

The political anatomy of pseudo-left war propaganda

Part one

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A Road Unforeseen: Women Fight The Islamic State, by Meredith Tax.

A pro-war propaganda book published in August calls to mind the cynical and perhaps apocryphal phrase of William Randolph Hearst, whose sensational and often false reporting aimed to generate public support for the Spanish-American war: “You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war.”

This epigram applies to Meredith Tax’s *A Road Unforeseen: Women Fight The Islamic State*. Tax’s book is pseudo-left war propaganda.

Tax is a self-described socialist and feminist with anarchist sympathies who became politically active in the late 1960s, visited China in 1973 as a young admirer of the Cultural Revolution, and has since regularly written for the *Nation*. Her articles have also appeared in the *New York Times*, *Dissent*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Socialist Review*, the journal of the International Socialist Organization’s British affiliate, the Socialist Workers Party.

Tax’s latest book was published in August 2016 in the midst of a propaganda campaign aimed at building support for the US war drive on a “left-wing” basis. In a series of articles published by the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Alternative, the Pabloite *International Viewpoint*, and others, the pseudo-left has attacked the Obama administration from the right for its alleged reluctance to wage a full-scale war in Syria.

All of the lies used by the pseudo-left to portray US intervention as “progressive” are amalgamated in her book. Tax explains in her introduction that she decided to write *A Road Unforeseen* as a reply to growing opposition to the US-led wars:

“To me, this single-minded focus on the US smacks of imperial narcissism. Like the neocons they hate, some on the Left see the US as all powerful—in their view, any popular movement that is not fighting the US is being manipulated by it, and the only thing Americans have to worry about is opposing their own government. Personally, I think the world has more than one ‘Evil Empire,’ and agree with David Graeber that anti-imperialist critique is insufficient without solidarity. That means supporting people who stand for the

same things progressives elsewhere support—human rights, a strong labor movement, separation between religion and politics, equality for all, racial justice, women’s liberation, an end to discrimination on the basis of sexuality or belief—and coming through when they ask for help” (pp. 18–19).

The arguments Tax advances illustrate the symbiotic relationship between the politics of the upper-middle-class “left” and the material aims of US imperialism. Her book employs postmodernist political categories (“privilege,” “identity,” “community economics,” “male domination,” etc.) in constructing an argument for war. Tax upholds the right-wing transformation of the Kurdish nationalist PKK as a model and proclaims that PKK-aligned forces backed by the CIA, American air power, and advanced weaponry, “have shown the world new ways to dream about democracy, equality, and living together” (p. 35).

Whitewashing the role of the United States

To support her argument that US intervention would advance “democracy, equality, and living together,” Tax paints a dishonest picture of the role of US imperialism over the last 25 years.

Tax has labeled one of the sub-chapters of her book, “Iraq: Free At Last.” In this section, the devastation wrought by American imperialism dating back to the Gulf War of 1991 is presented as a step forward for Iraq in general and for women and the Kurdish minority in particular.

“With the advent of the no-fly zone in 1991, for the first time in their history, Iraqi Kurds had enough breathing space to think about how they would govern themselves” (p. 93). The US imposed this no-fly zone “hoping to avoid another Kurdish genocide” and “put together a coalition to stop” Saddam Hussein for humanitarian reasons (p. 49).

“Not until 1998 was the US able to organize a solid peace agreement [regarding fighting in Kurdish areas of Iraq]. And

not until the US invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 did the Kurdish economy become viable” (p. 95).

Though the 2003 invasion may have been based on some “foolish assumptions,” ultimately the war laid the basis for the development of Kurdish autonomy. “Once the constant wars stopped, women had enough room to maneuver to create a feminist movement” (p. 97). While “what came out of the war was also terrible,” “the UN sanctions were over and the economy was taking off” (p. 96).

Tax cites a Kurdish activist: “In the post-dictatorship era ... political space was opened up for suspended issues to be addressed and sidelined voices to be heard” (p. 97).

In a latter section on the rise of ISIS, Tax criticizes the US role in the Middle East from the standpoint of its incorrect tactics. “Al Qaeda in Iraq might not have made so much headway had the American authorities behaved more intelligently,” she says (p. 206).

Tax explains the rise of right-wing Islamists as the product of “the success of the global women’s movement” (p. 25). Though Tax says the US may be vaguely to blame for funding right-wing Islamists against the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s, she does not cite this as one of the main causes for the rise of ISIS. Ultimately, Tax explains the rise of ISIS in terms of psychology and gender. She supportively quotes a sociologist who attributes the rise of ISIS to “a profound crisis of masculinity leading to more violent and coercive assertions of male prerogatives where the abuses of women can become a blood sport” (p. 24).

Tax’s portrayal of the US as a benevolent if imperfect champion of democracy and women’s rights and her silence on the US’ role in the rise of ISIS is aimed at covering over the devastation wrought by US imperialism over the last quarter century of war.

From the first Gulf War, to the Clinton administration’s mid-1990s sanctions, the 1998 bombing campaign, and the 2003 invasion and ongoing occupation, the US has killed over 1 million Iraqi civilians and driven millions more into homelessness and destitution. The US occupiers consciously adopted a sectarian program to divide Iraqis against one another, fanning the flames of a brutal civil war. American banks, corporations, and contractors have plundered the country’s national resources and reduced the country to semi-colonial status.

Likewise, in Syria and Libya the US bombing campaigns are directly responsible for creating the vacuum out of which ISIS has emerged. Now that ISIS and its affiliates are engaged in challenging the Russia-backed Assad government in Syria, the CIA has funneled heavy weaponry to extremist Islamic groups and the Pentagon has provided Islamic terrorist groups with air support.

Tax denounces those opposed to the US’ rapacious record in Iraq as “imperial narcissists.” In covering up for the crimes of

US imperialism in Iraq and Syria, she is playing the contemptuous role of preparing the region for further US atrocities.

“Humanitarian” imperialist intervention

At the crux of Tax’s argument for war is a February 3, 2016 appeal from Kurdish ruling elites in the Afrin canton which calls for US support after the region came under attack from the al-Nusra Front, who, it should be mentioned, are also armed with US weaponry.

The attacks “foretell a humanitarian catastrophe intensified due to complete absence of international organizations and the non-reaching of aids offered by international sides ... In light of the substantial US influence and role in the Syrian crisis, and considering the American administration’s positive and effective role in finding a peaceful and democratic solution to the Syrian crisis, we appeal to your immediate and urgent support intervention to lift the siege on Afrin Canton” (p. 174).

Tax cynically presents the Obama administration as heartless, weak and unwilling to intervene with sufficient military power to protect the Kurds. She writes that in August 2014 the “Obama administration debated whether to give air support to the Syrian Kurds” and asks: “What was holding the President back?” She notes that “the Obama administration’s position made no sense to anybody who knew what was actually going on” (p. 183).

“But finally, on October 21 [2015], the Obama administration took a clear position” and began providing support for the Kurds. Even after the US began bombing Syria, the latter “still needed better weapons” (p. 185–186).

In November 2014, “US forces were now collaborating more closely with the YPG-YPJ forces, who would call in coordinates to the bombers, and the airstrikes were beginning to hurt Daesh” (p. 186). By October 2015, “The US Congress had already appropriated \$721 million to supply Syrian rebels; the formation of the SDF [Syrian Democratic Forces] permitted some of these supplies to get to the Kurds. On October 12, US planes dropped the first 50,000 tons of ammunition” (p. 190). Tax pressed for further intervention.

To be continued



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