

## *Heterodox Economics Newsletter*

POSTMODERN IMPERIALISM: GEOPOLITICS AND THE GREAT GAMES, by Eric Walberg, Clarity Press, Atlanta, 2011. 283 pages; ISBN 978-0-9833539-3-5.

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In *Postmodern Imperialism*, Eric Walberg argues that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are characterized by three Great Games that are each dominated by an imperial power. Walberg focuses on the strategic use of periphery countries, specifically in the Middle East and Central Asia, by imperial powers and the future of the world order. The imperial power in each “Great Game,” whether Great Britain or the United States, seeks to expand its economic and political influence throughout the world. Walberg is critical of Great Britain’s colonization in the early twentieth century but he saves his wrath for the actions of the United States after World War II and its continued ability to only look out for its own interests.

Walberg begins Great Game I during the nineteenth century British imperialism and the subsequent race to colonize the periphery. During that time, economic, political, and social ideologies gave imperial powers the backing they required to colonize countries and peoples that they believed to be in need of rescuing. Great Britain, with the pound as the reserve currency, was able to dominant the gold standard system and thus the modern financial establishment and Western capitalism came to dominate international political economy. Walberg sums up Great Game I with the realist saying that “might makes right” and therefore the great powers could colonize and abuse any periphery country for their benefit.

Great Game II was the Cold War era and was the height of American political and financial power. In his discussion of Great Game II, Walberg focuses on how the prominence of the dollar and its role as the international reserve currency led to an era of American imperialism. American foreign policy during the Cold War reflected a United States that was willing to undertake any policies to benefit its economy and weaken the Soviet Union. The United States used both soft and hard power to achieve its goals in the periphery. While Walberg’s discussion of the United States and U.S. policy during this period is accurate, he does not seem to do more than repeat common history and rail against the U.S. for its policies.

Great Game III is the period after the Cold War in which the United States sought to address a global political and economic system that did not include communism. During this time, Walberg argues, neoconservatives shaped U.S. policy in the Middle East and other strategic regions. Walberg extensively comments on the role of Israel as an empire-and-a-half due to its power in the Middle East and influence over U.S. foreign policy. While other states in Europe and Asia, especially China, have economic and political power, the U.S. and Israel remain the dominant imperial powers through Great Game III.

The largest flaw in Walberg’s argument comes during his explanation of Great Game III, the period after the Gulf War. Walberg, like many individuals disillusioned with the United States, argues that the military and humanitarian interventions of the 1990s were another form of imperialism. He describes military intervention as “empire lite” or liberal imperialism because it still allows imperial powers to circumvent sovereignty to achieve national goals. However, he

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fails to address the consequences of those civil wars and genocides in which the U.S. and other large powers did not intervene, such as Rwanda and times during the Bosnian War.

In addition, Walberg fails to examine both sides of the argument over the U.S.-Israel relationship. The book places a large emphasis on the role of the Israel Lobby and American Jews in influencing American foreign policy in the Middle East. While the Lobby has played a role in continuing American support for Israel, it does not play nearly as large of a role as Walberg supposes. The U.S.-Israel relationship is similar to how Walberg describes it but his argument could have been more balanced if there was more discussion of Israel's relationship with its neighbors to determine if it can also be considered an imperial power.

While much of Walberg's argument does not directly address economics, he shows how political and economic powers are intertwined and expressed in foreign policy. One of the strengths of this book is the detail Walberg includes to show the economic power of various imperial countries. The book also highlights the importance of certain geopolitical areas (e.g. the Silk Road) throughout history and how these areas will remain areas of contention for their economic and political advantages.

Overall, Walberg's *Postmodern Imperialism* provides a useful history lesson of the last century and the roles that various world powers have played in shaping international politics and the global financial system. This book provides a good background reading for heterodox economists who are interested in the political economy of imperialism and the Middle East.