

The Politics of Empire. The US, Israel and the Middle East

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The Israeli military went again on a rampage against the ghettoized people in the Gaza strip. The last time, they “visited” the walled-in strip at the turn of the year 2008/09, they slaughtered 1 400 Palestinians. In 2014, they killed over 2 100 Palestinians, 80 per cent civilians, injured over 10 000, made over 300 000 homeless and ravaged the infrastructure. Israel’s patron, the US Empire, did not lift a finger in 2008/09; neither did it this time. This one-sided relationship is analyzed by James Petras, an award-winning author and Professor Emeritus, in a global geopolitical perspective.

In 2000, “the imperial military and ideological apparatus for direct intervention was firmly in place.” 9/11 seemed godsend. The objectives of the planned serial wars “were defined by their principal Zionist and militarists architects” as the following: First, “destroying regimes and states (that) have opposed Israel’s annexation of Palestine.” Secondly, “deposing regimes which promoted independent nationalist policies, opposing or threatening the Gulf puppet monarchist regimes and supporting anti-imperialist, secular or nationalist-Islamic movements around the world.”

Blinded by their imperial hubris, neither the Zionists nor the civilian militarists within the US administration anticipated prolonged national resistance from the attacked countries, writes Petras. The destruction of the entire political, administrative and military infrastructure by the US invaders and their willful European executioners created a “political vacuum”, which was never a problem for the embedded Zionists in the US Administration, “since their ultimate goal was to devastate Israel’s enemies”. According to the author, under the Obama presidency, “a new ‘cast’ of embedded Zionists has emerged to target Iran and prepare the US for a new war on Israel’s behalf”. After Benjamin Netanyahu’s speech before the UN General Assembly in September and his visit to the White House, 345 members of the US Congress signed a letter, in which they demanded from President Obama to remain tough with Iran. Netanyahu had raised the same demand from President Obama. It’s the first time that US Members of Congress publicly oppose their own president while supporting the demands of a foreign government!

The book is unique in providing an overall concept that links empire-building and foreign interventions to the domestic emergence of a police state, declining standards of living, advanced global spying on allies and adversaries, large scale commitments to wars in the Middle east to the detriment of major corporate interest, but for the benefit of its client State of Israel, and the power of a foreign state over US policy via its Zionist lobby. The question can be raised whether US foreign policy is bad for US corporations. Didn’t Hulliburton make a fortune, when the George W. Bush and his neoconservative gang

attacked Iraq?

According to Petras, the US is still inclined to advance its Empire, but the Obama Empire builders “have relied on a wider variety of interventions than their predecessor under George W. Bush”. The Obama administration has shown more restraint in direct interventions and relies more on its “imperial European allies”. For an aggressive continuation of Empire building, the current administration lacks domestic support, writes the author. The most serious obstacle, however, to effectively adapting to the current international realities “is the influential Israel-linked Zionist Power Configuration embedded in Congress,

the Administration and the mass media. Zionists are deeply committed to pushing the US into more wars for Israel.” Despite the “Zionist Power Configuration” (ZPC), Petras comes to the conclusion that the Obama Administration is less inclined to start large-scale military interventions and listens more to public opinion.

In this study, the author concentrates on US empire-building measures in the Middle East. Here, the ZPC comes into play. In this specific region, Zionist power has played an important role “in harnessing the US Empire to serving the regional power projections of Israel”. According to Petras, this fact is underlined by “the importance of the domestic political power relations in shaping US imperial policy, the importance of military ideology over economic interests; and the role of ‘dual citizens’ with foreign allegiances in subverting a potentially democratic foreign policy”.

The study shows also that US empire-building efforts are not confined solely to the Middle East and to serve Israeli interests. It’s a global US effort, but to advance its sphere of influence, for example, the US relies on its European allies like France and Great Britain to secure the realm in Africa. The overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in Libya and the direct intervention of France in Mali or in the Central African Republic are cases in point.

Petras regards the Zionist lobby as the most important factor in shaping US foreign policy in the Middle East. This goes beyond the influence of AIPAC because there exists a whole string of pro-Israeli think tanks, a power configuration of 52 Jewish organizations, influential individuals in the media and the military, plus leverage over the US Congress. It seems as if the author overrates the influence of the Zionist lobby, which influences and even determines US foreign policy, downplaying US policies mainly affected by the military, financial and industrial elites. Globally, Israel performs a useful role for the US in the region. In case of emergency, Israel would safeguard the Jordanian or the Saudi regimes from being overthrown either by internal unrest or foreign intervention .

The author argues that the loss of trust between the power elite and the majority of the American people is one of the leading factors influencing US foreign policy. Together with the totally discredited US Congress, only 9 per cent have a positive view of the Congress, and the public’s rejection of President Obama’s militarist approach are important factors that hindered the US empire’s determination for new wars. Despite this war-weariness, the war-mongering US Congress in close cooperation with the Zionist lobby pushes for a military confrontation with Iran, even though the negotiations between Iran and the five UN Security Council members plus Germany are heading in the right direction.

Although the geopolitical analysis of James Petras’ newest book is convincing in many

aspects, his focus on the Zionist Power Configuration and a subservient US Congress does not show the whole picture of US imperial interests. The domestic power configurations are more complex. For the political class of the United States, it would be a damning indictment, if Israel or its stakeholders would be the sole power brokers in terms of US foreign policy.

Whether the 21st century will be an American one, has to be seen, although, according to Petras, "there is no alternative imperial or modern anti-imperial tendency on the immediate horizon". Right now, the US makes more enemies than friends. Its new adventurism in Syria and Iraq may turn out to be even more disastrous for the US than the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Petras' book gives the readers an insight in the making of US foreign policy, which appears multifarious and determined by a power struggle between different elites.

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