

## Rise and decline of empires?

By Henrik Paulitz<sup>1</sup>

Until last the US were said to be the only empire. Recently China is often referred to as a newly ascended world power which allegedly could overtake the US. The old game of rise and decline of empires or great and super powers, respectively, must be questioned. Might it just be about shifting or attribution of imperial power in a world order which serves the worldwide economy with a global division of military labour?

The historian Winfried Speitkamp writes, illustrated by the example of decline and rise of early empires in West Africa, „what appeared as decline was in fact a shifting of power centres“.<sup>2</sup>

If you look at examples of empires like Egypt, Rome, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom or the United States of America, the following questions arise: the alleged decline of old, and the rise of new empires, was it always loss of power of former elites or, at least

partly, was there fluent transition? In such transitions, is there maintenance of exercising power by transnational structures and institutions? The occasional geographic shifting of power centres - has it perhaps much to do with economic changes, for example new long distance trade routes?

Shifting of power centres – is it often a consequence of “imperial overstretching” due to shortage or depletion of economic, military and ideological resources which are necessary for exercising power?<sup>3</sup>

If exercise of imperial power, not least military power, might primarily be considered not as a desire but particularly as a burden: do we not have to interpret the rise of a new empire as a transmission of (part of) the burden from one power to another?

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Dr. Winfrid Eisenberg.

<sup>2</sup> Winfried Speitkamp: Kleine Geschichte Afrikas. 2009. S. 48 f.

<sup>3</sup> Herfried Münkler: Imperien. 2014. S. 178.

## Global sharing of labour and burden

Is there indeed only one world power? Or does a global burden sharing take place – especially in the military field – in which China, economically strengthened, should participate more than now, in which „overstretched“ states like France and the United Kingdom could temporarily lean back, in which the US could concentrate on the pacific region, and in which Germany as a new force of order should assume responsibility in Europe, Middle East and Africa?<sup>4</sup>

Great and long lasting wars like in Afghanistan can be waged only by means of „troop supplier“-conferences with many states assuring their military contribution – usually with remarkable difficulties and surmounting.

The Syrian war can be waged only with a broad so called „Anti-Terror-Coalition“<sup>5</sup> whereby several states try to escape from the military burden as far as possible.

Thus, we observe on the one hand the concentration of broad confederations of states on big theatres of war and, on the other hand, a global distribution of military functions in diverse world regions, especially for the purpose of worldwide control of resources.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Henrik Paulitz: *Kriegsmacht Deutschland? Informationen und Handlungsempfehlungen zu brandgefährlichen ‚Internationalen Erwartungen an Deutschland‘*. Akademie Bergstraße. 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Außenministerium der Russischen Föderation: Rede des Präsidenten der Russischen Föderation, Wladimir Putin, in einer Plenarsitzung der 70. Tagung der UN-Vollversammlung am 28. September 2015 in New York.

<sup>6</sup> Vgl. Henrik Paulitz: *Anleitung gegen den Krieg*. Akademie Bergstraße. 2. Aufl. 2017.

## The future roles of Germany and China

Well, if China plays a strong role and, for example, becomes active in the resource-rich South China Sea, this must not necessarily be interpreted as a potential replacement of the US as a world power. It is also possible to regard China as a strengthened military power which controls the natural resources and the long distance trading routes together with the US – for the benefit of the global economy.

The economic power of China is the result of the close global cooperation with the so called „west“, and not least of the close group links.

A study of the ETH Zurich on the global ownership links of transnational companies came to the conclusion that Sinopec (China Petroleum & Chemical corporation), a leading oil and gas corporation, headquartered in Peking, represents together with companies like Barclays, JP Morgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, Unicredito Italiano, Allianz, UBS, Bank of America, Bank of New York Mellon (major shareholder of Gazprom!), and others, the heart of the global economy, a so called „elite of the elite“.<sup>7</sup>

Though, in this respect, it can be expected that China will act as a competitor of the western states and their economies, and in this

<sup>7</sup> Vitali S, Glattfelder JB, Battiston S (2011) The Network of Global Corporate Control. *PLoS ONE* 6(10): e25995. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0025995. Ebd. Supporting Information. – Frankfurter Rundschau (FR-Online): *Mächtige Konzerne. 147 Unternehmen kontrollieren die Welt*. Von Daniel Baumann und Jakob Schlandt. 24.10.2011. – *Die Welt: Die globale Macht der Großkonzerne*. 26.10.2011. Von Florian Hassel.

context acquire company shares on a large scale. On the other hand, China could, in close consultation with the elite groups of companies which are contributed to the west, provide global control of the oil and gas resources, also in Africa.

In the logic of the global elites states which are allowed to prosper under the transnational economical conditions, are required to provide military contributions at the service of the world economy.

Thus, Germany is expected – as well as Brazil, India, and China – to provide military services according to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP):<sup>8</sup>

“Germany’s military capabilities, which will be a big focus of your study, while less than in some other European countries, still puts it in the top ten countries spending on

defence, despite being under 1,5 percent of GDP. Germany could do more. Germany could be higher in that list, or at least could retain its position in that list as other countries like China, India, Brazil and others pick up their spending. Germany is the world’s fourth largest economy, the largest in Europe.”

Thus, if several states are requested behind the scenes to be more active as military forces of order, stories may be told in the public which make the generation of future wars plausible: In Asia, already now it is talked about a narrative of a potential confrontation between the US and China; similarly, in Africa a future confrontation between Germany and China could be postulated.

It is to be recommended that such representations must thoroughly be questioned.

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<sup>8</sup> Robin Niblett (Royal Institute of International Affairs/Chatham House): Internationale Erwartungen an Deutschland. Vortrag bei der Auftaktveranstaltung des

Weißbuchprozesses 2016. Berlin. 17.02.2015. Übersetzung von Dr. Winfrid Eisenberg.