

Debunking the Myth of America's Poodle:

Great Britain Wants War

Nu'man Abd al-Wahid

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In this short book (151 pages), Nu'man Abd al-Wahid sets out to provide 'a constructive rebuttal to a British anti-war movement's 60 year insistence that great Britain is a "poodle" to the United States'. (p. 1) The first chapter sets out to demonstrate this point by emphasising the extent to which the Cameron government pushed for intervention in Libya, while the Obama administration prevaricated and held back. Indeed, Obama was actually regarded as an 'obstacle' to be overcome if intervention was to take place. (p. 5) The point is well made, although it also has to be acknowledged that the British military were, by this time, in a much reduced condition, already approaching today's 'Potemkin village' status. As far as the British Establishment were concerned, successful military action was completely dependent on US participation. This certainly does not undermine his argument; in fact, it reinforces it. As the author goes on to insist, while the victims of the May 2017 Manchester bombing are remembered, 'the millions of victims of the British-led intervention' are forgotten – forgotten that is unless they are desperately seeking refuge in Britain, in which case they are maligned and abused. (p. 8)

Looking back on the invasion of Iraq, he insists that the Blair government was not dragged reluctantly into the conflict – a poodle on a lead, so to speak – but was energetically urging an interventionist policy on the US. As he points out, months before 9/11, special adviser, John Sawers had sent Tony Blair 'a memo advocating regime change in Iraq'. A key figure at this time, Sawers went on to briefly serve as British representative in occupied Baghdad, was from 2007 British representative at the UN, and was head of MI6 from 2009-2014. He 'is now non-executive director of BP' among other things. (p. 15) Sawers is also on the governing body of the Ditchley Foundation, a key organisation in the managing of Anglo-American relations, that really needs exposure to daylight. Among its other governors is a certain David Miliband. Nu'man also reminds us of (ex-South African president) Thabo Mbeki's claim

that Blair actually advocated at one point a joint South African-British invasion of Zimbabwe!

The book does sometimes exhibit a polemical tone that deflects attention from the main enemy. Nu'man is quite correct in his claim that the 1960s protests against Imperialism were against US Imperialism in Vietnam and that the movement in the main ignored the activities of the British state. And much the same can be said about the more recent 'Stop the War' movement. At the same time, it can be argued that these movements created an audience for indictments of the British Empire. Certainly my own *The Blood Never Dried: A People's History of the British Empire* was conceived as a book about the British Empire for the 'Stop the War' movement. The extent of opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it can be argued, helped open people's minds to the crimes of British Imperialism, both historical and contemporary. What people saw being done in these countries – and in the so-called War on Terror generally – made the murderous brutalities of the so-called Mau Mau Emergency in Kenya absolutely credible. And understanding the history of British Imperialism was recognised as necessary, if one was to understand the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The book has another great strength: its historical chapters, that make up the bulk of the volume, provide an exceptional indictment of British Imperialism which deserves the widest possible readership. As Nu'man points out, for example, the British occupation of Bengal so absolutely impoverished the people that, by 1770, 'millions of Bengalis were literally starving to death'. (p. 39) And millions of Bengalis were to starve to death some 170 years later, after decades of supposedly benevolent British rule in the great wartime Famine of 1943-44, a Famine that has by some mysterious process been written out of British history. The record is shocking and yet today we have a Prime Minister who celebrates in the most crass fashion possible both the crimes and their perpetrators without any shame whatsoever. Which brings us to the chapter on the British record in the Middle East: this chapter would make the book worth reading on its own, not least his chronicling of the British Empire's systematic denial of the democratic rights of the Palestinians as they were supplanted by Zionist settlers.

Debunking the Myth is a welcome addition to the small but growing number of books calling the British Empire to account. Such books are sorely needed at the present time.

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