

ISRAEL WILL DECIDE SYRIA'S FATE | Jonathan Cook
THE 'SILENT VIOLENCE' OF CORPORATE GREED | Ralph Nader
GHASTLY GLIMPSE OF THE RICH | Sam Pizzigati

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January 2025



TRUMP CONFRONTS A RISING CHINA

MICHAEL T. KLARE

PAGE 14



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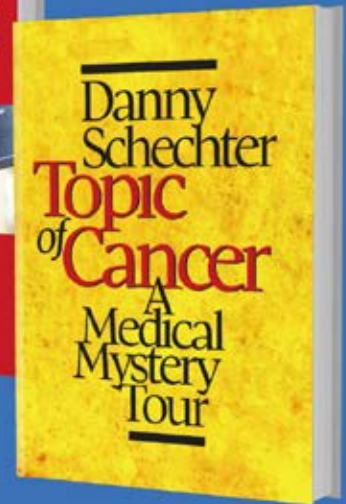
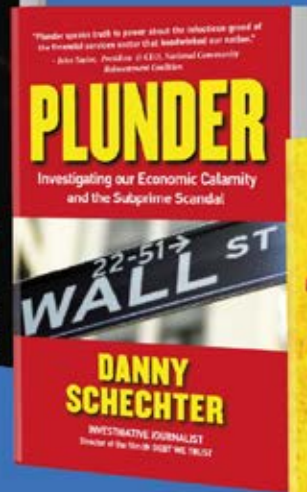
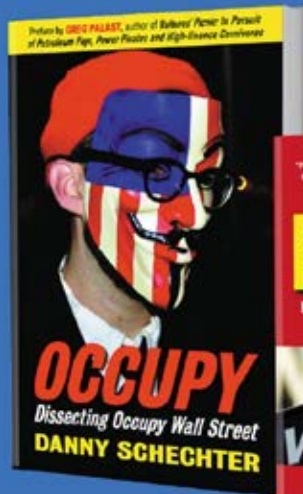
Is that a pitchfork?

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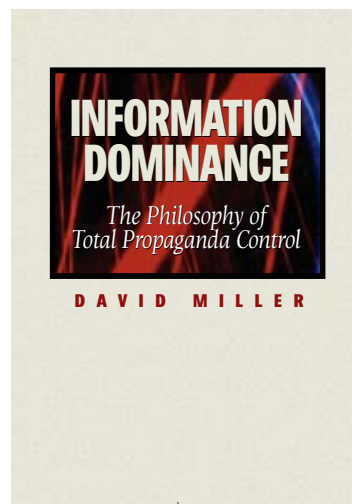
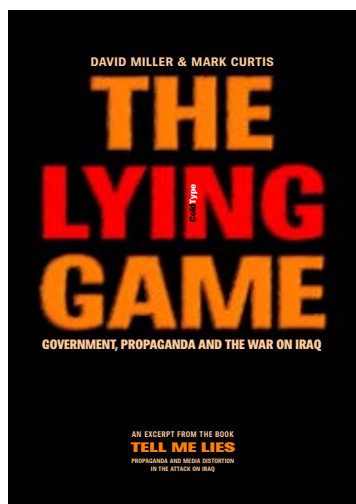
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FIGHTING THE INFORMATION WAR



Two important ebooks from the ColdType archives

By David Miller and Mark Curtis

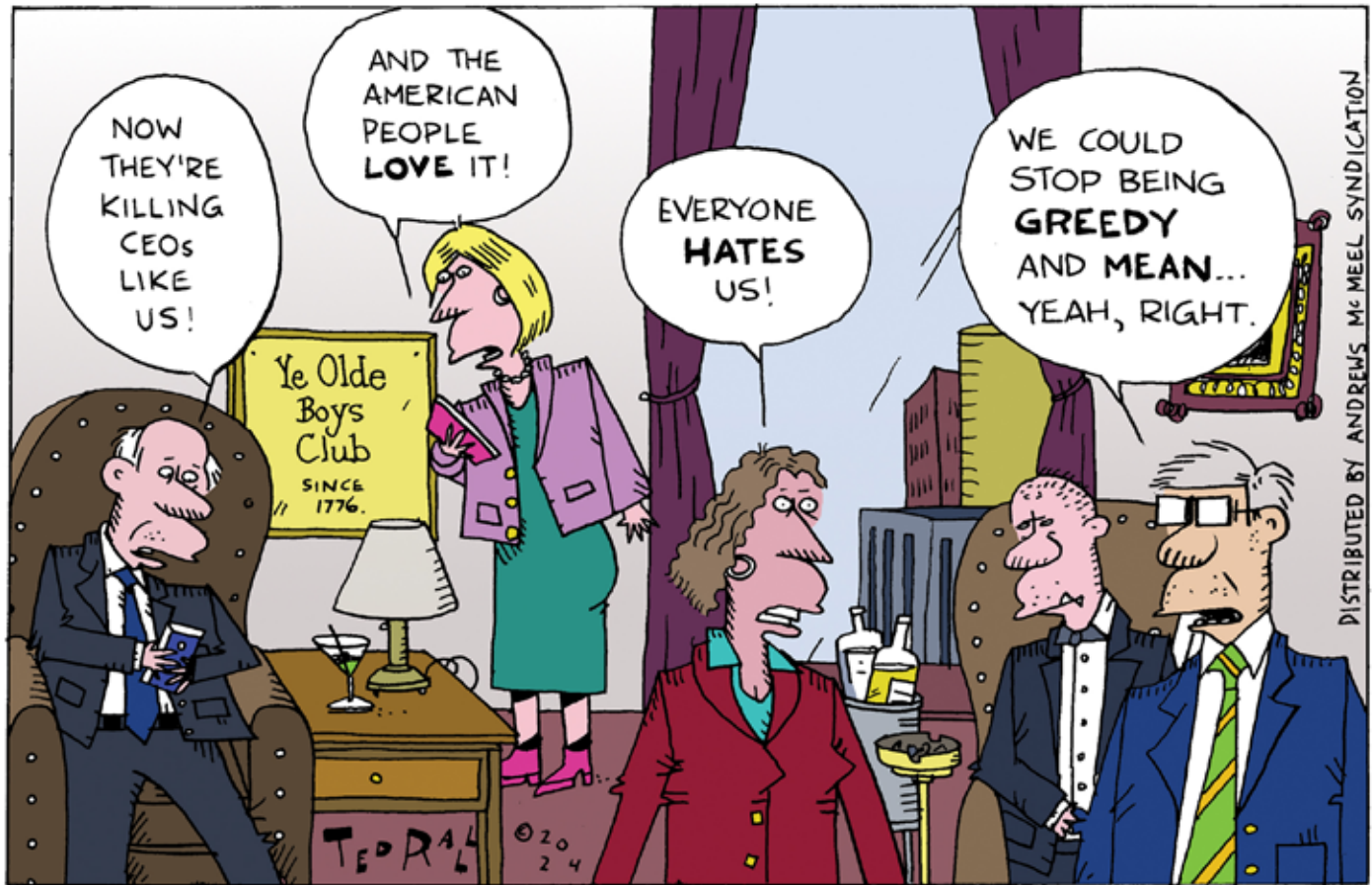
The relentless propaganda war we're seeing with Russia and China in Western crosshairs is not a recent occurrence, but has been gathering steam since the media-managed US war on Iraq 20 years ago. In these **two free ebooks** from the ColdType Archives, two prominent writers explain the genesis of the onslaught

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INSIGHTS

Cartoon: Ted Rall



For decades US consumer groups have been sounding clarion calls for action against the “silent violence” causing massive casualties that arise from the unbridled power of corporate greed, criminal negligence or indifference. They cite statistical and case studies that the media and lawmakers mostly ignored or relegated to low levels of enforcement.

Corporate bosses just have their corporate lawyers and public relations hacks brush away such warnings and pleas. One day stories they knew would not have legs if they

RALPH NADER

The silent violence of corporate greed and power

just kept quiet or mumbled some general words of regret, promising some vague improvements to their products and services.

But year after year, the deadly toll goes up, not down, and the horrors continue. For example, at least 5,000 people A WEEK die in hospitals in the US due to “preventable problems,” concluded a peer-reviewed study by Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine physicians in 2016. This is just one of numerous such studies of hospital-induced infections, overuse of antibiotics, medical malpractice or what is called “medical error,” pre-

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scribing bundles of drugs that backfire, “accidents,” deskilling and understaffing.

There has been no mass mobilisation by either government officials or industry executives to address this staggering toll of at least 250,000 fatalities a year!

Behind these figures are real people with families, friends and coworkers shocked, incensed or despondent over avoidable losses of life and preventable harms. Some of them undoubtedly knew the specific causes and demanded correction and compensation, to no avail.

Avoidable casualties also arise from the sweeping denial of insurance coverage for ill or injured patients by greedy unregulated or underregulated health insurance companies maximising profits and bonuses for CEOs. Many insurance companies are now using AI to help wear down consumers.

About 2,000 Americans a week lose their lives because they cannot afford health insurance to cover prompt diagnosis and treatment costs. System-driven patterns of denial of benefits by health insurers also cause deaths and injuries. The companies have algorithms that automatically delay or deny needed procedures without even seeing a patient’s medical records or speaking with the patient’s physician.

Insurance policies are full of fine print deductibles, co-pays, waivers and exclusions that drive consumers and their doctors up the wall. Insurance premiums are paid by patients or employers ahead of time with advertised assurances.

In the past two months, consumers have been overwhelmed by a blizzard of television ads by giant

insurers such as Aetna, Cigna, and Humana for their Medicare (dis)Advantage plans aimed at elderly beneficiaries. The ads are loaded with “freebies” that paint the companies as charities instead of cunning commercial marketers. In reality, denial of benefits is higher for these plans than for traditional Medicare. Moreover, these plans push patients into narrow networks of physicians and hospitals and subject them to dreadful over-use of “prior authorisation.” The latter means some remote company doctor or medical professional decides whether a physician with a patient can be reimbursed for a specific treatment. This results in overwhelming paperwork for the doctors, immense profits for the companies and degraded treatment for patients.



An October 31, 2023, NBC investigation titled “‘Deny, deny, deny’: By rejecting claims, Medicare Advantage plans threaten rural hospitals and patients,” by star reporter Gretchen Morgenson exposed another deadly impact of Medicare (dis)Advantage programmes on rural hospitals in America.

These companies are so entrenched that they have become largely immune to exposés. They have gamed the system to strait-jacket both patients and healthcare workers. The healthcare industry gets away with about \$360-billion in computerised billing fraud and abuses every year. (<https://scholar.harvard.edu/msparrow/license-to-steal>).

Prosecutions are minimal, and lawmakers are mostly indifferent as they count their campaign cash donations. Did you see any of the major party politicians in last year’s election campaigns even mention the devastating impact of the medical industry’s greed on innocent people or the taxpayers?

Just under the surface is a seething whirlpool of resentment, anger, frustration and bitterness about corporate abuses. Such reactions are often most pronounced in poor areas or workplaces, where people are subjected to choking pollution or exposure to carcinogenic toxins leading to cancer, heart disease and other organ ailments.

The corporate perpetrators, however, are remote from the impacts of their operations and policies. Their hugely overpaid bosses rule from elaborate suites and enjoy unimaginable luxuries. Very few people know the names, even of the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies like ExxonMobil, Aetna, Humana, Duke Energy, Bank of America, and so on. The lethality, the theft, the domination, and the escape from the rule of law are rendered impersonally by the corporatists who are now investing huge sums to go even more abstract and remote with tyrannical generative AI algorithms.

On December 4, a man made his anger very personal when at around 7:00 am, he singled out, in front of a busy midtown Manhattan hotel, the chief executive of the giant UnitedHealthcare, Brian Thompson, and shot him. The assassin fled on an electric bike. Police collected the bullet casings from his pistol. On these casings

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were the words, “deny,” “delay” and “depose.” [Luigi Mangione was arrested on Dec 9 in Altoona, PA, and charged with murder.]

As news of this fatal shooting spread over social media, a torrent of angry or morbid comments flooded the Internet. The *New York Times* reported a few, to wit:

“I’m an ER nurse and the things I’ve seen dying patients get denied for by insurance makes me physically sick. I just can’t feel sympathy for him because of all of those patients and their families.”

“Thoughts and deductibles to the family,” read one observer underneath a video of a CNN picture. “Unfortunately, my condolences are out of network.”

Tragically, Mr. Thompson, according to a company employee, was one of the few executives who spoke of changing the culture of the company.

But corporate culture, marinated to the core with endless cravings for ever-growing easy profits, is very hard to change – especially when it is so easy to extract more and more premium dollars from powerless consumers who lack adequate regulatory protections.

And so, the social media explosion included this typical comment on TikTok: “I pay \$1,300 a month for health insurance with an \$8,000 deductible. (\$23,000 yearly) When I finally reached that deductible, they denied my claims. He was making a million dollars a month.”

The *New York Times* described a “wrenching outpouring from patients and family members who posted horror stories of insurance claim reimbursement stagnation and denials.” The ugly reality will

continue to exponentially pour out with volcanic fury as the media receives more public reactions.

One wonders about the reaction if this were to have happened four months before the November election. Could the uproar have transformed the slimy rhythms of the Harris campaign, orchestrated by the Democrats’ corporate-conflict-

ed political consultants who manage the candidate messages and who definitely don’t listen to the warnings and popular proposals by Senator Bernie Sanders? **CT**

Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate and lawyer. His latest book is ‘Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us!’



ALL CHANGE: Banner of late Syrian President Hafez al-Assad in Damascus after the fall of his son Bashar's government.

► **BINOY KAMPMARK**

Syria beware: When foreign interventions go bad

The reports through Western presses read rather familiarly. Joyful residents taking selfies on abandoned, sullen tanks. Armed men ebullient and shooting into the sky with adventurist stupidity. The removal of statues and vulgar reminders of a regime. Prisoners freed; torture prisons emptied. The tyrant,

deposed.

This is the scene in Syria, a war with more external backers and sponsors than causes. The terrain for some years had been rococo in complexity: Russia, Iran and Shia militants in one bolstering camp; Gulf states and Turkey pushing their own mixture of Sunni cause and disruption in another; and the

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US throwing in its lot behind the Kurdish backed People's Protection Units (YPG). Even this schema is simplified.

While there will be an innumerable number of those delighted at the fall of Bashar al-Assad, the end of the Arab socialist Baathist regime provides much rich food for thought. Already, the whitewash and publicity relations teams are doing the rounds, suggesting that we are seeing a sound, balanced group of combatants that will ensure a smooth transition to stable rule. Little thought is given to the motley collection of rebels who might, at any moment, seek retribution or turn on each other, be they members of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), or those from the largest, most noted group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

There is little mention, for instance, about the blotted resume of the aspiring usurper, Abu Mohammad Al-Jolani, who retains a bounty of US\$10-million for information on his whereabouts and capture by US authorities. Human rights activist and former British diplomat Craig Murray helpfully posted a link from the US embassy in Syria from 2017, with the blood red title "Stop This Terrorist". As he acidly notes, "You might want to retweet this before they delete it."

When foreign powers meddle, particularly in the Middle East, the result is very often a cure worse than the disease. The billowy rhetoric follows a template: evil dictators, oppressors of their people, finally get their just desserts at the hands of a clearly demarcated, popular insurrection, helped along, naturally, by the world's freedom lovers and democracy hailers. That those same freedom loving powers tolerated,

traded and sponsored those same despots when it was convenient to do so is a matter confined to amnesia and the archives.

A few examples suffice. The scene in Libya in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 NATO intervention that overthrew Muammar al-Gaddafi saw commentary of delight, relief and hope. New prospects were in the offing, especially with the news of his brutal murder. "For four decades the Gaddafi regime ruled the Libyan people with an iron fist," stated US President Barack Obama. "Basic



Carlos Latuff / MintPressNews

human rights were denied, innocent civilians were detained, beaten and killed." At the end of the regime, Obama confidently claimed that the new administration was "consolidating their control over the country and one of the world's longest serving dictators is no more."

UK Prime Minister David Cameron struck the same note. "Today is a day to remember all of Colonel Gaddafi's victims." Libyans "have an even greater chance, after this news, of building themselves a strong and democratic future." French President Nicolas

Sarkozy chose to see the overthrow of Gaddafi as the result of a unified, uniform resistance from "the Libyan people" who emancipated "themselves from the dictatorial and violent regime imposed on them for more than 40 years."

What followed was not stability, consolidation and democratic development. Jihadi fundamentalism exploded with paroxysms of zeal. The patchwork of unsupervised and anarchically disposed militia groups, aided by NATO's intervention, got busy. Killings, torture, enforced disappearances, forced displacement and abductions became common fare. The country was nigh dismembered, fragmenting from 2014 onwards between rival coalitions backed by different foreign powers.

The same gruesome pattern could also be seen in the post-Saddam Hussein Iraq of 2003. It began with a US-led invasion based on sham premises: Weapons of Mass Destruction that were never found. It also resulted in the overthrow of another Arab socialist Baathist regime. Statues were toppled. There was much celebration and looting. Even before the invasion in March that year, US President George W. Bush was airily declaring that "a new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region." In November 2004, Bush would dreamily state that the US and Britain "have shown our determination to help Iraqis achieve their liberty and to defend the security of the world."

The consequences of the invasion: the effective balkanisation of Iraq aided by the banning of the Baath

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Party and the disbanding of the Iraqi Army; the murderous split between Sunni and Shia groups long held in check by Saddam with Kurdish rebels also staking their claim; the emergence of Iran as a regional power of significance; the continued thriving of al-Qaeda and the emergence of the caliphate-inspired Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) group.

Even as the body count was rising in 2006, Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair was still fantasising about the political wishes of a country he had been so instrumental in destroying. "This is a child of democracy struggling to be born," he told a gathering at Georgetown University in May that year with evangelical purpose. "The struggle for Iraqis for democracy should

unite them." The unfolding disasters were mere "setbacks and missteps." Blair continued to "strongly believe we did and are doing the right thing."

And so, we see the same pieties, the same reassurances, the same promises, played on a sedating loop regarding Syria's fate, the promise of democratic healing, the transfiguration of a traumatised society. How long will such prisons as Sednaya remain unfilled? Therein lies the danger, and the pity. **CT**

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He currently lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com.

moving nuclear missiles around by truck or rail was too dear and dumb even for the government. You don't 'modernise' that which is obsolete and redundant (and escalatory due to its inherent vulnerability). The smart move here is to eliminate land-based ICBMs.

Speaking as a retired Air Force officer, my old service will always want more of everything, including that which is obsolete. It's all about budgetary share. No enemy is more to be dominated than the other services, who are also competing for money.

Similarly, strategic bombers to drop nuclear bombs (or even to launch cruise missiles) are not needed for nuclear deterrence. The whole idea of 'penetrating' strategic bombers was obsolete by the late 1970s, which is why President Carter cancelled the B-1 bomber (it was revived by Ronald Reagan).

We simply don't need more strategic nuclear bombers – but the AF will always want them. If pilots can fly it (even if they have to do it remotely, as with drones), the AF wants it. Who cares if the B-21 will cost roughly \$1-billion per plane when it's finally fielded?

There is no need for the Sentinel or Raider. But the Air Force will fight until doomsday to protect its budgetary authority and the pilot and command billets that come with nuke missile fields and planes.

Let's never forget the power of the industrial side of the military-industrial complex as well. There are hundreds – even thousands – of billions of dollars at stake here, so of course industry will fight to the end (of all of us) for the money. Weapons makers will spend millions on lobbyists, and millions more to buy politicians, to make bil-

► **BILL ASTORE**

Air Force finds more ways to 'invest' nation's wealth

My fellow Americans, your government wants to spend nearly \$2-trillion over the next 30 years to 'modernise' its nuclear arsenal. Modernisation, of course, is a euphemism. And the Pentagon actually uses the word 'invest' rather than 'spend.' The dividends on this 'investment' go to the weapons makers, obviously, not to the American people.

Let's first consider the Sentinel ICBM; the military wants to buy 400+ of these and stuff them in fixed silos in places like Wyoming and North Dakota. Land-based

ICBMs were (among other things) obsolete by the 1970s; that's why the MX was developed as a mobile system under President Jimmy Carter. Fortunately, the shell-game idea of



COST-EFFECTIVE?: The Northrop Grumman B21 Raider.

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lions in return. The profit margin here is better than crypto or most anything, actually.

They say alchemists were wrong that lead could be turned into gold, but every day the lead of bullets is sold, earning gold for the weapons makers, so alchemy is real after all. Now America's weapons makers are turning radioactive uranium and

plutonium into nearly \$2-trillion in gold (or paper money, at least), the ultimate alchemical trick.

Don't let them do it, America. **CT**

Bill. Astore is a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF). He taught history for fifteen years at military and civilian schools. He writes at www.bracingviews.com

► JUAN COLE

Closing embassy doesn't deter Ireland from justice

The current Israeli Foreign Minister, Gideon Saar, is likely a war criminal by virtue of serving in the cabinet of a government pursuing a genocide.

He nevertheless had the gall to accuse the Prime Minister of Ireland of being a bigot, closing the Israeli embassy in Dublin on the grounds that he views virtually all Irish people as racists. Hmm. There must be a word for when you negatively stereotype an entire people...

Likely the move came in response to Ireland's recent decision to join in South Africa's complaint against Israel for genocide with the International Court of Justice. Even more dangerous for the government of Benjamin Netanyahu and Gideon Saar, Ireland is seeking a more practicable definition of genocide. Current international legislation puts too much emphasis on intent and sets the bar for finding genocide so high it is almost impossible to meet.

Deputy Prime Minister Micheál



UNITY: Kneecap, the Oscar-nominated Irish rappers, show their support for Palestine after Israel's decision to close its Dublin embassy.

Martin complained, "a very narrow interpretation of what constitutes genocide leads to a culture of impunity in which the protection of civilians is minimised." He said the Irish view of the genocide convention is "broader" and prioritises "the protection of civilian life."

Some things about Saar should be remembered. In his youth he was a member of the far right Tehiya Par-

ty and he protested the 1982 Israeli withdrawal from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula as a result of the Camp David peace accords. In other words, Saar has all his life held anti-Arab views and he wants to occupy and colonise the lands of his neighbours. The United Nations Charter, to which Israel is a signatory, forbids acquiring the territory of neighbours through aggressive war, but that was what Israel did in 1967 when it launched an invasion of Egypt, which had not militarily attacked it.

As Interior Minister, Saar rounded up African migrants in Israel and put them in a detention camp. He defended it and wanted to expand it. The camp was just for Africans. Hmm. There must be a word for when you target a particular racial group for collective punishment ...

Saar opposed then President Trump's "Deal of the Century" because it implied some form of a Palestinian state. Saar says Israel must remain the only state "from the river to the sea" (alert American university presidents, who seem to think this diction is racist). He firmly rejects any state for a Palestinian, insisting that they must remain stateless and under Israeli control forever. He says there can never be "two states for two peoples." He wants to annex much of the Palestinian West Bank, a violation of international law. He considers Hebron (al-Khalil), a major Palestinian city in the Palestinian West Bank, to be part of Israel.

He said that Gaza "must be smaller" after the war, another advocacy of a war crime.

Let's just imagine an American politician who wanted to occupy Manitoba or Tijuana militarily, who rounded up migrants and put

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them in camps, and who declared that there can be only one sovereign country in North America and it must be White. Those would be the US equivalents of Saar's politics. Those politics, in our context, would be forthrightly characterised by everyone as racist.

It is one of the great ironies of our time that a man with these views can have the temerity to brand Irish President Michael D Higgins and Prime Minister (Taoiseach) Simon Harris racist bigots who are prejudiced against Jews.

Higgins gave as good as he got, saying "I think it's very important to express, as President of Ireland, to say that the Irish people are antisemitic is a deep slander. To suggest because one criticises Prime Minister Netanyahu that one is antisemitic is such a gross defamation and slander."

Higgins came to the same realisation as everyone else who has been gaslighted by right-wing Zionists with their phony (and cynical) charges of Jew-hatred whenever anyone objects to Israeli war crimes:

"Originally... I put it down to lack of experience but I saw later that it was part of a pattern to damage Ireland."

It is as if families of victims murdered by mid-twentieth-century Vegas hit man Bugsy Siegel were accused of only complaining because they didn't like Jews.

Higgins insisted that Ireland "cannot be knocked off our principle support of international law." He pointed out that it was Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who is the one who has broken international law. [The International Criminal Court has issued an arrest

warrant for Netanyahu.]

The Irish president pointed out that the Israeli government is currently violating "the sovereignty of three of his neighbours." That would be Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. If Saar had his way it would be four, and would include Egypt.

Higgins made the remarks as he accepted the credentials of the new Palestinian ambassador to Ireland. Ireland, Spain and Norway reacted to Israel's Gaza genocide by recognising the state of Palestine last May.

The Irish people are having a good laugh at Saar's expense, according to WW News. One asked of the departure of the Israeli em-

bassy from Dublin, "Is this the first time the Israeli government has actually given up property?"

Deirdre in Cork asks, "Since the embassy will be going spare, we can probably let Palestinian refugees move in?" **CT**

Juan Cole is the founder and chief editor of Informed Comment – <https://www.juancole.com/author/jcedit>. He is Richard P. Mitchell Professor of History at the University of Michigan. He is author of 'Muhammad: Prophet of Peace amid the Clash of Empires and The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam' and many other books.

► IRISH EYES

FROM THE INTERNET



NAME GAME: "The Zionists have come up with the term *Paddystinians* as some take down they thought would hurt. The Irish think it's great and are running with it as badge of honour."
– Ewan MacKenna (@EwanMackenna)

INSIGHTS

► RAMZY BAROUD

Will the media please stop censoring Gaza voices?

Social media censorship is a global phenomenon, but the war on pro-Palestinian views on social media represents a different kind of censorship, with consequences that can only be described as dire.

Long before the current devastating war on Gaza and the escalation of Israeli violence and repression in the Occupied West Bank, Palestinian and pro-Palestinian voices have been censored.

Some date the censorship to an agreement in 2016 that, according to the Israeli government, sought to “force social networks to remove content that Israel considers to be incitement.”

This was translated, almost immediately, to the shutting down of thousands of accounts and the barring of many social media influencers, with the hope of slowing down the vastly growing pro-Palestinian tendencies in all Meta-linked platforms.

The war on Gaza, however, has escalated the censorship. In a report submitted to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Human Rights Watch noted that the documented restrictions on freedom of speech “undermine the fundamental human rights to freedom of expression and assembly.”

The censorship became so sophisticated and increasingly involved a direct Israeli role. To ensure that ‘offenders’ to Israeli sensi-

bilities were eliminated in large numbers, Meta began censoring specific words, thus deeming entire contents offensive, racist and antisemitic.

But Meta was not the only social media network involved in this practice. On 17 November, 2023, the X platform (previously known as Twitter) declared that users who write terms like “decolonisation”, “from the river to the sea”, or similar expressions would be suspended.



One year later, the social media platform Twitch followed suit by revising its ‘Hateful Content Policy’ to include “Zionist” as a potential slur.

Not only do these decisions, and many others, directly impair the freedom of speech and press, but they also confuse rational conversations with anti-Jewish sentiments.

The word ‘genocide,’ for example, is not a swear word, but a common

term, embraced by numerous countries around the world, accusing Israel of carrying out acts of genocide, meaning the “systematic destruction of a group of people because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or race.”

Under pressure from many countries, and after presenting a powerful case at The Hague, South Africa managed to compel the International Court of Justice to investigate Israel’s acts of genocide in the Gaza Strip in violation of the 1948 Genocide Convention.

In other words, this is not a matter for Mark Zuckerberg or any other social media company to decide, based on direct consultations with those carrying out the mass killings in Gaza.

The same applies to Zionism, an ideologically situated political movement that traces its history to 19th-century Europe, thus, neither to a specific race nor a religious text.

While many are, rightly, outraged by the fact that this kind of widespread, and growing, censorship directly challenges the main tenets of democracy, the actual harm for Palestinians is much bigger.

According to a November 2024 report by the Sada Social Centre for Digital Rights, the surge in digital violations targeting Palestinian content could not come at a worse time.

According to the organisation, “Meta platforms accounted for the largest share of violations at 57 per cent, followed by TikTok at 23 per cent.” YouTube and X follow at 13 and 7 per cent respectively.

This censorship, according to Sada, includes the shutting down of WhatsApp accounts, another Meta-owned platform that is also tightly controlled.

Unlike most of us, Palestinians in

INSIGHTS

Gaza use these platforms to communicate with one another, to know who is dead and who is alive, and to raise awareness of certain massacres, often taking place in isolation, especially in the northern Gaza Strip.

Regarding northern Gaza, Sada Social spoke of a ‘digital blackout,’ which has compounded the horror of that region – famine, mass killing, destruction of all hospitals, etc.

In the specific case of social media censorship in Gaza, lives are literally being lost as a result of politically motivated decisions.

HRW was one of many rights groups that have routinely spoken about the ‘systematic censorship’ by Meta. A December 2023 HRW report identified the following recurring patterns of censorship: removal of content, suspension of pro-Palestinian accounts, the reduction of visibility, known as ‘shadow-banning,’ the restrictions on engagement, and the deliberate misuse of policies on hate speech and graphic content.

The danger of this kind of censorship is multilayered. It is a direct threat to one of the most basic freedoms guaranteed under the law in any democratic society. In the case of Gaza, the censorship takes a dark, deadly turn as it could make the difference between people dying under the rubble of their homes or receiving assistance.

Additionally, censorship of this magnitude often creates precedents and often leads to other forms of censorship that, in fact, are already taking place against other vulnerable communities, whether on a national stage or globally.

While the international commu-

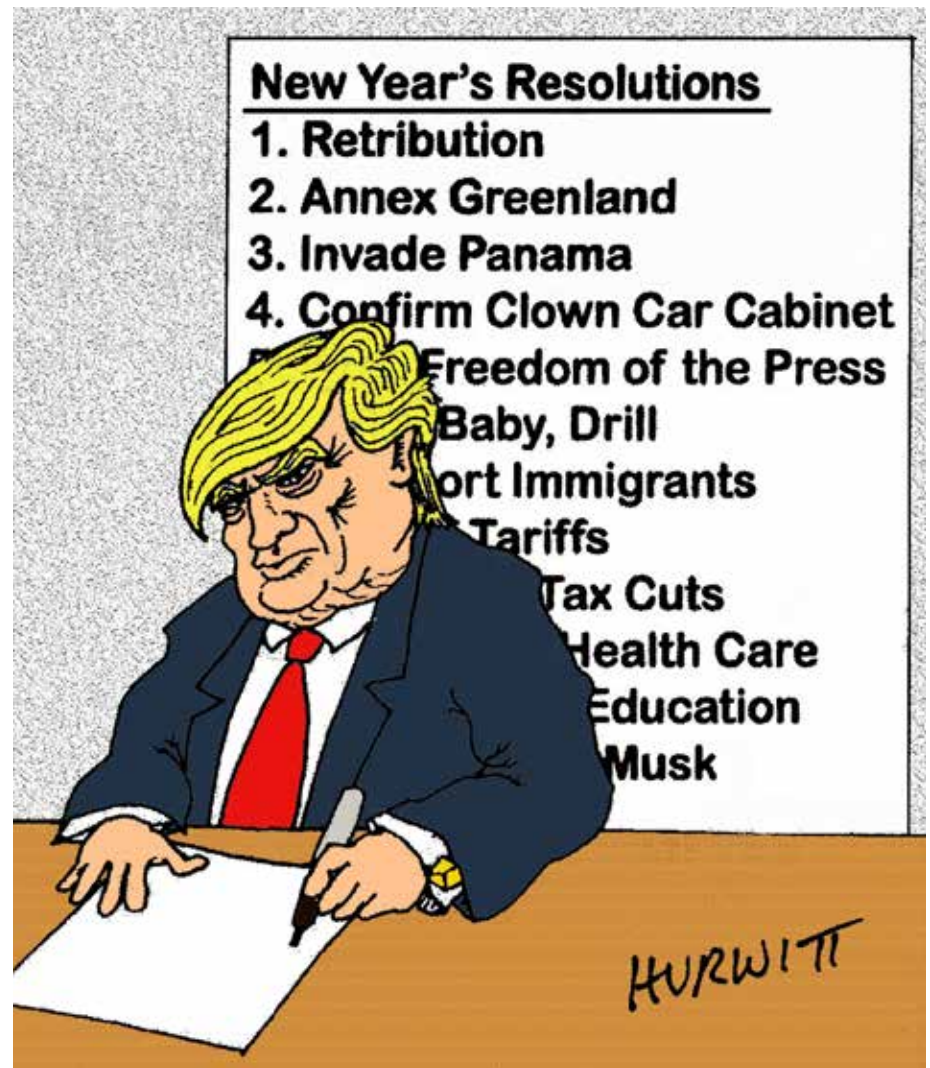
nity is yet to translate its verbal solidarity with Palestinians into any meaningful action, the least we could do is to give Palestinians their full rights to express their views, share their pain, and raise awareness of their collective plight. The world owes them that much, and no social media company should be permitted to hinder such a simple and reasonable demand. **CT**

Ramzy Baroud is a journalist,

author and the Editor of The Palestine Chronicle. He is the author of six books. His latest book, co-edited with Ilan Pappé, is ‘Our Vision for Liberation: Engaged Palestinian Leaders and Intellectuals Speak Out’. His other books include ‘My Father was a Freedom Fighter’ and ‘The Last Earth’. Baroud is a Non-resident Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA). His website is www.ramzybaroud.net

► HURWITT’S EYE

MARK HURWITT



MICHAEL T. KLARE

Can Donald Trump manage US-China relations during his second term as President without one of his verbal outbursts precipitating the outbreak of World War III?

Trump confronts a rising China

Gaza, Haiti, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Russia, Syria, Ukraine, and Venezuela: President-elect Donald Trump will face no shortage of foreign-policy challenges when he assumes office this month. None, however, comes close to China in scope, scale, or complexity. No other country has the capacity to resist his predictable antagonism with the same degree of strength and tenacity, and none arouses more hostility and outrage among MAGA Republicans. In short, China is guaranteed to put President Trump in a difficult bind the second time around: he can either choose to cut deals with Beijing and risk being branded an appeaser by the China hawks in his party, or he can punish and further encircle Beijing, risking a potentially violent

clash and possibly even nuclear escalation. How he chooses to resolve this quandary will surely prove the most important foreign test of his second term in office.

Make no mistake: China truly is considered The Big One by those in Trump's entourage responsible for devising foreign policy. While they imagine many international challenges to their "America First" strategy, only China, they believe, poses a true threat to the continued global dominance of this country.

"I feel strongly that the Chinese Communist Party has entered into a Cold War with the United States and is explicit in its aim to replace the liberal, Western-led world order that has been in place since World War II," Representative Michael Waltz, Trump's choice as national security adviser, declared at a 2023





event hosted by the Atlantic Council. “We’re in a global arms race with an adversary that, unlike any in American history, has the economic and the military capability to truly supplant and replace us.”

As Waltz and others around Trump see it, China poses a multi-dimensional threat to this country’s global supremacy.

In the military domain, by building up its air force and navy, installing military bases on reclaimed islands in the South China Sea, and challenging Taiwan through increasingly aggressive air and naval manoeuvres, it is challenging continued American dominance of the Western Pacific. Diplomatically, it’s now bolstering or repairing ties with key US allies, including India, Indonesia, Japan, and the members of NATO. Meanwhile, it’s already close to replicating this country’s most advanced technologies, especially its ability to produce advanced microchips. And despite Washington’s efforts to diminish a US reliance on vital Chinese goods, including critical minerals and pharmaceuticals, it remains a primary supplier of just such products to the United States.

For many in the Trumpian inner circle, the only correct, patriotic response to the China challenge is to fight back hard. Both Representative Waltz, Trump’s pick as national security adviser, and Senator Marco Rubio, his choice as secretary of state, have sponsored or supported legislation to curb what they view as “malign” Chinese endeavours in the United States and abroad.

Waltz, for example, introduced the American Critical Mineral Exploration and Innovation Act of 2020, which was intended, as he ex-

plained, “to reduce America’s dependence on foreign sources of critical minerals and bring the US supply chain from China back to America.” Senator Rubio has been equally combative in the legislative arena. In 2021, he authored the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act, which banned goods produced in forced labour encampments in Xinjiang Province from entering the United States. He also sponsored several pieces of legislation aimed at curbing Chinese access to US technology. Although these, as well as similar measures introduced by Waltz, haven’t always obtained the necessary congressional approval, they have sometimes been successfully bundled into other legislation.

In short, Trump will enter office this month with a toolkit of punitive measures for fighting China ready to roll along with strong support among his appointees for making them the law of the land.

But of course, we’re talking about Donald Trump, so nothing is a given. Some analysts believe that his penchant for deal-making and his professed admiration for Chinese strongman President Xi Jinping may lead him to pursue a far more transactional approach, increasing economic and military pressure on Beijing to produce concessions on, for example, curbing the export of fentanyl precursors to Mexico, but when he gets what he wants letting them lapse. Howard Lutnick, the billionaire investor from Cantor Fitzgerald whom he chose as Commerce secretary, claims that Trump actually “wants to make a deal with China,” and will use the imposition of tariffs selectively as a bargaining tool to do so.

What such a deal might look like is anyone’s guess, but it’s hard to see how Trump could win signifi-

For decades, one president after another reaffirmed the ‘one China’ policy while providing Taiwan with increasingly powerful weaponry

cant concessions from Beijing without abandoning some of the punitive measures advocated by the China hawks in his entourage. Count on one thing: this complicated and confusing dynamic will play out in each of the major problem areas in US-China relations, forcing Trump to make critical choices between his transactional instincts and the harsh ideological bent of his advisers.

Of all the China-related issues in his second term in office, none is likely to prove more challenging or consequential than the future status of the island of Taiwan. At issue are Taiwan’s gradual moves toward full independence and the risk that China will invade the island to prevent such an outcome, possibly triggering US military intervention as well. Of all the potential crises facing Trump, this is the one that could most easily lead to a great-power conflict with nuclear undertones.

When Washington granted diplomatic recognition to China in 1979, it “acknowledged” that Taiwan and the mainland were both part of “one China” and that the two parts could eventually choose to reunite. The US also agreed to cease diplomatic relations with Taiwan and terminate its military presence there. However, under the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, Washington was also empowered to cooperate with a quasi-governmental Taiwanese diplomatic agency, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States, and provide Taiwan with the weapons

needed for its defence. Moreover, in what came to be known as “strategic ambiguity,” US officials insisted that any effort by China to alter Taiwan’s status by force would constitute “a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area” and would be viewed as a matter “of grave concern to the United States,” although not necessarily one requiring a military response.

For decades, one president after another reaffirmed the “one China” policy while also providing Taiwan with increasingly powerful weaponry. For their part, Chinese officials repeatedly declared that Taiwan was a renegade province that should be reunited with the mainland, preferably by peaceful means. The Taiwanese, however, have never expressed a desire for reunification and instead have moved steadily towards a declaration of independence, which Beijing has insisted would justify armed intervention.

As such threats became more frequent and menacing, leaders in Washington continued to debate the validity of “strategic ambiguity,” with some insisting it should be replaced by a policy of “strategic clarity” involving an ironclad commitment to assist Taiwan should it be invaded by China. President Biden seemed to embrace this view, repeatedly affirming that the US was obligated to defend Taiwan under such circumstances. However, each time he said so, his aides walked back his words, insisting the US was under no legal obligation to do so.

The Biden administration also boosted its military support for the island while increasing American air and naval patrols in the area, which only heightened the possibility of a future US intervention should China invade. Some of these moves, including expedited arms

transfers to Taiwan, were adopted in response to prodding from China hawks in Congress. All, however, fit with an overarching administration strategy of encircling China with a constellation of American military installations and US-armed allies and partners.

From Beijing's perspective, then, Washington is already putting extreme military and geopolitical pressure on China. The question is: Will the Trump administration increase or decrease those pressures, especially when it comes to Taiwan?

That Trump will approve increased arms sales to and military cooperation with Taiwan essentially goes without saying (as much, at least, as anything involving him does). The Chinese have experienced upticks in US aid to Taiwan before and can probably live through another round of the same. But that leaves far more volatile issues up for grabs: Will he embrace "strategic clarity," guaranteeing Washington's automatic intervention should China invade Taiwan, and will he approve a substantial expansion of the American military presence in the region? Both moves have been advocated by some of the China hawks in Trump's entourage, and both are certain to provoke fierce, hard-to-predict responses from Beijing.

Many of Trump's closest advisers have, in fact, insisted on "strategic clarity" and increased military cooperation with Taiwan. Michael Waltz, for example, has asserted that the US must "be clear we'll defend Taiwan as a deterrent measure." He has also called for an increased military presence in the Western Pacific. Similarly, last June, Robert C. O'Brien, Trump's national security adviser from 2019 to 2021, wrote that the US "should make clear" its "com-

Trump has said that on day one of his new term he will impose a 10 percent tariff on all Chinese imports followed by other harsh measures

mitment" to "help defend" Taiwan, while expanding military cooperation with the island.

Trump himself has made no such commitments, suggesting instead a more ambivalent stance. In his typical fashion, in fact, he's called on Taiwan to spend more on its own defence and expressed anger at the concentration of advanced chip-making on the island, claiming that the Taiwanese "did take about 100 percent of our chip business." But he's also warned of harsh economic measures were China to impose a blockade of the island, telling the editorial board of the Wall Street Journal, "I would say [to President Xi]: if you go into Taiwan, I'm sorry to do this, I'm going to tax you at 150 percent to 200 percent." He wouldn't need to threaten the use of force to prevent a blockade, he added, because President Xi "respects me and he knows I'm [expletive] crazy."

Such comments reveal the bind Trump will inevitably find himself in when it comes to Taiwan this time around. He could, of course, try to persuade Beijing to throttle back its military pressure on the island in return for a reduction in US tariffs – a move that would reduce the risk of war in the Pacific but leave China in a stronger economic position and disappoint many of his top advisers. If, however, he chooses to act "crazy" by embracing "strategic clarity" and stepping up military pressure on China, he would likely receive accolades from many of his supporters, while provoking a (potentially nuclear) war with China.

The question of tariffs represents another way in which Trump will face a crucial choice between punitive action and transactional options in his second term – or, to be more precise, in deciding how severe to make those tariffs and other economic hardships he will try to impose on China.

In January 2018, the first Trump administration imposed tariffs of 30 percent on imported solar panels and 20 percent-50 percent on imported washing machines, many sourced from China. Two months later, the administration added tariffs on imported steel (25 percent) and aluminium (10 percent), again aimed above all at China. And despite his many criticisms of Trump's foreign and economic policies, President Biden chose to retain those tariffs, even adding new ones, notably on electric cars and other high-tech products. The Biden administration has also banned the export of advanced computer chips and chip-making technology to China in a bid to slow that country's technological progress.

Accordingly, when Trump re-assumes office on January 20th, China will already be under stringent economic pressures from Washington. But he and his associates insist that those won't be faintly enough to constrain China's rise. The president-elect has said that, on day one of his new term, he will impose a 10 percent tariff on all Chinese imports and follow that with other harsh measures. Among such moves, the Trump team has announced plans to raise tariffs on Chinese imports to 60 percent, revoke China's Permanent Normal Trade Relations (also known as "most favoured nation") status, and ban the transshipment of Chinese imports through third countries.

Most of Trump's advisers have

espoused such measures strongly. “Trump Is Right: We Should Raise Tariffs on China,” Marco Rubio wrote last May. “China’s anticompetitive tactics,” he argued, “give Chinese companies an unfair cost advantage over American companies... Tariffs that respond to these tactics prevent or reverse offshoring, preserving America’s economic might and promoting domestic investment.”

But Trump will also face possible pushback from other advisers who are warning of severe economic perturbations if such measures were to be enacted. China, they suggest, has tools of its own to use in any trade war with the US, including tariffs on American imports and restrictions on American firms doing business in China, including Elon Musk’s Tesla, which produces half of its cars there. For these and other reasons, the US-China Business Council has warned that additional tariffs and other trade restrictions could prove disastrous, inviting “retaliatory measures from China, causing additional US jobs and output losses.”

As in the case of Taiwan, Trump will face some genuinely daunting decisions when it comes to economic relations with China. If, in fact, he fol-

Trump will be pulled toward both increased militancy and combativeness and a more pragmatic, transactional approach

lows the advice of the ideologues in his circle and pursues a strategy of maximum pressure on Beijing, specifically designed to hobble China’s growth and curb its geopolitical ambitions, he could precipitate nothing short of a global economic meltdown that would negatively affect the lives of so many of his supporters, while significantly diminishing America’s own geopolitical clout.

He might therefore follow the inclinations of certain of his key economic advisers like transition leader Howard Lutnick, who favour a more pragmatic, businesslike relationship with China. How Trump chooses to address this issue will likely determine whether the future involves increasing economic tumult and uncertainty or relative stability. And it’s always important to remember that a decision to play hardball with China on the economic front could also increase the risk of a military confrontation leading to full-scale war, even to World War III.

And while Taiwan and trade are

undoubtedly the most obvious and challenging issues Trump will face in managing (mismanaging?) US-China relations in the years ahead, they are by no means the only ones. He will also have to decide how to deal with increasing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea, continued Chinese economic and military-technological support for Russia in its war against Ukraine, and growing Chinese investments in Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere.

In these, and other aspects of the US-China rivalry, Trump will be pulled toward both increased militancy and combativeness and a more pragmatic, transactional approach. During the campaign, he backed each approach, sometimes in the very same verbal outburst. Once in power, however, he will have to choose between them – and his decisions will have a profound impact on this country, China, and everyone living on this planet. **CT**

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Greg Koenderman



Israel, not ‘liberators,’ will decide Syria’s fate

Syria’s future under al-Qaeda spin-off HTS will come in two flavours only. Either submit and collude like the West Bank, or end up wrecked like Gaza

There has been a flurry of “What next for Syria?” articles in the wake of dictator Bashar al-Assad’s hurried exit from Syria and the takeover of much of the country by al-Qaeda’s rebranded local forces.

Western governments and media have been quick to celebrate the success of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), even though the group is designated a terrorist organisation in the United States, Britain and much of Europe.

Back in 2013, the US even placed a £10-million bounty on its leader, Abu Muhammad al-Julani, for his involvement with al-Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS) and for carrying out a series of brutal attacks on civilians.

Once upon a time, he might have expected to end up in an orange jumpsuit in the notorious, off-the-grid detention and torture facility run by the Americans at Guantanamo Bay. Now he is positioning himself as Syria’s heir apparent, seemingly with Washington’s blessing.

Surprisingly, before either HTS or al-Julani can be tested in their new roles overseeing Syria, the West is hurrying to rehabilitate them. The US and UK are both moving to overturn HTS’s status as a proscribed

organisation.

To put the extraordinary speed of this absolution in perspective, recall that Nelson Mandela, feted internationally for helping to liberate South Africa from apartheid rule, was removed from Washington’s terrorist watch list only in 2008 – 18 years after his release from prison.

Similarly, western media are helping al-Julani to rebrand himself as a statesman-in-the-making, airbrushing his past atrocities, by transitioning from using his nom de guerre to his birth name, Ahmed al-Sharaa.

Stories of prisoners being freed from Assad’s dungeons and of families pouring on to the streets in celebration have helped to drive an upbeat news agenda and obscure a more likely dismal future for newly “liberated” Syria – as the US, UK, Israel, Turkey and Gulf states jostle for a share of the pie.

Syria’s status looks sealed as a permanently failed state. Israel’s bombing raids – destroying hundreds of critical infrastructure sites across Syria – are designed precisely towards that end.

Within days, the Israeli military was boasting it had destroyed 80

per cent of Syria’s military installations. More have gone since.

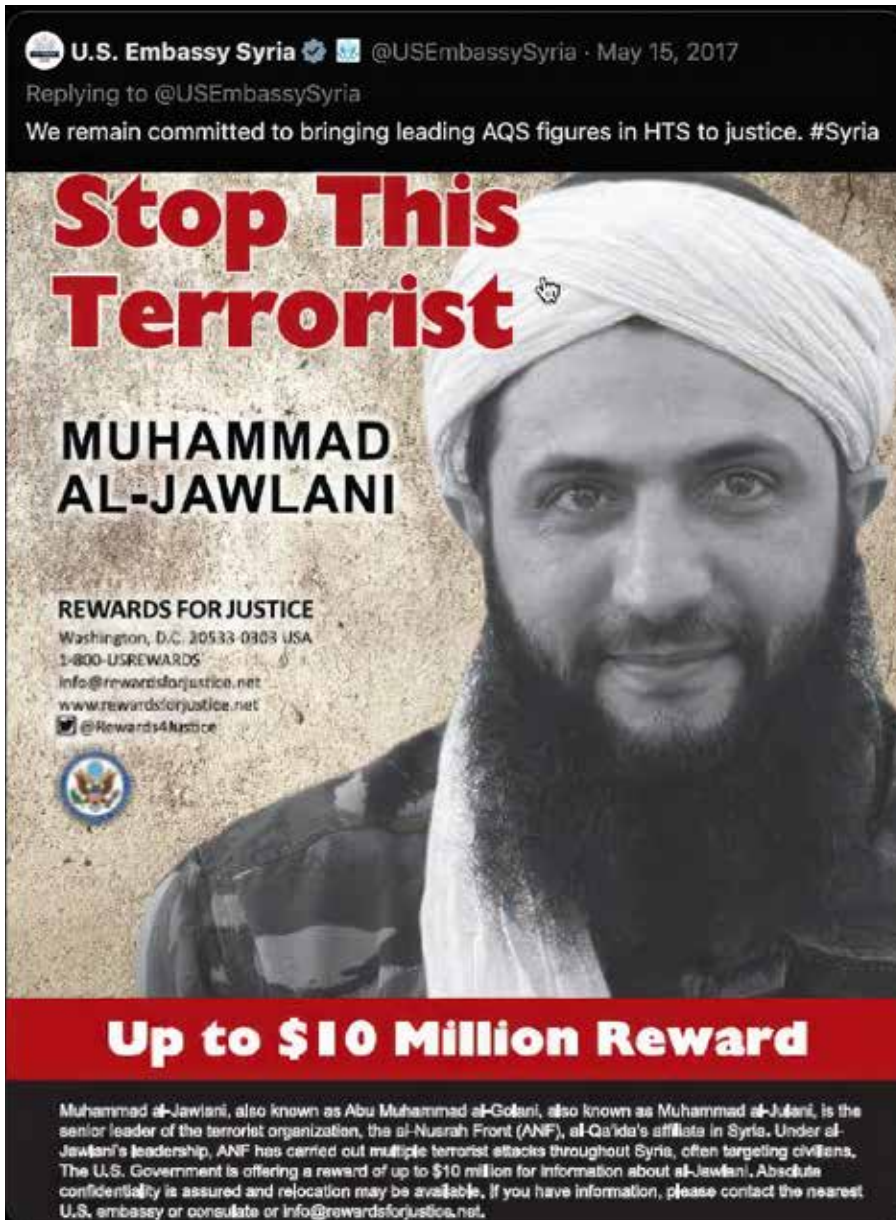
On December 16, Israel unleashed 16 strikes on Tartus, a strategically important port where Russia has a naval fleet. The blasts were so powerful, they registered 3.5 on the Richter scale.

During Assad’s rule, Israel chiefly rationalised its attacks on Syria – coordinating them with Russian forces supporting Damascus – as necessary to prevent the flow of weapons overland from Iran to its Lebanese ally, Hezbollah.

But that is not the goal currently. HTS’s Sunni fighters have vowed to keep Iran and Hezbollah – the Shiite “axis of resistance” against Israel – out of Syrian territory.

Israel has prioritised instead targeting Syria’s already beleaguered military – its planes, naval ships, radars, anti-aircraft batteries and missile stockpiles – to strip the country of any offensive or defensive capability. Any hope of Syria maintaining a semblance of sovereignty is crumbling before our eyes.

These latest strikes come on top of years of western efforts to undermine Syria’s integrity and economy. The US military controls Syria’s oil and wheat production areas, plundering these key resources with the help of a Kurdish minority. More generally, the West has im-



STILL WANTED?: This tweet from the US Embassy in Syria offering a \$10-million reward for the capture of HTS leader Abu Muhammad al-Julani was still online several weeks after he and his HTS group were being rehabilitated by the West following the overthrow of Bashar al-Sadat's government.

posed punitive sanctions on Syria's economy.

It was precisely these pressures that hollowed out Assad's government and led to its collapse. Now Israel is piling on more pressure to make sure any newcomer faces an even harder task.

Maps of post-Assad Syria, like those during the latter part of his beleaguered presidency, are a

patchwork of different colours, with Turkey and its local allies seizing territory in the north, the Kurds clinging on to the east, US forces in the south, and the Israeli military encroaching from the west.

This is the proper context for answering the question of what comes next.

Syria is now the plaything of a complex of vaguely aligned state in-

terests. None have Syria's interests as a strong, unified state high on their list.

In such circumstances, Israel's priority will be to promote sectarian divisions and stop a central authority from emerging to replace Assad.

This has been Israel's plan stretching back decades, and has shaped the thinking of the dominant foreign policy elite in Washington since the rise of the so-called neoconservatives under President George W Bush in the early 2000s. The aim has been to Balkanise any state in the Middle East that refuses to submit to Israeli and US hegemony.

Israel cares only that Syria is riven by internal feuding and powerplays. Beginning in 2013, Israel ran a covert programme to arm and fund at least 12 different rebel factions, according to a 2018 article in *Foreign Policy* magazine.

In this regard, Syria's fate is being modelled on that of the Palestinians.

There may be a choice but it will come in no more than two flavours. Syria can become the West Bank, or it can become Gaza.

So far, the indications are that Israel is gunning for the Gaza option. Washington and Europe appear to prefer the West Bank route, which is why they have been focusing on the rehabilitation of HTS.

In the Gaza scenario, Israel keeps pounding Syria, depriving the rebranded al-Qaeda faction or any other group of the ability to run the country's affairs. Instability and chaos reign.

With Assad's legacy of secular rule destroyed, bitter sectarian rivalries dominate, cementing Syria into separate regions. Feuding warlords, militias and crime families battle it out for local dominance.

Their attention is directed inwards, towards strengthening their rule against rivals, not outwards towards Israel.

There would be nothing new about this outcome for Syria in the worldview shared by Israel and the neocons. It draws on lessons Israel believes it learnt in both Gaza and Lebanon.

Israeli generals spoke of returning Gaza “to the Stone Age” long before they were in a position to realise that goal with the current genocide there. Those same generals first tested their ideas on a more limited scale in Lebanon, pummeling the country’s infrastructure under the so-called “Dahiya” doctrine.

Israel believed such indiscriminate wrecking sprees offered a double benefit. Overwhelming destruction forced the local population to concentrate on basic survival rather than organise resistance. And longer term, the targeted population would understand that, given the severity of the punishment, any future resistance to Israel should be avoided at all costs.

Back in 2007, four years before the uprising in Syria erupted, a leading articulator of the neocon agenda, Caroline Glick, a columnist for the *Jerusalem Post*, set out Syria’s imminent fate.

She explained that any central authority in Damascus had to be destroyed. The reasoning: “Centralised governments throughout the Arab world are the primary fulminators of Arab hatred of Israel.”

She added: “How well would Syria contend with the IDF [Israeli military] if it were simultaneously trying to put down a popular rebellion?”

Or, better still, Syria could be turned into another failed state like

Al-Julani’s commanders have lost no time explaining that they have no beef with Israel and do not want to provoke hostilities with it

Libya after Muammar Gaddafi’s ousting and killing in 2011 with the help of Nato. Libya has been run by warlords ever since.

Notably, both Syria and Libya – along with Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Lebanon and Iran – were on a hit list drawn up in Washington in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 by US officials close to Israel.

All but Iran are now failed or failing states.

The other possible outcome is that Syria becomes a larger version of the West Bank.

In that scenario, HTS and al-Julani are able to convince the US and Europe that they are so supine, so ready to do whatever they are told, that Israel has nothing to fear from them.

Their rule would be modelled on that of Mahmoud Abbas, leader of the much-reviled Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. His powers are little greater than those of the head of a municipal council, overseeing schools and collecting the rubbish.

His security forces are lightly armed – effectively a police force – used for internal repression and incapable of challenging Israel’s illegal occupation. Abbas has described as “sacred” his service to Israel in preventing Palestinians from resisting their decades-long oppression.

The Palestinian Authority’s active collusion was on show again in December when its security forces killed a resistance leader in Jenin wanted by Israel.

Al-Julani could similarly be cultivated as a security contractor. Largely thanks to Israel, Syria now has no army, navy or air force. It has only lightly armed factions such as HTS, other rebel militias like the misnamed Syrian National Army, and Kurdish groups.

Under CIA and Turkish tutelage, HTS could be strengthened, but only enough to repress dissent in Syria.

HTS would have powers but on licence. Its survival would depend on keeping things quiet for Israel, both through a reign of intimidation against other Syrian groups, including the Palestinian refugee population, who threaten to fight Israel, and by keeping out other regional actors resisting Israel, such as Iran and Hezbollah.

And as with Abbas, al-Julani’s rule in Syria would be territorially limited.

The Palestinian leader has to contend with the fact that large swathes of the West Bank have been carved out as Jewish settlements under Israeli rule, and that he has no access to critical resources, including aquifers, agricultural land and quarries.

Off-limits to HTS would likely be Kurdish areas policed by Turkey and the US, where much of the country’s oil is located, as well as a swath of territory in Syria’s southwest that Israel has invaded over the past two weeks.

It is widely assumed Israel will annex these Syrian lands to extend its illegal occupation of the Golan, which it took from Syria in 1967.

Al-Julani understands only too well the options ahead of him. Perhaps not surprisingly, he appears far keener to become a Syrian Abbas than a Syrian Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader killed by Israel

last October.

Given his clean-cut military makeover, al-Julani may imagine that he can eventually upgrade himself to the Syrian equivalent of the US-backed leader of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky.

However, Zelensky's role has been to fight a proxy war against Russia, on behalf of Nato. Israel would never countenance a leader of a country on its border being given that kind of military muscle.

Al-Julani's commanders have lost no time explaining that they have no beef with Israel and do not want to provoke hostilities with it.

The heady first days of HTS's rule were marked by its leaders thanking Israel for helping it to take Syria by neutralising Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. There were even declarations of "love" for Israel.

Such sentiments have not been dented by the Israeli army invading the large demilitarised zone inside Syria next to the Golan, in violation of the 1974 armistice agreement.

Nor have they been damaged by Israel's relentless bombing of Syria's infrastructure – a violation of sovereignty that the Nuremberg tribunal at the end of the Second World War decried as the supreme international crime.

Last month, al-Julani meekly suggested that Israel had secured its interests in Syria through air strikes and invasion and could now leave the country in peace.

"We do not want any conflict, whether with Israel or anyone else, and we will not let Syria be used as a launchpad for attacks [against Israel]," he told the *London Times*.

A Channel 4 reporter who tried last week to press an HTS spokesman into addressing Israel's attacks on Syria was startled by the response.

Israel has announced plans to double the number of Jewish settlers living illegally on occupied Syrian territory in the Golan

Obeida Arnaout sounded as though he was following a carefully rehearsed script, reassuring Washington and Israeli officials that HTS had no bigger ambitions than emptying the bins regularly.

Asked how HTS viewed the attacks on its sovereignty by Israel, Arnaout would only reply: "Our priority is to restore security and services, revive civilian life and institutions and care for newly liberated cities. There are many urgent parts of day-to-day life to restore: bakeries, electricity, water, communications, so our priority is to provide those services to the people."

It seems HTS is unwilling even to offer rhetorical opposition to Israeli war crimes on Syrian soil.

All of this leaves Israel in a strong position to entrench its gains and widen its regional ambitions.

Israel has announced plans to double the number of Jewish settlers living illegally on occupied Syrian territory in the Golan.

Meanwhile, Syrian communities newly under Israeli military rule – in areas Israel has invaded since Assad's fall – have appealed to their nominal government in Damascus and other Arab states to persuade Israel to withdraw. With good reason, they fear they face permanent occupation.

Predictably, the same western elites so incensed by Russia's violations of Ukraine's territorial integrity that they have spent three years arming Kyiv in a proxy war against Moscow – risking a potential nuclear confrontation – have

raised not a peep of concern at Israel's ever deepening violations of Syria's territorial integrity.

Once again, it is one rule for Israel, another for anyone Washington views as an enemy.

With Syria's air defences out of the way, Israel now has a free run to Iran – either by itself or with US assistance – to attack the last target on the neocons' seven-country hit list from 2001.

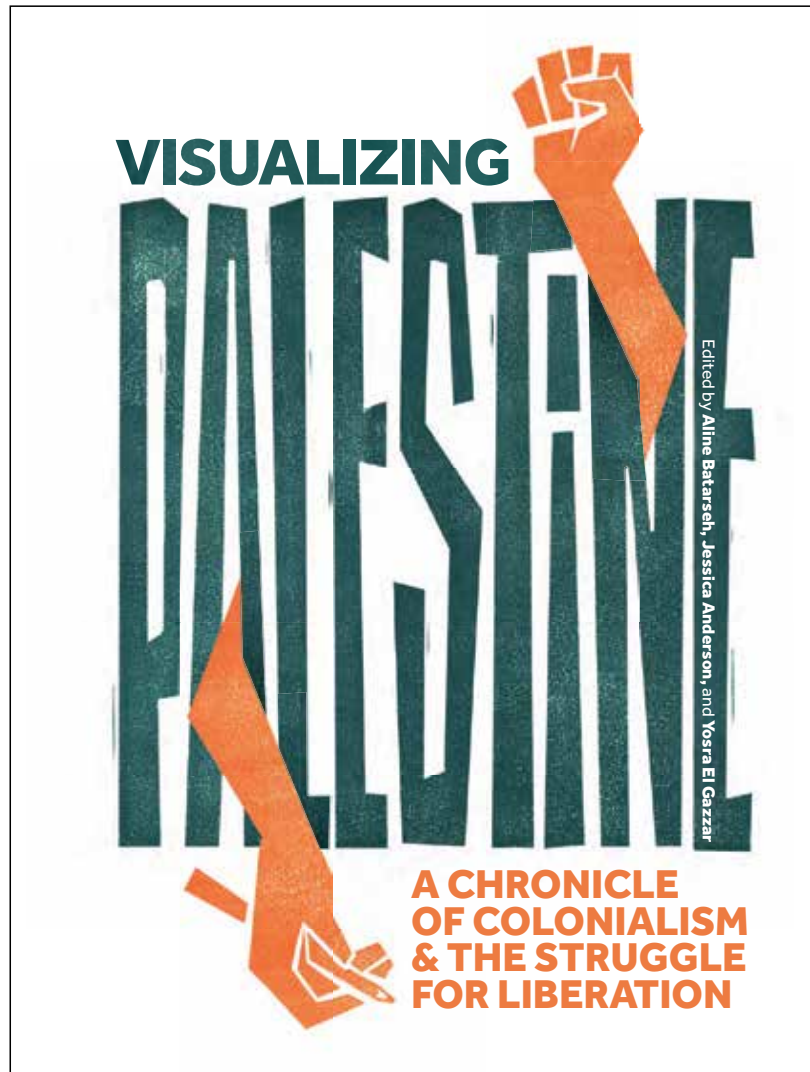
The Israeli media have excitedly reported on preparations for a strike, while the transition team working for incoming US president Donald Trump are said to be seriously considering joining such an operation.

And to top it all, Israel looks like it may finally be in sight of signing off on "normal" relations with Washington's other major client state in the region, Saudi Arabia – a drive that had to be put on hold following Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Renewed ties between Israel and Riyadh are possible again in large part because coverage of Syria has further disappeared the Gaza genocide from the West's news agenda, despite Palestinians there – starved and bombed by Israel for 14 months – likely dying in larger numbers than ever.

The narrative of Syria's "liberation" currently dominates western coverage. But so far the takeover of Damascus by HTS appears only to have liberated Israel, leaving it freer to bully and terrorise its neighbours into submission. **CT**

Jonathan Cook is the author of three books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a winner of the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. More of the author's writing can be found at www.jonathancook.net.



LEFT: Cover of *Visualizing Palestine* (Haymarket Books, US \$50)

A genocide in graphics

New book exposes Israel's apartheid regime

Visualizing Palestine is an important collection of more than 200 full-color infographics which provides a vivid portrait of Israeli settler colonialism and the Palestinian struggle for freedom.

The graphics in this 392-page work span more than a decade of work by the Visualizing Palestine group and are intended to demonstrate the urgency of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice, and equality. The stunning artworks displayed in the book reflect the collaboration of dozens of people spanning continents who created visual stories that nourish education, advocacy, organising, and collective action for Palestinian liberation.

The Visualizing Palestine organisation debuted in 2012

with an infographic on hunger strikes, published as Palestinian political prisoner Khader Adnan, who was being held in an Israeli jail without charge or trial, was on his 66th day of hunger strike and reportedly near death. As an infographic distributed primarily online, it signified the promise of social media to change the way people around the world engage with communities impacted by injustice.

Adnan spent six years in prison without charge and undertook five hunger strikes before dying of medical neglect in an Israeli prison in May 2023, days before the 75th anniversary of the mass displacement of Palestinians known as the Nakba.

Today, Visualizing Palestine continues to specialise

DIVIDE & DOMINATE

HOW ISRAEL MAINTAINS APARTHEID AND DENIES PALESTINIAN SELF-DETERMINATION

12% PALESTINIAN CITIZENS OF ISRAEL
(1948 Palestine)

Citizenship status granted to Palestinians inferior to nationality status reserved for Jews only

35% PALESTINIANS LIVING UNDER MILITARY LAW

Prolonged Israeli military occupation, closure and blockade of the Gaza Strip, the annexation wall, & severe movement restrictions further entrench Israel's strategic fragmentation

As a result of strategic fragmentation, **Palestinians cannot meet, group, or exercise collective rights, in particular the right to self determination**

20% West Bank

15% Gaza

50%

PALESTINIAN REFUGEES & EXILES

Denied the right of return to their homes, land, and country. Note: an additional 760,000 Palestinians are internally displaced within historic Palestine

3% PALESTINIANS IN JERUSALEM

Civil law institutionalizes a revocable residency status for Palestinians

Israel's apartheid laws, policies and practices are designed to ensure:



Denial of the right of return of Palestinian refugees



Continued population transfer



Dispossession of the Palestinian people



Entrenchment of Israeli settler colonialism

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AL-Mezan Center for Human Rights



VISUALIZING PALESTINE

DIVIDE AND DOMINATE: Infographic explains how, despite its denials, Israel is an Apartheid state



Palestinian students, faculty, and staff at Israeli universities experience racism and discrimination

ACADEMIA SERVING APARTHEID

PALESTINIAN STUDENTS
In 2022, two Palestinian students at Hebrew University were arrested by off-duty police officers and suspended from campus for singing Arabic folk songs
40% of polled Palestinian students report experiencing racism from faculty; students have been denied access to scholarships or campus housing due to not serving in the Israeli military

PALESTINIAN FACULTY
20% of citizens of Israel are Palestinian, yet in 2020 Palestinians made up less than 4% of faculty at Israeli-accredited universities

PALESTINIAN STAFF
In 2016, Tel Aviv University banned staff at its tuition call center from speaking Arabic on calls

VISUALIZING PALESTINE SOURCES bit.ly/VP-IsraeliUnis [WWW.VISUALIZINGPALESTINE.ORG](https://www.visualizingpalestine.org) @visualizingpalestine visualizing_palestine r.me/visualizingpalestine MAY 2022



Israeli universities benefit from close relationships with the military and multinational weapons companies

ACADEMIA SERVING APARTHEID

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY & TECHNION
Work with the Israeli military to develop unmanned combat vehicles and heavy machinery used to commit war crimes such as home demolitions

TECHNION, BAR-ILAN, & BEN GURION UNIVERSITIES
Participate in a robotics project funded by the Israeli Ministry of Defense and United States Department of Defense, an example of military priorities dictating academic research

TECHNION
Partners with arms developers such as Elbit and Rafael, whose weapons and surveillance technologies are tested on Palestinians and exported globally

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Israeli universities cater to military recruitment and training

ACADEMIA SERVING APARTHEID

TEL AVIV, HEBREW, HAIFA, & BEN GURION UNIVERSITIES
Offered special benefits and scholarships to student-soldiers who participated in the 2014 military assault on Gaza

HAIFA UNIVERSITY
Hosts three military training colleges, enrolls the largest number of Israeli military and security personnel, and offers a Bachelor's program tailored for the Israeli navy

HEBREW UNIVERSITY
Hosts the Israeli military's Talpiot and Havatzalot programs, which recruit students into elite military units and the intelligence corps

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Israeli universities participate in colonization of Palestinian lands and forced displacement of Palestinian communities

ACADEMIA SERVING APARTHEID

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY
Built on top of the depopulated Palestinian village of Sheikh Muwannis; suppresses commemoration of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948

HEBREW UNIVERSITY
Sited in occupied East Jerusalem on confiscated land; collaborates with Israeli police in the surveillance and harassment of the Palestinian neighborhood of Isawiyan

ARIEL UNIVERSITY
Located in Ariel, an illegal Israeli settlement in the occupied West Bank

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ABOVE: Academia's role in Israeli Apartheid. RIGHT: Documenting Israel's human rights abuses against Palestinian footballers.

in deeply researched, visually compelling infographics, aimed at making Palestinian perspectives more accessible and understandable as part of wider anticolonial and antiracist narratives.

So far, people in seventy-six countries have accessed the organisation's resources via its website., with student groups particularly active, using visuals on more than 100 college campuses.

Since the Israel's genocidal war on Gaza began 16 months ago, the movement for Palestinian liberation has grown more organised and impactful. In the first seven weeks of Israel's bombardment of Gaza, Israeli

forces killed more Palestinians than in the previous 34 years combined. In the months that followed, each morning brought devastation as the numbers of Palestinians killed, missing in the rubble, injured, displaced, thirsty, hungry, and sick climbed beyond comprehension and as governments failed in their duty to prevent what has been described as "a textbook case of genocide."

The work featured in *Visualizing Palestine* provide a searing indictment of the evils and misery that have been allowed to accumulate. It is, in the words of Arunhati Roy, author of *The God of Small Things*, "The anatomy of an occupation laid bare."

CT

THE TEAM THAT COULD HAVE BEEN

ISRAELI HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THROUGH THE LENS OF SPORT

Football is highly popular among Palestinians, but Israeli violations limit their ability to practice this sport. Visualizing Palestine has compiled information on 56 cases of Israeli human rights abuses against Palestinian footballers. This visual presents a sample of these cases.



IBRAHIM KHATTAB
9 years old
July 2014

MUHAMMAD NIMR
17 years old
Sep 2007

MAHMOUD SARSAK
22 years old
July 2009



MUHAMMAD DAHLAN
28 years old
Aug 2014



MUHAMMAD ABU AL-BAYD
27 years old
July 2014



ADAM HALABIYA
17 years old
Jan 2014



JAWHAR NASSER
19 years old
Jan 2014



MUHAMMAD OBEID
23 years old
Mar 2018



KARAM ZAIDAN
13 years old
July 2016



SAJI DARWISH
18 years old
Mar 2014
(killed)

DENIED TRAVEL DENIAL
26 Cases

BOMBING
12 Cases

SHOOTING
11 Cases

ARREST
9 Cases

LOST LIMB
9 Cases



OMAR ABU ROIS
23 years old
Feb 2012



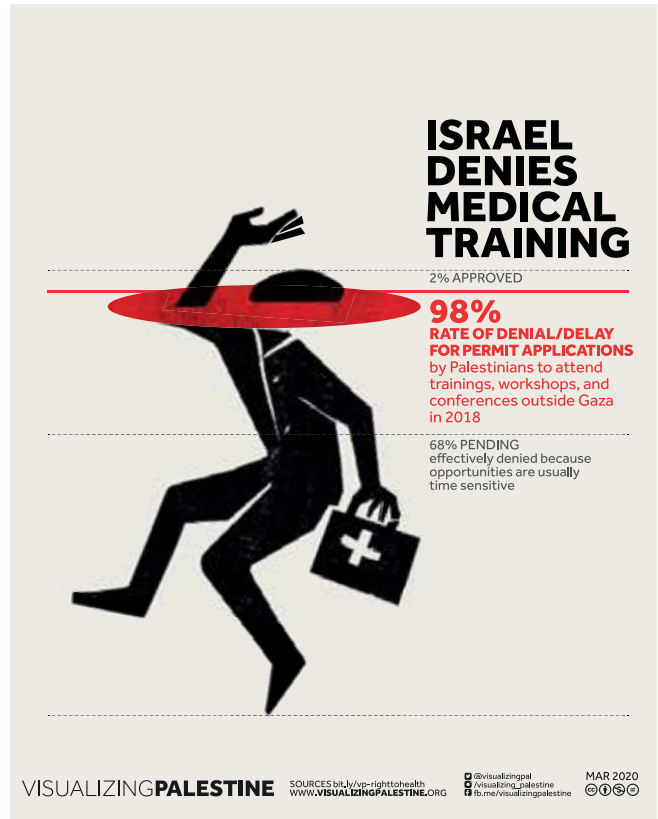
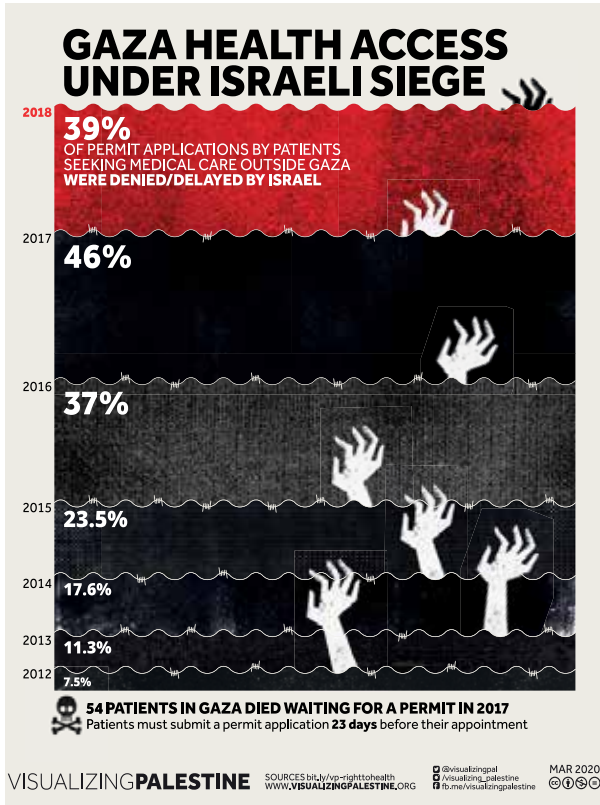
AHED ZAQOUT
49 years old
Jul 2014
(killed)

VISUALIZING PALESTINE

SOURCES bit.ly/vp-football-team
WWW.VISUALIZINGPALESTINE.ORG

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JUL 2018
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ABOVE: Inequality in health services is highlighted by a series of bold infographics. **RIGHT:** A LESSON FROM HISTORY: Israel is quick to deny accusations that it is an Apartheid state. Painstakingly-researched graphics in *Visualizing Palestine* suggest otherwise

1989

OVER
700

BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN
PRISONERS MOUNT
HUNGER STRIKE
AGAINST APARTHEID
REGIME FOR DETENTION
WITHOUT TRIAL

**ISTORY
REPEATS
ITSELF**

OVER
2,400

PALESTINIAN
PRISONERS MOUNT
HUNGER STRIKE
AGAINST ISRAELI
MILITARY FOR
DETENTION
WITHOUT TRIAL

2012

SOURCES

Where the references do not use definitive numbers, VP has used conservative numbers, eg. 'some 800' detainees is reported here as 'over 700'. The numbers noted refer to a single mass hunger strike that happened in that year noting that there were numerous other individual and smaller group hunger strikes throughout the year.

SAMJ, KALK, et al. June 1993. Voluntary total fasting in political prisoners- Clinical and biochemical observations VOL 83 Page 391
United Nations OCHA. 25 April to 1 May 2012. Protection of Civilians Weekly Report.

VISUALIZING PALESTINE

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IT IS AN ENTIRE NATION OUT THERE THAT IS RESPONSIBLE.

Isaac Herzog, Israeli President (2023)

VISUALIZING PALESTINE SOURCES bit.ly/vp-genocide OCT 2023 © ⓘ ⓘ ⓘ



VICTORY: ZERO RESIDENTS IN GAZA.

Banners posted in Israeli cities (2023)

VISUALIZING PALESTINE SOURCES bit.ly/vp-genocide OCT 2023 © ⓘ ⓘ ⓘ



THE ONLY THING THAT NEEDS TO ENTER GAZA ARE HUNDREDS OF TONS OF EXPLOSIVES FROM THE AIR FORCE, NOT AN OUNCE OF HUMANITARIAN AID.

Itamar Ben Gvir, Israeli Minister of National Security (2023)

VISUALIZING PALESTINE SOURCES bit.ly/vp-genocide OCT 2023 © ⓘ ⓘ ⓘ

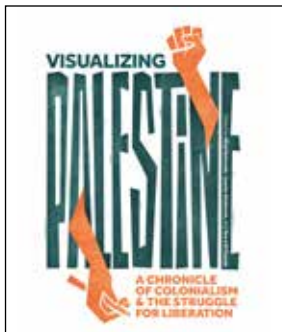


THE EMPHASIS IS ON DAMAGE AND NOT ON ACCURACY.

Daniel Hagari, Israeli army spokesperson (2023)

VISUALIZING PALESTINE SOURCES bit.ly/vp-genocide OCT 2023 © ⓘ ⓘ ⓘ

OUT OF THEIR OWN MOUTHS: Genocidal comments from Israeli leaders. **RIGHT:** Disregard for international law



VISUALIZING PALESTINE

A Chronicle of Colonialism and the Struggle for Liberation

By Jessica Anderson (Editor), Aline Batarseh (Editor), Yosra El Gazzar

Published by Haymarket Books – www.haymarketbooks.org

US \$50

“Israel's long-standing systematic impunity for international law violations has allowed for recurrence of grave violations without consequence.”

UN Human Rights Council 2016

MORE THAN

6,000

**ISRAELI RAIDS
IN 50 DAYS IN 2014
ATTACK ON GAZA**

+ 8,381

**HOMES
COMPLETELY
DESTROYED**

+ 11,166

**FAMILIES
MADE
HOMELESS**

+ 132

**PUBLIC
BUILDINGS
DESTROYED**

+ 1,545

**CIVILIANS
KILLED**

+ 556

**CHILDREN
KILLED**

0

**ZERO ISRAELI
POLITICIANS
ZERO MILITARY
GENERALS HELD
ACCOUNTABLE.**

مركز الميزان لحقوق الإنسان
AL Mezan Center for Human Rights



VISUALIZING PALESTINE

SOURCES

Data aggregated from Al Mezan, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UN Human Rights Council | 6000+ raids <http://bit.ly/rmta-raids> | Human loss data <http://bit.ly/mezan-loss> | UN quote <http://bit.ly/unhrc-accountable>

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Ghastly glimpse of the most rich-people friendly year yet

And there's much more of the same on the Trump II horizon

The good times – for America's super rich – are now rolling way past good. Our wealthiest have in 2024 enjoyed their best year ever. No other nation's deepest pockets have watched their fortunes grow as large or as fast.

Elon Musk perfectly embodies this unprecedented surge in the personal wealth of America's wealthiest. Musk entered 2024's last two weeks with a net worth spilling past \$450-billion, nearly half a trillion dollars. Over the last 12 months, the Bloomberg Billionaires Index neatly notes, Musk's wealth has doubled.

But Musk's good fortune hardly rates as unique. Amazon's Jeff Bezos is sitting on a quarter-trillion personal fortune, and the Facebook-driven net worth of Mark Zuckerberg has jumped comfortably over \$200-billion as well.

Of the world's 15 largest personal fortunes, 14 currently belong to Americans. All these 14 will be stepping into 2025 with at least \$100-billion in personal assets.

Amid the ranks of America's up-and-coming ultra-rich, in other words, \$100-billion fortunes have suddenly become eminently imaginable. For the rest of us, a personal fortune of a mere single billion remains utterly unimaginable. An American with a job annually paying \$75,000 would have to labor

over 13,000 years to amass enough pay stubs to equal that singular billion.

This past September, analysts at the London-based Informa research group predicted that Elon Musk, based on his then-current wealth trajectory, would hit trillionaire status sometime in 2027. Three other Americans, the researchers added, would likely join the trillion-dollar club before 2030. All these numbers, with this fall's personal fortune figures now almost all in, appear to make for a severe underestimate.

Numbers, of course, can only paint part of America's top-heavy picture. Where the riches of our richest end up going tells an even more disturbing story.

In the 2024 US presidential election, a *Guardian* analysis points out, the super rich of Silicon Valley alone spent almost \$400-million to elect their favoured candidate.

Elon Musk may soon be buying a \$100-million condo in West Palm Beach, across the bridge from Donald Trump's spread at Mar-a-Lago

Some \$243-million of that total came from Elon Musk's effort to elect Donald Trump. That huge outlay – the largest personal investment ever in a single American political campaign – amounted to a pin prick on Musk's overall fortune.

Back in the old days – before the US Supreme Court's Citizen's United decision in 2010 – America's wealthiest faced restrictions on how much money they could invest in electing their political pals to office. Today those rich can essentially spend whatever they want on political campaigns.

Or on anything else. Take housing, for instance. In the first half of this year, elevated mortgage rates had US home sales overall down 12.9 percent. But the luxury housing market has remained notably robust. Luxury sales rose 5.2 percent during this year's first half – even in the face of a 14.2 percent rise in typical luxury home prices.

Elon Musk, not surprisingly, is leading the luxury way. *Mansion Global* is reporting that Musk may soon be buying a \$100-million condo in Florida's West Palm Beach, a little home away from home right across the bridge from Donald Trump's spread at Mar-a-Lago. A Musk acquisition at that level would more than double the \$42.6-million existing purchase-price record for a West Palm condo.



Plenty of ultra-high-net-worth individuals have of late been rushing into Donald Trump's Greater Miami environs, and this rush has created at least one major problem these rich never envisioned: Teachers in the local elite private schools that cater to their kids can't find affordable places to live in America's new "Wall Street South."

Local housing prices overall have jumped about 75 percent over the last five years, Bloomberg notes, "bid up by thousands of affluent families moving south with jobs at firms like billionaire financier Ken Griffin's Citadel." Miami now ranks as America's least affordable metro area for housing.

At Ransom Everglades, a private secondary school that charges over \$50,000 a year for tuition, wealthy parents think they've come up with a teacher housing solution. They've created a \$30-million endowment

that will offer each of the school's 132 teachers a housing stipend worth at least \$11,000 a year.

Public school teachers in Florida, meanwhile, are facing their own tough times. Only one other state in the nation pays teachers in public school less than Florida. The main reason? The state has no income tax and depends overwhelmingly instead on sales taxes and excise tax levies on motor fuel, alcohol, and to

Teachers in the local elite private schools can't find affordable places to live in America's new "Wall Street South"

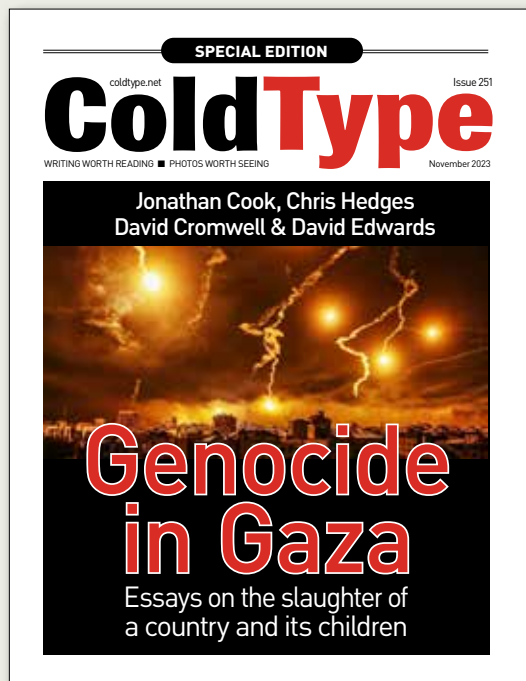
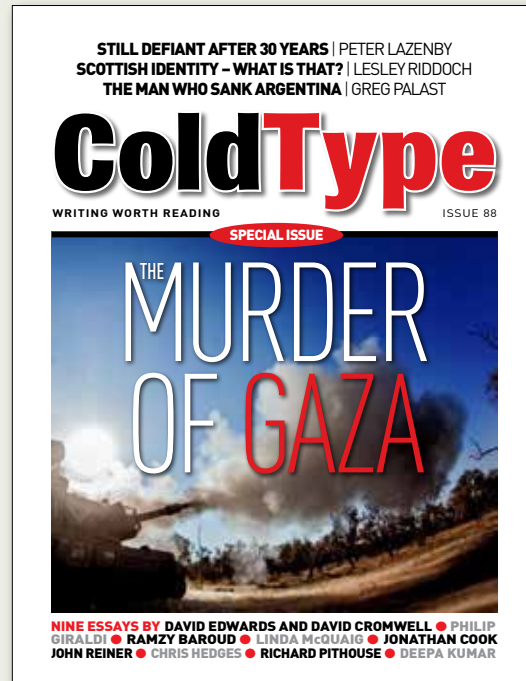
bacco. This rich-people-friendly approach to financing public services has Florida's working families paying in taxes over triple, as a share of their income, what the state's richest 1 percent pay.

Is Florida going to define America's future? Could be – if Donald Trump gets his way. He's filling his new administration, *Politico* notes, "with people who learned how to throw elbows in Florida first."

Those elbows, once in Washington, most certainly won't be hitting too many rich people's chins. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, co-edits Inequality.org. His latest books include The Case for a Maximum Wage and The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970.

Read about Gaza's struggle for freedom in these special reports from the ColdType archives



Download and read them at
www.coldtype.net/Gaza.html



EDWARD CURTIN

My internal exile

I joined the Marines and declared myself a conscientious objector as I realised the evil my country was committing in Vietnam

“Let me have war, say I; it exceeds peace as far as day does night: it’s spritely waking, audible, and full of vent. Peace is a very apoplexy, lethargy; mull’d, deaf, sleepy, insensible; a getter of more bastard children than war’s a destroyer of men.” – Shakespeare, ‘Coriolanus’

Long ago, but what seems like only yesterday, I didn’t go to the US war against Vietnam but the war came to me. It was when my exile began.

I am telling you this to try to shed some light on today’s wars and alarums since my tale is com-

mon for a small subset of Americans of my generation. We learned long ago that the USA was run by ruthless killers who revelled in war. Vietnam, the Phoenix Program, Cambodia, Indonesia, etc. Nothing was beyond them. We sensed that they would never stop and they haven’t. The genocide of Palestinians, the proxy war via Ukraine against Russia, the current US/Israel/Turkey bloodbath in Syria and Lebanon led by our ruthless terrorists – it is all nightmarish, malevolent, utterly evil, and conjures up hell on earth. And it will get worse in the future.

The mainstream media is claim-

ing that the new saviour of Syria is the terrorist “rebel” leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, the founding leader of Al Qaeda in Syria, al-Nusra, and a former deputy to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.,

While there is truth in the view that the world has always been a butcher’s bench with wars, hatred, and strife being a common theme, “always” is meaningless to me. For I have never lived in “always.”

I have lived since birth in the United States during a period of time when it has been the world’s number one butcher, starting with the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, then continuing waging

non-stop wars, assassinating foreign and domestic leaders, including President Kennedy, executing coup d'états, supporting and arming ruthless dictators and terrorists, and creating an economy dependent on war.

All this has been sustained by lies and propaganda that most Americans have swallowed. It is a deeply ingrained Yankee doodle dandy ethos joined with American exceptionalism and a self-induced false innocence.

Just this morning, December 8, 2024, as it did during the Vietnam war, the *New York Times* spewed out lies about the events in Syria, calling the US-backed jihadist terrorists (Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/Al Qaeda, et al.) “rebels” and the overthrow of the Assad government a “civil war.” In doing so, the paper is just doing what it has always done as an organ for US foreign policy, seemingly forgetting that it was the Obama administration that in 2012 launched Operation Timber Sycamore, a CIA programme to, under the guise of a civil war, overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as part of a larger effort to undercut Iran and Russia for US/Israel/Turkey/NATO control of the region.

It is propaganda about a much larger war well underway, as the presence of Ukrainian forces in Syria and the usual Israeli bombing attest. Like a mountain ridge wildfire, the winds whip wildly now, and whether the fire spreads next to Iran or somewhere else, it is sure to spread.

To paraphrase Thoreau, there is no need to care for a myriad of instances and applications, the only thing you need is to be acquainted with the principle, which in this case is the long-standing demonic nature of US foreign policy which is synchronous with waging perpetual war.

People seem to like war, if it is far away and the cheerleaders are on this side of the water. It lends excitement to life, like a real murder mystery ...

Yet most people don't want to go past such lying headlines that are repeated by all the mainstream media. They never did, except when the issues concerned them personally, as when there was a military draft.

Yes, government and media propaganda have contributed mightily to it, but so many of the country's war crimes have been committed out in the open and accompanied by the public's cheering and flag waving that propaganda is only part of the explanation.

The will to believe and self-delusion are a large part of it. And people seem to like war, if it is far away and the cheerleaders are on this side of the water. It lends excitement to life like a real murder mystery, a sex scandal, or an approaching hurricane.

Furthermore, it provides roots for the national myth, the mythic home, the mythic womb, wherein one can root for the home team as one stands with tens of thousands of team people and sing along with the words “bombs bursting in air” while feeling a stirring of patriotic pride.

This desire to be patriotically conventional, to support the national team in war and peace, is very powerful. Why else the creation of the mammoth bureaucracy called Homeland Security, the un-American word homeland taken straight from Hitler's 1934 Nuremberg rally. Root, root, root for the home team.

I know the patriotic feeling. It left me back in 1967 when my exile began. For the most part, it has not

been apparent to outside observers, for there are places difficult to reach, and the one within is the most distant. My youthful “normalcy” received its first body blow with JFK's assassination in 1963. By 1967 I had joined the Marines and then declared myself a conscientious objector as I realised the evil my country was committing in Vietnam. I was on my way away.

In the years that followed, as Malcolm X, MLK, Jr. and RFK, were assassinated and Johnson and Nixon lied and brutalized Vietnam, my understanding of history and politics deepened. Families and friends called me a communist for being a conscientious objector and opposing the war and a lying government. It was laughable but relentless.

Many years have elapsed, and the charges have risen and fallen as the years have gone by. For years now, the name of abuse is a “conspiracy” theorist or Russian sympathiser for daring to say that Russia Gate was a Democratic conspiracy and the war against Russia in Ukraine has been a US project from the start. There is much more.

But my point about internal exile is that I had to adopt the motions of normalcy in everyday life – to create a pleasant persona – to get through the days. My teaching and writing continued as hard-hitting as before, but family, friends, academic colleagues, and acquaintances didn't take my courses or read my writing, which they made sure to avoid.

These days, many more people have been forced to discover the twofold life where they can't talk to the people in their lives about many issues – politics, wars, Covid, etc. Something has broken. Almost everything.

To accept the conclusion that the

country is run by a bunch of ruthless warmongering imperialists is a step too far for most people. They must mean well or just make mistakes, for their hearts are in the right place, runs through so many minds. At least they assume that about the leaders they support.

A key way the endless wars roll on is the deadly political game of the lesser of two evils. If it is one's political party waging the foreign wars, there are always many reasons to still find it better than the other party's wars.

"My leader may be a warmonger but he's better than your warmonger" is the unspoken implication. This neat trick is supported by a host of mitigating excuses to justify the delusion that one is for peace even as these wars occur non-stop throughout the decades as the Democratic and Republican leaders switch highchairs.

Rather than dismiss the lot of them, the desire to feel that patriot heart-pump, however dim, and to reject the "extremist" conclusion that war is the life blood of the country, remains.

Throughout the sixty years of my adult life, the US has been continuously waging wars, hot and cold, small and large, openly and secretly, all across the world, and its economy has increasingly become a military-industrial-national-security complex so vast and intricately linked to daily life that the country would collapse without it. Simply

It seems to me very clear that most Americans are today suffering from some sort of traumatic mental sickness, trying desperately to deny it

put: Beneath daily life lies a death cult, a river of blood. If that sounds too strong for you, give me another name for it.

It seems to me very clear that most Americans are today suffering from some sort of traumatic mental sickness, trying desperately to deny it in a multitude of ways. Scratch the surface of an everyday conversation or a greeting on the street and there's the rolling of the eyes and the looks that say, "Let's not go there, it's all too crazy!" Something has broken, and people seem like walking desperadoes with the flag planted like a dagger in their hearts.

Even the alternative media, those writers with whom I share wishes for a peaceful world, have for a good while let their hopes trump reality by claiming the American empire is doomed, as is Israel and the neo-liberal, neo-con agenda. For many months now, I have noticed something amiss with these claims. Too much wishful thinking. Too little appreciation for the machinations

of the CIA, M-16, Mossad, Turkish conspiracies. To think these devils would accept defeat without bringing the world down is naïve.

I don't relish saying all this. It is depressing. But I think it is true.

Some people who know me call me an extremist and claim I make no room for the middle ground. When it comes to US war-waging, I say there is none. It is endless and integral to US foreign policy no matter which party is in office. And the foreign policy is integral to the domestic policy. Without it, the country would be so different. Bush, Obama, Trump, Biden – to buy their lies is to be a fool.

To realise the difference between power and innocence is to come to understand the demonic nature of America's Forever Wars. When in 2014 President Obama stood at West Point and said, "I believe in American exceptionalism with every fibre of my being," he was revealing, consciously or not, a hard truth, just as when he received the Nobel Peace Prize and told the world he believed in war. But he smiled.

For war is the lifeblood of this "exceptional" country. But if you keep repeating that, don't expect smiles to come your way. **CT**

Edward Curtin is an independent writer whose work has appeared widely over many years. His website is edwardcurtin.com and his latest book is 'Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies.'

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Riefenstahl: Film on Nazi propagandist warns of dangers of dictatorship and war

Film festival jury declares it one of the most relevant recent films – a warning of a fascist future that could haunt us all

Riefenstahl The new documentary film by director Andres Veiel deals with the career of the Nazi propaganda filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003). Released at the end of October in Germany, Veiel's work has attracted an exceptionally large number of viewers for a documentary.

The youth jury of the Leipzig Film Fair (FKM) declared it to be one of the most relevant of recent films – a warning of what could come. At the same time, the director has received a number of death threats from supporters of the far right.

Veiel is the first filmmaker to be able to draw on materials from Riefenstahl's extensive estate, which contains documents, letters, conversations she recorded and telephone conversations, as well as masses of photos. Film material comes partly from Ray Müller's 1993 documentary *Die Macht der Bilder: Leni Riefenstahl* (literally "The Power of Images," but given the English-language title *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*), the first extensive film about Riefenstahl. Made largely under her control, Müller's film refrains from an overt-



HIGHFLYING PROPAGANDA: Poster for Leni Riefenstahl's 1938 film *Olympia*.

ly critical stance.

Riefenstahl wanted to be remembered by posterity as an apolitical artist committed to the aesthetic ideal of beauty. Newly uncovered material, however, confirms that she was a staunch Nazi during WWII and remained so in its aftermath. In 1965, for example, a note in her calendar reminded the 62-year-old to vote for the far-right Nation-

al Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), a successor party to the Nazis, in the Bundestag [parliamentary] election.

Certain statements made by the NPD at the time, when the filmmaker was a sympathiser, clearly illustrate the continuity of Riefenstahl's fascist views:

– “One must not forget the educational effect of the concentration camps, which turned many Red Front Fighters and Marxists into decent Germans.” (Deputy Regional Chairman of the NPD in Baden-Württemberg, Peter Stöckicht)

– “The worker must be deployed where he serves German interests. It is not acceptable that certain associations encourage workers to go on strike or change jobs. The worker must serve the Fatherland at his post.” (Chairman of the NPD Munich district association, Josef Truxa)

At the beginning of the film, we see Riefenstahl asserting that her aesthetic ideas are free of ideology. For her, art is the opposite of politics, she insists. Her sense of beauty



GOOD FRIENDS: Leni Riefenstahl with Adolf Hitler.

comes from her innermost self. In his film, Veiel shows that it is not possible to separate this “inner self” from broader social realities.

Riefenstahl’s ideal of the powerful, supposedly idealistic person, willing and able to make extraordinary sacrifices, was compatible with Nazi ideology or its pretensions. This was already noted by famed screenwriter Carl Mayer (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Sunrise* and others) in the 1920s, when he saw her as an actress in a so-called “mountain film.” She climbs rocks barefoot and is enveloped by avalanches, as Riefenstahl herself relates.

She cites the film *The Blue Light* (*Das Blaue Licht*, 1932), which she co-directed with Hungarian critic and writer Béla Balázs and co-wrote with Mayer and Balázs (both of whom were Jewish), as holding the key to her life and work. She plays the lead role as a beautiful child of nature who draws strength to endure her difficult life from a

fairytale blue light in the mountains. She dies when the light goes out one day. It embodied the loss of her own ideals in the face of Nazism, Riefenstahl claims.

At the time of the end of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi takeover in 1933, she was electrified by Hitler. The Nazi Party Congress in 1934, she emphasised, was all about “peace and work,” not antisemitism. The whole world was enthusiastic about Hitler, she claimed. Veiel contradicts her with excerpts from her own Nazi Party congress film *Triumph of the Will*, which make clear that in fact “Peace” means “victory” based on racism and nationalism.

Veiel also delves into Riefenstahl’s “innermost being.” What shaped her early on? Her argumentativeness is striking, sometimes quickly leading to outbursts. When she feels pressured by Müller during the shoot-

ing of his documentary, she shouts out, “I won’t let myself be raped.” Veiel depicts a life that was shaped early on by violence and humiliation. Her childhood was shaped by the social climate prevailing prior to the outbreak of the First World War. The young dancer fully then experienced the social misery of the 1920s.

Former fighter pilot Ernst Udet describes his circle of friends as soldiers without a flag, which Hitler subsequently returned to them. Riefenstahl was part of this group and shared their sentiments. In a scene in *Triumph of the Will*, Hitler appeals to the willingness of German youth to endure hardship without breaking, all for the great goal of “national liberation.”

This requires strong, healthy bodies. In *Olympia*, Riefenstahl was fascinated by US athlete Jesse Owens, who moved like a “wildcat.” On film, she dramatised the marathon runners’ fight against exhaustion and stylised the high diving competi-

tion into a weightless flight of birds. What is fascist about that, she asks? During a television talk show in 1976, she frankly explained that she could not make a film about disabled people for aesthetic reasons.

Veiel's film also deals with the fate of Willy Zielke, a man little known to the general public. The talented cinematographer was the creator of the prologue to Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, in which he brings the sculpture of an ancient warrior to life. Zielke suffered a nervous breakdown after the film was finished and was forcibly sterilised in a mental hospital, which diagnosed an alleged psychological illness according to Nazi law. Riefenstahl was regularly informed about his condition, but did nothing.

Veiel does not speculate about intent; instead, he shows how closely the filmmaker's ideas of beauty and health correspond to Hitler's in *Mein Kampf*. Riefenstahl regards *Olympia* as the pinnacle of her work. She writes enthusiastically to Hitler about the success of the international premiere tour, which lasted several weeks. He in turn sent her roses in Italy on the occasion of her birthday, when her film was being shown at the Venice Biennale and won an award.

At this point, Riefenstahl was clearly at the height of her success – also in terms of her standing with the Nazi leadership. After the war, Riefenstahl repeatedly emphasised her poor relations with Goebbels, but in an unpublished interview with Müller, she refers to the process as a series of “affairs.” Among her friends is Hitler's chief architect and later armaments and war production minister Albert Speer. He is similar to her in artistic matters, Riefenstahl says: idealistic and uncompromising.

The war is a sharp caesura. It makes it more difficult for Riefenstahl, now a war correspondent, to find beautiful images. In 1939,

After the war, Riefenstahl was repeatedly confronted with her role in the Third Reich, but was able to win dozens of libel suits

she witnessed the shooting of Jews in Końskie, Poland. The photo showing her horrified face is well known. A revealing letter found among her papers was written by an eyewitness in 1952, who said that Riefenstahl was disturbed by the sight of Jews being guarded by soldiers as they dug a pit. She shouted at them to get out of the shot, but her words were understood as “Get rid of the Jews.” Her intervention led to panic, flight and shots.

Afterwards she complained to the military command. According to one witness, she primarily objected to the imposition of such chaotic working conditions. She was released from further film work in Poland. The advancing war also hinders her next film project, the feature film *Tiefland* based on motifs from the opera of the same name by Eugen d'Albert, one of Hitler's favourite operas. The film only premiered in 1954 and was a failure.

After the war, Riefenstahl was repeatedly confronted with her role in the Third Reich, but was able to win dozens of libel suits. She denied having had any agreement with the Nazis, and the authorities found it difficult or failed to make a serious effort to prove her guilt for crimes committed by the Hitler regime.

Riefenstahl was classified merely as a fellow traveller. She was, however, forced to retract the lie that she met the Sinti and Roma forced labourers she used as extras for *Tiefland* in good health after the war. In

fact, a large proportion of them, including several children, were murdered at a later date in Auschwitz.

German society in the 1960s was divided. One photograph shows Albert Speer leaving prison in 1966. He looks like a victor, is courted by the media and waves to his admirers. Three years earlier, the first Auschwitz trial had begun in Frankfurt amid great public interest.

Speer had been convicted as a Nazi war criminal in Nuremberg. In a telephone conversation recorded by Riefenstahl, she seeks his advice on future publishing contracts. She is writing her autobiography. Speer's autobiography was an international bestseller and Riefenstahl is pleased to be one of his most intimate friends.

In the further course of the film, Riefenstahl denies the Holocaust in another telephone call and questions the existence of gas chambers. In the wake of the racist attacks on foreign workers in the city of Rostock in 1992, she responds that there were never such attacks on innocent women and children in the Third Reich. She expresses her general mistrust of all those persecuted by the Nazi regime.

As during the Nazi era, she unscrupulously uses every opportunity that arises to work in film and remain in the public eye. She accepts support from companies in return for advertising and provides them with the appropriate photos. She discusses exorbitant interview fees with Speer on the phone and sets conditions for television invitations: above all the Holocaust must not be mentioned.

The 1976 talk show *Je später der Abend* (*The Later the Evening*) is significant. On the show Riefenstahl complains about the supposed witch hunt against her, asserts her innocence and once again explains that the German population was fully behind Hitler.

Also taking part in the talk show was a former Hamburg factory worker, Elfriede Kretschmar, who refutes Riefenstahl's claims. Everyone who lived in a big city, she says, knew what Hitler meant and what a concentration camp was. Kretschmar mentions that Hamburg workers knew about the camps early on because many had experienced their brutality as prisoners themselves.

The fact that the historical lie about universal German support for Nazism was part of the political canon of every postwar West German government facilitated Riefenstahl's insolent public appearances.

Current developments confirm once again that fascism is resorted to by the ruling elites, above all, to sup-

Current developments confirm once again that fascism is resorted to by the ruling elites, above all, to suppress the working class

press the working class. For example, extreme right Argentine President Javier Milei, recently warmly welcomed by Germany's Social Democratic Party chancellor Olaf Scholz, is criminalising social protests and banning strikes. In Riefenstahl's fascist propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*, workers are no longer traitors to the nation who strike against the domestic economy. Instead they line up obediently in rows to serve German interests as a "national race," in a manner befitting their "species."

Veiel's new film, which is well worth seeing, reveals the dangerous parallels between the present and the years before the outbreak of the Second World War, when Hitler's dictatorship met with international ruling class sympathy.

In a public discussion in Berlin, following the showing of his film, Veiel emphasised the film's topicality. Riefenstahl's images have now shifted from popular culture to the political sphere. Once again, there are images abounding of "well-drilled soldiers." In the US, Donald Trump's agitation against immigrants, whom he claims are contaminating American blood, clearly mirrors the racist Nazi incitement featured in *Triumph of the Will*. **CT**

Bernt Reinhardt wrote this article for the World Socialist Web Site at www.wsws.org.



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‘A future of dust’

*Why, in evil times, writers have a responsibility to take sides:
An essay, from Australia, on the Gaza conflict*

“We must ask for no references to Gaza/Palestine/Israel as it’s a very sensitive topic in our area. If these topics are included it drastically changes our risk management plans for events. Thus for safety and harmony we kindly ask the guest speakers avoid these topics and any questions about it that come up.”

Sam Wallman and I received this message from our publicist, one day before an event at a suburban library about our co-authored book.

“Did they even read the damn thing?” Sam joked, as we strategised our response.

Twelve Rules for Strife discusses grassroots social change. It celebrates the creativity of the people historian Studs Terkel described as the world’s “etceteras.” It contrasts the power of collective solidarity with what we dub “smug politics:” a liberalism that treats the masses as irredeemably backward, and so requiring careful management by the clever few on whom progress supposedly depends.

We had been invited to discuss the political agency of ordinary people – and then told our audience couldn’t hear about the world’s most significant crisis.

But Gaza is all I think about.

Last January, six-year-old Hind Rajab fled the fighting in Gaza City alongside her extended family. An Israeli tank targeted their car, killing almost everyone inside. Amid the wreckage and the blood, Hind’s 15-year-old cousin, Layan Hamadeh, phoned the Palestinian Red Crescent, crying and pleading for help.

“They are shooting at us,” she said. “The tank is right next to me.”

The dispatchers heard Layan scream as a machine gun again raked the vehicle. When they rang back, Hind, the only person now alive, answered.

“I’m so scared. Please come. Come take me. Please, will you come?”

She stayed on the phone for three hours, while the Red Crescent transmitted her location to the Israeli army and dispatched an ambulance – and then the line dropped out again.

Twelve days later, Hind’s surviving relatives found the wreckage of a van with two dead paramedics sprawled inside. Nearby, they located the car in which Layan, Hind and their family lay. An investigation by the US-based Forensic Architecture team established that 355 bullets had hit the vehicle. The researchers concluded that the shooters must have realised the vehicle contained civilians.

“*They were small,*” writes W.H. Auden in *The Shield of Achilles*,

And could not hope for help and no help came:

What their foes liked to do was done.”

Safe spaces and moral seriousness

I mention Hind because our interaction with the library (“we are doing this for everyone at the moment”, its email said) echoed the decision by the State Library of Victoria to cancel workshops by pro-Palestinian authors Omar Sakr, Jinghua Qian, Ariel Slamet Ries and Alison Evans. Grotesquely, the library cited its fears for children.

Within the arts and elsewhere, sensitivity has been weaponised against Palestine. Sam and I were told we could not mention Gaza for “safety and harmony,” just as the State Library of Victoria explained that at a “time of heightened sensitivities” it needed to ensure “cultural safety.” When three actors wore keffiyehs for the curtain call of the Sydney Theatre Company’s performance of *The Seagull*, a subsequent letter accused them of using a “safe space, a theatre that is meant to bring communities together [...] as a platform for a political stunt that sought only to divide and alienate.”

Ironically, Sam’s illustrations for the book we were



invited to discuss draw on research I had done about the evolution of the “safe spaces” concept. The term emerged in the United States in the mid-1960s. It was first used by the gay and lesbian bars where patrons sheltered from homophobic police. Then it came to be used for the centres, shelters and bookshops in which the pioneers of women’s liberation organised.

The meaning of a “safe space” shifted during the mass movement against the Vietnam war. In 1972, the psychoanalyst Chaim Shatan wrote for the *New York Times* about attending a “rap session” with the activist group Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He coined the phrase “post-Vietnam syndrome” for psychic injuries inflicted on men “deceived, used and betrayed” by those who led them into a cruel and brutal conflict. The

condition pertained not to combat per se, but the political context in which it took place.

When the anti-war movement declined, damaged veterans interpreted their suffering through less collective and more psychological narratives. In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III included “post-traumatic stress disorder,” a condition stripped of the political specificity on which Shatan had insisted. The description related to any severe stressors, and so could be diagnosed away from the battlefield. The US Department of Veterans Affairs listed “natural disasters, serious accidents, assaults or abuse, or even sudden and major emotional losses” as possible causes.

PTSD entered popular consciousness through depic-

Francesca Albanese says that there are “reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating the commission of the crime of genocide[...] has been met”

tions of veterans traumatised by backfiring cars or other noises resembling gunfire. By analogy, feminist commenters on the early internet began posting warnings before discussing sexual abuse, eating disorders or other topics that might “trigger” involuntary responses. The practice spread through blogs and then social media, and made its way to US universities in the 2010s.

Most campus trigger warnings simply replicated the journalistic convention of providing audiences notice before the display of disturbing content. Nevertheless, lurid – and sometimes entirely false – stories about safe spaces provided ammunition for the never-ending culture war in which right-wing populists denounced universities for indulging politically-correct snowflakes. It was that backlash, more than anything else, that brought the terminology into widespread use.

For a small number of radicals, trigger warnings and safe spaces became, in the absence of a mass student movement, a mechanism for shielding the marginalised and oppressed. To that end, activists looked to policies enforced by sympathetic student unions or university administrations. The reliance on institutional support gave the strategy a distinctly bureaucratic character, with “safety” defined and imposed from the top by a tiny and often self-selected minority.

The meaning of “safe spaces” evolved, in other words, from an adjunct to mass struggles to a version of the “smug politics” our book polemicised against.

That was why the term provided convenient cover for the opponents of Palestinian solidarity: the historical association with campus activism eased the conscience of “progressive” administrators, even as their bans received applause from the conservatives who had mocked and belittled safe spaces in the 2010s.

Consider how the organisers of Western Australia’s major arts festival prepared for discussions of Palestine. Under the heading “Perth festival fosters a safe and inclusive environment,” they explained:

“there is great concern and distress felt by members of our community in response to the suffering and tragic loss of innocent lives in the conflict between Israel and Hamas. Our hearts are with all those who are hurting or have lost loved ones or friends.

“Perth Festival seeks to bring people from broad backgrounds and perspectives together to embrace our shared humanity and foster understanding and compassion through a diverse program of artistic experiences. We believe art has the power to unite people and bridge divisions. [...]

“We all have a collective responsibility to engage with each other – including our audiences, artists, staff and volunteers – in a mutual spirit of safety, inclusivity, respect, courtesy and tolerance.”

Fine sentiments, in the abstract. Yet conciliation is a virtue only in particular circumstances. People squabbling over a cake might, respectfully and courteously, cut it into halves. They couldn’t do the same with a disputed kitten – at least, not without covering themselves in blood.

The International Court of Justice has declared “plausible” the allegations that Israel is committing acts of genocide in Gaza. United Nations Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese says that there are “reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating the commission of the crime of genocide [...] has been met.” Israeli Holocaust scholar Raz Segal speaks of “a textbook case of genocide.”

The University Network for Human Rights, the International Human Rights Clinic at Boston University School of Law, the International Human Rights Clinic at Cornell Law School, the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, and the Lowenstein Human Rights Project at Yale Law School have collaborated on a report that concludes Israel has

“committed genocidal acts of killing, causing serious harm to, and inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of Palestinians in Gaza, a protected group that forms a substantial part of the Palestinian people.”

How much less does festival etiquette matter than credible, serious claims about the worst crime known to humanity? A paternalistic injunction to “bridge divisions” displays a jaw-dropping lack of moral seriousness, as if artists and audiences should find middle ground between those opposed to genocide and those supportive of it.

For or against?

To illustrate the perversity of the safety trope, consider the literary response to a different war.

In June 1936, Nancy Cunard, the poet, shipping heiress and bohemian, circulated a document to her extensive network of writerly contacts asking about their attitudes to the Spanish Civil War. At the time, most of the left supported the Spanish republic against General Franco. Many on the right – particularly, the Catholic right – backed the fascists, presenting Franco’s insurrection as a defensive war against communism.

Over Gaza, however, curatorial courage melts away faster than Kafka's frozen sea, as if artists can shock and provoke only when absolutely nothing is at stake

Countries like Britain and Australia maintained a purported neutrality, though, as historian Paul Preston explains, “everything was done in legal and financial terms to facilitate arms procurement by the [fascist] rebels while obstacles were repeatedly put in the way of the Republic purchasing arms and equipment.”

Despite the controversy, Cunard did not urge the community of writers to come together and embrace a shared humanity. She sought, rather, to widen its divisions: “now, as certainly never before,” she said, “we are determined or compelled, to take sides. The equivocal attitude, the Ivory Tower, the paradoxical, the ironic detachment, will no longer do.”

Rejecting the logic of the “safe space,” Cunard demanded writers adopt a position:

“Are you for, or against, the legal government and the people of Republican Spain? Are you for or against Franco and Fascism? For it is impossible any longer to take no side.”

The *Left Review* published the responses as a six-penny pamphlet, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*. It remains a remarkable document, with 148 statements from some of the 20th-century’s greatest writers – Aldous Huxley, T.S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, H.G. Wells, W.H. Auden, Ford Maddox Ford, Christina Stead, Arthur Koestler – alongside many figures now entirely forgotten. Cunard divided contributors into three categories: “For”, “Neutral?” and “Against.”

She justified her project by taking seriously the claims artists made for their work. If poets were, as she said, “the most sensitive instruments of a nation,” their very sensitivity demanded a response to the war. As Thomas Mann argued, the artist “ever occupies humanity’s furthest outposts” – and as such could not “be allowed to shirk a decision.”

By comparison, today’s safety rhetoric reveals a cruelly diminished understanding of culture and its role. When submitting applications for funding, event organisers celebrate the supposed propensity of creatives to speak the unsayable. They don’t describe their programmes as “safe.” They invoke Kafka’s call for an art experienced like “a fist hammering on our skulls” and scour thesauruses for words like “challenging,” “provocative,” “brave” and “transgressive.”

Over Gaza, however, curatorial courage melts away faster than Kafka’s frozen sea, as if artists can shock and provoke only when absolutely nothing is at stake. The insistence on “safety” demonstrates that arts administrators understand culture as an umbrella full of

holes – perfectly fine until actually required.

Individual responsibility

In June 1937, the singer and actor Paul Robeson addressed a fundraising event for Spain in London’s Albert Hall. “Every artist, every scientist, every writer,” he said, “must decide now where he stands [...] The artist must take sides. He must elect to fight for freedom or for slavery. I have made my choice. I had no alternative.”

Both Robeson and Cunard stressed individual responsibility in a moment of extreme moral crisis. But both also made a different, and apparently contradictory, claim. Invoking choice, they hinted at necessity (“I had no alternative”), implying that the war forced everyone, whether they liked it or not, to pick a side.

By then, the stakes were evident. A victory for Franco meant mass extermination: a programme of reprisals Preston later called the “Spanish Holocaust.” It ensured the consolidation of fascism, not in a single country, but throughout Europe and the world. A global conflagration would follow, a crisis engulfing everything and everyone. Partisanship was inevitable because the catastrophe made every safe place deadly. We might say something similar today.

After the second world war, the victorious nations established various rules and structures designed to ensure that the horrors that began with Spain and culminated in Auschwitz never recurred. The norms and institutions so forged included the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, and the Geneva Conventions. All of them were flawed and partial, repeatedly used in the decades that followed to legitimate the powerful against the weak. Nevertheless, they at least symbolised an ideal of international relationships governed by something other than naked violence.

That model has now been shattered. The Gaza Strip – a territory only 41 kilometres long and less than 12 kilometres at its widest – houses nearly two million Palestinians, 47 percent of them children. Israel has dropped thousands of tonnes of explosives on that tiny area. The death toll is now more than 43,000. At least 31 of the 36 hospitals have been damaged or destroyed, with more than 800 health care workers slain. Over 130 journalists have been killed (only 69 died in the whole second world war), and 300 or more aid workers are dead. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United Nations report the systematic infliction of torture.

As Amnesty International’s head Agnès Callamard

"I feel like I'm going mad. ... All these dead children, and we're supposed to think it's all right, that it's normal. But it's not! It's not!"

argued, Gaza has revealed international law to be "frankly useless." Israel has been accused of violating the Geneva Conventions – and been rewarded by Washington with US\$17.9-billion in military assistance.

In an increasingly unstable geostrategic environment, marked by rising tensions between the US, China and Russia, all the historic mechanisms for governing and restraining conflict lie in ruins. "We are really as close to the abyss as we have ever been," Callamard says – and the chasm extends beyond military conflict.

The international strategy for climate action depends, utterly and absolutely, on a liberal consensus now defunct. In theory, the 2015 Paris Agreement, by which nations agreed to limit emissions, mandates legally binding obligations. But given that Israel has simply ignored rulings by the International Court of Justice – and suffered no consequences as a result – who or what will compel recalcitrant leaders to fulfil climate pledges?

The willingness of Western nations to privilege strategic interests over the lives of Palestinian children raises obvious questions about what or whom might be sacrificed as the environmental emergency intensifies. The profits from fossil fuels – a staggering US\$2.8-billion dollars every day for the last 50 years – provide a substantial incentive for the wealthy to continue with carbon business as usual. They know that rising temperatures disproportionately affect the poor and the brown – and Gaza has shown such people can be disposed of with impunity.

The time is short

In the 1930s, the Spanish writer Miguel Hernández warned:

*A future of dust advances,
A fate advances
In which nothing will remain;
Nor stone on stone nor bone on bone.*

So too today. The horrors of Gaza will resonate for decades to come.

Paradoxically, the very scale of the crisis makes worthwhile even the tiniest gesture of solidarity. When Sam and I said that we would not speak at a censored event, we received, almost immediately, an apology from the organisers. The directive, they explained, had not originated from the staff, but had been circulated without their knowledge by someone in management. We should ignore the ban, they said. We could dis-

cuss whatever we wanted. They really hoped we would speak.

We did, and I'm glad that we did.

It wasn't a huge event: perhaps 30 or so people around a makeshift stage and a dodgy speaker system. The participants were, like most attendees at literary events today, old, even frail, determinedly rugged up against a cold winter night. But they raised Palestine before we said anything.

"I feel like I'm going mad," a woman in her seventies told me:

"Like there's something wrong with me. All these dead children, and we're supposed to think it's all right, that it's normal. But it's not! It's not!"

She was almost crying. I doubt she cared very much about our book of cartoons about political organising. She came to a public event because she sought human connection, looking, in her anguish, for others who shared the sense of profound moral injury.

And there are lots of us. If any good can be salvaged from this evil time, it is the solidarity of ordinary people, the crowds assembling again and again and again at events at which noisy contingents of Jews and Palestinians stand side-by-side. Auden described how, in the struggle for Spain, "our moments of tenderness blossom." So too in the movement for Gaza, which brings together a kaleidoscope of identities, ethnicities and genders: refugee families alongside delegations of lawyers, Queers for Palestine next to pious Christians, Indigenous leaders on almost every platform.

I have never experienced an Australian writers' festival or cultural event that manifests anything comparable to the diversity of Palestinian solidarity, nor one in which the same youthful idealism dominates. A literary culture that, in the name of safety, guards itself against the world will, almost by definition, descend into sterility. By taking their place in the fight for Palestine, writers might, perhaps, play some role in reorienting a literature seemingly determined to pursue its own irrelevance.

But, really, that's not what matters. Journalist Alex McKinnon has written about the experience of social media in a genocide, the cascading images of children burned and broken among their bombed-out homes, each clip or picture a unique obscenity, a pornography of violence that degrades us all by its existence.

"You try and look away when you realise what you're looking at but by then it's too late, you put the phone

"I'm a different person now than I was at the start of October. I've changed in a deep and fundamental way and I don't see myself ever changing back"

down or turn it off or fling it away from you like a spider crawling on your hand but the image is already in your head along with all the other ones, filed away for when you're in a Zoom meeting or meeting someone for coffee or rocking your daughter back to sleep in the middle of the night."

Many of us know what he means. Roland Barthes described photography in terms of the "punctum": the accidental aspect of a particular scene that reaches out and pricks a viewer. I scroll, more or less unscathed, past a man flattened by an Israeli tank or a journalist sobbing as he learns his wife and children are dead, or a woman lying on a gurney with her brains leaking out and, for no obvious reason, it's the cheap plastic necklace around the neck of a little dead girl that unexpectedly brings me completely undone.

"I don't know if 'radicalised' is the right word," McKinnon concludes, "but I'm a different person now than I was at the start of October. I've changed in a deep and

fundamental way and I don't see myself ever changing back."

I don't either.

In the 1930s, Auden expressed the nature of the obligation we now face:

The stars are dead. The animals will not look.

We are left alone with our day, and the time is short, and

History to the defeated

May say Alas but cannot help or pardon.

Writers – and everyone else – must take sides, irrespective of the sensitivities they offend. We have no choice. Gaza is not safe, and neither is the world that allows Gaza to happen. **CT**

Jeff Sparrow is Senior Lecturer, Centre for Advancing Journalism, University of Melbourne This essay was shortlisted for the 2024 Melbourne Prize for Literature and was published at www.theconversation.com.

► THE DARK SIDE OF HISTORY

THE UN VOTES

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Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the					
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			X	ABSTENTION: 1	

October 30, 2024 – Only the US & Israel voted against ending the Economic, Commercial and Financial Embargo on Cuba that was first imposed by the United States in 1960. The US veto means the demand made annually by the UN since 1992, will wait for another year at least . . . Moldova was the country that abstained.

Israel and the US destroyed Syria and called it peace

American interference, at the behest of Netanyahu's far-right Israel, has left the Middle East in ruins, with open wars raging in Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, and with Iran on the brink of a nuclear arsenal

In the famous lines of Tacitus, Roman historian, “To ravage, to slaughter, to usurp under false titles, they call empire; and where they make a desert, they call it peace.”

In our age, it is Israel and the US that make a desert and call it peace.

The story is simple. In stark violation of international law, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his ministers claim the right to rule over seven million Palestinian Arabs.

When Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands leads to militant resistance, Israel labels the resistance “terrorism” and calls on the US to overthrow the Middle East governments that back the “terrorists.” The US, under the sway of the Israel Lobby, goes to war on Israel's behalf.

The fall of Syria last month is the culmination of the Israel-US campaign against Syria that goes back to 1996 with Netanyahu's arrival to office as Prime Minister. The Israel-US war on Syria escalated in 2011 and 2012, when Barack Obama covertly tasked the CIA with the overthrow of the Syrian Government in Operation Timber Sycamore. That effort finally came to “fruition”, after more than 300,000 deaths in

the Syrian war since 2011.

Syria's fall came swiftly because of more than a decade of crushing economic sanctions, the burdens of war, the US seizure of Syria's oil, Russia's priorities regarding the conflict in Ukraine, and most immediately, Israel's attacks on Hezbollah, which was the key military backstop to the Syrian Government. No doubt Assad often misplayed his own hand and faced severe internal discontent, but his regime was targeted for collapse for decades by the US and Israel.

Before the US-Israel campaign to overthrow Assad began in earnest in 2011, Syria was a functioning, growing middle-income country. In January 2009, the IMF Executive Board had this to say:

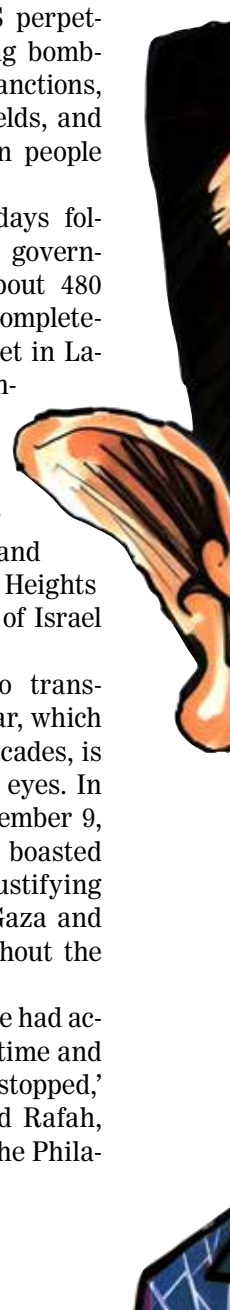
“Executive Directors welcomed Syria's strong macroeconomic performance in recent years, as manifested in the rapid non-oil GDP growth, comfortable level of foreign reserves, and low and declining government debt. This performance reflected both robust regional demand and the authorities' reform efforts to shift toward a more market-based economy.”

Since 2011, the Israel-US perpetual war on Syria, including bombing, jihadists, economic sanctions, US seizure of Syria's oil fields, and more, has sunk the Syrian people into misery.

In the immediate two days following the collapse of the government, Israel conducted about 480 strikes across Syria, and completely destroyed the Syrian fleet in Latakia. Pursuing his expansionist agenda, Prime Minister Netanyahu illegally claimed control over the demilitarised buffer zone in the Golan Heights and declared that the Golan Heights will be a part of the State of Israel “for eternity.”

Netanyahu's ambition to transform the region through war, which dates back almost three decades, is playing out in front of our eyes. In a press conference on December 9, the Israeli prime minister boasted of an “absolute victory,” justifying the on-going genocide in Gaza and escalating violence throughout the region:

“I ask you, just think, if we had acceded to those who told us time and again: ‘The war must be stopped,’ we would not have entered Rafah, we would not have seized the Phila-



delphia Corridor, we would not have eliminated Sinwar, we would not have surprised our enemies in Lebanon and the entire world in a daring operation-stratagem, we would not have eliminated Nasrallah, we would not have destroyed Hezbollah's underground network, and we would not have exposed Iran's weakness. The operations that we have carried out since the beginning of the war are dismantling the axis brick by brick."

The long history of Israel's campaign to overthrow the Syrian Gov-

ernment is not widely understood, yet the documentary record is clear. Israel's war on Syria began with US and Israeli neoconservatives in 1996, who fashioned a "Clean Break" strategy for the Middle East for Netanyahu as he came to office. The core of the "clean break" strategy called for Israel (and the US) to reject "land for peace," the idea that Israel would withdraw from the occupied Palestinian lands in return for peace.

Instead, Israel would retain the occupied Palestinian lands, rule over the Palestinian people in an Apartheid state, step-by-step ethnically cleanse the state, and enforce so-called "peace for peace" by overthrowing neighbouring governments that resisted Israel's land claims.

The Clean Break strategy asserts, "Our claim to the land – to which we have clung for hope for 2000 years – is legitimate and noble," and goes on to state, "Syria challenges Israel on Lebanese soil. An effective approach, and one with which American can sympathise, would be if Israel seized the strategic initiative along its northern borders by engaging Hizballah, Syria, and Iran, as the principal agents of aggression in Lebanon..."

In his 1996 book 'Fighting Terrorism,' Netanyahu set out the new strategy. Israel would not fight the terrorists; it would fight the states that support the terrorists. More accurately, it would get the US to do Israel's fighting for it. As he elaborated in 2001:

"The first and most crucial thing to understand is this: There is no international terrorism without the support of sovereign states.... Take away all this state support, and the entire scaffolding of international

terrorism will collapse into dust."

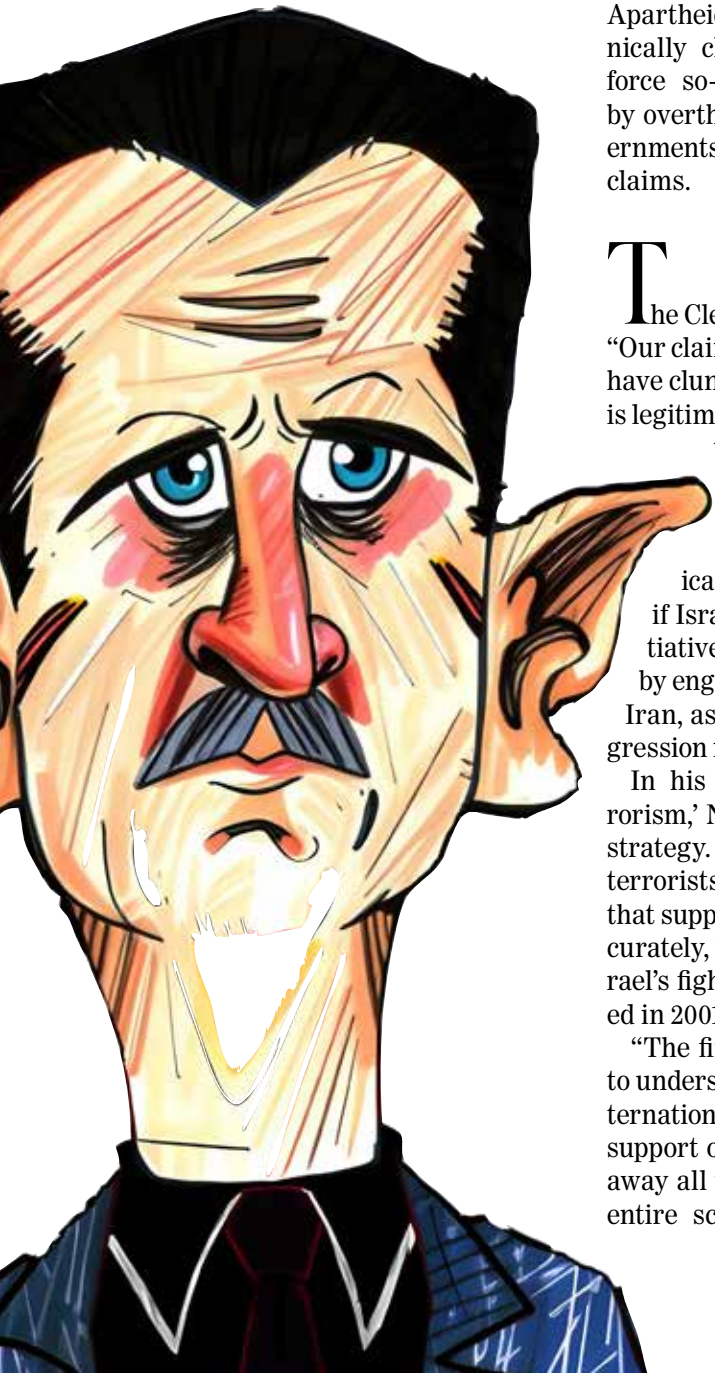
Netanyahu's strategy was integrated into US foreign policy. Taking out Syria was always a key part of the plan. This was confirmed to General Wesley Clark after 9/11. He was told, during a visit at the Pentagon, that "we're going to attack and destroy the governments in seven countries in five years – we're going to start with Iraq, and then we're going to move to Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Iran." Iraq would be first, then Syria, and the rest.

Netanyahu's campaign for the Iraq War is spelled out in detail in Dennis Fritz's new book, *Deadly Betrayal*. The role of the Israel Lobby is spelled out in Ilan Pappé's new book, *Lobbying for Zionism on Both Sides of the Atlantic*.

The insurgency that hit US troops in Iraq set back the five-year timeline, but did not change the basic strategy.

The US has by now led or sponsored wars against Iraq (invasion in 2003), Lebanon (US funding and arming Israel), Libya (NATO bombing in 2011), Syria (CIA operation during 2010's), Sudan (supporting rebels to break Sudan apart in 2011), and Somalia (backing Ethiopia's invasion in 2006). A prospective US war with Iran, ardently sought by Israel, is still pending.

Strange as it might seem, the CIA has repeatedly backed Islamist Jihadists to fight these wars, and jihadists have just toppled the Syrian regime. The CIA, after all, helped to create al-Qaeda in the first place by training, arming, and financing the Mujahideen in Afghanistan from the late 1970s onward. Yes, Osama bin Laden later turned on the US, but his movement was a US creation all the same. Ironically, as Seymour Hersh confirms, it was Assad's intelligence that "tipped off the US to an impending Al Qaeda bombing attack on the headquar-



ters of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet."

Operation Timber Sycamore was a billion-dollar CIA covert program launched by Obama to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. The CIA funded, trained, and provided intelligence to radical and extreme Islamist groups. The CIA effort also involved a "rat line" to run weapons from Libya (attacked by NATO in 2011) to the jihadists in Syria. In 2014, Seymour Hersh described the operation in his piece "The Red Line and the Rat Line":

"A highly classified annex to the report, not made public, described a secret agreement reached in early 2012 between the Obama and Erdoğan administrations. It pertained to the rat line. By the terms of the agreement, funding came from Turkey, as well as Saudi Arabia and Qatar; the CIA, with the support of MI6, was responsible for getting arms from Gaddafi's arsenals into Syria."

Soon after the launch of Timber Sycamore, in March 2013, at a joint conference by President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu at the White House, Obama said: "With respect to Syria, the United States continues to work with allies and friends and the Syrian opposition to hasten the end of Assad's rule."

To the US-Israeli Zionist mentality, a call for negotiation by an adversary is taken as a sign of weakness of the adversary. Those who call for negotiations on the other side typically end up dead – murdered by Israel or US assets. We've seen this play out recently in Lebanon. The Lebanese Foreign Minister confirmed that Hassan Nasrallah, Former Secretary-General of Hezbollah had agreed to a ceasefire with Israel days before his assassination. Hezbollah's willingness to accept a peace agreement according to the Arab-Islamic world's wishes of a two-state solution is long-standing. Similarly, instead of negotiating to end the war in Gaza, Israel assassi-

To the US-Israeli Zionist mentality, a call for negotiation by an adversary is taken as a sign of weakness of the adversary

nated Hamas' political chief, Ismail Haniyeh, in Tehran.

Similarly in Syria, instead of allowing for a political solution to emerge, the US opposed the peace process multiple times. In 2012, the UN had negotiated a peace agreement in Syria that was blocked by the Americans, who demanded that Assad must go on the first day of the peace agreement.

The US wanted regime change, not peace. In September 2024, Netanyahu addressed the General Assembly with a map of the Middle East divided between "Blessing" and "Curse," with Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran as part of Netanyahu's curse. The real curse is Israel's path of mayhem and war, which has now engulfed Lebanon and Syria, with Netanyahu's fervent hope to draw the US into war with Iran as well.

The US and Israel are high-fiving that they have successfully wrecked yet another adversary of Israel and defender of the Palestinian cause, with Netanyahu claiming "credit for starting the historic process." Most likely Syria will now succumb to continued war among the many armed protagonists, as has happened in the previous US-Israeli regime-change operations.

In short, American interference, at the behest of Netanyahu's Israel, has left the Middle East in ruins, with over a million dead and open wars raging in Libya, Sudan,

Somalia, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, and with Iran on the brink of a nuclear arsenal, being pushed against its own inclinations to this eventuality.

All this is in the service of a profoundly unjust cause: to deny Palestinians their political rights in the service of Zionist extremism based on the 7th century BCE *Book of Joshua*. Remarkably, according to that text – one relied on by Israel's own religious zealots – the Israelites were not even the original inhabitants of the land. Rather, according to the text, God instructs Joshua and his warriors to commit multiple genocides to conquer the land.

Against this backdrop, the Arab-Islamic nations and indeed almost all of the world have repeatedly united in the call for a two-state solution and peace between Israel and Palestine.

Instead of the two-state solution, Israel and the US have made a desert and called it peace. **CT**

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Is that a pitchfork...?

People who say violence is never the answer are usually ignoring some massive and hugely consequential forms of systemic violence which gave rise to the violence they're denouncing. It happened with October 7, and it happened with the health insurance CEO. On December 11, I asked my Twitter followers to complete the following sentence: "Instead of physically attacking the abusive plutocrats who expand their wealth and power by ruining lives and killing people, ordinary citizens should use the other options that are available to them to address such injustices, such as -----"

The responses were interesting. I got a lot of angry replies from people saying I was encouraging violence by posing this question, which is actually pretty revealing if you think about it.

I didn't actually encourage violence, I just asked people to list what the alternative options to violence were. If these respondents were aware of options besides violence for dealing with the abuses of wealthy oligarchs, it would never have occurred to them to see my question that way.

They themselves see no way to resolve these abuses besides violence; they just think people should submit to continued abuse.

Watching all the widespread support for the CEO's suspected killer Luigi Mangione reminds me of a 2014 essay by venture capitalist Nick Hanauer titled "The Pitchforks Are Coming For Us Plutocrats" warning what he termed his "fellow zillionaires"

that "No society can sustain this kind of rising inequality." "The problem isn't that we have inequality," Hanauer wrote. "The problem is that inequality is at historically high levels and getting worse every day. Our country is rapidly becoming less a capitalist society and more a feudal society. Unless our policies change dramatically, the middle class will disappear, and we will be back to late 18th-century France. Before the revolution.

"If we don't do something to fix the glaring inequities in this economy, the pitchforks are going to come for us," warned Hanauer. "No society can sustain this kind of rising inequality. In fact, there is no example in human history where wealth accumulated like this and the pitchforks didn't eventually come out. You show me a highly unequal society, and I will show you a police state. Or an uprising. There are no counter examples. None. It's not if, it's when."

Hanauer wasn't speaking out of compassion or altruism but basic self-concern. He wasn't trying to help the poor, he was trying to avoid meeting his maker at the business end of a guillotine blade.

All the rage and bloodlust directed toward these plutocrats does seem to be approaching the boiling point he warned of. I don't know how this is going to play out, but I will say we're at a fascinating point in history. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian independent journalist. This column was first published at www.caitlinjohnstone.com.au.

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