

## Welcome to the Desert of Real Imagination

By Sonja Buckel and Jens Wissel\*

In response to the violence of the international system, “realist” approaches are flourishing. In the aftermath of “9/11”, gulf war No. 3, the challenge to the achievements of international law<sup>1</sup> and the unchallengeable dominance of the US military-industrial complex, this is particularly noticeable. Theories which affirm an anarchical world without any international regulation, in which only the application of military power guarantees freedom and security are gaining credibility. This everyday understanding is also employed in Robert Kagan's essay.<sup>2</sup> While “the Americans” exercise power in an anarchical international system, “the Europeans” aim for a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity. The fuss about Kagan's essay can hardly be explained by a rich analysis of the current international situation, for it does not supply this. It is even more surprising that the superficial pattern of interpretation considers that the essay expresses a “fundamental truth of the international system,” which is only articulated once in ten years.<sup>3</sup> But we want to argue that it is not about “truth,” but about the production and propagation of a hegemonic discourse.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly Kagan must be perceived as what he is: the co-founder of the reactionary think tank “Project for a New American Century”; an intellectual belonging to the neo-conservative leadership structure, a group that pressed the ideological case for the war against Iraq.

The elite theory taken from Carl Schmitt's follower Leo Strauss forms the basis for a new version of the friend-enemy scheme, with which the idea of the “exclusive

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<sup>1</sup> Compare, Andreas Fischer-Lescano, *Die Macht des Weltrechts. Der Irak-Krieg wird juristische Folgen haben*, FRANKFURTER RUNDSCHAU, (15 April 2003).

<sup>2</sup> ROBERT KAGAN, OF PARADISE AND POWER: AMERICA AND EUROPE IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Cooper, *Europa muss seine Macht besser nutzen*, SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG (16 May 2003).

<sup>4</sup> And so about a power-knowledge complex that construes truth.

superpower USA" is finally to be implemented.<sup>5</sup> However, modern civil societies are characterised by the fact that they cannot be reproduced by repressive power only.

Pure force conditions, as Max Weber explained, are instable. The creation of consent, which develops in civil society,<sup>6</sup> is a necessary condition.<sup>7</sup> Hegemony is understood here not as a relation between states, but as the political leadership<sup>8</sup> necessary to create a system of social consent which is also shared by the subaltern. Pure military dominance of one nation state is not sufficient to protect a worldwide-networked mode of production. Both the population in the United States and that in Europe must be merged into the hegemonic project if it is to be successful in the long term. And Kagan's essay serves precisely this purpose, although superficially it seeks to demonstrate just the contrary, that is to say that the supremacy of "the USA" is not dependent on any concessions. However, this supremacy must first of all be perceived and accepted as such by the central actors. The struggle for hegemony is thus also a struggle about authority over the interpretation of social conditions.

Kagan is thus conceptualising states as self-contained actors. This point of view was always as simple as it was wrong - in times of increasing international interdependence it becomes almost grotesque. First of all we need to clarify of whom Kagan speaks when he talks about "the Americans" or "the Europeans." Probably not of those Americans who demonstrated in large numbers against the third gulf war, or of those Europeans who supported the genocidal government in Rwanda (also militarily) up to the bitter end.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, also, Robert Misik, *Bolschewismus von rechts*, TAGESZEITUNG (17 March 2003); Ralf Hanselle, *Mars Attacks. Wie Robert Kagan Amerika intellektuell für den Platz an der Sonne fit macht*, FREITAG (25 April 2003). Compare also the letter signed by Kagan, Richard Perle, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz to the former US president Bill Clinton, in which, already in 1998, military intervention in Iraq was demanded: [www.newamericancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm](http://www.newamericancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm).

<sup>6</sup> The term "civil society," going back on Antonio Gramsci, is not to be confused with the normative use to which it was put in the late 1980s. For Gramsci "civil society" is in no way separate from power and relationships of rule.

<sup>7</sup> See, also, Hans-Jürgen Bieling/Jochen Steinhilber, *Hegemoniale Projekte im Prozess der europäischen Integration*, in *DIE KONFIGURATION EUROPAS. DIMENSIONEN EINER KRITISCHEN INTEGRATIONSTHEORIE* 102 (Bieling/Steinhilber eds, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> In the sense of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault.

<sup>9</sup> Compare, ALISON DESFORGES, *KEIN ZEUGE DARF ÜBERLEBEN* (2003).

The “we” of whom Kagan claims to speak exists only as a false abstraction.<sup>10</sup> States are not subjects but “a material condensation of power relations.”<sup>11</sup> In fact the circumstances *within* the USA (as in the rest of the world) are strongly influenced by asymmetrical compromises as a result of social struggles. This can be demonstrated by the following facts: only the wealthiest 5% of the population have benefited from two-thirds of the latest US tax reduction;<sup>12</sup> as a result of the policy of “prison in place of social security” every 142nd American citizen is imprisoned,<sup>13</sup> 40 million US citizens live without health insurance. The “material condensation” of these relations constitutes the framework of the nation state.

The international configuration with its inherent relations of force, in which the states are embedded, has to be conceptualised in a different way. The crucial question is how transformation processes have reconfigured the relationship between economics and politics. Analysing this transformation, we have to keep in mind that the separation of economics and politics is simply the form of the profile of politics inside relations of production.<sup>14</sup>

The system of different states and their competition “is a decisive foundation of development in capitalism on a world scale,”<sup>15</sup> but its mode is nevertheless changing.

These changes are related to the alteration of social power relations, in the sense that the globalisation is also a strategic reformation of the power bloc. “Power bloc” does not mean a homogeneous composition, but an alliance structure that is fractured and full of contradictions. It is marked by permanent competition between the sectors of internationally oriented capital. Robert Cox specifies the hegemonic fraction of this block as “transnational manager class.”<sup>16</sup> This class fraction is in-

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<sup>10</sup> This applies also to the “We Europeans” of Habermas and Derrida, as the idea of a vanguard core Europe. Jürgen Habermas/Jacques Derrida, *Nach dem Krieg: Die Wiedergeburt Europas*, FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG (31 May 2003).

<sup>11</sup> NICOS POULANTZAS, STAATSTHEORIE. POLITISCHER ÜBERBAU, IDEOLOGIE, AUTORITÄRER ETATISMUS 154 *et seq.* (2002).

<sup>12</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Bush’s Plan – The Dangers*, THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS (12 May 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Loic Wacquant, *The Penalisation of Poverty and the Rise of Neo-Liberalism*, 9 EUROPEAN JOURNAL ON CRIMINAL POLICY AND RESEARCH 401-412 (2001).

<sup>14</sup> NICOS POULANTZAS, STAATSTHEORIE. POLITISCHER ÜBERBAU, IDEOLOGIE, AUTORITÄRER ETATISMUS 195 (2002).

<sup>15</sup> JOACHIM HIRSCH, HERRSCHAFT, HEGEMONIE UND POLITISCHE ALTERNATIVEN 35 (2002).

<sup>16</sup> ROBERT COX, PRODUCTION, POWER AND WORLD ORDER 359 *et seq.* (1987).

creasingly detached from the national economies and is strategically orientated towards the world market. As a result of internal disruption and different territorial references, this new fraction must not be mistaken for the embryonic core of a new world state.<sup>17</sup> The international, institutional framework in which this class is moving and organising itself<sup>18</sup> is still extremely fragile. It therefore remains closely related to the nation states. The synthesis of a world state is structurally impossible in capitalism.<sup>19</sup> To a large extent globalisation is a process organised inside and through the nation states.

Nicos Poulantzas tries to capture this phenomenon with the concept of an “internal bourgeoisie.”<sup>20</sup> This differs from a national bourgeoisie, which directly is related to the national state, as well as from the comprador bourgeoisie, which lacks its own material base and is therefore totally dependent on metropolitan capital. Globalisation and the nation state cannot be understood as thesis and antithesis. The internal bourgeoisie organises and accelerates the process of transformation in important ways inside the nation state, but it also establishes a lot of links between them.

These developments have led to a constellation in which hegemony in the international system cannot be understood exclusively as the hegemony of a leading nation state, not even of the USA.<sup>21</sup> The intellectual dispute between Kagan and his social democratic and liberal adversaries is one about the future regulation of the new power relations from the perspective of the metropolitan north-west: USA and the EU. Their *common* interest in “designing the future world domestic politics

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Giovanni Arrighi, *Entwicklungslinien des Empire: Transformation des Weltsystems*, in KRITIK DER WELTORDNUNG (Thomas Atzert and Jost Müller eds., 2003).

<sup>18</sup> On law, see Teubner’s interpretation of “lex mercatoria.” Gunther Teubner, *Breaking Frames. Economic Globalization and the Emergence of lex mercatoria*, 5 EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL THEORY Nr. 2, p. 199. And as a critique, Sonja Buckel, *Empire oder Rechtspluralismus? Recht im Globalisierungsdiskurs*, KRITISCHE JUSTIZ 2/2003, p. 177-1191.

<sup>19</sup> On the impossibility of a world state in capitalism, see, Joachim Hirsch, *Internationale Regulation. Bedingungen von Dominanz, Abhängigkeit und Entwicklung im globalen Kapitalismus*, DAS ARGUMENT 198/1993, p. 195.

<sup>20</sup> Poulantzas wants to argue that this new fraction has two faces. First, it is one that keeps politically close to the nation state - and is therefore internal. Secondly, the world market (and only to a lesser extend the national market) is of substantial interest to it. Unfortunately Poulantza’s concept of internal bourgeoisie is too close to domination of the US bourgeoisie’. Therefore it needs to be reformulated. See, Nicos Poulantzas, *Die Internationalisierung der kapitalistischen Verhältnisse und der Nationalstaat*, in DIE ZUKUNFT DES STAATES 19 (Joachim Hirsch, Bob Jessop and Nicos Poulantzas eds., 2001). See, also, Jens Wissel, “Naming the Beast.” *Nicos Poulantzas und das Empire*, DAS ARGUMENT, 248/2002, p. 791.

<sup>21</sup> Hans-Jürgen Bieling and Frank Deppe, *Gramscianismus in der Internationalen Politischen Ökonomie*, DAS ARGUMENT 217/1996, p. 7.

(*Weltinnenpolitik*),<sup>22</sup> in spite of all the differences, could recently be witnessed in Evian during the G 8 summit.

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<sup>22</sup> Habermas/Derrida, *ibid.*