

Obama's Unending Wars - Fronting the Foreign Policy of the Permanent Warfare State

A Book Review

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Global Research, August 13, 2019

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Military](#), [Militarization and WMD](#)

Obama is a shining light in comparison to his two bookends, George Bush and Donald Trump. His manner is calm and focused as he presents his ideas with well mannered rhetorical flourishes, speaking in terms of hope, peace, change, freedom and democracy for all. He is living proof of the success of black people, the American dream come true, and a representation of all the good of the indispensable democracy of the United States. Unfortunately it is for those who follow U.S. foreign policy a rather nice shine on a rather thin veneer.

The veneer is broken in Jeremy Kuzmarov's new work, *Obama's Unending Wars*. Throughout the book he contrasts Obama's rhetoric about the military helping people live free, protecting them from threats, promoting peace and human rights throughout the world, while all the while throughout his presidency (and after) he supported dictatorships and big business while killing or buying off opponents to the empire. Glen Ford's introduction sums it all up on the very first line,

"Barak Obama may go down in presidential history as the most effective - and deceptive - imperialist of them all."

The introduction to the book expands on that theme as Obama's presidency was significant in "institutionalizing a permanent warfare state," as he was the "most perfect spokesman for the military industrial complex" with a "liberal and humanitarian veneer." After drawing comparisons to Woodrow Wilson's failed ideals and citing an Obama speech wherein Obama says "Evil does exist in the world," Kuzmarov concludes "If evil exists in this world, Obama put America on its side."

The writing then turns through a range of chapters covering many details of the Obama era, from his pre-election marketing through to a reprisal of Wilsonian comparisons, a look at the policy towards Latin America and finally a well written summary conclusion.

In his summary statement on Obama's marketing, Obama's actions "betrayed his progressive base who all along failed to see him for what he was...a...cynical and calculating political operative who rode the wave of liberal guilt over the history of slavery and Jim Crow to personal fame and glory." A rather powerful statement which is fully supported by subsequent chapters detailing how Obama provided cover for the warfare state.

Africa, regardless of Obama's heritage and skin colour, was increasingly subject to the

warfare state,

“With drones buzzing overhead, and the ghosts of dead Congolese littered about, he duped and deceived Africans in a manner the even Cecil Rhodes would have admired.”

The drone wars in particular against alleged terrorists justified “preemptive military action under a human rights veneer.”

The discussion then turns to Afghanistan and Iraq, wars Obama did not start, but did not do anything to finish and withdraw. Asia’s turn comes next as Obama states the policy of the “pivot to Asia” in order to “deter threats to peace” while “operating in the tradition of empire builders.” Finally for this world adventure tour, Russia is revived as the evil persona – as Putin personally was reviled and attacked with unsubstantiated and highly doubtful claims. But then an empire always needs a good enemy to keep the people distracted from the military-industrial complex and its influence in most aspects of domestic living.

While reprising Obama’s Cairo promise, his policies towards Egypt’s Mubarak and Tunisia’s ben Ali “exemplified the betrayal of Obama’s Cairo vision and his blatant double standard on human rights.” This vision’s betrayal was “acute in his policy towards Israel.” While referring to Israel’s attack on Gaza (Protective Edge, 2014) Kuzmarov summarizes that “Obama’s complicity with Israeli state atrocity under cut the credibility of the 2009 Cairo speech,” as “freedom, democracy, and the rule of law...did not include Gaza.”

Overall the full failure of Obama’s wonderful Cairo speech comes from a member of the Muslim Brotherhood locked up in al-Sisi’s gulag:

“The one thing everyone had in common – the ISIS group, the Muslim Brotherhood group, the liberals, the guards, the officers – is they all hate America.”

Obama continued the U.S. drug wars in Latin America, ostensibly for combating drug cartels and keeping drugs off the streets of America, but it was “no less than continuing military force to contain nonconformist, disruptive movements, groups in resistance, and collective who raise their voices.” U.S. and other western corporations (many Canadian mining companies) were being given the ability to exploit these countries while U.S. trained armies and militias helped protect their ‘rights’ over the rights of the citizens.

In his conclusion Kuzmarov writes,

“Though packaging himself as a peace candidate, Obama ultimately proved indispensable to the military-industrial complex in his ability to sustain the illusion of humanitarian intervention and defuse anti-war activism.”

Kuzmarov’s thematic idea is well presented and well supported. His writing is easy to follow and each section has a clear, well written summary highlighting the ongoing message of Obama’s complicity with the warfare state. It is a disturbing book in part because of the “hope” that was first raised and then the realization afterwards that Obama accomplished very little, while doing a lot to promote and continue with the U.S.’ warfare state.

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