Mohsen BANAN's Reviews Collection

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About This Document

From time to time I write reviews of books and articles that I read. This document is a collection of such reviews.

1 Chalmers Johnson: Blowback Trilogy

Book Information

Title: Blowback

Title: The Sorrows of Empire

Title: Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic

Author: Chalmers Johnson

Publication Date: Blowback was published before 9/11/2001

Summary

Review Date: 2008

Great books. Highly recommend them.

Chalmers Johnson understood why 9/11 had to happen. He predicted it. His first book "BLOWBACK – The Costs and Consequences of American Empire" was published before September 2001. In that book he explains why Americans should be expecting a 9/11 and names Osama explicitly as the most likely.

Johnson's general style of explaining imperialism as interdependent linkages between military and economics is rare and powerful.

The main topic of his books are imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and the American Military-Industrial complex.

As an Iranian those topics were not particularly interesting for me. Understanding colonialism is a lot easier when you are at the receiving end of the exploitation.

But his thoughts on economics, economists and economic models was interesting and refreshing.

Some of his key points are:

- Economists and westerners view economics as a hard science. At best economics is a very soft science, sub-ordinate to society.
- Thinking that a formula or an equation abstracting a very limited domain, assumptions, time and circumstances is anything more than that is a joke. Yet, noble prize in economics routinely go to such a formula as if economics is science and has universality.
- That central planning and protectionism are very appropriate for many societies.
- That slogans of open markets amount to ”kicking the ladder” for those who have reached the top.
- That each society should define economics for itself.
- That free market slogans are a tool of imperialists/colonialists.
- That IMF, WTO, ... organizations are all part of the Western imperial design.

I strongly recommend reading Chalmers Johnson’s views on economics and economists to all.

Fortunately, Iranian leadership and Iranians (save the western chic) well understand economics western economic models for what they are.

2 Chalmers Johnson: Going Bankrupt

Article Information

Title: Going Bankrupt: Why the debt crisis is now the greatest threat to the American republic

Author: Chalmers Johnson

Publication Date: January 22, 2008

Web Pointers: http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/174884/chalmers_johnson_how_to_sink_america
http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/01/23/6553/

Summary

Review Date: January 24, 2008

Great article. Highly recommend it.

I am a fan of Chalmers Johnson. Not because what he says is new or thought provoking for me but because he writes what I would have written if I were to write for the average American audience. And Americans who see America for what it is and attempt to wake Joe Six-pack and Mary Merlot are rare. Neither Chalmers nor Mohsen are holding their breath for Joe and Mary to wake up.

Chalmers Johnson understood why 9/11 had to happen. He predicted it. His first book “BLOWBACK – The Costs and Consequences of American Empire” was published before September 2001. In that book he explains why Americans should be expecting a 9/11 and names Osama explicitly as the most likely.

The outlook that Johnson has developed in his sixties is mostly the same outlook that I developed when I was in my twenties. Not because I am smarter than him. But because he comes from an American Navy heritage and I am Iranian. Colonialism, Neo-colonialism and Imperialism are much easier to understand when you are on the receiving end of the exploitation.

Johnson’s general style of explaining imperialism as interdependent linkages between military and economics is rare and powerful. With respect to the current economic crisis in this January 22nd, 2008 article he makes that case again.

He is correct in his main points but there is a flaw in his logic. At a higher level his flaw is that instead of focusing on the American neo-colonialistic model he focuses on the American Imperialistic model.

Choosing to use the model and terminology of Imperialism in contrast to that of Neo-colonialism takes you in different directions.

Westerners in general are uncomfortable using the neo-colonialism vocabulary and are more comfortable seeing themselves as imperialists. Even Johnson hardly ever sees and calls Americans as neo-colonialists.

Consider US-France relations in an imperialistic context. The French can legitimately complain about certain not so very tangibles. Microsoft monopoly, McDonald, Starbucks, ... Clearly McDonald’s Big Mac has gone further because of McDonald-Douglas F-15s. That dominance does have something to do with the American Military-Industrial complex but the picture is not crisp. There is no neo-colonialism context in the US-France relationship. Just Imperialism.

Now, consider US-Saudi relations in the context of neo-colonialism. The exploitation is clear. When $18 Billion of the Arab people’s money goes into McDonald-Douglas F-15s, the role and profit of the American Military-Industrial complex is crystal clear.

So, the right vocabulary is neo-colonialism not imperialism.

This difference is subtle but important. The explicit logic flaw in Johnson’s article brings out the distinction.

Flaw: Military Keynesianism makes no contribution to either production or consumption

An explicit analysis of the Military-Industrial (+Congressional) Complex as a profit and loss center is extremely difficult. By now, the military-industrial complex is fully weaved into the fabric of the American economy. Further, non-tangible costs are vast, varied and scattered (maintenance of damaged veterans and other mercenaries, image of the bully, the aggressor, the occupier and the most hated, ...).

A closed system profit and loss analysis of the Military-Industrial complex quickly blurs the inter and intra concepts of production and consumption.

In his article, Johnson over simplifies that analysis.

Johnson says:

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This ideology I call "military Keynesianism" the determination to
maintain a permanent war economy and to treat military output as an
ordinary economic product, even though it makes no contribution to
either production or consumption.
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American arms are not consumed by Americans. So, what?

America is world's largest seller of arms. It forces plenty outside of America to consume its arms, its products, its culture and its values.

If military output is to not be treated as ordinary economic product, then our perspective needs to be neo-colonialism oriented. In this article Johnson under emphasizes this point. Johnson's above logic is flawed as long as the neo-colonies are willing to consume the American Military-Industrial production.

So far the American permanent war economy has been quite profitable contributing both to production and consumption when the neo-colonies are taken into account.

Prior to 1979 every penny that Iran spent on arms was immediate direct profit for the American Military-Industrial complex and the American economy.

Johnson further enumerates the top 10 military spenders as:

> The world s top 10 military spenders and the approximate amounts each country currently budgets for its military establishment are:
>
> 1. United States (FY08 budget), $623 billion
> 2. China (2004), $65 billion
> 3. Russia, $50 billion
> 4. France (2005), $45 billion
> 5. Japan (2007), $41.75 billion
> 6. Germany (2003), $35.1 billion
> 7. Italy (2003), $28.2 billion
> 8. South Korea (2003), $21.1 billion
> 9. India (2005 est.), $19 billion
> 10. Saudi Arabia (2005 est.), $18 billion
>
> World total military expenditures (2004 est.), $1,100 billion
>
> World total (minus the United States), $500 billion

By way of example.

Most, if not the entire $18 billion that Saudi Arabia spent is immediately and directly going to the American Military-Industrial complex and back to American economy.

Most, if not the entire $21 billion that South Korea spent is immediately and directly going to the American Military-Industrial complex and back to American economy.

Johnson's imperialistic oriented analysis is not as effective as the neo-colonial oriented analysis. Evolution of Johnson's thinking and model has brought him to neo-colonialism. By not using the vocabulary of neo-colonialism which explicitly makes the American people the exploiters and which makes much of the world the exploited, his logic is not as sharp as it can be.

The key question is: If one could do a comparison of the American economy with and without its Military-Industrial complex, then which is more profitable for Americans?

That all depends on how much resistance the exploited in the neo-colonies will exert back.

If there was to be one historic moment where the Military-Industrial complex turned from profit into loss, that is the Iranian 1979 revolution. Since then the trends are obvious.

People in the exploited American neo-colonies have woken up.

The Egyptians, the Saudis, the Pakistanis, the Indonesians, ... are starting to better understand the neo-colonial model and follow the concepts of the Iranian Revolution. In historic terms the significance of the Iranian Revolution has not been fully recognized yet. Its impact, ramifications and momentum is real and independent of western recognition.

It is through the neo-colonial prism and increases in costs caused by events such as the 1979 revolution where the essence of neo-colonialism was challenged that the Military-Industrial complex becomes unprofitable.

The Military-Industrial complex is becoming a loss center, because Ali and Sara have woken up. Because they understand neo-colonialism, the cost of ownership of the Military-Industrial complex will continue to increase.

Joe Six-Pack and Mary Merlot will likely not wake up before it is way too late.

Understanding neo-colonialism is a lot easier when you are at the receiving end of the exploitation.

3 Triplets of Belleville

Summary

Great book. Highly recommend it.

Movie Information

Title: Triplets of Belleville

Comments and Observations

Fun but also quite deep. It is no where as simple as it appears.

4 King Leopold's Ghost

Summary

Great book. Highly recommend it.

Book Information

Title: King Leopold's Ghost

Comments and Observations

If I was African, I would want accountability and justice.

If I was Belgian/French/Brit/American, each and every time that I would meet an African, I would applogize and beg for forgiveness.

5 CounterCoup

Summary

In terms of quality of writing and quality of thinking, the book is a piece of junk.

As a principal in the 1953 coup that overthrew the democratically elected Iranian prime minister, Mohamad Mossadeq, the author's character of course is well known. Kermit Roosevelt is morally bankrupt and corrupt to the bone.

Based on the book, it appears that later in life Kermit Roosevelt grows a conscience and writing of this book is part self granding and part desire to demonstrate a sense of morality.

To the extent that the book is a confession, it is like an arsonist being proud that he would only set fire to wooden structures as concrete does not burn as well. He goes on to take issue with subsequent CIA crimes and criticizes his bosses for following his pattern.

This criminal, Kermit Roosevelt (the author) at no point recognizes that he is a criminal.

The authorative document that describes details of the 1953 coup is a leaked CIA document. After reading this book and puting various other pieces together my guess is that the source of that leak is Kermit Roosevelt.

Book Information

Title: CounterCoup

This book is out of print but a scanned version is available on the web.

Comments and Observations

As I am Iranian, I want accountability and justice.

If I was an American, each and every time that I would meet an Iranian, I would applogize and beg for forgiveness.

The book provides yet another good window into the core of the American character. Morally bankrupt and self absorbed.

6 Things a Computer Scientist Rarely Talks About

Summary

Great book. Highly recommend it.

Book Information

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Things a Computer Scientist Rarely Talks About
  Donald E. Knuth
  ISBN 1-57586-326-X
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Comments and Observations

I just finished reading a book that a friend had recommended.

Mostly Knuth, but also Guy Steel and Mitch Kapur dig into questions of God, spirituality, free will, infinity, spirit and purpose from the perspective of a Computer Scientist.

I don't think that this book would be of much interest to none software guys/gals.

The book drifts a lot, but I liked the book and do recommend it.

If you decide to read it, I'd love to compare notes.