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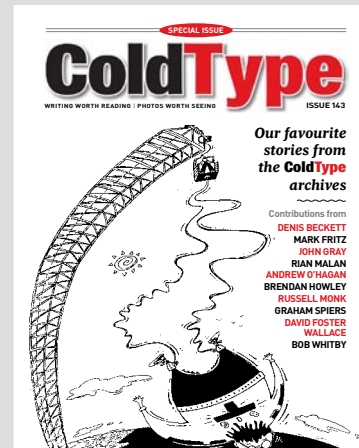


Photo: Nate Robert

In the  
Shadow  
of the  
Great  
Pyramid



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Sasha popovic

After the election

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# Divided, we stand

**Rozali Telbis** tells how the recent Golden Globe Awards ceremony has set the tone for faux feminism in 2018

***Despite what the latest celebrity humanitarian might say, these methods of creating change have only ever been successful in virtue signalling and moral narcissism***

A year ago, Meryl Streep delivered an impassioned political speech at the Golden Globe Awards. Her speech was largely hailed as an act of dissent by the mainstream media and liberal elite. This year, Hollywood A-listers once again graced us with their political engagement by dressing in all black as an act of solidarity with sexual assault victims and to fight gender inequality. Their goal was to continue the conversation that started months ago. Those who joined the crusade included Hollywood's heavy hitters: Jessica Chastain, Emma Stone, Reese Witherspoon, among many others.

Celebrities who had openly celebrated known child rapists (looking at you, Meryl Streep) promised a night of "change" and oh, did they deliver. If you want to know what activism looks like to celebrities, look no further than the Golden Globes. Evan Rachel Wood urged attendees to form a circle around predators. Seth Meyers delivered a politically infused monologue referencing sexual misconduct, Trump, and racism – the three most beloved topics in Hollywood. Some celebrities even brought activists with them as their dates, proudly showing off that they, too, are politically hip with it.

It was a grand evening of self-indulgence. Some celebrities also sported a 'Time's Up' protest pin, displaying their support for this new Hollywood initiative. Because as we know, celebrities will stop at nothing to make

everything about themselves.

## **Time's up on deploying Western saviour tactics**

The Time's Up movement includes hundreds of celebrities who will donate money to fund legal aid for poor women being abused in the workplace. In other words, it is your regular ol' case of class-saviour complex à la Oscar Wilde. Throw money at the poorest under the assumption they cannot take action themselves, thereby removing their sense of agency. It is a typical saviour tactic employed by the West that reinforces dependency and provides temporary solutions to a systemic problem. In this case, it is a problem that cannot be solved by out-of-touch, ego-infused celebrities. Various conscious capitalist campaigns function in the same way. Despite what the latest celebrity humanitarian might say, these methods of creating change have only ever been successful in virtue signalling and moral narcissism.

The launch letter of Time's Up reeks of the same class-based tactics to serve the underprivileged. "To every woman employed in agriculture who has had to fend off unwanted sexual advances from her boss, every housekeeper who has tried to escape an assaultive guest, every janitor trapped nightly in a building with a predatory supervisor, every waitress grabbed by a customer and expected to take it with a smile, every garment and factory worker forced to trade sexual acts for





**Emma Stone:**  
Heavy hitter



**Seth Meyers:** Three  
most beloved topics



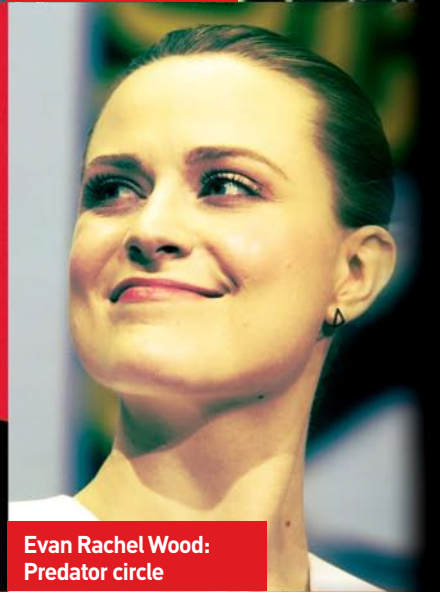
**Reese Witherspoon:**  
Joined the crusade



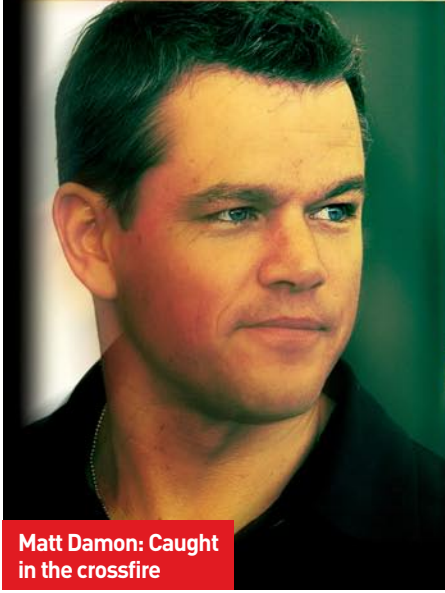
**Meryl Streep:**  
Night of change



**Harvey Weinstein:**  
Well-known reputation



**Evan Rachel Wood:**  
Predator circle



**Matt Damon:** Caught  
in the crossfire



**Pamela Anderson:**  
Common knowledge



**Donald Trump:**  
Dangerous concoction

## Celebrating Self-indulgence

***The civil rights movement, suffrage movement, labour rights – each and every one of these movements have been won by the working class. And they will continue to be won by the working class. We don't need hashtags and grandstanding, we need an active political movement***

more shifts, every domestic worker or home health aide forcibly touched by a client, every immigrant woman silenced by the threat of her undocumented status being reported in retaliation for speaking up, and to women in every industry who are subjected to indignities and offensive behaviour that they are expected to tolerate in order to make a living: We stand with you. We support you,” the letter states.

This campaign assumes that working-class women cannot stick up for themselves. Lest these outraged celebrities forget, all social movements have been won by ordinary people: The civil rights movement, suffrage movement, labour rights – each and every one of these movements have been won by the working class. And they will continue to be won by the working class. We don't need hashtags and grandstanding, we need an active political movement. People don't have time for empty gestures – celebrities can keep their hashtags, thank you. The rest of us will continue attending town halls, lobbying government, writing letters, and rallying our communities to create tangible change.

Time's Up is a self-indulgent campaign spurred on by the patronising #MeToo movement that was largely fuelled by finger wagging, the demonisation of men, and the proud embracement of victimhood. Reputations were destroyed because the most benign gestures, wolf whistling and knee touching, were labelled as assault. Matt Damon was caught in the crossfire when he made rational, reflective comments addressing the above. His comments instigated a petition to remove him from the film *Ocean's 8*. Anyone who dares to speak out critically is treated with the same contempt as the accused rapists and labelled as “victim blamers.” Women who came forward were pleased with using trauma-based narratives when claiming victimhood on the most minor casual advances. The #MeToo movement devolved into an anti-male grievance fest, normalising mob behaviour and infantilisation of accusers. There was no room for open

discourse and dialogue.

### **(Some) pushback to Hollywood hypocrisy**

All hope was not lost. Some of Hollywood's elite were more enlightened than others. Rose McGowan dared to speak out about the Hollywood hypocrisy and she, too, was shunned, even by her seemingly close friends. Other well-known figures who agreed with Rose were also undermined by the Hollywood Faux Feminists. Pamela Anderson pointed out the obvious: Harvey Weinstein's reputation was very well known in Hollywood – it was considered common knowledge, even to Z-listers. There are online forums littered with stories about Harvey dating back several years, along with celebrity interviews, TV and movie references, and an Oscar joke to boot. When Rose accused Meryl of knowing about Harvey's vile ways, the former was admonished. Yet when other women came forward making bold sexual assault claims, their stories weren't questioned. Reputations have already been slaughtered by the self-righteous without any form of due process. It's not far-fetched to believe that Streep knew about Harvey all this time. After all, her and many others publicly supported Roman Polanski and Woody Allen.

The media often portrays this dogmatic fight for gender equality by throwing generic trauma-ridden words such as “brave” and “courageous” – often catering to the powerful elite, to create that emotional narrative and drive the message home. These “feminist” movements (and I use the term “feminist” loosely here) are not the first symbolic, patronising gestures that we have seen coming from the liberal elite. They happen all the time. Hillary Clinton's presidential platform was wholly dependent on identity politics while her political platform served more as an afterthought. Clinton garnered wide celebrity support, despite the many contradictions and hypocrisies that seeped out of her campaign. She fought for gender equality, yet she used her own gender as a way to gain



special treatment and votes exclusively from women. Her female supporters were quick to whip out the pitchforks whenever Clinton the Feminist Cheerleader was challenged.

The corporate media also fawned over the women's marches that took place in response to Trump's victory. While they were largely symbolic in nature, the women's marches were widely celebrated online. Yet, other more substantial and wide-reaching movements were vilified and undermined, namely Occupy. Occupy was constantly invalidated by the mainstream media, self-proclaimed experts, and anyone with a loud online presence. Many of the women's marches participants were the same people who criticised the Occupy movement for being a leaderless, catch-all, movement with no concrete goals. People were obsessively nitpicking over Occupy, looking for any reason to reject it – articles came out of the woodwork following Occupy boldly stating that protests don't work. Yet the criticisms to the women's marches were almost nonexistent.

It's important to address Hollywood's role in all of this because it perfectly illustrates the politicisation of, well, everything. With politics, we reached a point where if you don't provide an opinion or get involved (even in the most superficial way), then you are seen as uncaring, ignorant, a Trump supporter, or whatever other ridiculous or reductionist explanation the social media mob comes up with. Now, more than ever, celebrities are pressured to insert themselves in current affairs thereby reducing political discourse to Trump's latest tweet, his orange skin, or any other trivial issue of the day. When you combine the regression of political discourse, outrage fanaticism and social media shaming, the result is a dangerous concoction of fragmentation, misunderstanding, and misinformation. Everyone wants to stake a claim in their outrage.

### **The false rebel in modern society**

We have allowed identity politics to hinder real understanding, respect, and compas-

sion. Identity politics is a divisive, zero sum game – it is inherently regressive. It has taken a foothold in academic circles and may significantly stall cultural and social progress in the Western world. The irony is clear – it is the “progressives” that will be complicit in stalling progress. Identity politics does not improve the human condition. Fear of being perceived as transphobic, xenophobic, or any other “-phobic” has rendered people sterile and nauseatingly dull. It's trendy and predictable to write about transgenderism, feminism, racism and any other marginal identifiers so long as it ticks off all the politically correct boxes. These censorship mechanisms greatly hinder progress. Identity politics has proven to be an effective way to show subversion but, at the same time, not ruffle any feathers at all.

The only way that is accepted to do feminism in the public eye is to berate others for doing it the wrong way. As a result, we lose the voices of strong, independent women in the process of shaming them for not having the same narrow-minded point of view. The politicisation of everything is bad for everyone. It diminishes politics, cultural and society as a whole.

In watching all of this unfold, I am reminded of Guy Debord's seminal work, *Society of the Spectacle*, which wonderfully captures the modern society in which we live. In his work, Debord coined the term “false rebellion” as a way to describe a person who engages in a socially accepted act of dissent, rendering it a façade. The false rebel perpetuates the spectacle in modern society – that is, it allows for illusions and shallow content to prevail over substance and critical thinking.

Maybe these celebrities should give it a read and learn that being a false rebel is no more virtuous than tweeting out shallow and morally narcissistic comments from the comfort of their empires. It is time we move past the false rebel, ignore these seriously misguided celebrities and refocus our efforts on the power of community organising to create tangible social change. **CT**

***Maybe these celebrities should read Guy Debord's seminal work, *Society of the Spectacle*, and learn that being a false rebel is no more virtuous than tweeting out shallow and morally narcissistic comments from the comfort of their empires***

.....  
**Rozali Telbis** is an activist and writer who lives in Vancouver, Canada.

Oh Dear!

# The 2017 'Are You Serious' Awards

**Conn M. Hallinan** presents the Dispatches From The Edge annual awards to individuals, companies and governments that make reading the news an adventure

***The “specialists” used the Arabic word for “salad” in place of “authority.”***

***Thus the governing body set up by the 1993 Oslo Accords became the “Palestinian Salad” (tasty with a light vinaigrette)***

**The Reverse WEBBY Award** – the Colsa Corporation based in Huntsville, Alabama, a company that runs the multi-million dollar WebOps programme for the US Defense Department.

WebOps, according to Associated Press, employs “specialists” who “employ fictitious identities and try to sway targets from joining the Islamic State.” But the “specialists” are not fluent and used the Arabic word for “salad” in place of “authority.” Thus the governing body set up by the 1993 Oslo Accords became the “Palestinian Salad” (tasty with a light vinaigrette).

Runner up is the military’s Special Operations Forces (SOFs) that botched a raid in Yemen last February that got a Navy SEAL killed and destroyed a \$75-million MV-22 Osprey aircraft. Desperate to show that the raid gathered valuable intelligence, US commanders published a video on how to make explosives they say were captured during the raid. Except the video was 10 years old and all over the Internet. The raid also killed several children, but the Trump administration called it “a success by all standards.”

**The Little Bo Peep Award** – the DOD’s “Iraq Train and Equip” programme that lost track of \$1.6-billion of weapons and military equipment, some of which might have fallen into the hands of the Islamic State. “Sending millions of dollars’ worth of arms

into a black hole and hoping for the best is not a viable counter-terrorism strategy,” Amnesty International researcher Patrick Wilcken told the Financial Times.

**The Rudyard Kipling Award** – the US DOD for spending \$28 million on new camouflage uniforms for the Afghan Army that depicts a lush forest background. The country is almost 98 percent desert.

Runner up is the British New Century Consulting contractor hired by the US for \$536-million to train intelligence officers for the Afghan Army. There is no evidence that the company did so, but New Century did buy Alfa Romeos and Bentleys for its executives and paid six figure salaries to employees’ relatives without any record of their doing work.

The US has spent \$120-billion in Afghanistan since 2002. Most of it goes to train the Afghan armed forces, whose desertion rate is close to 35 percent, in part because the Taliban are inflicting heavy casualties on police and soldiers. How many casualties? Not clear, because the Pentagon has classified those figures. “The Afghans know what’s going on; the Taliban knows what’s going on; the US Military knows what’s going on,” says John F. Sopko, the special inspector for Afghanistan. “The only people who don’t know what’s going on are the people paying for it.”



I suggest that readers read a short poem by Kipling entitled “Arithmetic on the Frontier.” Nothing’s changed.

**Marie Antoinette Award** – Brazilian President Michel Temer, who has instituted a draconian austerity regime in one of the most unequal countries in the world, while ordering more than \$400,000 in food for his official trips. That would include 500 cartons of Haagen-Dazs ice cream, almost a ton-and-half of chocolate cake, provolone, brie and buffalo mozzarella for sandwiches, and 120 jars of Nutella spread. Public uproar was so great that the order was cancelled. However, Temer did host a taxpayer-funded steak and shrimp feed for 300 legislators in an effort to get their support for budget cuts. Temer ally Pedro Fernandez suggested that one way to save money on a programme that feeds the poor for 65 cents a meal is to have them eat “every other day.”

**The Grinch Award** had three winners this year:

1. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) for demanding that Cambodia repay a \$506-million debt to Washington for a Vietnam War era programme called Food For Peace. While USAID was handing out rice, wheat, oil and cotton to refugees, the US military was secretly – and illegally – dropping more than 500,000 tons of explosives on Cambodia. Those bombings killed upwards of half a million people, destabilised the Phnom Penh government, and led to the genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge that killed more than two million people. Bombs still litter Cambodia and kill scores of people every year.

2. The US Defense Department for discharging soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, thus denying some of them health care, disability pensions and education funds. Of the 92,000 troops discharged from 2011 to 2015, some 57,000 were diagnosed with PTSD, TBI, or both. The military is supposed to screen discharges before tagging them with

the “misconduct” label, but in almost half the cases there was no screening. Of that 57,000, some 13,000 received a “less than honourable” discharge that denies them health care, pensions and benefits.

3. Stephen Miller, President Trump’s speech writer, for intervening in the Group of Seven summit meeting in Sicily and sabotaging an Italian initiative to resettle millions of refugees from wars in the Middle East and Africa. The G-7 includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain, and the US.

**The Golden Lemon Award** – Lockheed-Martin’s F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the most expensive weapons system in history. In the long run the program is estimated to cost \$1.5-trillion. The plane was withdrawn from an air show in Amberley, Australia because there was a possibility of lightning (the plane’s name is “Lightning II”), and this past June five pilots’ experienced “hypoxia-like” symptoms – no air – and the plane was grounded. So far, no one has figured out the problem. The F-35 can’t open its weapons bay at high speed, because it causes the plane to “flutter,” and while it is supposed to be able to take off from an aircraft carrier, it can’t. According to a study by the Director of Operational Test Evaluation, “The aircraft will have little, if any real combat capability for years to come.”

A better buy for the money? Higher education students in the US are currently \$1.3-trillion in debt.

**The Torquemada Award** – Alpaslan Durmas, education minister in Turkey’s conservative Islamic government, for removing all references to “evolution” in biology textbooks because it is “too complicated for students.” Instead they will be instructed that God created people 10,000 years ago. Mustafa Akyol of *Al Monitor* points out the irony in Durmas’ order. Medieval Muslim scholars wrote about a common origin of the species, and “That is why John William Draper, a Darwin contemporary, referred to

***The F-35 can’t open its weapons bay at high speed, because it causes the plane to “flutter,” and while it is supposed to be able to take off from an aircraft carrier, it can’t***

## Oh Dear!

**A guided missile cruiser collided with a South Korean fishing boat, and the guided missile cruiser Antietam ran aground in Yokosuka Harbour in Japan. The Navy also kind of lost track of an aircraft carrier battle group in the Indian Ocean**

Darwin's views as the 'Mohammadan theory of evolution.'"

Turkey has also blocked Wikipedia in case some of the kiddies want to read about evolution on line.

**Frankenstein Award** – the US Navy for building small “killer” boats called Autonomous Surface Craft that use artificial intelligence to locate and destroy their targets. I mean, what could go wrong, this is the US Navy, right? The same one that rammed two high-tech guided missile destroyers into a huge oil tanker and a giant container ship this past summer, killing a score of sailors. A guided missile cruiser collided with a South Korean fishing boat, and the guided missile cruiser Antietam ran aground in Yokosuka Harbour in Japan. The Navy also kind of lost track of an aircraft carrier battle group in the Indian Ocean.

So, not to worry.

**The Ostrich Award** – The Trump administration for first disbanding the federal advisory National Climate Assessment group and then sending speakers representing Peabody Energy, a coal company; NuScale Power, a nuclear engineering firm; and Tellurian, a liquid natural gas group to represent the US at the international climate talks in Germany. Barry K. Worthington, executive director of the US Energy Association, said he was going to challenge the idea fossil fuel should be phased out. “If I can throw myself on the hand grenade to help people realise that, I’m willing to do it.”

It was a puzzling analogy.

Meanwhile, 2016 was the hottest year on record, breaking records set in 2014 and 2015. Temperatures were particularly high in Asia and the arctic, and drought was widespread in southern Africa. Wildfires burned 8.9-million acres in western Canada

and the US. And a patch of warm water off the coast of Alaska facilitated the growth of toxic algae that killed thousands of seabirds and shut down fishing industries.

**The Doom's Day Award** goes to what the Financial Times calls the “uber-rich” who are “hedging against the collapse of the capitalist system” by buying up land in New Zealand. “About 40 percent of our clients are Americans,” says Matt Finnigan of Sotheby's International Realty New Zealand. The buyers want land that comes “with their own water supply, power sources and ability to grow food.”

But you don't have to go down under to bunker down. Vivos Group will sell you a hardened concrete bunker in South Dakota for \$25,000 and a yearly fee of \$1,000. Or you can buy a cabin on the World, a huge cruise liner that will take you far from trouble. If you are Larry Ellison, you can buy 98 percent of Lanai, one of Hawaiian Islands.

*In Memory of Edward Herman, co-author with Noam Chomsky of Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, who died on Nov. 11, 2017, aged 92. The book was what author and journalist Matt Taibbi called “a kind of bible of media criticism for a generation of dissident thinkers.” Herman wrote almost 20 books on political economy and corporate power, including his 1997 book, The Global Media, co-authored by Robert McChesney.*

**CT**

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

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# My family also came from shithole countries

**Barry Lando** reminds Donald Trump of the role that immigrants from less fortunate countries play in the development of their new societies

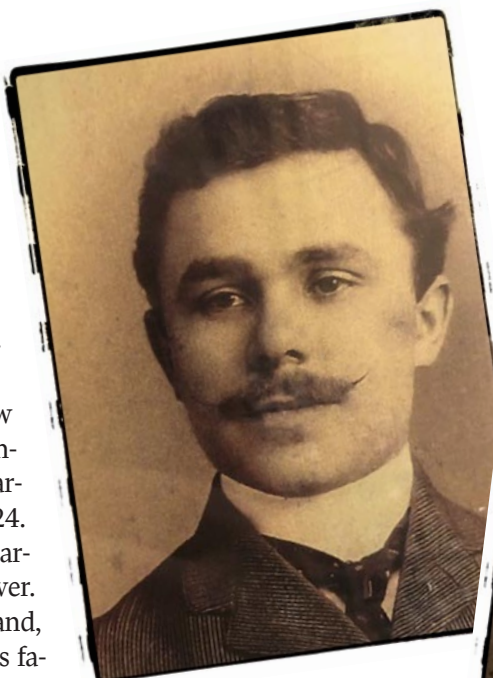
Donald Trump's obscene attacks against immigrants from certain benighted parts of the globe prompted me to reread some of the research I did a few years back about the origins of my own grandparents.

On March, 1905 at the New Road Synagogue in East London, Sarah Scheinman, 22, married Nathan "Lou" Lando, 24. His profession, noted on the marriage certificate, was wood carver.

He had emigrated to England, about 20 years earlier, with his father Isaac Landau. They came from the village of Shrentz near Plotzk, in modern day Poland. Speaking no English, they were among hundreds of thousands of Jews fleeing the anti-semitic upheavals in that part of the Russian empire.

Many travelled on foot for weeks to reach Hamburg, a main port of entry to England, one of the very few countries that would accept them. The ships were like cattle boats with passengers herded together, sleeping on fouled rags or blankets in cramped, fetid spaces between decks.

One reporter covering the arrival of a boat in London in 1891 wrote, "Of the passengers some were young women wearing shawls on



Left: Grandfather  
Nathan Louis Lando.  
Below: Grandmother  
Sarah Lando.



their heads and clad in soiled, faded and torn refinery. Some were men, young or middle-aged, but so enfeebled and spiritless that one might have fixed their age at nearer 70 than 30. A few were old women, bent, emaciated and almost lifeless.

"On landing, scroungers and loafers often robbed the new immigrants of their meagre means selling them bogus tickets to the USA and trying to coerce the young unprotected females into prostitution."

Anti-immigrant feelings, particularly



## Origins



***Fifty six percent of the population of the town was Jewish, but they were forbidden to own land or to enter the civil service or other professions***

anti-semitism, were rampant in the UK. Many residents reacted with horror to the swarms of desperate aliens piling into the teeming slums of East London.

Painfully, against huge odds, my grandparents and their parents and neighbours made their way, learned English, learned a trade, and eked out a living. But they soon decided that seething,

impoverished East End of London was not for them.

They took passage to Canada, my 16-year old great uncle was first, then my grandfather, Lou. My grandmother Sarah finally went with the children in 1912. Very unlikely they could ever make it into Canada today: no formal education, no real skills, and absolutely no idea what lay ahead.

They were simply determined to flee what lay behind.

My mother's father, Edward Mitchell, took a different route to North America. He was born Itzhak David Mitzel in 1889 in the village of Monastersytzka, today in the Ukraine. Ed was the second of nine children. Fifty six percent of the population of the town was Jewish, but they were forbidden to own land or to enter the civil service or other professions. My grandfather's father, Benjamin Mitchell, worked as a butcher out of a shed in his backyard.

In 1896, Benjamin scrimped together enough for passage to New York. "After many weeks in steerage," one of his sons later wrote, "my father was overjoyed to see the Statue of Liberty dominating New York Harbor. Although he could

not read the inscription – in fact, he never learned to read English – the sight of the Majestic Lady thrilled him. He understood that she represented America's promise of Freedom and Hope. Almost all the Jews who remained behind in Monastersytzka perished in the Holocaust.

Benjamin ultimately found work and sent for his family. They came to live in the Lower East Side of New York, an area swarming with other immigrants – Jews, Italians, Irish, Poles. These were tough, gang-infested streets.

In 1896, social reformer William Dean Howells penned a moving description of that tenement world, "The Lower East Side," he wrote "is said to be more densely populated than any other area in the world, or at least in Christendom, for within a square mile there are more than 350,000 men, women and children. One can imagine from this fact alone how they are housed and what their chances of the comforts and decencies of life may be."

He entered one dank courtyard. "The buildings surrounding it were low and very old. One of them was a stable, which contributed its stench to the odors that rose from the reeking pavement and from the closets filling an end of the court, with a corner left beside them for the hydrant that supplied the water of the whole enclosure. It is from this court that the inmates of



the tenements have their sole chance of sun and air. What the place must be in summer I had not the heart to think. I could better fancy this when I climbed the rickety stairs within one of the houses and found myself in a typical New York tenement.

“Then I almost choked at the thought of what a hot day, what a hot night, must be in such a place, with the two small windows inhaling the putrid breath of the court and transmitting it, twice fouled by the passage through the living-room, to the black hole in the rear, where the whole family lay on the heap of rags that passed for a bed. And for such a dwelling the tenant pays six dollars a month. If he fails to pay it he is evicted, and some 30,000 evictions have taken place in the past year.

“As there are always pestilences of some sort preying upon the poor (as if their poverty were not enough), my companion could point out a typhus quarter, which the Board had shut up and which we must not approach. It was squalor of a kind which, it seemed to me, it could not be possible to outrival anywhere in the life one commonly calls civilized.”

“We were just hungry all the time,” my grandfather, Ed, told us many years later. His father, Benjamin, earned three dollars a week delivering coal and wood on his back to fuel the stoves in the tenements. But Ed was finally obliged to quit elementary school to help supplement the family income..

Ultimately though slowly, painfully, with immense drive and sacrifice, my grandparents and their families – and millions of others made it. Some more spectacularly than others; but they and their children made it.

Ed Mitchell pulled himself out of the

reeking slums of New York, owned a department store in Boston by the time he was 22; went on to make a fortune in Winnipeg, lost it all in the Depression; then made it all over again in Los Angeles. He became a major contributor to medical research and charitable causes in the United States and Israel.

As for my other grandparents, Lou and Sarah Lando, from a small dry-goods store in far-off Prince Rupert, they ultimately became furriers in Vancouver.



Edith Lando being presented with the Order of Canada

My father, Esmond Lando, who was four years old when he crossed the ocean in steerage with his mother, became a prominent lawyer, Queen’s Counsel. He helped found several companies, including an airline, to open some of the wildest reaches of the Canadian West. My parents backed pioneering groups in music and the arts, my mother, Edith Lando nee Mitchel,

receiving the Order of Canada shortly before her death.

Inspired by such examples, others of our family in succeeding generations have reaped commendations and honours in their own chosen fields.

This is not to put the spotlight on my own ancestors. The point is that their stories and tremendously valuable contributions are replicated by the tens of millions of others who fled – and will never stop fleeing-the many shitholes of this world. **CT**

.....  
**Barry Lando** is a former producer of the CBS news programme 60 Minutes. His latest novel is *Deep Strike*, a tale of Russian hackers, rogue CIA agents and an American president, and his web site is [www.barrylando.com](http://www.barrylando.com)

***Ultimately though slowly, painfully, with immense drive and sacrifice, my grandparents and their families – and millions of others made it***



## In The Picture



Never turn your back on an angry horse. Giza street scene.

# In the shadow of the Great Pyramid

Giza's pyramids are good to look at, but the hash-wedding on the first night was a sight to behold, writes **Nate Robert**

After travelling for 1,992 days with little planning or time limit, I decided to take a few days off from running my own tours and get away for a few days' holiday – by visiting seven countries on three continents in a week. I didn't quite make it, but managed six countries – Iran, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, and Italy – on three continents in eight days.

Egypt seemed the perfect place to begin and, as it turned out, my three days in Giza, the site of all the best pyramids in the country, turned out to be the best short-holiday I've ever had.

Within Giza, there's a small tourist district. It's shabby, and has few tourists in these days of unrest through-

out the North African country. The streets are literally smeared with shit, and animals are constantly being whipped. At night, I saw three horses, a handful of dogs, and about half-a-dozen cats hanging out in a huge pile of rubbish, on the main street that enters this "tourist" part of Giza, while a herd of goats was living in rubble on top of an abandoned building next to my hotel. This cemented my decision to extend my booking, and spend three days exclusively in this neighbourhood, and that decision was made before being invited to an Egyptian "hash wedding" on night one.

Walking around the tourist enclave, there is little annoyance with touts – camel rides, invitations to restaur-







Goose for dinner? Street life in the shadow of the Great Pyramid at Cheops, the oldest of the Seven Wonders of the World.

rants, daily tours, buy a crappy magnet, but most of the locals seem to have pretty much given up on the tourist dollar and only half-heartedly tried to hawk anything. However, 100 meters away, past the 24-hour machine-gun guards and the roadblock into Giza proper, the touts completely disappear and it's another world entirely.

Earlier in the evening, driving in from the airport, I'd noticed what seemed to be an interesting part of town, and guessed it couldn't be more than a 20-minute walk from the hotel. As we approached the heavily armed guards, who stand in the middle of the street and examine every vehicle that enters the area, a local resident called out, "Go back, there's nothing more for you to see down that

way." We ignored his plea, and carried on walking – down a dark, polluted, street in a country I had almost no idea about at all. A few minutes later, I started taking photos. Immediately, a man dashed towards me.

"Hey! What are you doing? Why are you taking photos? What are you taking a photo of? Hey!"

The air pollution was so thick that the light from the street lamps was barely able to penetrate enough reach the ground. The whole area felt seedy: the traffic was noisy, and it was busy, but strangely isolating. Almost every car, van, bus, and Tuk-Tuk had at least one light missing or malfunctioning, and all were dented. But, apart from the guy who suggested we should leave the



## In The Picture



The Great Pyramid of Cheops, one of Seven Wonders of the World.



Giza coffee shop. Park the camel and watch the world pass by.



What's for dinner, mummy? Butcher shop at Giza.



One local told me this place is one of the better areas of Cairo.

area, nobody had even looked in our direction. It was too dark to read his face, so, I decided to ask *him* a few questions. “What are you doing? Why are you sitting in the middle of the street? Huh?”

Muhammad and his pals were drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, while sitting on small plastic chairs around a rickety plastic table. The table stood on a raised traffic island covered with dirt, in the middle of a six-lane highway. Phillipa, my partner, and I joined them for a drink. Within half an hour, Muhammad invited us to a wedding. Tonight. Now! One of them helped us into the back of a Tuk-Tuk, and we travelled for 20 minutes down a chaotic highway. I noticed a Volkswagen van,

with no headlights, driving backwards as fast as we were heading forwards, just before we turned onto an even darker, dustier, unpaved road, where we were chased by stray dogs.

Egyptian weddings are multi-day celebrations. Actually, I'm not sure if that's true; I'm trying hard to recall precisely what I think I was told. In any case, tonight was the “men's party.” We arrived at a large tent, with perhaps 200 men sitting around tables, in an atmosphere that was dusty and polluted outside. On the stage, a band was playing loudly and relentlessly, in a style best described as up-tempo-crazy. Decorations consisted of multi-coloured Christmas-type lighting and LED chandeliers.





Giza wedding. The guy with the big stick on the left is a bedouin nomad and also the mayor. Now, apparently, we're family.

Within moments of sitting down, a tablecloth was laid out and a couple of Muhammad's friends joined us. Then, hashish and rolling papers were placed on our table by a man who was circling from table to table. Beer arrived. A small team of Burqa-clad women provided bowls of fruit, and sprinkled salty sunflower seeds over the table.

Now, I've spent a lot of time in Amsterdam, and some time at Jonno's house in Perth, but I've never seen this level of hashish smoking. Ever. Anywhere. Rounded to the closest percentage, approximately 100 percent of the 200 or so men in the tent were smoking drugs as if it was going out of fashion. And Phillipa asked me if I noticed the needles being provided to the next table.

Phillipa was the only female guest, the only foreign female, the only blonde female, and the only person not totally stoned out of her freakin' mind. Yada yada yada.

The next day, we explored the Giza pyramid complex. Yes, the pyramids and the Sphinx were really, well, great. But the surrounding back streets of Giza are just as much fun: lively, dirty, and supremely welcoming. What's not to like? **CT**

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# Caught in a free speech comfort zone

Establishment voices who vilify student 'snowflakes' routinely exclude political ideas they don't like, such as socialism or environmentalism, says **George Monbiot**

***This is student politics, for God's sake. Daft ideas and failed experiments are its raison d'être***

When people obsess over a trivial issue, it usually means they are avoiding a more important one. The intense focus on student politics, and in particular no-platforming, by middle-aged journalists – columnists and leader writers at the Telegraph, Spectator, Times, Mail and Sun – suggests to me that there is something they would rather not see.

As it happens, I agree with them: the no-platforming of people whom students find offensive is often wrong (though not in the case of direct hate speech towards minorities, or the incitement of violence). But I also believe that, on the scale of global importance, this issue ranks about 12,000th. This is student politics, for God's sake. Daft ideas and failed experiments are its *raison d'être*.

Yet this middle-aged obsession is taken so seriously by a government that is otherwise slashing the state that it has set up a new public agency to police student follies. This is the body – the Office for Students – that caused such controversy by appointing no-platform obsessive Toby Young to its board (he resigned later after realising he had been a bit too free with his own free speech). Why does this issue command such attention? What is it that these people would prefer not to see? Perhaps it is the far graver no-platforming that prevails across adult public life.

For instance, the incoming vice-chancel-

lor of Edinburgh University is a man whose views, if they belonged to a student, would be quickly condemned. In his current post, as University of Hong Kong vice-chancellor, he signed the following letter: “We treasure freedom of expression, but we condemn its recent abuses. Freedom of expression is not absolute, and like all freedoms it comes with responsibilities. All universities undersigned agree that we do not support Hong Kong independence, which contravenes the Basic Law.”

Digging his hole deeper, he now claims that the phrase “recent abuses” refers not to the pro-independence protests at universities but to unrelated instances of hate speech. How can this meaning be deduced from the letter? Is a man who first rails against free speech, then engages in such sophistry, fit to serve in this role? Shouldn't the minister responsible for the OfS take an interest in the matter? Or is easier to attack a handful of confused 18-year-olds?

Another resounding silence concerns the US government's deletion from its websites of thousands of documents that mention climate breakdown. The US agriculture department instructs that the terms “climate change” or “greenhouse gases” should not be used in its publications; and the federal government bans the words “vulnerable”, “entitlement”, “diversity”, “transgender”, “foetus”, “evidence-based” and “science-

based” from an agency’s budget reports. This is real censorship, not a feeble attempt by a few teenagers to prevent their peers using trigger words. Could it be that our free speech crusaders quietly approve?

Lord Lawson gave a lecture last year, claiming that “the suppression of freedom of speech in the universities now is one of the great problems of our time”. Somehow he forgot to mention that he served in the government that banned Sinn Féin and 10 other organisations in Northern Ireland from being heard on television and radio broadcasts, regardless of what they were saying. This was not an occasional no-platforming but full-on prohibition. Yes, to use their unpleasant term, there are some snowflakes at university. But there’s a blizzard in the newspapers

But perhaps the real discomfort is that the worst no-platforming of all takes place within our newspapers. In the publications most obsessed with student silliness, there is no platform for socialism, no platform for environmentalism, no platform for those who might offend the interests of the proprietors. In the Telegraph, as its former chief political commentator Peter Osborne says, there is no platform for criticism of – or even embarrassing news about – some of its major advertisers.

In the Daily Mail, Dominic Sandbrook warned that universities “are becoming bubbles of received opinion, echo chambers in which the same lazy prejudices ... reverberate unceasingly.” Yes, that’s the Daily Mail, which has made its own contribution to free speech on campus by calling on readers to report views it disagrees with: “Have you – or do you know anyone – who has experienced anti-Brexit bias at university? Email [university@dailymail.co.uk](mailto:university@dailymail.co.uk).”

A column in the Sun warns: “Universities risk looking more like places of darkness, intolerance and ignorance.” This admonition comes from a newspaper that during the EU referendum campaign, according to research at Cardiff University (Iñaki Garcia-Blanco and Lucy Bennett, September 2017. *Voting with their heads and their hearts: The EU referen-*

*dum through letters to the editor. Seminar: Future of Journalism: Journalism in a post-truth age, Cardiff*), published 220 pro-leave letters and one pro-remain letter.

The newspapers that claim to be so incensed about no-platforming are not above seeking to deny people a platform. When the broadcaster Chris Packham spoke out against the shooting industry, both the Mail on Sunday and the Telegraph published articles that sought to have him sacked from the BBC. The BBC resisted this attempt, but – disciplined by both press and government – across much of its output it has unthinkingly succumbed. For instance, while it broadcasts series such as Mary Berry’s *Country House Secrets* and *Elizabeth & Philip: Love and Duty*, it provides no documentary platform for those who seek to break the stranglehold of patrimonial wealth and power. Where’s the balance?

I’m not claiming that journalists try to distract attention from their own industry. Quite the opposite. Projection is something we do unconsciously, to avoid facing uncomfortable truths. We should all seek to challenge ourselves unceasingly, in the forlorn hope of combating this tendency.

I believe that a healthy media organisation, like a healthy university, should admit a diversity of opinion. I want the other newspapers to keep publishing views with which I fiercely disagree. But they – and we – should also seek opposing views and publish them too, however uncomfortable this might be. Otherwise media organisations are vulnerable to the charge they level so freely at students: creating a safe space in which only the views they find congenial are heard.

Yes, to use their unpleasant term, there are some snowflakes at university. But there’s a blizzard in the newspapers. **CT**

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*George Monbiot’s latest book, How Did We Get Into This Mess?, is published by Verso. This article was first published in the Guardian newspaper. Monbiot’s web site is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)*

**Somehow Lord Lawson forgot to mention that he served in the government that banned Sinn Féin and 10 other organisations in Northern Ireland from being heard on television and radio broadcasts, regardless of what they were saying**

# Special Ops at war

From Afghanistan to Somalia, American Special Operations forces achieve less with more, writes **Nick Turse**

***At that second site, the residence of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, the special operators apparently encountered no resistance at all, even though several Americans were wounded due to friendly fire and a helicopter crash***

At around 11 o'clock that night, four Lockheed MC-130 Combat Talons, turboprop Special Operations aircraft, were flying through a moonless sky from Pakistani into Afghan airspace. On board were 199 Army Rangers with orders to seize an airstrip. One hundred miles to the northeast, Chinook and Black Hawk helicopters cruised through the darkness toward Kandahar, carrying Army Delta Force operators and yet more Rangers, heading for a second site. It was October 19, 2001. The war in Afghanistan had just begun and US Special Operations forces (SOF) were the tip of the American spear.

Those Rangers parachuted into and then swarmed the airfield, engaging the enemy – a single armed fighter, as it turned out – and killing him. At that second site, the residence of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, the special operators apparently encountered no resistance at all, even though several Americans were wounded due to friendly fire and a helicopter crash.

In 2001, US special operators were targeting just two enemy forces: al-Qaeda and the Taliban. In 2010, his first full year in office, President Barack Obama informed Congress that US forces were still “actively pursuing and engaging remaining al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.” According to a recent Pentagon report to Congress, American troops are battling more than 10 times

that number of militant groups, including the still-undefeated Taliban, the Haqqani network, an Islamic State affiliate known as ISIS-Khorasan, and various “other insurgent networks.”

After more than 16 years of combat, US Special Operations forces remain the tip of the spear in Afghanistan, where they continue to carry out counter-terrorism missions. In fact, from June 1st to November 24th last year, according to that Pentagon report, members of Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan conducted 2,175 ground operations “in which they enabled or advised” Afghan commandos.

“During the Obama administration the use of Special Operations forces increased dramatically, as if their use was a sort of magical, all-purpose solution for fighting terrorism,” William Hartung, the director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy, pointed out. “The ensuing years have proven this assumption to be false. There are many impressive, highly skilled personnel involved in special operations on behalf of the United States, but the problems they are being asked to solve often do not have military solutions. Despite this fact, the Trump administration is doubling down on this approach in Afghanistan, even though the strategy has not prevented the spread of terrorist organisations and may in fact be counterproductive.”





*Despite claims that the Islamic State has been defeated, the US remains embroiled in wars in Iraq and Syria, as well as in Afghanistan and Yemen, yet only 54 percent of special operators deployed overseas were sent to the Greater Middle East in 2017*

**Blackhawk helicopters take off after delivering supplies and Soldiers to the 155th Brigade Combat Team in Forward Operating Base Hotel, near Najaf, Iraq.**

Photo: US Army, Edward G. Martens

### **Global Commandos**

Since US commandos went to war in 2001, the size of Special Operations Command has doubled from about 33,000 personnel to 70,000 today. As their numbers have grown, so has their global reach. As the web site TomDispatch.com revealed last month, they were deployed to 149 nations in 2017, or about 75 percent of the countries on the planet, a record-setting year. It topped 2016's 138 nations under the Obama administration and dwarfed the numbers from the final years of the Bush administration. As the scope of deployments has expanded, special operators also came to be spread ever more equally across the planet.

In October 2001, Afghanistan was the sole focus of commando combat missions. On March 19, 2003, special operators fired the first shots in the invasion of Iraq as their helicopter teams attacked Iraqi border posts near Jordan and Saudi Arabia. By 2006, as the war in Afghanistan ground on and the conflict in Iraq continued to morph into a raging set of insurgencies, 85 percent of US commandos were being deployed to the Greater Middle East.

As this decade dawned in 2010, the numbers hadn't changed appreciably: 81 percent of all special operators abroad were still in that region.

Eight years later, however, the situation

## Dark Side

***Last spring, President Trump loosened Obama-era restrictions on offensive operations in Somalia. Allowing US forces more discretion in conducting missions there, he opened up the possibility of more frequent airstrikes and commando raids***

is markedly different, according to figures provided to TomDispatch by US Special Operations Command. Despite claims that the Islamic State has been defeated, the US remains embroiled in wars in Iraq and Syria, as well as in Afghanistan and Yemen, yet only 54 percent of special operators deployed overseas were sent to the Greater Middle East in 2017. In fact, since 2006, deployments have been on the rise across the rest of the world. In Latin America, the figure crept up from three percent to 4.39 percent. In the Pacific region, from seven percent to 7.99 percent. But the striking increases have been in Europe and Africa.

In 2006, just three percent of all commandos deployed overseas were operating in Europe. Last year, that number was just north of 16 percent. “Outside of Russia and Belarus, we train with virtually every country in Europe either bilaterally or through various multinational events,” Major Michael Weisman, a spokesman for US Special Operations Command Europe, told TomDispatch. “The persistent presence of US SOF alongside our allies sends a clear message of US commitment to our allies and the defence of our NATO alliance.” For the past two years, in fact, the US has maintained a Special Operations contingent in almost every nation on Russia’s western border. As Special Operations Command chief General Raymond Thomas put it last year, “[W]e’ve had persistent presence in every country – every NATO country and others on the border with Russia doing phenomenal things with our allies, helping them prepare for their threats.”

Africa, however, has seen the most significant increase in special ops deployments. In 2006, the figure for that continent was just one percent; as 2017 ended, it stood at 16.61 percent. In other words, more commandos are operating there than in any region except the Middle East. As I recently reported at Vice News, Special Operations forces were active in at least 33 nations across that continent last year.

The situation in one of those nations, Somalia, in many ways mirrors in microcosm the 16-plus years of US operations in Afghanistan. Not long after the 9/11 attacks, a senior Pentagon official suggested that the Afghan invasion might drive militants out of that country and into African nations. “Terrorists associated with al-Qaeda and indigenous terrorist groups have been and continue to be a presence in this region,” he said. “These terrorists will, of course, threaten US personnel and facilities.”

When pressed about actual transnational dangers, that official pointed to Somali militants, only to eventually admit that even the most extreme Islamists there “really have not engaged in acts of terrorism outside Somalia.” Similarly, when questioned about connections between Osama bin Laden’s core al-Qaeda group and African extremists, he offered only the most tenuous links, such as bin Laden’s “salute” to Somali militants who killed US troops during the infamous 1993 Black Hawk Down incident.

Nonetheless, US commandos reportedly began operating in Somalia in 2001, air attacks by AC-130 gunships followed in 2007, and 2011 saw the beginning of US drone strikes aimed at militants from al-Shabaab, a terror group that didn’t even exist until 2006. According to figures compiled by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, the US carried out between 32 and 36 drone strikes and at least nine to 13 ground attacks in Somalia between 2001 and 2016.

Last spring, President Trump loosened Obama-era restrictions on offensive operations in that country. Allowing US forces more discretion in conducting missions there, he opened up the possibility of more frequent airstrikes and commando raids. The 2017 numbers reflect just that. The US carried out 34 drone strikes, at least equaling if not exceeding the cumulative number of attacks over the previous 15 years. (And it took the United States only a day to resume such strikes this year.)

“President Trump’s decision to make



parts of southern Somalia an ‘area of active hostilities’ gave [US Africa Command or AFRICOM] the leeway to carry out strikes at an increased rate because it no longer had to run their proposed operations through the White House national security bureaucratic process,” said Jack Serle, an expert on US counterterrorism operations in Somalia. He was quick to point out that AFRICOM claims the uptick in operations is due to more targets presenting themselves, but he suspects that AFRICOM may be attempting to cripple al-Shabaab before an African Union peacekeeping force is withdrawn and Somalia’s untested military is left to fight the militants without thousands of additional African troops.

In addition to the 30-plus airstrikes in 2017, there were at least three US ground attacks. In one of the latter, described by AFRICOM as “an advise-and-assist operation alongside members of the Somali National Army,” Navy SEAL Kyle Milliken was killed and two US personnel were injured during a firefight with al-Shabaab militants. In another ground operation in August, according to an investigation by the Daily Beast, Special Operations forces took part in a massacre of 10 Somali civilians. (The US military is now investigating.)

As in Afghanistan, the US has been militarily engaged in Somalia since 2001 and, as in Afghanistan, despite more than a decade and a half of operations, the number of militant groups being targeted has only increased. US commandos are now battling at least two terror groups – al-Shabaab and a local Islamic State affiliate – as drone strikes spiked in the last year and Somalia became an ever-hotter war zone. Today, according to AFRICOM, militants operate “training camps” and possess “safe havens throughout Somalia [and] the region.”

“The under-reported, 16-year US intervention in Somalia has followed a similar pattern to the larger US war in Afghanistan: an influx of special forces and a steady increase in air strikes has not only failed to

stop terrorism, but both al-Shabaab and a local affiliate of ISIS have grown during this time period,” said William Hartung of the Center for International Policy. “It’s another case of failing to learn the lessons of the United States’ policy of endless war: that military action is as likely or more likely to spark terrorist action as to reduce or prevent it.”

Somalia is no anomaly. Across the continent, despite escalating operations by commandos as well as conventional American forces and their local allies and proxies, Washington’s enemies continue to proliferate. As Vice News reported, a 2012 Special Operations Command strategic planning document listed five prime terror groups on the continent. An October 2016 update counted seven by name – the Islamic State, Ansar al-Sharia, al-Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb, al-Murabitun, Boko Haram, the Lord’s Resistance Army, and al-Shabaab – in addition to “other violent extremist organisations.” The Pentagon’s Africa Center for Strategic Studies now offers a tally of 21 “active militant Islamist groups” on the continent. In fact, as reported at The Intercept, the full number of terrorist organizations and other “illicit groups” may already have been closer to 50 by 2015.

### **Saving SOF through proxy war?**

As wars and interventions have multiplied, as US commandos have spread across the planet, and as terror groups have proliferated, the tempo of operations has jumped dramatically. This, in turn, has raised fears among think-tank experts, special ops supporters, and members of Congress about the effects on those elite troops of such constant deployments and growing pressure for more of them. “Most SOF units are employed to their sustainable limit,” General Thomas told members of Congress last spring. “Despite growing demand for SOF, we must prioritise the sourcing of these demands as we face a rapidly changing security environment.” Yet

***Across Africa, despite escalating operations by commandos as well as conventional American forces and their local allies and proxies, Washington’s enemies continue to proliferate***

## Dark Side

**The 50,000-strong Syrian surrogate army had to be raised, in fact, after the US-trained Iraqi army, built during the 2003-2011 American occupation of that country, collapsed in the face of relatively small numbers of Islamic State militants in 2014**

the number of countries with special ops deployments hit a new record last year.

At a November 2017 conference on special operations held in Washington, influential members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees acknowledged growing strains on the force. For Jack Reed, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, the solution is, as he put it, “to increase numbers and resources.”

While Republican Senator Joni Ernst did not foreclose the possibility of adding to already war-swollen levels of commandos, she much prefers to farm out some operations to other forces: “A lot of the missions we see, especially if you . . . look at Afghanistan, where we have to train, advise, and assist missions, if we can move some of those into conventional forces and away from SOF, I think that’s what we need to do.” Secretary of Defense James Mattis has already indicated that such moves are planned. Leigh Claffey, Ernst’s press secretary, told TomDispatch that the senator also favours “turning over operations to capable indigenous forces.”

Ernst’s proxies approach has, in fact, already been applied across the planet, perhaps nowhere more explicitly than in Syria in 2017. There, SOCOM’s Thomas noted, US proxies, including both Syrian Arabs and Kurds, “a surrogate force of 50,000 people . . . are working for us and doing our bidding.” They were indeed the ones who carried out the bulk of the fighting and dying during the campaign against the Islamic State and the capture of its capital, Raqqa.

However, that campaign, which took back almost all the territory ISIS held in Syria, was exceptional. US proxies elsewhere have fared far worse in recent years. That 50,000-strong Syrian surrogate army had to be raised, in fact, after the US-trained Iraqi army, built during the 2003-2011 American occupation of that country, collapsed in the face of relatively small numbers of Islamic State militants in 2014. In Mali, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Honduras, and elsewhere, US-

trained officers have carried out coups, overthrowing their respective governments. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, where special ops forces have been working with local allies for more than 15 years, even elite security forces are still largely incapable of operating on their own. According to the Pentagon’s 2017 semi-annual report to Congress, Afghan commandos needed US support for an overwhelming number of their missions, independently carrying out only 17 percent of their 2,628 operations between June 1, 2017, and November 24, 2017.

Indeed, with Special Operations forces acting, in the words of SOCOM’s Thomas, as “the main effort, or major supporting effort for US [violent extremist organisation]-focused operations in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, across the Sahel of Africa, the Philippines, and Central/South America,” it’s unlikely that foreign proxies or conventional American forces will shoulder enough of the load to relieve the strain on the commandos.

Bulking up Special Operations Command is not, however, a solution, according to the Center for International Policy’s Hartung. “There is no persuasive security rationale for having US Special Operations forces involved in an astonishing 149 countries, given that the results of these missions are just as likely to provoke greater conflict as they are to reduce it, in large part because a US military presence is too often used as a recruiting tool by local terrorist organizations,” he told TomDispatch. “The solution to the problem of the high operational tempo of US Special Operations forces is not to recruit and train more Special Operations forces. It is to rethink why they are being used so intensively in the first place.” **CT**

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# Big media dismisses Catalan election vote

**Thomas S. Harrington** discusses the sloppy media coverage of December's David versus Goliath battle for grass roots democracy in Catalonia



*What was played to audiences as a biting satirical joke about the ignorant presumptuous of certain old people in the 1970s, is now standard operating procedure in the US corporate press, and its slavish imitators in Europe*

Cops move in to break up the celebrations after the Catalan parliament's unilateral declaration of independence last October.

Photo: Sasha Popovic – [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

Americans of a certain age will almost all remember Gilda Radner's Emily Litella character from NBC's Saturday Night Live. She was the little old lady who regularly appeared on the Weekend Update mock news programme to give her opinion on the pressing events of the day.

Week after week she would launch into involved explanations of a current social happenings based on a completely flawed understanding of the issue – usually resulting from a mishearing of one of its key terms – only to be stopped by the “host” of the programme, Chevy Chase, half way through her rant.

When Chase would point out the reality of the subject she was supposed to be address-

ing, she would meekly reply “Never mind” and end the segment. What she never, ever did, however, was to apologise for absurd things she had just spent the last few minutes saying.

What was played to audiences as a biting satirical joke about the ignorant presumptuous of certain old people in the 1970s, is now standard operating procedure in the US corporate press, and its ever-increasing corps of slavish imitators in Europe.

When a crisis comes up somewhere in the world, we are treated to instant analyses on the matter from “experts,” generally media colleagues of the person reading the news, whose knowledge of the subject amounts

## Ignoring Reality

***The lives of Americans and the citizens of their loyal client states are considered real. However, those of people in countries that refuse to cooperate with our geopolitical dictates are considered to be inherently “delinquent” in nature***

mostly to repetitions of the memes generated by the people in the centre-right, so-called quality press (all of the so-called quality press today in Europe and Latin America is now centre-right if not flat out right in orientation) of the country they have just flown into.

If these frequently monolingual US news-gathering Martians are lucky, they will the will run into a bilingual reporter from the area – either a local or a long-term foreign correspondent – who will inform them of their all they need to know” to fill up the two-minute report for the rubes back home.

On news programmes that have a higher opinion of themselves, such as the PBS Snooze, I mean, News Hour, we get a slightly different variation of the same theme. While the people there are surely no strangers to employing their fellow journalists, or RCRs (Received Cliché Re-circulators), they like to spice things up on foreign affairs with “strategic thinking” experts on the foreign crisis in question – that is, someone from a corporate funded Washington-area think tank who views the world through the narrow prism of the so-called “intelligence” and “defence” communities of the US government.

Here again, the ability to talk and listen to the people in the country in question on their own terms and in their own language and in the context of their own history and its long-standing conflicts is strictly optional.

Much more important for this putatively more enlightened gang is the ability call up an English-speaking “expert” colleague in the country in question who works within an Atlanticist-funded organisation or an Atlanticist-dominated press outlet (which today means virtually all major European papers) and learn, in five minutes, what needs to be said.

In the particular case of Spain the pursuit of these two avenues of knowledge will lead the intrepid American newsgatherer into the maws of people like the NYT’s Rafael Minder, author of a book on Catalan nationalism who admitted in an interview to not regularly reading any Catalan nationalist newspapers, or

El País’s David Alandete, who recently went to the British Parliament to explain with a straight face that the Russians are actually a driving force behind the Catalan independence movement and that reports of more than 900 people injured by Spanish police during their assaults on voters during the October 1st independence referendum voting were a case of pure fabrication.

That general economic and political news about Spain in the US and indeed much of Europe is filtered through this ideological construct is bad enough. But when the particular Spanish issue in question is the independence movement in Catalonia, things lurch into the realm of what the great early 20th-century Spanish Galician playwright Valle-Inclan termed the “esperpento,” a reality marked by the grotesque and/or the sloppily outlandish.

Why?

Because as incredible as it may seem, the average Madrid-based commentator’s grasp of the particular history of Catalonia is roughly the same as the average American pundit’s grasp of the particular histories of the Middle Eastern countries we regularly bomb and destroy, and for very similar reasons; the retention of their existing world view, forged through years of highly institutionalised culture-planning, depends on their maintaining a distanced ignorance and disdain about these places.

Perhaps an example will show what I am talking about. A few years back, Americans were treated to the edifying spectacle of the American Secretary of State and future presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton laughing demonically on camera in reaction to the news that a sovereign head of state, Muammar Gaddafi, had been assassinated by means of multiple bayonet thrusts to the anus in the wake of an unprovoked invasion of his country promoted and planned by the selfsame chief of US “diplomacy.”

Imagine for a moment if a high official from another country was filmed doing the same thing upon hearing of a similarly executed death of a US official, or a high official



of a US client state. There would be no end to the outrage and no end to the looping of the sound bite on US and European TV. But outside of a few small outlets on the left and the right, the incident hardly drew any sustained media attention in the US.

The reason for the disparity in reaction is simple. The lives of Americans and the citizens of their loyal client states are considered real. However, those of people in countries that refuse to cooperate with our geopolitical dictates are considered as Ana Ramos Zayas – writing in relation to the social status of Puerto Ricans in Chicago – to be inherently “delinquent” in nature and thus rightly subject to all the punishment that the self-proclaimed master collective decides to mete out to them.

According to the rules of this game, the only way the “delinquent citizen” can ever be delivered from his or her state of inherent depravity is by renouncing their view of the world and gaudily demonstrating their devotion to the core narratives of the ruling collective by, in the cases Ramos Zayas describes, joining the US marines or the very police force that has abused them daily over the course of their young lives.

While the Spanish state has done nothing close to the preferred US option of calling in the bombs to take care of the legally-elected Catalanist leadership, it has tried pretty much every other trick in the regime-change playbook, including imprisoning of its completely non-violent civic and political leadership, suspending the Autonomous Community’s sitting parliament, and quite openly fomenting economic panic.

And just as US leaders like to talk casually and repeatedly in the media about “taking out” foreign leaders, the Spanish government repeatedly issued threats of violence against the Catalanists in the lead up to their Declaration of Independence on October 27. And since their coup against that legally-elected government, effected during the first week of November, central government officials have crowed unabashedly about the positive

effects of their campaign of violence and intimidation

An example of the first case mentioned came on October 7 when Pablo Casado, an official spokesman for the ruling Popular Party, obliquely threatened Catalan president Puigdemont with death by evoking how the last Catalan president to declare independence from Spain, Lluís Companys, was shot by a Francoist firing squad.

An example of the second case came on December 16 when Soraya Saenz de Santamaría, the Vice President of the current Spanish government (and widely acknowledged to be the brain of the cabinet) bragged, complete with repugnant Clintonian body language, about having “decapitated” and “liquidated” Catalan nationalism through the forceful takedown of the Catalan government.

Not to be outdone, the putatively leftist former Spanish Socialist cabinet member and candidate for Prime Minister, José Borrell, spoke on the same day about the need to “disinfect” Catalonia and its media of their independentists. This, notwithstanding the undeniable fact that within the Catalan media environment, those outlets supporting independence and denouncing Spanish state interventionism constitute a very small and relatively powerless part of the total information system. We thus can see that, much like their counterparts in the of the US, the central concern of Spain’s “progressives” is not promoting social justice or democracy, but rather insuring that the hard right not have any pretext for calling them “soft” on what that same authoritarian right defines as the nation’s core issues of “national security.”

But arguably more consequential than these acts of shameless civic thuggery has been the Madrid-based press’ (and subsequently the international press’) deadpan normalisation of them. Outside of the complaints of a few Catalan journalists, which are systemically dismissed as meritless in the capital (and from there, most of the rest of the Spanish state), comments of this type were, and

***While the Spanish state has done nothing close to the preferred US option of calling in the bombs to take care of the legally-elected Catalanist leadership, it has tried pretty much every other trick in the regime-change playbook, including imprisoning of its completely non-violent civic and political leadership***

## Ignoring Reality

**As the age-old authoritarian saying goes, “If at first your attempts to lie, exaggerate, censor and intimidate don’t work, try, try again”**

regularly are, met with snoring disinterest.

But, of course, had a Catalan official said anything one-eighth as incendiary it would have dominated the news cycle for days, if not weeks, on end. But that’s the way it works when one group and its mouthpieces have been socialised with a pre-ordained sense of their own enviable “normalcy,” and with it, their orientalisering “right” to brand those who deign to challenge the supremacist presumptions of their “normal” world view as delinquents, and thus deserving of any and all forms of opprobrium levelled at them.

If there has been a master trope of the Catalan crisis within the Madrid-based political and media class (and by reverberation the mainstream pundits of the Europe and the US) it has been the idea that, as Sáenz de Santamaría made clear in the above mentioned speech, a minority of separatists is trying to force its will upon the clear majority of Catalans who wish to remain within Spain.

Sounds awful doesn’t it?

It never seems to bother those that repeat this charge ad nauseam this that in the previous elections for the Catalan parliament held in September 2015 the independentists outpolled the proponents of unionism by nine percentage points, 48.3 to 39 percent, totals, which under the d’Hondt Law governing the ratio between votes and parliamentary seats in all Spanish elections, gave them a slim absolute majority in the Catalan Parliament. (nb Most of the of the votes needed to round out 100 percent total of the electorate in this election went to CSQP which coquettishly refused to take a hard position one way or another on the matter of independence.)

Strangely, during the lead-up to the October 1 referendum no one in the press ever seemed to ask the people constantly making the claim about a minority forcing its will upon the majority two basic questions:

1) If the majority of Catalans are, as you repeatedly claim, unionists, why was this faction unable to come anywhere close to a majority in the 2015 plebiscitary elections?

2) If the majority of Catalans are, as you repeatedly claim, unionists, what could you possibly have to fear with letting the October 1 referendum go ahead unimpeded?

When these simple questions are posed, it becomes abundantly clear that no unionist majority in Catalonia presently exists outside the overheated minds of the Madrid-based political and media establishment and the millions around the world that mindlessly parrot their talking points.

And this is why the government resorted to force. And as the age-old authoritarian saying goes, “If at first your attempts to lie, exaggerate, censor and intimidate don’t work, try, try again.” And this was precisely Spanish government’s plan when it applied article 155 of the Spanish constitution following the Catalan Parliament’s declaration of independence last October 27th.

Realising, however, that their own spinmeisters, and perhaps more importantly, the EU spinmeisters in Brussels, would never consent to the Rajoy government’s long-cherished goal of cancelling Catalonia’s stature of autonomy once and for all, they opted for the next best thing: elections rigged to achieve the de facto neutering, or as Saenz de Santamaría later shamelessly said, the “liquidation” of the Catalanist movement for the foreseeable future.

How did they plan to do it?

1) By imprisoning and chasing into exile the legally elected leaders of the independentist parties.

2) By orchestrating non-stop smear and harassment campaigns against the remaining independentist candidates.

Key to these efforts was the central government’s control of the electoral commission regulating the campaign leading to the December 21 vote. Knowing that this body would be more than open to condemning anything that legitimated the independentists view of the world, the unionist partisans forwarded to it an endless stream of accusations about the “bias” of media outlets they deemed as being insufficiently supportive their – of course –



self-evidently “neutral” posture on the matter.

This meant, in effect, that unionists and the unionist media, which as mentioned above is overwhelmingly hegemonic in Catalonia, could insult and disdain the independentists in any and all ways without fear of reproach, while the few media outlets, such as the Catalan Autonomous broadcaster TV3, that had been declared “delinquent” in relation to its devotion to the sacred idea of the unity of Spain, were subject to all manner of rhetorical micro-management.

For example, announcers at TV3 were prohibited from referring to the legally-elected president of Catalonia as “president” or the group of cabinet ministers that followed him into exile in Belgium as “the government in exile” or to make any reference to the Catalan government ministers jailed near Madrid as “jailed ministers.” They also prohibited the channel from broadcasting the December 7 rally held by some 45,000 Catalans in Brussels in support of their exiled President.

The electoral commission reached its height of Orwellian absurdity when it tried to effectively outlaw the use of the colour yellow in public spaces. For example, it ordered the Barcelona city government to stop illuminating a centrally located water fountain with lights of that colour.

The reasoning went like this:

The independentists had begun a drive to have their fellow citizens wear yellow ribbons in hopeful tribute (as in “tie a yellow ribbon ‘round the old oak tree”) to the civil society leaders and Catalan government ministers imprisoned by the central government. By allowing prominent displays of yellow in public places, the city was, according to the logic of the commission, effectively poisoning the otherwise bias-free pre-election atmosphere.

The approach of the government could perhaps best be compared to the actions of a privileged group of soccer parents who, upon witnessing the defeat of their ever-deserving children in a game against an unheralded upstart team of self-evidently lesser players, use

their social clout with the league’s president to first erase the results from the standings and then organize a re-match in which all of the best players from the upstart team are banned from participating. And then to make doubly sure no untoward result occurs, they carefully organize a section of hooligans on the sidelines to vigorously harass and threaten the referee any time he happens whistle a penalty in favour of the upstarts.

All of which brings us back to last Thursday’s elections and big media’s reaction to them.

Despite all the central government’s attempts to rig them in favour of the unionist parties, the independentists in fact added to the number of seats they control in the Catalan parliament, thus holding on to the absolute majority they had before the central state’s armed coup against them. Yes, the unionists also added to the total of their seats. But when we exclude the “after-all-these-years-we-can’t-decide-what-we-really-believe-on-independence Comuns – political nephews of the aforementioned CSQP and linked to the European and American left’s beloved Podemos in Madrid – and their 7.5 percent of the vote, the combined independentist forces achieved a rather clear 48 percent to 43 percent advantage over the combined unionist forces who were, as we have seen, operating in a game that was wholly rigged in their favour.

One would think that, if nothing else, the US and European press would be captivated by the David vs. Goliath nature of the victory. But, of course, paying attention to a victory of this type would mean calling attention to just how far off the mark all of that “common knowledge” they had spread about a minority recklessly inflicting its will on a majority had truly been.

So after a few hours of media excitement in Europe, and virtually no headline coverage in the US, the story – which arguably constitutes the most important victory for progressively-oriented grass roots democracy in Europe in over a decade – quickly faded out of view. As Emily Litella would say, “Never mind.” **CT**

***The electoral commission reached its height of Orwellian absurdity when it tried to effectively outlaw the use of the colour yellow in public spaces***

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**Thomas S.**

**Harrington** is a professor of Iberian Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut and the author of the recently released *Livein’ la Vida Barroca: American Culture in a Time of Imperial Orthodoxies.*

# A lesson worthy of Gandhi

**Jonathan Cook** tells how Ahed Tamimi's actions expose the 'gun-wielding bully lurking in the soul of too many Israelis'

**Ahed has been filmed regularly since she was a small girl confronting soldiers who tower above her. Such scenes inspired one veteran Israeli peace activist to anoint her Palestine's Joan of Arc**

Sixteen-year-old Ahed Tamimi may not be what Israelis had in mind when, over many years, they criticised Palestinians for not producing a Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela.

Eventually, colonised peoples bring to the fore a figure best suited to challenge the rotten values at the core of the society oppressing them. Ahed is well qualified for the task.

She was charged earlier this month with assault and incitement after slapping two heavily armed Israeli soldiers as they refused to leave the courtyard of her family home in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh, near Ramallah. Her mother, Nariman, is in detention for filming the incident. The video quickly went viral. Ahed lashed out shortly after soldiers nearby shot her 15-year-old cousin in the face, seriously injuring him.

Western commentators have largely denied Ahed the kind of effusive support offered to democracy protesters in places such as China and Iran. Nevertheless, this Palestinian schoolgirl – possibly facing a long jail term for defying her oppressors – has quickly become a social media icon.

While Ahed might have been previously unknown to most Israelis, she is a familiar face to Palestinians and campaigners around the world. For years, she and other villagers have held a weekly confrontation with the Israeli army as it enforces the rule of Jew-



**REBEL WITH A CAUSE: Ahed Tamimi**

Photo: Wikimedia

ish settlers over Nabi Saleh. These settlers have forcibly taken over the village's lands and ancient spring, a vital water source for a community that depends on farming.

Distinctive for her irrepressible blonde hair and piercing blue eyes, Ahed has been filmed regularly since she was a small girl confronting soldiers who tower above her. Such scenes inspired one veteran Israeli peace activist to anoint her Palestine's Joan of Arc.

But few Israelis are so enamoured. Not only does she defy Israeli stereotypes of a Palestinian, she has struck a blow against the self-deception of a highly militarised



and masculine culture. She has also given troubling form to the until-now anonymised Palestinian children Israel accuses of stone-throwing.

Palestinian villages such as Nabi Saleh are regularly invaded by soldiers. Children are dragged from their beds in the middle of the night, as happened to Ahed during her arrest last month in retaliation for her slaps. Human rights groups document how children are routinely beaten and tortured in detention. Many hundreds pass through Israeli jails each year charged with throwing stones. With conviction rates in Israeli military courts of more than 99 percent, the guilt and incarceration of such children is a foregone conclusion. They may be the lucky ones. Over the past 16 years, Israel's army has killed on average 11 children a month.

The video of Ahed, screened repeatedly on Israeli TV, has threatened to upturn Israel's self-image as David fighting an Arab Goliath. This explains the toxic outrage and indignation that has gripped Israel since the video aired.

Predictably, Israeli politicians were incensed. Naftali Bennett, the education minister, called for Ahed to "end her life in jail." Culture minister Miri Regev, a former army spokeswoman, said she felt personally "humiliated" and "crushed" by Ahed.

But more troubling is a media debate that has characterised the soldiers' failure to beat Ahed in response to her slaps as a "national shame." The venerable television host Yaron London expressed astonishment that the soldiers "refrained from using their weapons" against her, wondering whether they "hesitated out of cowardice."

But far more sinister were the threats from Ben Caspit, a leading Israeli analyst. In a column in Hebrew, he said Ahed's actions made "every Israeli's blood boil." He proposed subjecting her to retribution "in the dark, without witnesses and cameras," adding that his own form of revenge would lead to his certain detention.

That fantasy – of cold-bloodedly violat-

ing an incarcerated child – should have sickened every Israeli. And yet Caspit is still safely ensconced in his job.

But aside from exposing the sickness of a society addicted to dehumanising and oppressing Palestinians, including children, Ahed's case raises the troubling question of what kind of resistance Israelis think Palestinians are permitted. International law, at least, is clear. The United Nations has stated that people under occupation are allowed to use "all available means," including armed struggle, to liberate themselves.

But Ahed, the villagers of Nabi Saleh and many Palestinians like them have preferred to adopt a different strategy – a confrontational, militant civil disobedience. Their resistance defies the occupier's assumption that it is entitled to lord it over Palestinians. Their approach contrasts strongly with the constant compromises and so-called "security cooperation" accepted by the Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas.

According to Israeli commentator Gideon Levy, Ahed's case demonstrates that Israelis deny Palestinians the right not only to use rockets, guns, knives or stones, but even to what he mockingly terms an "uprising of slappings."

Ahed and Nabi Saleh have shown that popular unarmed resistance – if it is to discomfort Israel and the world – cannot afford to be passive or polite. It must be fearless, antagonistic and disruptive.

Most of all, it must hold up a mirror to the oppressor. Ahed has exposed the gun-wielding bully lurking in the soul of too many Israelis. That is a lesson worthy of Gandhi or Mandela.

**CT**

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**Popular unarmed resistance – if it is to discomfort Israel and the world – cannot afford to be passive or polite. It must be fearless, antagonistic and disruptive. Most of all, it must hold up a mirror to the oppressor. Ahed has exposed the gun-wielding bully lurking in the soul of too many Israelis**

# The robber barons of Silicon Valley

Today's high-tech robber barons use old-school techniques to make piles of money from the skilled and unskilled workers they exploit, explains **Christopher Baum**

***They were rich because they controlled and manipulated the markets in which they operated, squeezing greater and greater profits by exploiting workers and crushing any competitors who dared to challenge their ever-expanding monopolies***

Among the many lamentable “highlights” of 2017, the Guardian newspaper reports the following: “The world’s super-rich hold the greatest concentration of wealth since the US Gilded Age at the turn of the 20th-century, when families like the Carnegies, Rockefellers and Vanderbilts controlled vast fortunes.”

The comparison to figures of the Gilded Age such as steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, oil tycoon JD Rockefeller and railroad and shipping mogul Cornelius Vanderbilt is apt, but there’s more to it than their “vast fortunes.”

These men, along with other leading figures such as JP Morgan (finance and industrial consolidation), Jay Gould (railroads) and Andrew Mellon (banking and oil), weren’t merely rich. They were rich because they controlled and manipulated the markets in which they operated, squeezing greater and greater profits by exploiting workers and crushing any competitors who dared to challenge their ever-expanding monopolies.

Not for nothing are they known to history as the robber barons.

There are many candidates for the status of robber baron in our own day. But perhaps the most notable examples can be found in the world of Silicon Valley.

The leaders of companies such as Amazon, Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Ap-

ple offer striking parallels to the robber barons of the late 19th-century. As Rob Cox, writing in Newsweek in 2012, put it: “Behind the hoodies and flip-flops lurk businesspeople as rapacious as the black-suited and top-hatted industrialists of the late 19th-century. Like their predecessors in railroads, steel, banking, and oil a century ago, Silicon Valley’s new entrepreneurs are harnessing technology to make the world more efficient. But along the way, that process is bringing great economic and labor dislocation, as well as an unequal share of the spoils. [In early 2012], the Justice Department warned Apple that it planned to sue the company along with several US publishers for colluding to raise the price of electronic books – monopolistic behaviour that would have made John D. Rockefeller proud.”

Apple ultimately lost that case and was ordered to pay a settlement of \$450-million. But before the case was decided, it attracted the attention of Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York, who penned an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal defending Apple and its co-defendants and calling on the Department of Justice to drop the suit, on the grounds that going ahead would “empower monopolists and hurt innovators.” Schumer said the suit could “wipe out the publishing industry as we know it.”

So far, this hasn’t happened.



But the case does highlight another feature that the current tech overlords have in common with their robber-baron predecessors: They can always count on certain politicians to take their side in any fight.

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One of the most notorious characteristics of the earlier robber barons was their callous disregard for the health and safety – to say nothing of the living standards – of workers.

Apple once again serves as a parallel example. For years, the world’s most valuable corporation has been under fire for outsourcing product assembly to suppliers such as the China-based Foxconn, which faces widespread reports of brutal and unsafe working conditions, excessive overtime, overcrowded dormitories, lack of concern for workers’ health, use of underage workers, and even workers driven to suicide.

When the New York Times investigated a 2011 explosion at a Foxconn factory in Chengdu in China’s Sichuan province, the off-the-record comments they obtained from former executives would again have seemed all-too-familiar to miners or railroad workers in the era of Vanderbilt: “We’ve known about labour abuses in some factories for four years, and they’re still going on,” a former Apple executive told the Times on the condition of anonymity. “Why? Because the system works for us. Suppliers would change everything tomorrow if Apple told them they didn’t have another choice.”

Apple insisted then, as it does today, that it has a supplier “code of conduct” and an auditing system to identify abuses on the part of their suppliers. The Times report noted that “Apple’s annual supplier responsibility reports, in many cases, are the first to report abuses.”

But, of course, that doesn’t explain why the abuses were allowed to go on.

In April 2016, eager to show off the improvements they had made, Apple and another of its Chinese suppliers, Pegatron,

led journalist Shai Oster on a guided tour of a Pegatron factory in Shanghai. The centrepiece of the factory’s “improvements,” according to Oster’s report, is a computerised employee ID system that limits employees to around 80 hours of overtime per month and supposedly prevents them even signing in to work once this total is reached.

But there are two rather serious problems with this. First, Oster says, the advocacy group China Labor Watch has pointed out that “base pay remains so low that workers need overtime simply to make ends meet,” a point echoed by several employees interviewed for the article.

Thus, whatever concerns may be driving Apple’s supposed improvements, they still seem utterly unconcerned with providing their workers with a living wage.

Second, and following directly from the previous point, China Labor Watch claims that employees are, in fact, continuing to work massive amounts of overtime. According to its analysis, during March 2016 – right around the time of Oster’s tour – some 63 percent of workers at this same factory logged more than 100 hours of overtime.

It is difficult to reconcile these reports with Apple’s supplier code of conduct, which stipulates that employees should have at least one day off per week and work no more than 60 hours.

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Workplace conditions aren’t just a problem overseas, as Amazon’s recent history readily shows. As long ago as 2011, there were reports of brutal conditions at the company’s warehouse in Breinigsville, Pennsylvania.

Despite summertime temperatures inside the facility of 100 degrees or more, workers were hounded to maintain a brutal work pace or else face termination. “Pickers,” who physically retrieve items for packing, would routinely walk 10 to 15 miles a day in such conditions and face constant threats of termination, with fired workers being escorted off the premises. Management re-

**Whatever concerns may be driving Apple’s supposed improvements, they still seem utterly unconcerned with providing their workers with a living wage**

## Cashing In

***Bezos preaches about how seriously the company takes its employees' well-being, how much it values its workers, and how proud it is to give so many people such great jobs. And yet the reports of abusive conditions continue***

portedly refused to open loading bay doors for ventilation, even on the hottest days, to prevent theft. Instead, they stationed paramedics outside.

There have been many similar reports since from Amazon facilities all over the world.

And brutal working conditions are not merely found in Amazon's warehouses and distribution centres, but in its corporate offices as well. As the New York Times reported in 2015 [13]: "At Amazon, workers are encouraged to tear apart one another's ideas in meetings, toil long and late (e-mails arrive past midnight, followed by text messages asking why they were not answered), and held to standards that the company boasts are "unreasonably high." The internal phone directory instructs colleagues on how to send secret feedback to one another's bosses. Employees say it is frequently used to sabotage others. (The tool offers sample texts, including this: "I felt concerned about his inflexibility and openly complaining about minor tasks.")

One former employee quoted in the Times article "said that his enduring image was watching people weep in the office, a sight other workers described as well. 'You walk out of a conference room and you'll see a grown man covering his face,' he said. 'Nearly every person I worked with I saw cry at their desk.'"

In response to all this, there have, of course, been many protestations from Amazon's higher-ups, including company founder Jeff Bezos – who recently eclipsed Microsoft's Bill Gates as the world's richest person, with a net worth of just under \$100-billion.

Bezos preaches about how seriously the company takes its employees' well-being, how much it values its workers, and how proud it is to give so many people such great jobs. And yet the reports of abusive conditions continue.

In late November, British journalist Alan

Selby issued a damning report detailing the five weeks he spent working undercover at an Amazon warehouse in the UK.

Selby reported employees regularly being taken away in ambulances (some due to injuries and others due to exhaustion), workers falling asleep on their feet, relentless haranguing of staff to meet unrealistic output targets, timed toilet breaks, unsanitary lavatory conditions – all for less than a living wage.

Selby's work builds on the efforts of an unnamed BBC reporter who, in November 2016, went undercover as an Amazon delivery driver, revealing similarly brutal conditions, including stories of drivers urinating and even defecating in their trucks in order to stay on schedule to deliver the required 150 to 200 parcels a day – all "on a fixed salary the equivalent of less than the minimum wage."

This is how the richest person in the world, head of one of the world's most powerful and successful companies, treats his workers. If Jeff Bezos isn't a robber baron, then no one is.

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Today's techrobber barons also carry on their forebears' tradition of exploiting immigrant labour in the US. Most Silicon Valley companies, including Google and Facebook, offer permanent resident sponsorship to employees on temporary H-1B visas, which are issued to skilled workers from other countries to come work under the US government's employment-based (EB) sponsorship program.

As Norm Matloff writes in the Huffington Post, "EB sponsorship renders the workers de facto indentured servants; though they have the right to move to another employer, they do not dare do so, as it would mean starting the lengthy green card process all over again."

Actually, since H-1B visas are employer-specific, the same could really be said even of foreign workers who are not pursuing permanent residency: once your job ends,

your visa expires as well, and as of that moment, you are in the country illegally.

So unless an H1-B worker has another job lined up that will itself provide a new visa, they face very powerful pressures to stay with their current employer, whether or not they are seeking a green card.

Matloff continues: “This stranglehold on foreign workers enables firms to pay low wages . . . And while the industry’s clout gives it bipartisan congressional support concerning H-1B and green card policy, Congress’ own commissioned report found that H-1B workers “received lower wages, less senior job titles, smaller signing bonuses and smaller pay and compensation increases than would be typical for the work they actually did.”

In addition, and in common with immigrant labor under capitalism at all times, H-1B workers are targets of xenophobia and racism, which (again as always) the ruling class is only too happy to exploit in order to keep the working class divided against itself.

This, too, is a dynamic with which the railroad, oil and mining tycoons of the late 19th-century would have been entirely familiar.

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But, if we are in some ways living in a new Gilded Age, we can at least draw lessons from how the last one came to an end. In a speech before Congress in 1890 in favour of antitrust legislation, Sen. John Sherman sounded an ominous note of popular uprising: “Sir, now the people of the United States as well as of other countries are feeling the power and grasp of these combinations, and are demanding of every legislature and of Congress a remedy for this evil . . . You must heed their appeal or be ready for the socialist, the communist, and the nihilist. Society is now disturbed by forces never felt before.”

“Be ready for the socialist.” Indeed, beginning already in the 1880s, in response to the robber barons’ continued exploita-

tion, oppression and deliberate segmentation of the working class, there arose the first great flowering of working-class revolt in the US

This was the era of the Knights of Labor, the Populist movement and the birth of the Socialist Party in the US. It was the time of the 1886 Southwestern Railroad strike, the New Orleans general strike of 1892, the Homestead Steel strike that same year, the Pullman strike of 1894 and many others.

None of these stories, it is true, ended happily for the working class. It should also be noted that the Sherman Antitrust Act, when it was passed, was quite often employed against striking workers, whom the courts tended to pursue far more vigorously than they did the robber barons themselves.

Still, out of the confused political movements and overmatched strike actions of the period grew a spirit of solidarity, class consciousness and rebellion that survives, however bloody and bruised, to this day. It is up to us to cultivate that spirit as we join together to rise up against the robber barons of our own day – and against their friends and enablers in the halls of government.

According to the Guardian report cited at the beginning of this article: “The big increase in the fortunes of the ultra-wealthy comes as billions of poorer people across the world have seen their wealth stand still or decline. The gap between the very rich and everyone else has widened to the biggest it has been in a century. . . .”

The article later quotes UBS executive Josef Stadler, who “said his billionaire clients were concerned that growing inequality between rich and poor could lead to a ‘strike back.’”

The Guardian did not pursue the point further, but we should. **CT**

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***Out of the confused political movements and overmatched strike actions of the period grew a spirit of solidarity, class consciousness and rebellion that survives, however bloody and bruised, to this day***



Same Again?

# Zimbabwe: Between a Croc and a hard place

Africa and the world rejoiced when Robert Mugabe fell from power in Zimbabwe. But are the men who have replaced him any better? asks **Trevor Grundy**

**Robert Mugabe was able to bamboozle people of all backgrounds with his determination to create an overarching ruling political party which many liken now to the Nazification of Germany in the 1930s**

**Author's Note on Headline:** Emmerson Mnangagwa is known as *The Crocodile* (*The Croc*) because of his participation in the early 1960s in the activities of a group of "freedom fighters" called *The Crocodile Gang* who raided European-owned farms in Eastern Rhodesia.

In the preface to his book *Eminent Victorians*, Lytton Strachey issued a warning that resonates with writers, historians and journalists as they try to make sense of post-Mugabe Zimbabwe. He wrote: "The history of the Victorian Age will never be written: we know too much about it."

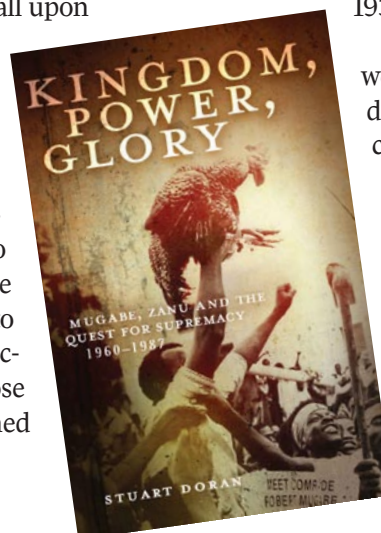
That great early 20th-century sender-upper of four lauded pillars of Victorian Britain (Cardinal Manning, Dr Arnold, General Gordon and Florence Nightingale) observed: "Our fathers and our grand-fathers have poured forth and accumulated so vast a quantity of information that the industry of a Ranke would be submerged by it, and the perspicacity of a Gibbon would quail before it."

To counter the ignorance we share about the past, Strachey suggested that if the historian is wise, "he will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined. He will row out over the great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity."

In *Kingdom, Power, Glory: Mugabe, Zanu and the Quest for Supremacy 1960-1987* the Australian historian Stuart Doran has lowered, not a small bucket, but a vast ship-size container into a rubbish-filled African ocean. He has brought to the surface for our "careful curiosity" not only the criminals and crooks who ran Rhodesia under Ian Smith from 1962-1979 but also a whole cast of villains, mass murderers and self-serving sycophants who dominated Zimbabwe from 1980 to the demise of Robert Mugabe last November.

The overwhelming theme of this large and fascinating book is the way Robert Mugabe was able to bamboozle people of all backgrounds and his single minded determination to create an overarching ruling political party which many liken now to the Nazification of Germany in the 1930s.

The book largely follows a well-worn path, from the last days of Ian Smith's Rhodesia caused by a seven year war



**KINGDOM, POWER, GLORY**  
**Mugabe, Zanu and the Quest for Supremacy 1960-1987**

**Stuart Doran**

Sithatha Media

Amazon (Kindle) US\$25.91

that cost an estimated 35,000 black lives, into a peace process organised by Britain at a Commonwealth meeting in Lusaka in 1979. But the strength of this meticulously researched book is what comes after Mugabe's appointment as Prime Minister, his clever, at times terrifying, use of power.

As a journalist who lived in Zimbabwe from independence to almost the end of 1996, it's hard to say that Doran has made me grasp how little I knew about what was going on at the time. It's some relief to know I was in good company.

"How was it possible that so serious an error of judgement could have been made by so many people in the world, not only in Zimbabwe?" asked the Zimbabwean journalist Trevor Ncube in the foreword to Michael Auret's book, *From Liberator to Dictator – An Insider's account of Robert Mugabe's Descent into Tyranny*.

And Elinor Sisulu wrote in her introduction to *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe*: "As I read this report, I felt a deep sense of shame about my own silence. The silence that greeted this massacre is in direct contrast to the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, news of which reverberated around the world."

Perhaps the saddest voice of them all, however, belongs to Mike Auret, who served for so many years on Zimbabwe's Catholic Commission of Justice and Peace (CCJP), and who did so much to tell the world about the white-led atrocities against blacks when Zimbabwe was a country called Rhodesia.

In 1980, he saw Mugabe as Zimbabwe's political messiah. It was only after Mugabe dismissed reports that Five Brigade was carrying out Nazi-style executions in North/South Matabeleland, the Midlands and parts of Mashonaland that the scales fell from his eyes as between 20,000 to 50,000 men, women and children were slaughtered.

Auret says: "I could now see what I had refused to recognise before – that Mugabe would brook no opposition at all to whatever plan he devised. He believed that he was



**BEFORE THE SLAUGHTER STARTED: ZIPRA commander Lt-General Lookout Masuka (left) walks hand-in-hand with ZANLA Commander Rex Nhongo in 1980, before the start of the Gukurahundi genocide.** Photo: Trevor Grundy

the only person who had the right to engineer the future of the country. He would do anything that was necessary to maintain the power of the party and his own position within it. To this end, he would pardon the most heinous crimes, he would accept the corruption of his party colleagues and he would not concern himself with the torture and harassment used by his police and the CIO. He was indeed a most dangerous man."

In short – and to the West's universal approval and applause – Mugabe released a balloon with the word "Democracy" printed on it. While Zimbabweans raised their eyes to the sky, liars and cheats pinched their wallets.

Several Africanists say Doran's is the best book so far about a pivotal time in Zimbabwean history. It's certainly the longest with 21 chapters spread over 842 pages. It contains a couple of maps but not a single photograph or illustration, which is a shame, like touring the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's in London and seeing the names but not the faces of waxwork monsters.

**\* Gukurahundi.**  
The word derives from a Shona language term which loosely translates to "the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains."

## Same Again?

**Britain didn't want to show how vile was the new regime north of the Limpopo to whites in South Africa, who were so fearful of black rule**

In 1980, Doran's father was commissioned by the World Bank and the Zimbabwean government to design the land resettlement programme for Matabeleland. Three years later, his field workers started bringing in stories about mass killings by the army. "So," he explained, "I had an interest in the story from that time. My interest was further fuelled by 1997 reports on the \*Gukurahundi and I decided to focus on the political and military angles – what the government did, and why.

"The source material for such a study wasn't going to come from Zimbabwe but another way presented itself in 2003 when I was working as an historian for the Australian government. We were thinking of doing a piece on Australia's role in Zimbabwe's independence. I read through the still-classified files from the Australian High Commission in Harare (*the Australian High Commissioner Jeremy Hearder had a very soft spot for Mugabe, as several quotes reveal – TG*) and realised they were a goldmine. The extent to which Zanu (PF) ministers leaked information to diplomats during the Gukurahundi was a revelation. They implicated each other in the killings and also pointed the finger directly at Mugabe, revealing that he not only knew about events in Matabeleland but was directing them."

Canadian and South African documents were acquired through various contacts and excursions and this enabled Doran – after years of study, research and probably frustration, to complete a book that has, for the first time drawn from material sent to home bases by British, Australian, Canadian and South African diplomatic missions.

However, for the most part, Britain's role during Gukurahundi will be kept under official wraps. One wonders, for example, what ever happened to the memoirs of Sir Martin Ewans, British High Commissioner between 1983-1985.

It was left to BBC journalist Fergal Keane

to tell the world about the way Britain told its diplomats to shut up and not annoy Mugabe because Britain had "bigger fish to fry in Africa (*BBC: The Price of Silence, 10 March, 2002*). Britain didn't want to show how vile was the new regime north of the Limpopo to whites in South Africa, who were so fearful of black rule.

Keane spoke to Ewans, also to the former Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, Pius Ncube, and Mike Auret.

**Keane:** *Did you protest personally about what was happening?*

**Ewans:** No, I didn't.

**Keane:** *No protest?*

**Ewans:** No.

**Keane:** *Do you have any regret about that?*

**Ewans:** No. I think this business has really perhaps been rather blown up . . .

**Keane:** *What was the advice from London about how one dealt with Mugabe, particularly around something like Matabeleland?*

**Ewans:** I think the advice was to steer clear of it in the interests of the . . . of help to build Zimbabwe up as a nation. . . . We had very much an eye to what was happening in South Africa at that time with apartheid and we were hopeful that Zimbabwe would be something of a contrast and South Africans would say ah yes, it is possible to work with a multiracial society. So I think Matabeleland is a side issue. The real issues were much bigger and more positive and more important.

Pius Ncube, the courageous Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, added: "He should imagine if his own family is being murdered. Is that a side issue?"

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It is Doran's research into who did what, where and when during Gukurahundi that the reader will find most interesting, especially the roles played by Zimbabwe's new head of state, Emmerson Mnangagwa, and those closest to him in the new post-Mugabe set-up – Perence Shiri (the new Lands Minister) General



Sibisio Moyo (Foreign Affairs) and General Constantine Chiwenge.

Already Mnangagwa's spin doctors and rapidly on-side journalists from the Herald, the slavishly-loyal-to-anyone-in-power newspaper, are saying in Harare that all these things happened decades ago; it's a new world so why dredge up the past?

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One thing has certainly improved over the years – Mnangagwa's language. During Gukurahundi, he was notorious for his chilling use of Biblical phraseology.

“Blessed are they who follow the path of the government laws, for their days on earth shall be increased. But woe unto those who will choose the path of collaboration with dissidents, for we shall certainly shorten their stay on earth.”

While introducing Five Brigade to Matabeleland in early 1983, he described his enemies as “cockroaches and bugs,” saying their activities had reached “epidemic proportions,” and the Mugabe government had to bring in “DDT” (Five Brigade) to deal with the problem.

A large part of the military clique that surrounded Mugabe at that time is still with us today, and the children of the 1983-1987 slaughter are demanding transparency, while lawyers have now asked Britain to own up and publish what its diplomats knew about the slaughter.

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One of the most fascinating parts of Doran's book is the way he shows how the officers of the outgoing Rhodesian Security Forces and the state's Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), run mainly by Ken Flower and Danny Stannard under the command of the new President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, sided with Mugabe

Doran shows that the military saw Gukurahundi as a black Zimbabwean war and that whites should keep their distance. They did not understand that what was about to happen in Matabeleland because it was an African thing, a largely Shona war against

a historic enemy, the Ndebeles who, under two invading chiefs – Mzilikazi and Lobengula, stole cattle, raped women and slaughtered thousands of Shona men in the 19th-century.

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After the death of thousands of Ndebeles between 1983-1987, the Queen knighted Robert Mugabe. His title was removed after the death of 12 white farmers following Mugabe's white-owned land grab in 2000. A Foreign Office spokesman explained that Britain could not justify an individual who was responsible for a consistent campaign of human rights violations and the disregard for the democratic process retaining such an honour.

I doubt we'll ever know the exact number of men, women, children and babies slaughtered with the connivance of Robert Mugabe and the military men who surrounded him almost 35 years ago. The government's figure is as low as 3,000. However, Doran draws attention to an interview Stannard gave to Dr Sue Onslow, deputy director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and author of a forthcoming book about Mugabe with co-author Martin Plaut, in October 2008.

Stannard said: “Nobody knows the actual figure but between 30-50,000.”

Doran has written a remarkable book which should be read by diplomats, journalists and NGO workers before they set foot in the “new” Zimbabwe which is led by some of the men who organised the slaughter that must rank alongside several other ethnic cleansing disasters of the late 20th-century.

This book might persuade the mandarins at the Foreign Office in London to come clean about what was known in Whitehall about the slaughter and why such a cowardly silence was maintained for so long. **CT**

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**Trevor Grundy** is a British reporter who lived and worked in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa from 1966-1996.

**Lawyers have now asked Britain to own up and publish what its diplomats knew about the slaughter**

# How Britain became an American state

**Brian Mitchell** finds revelation in the history books

The British Government, having lost their gamble with the Nazis in the pre-war Munich deals with the Nazis, then having had to run begging to the US for economic and military aid in the war and afterwards, had to cede Britain's colonies, overseas assets, markets and foreign military bases to the US and submit to US demands for bases in Britain in order to bring our wartime allies, the Soviet Union, within range of US nuclear bombers in the US led Cold War and without any British control. In other words the British Sceptre passes to the US.

“...to set forth the political, military, territorial and economic requirements of the United States in its potential leadership... including the United Kingdom itself as well as the Western hemisphere and the Far East. The first and foremost requirement of the United States in a world in which it proposes to hold unquestionable power in the rapid fulfilment of a programme of complete re-armament... to secure the limitation of any exercise of sovereignty by foreign nations that constitutes a threat to the minimum world area essential for the security and economic prosperity of the United States.” – Economic and Financial Group of the US Council of Foreign Relations, 1940.

“The question of leadership need hardly arise. If any permanently closer association of the two nations is achieved, an island people of fifty millions cannot expect to be the senior partner. The centre of gravity and the ultimate decision must increasingly lie with America. We cannot resent this historical development.” – The Economist Oct 19 1940.

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“Well, Boys, Britain's broke. It's your money we want.”  
– Lord Lothian, British ambassador to Washington, November 23 1940.

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“Whatever the outcome of the war, America has embarked on a career of imperialism in world affairs and in every other aspect of her life... Even though by our aid England should emerge from this struggle without defeat, she will be so impoverished economically and crippled in prestige that it is improbable that she will be able to resume or maintain the dominant position in world affairs that she has occupied for so long. At best, England will become a junior partner in a new Anglo-Saxon imperialism in which the economic resources and the military and naval strength of the United States will be the centre of gravity... The sceptre passes to the United States.” – Virgil Jordan, President of the US National Industrial Conference Board, to the Annual Convention of the Investment Bankers' Association of America, Hollywood, Dec 10 1940.

“Gradually, very gradually, and very quietly, the mantle of leadership was slipping from British shoulders to American.” – Elliott Roosevelt, on the Atlantic Charter conference with his father US President Franklin Roosevelt and British PM Churchill in August 1941.

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“My dear Americans, we may be short of dollars, but we are not short of will... We won't let you down. Standards of life may go back. We may have to say to our miners and to our steel workers: “We can't give you all we hoped for. We can't give you the houses we want you to live in. We can't give you the amenities we desire to give



to give you.” But we won’t fail.” – Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Secretary, to the American Legion, London, Sept 10 1947.

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“Today Americans know that they are the dominant power in the world... and they expect the rest of us to respect their leadership.” – Tory Lord Woolton, Sunday Times, July 16 1950.

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“Mr. Bevin went to New York, determined to prevent the precipitate rearmament of Germany... He failed... Faced with an American ultimatum... he toed the line.” – New Statesman and Nation, Dec 2 1950.

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“We British must recognise that American policy must prevail, if there is an honest difference of opinion between us as to what to do next in the world struggle. He who pays the piper calls the tune.” – Labour MP Commander King-Hall, National Newsletter, June 28 1951.

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“Do we need Britain? The British Empire, for all its reduced power, has a valuable string of naval bases around the world – Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Malta, Suez, Aden, Singapore, to mention the most important... The colonies take one into the economic sphere - tin, rubber, uranium and other raw materials... We need Britain.” – New York Times, Jan 9 1952.

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“You may be sure that we shall stand by you on fundamentals.” – Prime Minister Winston Churchill in letter to US President Eisenhower, 1953.

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“...this Marshall Plan is going to be the biggest damned interference in international affairs that there has ever been in history. It doesn’t do any good to say we are not

going to interfere. ... I don’t think we need to be so sensitive about interfering in the international affairs of these countries.” – US Senator Cabot Lodge to the US Foreign Relations Committee regarding post war Marshall aid to Britain and Western Europe.

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“Am I wrong in saying all British governments since 1945 have done what the Americans have wanted?” – Tony Benn, British Labour MP.

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“Abominable. Loyal, blind, apparently subservient... I think that the almost undeviating support by Great Britain for the ill-advised policies of President Bush in Iraq have been a major tragedy for the world... has prolonged the war and increased the tragedy that has resulted.” – US President Carter, on British PM Tony Blair’s subservience to the US, on BBC Radio.

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“The UK will... take on at times the role of a Trojan Horse ... but its effectiveness in this role will depend on... not appearing to act as a US stooge.” – British Foreign Office, 1972.)

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“We’ve got to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Americans.” – Observer editor Roger Alton to his journalists, January 2003.

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“I care not what puppet is placed on the throne of England to rule the Empire. The man who controls Britain’s money supply controls the British Empire and I control the British money supply.” – US billionaire Nathan Rothschild. **CT**

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*Brian Mitchell is a London-based author and journalist. He is a former trade union organiser and teacher.*



# Seven forbidden words

**Lawrence Davidson** analyses the Orwellian methods being used by the White House to restructure the language of government

***Sometime in the month of December 2017, somewhere in the bowels of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in Washington, DC, a high-level appointee of the Trump administration moved to take ideological control of the agency's budget-writing process***

There is a scene in George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984, where the protagonist, Winston Smith, is having a conversation with a philologist by the name of Syme. Syme is involved in a government effort to restructure the language spoken by the upper classes, those who have power or work for the ruling party. The language is called "Newspeak." Syme's job is to get rid of dangerous words. Here is how he describes his task: "We're destroying words – scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. . . . The whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought. In the end we shall make thoughtcrime [having unorthodox thoughts] literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it."

Now let's shift to another scene, not a literary or fictional scene, but a probable real life one.

Sometime in the month of December 2017, somewhere in the bowels of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in Washington, DC, a high-level appointee of the Trump administration moved to take ideological control of the agency's budget-writing process. This official presented a directive to the agency's departments, such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), listing seven words that were not to be used in budget preparation. If they were, they would be flagged and the document sent back for "correction." The seven

"forbidden" words are: "vulnerable," "entitlement," "diversity," "transgender," "fetus," "evidence-based" and "science-based."

The higher-ups at the HHS have insisted that there is no "ban" in place. Departments such as the CDC can still do research in areas to which these unwelcome key words relate. But this disclaimer is misleading. To do the research you need money, and the money comes from the budget. The "discouragement" of key words is meant to marginalise their related research agendas. If fully effective, this attempt at censorship – for that is what it is – could contribute to undermining several generations of cultural progress, and challenge the "science-based" methodology that serves as a foundation for the modern world.

We already know that President Trump has no time for facts that differ from his personal worldview. That is why the US is not part of the "science-based" treaty to slow down global warming. We also already know that he does not think minorities (both racial/ethnic and sexual) deserve protection under the law. These and other prejudices, worn so publicly by the president of the United States, have let loose a revolt of religious and social reactionaries, perhaps numerically represented by the 33 percent of Americans who approve of Trump's performance. These folks would take the country back to a time of discrimination, segrega-

tion, and scientific know-nothingness. And for Trump these folks are the only ones who really count. He has recently declared that unfavourable polls are “fake news.” This is Trump “making America great again.”

It appears that one way Trump and his allies think this can be done is by censoring the language used by the people in power and those who work for them. As the computer engineer and writer Jem Berkes points out in reference to 1984, “the ultimate aim of Newspeak is to enclose people in an orthodox pseudo-reality and isolate them from the real world.” Sounds a lot like what is happening at HHS.

### **Trump’s double talk**

Can this work? It probably already has among the roughly one-third of adult Americans who are sympathetic to Mr. Trump’s ultimate aims. These include many Christian fundamentalists and various racist conservative sects, the Alt-Right and Fox TV talking heads. Among those who are of the opposite point of view, both cultural and political progressives, there is no chance that this proposed “orthodoxy” will go unchallenged. Many of this latter group are old enough to remember what the president’s “great America” once looked like – for instance, what life was like before the civil rights acts. And many of those who can see through Trump’s double-talk, of whatever age, have an instinctive preference for equality, fairness and clear thinking.

However, between these two opposing groups lies the insulated masses – the millions who pay little attention to politics and know little of the importance of science. These folks, focused on their day-to-day concerns are essentially isolated in their localness. They have no sense of what is presently at stake, and therefore find it difficult to think critically about the Trump agenda. For this group, skewing language may well result in skewing their worldview. It is probably from the perceptions of this segment of the population that Trump and his agents

want to ultimately eliminate the values represented by the “seven forbidden words” and all that they mean for social policy.

Thus, the end game is no more thinking of society and its problems in terms of a citizen diversity, minority vulnerability, or entitlement based on proven need. For instance, citizens are not to think that sexual minorities are in need of legal protections. Indeed, the country’s LGBT population turns out to have less right to protection than an unborn fetus. In addition, citizens are to no longer to pay heed to evidence-based and science-based arguments when they may call into question the practices of alleged societal customs.

You might find the scenario laid out above far-fetched. Yet it correlates well with the way Donald Trump uses language, as well as his devaluing of any objective standard for truth. Thus, President Trump’s persistent combination of gross exaggeration and “alternative facts” gives many of his public statements an Orwellian odour.

In his ghost-written book *The Art of the Deal*, Trump is quoted as stating that “if you tell people a lie three times, they will believe anything.” No doubt he has told himself this more than three times, for he now seems to live his public life by this tenet. There are fantastic and untrue self-aggrandising claims such as, because of the changes Trump is initiating, “our children will grow up in a nation of miracles,” and “we have done more in five months than practically any president in history.” There are also fantastic and untrue negative claims such as some three-million votes were cast illegally in the presidential election – all of them apparently for Hilary Clinton, and “[President] Obama founded ISIS, literally. “According to the Washington Post’s Fact Check project, “President Trump has made 1,318 false or misleading claims over [his first] 263 days [in office].” Many of these claims are repeated over and over again – significantly more than three times.

Forbidding specific terminology from the

***Many of those who can see through Trump’s double-talk, of whatever age, have an instinctive preference for equality, fairness and clear thinking***

## Word Play

***The implicit censorship inherent in ideology has always played a role in US politics, and the ultra-conservative ideology behind the “seven forbidden words” gambit has been around for a long time***

budget language of HHS departments constitutes one avenue of attack against those who refuse to believe Trump’s innumerable lies. You might not believe his fantasies, but you are not to use “evidence-based” counter-arguments if you operate within the executive branch bureaucracies he ultimately controls.

Of course, the implicit censorship inherent in ideology has always played a role in US politics, and the ultra-conservative ideology behind the “seven forbidden words” gambit has been around for a long time. It dominated economic policy until the New Deal and social policy until the Civil Rights Movement. By modern standards it brought disaster in both realms. So why would anyone want it back? Maybe because the aims of greater economic and racial/ethnic equality make some white citizens feel dis-

empowered and uncomfortable. One way to address that discomfort is to turn the clock back. To do this, you just restructure reality by labelling those parts that you don’t like as “fake.” Trump does this almost daily.

The strategy of eliminating the official use of words like “diversity,” “vulnerable,” “entitlement,” “transgender,” “evidence-based,” “science-based,” and “fetus” is part of this effort to turn the clock back. Maybe then, so the story goes, with no words to express these concepts, the uncritical minds of our time will be – as Syme the philologist predicts – unable to think unorthodox thoughts. **CT**

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# ColdType Insights

## What can be done about modern Frankensteins?

Scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs are starting to have second thoughts about their creations, writes **Adam Briggie**

In 1797, at the dawn of the industrial age, Goethe wrote *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, a poem about a magician in training who, through his arrogance and half-baked powers, unleashes a chain of events that he could not control. About 20 years later, a young Mary Shelley answered a dare to write a ghost story, which she shared at a small gathering at Lake Geneva. Her story would go on to be published as a novel, *Frankenstein*; or, the Modern Prometheus, on Jan. 1, 1818.

Both are stories about our powers to create things that take on a life of their own.

Goethe's poem comes to a climax when the apprentice calls out in a panic:

*Master, come to my assistance!  
Wrong I was in calling  
Spirits, I avow,  
For I find them galling,  
Cannot rule them now.*

While the master fortunately returns just in time to cancel the treacherous spell, Shelley's tale doesn't end so nicely: Victor Frankenstein's monster goes on a murderous rampage, and his creator is unable to put a stop to the carnage.



**Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster in the *Bride of Frankenstein*.** Wikimedia

Who foretold our fate: Goethe or Shelley? That's the question we face on the 200th anniversary of *Frankenstein*, as we find ourselves grappling with the unintended consequences of our creations on Facebook, to artificial intelligence and human genetic engineering. Will we sail through safely or will we, like Victor Frankenstein, witness "destruction and infallible misery"?

In Goethe's poem, disaster is averted through a more skillful application of the same magic that conjured the problem in the first place. The term for this nowadays is "reflexive modernity" – the idea

that modern technology can be applied to deal with any problems of its own creation and that whatever problems arise from technoscience, we can fix with more technoscience. In environmentalism, this is known as ecomodernism. In transhumanist circles, it is called the proactionary principle, which "involves not only anticipating before acting, but learning by acting."

Frankenstein, by contrast, is a precautionary tale. Imbued with the impulse to transform nature, humans risk extending beyond their proper reach. Victor Frankenstein comes to rue the ambition to become "greater than his nature will allow." He laments: "Learn from me . . . how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world."

Hubris, he seems to warn, will be the death of us all.

This same worry over hubris appears to be creeping up among today's scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs, many of whom seem to be getting cold feet. After creating something, they've turned around and denounced their very creations.

Are they like the apprentice calling for the master to rescue him? Or are they, like Frankenstein, engaged in a futile quest to squelch something that is already beyond our control?

Consider Sean Parker. The co-founder of Napster and an early investor in Facebook recently announced his status as a social media

# Insights

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“conscientious objector.” Facebook, he claims, is likely damaging children’s brains and definitely exploiting human psychological weaknesses.

There are more Silicon Valley refuseniks. Justin Rosenstein, the inventor of the Facebook “like” button, has deleted the app from his phone, citing worries about addiction, continuous partial attention disorder and the demise of democracy at the hands of social media. Former Google employee Tristan Harris and Loren Brichter, who invented the slot machine-like, pull-to-refresh mechanism for Twitter feeds, are both warning us about the dangers of their creatures.

Anthony Ingraffea spent the first 25 years of his engineering career trying to figure out how to get more fossil fuels out of rocks. From 1978 to 2003, he worked on both government and industry grants to improve hydraulic fracturing. His own research never panned out, but when he learned of the success of others and the magnitude of chemicals and water required, he was “aghast” and said, “It was as if [I’d] been working on something [my] whole life and somebody comes and turns it into Frankenstein.” Over the past 10 years he has become one of the nation’s leading fracking opponents. The industry that once funded him now regularly trolls and attacks him.

Jennifer Doudna is one of the main scientists behind the gene-editing technique known as CRISPR. In her new book, *A Crack in Creation*, she writes that CRISPR could eliminate several diseases and improve lives, but it could also be used in ways similar to Nazi eugenics. Doudna has revealed that she has

nightmares where Hitler asks her to explain “the uses and implications of this amazing technology.”

Elon Musk worries that with artificial intelligence we are “summoning the devil.” AI is, for him, “our greatest existential threat.” Musk has gone beyond Dr Frankenstein’s initial impulse of evading his abominable creation: He is working on interplanetary colonisation so that we can run all the way to Mars when AI goes rogue on planet Earth.

The anthropologist Bruno Latour chastised Musk for this kind of thing. The way Latour sees it, the moral of Frankenstein is not that we should stop making monsters but rather that we should love our monsters. The problem wasn’t Dr. Frankenstein’s hubris, but his unfeeling – he abandoned his “child” rather than educating it so that it could learn how to behave.

Latour’s point is that no amount of technological advance will give us total control and a blissful detachment from the world. Instead, technology, like parenting, will always require being constantly folded into new developments, tending, fretting and caring.

Musk’s initiative OpenAI, which seeks to develop safer AI technologies, is more what Latour has in mind.

As it turns out, Latour is putting his own advice to the test. He is the creator-in-chief of the scariest monster of our times. This creature is not actually a product of science, but rather a way of thinking about science. Latour spent his career showing how scientific facts are socially constructed, and that there is no such thing as unbiased access to truth.

In short, he argues that objectivity is a sham and science is never really settled or certain.

Now, of course, he’s watching in horror as this spirit of deconstruction and distrust takes root in our post-truth age of alternative facts, climate change denialists and partisan media bubbles.

In a recent interview, Latour admitted that he now regrets his earlier “juvenile enthusiasm” in attacking science and vows to reverse course:

“We will have to regain some of the authority of science. That is the complete opposite from where we started doing science studies.”

In order to love our monsters, we have to have some basic agreement about when they are misbehaving and what to do about it. That agreement comes through widespread trust in the traditional institutions of truth: science, the media and universities. Latour sought to liberate us from the paternalism of the experts inhabiting these institutions, and it was a noble quest.

But his acid, combined with the chaos of social media and the greed of big money, has corroded things more deeply than he imagined. Now it is bias all the way down, everything is susceptible to a knee-jerk accusation of “fake news.” Climate change may be the ultimate abomination or maybe it’s a hoax. Who can tell? The scepticism-induced paralysis is hardly conducive to chasing monsters. **CT**

*Adam Briggles is assistant professor of philosophy and religion studies, at the University of North Texas. This article first appeared at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*

## Social madness: the Russian canard

**Norman Solomon** tells how anti-Russian bombast gets more airtime than discussion of need for nuclear détente

For several months we've been hearing a crescendo of outcries that Russia used social media to sway the 2016 presidential election. The claim has now been debunked by an unlikely source – one of the most Russiagate-frenzied big media outlets in the United States, the Washington Post.

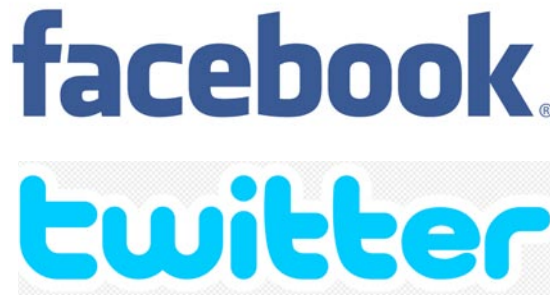
Far away from the media echo chamber, the Post news story is headlined: *There's Still Little Evidence That Russia's 2016 Social Media Efforts Did Much of Anything*. The article focuses on “what we actually know about the Russian activity on Facebook and Twitter: It was often modest, heavily dissociated from the campaign itself and minute in the context of election social media efforts.”

In fact, the ballyhooed Facebook ads were notably not targeted to be seen in swing states, the piece by Post journalist Philip Bump reports. As for the much-hyped tweets, they were smaller than miniscule in quantity compared to overall election-related tweets.

But don't expect the fervent canard about Russian manipulation of social media to fade away anytime soon. At this point, the Russiagate atmosphere has become so toxic – with incessant propaganda, credulity, fear-laced conformity and

partisan opportunism – that basic logic often disintegrates.

One of the weirdest aspects of claims that Russia undermined the election with social media has involved explaining away the fact that few of the ads and posts in question actually referred to Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump or the election. Instead, we're told, the wily Russians tried to help Trump by inflaming social divisions such as racial tensions. It's a rampant storyline that's



reminiscent of the common claim during the civil rights movement that “outside agitators,” such as Russian-directed reds, were inflaming and exploiting racial tensions in the South.

From there, it's just a hop skip and jump to smearing Americans who dissent from US orthodoxies as useful idiots who serve the interests of plotters in the Kremlin.

Of course history is not exactly repeating itself, but it's rhyming an

awful lot. There are real parallels between the McCarthy Era and today's anti-Russia fervour in the United States.

Despite all the information and analysis that have strengthened progressive understanding in this country during the last few decades, fixating on Russia as culpable for the election of Trump has been widely irresistible. Perhaps that fixation is less upsetting than deeper realisation of just how rotten the US corporate system of injustice has become – and how the forces that brought us the horrors of the Trump presidency are distinctly homegrown.

Narratives scapegoating Russia now have an extremely powerful grip on the USA. The consequences include heightened US-Russia tensions that absolutely mean heightened risks of nuclear war – and worsening threats to democratic discourse at home.

The conditioned reflex to label as somehow “pro-Putin” any opinion that overlaps with a Kremlin outlook is becoming part of the muscle memory of much of the American body politic. Countless journalists, pundits, activists and politicians have fallen under the Russiagate spell. They include the liberal primetime lineup on MSNBC, where – as the media watchdog group FAIR pointed out last month – Rachel Maddow and Chris Hayes routinely bypass stories of great importance in order “to lead with minutiae from the ongoing Russia investigation that has consumed MSNBC's coverage like no other news event since the be-



ginning of the Trump presidency.”

Across most of the media landscape, the meme that Russians attacked American democracy with social-media posts has been treated as self-evident.

In a typical exercise of the conformity that afflicts the national press corps, David Corn, the Washington bureau chief for Mother Jones magazine, wrote last fall that the House intelligence committee needed more staff to investigate, in his words, “how” – not whether – “a foreign adversary attacked American democracy.”

His piece breathlessly declared that “the Trump-Russia scandal” was “expanding – it now includes new revelations regarding Moscow’s use of social media in the United States to influence the 2016 campaign.”

That kind of stenography for powerful spin may snag cable TV appearances and lucrative book contracts, but it’s a notable disservice to journalism and democracy.

Meanwhile, most Democrats on Capitol Hill are eager to engage in such rhetoric. So, it was just another routine appearance when Senator Richard Blumenthal went on CNN a week before Christmas and declared, “there is increasing evidence that the Russians are continuing their attack on our democracy.”

He said: “The Russian attack on our elections in 2016 was endlessly ingenious and inventive, using all kinds of social media, all kinds of intermediaries, sources of information for them.”

To put it mildly, that sort of bombast gains vastly more airtime than discussing the urgent need

for détente between the world’s two nuclear superpowers.

On MSNBC, Rachel Maddow has climbed with her ratings to great mass-media acclaim, while advancing herself from the outset of the Trump presidency as one of the most prominent and irresponsible Russia baiters in US media. At this rate, when Maddow retires – if she and the rest of us are lucky enough to avoid a nuclear holocaust – she can look back on a career that deteriorated into an obsessive crusade against Russia that increased the chances of World War III.

In the poisonous media environment that keeps boosting her fame

and fortune, it’s grotesquely fitting that Maddow – time after time after time – has devoted so much of her program to the illusory Russian assault on democracy via social media.

But that’s the way it goes in the propaganda-polluted land of Russia. **CT**

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*Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org. His books include “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.” He is the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy.*

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## The free market made us do it!

A new global CEO pay comparison demolishes the rationale for over-the-top executive pay, writes **Sam Pizzigati**

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**A**pologists for the many millions in compensation that America’s largest corporations regularly dole out to their top executives have essentially one basic, all-purpose go-to defence.

America’s corporate giants, this defence contends, are just paying the going “market rate” for top-notch executive talent. So chill out, America. Average Americans who complain about excessive executive pay, says Stanford Business School’s Nick Donatiello, simply do not realise “how much compensation is required, given the market for talent, to attract and motivate the right

people.” Any company that tries to go cheap and get by without that “right talent,” America’s corporate wisdom continues, would never be able to successfully compete in our globalised marketplace.

Does this defence hold any water? Not any more. Business analysts at Bloomberg have now forever scorched the notion that American CEO pay somehow reflects “market” reality. These analysts have just released the best comparative data yet on what companies that compete successfully in the global marketplace are actually shelling out for corporate executive compensation.

# Insights

The Bloomberg researchers looked worldwide at major corporations of similar size and heft. In all, the researchers examined corporate pay records in 22 nations. In not one of these nations, Bloomberg found, do the executives of top-line firms make anything close to the paychecks of America's corporate execs.

In fact, America's top corporate executives are taking home, on average, quadruple the average CEO pay that comparable top execs in the rest of the world are making.

If this huge pay difference simply reflected a "marketplace" judgment on the sheer talent of America's top execs, top US corporations would be totally dominating global markets, outselling their foreign rivals by wide margins in everything from cars to computers. US corporations are doing no such thing, of course. In one key global market sector after another, foreign corporations that pay their CEOs much less than US CEOs are running neck and neck with their US counterparts – and often leading the pack.

The global marketplace, in other words, hardly seems to be demanding that top executives take home \$14.25-million each, the current average pay Bloomberg researchers calculate for major US corporate chiefs. CEOs in no other nations come anywhere near that \$14.25-million level. America's peer nations in the global market-

place are shelling out, on average, \$3.55-million for top execs.

In Switzerland, the second-highest nation on Bloomberg's CEO pay scale, top executives are pulling down \$8.5-million a year, not much over half the going-rate for top US execs. In Germany, home to many of the world's most successful companies, CEOs average \$6.17-million.

The Bloomberg researchers have also been comparing what CEOs receive to the compensation that goes to average workers. They have found a similar story. No nation has as wide a CEO-worker pay gap as the United States.

Top US CEOs are taking home 265 times what US workers are making, the Bloomberg analysts note. Comparable German CEOs are outpacing German workers by 174 times. The gap in Australia: 140 times.

The world's narrowest gap between CEO and worker pay, not surprisingly, resides in one of the world's most equal nations. In Norway, major corporate CEOs are averaging just \$1.28-million in compensation, the income of about 20 average Norwegians.

In the UK, the only developed nation besides the United States with a CEO-worker pay ratio over 200 times, even conservative politicians have been railing against excessive executive compensation. Prime minister Theresa May's conservative government has moved to require that Britain's 9,000 publicly

traded companies start disclosing, later this year, the pay ratios between their top executives and average workers.

The UK opposition Labour Party wants to go considerably further. If elected into power, Labour's top business matters spokesperson has just pledged, the party will place a special tax on excessive corporate executive compensation and require businesses bidding for public contracts to have a CEO-worker pay ratio no wider than 20:1.

Labour leaders such as Tim Roache, the general secretary of one of the UK's largest unions, are welcoming that pledge. Top execs in the UK, Roache observes, made more in the first three days of 2018 than average British workers will make over the course of the entire year.

"Does anyone really think these fat cats," asks Roache, "deserve 100 times more than the hard-working people who prop up their business empires?"

A question even more worth asking in the US of A. **CT**

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

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## Israel keeps bombing. Why don't we care?

Conflict likely to break out between Iran and Israel if action isn't taken soon, says **Darius Shahtahmasebi**

The Syrian Army is alleging that Israeli jets struck positions dozens of times within Syria early this month in the al-Qutayfa area east of Damascus.

According to a statement by Syria's General Command, the Syrian government's air defences not only intercepted all of the missiles Israel fired, but also managed to counter strike one of the Israeli jets, the Jerusalem Post reports.

While the strike was unconfirmed on the Israeli side, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred to the recent assault during a lunch with NATO ambassadors in Jerusalem, according to the Post.

"We have a long-standing policy to prevent the transfer of game-changing weapons to Hezbollah from Syrian territory. This policy has not changed. We back it up as necessary with action," he said.

Israel has hit Syrian territory more than 100 times since the conflict began in 2011. It has also openly talked recently about bombing Lebanon. Each of these conflict theatres is aimed at containing Iran's expanding influence.

All of this begs the question: Why haven't Iran, Syria, and/or Hezbollah in Lebanon responded directly? Striking the territory of a sovereign nation is not only an act of war, it is completely illegal without authori-



**Benjamin Netanyahu.** Photo: Wikimedia

sation from the UN unless it has been done in self-defense.

Is it because Israel reportedly has well over 200 nukes all "pointed at Iran," and there is little Iran and its allies can do to take on such a threat?

According to the Guardian, Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly instructed both Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Hezbollah not to retaliate against Israeli strikes in Syria. The Guardian also notes that Israeli media has claimed Putin even proposed a deal that would prevent foreign powers from using Syria as a base for attacking a neighbouring state, a blatant reference to Iran.

While much of Syria's air defences are Russian-supplied, the Jerusalem Post notes that the far more advanced Russian S-300 and S-400 have not been used against Israeli jets, but Syrian air defences have. This includes an incident last

March where three anti-aircraft missiles with a 200-kilogram warhead targeted several Israeli jets.

Clearly, Russia has no interest in getting involved in a spat between Israel and Iran. In fact, it can most likely use the impending conflict to further pursue its goals in the Middle East and successfully emerge as the major power broker, wedging the United States out of the area completely. Even now, Russia is continuing its support for the Syrian government to retake the remaining parts of Syria currently up for grabs, particularly in the Idlib province. Much of the media's attention is focused elsewhere, such as the protests in Iran.

Make no mistake, the looming conflict between Iran and Israel via its proxy states could easily break out unless something drastic is done to diffuse it.

The head of the Mossad, Yossi Cohen, warned of the proliferation of accurate Iranian missiles in the Middle East. "The Iranians are coasting into the Middle East undisturbed and with very large forces, in a way that virtually creates an air and land corridor that pours fighters into the region in order to actualise the Iranian vision," Cohen warned at a Finance Ministry event in Jerusalem, adding that "we hear the concerns from Sunni leaders about Iran are growing, just as they are in Israel. We are hearing it from everywhere."

Speaking to Politico in December, Ron Dermer, Israel's Ambassador to the United States also warned: "If Iran is not rolled back in Syria, then the chances of military confrontation are growing. I don't want to tell you by the year or by the month. I'd



say even by the week,” he said.

“Because the more they push, we have to enforce our red lines, and you always have the prospects of an escalation, even when parties don’t want an escalation. So in taking action to defend ourselves, you don’t know what could happen. But I think it’s higher than people think.”

Meanwhile, it is unclear how much Russia might tolerate a bla-

tant attack on Iran if it extends past the disputed border area with Israel. Regardless, Iran and Russia will remain key allies in the years to come until Washington’s influence and control over the Middle East has all but completely eroded. **CT**

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*Darius Shahtahmasebi is editor of [www.theantimedia.com](http://www.theantimedia.com) where this article first appeared*

society that does not necessarily include truth or justice but generally advantage and venality. Of course, the irony is that those hired to oppose the ACLU are also lawyers.

According to social philosophers, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, “reality is socially constructed,” thus we find ourselves in courtrooms confronted with conflicting realities as constructed by the opposing sides. These combatting realities are presented as truth, so help us, God. It is not as much legal philosophy being played out as it is a pathology. What we are witnessing is sociopathic behaviour which destroys the social contract that has kept the USA on a more-or-less even keel since the end of the Great Depression. I was recently informed by a lawyer that there is no Social Contract. I took it he meant that it’s “everyone for themselves, dog-eat-dog.” This is the socially constructed reality being played out in courtrooms today.

As philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt so elegantly put it, “The most irreducibly bad thing about lies is that they contrive to interfere with, and to impair, our natural effort to apprehend the real state of affairs.” In the absence of truth, the “real state of affairs” is rendered irrelevant. There cannot be justice in this, and in the end the most serious moral flaw in the adversarial legal system is the making of truth simply another victim. What kind of a world will we then have if the liars prevail? **CT**

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## What’s justice got to do with it?

**Emanuele Corso** on the profession that is so obsessed with winning that it often ignores justice and truth

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The problem with lawyers can be expressed in three words – Truth, Justice, and Winning. Simple sounding words alright but words that govern a great deal of what transpires in America in the guise of civility. Winning has become all in this competitive American society. Whatever it takes to win is the battle cry. Children are conditioned almost from birth to compete at whatever activity they engage in and to achieve it at whatever cost. We have popular sayings to characterise both poles of the dynamic: winners and losers; champs and chumps. And as the memorable Vince Lombardi put it, “Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.”

When lawyers convene in a courtroom the word Winning looms like a scimitar. Forget about justice, it’s all about winning. If lawyers don’t

win they will soon be out of work not unlike coaches of losing professional sports teams. In fact, court trials are not unlike sports events as each side competes for the same trophy – not always justice but, always and ever, winning. Are there two or more truths in these matters? Truth is irrelevant.

What this sophistry does is reduce justice to a very low status. Seeking winning over justice demeans the legal processes and, even, worse destroys public belief and faith in the fairness of civil justice and civilised recourse. This is why we must have ACLU lawyers and the other exceptions who fight bravely and intelligently for social justice and a manifestation of truth. On the other hand, those who vigorously oppose the ACLU and its lawyers are just as interested in defending a vision of

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