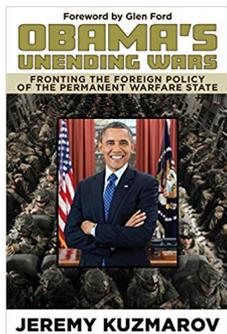


Review: Kuzmarov, Obama's Unending Wars: Fronting the foreign policy of the permanent warfare state

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Jeremy Kuzmarov, *Obama's Unending Wars: Fronting the foreign policy of the permanent warfare state*, Clarity, 2019.

In *Obama's Unending Wars*, Kuzmarov has brought together many telling proofs, nuggets, of just how horrible the world is, and just how responsible the US and its henchmen around the world are. A kind of who-does-it. Kuzmarov is that rare analyst ([Belen Fernandez](#) is another) who respects footnotes, leaving fascinating bits there that would otherwise detract from his focus.

Standing out in my mind after reading *Ouw* is the power that China has matured into in the past three decades, the US more and more resentful and frightened by it. Russia also has reclaimed much of its international clout, abandoned by Yeltsin, retrieved and nurtured by Putin, again infuriating the US. Other developed countries play almost no part in *Ouw*, as if passive spectators of the geopolitical battles now being fought, as if they don't even exist.

But as a Canadian, that makes perfect sense. Canada long ago lost any respect internationally, respect it once merited during and immediately after WWII, the only 'good war' the world has ever seen, fought courageously by 'good guys' against 'bad guys'. We are living in a grey fog ever since. *Ouw* is a fine lighthouse piercing through it.

Uncle Sam = Great Satan

That brings me to the other impression Kuzmarov's book leaves: a mourning for the once well-meaning Uncle Sam, under the last great US president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who presided over a quasi-socialist experiment, the only way to extract the US from its capitalist hell, and who made friends with everyone, except the 'bad guys' Hitler and Tojo. Sadly FDR died before he could cement his vision of a peaceful world order, where the US was not the world policeman fighting pretty well the rest of the world, able to cow most countries, and making enemies of those who insisted on independence.

Kuzmarov mentions FDR only as author of the 'Good Neighbor Policy' towards Latin America, basically cancelling the Monroe Doctrine. It was a mixed bag, with FDR's acceptance of Nicaragua caudillo Somoza as 'our son of a bitch', but even in admitting that shameful act, FDR underlines his distaste for realpolitik. FDR was fighting an already ravenous US imperialist elite, who openly supported Hitler, who had, since the invasion of Philippines in 1898, been invading, occupying, setting up puppet regimes increasingly, especially in Central America.

But FDR is the antithesis of Obama. It is Wilson who is the role model for Obama. An intellectual president with an elegant plan, a mission, to bring the world to heel in the name of American principles, and anyone in the way -- beware!

There are so many facts marshalled, it is hard to keep focused. Halfway through, the name Crown caught my eye, a recurring motif. Already on p20, we learn that one of Obama's primary financial sponsors was Henry Crown & Company, which owns 20% of General Dynamics (GD), manufacturer of the Trident rocket, Stryker troop carrier, bunker buster bombs, LAV-25 amphibious armored vehicle, Abrams tank, nuclear subs, naval destroyers ... During Obama's presidency, General Dynamics bought out 11 firms specializing in satellites, geospatial intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, working for 16 intelligence agencies (how many are there!) after investing \$10m per year in lobbying. Then it gets interesting. GD got caught lying to the government, but -- what, me worry? -- paid a \$4m 'fine' and the same year (2016) tripled its profits over 2000.

There are many Crowns. Their dynasty began as Material Services Corporation, one of the

government's largest WWII contractors (sued for \$1m for price-gouging). Rechristened GD by 1962, it was awarded a \$7b Pentagon contract for bombers (influence peddling investigation quashed). James Crown told the New York Times that his father was 'fairly hawkish about Israel's security,' and felt Obama was 'terrific on Israel.' Lester told the Chicago Jewish News

that the two-state solution was find if 'you will have a demilitarized, peaceful Palestinian entity.' Ha! Not a 'state'. Hey, did Lester help Jared Kushner write his 'deal of the century'?

Obama's legacy is clear. He is a good provider. He is just not interested in corruption. The imperial gravy train is full speed ahead. It is now an 'intelligence' government, with shadowy private corporations increasingly doing the imperial dirty work, leaving the real 'bad guys' looking cultured, too smart to be nasties. Bush-Cheney have their Blackwater (rechristened Xe now Academi). Obama told CIA director Leon Panetta the CIA would 'get everything it wanted.' The NYT reported that 'in the 67 years since the CIA was founded, few presidents have had as close a bond with their intelligence chiefs as Mr. Obama with Mr. Brennan' (architect of the CIA's extraordinary rendition program).

It certainly looks, now, that Trump has boxed himself in everywhere he has tried to be original: Iran, Venezuela, Russia, Afghanistan, Syria... But Obama put the finishing touches on the box. Kuzmarov makes it clear that all of those Trump 'initiatives' -- economic war against Iran, Venezuela, and Russia, negotiations with the Taliban, US troops in Syria (uninvited) -- were all in Obama's game plan.

Obama promised 'we can'. We all pointed to his vote against the Iraq invasion in 2003, his Nobel Peace prize, misunderstanding his 'no stupid war' for 'no war'. Obama saw himself as the 'smart war' guy. After all he is 'black', so he can't possibly be an agent of US whiteman imperialism; he's so much smarter than stupid Bush with his 'stupid war'.

Handbook

Reading Kuzmarov is like reading a speeded-up survey of the past decade, with the same scenarios repeated: something smacks of people power, the US nurtures instability (take your

pick, Nicaragua, Burkina Faso ...), leading to a collapse of authority, growth of insurgents, 'invite' in US troops, make sure your new puppet is secure. But that could be Haiti, or Chad, or Syria.

It's hard to keep on top of all the machinations in the world, so you can see OUW as a handbook, focus on the gaps in your knowledge. I found Yemen especially instructive. The Houthi only recently formed as a force, harking back to the pre-colonial Zaydeh clan that ruled in the north prior to the outbreak of civil war in the 1960s (i.e., they have street creds).

By 2013, the Houthi were part of a larger coalition that included deposed dictator Saleh and his loyalists, various tribal militias and most military and public sector workers, who were protesting the corruption and poor living standards under the post-2011 (unelected) Saudi-approved Mansour Hadi. The Pentagon had a working relationship with the Houthi in the fight against al-Qaeda (i.e., they're okay). But Obama and now Trump refuse to work with them, supporting the Saudi sponsor, which has meant the resurgence of al-Qaeda in southern Yemen and the worst humanitarian crisis going.

The US-led Saudi coalition against the Houthi *recruited al-Qaeda* to fight the Houthi (haven't we heard that before? Afghanistan 1980s?). Shia are immune to the al-Qaeda virus, which was spawned by the Saudi Wahhabi sect. So if the US is serious about fighting al-Qaeda, ISIS, et al, its natural ally is not Saudi Arabia but Iran.

Did 'smart' Obama see that? Is that why he persisted in trying to bring Iran back into the international community, to work with it to really, really defeat the Islamic terrorists?

In Obama's defense, he did a few brave, principled things:

*He carried through on the START talks and treaty with Russia

*He supported negotiations with Iran and even coughed up \$400m to settle a pre-1979 contract for arms to the Shah which were never delivered

*He (sort of) normalized relations with Cuba

*He pardoned hundreds of prisoners who had been caught in Clinton's 'three-strikes' sentencing bill

*He pardoned Chelsea Manning (but went after Snowden and Assange with a vengeance)

*He voted to abstain on a UN condemnation of Israeli settlements

*He was mixed on the environment, encouraging fracking, but cancelling the pipeline through Standing Rock (though not for long).

It is important to remember this in assessing his legacy. Just painting Obama 'black' doesn't leave much room for analysis. My own views on Obama are mixed. He was not just a puppet, though his good initiatives were few and timid. Power certainly corrupted him, as it did his earlier JFK heirs, Bill and Hillary, who likewise moved from (disavowed) student radicalism to outright channelers of Cecil Rhodes.

Kuzmarov mentions Bill Ayers as a friend of Obama. But Ayers, a former leader of the Weather Underground, lost his illusions about Obama after he was elected. In 2013, he told USA Today:

Every president in this century should be put on trial ... for war crimes. Every one of them goes into office -- an office dripping with blood -- and then adds to it. And, yes, I think that these are

war crimes. I think that they're acts of terror. [Then:] He is a curious man who does a lot of reading. He's a really good guy.

Don't believe everything you read or that people are quoted as saying. I suspect Ayers was just playing to the mainstream audience. No point in signing your own death warrant for *USA Today*

Which brings me to the unanswered question: Yes, Obama is slick, articulate, clever, well read. Not very funny, despite the cheery smile. But *does he believe the things he spouts?* Even half or one tenth? As I read his mellifluous words in

OUW

, I conjured up Obama's schoolmarmish, mechanical, measure baritone, exhorting us to listen up:

As someone who stands here as a direct consequence of Dr. King's life work, I am living testimony to the moral force of non-violence... I cannot be guided by [Gandhi and King's] examples alone. I face the world as it is. ... To say that force may someday be necessary is not a call to cynicism -- it is a recognition of history, the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.*

In his Nobel Peace prize lecture, he recalls winner Wilson (1919) who

led the world in constructing an architecture to keep the peace: a Marshall Plan and United Nations, mechanisms to govern the waging of war, treaties to protect human rights, prevent genocide, restrict the most dangerous weapons.

One-tenth? He did go to Hiroshima (the first sitting US president), though he was careful not to mention who did what there.

As I read, I would pause from time to time to daydream 'what if...?'

This is Kuzmarov's last chapter 'Seeking a better way to live', and it is not just platitudes. 'I know why I don't want the empire. There are better ways to live and better ways to die.'** And there are Americans who understand that. In

The Demilitarized Society: Disarmament and Conversion (1988), Seymour Melman criticized the peace movement for not developing and promoting a long term program for converting the US into an economy of peace.

Speaker of the House Jim Wright (D-TX), once a hawk, convened a meeting of members who had proposed economic conversion legislation to switch the US economy from the Vietnam-era killing machine into ... whatever. But Newt Gingrich (Lockheed Martin in his constituency) targeted him in a political witch-hunt, and the plan died. Just as the Soviet Union was collapsing, when there were no enemies (phantom or otherwise), Newt drowned out any further discussion of economic conversion. A historic opportunity had been destroyed.

There are good American politicians! But what about the 1.3m American soldiers? What do they do, every day, day after day? Polish boots, terrorize Afghans, terrorize terrorists, play video war games, drink beer, counting the days till their leave from whatever hell-hole they're in? Surely there are better ways to live and die.

There are so many horrible things the US does, that if it didn't, the whole world (including the US) would benefit. Standing up to Saudi Arabia and Israel, letting alone good guys like Maduro. Making peace with Russia and Iran (Obama at least tried with the latter). The world wouldn't hate the US if it let up a bit on the jingoism, the killing. Why can't an American president do good anymore, like FDR? Or Lincoln?

The latter gives a hint. Doing the right thing often results in assassination in the US. After JFK, RFK, MLK and Malcolm X, the likelihood of a truly progressive (like Obama's youthful friend Bill Ayers) is almost zero, and if s/he strays a bit too far from the script, BANG!

My sore spot

I have only one dispute with this stimulating, instructive and highly readable survey of imperialism. Kuzmarov dismisses the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as the empire's choice in 2012. That is not true. They were/are in no one's back pocket -- US or Saudi. They have been victimized from both sides.

Kuzmarov notes that they refused to join the US-led campaign to overthrow Assad, upsetting Obama, though logically they should have. The Syrian MB was slaughtered in 1980 when they starting a violent uprising, inspired by the (peaceful) Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. Morsi said little about them, instead extending a hand to Iran, the first Egyptian president to visit Tehran (for the Non-Aligned Movement conference). Only in June 2013, with the coup in the air, did Morsi call for an international campaign to overthrow Assad. Kuzmarov rightly states this was pretty tame stuff, and that Obama was hoping for more, a replay of the 1980s in Afghanistan.

But 2013 was not 1980. And even this limp support for overthrowing a leader and his army was too much for the Egyptian army, which was/is rooting for Assad, fearing their MB. Take my word. Morsi is right up there with Lenin and Khomeini, defending the revolution.

*'The World Beyond Iraq', Fayetteville, North Carolina, March 19, 2008.

**William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life*, Oxford University Press, 1980. p266.