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The Empire Strikes Back: The United States and the Delegitimization of the “Other”

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Recently, the figure of Gustavo Petro has taken shape in the press media and in certain academic analyzes of political situations, the first candidate proposed by leftist forces whose political career, backed by broad popular support, made it possible for him to sit in the presidency of Colombia, in August 2022. A few days ago, CubaSi published an interesting and timely article by colleague Arnaldo Musa, entitled Another coup attempt against Petro, detailing, the current state of the disqualifying propaganda attack that is object.

Not two years have passed since that electoral victory - an unprecedented event in the history of electoral processes in that country -, whose resonance still echoes, for better and for worse. On the one hand, there are expressions of optimism, which reflect hope in the possibility of a change, which would put an end to a government tradition of the right and center-right, palpable in the more than two decades that have passed in this century, favoring a neoliberalism that deepened the huge inequality gap and the scenarios of overwhelming violence and ungovernability. On the other hand, there's a reactionary offensive, articulated between the internal oligarchic sectors and the usual destabilizing policy the United States promotes against any government, party or social movement that it classifies as an adversary. So the image of the “other” is consciously and sustainably constructed, demonizing it, delegitimizing it, presenting it as a supposed threat to their national security and beyond, continental. Thus, once again, the United States does not consider Latin America as a subject of its own security, but as an object of North American security.

This occurs in times of unconventional war, with the consequent follow-up of a sophisticated line of ideological and psychological aggression, leading to the discrediting of the image of leadership that imperialism seeks to weaken and expel from the government in question. The formulas and names that this war takes are varied and point to different angles, but in essence, it's defined by hybridity, that is, the combination of means and methods, trying to avoid the format of direct military actions and conventional military coup d'etat. The label used now is that of a “soft” or “soft” coup, similar to the one applied against Manuel Zelaya in Honduras in 2009, which removed him from the presidency and the country with a “democratic” façade. In some way, the recipe began there, under the Administration of Barack Obama, which lasts, implemented through the legislative or judicial power, depending on the case, which was reiterated in Paraguay, against Fernando Lugo.

Without ignoring the significance of what's happening today with the current Colombian president, it's worth retaining background information, since the main thing is to raise awareness that this is a practice wisely thought out and implemented by imperialism, against which we have plenty of calls for alert. Memory and history are always useful tools, especially when the tricks the U.S. governments use to subvert legitimate processes, such as those mentioned, led by presidents elected by vote at the polls, which were the result, therefore, of the rules of representative bourgeois liberal democracy, of which said country is considered the best exponent. When you follow that lead, looking back, what becomes clear is that when the empire faces the aforementioned threats or, at least, part of that perception, even if it does not agree with reality, it counterattacks. The modalities and instruments that make this reaction viable vary according to the times. On occasions, trickery, masked or covert action, has prevailed. Other times, it has been uncovered. The same occurs with the proportion in which subtlety or the appearance of “softness” is mixed with harshness, sometimes including the use of military force.

Perceptions such as those mentioned were those that led to what was called the imperialist counteroffensive involved in the aforementioned new type of coups in Honduras and Paraguay. The context then reflected an ascent of the emancipatory, progressive spiral, with revolutionary expressions in some cases, that began to take shape since the electoral victory of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, at the end of the last century, to which the processes led by Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Evo Morales in Bolivia joined in. Since the deployment of the Bolivarian Revolution, the Citizen Revolution and the Democratic-Cultural Revolution, respectively, the United States reconsidered the functionality and effectiveness of its regional strategy. Despite the hostility of the George W. Bush government, the truth was that the aforementioned spiral continued its course and that he could not reverse it, although his conservative rhetoric and his determined work in foreign policy, which gave rise to what was called the “Bush doctrine” was not able to reverse such processes. The way in which imperialism revamped its interventionist arsenal with Obama achieved what was not achieved with its predecessor. Thus, the strategy aimed at regime change is redefined and begins, around year 2015, to change the tide in Latin America. The progressive wave or cycle has since stumbled upon the variants of what has been known for some time, such as lawfare and fakenews. Those that, precisely, apply to Petro's case, in the present, with increasing coherence, organicity, depth.

Although these terms are surely more than familiar to the reader, given their frequent mention in the press, a specific reference to them would be appropriate, even very briefly. Both concepts are imported from the Anglo-Saxon world, that is, they come from the English language. The first is constructed with the words law and warfare, and is used to denote the idea of judicial persecution, based on spurious interests and not in the field of law, or to highlight the instrumentalization of justice, better known as “judicialization of politics.” Although the literal translation would be legal war, it's about what it's commonly designated as a “dirty war from the courts”, with the intention of discrediting, criminalizing or destroying the public image of a relevant figure in electoral or power disputes. The second means fake news. It refers to those expressions, statements or arguments, aimed at misinformation and deception, which complements the above. In both cases, these are not isolated actions, but developed from an elaborate ideological operation, with subversive purposes, which are related to the activity aimed at regime change. Thus, they are part of the current imperialist strategy, which has been enriched by the development of new information and communications technologies, with their best expression in digital social networks.

As part of this strategy, which, as can be seen, is not new - in which North American politics has extensive experience, and has achieved notable successes throughout history, appealing to slander, defamation, the fabrication of pretexts or artificial situations, the creation of stereotypes, based on false perceptions of threat, induced and spread in an ingenious and convincing way--, media scandals and actions are encouraged in the field of civil society, leading to protests, civil disobedience, encouraging the political opposition, all on the basis of promoting and establishing a climate of questioning and rejection of the fundamental figures who embody the direction of the government and the State. The expedient used includes the discrediting of the process of change that is carried out, reformist or revolutionary, the promotion of a credibility crisis around the nation project that is promoted, distrust in the agenda, the purposes, the language used by the President, the main ministers and the one who supports public policies of popular benefit.

The media, traditional and new - along with intellectual circles with influence on states of opinion, sometimes supported by certain religious, cultural and academic institutions - echo these propaganda campaigns, generated in most cases in the opposition political-partisan sphere, actively contributing to shaping consensus and encouraging states of mind in the population, which reach the capacity of national calling to such degree that they can lead to the eviction of the positions occupied by government authorities. and party leaders, to the deterioration of domestic unity in the nation involved and to the bankruptcy of the project that the latter symbolizes.

In the recent past, the best or most graphic examples of the counterattack of imperialism and its oligarchic acolytes in Latin America could be seen in Brazil, when the right-wing forces in this country articulated the offensive against the government of the Workers' Party (PT) and its main figure, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, and against President Dilma Rousseff. The arguments used to discredit both leaders would be structured around issues that from an ethical, moral, and cultural point of view allowed the manipulation of public opinion, fertilizing a harmful environment, in which the object of denigrating their figures flourished. The subsequent legal and media attack against Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, in Argentina, is also part of that file, as is the destabilizing setup against Pedro Castillo, in Peru. Holding specific features in the steps taken, the subversive model was more or less the same: the judiciary led the counterattack against progressive leaders, in collusion with the legislature and the help of the media, as a magnifier of the complaints or accusations. In the altarpiece installed against the Colombian president, as if following the script of the same theatrical performance, in the face of the onslaught of the prosecutor's office, which is calling him for alleged illegal financing of his electoral campaign, Petro has warned that the right is trying to cause an institutional rupture, achieving a favorable popular response, with support mobilizations.

In this context, issues such as corruption, connections to drug trafficking, questioning of personal and civic integrity, or the media attack on family members gain space, creating confusion, leaving aside the strategy that, usually, it was based on weakening the political agenda, the development plan, the nation project, promoted by the adversary. The imperialist perversion, intertwined with local right-wing forces, addressed sensitive issues for the family and Latin American culture. As is known, when matters are handled that touch the moral image of politicians, accusations or scapegoats are mixed, who use reasons and present "proof or evidence" related to improper conduct, political communication becomes contaminated in such a way that propaganda acquires an unusual functionality.

Thus, the diversion of public resources, embezzlement, the link with pornography, police violence, prostitution of minors, homosexuality, drug consumption or trafficking, money laundering, organ trading, become articulating themes, par excellence, in the field of lawfare and fake news. The veracity of what's said becomes secondary when it comes to demanding imprisonment, challenges, political trials. Professional associations and chambers of commerce combine efforts with political parties, union organizations, and right-wing social movements, in their wide diversity of nuances, such as center or extreme, often in alliance with religious entities. The greatest emphasis of this escalation of actions is recorded in electoral times, when the goal is to rule out competition, weakening figures with leftist positions who enjoy popular sympathy, especially in the face of presidential contests. That would be the subversive scheme applied, without giving up its combination with economic and psychological warfare, especially in cases such as those of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, where the most radical change processes were promoted, identified with, or close to, the socialism as a horizon, and linked to the Cuban Revolution, although also, with less intensity, in others, such as those of Argentina and Brazil where, with greater moderation, projects with various margins of autonomy with respect to imperialism and the transnational capital were also carried out, with broad support in the popular sectors.

The role of the judicial apparatus, as already indicated, has become in recent years a powerful space from which to deploy, almost without limitations, activities of destabilization and political persecution, operating under a perverse mantle of institutionality. It's a practice that has proven imperialist efficiency in the path of delegitimizing and persecuting popular political figures opposed to its interests. In this regard, work has been done, with the decisive assistance or complicity of local oligarchic actors, often overlapping with transnational entities, in the reorganization of the judicial apparatus. That is, the elites with control of the State apparatus placed in key spaces or positions personnel considered "technical" or "professional" (lawyers, judges, prosecutors), linked to the power in charge, from where the political adversary is attacked, eroding its influence and reducing its base of electoral support and credibility.

At the same time, the media, which has also already been said has acquired a key role in the manipulation of information and news and in the analysis of fundamental circumstances and processes in national life, distorting images, creating "realities" around which primordial consensuses are defined. Among other recent examples, one could add that of Gustavo Petro, that of the president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has insisted that a media war against his government is underway, and has warned the population that, if although we are not facing a coup threat - in the conventional style -, we are the object of a dirty war, based on media strategies carried out by corporate, business and political interest groups, together with large radio networks, most of the newspapers, who share disqualifying criteria from the right with well-known television analysts and commentators. The case of AMLO, as he is usually called, is similar to that of Petro, in the sense that he was the first candidate

promoted by the left who, in Mexican history, at least in the last fifty years, reached the presidency, being harassed and demonized since he was projecting his campaign in 2012, in which he was defeated, and again in 2018, in which he came out winner. If anyone knows lawfare and fake news closely, although it was not talked about at that time, it's him.

It could be added, to conclude these reflections, that the strategy described responds not only to the way in which this or that North American Administration, Democratic or Republican, liberal or conservative, its ideologues or officials, assess and decide the directions of its foreign policy or the expressed through speeches, declarations or documents, but rather has important points of support, one could say permanent, committed to the interests of the system, above that of governments and presidents, who are temporary, transitory or temporary.

This transcendent Reason of State (*raison d'Etat*) benefits from the work of organic intellectuals, identified with the myths and values inherent to the hegemonism of the United States since ancient times, in its pretension to be at the forefront of international leadership and domination. In that sense, the role of the think tanks, the so-called think-tanks, has been, and it's, essential. The attack has not only been against the leaders of these processes, but against the system in force in the countries involved, going beyond even the government they represent. That was the case of the systematic aggression and delegitimization against socialism in Europe, first, and then against the Cuban Revolution.

An agile overview forces us to point out that, as early as 1919, just two years after the first socialist revolution, the Russian one, triumphed in 1917, the Hoover Institution was created in the United States (whose full name is Hoover Institution on War Revolution and Peace). With a conservative seal, it investigates public policy issues, mainly foreign, focused on revolutions, peace and war, and promotes individual and economic freedom, free enterprise, establishing limits on the role of the government, betting on the private world, from which it receives its financing. Located in Stanford, California, it takes its name from the last name of its founder, Herbert Hoover, who had graduated from the university in that city before becoming president. Since that time, the United States had diagnosed about the newborn Soviet Union and, after World War II, about the European socialist system. It was the initial bastion of the study of the world of the “other.” Of what was later called sovietology and communismology.

Reference should not be omitted to the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), created in 1943, by private initiative, in the middle of World War II, and dedicated explicitly to preserving and strengthening the foundations of freedom, in the sense of classical bourgeois thought, that is, to the defense of little interventionist governments in the social and economic sphere, consistent with the reduction of taxes, maximum freedom of enterprise, the defense of private action, a strong national defense and a strong foreign policy. Studies on socialism were prioritized, taking into account countries like the Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, whose results were used in the design of subversive actions.

Another timely mention is to the RAND Corporation (Research And Development), probably much better known than the previous one, created in 1948, in Santa Monica, California, self-defined as a non-profit organization, like a laboratory of ideas engaged in research-development issues. Financed mostly by the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security, although it receives support from private donors. It focuses mainly on defense and international relations issues. It takes its name from Cato's Letters, historical-literary essays that contributed to the philosophical foundation of the Revolution of Independence, whose axis were the ideas about freedom of expression and action in a free society, decisive in the image of the United States as a promised land, paradigm of democracy and freedom. In accordance with this line of work, research on the aforementioned European socialist countries was always among the priorities. The contributions of this center, as well as those named above, played an important role in the construction of the stereotypical image of these centers, which presented them as systematic violators of human rights, antidemocratic, totalitarian, and dictatorial.

Probably the best known of all is the Project for the New American Century, which was born in the late 1990s, as a powerful think tank, established in Washington D.C with bipartisan sponsorship, from Republicans and Democrats, from the pressure group or Jewish, pro-Israel lobby, and other financial power groups, with influences on Wall Street, the media, and the military-industrial complex. Founded in 1997 with the main goal of keeping and promoting by all available means the hegemony and military, political, and economic leadership of the United States and its allies in the world, it provided characterizations and recommendations on the world situation, based on of foreign policy advice and North American hegemonic positioning.

Thus, since the times spanning the two post-world wars, the United States has had nutrients that delegitimize everything that constitutes (or is associated with) the “other.” For this reason, in the face of the terrorist attacks on

September 11, 2001, President W. Bush used the phrase, “with me or against me,” when urging global support for the United States, in the face of aggression from the “other,” defined like the enemy. Petro and AMLO today, yesterday Chávez, Correa and Evo, along with the Cuban revolutionary leadership, fit that pattern. Drugs, dictatorship corruption, disrespect for human rights and denial of democracy. Those are the themes. The countries that are the object of the empire's counterattack are classified as “Failed States.” But that is another matter, which will require attention later.

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