

The Secret War With Iran.

Review of Ronen Bergman's Book

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If one knew little about the Middle East and its many strands of religious, political, military, and strategic interests, this seemingly well written work would have the reader believing that Israel is the altruistic good guy – although making tactical mistakes in its counter terrorist endeavours – and the Iranians are the cause of all the atrocities in the Middle East. In the epilogue Ronen Bergman indicates that he “began researching this book in order to uncover and make sense of” the “secret war” that has been ongoing between Israel and Iran, and “to place the events...in their historical context.” If that is what he intended to do, then this work fails completely.

The major fault with *The Secret War With Iran* is exactly that, one of context. It is a fault that puts this book squarely in the genre of blatant apologetics and rhetoric exhorting the Americans to attack Iran. The contexts not revealed in the text are several. The main hidden context being the reasons for much of the Middle East’s anger at Israel, the ongoing occupation and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian “territories”. This uses many guises from outright military force, imprisonment, torture, house demolition, through to the subtler and yet more psychologically abusive tactics of land expropriation, marriage laws, and a multitude of other laws that make it impossible for the Palestinian people to have a home and a culture. Only once in the work do I recall the word occupation being used, with the implication otherwise that the Israeli military is in Palestinian territory to stop the terrorists, not to ethnically cleanse the territory for Jewish Zionist settlers. [1]

The United States is mentioned frequently with the final commendation being that “Israel’s considerable contribution to America’s endeavors to make the world a better place must be acknowledged.” I would consider that an outright lie, unless Israel’s contribution is the shaping of the American political landscape (consider AIPAC and all the right wing American apocalyptic rapture fanatics looking for Armageddon). America has little consideration for the world being a better place, only a place that is subservient to its demands and wishes for resources and geopolitical control. That underlies the second major dissimulation in the text, the massive support that the United States has given Israel both directly as \$3 billion in direct aid and more in military aid (per annum), and the aid it has provided to other Middle East countries in its attempts at hegemonic control. Alongside rests the American tendency to make this a religious war, “this crusade” in the words of Bush, and the Israeli acceptance and support for that are all concealed to the reader. Iran is not the only country that uses money, religious fanaticism, and subterfuge to work towards its goals.

Another area taken out of context is of course the Iranian attempts to acquire a nuclear weapon. What Bergman describes as Iran’s march towards achieving nuclear success rings mostly true in relation to other books; and while he does simply admit that Israel has

nuclear weapons, the Israeli process could well suffer the same description as he has given to the Iranian attempts as a “dance of lies, deception, fabrications, and stalling that [Israel/Iran] has been carrying out to mislead the West.” Israel of course was very successful with this, achieving a clear nuclear supremacy in the Middle East (one bomb would have done that) yet still playing a tune of recalcitrant coyness. The latter phrase refers to the fact that Israel operated entirely outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and still does and has never officially admitted to having a weapon, while Iran has been working within it, even if deceptively. Finally of course, lies the context of the United States being the main nuclear power in the world, the only nuclear power to have used the weapon, the only power to advocate a first-strike pre-emptive roll for them, and the main power abrogating treaties that attempt to control their spread (the ABM treaty, the NPT treaty and its current relations with India). [2]

This lack of context emphasizes the double standards that to a sceptical and educated mind permeate the stories. Along with the occupation of Palestine, the massive military support of the U.S., and the Israeli nuclear weapons, other double standards occur. The suicide bombings effects in Israel are vividly described, but never are the atrocities committed by the IDF in the occupied territories. Bergman says, “No attempt was made to get down to the root of the matter [suicide bombings].” Of course not, because the root of the matter is the occupation and subjugation of the Palestinian people, although at this point in his tale of woe, the Israelis are in occupied Lebanon. Hizbollah and the Palestinians are implicated in drug dealings, ignoring the connection that wherever the Americans go in their quest against communists or terrorists major drug operations seem to spring up. Where there’s oil, there are Americans, where there are Americans there are war and drugs – it’s not strictly limited to Hizbollah and the Taliban. [3]

The ultimate insult from the perspective of double standards is in the reference section. Bergman’s sources are almost entirely Jewish (should we be surprised?) and he emphasizes the oral interviews as the main emphasis for his research. Oral history is described as “a complex matter that demands various rules and precautions, mainly finding written or oral evidence to confirm the information process.” That fully contradicts Israeli attempts to deny the oral history of Palestine, the destruction of over 500 villages and towns, the slow gradual cleansing of Palestinians from their land in spite of both oral and written records. Of course the occupation and ethnic cleansing are not even considered in this work so that disturbs Bergman not at all. [see note 1]

It would be laborious to go through the work pointing out all the other matters that are borderline dissimulation, double standards, and outright lies, but allow me a few examples. First up is Mossadegh who in most histories is considered to be a full fledged democratic personage who took power away from the Shah, gave the power to the people via the parliament, nationalized the oil companies (mostly British at the time) and while he despised the communists, allowed them to continue to operate. Bergman however describes Mossadegh as someone who “practically took over the government.” If taking over the government means transferring the power to the people, then yes, he “practically” took it over – we should be so lucky if that happened in the U.S. The only reason he did not was because Britain and the U.S. conspired to eliminate him one way or another. That is where the real story of modern Iran begins, not with the overthrow of the Shah. [4]

A few ‘smaller’ items entertain the story along the way: Khomeini seeing the world “as a clash between good and evil (same school of religion as Bush); the Shah’s son being

“perhaps the best person to explain his downfall” (truly unbiased that would be); the U.S. “maintained pressure on Tehran not to violate human rights” (a constant with U.S. foreign affairs, never minding its own business); criticizing the PLO for behaving in Lebanon “as if the country belonged to them” (perhaps recognizable from the Israeli occupation of Palestine?).

What really irked my anger was the simplistic lie concerning the Sabra and Shatilla massacres, that “Israel was not an active partner in this atrocity, but its forces also did nothing to prevent it.” Even if one could salvage a grain of truth from this, the Israelis were an occupying force and therefore responsible under international law for the safety and health of the citizens of that country. There is so much evidence against this that it can only be labelled a lie – oh yes, I forgot, it’s oral history mostly, corroborated by many participants and eye-witnesses. I guess it doesn’t count then. [5]

I could go on ...and on...with the double standards and out of context information in this work, but then I would be rewriting it for the next while, an unnecessarily strenuous task. What then is Bergman’s ultimate purpose in writing all this? Possibly threefold. First, having the U.S. attack Iran would save Israel a lot of men and equipment at least initially. Secondly, it would destroy Iran’s perceived intent against Israel, but as with the Shah, would manipulate the geopolitical scene in Israel’s favour. It could, but not likely, shift some of the retaliation and revenge focus away from Israel but as the U.S. and Israel are so intertwined that would not be too likely. Another consideration, as it is a work of propaganda in the truest sense, is to convince American politicians of all stripes (well, there really is only one stripe to an American politician) that attacking Iran is a necessity.

Whatever the reason, the book falls within the categories of rhetoric, dissimulation, and propaganda. Bergman has faithfully fulfilled the Israeli media position of an aggrieved Israeli state fighting off all the terrorists, while denying its own terror and ethnic cleansing within the Palestinian territory. Read it if you wish, but be guarded as to what you accept. [6]

NOTES

[1] there are many recent works on this topic. See among others: Ramzy Baroud’s *The Second Palestinian Intifada*; Ilan Pappé’s *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine and A History of Modern Palestine*; Tanya Reinhart *The Road Map to Nowhere and Israel/Palestine*; Jonathan Cook’s *Blood and Religion*; Geoff Simons’ *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*; more recently: Marda Dunsky’s *Pens and Swords* and Saree Makdisi’s *Palestine Inside Out – An Everyday Occupation*.

[2] see Michael Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement – How Israel Went Nuclear and What That Means for the World*.

[3] see various works by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, including *Whiteout and Imperial Crusades*.

[4] see Stephen Kinzer’s *All the Shah’s Men* (Wiley, 2003) and *Overthrow* (Times Books, 2006)

[5] this story is written in many of the books found under note 1 and in many other books.

As this month is the 26th anniversary of the massacre there have been a number of recent internet articles as well on the topic, from which two excerpts:

Robert Fisk - "If the Israelis had not taken part in the killings, they had certainly sent militia into the camp. They had trained them, given them uniforms, handed them US army rations and Israeli medical equipment. They had watched the murderers in the camps, they had given them military assistance - the Israeli airforce dropped all those flare to help the men who were murdering the inhabitants of Sabra and Chatila - and they had established military liaison with the murderers in the camps."

<http://www.countercurrents.org/pa-fisk180903.htm>

Mahmoud El-yousseph - "Present at the command post [the Kuwaiti embassy] were the primary architects of the atrocity: Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon...along with high-ranking army officials....A group of refugees who reached the one of the Israeli checkpoint [sic] were ordered by soldiers to return back into the camp - even though they told the soldiers that people are being slaughtered inside. This encounter was documented by a Scandinavian news crew."

http://www.palestinechronicle.com/view_article_details.php?id=14175

[6] for a much stronger and more academically balanced history, one that looks at many more perspectives more accurately see Treta Parsi's Treacherous Alliance - The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S. (Yale University, 2007).

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