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**Dying for Capitalism: An Analysis of Marxism**

**ABSTRACT:** *Marxism is one of the most important breakthroughs in international policy, turning the mirror back on the state themselves. This paper investigates the philosophical and historical beginnings of the theory, then uses events as evidence of the theory. It also breaks down the strengths and weaknesses of Marxism, applying these with direct examples.*

Today, Marxism represents much more than an economic theory. Right wing politicians have made it their mission to incorrectly label their dislikes as Marxist. Whether it be social security, the teaching of American racism, or the new M&M mascots. But before it was a buzzword, Marxism was a strong international relations theory used to critically analyze foreign policy decisions. The basic premise of Marxism is that states make policy decisions based on expansionary, capitalist ideals. Examples of state action under these pretenses exist throughout capitalist history, including the American interventions in Iraq, Iran, and Ukraine, as well as the current US-China rivalry.

The philosophical origins of Marxism are tied to its original economic basis. As capitalism spread across the world after the British industrial revolution, a rival economic theory came into play. Economic Marxism is predicated on the idea of a revolution resulting in workers taking over and controlling the means of production. Marxism says that the fundamentals of capitalism will inevitably lead to massive class inequality and, eventually, a communist revolution. While Marx himself was much more focused on the actions within states than interstate relations, he did apply his theory to world connections at points.

Marxism as an international relations theory argues that interstate rivalry is rooted in the expansionary ideals of capitalism. It refutes the weather-vane theory that states actions are pushed by interest groups, with the state itself being a neutral actor. Instead, Marxism argues that the state is structurally controlled by the capitalist ruling elites, so therefore the state itself is an actor. The “best interests” of the state will always be the best interest of the elite and it will make its decisions on this basis. The only way to end this rule is via a revolution that systematically changes the state into a socialist society. Marxism argues that the actions of states are not simply an end, but a means to capitalist expansion.

The international relations theory that most staunchly diverges from marxism is liberalism. Liberalism is based on a global free market, arguing that once economic integration occurs across the world, an international community can be created and conflict will be avoided due to economic reliance. The modern day situation in China is a prime example of the differences in theory. While trade between the nations is robust, the United States recently clamped down on the exportation of semiconductors to Chinese customers to prevent the spread of the technology. Many consider this an act of economic warfare and tensions between the nations have continued to grow. Liberals would argue war is being avoided because capitalism is keeping the peace. They would look at the shared reliance on trade and say that the United States and China will never go to war, because it would risk their economic prosperity. Marxists would argue the opposite. They would look at the world’s two largest economies and note that their current rivalry is rooted in capitalism. Modern capitalists need global trade, which inherently leads to global economic rivalry. Capitalism doesn’t have a ceiling. Capitalists have a constant goal: accumulate, accumulate, and accumulate more. In that vein, Marxists would look at the United States-China situation and argue that war is inevitable.

One of the most formative events in the spread of Marxism as international relations theory was the United States’ intervention in Iran in the 1950s. Between 1901 and 1952, British owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company enjoyed a monopoly on Iranian oil. In 1951, Mohammed Mossadegh came into power in Iran, expelling the AIOC and nationalizing Iranian oil. In response, the British attempted and failed a coup, leading to the nation inquiring with newly elected US President Dwight Eisenhower about possible US involvement. Eisenhower’s secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, “had two lifelong obsessions: fighting Communism and protecting the rights of multinational corporations”. Knowing this, the British misled Dulles that Mossadegh was pushing Iran toward Communism. The US, pusheed by American oil companies, staged a coup. After a few attempts, the US eventually overtook Mossadegh, bringing in authoritarian General Fazlollah Zahedi (Kinzer). The actions of America in Iran can be used to support a Marxist view of foreign policy, as the government acted in opposition to democratic ideals to overthrow a free government and raise their own stature as an oil king.

The strength of Marxism lies in the historical decisions made by nations. The most infamous foreign policy disagreement in the 21st century is the Iraq War. Different theorists have different theories as to why the war was fought. Liberals believe it was to restore United Nation authority and promote human rights in the region. Realists often follow the official American arguments that Saddam Hussein was a threat to world stability and held weapons of mass destruction. Marxists however, promote one of the more controversial arguments: the war was fought to gain oil access in the region and to promote the global capitalist order (Cafruny).

At the time of the war, the US had been looking for a chance to consolidate their power in the region. A little over a decade prior, an indebted Hussein had invaded Kuwait to drill for oil, sparking the Gulf War. While the US invasion of Iraq was declared legal under the facade of saving the people of Kuwait, it is not a reach to suggest that the US only entered the war to solidify their control over the Kuwaiti oil supply. After the war ended, Hussein began making oil deals with Russia, Germany, France, China, and other nations. American oil companies, nervous about losing their customers, pushed the Bush administration to come up with a solution. They did, and the United States invaded Iraq after, according to the Center for Public Integrity, “an orchestrated campaign that…led nation to war under decidedly false pretenses” (NPR). As argued by Cafruny, “The Iraq war was fought to reverse the decline of American international oil companies (IOCs) relative to state-owned national oil companies (NOCs) in the Middle East and their less disciplined clients in Europe and Asia, while improving the position of the American IOCs in the struggle for wealth and power.” (Cafruny). American oil companies were desperate for more control in the region, and the invasion of Iraq gave them an excuse.

In modern day, the strengths of Marxist theory can be applied to the current Russia-Ukraine war. The United States, while feigning morality, continues to push for the war as a means of weakening Russia. America is fighting a war with Ukranian bodies, and Marxists would argue that a significant factor in the current war was the Russia-Germany gas pipeline. The US has been attempting to end this pipeline so they could begin selling natural gas to Germany for years, and construction on a new one, Nord Stream 2, had begun. At the war’s beginning, the US pressured Germany to punish Russia’s illegal invasion by cutting off the pipeline. Germany abided, but the pipeline was still “mysteriously” destroyed at the beginning of the war. Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reported evidence that the US had involvement in the pipeline’s destruction, something that was heavily speculated but not confirmed. The demolition of the two Nord Streams allowed for Germany to worry less about increasing their own tensions with Russia, and has led to more German reliance on American gas companies.

In general, for strengths and evidence of Marxism, look no further than the Cold War. Every foreign policy decision made by America during the period was made with the intention of spreading the global capitalist order. The Vietnam and Korean wars, their backing of Osama bin Laden in the Afghan War, and the countless coup d'etats they orchestrated all looked to push capitalism. While disguised under “spreading democracy”, the replacing of democratically elected leaders in Chilé and Iran with authoritarians shows that the US would prefer a fascist, capitalist world order than a free, leftist one.

On the other hand, Marxism can have some weaknesses. A key error in its development is the assumption of rational actors in power. Since Marxists believe that the state is not a neutral actor and instead structurally created to support the elite, then the decisions of the state should have this same intention. However, some leaders are not rational. Even if there is a “correct” decision to gain that nation economic power, leaders may make different choices based on irrational, moral, or greater political reasons. For example, the US recently affirmed the election of new leftist Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who defeated right wing leader Jair Bolsonaro. After the election, there was a raiding of the Brazilian capital building a la January 6 in the US. America’s Democratic leaders called the election free and fair, something they rarely do with leftist leaders. The reason they would do this is because at this point it is more politically beneficial for Joe Biden to have a leftist running Brazil than it would be to position himself next to right winger Bolsonaro in today’s political climate.

Marxism is not an extreme idea. It is not this boogeyman like many in American politics try to paint it as. To critique capitalistic structures does not make one a radical, and to unbiasedly view the policy decisions made by capitalistic nations does not make one a leftist. Marxism is a strong international relations theory, and it is past time the world began accepting it as it once did.

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