

BOOKS IN BRIEF—Fall 2010

Joy Gordon. *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions*
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. 359 pages.
Hardcover \$39.95

Gordon exposes in her book the invisible war launched by the United States against Iraq through the use of sanctions and lays bare the damage that took place and can be done by the crucial unchecked power in US institutions of international governance. Drawing on internal United Nations documents, confidential minutes of closed meetings, and interviews with foreign diplomats and US officials she examined the key role the United States played in shaping the sanctions. The book is a sharp indictment of United States policy. Gordon details how: (a) the US prevented critical humanitarian goods from entering Iraq; (b) it undermined attempts at reform; (c) unilaterally it overrode the UN weapons inspectors; and (d) it manipulated votes in the Security Council. These are deliberate policies of the US to ensure the continuation of Iraq's catastrophe.

The book covers the period between August 1990 and May 2003 to expose the part that the United States played but not the announced governmental side of the story. This book is not intended to be a complete review. Gordon first exposes the policy of containment (ch. 1) throughout all three administrations, and then details the role of the US and its institutions and committees in the cruelty of the United Nations sanctions on Iraq (chs. 2 and 3). She then examines the use of holds placed on contracts (ch. 3) and how it provides a "roadmap of US practices that ensured that the sanctions would keep Iraq in a state of destitution" (62).

Gordon exposes the magnitude of the catastrophe, which went beyond the physical damage and human losses to destroy the infrastructure and prevent Iraq from rebuilding for years to come (ch. 5). As a result, there are tensions at the UN derived from US resistance to attempts at documenting the humanitarian crisis perpetrated by the United States (ch. 6). Gordon exposes the constant blaming of the Iraqi government by the US administration (ch. 7), the insignificant role of Congress in shaping the US policy regarding sanctions (ch. 8), and the oil for food scandal and improprieties that took place, especially the disappearance of funds during the 14-month period of the US-led occupation (ch. 9). Gordon examines US policies and their humanitarian impact and shows how the US intended to inflict damage on Iraqi society (ch. 10). Finally, she explores the international law and the sanctions or what she calls "legalizing atrocities" (ch. 11).

The conception of this work is one that begins with a discussion of the ethics of economic sanctions to find out that they were about much more than Iraq and much more than sanctions. The US practices were more extreme and harsh, even often unilateral. It is a moral and political question. This book, which is meticulously documented, represents a courageous venture indeed. It exposes the internal processes within the US that should only lead to a feeling of guilt for the genocidal acts against the Iraqi people. It is an excellent read for whoever doubts that.

Shahid M. Alam. *Israeli Exceptionalism: The Destabilizing Logic of Zionism*

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 274 pages. Paper \$30.00

In a courageous tone Alam questions the logic of Zionism and how Zionists perceived their racist movement as exceptional. However, this is done by charting out geopolitical consequences of Israeli occupation and contextualizing it on a global scale. Alam's main purpose is to explain why Zionism is not viable but still it managed to sustain Israeli exceptionalism. As he says, Israel's creation and survival are anomalies. He demystifies such a publicly accepted destabilizing logic that swept the western world since the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, Zionism coerced the West to stand behind its colonial project.

Alam examines Israeli exceptionalism that aimed to exempt Israel from being censured and how the Palestinians have paid the price for six decades now. Consequently, Israel claimed the right to kill millions and persist in violence and threaten the Arab world with a nuclear war. To justify its actions Israel created a new language and vocabulary. It recruited anthropologists and geneticists, and promoted the spin of exceptionalism through the media. This was based on three principles: "divine right," the morale of the flock to win support, and Jewish unique tragic history. The Zionists constructed this ideology and exceptionalist claims to serve the racist state of Israel that was founded on conquest and ethnic cleansing. "Israeli exceptionalism has many uses. *It* defends, obscures, explains away the 'abnormal' character of Zionist nationalist project" (17).

Based on this "Israeli exceptionalism" later the Jewish colonizers in Palestine succeeded in creating an exclusionary settler state. Alam says that: "The secret of Zionist success, then, lies in the manner in which it overcame the chief flaw in its design: it did not have a natural mother country to support its colonial project" (218). Alam contends that Israel is most likely the only country in the world that insists on defining citizenship independent of geography (5). It practiced legal discrimination that is massive and blatant and created apartheid in the occupied territories. It is the only country that refuses to define its borders. Meanwhile the Zionists wanted to spread the illusion that the Palestinians were not a people; they

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