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ISSUE 199

ColdType

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FEBRUARY 2020



Independence Day

Like Trumpism, Brexit has been driven by a reactionary vision of 'greatness' steeped in imperial nostalgia and splendid British isolationism and national exceptionalism

– Matt Carr | Page 4

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■ MATT CARR

Independence Day

Like Trumpism, Brexit has been driven by a reactionary vision of ‘greatness’ that was often steeped in imperial nostalgia and splendid British isolationism and national exceptionalism



MORE than four years after the referendum that plunged the UK into what has been the most bitter and divisive political crisis in its history, we finally reached the day that so many Brexiters have dreamed of and yearned for. For many of those who voted and campaigned to leave the European Union, Friday January 30 was the day when Britain became a ‘free country’ once again, and extricates itself from the ‘shackles’ of EU membership – or what Brexitspeak terms ‘dictatorship’.

As we heard ad infinitum during December’s election campaign last month, it was the day when Brexit finally ‘gets done’. But, like so much that comes out of Johnson’s mouth, this claim is a lie, because the ‘end’ is actually the beginning of years of difficult wrangling over trade deals, and grappling with technical details that successive UK governments have either ignored or failed to understand.

The UK may or may not escape the spectre of No Deal, depending on how much the government is prepared to concede in terms of

regulatory alignment and extending the transition period. But Brexit will dominate British politics for decades, as successive (Tory) governments fight over which laws and regulations to change and what to replace them with; over immigration and the rights of EU nationals and Brits abroad; over fishing rights and fishing export markets; over a thousand crucial details regarding customs checks in Northern Ireland, supply chains, tariffs and non-tariff barriers to trade; over Scottish and possibly Irish independence and so much else that has been largely ignored, treated as irrelevant or breezily dismissed as ‘Project Fear’.

For some Leavers, all this pales beside the symbolism of recovering ‘sovereignty’ and ‘taking our country back’. Like Trumpism, Brexit has been driven by a reactionary vision of ‘greatness’ that was often steeped in imperial nostalgia and splendid British isolationism and national exceptionalism.

Consider these sinister meditations from Jacob Rees-Mogg in the *Daily Mail* late last month, which

hailed Brexit as the beginning of a new golden age: “The moment of national renewal has come. While spring is yet to sweep the chill from the air, fresh shoots of rejuvenation and regeneration are piercing through the cold earth. The electorate, the British people, the most patient and forbearing in the world, will finally have their decisiveness rewarded and, thanks to the General Election result, we will have got Brexit done. By unleashing a reviving wave of blue MPs to rehydrate the parched soil, the British people have set the scene for the biggest restoration of vitality and viridity to our land in generations.”

As George Orwell once observed, bad prose is often an indication of bad thoughts, and it takes a strong stomach to accept Rees-Mogg’s claim that ‘Over two millennia since mighty Augustus quelled the unrest and strife in ancient Rome and brought in a new golden age, our auriferous Prime Minister is bringing in a new era of revitalisation to our nation.’

For those who didn’t know (I was one of them) ‘auriferous’ means ‘containing gold’. This is



BREXIT PARTY : Pity about the spelling . . .

Photographer unknown / via Twitter

the kind of epithet that you would have expected from some fawning 16th-century courtier trying to curry favour with Henry VIII, and the comparisons between our sleazy Etonian charlatan and a Roman dictator ought to be as worrying as Rees-Mogg's vision of 'national renewal.'

And at the other end of the political spectrum, *Socialist Worker* offered another form of magical thinking, which is no less painful to read: "Brexit presents opportunities for the left, not just the right. It's an opportunity to fight for a huge programme of renationalisation and state aid that EU rules were designed to stop. Brexit has unleashed four years of crisis on British politicians, bosses and bankers. Their divisions give us more chance of stopping Tory assaults – and of challenging the neoliberalism and austerity that dominates British politics."

Coming only one month after the Labour Party was comprehensively slaughtered, perhaps for a generation, the least you can say about these predictions is that they reveal a tendency towards excessive optimism. Nevertheless these fantasies of national transformation – whether imagined by the right or the left – are part of the explanation for how we found ourselves in our current predicament: a mid-range power that has detached itself from membership of a trade bloc and political organisation whose concerns it had a crucial impact in shaping, in pursuit of an 'independence' that leaves it in a far weaker position – politically and economically – not only in regards to Europe, but to the United

States, whose support Brexiters see as crucial to the success of their project.

At present we are not aligned to either Europe or the United States, and there is absolutely no guarantee that any of this will work out well. Yet we have embarked on this adventure without weighing up the consequences, without moving cautiously and carefully, without trying to forge consensus based on expert advice and wise counsel. Instead we have allowed charlatans, demagogues, liars, fanatics and ignoramuses to drive Brexit forward, and actively ignored expertise that told us what we didn't want to hear.

All this is a terrible indictment not only of the politicians who campaigned for it and made it possible, but of the entire political class. It has been a political failing, a failure of public education, a failure of leadership and responsibility, and also a media failure, in which large sections of the British media either churned out pro-Brexit propaganda or failed to challenge and unpick it.

It has been part of the tragedy of Brexit that three of the worst governments in British history have overseen this process in the face of the worst opposition in British history. This failure is not simply due to Jeremy Corbyn, though Corbyn's Labour is certainly at fault.

During last year's election, Labour had what was probably the most sensible of all the positions available, in terms of forging some kind of national unity. A confirmatory vote was certainly a more democratic way of reaching

A country that once specialised in divide and rule governance is divided & undone by the stupidity, venality and incompetence of its own rulers

across the Leave/Remain divide than the Lib Dems' promise to revoke Article 50. The problem was that Labour had been dragged to it so slowly, and with such obvious reluctance, that it made no sense to many voters, and the Labour leadership often seemed as divided and lukewarm about this policy as it was about EU membership during the referendum itself.

In effect, the Labour Party failed to show leadership on the defining political issue of the age, and it has now been punished so comprehensively that it is difficult to imagine how it can find its way to power again. Some have attributed these failings exclusively to Corbyn's leadership.

But too many politicians across the spectrum refused to tell the electorate things that it did not want to hear, for fear of being seen as undemocratic and 'anti-Brexit'. Too often 'democracy' was reduced to the zero sum game of the referendum, in which the side that wins is the side that gets its foot over the finishing line first.

This view essentially left more than half the country, which either explicitly rejected Brexit or didn't vote for either option, without no choice but to accept whatever form of Brexit transpired. 'Loser's consent' works in elections, because

there is always the possibility of changing the result every few years. A referendum involving permanent constitutional change and the loss of rights for millions of people is an entirely different matter, and it should have been treated as such.

The possibility of reaching consensus was more or less shot to pieces when Theresa May tacked to the right in 2016 in order to shore up her position within the Tory party, only to back down when faced with the practical consequences of realising her ludicrous 'Brexit means Brexit' mantra. Now that schism remains as sharp and as brutal as it was in the beginning, and it is difficult to see the more emollient and magnanimous speechifying from Johnson and some Tory politicians as more than a cynical attempt to share ownership for a project that belongs exclusively to them.

There may some kind of karma in watching a country that once specialised in divide and rule imperial governance – often with tragic consequences for those it ruled – so comprehensively divided and undone by the stupidity, venality and incompetence of its own rulers, but that is the situation we are in.

The last four years have diminished and shrunk us morally, politically, economically, culturally, and intellectually. We have seen parliament, judges and the civil service attacked in the press and by the government for being infiltrated by traitors' and 'Remoaners' – supported by a mob chorus from the streets. Again and again, we have seen successive Tory governments seeking to weaken parliament and remove the Brexit

process – and themselves – from accountability and scrutiny. To get Brexit, they have tried to neuter judges, prorogue parliament, suppress reports indicating Russian interference in domestic politics, and much else

Most depressingly of all, there has been an almost blanket refusal across the political class to recognise the dangerous rise in ‘take our country back’ hate crime, or stand up for the EU nationals who have been variously used as ‘bargaining counters’ or treated with shameful hostility, contempt, and indifference.

The left has been, for the most part, no better than the right, in opposing these forces, relying too often on formulaic ‘migrants welcome here’ slogans that fail to recognise the very specific victimisation and/or marginalisation of EU nationals – or the extent to which Brexit has emboldened and legitimised racists and xenophobes across the country.

Even now, some sections of the Labour left blame ‘Remainers’ for Labour’s defeat and dismiss the genuine sense of pain and separation with which millions of people – both Brits and EU nationals in this country – have felt in response to Brexit and the loss of their European identity.

The EU can certainly be criticised, but the contemptuous dismissal of Europeanism by some sections of the left as a truncated form of internationalism fails to explain what kind of internationalism can take its place – in a country that has rejected even the limited ‘European’ concept of pooled sovereignty and transnational citizenship.

For all Johnstone’s talk of ‘healing’, social media is awash with Brexiters exulting in their victory and inviting ‘Remoaners’ to ‘suck it up’

Throughout this dismal process, I have often been struck again and again, by the mean-spiritness, selfishness, arrogance, jingoism, and petty vindictiveness at the heart of Brexit. In these last four years, I cannot think of a single generous sentiment or idea that has come out of it – unless you consider the persistent calls to ‘put our own people first’ as the basis for some kind of social solidarity.

I don’t think it is. I very much doubt that many of those who claim to care about ‘our people’ really care about any people. If they cared about ‘our people’ they had various opportunities to vote for Labour governments that would have taken steps to alleviate austerity, homelessness, food banks etc.

They didn’t. Instead they voted for a reactionary political project, lubricated by the fear and loathing of immigrants and foreigners and fatuous delusions of Global Britain that I suspect will be painfully unravelled over the coming years.

All this may get worse, when the promises of our newfound ‘freedom’ fail to materialise. Because the radical conservatives, populists and far-right groupings that supported Brexit didn’t do all this just to end at this point.

For all Johnson’s talk of ‘healing’, social media is awash right

now with Brexiters exulting in their victory and inviting ‘Remoaners’ to ‘suck it up’. Rarely, as Nigel Farage and his gang showed in the European Parliament yesterday, has victory been so joyless, so lacking in grace, dignity and magnanimity, so steeped in bitter relish at the humiliation of the opposition.

Millions of us did not want this outcome, for various reasons that cannot be encapsulated by the label ‘Remainers’. We failed to stop it or even to mitigate its destructive impact. Now we will have to live with the consequences for a long time.

So we have a right to mourn what we have lost, and then we will have to move on to our common task: to fight a destructive and clueless Tory government that will seek to shift the balance of political and economic power even more than it already is in the interests of the rich and powerful; to show solidarity with the minorities that will come under attack and who are already under attack; to stand up for the values of internationalism, liberalism, and solidarity which the European Union itself as not always upheld in practice.

If we can do this, we might become a half-decent country once again.

But right now, that day is a long way off. **CT**

***Matt Carr** is a writer, campaigner and journalist. His latest book is *The Savage Frontier: The Pyrenees in History and the Imagination* (New Press/Hurst, 2018). This article was first published on his blog – www.infernalmachine.co.uk.*

The media versus Jeremy Corbyn

Since he emerged as a contender for the Labour Party leadership in 2015, Jeremy Corbyn was subjected to unprecedented vilification by the UK's dominant Conservative-supporting, pro-Brexit press. Some of the country's highest-paid columnists and commentators succeeded in delivering a master class in character assassination



Sept 18, 2015 – The *Daily Mail* dubbed Corbyn 'The Sexpot Trot' during his leadership campaign in a series of spreads that investigated 'why women were fascinated by the man who could destroy Labour'.



April 28, 2017 – In the lead-up to the 2017 general election, Boris Johnson, then Foreign Secretary, joked that Corbyn was a mugwump – a jibe to add colour to the *Sun*'s demolition job on the Labour leader.



May 23, 2017 – Corbyn's long-standing political links with Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams were condemned by the *Sun* because of his refusal to 'explicitly condemn' IRA atrocities in Northern Ireland.



May 27, 2017 – At the height of the 2017 general election campaign, a terrorist bomb explosion at Ariana Grande's concert in Manchester added impetus to the *Mail*'s attacks on Corbyn's past associations.

STEPS should be taken to challenge the political agenda-setting impact of national newspapers, but that requires the news media at large to have the courage the flag up the heightened politicisation of UK newspapers.

The 24-hour news cycle, and the explosion in social media, have combined to extend the reach of the kind of hostile coverage that constantly repeated the claims of the tabloid press that Corbyn was the terrorists' friend and a security risk.

Whatever one's views on Jeremy Corbyn's past activism, or the company he kept, his demonisation has been intense, concentrated into a four-year period from his leadership campaign in mid-2015 through to the lead-up to the general elections of both 2017 and 2019.

Journalists were able to draw on a treasure trove

of stories and photographs dating back for 30 years or more. The challenge for the Tory commentariat's elite was to find ways to project fear and alarm from faded press clippings from the 1980s and 1990s, and especially images of a much younger looking Corbyn. Their aim was to exploit his links with leaders of Sinn Fein, and then, in the wake of the Manchester Arena and London Bridge terrorist attacks, his past associations with Jihadists.

The now familiar storylines had to be continually reworked, but any study of the journalists' output underlines their ingenuity and ability to recycle the same material.

Instead of being just supporters, newspapers such as the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Telegraph* have now become campaigners and propagandists for the Conservative Party. Their front pages are



June 6, 2017 – After the London Bridge terror attack and Manchester Arena explosion, the *Sun* claimed just before the election that the safety of the country was at risk if Labour's top three were elected.



June 7, 2017 – In a follow up to the *Sun*, on the eve of polling day, the *Mail's* main head was 'Apologists for Terror'. An inside spread was a 'frightening insight' into the 'troika befriending Britain's enemies'.



October 28, 2017 – *Daily Mail* writer Dominic Sandbrook is introduced as an 'historian' on BBC programmes without mention of his role as a mainstay of the paper's production line of hostile Corbyn coverage.



August 17, 2018 – After saying Corbyn had visited the grave in Tunisia of Black September terrorists, the *Mail* published a 2002 photograph of him about to share a platform with plane hijacker Leila Khaled.

blatant party promotion, although as late as the 1990s most newspapers kept their political endorsements to an editorial column on an inside page.

Press politicisation could be countered by broadcasters, starting perhaps with the introduction of a system of health warnings.

When controversial front pages are reproduced on screen in television press reviews, there should be a notification of a newspaper's political allegiance, a reminder, for example, that its readers were urged to support Leave in the 2016 EU Referendum or vote for Boris Johnson in the 2019 election.

Television and radio presenters rarely indicate the political background of media guests taking part in press reviews and political discussions, while columnists and commentators with regular bylines in Conservative, pro-Brexit papers are often introduced

neutrally as "authors" or "historians".

Broadcasters are failing in their responsibilities, misleading the public by giving the impression their guests are somehow independent writers or observers.

Presenters should be far more transparent about the political hinterland of their interviewees, not least, for example, if they were a mainstay of what became a production line of anti-Corbyn tirades.

My fear is that broadcasters will continue to shy away from clarity for fear of losing guests and antagonising still further already hostile newspapers. **CT**

Nicholas Jones was a BBC Industrial and Political Correspondent for 30 years. His books include The Lost Tribe: Whatever Happened to Fleet Street's Industrial Correspondents?



August 18, 2018 – The Mail followed up its earlier exclusive about Corbyn's 2014 trip to Tunisia with a photograph of him with a Palestinian activist convicted of trying to blow up a cinema in Israel in 1967.



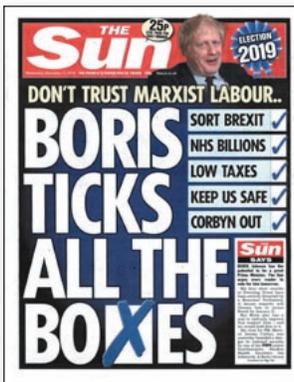
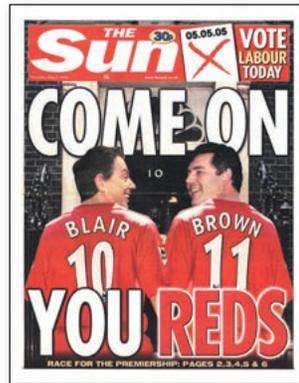
December 3, 2019 – Unlike Theresa May, who failed in 2017 to follow through tabloid attacks on Corbyn, Boris Johnson synchronised his attack on him in a Sun interview for the 2019 election campaign.



December 4, 2019 – The Mail and other newspapers exploited, photographs of Corbyn's past associations from his years of activism on the left, back to his election as an MP in 1983.



December 9, 2019 – The word 'Nightmare' beneath Corbyn's head filled the Sun's front page in the week of the 2019 election. Inside it repeated its 2017 coverage with a "dossier of doom".



Politicising the front pages

RUPERT Murdoch has been the most promiscuous of the UK's press proprietors in using the election day front page of his flagship newspaper the *Sun* to support the political party best suited to serve the interests of his media businesses. He abandoned years of loyal support for Margaret Thatcher and her successor John Major by switching his patronage from the Conservatives to Labour to back Tony Blair in the 1997 general election.

Downing Street papers revealed several years later that Murdoch promised Blair his papers would back Labour as long as the UK continued supporting the US following George Bush's 2003 invasion of Iraq. The *Sun's* final pro-Labour front cover, for the 2005 general election, two years after the Iraq War, was as a classic of the genre. Blair and his Chancellor Gordon Brown appeared in red football shirts numbered

10 and 11. Under the headline, 'Come on You Reds', the imagery could not have been clearer: red was the colour of both Labour and Manchester United, then the UK's most successful football club.

Switching back to the Conservatives to support David Cameron in the 2015 general election, the *Sun* produced another classic: Cameron's face was superimposed on the design of the famous Obama poster. This time the legend were the three words: 'Our Only Hope.'

If the election outcome is tight, the *Sun* remains in full attack mode on polling day. When John Major seemed on the verge of defeat in 1992, the target was the Labour leader Neil Kinnock whose face appeared in a light bulb alongside the headline line, 'If Kinnock wins today will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights.'

There was an echo of that memorable treatment in the *Sun* front page in the 2019 election. This time Boris Johnson was inside the light bulb over the line, "If Boris wins today, a bright future begins tomorrow". Corbyn's light bulb was off, with the warning, "But if Jez gets in, the lights will go out for good."

Increasingly front pages of the *Mail* and *Daily Express* are political endorsements. – *Nick Jones*

How this became a Gitmo world

Eight ways in which the toxic policies of the offshore detainee prison in Cuba have contaminated American institutions, as well as its laws and customs

In January 2002, the Guantánamo Bay Detention Facility in Cuba opened its gates for the first 20 detainees of the war on terror. Within 100 days, 300 of them would arrive, often hooded and in those infamous orange jumpsuits, and that would just be the beginning. At its height, the population would rise to nearly 800 prisoners from 59 countries. Eighteen years later, it still holds 40 prisoners, most of whom will undoubtedly remain there without charge or trial for the rest of their lives. (That's likely true even of the five who have been cleared for release for more than a decade.) In 2013, journalist Carol Rosenberg astutely labelled them 'forever prisoners'. And those detainees are hardly the only enduring legacy of Guantánamo Bay. Thanks to that prison camp, we as a country have come to understand aspects of both the law and policy in new ways that might prove to be 'forever changes.'

Here are eight ways in which the toxic policies of that offshore facility have contaminated American institutions, as well as our

laws and customs, in the years since 2002.

1. Indefinite detention: The first item on any list of Guantánamo's offspring would have to be the category 'indefinite detention'. In the context of US law, until that long-ago January, the very notion was both foreign and forbidden. Detention without charge or trial was, in fact, precluded by the Fifth Amendment's right to due process, a reality that had been honoured since the founding of the republic. Though the detainees there were eventually granted access to lawyers and the right to have their cases reviewed, for only a handful of them has that right of being charged or released been realised.

The indefinite detention that began at Guantánamo Bay has now spawned its mirror image in camps for undocumented immigrants (and their children) along the US Mexican border. Even the optics there are proving to be carbon copies of Guantánamo: the open-air wire cages, the armed guards, and the physical abuse of migrants and

asylum seekers, both adults and children. At Guantánamo Bay, the government didn't distinguish between juveniles and adults until years after the facility had opened, another example of a policy Gitmo brought into existence that was previously inconceivable in the US legal system. In some ways, in fact, the situation at the border may be even worse, as the detained there are kept in unsanitary conditions without sufficient access to doctors.

And here's another way the border is one-upping Guantánamo. The government was required to give the International Committee of the Red Cross access to its wartime detention facilities, so the health and medical conditions at Gitmo were monitored and kept to a relatively decent standard once those initial three months of open-air cages ended. In the border detention centres, however, tots have been left in soiled diapers, housed along with their mothers and fathers in bitterly cold, jail-like conditions, and denied adequate medical attention, including vaccines.



ABANDON HOPE: Watchtower security teams at Camp X-Ray, Guantamano Bay in 2002.

2. A new legal language for the purpose of bypassing the law:

From the very start, Guantánamo challenged the normal language of law and democracy. The detainees there could not be called ‘prisoners’ as they would then have been considered ‘prisoners of war’ and so subject to the protections of the Geneva Conventions. The cages and later prefab prison complexes (transported from Indiana) could not be labelled ‘prisons’ for the same reason. So the government invented a new term, ‘enemy combatant’, derived from ‘unlawful enemy belligerent’, that did have legal standing. The point, of course, was to create a whole new legal category that, like the offshore prison itself,

The government invented a new term, ‘enemy combatant’, derived from ‘unlawful enemy belligerent’, that did have legal standing

would be immune to existing laws, American or international, pertaining to prisoners of war.

This evasion of the law has not only persisted to this day, but has crept into other areas of Washington’s foreign policy. Recently, for instance, Trump administration

lawyers invoked the term ‘enemy combatant’ to justify the drone killing of Iranian Major General Qassem Suleimani in Iraq. Meanwhile, at the border, asylum seekers have been transformed into ‘illegal immigrants’ and, on that basis, denied essential rights.

3. Legal cover: While a new language was being institutionalised, the Department of Justice offered its own version of legal cover. Its Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) was enlisted to provide often-secret legal justifications for the policies underlying what was then being called the Global War on Terror. The OLC would, in fact, devise farfetched rationales for many

previously outlawed policies of that war, most notoriously the CIA's torture and interrogation programs whose 'enhanced interrogation techniques' were used at the Agency's 'black sites' (or secret prisons) around the world upon a number of high-profile detainees later sent to Guantánamo.

Before 9/11, few outsiders even knew of the existence of the Office of Legal Counsel. In the years since, however, it's become the White House's go-to department for contorted, often secret legal 'opinions' meant to justify previously questionable or unauthorised executive actions. Notoriously, OLC memos justified 'targeted killings' by drone of key figures in terror groups, including an American citizen. Recently, for instance, that office has been used to explain away a number of things, including why a sitting president cannot be indicted (*see: former special counsel Robert Mueller*) or the granting of absolute immunity to White House officials so they can defy subpoenas to testify before Congress (*see: House impeachment hearings*). And as any OLC memos can be kept secret, who's to know, for instance, whether or not similar legal memos were written to cover acts like the recent killing of Major General Suleimani?

4. The sidelining and removal of professionals: From its inception, Guantánamo's supervisors shoved aside any professionals or government officials who stood in their way. Notably, then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld appointed individuals to run Guantánamo who would report directly to him rather than through

Donald Rumsfeld effectively removed those who would contradict his orders or the policies put in place under his command

any pre-existing chain of command. In that way, he effectively removed those who would contradict his orders or the policies put in place under his command, including, for instance, that prisoners on hunger strikes should be force-fed.

In the Trump era, this dislike of professionals has spread through many agencies and departments of the government. The twist now is that those professionals are often leaving by choice. The State Department, for instance, has dwindled steadily in size since Donald Trump took office, as those disagreeing with administration policies have simply quit or retired in significant numbers. Similarly, at the Pentagon, in a steady drumbeat, officials have resigned or been fired due to policy disagreements.

5. The use of the military for detention operations: In the fall of 2002, General Tommy Franks, the head of US Central Command, complained to Rumsfeld that his troops were being wasted on detainee operations. Hundreds of prisoners had been captured in the invasion of Afghanistan that began in October 2001 and Army personnel were being asked to serve as guards in

the detention centres set up at the new American military bases in that country. Though many of those detainees would subsequently be transferred to Guantánamo, the military was not off the hook. A joint task force of all four of its branches would be deployed to Guantánamo to serve as guards for the arriving detainees. Some of them insisted that it was not a task they were prepared for, that their previous service as guards at military briggs for service personnel who had broken the law was hardly proper preparation for guarding prisoners from the battlefield. But to no avail.

Today, that military has been deployed in a similar fashion to the southern border in support of detention operations there, a steady presence of more than 5,000 troops since the early days of the Trump presidency, including active-duty military personnel and the National Guard. Under US law, the military is not authorised to carry out domestic law enforcement. A letter from 30 members of Congress to Pentagon Principal Deputy Inspector General Glenn Fine made the point: "The military should have no role in enforcing domestic law, which is why Trump's troop deployment to the southern border risks eroding the laws and norms that have kept the military and domestic law enforcement separate". Fine is now conducting a review of that deployment, but who knows when (or even if) it will see the light of day.

6. Secrecy and the withholding of information: When it came to Guantánamo, Pentagon officials discussing the number of detain-

ees there would usually offer only approximations, rather than specific numbers, just as they would generally not mention the names of the prisoners. Journalists were normally kept from the facility and photographs forbidden. Meanwhile, a blanket of secrecy shrouded the prior treatment of those detainees, many of whom had been subjected to abuse and torture at the black sites where they were held before being transported to Gitmo.

Today, on the border, the policy towards journalists, infamously dubbed ‘the enemies of the people’ by this president, has been distinctly Gitmo-ish. Information has been withheld and efforts have been made to keep both journalists and photographers from border detention camps. Journalistic Freedom of Information Act requests have often been the singular means by which the public has got some insight into government border policies. Even members of Congress have been denied access to the detention facilities, while the US Customs and Border Protection Agency has failed to keep records that would enable migrant families to reunite or let any oversight agency accurately determine the number of detainees, particularly children, being held.

In the theatre of war, similar secrecy persists. Just last month, for example, the administration refused to present Congress (no less the public) with evidence of its assertion that the Iranian major general it assassinated by drone posed an imminent threat to the United States and its interests.

7. Disregard for international law and treaties: In character-

The government has failed to keep records to enable migrant families to reunite or let anyone determine the number of detainees being held

ising the Geneva Convention as ‘quaint’ and ‘obsolete’ as part of its justification for the detention and treatment of prisoners in the war on terror, President George W. Bush’s administration began to steadily eat away at Washington’s adherence to international treaties and conventions to which it had previously been both a signatory and a principal moral force. What followed, for instance, was a contravention of the Convention Against Torture, both in the CIA’s global torture program and in Washington’s toleration of the mistreatment of detainees it rendered to other countries.

The lack of respect for treaty obligations and for the sanctity of international cooperation in matters affecting world peace, health, and harmony has only spread in these years with Trump administration decisions to withdraw from agreements and treaties of various sorts. These included: the Paris climate accord, the nuclear agreement with Iran, and Cold War-era nuclear arms treaties with Russia (the Intermediate Nuclear Forces agreement last year and, more recently, the ignoring of warnings from the Russians that there will not be sufficient time to negotiate the renewal of the essential

New Start nuclear arms limitation agreement that will lapse in 2021). As a result, the world has become a more dangerous and unpredictable place.

8. Lack of accountability: Although some of the newly legalised policies of the Bush era, including the use of torture, were ended by the Obama administration, there has been no appetite for holding government officials responsible for illegal and unconstitutional conduct. As President Obama so classically put it when it came to taking action to hold individuals accountable for the CIA’s torture programme, it was time “to look forward as opposed to looking backwards.”

Today, Donald Trump and his team expect a similar kind of Gitmo-style impunity for themselves. As he’s said many times, “I can do whatever I want as president”. The withholding of military aid to Ukraine in an attempt to get information on rival Joe Biden (and his son) is but one example of the license he’s taken. A sense of immunity from the law is deeply entrenched in this administration (as the refusal of his key officials to testify before the House of Representatives has shown).

It’s worth noting that the House impeachment of the president was a rare step forward when it comes to holding officials accountable for violations of the law in this era (though conviction in the Senate is essentially unimaginable). Whether such accountability will ever take hold in the context of global policy – in the killing of Suleimani, in the separation of children from their families

at the border, or in the context of election interference – remains to be seen. At the moment, it seems unlikely indeed. After all, we still live in the Guantánamo era.

The toll of the war on terror in terms of lives and treasure has been well documented. It has cost American taxpayers at least \$6.4-trillion (and probably far more than that), while resulting in the deaths of up to 500,000 people, nearly half of whom are estimated to have been civilians (a number that doesn't include indirect deaths from disease, starvation and other war-related causes). Meanwhile, a new Gitmo-ised narrative for the law and national security policy has come into being.

The irony is unmistakable. The Guantánamo Bay detention facility was purposely established outside

Instead of remaining an offshore anomaly, Guantánamo has moved incrementally onshore and that is undeniably its indelible legacy

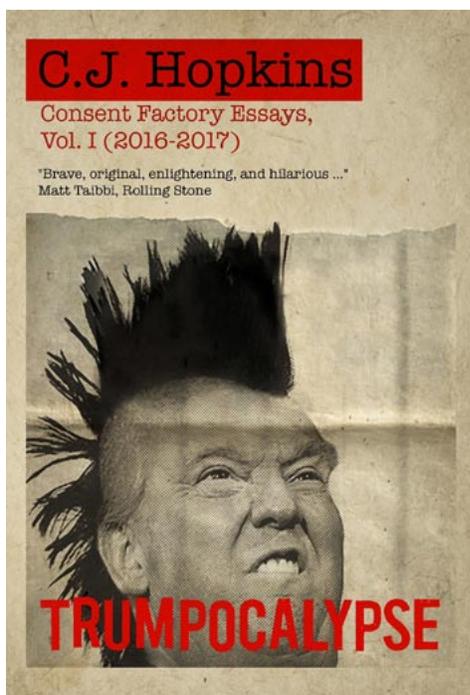
the US so that it would not be subject to the country's normal laws and policies. As many warned at the time, the notion that it would remain separate and anomalous was sure to be illusory. And indeed that has proved to be so.

Instead of remaining an offshore anomaly, Guantánamo has moved incrementally onshore and that is undeniably its indelible legacy. **CT**

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*Joshua L Dratel, a New York-based lawyer, litigates key national security cases involving terrorism, surveillance, and whistleblowers. He is a contributor to Greenberg's newest volume, *Reimagining the National Security State: Liberalism on the Brink*.*

Julia Tedesco helped with research. This article was first published at www.tomdispatch.com.



Trumpocalypse

Consent Factory Essays
Vol. 1 (2016-2017)

C.J. Hopkins

In this first collection of his Consent Factory essays, C.J. Hopkins irreverently covers the improbable rise of Donald Trump, the political dynamics that led to his presidency, and the media-generated mass hysteria that swept America during his first term in office. "Brave, original, enlightening, and hilarious" (Matt Taibbi, *Rolling Stone*), the essays in this volume capture the insanity of 2016 and 2017. Trump's candidacy, the election, the Resistance, "Putin-Nazis," neo-McCarthyism, fake news, bots, Charlottesville ... the whole mad circus unleashed by America's "insane clown president."

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MINNEAPOLIS MAN: Prince was a musical genius who owed much of his success to his home city.

■ RASHAD SHABAZZ

How Minneapolis made Prince

His musical influences were in the notes of a city born amid war, mills and migration

IT'S been four years since Prince's death, but fascination about the artist, the man and his mythology endures.

On January 28, Alicia Keys, the Foo Fighters, Usher and several of Prince's collaborators paid tribute to the late musician in a special concert, *Let's Go Crazy: The Grammy Salute to Prince*, in Los Angeles.

Prince's peers, critics and fans are often quick to cite his creativity, versatility and talent.

But, as a longtime Prince fan who's also a human geographer, I've found myself drawn to the way his hometown, Minneapolis, Minnesota, cultivated his talent.

Prince did not come of age in a vacuum. He was raised within the sonic landscape of a city that had a rich tradition of musical education, experimentation and innovation.

Long before Prince put the city on the musical map with albums such as *1999* and *Purple Rain*, local musicians were creating a

polyphonic sound that reflected the city's migration patterns – a sound influenced by economic, social and political forces. Prince inherited this musical landscape, and would go on to synthesise the sounds of the city to change the course of 20th-century pop music.

Simply put, Prince would not sound like Prince without Minneapolis.

Minneapolis's story began with a struggle over land. In 1680, European explorers came across

the only waterfall on the Mississippi River. Wanting to harness its power and settle the land around it, these pioneers began a century-long war with native Americans over control of the region. By the dawn of the 19th-century, the federal government had taken control of the area and its resources.

The municipality of St. Anthony was incorporated on the eastern side of the river in 1849. The town of Minneapolis, located on the western side of the river, was formed in 1856 and became a city in 1867. In 1872, the two cities merged.

Due to its proximity to the waterfall, Minneapolis staked its economic future on milling. At the end of the 19th-century, Minneapolis was producing more flour than any other region in the country, earning the title ‘flour-milling capital of the world’.

As the city’s industrial ambitions grew, so too did its immigrant population. Scandinavians came in waves, and more Norwegians settled in Minneapolis than in any other state in the union. They were joined by migrants from the American Northeast and South looking for work.

The rugged towns on the icy shores of the Mississippi River had become a thriving metropolis. Though mills dominated the landscape, it was music that united the city’s disparate identities and ethnicities.

The early music scene was a mix of sounds – Scandinavian folk music, Northeastern classical music and Southern hillbilly rhythms.

Church hymns, folk songs and the patriotic jingles of military and marching bands filled the streets. Glee clubs cropped up at



Albert Bierstadt’s ‘The Falls of St. Anthony.’

The early music scene was a mix of sounds – Scandinavian folk music, Northeastern classical music and Southern hillbilly rhythms

the newly founded University of Minnesota. Smaller groups, such as the Quintette Club, a four-part harmony group, sprung up. And in 1855, the Minnesota Musical Association put on the city’s first music convention.

Music could also be heard day in and day out in the bars and brothels that drew mill workers. Meanwhile, the Northeastern robber barons who owned the mills along the river built majestic music halls to resemble those in New York and Boston. The Pence opera house opened in 1869, and classical music societies, opera clubs and the first philharmonic clubs were also founded during this time. By

the 1880s, the city was regularly organising public concerts that attracted huge crowds.

Then, in 1910, the city made an important change to its public school curriculum, one that ingrained music in the city’s identity: Musical education became mandatory. All students in every school had to take and pass a music class in order to matriculate.

The superintendent of music education, Thaddeus Paul Giddings, spearheaded the effort, designing and promoting a curriculum that stressed sight reading, posture and tone. Giddings was a bold innovator: Minneapolis’s school system was the first in the nation to make music education compulsory.

To Giddings, music was not just a simple pleasure but a fundamental part of childhood development. “Music for every child and every child for music” was the mantra that guided him.

As a result, Giddings democratised music education and music performance. So successful were his methods that, according to a 1940 article in the *Minneapolis*

Star, one in every six children in the system – spanning race, class and ethnicity – played at least one instrument.

Between World War I and World War II, nearly 2-million blacks fled the South. Fleeing Jim Crow racism and lynching, they landed in cities across the Northeast, West and Midwest, including Minneapolis. Minneapolis didn't see the massive influx of black migrants that other major cities experienced, but black Southerners nonetheless had an outsized impact on the city's music scene.

Their primary contribution was the 12-bar blues, which introduced the city's white residents to the sounds and rhythms of the Mississippi Delta. The progression allows a musician to play three chords in constant rotation – the one, four and five chords – to create a steady harmony. This, in turn, creates space for solo improvisations.

These influences – combined with the city's promotion of music and emphasis on education – ensured that Prince, who was born in 1958,

Minneapolis didn't get as many black migrants as major cities, but black Southerners nonetheless had an outsized impact on the city's music scene

would be raised in one of the country's most fertile incubators for new music.

Yes, his parents were talented musicians, with his father's piano playing inspiring him from a young age. And Prince was a genius: By his mid-teens, he could play guitar, piano, drums and bass; he could hear a song and instantly play it back. But his music classes in school played a significant role in his music education. He was also surrounded by a sonic culture built on fusion, education and black styles – a scene that prized combining genres, improvisation and creating new sounds.

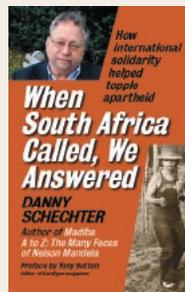
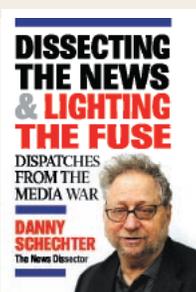
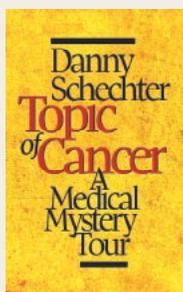
In his magnum opus, *Sign O' the Times*, Prince created a mash-up

of psychedelic-rock, gut-bucket funk and cutting-edge R&B. Like the sounds of Minneapolis, this double LP defied existing musical genres and made synthesis its raison d'être, expanding the horizon of what was possible in popular music.

We also witnessed the city's rich musical legacy in the diverse sounds that emerged alongside Prince's: Morris Day, Jimmy Jam, Terry Lewis, Hüsker Dü, The Replacements and the Suicide Commandos, to name a few.

Minneapolis gets little love whenever there's a Prince tribute. People are quick to cite his brilliance, legendary work ethic – the man didn't sleep – and virtuosity. All of which are worth noting. But in the music of Prince Rogers Nelson, the unseen notes of a city born amid war, mills and migration linger. **CT**

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■ DOUGIE WALLACE

The writing on the wall

A photographer casts his eye over the changing face of London's East End



Review by Tony Sutton

DOUIGIE Wallace is intoxicated by the rapidly changing streets of Shoreditch in the East End of London where, writes Paul Lowe in his introduction to *East Ended*, the photographer's second photobook on the area, "Every alleyway, wall and street corner, every square centimetre has been appropriated by competing visual displays overlaid on each other like millennia-old rock strata."

Wallace, who lived in East London for 20 years before gentrification squeezed him out last summer, spent seven years capturing images of the explosion of life in streets that have been in constant flux since being virtually flattened by German bombs during the London Blitz during the early part of World War II.

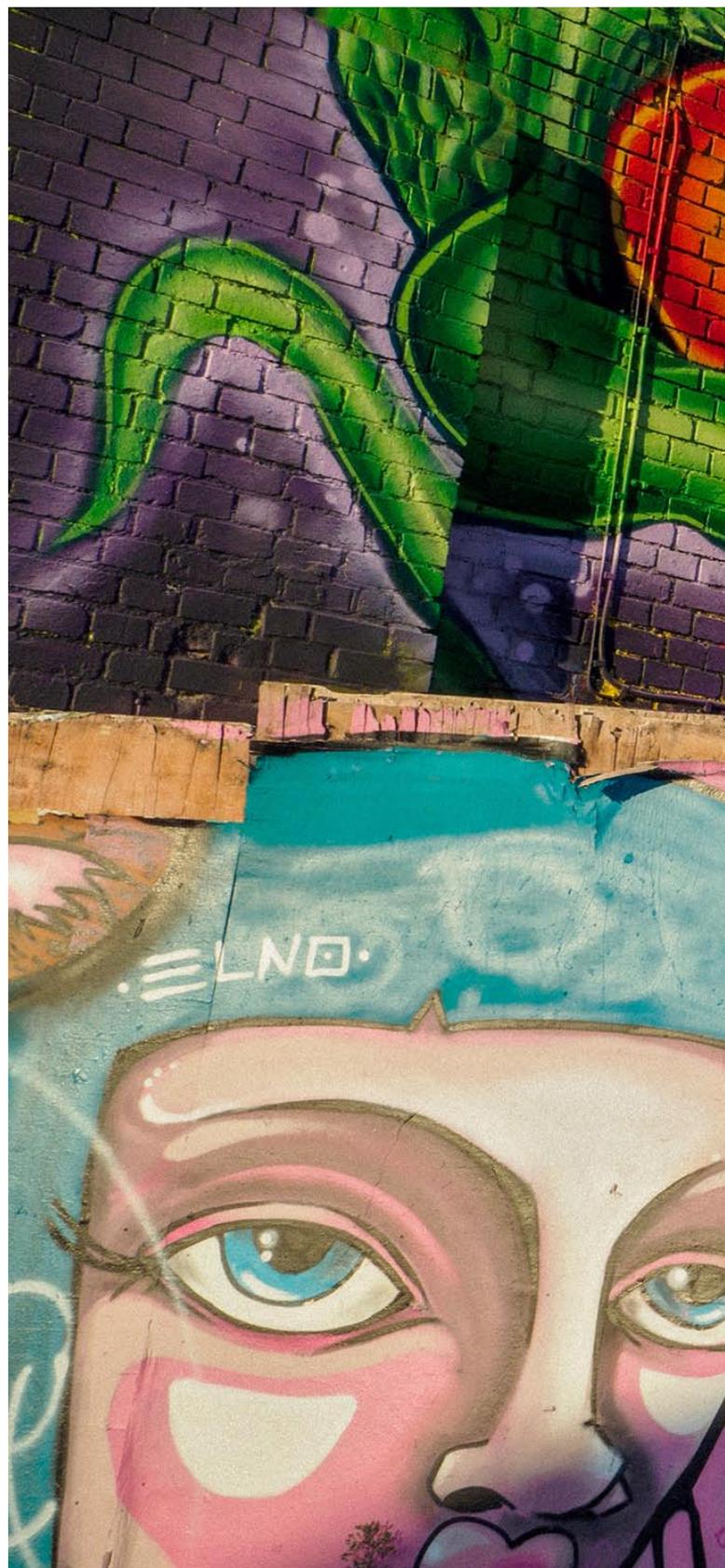
Lowe, course director of the Masters Programme in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at the London College of Communication, tells us that the streets, situated close to the heart of the UK financial establishment, became a haven for Bangladeshi migrants, who “established Brick Lane as a global byword for curry, and the street market of the same name became a fertile hunting ground both for astute bargain hunters and photographers.” Those migrants were joined by a community of artists who lived and worked in low-rent warehouses and factories. But, like Wallace, they’ve been chased away by an influx of wealthy residents attracted by the vibrant community and access to London’s financial centre.

Shoreditch Wild Life, Wallace’s first collection of photographs taken on these pulsating streets, published



in 2014, disappointed many of his fans because of its small paperback size, but the images in this new volume, which he describes as “a big, BIG, book, nearly the size of a 15 inch MacBook. Closed!” – leap from the pages in a riot of colour, glamour, and an ostentatious disregard for conformity. *East Ended's* images show how the area burst into life in a vast jumble of flaunting graffiti that adorns previously-drab walls, a vision that is accentuated by the stark contrasts in age, wealth and backgrounds of the multi-ethnic residents.

The graffiti – formerly a sign of decay – provided the spark for the area’s renaissance as a trendy hot-spot. “but it’s becoming a barometer of gentrification”, says Wallace. “What used to be big-bristled letters daubed in white paint on walls in no-go areas starkly









proclaiming SKINS, PIGS, NF and so on, was renamed ‘street art’ and appropriated by Gucci, Burberry, Absolut Vodka, and other high-end advertisers. It’s been East Ended!” Gentrification, he says, “has driven out the communities that gave it life, and now Shoreditch is becoming just another ho-hum tourist destination”.

What next? Despite his scepticism, Wallace isn’t finished with the East End, and is working on two more projects in the area. “The first”, he says, “is titled *Have I Got Views For You*, and is a spin-off, featuring political posters. It should be finished in a year or five!” And he’s just started work on *The Leicester Squareification of Shoreditch*, for which he’s changing his shooting style. Previously, he used multiple flashes attached to his camera: “Two flashguns on the top and bottom of the camera ... from the 80’s, those guns. Now the area’s like the West End at night, so I’m shooting in low light, no flash.” **CT**

Tony Sutton is the editor of ColdType.



EAST ENDED

Dougie Wallace

Published by
Dewi Lewis Publishing
www.dewilewispublishing.com

UK: £35 – US: \$49

● Wallace has a new show at Gallery46 in Whitechapel, London. See the gallery's website – www.gallery46.co.uk – for details

The war in Libya will never end

NATO war turned it into a battlefield of other people's ambitions, reducing Libya to a chessboard for a multidimensional game that is hard to explain and even harder to end

GENERAL Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA) continue to partly encircle Libya's capital, Tripoli. Not only does the LNA threaten Tripoli, but it is within striking distance of Libya's third-largest city, Misrata. Both Tripoli and Misrata are in the hands of the Government of National Accord (GNA), which is backed by the United Nations and – most strongly – by Turkey.

The second-largest city, Benghazi, is in the hands of Haftar's LNA. Haftar's LNA is backed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Russia. There has always been a whiff of suspicion that Haftar himself is an old CIA asset – having lived under the shadow of the CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, for decades. What the NATO war on Libya did to that country is to turn it into a battlefield of other people's ambitions, to reduce Libya to a chessboard for a multidimensional game that is hard to explain and even harder to end.

On January 19, the UN and German government held a conference in Berlin on the Libyan question. Curiously, the two belligerent par-

ties from Libya were in Berlin but did not attend the conference. General Haftar of the LNA and Faye Serraj of the GNA stayed in their hotels to be briefed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the UN representative on Libya Ghasan Salamé. In 2012, the UN said that no conference should be held that is not 'inclusive' and does not have the stakeholders at the table. The point of this exercise was not so much to create a deal within Libya to stop the import of arms and logistics into Libya.

"We commit to refraining from interference in the armed conflict or in the internal affairs of Libya", agreed the external parties, "and urge all international actors to do the same."

External backers of each of the sides – Egypt, France, Russia, Turkey, the United States – were all signatories of this agreement. You can imagine that none of them will take it seriously. Merkel hastened to Istanbul after the Berlin conference to solidify the pact she has made with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who then flew to Algeria to say that he would not appreciate external interven-

tion into Libya. It is not Erdoğan alone who sounded bewildering – all the other leaders who came to Berlin made similar remarks. You stay out of Libya, they said, but we will have to be involved in any way we think appropriate.

The UN released a statement recently with a clear indication that the deal is not worth its paper. "Over the last ten days," the UN notes, "numerous cargo and other flights have been observed landing at Libyan airports in the western and eastern parts of the country providing the parties with advanced weapons, armoured vehicles, advisers and fighters." It does not name the countries that continue to violate the embargo, but everyone knows who they are.

Emboldened by his backers, Haftar's forces tested the GNA and its assorted militia groups in the outskirts of Misrata over the past few days. The LNA had taken up positions in al-Wishka, but they made a foray into Abu Grein, which is on the road to Misrata. The ceasefire that was supposed to be honoured was violated, as the

GNA Army's spokesperson Mohammed Gununu said on Jan 26. Haftar's spokesperson Ahmed al-Mismari said there is no political solution for Libya; the only solution is through "rifles and ammunition." It is a clear statement that this war is not going to be ended at the UN or in Berlin. It will have to end in Misrata and in Tripoli.

Several years ago, when it became clear that Libyans who were close to the Muslim Brotherhood might come to power, Saudi Arabia went to work against them. The Saudis have made it clear that they will not tolerate any more Muslim Brotherhood forces coming to power in North Africa or West Asia.

The Saudi embargo on Qatar, the Saudi interference in Tunisia, the Saudi intervention in Egypt to remove the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi, and now the Saudi backing of Haftar provides a clear indication of the Saudi intention to rid the region of the Brotherhood, of whom Turkey and Qatar have been the main sponsors. Saudi Arabia has dented Qatar's ambition, but it has not been able to tether Turkey. The war in Libya is – apart from the clueless intervention of the Europeans – a war between Saudi Arabia and Turkey, with Russia playing a curious role between these powers.

Neither Saudi Arabia nor Turkey will relinquish their backing of the LNA and the GNA, respectively. No one makes any public noises about this, although everyone knows that it is these powers that have been behind this horrendous new phase of the conflict since NATO entered Libya in 2011 and sent the country into a situation of permanent war. The UN has done the calculations. Since April, in

Tripoli alone there are 220 schools closed and at least 116,000 children with no education. Schools, universities, hospitals are all working on reduced hours or closed.

Haftar made his move on Tripoli in April 2019. He felt he had the backing of the most important powers, and had already taken charge of several oil fields and squeezed the Tripoli government. His rush to Tripoli was dramatic in the first few weeks, then stalled in the outskirts of the capital.

On January 19, the LNA and its allies seized the Sharara and El Feel oil fields; both of which produce a third of Libya's oil, production of which has fallen to less than 300,000 barrels per day from more than a million barrels per day. The Libyan National Oil Company, controlled by the government in Tripoli, has now forced an embargo on oil exports from Libya. This is a blow to Europe, which relies on the sweet Libyan oil as much as it has relied upon Iranian and Russian energy sources – both blocked by US-driven sanctions.

Europe wants the oil but does not want the refugees. A UN report was recently released on the LNA's bombardment of a refugee detention centre in Tajoura on July 2, 2019. That attack, by LNA aircraft, killed 53 migrants and refugees who had come from Algeria, Chad, Bangladesh, Morocco, Niger, and Tunisia. After the jet dropped its bombs on the Daman complex, there were "bodies everywhere, and body parts sticking out from under the rubble. Blood [was] all around". The migrants and refugees who survived remained in the complex. Four days later, they

went on hunger strike. There have been several murders since July 2019, mainly of refugees shot by guards as they tried to leave the various detention centres that sit along the Libyan coastline and in Tripoli. There is no proper account of the total number of refugees and migrants in detention. The European Union (EU) has been paying the Tripoli government and militia groups to hold these refugees and migrants in Libya rather than let them travel across the Mediterranean Sea.

Europe has taken no responsibility for its role in the NATO war in 2011, which destabilised Libya; it has, instead, militarised the refugee crisis in Libya by using the militias. Operation Sophia of the EU brought European ships into the Mediterranean Sea to stop oil and refugee smuggling from Libya to Europe; there is now interest in restarting this policy.

In Berlin, the EU's High Representative Josep Borrell told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that "Libya is a cancer whose metastases have spread across the entire region." This is the attitude of Europe: how to contain the crisis and let it remain within the Libyan borders. It is a shocking statement.

Libya today is a people abandoned to this war that will never end, a people buried in oil and fear, a people in search of the home that has been taken from them. **CT**

Vijay Prashad's most recent book is No Free Left: The Futures of Indian Communism (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2015). This article was produced by Globetrotter, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Dead President Walking

The CIA would never assassinate a president, especially not one they had been telling everyone is a ‘Russian asset’, and ‘literally Hitler’, and a ‘traitor’, and a ‘dictator’, for more than three years ... They’re a notorious bunch of jokesters, these CIA guys

NEVER thought I’d hear myself say this, but I’m a little worried about Donald Trump. I’m worried he may be on the verge of a sudden, major heart attack, or a stroke, or a fatal golfing accident.

Food poisoning is another possibility. Or he could overdose on prescription medication. A tanning bed mishap is not out of the question. He could accidentally hang himself during autoerotic asphyxiation, or get shot by a lone-wolf white supremacist terrorist trying to start the RaHoWa (*Racial Holy War –Ed*). The Russians could spray him with that Novichok perfume.

There are any number of ways he could snuff it.

I don’t mean to sound alarmist, but the Resistance is running out of non-lethal options for removing Donald Trump from office. Here they are, in no particular order ...

Resistance Non-Lethal Option 1

Winning the 2020 election, which isn’t looking very promising. The Democratic Party is in shambles. According to the polls, their current front-runner is a senile, hair-sniffing, finger-sucking freak who

never met a credit card company or a healthcare lobbyist he didn’t like, and who rivals even Donald Trump when it comes to incoherent babbling.

Yes, that’s right, folks, it’s ‘Smilin’ Joe’ Biden, vanquisher of the razor-wielding, swimming-pool-gangster ‘Corn Pop’ to the rescue! As far as I’ve been able to gather, the plan is for Joe to out-crazy Trump (and thus win back the ‘bull goose loony’ demographic) by going completely off his medication and having a series of scary-looking *petit mal* seizures on national television.

That is, unless the impossible happens, and Biden is vanquished by Bernie Sanders (aka ‘The Magic Socialist’), who Democratic Party bigwigs would sooner publicly immolate themselves than nominate, and who the corporate media are already accusing of being a lying, sexist, communist, crypto-Trump-loving, Jew-hating Jew.

Sanders, it seems, has gone totally ‘native’. He’s out there, in the heart of the American darkness, like a geriatric Colonel Kurz, operating without any decent restraint, totally beyond the pale of any ac-

ceptable human conduct. According to the latest reconnaissance, he is building another ‘revolutionary’ army of fanatical, doped-up, hacky-sacking ‘socialists’ that he will lead into the convention in July and deliver to Biden, or Elizabeth Warren, or whichever soulless corporate puppet the party honchos eventually nominate, and then obsequiously stump for them for the next five months. (Or, who knows, maybe Michael Bloomberg will put the Democrats out of their misery and just buy the party and nominate himself.)

The ‘Crush Bernie’ movement is just getting started, but you can tell the Resistance isn’t screwing around. Hillary Clinton just officially launched her national ‘Nobody Likes Bernie’ campaign at the star-studded 2020 Sundance Film Festival. Influential Jewish journalists such as Bari Weiss and Jeffrey Goldberg, and Ronald Lauder’s newly-founded Anti-Semitism Accountability Project, have been Hitlerising him, or, rather, Corbynising him. Obama has promised to ‘stop him’, if necessary. MSNBC anchor Joy Reid brought on a professional ‘body language



expert' to phrenologise Sanders 'live' on the air ... and, as I said, they're just getting started.

In any event, no matter who they nominate, they have no chance of winning in November. How could they, given the total stranglehold the Russians now have on American democracy? As Adam Schiff just reminded everyone, unless Donald Trump is removed from office, "we cannot be assured that the vote will be fairly won", because at any moment Putin could order Trump to pressure the Ukrainian president into investigating Biden's son's

corruption by refusing to fund the Ukrainian military's resistance to Putin's secret plot to occupy the entire Ukraine and use it as a covert base from which to launch an all-out thermonuclear war against the United States (which Putin already controls through his puppet, Trump, and his network of nefarious Facebook bots, which, according to this expert on NPR, are already brainwashing gullible Black people into voting for Bernie Sanders this time, or at least refusing to vote for Biden, like they refused to vote for Hillary last time ... which, OK,

I know, that sounds kind of racist, but we're talking NPR here, folks. These people aren't racists. They're liberals!)

OK, I got a little lost there ... the point is, if the election goes ahead, and Trump doesn't have an embolism or something, odds are, we're looking at four more years of Putin-Nazi occupation. Which brings us to ...

Non-Lethal Option 2

This is, of course, the current impeachment circus. I don't even know where to start with this one.

After three-and-a-half years of corporate-media-manufactured mass hysteria and Intelligence Community propaganda designed to convince the American public that Donald Trump is a 'Russian asset' (and possibly Putin's homosexual lover) and also literally the Resurrection of Hitler, the Democrats are trying to impeach the man for something that most Americans either (a) believe is common practice among members of the political class, (b) don't entirely understand, or (c) do, but don't give a shit about.

Seriously, it's like they held a contest to see if anyone could think of something that would out-anticlimax the Mueller report, and this is what the winner came up with ... an over-acted, sanctimonious snooze-fest, the stakes of which could not possibly be lower. Sure, the corporate media are doing their best to cover every twist and turn of the "drama" as if the fate of democracy were hanging in the balance, but everybody knows it's a joke ... or, all right, almost everybody.

So we're down to ...

Non-Lethal Option 3

The intention here is to whip up so much mass hysteria over ‘white supremacist terrorism’, ‘the sudden resurgence of anti-Semitism’, ‘the imminent Putin-Nazi Apocalypse’ (which has been imminent since the summer of 2016), and other iterations of Hitler hysteria, that people can’t really even think anymore, and will join the Resistance and pour into the streets in their millions and demand Trump resign. The Resistance has been at this for over three years now, ie, casting the neo-Nazi subculture that has always been part of the political landscape as a powerful, worldwide fascist movement that is going to rise up any minute and Hitlerise the entire Western world.

It isn’t working. People aren’t buying it. OK, sure, some liberals are still buying it. But most people aren’t, not anymore. For example, the hysteria leading up to the recent gun rights rally in Richmond, which according to the corporate media had been infiltrated by ‘Nazi terrorists’ who were plotting to publicly mass murder each other in a desperate attempt to finally launch the ‘Boogaloo’, or the ‘RaHoWa’ ... or whatever.

Apparently, a few days before the rally, the FBI got some neo-Nazis to agree to conspire to murder some people and then violently overthrow the US government with their arsenal of homemade machine guns. These neo-Nazi masterminds were allegedly members of ‘the Base’, ie, one of these little neo-Nazi clubs that we’re all supposed to live in mortal fear of now ... this one, as it turns out, run by a former (and possibly current) ‘security contractor.’

No Boogaloo. No bloodbath. No Putin-Nazi Apocalypse. Just a lot of gun owners and militia types parading around with their guns and gear

The governor declared a state of emergency. Anti-Terror forces were put on alert. A ‘no-fly zone’ was implemented, presumably to prevent the Russians from dropping a division of Putin-Nazi paratroopers onto the lawn of the Capitol. The corporate media warned that it was probably going to be a bloodbath.

Well, the day came and went, and no Boogaloo. No bloodbath. No Putin-Nazi Apocalypse. Just a lot of gun owners and militia types parading around with their guns and gear. Antifa didn’t even show up this time ... or, rather, the few ‘anti-fascists’ that did were also armed and supporting the rally.

And that’s the problem with Non-Lethal Option No. 3 ... there are only so many times you can have the corporate media scream, ‘THE NAZIS ARE COMING!’ and then not produce any actual Nazis. The Resistance has exceeded that allotment.

Which brings me back to where I started, and my concerns about Donald Trump, and his health, and the assorted tragic accidents that could befall him before we get to November. Because, unless you believe that the Intelligence Community (and the transnational empire it is part and parcel of) is pre-

pared to sit by and allow Donald Trump to serve another four years as president ... well, I wouldn’t be sharing any Diet Cokes or riding in any motorcades with him.

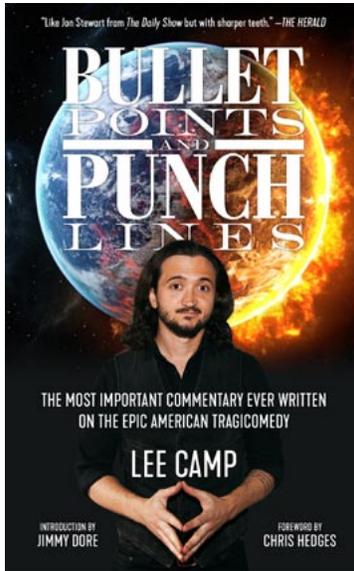
I don’t know, maybe I’ve been reading too much of that “conspiracy theory” stuff on the Internet, but Senator Schumer’s warning to Trump back in 2017 keeps playing in my head: “Let me tell you, you take on the intelligence community, they have six ways from Sunday at getting back at you.”

Relax, folks. I’m just kidding, of course. The Intelligence Community would never dream of doing anything ... you know, illegal. The community doesn’t assassinate people, and commit all sorts of other atrocities. That’s just a thing they do in the movies. In reality, they would never assassinate a president, especially not one they had been telling everyone is a ‘Russian asset’, and ‘literally Hitler’, and a ‘traitor’, and a ‘dictator’, for more than three years.

OK, those are pretty harsh words, but they probably don’t really mean all that stuff. Odds are, they’re just horsing around. They’re a notorious bunch of jokesters, those CIA guys. **CT**

CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing and Broadway Play Publishing, Inc. His dystopian novel, Zone 23, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. Volume I of his Consent Factory Essays is published by Consent Factory Publishing. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or consentfactory.org.

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■ JONATHAN COOK

The Holocaust, the BBC and antisemitism smears

Reporter's mistake was to hint at European white racism that not only fuelled the Holocaust but also sponsored the stealing of the Palestinians' homeland for a Jewish state

SENIOR BBC news reporter Orla Guerin has found herself in hot water of an increasingly familiar kind. During a report on preparations for the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp, she made a brief reference to Israel and an even briefer reference to the Palestinians. Her reporting coincided with Israel hosting world leaders at Yad Vashem, its Holocaust remembrance centre in Jerusalem.

Here is what Guerin said over footage of Yad Vashem: "In Yad Vashem's Hall of Names, images of the dead. Young [Israeli] soldiers troop in to share in the binding tragedy of the Jewish people. The state of Israel is now a regional power. For decades, it has occupied Palestinian territories. But some here will always see their nation through the prism of persecution and survival."

British Jewish community leaders and former BBC executives leapt on her 'offensive' remarks, even accusing her of antisemitism. Guerin had dared, unlike any of her colleagues in



Photo: YouTube screenshot

OFFENSIVE REMARKS? – The BBC's Orla Guerin 'dared to allude to the price inflicted on the Palestinian people.'

the western media, to allude to the terrible price inflicted on the Palestinian people by the west's decision to help the Zionist movement create a Jewish state shortly after the Holocaust. The Palestinians were dispossessed of their homeland as apparent compensation – at least for those Jews who became citizens of

Israel – for Europe's genocidal crimes.

Guerin's was a very meek – bland even – reference to the predicament of the Palestinians after Europe's sponsorship, from the 1917 Balfour Declaration onwards, of a Jewish state on their homeland. There was no mention of the Palestinians' undoubted suffering over many decades or of Israel's documented war crimes against the Palestinians. All that Guerin referred to was an indisputable occupation that followed, and one could argue was a legacy of, Israel's creation.

In fact, as we shall see in a moment, Israel's establishment is today invariably and necessarily justified by antisemitism and its ultimate, horrifying expression in the Holocaust. The two are now inextricably intertwined. So Guerin's linking of these two events is not only legitimate, it is required in any proper analysis of the consequences of the Holocaust and of European racism.

In fact, the furore among Jewish groups in Britain seems all the more perverse given that the Israeli media have extensively re-



ported on Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's explicit efforts to weaponise the current Holocaust commemorations to harm the Palestinians.

He hopes to leverage sympathy over the Holocaust to win assistance from western capitals in bullying the International Criminal Court in the Hague into denying that it has any jurisdiction over the Palestinian territories Israel is occupying. That would prevent the court from enforcing international law by investigating war crimes perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinians. (In fact, aware of the diplomatic stakes, the ICC's prosecutors have so far shown zero appetite for pursuing those investigations.)

This extract from a commentary by noted Israeli human rights activist Hagai El-Ad, published in the liberal Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*

By not entirely airbrushing the Palestinians from European post-Holocaust history, Guerin stood isolated and exposed

(Israel's version of the *New York Times*), gives a proper sense of how inadequate was Guerin's solitary reference to the Palestinians – and how her colleagues are actually complicit through their silence in allowing Israel to weaponise antisemitism and the Holocaust to oppress Palestinians:

“How dehumanizing [of Netanyahu and the Israeli government], to insist on denying a people's last recourse to even an uncertain,

belated, modicum of justice [at the ICC]. How degrading to do so while standing on the shoulders of Holocaust survivors, insisting that this is somehow being carried out in their name. ...

“It remains in our hands to decide if the past's painful lessons will be allowed to be turned on their head in order to further oppression – or remain loyal to a vision of freedom and dignity, justice and rights, for all.”

By not echoing the rest of the western media in entirely airbrushing the Palestinians out of Europe's post-Holocaust history, Guerin stood isolated and exposed. None of her colleagues – supposedly fearless, muckraking journalists – appear willing to come to her aid. She has been made a scapegoat, a sacrificial victim – one that will serve as a future reminder to her colleagues of what they are per-

mitted to mention, which parts of Europe's history they may examine and which parts must remain forever in the shadows.

Guerin's comment was denounced as 'offensive' by her former boss, Danny Cohen, who was previously the director of BBC television. No one, of course, cares that the Palestinians' experience of being wiped out of recent European history and its legacy in the Middle East is deeply offensive. The Palestinians are what historian Mark Curtis refers to as 'Unpeople'.

What he and others meant by 'offensive' was made explicit by the Campaign Against Antisemitism (CAA), which argued that Guerin's statement was antisemitic.

The CAA is one of the groups that, using similarly twisted logic, led the attacks on the British Labour party over claims of antisemitism in its ranks under leader Jeremy Corbyn. It helped to foist a highly problematic new definition of antisemitism on the party that downgrades concerns about racism directed at Jews to prioritise a supposedly bigger crime: criticism of Israel. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition offers 11 examples of antisemitism, seven of which refer to Israel rather than Jews.

Preposterously, the CAA alleged that Guerin had violated one of these examples. It said her report had included "drawing comparisons between Israeli policy and the Nazis". Very clearly, she had done no such thing.

The most that could be inferred from Guerin's extremely vague, overly cautious remark

At no point did Guerin make a comparison between the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust and the suffering of Palestinians

was two things. First, that Israel justifies the need for a Jewish state on the threat to Jews posed by antisemitism (as evidenced by the Holocaust). And second, that the resulting state of Israel has inflicted a very high price on the Palestinians, who had to be displaced from their homeland to make that state achievable. At no point did Guerin make a comparison between the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust and the suffering of Palestinians.

She simply, and rightly, hinted at a chain of related events: European racism towards Jews culminated in the Holocaust; the Holocaust was used by the Zionist movement to justify European sponsorship of a Jewish state on the ruins of Palestine; Palestinians and their supporters feel aggrieved that the Holocaust has become a pretext for ignoring their plight and suppressing criticism of Israel. Each of those links is irrefutably true. And unless the truth is now antisemitic – and there is mounting evidence that it is being made so by Israel, its lobbyists and western governments – what Guerin said was not conceivably antisemitic.

It may seem obvious why Israel and its lobbyists would want to silence criticism, or even a basic historical understanding, of the

context and consequences of Israel's founding. But why are western officials evidently so keen to aid Israel in this project of erasing the historical record?

Israel could never have been established without the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland and the destruction of hundreds of their villages to prevent any return. That is why a growing number of historians have risked the wrath of the Israel lobby to declare these events ethnic cleansing – in other words, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Let us note that the circumstances in which Israel was created were not exceptional – at least, from the point of view of recent western history. In fact, Israel is an example of a typical settler colonial state. In other words, its creation depended on the replacement of the native population by a group of settlers, just as occurred when Europeans founded colonies in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

The difficulty for Israel and its western allies has been that Israel's crimes are being committed in the modern era, at a time when the west has claimed to have learnt the lessons both of its colonial past and of the Second World War. In the post-war period the west promised to change its ways, with a new commitment to international law and the recognition of human rights.

The shameful irony about the west's complicity in Israel's creation is that Israel could only have been established through the dispossession and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people. Those outrages occurred in the very same

year that, via the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, western states pledged to create a different, better world.

In other words, Israel was launched as an old-style western colonial project at the very moment when the western powers promised to decolonise, giving their colonies independence. Israel was embarrassing proof of the west's hypocrisy in promising to break with its colonial past. It was evidence of bad faith from the outset. The west used Israel to outsource its colonialism, to bypass the new limitations it claimed to have imposed on itself.

So committed were the western powers to Israel's success that France and Britain helped it from the late 1950s to build a nuclear arsenal – the only one in the Middle East – in violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Predictably, that further destabilised an already highly volatile region as other states, especially Iraq and Iran, considered trying to level the playing field by developing their own nuclear weapons.

In another sign of the west's commitment to this colonial spin-off was its determination to turn a blind eye in 1967 to Israel's greedy expansion of its borders in conquering the rest of historic Palestine. For more than half a century Israel has been given free rein to entrench its occupation and to build settlements in violation of international law. All these decades later the International Criminal Court is still dragging its heels – indefinitely, it seems – rather than prosecute Israel for settlements that are irrefutably a war crime. And more than 50 years on, Europe continues to subsidise the

Much teaching in Israel depends on unspoken, unexamined claims in the Bible that Jews have a superior right to the land than Palestinians

settlements through trade agreements and a refusal even to label settlement products.

Rather than account for these outrageous violations of an international order the west founded, Israel's allies have helped to obscure or pervert this real history. Israel has developed a whole industry, *hasbara*, to try to prevent outsiders from grasping what has happened since 1948.

It is therefore important for Israel and its western allies to promote justifications for Israel's creation that appeal to emotion, not reason, as a way to dissuade observers from delving too seriously into the past. In fact, there are only three possible justifications / explanations for the transformation of what was once Palestine into Israel, a state created by and for European Jews on the ruins of Palestine. Two of these rationales play extremely poorly in the modern west.

That leaves only the third justification, as Guerin intimated in her report, and one that resonates well in an age saturated with identity politics.

The first justification says that the Zionist movement was entitled to rid Palestine of the overwhelm-

ing majority of its Palestinian natives because God promised Jews the land of Palestine thousands of years ago. This argument tells Palestinians: Your family may have lived for centuries or even millennia in Nazareth, Nablus, Bethlehem, Beersaba, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Hebron, Haifa but that counts for nought because God told Abraham the land belonged to the Jews.

Let us not discount the continuing power of this argument. It was what inspired the 19th-century, apocalyptic movement of Christian Zionism – a longing for the 'restoration' of Jews to the Promised Land to bring about an end-times in which only true Christians would be saved.

Later, Christian Zionism was repurposed and adopted by small numbers of influential Jews like Theodor Herzl who realised they needed the support of Christian Zionist elites if they were ever to build a Jewish state. They finally found a sponsor in colonial Britain. In part, it was an appetite for Biblical prophecy that guided the British cabinet in approving the Balfour Declaration.

Today, much teaching in Israel depends on unspoken, unexamined claims in the Bible that Jews have a superior right to the land than Palestinians. Nonetheless, Israeli officials know that nowadays Biblical arguments hold little sway in much of the west. Outside Israel such claims play well only with evangelicals, mostly in the US, and have therefore been deployed selectively, targeted chiefly at US President Donald Trump's base. For the rest of us, the Biblical rationale is quietly set aside.

The second justification, frequently resorted to in the early

years of the Zionist project, was a fully fledged colonial one, and closely tied to ideas about a superior Judeo-Christian civilisation.

Colonialism assumed that white westerners were a biologically separate race that had to assume responsibility for taming and civilising the savage nature of inferior peoples around the planet. These inferior beings were treated like children – seen as impulsive, backward, even self-destructive. They needed a role model in the white man whose job was to discipline them, re-educate them and impose order. The white man was compensated for the heavy burden he had to shoulder by awarding himself the right to plunder the savage people's resources. In any case, it was assumed, these barbarians were incapable of managing their affairs or putting their own resources to any good use.

If all this sounds improbably racist, remember that Trump right now is proposing a variation of the same idea: Mexicans must pay for the wall that keeps them out of a white America, even as US corporations continue to exploit cheap Mexican labour; and ungrateful Iraqis are threatened with being made to pay for the soldiers that invaded their country and the US military bases that oversee their occupation.

Liberals are no less averse to colonial ideas. The white man's burden underpins the 'humanitarian intervention' project and the related, endless 'war on terror'. It has been easy to paint other states and their peoples negatively as they continue to reel from centuries of colonial interference – the theft of resources, the imposition of artificial borders that stoke

If all this sounds improbably racist, remember that Trump right now is proposing a variation of the same idea

internal, tribal conflict, and western support for local dictators and strongmen.

Developing states have also struggled to prosper in a world dominated by western colonial institutions, whether NATO, the World Bank, the IMF or the UN Security Council. Doomed to failure by the very rules rigged to ensure the western powers alone prosper, developing states find their dysfunctional or authoritarian politics turned against them, used to justify continuing invasion, plunder and control of their resources by the west.

Whatever Zionism claims, Israel was not an antidote to this 'white man's burden' ideology. It was an extension of it. Much of Europe may have been deeply racist towards Jews, but Europe's Jews were usually viewed as higher in the racial hierarchy than black, brown or yellow people. Typically Jews were despised or feared by antisemites not because they were seen as backward or primitive but because they were presented as too clever, or as manipulative, secretive and untrustworthy.

The Zionist movement sought to exploit this racism. Its founders, white European Jews, impressed

on potential sponsors their ability to help colonise the Middle East on behalf of the European powers. After the Balfour Declaration was issued, the British government put the Colonial Office in charge of shaping a Jewish 'home' in Palestine.

An indication of the degree to which European ideas of racial categories polluted the thinking of the early Zionist movement can be gauged by the treatment of the Mizrahim – Jews from neighbouring Arab states who arrived in the wake of Israel's creation.

The Ashkenazi (European) Jews who founded Israel had no interest in these Jews until the destruction of large parts of European Jewry in the Nazi death camps. Then the Mizrahim were needed to bolster Jewish demographic numbers against the Palestinians. Founding father David Ben Gurion was disparaging of the Mizrahim, terming them 'human dust'. There were vigorous debates inside the Israeli army about whether the supposedly inferior, backward Arab Jews could ever have their savage natures tamed sufficiently to serve usefully as soldiers.

Israel launched an aggressive campaign to de-Arabise the children of these Jews – so successfully that today, even though Mizrahim constitute half of Israel's Jewish population, less than 1 per cent of Israeli Jews can read a book in Arabic. So complete has their re-education been that Mizrahi supporters of the Beitar Jerusalem football club lead chants of 'Death to the Arabs' at the ground, apparently unaware that their grandparents were Arab in every sense of the word.

Again, Israel and its western al-

lies understand that few observers will accept overtly colonial-style justifications for Israel's creation, except of the vague, war-on-terror kind. Such arguments run counter to the spirit of the times. Nowadays western elites prefer to pay lip service to identity politics, intersectionality, native rights – at least if they can be used to provide cover for white privilege and to disrupt class solidarity.

Israel has proven particularly adept at inverting and weaponising this form of identity politics. Now deprived of traditional Biblical and colonial rationales, Israel has been left with only one palatable argument to justify its crimes against Palestinians. A Jewish state is supposedly needed as inoculation against a global plague of antisemitism. Israel, it claims, is a vital sanctuary to protect Jews from inevitable future Holocausts.

Palestinians are not just collateral damage of the European project to create a Jewish 'home'. They are also presented as a new breed of antisemite – their anger supposedly driven by irrational, inexplicable hatred – that Jews need protecting from. In Israel, roles of oppressor and victim have been reversed.

Israel is only too keen to extend the accusation of antisemitism to any western critic who champions the Palestinian cause. In fact, it has gone much further. It argues that, whether consciously or not, all non-Jews harbour the virus of antisemitism. Other Holocausts have been averted only because nuclear-armed Israel behaves like "a mad dog, too dangerous to bother", as Israel's most famous mili-



Photo: Sophie Brown / Wikipedia.org

ATTACKED: Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party leader, was accused of being an antisemite before the UK election.

tary chief of staff, Moshe Dayan, once declared. Israel is designed as a garrison state for its Jews, and an impregnable bolt-hole in time of trouble for any Jews who foolishly – Israeli leaders imply – have not understood that they face another Holocaust outside Israel.

This is the self-rationalising appeal of antisemitism for Israel. But it has proved the perfect weapon too for western elites who wish to besmirch their opponents' arguments, as Corbyn, Labour's outgoing leader, found to his cost. Just as the Zionist movement and its Jewish state project were once the favoured vehicle for spreading British colonial influence in the Middle East, today Israel is the favoured vehicle for impugning the motives of those who criticise western imperialism or advocate for political alternatives to capitalism, such as socialism.

Few outside Israel understand the implications of the mischievous, self-serving antisemitism rationale crafted long ago by Israel and now embraced by western officials. It assumes that antisemitism is a virus present in all non-Jews, even if often lies dormant. Non-

Jews must remain vigilant to prevent it reviving and infecting their thinking.

This was at the heart of the claims against the British Labour party. So-called 'extreme leftists' like Corbyn and his supporters, so the argument goes, were so sure of their anti-racism credentials that they dropped their guard. Largely free of a fear of immigrants and non-white populations, they mixed with British Muslims and Arabs whose attitudes and ideas were easily passed on. Arab and Muslim resentment towards Israel – again, presented as inexplicable – supposedly provided fertile soil for the growth of antisemitism on the left and in Corbyn's Labour party.

Guerin's mistake was to hint, even if briefly and vaguely, in her report at a deeper, even more discomfiting recent history of European white racism that not only fuelled the Holocaust but also sponsored the dispossession of the Palestinians of their homeland to make room for a Jewish state.

The connecting thread of that story is not antisemitism. It is white European racism. And the fact that Israel and its supporters have signed up as cheerleaders for that kind of racism makes it no less white and no less racist. **CT**

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■ GREGORY SHUPAK

America's inalienable right to violence

When pundits dusted off 13-year-old propaganda to rationalise killing Soleimani it was a clear indication that they were desperately grasping for any imperialist apologia within reach

EVEN when critical of US actions, media commentary on recent US bombings and assassinations in the Middle East is premised on the assumption that the US has the right to use violence (or the threat of it) to assert its will, anytime, anywhere. Conversely, corporate media coverage suggests that any countermeasure – such as resistance to the US presence in Iraq – is inherently illegitimate, criminal and/or terroristic.

One step in this dance is depicting US military forces in Iraq as innocent bystanders under attack by sadistic Iranian puppet masters.

Media analysis of the US murder of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani consistently asserted that he was “an architect of international terrorism responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans” (*New York Times*, 1/3/20) or “a terrorist with the blood of hundreds of Americans on his hands” (*Washington Post*, 1/7/20).

According to Leon Panetta (*Washington Post*, 1/7/20), a former Defense Secretary and

CIA director, “The death of Soleimani should not be mourned, given his responsibility for the killing of thousands of innocent people and hundreds of US military personnel over the years.”

There is little evidence for this contention that Iran in general or Soleimani personally is responsible for killing hundreds of Americans. When the State Department claimed last April that Iran was responsible for the deaths of 608 American service members in Iraq between 2003 and 2011, investigative journalist Gareth Porter (*Truthout*, 7/9/19) asked Navy Commander Sean Robertson for evidence, and Robertson “acknowledged that the Pentagon doesn’t have any study, documentation or data to provide journalists that would support such a figure.”

Porter showed that the US attribution of deaths in Iraq to Iran is an unsubstantiated government talking point from the Cheney era, one that was exposed at the time when Lt Gen Ray Odierno admitted that, though the US had attributed Iraqi resistance fighters’ weapons to Iran, US troops

found many sites in Iraq at which such weapons were being manufactured.

Scholar Stephen Zunes (*Progressive*, 1/7/20) similarly demonstrated the lack of evidence for the idea that Iran is behind the killing of US forces in Iraq. Zunes noted that the National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq, compiled by America’s 16 intelligence agencies, downplayed Iran’s role in Iraq’s violence at roughly the same time that the Bush administration was saying that Iran was culpable.

As Porter pointed out, there was a much simpler explanation for American deaths in the period: The US targeted Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army and the Mahdi Army fought back, imposing more casualties on US troops.

That the pundits dusted off 13-year-old propaganda to rationalise killing Soleimani is a clear indication that they were desperately grasping for any imperialist apologia within reach. If the American public is led to believe that Soleimani killed hundreds of Americans, large swathes of it are likely to regard his assassi-



FRIEND OR FOE? US Army soldiers patrol the region of Nowabab, Afghanistan in 2004.

nation as justified, necessary, or at worst a feature of the tit-for-tat ugliness inherent to war.

The narrative also ideologically shores up the US war on Iran in the American popular consciousness by presenting Iranians as primordially violent savages out to spill the blood of Americans, notably those in the military who are in the Middle East, presumably doing nothing but minding their own business.

Presenting Iran as the reason for attacks on US forces in Iraq also implies that Iraqis had little objection to the US invasion, legitimising the US's ongoing military presence in the country. The most obvious point about the deaths of US soldiers in Iraq is that they wouldn't happen if US soldiers

Presenting Iran as the reason for attacks on US forces in Iraq also implies that Iraqis had little objection to the US invasion

weren't there.

Another media dance move is to condemn anti-imperial violence while naturalising imperialist violence. An editorial in the *New York Times* (1/3/20) said that "Soleimani no doubt had a role in the campaign of provocations by Shiite militias against American forces in Iraq that recently led to the death of an

American defence contractor and a retaliatory American airstrike against the militia responsible for the attack."

Having US troops in Iraq, a country in which the US is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands, is not a "provocation", in the *Times'* perspective; opposition to their presence is the provocation.

The December 27 attack that killed the US contractor did not occur in a vacuum. In 2018, the US was suspected of bombing affiliates of Kataib Hezbollah, the group the US blames for killing the contractor. Israel is suspected of carrying out a string of deadly bombings of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces, of which Kataib Hezbollah is a key component, be-

tween July and September, a scenario at which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hinted.

The US reportedly confirmed that Israel was behind at least one of the bombings, and said it supports Israel's actions while denying direct participation. In any case, the US's lavish military support for Israel means that the former is effectively a party to the latter's bombing. Thus, the Kataib Hezbollah attack that killed the contractor can be seen as 'retaliatory,' which complicates the notion that the subsequent US attack was as well.

Another *Times* editorial (1/4/20) describes Soleimani as "one of the region's most powerful and, yes, blood-soaked military commanders."

At no point is Trump or any other US leader described as 'blood-soaked' or anything comparable – here, or in any of the mainstream media coverage I can find – even as he and his predecessors are sopping with that of Afghans, Iraqis, Libyans and Syrians, to cite only a few recent cases. Evidently imperial violence is so righteous it leaves no trace behind.

Stephen Hadley, national security adviser in the George W Bush administration, wrote in the *Washington Post* (1/5/20): "What is clear is that one of the PMFs, Kataib Hezbollah, has been behind the escalating violence over the past several months as part of a campaign (assuredly with Iranian approval) to force out US troops. The campaign culminated in the December 31 attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad. (The head of Kataib Hezbollah, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, was killed with Soleimani.)" By

At no point is Trump or any other US leader described as 'blood-soaked' in any of the mainstream media coverage I can find

expelling US forces, the Iraqi government would be falling into Kataib Hezbollah's trap: rewarding the militia's violent campaign, strengthening the Iranian-backed PMFs, weakening the Iraqi government and state sovereignty, and jeopardising the fight against the Islamic State.

Kataib Hezbollah's actions are called 'violence' twice in these three sentences, with their apex apparently being "the December 31 attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad". Remarkably, the author makes no mention of the December 29 US airstrikes on five sites in Iraq and Syria that the US says belong to Kataib Hezbollah, bombings that reportedly killed 25 and injured 55. Those, it would seem, do not constitute 'violence'. Iraqis damaging the embassy of the country whose economic sanctions killed half a million Iraqi children is 'violence', but the US's lethal air raids are not. And expelling foreign armies weakens state sovereignty!

Thomas Friedman's *Times* article (1/3/20) on Soleimani's murder was bad even by Thomas Friedman standards. He dismissed the protests at the US embassy: "The whole 'protest' against the

United States Embassy compound in Baghdad last week was almost certainly a Soleimani-staged operation to make it look as if Iraqis wanted America out when in fact it was the other way around. The protesters were paid pro-Iranian militiamen. No one in Baghdad was fooled by this.

"In a way, it's what got Soleimani killed. He so wanted to cover his failures in Iraq he decided to start provoking the Americans there by shelling their forces, hoping they would overreact, kill Iraqis and turn them against the United States. Trump, rather than taking the bait, killed Soleimani instead."

That there were thousands of protesters at the US embassy and that the Iraqi security forces stood aside to allow them to demonstrate suggests that what happened at the embassy cannot be reduced to a hoax stage-managed and paid for by Iran.

Furthermore, the US did kill Iraqis two days before the protests, and that's what ignited them (to say nothing of the longer term record of the US devastating Iraq). Like Hadley, however, Friedman pretends that the US's December 27 bombings didn't happen.

In the imperial imagination, the US has the right to violently pursue its objectives wherever it wants, and any resistance is illegitimate. **CT**

Gregory Shupak teaches media studies at the University of Guelph-Humber in Toronto. His book, The Wrong Story: Palestine, Israel and the Media, is published by OR Books. This article was originally published by FAIR – www.fair.org.



■ GRAHAM VANBERGEN

Boris Johnson creates film factory to rewrite Brexit history

Dan Brown, author of the *Da Vinci Code*, once wrote, “History is always written by the winners. When two cultures clash, the loser is obliterated, and the winner writes the history books – books which glorify their own cause and disparage the conquered foe. As Napoleon once said, ‘What is history, but a fable agreed upon?’”

I would like to think this was a fake news story but sadly, it is not. And so it is that history will be written by the winners and the loser will be obliterated. The clash was the 52 percent against the 48 percent.

Many of us who feel that the UK’s December election was confirmation of the collective insanity of an entire country prepared to shoot itself for an ideology that is already failing – know they have no leg to stand on. The country voted for Brexit twice. For the 48 percent, the pain of being written out of the battle for Britain’s future will be much too excruciating.

Now Boris Johnson is setting up his own film factory to present and preserve his Brexit ideology to the populace. Its purpose is to show Brexit in a positive, idealised and romanticised way. This was a battle that Boris won

in Churchillian fashion with toil, sweat and tears – it was, as we will be told, his finest hour. This is gloating on a phenomenal scale and will do nothing to unify the country.

Tim Walker at the *New European* reports of a contact from the inside this latest government propaganda exercise as saying, “The idea is to put up films online and elsewhere that show the human triumphs of Brexit and we’re now actively recruiting the best film professionals available. New cash is being made available and existing resources are being diverted from the old-fashioned media operations that churned

out press releases for the legacy publications.”

In other words, social media is to be flooded with this crap at public expense – and people will believe it.

Although his adviser Dominic Cummings will play a key role in setting up the film unit, it is very much Johnson’s brainchild. In 2018, as mayor of London, he commissioned an astonishing 168 ‘official information films’, all, needless to say, starring himself: From the banks of the Amazon to the merits of Britain’s border force.

However, serious actors and filmmakers should be wary of involving themselves in this type of propaganda as it may well come back to haunt them.

As Walker says, “I well remember interviewing the late actor Sir Anthony Quayle, and, when I asked him if he ever regretted narrating Conservative party broadcasts, he looked dolefully out of the window and brought the interview to an abrupt halt.”

The fight to stay in the European Union is now lost and Boris Johnson intends to show the world how great he is, how he brought the nation together, how he unified us all and how great Britain really is.

The worst elements of the ‘remain’ campaign will, of course, be highlighted as the foe that needed defeating in this great Brexit Battle of Britain.

What won’t be shown is the extent of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the billionaires who quietly and often illegally bankrolled the

Brexit campaign, the ongoing Russia report scandal, funding by dodgy donors, peerages for cash, the use of right-wing bully boys and sheer scale of criminality deployed.

This propaganda fest won’t tell anyone about the money-laundering bankers and hedge funds who, with the help of corrupt pollsters, defrauded the nation of the real statistics, or the lying, fake news, and distribution of misinformation by our own government.

The uncomfortable truth will be excluded and written out of

really happened.

In the meantime, the government is pressing ahead with plans for a ‘Festival of Brexit Britain’ in 2020 at a cost of £120-million. **CT**

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■ GEORGE MONBIOT

If defending life on earth is extremist, that’s what we are

It’s not an ‘error’ or an ‘accident’, as the police now claim – it’s a pattern. First, the *Guardian* revealed that counterterrorism police in south-east England have listed Extinction Rebellion (XR) and the youth climate strikes as forms of ‘ideological extremism’. Then teachers and officials around the country reported that they had been told, in briefings by the anti-radicalisation Prevent programme, to look out for people expressing support for XR and Greenpeace.

Then the *Guardian* found a guide by Counter Terrorism Policing to the signs and symbols used by various groups. Alongside terrorists and violent ex-

tremist organisations, the guide listed Greenpeace, XR, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, CND, the Socialist Party, Stop the War and other peaceful green and left organisations. Then the newspaper discovered that City of London Police had listed XR as a ‘key threat’ in its counterterrorism assessment.

There’s a long history in the UK of attempts to associate peaceful protest with extremism or terrorism. In 2008, for example, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) produced a list of ‘domestic extremists’. Among them was Dr Peter Harbour, a retired physicist and university lecturer, who had

committed the cardinal sin of marching and petitioning against an attempt by the energy company RWE npower to drain a beautiful local lake and fill it with pulverised fly ash. ACPO sought to smear peace campaigners, Greenpeace and Climate Camp with the same charge.

The police have always protected established power against those who challenge it, regardless of the nature of that challenge. And they have long sought to criminalise peaceful dissent. Part of the reason is ideological: illiberal and undemocratic attitudes infest policing in this country. Part of it is empire building: if police units can convince the government and the media of imminent threats that only they can contain, they can argue for more funding.

But there's another reason, which is arguably even more dangerous: the nexus of state and corporate power. All over the world, corporate lobbyists seek to brand opponents of their industries as extremists and terrorists, and some governments and police forces are prepared to listen. A recent article in the *Intercept* sought to discover why the US Justice Department and the FBI had put much more effort into chasing mythical 'ecoterrorists' than pursuing real, far-right terrorism. A former official explained, "you don't have a bunch of companies coming forward saying, 'I wish you'd do something about these right-wing extremists.'" By contrast, there is constant corporate pressure to 'do something' about environmental campaigners and animal

rights activists.

We feel this pressure in the UK. In July last year, the lobby group Policy Exchange published a report claiming that XR is led by dangerous extremists. Policy Exchange is an opaque organisation that refuses to disclose its donors. But an investigation by *Vice* magazine revealed it has received funding from the power company Drax, the trade association Energy UK and the gas companies E.On and Cadent.

One of the two authors of the



Photo: Wikimedia

PRITI PATEL: 'Relaxed' about working with tobacco company.

Policy Exchange report, Richard Walton, is a former police commander. A report by the Independent Police Complaints Commission said he would have had a misconduct case to answer, had he not retired. The case concerned allegations about his role in the spying by undercover police on the family of the murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence. The purpose of the spying operation, according to one of the police officers involved, was to seek 'disinforma-

tion' and 'dirt' on the family, and stop their campaign for justice 'in its tracks.'

The Home Secretary, Priti Patel, has defended the inclusion of XR on the police list of extremist ideologies. But it seems to me that people like Patel and Richard Walton pose much greater threats to the nation, the state and our welfare than any green campaigners. Before she became an MP, she worked for the company Weber Shandwick, as a lobbyist for British American Tobacco. Among her tasks was to campaign against the European tobacco control directive, whose purpose was to protect public health. A BAT memo complained that the Weber Shandwick team as a whole "does not actually feel comfortable or happy working for BAT". But it was pleased to note that two of its members "seem quite relaxed working with us". One of them was Priti Patel.

In her previous government role, as secretary of state for international development, Patel held unauthorised and undisclosed meetings with Israeli officials, after which she broached the possibility of her department channelling British aid money through the Israeli army, in the occupied Golan Heights. After she was less than candid with then prime minister, Theresa May, about further undisclosed meetings, she was forced to resign. But she was reinstated, in a far more powerful role, by Boris Johnson.

Our government is helping propel us towards a catastrophe on a scale humankind has never

encountered before: the collapse of our life support systems. It does so in support of certain ideologies – consumerism, neoliberalism, capitalism – and on behalf of powerful industries. This, apparently, meets the definition of moderation.

Seeking to prevent this catastrophe is extremism. If you care about other people, you go on the list. If you couldn't give a damn about humankind and the rest of life on Earth, the police and the government will leave you alone. You might even get appointed to high office.

It is hard to think of any successful campaign for democracy, justice, or human rights that would not now be classed by police forces and the government

as an extremist ideology. Without extremists such as Emmeline Pankhurst, who maintained that “the argument of the broken window pane is the most valuable argument in modern politics”, Priti Patel would not be an MP. Only men with a certain amount of property would be permitted to vote. There would be no access to justice, no rights for workers, no defence against hunger and destitution, no weekends.

In his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, Martin Luther King, subjected to smears very similar to those now directed against XR and other environmental groups, noted, “the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be.

Will we be extremists for hate or

for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?”

Good citizens cannot meekly accept the death of the living planet, as corporations rip it apart for profit. The moderation demanded of us is, in reality, extremism: acceptance of an economic and political model driving us towards unprecedented disaster. If seeking to defend life on Earth defines us as extremists, we have no choice but to own the label. We are extremists for the extension of justice and the perpetuation of life. **CT**

George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian, where this article first appeared. His website is www.monbiot.com

Ask your smartphone how to drive from Copenhagen to Berlin and it will give you an estimate of how long the trip will take, based on current traffic. If there is a traffic jam in Hamburg, say, the extra time this traffic jam takes will be included in the estimate. But, of course, you are not at all the points of your journey now. Rather, you'll be in Copenhagen first, then at Odense, then Kolding, and so forth. By the time you get to Hamburg, there may no longer be a traffic jam. The estimate your smartphone gave you will be off. Life expectancy is calculated in much the same way.

Life expectancy in 2019 is calculated using the chances of survival for all ages in 2019: those who turned 70 in 2019, those who

Art: Pixabay.com



■ MAARTEN WENSINK

Why women live longer than men – for now

turned 69 in 2019, those who turned 71 ... you get the point. But nobody actually has all their birthdays in 2019. People have at most one birthday a year (less than one for some of those who died that year and those born on February 29). Since I turned 35 in 2019, why should the 2019 chances of survival for a 70-year-old matter to me? By the time I turn 70, the world will have changed. The estimate will be off.

But your smartphone also tells you something like “31 minutes extra travel time due to a traffic jam”. With this information, you can guess how long the trip will take assuming that the traffic jam will be resolved by the time you get there: just subtract those 31 minutes. Every part of the journey has a travelling time and

you can pick those pieces apart.

Similarly, life expectancy is built up out of many small pieces, one for each age, and demographers can pick those pieces apart. We did that to answer questions such as: “What is the part of life expectancy lived between ages 50 and 85?” (which will be a number between 0 and 35). And “suppose that in 2015 no 70-year-old died of smoking (for example through lung cancer), what would that life expectancy have been?” And “how has the importance of smoking-related deaths been changing, and was that different for men and women?”

Throw all that in the mixer and you get some interesting results, which my colleagues and I – a team from the University of Southern Denmark and University of Groningen – published in *BMC Public Health*.

We studied the part of life expectancy lived between ages 50 and 85 for high-income North America, high-income Europe and high-income Oceania for the period 1950-2015. Around 1950, males lived about two-and-a-half years less than females. Around 1980, this difference had increased to about four-and-a-half years. Then the difference in life expectancy declined to new lows of about two years in 2015.

All of that increase and subsequent decrease was due to smoking. Remove smoking and you get an almost flat line at only two years, which is what the difference in life expectancy between ages 50 and 85 would have been if

nobody had smoked.

If smoking is so bad, why are we seeing all of these early deaths? Why aren't people smarter? Well, if cigarettes killed you right away, nobody would touch them. The problem is that cigarettes do kill you – only decades later.

Because, historically, men started smoking earlier and heavier than women, any effect of smoking on life expectancy shows in males first. While medical doctors were coming to the conclusion that smoking is bad – basing their conclusions on evidence from men – women decided it was time to take up smoking. Now, decades later, the effect of smoking (death) is declining in males but still increasing for older females who smoked in the past.

This gives rise to a four-wave pattern dubbed “the smoking epidemic”: first men smoke, then

men start dying from smoking at around the same time women start smoking, then women start dying from smoking.

In the final phase of the smoking epidemic, people get smarter and stop smoking. This last part of the smoking epidemic, however, is the more difficult part. Unfortunately, people keep smoking (big tobacco is doing just fine).

But our study also showed some good news. Recently, there was a big drop in smoking-related deaths for people of around 50 years old. While smoking is certainly not down and out, at least some people seem to get that tobacco is a killer. **CT**

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■ CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

Belmarsh inmates are more ethical than western empire

In some refreshingly good news about Julian Assange, WikiLeaks is reporting that its founder has finally been moved out of solitary confinement to a different wing in Belmarsh Prison where he can have normal social interactions with 40 other inmates.

This fantastic news lifts a

huge weight from the chests of those of us who've been protesting Assange's cruel and unusual treatment at the hands of an international alliance of governments bent on making a draconian public example of a journalist whose publications exposed US war crimes.

Solitary confinement is a form

of torture, and a UN Special Rapporteur has confirmed that Assange shows clear symptoms that he is a victim of psychological torture caused by his persecution from coordinated efforts by Washington, London, Stockholm, Canberra and Quito.

So what caused this shift in Assange's treatment? Did the powerful empire-like alliance loosely centralised around the United States suddenly come to its senses and realise that torturing journalists for telling the truth is the sort of tyrannical abuse that it accuses other governments of perpetrating? Did officials in the British government bow to public pressure from the pro-Assange demonstrations which have been taking place in London month after month and have some faint flickerings of conscience? Did Belmarsh Prison authorities come to their senses after more than 100 doctors warned that their cruelty was killing the award-winning publisher?

Why no. As it turns out, Assange was rescued from the cruelty of this globe-sprawling empire by the concerted protests of high-security prison inmates.

"In a dramatic climbdown, authorities at Belmarsh Prison have moved Julian Assange from solitary confinement in the medical wing and relocated him to an area with other inmates," said WikiLeaks Ambassador Joseph Farrell. "The move is a huge victory for Assange's legal team and for campaigners who have been insisting for weeks that the

prison authorities must end the punitive treatment of Assange."

"But the decision to relocate Assange is also a massive victory of prisoners in Belmarsh," Farrell added. "A group of inmates have petitioned the prison governor on three occasions, insisting that the treatment of Assange was unjust and unfair. After meetings between prisoners, lawyers and the Belmarsh authorities, Assange was moved to a different prison wing – albeit one with only 40 inmates."



Belmarsh is a notoriously harsh maximum-security prison full of violent offenders and prisoners convicted under anti-terrorism laws, one of many reasons that Assange supporters have so vigorously opposed his confinement there. What does it tell you about the society you are living in that this population has a superior moral compass to the people who are actually running things?

For years I've been arguing with Democratic Party-aligned liberals on one side saying that Assange is a Russian agent who

deserves to be tortured, and a bunch of Trump-aligned right wingers on the other side saying their president is extraditing Assange for the good of the world. These are the two mainstream views on Assange within the western empire today. And a group of Belmarsh prisoners just proved themselves infinitely more ethical than any of them. They have a better sense of right and wrong than those running the empire, and they have a better sense of right and wrong than the propagandised apologists for that empire.

Not that this should surprise us; the US-centralised empire is spectacularly evil, and this group of Belmarsh prisoners had a unique vantage point on Assange's plight. The prisoners demonstrated their moral superiority to the mainstream public not because prison inmates are on average inherently better people than those on the outside, but because they were confronted with the reality of Assange's situation instead of mainlining mass media propaganda about Assange. They were dealing with reality rather than narrative, so they addressed that reality. And they did so admirably.

The smear campaign that has been conducted against Assange by the political/media class has distorted public perception of his plight so severely that there are far more people seeing his case through a distorted understanding than there are people who actually understand what's happening to him. We saw this illustrated very clearly when the aforementioned

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, admitted frankly that before going to investigate Assange's case for himself he'd been propagandised by this same smear campaign as well.

"When I was first approached by his defence team seeking protection from my mandate in December last year, I was reluctant to do so, because I had been affected by this prejudice that I had absorbed through all these public narratives spread in the media over the years",

Melzer told *Democracy Now* in an interview last year. "And only when I scratched the surface a little bit, I saw how little foundation there was to back this up and how much fabrication and manipulation there is in this case. So I encourage everybody to really look below the surface in this case."

Inmates of Belmarsh had a better understanding of Assange's plight because they wouldn't have been affected by these narratives. They would simply have seen what's right

in front of them, with their own eyes: a non-violent prisoner being caged in solitary confinement 23 hours a day.

You couldn't ask for a clearer example of the difference between fact and narrative than this. Whoever controls the narrative controls the world. Whoever can see beyond narrative can see the truth. We must all strive for this. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Her website is www.caitlinjohnstone.com

■ JIM HIGHTOWER

A \$500,000 gift for the rich and clueless

I'm guessing that being rich is a comfortable feeling – no money worries, you're set for life! But is it possible that being too rich can be too much, even discombobulating?

Imagine being Mark Zuckerberg, whose social media monopoly, Facebook, put another \$27.3- billion in his pocket last year. Forget fundamental questions about whether he (or anyone) is worthy of such an excessive haul of the world's wealth – how do you even spend it?

Mansions, yachts, jets, jewels, a Picasso painting, your personal island, and other trinkets would barely dent your multibillionous windfall. And since the Trumpeters drastically slashed your

taxes, far less of your extraordinarily good fortune is diverted to public need and America's common good.

Thus, the bulk of your booty goes to making you even richer.

You buy out other corporations and advanced technologies, and you dump billions into Wall Street, artificially jacking up the price of stocks you own. Your wealth expands exponentially, inequality spreads, and the egalitarian ideals that hold our huge, diverse society together are stretched to the breaking point.

Alternately, you can spend your extra wealth on... guarding your extra wealth.

Interestingly, more and more über-rich individuals are com-

prehending the ultimate consequences of such extreme selfishness – so they're responding with extreme consumerism.

Specifically, they've created a boom in the sale of maximum-security, James Bondish armoured vehicles. Priced in the half-million-dollar range, these rolling fortresses can come with 700-horsepower engines, tailpipe-to-grille anti-blast protection, door handles that can electrocute intruders, roof-mounted gun turrets, and room for 10 fully-equipped bodyguards.

With names like 'Marauder' and 'Black Shark', these armoured beasts have become the preferred ride of gajillionaires – not to flaunt their fortunes, but to fend off the masses they've ripped off. **CT**

Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, writer, and public speaker. His weekly column is distributed by www.otherwords.org

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