



The Fourth World War Has Begun

Subcomandante Marcos

War is a business of vital importance to the state, it is the province of life and death, the path that leads to survival or to annihilation. To study it in depth is indispensable.

—Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Neoliberalism, as a global system, is a new war to conquer territories. The end of the Third World War (or “Cold War”) does not in any way mean that the world has overcome bipolarity and regained stability under the hegemony of the winner. Because, if there has been a vanquished (the socialist camp), it is difficult to name the victor. The United States? The European Union? Japan? All three?

The defeat of the “Evil Empire” has opened up new markets whose conquest is provoking a new world war, the fourth. Like all conflicts, this one forces nation-states to redefine their identity. The world order has returned to the old era of the conquests of America, Africa, and Oceania. It is a strange modernity that advances by going backward. The twilight of the twentieth century resembles earlier barbarous periods more than it does the rational futures described by so many works of science fiction.

Vast territories, wealth, and, above all, an immense available workforce await their new master. And although there are numerous candidates, there is only one position of world ruler. Hence the new war among those claiming to belong to the “Empire of the Good.”

If the Third World War saw the confrontation of capitalism and socialism on various terrains and with varying degrees of intensity, the fourth will be played out between large financial centers, on a global scale, and at a tremendous and constant intensity.

The misnamed “Cold War” reached very high temperatures: from the catacombs of international espionage to the sidereal space of Ronald

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Reagan's famous "Star Wars"; from the sands of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam; from the unbridled nuclear arms race to the savage coups in Latin America; from the reprehensible maneuvers of NATO armies to the intrigues of CIA agents in Bolivia, where Che Guevara was assassinated. All these events culminated in the collapse of the socialist camp as a world system and in its dissolution as a social alternative.

For the victor, capitalism, the Third World War revealed the advantages to be derived from "total war." The postwar period allows a glimpse of a new planetary dispensation in which the main sources of conflict lie in the considerable growth of no-man's-lands (product of the debacle in the East), the development of a reduced number of powers (the United States, the European Union, Japan), the global economic crisis, and a new information revolution.

Thanks to computers, financial markets impose their laws and precepts upon the planet according to the whims of the trading floor. "Globalization" is no more than the totalitarian extension of their logic into all aspects of life. Formerly master of the economy, the United States is now directed, or teledirected, by the very dynamic of financial power: free trade. This logic has profited from the porosity brought about by the development of telecommunications so as to appropriate for itself all aspects of social activity. At last a totally total world war!

One of the first victims of this war is the national market. Like a bullet fired inside a steel-walled room, the war unleashed by neoliberalism ricochets and ends up wounding whoever pulled the trigger. One of the basic structures of the modern capitalist state, the national market, is liquidated by the artillery of the global financial economy. The new international capitalism renders national capitalisms obsolete and starves public powers until they are exhausted. The blow has been so brutal that nation-states do not have the strength to defend citizens' interests. The beautiful shop window of the New World Order, inherited from the Cold War, has been broken into a thousand pieces by the neoliberal explosion. A few minutes is all it takes for businesses and states to collapse, due not to the winds of proletarian revolution but to the violence of financial storms.

The son (neoliberalism) devours the father (national capital) and in the process destroys the lies of capitalist ideology: in the New World Order there is neither democracy nor liberty, neither equality nor fraternity. The planetary stage is transformed into a new battleground where chaos reigns.

Toward the end of the Cold War, capitalism created a military horror: the neutron bomb, a weapon that destroys life while leaving buildings

intact. During the Fourth World War, however, a new wonder has been discovered: the financial bomb. Unlike those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this new bomb not only destroys the polis (here, the nation), imposing death, terror, and misery on those who live there, but also transforms its target into just another piece in the puzzle of economic globalization. The result of the explosion is not a pile of smoking ruins, nor thousands of lifeless bodies, but a department added to the new planetary superstore, and a workforce retooled for the new world job market.

The European Union is feeling the effects of the Fourth World War acutely. Globalization has succeeded in erasing the borders between rival states that have been enemies for centuries, obliging them to converge toward political union. The road from nation-states to the European federation will be paved with destruction and ruin, beginning with those of European civilization.

Megapoles reproduce themselves all over the planet, with zones of commercial integration being their preferred terrain. In North America, the Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, the United States, and Mexico precedes the realization of an old dream of conquest: “America for the Americans.”

Are “megapoles” replacing nations? No. Or, rather, not only replacing them. Instead, megapoles give nations new functions, new limits, and new perspectives. Entire countries become departments of neoliberal megabusiness, producing, on the one hand, destruction and depopulation and, on the other, the reconstruction and reorganization of regions and nations.

If during the Third World War nuclear bombs had a threatening and coercive deterrent character, the financial hyperbombs of the fourth are of a different nature. They are used to attack territories (nation-states), destroying the material bases of their sovereignty and, in producing their qualitative depopulation, excluding all those deemed unsuitable to the new economy (for example, indigenous peoples). Simultaneously, the financial centers also impose a reconstruction of nation-states, reorganizing them according to a new logic in which the economic prevails over the social.

The indigenous world is full of examples that illustrate such a strategy: Ian Chambers, director of the Central American Office of the International Labor Organization, has stated that the world’s indigenous population (300 million people) inhabits areas containing 60 percent of the planet’s natural resources: “It is not surprising, then, that many conflicts break out in order to take over their lands” (quoted in García 1997). As the

journalist who interviewed Chambers paraphrases him, “The exploitation of natural resources (petrol and mines) and tourism are the main industries that threaten indigenous territories in America” (García 1997). Other threats are pollution, prostitution, and drugs.

In this new war politics is no longer the driving force of the nation-state. Now it only manages the economy. Politicians, meanwhile, are no more than business managers. The new rulers of the world do not need to govern directly because national governments have taken charge of the administration of business on their behalf. The new order is the unification of the world into a single market; and if states are merely managers in the guise of governments, the new regional alliances resemble commercial mergers more than they do political federations. The unification that neoliberalism produces is economic; in the gigantic planetary superstore only merchandise circulates freely, not people.

Globalization also spreads a general mode of thought: “The American way of life,” having followed U.S. troops to Europe during the Second World War, then to Vietnam, and more recently to the Persian Gulf, is now being spread around the world by means of the computer. It is thus not only a question of the destruction of the material bases of nation-states but, equally, of historical and cultural destruction.

All cultures forged by nations—the noble indigenous past of America, the brilliant civilization of Europe, the wise history of Asian nations, and the ancestral wealth of Africa and Oceania—are corroded by the American way of life. In this way, neoliberalism imposes the destruction of nations and groups of nations in order to reconstruct them according to a single model. This is a planetary war, of the worst and cruelest kind, waged against humanity.

We are faced with a puzzle. We still lack many of the pieces needed to put it together and understand today’s world. Nevertheless, seven can be found, providing some hope that this conflict will not end with the destruction of humanity. Seven pieces . . . to draw, color, cut out, and, by fitting them with others, attempt to put the global puzzle back together.

The first of these pieces is the dual accumulation of wealth and poverty at the two poles of planetary society. The second is the wholesale exploitation of the world. The third is the nightmare of the unemployed part of humanity. The fourth is the nauseating relationship between power and crime. The fifth is the violence of the state. The sixth is the mystery of megapolitics. The seventh is the multiple forms of resistance that humanity deploys against neoliberalism.

Piece No. 1: The Concentration of Wealth and the Redistribution of Poverty

Figure 1 is constructed by drawing a monetary sign.

In the history of humanity many models have vied to make the absurd the sign of the world order. Neoliberalism will occupy a prominent place when the medals are handed out. Its conception of “sharing” wealth is doubly absurd: accumulation of wealth for some, and of needs for millions of others. The characteristic signs of the contemporary world are injustice and inequality. There are 5 billion human beings on the Earth: 500 million live comfortably, 4.5 billion suffer poverty. The rich make up for their numerical minority with their billions of dollars. The wealth of the 358 richest people in the world, dollar billionaires, is more than the annual revenue of half of the poorest inhabitants of the planet, that is, around 2.6 billion people.

The progress of transnational corporations does not necessarily imply progress in the developed nations. On the contrary, the more these giants enrich themselves, the more poverty increases in the so-called rich countries. The gap between rich and poor is enormous and, far from being attenuated, social inequalities are growing.

The monetary sign that you have drawn represents the symbol of global economic power. Now, color it dollar green. Ignore the nauseating smell; the smell of excrement, muck, and blood is certified genuine.

Piece No. 2: The Globalization of Exploitation

Figure 2 is constructed by drawing a triangle.

One neoliberal lie is to insist that economic growth produces a better distribution of wealth and employment. This is not true. Just as the growth of a king’s power does not increase the power of his subjects (the opposite is closer to the truth), the absolutism of financial capital does not improve the distribution of wealth and does not create jobs. Its structural consequences are, rather, poverty, unemployment, and job insecurity.

During the 1960s and 1970s the number of poor (defined by the World Bank as those living on less than \$1 per day) was 200 million. At the beginning of the 1990s the number was 2 billion.

More poor and impoverished human beings and fewer rich ones (who are getting ever richer). Such are the lessons of the first piece of the puzzle. In order to obtain this absurd result the global capitalist system “modernizes” production and the circulation and consumption of merchandise. The new technological (information) revolution and the new

political revolution (the megapoles emerging from among the ruins of the nation-state) produce a new social “revolution,” in fact a reorganization of social forces—primarily the workforce.

The world’s economically active population has increased from 1.38 billion in 1960 to 2.37 billion in 1990. More human beings capable of working are working, but the New World Order consigns them to particular spaces and rearranges their occupations (or “nonoccupations” in the case of the unemployed and underemployed). The global population employed by sector (GPES) has been radically modified over the last twenty years. The agricultural and fishing sectors have fallen from 22 percent in 1970 to 12 percent in 1990, manufacturing from 25 percent to 22 percent. But the tertiary sector (commerce, transport, banking, and services) has risen from 42 percent to 56 percent. In the developing countries the tertiary sector has grown from 40 percent in 1970 to 57 percent in 1990, with agriculture and fishing falling from 30 percent to 15 percent (Chi and del Pilar 1997). More and more workers are oriented toward high-productivity activities. In this way the system acts as a sort of megaboss for whom the global market is just a single business, managed in a “modern” way.

With capitalist production continuing to call on child labor, however, neoliberal “modernity” resembles more the bestial birth of capitalism than it does utopian “rationality.” Of the 1.15 billion children in the world, at least 100 million live on the streets and 200 million work—according to some forecasts this figure will reach 400 million in the year 2000. In Asia alone, 146 million work in manufacturing; and, in the North too, hundreds of thousands of children work either to supplement family income or to survive—many in the pleasure industries (according to the United Nations, 1 million children are thrown into the sex industry every year).

Unemployment, and the insecurity of millions of workers throughout the world, is a reality we’re not likely to be soon rid of. In the countries of the Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development, unemployment has gone from 3.8 percent in 1966 to 6.3 percent in 1990; in Europe, it has gone from 2.2 percent to 6.4 percent. The globalized market destroys small and medium-sized businesses: with the disappearance of local and regional markets, and deprived of protection, small and medium-sized businesses cannot compete with transnational giants. In this way millions of workers find themselves unemployed. A neoliberal absurdity: far from creating jobs, the growth of production destroys them—the United Nations talks of “growth without jobs.”

But the nightmare does not end there. Workers must accept more precarious terms, greater instability, longer working days, and lower salaries. These are the consequences of globalization and the explosion of the service industries. All this produces a specific surplus: excess human beings who are not useful to the New World Order because they are no longer productive, no longer consume, and no longer borrow from banks. In short, they are disposable. Every day the financial markets impose their laws on states and on groups of states. They redistribute the inhabitants only to realize at last that there are still too many people.

Here, then, is a figure that resembles a triangle, the representation of the pyramid of global exploitation.

Piece No. 3: Migration, the Errant Nightmare

Figure 3 is constructed by drawing a circle.

We have already mentioned the existence at the end of the Third World War of new territories to conquer (the formerly socialist countries) and others to reconquer. Hence the triple strategy of the market: the proliferation of “regional wars” and “internal conflicts,” the pursuit of an atypical accumulation strategy by capital, and the mobilization of great masses of workers. The result: a great wheel of millions of migrants across the planet. “Foreigners” in a world “without borders” (according to the promise made by the victors of the Cold War) who suffer xenophobic persecution, job insecurity, the loss of their cultural identity, police repression, and hunger—that is, when they aren’t thrown into prison or murdered.

Whatever its cause, the nightmare of migration continues to grow. The number of those dependent on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has exploded, rising from 2 million in 1975 to more than 27 million in 1995.

The goal of neoliberal migratory policy is more to destabilize the global labor market than to curb immigration. The Fourth World War—with its mechanisms of destruction/depopulation and reconstruction/reorganization—has brought about the displacement of millions of people. With their nightmares on their backs, their destiny is to wander, and to act as a kind of scarecrow—frightening those who have jobs into forgetting the boss—as well as a pretext for racism.

Piece No. 4: Financial Globalization and the Generalization of Crime

Figure 4 is constructed by drawing a rectangle.

If you think that the world of outlaws is dead and buried, you are mistaken. During the period known as the Cold War, organized crime acquired a more respectable image. Not only has it begun to function like a modern business, but it has also profoundly penetrated the political and economic systems of nation-states.

With the beginning of the Fourth World War, organized crime has globalized its own activities. The criminal organizations of five continents have appropriated the “spirit of world cooperation” and participate as partners in the conquest of new markets. They invest in legal businesses not only to launder dirty money but also to acquire the capital required for their illegal businesses. Their preferred sectors: high-rent real estate, leisure, the media, and . . . banking.

Ali Baba and the forty bankers? Worse. The commercial banks use dirty money for their legal activities. According to a United Nations (1995) report “the development of crime syndicates has been facilitated by the programs of structural adjustment which indebted nations have been forced to accept in order to gain access to International Monetary Fund loans.”

Organized crime also makes use of tax havens. There are some thirty-five of them, one of which, the Cayman Islands, ranks as the fifth most important banking center, possessing more banks and registered companies than inhabitants. As well as laundering dirty money, tax havens are the places of contact between government leaders, businessmen, and mafia bosses.

Here, then, is the rectangular mirror in which legality and illegality exchange reflections. On which side of the mirror is the criminal? On which side the pursuer?

Piece No. 5: The Legitimate Violence of an Illegitimate Power

Figure 5 is constructed by drawing a pentagon.

In the cabaret of globalization, the state gives itself over to a striptease, at the end of which it retains only the bare minimum: its repressive force. Its material base destroyed, its sovereignty and its independence annulled, its political class effaced, the nation-state becomes a simple security apparatus in the service of “megabusiness.” Instead of targeting public

investment on social spending, it prefers to improve the equipment that facilitates social control.

What is to be done when violence follows the laws of the market? When is violence legitimate? When illegitimate? What monopoly of violence can the unfortunate nation-states claim when the free play of supply and demand defies such a monopoly? Have we not shown, in piece number 4, that organized crime, government, and the financial centers are all intimately linked? Is it not obvious that organized crime possesses real armies? Nation-states no longer hold a monopoly on violence: the market has put it up for auction. . . .

If the contestation of the monopoly of violence invokes not the laws of the market but the interests of “the underdogs,” then global power will see it as aggression. This is one of the least studied (and most condemned) aspects of the challenge launched by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) against neoliberalism and in the name of humanity.

The symbol of U.S. military power is the Pentagon. The new global policeman wants armies and national police forces to be mere security guards, guaranteeing order and progress in the neoliberal megapoles.

Piece No. 6: Megapolitics and the Little People

Figure 6 is constructed with a scribble.

We have said that nation-states are being attacked by the financial markets and made to dissolve into the space of the emerging megapoles. Yet neoliberalism does not only wage its war by “uniting” nations and regions. In addition, its strategy of destruction/depopulation and of reconstruction/reorganization produces fractures in nation-states. Herein lies one of the paradoxes of this fourth war: intended to eliminate borders and to unite nations, it multiplies borders and pulverizes nations.

Those who still doubt that this globalization is a world war should consider the conflicts that have led to the break-up of the U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia, victims of the crises that shatter the economic foundations and cohesion of nation-states. The construction of megapoles and the fragmentation of states are a consequence of the destruction of nation-states. Are these separate events? The symptoms of a megacrisis to come? Isolated events?

The suppression of trade barriers, the explosion of telecommunications, the information superhighways, the power of financial markets, the international free-trade treaties, all contribute to the destruction of nation-states. Paradoxically, globalization produces a fragmented world made up

of watertight compartments barely linked by economic gangways. A world of broken mirrors that reflect the useless global unity of the neoliberal puzzle.

Neoliberalism does not only fragment the world that it wants to unify, it also produces the politico-economic center that directs this war. It is urgent that we talk about megapolitics, which incorporates national politics and links them to a center with global interests whose logic is that of the market. It is in the name of the latter that wars are fought, credit granted, and merchandise bought and sold; that diplomatic recognition, economic blocs, political alliances, immigration laws, international ruptures, financial investment—in short, the survival of whole nations—are decided.

Financial markets are not interested in the political colors of a nation's leaders. What counts, in their eyes, is respect for the economic program. Financial criteria impose themselves on everyone. The rulers of the world can tolerate the existence of a left-wing government, on the condition that it does not adopt measures that damage the workings of the market. They will never accept a politics that breaks with the dominant model.

In the eyes of megapolitics, national politics is led by little people who must bend to the diktats of the financial giants. It will always be this way . . . until the little people rebel.

Here, then, is the figure representing megapolitics. It is impossible to find the least bit of rationality in it.

Piece No. 7: Pockets of Resistance

Figure 7 is constructed by drawing a pocket.

“To start with, I ask you not to confuse resistance with political opposition. The opposition does not oppose itself to power, and its highest form is that of an opposition party; while resistance, by definition, cannot be a party: it is not made to govern . . . but to resist” (Segovia 1996).

The apparent infallibility of globalization collides with the obstinate disobedience of reality. While neoliberalism pursues its war, groups of protestors, hard cores of rebels, form across the planet. The empire of financiers with full pockets confronts the rebellion of pockets of resistance. Yes, pockets. Of all sizes, of different colors, of different styles. The only thing they have in common is a will to resist the “New World Order” and the crime against humanity that this fourth war represents.

Neoliberalism attempts to subdue millions of human beings and wants to rid itself of all those who are “superfluous.” But these “disposable”

people rebel: women, children, the old, the young, indigenous peoples, ecologists, homosexuals, lesbians, those who are HIV-positive, workers, and all those who disturb the new order, who organize themselves and struggle. Those excluded from “modernity” weave resistances.

In Mexico, for example, in the name of the Program of Integral Development of the Tehuantepec Isthmus, the authorities want to create a large industrial zone. This area will be comprised of “screwdriver” factories¹ and an oil refinery that will treat a third of Mexican crude oil and manufacture petrochemical products. Interoceanic transit routes will be constructed: roads, a canal, and a transisthmian railway line. Two million peasants will become workers in these factories. Similarly, in the Lacandona jungle in southeastern Mexico, a program of long-term regional development is being set up, its objective being to place indigenous lands rich in dignity and in history (but also in petroleum and uranium) at the disposal of capital.

These projects will result in the fragmentation of Mexico, separating the Southeast from the rest of the country. They are inscribed, in fact, in a strategy of counterinsurgency, which seeks to surround and clamp down on the anti-neoliberal rebellion born in 1994 (at the center of which are the indigenous rebels of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation).

On the question of indigenous rebellions, a parenthesis: the Zapatistas reckon that, in Mexico, the reconquest and defense of national sovereignty are part of the anti-neoliberal revolution. Yet, paradoxically, it is the EZLN that is accused of wanting to fragment the country. The reality is that the only ones to invoke separatism are the entrepreneurs of the oil-rich state of Tabasco and those deputies from the state of Chiapas who are members of the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI). The Zapatistas think that the defense of the national state is necessary in the face of globalization, and that attempts to break Mexico into pieces stem from those in power rather than from the just demands for autonomy of Indian peoples.

The EZLN and the entire national indigenous movement do not want Indian peoples to separate themselves from Mexico: they intend to be recognized as an integral part of the country, but with their own particularities. They aspire to a democratic, free, and just Mexico. If the EZLN defends national sovereignty, the Mexican federal army protects a government that has destroyed its material infrastructure and offered the country to foreign corporations and to the drug traffickers.

It is not only in the mountains of southeastern Mexico that neoliberalism is being resisted. In other regions of Mexico, in Latin America, in the United States and in Canada, in the Europe of the Maastricht Treaty, in Africa, in Asia, and in Oceania, pockets of resistance are multiplying. Each has its own history, its specificities, its similarities, its demands, its struggles, its successes. If humanity wants to survive and improve, its only hope resides in these pockets made up of the excluded, the left-for-dead, the “disposable.”

This is one example of a pocket of resistance, but I don’t attach particular importance to it. The examples are as numerous as the resistances and as diverse as the worlds of this world. Draw, then, whatever example you like. In this business of pockets, as in that of resistance, diversity is strength.

After having drawn, colored, and cut out these seven pieces you will see that it is impossible to put them together. This is the problem. Globalization wants to assemble pieces that do not fit. For this reason, and others that I can’t develop here, it is necessary to build a new world, a world that can contain many worlds, that can contain all worlds.

Postscript that tells of dreams nestling in love. The sea rests at my side. For a long time she has shared in the anguish, the uncertainty, and in numerous dreams, but now she sleeps with me in the hot jungle night. I watch her undulating like wheat in my dreams, and once again I wonder at finding her unchanged: warm and clear at my sides. The suffocating atmosphere draws me out of bed and takes hold of my hand, and my pen, so as to bring back old Antonio, today as years ago. . . .

I had asked old Antonio to accompany me on an exploration upriver. We carry little food. After hours following the river’s capricious course we are seized by hunger and by the heat. We spend the afternoon pursuing a herd of wild boar. It is nearly dark when we catch up with them. Suddenly, an enormous wild pig detaches itself from the group and attacks us. Calling on my military knowledge, I throw down my weapon and climb the nearest tree. Old Antonio stays calm in the face of the attack and, instead of running, positions himself behind a coppice. The enormous boar rushes straight at him with all its force and embeds itself in the branches and spines. Before it can free itself, old Antonio raises his old carbine and, with one shot, provides the evening meal.

At dawn, when I've finished cleaning my own, modern automatic rifle (an M-16, 5.56 mm caliber, with a speed adjustor and a range of 460 meters, telescopic sights, and a magazine of 90 bullets), I write up my campaign diary, omitting what happened. I simply note: "Met boars and A. killed one. Height 350 meters. It has not rained."

While we wait for the meat to cook, I tell old Antonio that my share will provide meat for the day of celebrations being planned at the encampment. "A fiesta?" he asks, poking the fire. "Yes," I tell him. "Whatever the month, there is always something to celebrate," and I follow with a brilliant speech on the historical calendar and Zapatista celebrations. Old Antonio listens in silence. Thinking that my sermon is of no interest to him, I settle down to sleep.

Lost in my dreams, I see old Antonio take my book and write in it. The next day, after breakfast, we divide the meat out and then go our separate ways. Back at camp I give my report and show them the book so they will know what happened. "This is not your writing," they say, showing me the page in the book. There, after what I had noted down, old Antonio had written, in big letters: "If you can't have both reason and force, always choose reason and leave force to the enemy. In many battles force provides victory, but a war is only won thanks to reason. The powerful will never draw reason from force, while we can always draw strength from our reason."

And lower down, in tiny letters: "Felices fiestas."

I wasn't hungry anymore, of course. As usual, the Zapatista celebrations were indeed joyous.

*Translated by
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Notes

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1. That is, plants, usually owned by foreign or transnational firms, in which domestic workers assemble foreign-made parts. The firms benefit from the low wages they can offer local workers (the "screwdrivers"); the workers, however, are offered few high-skill jobs or opportunities for advancement, and the country

benefits less than it would from a business more integrated into the national economy (e.g., one that assembled parts made in the country). *Ed.*

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