



James Petras, *The Arab Revolt and the Imperialist Counterattack*, Clarity Press, Atlanta 2012, 130 pp. \$ 16.95.

“Under the Clinton regime, US militarized imperialism in Africa took off”, writes James Petras, Bartle Professor (Emeritus) of Sociology at Binghamton University, New York, in his introductory remarks to his latest book that compiles articles the author has written in recent months. They deal with the Arab Revolt and the belligerent actions taken by the United States and its allies within NATO. This compilation of essays shows the growing militarization of U. S. policy in North Africa and the Gulf and the historic confrontation between the Arab democratic revolution and the imperial backed reactionary satraps in the Middle East.

When public uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt overthrew U. S. dictatorial-backed regimes, the ruling class in the United States was taken by surprise. However, as the Arab revolt spread to the center of U. S. national interest, meaning the oil fields of Saudi-Arabia, and the Emirates of the “Gulf Counter-revolutionary Council” (GCC) like Bahrain, the U. S. Empire struck back. Together with their imperialist partners, France and Great Britain, they backed so-called rebels in Libya to oust Muammar al-Gaddafi and bombed the country into oblivion.

Military interventions in Africa reached their peak under the “boy-emperor from Crawford, Texas”, the George W. Bush’s junior administration. The Pentagon has military ties with 53 African countries. The militarization of Africa was accelerated after 9/11. In 2002, the Bush administration announced that Africa was a “strategic priority in fighting terrorism”. Obama’s aggressive drone-war strategy in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen, his invasion and bombing of Libya is thus a “continuation of a longstanding imperial practice designed to enhance US power via the installation of client regimes, the establishment of military bases and the training and indoctrination of African mercenary forces.” (12)

U. S. Middle Eastern policy has a long history of “installing, financing, arming and backing dictatorial regimes which back its imperial policies and interests as long as they retain control over their people”, writes the author. (15) The U. S. Empire has not only a very long tradition of cooperating with right-wing dictatorships in Latin America but also with pro-Western Arab despots ranging from Tunisia through Morocco, Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and the Palestinian Authority. The U. S. foreign policy has a long tradition of backing dictatorial regimes as long they are able to control and oppress their own people. Obama’s political dippy-doodle during the revolt against Hosni Mubarak was due to Washington’s would be loss of credibility towards other client-regimes and to the highly influential pro-Israel lobby AIPAC and their backers in the U. S. Congress that saw in the Mubarak regime an important asset for the State of Israel.

However, the major obstacle to ousting Mubarak was that a major sector of Egypt’s state apparatus, especially the 325,000 Central Security Forces and the top generals in the Army (468,500 members) have buttressed Mubarak for 30 years and have been enriched by their control over very lucrative companies in a wide range of fields, writes Petras. (18) While the White House may tolerate social movements in “sacrificing” dictatorships, “it has every intention of preserving the state”. (24) The author points out with some relish that the omnipotent CIA and the legendary Mossad were caught by surprise by the Arab uprisings, although they have not only trained their Arab stooges but also cooperated

closely against the will of the Egyptian and Palestinian peoples. Neither the Mossad nor the CIA could detect and prevent the rise of the popular democratic movement, nor could they save their “willing collaborator” Mubarak. (26)

According to Petras, the causes for the Arab revolt lay in the “huge demographic-class contradictions of the clan-class ruled rentier economy”. (35) Their clan-subjects are ruled by sticks and carrots. They control their population by “traditional clan and neo-colonial recruits and mercenary” through modern U. S. armaments. (32) These “rentier rulers govern via their ties to the US and EU military and financial institutions”. (38)

The author debunks the belief held by the political left (“progressives”) and right (imperialists) that so-called humanitarian intervention is about “saving civilian lives in the face of genocide” or that the Euro-U. S. intervention is “all about oil”. (41) He deconstructs the myths on Libya that the intervention was prompted by humanitarian considerations, was about oil, about the elimination of the “terrorist Gaddafi”, the Libyan Al-Qaeda connection, or an imminent “genocide” or armed civil war. (42-50) Petras argues that the main driving force behind U. S.-led imperial expansion is not economically but militarily motivated. Gaddafi had to go because he “did not become a strategic geo-political-military asset of the empire”. (51) Petras criticizes “naïve” pro-war reporting or U. S.- Euro propaganda of the Western corporate media that “acclaimed” to the imperial juggernaut that caused at least 50.000 civilian deaths. NATO’s war crimes were directed against the “Arab spring”. According to the author, it was a “counterattack” against the “popular democratic and anti-imperialist movements” which had ousted U. S.-client dictators.

The drive for world domination by the U. S. Empire is not primarily done by economic means or by mere political ones. They “vary according to the particular conditions necessary for empire building”. (60) For example, in the war to break-up Yugoslavia and establish client regimes, as in Kosovo, imperial Western ideology utilized humanitarian rhetoric. In the genocidal wars in the Middle East, anti-terrorism and anti-Islamic ideology is used. Against China, democratic and human rights rhetoric predominates. In Latin America, receding imperial power relies on democratic and anti-authoritarian rhetoric aimed at the democratically elected Chavez government, writes the author. Petras stress the argument that Washington’s imperial network is increasingly based on military ties with its allies, whereas “China offers greater economic returns and less political-military interference than the US.” (71)

The U. S.-NATO-led imperial counterattack against the democratic movements and the remodeling of the Arab world is already in full swing as the Saudi backed invasion in Bahrain, the instigated civil war in Syria and the planned attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities show. The “naked aggression” has heightened other nations’ security concerns. (85) Amidst all the created chaos by the U. S. Empire, will there come out an “Obama doctrine” by successfully rolling back independent Arab regimes and movements, as the author speculates? The allies of the empire “include an amalgam of fundamentalist, tribal, gangster, and opportunist clan and neoliberal operators who have few interests in common. And all are armed and ready to carve up competing fiefdoms”. (104) The “Obama doctrine” relying on bands of foreign mercenaries and on drone warfare has already boomeranged because it “has not secured a single major triumph over any of the targeted insurgencies by this means”. (105) Obama’s reliance on a “third party” for interventions was also only partly successful. So are the “Special Forces” which terrorize the local population and assassinate people like Osama bin-Laden in Pakistan or the U. S. citizen Anwar Al-Awlaki in Yemen. The most important element of the “Obama doctrine” might be “the promotion of civil-

military mass uprisings and the reshuffle of elite figures to 'co-opt' popular pro-democracy movements in order to derail them from ending their country's client relationship to Washington". (107) Beside these "external" elements, there is an "internal" one, namely, the exploitation of a "civilian-military subversion" in order to derail the promising the anti-imperial movements that rocked the imperial-guided dictatorships in the Arab world. At the end, Petras warns readers of the fatal consequences of Obama's strategy: "The 'Obama doctrine' of extra-territorial air wars with impunity, if turned against Iran, would provoke a catastrophic conflagration, which would far surpass the disastrous outcome of the land wars in Iraq and Afghanistan." (110)

Concluding his analysis, the author evaluates the future of the "Washington/Moderate Islam Alliance". In certain political parameters the "Islamists" can operate as long as they fight secular nationalists and anti-imperialist regimes like those of Libya or Syria. This Islamist-Imperialist has a common enemy, namely seculars and nationalists. The alliance might be temporary as long as it suits the West. After the militant Muslims are defeated "moderate Islamists" find themselves being attacked by the colonial liberal regime most favorable to the empire, like in Afghanistan. According to the author, the key to U. S.-Islamist relations will depend – from a U. S. perspective – on Islamists' attitude toward Empire, class politics, NATO, and the free market with foreign private investments. (118) How deadly "successful" the collaboration between "moderate Islamists" and the U. S.-EU-led imperial axis is, can be seen by the role Qatar is playing. Its "spiritual guide", Sheik Youssef al-Qaradawi, did not only justify the killing of 50.000 Libyans and the aerial bombardment by NATO with the Quran but also called for armed intervention in Syria to overthrow the secular Assad regime. The alliance between Western imperialism and "moderate Islamists" will be of a tactical nature because the empire growing economic tensions will simply postpone a more decisive in the future.

James Petras shows in his analysis the need for a class-based approach for analyzing the policy of the Western imperialism under the leadership of the U. S. Empire. He shows that U. S. imperialism and neo-colonialism exist separately from the interests of particular states. That is why Israel plays only a very marginal role in this book, although in other books he emphasizes that U. S. foreign policy is mainly dominated by Israel and its Zionist lobby. An interesting book to read.

Ludwig Watzal

First published: <http://mwcnews.net/focus/analysis/17628-james-petras.html>

http://australia.to/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9128:james-petras-the-arab-revolt-and-the-imperialist-counterattack&catid=73:oped&Itemid=165

<http://between-the-lines-ludwig-watzal.blogspot.de/2012/03/arab-revolt-and-imperialist.html>