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The Prospects of US Imperialism: Will it be Petras' Apocalypse or Hammond's Hopeful Enlightenment?

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It is time to assess the legacy that President Obama bequeaths us. Two timely books contribute to this; namely, *The End of the Republic and the Delusion of Empire* by James Petras, (Clarity, 2016) and *Obstacle to Peace: The US Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* by Jeremy Hammond, (Worldview, 2016) with Hammond focusing on the "special relationship", Petras, more broadly on US imperialism. Both are pessimistic about the possibility of any change without an active, articulate citizens' movement that has staying power, thereby creating the conditions for a political renewal.

Hammond's work is detailed, documenting the period starting with Obama's 2008 victory and Israel's immediate response: its invasion of Gaza in December. Throwing down the gauntlet, which president-elect Obama refused to pick up.

There were more such attacks to come, involving seizing aid flotillas headed for Gaza, culminating in a repeat of that full scale invasion of Gaza in 2014, both killing thousands of innocents. Hammond's main point is to separate Obama's weak, nice words — "the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines" — with his inability to move towards fulfilling them.

The gap between word and deed is really an abyss here. Either Obama is helpless, cowardly or cynical. Perhaps he will tell us someday — when it's too late to make any difference.

Hammond realized he had to document this 'legacy' and he does it well. He writes with a quiet passion which makes the ugly reality more bearable. The Palestinians arguably have it worse than any other victim of imperialism, being under daily, direct imperial attack, not just the "soft power" behind-the-scene manipulation of local politicians, etc. "We are all Palestinians now" is increasingly the credo of anyone with a heart.

'A word means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less'*

2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the 1967 war of conquest that *Israel launched* (Menachen Begin agrees). Hammond is a 'two-stater': advocating some kind of binational state or independent states based on 1967 borders. He reveals the confusion that the hurried, chaotic UN negotiations in 1947 leading to Resolution 181 produced. The UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) recommended an Arab state be set up on 44% of Palestine, expropriating land to redistribute to Jews.

No Arab delegate or nation was included in UNSCOP, but even so, UNSCOP realized "the

partition proposal was a violation of the rights of the Arabs, as well as contrary to the very Charter under which they were acting." But they recommended the partition anyway. Sounds fishy.

The UN General Assembly rejected it and supported the Arab Higher Committee's call for the recognition of a Palestinian state "which would respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and equality of all persons before the law, and would protect the legitimate rights and interests of all minorities."

But, like UNSCOP, the General Assembly backed down, adopting Resolution 181–now it sounds like a conspiracy–and the Zionists began deporting and killing Arabs, seizing land, leading up to the end of the British Mandate on May 14, 1948.

The result was called the United Nations *Partition* Plan for Palestine, and recommended the creation of independent Arab and Jewish States and a Special International Regime for the city of Jerusalem. Hammond argues that the resolution "neither partitioned Palestine nor conferred upon the Zionist leadership any legal authority to declare the state of Israel."

Sounds to me like it did–after arm-twisting by the US. That's certainly what Humpty Dumpty would say. The Arabs clearly agree with Hammond. That's why they dared take on the state-of-the-art Israelis, armed by the US, British and Soviets, facing a rag-tag, pathetic multi-national force using WWI discards and donkeys.

So it looks like Resolution 181 was indeed a "partition plan", which Israel was able to massage into its 'facts on the ground', leaving behind a "frozen war". Until 1967, when Israel seized what was left and began to settle it with new Jewish immigrants.

What about 'infamy' and 'uniqueness'?

Hammond documents Israeli policy over the past decade. Richard Falk, a committed anti-Zionist, wrote the foreword. Hammond tries to ward off cries of "anti-Semitism" with an introduction by a more neutral Gene Epstein, asserting his "pride in being Jewish and American, and identification with many Israelis".

Falk makes Hammond's central point that "the US has been an essential collaborator in a grotesque double deception: falsely pretending to negotiate the establishment of a Palestinian state, while doing everything within its power to ensure that Israel has the time it needs to make such an outcome a practical impossibility."

Epstein denounces Israel's crimes as "heinous', but "that hardly makes them unique … nor does it make the history of Israel very different from that of many other nations, including the US." Okay, the US committed a holocaust against the native people. That is something that Zionists like to throw in your face to change the subject of *their* crimes.

But Epstein nonetheless turns around and concludes that the Palestine-Israel conflict is "the most infamous of the world's longstanding international conflicts." So which is it? Doesn't "most infamous" mean "unique"?

He agrees with Hammond that "'Jewish state' [is] a racially-tinged statement that seems to codify the second-class status of Israel's non-Jewish citizens". More proof of infamy and uniqueness.

Hammond doesn't take the one-state proposal seriously, what Falk describes in the foreword as, "a unilaterally imposed Israeli one-state solution combined with either Palestinian Bantustanization or third-class citizenship in an enlarged Israel." Falk reluctantly endorses some version of it "based on the equality of the Palestinian and Jewish peoples" to resolve "overlapping claims of self-determination".

There is no 'happy ending' here. Both one and two state solutions are ugly with the massive wall enclosing the West Bank, and the unending siege of Gaza. The Palestinians will accept any reasonable solution based on pre-1967 borders. They would "recognize Israel by whatever name it applies to itself in accordance with international law,"** based on the 1967 borders and an end of the Israeli occupation. What more could a sensible enemy ask for?

But the words coming from Washington and Tel Aviv having nothing to do with reality. (Correction: Israel is more honest at times. Netanyahu flatly vowed during the 2015 election campaign that there would be no two-state solution if he was re-elected.)

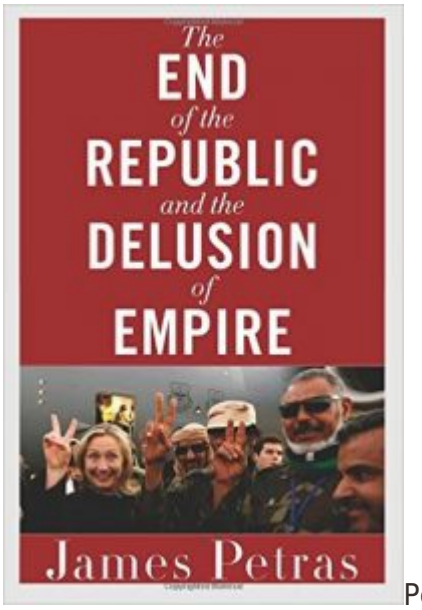
We can't rely on the Obamas and Netanyahus, or even the well-meaning others. The only hope is to mobilize world opinion to pressure governments to bring Israel to account. It has been done before to other "unique" states: South Africa and Nazi Germany, though it was not an easy road. The world came to recognize the racist danger that both those nations posed to their people and fought it to end the scourge of racism back then.

Resistance is not "terrorism", just as the partisans who blew up bridges and exploded bombs in occupied Europe in WWII were not terrorists. It is the invaders who are by definition the terrorists. Despite their legitimate right to resist, the Palestinians have disavowed further violent resistance, in line with the South African anti-apartheid struggle, though there will always be hot-heads as long as the crimes continue.

What role do Jews with a conscience have? Again, not an easy road. Shlomo Sand and Gilad Atzmon are the two most prominent Israelis who realized that having "Jew" on their Israeli passports was racist, wrong, and refuse to call themselves by this now sullied signifier. For this courageous few, *it* is the real 'obstacle to peace'.

Rather than "identification with many Israelis", as Epstein claims, why not "identification with many Palestinians", as Atzmon and Shlomo do?

Zionist Power Configuration



Petras doesn't write much about Israel, *per se*; his speciality is the Israeli-Jewish-Zionist–call it what you like–lobby, and he has written extensively on this in the past. His most recent books are more focused on the US.

This one is more a collection of essays, using the election year as a hook for reviewing Obama's term, timed for election reading. Sharp brush strokes for anyone still needing convincing that both Trump and Clinton are bad news. In polls, 60% of both Republican and Democratic voters say they are disgusted with both candidates, and *The End of the Republic* will only add to their nausea.

Petras exposes again "the Zionist Power Configuration … embedded in the US state apparatus." US policy has been to destroy Islamic and Arab-nationalist structures and institutions of power", parroting "Israeli-settler policy of 'erasure'". Together, they have made the Middle East ever-more unstable.

Petras knows his South American politics well. That part to me was the most revealing: even when left wing governments are elected, despite US meddling, they are hounded, the right wing forces, ably assisted by Washington, biding their time and then pouncing. Sometimes with the military upfront, sometimes just using Washington's minions.

The latest casualties are the Kirchner-Fernandez government in Argentina (2015), the Lula-Rousseff government in Brazil (2014–16), and the Chavez-Maduro government in Venezuela (2015).

Hillary's *War and Peace*

Petras is most of all worried that Hillary will launch WWIII, citing her promotion of all US military adventures since the days of 'Billary' from 1992–2000. Then it was Iraq and Yugoslavia, where US pressure following the collapse of the Soviet Union pushed the various ethnicities to form independent pseudo nations under US-EU tutelage.

Her love of killing continued as a senator under Bush, with her loud support for the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and went into high gear as secretary of state under Obama, with overthrows of progressives in Honduras, Paraguay, Libya and (still in progress) Syria. Her support for the putsch in Ukraine in 2014, and loud cries to overthrow Iran and prevent negotiations for normal relations continue. The Clinton Foundation's biggest donors 1999–2014 were Ukrainian oligarchs.

It Takes a Village (1996) is a particularly jarring instance of what bugs Hammond — the gap between word and deed among politicians, although even motherly Hillary can't hide her warmongering record. Perhaps, if by some miracle, the less imperialist Trump wins, she can retire and write a sequel *It Takes Bombing a Village*.

Trump and other rebels

How could Trump be worse? He's actually much better on almost all international issues. 'Withdraw from foreign bases', 'Make the allies cough up', 'Friends with Russia', 'Jobs for Americans'… But his gaffes are catching up with him. He taunts Obama (and Clinton) as "the founder of ISIS", which is spot-on, but serves no purpose without context. We can't expect Trump to launch into a lecture on the evils of imperialist scheming, so he is merely scoffed at as loony. Alas, we must suffer Clinton II, just as we suffered Reagan.

I have a bit more hope than Petras, who paints a gloomy picture of both the imperial reality and the frustrated grassroots opposition to the madness we must put up with. He sees the most likely scenario as US collapse and the remnants of the working class movement taking greater prominence to provide a way forward. Recall that the Roman Empire took 300–400 years to collapse. I'm not holding my breath.

And where is the working class struggle anymore? Between China and technology, our working class is shrinking, and as it becomes more middle class, is losing its militancy, increasingly supporting, at best, grassroots environmental campaigns. We are 'citizens' now, more than class conscious. The *ruling* class is still very much alive and well, and 'citizens' with ambition and few scruples struggle to join it.

Hammond's earnest attempt to educate in the hope that some of it will sink in, and to reach out, makes me think of the great flowering of the peace movement in the late 1950s, when the Cold War began to thaw, empowering Americans to question the nuclear war scares. The best of US society joined in, from Linus Pauling to Stanley Kubrick.

No one can outdo *Dr Strangelove*, and that committed mass movement effectively dismantled the nuclear button. I never really believed anyone would destroy the earth, and I still don't think Clinton would do that. She will continue to carry out the empire's will, just as Obama did before her. Bush-lite (no Obama-lite, given Clinton's track record).

Where's the Legacy?

The 1960s legacy is that mass movements are important, in fact, the most important form of democracy. Campaigns to save whales and seals captured the public's imagination and achieved bans on hunting. Today, environment apocalypse is pushing people to organize on many fronts, from fuels to song birds and frogs. "We will overcome," will never go out of style.

Which brings us back to the Great Dissimulator's legacy. Both Hammond and Petras are bitterly disappointed with his *lack* of legacy, his willingness to follow the 'yellow brick' road. Yet he promised so much.

He *has* left an environmental imprint, refusing the oil pipeline and lobbying to commit the US to a world agenda on climate change. He has also had a profound social impact, promoting greater black dignity, pushing through a national medical insurance plan, pardoning hundreds of prisoners, more than any other president. He is a conflicted person,

and we will all look back on his checkered term nostalgically, at least as long as the Clinton dynasty continues to do what the empire requires.

Americans can go to Cuba now, and maybe even Iran, or at least trade with them. There is no room for all this in Petras's book as it is a polemic. There is none in Hammond's as his deals solely with US-Israeli relations, where Obama's distaste for Netanyahu is kept out of sight, and Israeli settlement activity and mass killing of Palestinians goes on on schedule.

However, Obama did defy the Zionist Power Configuration in his final year in office. He not only did not invade Iran, but negotiated an end to sanctions. He is breaking away now on Syria. Perhaps freeing Pollard in 2015 (done very quietly, thanks to the discretion of the mainstream media) was to massage bruised Zionist egos.

Obama's inability to do very much to dent the stranglehold the banks and the super rich have on us, is sad, if not frightening. Neoliberalism is deeply entrenched and is proving resilient despite its obvious disastrous effect on the 99%. Obama will go down in history as a tragic figure, the last hope that wilted on the vine. Is it to be Petras's apocalypse or Hammond's hopeful enlightenment?

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A propos :

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