

Globalistan: How the Globalized World is Dissolving into Liquid War, by Pepe Escobar

Book Review

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Globalistan: How the Globalized World is Dissolving into Liquid War,

By Pepe Escobar,

Nimble Books LLC.

This marvelous book by Pepe Escobar, the well-known ‘Roving Eye’ of Asia Times Online, ought to be placed on the desk of every member of the US Congress, as well as British Parliament members and any others who are debating placing their troops in far-flung remote areas of the world to ‘make the world safe for Globalistan.’

Escobar is at his inimitable best in his personal narratives, with his keen eye for the absurdities of the globalizing world, the contrast between obscenely wealthy and dirt poor. It is no simple description, however. He has not merely gone to Iraq or Afghanistan as a journalist embedded in to a NATO fighting unit to report the filtered perceptions allowed reporters in this bizarre new form of controlled journalism. Escobar gets out of the jeep, wanders off the beaten paths, into the villages, talks with the rich, the poor, the young, the old, the scholars, the tradesmen. The result is in the best tradition of a Peter Schall-Latour or John Gunther, the famous political traveler of the 1940’s.

Yet this book should not be mistaken for a travelogue through the mysterious regions of Eurasia or Latin America. It is a rich, political history of our time.

Escobar manages to capture the absurd element of what he appropriately names ‘Jihad Inc’ as a Made in America phenomenon emerging from the ill-considered experiment in the early 1980’s by a part of US intelligence to unleash the force of Islamic believers against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan: “Jihad Inc is an American invention, along with associate executive directors Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan. It was a US strategy in USSR-invaded Afgjhanistan in the 1980’s—‘Let’s launch one billion Muslims against the Evil Empire!—that catapulted jihad to the forefront of political Islam. Zia ul-Haq, the Pakistani dictator, supported by billions of dollars, could not pass up the opportunity to launch a true, pan-Islamic jihad against Russian infidels. Wahabi Saudi Arabia also jumped at the golden opportunity to spread its rigid interpretation of Islam. In 1985 Ronald Reagan described the Afghan jihadis visiting him at the White House as the ‘moral equivalent of America’s founding fathers.’ Even at the time Whitney Houston-fan Osama bin Laden would frown if landed in the same corner of lower Paradise in the company of Thomas Jefferson. The Looney Tunes element of it all is deliriously funny—if it was not tragic. First the US pitted

political Islam against communism. Then communism died. Now it's the US against political Islam. A historical 'what if' perfectly allows us to think that were the Cold War still on, everyone would still be watching the same movie..." (p.92).

The writer manages to mix his unique wealth of personal experiences as a global journalist talking, listening, observing, with that of a serious student of culture and history. Another brief excerpt is useful: "But then, around mid-2004, Islamic scholars from Morocco to Malaysia started to finally legitimize al Qaeda as a *Muqadamaul Jaish*—in fact a revolutionary vanguard. This totally Western concept was absolutely unheard of in Islam—well, at least until the symbolically-charged spring of 2003 when Baghdad was 'liberated' by George W. Bush's Christian armies. The concept of revolutionary vanguard simply does not exist in Islam. Before Hezbollah surged to the fore in the summer of 2006, al Qaeda's internationalism might conceive of merging with some radical strands of the only other global protest movement: the alter-globalization, anti-imperialism brigade...As much as al Qaeda's only strategic goal is trapping the US, Washington helped al Qaeda by trapping itself in Iraq and in still another, dangerous form of hubris, George W. Bush's Greater Middle East." (pp.100-101).

What is most compelling is the unpretentious manner in which Pepe Escobar sifts through the incredibly complex historically-rooted strands of Islamic history and political geography to clarify the implications of the historical fault-line cutting through Islam, that between Shiite and Sunni and all its manifold complexities. It makes starkly clear how Washington and the pro-war Pentagon hawks are playing with a fire that has the potential to ignite a conflagration not even the Pentagon's Smart Bombs, Full Spectrum Dominance, Net-Centric warfare methods, its Revolution in Military Affairs, laser-guided bombs or deadly chemical weapons would be able to control. Iraq today should serve as ample warning, were anyone in Washington even dimly aware.

On another front in today's 'war against the Axis of Evil': "The only reason Afghanistan matters in the (Bush Administration's) Long War worldview remains the same one when the Taliban rose to power: as a transit corridor for (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline) TAP from Turkmenistan to Baluchistan and eventually to India...The only way for TAP to be profitable is with India as a final destination—and Delhi knows its best bet for natural gas is from Iran, and the second best from Qatar. Hamad Karzai wants TAP by all means—not TAP itself but the badly needed US\$300 million a year he could collect in transit fees. In Pakistan the independent Baluchistan Liberation Army would certainly raise some hell to get a piece of the action. The Taliban also have TAP on their sights—but for more ballistic motives"... (p.168).

Escobar manages to capture the impact of the War on Terrorism as it hits the so-called Islamic street: "The Bush Administration may have demonized [Osama bin Laden] as the Prince of Darkness in a 24/7 planetary soap. But for millions of urban, radicalized, dirt-poor seething in anger in an immense Islamic slum nebula, Osama is comparable to El Comandante Fidel in 1959 Cuba—a true mass hero. Destitute Arab brothers know there are no more heroes rising from the desert like Muhamad in the 7th Century, so for them Osama became the remixed version of the Holy Prophet—the media-savvy Warrior Prophet...He knows how to tweak the financial markets. And of course he knows everything about Globalistan. No wonder. People from the bin Laden clan are bedouin fishermen from the Hadramut region. They have been 'global' since time immemorial..." (p.107).

That's the point. The book illustrates that in some 340 pages of invaluable mixture between personal anecdote and relevant history. The central conclusion the reader is left with is the futility and the unbelievable arrogance of those who believe they can 'put into play' forces such as Islam to further their own geopolitical agenda of domination and 'pre-emptive' hegemony. It's a 'must read.'

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