

BIG READ

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DECEPTION IN PLAIN SIGHT

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ISSUE 159

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Gunning down the Easter Bunny



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Winnie Mandela: Heroine and villain

Despite her heroism, the legacy of South Africa's Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who died recently aged 80, must not depend on a denial of historical realities

PART of my *Soul Went With Him* is the title of a 1985 book by the woman born Nomzamo Winifred Zanyiwe Madikizela. As SA pays tribute to one of its remarkable daughters, it is fitting to ask what part of our “soul” as a nation has gone with Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

This period of national mourning has been as South African as it gets. Adherents to the politics of adulation have been in close combat with those who avow the politics of condemnation. Some praise Winnie because she was a fearless fighter for justice and a feminist icon; others excoriate her because she was a violent egomaniac. Hagiography meets *swart gevaar* [Afrikaans for “black danger.”] The contest has been shrill and depressing in equal measure, especially in the hyperventilation chamber that is Twitter.

We do history a disservice if we omit the truth about the characters and events that shaped democratic South Africa. So, we must accept that Winnie Mandela was both heroine and villain.

My very first struggle song was about Winnie Mandela. As little children playing in the dusty streets of Mamelodi, we sang that Winnie was arrested and tortured because she was fight-

ing for our land. The apartheid government had silenced nearly everyone, mostly men, by sending them to jail and forcing them into exile. But they did not silence Winnie – a courageous and defiant black woman who stared down the brutal racist regime and declared that freedom would happen in her lifetime. She took on the mantle of “mother of the nation,” for which she paid with torture, banishment and loneliness. In these conditions, the other Winnie was born.

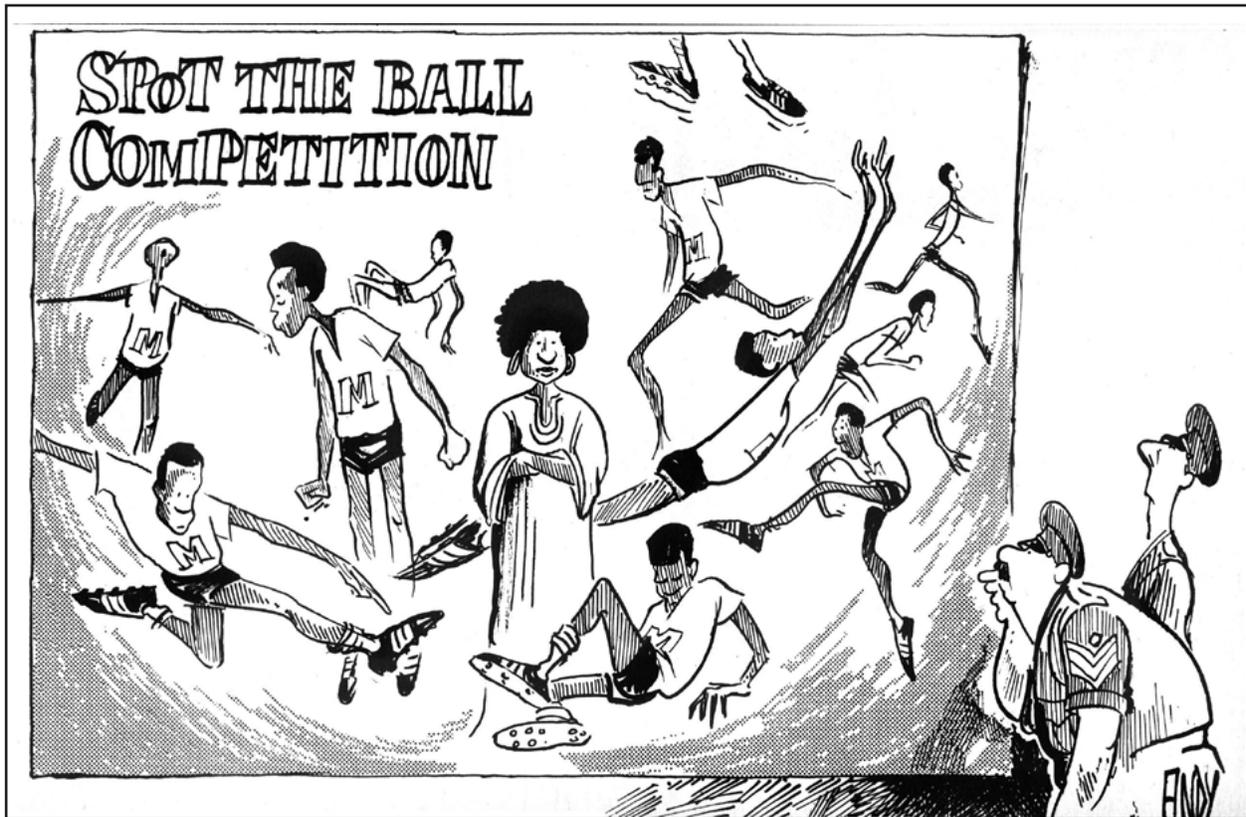
When she returned to Soweto from Brandfort, she surrounded herself with a group of thugs who acted as her bodyguards. Her association with the Mandela United Football Club, and her adoption of demagogic politics (“with our boxes of

matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country”) marked her downfall.

In 1991, Madikizela-Mandela was convicted of the kidnapping of four boys in the case that included 14-year-old Stompie Sepei. But to consider who Winnie had become, consider the separate case of Lolo Sono, 21, and his friend Siboniso Shabalala, 19. In November 1988, Sono was driven away in a kombi by Winnie; Shabalala was summoned to her house the day after. The



David Anderson (from Frontline magazine, March 1988)



SPOT THE BALL: How David Anderson (Andy), then the cartoonist at the Johannesburg Star newspaper saw the furore surrounding Winnie and the Mandela United football team. February 16, 1989.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) later found that she should accept responsibility for their disappearance. Their remains were exhumed from two paupers' graves at Avalon Cemetery in Soweto in 2013 as a result of work by the Missing People's Task Team at the National Prosecuting Authority. The two had been stabbed to death within 24 hours of their disappearance, according to post-mortem reports.

In his 1996 testimony to the TRC, Sono's father, Nicodemus, said that just before his son disappeared he was told that "Mama Winnie" wanted to see him. He found her in a kombi with his son, who had been badly beaten. "Mrs Mandela told me that she is taking Lolo away because they labelled him as a spy," said the boy's father. He pleaded with her to return his son, to no avail.

However, it is Caroline Sono, Lolo's stepmother, who best captures the tragedy of Winnie Mandela. Before the TRC she said: "I am pleading with Mrs Mandela today, in front of the whole world, that

please, Mrs Mandela, give us our son back. Even if he is dead, let Mrs Mandela give us the remains of our son, so that we must bury him decently."

These were the tears of black parents who were deeply hurt by our heroine. Their story and others should not be erased because Madikizela-Mandela has become a feminist icon. Nor is it acceptable to argue that "bad things happen in war." To do so is nothing short of rationalising violence. During the 1980s, Soweto was under siege from the violence of apartheid and criminal gangs. Madikizela-Mandela's protectors were at the centre of this orgy of violence. Their reign of terror made it possible for the phenomenon of "jackrolling" – a morbid "sport" in which groups of young men would kidnap girls and gang rape them – to take root. .

It has been reported that there were police spies within her retinue. But what matters here is that Madikizela-Mandela flatly refused wise counsel from her comrades to end her association with them. And so the die was cast. At a

PALESA MORUDU

press conference on February 16 1989, United Democratic Front (UDF) publicity secretary Murphy Morobe, flanked by UDF president Archie Gumede and Cosatu president Elijah Barayi, said: “We are outraged at Mrs Mandela’s complicity in the recent abductions of Stompie [Seipei]. Had Stompie and his three colleagues not been abducted by Mrs Mandela’s ‘football team,’ he would have been alive today. The Mass Democratic Movement hereby distances itself from Mrs Mandela and her actions.”

Morobe was no patriarchal sexist. He was speaking on behalf of a nonracial coalition of more than 400 organisations of students, women, workers and activists that had been formed in 1983 to launch a final assault on apartheid. Madikizela-Mandela’s refusal to abandon her thuggish comrades posed a major risk to that project.

In reading the riot act to a heroine of the struggle – a Mandela, no less – the UDF was calling power to account. Madikizela-Mandela had a choice: subject herself to accountability or remain “a leader of the people” without an organisation. She made her choice, as did the UDF. We

all have to account for the choices we make.

The problem with portraying individuals who made a contribution as “struggle royalty” and lavishing them with such praise is that they begin to believe it. And like all royalty, they end up acting as if they are the law, and the peasants be damned.

Azhar Cachalia, the human rights lawyer who is now a judge, stressed to the TRC the importance of taking a stand against leaders who become drunk with power. He called the UDF’s collective decision to publicly distance itself from Madikizela-Mandela’s actions “one of the most difficult decisions I have ever made. But it is also one of the proudest moments I can remember.”

This isn’t merely a historical footnote. If we can’t hold Madikizela-Mandela accountable for her legacy, what gives us the right to hold those who are currently assaulting our democracy to account? In some quarters, Jacob Zuma is considered a “struggle hero.” Enough said.

In Njabulo Ndebele’s novel *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, the character Winnie says this about her relationship with the new SA: “For me, reconciliation demands my annihilation. No. You, all of you, have to reconcile not with me, but with the meaning of me. For my meaning is the endless human search for the right thing to do.

“I am your pleasure and your pain, your beauty and your ugliness. Your solution and your mistake. Your hell and your heaven.

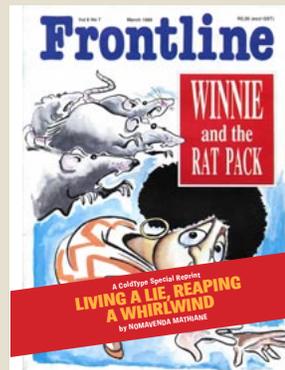
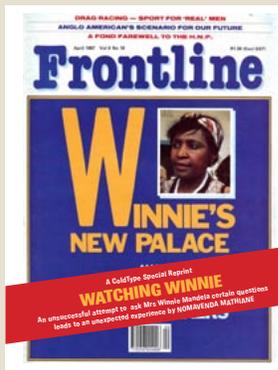
“I am your squatter camp shack and your million-rand mansion. I am all of you who maim and rape. I am all of you who give love and succour. I am your pride and your shame. Your honour and your humiliation.”

Madikizela-Mandela was buried on April 14. May she rest in peace. Let us celebrate the glory of her legacy – and condemn its horrors. **CT**

Palesa Morudu is co-owner of Clarity Editorial in Cape Town. This article first appeared at the website of South Africa’s Business Day newspaper.

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EXCLUSIVE: Read the story as it was published



Exposing Winnie Mandela and her football team

The tale of Winnie Mandela and her football team was first published in the South African magazine *Frontline* in April 1987 and March 1988. Those stories, written by **Nomavenda Mathiane**, are now available exclusively from ColdType (in pdf format and reproduced exactly as they were published) at

www.coldtype.net/mandela.html

BRIAN MITCHELL

Patriotism, racism, and other inhumanities

Patriotism was always immoral and dangerous to humanity. The only true morality is unconditional loyalty and support for all humanity

THE power and importance of original quotes cannot be stressed enough. It is most revealing and undeniable, to let presidents, prime ministers, and military leaders speak for themselves. Although some of these quotes may be dated, the ideology of capitalism remains just as inhuman, predatory, warlike, and genocidal.

“You’re not supposed to be so blind with patriotism that you can’t face reality. Wrong is wrong no matter who does it or says it.” – *US human rights activist Malcolm Little, better known as Malcolm X.*

“Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it.” – *George Bernard Shaw.*

“Patriotism is a lively sense of collective responsibility. Nationalism is a silly cock crowing on its own dunghill.” – *English poet Richard Adlington.*

“If patriotism were defined, not as blind obedience to government, not as submissive worship to flags and anthems, but rather as love of one’s country, one’s fellow citizens (all over the world), as loyalty to the principles of justice and democracy, then patriotism

would require us to disobey our government, when it violated those principles.” – *US professor, historian, author and political activist Howard Zinn.*

“Patriotism is often an arbitrary veneration of real estate above principles.” – *US author George Nathan.*

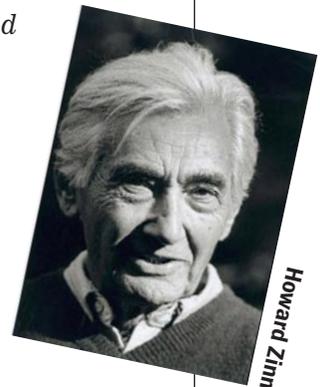
“Patriotism is the principle that will justify the training of wholesale murderers.” – *Russian writer Leo Tolstoy.*

“Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.” – *Samuel Johnson.*

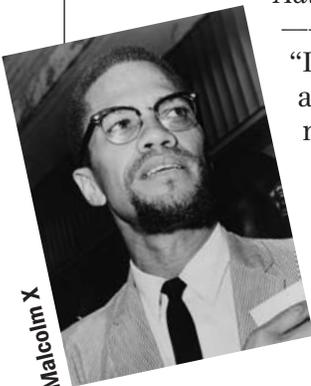
“They wrote in the old days that it is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country. But in modern war, there is nothing sweet nor fitting in your dying. You will die like a dog for no good reason.” – *Author Ernest Hemingway.*

“In time of war the loudest patriots are the greatest profiteers.” – *German socialist August Bebel.*

“The only way to save our empires from the encroachment of the people is to engage in war, and thus substitute national passions for social aspirations.” – *Empress Catherine of Russia, 1729-1796.*



Howard Zinn



Malcolm X

BRIAN MITCHELL

“If I were reincarnated, I would wish to be returned to earth as a killer virus to lower the human population levels.” – *Prince Phillip of Great Britain, to the World Wildlife Fund.*

“My father was a creole, his father a Negro, and his father a monkey; my family, it seems, begins where yours left off.” – *French novelist Alexandre Dumas.*

“National hatred is something peculiar. You will always find it strongest and most violent where there is the lowest degree of culture.” – *Goethe.*

“Negroes in the great numbers that exist here must of necessity be slaves. Theoretical notions of humanity and religion cannot shake the commercial fact that their labour is of great value and cannot be dispensed with. ... Remove them to a secure place and reduce them to a helpless condition.” – *US Army Chief of staff General William Sherman, on US Government policy against the native Americans.*

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“The blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa, morally, socially, and physically ... How long their subjugation may be necessary is known and ordered by a wise Merciful Providence.” – *US revolutionary hero, General Robert E. Lee.*

“I don’t feel we did wrong in taking this great country away from them. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it for themselves. ... I believe in white supremacy until the blacks are educated to a point of responsibility.” – *US actor John Wayne.*

“I am not in favour of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races ... of making voters or jurors of negroes, not of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people ... there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as

much as any other man am in favour of having the superior position assigned to the white race.”

– *US President Abraham Lincoln, 1858.*

“We are the first race in the world, and the more of the world we inherit the better it is for the human race.”

– *Cecil Rhodes.*

“Our new government’s foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man, that slavery – subordination to the superior race – is his natural and normal condition.” – *US Vice President Alexander Stephens, 1861.*

“We insisted on the right to bomb niggers.” – *British Prime Minister Lloyd George, 1930s.*

“The Confederate States may acquire new territory... In all such territory, the institution of negro slavery, as it now exists in the Confederate States, shall be recognised and protected by the Congress and by the territorial government.” – *The US Confederate Constitution.*

“No man has ever been born a Negro hater, a Jew hater, or any other kind of hater. Nature refuses to be involved in such suicidal practices.” – *US labour leader Harry Bridges.*

“The key to the triumph of fascism is its ideological victory over the entire working class. Given the eruption of a severe economic crisis, the door to such an ideological victory can be opened by the active approval or passive tolerance of racism. It is essential that white workers become conscious that historically through their acquiescence in the capitalist-inspired oppression of Blacks they have only rendered themselves more vulnerable to attack.” – *Black American activist Angela Davis, If They Come in the Morning.*

“Young men may join the British Union of Fas-



Cecil Rhodes



John Wayne

BRIAN MITCHELL

cists by writing to the Headquarters, Kings Road, Chelsea, London SW.”

– *Lord Rothermere, owner of Associated Newspapers including the Daily Mail.*

“Whoever does not fight the growth of fascism at these preparatory stages is not in a position to prevent the victory of fascism, but, on the contrary, facilitates that victory.” – *Prime Minister of Bulgaria Georgi Dimitrov.*

“To think that that once almost ruled the world; This time the peoples conquered it but yet Before rejoicing, let us not forget: The womb is fertile still from which it crawled.” – *German writer and playwright Berthold Brecht, on fascism.*

“I hate Indians ... They are a beastly people with a beastly religion.” – *British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.*

“We proceeded systematically, village by village, and we destroyed the houses, filled up the wells, blew down the towers, cut down the great shady trees, burned the crops and broke the reservoirs in punitive devastation.” – *Winston Churchill, on British operations in Afghanistan.*

“We have always found the Irish a bit odd. They refuse to be English.” – *Winston Churchill.*

“Is it compulsory that I have to be naked? I have been naked since I came here.” – *Steve Biko, to visiting magistrate, after being kept naked in his cell for 20 days. The magistrate did not reply. Biko died in jail ten days later.*

“I am not glad and I am not sorry about Mr. Biko. His death leaves me cold... I shall also be sorry if I die. (Laughter follows.)” – *Jimmy Kruger, South African Minister of Police Kruger, to Nationalist Party Congress, September 14 1977.*

“There is a need now for strong and brutal



Winston Churchill

reaction. We need to be accurate about timing, place, and those we hit. If we accuse a family, we need to harm them without mercy, women and children included. ... there is no need to distinguish between guilty and not guilty.” – *Irgun (Zionist terrorist group) leader and first Prime Minister of Israel David Ben Gurion, in his diary, January 1 1948.*

“When we have settled the land, all the Arabs will be able to do about it will be to scurry around like drugged cockroaches in a bottle.”

– *Raphael Eitan, Chief of Staff of Israeli Defence Forces, New York Times April 14 1983.*

“There is no such thing as a Palestinian people ... It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn’t exist.” – *Ukraine-born Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, Sunday Times, June 15 1969.*

“Our children are not born to hate, they are raised to hate.” – *Thomas della Peruta. CT*

Brian Mitchell is a retired London schoolteacher and union activist



Golda Meir

Deception in plain sight

Examining the role of UK media's creation
of a mind-set for war in the Middle East

PART ONE

CORPORATE media in the UK are under a curious kind of military occupation. Almost all print and broadcast media now employ a number of reporters and commentators who are relentless and determined warmongers. Despite the long, unarguable history of US-UK lying on war, and the catastrophic results, these journalists instantly confirm the veracity of atrocity claims made against Official Enemies, while having little or nothing to say about the proven crimes of the US, UK, Israel and their allies. They shriek with a level of moral outrage from which their own government is forever spared. They laud even the most obviously biased, tinpot sources blaming the “Enemy,” while dismissing out of hand the best scientific researchers, investigative journalists and academic sceptics who disagree.

Anyone who challenges this strange bias is branded a “denier,” “pro-Saddam,” “pro-Gaddafi,” “pro-Assad.” Above all, one robotically repeated word is generated again and again: “Apologist ... Apologist ... Apologist.”

Claims of a chemical weapons attack on Douma, Syria, on April 7 offered yet another textbook example of this reflexive warmongering. Remarkably, the alleged attack came just days after US president Donald Trump had declared of Syria: “I want to get out. I want to bring our

troops back home. I want to start rebuilding our nation.”

The “mainstream” responded as one, with instant certainty, exactly as they had in response to atrocity and other *casus belli* claims in Houla, Ghouta, Khan Sheikhoun and many other cases in Iraq (1990), Iraq (1998), Iraq (2002-2003), Libya and Kosovo.

Once again, the Guardian editors were sure: there was no question of a repetition of the fake justifications for war to secure nonexistent Iraqi WMDs, or to prevent a fictional Libyan massacre in Benghazi. Instead, this was “a chemical gas attack, orchestrated by Bashar al-Assad, that left dead children foaming at the mouth.”

Simon Tisdall, the Guardian’s assistant editor, had clearly decided that enough was enough: “It’s time for Britain and its allies to take concerted, sustained military action to curb Bashar al-Assad’s ability to murder Syria’s citizens at will.”

This sounded like more than another cruise missile strike. But presumably Tisdall meant something cautious and restrained to avoid the terrifying risk of nuclear confrontation with Russia: “It means destroying Assad’s combat planes, bombers, helicopters and ground facilities from the air. It means challenging Assad’s and Russia’s control of Syrian airspace. It means taking out Iranian military bases and batteries in Syria if they are used to prosecute the war.”

But surely after Iraq – when UN weapons inspectors under Hans Blix were prevented from



WHO'S TRUTH?:
A child is treated following an alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma, Syria, on April 7.

— Photo: TV screengrab

completing the work that would have shown that Saddam Hussein possessed no WMD – “we should wait for the intergovernmental Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons inspectors to investigate. After all, as journalist Peter Osborne noted of Trump’s air raids: “When the bombing started the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was actually in Damascus and preparing to travel to the area where the alleged chemical attacks took place.”

Osborne added: “Had we wanted independent verification on this occasion in Syria surely we ourselves would have demanded the OPCW send a mission to Douma. Yet we conspicuously omitted to ask for it.”

Tisdall was having none of it: “Calls to wait for yet another UN investigation amount to irresponsible obfuscation. Only the Syrian regime and its Russian backers have the assets and the motivation to launch such merciless attacks on civilian targets. Or did all those writhing children imagine the gas?”

The idea that only Assad and the Russians had “the motivation” to launch a gas attack simply defied all common sense. And, as we will see, it was not certain that children had been filmed “writhing” under gas attack. Tisdall’s pro-war position was supported by just 22 percent of British people.

Equally gung-ho, the oligarch-owned Evening Standard, edited by veteran newspaperman and politically impartial former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, headlined this plea on the front page: HIT SYRIA WITHOUT A VOTE, MAY URGED

Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland, formerly the paper’s comment editor, also poured scorn on the need for further evidence: “Besides, how much evidence do we need? ... To all but the most committed denialists and conspiracists, Assad’s guilt is clear.”

Freedland could argue that the case for blaming Assad was clear, if he liked, but he absolutely could not argue that disagreeing was a sign of denialist delusion.

Time and again, we encounter these jaw-dropping efforts to browbeat the reader with fake certainty and selective moral outrage. In his piece, Freedland linked to the widely broadcast social media video footage from a hospital in Douma, which showed that Assad was guilty of “inflicting a death so painful the footage is unbearable to watch.” But when we actually click Freedland’s link and watch the video, we do not see anyone dying, let alone in agony, and the video is not in fact unbearable to watch. Like Tisdall’s claim on motivation, Freedland was simply declaring that

black is white.

But many people are so intimidated by this cocktail of certainty and indignation – by the fear that they will be shamed as “denialists” and “apologists” – that they doubt the evidence of their own eyes. In “mainstream” journalism, expressions of moral outrage are offered as evidence of a fiery conviction burning within. In reality, the shrieks are mostly hot air.

In the Observer, Andrew Rawnsley also deceived in plain sight by blaming the Syrian catastrophe on Western inaction: “Syria has paid a terrible price for the west’s disastrous policy of doing nothing.”

However terrible media reporting on the 2003 Iraq war, commentators did at least recognise that the US and Britain were involved. We wrote to Rawnsley, asking how he could possibly not know about the CIA’s billion dollar per annum campaign to train and arm fighters, or about the 15,000 high-tech, US anti-tank missiles sent to Syrian “rebels” via Saudi Arabia.

Rawnsley ignored us, as ever.

Just three days after the alleged attack, the Guardian’s George Monbiot was asked about Douma: “Don’t you smell a set up here though? Craig Murray doesn’t think Assad did it.”

Monbiot replied: “Then he’s a fool.”

Craig Murray responded rather more graciously: “I continue to attract attacks from the “respectable” corporate and state media. I shared a platform with Monbiot once, and liked him. They plainly find the spirit of intellectual inquiry to be a personal affront.”

Monbiot tweeted back: “I’m sorry Craig but, while you have done excellent work on some issues, your efforts to exonerate Russia and Syria of a long list of crimes, despite the weight of evidence, are foolish in the extreme.”

The idea that Murray’s effort has been “to exonerate Russia and Syria of a long list of crimes” is again so completely false, so obviously not what Murray has been doing. But it fits perfectly with the corporate media theme of Cold War-style browbeating: anyone challenging the case for US-UK policy on Syria is an “apologist” for “the enemy.”

If Britain was facing imminent invasion across

the channel from some malignant superpower, or was on the brink of nuclear annihilation, the term “apologist” might have some merit as an emotive term attacking free speech – understandable in the circumstances. But Syria is not at war with Britain; it offers no threat whatsoever. If challenging evidence of Assad’s responsibility is “apologism,” then why can we not describe people accepting that evidence as “Trump apologists,” or “May apologists,” or “Jaysh al-Islam apologists”? The term really means little more than, “I disagree with you” – a much more reasonable formulation.

The cynical, apologetic absurdity of questioning the official narrative has been a theme across the corporate media. In a Sky News discussion, Piers Robinson of Sheffield University urged caution in blaming the Syrian government in the absence of verifiable evidence. In a remarkable response, Alan Mendoza, executive director of the Henry Jackson Society, screeched at him: “Who do you think did it? Was it your mother who did it?”

Again, exact truth reversal – given the lack of credible, verified evidence, it was absurd to declare Robinson’s scepticism absurd.

Mendoza later linked to an article attacking Robinson, and asked: “Why are UK universities allowing such “academics’ – and I use the term advisedly because they are not adhering to any recognised standard when promoting material with no credible sourcing, and often with no citation at all – to work in their institutions?”

In 2011, Mendoza wrote in the Times of Nato’s “intervention” in Libya: “The action in Libya is a sign that the world has overcome the false lessons [sic] of Iraq or of “realism’ in foreign policy.”

The UN had “endorsed military action to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe unfolding.”

In fact, the unfolding “humanitarian catastrophe’ was fake news; Mendoza’s mother needed no alibi. A September 9, 2016 report on the war from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons commented: “Despite his rhetoric, the proposition that Muammar Gaddafi would have ordered the massacre of civilians in Benghazi

was not supported by the available evidence....”

The Times launched a shameful, front-page attack on Robinson and other academics who are not willing to accept US-UK government claims on trust. The Times cited Professor Scott Lucas of Birmingham University: “Clearly we can all disagree about the war in Syria, but to deny an event like a chemical attack even occurred, by claiming they were ‘staged,’ is to fall into an Orwellian world.”

In similar vein, in a second Guardian comment piece on Douma, Jonathan Freedland lamented: “We are now in an era when the argument is no longer over our response to events, but the very existence of those events.” Echoing Soviet propaganda under Stalin, Freedland warned that this was indicative of an intellectual and moral sickness: “These are symptoms of a post-truth disease that’s come to be known as ‘tribal epistemology,’ in which the truth or falsity of a statement depends on whether the person making it is deemed one of us or one of them.”

And this was, once again, truth reversal – given recent history in Iraq and Libya, it was Lucas and Freedland who were falling into an Orwellian fantasy world. Mail on Sunday columnist Peter Hitchens made the obvious point: “Given the folly of the British government over Iraq and Libya, and its undoubted misleading of the public over Iraq, it is perfectly reasonable to suspect it of doing the same thing again. Some of us also do not forget the blatant lying over Suez, and indeed the Gulf of Tonkin.”

Hitchens clearly shares our concern at media performance, particularly that of the Guardian, commenting: “Has Invasion of the Bodysnatchers been re-enacted at Guardian HQ? Whatever the dear old thing’s faults it was never a Pentagon patsy until recently. Rumours of relaunch as The Warmonger’s Gazette, free toy soldier with every issue.”

Hitchens questioned Guardian certainty on Douma: “But if facts are sacred, how can the Guardian be so sure, given that it is relying on a report from one correspondent 70 miles away, and another one 900 miles away.. and some anon-

ymous quotes from people whose stories it has no way of checking?”

He added: “The behaviour of the Guardian is very strange & illustrates just what a deep, poorly-understood change in our politics took place during the Blair years. We now have the curious spectacle of the liberal warmonger, banging his or her jingo fist on the table, demanding airstrikes.”

Indeed, in discussing the prospects for ‘intervention’ in the Guardian, Gaby Hinsliff, former political editor of the Observer, described the 2013 vote that prevented Britain from bombing Syria in August 2013 as “that shameful night in 2013.” Shameful? After previous ‘interventions’ had completely wrecked Iraq and Libya on false pretexts, and after the US regime had been told the evidence was no ‘slam dunk’ by military advisers?

“Some of us do not forget the blatant lying over Suez, and indeed the Gulf of Tonkin”

In the New Statesman, Paul Mason offered a typically nonsensical argument, linking to the anti-Assad website, Bellingcat: “Despite the availability of public sources showing it is likely that a regime Mi-8 helicopter dropped a gas container onto a specific building, there are well-meaning people prepared to share the opinion that this was a ‘false flag,’ staged by jihadis, to pull the West into the war. The fact that so many people are prepared to clutch at false flag theories is, for Western democracies, a sign of how effective Vladimir Putin’s global strategy has been.”

Thus, echoing Freedland’s reference to “denialists and conspiracists,” sceptics can only be idiot victims of Putin’s propaganda.

US media analyst Adam Johnson of FAIR accurately described Mason’s piece as a “mess,” adding: “I love this thing where nominal leftists run the propaganda ball for bombing a country 99 yards then stop at the one yard and insist they don’t support scoring goals, that they in fact oppose war.”

Surprisingly, the Bellingcat website, which publishes the findings of “citizen journalist” investigations, appears to be taken seriously by some very high-profile progressives.

In the Independent, Green Party leader Caroline Lucas also mentioned the Syrian army “Mi-8” helicopters. Why? Because she had read the same Bellingcat blog as Mason, to which she linked: “From the evidence we’ve seen so far it appears that the latest chemical attack was likely by Mi-8 helicopters, probably from the forces of Syria’s murderous President Assad.”

On Democracy Now!, journalist Glenn Greenwald said of Douma: “I think that it’s – the evidence is quite overwhelming that the perpetrators of this chemical weapons attack, as well as previous ones, is the Assad government ...”

This was an astonishing comment. After receiving fierce challenges (not from us), Greenwald partially retracted, tweeting: “It’s live TV. Something [sic – sometimes] you say things less than ideally. I think the most likely perpetrator of this attack is Syrian Govt.”

We wrote to Greenwald (Twitter, April 10, direct message) asking what had persuaded him of Assad’s “likely” responsibility for Douma.

The first piece of evidence he sent us (April 12) was the Bellingcat blog mentioning Syrian government helicopters cited by Mason and Lucas. Greenwald also sent us a report from Reuters, as well as a piece from 2017, obviously prior to the alleged Douma event.

This was thin evidence indeed for the claim made. In our discussion with him, Greenwald then completely retracted his claim (Twitter, April 12, direct message) that there was evidence of Syrian government involvement in the alleged attack. Yes, it’s true that people “say things less than ideally” on TV, but to move from “quite overwhelming” to “likely,” to declaring mistaken the claim that there is evidence of Assad involvement, was bizarre.

Political analyst Ben Norton noted on Twitter: “Reminder that Bellingcat is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which is funded by the US government and is a notori-

ous vehicle for US soft power.”

Norton added: “It acts like an unofficial NATO propagandist, obsessively focusing on Western enemies.”

And: “Bellingcat founder Eliot Higgins is a fellow at the Atlantic Council, which is funded by NATO, US, Saudi, UAE, etc.”

And: “According to Meedan, which helps fund Bellingcat – along with the US government-funded NED – Bellingcat also works with the group Syrian Archive, which is funded by the German government, to jointly produce pro-opposition “research””

And: “The board of the directors for Meedan, which funds Bellingcat, includes Muna AbuSulayman – who led the Saudi oligarch’s Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation – and Wael Fakharany – who was the regional director of Google in Egypt & North Africa (US gov. contractor Google also funds Bellingcat).”

And: “Bellingcat – which gets money from the US gov-funded NED and fixates obsessively on Western enemies – claims to be nonpartisan and impartial, committed to exposing all sides, but a website search shows it hasn’t published anything on Yemen since February 2017.”

Although Bellingcat is widely referenced by corporate journalists, we are unaware of any “mainstream” outlet that has seriously investigated the significance of these issues for the organisation’s credibility as a source of impartial information. As we will see in Part 2, corporate journalism is very much more interested in challenging the credibility of journalists and academics holding power to account.

PART 2

JONATHAN Freedland’s “committed denialists and conspiracists,” and Paul Mason’s victims of Putin’s “global strategy” clutching at “false flag theories,” presumably include Lord West, former First Sea Lord and Chief of Defence Intelligence. In an interview with the BBC, West commented: “President Assad is in the process of winning this civil war. And he was about to take over and

occupy Douma, all that area. He'd had a long, long, hard slog, slowly capturing that whole area of the city. And then, just before he goes in and takes it all over, apparently he decides to have a chemical attack. It just doesn't ring true.

"It seems extraordinary, because clearly he would know that there's likely to be a response from the allies – what benefit is there for his military? Most of the rebel fighters, this disparate group of Islamists, had withdrawn; there were a few women and children left around. What benefit was there militarily in doing what he did? I find that extraordinary. Whereas we know that, in the past, some of the Islamic groups have used chemicals, and of course there would be huge benefit in them labelling an attack as coming from Assad, because they would guess, quite rightly, that there'd be a response from the US, as there was last time, and possibly from the UK and France..."

Shut down by a Sky News journalist 30 seconds after he started saying the wrong thing

"We do know that the reports that came from there were from the White Helmets – who, let's face it, are not neutrals; you know, they're very much on the side of the disparate groups who are fighting Assad – and also the World Health Organisation doctors who are there. And again, those doctors are embedded in amongst the groups – doing fantastic work, I know – but they're not neutral. And I am just a little bit concerned, because as we now move to the next phase of this war, if I were advising some of the Islamist groups – many of whom are worse than Daish – I would say: "Look, we've got to wait until there's another attack by Assad's forces – particularly if they have a helicopter overhead, or something like that, and they're dropping barrel bombs – and we must set off some chlorine because we'll get the next attack from the allies..." And it is the only way they've got, actually, of stopping the inevitable victory of Assad."

Another senior military figure, Major General

Jonathan Shaw, former commander of British forces in Iraq (his responsibilities have included chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear policy), was shut down by a Sky News journalist 30 seconds after he started saying the wrong thing:

"The debate that seems to be missing from this... was what possible motive might have triggered Syria to launch a chemical attack at this time in this place? You know, the Syrians are winning... Don't take my word for it. Take the American military's word. General Vergel [sic – Votel], the head of Centcom – he said to Congress the other day, 'Assad has won this war, and we need to face that.'

"Then you've got last week the statement by Trump – or tweet by Trump – that America has finished with ISIL and we were going to pull out soon, very soon.

"And then suddenly you get this..."

At which point Shaw's sound was cut and the interview terminated. Peter Hitchens asked: "Can anyone tell me what was so urgent on Sky News, which made it necessary to cut this distinguished general off in mid-sentence?"

Sky News claimed they had to take an ad break.

Also taking a more cautious view than Tisdall, Freedland, Rawnsley, Lucas, Mendoza, Monbiot, Mason and the Guardian editors, is James 'Mad Dog' Mattis, the US Secretary of Defence, who said: "I believe there was a chemical attack and we are looking for the actual evidence."

Only "looking" for actual evidence?

"As each day goes by — as you know, it is a nonpersistent gas — so it becomes more and more difficult to confirm it."

The evidence clearly, then, had not yet been found and the claims had not yet been confirmed.

Peter Ford, former British ambassador to Syria, voiced scepticism:

"The Americans have failed to produce any evidence beyond what they call newspaper reports and social media, whereas Western journalists who have been in Douma and

produced testimony from witnesses – from medics with names so they can be checked – to the effect that the Syrian version is correct.”

Before Trump’s latest attack, Scott Ritter, former chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq, made the point that mattered: “The bottom line, however, is that the United States is threatening to go to war in Syria over allegations of chemical weapons usage for which no factual evidence has been provided. This act is occurring even as the possibility remains that verifiable forensic investigations would, at a minimum, confirm the presence of chemical weapons...”

Even a BBC journalist managed some short-lived scepticism. Riam Dalati tweeted:

“Sick and tired of activists and rebels using corpses of dead children to stage emotive scenes for Western consumption.

“Then they wonder why some serious journos are questioning part of the narrative.

“#Douma #ChemicalAttack #EasternGhouta’

The tweet was quickly deleted.

Craig Murray wrote: ‘For the FCO, I lived and worked in several actual dictatorships. The open bias of their media presenters and the tone of their propaganda operations was – always – less hysterical than the current output of the BBC. The facade is not crumbling, it’s tumbling.’

Veteran Middle East journalist Robert Fisk visited Douma and reported his findings in the Independent. He spoke to a senior doctor in the clinic where victims of the alleged chemical attack had been brought for treatment. Dr Ra-haibani told Fisk what had happened that night:

“I was with my family in the basement of my home 300 metres from here on the night but all the doctors know what happened. There was a lot of shelling [by government forces] and aircraft were always over Douma at night – but on this night, there was wind and huge dust clouds began to come into the basements and cellars where people lived. People began to arrive here suffering from hypoxia, oxygen loss. Then someone at the door, a ‘White Helmet,’ shouted ‘Gas!’, and a panic began. People started throwing wa-

ter over each other. Yes, the video was filmed here, it is genuine, but what you see are people suffering from hypoxia – not gas poisoning.”

Not gas poisoning? Why was this not immediately headline news in the “mainstream” press and on BBC News? In fact, almost throughout the “MSM,” it was quietly buried. The glaring exception was an article in the Times with the pejorative headline: Critics Leap On Reporter Robert Fisk’s Failure To Find Signs Of Gas Attack

The piece suggested that there were big question marks over Fisk’s record: “Fisk is no stranger to controversy.”

A list of Fisk’s “controversies” followed. There was no mention that, among many accolades, the Arabic-speaking Fisk has won Amnesty International press awards three times, the Foreign Reporter of the Year award seven times and the Journalist of the Year award twice.

In an article by openDemocracy, Philip Hammond, professor of media and communications at London South Bank University, observed that: “In seeking to close down such dissident thought, Times journalists are acting, not as neutral defenders of truth, but as partisan advocates for a particular understanding of the war.”

A Guardian article by diplomatic editor Patrick Wintour and world affairs editor Julian Borger commented of Douma: “A group of reporters, many favoured by Moscow, were taken to the site on Monday. They either reported that no weapon attack had occurred or that the victims had been misled by the White Helmets civilian defence force into mistaking a choking effect caused by dust clouds for a chemical attack.”

Not only was Fisk not mentioned by name, he was lumped in with reporters “favoured by Moscow.” Jonathan Cook’s observation said it all: “They managed the difficult task of denigrating his account while ignoring the fact that he was ever there.”

In the Intercept, columnist Mehdi Hasan wrote an open letter addressed to “those of you on the anti-war far left who have a soft spot for the dictator in Damascus: Have you lost your minds? Or have you no shame?” The piece began:

“Dear Bashar al-Assad Apologists,
“Sorry to interrupt: I know you’re very busy

right now trying to convince yourselves, and the rest of us, that your hero couldn't possibly have used chemical weapons to kill up to 70 people in rebel-held Douma on April 7. Maybe Robert Fisk's mysterious doctor has it right – and maybe the hundreds of survivors and eyewitnesses to the attack are all 'crisis actors.'”

So, Fisk's evidence with its “mysterious doctor” was clearly worthless, something shameless “apologists” were using to try and convince themselves of an absurdity. Hasan named no other names, but readers could guess from the many smear pieces in the Times, Huffington Post, on the BBC, and spread by the likes of Oliver Kamm, George Monbiot and Alan Mendoza.

Hasan portrayed Assad as a satanic figure while the US and its allies – countries that have sent 15,000 high-tech anti-tank missiles, as well as billions of dollars of other weapons and training to fighters in Syria – are mere “meddlers.” The jihadists are “rebels” (a generally noble term), not fanatical invaders from Libya and Iraq. Hasan referenced biased sources including Ken Roth of Human Rights Watch, Martin Chulov of the Guardian, and the White Helmets.

The Intercept's co-editor, Glenn Greenwald, defended the piece: “There is a meaningful debate to be had on Syria and, as I've said before, most media outlets (including us) have been quite one-sided about it. That said, Mehdi's article, well-documented though it was, didn't name anyone who guilty of loving Assad so I'm not sure who is offended.”

We replied: “Mehdi's article, well-documented though it was, didn't name anyone.' That's the problem. Hasan's article arrives in the context of a cross-spectrum, name-and-shame smear campaign making similar points.”

Political analyst Ian Sinclair declared Hasan's article a “Necessary and important piece.”

It wasn't “necessary” to damn Assad yet again – the world's corporate media have been packed with news and comment pieces doing exactly that for years. As for the need to expose left “apologists” – as we have seen, corporate media are currently mounting a fierce campaign tar-

getting leftist university academics, apparently with the intention of getting them fired.

The question of importance is less clear-cut. The piece will, of course, have no effect whatsoever on Assad, whom Western “apologists” on “the anti-war far left” would be powerless to influence even if they came round to Hasan's view. On the other hand, as a purported “leftist,” Hasan's piece is important as ammunition for foreign policy warmongers, neocons and others.

Thus, Jonathan Freedland tweeted: “Strong piece from @mehdirhasan”

George Monbiot: “To all those who have been trying to persuade me that the Assad government is simply maintaining order, please read this excellent article by @mehdirhasan #Syria”

Oliver Kamm of The Times: “‘Is this atrocity denial really necessary?’ Well said by Mehdi on the extraordinary, scandalous spectacle of people purporting to be anti-imperialists while denying the crimes of Assad.”

Hasan's piece is important as ammunition for foreign policy warmongers and neocons

Hasan, of course, knew his article would receive this kind of favourable attention, and he has form in reaching out to this audience. In 2010, whilst senior political editor at the New Statesman, he wrote a letter offering his services to Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre:

“I have always admired the paper's passion, rigour, boldness and, of course, news values. I believe the Mail has a vitally important role to play in the national debate, and I admire your relentless focus on the need for integrity and morality in public life, and your outspoken defence of faith, and Christian culture, in the face of attacks from militant atheists and secularists. I also believe ... that I could be a fresh and passionate, not to mention polemical and contrarian, voice on the comment and feature pages of your award-winning newspaper. For the record, I am not a Labour tribalist and am often ultra-critical of the left – especially on social and moral issues, where my fellow leftists and liberals have

lost touch with their own traditions and with the great British public ... I could therefore write pieces for the Mail critical of Labour and the left, from 'inside' Labour and the left (as the senior political editor at the New Statesman)."

Because, as we all know, being "ultra-critical" of the left "from 'inside' Labour and the left" – for example, asking "the anti-war far left who have a soft spot for the dictator in Damascus: Have you lost your minds? Or have you no shame?" – carries enormous weight.

Hasan's angry mockery of doubters on Douma is ironic indeed, given his own record on Libya. At a crucial time in March 2011, with NATO jets bombing Gaddafi's troops, Hasan commented: "The innocent people of Benghazi deserve protection from Gaddafi's murderous wrath."

The reality is that the claim was "not supported by the available evidence."

Fisk's account, irrationally scorned by Hasan, was backed by on-the-ground testimony from reporter Pearson Sharp from One America News Network: "Not one of the people that I spoke to in that neighbourhood said that they had seen anything, or heard anything, about a chemical attack on that day ... they didn't see or hear anything out of the ordinary."

As far as we could tell, there was nothing on the flagship BBC News at Six and Ten about any of this testimony from doctors and residents claiming that there was no evidence of a chemical attack in Douma on April 7. It is shocking that the BBC ignored evidence supplied from Syria by Fisk – one of Britain's finest journalists – when it has cited hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times evidence supplied by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, run by a clothes shop owner in Coventry who supports regime change in Syria.

On BBC News at Ten on April 15, presenter Mishal Husain, Middle East editor Jeremy Bowen and political editor Laura Kuenssberg discussed the missile strikes on Syria and the political fallout here at home. There was no mention that the strikes had taken place just as OPCW inspectors had arrived in Damascus. Nor was there any discussion of expert opinion from in-

ternational lawyers contradicting the government's assertion that the attacks were legal. A group of international law experts warned: "We are practitioners and professors of international law. Under international law, military strikes by the United States of America and its allies against the Syrian Arab Republic, unless conducted in self-defense or with United Nations Security Council approval, are illegal and constitute acts of aggression."

Meanwhile, the BBC joined the McCarthyite witch-hunt against anyone challenging the official narrative. In a piece titled, Syria War: The Online Activists Pushing Conspiracy Theories, an anonymous BBC journalist commented: "Despite the uncertainty about what happened in Douma, a cluster of influential social media activists is certain that it knows what occurred."

Of course, the irony is that an incomparably bigger and better funded "cluster of influential" state-corporate media has been vociferously claiming certainty about what is happening in Syria; not least 100 percent conviction of Assad's guilt for a string of chemical weapon attacks.

We have no idea who was responsible for the event in Douma – we don't know even if there was a chemical weapons attack. Our point is not that credible, sceptical voices are right, but that they should be heard.

On April 12, novelist Malcolm Pryce sent us this poignant tweet: "I remember in the run-up to the Iraq War a friend I had known all my life said to me, 'We must do something about this monster in Iraq.' I said, 'When did you first think that?' He answered honestly, 'A month ago.'"

This is the power of the corporate media to shape the public mind it is supposed to serve. But to achieve this effect, it must present a black and white view of the world – "we" are "good," "they" are "bad," "we" are "certain," "they" are morally bewildered "apologists." When reality threatens to get in the way, when there is no choice, an increasingly extreme "mainstream" will resort to deception in plain sight. **CT**

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Julian Assange:
Photo: Espen Moe

The Assad-loving conspiracy theorists

The global capitalist ruling class do not care about the facts or the truth. Their tactics are solely intended to define the boundaries of political debate

19

So the global capitalist ruling classes' War on Dissent is now in full swing. With their new and improved official narrative, "Democracy versus the Putin-Nazis," successfully implanted in the public consciousness, the corporatocracy have been focusing their efforts on delegitimizing any and all forms of deviation from their utterly absurd and increasingly paranoid version of reality.

The Democratic Party is suing Russia, the Trump campaign, and Wikileaks (seriously ... they've filed an actual lawsuit in an actual court of law and everything) for launching "an all-out assault on democracy" by publishing the DNC's emails, "an act of unprecedented treachery," according to party chairman Tom Perez. Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, having already spent the last six years in a room in the Ecu-

dorian embassy in London to avoid being arrested by the British authorities, extradited to the United States, and imprisoned for the remainder of his natural life, has been cut off from the outside world in order to prevent him from further "interfering" with democracy by expressing his opinions.

In Syria, where the "international community" has been battling the "global terrorist threat" by supporting moderate jihadist militias intent on overthrowing the government and establishing a fundamentalist theocracy, the corporate media have been hard at work sanctifying the official story of the "chemical weapons attack" in Douma. According to this story, Bashar al-Assad, an uncooperative brutal dictator whom the corporatocracy has been trying to replace with a more cooperative brutal dictator, dropped a lot of chlorine gas bombs (and possibly sarin, the deadly

nerve agent), onto a house full of innocent babies. He did this on the eve of victory over those moderate jihadist militias the “international community” has been supporting in their eight-year attempt to take over his country, slaughter him and his entire family, mount their severed heads on spikes, implement nationwide Sharia law, and then go out hunting homosexuals and heretics to gruesomely behead on YouTube. The evacuation of these freedom fighters was already being negotiated, but Assad didn’t want to miss his last chance to sadistically gas a lot of women and children and have the Western corporate media broadcast his war crimes throughout the world, or something more or less along those lines.

This gratuitous baby-gassing massacre could not be allowed to go unpunished, so Emmanuel Macron and other senior members of the “international community” hauled Trump off a golf course somewhere (or wrestled him away from the Gorilla Channel) and ordered him to order a completely pointless \$150-million dollar series of “retaliatory” missile strikes on assorted uninhabited buildings containing zero chemical weapons and of absolutely no strategic value. The corporate media and their paid menagerie of military experts and other talking heads took to the airwaves to celebrate this demonstration of international “resolve,” as did investors in Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, and General Dynamics.

The celebrations were short-lived, however, as the corporate media needed to immediately turn their attention to aggressively countering the malicious disinformation campaign being waged by the infamous International Putin-Nazi Propaganda Network (ie, anyone capable of critical thinking). Reports by journalists actually in Syria, like Robert Fisk of the Independent, casting doubt on the official story needed to be strenuously ignored, ridiculed, and delegitimised. Fisk, a respected, award-winning journalist who has covered the Middle East for over four decades, had clearly been duped by his Putin-Nazi minders into publishing pro-Assad propaganda. Just as clearly, any actual Syrians

contradicting the official story (which the corporate media had scrupulously fact-checked with the US military and intelligence agencies) had been intimidated into doing so by Putin-Nazi-Assadist death squads.

But Fisk and the Syrians are small potatoes compared to the discord-sowing threat posed by the International League of Assad-Loving Twitter Conspiracy Theorists, a decentralised network of “anti-Western,” “pro-Assad,” extremist traitors led by people like Sarah Abdallah, a shadowy figure whose current whereabouts the BBC is still trying to pinpoint (and presumably report to MI6), and Vanessa Beeley, an independent journalist who writes about Syria for an “extreme right” website, speaks to “fringe groups,” and has appeared on RT, which the BBC is at pains to remind us is a “state-owned” media organisation.

This nefarious network of dissension-sowers is also responsible for the “4,000 percent increase” in Putin-Nazi propaganda in the wake of the Poisoned Porridge Attack that “Russia” carried out in Salisbury in March, in which operatives allegedly smeared the doorknob of a former Russian intelligence officer and his daughter with oatmeal laced with Novichok, “the deadliest nerve agent ever devised,” instead of, well, you know, just shooting the guy, or throwing him out of an upper-floor window. Despite the potency of this lethal nerve agent, which, for some reason, “can only be made in Russia,” both victims are expected to completely recover. Tragically, their cat and guinea pigs, having also managed to survive the attack, were slowly starved to death by the police, presumably out of an abundance of caution.

The cat and guinea pigs were slowly starved to death by the police

In any event, according to the diligent, authoritative investigative journalists at the Guardian, following this brazen porridge attack, “automated bots” “based in Russia,” such as @Partisan-girl and @Ian56789, spread Putin-Nazi disinform-

mation to millions of unknowing Twitter users in an attempt to “undermine the international system” (whatever that’s supposed to mean). As it turns out, @Partisangirl is a human being and not a robot at all, and @Ian56789 is a feisty British pensioner who is tired of being routinely lied to by the government and the corporate media ... unless, of course, he’s a sleeper agent just posing as a feisty pensioner, which he hasn’t been able to conclusively disprove to the satisfaction of the corporate media.

People will conform to the most absurd and paranoid nonsense you can possibly imagine

These are just a few examples of how the global capitalist ruling classes and their mouthpieces in the corporate media have been generating an atmosphere of mindless hysteria and paranoia in the service of drawing “a line in the sand” between neoliberalism (ie, global capitalism) and any and all forms of dissent therefrom. They’ve been at this, relentlessly, for almost two years now, since they recognised they were being confronted with a bona fide widespread “populist” insurgency against the hegemony of global capitalism, not just in the Greater Middle East, but right in the heart of the Western empire.

I’ve been writing about this since 2016, so I’m not going to try to rehash all that here. The short version is, Western societies are being divided into two opposing camps ... two extremely broad ideological camps, both of which encompass the traditional political division into left and right. Let’s call camp number one “the Normals” (ie, those who support and conform to the values and ideology of global capitalism, regardless of whether they identify as conservatives, liberals, neoliberals, neoconservatives, or anything else). Let’s call camp number two “the Extremists” (ie, those opposing global capitalism, or not conforming to its ideology, regardless of whether they identify as socialists, communists, anarchists, fascists, anti-fascists, jihadists, or whatever).

While, of course, real political conflict still takes place within each of these two broad camps, the global capitalist ruling classes are less concerned with the “left/right” equation than they are with “Normal/Extremist” equation. This is the battle they are fighting currently. Short some sort of miraculous event, it is a battle they are going to win. They are going to win it by demonising anyone opposing global capitalism as one or another form of “extremist” ... an Islamic terrorist, an Antifa terrorist, a white supremacist, a Black identity extremist, an anti-Semite, a conspiracy theorist, an Assad apologist, a Russian bot, a Putin-Nazi propagandist ... or whatever. It doesn’t really matter which labels they use. The point is, anyone not conforming to the global capitalist version of reality is an enemy of all that is normal and good.

In an atmosphere of mass hysteria and paranoia (such as the one we’re living in at the moment), the authorities’ narratives do not have to make sense, or stand up to any type of real scrutiny. Their primary purpose is not to deceive, but rather to demarcate an ideological territory of acceptable belief, expression, and emotion to which “normal” people are expected to conform. Beyond the boundaries of that territory lies the outer darkness of “abnormality” and “extremism,” which no “normal” person wants anything to do with. To avoid being cast into this outer darkness, people will conform to the most absurd and paranoid nonsense you can possibly imagine. The global capitalist ruling classes know this, which is why they don’t care if you disprove their narratives on Twitter or some “disreputable” website they’ve rendered virtually invisible anyway. They are not debating the facts or the truth ... they are marking the boundaries of that “normal” territory, and herding frightened people into it.

CT

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HARRY BENSON



22

The best President America never had

Photobook revives memories of Bobby Kennedy's life, and tragic death at the height of his presidential campaign in 1965



Top: On the Snake River, Idaho, Jul 3 2, 1966

Above: Bobby dives into the crowd, smiling, to shake hands with people. They all wanted to touch him. Fifth Ave, New York, 1968.

HARRY BENSON



23



Above: RFK's speaks to supporters at the Ambassador Hotel Ballroom, Los Angeles, California, on June 5, 1968. Moments later he was shot. Left: A campaign worker stands where Kennedy fell.

As a friend, advisor, and attorney general to his brother, John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy stood at the heart of Washington politics. He is remembered as a compassionate, articulate, and optimistic man – friend of the poor, civil rights advocate, and a champion for peace.

The images in photojournalist Harry Benson's re-issued book **RFK: A Photographer's Journal** (powerHouse Books, \$35) capture family outings and outdoor adventures along with RFK's presidential run in 1968, from the announcement of his candidacy on St. Patrick's Day, his days on the campaign trail, through to his assassination in Los Angeles on June 5, and the funeral procession to Arlington Cemetery. Benson reveals glimpses of RFK's campaign, the chaos of that fateful night in LA, and the mourning for the man whom many people still consider the best president the US never had. **CT**

FRIDA BERRIGAN

Gunning Down the Easter Bunny

The disturbing weaponisation of everyday life

GUNS. In a country with more than 300-million of them, a country that's recently been swept up in a round of protests over the endless killing sprees they permit, you'd think I might have had more experience with them.

As it happens, I've held a gun only once in my life. I even fired it. I was in perhaps tenth grade and enamoured with an Eagle Scout who loved war reenactments. On weekends, he and his friends camped out, took off their watches to get into the spirit of the War of 1812, and dressed in homemade muslin underclothes and itchy uniforms. I was there just one weekend. Somehow my pacifist parents signed off on letting

their daughter spend the day with war re-enactors. Someone lent me a period gown, brown and itchy and ill-fitting. We women and girls spent an hour twisting black gunpowder into newspaper scraps. I joked that the newspaper was anachronistic – the previous week's Baltimore Sun – but no one laughed.

A man came by with a long gun, an antique, resting on the shoulder of his jerkin to collect our "bullets" and he must have read the gun fear written on my face.

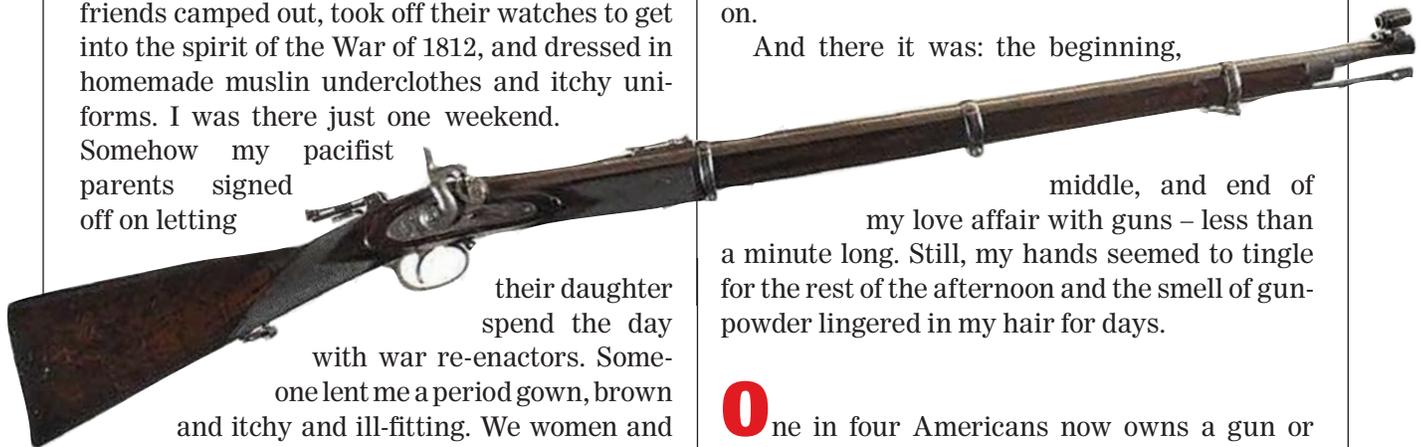
"Wanna give it a try?" he asked.

"Sure," I said, stumbling to my feet, pushing my gown out of the way, and trying to act as if I didn't have broken-rifle patches, symbols of the pacifist War Resisters League, all over my real clothes. I felt a surge of adrenaline as I took the heavy weapon in my way-too-small hands. He showed me how to wrestle it into position, aim it, and fire. There were no bullets, just one of my twists of powder, but it made a terrifying noise. I shrieked and came close to dropping the weapon.

And there it was: the beginning,

middle, and end of my love affair with guns – less than a minute long. Still, my hands seemed to tingle for the rest of the afternoon and the smell of gunpowder lingered in my hair for days.

One in four Americans now owns a gun or lives in a household with guns. So how strange that, on that day in the late 1980s, I saw a real gun for the first and last time. I grew up in inner city Baltimore. I've worked at soup kitchens and homeless shelters all over the East Coast and stayed at dozens of Catholic Worker Houses around the country – Providence, Camden, Syracuse, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles – every one in a "tough" neighbourhood. I lived in Red Hook,



Brooklyn, in the mid-1990s, before you could get a \$4 coffee or a zucchini scone on Van Brunt Street, before there was an Ikea or a Fairway in the neighbourhood. All those tough communities, those places where President Trump imagines scenes of continual “American carnage,” and I’ve never again seen a gun.

He just wanted to make sure his son was going to be safe and I was grateful that he asked

Still, people obviously own them and use them in staggering numbers and in all sorts of destructive ways. Sensing that they’re widespread beyond my imagination, my husband and I have started asking the parents of our kids’ school friends if they own guns when we arrange play dates or sleepovers. We learned this from the father of a classmate of my 11-year-old stepdaughter Rosena. The dad called to make the arrangements for his son to come over after school. We talked logistics and food allergies and then he paused. “Now, I am sorry if this is intrusive,” he said, “but I do ask everyone: Do you keep guns in your house?” He sounded both uncomfortable and resolute.

I almost choked on my urge to say, “Don’t you know who I am?” In certain odd corners at least, my last name, Berrigan, is still synonymous with muscular pacifism and principled opposition to violence and weaponry of just about any kind, right up to the nuclear kind. But that dad probably didn’t even know my last name and it probably wouldn’t have meant a thing to him if he had. He just wanted to make sure his son was going to be safe and I was grateful that he asked – rather than just assuming, based on our Volvo-driving, thrift-shop-dressing, bumper-sticker-sporting lifestyle, that we didn’t.

“You know how kids are,” he said after I assured him that we were a gun-free household. “They’ll be into everything.”

And right he is. Kids are “into everything,” which is undoubtedly why so many of them end up with guns in their hands or bullets in their bodies.

“Do you question everyone about their guns?” I asked the dad. He replied that he did and, if they answered yes, then he’d ask whether those weapons were locked away, whether the ammunition was stored separately, and so on.

“Thank you so much. I think we need to start doing that too,” I said as our conversation was ending and indeed I have ever since.

It’s a subject worth raising, however awkward the conversation that follows may be, because two-million kids in this country live in homes where guns are not stored safely and securely. So far this year, 59 kids have been hurt in gun accidents of one sort or another. On average, every 34 hours in our great nation a child is involved in an unintentional shooting incident, often with tragic consequences.

The National Rifle Association’s classic old argument, “guns don’t kill people, people kill people,” takes on a far harsher edge when you’re talking about a seven-year-old accidentally killing his nine-year-old brother with a gun they found while playing in an empty neighbouring house in Arboles, Colorado.

Two weeks after we learn this new parenting life skill in this oh-so-new century of ours, my husband Patrick is on the phone with a mom arranging a sleepover for Rosena. I hear him fumble his way through the gun question. From his responses, I assume the mom is acknowledging that they do have guns. Then there’s the sort of long, awkward silence that seems part and parcel of such conversations before Patrick finally says, “Well, okay, thanks for being so honest. I appreciate that.”

He hangs up and looks at me. “They do keep guns for hunting and protection, but they’re locked up and out of sight,” he tells me. “The mom says that the kids have never tried to get at the guns, but she understands the dangers.” (He had heard in her voice apology, embarrassment, and worry that the guns might mean no sleepover.)

I grimaced in a way that said: I don’t think Rosena should go and he responded that he thought she should. The two of them then had a

long conversation about what she should do and say if she sees a gun. She slept over and had a great time. A lesson in navigating difference, trusting our kid, and phew... no guns made an appearance. And we know more about our neighbours and our community.

He made popping noises with his mouth and held his hand as if he were grasping a toy gun

My son Seamus, five, received an Easter basket from a family friend. He was happy about the candy of course and immediately smitten with the stuffed bunny, but he was over the moon about what he called his new “carrot gun.” It wasn’t a toy gun at all, but a little basket that popped out a light ball when you pressed a button.

The idea was that you’d catch the ball, put it back in, and do it again. But that wasn’t the game my kids played. They promptly began popping it at each other. His little sister Madeline, four, was in tattle mode almost immediately. “Mom, Seamus is shooting me with his carrot gun!”

“Mom, mom, mom,” he responded quickly, “it’s a pretend play gun, not a real play gun. It’s okay.” He made popping noises with his mouth and held his hand as if he were grasping a genuine forbidden toy gun. It was an important distinction for him. He’d been a full-throated participant in the March for Our Lives in Boston on March 24, chanting with the rest of us “What do we want? Gun Control! When do we want it? NOW!” for four hours straight.

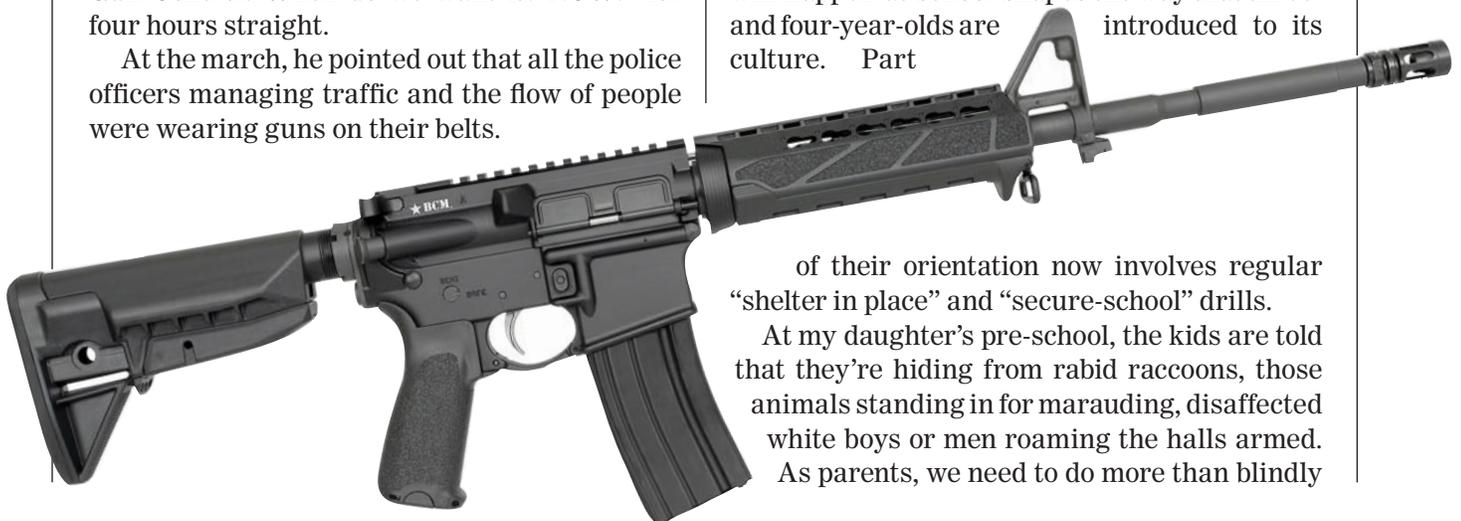
At the march, he pointed out that all the police officers managing traffic and the flow of people were wearing guns on their belts.

“I see a gun, Mom,” he kept saying, or “That police officer has a gun, Mom.”

Repeatedly, he noticed the means to kill – and then four days after that huge outpouring of youth-led activism for gun security, Stephon Clark was indeed gunned down in his grandmother’s backyard in Sacramento, California. The police officers who shot him were looking for someone who had been breaking car windows in the neighbourhood and they fired 20 shots into the dark in his direction. The independent autopsy found that he had been hit eight times, mostly in his back. Clark turned out to be holding only a cellphone, though the police evidently mistook it for a tool bar, which could have done them no harm from that distance, even if he had wielded it as a weapon.

Maybe the police saw a weapon the same way my five-year-old son sees one. He can make a stick or just about anything else, including that little basket, into a “gun” and so evidently can the police. Police officers have killed black men and boys holding pipes, water hose nozzles, knives, and yes, toy guns, too.

Parkland (17 killed, 14 wounded). Newtown (28 killed, 2 wounded). Columbine (15 killed, 21 injured). School shootings are now treated as a structural part of our lives. They have become a factor in school architecture, administrator training, city and state funding, and security plans. The expectation that something terrible will happen at school shapes the way that three- and four-year-olds are introduced to its culture. Part



of their orientation now involves regular “shelter in place” and “secure-school” drills.

At my daughter’s pre-school, the kids are told that they’re hiding from rabid raccoons, those animals standing in for marauding, disaffected white boys or men roaming the halls armed. As parents, we need to do more than blindly

accept that these traumatic exercises are preparing our kids for the worst and helping them survive. Kids are vulnerable little beings and there are countless dangers out there, but they have a one-in-600-million chance of dying in a school shooting. We endanger them so much more by texting while driving them home from school.

Power is about never having to say you're sorry, never being held accountable

After every episode of violence at a school – or in the adult world at a church, night club, concert, movie theatre, or workplace like San Bernardino's Inland Regional Center or the YouTube headquarters – there's always a huge chorus of "Why"? Pundits look at the shooter's history, his (it's almost always a guy) trauma, and whatever might be known about his mental health. They speculate on his (or, in the rare case of those YouTube shootings, her) political leanings, racial hatreds, and ethnic background. The search for why can lead to hand wringing about hard-driving rock music or nihilistic video games or endemic bullying – all of which could indeed be factors in the drive to kill significant numbers of unsuspecting people – but never go far enough or deep enough.

Two questions are answered far too infrequently: Where do the guns come from? Where does violence come from?

Guns of all sizes and description are manufactured and sold in the USA in remarkable numbers, far more than can be legally absorbed in our already gun-saturated land, so thousands of them move instead into the gray and black markets. Evidence of this trend shows up repeatedly in Mexico, where 70 percent of the weapons seized in crimes between 2009 and 2014 turned out to be made in El Norte. We have an estimated 300-million guns in this country, making us first by far in the world in gun ownership and some of them couldn't conceivably be used for "hunting." They are military-style weapons meant to tear human flesh and nothing but that – like the AR-15 that 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz legally bought and

used in his grim Parkland shooting spree.

This country, in other words, is a cornucopia of guns, which – honestly, folks – doesn't have a damn thing to do with the Second Amendment.

Where does the violence come from? I've already shared my inexperience with guns. Now, let me add to it my inexperience with violence. I don't know what it's like to have to react in a split second to or flee an advancing perpetrator. No one has ever come at me with a gun or a knife or a pipe, or anything else for that matter. And I count myself lucky for that. In a nation in which, in 2016 alone, 14,925 people were killed due to gun violence and another 22,938 used a gun to kill themselves, it's a significant thing to be able to say.

And yet, I know that I'm the product of violence (as well as the urge, in my own family, to protest and stop it): the violence of white privilege, the violence of American colonialism, the violence of American superpowerdom on a global scale... and that's no small thing. It's a lot easier to blame active-shooter scenarios on poor mental-health screening than on growing up in a world layered with the threat of pervasive violence.

Power is about never having to say you're sorry, never being held accountable. And that's hardly just a matter of police officers shooting black men and boys; it's about the way in which this country is insulated from international opprobrium by its trillion-dollar national security state, a military that doesn't hesitate to divide the whole world into seven US "commands," and a massive, planet-obliterating nuclear arsenal.

And don't think that any of that's just a reflection of Trumpian bombast and brutality either. That same sense of never having to say you're sorry at a global level undergirded Barack Obama's urbane dispassion, George Bush Junior's silver spoon cluelessness, Bill Clinton's folksy accessibility, George Bush Senior's patrician poshness, Ronald Reagan's aura of Hollywood charm, and Jimmy Carter's southern version of the same. We're talking about weapons systems designed to rain down a magnitude of terror unimaginable to the Nikolas Cruzes, Dylann Roofs,

FRIDA BERRIGAN

and Adam Lanzas of the world.

And it doesn't even make us safe! All that money, all that knowledge, all that power put into the designing and displaying of weapons of mass destruction and we remain remarkably vulnerable as a nation. After all, in schools, homes, offices, neighbourhoods across the country, we are being killed by our kids, our friends, our lovers, our police officers, our crumbling roads and bridges, our derauling trains. And then, of course, there are all those guns. Guns meant to destroy. Guns beyond counting.

So what might actually make us safer? After all, people theoretically buy the kind of firepower you might otherwise use only in war and pledge allegiance to the US war machine in search of some chimera of safety. And yet, despite that classic NRA line – “The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is with a good guy with a gun” – are we truly safer in a nation awash in such weaponry with so many scrambling in a state of incipient panic to buy yet more? Are my kids truly on the way to a better life as they practice cowering in their cubbies in darkened classrooms for fear of invading rabid “raccoons”?

Don't you think that true security lies not in our arming ourselves to the teeth against other people – that is, in our disconnection from them – but in our connection to them, to the web of mutuality that has bound societies, small and large, for millennia? Don't you think that we would be more secure and so much less terrified if we found ways to acknowledge and share our relative abundance to meet the needs of others? In a world awash in guns and fears, doesn't our security have to involve trust and courage and always be (at best) a work in progress?

I'm tackling that work in progress in whatever ways I can – with my neighbours, my town, my husband, and most of all my children, educating them in the ways violence scars and all those weapons just increase our journey into hell, never delivering the security they promise. **CT**

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*Frida Berrigan is the author of **It Runs In The Family: On Being Raised By Radicals and Growing Into Rebellious Motherhood**. She lives in New London, Connecticut and writes the **Little Insurrections** blog for www.WagingNonviolence.org – This essay first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com*

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ONE MAGAZINE'S 10-YEAR QUEST FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Before I wound up in Toronto and ColdType, I designed **Frontline** magazine, South Africa's top liberal-left magazine, for 10 years during the 1980s as it battled for justice and equality during the final years of Apartheid. Now, we're digitising Frontline, as a case study of prophecy and history. The first digital issues are now on line, more will follow each month.

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



Read the digital editions of Frontline, exactly as they were published, free of charge, at www.issuu.com/frontline.south

Facing up to the antisemitism question

Why has the media been making so much of supposed antisemitism in the British Labour Party recently? Could their 'concern' be connected to the elections that are taking place this month?

WHAT is antisemitism? My understanding is that it is hatred of, bias against, oppression of, discrimination against or belittling of a Jewish person and/or Jews generally.

This sits tractably with the definition offered by Community Security Trust, self-styled as a charity that protects British Jews from antisemitism: "hatred, bigotry, prejudice or discrimination against Jews." Both formulae are, I venture, relatively easy to comprehend and to apply as tests of words, behaviour and actions.

Resoundingly absent from either definition are the words Israel and Zion. For myself, I find the variations on Zion hazardous to deploy and hence I avoid doing so. Words or actions aimed at Israel only become antisemitic if their purpose is to harm verbally, physically or psychologically the people of Israel in their Jewishness. Criticism of the policies or actions of Benjamin Netanyahu or the government of Israel is emphatically not antisemitic, any more than criticism of Donald Trump or his administration is antiAmerican, of Theresa May or her ministry antiBritish. It is not unknown that apologists for Israeli policies and actions parlay opposition to those policies and actions into antisemitism. That does not make it so.

Also left out of the definitions are the terms Shoah and Holocaust. It should go without saying that the vile hypothesis that the persecutions by the Nazis did not occur or were in some sense

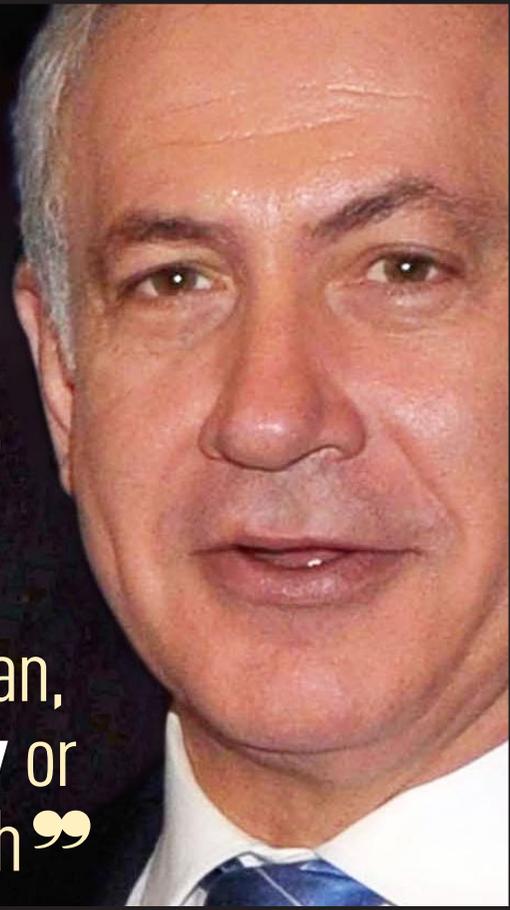
a "hoax" is as gross as any example of misanthropy, propaganda and mendacity. But there is a difficulty here and it resides in the terminology. Both Shoah and Holocaust define the mass murders committed by the Nazis as being exclusively of Jewish people.

However, it is a fact – and it is not antisemitic to state it – that thousands of people who were not Jewish also perished in the concentration camps, and those people are not embraced in the terms Shoah and Holocaust. Prisoners of war, Socialists, Communists, Social Democrats, trade unionists, pacifists, anarchists, deserters, spies, homosexuals, the mentally or physically disabled, Freemasons, Jehovah's Witnesses, dissenting clerics, Romanies, immigrants, indigents, alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes, rapists and common criminals were also rounded up.

This is certainly not to propose that the Jews were not the most numerous of the victims of Nazi atrocities nor that they were not persecuted in the most systematic way. What was particular about the imprisonment and murder of the Jews (also of Romanies) was that they were arrested and transported in families, rather than picked off one by one.

That being said, that the enemies of, and victims of, fascism needed to make and still need to make common cause must never be forgotten. The Lutheran minister Martin Niemöller,

“Criticism of the policies or actions of **Benjamin Netanyahu** (right) or the government of Israel is emphatically not antisemitic, any more than criticism of **Donald Trump** or his administration is antiAmerican, or criticism of **Theresa May** or her government is antiBritish”



who spent seven years incarcerated at Sachsenhausen and Dachau, later spoke these unforgettable words: “First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me.”

Who are the antisemites? Readers of Cold Type hardly require instruction in these matters, but many of those who have involved themselves in the on-going controversy concerning antisemitism evidently do, so it may be necessary to remind ourselves of what is in play here. The rise of right-wing populism and fundamentalism in Europe has contained within it

a strong element of neo-fascism. In the EU, the four members of the Visegrád Group – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – are all governed by right-wing parties, as are Britain, Austria, Spain, Denmark, Croatia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Luxembourg and Cyprus, and Italy will be shortly. Neo-Nazis thrive in many countries, including particularly Germany, Austria, France, Russia, Britain, Pakistan, Estonia, Ukraine, Bosnia, Belgium, Turkey, Greece and the United States. Antisemitism is as intrinsic an ingredient in these groupings as antiSocialism.

So, to the idea presently being peddled about Jeremy Corbyn’s supporters, that Socialists are innately antisemitic. This is a lie. The Valhalla of the left is full of Jews: Rosa Luxemburg, Ernst Bloch, Eric Hobsbawm, Harold Laski,

W. STEPHEN GILBERT

Noam Chomsky, Joe Slovo, Natalia Ginzburg ... not to mention the great hate-figure for Social Democrats, Leon Trotsky, and indeed Karl Marx himself (Marx of course was non-practising. He wrote acutely about pluralism in his 1844 book, *On the Jewish Question*). In sum, Jews are deeply bound into the development of Socialist thought.

Here is a statement that underlines this relationship: “The Jewish Socialists’ Group expresses its serious concern at the rise of antisemitism, especially under extreme right wing governments in central and Eastern Europe, in America under Donald Trump’s presidency and here in Britain under Theresa May’s premiership. The recent extensive survey by the highly respected Jewish Policy Research confirmed that the main repository of antisemitic views in Britain is among supporters of the Conservative Party and UKIP. This political context, alongside declining support for the Tories, reveals the malicious intent behind the latest flimsy accusations of antisemitism against Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party. These accusations have come from the unrepresentative Board of Deputies and the unelected, self-proclaimed ‘Jewish Leadership Council,’ two bodies dominated by supporters of the Tory Party” – posted on the Jewish Socialists’ Group website, March 26th 2018.

The left have also been blackguarded over the Nazis and Shoah. Reacting to a previous outbreak of accusations of antisemitism in 2016, former London mayor Ken Livingstone attempted a gloss on Hitler’s attitude to the mooted creation of Israel that was impossible to categorise seriously as in itself antisemitic, but was certainly a debatable proposition. In a rapidly hysterical climate, though, such debate was not possible. Much worse assaults have been made on the left, including accusations of Holocaust denial. This vile crime is not to be found on the left of politics. Of the 18 British Holocaust deniers identified on Wikipedia, all but four are placed actively on the far right. The exceptions are Michèle Renouf, who appears to have just the one interest; Richard Williamson, a dissenting Catholic bishop; Nicholas Kollerstrom, a serial conspiracy theorist; and David Icke, a notorious crank and espouser of multiple marginal causes. Both Kollerstrom

and Icke are former members of the Green Party – perhaps someone would like to set going a major scandal about that party’s links with antisemitism. And let’s just recall again that Socialists perished in large numbers alongside Jews in the concentration camps.

Why is antisemitism in the British Labour Party an issue now? Simply put, because there are local elections this month and Labour was hitherto expected to do well and the Tories badly. The last time this was an issue was in the run-up to local elections in 2016, the first under Corbyn’s leadership. It’s no coincidence.

Two years ago, Conservative Central Office fed an old story to an anti-Labour blogger who was able to spin it falsely as an example of antisemitism. Corbyn’s enemies in the Labour Party and Labour’s enemies in the Tory press combined to build the matter into a notion that antisemitism was rife in the party as a result of entryism by anti-Israel Trotskyites, whose god-head was Corbyn.

This time, the old story that kicked it off allowed Corbyn himself to be fingered as winking at antisemitism. As CJ Hopkins noted in *ColdType* 158, the mural that Corbyn gallantly defended several years ago was perceived to be antisemitic ... except of course that it wasn’t, unless you know how to twist the cartoon depiction of five bankers, two of whom happen to be Jewish, into a general expression of antisemitism. Cue for allegations of countless expressions of antisemitism by Corbyn supporters, all of them implicitly blessed by the famously anti-racist leader.

It’s easy enough to create a simulacrum of outrage. In a debate on antisemitism in the Commons, the Labour MP John Mann repeatedly cited “a Labour Marxist antisemite ... a leftist antisemite” as having threatened and abused members of his family online. He also specifically accused the pro-Corbyn grouping Momentum, which was founded by Jon Lansman who, it so happens, is Jewish. How does Mann know these abusers were Marxist or leftist? He doesn’t. He assumes it because he is a serial critic of Jeremy



PILING ON THE ABUSE: Recent Daily Mail front pages.

Corbyn. It suits his stance to characterise these abusers in such terms. But he cannot know this to be the case. The hashtag #JC4PM added to the abuse is not evidence. Nor does it show that Corbyn sanctions the sentiments by the supposed supporter. And the use of the so-called false flag has greatly increased in recent years because, particularly in an era when instant “news analysis” is favoured over considered judgment, it has been found to be a highly effective technique.

To try to smear Corbyn as an antisemite is as vile as antisemitism itself. If you need reminding, here is London-based journalist Joseph Finlay: “Jeremy Corbyn is one of the leading anti-racists in parliament – I would go so far to say that he is one of the least racist MPs we have. So naturally Corbyn signed numerous Early Day motions in Parliament condemning antisemitism, years before he became leader and backed the campaign to stop Neo-Nazis from meeting in Golders Green in 2015 ...

“Whenever there has been a protest against racism, the two people you can always guarantee will be there are Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell. Who do you put your trust in – the people who hate antisemitism because they hate all racism, or the people (be they in the Conservative party or the press) who praise Jews whilst engaging in Islamophobia and anti-black racism? The right-wing proponents of the Labour antisemitism narrative seek to divide us into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ minorities – they do not have the well-being of Jews at heart” [The Times of Israel March 26th].

But, because he is deemed to have done insufficient to curb it, Corbyn is found to be complicit

in abuse, whether it be against Jews or women or anyone and everyone else. So a know-nothing pisher (“A young squirt ... a nobody” according to Leo Rosten’s indispensable *The Joys of Yiddish* is picked out at the Palace of Westminster demonstration by the BBC news camera, chanting “O-o-oh Jeremy’s a racist” [March 29th].

What you look for in vain is any suggestion of

what more Corbyn can do about prejudice and abuse. After all, the owners of social media platforms are quite incapable of policing the posts, tweets and blogs of their own users. How can Corbyn halt anonymous abuse, the perpetrators of which are said to run into thousands?

If not the Internet, another medium for discipline is the Labour Party itself. The Party is not Corbyn’s personal fiefdom. It has an unwieldy bureaucracy designed to preserve that awkward ideal, democracy, and it is expected to subscribe to the view that allegations must be proved and defendants found guilty before reparation is extracted. Under the recently retired Iain McNicol as General Secretary of the party, a great many sanctions were handed down against people alleged to have fallen foul of Labour’s membership policy. Many of those sanctions were widely denounced as unjust, designed to try to reduce the votes in favour of Jeremy Corbyn when he was challenged for the leadership. There is a vast backlog of unfinished business.

There are areas, especially in London, where Labour may well suffer in the local elections because of this phony farrago. Happily, the Tories have contrived their own discrimination scandal in the treatment of the Windrush generation, but that’s a story for another day. **CT**

*W Stephen Gilbert is the author of *Jeremy Corbyn – Accidental Hero* [Eyewear 2015; 2nd edition 2016]*

CRAIG MURRAY

Condemned by their own words

An Israeli general justifies the shooting of unarmed children

This transcript of an Israeli army general on an Israeli radio station (see below for source – begins 6.52 in) defending the latest killing by Israeli army snipers of a 14-year-old boy who posed no threat of any kind, is much more powerful if you just read it than any analysis I can give.

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B **RIGADIER-GENERAL** (Res.) Zvika Fogel interviewed on the Yoman Hashevua program of Israel's Kan radio, April 21 2018.

Ron Nesiel: *Greetings Brigadier General (Res.) Zvika Fogel. Should the IDF [Israeli army] rethink its use of snipers? There's the impression that maybe someone lowered the bar for using live fire, and this may be the result?*

Zvika Fogel: Ron, let's maybe look at this matter on three levels. At the tactical level that we all love dealing with, the local one, also at the level of values, and with your permission, we will also rise up to the strategic level. At the tactical level, any person who gets close to the fence, anyone who could be a future threat to the border of the State of Israel and its residents, should bear a price for that violation. If this child or anyone else gets close to the fence in order to hide an explosive device or check if there are any dead zones there or to cut the fence so someone could infiltrate the territory of the State of Israel to kill us ...

Nesiel: *Then, then his punishment is death?*

Fogel: His punishment is death. As far as I'm concerned then yes, if you can only shoot him to stop him, in the leg or arm – great. But if it's more than that then, yes, you want to check with me whose blood is thicker, ours or theirs. It is clear to you that if one such person will manage to cross the fence or hide an explosive device there ...

Nesiel: *But we were taught that live fire is only used when the soldiers face immediate danger.*

Fogel: Come, let's move over to the level of values. Assuming that we understood the tactical level, as we cannot tolerate a crossing of our border or a violation of our border, let's proceed to the level of values. I am not Ahmad Tibi, I am Zvika Fogel. I know how these orders are given. I know how a sniper does the shooting. I know how many authorisations he needs before he receives an authorisation to open fire. It is not the whim of one or the other sniper who identifies the small body of a child now and decides he'll shoot. Someone marks the target for him very well and tells him exactly why one has to shoot and what the threat is from that individual. And to my great sorrow, sometimes when you shoot at a small body and you intended to hit his arm or shoulder it goes even higher. The picture is not a pretty picture. But if that's the price that we have to pay to preserve the safety and quality of life of the residents of the State of Israel, then that's the

Source of speech – <https://www.kan.org.il/radio/player.aspx?ItemId=29159>

"Whose blood is thicker, ours or theirs?"

– Brigadier-General (Res.) Zvika Fogel.

Photo: Wikipedia



price. But now, with your permission, let us go up one level and look at the overview. It is clear to you that Hamas is fighting for consciousness at the moment. It is clear to you and to me

Nesiel: *Is it hard for them to do? Aren't we providing them with sufficient ammunition in this battle?*

Fogel: We're providing them but ...

Nesiel: *Because it does not do all that well for us, those pictures that are distributed around the world.*

Fogel: Look, Ron, we're even terrible at it. There's nothing to be done, David always looks better against Goliath. And in this case, we are the Goliath. Not the David. That is entirely clear to me. But let's look at it at the strategic level: you and I and a large part of the listeners are clear that this will not end up in demonstrations. It is clear to us that Hamas can't continue to tolerate the fact that its rockets are not managing to hurt us, its tunnels are eroding ...

Nesiel: Yes.

Fogel: And it doesn't have too many suicide bombers who continue to believe the fairytale about the virgins waiting up there. It will drag us into a war. I do not want to be on the side that gets dragged. I want to be on the side that initiates things. I do not want to wait for the moment where it finds a weak spot and attacks me there. If tomorrow morning it gets into a military base

or a kibbutz and kills people there and takes prisoners of war or hostages, call it as you like, we're in a whole new script.

I want the leaders of Hamas to wake up tomorrow morning and for the last time in their life see the smiling faces of the IDF. That's what I want to have happen. But we are dragged along. So we're putting snipers up because we want to preserve the values we were educated by. We can't always take a single picture and put it before the whole world. We have soldiers there, our children, who were sent out and receive very accurate instructions about whom to shoot to protect us. Let's back them up

Nesiel: *Brigadier-General (Res.) Zvika Fogel, formerly Head of the Southern Command Staff, thank you for your words.*

Fogel: May you only hear good news. Thank you.

There is no room to doubt the evil nature of the expansionist apartheid state that Israel has now become. Nor the moral vacuity of its apologists in the western media. **CT**

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Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. His web site is www.craigmurray.org.uk – (Translation by Dena Shunra).

ALEXANDER VON LÜNEN

Feminist icon and fascist film-maker

Controversy over Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler's favourite photographer, gets a new twist as her works are handed to a Berlin museum

THE dancer, actress, director and photographer Helene “Leni” Riefenstahl, who died in 2003, is a controversial character, largely because of the many propaganda movies she produced for the Nazis. So when it was recently announced that her estate would be handed over to a Berlin photography museum, historians of the period hoped to find some clarification about the extent of her involvement with the Nazi regime.

But these hopes are likely to be dashed. Riefenstahl, like many other celebrities of the Third Reich, was wise enough to destroy incriminating evidence at the end of World War II and created the image of herself as a naïve opportunist through interviews, autobiographies and – often enough – libel cases.

Riefenstahl’s cinematic legacy, particularly in sports journalism, is undeniable. This is why Germany’s most prolific feminist, Alice Schwarzer, has criticised historians and journalists who always bring up Riefenstahl’s past involvement with the Nazis, while supposedly being more lenient towards male Nazi celebrities.

But this is demonstrably untrue. Male artists, such as conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, have been equally criticised for being co-opted by the Nazi regime. Schwarzer may have a point that other artists did not experience the same scrutiny after 1945. But her movies in the 1930s are prime examples of Nazi propaganda. Male filmmakers who produced such brazen propaganda on simi-



Leni Riefenstahl as war correspondent in Poland 1939, wearing a Wehrmacht uniform.

Photo: German Federal Archives

lar levels, however, got similar treatment.

Riefenstahl would later claim that Goebbels hated her and only Hitler’s patronage spared her from trouble. But this has never been substantially backed up by evidence. Riefenstahl’s acquaintance with Hitler goes back to 1932 when they met for the first time – after she wrote to

him requesting a meeting.

Riefenstahl, who made a name for herself in the 1920s as an actress and then as a director in the early 1930s, became a star in the then popular genre of “mountain movies.” This was a topic dear to the Nazis and other nationalists in Weimar Germany who saw mountaineering – man’s struggle with nature – as both a symbol for Germany’s post-World War I struggle and the social-Darwinistic model of the survival of the fittest. Riefenstahl’s 1932 movie *The Blue Light*, which she directed and had the leading role in, reportedly became one of Hitler’s favourite movies. Its plot featured some of the main tropes of Nazi ideology: the perils of greed and materialism represented by sinister foreigners.

After the Nazi Party came to power in January 1933, Riefenstahl turned her close links to Hitler into a profitable venture. Riefenstahl was commissioned to produce films on the annual Nazi Party rallies in Nuremberg 1933 and 1934, *Victory of Faith* and *Triumph of the Will*, respectively. The latter, in particular, is regarded as a cinematic milestone for using novel techniques in visual storytelling.

Riefenstahl would defend herself after the war by saying that these, like her two movies on the Berlin Olympics, were documentaries rather than propaganda movies – there is no narrator in the film and thus no explicitly stated political agenda. But when you see the films, there is really no need for a narrator. The opening sequence of *Triumph of the Will* is a plane carrying Hitler to Nuremberg, to be greeted by an enthusiastic crowd upon landing. This descent from the heavens echoes Nazi propaganda that Hitler was sent by providence to rescue Germany.

As renowned art critic Susan Sontag wrote in 1975: “Her two movies on the Olympic Games carry similar images. According to Riefenstahl, she only wanted to celebrate the aesthetics of athletic bodies – a claim reflected in the title of the second movie: *Festival of Beauty*. This, obviously, corresponds with the Nazi idea of purity and athleticism as signs of the virility and the superiority of the ‘Aryan’ race.”

As Sontag points out, Riefenstahl remained true to this ideal after the war, even when no longer focusing on white people. Her 1975 photo book on the Sudanese Nuba tribe also focused on the young, male, muscular body – promoting once more the ideal of a body image that cherishes the healthy and athletic form. In Sontag’s eyes, this focus on athleticism “can be seen as the third in Riefenstahl’s triptych of fascist visuals” – following in the footsteps of her movies on mountains and the Olympics.

Schwarzer’s attempt to somewhat exculpate Riefenstahl by arguing that she had to cooperate with the Nazis in order to make a career as a woman seems facile. Riefenstahl and the Nazis found each other because they had similar ideas about the body, society and their representation. Riefenstahl may not have been a card-carrying Nazi in the sense of antisemitism or thirst for war, although her post-war excuse that she didn’t witness atrocities during her time as war correspondent has been debunked by historians. But her aesthetics and her understanding of community and mysticism went hand-in-glove with Nazi ideology.

Worryingly enough, as Sontag pointed out, these aesthetics were rehabilitated in the 1970s with the rise of the body-building movement. Celebrating the beauty of the athletic body became in vogue again, and also led to a rehabilitation of sorts for Riefenstahl.

Her contributions to film history are undeniable. Many techniques that are now seen as common in sports reporting were introduced and championed by her Olympia movies – such as cameras on dollies to follow the athletes on the track or underwater cameras in the swimming and diving competitions to give a perspective to viewers that even spectators in the stadium wouldn’t get.

So maybe Leni Riefenstahl is such a controversial figure because she is both a feminist and Nazi icon. **CT**

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Unperson

Rex Tillerson gets the 'Stalinist' treatment as he falls from favour with Trump's Washington

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ONE reason it's so easy to get an American administration, the mainstream media, and the American people to jump on an anti-Russian bandwagon is of course the legacy of the Soviet Union. To all the real crimes and shortcomings of that period, the US regularly added many fictitious claims to agitate the American public against Moscow. That has not come to a halt. During a debate in the 2016 Republican presidential primary, candidate Ben Carson (now head of the US Housing and Urban Development agency) allowed the following to pass his lips: "Joseph Stalin said if you want to bring America down, you have to undermine three things: Our spiritual life, our patriotism, and our morality." This is a variation on many Stalinist "quotes" over the years designed to deprecate both the Soviet leader and any American who can be made to sound like him. The quote was quite false, but the debate moderators and the other candidates didn't raise any question about its accuracy. Of course not.

Another feature of Stalinism that was routinely hammered into our heads was that of the "non-person" or "unperson" – the former well-known official or writer, for example, who fell out of favour with the Stalinist regime for something he said or did, and was thereafter doomed to a life of obscurity, if not worse. In his classic 1984 George Orwell speaks of a character who "was already an unperson. He did not exist: he had never existed." I was reminded of this by the recent

sudden firing of Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State. Matthew Lee, the courageous Associated Press reporter who has been challenging State Department propaganda for years, had this to say in an April 1 article: "Rex Tillerson has all but vanished from the State Department's website as his unceremonious firing by tweet took effect over the weekend."

"The 'Secretary of State Tillerson' link at the top of the department's homepage disappeared overnight Saturday and was replaced with a generic 'Secretary of State' tab. When clicked, it leads to a page that informs visitors in a brief statement that Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan 'became acting Secretary of State on April 1, 2018.' It shows a photo of Sullivan signing his appointment papers as deputy in June 2017 but offers no explanation for the change in leadership.

"In addition to that change, links that had connected to Tillerson's speeches, travels and other events now display those of Sullivan. The link to Tillerson's biography as the 69th secretary of state briefly returned a 'We're sorry, that page can't be found' message. After being notified of the message, the State Department restored the link and an archive page for Tillerson's tenure was enabled."

The most repeated Cold War anti-Communist myth was of course Nikita Khrushchev's much quoted – No, eternally quoted! – line: "We will bury you." On November 20 1956 the New York Times had reported: "In commenting on coexist-



UNPERSON: Within days of being sacked as US secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, shown here at his confirmation hearing, “vanished” from the departmental web site. Photo: Whitehouse.gov

ence last night Mr. Khrushchev said communism did not have to resort to war to defeat capitalism. “Whether you like it or not, history is on our side,” he said. “We will bury you.”

Obviously, it was not a military threat of any kind. But tell that to the countless individuals who have cited it as such forever. So, as matters turned out, did communism, or call it socialism, bury capitalism? No. But not for the reason the capitalists would like to think – their superior socio-economic system. Capitalism remains the world’s pre-eminent system primarily because of military power combined with CIA covert actions. It’s that combination that irredeemably crippled socialist forces in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Philippines, Guatemala, Haiti, Ecuador, the Congo, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Chile, Angola, Grenada, Nicaragua, Bulgaria, Albania, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, El Salvador, etc, etc, etc.

We’ll never know what kind of societies would have resulted if these movements had been allowed to develop without US interference; which of course was the idea behind the interference.

Political assassination. Political propaganda

In the Cold War struggles against the Soviets/Russians, the United States has long had the upper hand when it comes to political propaganda. What do the Russkis know about sales campaigns, advertising, psychological manipulation of the public, bait-and-switch, and a host of other Madison Avenue innovations. Just look at what the American media and their Western partners have done with the poisoning of the two Russians, Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the UK. How many in the West doubt Russia’s guilt?

Then consider the case of Hugo Chávez. When he died in 2013 I wrote the following: “[W]hen someone like Chávez dies at the young age of 58 I have to wonder about the circumstances. Unremitting cancer, intractable respiratory infections, massive heart attack, one after the other ... It is well known that during the Cold War, the CIA worked diligently to develop substances that could kill without leaving a trace. I would like to see the Venezuelan government pursue every avenue of investigation in having an autopsy performed.” (None was performed apparently.)

Back in December 2011, Chávez, already un-

der treatment for cancer, wondered out loud: “Would it be so strange that they’ve invented the technology to spread cancer and we won’t know about it for 50 years?” The Venezuelan president was speaking a day after Argentina’s leftist president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, announced she had been diagnosed with thyroid cancer. This was after three other prominent leftist Latin America leaders had been diagnosed with cancer: Brazil’s president, Dilma Rousseff; Paraguay’s Fernando Lugo; and the former Brazilian leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

“Evo take care of yourself. Correa, be careful. We just don’t know,” Chávez said, referring to Bolivia’s president, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa, the president of Ecuador, both leading leftists.

Chávez said he had received words of warning from Fidel Castro, himself the target of hundreds of failed and often bizarre CIA assassination plots. “Fidel always told me: ‘Chávez take care. These people have developed technology. You are very careless. Take care what you eat, what they give you to eat ... a little needle and they inject you with I don’t know what.’”

When the new Venezuelan president, Nicolas Maduro, suggested possible American involvement in Chávez’s death, the US State Department called the allegation “absurd” even though the United States had already played a key role in the short-lived overthrow of Chávez in 2002. I don’t know of any American mainstream media that has raised the possibility that Chávez was murdered.

I believe, without any proof to offer, (although no less than is offered re Russia’s guilt in the UK poisoning) that Hugo Chávez was indeed murdered by the United States. But unlike the UK case, I do have a motivation to offer: Given Chávez’s unremitting hostility towards American imperialism and the CIA’s record of more than 50 assassination attempts against such world political leaders, if his illness and death were NOT induced, the CIA was not doing its job. The world’s media, however, did its job by overwhelmingly ignoring such “conspiracy” talk, saving it for a more “appropriate” occasion, one involving their favourite bad guy, Russia.

If I could speak to British prime minister Theresa May and her boorish foreign minister Boris Johnson I’d like to ask them: “What are you going to say when it turns out that it wasn’t Russia behind the Skripal poisonings?” Stay tuned.

Another of the many charming examples of Cold War anti-communism

Nostalgia is on the march in Brazil, a longing for a return to the military dictatorship of 1964-1985, during which nearly 500 people were killed by the authorities or simply disappeared. It was a time when the ruling generals used systemic brutality, including electric shocks, as well as psychological torture in their effort to cement power and ward off what they called “communism.” They also stole many of the very young children of their victims and gave them to their followers, whom the children then believed to be their parents.

Crime is the main problem in Brazil today, the leading reason for the desire to return to the good old days of dictatorial rule. An estimated 43 percent of the Brazilian population supports at least a temporary revival of military control, according to a 2017 poll, up from 35 percent in 2016. Fear of violence, whether it be terrorism or street crime, has fuelled support for authoritarian parties and bolstered populist leaders with tough-on-crime, anti-immigrant platforms around the world, from President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines to Chancellor Sebastian Kurz in Austria to a fellow named Trump in the good ol’ US of A.

“Thanks to you, Brazil did not become Cuba!” the crowd chanted at a recent demonstration in Brazil, some snapping salutes. This is indeed the height of irony. In all likelihood many of those people were not strangers to hunger, struggling to pay their rent, could not afford needed medical care, or education; yet, they shouted against a country where such deprivations are virtually nonexistent.

The United States, of course, played a significant role in the 1964 overthrow of the Brazilian democracy. How could it be otherwise in this world? Here is a phone conversation between US

WILLIAM BLUM

President Lyndon B. Johnson and Thomas Mann, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, April 3, 1964, two days after the coup:

MANN: I hope you're as happy about Brazil as I am.

LBJ: I am.

MANN: I think that's the most important thing that's happened in the hemisphere in three years.

LBJ: I hope they give us some credit instead of hell.

Does the man ever feel embarrassed?

In his desperation for approval, our dear president has jumped on the back of increased military spending. Speaking to the presidents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania he said that he should be given "credit" for pressuring countries like theirs to give more money to NATO. None of presidents had the nerve to ask Mr. Trump why that is a good thing; perhaps pointing out that some of the millions of dollars could have been used to improve the quality of their people's lives.

A few days later, at the White House Easter Egg Roll the president "bragged to a crowd of

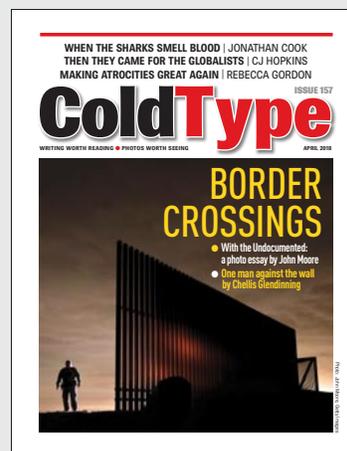
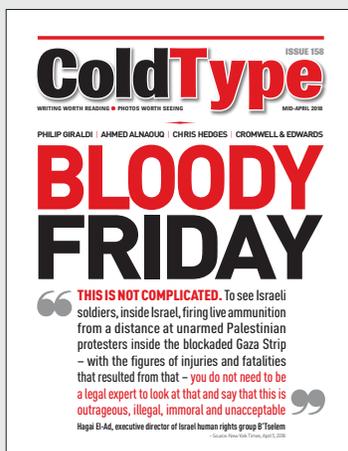
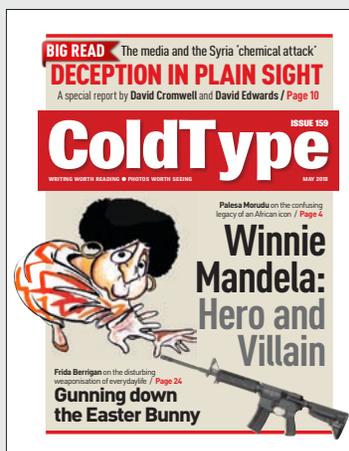
children about increasing military spending to \$700-billion." One can imagine what their young minds made of this. Will they one day realise that this man called "The President" was telling them that large amounts of money which could have been spent on their health and education, on their transportation and environment, was instead spent on various weapons used to kill people?

The size of the man's ego needs can not be exaggerated. The Washington Post observed that Trump instructed the Lithuanian president, "to praise him on camera, just as he said she had done privately in the Oval Office. She obliged, saying changes to NATO would not be possible without the United States and that its 'vital voice and vital leadership' are important. Trump pressed her: 'And has Donald Trump made a difference on NATO?' Those in the room laughed, as she confirmed he has made a difference."

Thank God some of those in the room laughed. I was beginning to think that all hope was lost. **CT**

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The Great Game comes to Syria

New alliance between Turkey, Russia and Iran could re-shape the Middle East

An unusual triple alliance is emerging from the Syrian war, one that could alter the balance of power in the Middle East, unhinge the NATO alliance, and complicate the Trump administration's designs on Iran. It might also lead to yet another double cross of one of the region's largest ethnic groups, the Kurds.

However, the "troika alliance" – Turkey, Russia and Iran – consists of three countries that don't much like one another, have different goals, and whose policies are driven by a combination of geo-global goals and internal politics. In short, "fragile and complicated" doesn't even begin to describe it.

How the triad might be affected by the joint US, French and British attack on Syria is unclear, but in the long run the alliance will likely survive the uptick of hostilities.

But common ground was what came out of the April 4 meeting between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Meeting in Ankara, the parties pledged to support the "territorial integrity" of Syria, find a diplomatic end to the war, and to begin a reconstruction of a Syria devastated by seven years of war. While Russia and Turkey explicitly backed the UN-sponsored talks in Geneva, Iran was quiet on that issue, preferring a regional solution without "foreign plans."

"Common ground," however, doesn't mean the members of the "troika" are on the same page.

Turkey's interests are both internal and external. The Turkish Army is currently conducting two military operations in northern Syria, Olive Branch and Euphrates Shield, aimed at driving the mainly Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) out of land that borders Turkey. But those operations are also deeply entwined with Turkish politics.

Erdogan's internal support has been eroded by a number of factors: exhaustion with the ongoing state of emergency imposed following the 2016 attempted coup, a shaky economy, and a precipitous fall in the value of the Turkish pound. Rather than waiting for 2019, Erdogan called for snap elections last month and beating up on the Kurds is always popular with right-wing Turkish nationalists. Erdogan needs all the votes he can get to implement his newly-minted executive presidency that will give him virtually one-man rule.

To be part of the alliance, however, Erdogan has had to modify his goal of getting rid of Syrian President Bashar Assad and to agree – at this point, anyhow – to eventually withdraw from areas in northern Syria seized by the Turkish Army. Russia and Iran have called for turning over the regions conquered by the Turks to the Syrian Army.

Moscow's goals are to keep a foothold in the Middle East with its only base, Tartus, and to aid its long-time ally, Syria. The Russians are not deeply committed to Assad personally, but they

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want a friendly government in Damascus. They also want to destroy al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, which have caused Moscow considerable trouble in the Caucasus.

Russia also wouldn't mind driving a wedge between Ankara and NATO. After the US, Turkey has NATO's second largest army. NATO broke a 1989 agreement not to recruit former members of the Russian-dominated Warsaw Pact into NATO as a quid pro quo for the Soviets withdrawing from Eastern Europe. But since the Yugoslav war in 1999 the alliance has marched right up to the borders of Russia. The 2008 war with Georgia and 2014 seizure of the Crimea were largely a reaction to what Moscow sees as an encirclement strategy by its adversaries.

Turkey has been at odds with its NATO allies around a dispute between Greece and Cyprus over sea-based oil and gas resources, and it recently charged two Greek soldiers who violated the Turkish border with espionage. Erdogan is also angry that European Union countries refuse to extradite Turkish soldiers and civilians who, he claims, helped engineer the 2016 coup against him. While most NATO countries condemned Moscow for the recent attack on two Russians in Britain, the Turks pointedly did not.

Turkish relations with Russia have an economic side as well. Ankara want a natural gas pipeline from Russia, has broken ground on a \$20-billion Russian nuclear reactor, and just shelled out \$2.5-billion for Russia's S-400 anti-aircraft system.

If President Trump pulls US forces out of Syria, it will be tempting for Turkey to move in

The Russians do not support Erdogan's war on the Kurds and have lobbied for the inclusion of Kurdish delegations in negotiations over the future of Syria. But Moscow clearly gave the Turks



Recep Erdogan.

Photo: Wikimedia

a green light to attack the Kurdish city of Afrin in March, driving out the YPG that had liberated it from the Islamic State and Turkish-backed al-Qaeda groups. A number of Kurds charge that Moscow has betrayed them.

The question now is: Will the Russians stand aside if the Turkish forces move further into Syria and attack the city of Manbij, where the Kurds are allied with US and French forces? And will Erdogan's hostility to the Kurds lead to an armed clash among three NATO members?

Such a clash seems unlikely, although the Turks have been giving flamethrower speeches over the past several weeks. "Those

who cooperate with terrorist organisations [the YPG] will be targeted by Turkey," Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag said in a pointed reference to France's support for the Kurds. Threatening the French is one thing, picking a fight with the US military quite another.

Of course, if President Trump pulls US forces out of Syria, it will be tempting for Turkey to move in. While the "troika alliance" has agreed to Syrian "sovereignty," that won't stop Ankara from meddling in Kurdish affairs. The Turks are already appointing governors and mayors for the areas in Syria they have occupied.

Iran's major concern in Syria is maintaining a buffer between itself and a very aggressive alliance of the U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia, which seems to be in the preliminary stages of planning a war against the second-largest country in the Middle East.

Iran is not at all the threat it has been pumped up to be. Its military is miniscule and talk of a so-called "Shiite crescent" – Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon – is pretty much a western invention (although the term was dreamed up by the King of Jordan).

Tehran has been weakened by crippling sanc-

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tions and faces the possibility that Washington will withdraw from the nuclear accord and reimpose yet more sanctions. The appointment of National Security Advisor John Bolton, who openly calls for regime change in Iran, has to have sent a chill down the spines of the Iranians. What Tehran needs most of all is allies who will shield it from the enmity of the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia. In this regard, Turkey and Russia could be helpful.

Iran has modified its original goals in Syria of a Shiite-dominated regime by agreeing to a “non-sectarian character” for a post-war Syria. Erdogan has also given up on his desire for a Sunni-dominated government in Damascus.

War with Iran would be catastrophic, an unwinnable conflict that could destabilise the Middle East even more than it is now. It would, however, drive up the price of oil, currently running at around \$66 a barrel. Saudi Arabia needs to sell its oil for at least \$100 a barrel, or it will very quickly run of money. The on-going quagmire of the Yemen war, the need to diversify the economy, and the growing clamour by young Saudis – 70 percent of the population – for jobs requires lots of money, and the current trends in oil pricing are not going to cover the bills.

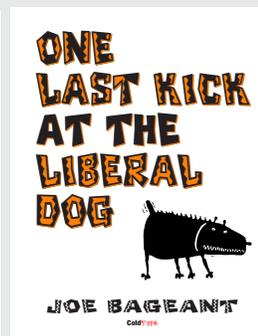
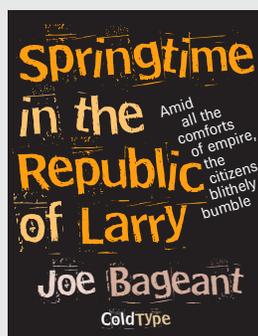
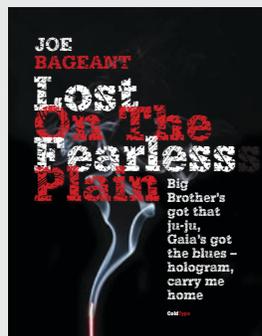
War and oil make for odd bedfellows. While the Saudis are doing their best to overthrow the Assad regime and fuel the extremists fighting the Russians, Riyadh is wooing Moscow to sign onto to a long-term OPEC agreement to control oil supplies. That probably won't happen – the Russians are fine with oil at \$50 to \$60 a barrel – and are wary of agreements that would restrict their right to develop new oil and gas resources. The Saudi's jihad on the Iranians has a desperate edge to it, as well it might. The greatest threat to the Kingdom has always come from within.

The rocks and shoals that can wreck alliances in the Middle East are too numerous to count, and the “troika” is riven with contradictions and conflicting interests. But the war in Syria looks as if it is coming to some kind of resolution, and at this point Iran, Russia and Turkey seem to be the only actors who have a script that goes beyond lobbing cruise missiles at people.

CT

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How the media made austerity worse

New book shows how Europe was way ahead of the UK in leading debate on financial crisis, writes **Steve Schifferes**

THE UK financial press was much slower to criticise the austerity policies of the government than in other parts of Europe. This meant that it became accepted as the only way to tackle the legacy of the global financial crisis of 2007-08, despite many economists arguing it would further damage the economy.

This is the central finding of research published in a new book, *The Media and Austerity*, which I co-edited with colleagues Sophie Knowles and Laura Basu. The lack of a broader discussion of alternatives to austerity meant that there was little public debate on other policies which might have had a less severe effect on public services.

Austerity was introduced in the UK after the 2010 election by the coalition government. The government argued that cutting public spending to reduce

the large public sector deficit was the only way to restore the economy to health. The deficits were caused by the sharp increase in government borrowing to bail out the banks, and by the decline in tax revenues due to the recession caused by the crisis.



The UK coalition government introduced austerity policies in 2010.

Photo: Number 10

Meanwhile, many economists argued that cutting public spending during a recession would be bad for the economy. It was an argument that grew stronger as the promised recovery

failed to materialise after a brief uplift in 2013. And the weak economy meant that the public sector deficit remained stubbornly high.

The scale of the public sector cuts put a severe strain on public services such as health and education, and reduced help for the poor. But little of this argument was played out in the press as a whole.

Looking at the pattern of press coverage by key commentators from the beginning of the crisis, it is clear that a new consensus on austerity had already emerged in the run up to the

2010 election, when the credibility of the Labour government at the time was challenged by the economic slowdown.

This consensus view changed little over the next five years, despite the failure of the policy to prevent the biggest global slowdown since the 1930s – let alone deliver the promised benefits of economic recovery and prosperity.

One factor was the inability of the political opposition to articulate a clear alternative, which made it difficult for the press to put one forward. But the press was also guilty of a collective amnesia. It quickly forgot the lessons of

the global financial crisis itself, which demonstrated that the conventional economic wisdom was based on weak foundations.

In that pre-crisis view, markets would always correct themselves and the government should reduce regulation to boost the economy. What was striking was how little the press challenged the new orthodoxy of austerity. This failure was all the more notable, given that the press was widely criticised – notably by the Treasury select committee – during the financial crisis for its lack of historical perspective that might have informed its coverage. It should have been more sceptical of claims that we had entered a new era of crisis-free stability.

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The book also critiques the press' relationship with the economics profession. Economist Simon Wren-Lewis points out that the television media especially, lacked the knowledge to evaluate economic arguments and rarely cited the more sceptical views of academic economists in evaluating austerity.

Instead, the press, when they consulted economists at all, quoted City economists for comment on short-term news events, rather than seeking out a deeper understanding of government policy. Had they done so, the limits of austerity might have emerged earlier and better debate might have ensued.

There was also a disconnect between the media coverage and the experience of ordinary people. Focus group research revealed that there were many

concerns about the effects of austerity on ordinary households, including on jobs and public services, but this was not widely reported. This made it more difficult for the public to articulate concerns and feel part of the debate.

One of the most telling examples of how the role of the press might have been different was an analysis of the UK's first austerity programme, the 1922 "Geddes Axe". This was a plan to slash all government spending by 10% to deal with the legacy of the huge debt accumulated during World War I. In a detailed study of press coverage, the financial historian Richard Roberts shows that the press played a key role in promoting this, even backing independent political candidates who ran on an austerity ticket.

But after the policy was adopted, the press also played a

key role in blunting the severity of the cuts, fuelled by strategic leaks by ministers who objected to their departmental budgets being slashed. In this more patriotic era, it was the resistance of the British Navy to cutting back the fleet that carried the day.

Our conclusion is that the media failed to play its proper role of serving as a forum for public debate on the central economic policy of the last decade. The history of the last few decades of economic policy suggests that when the press fails to play its watchdog role, entrenched views and group-think can persist for a long time. This limits the space for credible alternatives to emerge and, in turn, the ability of policymakers to respond.

Steve Schifferes is a professor of financial journalism at the City University of London. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

Shielding Israel is a matter of policy

Western media shields Israel, while demolishing the image of Israel's enemies, says Ramzy Baroud

THE term 'media bias' does not do justice to the western corporate media's relationship with Israel and Palestine. The relationship is, indeed, far more profound than mere partiality. It is not ig-

norance, either. It is a calculated and long-term campaign, aimed at guarding Israel and demonising Palestinians.

The current disgraceful coverage of Gaza's popular protests indicates that the media's

position aims at suppressing the truth on Palestine, at any cost and by any means.

Political symbiosis, cultural affinity, Hollywood, the out-reaching influence of pro-Israel and Zionist groups within the political and media circles, are some of the explanations many of us have offered as to why Israel is often viewed with sympathetic eyes and Palestinians and Arabs condemned.

But such explanations should hardly suffice. Nowadays, there are numerous media outlets that are trying to offset some of the imbalance, many of them emanating from the Middle East, but also other parts of the world. Palestinian and Arab journalists, intellectuals and cultural representatives are more present on a global stage than ever before and are more than capable of facing off, if not defeating, the pro-Israeli media discourse.

However, they are largely invisible to western media; it is the Israeli spokesperson who continues to occupy the center stage, speaking, shouting, theorizing and demonising as he pleases.

It is, then, not a matter of media ignorance, but policy.

Even before March 30, when scores of Palestinians in Gaza were killed and thousands wounded, the US and British media, for example, should have, at least, questioned why hundreds of Israeli snipers and army tanks were ordered to deploy at the Gaza border to face-off Palestinian protesters.

Instead, they referred to

‘clashes’ between Gaza youth and the snipers, as if they are equal forces in an equivalent battle.

Western media is not blind. If ordinary people are increasingly able to see the truth regarding the situation in Palestine, experienced western journalists cannot possibly be blind to the truth. They know, but they choose to remain silent.

The maxim that official Israeli propaganda or ‘hasbara’ is too savvy no longer suffices. In fact, it is hardly true.

Where is the ingenuity in the way the Israeli army explained the killing of unarmed Palestinians in Gaza?

“Yesterday we saw 30,000 people,” the Israeli army tweeted on March 31. “We arrived prepared and with precise reinforcements. Nothing was carried out uncontrolled; everything was accurate and measured, and we know where every bullet landed.”

If that is not bad enough, Israel’s ultra-nationalist Minister of Defense, Avigdor Lieberman, followed that self-indictment by declaring there are “no innocent people in Gaza”; thus, legitimizing the targeting of any Gazan within the besieged Strip.

Unfair media coverage is not fuelled by the simplistic notion of ‘clever Israel, imprudent Arabs’. Western media is actively involved in shielding Israel and enhancing its diminishing brand, while painstakingly demolishing the image of Israel’s enemies.

Take for example, Israel’s un-

founded propaganda that Yasser Murtaja, the Gaza journalist who was killed in cold blood by an Israeli sniper while covering the Great March of Return protests at the Gaza border, was a member of Hamas.

First, ‘unnamed officials’ in Israel claimed that Yasser is ‘a member of the Hamas security apparatus.’ Then, Lieberman offered more (fabricated) details that Yasser was on Hamas’ payroll since 2011 and ‘held a rank similar to a captain.’ Many journalists took these statements and ran with them, constantly associating any news coverage of Yasser’s death with Hamas.

It turned out that, according to the US State Department, Yasser’s start-up media company in Gaza had actually received a small grant from USAID, which subjected Yasser’s company to a rigorous vetting process.

More still, a report by the International Federation of Journalist claimed that Yasser was actually detained and beaten by the Gaza police in 2015, and that Israel’s Defense Minister is engineering a cover-up.

Judging by this, Israel’s media apparatus is as erratic and self-defeating as North Korea; but this is hardly the image conveyed by western media, because it insists on placing Israel on a moral pedestal while misrepresenting Palestinians, regardless of the circumstances.

But there is more to western media’s approach to Palestine and Israel than shielding and elevating Israel, while demonising Palestinians. Oftentimes, the

media works to distract from the issues altogether, as is the case in Britain today, where Israel's image is rapidly deteriorating.

To disrupt the conversation on Palestine, the Israeli Occupation and the British government's unconditional support of Israel, British mainstream media has turned the heat on Jeremy Corbyn, the popular leader of the Labor Party.

Accusations of anti-Semitism has dogged the party since Corbyn's election in 2015. Yet, Corbyn is not racist; on the contrary, he has stood against racism, for the working class and other disadvantaged groups. His strong pro-Palestine stance, in particular, is threatening to compel a paradigm shift on Palestine and Israel within the revived and energised Labor Party.

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Sadly, Corbyn's counter strategy is almost entirely absent. Instead of issuing a statement condemning all forms of racism and moving on to deal with the urgent issues at hand, including that of Palestine, he allows his detractors to determine the nature of the discussion, if not the whole discourse. He is now trapped in a perpetual conversation, while the Labor Party is regularly purging its own members for alleged anti-Semitism.

Considering that Israel and its allies in the media, and elsewhere, conflate between criticism of Israel and its Zionist ideology, on the one hand, and that of Jews and Judaism on the other, Corbyn cannot win this battle.

Nor are Israel's friends keen

on winning, either. They merely want to prolong a futile debate so that British society remains embroiled in distractions and spares Israel any accountability for its action.

If British media was, indeed, keen on calling out racism and isolating racists, why then is there little discussion on Israel's racist policies targeting Palestinians?

Media spin will continue to provide Israel with the needed margins to carry out its violent policies against the Palestinian people, with no moral accountability. It will remain loyal to Israel, creating a buffer between

the truth and its audiences.

It is incumbent on us to expose this sinister relationship and hold mainstream media to account for covering up Israel's crimes, as well as Israel for committing these crimes in the first place. **CT**

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Doctor Death from Damascus?

Bashir al-Assad isn't seen as a monster to everyone; for many Syrians he's the only hope for the future, writes **Eric Margolis**

BUTCHER of Damascus. Gasser of children. Baby Killer of Syria. Tool of Moscow. Cruel despot. Monster. These are all names the western media and politicians routinely heap on Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad. He has now become the top Mideast villain, the man we love to hate.

As a veteran Mideast watcher, I find all this hard to swallow. Compared to other brutal Mideast leaders, Assad is pretty weak tea. The US/British propaganda effort to paint Assad in blackest colors is having a

difficult time.

Mideast leaders who toe the US line and make nice to Israel are invariably called 'statesmen' or 'president' by the American government and its increasingly tame media. There's good old President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt, the military dictator who crushed that nation's only democracy and imposed an iron-fisted rule. But we will never hear from the US media of Egypt's political murders, disappearances, secret prisons and torture. Or that Egypt has been one of the world's most draco-

Insights

nian police states since the era of Anwar Sadat and successor Hosni Mubarak.

Saudi rulers are reverently treated by the US media and government in spite of leading the world in executions. Last year, 44 people were publicly beheaded. In some years, around 150 people have been beheaded in Saudi Arabia, often a quarter of them Pakistani guest workers. Having been arrested by the Saudi religious police, I can tell you that the kingdom is a police state with sand dunes and camels. Saudi vassal states Bahrain and the Emirates are better, but not much.

Morocco, a key US ally, is notorious for its ghastly prisons and brutal torture. Iraq and Afghanistan, now under US control, are even worse. Israel, the largest recipient of US aid, holds close to 7,000 Palestinian political prisoners, among them 400 children, and is gunning down Palestinian demonstrators on the Gaza border.

Syria has always been a repressive police state. I recall watching 'spies' being hanged in front of my hotel. Its various police forces are notorious for brutality and torture. In fact, until recently, the US actually sent captive suspects to Syria to be tortured and jailed.

That was before Washington made the decision to overthrow Syria's legitimate government ('regime' in DC talk) as the first step in attacking Iran.

But Damascus was no worse a human rights abuser than Cairo, Amman, Rabat and Riyadh, all



Syrian ruler, Bashar al-Assad.

Photo: Fabio Rodrigues Pozzebom

US vassals.

While looking at the current western hate campaigns against Syria and Iran, keep in mind the history of the modern Mideast. We are again seeing the 1914 era lies from London about Belgian babies speared on German bayonets.

Any Arab or Iranian leader who sought an independent policy or refused the tutelage of London and then Washington was delegitimised, excoriated, and demonised. Remember the Iranian leader Mohammed Mossadegh overthrown in a CIA coup? The renowned Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, whom the British branded 'Hitler on the Nile?' Or the late, murdered Libyan Muammar Khadaffi, called 'Mad Dog of the Mideast' by President Ronald Reagan? Imam Khomeini of Iran and President Ahmadinejad, both favored targets of western media invective, and both compared to the much overused Hitler. Saddam Hussein, the Butcher of Baghdad, and that modern Dr Fu Manchu, Osama

bin Laden, the all-time favorite Muslim arch villain.

Of course, there's nothing new in this nasty name-calling. During the Victorian Era, Britain's press demonised arch villains like 'the Mad Mullah,' the Mahdi, the Fakir of Ipi, and Nana Sahib of the 1857 Indian uprising against British imperial rule.

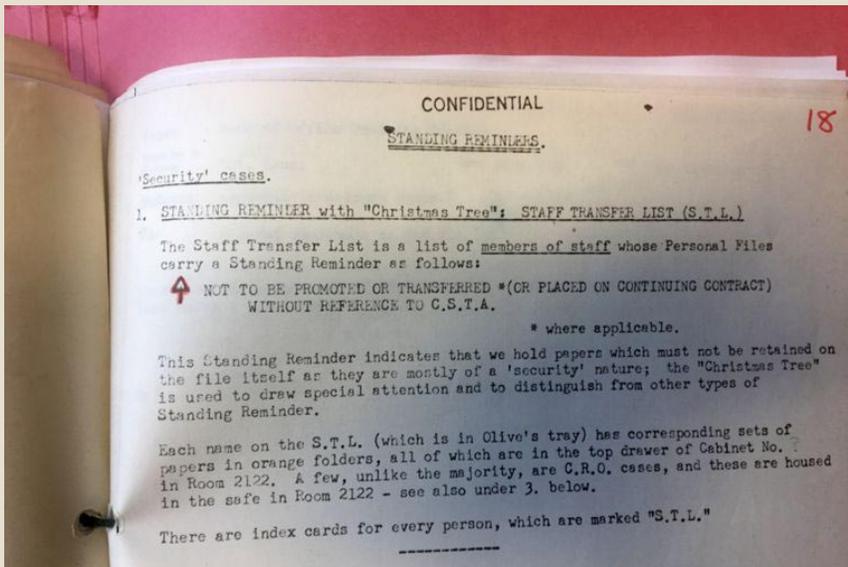
Bashar al-Assad was a mild-mannered ophthalmologist living in London with his British-born wife. When his rash elder brother Basil was killed in a car crash, Bashar was compelled to return to Syria and become the nominal political leader after the death of his very tough, ruthless father, Hafez al-Assad. Bashar's main role was mediating between powerful factions in Damascus and trying to modernize his nation.

In 2011, the US, Britain, Israel and Saudi Arabia ignited an uprising in Syria using often fanatical jihadists. The shy, retiring Bashar was forced to become war leader in a bloody civil conflict as his nation disintegrated.

President Trump, whose B-52 bombers are ravaging the Mideast, Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen calls al-Assad a monster. Some of his relatives are indeed ruthless. But very many Syrians think of Assad as their nation's only hope of returning to normalcy. **CT**

Eric Margolis is an award-winning, internationally syndicated columnist. His web site is www.ericmargolis.com

Insights



The 'Christmas tree' mark and 'standing reminder' used to bar 'suspect' staff from promotion

BBC lied for 60 years about staff vetting

British state broadcaster worked with spy agency for many years to keep 'subversives' out of jobs

A **REMARKABLE** BBC article, published last month, has removed the lid from over sixty years of intentional deception of the British public by the nation's broadcaster.

For decades from 1933, the BBC worked hand in glove with the Security Service to vet job applicants to keep out "subversives" – that is, anyone with even a vague association with left-wing groups – a process known to those involved as "the formalities."

Any found to have "subversive" links who was already



BBC executive Alan Dawnay, who instigated the "formalities."

in the BBC was blocked from promotion into positions of influence by means of markers and comments on their files – which the BBC has also admitted removing before files were sent to, for example, industrial tribunals.

In other words, the BBC admits withholding evidence.

According to the article, the practice continued until the 1990s – but it also admits: "The BBC will not say whether any staff are vetted these days. . . . We do not comment on security issues," a spokesperson said. "But any residual vetting, of people needing access to classified information for emergency planning for example, would be open and known to the person. There is no more secrecy as once there was."

So it could well still be happening – and the claim that anyone being vetted now would know about it these days is only as believable as it should be from an organisation that just admitted 60 years and possibly more of deliberate deception.

The fact that the Security Services vetted personnel to ensure only Establishment-friendly figures reached positions of influence will surprise few. But the fact that the Corporation now admits actively and knowingly lying to us all is a remarkable admission.

One deserving of a lot more exposure than a minor article on the BBC News website. **CT**

This article first appeared at the UK website, skwawkbox.org

Gaza doctors find devastating injuries

Israeli bullets are causing massive injuries to protesters, say doctors of **Medecins Sans Frontieres** organisation

SINCE 1 April, MSF teams in Gaza, Palestine, have provided post-operative care to more than 500 people injured by gunshots during the March of Return demonstrations. The number of patients treated in our clinics over the last three weeks is more than the number we treated throughout all of 2014, when Israel's military Operation Protective Edge was launched over the Gaza strip. MSF medical staff report receiving patients with devastating injuries of an unusual severity, which are extremely complex to treat. The injuries sustained by patients will leave most with serious, long-term physical disabilities.

Medical teams in Gaza's hospitals prepare to face a pos-

sible new influx of wounded this Friday in the latest of the March of Return demonstrations. MSF surgeons in Gaza report devastating gunshot wounds among hundreds of people injured during the protests over recent weeks. The huge majority of patients – mainly young men, but also some women and children – have unusually severe wounds to the lower extremities. MSF medical teams note the injuries include an extreme level of destruction to bones and soft tissue, and large exit wounds that can be the size of a fist.

“Half of the more than 500 patients we have admitted in our clinics have injuries where the bullet has literally destroyed tissue after having pulverised the bone”, said Marie-Elisabeth

Ingres, Head of Mission of MSF in Palestine. “These patients will need to have very complex surgical operations and most of them will have disabilities for life.”

Managing these injuries is very difficult. Apart from regular nursing care, patients will often need additional surgery, and undergo a very long process of physiotherapy and rehabilitation. A lot of patients will keep functional deficiencies for the rest of their life. Some patients may yet need amputation if not provided with sufficient care in Gaza and if they don't manage to get the necessary authorisation to be treated outside of the strip.

To face this massive influx of patients, MSF has reinforced its capacities, increased the number of beds in its post-operative clinics, and recruited and trained additional medical staff. A fourth clinic will open soon in the Middle-Area region of Gaza to provide patients with the necessary specialised care.

In response to the crisis, MSF has also deployed a team of surgeons (including vascular, orthopaedic and reconstructive surgeons) and anaesthetists to operate – or re-operate – on the more severe cases. This team currently works side-by-side with Palestinian medical staff in Al-Shifa and Al-Aqsa public hospitals. **CT**

This report was distributed by the international aid organisation Medecins Sans Frontieres at their web site www.msf.org/

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Patients in the waiting area of Gaza clinic, treated following gunshot wounds sustained at the Gaza protests.

Photo:
Laurie
Bonnaud/MSF



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