuring where power actually lies and weakening effective anti-imperialist struggle.

Here, we confront four of the most common myths →

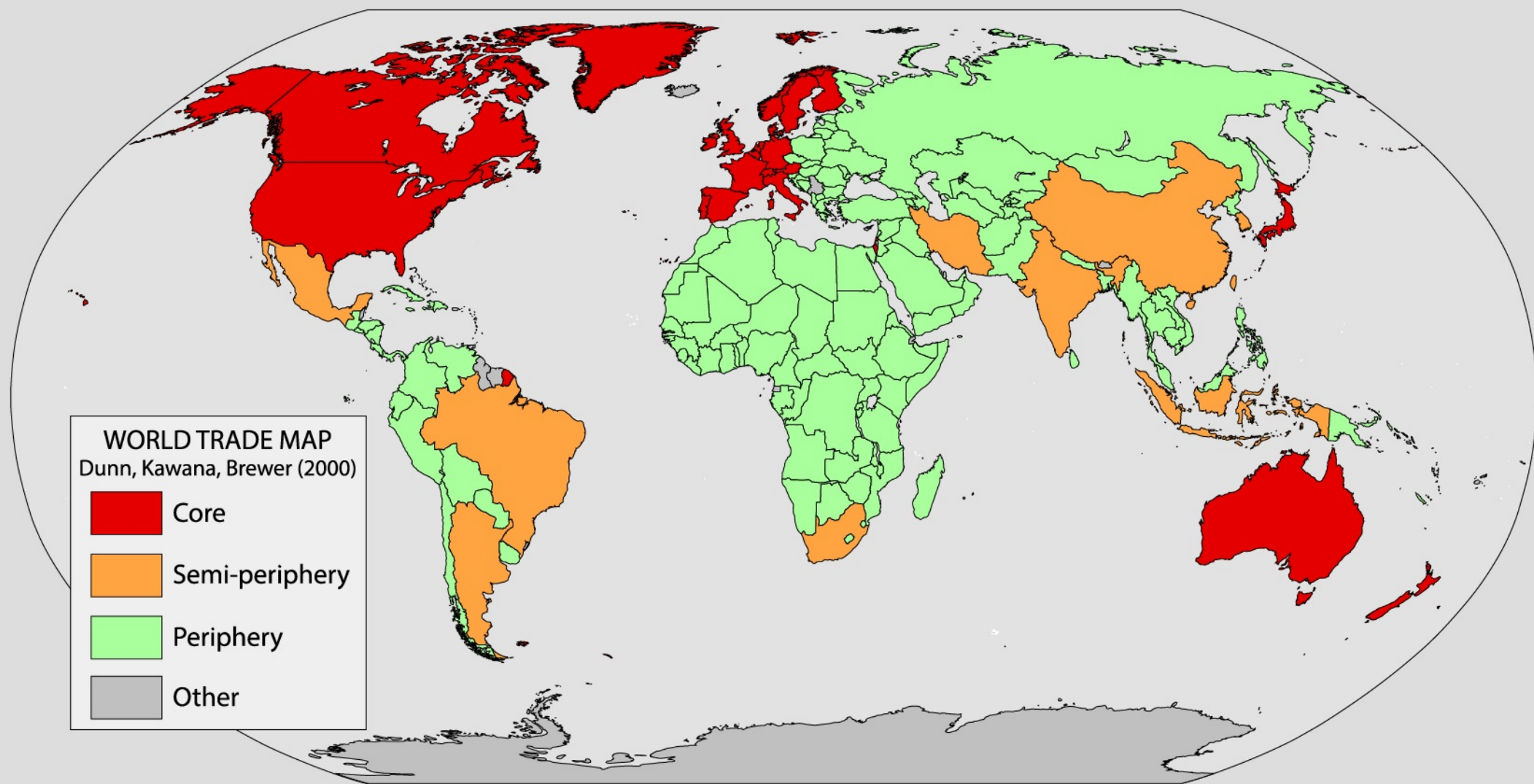


MYTH 1

There are multiple imperialisms.

One of the most widespread claims is that there are multiple, equivalent “imperialisms,” wherein major powers are engaged in inter-imperialist competition.

China and Russia are often labelled “imperialist” based on their continental scale, large economies, control over strategic resources (e.g. Russian oil or Chinese technologies), and unequal relations with smaller states. Similarly, regional powers like Brazil, Iran, and South Africa are sometimes described as “sub-imperialist.”



This framing mistakes rival national strategies for imperialism.

Imperialism is a hierarchical global order where a single imperial core underdevelops peripheral states and denies them sovereign control over their own resources through economic and military coercion, enabling the systemic drain of value. By this measure, the equivalence collapses.

There is no evidence of sustained, large-scale value transfer from poorer countries to BRICS economies that is comparable to the massive flows that continue to enrich the US-led imperial core.



MYTH 2

Imperialism is any military aggression.

A related misconception treats imperialism as a policy of aggression that any sufficiently powerful state can choose to pursue. However, the ethics — or lack thereof — of these actions do not, in themselves, determine whether a state is imperialist.



For example, Russia is frequently labelled imperialist on the basis of its 2008 invasion of Georgia, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Ultimately, however, Russia is a semi-peripheral state that is subordinated to the imperial core. It does not dominate global finance, control international institutions, or systematically accumulate value extracted from the periphery. Therefore, Russia's military actions, irrespective of their ethical justification, are better understood as regional power projection within and against the US-led imperial order, particularly the eastward expansion of NATO.

EXCLUSIVE MIDDLE EAST

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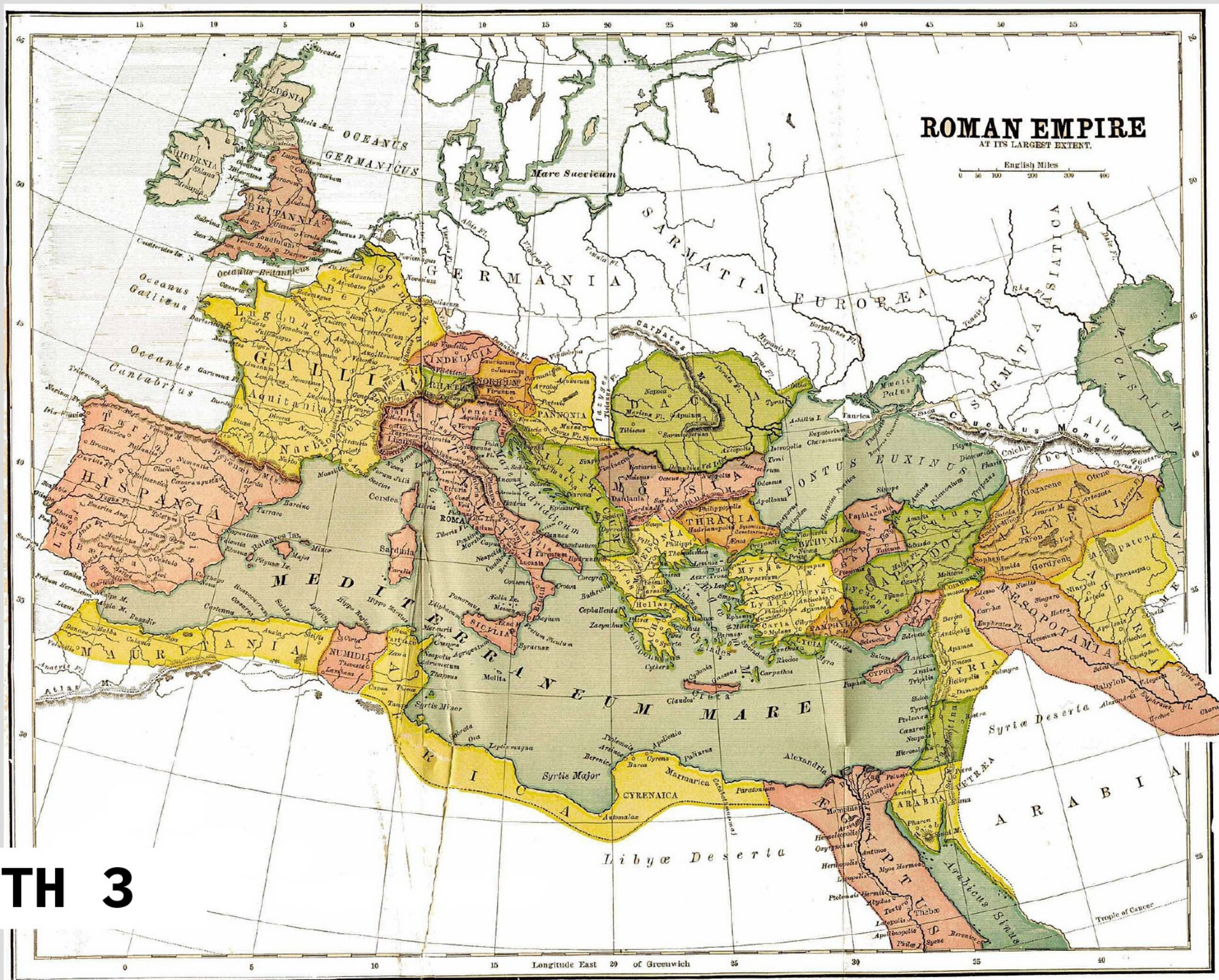


Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Trump in Washington in 2020. TOM BRENNER/REUTERS

Imperialism is not war alone. It is the connection between war and finance.

Imperialist powers use military force to maintain the subordinate position of a peripheral state, ensuring for the un-interrupted drain of value. If a peripheral state tries to shake off its dependency, then it's immediately subject to economic coercion and, ultimately, military intervention.

If imperialism simply means military intervention or regional coercion, it ceases to describe a system of domination and collapses into a moral accusation, stripping the concept of analytical and political force.



MYTH 3

Imperialism is human nature.

Another common misunderstanding treats imperialism as a timeless feature of human civilisation, rather than a system historically rooted in capitalism. It points to historical empires, such as those of the Romans, Mongols, or Aztecs, to argue that empires long pre-date capitalist society.



But the character of imperialism is historically specific. Past empires may share a name, but they served a qualitatively different function than modern imperialism.

Under capitalism, military aggression was adapted not primarily to impose political authority, but to enforce class rule and capitalist relations both within and between states: the boss exploited the worker, while core states exploited peripheral states.

Imperialism ceased to be the strategy of particular territories and came to be a global system of exploitation.



MYTH 4

Anti-imperialist solidarity is optional for the left.

Some on the left within the imperial core argue that socialists should not extend solidarity to anti-imperialist states like Cuba and Venezuela because of accusations about human rights abuses, authoritarian practices, or a lack of liberal democratic elections.



First, these arguments lose sight of contemporary capitalism's primary contradiction: imperialism.

Domestic issues in the periphery must be understood in the context of total imperialist siege, including economic coercion, financial strangulation, information warfare, legal manipulation, and military violence.

Second, it is essential to account for the political context in which these critiques circulate. Claims about human rights abuses or lacking democracy are routinely weaponised to justify sanctions, coups, and military intervention. Too often, the Western left uncritically reproduces narratives that serve imperialist aggression rather than challenging it. Indeed, many such critiques rely directly on imperialist propaganda.

Imperialism is a global system of class domination waged by states in the imperial core against those of the periphery.

It is the primary barrier to global eco-socialism.

By weakening imperialism, we create better conditions for the survival and emergence of socialist projects in the periphery, which, in turn, creates better conditions for revolution in the imperial core.