

Obama: “Remaking the Middle East”: The American Gulag

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During the beginning of his first term in office President Obama promised “to remake the Middle East into a region of prosperity and freedom”. Six years later the reality is totally the contrary: the Middle East is ruled by despotic regimes whose jails are overflowing with political prisoners. The vast majority of pro-democracy activists who have been incarcerated, have been subject to harsh torture and are serving long prison sentences. The rulers lack legitimacy, having seized power and maintained their rule through a centralized police state and military repression. Direct US military and CIA intervention, massive shipments of arms, military bases, training missions and Special Forces are decisive in the construction of the Gulag chain from North Africa to the Gulf States.

We will proceed by documenting the scale and scope of political repression in each US backed police state. We will then describe the scale and scope of US military aid buttressing the “remaking of the Middle East” into a chain of political prisons run by and for the US Empire.

The countries and regimes include Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan and Turkey . . . all of which promote and defend US imperial interests against the pro-democracy majority, represented by their independent social-political movements.

Egypt: Strategic Vassal State

A longtime vassal state and the largest Arab country in the Middle East, Egypt’s current military dictatorship, product of a coup in July 2013, launched a savage wave of repression

subsequent to seizing power. According to the Egyptian Center for Social and Economic Rights, between July and December 2013, 21,317 pro-democracy demonstrators were arrested. As of April 2014, over 16,000 political prisoners are incarcerated. Most have been tortured. The summary trials, by kangaroo courts, have resulted in death sentences for hundreds and long prison terms for most. The Obama regime has refused to call the military’s overthrow of the democratically elected Morsi government a coup in order to continue providing military aid to the junta. In exchange the military dictatorship continues to back the Israeli blockade of Gaza and support US military operations throughout the Middle East.

Israel: The Region’s Biggest Jailer

Israel, whose supporters in the US dub it the “only democracy in the Middle East”, is in fact

the largest jailer in the region.

According to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, between 1967 and December 2012, 800,000 Palestinians have been imprisoned at some point, over 20% of the population. Over 100,000 have been held in “administrative detention” without charges or trial. Almost all have been tortured and brutalized. Currently Israel has 4,881 political prisoners in jail. What makes the Jewish state God’s chosen... premier jailer, however, is the holding of 1.82 million Palestinians living in Gaza in a virtual open air prison. Israel restricts travel, trade, fishing, building, manufacturing and farming through air, sea and ground policing and blockades. In addition, 2.7 million Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (West Bank) are surrounded by prison-like walls, subject to daily military incursions, arbitrary arrests and violent assaults by the Israeli armed forces and Jewish vigilante settlers engaged in perpetual dispossession of Palestinian inhabitants.

Saudi Arabia: Absolutist Monarchy

According to President Obama’s ‘remaking of Middle East’ Saudi Arabia stands as Washington’s “staunchest ally in the Arab world”. As a loyal vassal state, its jails overflow with pro-democracy dissidents incarcerated for seeking free elections, civil liberties and an end to misogynist policies. According to the Islamic Human Rights Commission the Saudis are holding 30,000 political prisoners, most arbitrarily detained without charges or trial.

The Saudi dictatorship plays a major role bankrolling police state regimes throughout the region. They have poured \$15 billion into the coffers of the Egyptian junta subsequent to the military coup, as a reward for its massive bloody purge of elected officials and their pro-democracy supporters. Saudi Arabia plays a big role in sustaining Washington’s dominance, by financing and arming ‘jailer-regimes’ in Pakistan, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan and Egypt.

Bahrain: Small Country - Many Jails

According to the local respected Center for Human Rights, Bahrain has the dubious distinction of being the “top country globally in the number of political prisoners per capita”. According to the Economist (4/2/14) Bahrain has 4,000 political prisoners out of a population of 750,000. According to the Pentagon, Bahrain’s absolutist dictatorship plays a vital role in providing the US with air and maritime bases, for attacking Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. The majority of pro-democracy dissidents are jailed for seeking to end vassalage, autocracy, and servility to US imperial interest and the Saudi dictatorship.

Iraq: Abu Ghraib with Arab Characters

Beginning with the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 and continuing under its proxy vassal Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens have been tortured, jailed and murdered. Iraq’s ruling junta, has continued to rely on US military and Special Forces and to engage in the same kinds of military and police ‘sweeps’ which eviscerate any democratic pretensions. Al-Maliki relies on special branches of his secret police, the notorious Brigade 56, to assault opposition communities and dissident strongholds. Both the Shi’a regime and Sunni opposition engage in ongoing terror-warfare. Both have served as close collaborators with Washington at different moments.

The weekly death toll runs in the hundreds. The Al-Maliki regime has taken over the torture centers (including Abu Ghraib), techniques and jails previously headed and run by the US

and have retained US 'Special Forces' advisers, overseeing the round-up of human rights critics, trade unionists and democratic dissidents.

Yemen: A Joint US-Saudi Satellite

Yemen has been ruled by US-Saudi client dictators for decades. The autocratic rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh was accompanied by the jailing and torture of thousands of pro-democracy activists, secular and religious, as well as serving as a clandestine torture center for political dissidents kidnapped and transported by the CIA under its so-called "rendition" program. In 2011 despite prolonged and violent repression by the US backed Saleh regime, a mass rebellion exploded threatening the existence of the state and its ties to the US and Saudi regimes. In order to preserve their dominance and ties to the military, Washington and Saudi orchestrated a 'reshuffle' of the regime: rigged elections were held and one Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi, a loyal crony of Saleh and servant of Washington, took power. Hadi continued where Saleh left off: kidnapping, torturing, killing pro-democracy protestors... Washington chose to call Hadi's rule "a transition to democracy". According to the Yemen Times (4/5/14) over 3,000 political prisoners fill the Yemen prisons. "Jailhouse democracy" serves to consolidate the US military presence in the Arabian Peninsula.

Jordan: A Client Police State of Longstanding Duration

For over a half century, three generations of reigning Jordanian absolutist monarchs have been on the CIA payroll and have served US interests in the Middle East. Jordan's vassal rulers savage Arab nationalists and Palestinian resistance movements; signed off on a so-called "peace agreement" with Israel to repress any cross-border support for Palestine; provide military bases in support of US, Saudi and EU training, arming and financing of mercenaries invading Syria.

The corrupt monarchy and its crony oligarchy oversee an economy perpetually dependent on foreign subsidies to keep it afloat: unemployment is running over 25% and half the population is subsisting in poverty. The regime has jailed thousands of peaceful protestors. According to a recent Amnesty International Report (Jordan 2013), King Abdullah's dictatorship "has detained thousands without charges". The jailhouse monarchy plays a central role in buttressing US empire-building in the Middle East and facilitating Israeli land grabbing in Palestine.

Turkey: NATO Bulwark and Jailhouse Democracy

Under the reign of the self-styled "Justice and Development Party" led by Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey has evolved into a major military operational base for the NATO backed invasion of Syria. Erdoğan has had his differences with the US; especially Turkey's cooling relations with Israel over the latter's seizure of a Turkish ship in international waters and the slaughter of nine unarmed Turkish humanitarian activists. But as Turkey has turned toward greater dependence on international capital flows and integration into NATO's international wars, Erdoğan has become more authoritarian. Facing large scale public challenges to his arbitrary privatization of public spaces and dispossession of households in working class neighborhoods, Erdoğan launched a purge of civil society, class based movements and state institutions. In the face of large scale pro-democracy demonstrations in the summer of 2013, Erdoğan launched a savage assault on the dissidents. According to human rights groups over 5,000 were arrested and 8,000 were injured during the Gezi Park protests.

Earlier Erdoğan established “Special Authorized Courts” which organized political show trials based on falsified evidence which facilitated the arrest and imprisonment of hundreds of military officers, party activists, trade unionists, human rights lawyers and journalists, particularly those critical of his support for the war against Syria. Despite conciliatory rhetoric, Erdogan’s jails contain several thousand Kurdish dissidents, including electoral activists and legislators (Global Views 10/17/12).

While Erdoğan has served as an able and loyal Islamist anchor against popular democratic and nationalist movements in the Middle East, his pursuit of greater Turkish influence in the region, has led the US to deepen its political ties with the more submissive and pro-Washington , pro-Israel Gulenist movement embedded in the state apparatus ,business and education. The latter has adopted a permeationist-strategy: purging adversaries in its quiet march to power from within the state. The US still relies on Erdoğan’s “jailhouse democracy” to repress anti-imperialist movements in Turkey; to serve as a military anchor for the war against Syria; to back sanctions against Iran and to support the pro-NATO Maliki regime in Iraq.

The Middle East Gulag and US Military Aid

The police state regimes and the long-term authoritarian political culture in the Arab world is a product of long-term US military support for despotic rulers. The absence of democracy is a necessary condition for expanding and advancing the US imperial military presence in the region.

A small army of US Islamophobic academics, “experts”, journalists and media pundits totally ignore the role of the US in promoting, sustaining and strengthening the ruling dictators and repressing the profoundly democratic mass movements which have erupted over a prolonged period of time. Spearheaded by long-time pro-Israel Middle East scribes and scholars, in Ivy League universities, these propagandists, claim that Arab dictatorships are a product of “Islamic culture”,or the “authoritarian personality of Arabs” in search of a ‘strongman’ to guide and rule them. Ignoring or distorting the history of working class struggles, pro-democracy protests and affirmations, in all of the major Arab countries, these scholars justify the US ties to the dictatorships as “realistic policies” given the “available options”.

Wherever real democracy begins to emerge, where political rights begin to be exercised, Washington provokes coups and intervenes to bolster the repressive apparatus of the state (Bahrain 2011-14, Yemen 2011 to 2014, Egypt 2013, Jordan 2012 among numerous other cases). While the bulk of the Middle East “experts” blame the Arab citizens for authoritarian rule, they completely ignore and cover-up Israel’s racist majority which solidly backs the incarceration and torture of hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy Palestinians.

To understand the Middle East gulag requires a discussion of US ‘aid policy’ which is central to sustaining the ‘jailhouse regimes’.

US Aid to Egypt: Billions for Dictators

The Egyptian police state anchors the US ‘arc of empire’ from North Africa to the Middle East. Egypt has been actively engaged in destabilizing Libya, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria and collaborating with Israel’s dispossession of Palestinians. The Mubarak dictatorship received \$2 billion dollars a year from Washington – nearly \$65 billion for its imperial services. US aid

strengthened its capacity to jail, and torture pro-democracy and trade union activists. Washington continued its military support of dictatorial rule after the military coup against Egypt's first democratically elected government, to the tune of \$1.55 billion dollars for 2014

Despite "expressions of concern" over the murder of thousands of pro-democracy protesters by the new military strongman General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, there was no cut in funding for so-called "counter-terrorism" and "security". To continue funding the dictatorship under US Congressional legislation, Washington refused to characterize the violent seizure of power as a coup . . . referring to it as a "transition to democracy". The key role of Egypt in US foreign policy is to protect Israel's 'eastern flank'. US aid to Egypt is product of the pressure and influence of the Zionist power configuration in Congress and the White House: US aid is conditioned on Egypt's 'policing' of the Gaza border, ensuring that Israel's blockade is effective. The White House supports Cairo's repression of the majority of nationalist, anti-colonial Egyptians opposed to Tel Aviv's dispossession of the Palestinians. Insofar as Israel's interests define US Middle East policy, Washington's financing of Egypt's jailhouse dictatorship is in accord with Zionist Washington's strategy.

Israel: The US "Pivot" in the Middle East

Most independent and knowledgeable experts agree that US Middle East policy is largely dictated by a multitude of Zionist loyalists occupying key policymaking positions in Treasury, State Department, the Pentagon and Commerce as well as Congressional dominance by the Presidents of the 52 Major American Jewish Organizations and their 171,000 full time paid activists. While there is some truth in what some critics cite as the divergence of the 'real' US 'national interest' from Israel's colonial ambitions, the fact is that US leaders in Washington perceive a convergence between imperial dominance and Israeli militarism. In point of fact a submissive Egypt serves wider US imperial and Israeli colonial interests.

Israel's war on Lebanon against the anti-imperialist Hezbollah movement served US efforts to install a docile client as well as Israeli's effort to destroy a partisan of Palestinian self-determination. Washington's divergence with Israel over Israel's dispossession of all Palestine does run counter to Washington's interest in a Palestinian mini-state run by neo-colonial Arab officials. As a result of Zionist influence, Israel is the biggest per-capita US aid recipient in the world, despite having a higher standard of living than 60% of US citizens. Between 1985-2014, Israel received over \$100 billion dollars, of which 70% was military, including the most advanced high technology weaponry. Israel, the country which has the world record for political prisoners and military attacks on its neighbors over the past forty years, holds the record for US military aid. Israel as the premier 'jailhouse democracy' is a key link in the chain of gulags extending from North Africa to the Gulf States.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia competes with Israel as an incarceration center of pro-democracy dissidents; the Saudi's recycle hundreds of billions of petro-rents through Wall Street, enriching local Saudi despots and overseas pro-Israel investment bankers. The Saudi-US-Israeli convergence is more than incidental. They share military interests in warring against pro-independence, pro-democracy Arab movements throughout the Middle East. Saudi houses the major US military base and the biggest intelligence operations in the Gulf. It backed the US invasion of Iraq. It finances thousands of Islamic mercenaries in the US-NATO proxy war

against Syria. It invaded Bahrain to smash the pro-democracy movement. It intervenes with Washington in support of the Yemen police state. It is the biggest and most lucrative market for the US military-industrial complex. US military sales between 1951 - 2006 totaled \$80 billion. In October 2010 it signed off on a \$60.5 billion purchase of US arms and services.

Bahrain: A US Aircraft Carrier called a Country

Bahrain serves as the naval base for the US Fifth fleet - and an operative base for attacking Iran. It has been servicing the occupation of Afghanistan and US control of oil shipping routes. The Al-Khalifa dictatorship is extremely isolated, highly unpopular and faces constant pressure from the pro-democracy majority. To bolster their vassal rulers, Washington has increased its military sales to the tiny statelet from \$400 million between 1993-2000 to \$1.4 billion in the subsequent decade. Washington has increased its sales and military training program in direct proportion to the growth of democratic discontent, resulting in the geometrical growth of political prisoners.

Iraq: War, Occupation, and the Killing Fields of a Jailhouse Democracy

The US invasion and occupation of Iraq led to the slaughter of nearly 1.5 million Iraqis (mostly civilians, non-combatants) at a cost of \$1.5 trillion dollars and 4,801 US military deaths. In 2006 the US engineered 'elections' led to the installation of the Maliki regime, buttressed by US arms, mercenaries, advisers and bases. According to a recent study for the Congressional Research Office (February 2014), by Kenneth Kilzian, there are 16,000 US military personnel and "contractors" currently in Iraq. Over 3,500 US military contractors in the Office of Security Cooperation bolster the corrupt Maliki police state. The jailhouse democracy has been supplied with US missiles and drones and over \$10 billion dollars in military assistance :this includes \$2.5 billion in aid and \$7.9 billion sales between 2005 - 2013. For 2014 -2015 Maliki has requested \$15 billion in weapons, including 36 US F-16 combat aircraft and scores of Apache attack helicopters. In 2013 the Maliki regime registered 8,000 political deaths resulting from its internal war.

Iraq is a crucial center for US control of oil, the Gulf and as a launch pad to attack Iran. While Maliki makes 'gestures' toward Iran, its role as an advanced link in the US imperial gulag defines its real 'function' in the Gulf region.

Yemen: The Desert Military Outpost for the American Gulag

Yemen is a costly military outpost for Saudi despotism and US power on the Arabian Peninsula. According to a study, Yemen: Background and US Relations by Jeremy Sharp for the Congressional Research Service (2014), the US has supplied \$1.3 billion in military aid to Yemen between 2009-2014. Saudi Arabia donated \$3.2 billion in 2012 to bolster the Saleh dictatorship in the face of a mass popular anti-dictatorial uprising. Washington engineered a transfer of power from Saleh to "President" Hadi and ensured his continuity by doubling military aid to keep the jails full and the resistance in check. According to the New York Times (6/31/13) Hadi was "a carry-over of dictator Saleh". The continuity of a jailhouse democracy in Yemen is a crucial link between the Egypt-Israel-Jordan axis and the Saudi-Bahrain imperial gulag.

Jordan: Eternal Vassal and Mendicant Monarchy

Jordan's despotic monarchy has been on the US payroll for over a half century. Recently it has served as a torture center for kidnapped victims seized by US Special Forces engaged in the "rendition" program. Jordan has collaborated with Israel in assaulting and arresting Palestinians in Jordan engaged in the freedom struggle. Currently Jordan along with Turkey serves as a training and weapons depot for NATO backed mercenary terrorists invading Syria. For its collaboration with Israel, Washington and NATO, the corrupt jailhouse monarchy receives large scale long-term military and economic aid. The monarchy and its extended network of cronies, jailers and family, skim tens of millions of dollars in foreign aid, laundered in overseas accounts in London, Switzerland, Dubai and New York. According to a Congressional Research Service Report (January 27, 2014), US aid to the Jordanian royal dictatorship amounts to \$660 million per year. An additional \$150 million for military aid was channeled to the regime with the onset of the NATO intervention in Syria. The fund was directed to build-up the infrastructure around the Jordan-Syria border. In addition, Jordan serves as a major conduit for arms to terrorists attacking Syria: \$340 million destined for "overseas contingencies" probably is channeled through Amman to arm the terrorists invading Syria. In October 2012, Jordan signed agreements with the US allowing a large contingent of Special Forces to establish airfields and bases to supply and train terrorists.

Turkey: A Loyal Vassal State with Regional Ambitions

As the southern military bulwark of NATO, on Russia's frontier, Turkey has been on the US payroll for over 66 years. According to a recent study by James Zanotti Turkey - US Defense Co-Operation: Prospects and Challenges (Congressional Research Service, April 8, 2011) in exchange for bolstering the military power of Turkey's "jailhouse democracy", the US secured a major military presence including a huge air base in Incirlik a major operational center housing 1,800 US military personnel. Turkey collaborated with the US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and supported the NATO bombing of Libya. Today Turkey is the most important military operational center for jihadist terrorists invading Syria. Despite President Erdoğan's periodic demagogic nationalist bombast, the US empire builders continue to have access to Turkish bases and transport corridors for its wars, occupations and interventions in the Middle East and South and Central Asia. In exchange the US has stationed missile defense systems and vastly increased arms sales, so-called "security assistance". Between 2006 - 2009 US military sales exceeded \$22 billion dollars. In 2013-14, tensions between Turkey and the US increased as Erdoğan moved to purge the state of the Gulenists, a US backed fifth column, which permeated the Turkish state and used its position to support closer collaboration with Israel and US military interests.

Conclusion

The expansion of the US Empire throughout North Africa and the Middle East has been built around arming and financing vassal states to serve as military outposts of the empire. These vassal regimes, ruled by dictatorial monarchies, and authoritarian military and civilian rulers, rely on force and violence to sustain their rule. The US has supplied the weapons, advisers, and financing allowing them to rule. The US arc of imperial military bases stretching from Egypt through Israel, Turkey, Jordan, Yemen, Iraq, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, is protected by a chain of prison camps containing tens of thousands of political prisoners.

The US engagement, its pervasive presence throughout the region, is accompanied by a chain of jailhouse democracies and dictatorships. Contrary to liberal and conservative policy pundits and academics, US policy for over 50 years has actively sought out, installed

and protected bloody tyrants who have pillaged the public treasury, concentrated wealth, surrendered sovereignty and underdeveloped their economies.

Pro-Israel academics at prestigious US universities have systematically distorted the structural bases of violence, authoritarianism and corruption in the Islamic world: blaming the victims, the Turkish and Arab people, and ignoring the role of US empire builders in financing and arming the authoritarian civilian and military rulers and absolutist monarchies and their corrupt military, judicial and police officials.

Contrary to the mendacious tomes published by the prestigious University presses and written mostly by highly respected pro-Israel political propagandists, the remaking of the Middle East depends on the strength of the democratic currents in Islamic society. They are found in the student movements, among the trade unionists and unemployed, the nationalist intellectuals and Islamic and secular forces who oppose the US Empire for very practical and obvious reasons. Along with Israel the US is the main organizer of the vast chain of political prison camps that destroy the most creative and dynamic forces in the region. Greater Arab vassalage provokes the periodic explosion of a vibrant democratic culture and movement; unfortunately it also results in greater US military aid and presence. The real clash of civilizations is between the democratic aspirations of the Eastern popular classes and the deeply embedded authoritarianism of Euro-American-Israeli imperialism

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