

THE AXIS AND THE 'NEW MIDDLE EAST'



Iran, Iraq and Syria face common enemies together. Military leaders of Iran, Iraq and Syria meet in Damascus, March 2019. Photo by SANA.

In the series of 21st century wars in West Asia, initiated by Washington in the name of a 'New Middle East', resistance forces are prevailing. Like all imperial gambits before it the plan has been to subjugate the entire region – this one in the name of US-led 'freedom' – to secure privileged access to its tremendous resources and then dictate terms of access to all other players. On various pretexts Afghanistan and Iraq were invaded and Libya was destroyed. Washington made good use of its client states, Israel and Saudi Arabia, to divide and weaken the independent states and peoples. However, Israel's attempts to disarm the Lebanese resistance failed, huge Saudi- and Qatari-backed proxy wars against Syria and Iraq were eventually put down, the indigenous insurrection in Yemen cannot be defeated

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and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the centre of imperial obsession, remains strong.

The key to a definitive defeat of Washington's ambitions lies in greater regional integration of the resistance forces. That integration is led by Iran, the undisputed leader of an 'Axis of Resistance' to foreign domination and Zionist expansion. Tehran's position has less to do with its religious identity and more to do with its principled independence, great capacity and independent political will. Russia has become an important ally of this Axis but – because of its wider interests and its compromised relationship with Israel – we cannot regard it as a full member of the regional resistance. Yet Iran and the other Axis countries have formed an alliance with Russia, to frustrate Washington's regional ambition and preserve their own security (Naqqash 2019).

Iran's importance is seen through Tel Aviv's fear of Tehran 'at Israel's borders', and through Washington's obsessive jealousy at the Islamic Republic's regional influence. When Zionist analysts and think tanks warn of the danger of a 'widening Iranian corridor' or 'land bridge' from Tehran to Beirut (Debka 2018; Lappin 2018), they tell us that independent Arab and Muslim regional integration remains their great fear. There would be substantial benefits in such integration for the peoples of the region. However, imperialism wants to keep those peoples weak and divided. That reminds us why imperialism is such a great enemy of human society. It is also why, in the final stages of the failed war on Syria, the task of US occupation forces has been to block key border crossings between Iraq and Syria (Myroie 2018). Such obstruction is unlikely to last.

This book, *Axis of Resistance: towards an independent Middle East*, follows my 2016 book *The Dirty War on Syria*, examining the end of the war on Syria and exploring wider elements of the regional conflict. Behind the particular histories there are three basic propositions.

First, there is a single – and an essentially colonial – war in the Middle East or West Asian region. This hybrid war drives each particular conflict, from Libya to Afghanistan, and has

several features: propaganda offensives promoting the heroic role of a US-led coalition improbably delivering 'freedom' from a long line of supposed 'brutal dictators'; economic siege warfare through sanctions and blockades; terrorist proxy wars; direct invasions followed by military occupations; and repression through client state regimes. In 2006 the Bush administration called this project the 'New Middle East' (Condoleezza Rice in Bransten 2006). In 2009 Obama declared that it involved a 'new beginning' with Islam (Obama 2009). That marked a shift from direct invasions to greater use of sectarian, Saudi-style 'Islamist' proxy armies. Yet it seems these were as much mercenary militia as religious zealots.

The strategy of this regional war has been to destroy the independent states of the region, subjugate independent peoples and dominate the entire region. By this logic, resistance forces must be kept fragmented. Regardless of any specific pretext for each conflict, the wave of bloody aggression has a single aim: to secure privileged access to the region's resources and so dictate terms of access to Russia, China and any other outside power. The fact that other powers are subject to this jealous focus does not imply that they are themselves imperial powers, and that we are therefore witnessing inter-imperial rivalry. It simply demonstrates that would-be empires are always obsessed with the fear of the next large, potential rival.

Second, while the extraordinary pretexts for each war must be studied, with independent evidence, they cannot be fully understood separately. Each aggression forms part of a broader strategy. The separate wars can be seen most clearly with regard to the regional plan, and indeed the globalist ambitions of the patron.

Similarly, the resistance in particular countries can and should be studied, but their integration into the regional resistance remains critical to their success. No single independent state or people has the capacity to prevail against this onslaught. As Cuba's national hero Jose Marti said of the independent nations of Latin America in the late 19th century, facing both the Spanish and the rising North American empire: 'The trees must form ranks to keep the giant with seven-league boots from passing! ... we

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must move in lines as compact as the veins of silver that lie at the roots of the Andes' (Martí 1892). Small states and peoples cannot fight big powers alone; they must form a strong alliance.

Third, the resistance to foreign domination in each country, and regionally, is the historical outcome of particular forces. Resistance has a common character but no idealised personality. It is informed by different cultural and religious principles, historical circumstances and social formations. Yet the common defence is of popular self-determination and maintaining accountable social structures that serve broad social interests. In every circumstance imperial intervention is destructive of that accountability and those interests. So it is that, in the West Asian region, the Resistance combines secular-pluralist, Shi'a and Sunni Muslim, Christian, Druze, socialist, secular and Arab nationalist traditions. Notwithstanding the fact that organised resistance requires strong social structures, the primary contradiction of this struggle is not 'capitalism v socialism' but rather imperialism versus independence. No social gains can be built without an independent and locally accountable body politic; nor can they be defended in face of the sustained onslaught without strong regional coordination and collective action.

As with *The Dirty War on Syria*, this book addresses the myths created to advance the multiple wars and myths about the resistance. It also attempts some provisional history of the conflicts. The focus on resistance, I suggest, can help us understand and anticipate the defeat of great powers, something not really possible for those whose analysis begins and ends with power.

Once again, this book is written, not so much for those who are committed to western myths, as for those honest and curious people who engage with such myths. Once again I use reason, ethical principles and independent evidence, in the hope that this might construct and provide a useful resource.

I hope the book is a contribution to a broader group of independent histories of the US-led 21st century wars against the peoples of the Middle East or West Asia. Many such histories are necessary, in light of the intense propaganda which accompanies

each bloody conflict. Two decades of neo-colonial aggression against the Arab and Muslim peoples of the region have destroyed more than 2 million lives and have shattered many critical social structures. Yet the aggressors are unrepentant and there is, so far, no end in sight.

As a keen observer and student I firmly believe that the aggression can only be defeated by a united resistance bloc, such as has been foreshadowed by the Axis of Resistance. There is no contradiction between documenting the wars and holding such an opinion, as I explain when speaking of the myth of analytical 'neutrality', in chapter four.

The anatomy of this massive regional war and its multiple crimes must be documented and exposed. That it has not yet been well documented, in the western and English-speaking worlds, is due to the collapse of a critical, anti-war culture and a failure of western solidarity and internationalism.

I would put the reasons for that collapse in this way. First, an elite consensus has been forged amongst the imperial and former colonial powers, including both the realist and the liberal wings, that a globalised order must be enforced on the oil rich region. The realist approach presents self-interest in intervention more directly; the liberal approach presents an old-style 'civilising mission' with the contemporary language of human rights and democracy. It has to be admitted that the repeated stories of 'saving' foreign and hardly known peoples from their own states and societies has been a great success within western culture. That offer of a heroic self-image seduced most western liberals. Their vanity deceived them.

Second, and despite the range of popular media options opened up by the internet, there has been tight corporate and state media backing for that elite consensus. That is explained by ongoing control of this media by the same private financial-entrepreneurial groups that dominate western governments. To put it bluntly, and in the words of the late Salvador Allende of Chile, when he spoke of media reporting on Cuba in the early 1960s: 'they lie every minute of every day' (in Timossi 2007).

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Well at least they do this while each war is in play. After Iraq and Libya were destroyed, the defence of those false pretexts was thought less important.

Third, such histories are lacking but necessary, because of the failure of western internationalism. With some honourable exceptions, many have found the pseudo revolutions and fabricated humanitarian pretexts for war quite attractive. It seems to appeal to what I have called a 'saviour complex' in the colonial cultures. The disengagement of western left-liberals from anti-war campaigns has weakened the field of critical writing and analysis.

This book is divided into four sections. Part 1 on 'Imperialism and Resistance' begins with this introduction, then turns to some broader reflections on self-determination and empires. There follows a chapter on the role of sanctions as a form of economic siege warfare, then a discussion on the myth of neutrality during war and some necessary elements of method in the study of war.

Part 2 'Collapse of the Dirty War on Syria' comprises a series of thematic essays on the final years of the war on Syria. It begins with some updated themes from my 2016 book, which addressed both the 'humanitarian' and the 'protective' intervention rationales of that dirty war. That includes an update of key evidence which shows that all the internationally proscribed terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq were backed by the US-led coalition, in attempts to destroy the independent Syrian state and to destabilise and weaken the new Iraqi state. There follows an account of the liberation of Aleppo, Syria's second city, which documents the pretexts used in attempts to block the Syrian Army from driving al Qaeda groups out of Syria's second city. 'The US-Fighting-ISIS Deception: DAESH and the Crime at Jabal al Tharda' draws on the author's firsthand investigation of a September 2016 massacre of Syrian soldiers in eastern Syria, in which the US coalition directly coordinated its attacks to assist the internationally banned terrorist group. The method of deciphering contemporary controversies, introduced in the first section, is applied to the protracted scandals over chemical weapon use in Syria in 'WMD take two', drawing

parallels with the false pretexts of the 2003 Iraq invasion. A more detailed chapter on 'The Human Rights Industry in Humanitarian War', illustrated with examples from Syria, shows the use in hybrid war of embedded NGOs and other war propagandists. Particular attention is paid to the role of the corporate-NGOs Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The section concludes with reflections on left illusions about the so-called Syrian revolution, and the use of refugees as instruments of war propaganda.

Part 3 'The West Asian Alliance' introduces three other nations of the regional resistance: Palestine, Lebanon and Iran. 'The Future of Palestine' reviews the longstanding conflict generated by the Israeli colony which in recent decades has become an apartheid state. This chapter reviews the history, ideology and practice of the Zionist colony, and the achievements of the Palestinian resistance, before moving to an assessment of the prospects for a democratic Palestine, taking into account all obstacles and advantages. 'Hezbollah and the Regional Resistance' examines myths about the leading party of the Lebanese Resistance, in particular the accusations of sectarianism and terrorism, before explaining the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon and its wider influence, particularly on the popular resistance in Iraq. 'Why Iran Matters' reviews the leading state of the Axis, charting its development from the 1979 Revolution and documenting its human development achievements and challenges. The constant and multi-faceted war against Iran helped drive this nation's emergence as the heart of the regional resistance. The section concludes with 'Towards West Asia', which sums up the prospects for an independent region no longer defined as the 'Middle East' of a Eurocentric world. That transition will require commitment, sacrifice and regional unity.

A final chapter tells the more personal story of this writer's own journey in documenting and defending other peoples. It is a reflection on free and independent expression in an abusive, colonial culture. Nevertheless that struggle is a necessary process for anyone who believes in understanding great conflicts, and in sharing those understandings with others.

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