

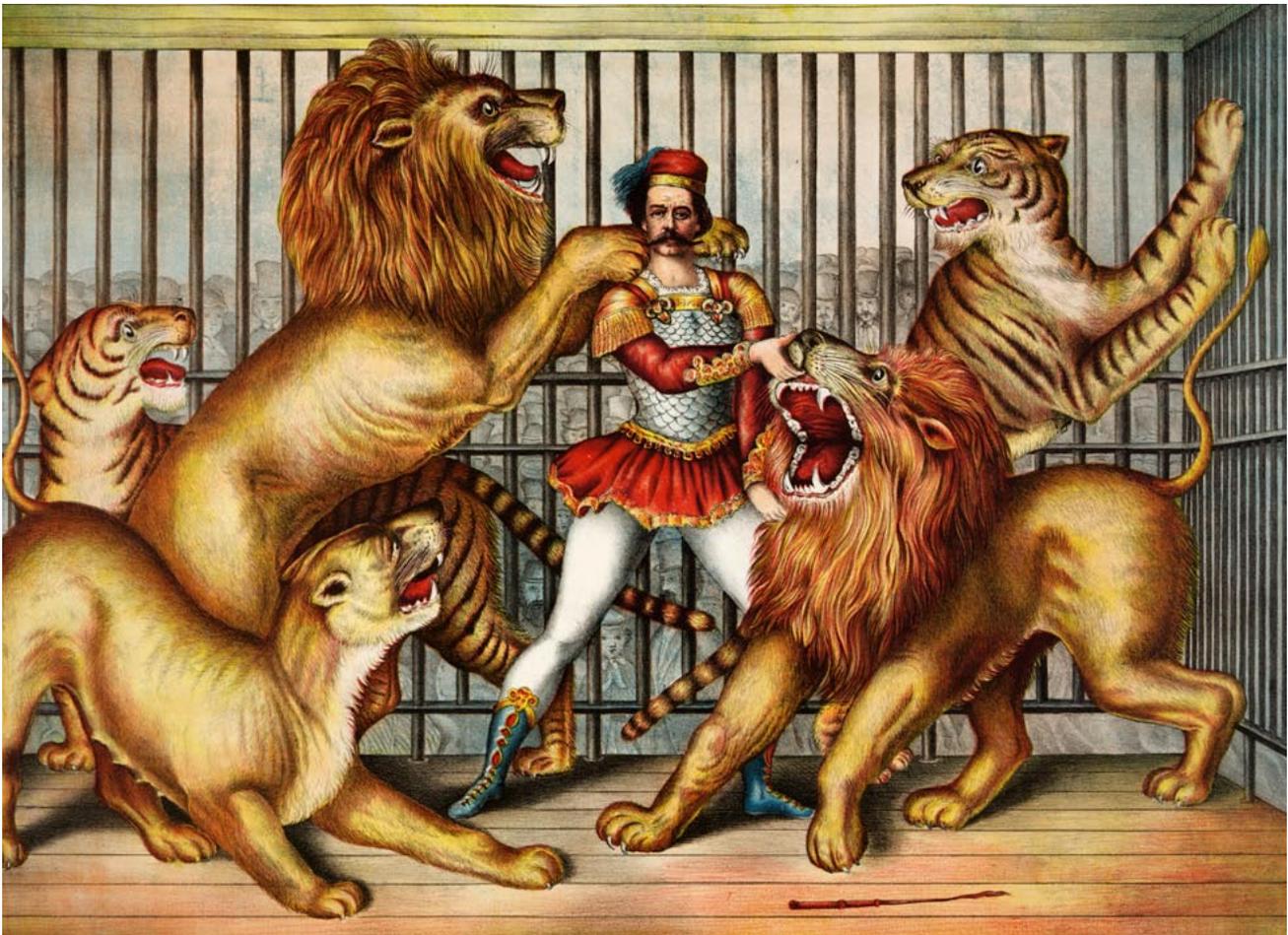
THE SIMULATION OF DEMOCRACY | CJ HOPKINS
LIFTING THE VEIL ON SAUDI ARABIA | DOUGIE WALLACE
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ISSUE 161

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The simulation of democracy

Think we're living in a democratic society in which our votes and opinions count? Well, think again, it's just a mirage created by our capitalist rulers

ONE of the most complicated and frustrating aspects of operating a global capitalist empire is maintaining the fiction that it doesn't exist. Virtually every action you take has to be carefully recontextualised or otherwise spun for public consumption. Every time you want to bomb or invade some country to further your interests, you have to mount a whole PR campaign. You can't even appoint a sadistic torture freak to run your own coup-fomenting agency, or shoot a few thousand unarmed people you've imprisoned in a de facto ghetto, without having to do a big song and dance about "defending democracy" and "democratic values".

Naked despotism is so much simpler, not to mention more emotionally gratifying. Ruling an empire as a godlike dictator means never having to say you're sorry. You can torture and kill anyone you want, and conquer and exploit whichever countries you want, without having to explain yourself to anyone. Also, you get to have your humongous likeness muraled onto the walls of buildings, make people swear allegiance to you, and all that other cool dictator stuff.

Global capitalists do not have this luxury. Generating the simulation of democracy that most Western consumers desperately need in order to be able to pretend to believe that they are not just smoothly-functioning cogs in the machinery of a murderous global empire managed by a class of obscenely wealthy and powerful international elites to whom their lives mean exactly nothing,

although extremely expensive and time-consuming, is essential to maintaining their monopoly on power. Having conditioned most Westerners into believing they are "free", and not just glorified peasants with gadgets, the global capitalist ruling classes have no choice but to keep up this fiction. Without it, their empire would fall apart at the seams.

This is the devil's bargain modern capitalism made back in the 18th-century. In order to wrest power from the feudal aristocracies that had dominated the West throughout the Middle Ages, the bourgeoisie needed to sell the concept of "democracy" to the unwashed masses, who they needed both to staff their factories and, in some cases, to fight revolutionary wars, or depose and publicly guillotine monarchs.

"Democracy" became the rallying cry, and the official narrative of capitalism

All that gobbledegook about taxes, tariffs, and the unwieldy structure of the feudal system was not the easiest sell to the peasantry. "Liberty" and "equality" went over much better. So "democracy" became their rallying cry, and, eventually, the official narrative of capitalism. The global capitalist ruling classes have been stuck with "democracy" ever since, or, more accurately, with the simulation of democracy.

The purpose of this simulation of democracy



is not to generate fake democracy and pass it off as real democracy. Its purpose is to generate the *concept* of democracy, the only form in which democracy exists. It does this by casting a magic spell (which I'll do my best to demystify in a moment) that deceives us into perceiving the capitalist marketplace we Westerners inhabit, not as a market, but as a society. An essentially democratic society. Not a fully fledged democratic society, but a society progressing toward "democracy" ... which it is, and simultaneously isn't.

Obviously, life under global capitalism is more democratic than under feudal despotism, not to mention more comfortable and entertaining. Capitalism isn't "evil" or "bad". It's a machine. Its fundamental function is to eliminate any and all despotic values and replace them with a single value, ie, exchange value, determined by the market. This despotic-value-decoding machine is what freed us from the tyranny of kings and priests, which it did by subjecting us to the tyranny of capitalists and the meaningless value of

the so-called free market, wherein everything is just another commodity ... toothpaste, cell phones, healthcare, food, education, cosmetics, etcetera. Despite that, only an idiot would argue that capitalism is not preferable to despotism, or that it hasn't increased our measure of freedom. So, yes, we have evolved toward democracy, if we're comparing modern capitalism to medieval feudalism.

The problem is that capitalism is never going to lead to actual democracy (ie, government by and for the people). This is never going to happen. In fact, capitalism has already reached the limits of the freedom it can safely offer us. This freedom grants us the ability to make an ever-expanding variety of choices ... none of which have much to do with democracy. For example, Western consumers are free to work for whatever corporation they want, and to buy whatever products they want, and to assume as much debt as the

market will allow to purchase a home wherever they want, and to worship whichever gods they want (as long as they conform their behaviour to the values of capitalism and not their religion), and men can transform themselves into women, and white people can deem themselves African Americans, or Native Americans, or whatever they want, and anyone can mock or insult the President or the Queen of England on Facebook and Twitter, none of which freedoms were even imaginable, much less possible, under feudal despotism.

But this is as far as our “freedom” goes. The global capitalist ruling classes are never going to allow us to govern ourselves, not in any meaningful way. In fact, since the mid-1970s, they’ve been systematically dismantling the framework of social democracy throughout the West, and otherwise relentlessly privatising everything. They’ve been doing this more slowly in Europe, where social democracy is more entrenched, but, make no mistake, American “society” is the model for our dystopian future. The ruling classes and their debt-enslaved servants, protected from the desperate masses by squads of hyper-militarised police, medicated in their sanitised enclaves, watching Westworld on Amazon Prime as their shares in private prisons rise and the forces of democracy defend their freedom by slaughtering men, women, and children in some faraway country they can’t find on a map, and would never visit on vacation anyway ... this is where the USA already is, and where the rest of the West is headed.

The capitalist ruling classes are never going to allow us to rule ourselves

Which is why it is absolutely crucial to maintain the simulation of democracy, and the fiction that we’re still living in a world where major geopolitical events are determined by sovereign nations and their leaders, rather than by global corporations and a class of supranational elites whose primary allegiance is to global capitalism, rather than to any specific nation, much

less to the actual people who live there. The global capitalist ruling classes need the masses in the West to believe that they live in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and so on, and not in a global marketplace. Because, if it’s all one global marketplace, with one big global labour force (which global corporations can exploit with impunity), and if it’s one big global financial system (where the economies of supposed adversaries like China and the United States, or the European Union and Russia, are almost totally interdependent), then there is no United States of America, no United Kingdom, no France, no Germany ... or not as we’re conditioned to perceive them. There is only the global capitalist empire, divided into “national” market territories, each performing slightly different administrative functions within the empire ... and those territories that have not yet surrendered their sovereignty and been absorbed into it. I think you know which those territories are.

But getting back to the simulation of democracy (the purpose of which is to prevent us from perceiving the world as I just suggested above), how that works is, we are all conditioned to believe we are living in these imperfect democracies, which are inexorably evolving toward “real” democracy but just haven’t managed to get there quite yet. “Real” being the key word here, because there is no such thing as real democracy. There never has been, except among relatively small and homogenous groups of people. Like Baudrillard’s Disneyland, “Western democracy” is presented to us as “imperfect” or “unfinished” (in other words, as a replica of “real democracy”) in order to convince us that there exists such a thing as “real democracy”, which we will achieve ... someday.

This is how simulations work. The replica does not exist to deceive us into believing it is the “real” thing. It exists to convince us that there is a “real” thing. In essence, it invokes the “real” thing by pretending to be a copy of it. Just as the images of God in church invoke the “god” of which they are copies (if only in the minds of

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the faithful), our imperfect replica of democracy invokes the concept of “real democracy” (which does not exist, and has never existed, beyond the level of tribes and bands).

This is, of course, ceremonial magic ... but then so is everything else, really. Take out a \$20, or a £20 note, or your driver’s license. They are utterly valueless, except as symbols, but no less powerful for being just symbols. Or look at some supposedly solid object under an electron microscope. Try this with a tablespoon. As that bald kid in *The Matrix* put it, you will “realise that there is no spoon,” or, rather, that there is only the spoon we’ve created by believing that there is a spoon.

Look, I don’t mean to get all spooky. What that kid (among various others throughout history) was trying to get us to understand is that we create reality, collectively, with symbols ... or we allow reality to be created for us. Our collective reality is also our religion, in that we live our lives and raise our children according to its precepts and values, regardless of whatever other rituals we may or may not engage in on the weekend. Western consumers, no matter whether nominally Christians, Jews, Muslims, atheists, or of

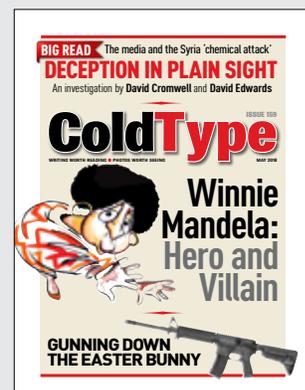
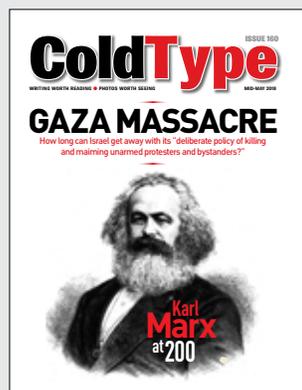
any other faith, live their lives and raise their children according to the values and rules of capitalism. Capitalism is our religion. Like every religion, it has a cosmology.

In the cosmology of global capitalism, “democracy” is capitalist heaven. We hear it preached about throughout our lives, we’re surrounded by graven images of it, but we don’t get to see it until we’re dead. Attempting to storm its pearly gates, or to create the Kingdom of Democracy on Earth, is heresy, and is punishable by death. Denying its existence is blasphemy, for which the punishment is excommunication, and consignment to the City of Dis, where the lost souls shout back and forth at each other across the lower depths of the Internet, their infernal voices unheard by the faithful ... but, hey, don’t take the word of an apostate like me. Go ahead, try it, and see what happens.

CT

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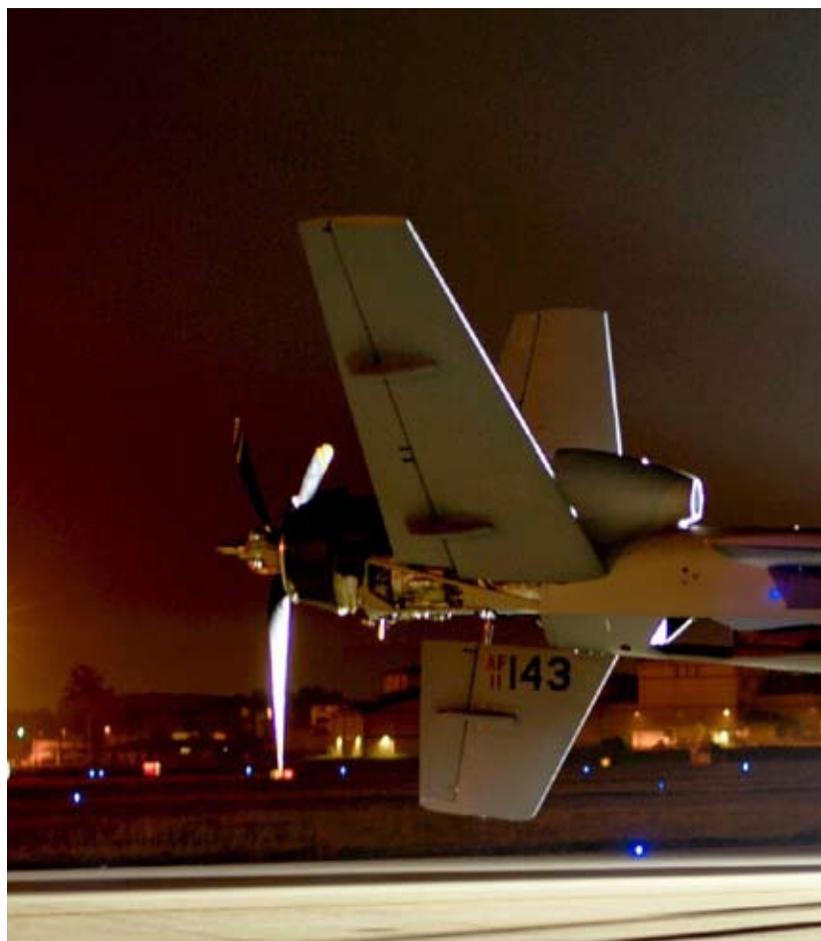
Trump drones on

Coming soon to terrorise innocent citizens of a faraway foreign land:
How unpowered aircraft expand the US 'war on terror'

THEY are like the camel's nose, lifting a corner of the tent. Don't be fooled, though. It won't take long until the whole animal is sitting inside, sipping your tea and eating your sweets. In countries around the world – in the Middle East, Asia Minor, Central Asia, Africa, even the Philippines -- the appearance of US drones in the sky (and on the ground) is often Washington's equivalent of the camel's nose entering a new theatre of operations in this country's forever war against "terror." Sometimes, however, the drones are more like the camel's tail, arriving after less visible US military forces have been in an area for a while.

AFRICOM, the Pentagon's Africa Command, is building Air Base 201 in Agadez, a town in the nation of Niger. The \$110-million installation, which officially opens later this year, will be able to house both C-17 transport planes and MQ-9 Reaper armed drones. It will soon become the new centrepiece in an undeclared US war in West Africa. Even before the base opens, armed US drones are already flying from Niger's capital, Niamey, having received permission from the Nigerien government to do so last November.

Despite crucial reporting by Nick Turse and others, most people in this country only learned of US military activities in Niger in 2017 (and had no idea that about 800 US military personnel were already stationed in the country) when news broke that four US soldiers had died in an October am-



bush there. It turns out, however, that they weren't the only US soldiers involved in firefights in Niger. This March, the Pentagon acknowledged that another clash took place last December between Green Berets and a previously unknown group identified as ISIS-West Africa. For those keeping score at home on the ever-expanding enemies list in Washington's war on terror, this is a different group from the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), responsible for the October ambush. Across Africa, there have been at least eight other incidents, most of them in Somalia.

What are US forces doing in Niger? Ostensibly, they are training Nigerien soldiers to fight the insurgent groups rapidly multiplying in and around their country. Apart from the uranium that accounts for over 70 percent of Niger's exports, there's little of economic interest to the United States there. The real appeal is location, location, location. Landlocked Niger sits in the middle of Africa's Sahel region, bordered by Mali and Burkina Faso on the west, Chad on the east, Algeria and Libya to the north, and Benin and

EXECUTION MACHINE: An MQ-9 Reaper sits on the flight line at Hurlburt Field, Fla., in 2014. The drone is, according to the military, "an armed, multi-mission, medium-altitude, long-endurance remotely piloted aircraft that is employed primarily as an intelligence-collection asset, and secondarily against dynamic execution targets".

US Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. John Bainter



Nigeria to the south. In other words, Niger has the misfortune to straddle a part of Africa of increasing strategic interest to the United States.

In addition to ISIS-West Africa and ISGS, actual or potential US targets there include Boko Haram (born in Nigeria and now spread to Mali and Chad), ISIS and al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Libya, and Al Mourabitoun, based primarily in Mali.

At the moment, for instance, US drone strikes on Libya, which have increased under the Trump administration, are generally launched from a base in Sicily. However, drones at the new air base in Agadez will be able to strike targets in all these countries.

Suppose a missile happens to kill some Nigerien civilians by mistake (not exactly uncommon for US drone strikes elsewhere)? Not to worry: AFRICOM is covered. A US-Niger Status of Forces Agreement guarantees that there won't be any repercussions. In fact, according to the agreement, "The Parties waive any and all claims... against each other for damage to, loss, or destruction of

the other's property or injury or death to personnel of either Party's armed forces or their civilian personnel." In other words, the United States will not be held responsible for any "collateral damage" from Niger drone strikes. Another clause in the agreement shields US soldiers and civilian contractors from any charges under Nigerien law.

The introduction of armed drones to target insurgent groups is part of AFRICOM's expansion of the US footprint on a continent of increasing strategic interest to Washington. In the 19th- and early 20th-century, European nations engaged in the "scramble for Africa", a period of intense and destructive competition for colonial possessions on the continent. In the post-colonial 1960s and 1970s, the United States and the Soviet Union vied for influence in African countries as diverse as Egypt and what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Today, despite AFRICOM's focus on the war on terror, the real jockeying for influence and power

on the continent is undoubtedly between the US and China. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, “China surpassed the United States as Africa’s largest trade partner in 2009” and has never looked back. “Beijing has steadily diversified its business interests in Africa”, the Council’s 2017 backgrounder continues, noting that from Angola to Kenya, “China has participated in energy, mining, and telecommunications industries and financed the construction of roads, railways, ports, airports, hospitals, schools, and stadiums. Investment from a mixture of state and private funds has also set up tobacco, rubber, sugar, and sisal plantations... Chinese investment in Africa also fits into Chinese President Xi Jinping’s development framework, ‘One Belt, One Road’ ”.

More than half the world’s supply of cobalt lies underground in the DRC

For example, in a bid to corner the DRC’s cobalt and copper reserves (part of an estimated \$24-trillion in mineral wealth there), two Chinese companies have formed Sicominex, a partnership with the Congolese government’s national mining company. The Pulitzer Center reports that Sicominex is expected “to extract 6.8-million tons of copper and 427,000 tons of cobalt over the next 25 years.” Cobalt is essential in the manufacture of today’s electronic devices – from cell phones to drones – and more than half of the world’s supply lies underground in the DRC.

Even before breaking ground on Air Base 201 in Niger, the United States already had a major drone base in Africa, in the tiny country of Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen. From there, the Pentagon has been directing strikes against targets in Yemen and Somalia. As AFRICOM commander Gen. Thomas Waldhauser told Congress in March, “Djibouti is a very strategic location for us”. Camp Lemonnier, as the base is known, occupies almost 500 acres near the Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport. US Central Command, Special Operations Command, European Command, and Transportation Command all use the base. At present, however, it appears

that US drones stationed in Djibouti and bound for Yemen and Somalia take off from nearby Chabelley Airfield, as Bard College’s Center for the Study of the Drone reports.

To the discomfort of the US military, the Chinese have recently established their first base in Africa, also in Djibouti, quite close to Camp Lemonnier. That country is also horning in on potential US sales of drones to other countries. Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates are among US allies known to have bought Chinese drones.

From the beginning, the CIA’s armed drones have been used primarily to kill specific individuals. The Bush administration launched its global drone assassination programme in October 2001 in Afghanistan, expanded it in 2002 to Yemen, and later to other countries. Under President Barack Obama, White House oversight of such assassinations only momentum (with an official “kill list” and regular “terror Tuesday” meetings to pick targets). The use of drones expanded 10-fold, with growing numbers of attacks in Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia, as well as in the Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian war zones. Early on, targets were generally people identified as al-Qaeda leaders or “lieutenants.” In later years, the kill lists grew to include supposed leaders or members of a variety of other terror organisations, and eventually even unidentified people engaged in activities that were to bear the “signature” of terrorist activity.

But those CIA drones, destructive as they were (leaving civilian dead, including children, in their wake) were just the camel’s nose – a way to smuggle in a major change in US policy. We’ve grown so used to murder by drone in the last 17 years that we’ve lost sight of an important fact: such assassinations represented a fundamental (and unlawful) change in US military strategy. Because unpiloted airplanes eliminate the physical risk to American personnel, the United States has embraced a strategy of global extrajudicial executions: presidential assassinations on foreign soil.

Successive administrations have implemented this strategic change with little public discussion. Critiques of the drone program tend to focus – not unreasonably – on the many additional

people (like family members) who are injured or die along with the intended targets, and on civilians who should never have been targets in the first place. But few critics point out that executing foreign nationals without trial in other countries is wrong and illegal under US law, as well as that of other countries where some of the attacks have taken place, and of course, international law.

How have the Bush, Obama, and now Trump administrations justified such killings? The same way they justified the expansion of the war on terror itself to new battle zones around the world – through Congress’s September 2001 Authorisation for the Use of Military Force (AUMF). That law permitted the president “to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organisations, or persons he determines planned, authorised, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harboured such organisations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organisations or persons”.

Given that many of the organisations the United States is targeting with drones today didn’t even exist when that AUMF was enacted and so could hardly have “authorised” or “aided” in the 9/11 attacks, it offers, at best, the thinnest of coverage indeed for such a worldwide program.

George W. Bush launched the CIA’s drone assassination program and that was just the beginning. Even as Barack Obama attempted to reduce the number of US ground troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, he ramped up the use of drones, famously taking personal responsibility for targeting decisions. By some estimates, he approved 10 times as many drone attacks as Bush.

In 2013, the Obama administration introduced new guidelines for drone strikes, supposedly designed to guarantee with “near certainty” the safety of civilians. Administration officials also attempted to transfer most of the operational responsibility for drone attacks from the CIA to the military’s only-slightly-less-secretive Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). Although the number of CIA strikes did drop, the Agency

remained in a position to rev up its program at any time, as the Washington Post reported in 2016: “US officials emphasized that the CIA has not been ordered to disarm its fleet of drones, and that its aircraft remain deeply involved in counterterrorism surveillance missions in Yemen and Syria even when they are not unleashing munitions.”

President Trump has no qualms about the CIA’s involvement in drone killings

It’s indicative of how easily drone killings have become standard operating procedure that, in all the coverage of the confirmation hearings for the CIA’s new director, Gina Haspel, there was copious discussion of CIA torture programme, but not a public mention of, let alone a serious question about, its drone assassination campaign. It’s possible the Senate Intelligence Committee discussed it in their classified hearing, but the public has no way of knowing Haspel’s views on the subject.

However, it shouldn’t be too hard to guess. It’s clear, for instance, that President Trump has no qualms about the CIA’s involvement in drone killings. When he visited the Agency’s headquarters in Langley, Virginia, the day after his inauguration, says the Post, “Trump urged the CIA to start arming its drones in Syria. ‘If you can do it in 10 days, get it done,’ he said”. At that same meeting, CIA officials played a tape of a drone strike for him, showing how they’d held off until the target had stepped far enough away from the house that the missile would miss it (and so its occupants). His only question: “Why did you wait?”.

You may recall that, while campaigning, the president told Fox News that the US should actually be targeting certain civilians. “The other thing with the terrorists”, he said, “is you have to take out their families, when you get these terrorists, you have to take out their families. They care about their lives, don’t kid yourself. When they say they don’t care about their lives, you have to take out their families”. In other words, he seemed eager to make himself a future murderer-in-chief.

How, then, has US drone policy fared under Trump? The New York Times has reported ma-

major changes to Obama-era policies. Both the CIA's and the military's "kill lists" will no longer be limited to key insurgent leaders, but expanded to include "foot-soldier jihadists with no special skills or leadership roles". The Times points out that this "new approach would appear to remove some obstacles for possible strikes in countries where Qaeda- or Islamic State-linked militants are operating, from Nigeria to the Philippines". And no longer will attack decisions only be made at the highest levels of government. The requirement for having a "near certainty" of avoiding civilian casualties – always something of a fiction – officially remains in place for now, but we know how seriously Trump takes such constraints.

He's already overseen the expansion of the drone wars in other ways. In general, that "near certainty" constraint doesn't apply to officially designated war zones ("areas of active hostility"), where the lower standard of merely avoiding unnecessary civilian casualties prevails. In March 2017, Trump approved a Pentagon request to identify large parts of Yemen and Somalia as areas of "active hostility", allowing leeway for far less carefully targeted strikes in both places. At the time, however, AFRICOM head General Thomas D. Waldhauser said he would maintain the "near certainty" standard in Somalia for now (which, as it happens, hasn't stopped Somali civilians from dying by drone strike).

Another change affects the use of drones in Pakistan and potentially elsewhere. Past drone strikes in Pakistan officially targeted people believed to be "high value" al-Qaeda figures, on the grounds that they (like all al-Qaeda leaders) represented an "imminent threat" to the United States. However, as a 2011 Justice Department paper explained, imminence is in the eye of the beholder: "With respect to al-Qaeda leaders who are continually planning attacks, the United States is likely to have only a limited window of opportunity within which to defend Americans". In other words, once identified as an al-Qaeda leader or the leader of an allied group, you are by definition "continually planning attacks" and always represent an imminent danger, making you a permanent legitimate target.

Under Trump, however, US drones are not only

going after those al-Qaeda targets permitted under the 2001 AUMF, but also targeting Afghan Taliban across the border in Pakistan. In other words, these drone strikes are not a continuation of counterterrorism as envisioned under the AUMF, but rather an extension of a revitalised US war in Afghanistan. In general, the law of war allows attacks on a neutral country's territory only if soldiers chase an enemy across the border in "hot pursuit." So the use of drones to attack insurgent groups inside Pakistan represents an unacknowledged escalation of the US Afghan War. Another corner of the tent lifted by the camel's nose?

A 2016 executive order requires that the federal director of national intelligence issue an annual report by May 1st on the previous year's civilian deaths caused by US airstrikes outside designated "active hostility" zones. As yet, the Trump administration has not filed the 2017 report.

This March, Fox News reported that the Marine Corps is planning to build a fancy new drone, called the MUX, for Marine Air Ground Task Force Unmanned Aircraft System-Expeditionary. This will sport quite a set of bells and whistles, as Fox marvelled: "The MUX will terrify enemies of the United States, and with good reason. The aircraft won't be just big and powerful: it will also be ultra-smart. This could be a heavily armed drone that takes off, flies, avoids obstacles, adapts and lands by itself – all without a human piloting it".

Between pulling out of the Iran agreement and moving the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, Trump has made it clear that – despite his base's chants of "Nobel! Nobel!" – he has no interest whatsoever in peace. It looks like the future of the still spreading war on terror under Trump is as clear as MUX.

CT

*Rebecca Gordon teaches at the University of San Francisco. She is the author of *American Nuremberg: The US Officials Who Should Stand Trial for Post-9/11 War Crimes*. Her previous books include *Mainstreaming Torture: Ethical Approaches in the Post-9/11 United States* and *Letters from Nicaragua*. This essay first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com*



TRUST US. WE'RE AMERICAN: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (second left) poses for a photo with National Security Advisor John Bolton, President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence before his swearing-in ceremony in Washington, on May 2. Photo: US State Department

Iran and sanctions: A prelude to war?

13

The United States seems determined to steer itself into another unwinnable Middle East quagmire

THE question is: has the Trump administration already made a decision to go to war with Iran, similar to the determination of the Bush administration to invade Iraq in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks on New York and Washington?

Predictions are dicey things, and few human institutions are more uncertain than war. But several developments have come together to suggest that the rationale for using sanctions to force a re-negotiation of the Joint Comprehensive

Plan of Action (JCPOA) is cover for an eventual military assault by the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia aimed at regime change in Teheran.

As clueless as the Trump administration is on foreign policy, the people around the White House – in particular National Security Advisor John Bolton – know that sanctions rarely produce results, and unilateral ones almost always fail.

Sanctions aimed at Cuba, North Korea, Iraq and Libya did not dislodge any of those regimes

CONN HALLINAN

and, in the case of North Korea, spurred Pyongyang into producing nuclear weapons. Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi were eventually overthrown, but by American firepower, not sanctions.

The only case in which sanctions produced some results were those applied to Iran from 2010 to 2015. But that embargo was multi-lateral and included China, India, and one of Iran's major customers, the European Union (EU). When the US unilaterally applied sanctions to Cuba, Iran and Libya in 1996, the move was a conspicuous failure.

This time around, the White House has made no effort to involve other countries. The Trump plan is to use the power of the American economy to strong-arm nations into line. Back our sanctions, threatens the administration, or lose access to the US market. And given that the world uses the dollar as its de-facto international currency, financial institutions may find themselves barred from using the Society for Worldwide Interbank Telecommunications (SWIFT), the American-controlled network that allows banks and finance centres to transfer money from country to county.

Those threats have not exactly panicked the rest of the world. China and India, which between them buy more than 1 million of Iran's 2.1 million barrels per day production, say they will ignore the sanctions. According to Federica Mogherini, the EU's foreign affairs minister, "The European Union is determined to act in accordance with its security interests and protect its economic investments."

Adding up all the countries that will go along with the sanctions – including South Korea and Japan – will cut Teheran's oil exports by 10% to 15%, nothing like the 50% plus that Iran lost under the prior sanctions regime.

In short, the sanctions won't work, but were they really meant to?



GREEN LIGHT: Israel foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman.

Photo: Michael Thaidigsmann

It is possible that the White House somehow thinks they will – delusion is a characteristic of the Oval Office these days – but other developments suggest the administration is already putting in place a plan that will lead from economic sanctions to bombing runs.

For starters, there is the close coordination between the White House and Tel Aviv. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's April 30 speech shortly before Trump withdrew from the Iran agreement was tailored to give Washington a casus belli to dump the agreement. Virtually all of what Netanyahu

"revealed" about the Iranian nuclear program was old news, already known by US, Israeli and European intelligence services.

Four days before Netanyahu's speech Israeli defence minister Avigdor Lieberman met with his American counterparts and, according to Al Monitor, got a "green light" for any military action Tel Aviv might take against Iran.

The same day Lieberman was meeting with the Pentagon, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told Saudi Arabia to end its campaign against Qatar because the Americans wanted the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to be united around a campaign against Iran.

Each of these moves seems calculated to set the stage for a direct confrontation with Iran involving some combination of the US, Israel and the two most aggressive members of the GCC, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The latter two are currently waging war on the Iranian-supported Houthis in Yemen.

It is almost impossible to imagine what the consequences of such a war might be. On paper, it looks like a cakewalk for the anti-Teheran axis. Iran has an antiquated air force, a bunch of fast speedboats and tanks that date back to the 1960s. The military budgets of the US, Israel and the GCC are more than 58 times those of Iran. But, as the Prussian military theorist Karl von Clausewitz once remarked, the only thing one can determine in war is who fires the first shot.

CONN HALLINAN

Military might does not translate into an automatic win. After almost 17 years of war, the US is still bogged down in Afghanistan, and it basically left Iraq with its tail between its legs. Indeed, the last time the American military won a war was in Grenada. As for the GCC, in spite of more than two years of relentless warfare in Yemen, the monarchs are no nearer victory than they were when the war started. And Hezbollah fought Israel to a stalemate in 2006.

While Iran does not have much in the way of military force, it has 80 million people with a strong streak of nationalism who would certainly unite against any attacker. It would be impossible to “win” a war against Iran without resorting to a ground invasion.

But none of Iran’s antagonists have the capacity to carry that out. The Saudis have a dismal military record, and the UAE troops are stalemated in their campaign to take Yemen’s capital, Saana from the rag-tag Houthi militia. The Israelis don’t have the troops – and, in any case, would never put them in harm’s way so far from home – and the Americans are not about to send in the Marines. Most likely this would be a war of aircraft and missiles to destroy Iran’s military and civilian infrastructure. There is little that Teheran can do to stop such an assault. Any planes it put up would be toast, its anti-aircraft weapons are obsolete, and its navy would not last long.

But flattening Teheran’s military is not winning a war, and Iran has other ways to strike back. The Iranians, for instance, have shown considerable skill at asymmetric warfare in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and it does have missiles.

The real damage, however, will be the fallout from the war. The price of oil is already on the rise, and hostilities in the middle of one of the world’s largest petroleum repositories will likely send it through the roof. While that will be good for the GCC, high oil prices will put a dent into the economies of the EU, China, India, and even the US.

What a war will almost certainly do is re-ignite Iran’s push to build a nuclear weapon. If that happens, Saudi Arabia will follow, and the world

will be faced with several new nuclear powers in one of the most volatile regions of the world.

Which doesn’t mean war is inevitable.

The Trump administration hawks broke the JCPOA because they hoped Iran would then withdraw as well, giving the anti-Iranian axis an excuse to launch a war. Iranians are divided on this issue, with some demanding that Teheran restart its uranium enrichment program, while others defend the agreement. Europe can play a key role here by firmly supporting the Joint Agreement and resisting the American sanctions, even if it means taking a financial hit. Some European firms, however, have already announced they are withdrawing their investments.

The US Congress can also help stop a war, although it will require members – mostly Democrats – to put aside their anti-Iranian bias and make common cause with the “stay in the pact” Iranians. This is a popular issue. A CNN poll found that 63 percent of Americans opposed withdrawing from the agreement.

It will also mean that the Congress – again, mainly Democrats – will have to challenge the role that Israel is playing. That will not be easy, but maybe not as difficult as it has been in the past. Israel’s brutality against Palestinians over the past month has won no friends except in the White House and the evangelical circuit, and Netanyahu has made it clear that he prefers Republicans to Democrats.

Lastly, Congress should cut the arms pipeline to the GCC and stop aiding the Saudis in their war on Yemen

If war comes, Americans will find themselves in the middle of an unwinnable conflict that will destabilise the Middle East and the world’s economy, and pour more of this country’s resources into yet another quagmire. **CT**

Conn Hallinan is a columnist for Foreign Policy In Focus. He has a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley and oversaw the journalism programme at the University of California at Santa Cruz for 23 years. A winner of a Project Censored Real News Award, he lives in Berkeley, California and blogs at dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com

High CEO pay leaves workers in the dust

US bosses get rich as their workers become poorer,
writes **Sam Pizzigati**

No single statistic, in isolation, tells us particularly much. Numbers only gain real meaning when we compare them. Take, for instance, the figure for the increase in CEO pay last year at major American corporations. A statistic for this increase – 6.4 percent – appears in the just-released 2018 edition of the AFL-CIO’s annual PayWatch report on corporate compensation.

Does that 6.4 percent increase rate as a big deal – or nothing to get worked up about? We can’t reasonably answer that question without putting the 6.4 percent figure into some sort of broader perspective. The new PayWatch report, thankfully, provides that context: Average worker pay in the United States last year increased just 2.6 percent.

In other words, as the PayWatch study notes, “the imbalance in our economy between the pay of CEOs and working people is worsening”. And that rates as a big deal.

But to really understand how staggering America’s CEO-worker pay imbalance has become, we need to widen our field of comparative vision, from domestic to global.

And what do we find when we take that step? Simply this: CEOs in the United States make significantly more than their counterparts in our peer nations, and American workers make significantly less.

Researchers at Bloomberg have conveniently reduced global CEO pay trends down to a simple index. These researchers have looked at major

corporations in 22 nations around the world. CEO pay for all these nations combined last year averaged \$3.55 million. Bloomberg gives this average an index value of 100.

CEOs in Canada turn out to take home almost twice this global CEO pay average. Their average \$6.49-million take-home gives them an index value of 183. UK CEOs make a little bit more than twice the global average. They average \$7.95-million in pay, enough for a 224 index value.

What about CEOs in the United States? They top the Bloomberg global CEO charts. US CEOs average over quadruple the global major corporate CEO average, with \$14.25-million in annual pay and a 401 index value.

The next highest nation for CEO pay? Switzerland. Swiss chief execs average \$8.5-million, not much more than British CEOs.

Global comparisons like these make apologists for American corporate executive compensation nervous, and for good reason.

These defenders of our unequal status quo like to claim that CEO pay in the United States simply reflects the value that the “market” places on the labor of chief executives. But US CEOs compete in the same global marketplace as CEOs from Great Britain, Canada, and Switzerland. How can the same marketplace value the labor of US CEOs so much more highly than the labor of CEOs from other nations?

America’s corporate cheerleaders have an an-



swer: US CEOs must be the world's best CEOs! In one sense, that claim rates as true. US CEOs certainly do deliver the best results for themselves. They certainly do not, on the other hand, deliver the best results for average people in their nations.

Analysts at HowMuch.net have just crunched data from the OECD, the official economic research agency of the world's developed nations, to chart how much workers take home in the world's top national economies.

US CEOs do not deliver the best results for ordinary people, but they do for themselves

US workers labour under the world's highest-paid bosses. These workers turn out to have smaller paychecks than wage-earners in 11

other major nations. Average workers in Switzerland made \$70,835 in 2017. Average workers in the United States made \$52,988.

Swiss corporate CEOs, remember, make less than 60 percent of what US CEOs earn.

The Swiss, by the way, happen to feel that their own CEOs are grabbing much too much, well more than their fair share. Voters in Switzerland have actually passed a national referendum designed to moderate top executive pay. What might those Swiss voters feel, we can only wonder, if they lived in the United States? **CT**

Sam Pizzigati co-edits *Inequality.org*. Among his books on maldistributed income and wealth: *The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970*. His latest book, *The Case for a Maximum Wage*, will appear in June. Follow him at @Too_Much_Online

Other people's money

Careless bosses must be forced to pay for the disasters they cause, writes **George Monbiot**

ONCE more, they walk away. The senior bosses at Carillion, like those at RBS, Northern Rock and a host of other corporate zombies, went home to count their undiminished millions. The pain they inflicted was felt by others. Reckless greed paid out again.

Last month's UK House of Commons report on this fiasco is one of the most damning assessments of corporate behaviour parliament has ever published. But it's still pathetic. While it scorches the company's executives and board and laments the weakness of the regulators, it scarcely touches the structural causes that make gluttony a perennial feature of corporate life.

The problem begins with an issue the report does not once mention: the extreme nature of limited liability. To allow the owners of a limited company to risk nothing but the money they have spent on shares is to grant them free, uncapped indemnity against the risks they impose on others. It's the equivalent of permitting drivers to take to the roads without buying insurance, knowing that if they cause a crash they will carry no more than the cost of replacing their own car, regardless of the expense, injury and death they might impose on others.

The current model of limited liability allowed the directors and executives of Carillion to rack up a pension deficit of £2.6-billion, leaving the 27,000 members of its schemes to be rescued by the state fund (which is financed by a levy on your pension – if you have one). This indemnity

permitted the owners of the company to walk away from the £2-billion it owed to its suppliers and subcontractors. The same free pass landed the cost of rescuing the public services so foolishly entrusted to this company back on the government.

A recent study exposes a direct link between the generosity of the limited liability regime and the corporate incentive to dump costs on other people. In 1998 the US Supreme Court ruled that parent companies were liable for only narrowly defined harms caused by their subsidiaries. The study reveals that in the aftermath of this decision, toxic emissions by subsidiary companies in the US rose by an average of 10 percent, as they cut investment in abatement technologies.

Limited liability not only allows companies to act recklessly with regard to the interests of others – it obliges them to do so. Directors have a fiduciary duty to use all legally available means to maximise shareholder value. Limited liability compels them to externalise risk.

There is no way that fossil fuel companies could pay for the climate breakdown they cause. There is no way that car companies could meet the health costs of air pollution. Their business models rely on dumping their costs on other people. Were they not protected by the extreme form of limited liability that prevails today, they would be obliged to switch to clean technologies.

Various estimates put the cost that business-

GEORGE MONBIOT

es dump on society at somewhere between 4percent and 20 percent of GDP. In other words, it exceeds the rate of economic growth. Were such costs internalised, the economy would have to be run on an entirely different basis. Human health and the survival of the natural world would come first; corporate greed would come last.

Executive incentives also conflict with the interests of society. Even as Carillion spiralled down, pay and bonuses spiralled up. The UK Corporate Governance Code recommends that directors who fail in their duties should forfeit some of the pay they would otherwise have received, but the details are left to the discretion of their companies. In Carillion's case, the remuneration committee defined the terms so narrowly that even total failure did not trigger a clawback of the executives' vast bonuses.

Its long-term incentive plans were useless. The finance director, Richard Adam, had a stack of performance shares that were held back for three years, ostensibly to prevent reckless behaviour. But the Commons report alleges that his "accounting tricks" propped up the value of the shares until the day they became payable, whereupon he sold them. Within two months, their value had fallen by three quarters. Even when they work well, such incentives protect only the interests of the corporation, rather than the interests of society.

Company executives should pay for any disasters they impose on others

So what is to be done? The first step, I believe, is a radical reassessment of limited liability. A recent paper by the US law professor Michael Simkovic proposes that companies should pay a fee for this indemnity, calibrated to the level of risk they impose on society. Why, after all,



IMPROVING THE IMAGE OF CONSTRUCTION?:
Sign at a Carillion building sit at Sheffield.

should this insurance be free? As numerous leaks show, companies tend to be far more aware of the risks they inflict than either governments or the rest of society. The fees they are prepared to pay for limited liability will reveal their own assessment of the costs they currently externalise. Antisocial practices could be progressively priced out.

As for the executives, I have a tentative proposal of my own. Any manager earning more than a certain amount – say £200,000 – would have half their total remuneration placed in an escrow account, which is controlled not by the company but by an external agency. The deferred half of their income would not become payable until the agency judged that the company had met the targets it set on pension provision, workers' pay, the treatment of suppliers and contractors and wider social and environmental performance. This judgement should draw on mandatory social and environmental reporting, assessed by independent auditors.

If they miss their targets, the executives would lose part or all of the deferred sum. In other words, they would pay for any disasters they impose on others. To ensure it isn't captured by corporate interests, the agency would be funded by the income it confiscates.

Are these the right solutions? I'm not yet sure. So please support them, oppose them or suggest better ideas in the comment thread. I know that, at best, they address only part of the problem. Should corporations in their current form exist at all? Is capitalism compatible with life on earth? Radical as they sound, the ideas in this column are small steps. But by comparison to the timid measures in the Commons report, they're giant strides.

CT

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George Monbiot's latest book, *How Did We Get Into This Mess?*, is published by Verso. This article was first published in the *Guardian*. Monbiot's web site is www.monbiot.com

A brief history of lion taming

The world's first lion tamer shocked, and delighted, Big Top audiences almost 200 years ago. Now, changing attitudes to animal cruelty have resulted in the last British trainer losing his licence, writes **Helen Cowie**

BRITAIN'S last lion tamer, Thomas Chipperfield, was recently refused a licence to continue performing with his two lions and one tiger. The decision – which Chipperfield intends to appeal – marks the end of a long tradition of lion taming in Britain. It reflects a gradual shift in public attitudes towards circuses and a growing sense that making wild animals perform unnatural tricks is both dangerous and cruel.

While it has taken nearly 200 years for such views to result in a formal ban, these sentiments have been around for a long time. From its origin

in the early 19th-century, lion taming has elicited both awe and horror. It has also attracted a socially diverse range of tamers, whose performances have been both praised and condemned.

The first lion tamer to make it big in the UK was Isaac Van Amburgh. Born in Fishkill, New York State, Van Amburgh toured Europe between 1838 and 1845 and achieved notoriety for his performances with big cats. His act included introducing a lamb into the lions' cage and inserting his head into the mouth of his largest lion. Queen Victoria, a big fan of Van Amburgh's, commissioned a famous portrait of the lion tamer by the artist Edwin Landseer.

Though many were impressed by Van Amburgh's bravery, his performances also elicited criticism. When the American floated the idea of taking his largest lion up in a hot air balloon, the authorities banned the venture, persuaded that "if loss of life" were to occur without "even the shadow of a scientific pretext, it will certainly entail responsibility of a heavy kind upon all the parties concerned in so absurd an exhibition" (*Morning Chronicle*, September 24 1838).

Reviewing one of the lion tamer's performances in 1838, meanwhile, a journalist for *The Examiner* objected to "the thrusting of his head within the lion's jaws", which was "at once a piece of gratuitous impertinence towards the animal, a very disagreeable exhibition for the spectators, and above all a highly hazardous proceeding for

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WILD THINGS: Edwin Landseer, *Isaac Van Amburgh and his Animals, 1839*. Art: Wikimedia Commons

HELEN COWIE



Illustration: Wikimedia Commons

the exhibitor”. Some level of peril was acceptable, and gave lion taming its thrill value, but excessive risk drew public condemnation. Soon a new trend swept the menagerie business: the phenomenon of the female lion tamer. Eager to ratchet up the tension of the lion-taming spectacle, menagerists searched for innovations in personnel and homed in on the idea of a “lion queen”. The first lion queen, a Miss Hilton, had entered the lions’ den at Stepney Fair in 1839, and was soon followed by others. By the late 1840s, having a female tamer on the staff was virtually a necessity for any self-respecting menagerist.

Needless to say, not everyone was comfortable with the idea of letting a woman perform with wild animals, and the lion queen craze subsided in 1850 when tamer Ellen Bright was killed by a tiger in Kent. According to witnesses, the ac-

cident happened when Bright, who was only 17, was coming to the end of her final performance of the evening.

The first lion queen, a Miss Hilton, entered the lions’ den at Stepney Fair in 1829

The Daily News reported that wanting to perform a trick with the lion, she pushed the tiger out of her way, striking it “slightly with a small whip that she carried in her hand”. The animal “growled, as if in anger”, and immediately tripped the girl with its paw, “seizing her furiously by the neck, inserting the teeth of the upper jaw in her chin, and in closing its mouth, inflicting frightful injury in the throat”.



VICTORIAN DEVIL: 'Hyena', Illustrated London News, November 21 1868. Illustrated London News

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This shocking incident precipitated a flurry of impassioned protests against lion queens. One commentator, a journalist from the Stamford Mercury, eulogised “the graceful attractions of Miss Bright” and deplored “the folly of allowing so perfect a form to be thus exposed to ruthless hazard” through her “ill-advised tampering” with “caged monsters”. Another, writing in *The Morning Chronicle*, denounced lion taming as a futile and brutalising spectacle that “degrades both the exhibitor and the spectator and hardens the nature while steeling it to fear and to pity”. Once again, the motives of both performers and spectators were under scrutiny, triggering a bout of national soul searching.

Another common critique of lion taming – even in the 19th century – was the cruelty it inflicted on animals. Van Amburgh used violence against his big cats, hitting them with a crowbar to make them submissive. Rumours also circulated that he declawed his lions and had their teeth filed. Writing in 1881, the RSPCA denounced all lion taming performances as “an exhibition of successful cruelty” in which “big animals are punished into sulky obedience or are made to howl

with anger”.

One particularly shocking case of animal cruelty occurred in Leeds in 1874, when, as the *Leeds Mercury* reported, keeper Frederick Hewitt forced a group of hyenas to jump through a fiery hoop “saturated with naphtha and then lighted”. Many of the animals were “severely burned”. Others exhibited “raw wounds ... from which blood oozed”. The RSPCA prosecuted Hewitt for the abuse, calling for an end to such performances. Though the case was dismissed on a legal technicality it paved the way for other successful prosecutions involving circus animals.

Outrage ensued when a one-armed trainer was killed by lions at Bolton

Nor was it just animals that showmen were accused of exploiting. In addition to women, non-European, underage and disabled people also acted as tamers, drawing criticism from contemporaries. In 1866 magistrates in Nottingham denounced the performances of a five-year-old boy, Daniel Day, who entered the lion’s den in his father’s menagerie. And in 1870 concern was expressed for “a dwarf named Tommy Dodd”, who performed with lions in Aberdeen. Then in 1872, outrage ensued when one-armed tamer Thomas McCarty was killed by lions in a menagerie at Bolton.

While the chance to perform with lions may, in some respects, have been a liberating (and financially rewarding) experience for socially disadvantaged tamers, many saw the practice as voyeuristic and exploitative and called for its end. But despite surges of anger following serious accidents and deaths, the lion taming act survived public opposition, attracting large audiences well into the 20th century. It has only been in recent decades that its popularity has faded, thanks, in large part, to a rise in animal welfare activism. **CT**

Helen Cowie is a lecturer in early Modern history at the University of York. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

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**



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www.issuu.com/frontline.south

When the poor sponsor the rich

Filip Reyntjens tells how one of the world's poorest countries came to sponsor one of the Britain's richest soccer teams

RWANDA keeps surprising. Recently the Rwandan Development Board signed a sleeve sponsoring deal with London Premier League club, Arsenal. Over a three-year period, the 200 sq centimetre ad “Visit Rwanda” will cost the country US \$39-million.

President Paul Kagame is known to be a committed Arsenal fan. Recently, he even tweeted that the club needed a new coach after Arsenal's once invincible league and cup winning manager Arsene Wenger's poor record over the past number of seasons. One may suppose that it is a coincidence that the deal was struck just after Wenger's retirement at the end of the 2017/18 season.

Rwanda is the 19th poorest country in the world with a per capita income of around USD\$700. Arsenal is one of the richest football clubs in the world. It's not surprising therefore that the nearly USD\$40 million has upset quite a few people.

Dutch lawmakers, including some from the governing coalition, immediately reacted angrily to the news that such a poor country receiving a great deal of aid from The Netherlands would sponsor one of the world's richest soccer clubs. Similar reactions could be heard in the UK, Rwanda's second largest bilateral donor. An MP described the deal as “an own goal for foreign aid”.

In addition, those concerned with democracy and human rights think the deal is sending

the wrong message about a country that has a strong authoritarian streak running through it.

The question is: Is Kagame entering into a deal with his favourite club to promote tourism or has he done it to enhance his image and shield him from criticism? He appears to have made the decision off his own bat: the contract appears not to have been discussed in the cabinet and the money does not figure in the budget approved by parliament.

For the Rwandan government, the deal is part of a broader strategy to develop tourism, which in 2017 accounted for about 12.7% of GDP and USD\$400 million of revenue. The country sees upmarket leisure and convention tourism as an important growth sector. It has a lot going for it: lush green landscapes, the mountain gorillas of the Virunga volcanos, the Akagera wildlife park, the tropical Nyungwe forest, idyllic Lake Kivu, and even genocide memorials – all compressed into a space of just 26,000 sq kms.

This strategy is integrated and makes sense on paper. The state has invested heavily in its national airline RwandAir and built the Kigali Convention Centre and high-end hotels. And the development of the new Bugesera International Airport, designed to become a major regional hub, is underway.

But there are doubts about the profitability of these ventures. For instance, RwandAir has yet to break even 14 years after it was launched.



THIRTY-NINE-MILLION DOLLAR MEN: Rwanda, one of the world's poorest countries, has come under fire for splashing out sponsorship cash to Arsenal, one of the world's richest soccer teams.

The government keeps it afloat with an annual grant of USD\$50 million just for operations.

Investments in a constantly expanding fleet to cater for an ever growing network of continental and intercontinental destinations require considerable borrowing at a high cost. The fiscal risk involved in the government's strategy is high, and economists wonder how sustainable these outlays will be in the medium term.

Calculations like these are for the Rwandan government to consider. But has Arsenal considered the signal it's giving in light of Kagame's human rights and democracy records?

Rwanda is a de facto one-party state with no meaningful political opposition

Canadian investigative journalist Judi Rever recently recorded in a book, "In Praise of Blood: The Crimes of the Rwandan Patriotic Front", that the Rwandan regime has massacred tens if not hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, particularly in the 1990s.

And last year Human Rights Watch issued

worrying reports about human rights abuses. These included the rounding up and arbitrary detention of poor people in "transit centres" across the country, widespread repression in land cases, extrajudicial killings and unlawful detention and torture in military facilities.

In October 2017 the United Nations subcommittee on Prevention of Torture suspended its visit to Rwanda because of "a series of obstructions imposed by the authorities". It was only the third time in 10 years the subcommittee has done this.

On top of this there has been widespread analysis and commentary on the state of democracy in Rwanda. The country is a de facto one-party state with no meaningful political opposition, no press freedom and no independent civil society.

Kagame's grip on power is absolute and in August last year he was reelected with over 98% of the vote. A referendum on a constitutional amendment in 2015 gave him the right to stay of-fice until 2034.

Realising that battles are fought in the media as much, if not more than on the ground, Kag-

FILIP REYNTJENS

ame's party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has developed a formidable information and communication strategy stretching back to the civil war it launched in October 1990.

Kagame once said: "We used communication and information warfare better than anyone. We have found a new way of doing things".

This has involved paying those who can help promote the right image, including public relations firms.

T rue, political ethics and sports don't match well. Until recently FC Barcelona agreed to a Qatar sponsorship that saw the country featured on the team's jerseys. Qatar has a very chequered political record. Due to host the 2022 World Cup, it's known for its notorious human rights abuse, especially when it comes to the rights of migrant workers and women.

Another example is Atlético Madrid which

was controversially sponsored by Azerbaijan, where the Euro 2020 football tournament will take place. This east European country has been flagged by Amnesty International for its "crackdown on the right to freedom of expression, particularly following revelations of large-scale political corruption".

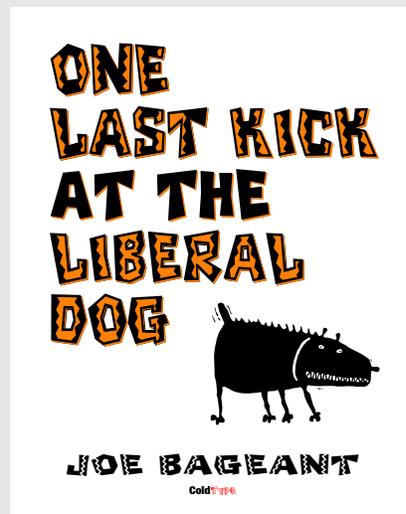
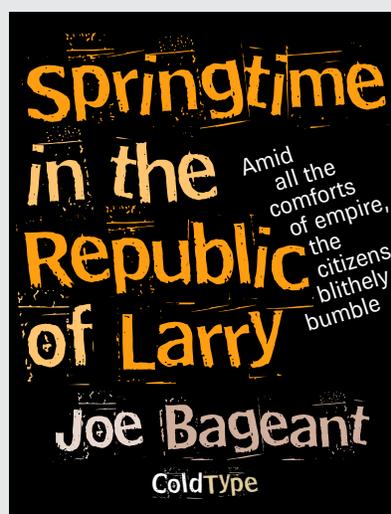
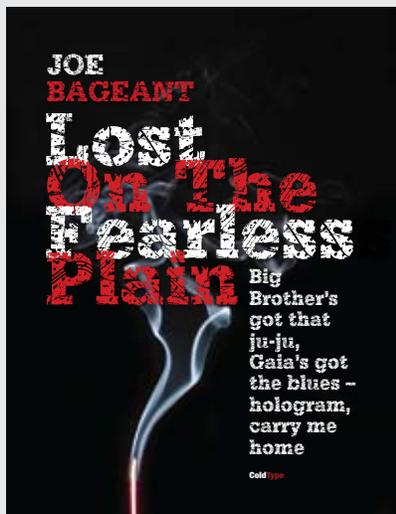
Not that it should make any difference, but these two countries are very rich, while Rwanda is very poor.

And I nearly forgot: Many Arsenal fans were opposed to the deal, not because of Rwanda's human rights and democracy records, but because they didn't like the design of the sleeve print.

CT

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Above: Ghostly airbrushing creates eery background display in an upmarket store. Below: the eyes have it . . .

Lifting the veil

There's something surreal about visiting a shopping mall in which the women on advertising hoardings and posters have their faces, hands and feet digitally removed





D **UGIE WALLACE** made waves in Saudi Arabia when he recently published *Harrodsburg*, a book of photographs showing the outrageous consumer avarice of some of the kingdom's richest citizens as they shopped the streets of Knightsbridge in London.

Then, in an unexpected twist, Reem al Faisal, a Saudi Princess, invited Wallace to exhibit images from the book in the Saudi Arabian Red Sea city of Jeddah. While there, he discovered that there are few entertainment options in the kingdom, which has no cinemas, bars, or nightclubs. Instead, residents spend their leisure time in giant, upscale, shopping malls.

Above: Blurred faces for models on giant hoarding inside a store in a Jeddah shopping mall.
Left: Pixels instead of a face.

DOUGIE WALLACE



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While browsing these malls, Wallace saw how major international stores struggled to combat strict religious laws that only allow women to be seen in public as shapeless forms under black burkas that cover everything but their faces, feet and hands – although there are fewer restrictions on men and children. And mannequins, both male and female, can't have heads, in case you worship them!

In *Behind the Veil*, the new project developed during his Saudi journey, Wallace shows how Western corporations adapt their sales campaigns to laws that are so harsh that the sight of a strand of hair or a jeans-clad leg in an advertising poster can result in a visit from the religious police or *mutaween*, the Com-

IT'S A MAN'S WORLD: Women's faces are pixelated into unrecognisability (above), but those of the men are clear and unaltered (below)





GHOSTLY VISION: A headless, footless woman follows her man (above). Fathers and baby, but no place for mother (left). Home, sweet home, but where's the wife? (below).



DOUGIE WALLACE

BENEATH THE BURKA: Sexy underwear and flimsy nightwear are fine, but faces and hands are forbidden.



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mittee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice. Those marketing efforts have led to the creation of an eerie advertising netherworld, where women in displays in Marks & Spencer stores have their faces erased, and the models in Zara are ghostly apparitions; where Ikea billboards convey homoeroticism: solitary, bare-chested men luxuriating in sumptuous white bed linen; and neither Victoria's Secrets nor Top Shop have a woman in sight.

"Strangely", Wallace notes, "this same religious logic seems unmoved by the display of pertuppled dummies, dressed in lascivious lingerie and outfits dreamed up for kinky sex that appear in abundance in the malls. No faces, no hands, no feet, so all is well . . ."

Aware of the contradictions and the heavy-handed reputation of the country's religious po-

lice, Wallace says, "I decided to shoot empty shops with a small, fast and discrete camera, being careful not to include anyone in the images. Even so, I always expected a tap on the shoulder and then having to explain my photos of women's undergarments. I had a story ready that I was a fashion blogger, interested only in the clothes. But I thought, 'That will last about 10 minutes under interrogation', and had a couple of meltdown moments when I wondered if, perhaps, it would be more sensible if I formatted my memory card."

Reflecting on the "humiliation of women in the multinationals' advertising", Wallace says, "It seems to me that high street stores such as M&S and Zara are accomplices in this humiliation of women. In the West, we protest about companies that objectify and sexualise women by selling



over-revealing clothes to girls. Yet, surely, a similar message is implied when females accept that they must cover up so that men can control their desires.

“Islamic fashion is one of the industry’s fastest growing sectors, expected to be worth more than £200-billion by 2020, which explains why greedy high street chains see nothing wrong in indulging women in one wealthy market, while promoting the imprisoning of women’s bodies in another. Is there any line big business won’t cross in order to cash in?”

I think he already knows the answer to that question. **CT**
Tony Sutton

- **Dougie Wallace's book Harrodsburg is published by Dew Lewis – www.dewilewispublishing.com – price £30**
- **Watch a 30-minute BBC TV video of Harrodsburg at <https://vimeo.com/194869208>**
- **See more of Wallace's work at www.dougiwallace.com**

JAMES HAMILL

Remembering South Africa's catastrophe

The 1948 election that launched an apartheid state

AMID extensive media coverage of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel – commemorated by Palestinians as the nakba (catastrophe) – it's important that the 70th anniversary of South Africa's own tragedy should not pass unnoticed. That is the election of May 1948 which brought the National Party to power on a platform of apartheid.

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That both events should fall in the same month is a neat coincidence given the close Israel-South Africa relationship from 1967. This was documented in detail by Sasha Polakow-Suransky in his 2011 book "The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa".

Added to this is the contemporary view among Israel's critics that the country increasingly resembles an apartheid state. This comparison was given added weight by the recent killing of 60 Palestinians by the Israeli army, which evoked memories of the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.

May 1948 continues to cast a long shadow over South African life. Apartheid has been removed from the statute book for almost three decades. But there is widespread recognition that a de facto apartheid endures both economically and socially. After 24 years of democracy, millions of South Africans still await change.

The country may no longer be the two distinct nations – "one white and wealthy, the other black and poor" – captured in the words of former president Thabo Mbeki. The last two decades have

witnessed a growing black middle class, but the disparities are still grotesque.

Black South Africans continue to be disadvantaged by unemployment, homelessness and inadequate provision of such basic services as water and sanitation. They have a lower life expectancy, and higher levels of absolute poverty compared to their white compatriots.

True, apartheid should not become an all-purpose alibi for failure and poor governance. And the record of the African National Congress (ANC), in power since 1994, has been distinctly chequered. But, it was always inevitable that such a pervasive ideology would live on after its formal legislative demise.

Even beyond the area of acute socio-economic disadvantage, apartheid retains a capacity to contaminate South African life. Voting is still heavily skewed by race and a polarised racial discourse continues around key issues such as land redistribution, affirmative action, education and even, on occasion, foreign policy.

In fact, apartheid itself remains the subject of dispute across racial lines as to the scale of its crimes and how best they might be atoned for.

What remains bizarre about the May 1948 election is that it was surrounded by all the trappings of a supposedly democratic society. There were discussions of marginal seats, manifestos and campaigns. Yet it was all aimed exclusively at a narrow, racially defined, white segment of



NOT-SO-GREAT: Black commuters line up to board a 'Non-Whites Only' bus in Johannesburg during the mid-1970s, just before the Soweto schoolkids' riots of 1976 signalled the beginning of the final push in the struggle to eliminate apartheid. Photo: Duncan Mangham

the population.

The overwhelming majority of South Africans were excluded on grounds of their skin colour. Black Africans, then over 70 percent of the population, were passive onlookers at an election which would shape their lives for generations. The National Party, led by Daniel Malan, campaigned on the platform of apartheid (apartness), which at that point was principally a slogan to mobilise white, particularly Afrikaner, voters.

*Passive onlookers at an election
that would shape their lives
for generations*

It was unashamedly racist and played on white insecurities by raising the spectre of the “swart gevaar” (“black peril”); amid growing black urbanisation, bringing with it the triple threat of economic competition, demands for political rights, and the likelihood of racial mixing.

An almost Nazi-like emphasis on preserving

the “purity of the white race” was central to the NP campaign message in 1948. This was coupled with the view that their opponents, the United Party led by Prime Minister Jan Smuts, had no “big idea” to place before the white electorate to rival the apartheid slogan.

There was also a class factor at work. The Nationalists argued that the United Party could afford to indulge in racial liberalism as its supporters were generally more affluent and cossetted than its core base of small farmers, blue-collar workers and “poor whites”. These groups found themselves at the sharp end of competition with black Africans and, in the Nationalists’s view, required statutory racial “protection” in the job market.

Much of this was grossly exaggerated to the point of outright fabrication. Smuts was never a racial liberal, still less an integrationist. He believed firmly in white supremacy which, in his political credo, was uncontroversial. But, crucially, Smuts recognised that the total separation of the races was a practical impossibility. It



POVERTY OF APARTHEID: Crippled and homeless, a man holds out his hat out as passers by ignore him in a Johannesburg street during the days of apartheid in South Africa. Photo: Duncan Mangham

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was this point which distinguished him from the delusional politics of the National Party.

He believed that the white-run economy, and the white population more generally, would always depend on black labour for their well-being. The flow of black Africans to the cities, so troubling to the National Party, could perhaps be regulated, to some degree contained, but it could never be reversed. As he said in a much quoted 1942 comment, one might as well try to sweep the ocean back with a broom.

Smuts would eventually be vindicated when four decades later in the early 1980s, the National Party abandoned this central pillar of apartheid doctrine and formally accepted the permanence of the urban black population. This, while seeking to build a new “reform” policy around that reality.

But in 1948 the Smuts position was characterised as weak and indecisive and the National

Party made political capital from such apparent uncertainty, so much so that Smuts even lost his own seat at Standerton in the then Transvaal. While the National Party victory of 1948 was undoubtedly a political earthquake, paradoxically it was no electoral landslide. In terms of share of the popular vote the party was in fact defeated. The United Party and its allies secured 50.9 percent of the popular vote and the National Party and its allies 41.2 percent, a significant disparity. But, due to the vagaries of an electoral system heavily weighted in favour of rural seats where the National Party was dominant, the party emerged with 79 seats to the UP’s 71.

When all the parliamentary arithmetic was concluded, the National Party and its allies emerged with an overall majority of five. This outcome was viewed by the party as a triumph in two distinct areas.

First, it was considered a triumph over the English-speaking electorate and the British, from whom Afrikaners had supposedly reclaimed the country to become, once again, masters in their own house. Second, and more significantly, it was considered a triumph over the black population. It allowed the National Party to begin to address the so-called “native question”.

This was the prelude to four decades of racial fanaticism, ethnic cleansing, systematic discrimination and oppression, which made South Africa an international outcast and left a devastating legacy for the post-apartheid government.

It is a tragedy and one of history’s supreme ironies that such a malign ideology and system – one with calamitous long-term consequences – should have been launched on so flimsy, indeed non-existent, a mandate. **CT**

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See more of Duncan Mangham’s photographs of South Africa under apartheid at www.coldtype.net/Assets.14/pdfs/0314.Mangham.Africa.singles.pdf

The Pentagon can't account for \$21-trillion!

It seems vaguely upsetting, but you forget about it 15 seconds later because ... what else is there to do?

TWENTY-ONE trillion dollars. The Pentagon's own numbers show that it can't account for \$21-trillion. Yes, I mean trillion with a "T". And this could change everything.

But I'll get back to that in a moment.

There are certain things the human mind is not meant to do. Our complex brains cannot view the world in infra-red, cannot spell words backward during orgasm and cannot really grasp numbers over a few thousand. A few thousand, we can feel and conceptualize. We've all been in stadiums with several thousand people. We have an idea of what that looks like (and how sticky the floor gets).

But when we get into the millions, we lose it. It becomes a fog of nonsense. Visualizing it feels like trying to hug a memory. We may know what \$1-million can buy (and we may want that thing), but you probably don't know how tall a stack of a million \$1-bills is. You probably don't know how long it takes a minimum-wage employee to make \$1-million.

That's why trying to understand – truly understand – that the Pentagon spent 21-trillion unaccounted-for dollars between 1998 and 2015 washes over us like your mother telling you that your third cousin you met twice is getting divorced. It seems vaguely upsetting, but you forget about it 15 seconds later because ... what else is there to do?

Twenty-one trillion.

But let's get back to the beginning. A couple

of years ago, Mark Skidmore, an economics professor, heard Catherine Austin Fitts, former assistant secretary in the Department of Housing and Urban Development, say that the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General had found \$6.5-trillion worth of unaccounted-for spending in 2015. Skidmore, being an economics professor, thought something like, "She means \$6.5-billion. Not trillion. Because trillion would mean the Pentagon couldn't account for more money than the gross domestic product of the whole United Kingdom. But still, \$6.5-billion of unaccounted-for money is a crazy amount".

So he went and looked at the inspector general's report, and he found something interesting: It was trillion! It was fucking \$6.5-trillion in 2015 of unaccounted-for spending! And I'm sorry for the cursing, but the word "trillion" is legally obligated to be prefaced with "fucking". It is indeed way more than the UK's GDP.

Skidmore did a little more digging. As Forbes reported in December 2017, "[He] and Catherine Austin Fitts ... conducted a search of government websites and found similar reports dating back to 1998. While the documents are incomplete, original government sources indicate \$21-trillion in unsupported adjustments have been reported for the Department of Defense and the Department of Housing and Urban Development for the years 1998-2015."

Let's stop and take a second to conceive how

much \$21-trillion is (which you can't because our brains short-circuit, but we'll try anyway).

1. The amount of money supposedly in the stock market is \$30-trillion.

2. The GDP of the United States is \$18.6-trillion.

3. Picture a stack of money. Now imagine that stack of dollars is all \$1,000 bills. Each bill says "\$1,000" on it. How high do you imagine that stack of dollars would be if it were \$1-trillion. It would be 63 miles high.

4. Imagine you make \$40,000 a year. How long would it take you to make \$1-trillion? Well, don't sign up for this task, because it would take you 25 million years (which sounds like a long time, but I hear that the last 10 million really fly by because you already know your way around the office, where the coffee machine is, etc.).

The expenses with no explanation were 54 times the budget allotted by Congress

The human brain is not meant to think about a trillion dollars.

And it's definitely not meant to think about the \$21-trillion our Department of Defense can't account for. These numbers sound bananas. They sound like something Alex Jones found tattooed on his backside by extraterrestrials.

But the 21-trillion number comes from the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General – the OIG. Although, as Forbes pointed out, “after Mark Skidmore began inquiring about OIG-reported unsubstantiated adjustments, the OIG’s webpage, which documented, albeit in a highly incomplete manner, these unsupported “accounting adjustments”, was mysteriously taken down.”

Luckily, people had already grabbed copies of the report.

Here's something else important from that Forbes article – which is one of the only mainstream media articles you can find on the largest theft in American history:

GIVEN THAT THE ENTIRE ARMY BUDGET IN FISCAL YEAR 2015 WAS \$120-BILLION,

UNSUPPORTED ADJUSTMENTS WERE 54 TIMES THE LEVEL OF SPENDING AUTHORIZED BY CONGRESS.

That's right. The expenses with no explanation were 54 times the actual budget allotted by Congress. Well, it's good to see Congress is doing 1/54th of its job of overseeing military spending (that's actually more than I thought Congress was doing). This would seem to mean that 98 percent of every dollar spent by the Army in 2015 was unconstitutional.

So, pray tell, what did the OIG say caused all this unaccounted-for spending that makes Jeff Bezos' net worth look like that of a guy jingling a tin can on the street corner?

“[The July 2016 inspector general] report indicates that unsupported adjustments are the result of the Defense Department’s ‘failure to correct system deficiencies.’”

They blame trillions of dollars of mysterious spending on a “failure to correct system deficiencies”? That's like me saying I had sex with 100,000 wild hairless aardvarks because I wasn't looking where I was walking.

Twenty-one trillion.

Say it slowly to yourself.

At the end of the day, there are no justifiable explanations for this amount of unaccounted-for, unconstitutional spending. Right now, the Pentagon is being audited for the first time ever, and it's taking 2,400 auditors to do it. I'm not holding my breath that they'll actually be allowed to get to the bottom of this.

But if the American people truly understood this number, it would change both the country and the world. It means that the dollar is sprinting down a path toward worthless. If the Pentagon is hiding spending that dwarfs the amount of tax dollars coming in to the federal government, then it's clear the government is printing however much it wants and thinking there are no consequences. Once these trillions are considered, our fiat currency has even less meaning than it already does, and it's only a matter of time before inflation runs wild.

It also means that any time our government

LEE CAMP

says it “doesn’t have money” for a project, it’s laughable. It can clearly “create” as much as it wants for bombing and death. This would explain how Donald Trump’s military can drop well over 100 bombs a day that cost well north of \$1-million each.

So why can’t our government also “create” endless money for health care, education, the homeless, veterans benefits and the elderly, to make all parking free and to pay the Rolling Stones to play stoop-front shows in my neighbourhood? (I’m sure the Rolling Stones are expensive, but surely a trillion dollars could cover a couple of songs.)

Obviously, our government could do those things, but it chooses not to. Last month, Louisiana sent eviction notices to 30,000 elderly people on Medicaid to kick them out of their nursing homes. Yes, a country that can vomit trillions of dollars down a black hole marked “Military” can’t find the money to take care of our poor elderly. It’s a repulsive joke.

Twenty-one trillion.

Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates spoke about how no one knows where the money is flying in the Pentagon. In a barely reported speech in 2011, he said, “My staff and I learned that it was nearly impossible to get accurate information and answers to questions such as, ‘How much money did you spend?’ and ‘How many people do you have?’”

They can’t even find out how many people work for a specific department?

Note for anyone looking for a job: Just show up at the Pentagon and tell them you work there. It doesn’t seem like they’d have much luck proving you don’t.

For more on this story, check out David DeGraw’s excellent reporting at ChangeMaker.

media, because the mainstream corporate media are mouthpieces for the weapons industry. They are friends with benefits of the military-industrial complex. I have seen basically nothing from the mainstream corporate media concerning this mysterious \$21-trillion. I missed the time when CNN’s Wolf Blitzer said that the money we dump into war and death – either the accounted-for money or the secretive trillions – could end world hunger and poverty many times over.

While no one is looking, the largest theft of all times is going on behind our backs

There’s no reason anybody needs to be starving or hungry or unsheltered on this planet, but our government seems hellbent on proving that it stands for nothing but profiting off death and misery. And our media desperately want to show they stand for nothing but propping up our morally bankrupt empire.

When the media aren’t actively promoting war, they’re filling the airwaves with shit, so the entire country can’t even hear itself think. Our whole mindscape is filled to the brim with nonsense and vacant celebrity idiocy. Then, while no one is looking, the largest theft humankind has ever seen is going on behind our backs – covered up under the guise of “national security.”

Twenty-one trillion.

Don’t forget.

CT

Lee Camp is an American stand-up comedian, writer, actor and activist. Camp is the host of the weekly comedy news TV show “Redacted Tonight With Lee Camp” on RT America. He is a former comedy writer for the Onion and the Huffington Post and has been a touring stand-up comic for 20 years.

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Burned to death, but will anyone notice?

The flames that killed Fathi Harb should make us all burn with guilt and shame

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FATHI Harb should have had something to live for, not least the imminent arrival of a new baby. But last week the 21-year-old extinguished his life in an inferno of flames in central Gaza.

It is believed to be the first example of a public act of self-immolation in the enclave. Harb doused himself in petrol and set himself alight on a street in Gaza City shortly before dawn prayers during the holy month of Ramadan.

In part, Harb was driven to this terrible act of self-destruction out of despair.

After a savage, decade-long Israeli blockade by land, sea and air, Gaza is like a car running on fumes. The United Nations has repeatedly warned that the enclave will be uninhabitable within a few years.

Over that same decade, Israel has intermittently pounded Gaza into ruins, in line with the Israeli army's Dahiya doctrine. The goal is to decimate the targeted area, turning life back to the Stone Age so that the population is too preoccupied with making ends meet to care about the struggle for freedom.

Both of these kinds of assault have had a devastating impact on inhabitants' psychological health.

Harb would have barely remembered a time before Gaza was an open-air prison and one where a 1,000kg Israeli bomb might land near his home.

In an enclave where two-thirds of young men are unemployed, he had no hope of finding work.

He could not afford a home for his young family and he was about to have another mouth to feed.

Doubtless, all of this contributed to his decision to burn himself to death. But self-immolation is more than suicide. That can be done quietly, out of sight, less gruesomely. In fact, figures suggest that suicide rates in Gaza have rocketed in recent years.

But public self-immolation is associated with protest. A Buddhist monk famously turned himself into a human fireball in Vietnam in 1963 in protest at the persecution of his co-religionists. Tibetans have used self-immolation to highlight Chinese oppression, Indians to decry the caste system, and Poles, Ukrainians and Czechs once used it to protest Soviet rule.

More likely for Harb, the model was Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire in late 2010 after officials humiliated him once too often. His public death triggered a wave of protests across the Middle East that became the Arab Spring.

Bouazizi's self-immolation suggests its power to set our consciences on fire. It is the ultimate act of individual self-sacrifice, one that is entirely non-violent except to the victim himself, performed altruistically in a greater, collective cause.

Who did Harb hope to speak to with his shocking act? In part, according to his family,

JONATHAN COOK

he was angry with the Palestinian leadership. His family was trapped in the unresolved feud between Gaza's rulers, Hamas, and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank. That dispute has led the PA to cut the salaries of its workers in Gaza, including Harb's father.

But Harb undoubtedly had a larger audience in mind too.

Until a few years ago, Hamas regularly fired rockets out of the enclave in a struggle both to end Israel's continuing colonisation of Palestinian land and to liberate the people of Gaza from their Israeli-made prison.

But the world rejected the Palestinians' right to resist violently and condemned Hamas as "terrorists". Israel's series of military rampages in Gaza to silence Hamas were meekly criticised in the West as "disproportionate".

The Palestinians of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where there is still direct contact with Israeli Jews, usually as settlers or soldiers, watched as Gaza's armed resistance failed to prick the world's conscience.

So some took up the struggle as individuals, targeting Israelis or soldiers at checkpoints. They grabbed a kitchen knife to attack Israelis or soldiers at checkpoints, or rammed them with a car, bus or bulldozer.

Again, the world sided with Israel. Resistance was not only futile, it was denounced as illegitimate.

Since late March, the struggle for liberation has shifted back to Gaza. Tens of thousands of unarmed Palestinians have massed weekly close to Israel's fence encaging them.

The protests are intended as confrontational civil disobedience, a cry to the world for help and a reminder that Palestinians are being slowly choked to death.

Israel has responded repeatedly by spraying



BLAME THE VICTIMS: Nikki Haley, US Ambassador to the UN.

the demonstrators with live ammunition, seriously wounding many thousands and killing more than 100. Yet again, the world has remained largely impassive.

In fact, worse still, the demonstrators have been cast as Hamas stooges. The United States ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, blamed the victims under occupation, saying Israel had a right to "defend its border", while the British government claimed the protests were "hijacked by terrorists".

None of this can have passed Harb by.

When Palestinians are told they can "protest peacefully", western governments mean

quietly, in ways that Israel can ignore, in ways that will not trouble consciences or require any action.

In Gaza, the Israeli army is renewing the *Dahiya* doctrine, this time by shattering thousands of Palestinian bodies rather than infrastructure.

Harb understood only too well the West's hypocrisy in denying Palestinians any right to meaningfully resist Israel's campaign of destruction.

The flames that engulfed him were intended also to consume us with guilt and shame. And doubtless more in Gaza will follow his example.

Will Harb be proved right? Can the West be shamed into action?

Or will we continue blaming the victims to excuse our complicity in seven decades of outrages committed against the Palestinian people? **CT**

Jonathan Cook won the *Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism*. His latest books are *"Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East"* (Pluto Press) and *"Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair"* (Zed Books). His website is <http://www.jonathan-cook.net>

Skirmishes: Israel's blitz on Syria

Words as weapons: How the mainstream media deceive readers in their reporting of Israeli action against neighbouring countries

A **KEY** mainstream media theme in covering the Israeli army's repeated massacres of unarmed, non-violent Palestinian civilians protesting Israel's military occupation in Gaza – killing journalists, a paramedic, the elderly and children – has been the description of these crimes as “clashes”.

This has been a clear attempt to obfuscate the fact that while two groups of people are involved, only one group is being killed and wounded.

To the casual reader – and many readers do not venture beyond the headlines – a “clash” suggests that both sides are armed, with both suffering casualties. One would not, for example, describe a firing squad as a clash”. There was no clash” in New York on September 11, 2001, and so on.

Following Israel's massive blitz on more than 100 targets in Syria on May 10, mainstream coverage offered similarly questionable frameworks of understanding. A Guardian headline read: “Israel retaliates after Iran ‘fires 20 rockets’ at army in occupied Golan Heights’

For moral, legal and public relations reasons, the issue of which side started a conflict is obviously crucial. If the public recognises that the case for war is unjustified, immoral or illegal – that a country has chosen to launch a war of aggression – they will likely oppose it, sometimes in the millions, as happened in 2002 and 2003 in relation to the Iraq war. It is thus highly significant that the Guardian described Israel as retaliating.

The BBC reported of Israel's attacks: “They came after 20 rockets were fired at Israeli military

positions in the occupied Golan Heights.”

Reuters took the same line as the Guardian and BBC: “Iran targets Israeli bases across Syrian frontier, Israel pounds Syria.

“Iranian forces in Syria launched a rocket attack on Israeli forces in the Golan Heights early on Thursday, Israel said, prompting one of the heaviest Israeli barrages in Syria since the conflict there began in 2011.”

The New York Times also reported: “It was a furious response to what Israel called an Iranian rocket attack launched from Syrian territory just hours earlier.” And yet, the report buried a challenge to its own claim that Israel had retaliated in the second half of the piece: “Iran's rocket attack against Israel came after what appeared to have been an Israeli missile strike against a village in the Syrian Golan Heights late on Wednesday.”

According to the BBC, the Israeli missile strike had targeted an Iranian drone facility killing several Iranians. So, it might be said that Iran was retaliating to Israeli attacks – a more reasonable interpretation, given recent history also described by the New York Times: “Israel has conducted scores of strikes on Iran and its allies inside Syria, rarely acknowledging them publicly.”

Nevertheless, the corporate media theme has been that Israel retaliated, part of a long-term trend in media coverage. In a 2002 report, “Bad News From Israel”, The Glasgow University Media Group commented: “On the news, Israeli actions tended to be explained and contextualised – they were often shown as merely ‘responding’

DAVID EDWARDS

to what had been done to them by Palestinians (in the 2001 samples they were six times as likely to be presented as ‘retaliating’ or in some way responding than were the Palestinians)”.

But was Iran even involved at all? The opening, highlighted sentence in a front-page BBC piece by diplomatic editor Jonathan Marcus left the reader in no doubt: “These are the first skirmishes in a potential war between Israel and Iran that promises a fearful level of destruction – even by the standards of the modern Middle East.”

So this was a “skirmish”, a clash involving Israel and Iran – they were both involved in the combat. And yet, in the second half of the article, Marcus wrote: “The alleged Iranian attack last night – I say alleged because at this stage there is no confirmation from Iranian sources as to the precise authors of the attack – involved a single and relatively short-range system, what appears to have been a multiple-barrelled rocket launcher.”

How can the Iranian attack be merely “alleged” half-way down the article but a bald fact in the highlighted opening sentence? In fact, not only has there been “no confirmation”, there has been outright Iranian rejection of the claims. Abolfazl Hassan-Baygi, deputy head of the Iranian parliament’s national security committee, commented: “Iran has nothing to do with the missiles that struck the enemy entity yesterday.”

Associated Press reported Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi commenting that Israel’s attacks were based on “fabricated and baseless excuses”, and were a breach of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. AP quoted a senior Lebanese politician and close ally of Syria and Iran, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, as saying: “this time the Syrian retaliation was in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights but next time it will be in Israel proper”.

Later in his BBC piece, Marcus wrote: “The immediate tensions stem from an Israeli air strike on what they claimed was an Iranian drone facility at the so-called T-4 air base, near Palmyra, on 9 April, which reportedly killed several Iranian military advisers.”

This again challenged the idea that Israel had retaliated”, but again it was not given the kind of prominence that could challenge Israel’s ver-

sion of events. So the “skirmishes” may actually have consisted of Israel first attacking an Iranian drone facility killing Iranian personnel, and then launching a massive attack against Iranian positions across Syria, without Iran responding at all. And yet Marcus wrote: “It is a conflict that needs to be averted and the time to do it is now. However Israel and Iran remain on a collision course.”

Despite the uncertainty on whether Iran had attacked, Marcus concluded: “Iran’s strategic intent is clear ... it is unlikely to be dissuaded from its efforts.” He added: “Israel has drawn its red lines and it is clearly not going to back down either”.

Obama also famously drew his “red line” in Syria in 2012, threatening a massive attack in the event of Syrian government use of chemical weapons. But for Marcus, Israel’s actual launch of a massive attack merely constituted the drawing of “red lines”. And again, ignoring his own doubts about what had happened, the required war-mongering “balance” was favoured: “For the immediate future, the pattern of strike, attempted riposte, and counter-strike is likely to continue.”

If it had started at all!

Marcus concluded his article with three ominous lines identifying another threat alongside the danger of Israel drawing more ‘red lines’ with more massive attacks: “One clear danger is that Iran may seek to exact its revenge outside the Middle East.

“Pro-Iranian factions have in the past attacked Israeli tourists abroad or Jewish organisations, notably in Latin America.

“A successful terrorist attack of this kind would inevitably alter the picture, pushing Israel and Iran to the brink of a full-scale war.’

The word “terrorist” thus made its first appearance in the last line of Marcus’s piece, in reference to a hypothetical Iranian atrocity.

The idea that Israel might already have committed terrorist atrocities in Syria by launching unprovoked attacks, by illegal bombings committed completely outside of international law, is unthinkable. **CT**

David Edwards is the co-editor of Medialens, the UK media watchdog – www.medialens.org

Dreamers, opioids and involuntary celibates

An author says farewell to the streets of Philadelphia

44

M back in Philly to wrap things up, return my apartment, give a paid talk and say good-bye to my friends. With Felix Giordano, I've hit bars in the Italian Market, Point Breeze, Pennsport, Fishtown and Whitman. Soon, we'll run over to Billy Boy's in the Pine Barrens, where the owner/cook makes some of the best comfort food anywhere, and the hardy, friendly people soothe our souls. Mellowing in there, it's hard to believe you're only 30 miles from the mayhem of Camden. Even in the Piney, though, things have changed for the worse. "You can't really smell pig shit anymore", Felix pointed out. "It's not like when I was a kid, coming here. There's less pig farming now".

At Nickels', I had a \$3.50 roast beef sandwich that came with pickle, peppers, horseradish and potato chips. Can't beat that! There was a sign, "DRUG ACTIVITY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED HERE." At a Fishtown dive, Teresa the bartender comped my second Guinness, "Welcome to the neighbourhood!". There, I talked to Matt, a 56-year-old union electrician, about Poland, the economy, his fishing boat and heroin. We both know people who've died from it.

Matt showed me, on his cellphone, a young man nodding on a subway train. A couple of years ago, Matt found a friend passed out on the street, so he lifted him onto a shopping cart and pushed him home. The man died soon after from an overdose. "This guy was a football player in high school, man, a super jock, and very popular". As we chattered, the pleasant smell of mari-

juana wafted in from the sidewalk.

As Felix and I were leaving, a middle-aged black lady stood up and shouted at us, "I love you all! Love you all!"

Wandering around Center City, I enjoyed the bustle and fine, cool weather, as I got reacquainted with the sights of the sleeping or panhandling homeless. Near City Hall, I noticed a row of broken glass panes at a subway entrance. I've been to maybe 30 countries, and the only one that had the same level of vandalism and graffiti as the US was Germany.

With purple hair, eyebrows and lipstick to accentuate her cadaverous complexion, an out-of-shape, college-aged, woman wore a jean vest that had a cupcake on each side. "EAT SHIT" "AND DIE", they said.

At Thomas Paine Plaza, there's a multi panel art project celebrating Dreamers, or underage illegal immigrants. One large image shows a Hispanic girl studying a book, Milk and Honey, with these words surrounding her, "Education THINKING Research Success FUTURE Expert SKILLS PROGRESS JOB KNOWLEDGE TRAINING DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE ADVANTAGE FOCUS LEARN WORK SOCIAL LEADERSHIP EMPLOYMENT TEST HOPE HARD WORK", and so on.

There are LOOK UP/SPEAK UP signs everywhere to condition citizens to be suspicious of each other. Since the 9/11 false flag, enforced



JUSTICE FOR ALL: Flag on the side of Mei Mei Grocery. Port Richmond, Philadelphia.

Photo: Linh Dinh

paranoia has become the norm:

Sticker on a steel pole, “THE LEFTIST AGENDA: DIVIDE AND OPPRESS”.

At a bus shelter, a fat man with a vapid expression sat next to a poster advertising the TV show, *Arrested Development*.

Near City Hall, there’s a white sign with a black arrow, pointing to the ground, “HUB OF HOPE”. I have no idea if it’s a joke.

Three days after I got back, I checked the *Inquirer* to find that nine Philadelphians had been shot within 18 hours, with five dead. Among the survivors was a 61-year-old man who had been hit in the groin, and a 28-year-old who had been blasted in the face. I was certainly not in East Asia anymore.

Six Temple students have been killed or committed suicide this academic year, with two business majors overdosing from drugs within a week. A 24-year-old was found dead in the library. In 2017, 1,217 Philadelphians died from

drug overdoses, up from 907 in 2016. Per capita, Pittsburgh tops the country in drug deaths.

Discussing the opioid crisis last year, I was hissed at by a gaggle of pissy ostriches. One sneered, “What are these places he’s talking about? And the commenters, too? Who are these degenerates? I don’t know a single person or place that fits ANY of this. And I’m no spring chicken”. It is hopeless.

One evening, I ran into a 41-year-old bartender who had been fired months before for being so fogged up, she couldn’t give the correct change or even hear a drink order. It didn’t help that Becky also downed shots of Jameson while working.

“You look great, Becky! You really do. The last time I saw you, you were pretty out of it”.

“I know”.

“That guy Jack who gave you pills, he fucked you up!”. Handing out pills, Jack got whiskey back.

“The pills did help me, Linh”. Becky’s foot was in extreme pain.

“Jack got you fired”.

“Yes, he did”.

In retrospect, Becky is not all that sorry to be canned, for her boss was an asshole, “Elio kept telling me to not let the Mexicans sit at the bar. ‘They have to sit at the tables’, he kept saying, but how do you tell people they can’t sit at the bar?! That’s why I came home crying all the time. One time, Elio came in and yelled at me, ‘Why is that guy sitting at the bar?’”

“I know Elio’s an asshole, but I didn’t know he was that much of an asshole!”.

“That’s why he won’t stock Corona or Tecate. Elio doesn’t want Mexicans in his bar”.

“With all the old white guys gone, he should welcome these Mexicans as customers”.

“And they’re good customers, too. He keeps saying they don’t tip, but they do tip. They’re very sweet and never cause any trouble”.

With no work since, Becky’s been supported by her 48-year-old boyfriend. They’ve been together eight years. Volatile, he sometimes beats her.

46

Two years ago in Brooklyn, I interviewed Noam, a straying Hasid, and we’ve been in touch since. I encouraged Noam to get out of smug, close-minded New York whenever possible, so he could be more exposed to life’s infinite variety. Last Yom Kippur, Noam came to Philly for the first time, and liked it so much, he returned this Shavuot. He emailed me, “I’m actually in Philly again for the weekend, avoiding another Jewish three-day holiday”. Huge family gatherings had become insufferable to the 25-year-old apostate.

From his Airbnb room in Fishtown, Noam walked four miles to the Friendly Lounge to meet me. Along the way, he stopped in Old Philadelphia for a Yuengling or two. “It’s a great old-school bar,” I texted him. One by one, they’re being destroyed. To many people’s dismay, Jack’s Famous Bar, with its 400 brown, dusty bottles of liquor from the 1930’s, has been shuttered by the building’s new Asian owner. It was owned by a bookish Jew who would sit at the back, leaning over a novel. Mel charged but \$4 for a cheese-steak. I had planned on stopping by to say hello.

In two years, Noam has made great progress

in shedding his Hasidism. He has a job as a driver for a car leasing company and is enrolled in college. “My psychology teacher is this pretty hot Asian woman who dresses like a porn star”. He has read Kafka, Singer, Erik Erikson and Kerouac, among others. His wardrobe of thrift-store clothes has become increasingly casual and colourful. He keeps his beard trimmed and has even shaved his head.

“Growing up, I was told to stay away from all women, as if they were a source of danger”

Noam sees me as a sympathetic, advice-dispensing uncle, so I try my best to fulfil this role. Noticing plenty of crusty, pustulent, maroon and chalky scales on his arms and scalp, I cringed, “What the fuck, man! You’ve got to do something about this”.

“It’s the stress. I’ve had it since I was twelve”.

“You’re not going to get laid, looking like this”.

We had been talking a lot about women, just like the last time. Noam informed me that a love interest, Rachel, had gotten married, so he’s now focused on a Taiwanese-Australian with a “temporary boyfriend”.

“I feel so behind”, Noam said in the darkened Friendly. “Growing up, I was told to stay away from all women, as if they were a great source of danger, and even at home, I was not supposed to touch my sister. Ever!”

“That’s pretty extreme!”

“When I was 12, I had my first spermache”.

“A what?”

“A spermache. I had my first ejaculation. I was sitting in class and feeling extremely claustrophobic. I had never felt so trapped, I just wanted to get out of there, but I couldn’t, then suddenly, it happened, and I felt so relieved, but also fearful and confused. I had no idea what had just happened”.

On television, Jorge Alfaro had just reached on an infield single, plating somebody. Led Zepelin blared from the jukebox.

“All through my teens”, Noam continued, “I

LINH DINH



WATCHFUL GAZE: Customer at JR's Place, Fishtown, Philadelphia.

Photo: Linh Dinh

felt so much guilt because I was attracted to my male classmates. I just wanted to touch them”.

“You thought you were gay?”

“No, it wasn't that. Just the sexuality. I didn't understand why I felt such a strong need to touch”.

“And you didn't feel this towards girls?”

“There were no girls! I was never around any girl!” Noam leaned back, lit another cigarette then huffed out a disgusted smile. “Recently, I was on a commuter train, and surrounded by all these gorgeous women. They were showing legs and cleavages, so I had an erection, you know. It was so obvious, I thought I might get arrested. Suddenly, this huge black guy came in and sat down. He was manspreading. For some reason, I came right then. I was practically convulsing. I thought surely, everyone knew, but nothing happened”. Noam laughed.

“Man, you must solve this soon, get it out of the way, so you can think straight!” I did add, “But sex, though, isn't just the act. It's the totality of being with someone. One step at a time, man. You can be with a girl, and get used to each other, then if it happens, it happens”.

“It almost happened”.

“What did you do?”

“I went to a massage parlour on the Lower East Side”.

“A Chinese place?”

“Yeah, and she touched my penis, gave me a hand job. She was about 32, and good looking too. That was the very first time anyone touched my penis, and I'm not counting myself, of course. That was my very first sexual experience! It cost me \$80”.

“You overpaid, but so what! At least you got that out of the way. So did you go back?”

“Yes, I did, three times, but they never let me back in”.

“That's fucked up. They must have thought you were a cop, man”.

“I think so. I tried another place, but they gave me a guy!”

“That's funny as shit!”

“I wasn't going to pay good money to have some guy knead my back, so I insisted on a woman”.

“So did they give you one?”

“Yeah, a 65-year-old!”

“Some of them can look OK”, I smiled.

“This one was super ugly. She shoved a hand in between my butt cheeks, but I felt nothing”.

“What a nightmare”.

LINH DINH

“It was. Another time, I had a date with a black girl, and she let me touch her thigh. She was very aggressive. Finally, she said, ‘I want you to come home with me’, but I couldn’t”.

“Oh man!”

“I was filled with fear”.

“That’s understandable. Hey, are you familiar with the shower scene from the movie, *Carrie*? It’s very famous”.

“Not at all”.

“It’s this girl with a very religious mother, and she’s in the school shower, after gym class, and she has her first period ever, so she freaks out, because she doesn’t know what’s happening. Screaming, she runs to her classmates for help, but they just laugh at her and humiliate her. Why don’t you pull it up on YouTube”.

As we watched all these supposedly teens with ’70’s haircuts pelt a cowering and naked Sissy Spacek with tampons, Noam sighed, “That’s me, man.”

48

Through Noam, I found out about incel, an internet community of involuntary celibates. Unable to get laid, they rage against women, as well as the men who can bed them. In today’s sexual economy, the beefcakes, “chads”, don’t just snag all the babes, “stacys”, but shag all the plain ones, “beckys”, as well, leaving no nookies for the weak-chinned, pencil-necked, stoop-shouldered, muscle-free or just plain socially-awkward dudes.

Before allegedly killing 10 people with a rented van in Toronto this year, 25-year-old Alek Minassian declared on FaceBook, “The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!” In 2014, a similarly sexually-frustrated Rodger murdered six people, before killing himself.

Much has already been written about the incels, but most commenters have only focused on their worst, most hateful aspects, without much sympathy for their sexual starvation. While no man can demand access to a woman’s body, it’s also true that access to sex, love and acceptance is becoming increasingly hard to come by



BAD TIMES? Man with a large hole in his pants. Centre City, Philadelphia

Photo: Linh Dinh

for more Americans. A recent NBC headline, “Americans are lonelier than ever – but ‘Gen Z’ may be the loneliest”, so the trend is towards more social isolation. Confirming this withdrawal and defeat are spreading addictions to porn, video games and opioids. In this winners take-all culture, there’s a widening sex gap between the haves and have nots. While some are sexual Walmarts, many more must lick whatever scraps flutter their ways. Those who can’t get any are still titillated nonstop, for this is the land of the endless come-ons. Masturbating, they can consume sex as spectacles.

On June 1 in Las Vegas, at least 1,000 people are expected to participate in the world’s biggest orgy ever. Couples must pay \$200, and it’s \$25 for single women. Since no single men are allowed, the incels can stay home and seethe. The current record is 500 people, established in Tokyo in 2006. Japan, too, has a mushrooming population of sexless miserables.

Pushing cockteases as much as bombs, we must expect eruptions. **CT**

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Linh Dinh’s latest books are “Postcards from the End of America” (non-fiction) and “A Mere Rica” (poetry). He maintains a photo blog at www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.ca

ColdType Insights

- MICK ARMSTRONG
- JILL RICHARDSON
- KATHY KELLY
- EMMANUELE CORSO

Two apartheids, two massacres

Mick Armstrong on his country's shameful reaction to another apartheid massacre – at Sharpeville, in South Africa

ON 21 March 1960, the apartheid state of South Africa carried out one of its most notorious massacres, unleashing murderous fire on 5,000 black people gathered outside the police station in Sharpeville. They were protesting against racist pass laws that severely restricted the movement of black Africans. Sixty-three were killed and more than 360 injured.

Almost 60 years later, another apartheid regime has carried out a similar massacre on the Gaza border. Israeli soldiers unleashed a merciless barrage of fire on a crowd of 40,000 protesters, who were demanding the right of return to the homes from which their families had been driven by Zionist terror gangs in 1948.



The row of graves of the 69 people killed by police during an anti-pass protest at the Sharpeville Police Station on March 21, 1960. Photo: Andrew Hall

More than 60 were killed and hundreds more wounded.

I was only nine at the time of Sharpeville, but I remember it well because the news of the massacre sent my father into a furious and indignant rage against the apartheid state. That was not, however, the response of the

Australian Liberal government of the time.

Years later, in the wake of the overthrow of the white South African regime, Liberal politicians scrambled to make out that they had always opposed apartheid. Nelson Mandela, whom they had previously condemned as a

communist and a terrorist, now was lauded as an icon of non-violence and moderation.

Former Australian PM John Howard attempted to rewrite history by claiming in his memoirs that his hero Robert Menzies, prime minister at the time of Sharpeville, was an opponent of apartheid. The actual record is very different, however. In response to public pressure to condemn the massacre, Menzies retreated into legalistic pedantry: “One government does not interfere in matters which are within the domestic jurisdiction of another. That is a matter of profound importance”.

Even after Britain’s House of Commons voted to condemn South Africa’s “racialist policies”, Menzies said any Australian comment would “exacerbate a state of affairs (in South Africa) which is already sufficiently menacing”. Then, in a speech to parliament, Menzies welcomed an official enquiry by the racist regime as it would present an “authoritative account of the facts”.

When, in the aftermath of Sharpeville, South Africa was forced out of the British Commonwealth, Menzies was “deeply saddened”. “Apartheid, which has been the accepted policy of South African governments ... never previously [has] been brought up at a prime ministers’ conference.”

Little wonder that the South African prime minister of the time, and key architect of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd, described Menzies “as perhaps the best friend South Africa has”.

The Southern African govern-

ment, very much like the Israeli authorities today, defended the Sharpeville massacre as necessary to put down a riot and a rebellion. The racist regime denounced the devilish “communists” of the recently-formed Pan Africanist Congress (a split from the African National Congress), headed by Robert Sobukwe for supposedly provoking the massacre. Australia’s acting minister for external affairs Garfield Barwick echoed this theme, condemning the Australian Labor Party’s call for the imposition of a trade boycott on the apartheid regime because it would create “a climate suitable for communist subversion”.

Copying from the same playbook, the Israeli government today blames the Gaza massacre – which it carefully planned and ordered – on Hamas’s provocation. Malcolm Turnbull disgracefully rushed to endorse that lie. Turnbull’s and foreign minister Julie Bishop’s apologetics for the mass murders by apartheid Israel, and their claims that this was just Israel “defending itself” and “protect[ing] its population”, is appalling. Tony Abbott went further, calling for Australia to copy Donald Trump and move its embassy to Jerusalem. The “even-handed” stance of Bill Shorten’s Labor Party was little better.

The South African government, which recognises an apartheid regime when it sees one, has withdrawn its ambassador from

Israel. European governments have been highly critical of the massacre. New Zealand Labour prime minister Jacinda Ardern slammed Israel for a “devastating, one-sided loss of life”.

What was Shorten’s response? A pathetic call for “restraint on all sides”. So the Israeli army should fire only half as many bullets? Kill only a third as many unarmed protesters?

The ALP’s shameful response to the Gaza massacre also compares incredibly badly with Labor’s outraged reaction back in 1960 to the equivalent horror at Sharpeville. The Labor leader at the time, Arthur Calwell, was no raving radical and had a pretty dubious track record, to say the least, on racial issues. But to give him his due, even before Sharpeville, Labor had been campaigning for the Australian government to impose a trade boycott on the apartheid regime. Then, in response to the massacre, the Labor opposition moved a motion in parliament declaring outrage at the shootings, censuring the Australian government for its weak-kneed attitude to apartheid and calling for a trade boycott.

Nothing “even handed” about that – and rightly so. South Africa was an appalling, racist apartheid state. Israel today is an appalling, racist apartheid state. It deserves the same condemnation and treatment. **CT**

Mick Armstrong wrote this article for the Red Flag, the newspaper of Australia’s Socialist Alternative Party – www.sa.org.au

The lesson I learned growing up Jewish

I was told to stand up when someone's being mistreated, so I stood up for Palestinians, writes **Jill Richardson**

NOW that Israel has killed dozens of Palestinian protesters in an obviously gross human rights violation, can we get something straight? You can criticise Israel without being antisemitic. I grew up Jewish, in an environment strongly supportive of the Israeli state. But I don't support the way Israel treats the Palestinians, particularly when they slaughter unarmed people.

My parents sent me to 13 years of Jewish Sunday school, complete with a Bat Mitzvah and all. I don't really consider myself Jewish as an adult, but an entire childhood of religious education still made its mark.

Half of Jewish holidays revolve around the theme that some people oppressed us or tried to wipe us out just for being Jewish, and we suffered, but we survived. We were told that when you stand silently when someone is being mistreated – whether it's a kid getting bullied on the playground or an entire people suffering genocide – you are part of the problem. If there's one lesson I learned from growing up Jewish, that's it.

Unfortunately, that lesson can be at odds with another one we commonly get growing up: that Israel is our homeland. Whoever

you are, if you are Jewish, when you go to Israel, you are home.

Sadly, nobody in our synagogue ever mentioned that the Palestinians should have rights, or even questioned whether Israel was treating them justly.

I internalised a belief that Israel was the land of the Jews, and when the Jews came back to reclaim it in the 20th-century, the Palestinians were in the way. So they should leave. (Also, they were terrorists.)

At 18, I finally went to Israel. But Israel didn't feel like my home. It felt like a blend of Middle Eastern and European culture. I felt just as foreign there as I did in Italy, Greece, or Egypt when I visited those places.

I saw a small snapshot of how badly the Palestinians were treated by the Israeli government. I also saw that the Palestinians were people too, mostly just trying to live their lives.

For the first time, I questioned what I'd been told about Israel. My principle of opposing injustice meant that I should stand for Palestinian rights, even if it meant disagreeing with the Israeli government.

I thought being Jewish was synonymous with supporting

Israel, so after my trip I decided I was no longer Jewish.

Looking back, it was a mistake to equate Judaism with unquestioning support of Israel's government. I know now that if I chose, I could be Jewish while remaining critical of the Israeli government.

Many Israelis oppose their own government's treatment of the Palestinians. Left-leaning Israelis vote against Prime Minister Netanyahu, and they opposed Trump's inflammatory decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem. The same is true of millions of Jews in the United States.

Of course Palestinians protest. Life has got worse for them since I visited, particularly in Gaza. Some call Gaza an "open air prison" and compare Israel's treatment of Palestinians to South Africa's apartheid. If Israel has a problem with Palestinians protesting, improving those conditions makes more sense than killing people.

Calling anyone who critiques the Israeli government's policies and actions "antisemitic" may be a useful way to silence dissent, but it's not at all accurate.

Israel is not Judaism. We can and should have a healthy debate about Israel's policies and US policy on Israel, just as we debate anything else in politics. **CT**

Jill Richardson is the author of "Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It". Her column is distributed by www.otherwords.org.

It's time to end the scourging of Yemen

The United States should end sales of arms used in Saudi attacks on civilians and children, writes **Kathy Kelly**

ON May 10, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia informed the UN Security Council and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres that Saudi air defences had intercepted two Houthi ballistic missiles launched from inside Yemeni territory targeting densely populated civilian areas in Riyadh, the Saudi capital. No one was killed, but an earlier attack, on March 26, 2018, killed one Egyptian worker in Riyadh and an April 28 attack killed a Saudi man.

Unlike the unnumbered victims of the Saudis' own ongoing bombardment of Yemen, these two precious, irreplaceable lives are easy to document and count. Death tolls have become notoriously difficult to count accurately in Yemen. Three years of US-supported blockades and bombardments have plunged the country into immiseration and chaos.

In their May 10 request, the Saudis asked the UN to implement "all relevant Security Council resolutions in order to prevent the smuggling of additional weapons to the Houthis, and to hold violators of

the arms embargo accountable". The letter accuses Iran of furnishing the Houthi militias with stockpiles of ballistic missiles, UAVs and sea mines. However, the Saudis' letter omits mention of massive US weapons exports to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The Security Council resolutions invoked by the Saudis name the Houthis as a warring party in Yemen and call for an embargo so the Houthis can't acquire more weapons. But these resolutions don't name the Saudis as a warring party in Yemen, even though Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has, since March 2015, orchestrated Saudi involvement in the war, using billions of dollars of

weapons sold to the Saudis and the UAE by the US and the UK.

The Saudis have an undeniable right to call on the UN to work toward preventing the Houthis from acquiring ballistic weapons that could be fired into Saudi Arabia, but the air, sea and water blockade now imposed on Yemen brutally and lethally punishes children who have no capacity whatsoever to affect Houthi policies. What's more, the US military, through midair refuelling of Saudi and Emirati warplanes, is directly involved in devastating bar-rages of airstrikes while the UN Security Council essentially pays no heed.

As Yemeni civilians' lives become increasingly desperate, they become increasingly isolated, their suffering made invisible by a near-total lack of Western media interest or attention. No commercial flights are allowed into the Sana'a airport, so media teams and human

rights documentarians can't enter the areas of Yemen most afflicted by airstrikes. The World Food Program (WFP) organises a weekly flight into Sana'a, but the WFP must vet passengers with the Saudi government. Nevertheless, groups working in Yemen, including Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Save the Children, Oxfam, and various UN agencies do



Cartoon: S. Reynolds

Insights

their best to report about consequences of the Saudi-Emirati led coalition's blockade and air-strikes.

On May 18, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) issued a report about airstrikes against the Saada governorate which notes that "in the past three years, the coalition has carried out 16,749 air raids in Yemen, ie an average of 15 a day. Almost a third of the raids have hit non-military sites".

Earlier in May, MSF responded to a series of Saudi-Emirati coalition led airstrikes on May 7 which struck a busy street in the heart of Sana'a, killing six people and injuring at least 72.

"Civilians, including children, were killed and maimed because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time", said João Martins, MSF head of mission in Yemen. "No-one should live in fear of being bombed while going about their daily life; yet again we are seeing civilian victims of airstrikes fighting for their lives in hospitals".

Lacking access to food, clean water, medicine and fuel, more than 400,000 Yemeni children are, according to Save the Children, at imminent risk of starvation. "Most of them will never see a health clinic or receive treatment", says Kevin Watkins, the organisation's UK director. "Many of those who survive will be affected by stunting and poor health for the rest of their lives". Watkins says the Saudi-UAE led coalition is using economic strangulation as a weapon of war, "targeting jobs, infra-

structure, food markets and the provision of basic services".

On March 22, 2018, Amnesty International called for an end to the flow of arms to the Saudi-led coalition attacking Yemen. "There is extensive evidence that irresponsible arms flows to the Saudi Arabia-led coalition have resulted in enormous harm to Yemeni civilians", their statement says. "But this has not deterred the USA, the UK and other states, including France, Spain and Italy, from continuing transfers of billions of dollars' worth of such arms".

The UN Charter begins with a commitment to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. The UN Security Council has miserably failed the Yemeni people by allowing the scourge of war to worsen, year by year. By approving biased resolutions that neglect to even name the most well-funded and sophisticated warring parties in Yemen – Saudi Arabia; the United Arab Emirates; the United States – the Security Council promotes the intensification of brutal, apocalyptic war and enables western war profiteers to benefit from billions of dollars in weapon sales. Weapon manufacturers such as Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and Boeing then pressure governments to continue selling weapons to two of their top customers, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Earnest, honest and practical steps to stop the war are urgently needed. The UN must

abandon its biased role in the Yemen conflict, so it can broker a peace in which the Houthi minority can retain some dignity and representation in majority-Sunni Yemen, which even before the Houthi uprising lacked any legitimate elected leader. The Houthis must be given an option to lay down arms without landing in any of the clandestine prisons operated by the UAE in Yemen, reported to be little more than torture camps. Even more urgent, the violence and economic strangulation by foreign invaders must cease.

At the very least, citizens in countries supplying weapons to the Saudi-Emirati coalition must demand their legislators forbid all future sales. The time for determined action is running out in the US as the State Department is already taking preliminary steps toward a massive, multibillion-dollar sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The package is said to include tens of thousands of precision-guided munitions from Raytheon.

Yemeni civilians, especially children, pose no threat whatsoever to the US. Yet, US support for airstrikes, blockades and the chaos inevitably caused by prolonged war threatens Yemeni civilians, especially vulnerable children. They have committed no crime but are being punished with death. **CT**

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54 Binary pablum for the masses

Emmanuele Corso calls on the media to end its infatuation with the pathetic antics of a puerile Joker-in-Chief

THE smoke and mirrors tactics of the 2016 presidential campaign continue with the relentless repetition of empty mantras such as “Make America Great Again”, “Lock Them Up”, and “Fake News”. Venom is being spewed across the country, part and parcel of the same strategy of puerile name-calling, disruption, and confusion that we witnessed in the last election

This is the fundamental strategy of the non-stop Trump campaign that continues to create and manipulate resentment and foment a collapse of civility

and faith in government. It is all shuck and jive with some of the mainstream press unwittingly complicit in Trump’s strategy simply by repeating his vile utterances.

The press cannot ignore even a bloviating President, of course. They are damned if they do and damned if they don’t. The Joker-in-Chief deliberately deploys a maelstrom of contradiction with which the entire civilised world must struggle, and that, of course, is the intent. Keep all the rhetorical balls in the air. Keep everyone guessing. When did America stop being great?

What isn’t great about America? There aren’t any answers forthcoming because there is no truth to appeal to and none is demanded by his True Believers. It’s true because their Dear Leader says it’s true.

How this came to pass and why it has been so effective are the consuming questions of our time. One answer to consider is a longing by so many people for a world where everything is rendered as simplistic binaries. There are no subtleties: everything is black and white. A very large proportion of the mainstream public does not want shades of grey, they want certainty. It’s a longing, if not a desperation, for an “Us against Them”, “Right and Wrong”, world. Good guys vs. bad guys. They want it to be like Tom Mix riding to the rescue, blasting the bad guys, and riding away on his white horse with the fair maiden holding on behind him. Destroy the Taliban. Destroy al Qaeda. No big deal! And, while you are at it, why not take down the United Nations? Take all those freeloaders off Social Security, welfare, Medicare, and food stamps. No DREAMERS, no foreigners. Up or down, left or right. With us or against us. Never mind consequences or complexities and nuance. Don’t stop to think that you will be hurting yourself. It’s only a matter of “bada bing”, drop a few small nukes here and there and everything will be back to the way we imagine it. We’ll be “Great Again!”

Trump gives his base a com-

Insights

forting, simplistic conception of the world, a peculiar form of indecipherable clarity. No questions need be asked, he has their backs. He says whatever comes to mind and it's swallowed whole. None of it is realisable, of course, it's just out there like a gigantic public Binkey. A warm bowl of Mom's chicken soup, binary pabulum for the masses.

The use of simplistic binary rhetoric has been the modus operandi of populist leaders throughout history. Hitler and Mussolini were masters of the tactic to rally and control their true believers by pointing at designated illegitimate mem-

bers of their society. Today's undocumented Dreamers and refugees are yesterday's Jews of the Third Reich. We have a president with bad hair, who will say whatever it takes to maintain his delusions. It's the confusion and the illusions he creates that hold his polity. What kind of destructive mentality emboldens a person holding the highest office and the highest level of responsibility in our society to publicly denounce people like James Comey as an "untruthful slime ball"? What kind of gall does it take for a five-time draft dodger to insult and threaten Robert Mueller, a retired mili-

tary officer who has served this country honourably? What will emerge out of the chaos being spewed out across this country and across the world stage remains to be seen. And I don't doubt Putin is having a good laugh at our expense. **CT**

***Emanuele Corso** taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he took his PhD and three Master's degrees. A veteran of the US Air Force's Strategic Air Command, he served as a combat crew officer during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He can be reached at 575-587-1022 or: ecorso51838@gmail.com*



1. Homeless man sits in the street surrounded by his possessions, Windsor Castle reflected in window



2. Police 'clear up' the site and seal the man's possessions in plastic bags

A wedding tale

Windsor council had an image problem before the May 19 royal wedding at Windsor Palace of Prince Harry and US movie star Meghan Markle: what to do about those unsightly homeless people who sleep in the streets? No problem: They sent in the cops to pack up their belongings and dispatch the homeless out of TV camera view. But those cops were noticeably absent the night before the wedding, however, when those same streets were packed with sleeping fans awaiting the royal procession.



3. Sleep in the street for the royal wedding? No problem.

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