

ESCALATION DOMINANCE | Norman Solomon
HOW BBC DISGUISES ISRAELI WAR CRIMES | Jonathan Cook
DESPERATELY SEEKING SWIFTIE | Dougie Wallace

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Issue 262

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

October 2024



**WE'RE
GETTING
SICK OF
NOISE
POLLUTION**

STAN COX / PAGE 30



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INSIDE

INSIGHTS

- 5 15 rules for discussing Israeli warmongering
Caitlin Johnstone
- 6 Hurwitt's Eye
Mark Hurwitt
- 7 Words kill. Why Israel gets away with murder
Ramzy Baroud
- 8 Failed machismo: Israel's pager killings
Binoy Kampmark
- 10 The ghosts of Palestine haunt Kamela Harris
John Clarke
- 11 The world says Israel's occupation must end
Vijay Prashad
- 13 We Are All Fried
Greg Koenderman

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On the road to destruction – Page 38

ISSUES

- 14 Julian Assange: 'I pleaded guilty to journalism'
Laura Tiernan
- 16 BBC weaponises Lebanon reporting to help disguise Israel's war crimes
Jonathan Cook
- 22 *Born in the USA at 40*: Still one of Springsteen's most misunderstood songs
Diana Winston
- 24 Desperately seeking Swiftie
Dougie Wallace
- 30. We're getting sick of noise pollution
Stan Cox
- 35 Tireless champion of the underdog
Tony Sutton
- 38 Escalation dominance: 1,000 new holocausts
Norman Solomon
- 42 'Propaganda material will need to be disseminated'
Mark Curtis
- 44 Football: A new opiate of the masses
Indrajit Samarajiv



HERMES 900 FIELD-TESTED ON PALESTINIANS

The Hermes 900 is a lethal drone manufactured by Elbit systems and first deployed during Israel's 2014 attack on the besieged Gaza strip. Elbit supplies 85% of the drones used by the Israeli military for drone strikes and surveillance, resulting in grave human rights violations against Palestinians.

36,090
**PALESTINIANS
KILLED**

during Israel's genocide in Gaza as of May 28, 2024. The Israeli military used drones for 90% of targeted killings in Gaza in October and November 2023.

11.5%
RISE IN REVENUE

(year over year) reported by Elbit Systems for the first quarter of 2024, 6 months into the genocide in Gaza.

**TESTED
ON PALESTINIANS**

"The fact that our systems are in operational use in Israel helps us because customers prefer to get mature solutions." —Elbit Systems CEO Bez Halel Machlis, May 2024

VISUALIZING**PALESTINE**

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JUN 2024
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INSIGHTS



► CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

15 rules for discussing Israeli warmongering

Israel killed almost 500 people in a massive new onslaught in Lebanon on September 23 which saw the IDF launch more than a thousand airstrikes.

The US is once again sending additional troops to the middle east as things escalate, on the orders of god knows who because the president's brain has completely stopped functioning.

It's been a few minutes since Israel last began a new project of mass military violence, so perhaps it's time for a refresher on the official rules on how we're meant

think and talk about such matters.

Rule 1: Recorded history began on October 7 2023. Maybe some things happened before that date, but nobody can remember.

Rule 2: Anything bad that Israel does is justified by Rule 1. This is true even if it does things that would be considered completely unjustifiable if it were done by a nation like Russia or Iran.

Rule 3: Israel has a right to defend itself, but nobody else does.

Rule 4: Israel never bombs civilians, it bombs terrorists. If shocking numbers of civilians die it's because they were actually terrorists, or because terrorists killed them, or because a terrorist stood too close to them. If none of those reasons apply then it's for some other mysterious reason we are still waiting for the IDF to investigate.

Rule 5: Criticising anything Israel does means you hate Jewish people. There is no other reason anyone could possibly oppose military explosives being dropped on areas packed full of children besides a seething, obsessive hatred for a small Abrahamic faith.

Rule 6: Nothing Israel does is ever as bad as the hateful criticisms described in Rule 5. Criticism of

INSIGHTS

Israel's actions is always worse than Israel's actions themselves, because those critics hate Jews and wish to commit another Holocaust. Preventing this must consume 100 percent of our political energy and attention.

Rule 7: Israel can never be the victimiser, it can only ever be the victim. If Israel attacks Lebanon, it's because Hezbollah attacked it completely unprovoked while Israel was innocently minding its own business trying to commit a little genocide in peace. If people protest against Israel bombing entire cities into dust, then Israel is the victim because the protests made Israel's supporters feel sad.

Rule 8: The fact that Israel is literally always in a state of war with its neighbours and with

displaced indigenous populations must be interpreted as proof that Rule 7 is true instead of proof that Rule 7 is ridiculous nonsense.

Rule 9: Arab lives are much, much less important to us than western lives or Israeli lives. Nobody is allowed to think too hard about why this might be.

Rule 10: The media always tell the truth about Israel and its various conflicts. If you doubt this then you are likely in violation of Rule 5.

Rule 11: Unsubstantiated claims which portray Israel's enemies in a negative light may be reported as factual news stories without any fact checking or qualifications, while extensively evidenced records of Israeli criminality must be reported on with extreme

scepticism and doubtful qualifiers like "Lebanon says" or "according to the Hamas-run health ministry". This is important to do because otherwise you might get accused of being a propagandist.

Rule 12: Israel must continue to exist in its current iteration no matter what it costs or how many people need to die. There is no need to present any logically or morally grounded reasons why this is the case. If you dispute this then you are likely in violation of Rule 5.

Rule 13: The US government has never lied about anything ever, and is always on the right side of every conflict.

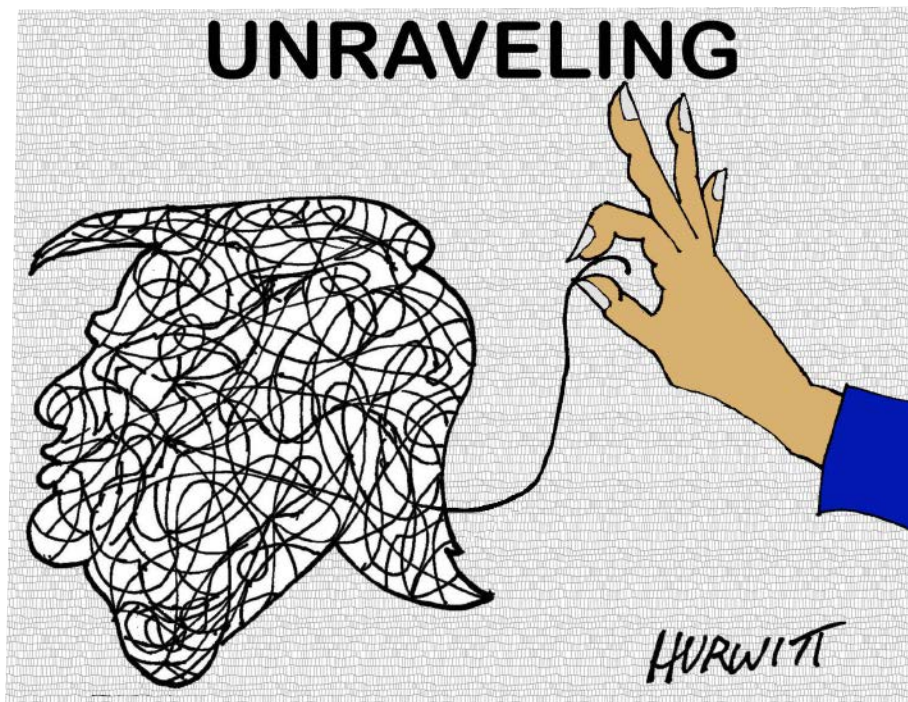
Rule 14: (Americans only) Nothing that happens in the middle east is as urgent or significant as making sure the correct person wins the US presidential election. Ignore any inconvenient facts which distract you from this mission of unparalleled importance.

Rule 15: Israel must be protected because it is the last bastion of freedom and democracy in the middle east, no matter how many journalists it has to assassinate, no matter how many press institutions it needs to shut down, no matter how many protests its supporters need to dismantle, no matter how much free speech it needs to eliminate, no matter how many civil rights it needs to erase, and no matter how many elections its lobbyists need to buy. **CT**

Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. Read more of her work at www.caitlinjohnstone.com.au

HURWITT'S EYE

MARK HURWITT



INSIGHTS

Alisdare Hickson



"The genocide in Gaza is not happening in my name" – Stephen Kapos, 87, a Holocaust survivor, stands in solidarity with students at the University College of London (UCL) protesting against Israeli genocide

► RAMZY BAROUD

Words kill. Why Israel gets away with murder

The official Israeli army version of why it has targeted civilian areas during the intense and deadly bombardment of September 20 in south Lebanon is that the Lebanese are hiding long-range missile launchers in their own homes.

This official explanation by the Israeli military was meant to justify the killing of 492 people and the wounding of 1,645 in a single day of Israeli strikes.

This ready-to-serve explanation shall accompany us throughout the Israeli war in Lebanon, however long it takes. Israeli media is now heavily citing these claims and, by extension, US and western media are following suit.

Keep this in mind as you reflect on earlier statements made by Israeli President Isaac Herzog on October 13 when he argued that there are no civilians in Gaza and "there

is an entire nation out there that is responsible."

Israel does this in every war it launches against any Palestinian or Arab nation. Instead of removing civilians and civilian infrastructures from its bank of targets, it immediately turns the civilian population into the main targets of its war.

A quick glance at the number of civilians killed in the ongoing war and genocide in Gaza should be enough to demonstrate that Israel targets ordinary people as a matter of course.

According to the Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza, children and women constitute the largest percentage of the war's victims at 69 percent. If we factor in the number of adult males who have been killed – a number that includes doctors, medics, civil defense workers and numerous other categories – it

will become obvious that the vast majority of all of Gaza's victims are civilians.

Only Israeli media, and their allies in the west, continue to find justifications of why Palestinian civilians, and now Lebanese, are being killed in large numbers.

Compare the following two statements, which received much attention in the media, by Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari, regarding both Gaza and Lebanon.

" Hamas systematically uses hospitals to wage war and consistently uses the people of Gaza as human shields," Hagari said on March 25.

Then, "Hezbollah's terror headquarters was intentionally built under residential buildings in the heart of Beirut, as part of Hezbollah's strategy of using human shields," he said on September 27.

For those who are giving Hagari the benefit of the doubt, just review what has taken place in Gaza in the last year.

For example, Israel claimed that the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital massacre was not of its doing, and that it was a Palestinian rocket that killed the nearly 500 displaced refugees and wounded hundreds more on October 17.

All evidence, including investigations by well-respected rights groups, concluded the opposite. Still, however, the false Israeli claims received much coverage in the media.

The Baptist Hospital episode was repeated numerous times. In fact, the lies started on October 7, not October 17, when Israel made claims about decapitated babies and mass rape. Even though much of that has been conclusively proven to be

INSIGHTS

wrong, some in the media, and pro-Israel officials, continue to speak of it as a proven fact.

And though no Hamas headquarters were ever found under Al-Shifa Hospital, the unsubstantiated Israeli claims continue to be repeated as if they were the full truth.

The same logic is now being applied to Lebanon, where Israel claims that it does not target civilians and, when civilians are killed, it is the Lebanese themselves who should be blamed for supposedly using civilians as human shields.

The Gaza playbook is now the Lebanon playbook. Of course, many are playing along, not because they are irrational or unable to reach proper conclusions based on the obvious evidence. They do so because they are part of the Israeli narrative, not neutral storytellers or honest reporters.

Even the likes of the BBC are part of that narrative, as they use Israeli claims as the starting point of any conversation on Palestine or Lebanon. For example, "Israel has said it carried out a wave of pre-emptive strikes across southern Lebanon to thwart a large-scale rocket and drone attack by Hezbollah," the BBC reported on August 26.

Israel gets away with its lies pertaining to the mass killings in Gaza, and now sadly in Lebanon, because Israeli propaganda is welcomed, in fact, embraced by western officials and journalists.

Thus, when US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan described the September 20 airstrikes on Lebanon as "justice served," he was indicating to mainstream media that its coverage should remain committed to that official assessment.

Imagine the outrage if the tables were turned, as in thousands of Israeli civilians were slaughtered in their own homes by Lebanese bombs. There would be no need to elaborate on the reactions of the US or western media as this should be obvious to anyone who is paying attention.

Lebanon is a sovereign Arab state. Gaza is an occupied territory, and its people are protected under the Fourth Geneva Conventions. Neither Lebanese nor Palestinian lives are without worth, and their mass murder should not be allowed to take place for any reason, especially based on utter lies communicated by an Israeli military spokesman.

Perpetuating Israeli lies is dan-

gerous, not only because truth-telling is a virtue but also because words kill, and dishonest reporting can, in fact, succeed in justifying genocide. **CT**

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

➤ BINOY KAMPMARK

Failed machismo: Israel's pager killings

With each ludicrously diabolical move, Israel's security and military services are proving that they will broaden the conflict ignited when Hamas breached the country's vaunted security defenses on October 7. Notions such as ceasefire and peace are terms of nonsense and babble before the next grand push towards apocalyptic recognition.

The pager killings in Lebanon and parts of Syria on September 17 that left almost 3000 people injured and 12 dead were just another facet of this move. On September 18,

a number of walkie-talkies used by members of Hezbollah were also detonated, killing 14. (The combined death toll continues to rise.)

In keeping with the small script that always accompanies such operations, the coordinated measure to detonate thousands of deadly pagers had Mossad's fingerprints over it, though never officially accepted as such. It featured the use of the Apollo AR924 pager, adopted by Hezbollah as a substitute for smartphone technology long compromised by Israeli surveillance.

The group had ordered 5,000 beepers made by the Taiwan-

INSIGHTS

ese Gold Apollo manufacturer in the early spring, most likely via BAC Consulting, a Hungarian-based company licensed to use the trademark.

According to a Reuters report, citing a “senior Lebanese source”, these had been modified “at the production level.” Mossad had “injected a board inside the device that has explosive material that receives a code. It’s very hard to detect it through any means. Even with a device or scanner.”

The manner of its execution stirred sighs of admiration. Here was Israel’s intelligence apparatus, caught napping on October 7, reputationally restored.

French defence expert Pierre Servent suggested that, “The series of operations conducted over the last few months marks their big comeback, with a desire for deterrence and a message: ‘we messed up but are not dead.’”

A salivating Mike Dimino, former CIA analyst and plying his trade at Defense Priorities, a US-based think tank, admired the operation as one of “classic sabotage” that would have taken “months if not years” to put into play and proved to be “[i]ntelligence work at its finest.”

While admired by the security types as bloody, bold machismo, this venture remains politically stunted. However stunning a statement of power, it only promises temporary paralysis. It’s true that Hezbollah is in disarray regarding its communications, the extent of the compromise, and pondering the nightmarish logistics of it all. Its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has every reason to feel rattled. But the pretext for an escalation, the temptation to reassert virility and

strength, has been set, thereby creating the broader justification for a move into Lebanon.

The broader war, the death, and the calamity, beckons, and an excited DiMino proposes that, “If you were planning a ground incursion into Lebanon to push Hezbollah N[orth] of the Litani, this is exactly the sort of chaos you’d sow in advance.” An unnamed former Israeli official, speaking to Axios, confirmed that the modified pagers had been originally intended as a swift, opening attack “in an all-out war to try to cripple Hezbollah.” Their use



Part of an exploded walkie talkie

on September 17 was only prompted by Israeli concerns that their operation might have been compromised.

Nasrallah, in his September 19 speech, complemented the dark mood. “Israel’s foolish Northern Command leader talks about a security zone inside Lebanese territory – we are waiting for you to enter Lebanese territory.” He also promised that the only way 120,000 Israelis evacuated from the North could return safely “is to stop the aggression on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.”

Every resort to force, every attempt to avoid the diplomatic table, is another deadly deviation, distraction and denial. It is also an admission that Israel remains incapable

of reaching an accord with the Palestinians and those who either defend or exploit their dispossession and grief.

On a granular level, the wide flung nature of the operation, while audacious in its execution, also suggests an absence of focus. The target range, in this case, was violently expansive: not merely leaders but low-level operatives and those in proximity to them. The result was to be expected: death, including two children, and broadly inflicted mutilations. In humanitarian terms, it was disastrous, demonstrating, yet again, the callousness that such a conflict entails. Bystanders at marketplaces were maimed. Doctors and other medical workers were injured. Lebanon’s hospital system was overwhelmed.

Human Rights Watch notes that international humanitarian law prohibits the use of booby-traps precisely because such devices could place civilians in harm’s way.

“The use of an explosive device whose exact location could not be reliably known,” opined Lama Fakhri, Middle East and North Africa Director at HRW, “would be unlawfully indiscriminate, using a means of attack that could not be directed at a specific military target and as a result would strike military targets and civilians without distinction.”

Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, to which both Lebanon and Israel are parties, offers the following definition of a booby-trap: “any device or material which is designed, constructed or adapted to kill or injure, and which functions unexpectedly when a person disturbs or approaches an apparently harmless object or performs an apparently safe act.”

INSIGHTS

Quibbling over matters of international humanitarian law is never far away. Over the dead and injured in rarified air, disputatious legal eagles often appear. While the use of such devices “in the form of harmless portable objects which are specifically designed and constructed to contain explosive material” is prohibited by Article 7(2) of Amended Protocol II, the legal pedants will ask what constitutes specific design and construction. Ditto such issues as proportionality and legitimate targeting.

Jessica Peake of the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law, is mercifully free of quibbles in offering her assessment: “detonating pagers in people’s pockets without any knowledge of where those are, in that moment, is a pret-

ty evident indiscriminate attack” and also a violation of the rule of proportionality.

The calculus of such killings and targeting enriches rather than drains the pool of blood and massacre. Its logic is not one of cessation but replication. No longer can Israel’s military prowess alone be seen as a reassurance against any retaliation and whatever form it takes. October 7 continues to cast its dispelling shadow. Deterrence through sheer technological power, far from being asserted, has been further weakened. **CT**

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vince the party’s political base that its candidate was a ‘progressive’ option.

The hasty switch to Kamala Harris raised the question of whether a vice-president implicated in the horrors unfolding in Gaza could succeed in this task, where the hapless Biden was clearly failing.

In this regard, Harris faced her first major test with the Democratic National Convention in August. Harris and running mate, Tim Walz, worked to generate a perception that they would approach the question of Palestine differently – but not too differently. This operation involved something of a balancing act. The message of increased impatience with Israel and greater sympathy for Palestinian suffering was matched by a determined effort to prevent the Palestinian case from being put forward at the convention.

Though it unfolded in a climate of considerable tension, the convention was able to follow the script that the party establishment had prepared. Biden came to the stage to bask in ill-deserved glory, with tributes from all quarters, including one from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who showered thanks upon him. Biden’s performance, followed by an array of leading Democrats, set the stage for Harris’s major speech at the end of the convention. She asserted that, “I will always stand up for Israel’s right to defend itself, and I will always ensure Israel has the ability to defend itself. Because the people of Israel must never again face the horror that the terrorist organisation Hamas caused on October 7...At the same time, what has happened in Gaza over the past 10 months is devastating. President Biden and I are working to end this

➤ JOHN CLARKE

The ghosts of Palestine haunt Kamela Harris

When the Democratic Party establishment still hoped that the fading Joe Biden could be propped up and run as a presidential candidate, his monstrous role in arming and enabling the ongoing genocide in Gaza was an albatross around his neck. His brief period on the campaign trail was marked by disruptive protests that challenged him as the president who will be widely remembered as ‘Genocide Joe.’

This readiness to confront Biden’s re-election bid grew out of a sus-

tained Palestine solidarity mobilisation in the US that included a considerable number of powerful encampments at universities throughout the country that, though they were vilified and faced very serious police repression, created a crisis for those in power and won some concrete concessions.

Large scale protests against Israel’s brutal assault on Gaza created a particular crisis of legitimacy for the Democratic Party at the worst possible time. In order to hold off the threat of a second Trump presidency, it would be necessary to con-

INSIGHTS

war such that Israel is secure, the hostages are released, the suffering in Gaza ends and the Palestinian people can realise their right to dignity, security, freedom and self-determination.”

The corporate media has been very ready to suggest that the Palestine solidarity protests directed at the convention ‘fizzled’ and that Harris was responsible for subduing them. This is to significantly overstate the situation. There were large scale actions that had an effect and the shadow of the Gaza genocide was cast over the gathering. Still, there is no denying that Harris and the Democratic establishment enjoyed some measure of success in fostering false hopes and convincing many to wait and see.

But with such terrible crimes underway and the risk of a catastrophic regional conflict growing ever more serious, the image that Kamala Harris has developed is a very fragile construction indeed. In the face of her direct responsibility for such horrors, her ability to present herself as a progressive alternative to Trump or even a ‘lesser evil’ will face serious challenges. Her effort to contain the movement of Palestine solidarity is far from assured and her road to the White House may well be a rocky one.

John Clarke was an organiser with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) for nearly three decades. He blogs at www.johnclarkeblog.com

and that it must be ended immediately. The language of the ICJ is very strong: “The sustained abuse by Israel of its position as an occupying Power, through annexation and an assertion of permanent control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory and continued frustration of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, violates fundamental principles of international law and renders Israel’s presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory unlawful.” There is no ambiguity about this statement, and none in the UNGA resolution that followed.

Ruins of Heaven

Going from one village to another in Palestine’s West Bank, I was shown broken water cistern after broken water cistern. Each time the story was the same. Palestinians, starved of water by the illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestine Territory (OPT) and by the Israeli military, try their best to harvest rainwater in cisterns. But each time the Israelis find out about this ancient human practice, the Israeli military shows up and destroys the cisterns. It has become part of the ritual of the Israeli occupation. After the 1967 war, the Israeli government issued Military Order 158 (November 1967) and Military Order 498 (November 1974) which forced Palestinians to seek permits from the Israeli military before they could build any water installation.

During one of these visits, an elderly Palestinian man asked me if I had read either the Torah or the Bible. I told him that I had read bits and pieces of the Bible, but not systematically. He then proceeded to tell me a story from Deuteronomy

➤ VIJAY PRASHAD

The world says Israel’s occupation must end

On September 18 the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) passed a resolution that demanded that Israel immediately withdraw from the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) of East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank. The resolution used strong language, saying that “Israel’s continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful” and that it is “under an obligation” to end its “unlawful presence” in the OPT “as rapidly as possible.” The resolution was submitted by the State of Palestine, which was recognised as a

bona fide part of the United Nations only in June of 2024 as part of the global disgust with Israel’s genocide in Gaza. The result was predictable: while 43 countries abstained, 124 voted for the resolution and only 14 voted against it (with the United States and Israel at their head). It is now perfectly legal to say that Israel’s occupation of the OPT is illegal and that this occupation must end immediately.

The UNGA resolution follows the ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in July 2024. This ICJ ruling argued that Israel’s continued seizure of the OPT is illegal

INSIGHTS

about the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, where they had been enslaved. Egypt, they are told, was a land of milk and honey, while the land before them – Palestine – is a land that suffers from a lack of water. The Jews would have to rely upon the “rains of heaven” and not the rivers that irrigated Egypt. These rains of heaven, said the elderly Palestinian man, “are denied to us.”

Israelis who live in the illegal settlements in the West Bank consume on average 247 litres of water per person per day, while the Palestinians can access at most 89 litres per person per day (the World Health Organisation (WHO) minimum amount is 100 litres per person per day). It bears repeating to say that the Israelis live in illegal settlements. This illegality is not made in moral terms but in terms of international law. Several United Nations Security Council resolutions have said that Israel is in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention as it extends its settlements in the West Bank: Resolution 446 (March 1979), Resolution 478 (August 1980), and Resolution 2334 (December 2016). The 2024 ICJ ruling and the new UNGA resolution underlie the illegality. We did not need more laws to clarify the situation, but it does help that the new statements are unequivocal.

Water in Gaza

A decade ago, the only time I was in Gaza, I was horrified by the lack of basic water supplies. Wadi Gaza, which runs through the Gaza Strip, is the culmination of rivers that stretch into the West Bank (Wadi al-Khalil) and rivers that run into the al-Naqab desert (Wadi Besor). It would be an act of foolishness to

drink from Wadi Gaza or from the coastal aquifer, most of which was polluted by insufficient sewage services in Gaza long before this genocidal war.

Most people in Gaza, even in 2014, bought water from expensive private tankers. There was no other choice.

If the situation in Gaza was objectionable a decade ago, it is now beyond belief. The average Palestinian in Gaza, who has been forcibly ejected from their homes (most of



Wikimedia

them bombed), now survives on an average of 4.74 litres of water per person per day (that is 95.53 litres less than the WHO-mandated minimum for a person to survive). Since October 2023, the daily use of water amongst the Palestinians of Gaza has declined by 94 percent.

The scale of the destruction of Gaza’s infrastructure is overwhelming (as shown by the UN Satellite Centre). In April 2024, only 6 percent of Rafah’s water and sanitation infrastructure showed signs of damage, but by June, the Israelis had destroyed 67.6 percent of all the infrastructure. It has been clearly demonstrated that the Israelis are

targeting the basic elements of life, such as water, to ensure the annihilation of the Palestinians in the OPT.

This is precisely why the UNGA voted overwhelmingly for Israel to exit the OPT and cease its annexationist policies. The Israeli government responded with defiance, saying that the resolution “tells a one-sided, fictional story” in which there is no violence against Israel.

However, what the Israeli government ignores is the occupation, which frames the entire conflict. A people who are occupied have the right to resist their occupation, which makes the violence against Israel important to register but not central to the argument.

The ICJ and the UNGA say that Israel’s occupation must end. That point is not addressed by the Israeli government, which pretends that there is no occupation and that they have the right to annex as much land as possible even if this means ethnic cleansing. Cutting access to water, for example, is one of the instruments of that ceaseless, genocidal violence. **CT**

Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor, and journalist. He is a writing fellow and chief correspondent at Globetrotter. He is an editor of LeftWord Books and the director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. He has written more than 20 books, including The Darker Nations and The Poorer Nations. His latest books are Struggle Makes Us Human: Learning from Movements for Socialism and (with Noam Chomsky) The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of US Power. This article was produced by Globetrotter.

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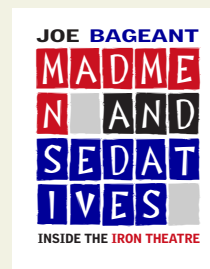
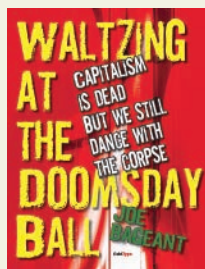
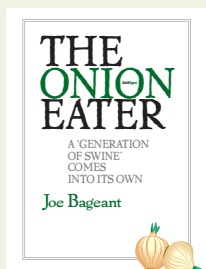
WE ARE ALL FRIED

Greg Koenderman



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➤ LAURA TIERNAN

Julian Assange: ‘I pleaded guilty to journalism’

“Once I was trapped in the United Kingdom, it took me time to understand what UK society was about – who you could trust, who you couldn’t trust”

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange delivered a powerful speech on October 1 in Strasbourg, France during a 90-minute session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). He described 14 years of extra-judicial persecution, lawfare and imprisonment against him by the United States and Britain and its chilling effects on media freedom worldwide.

Assange travelled from Australia to appear before PACE in person. He was seated alongside his wife Stella and WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson. It was Assange’s first public speech since his release from Belmarsh prison four months ago after a plea deal with the US Department of Justice.

Assange said of the deal, in which he pleaded guilty to conspiring with US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to obtain and disclose classified documents: “I eventually chose freedom over unrealisable justice after being detained for years and facing a 175-year sentence with no effective remedy.”

He emphasised, “I am not free today because the system worked, I am free today after years of incarceration because I pled guilty to journalism.”

He said that without an unprece-

ded global campaign for his freedom, waged by activists, citizens, legal and medical professionals and political representatives, “I never would have seen the light of day.”

Assange was appearing at a specially convened parliamentary session on his detention and conviction. It was introduced by Icelandic representative Thórhildur Sunna Ævarsdóttir, general rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders for the Council of Europe and member of the Pirate Party.

The personal toll on Assange wreaked by the US-led vendetta against WikiLeaks was evident. Assange told PACE:

“The experience of isolation for years in a small cell is difficult to convey. It strips away one’s sense of self, leaving only the raw essence of existence. I am yet not fully equipped to speak about what I have endured, the relentless struggle to stay alive both physically and mentally. Nor can I speak yet about the death by hanging, murder and medical neglect of my fellow prisoners.”

He continued: “Isolation has taken its toll, which I am trying to unwind, and expressing myself in this setting is a challenge. However, the gravity of this occasion and the

weight of the issues at hand compel me to set aside my reservations and speak to you directly.”

Assange used his appearance to warn of the far-reaching implications of his prosecution under the Espionage Act, which had criminalised journalism and ushered in a regime of “transnational repression.” His conviction meant that any journalist anywhere in the world could be charged, extradited and imprisoned for exposing war crimes and other human rights abuses by the US government.

After 14 years’ incarceration in Britain, under house arrest, inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and then prison, Assange described emerging from “the dungeon of Belmarsh” and finding “how much ground has been lost during that time ... how expressing the truth has been undermined, attacked, weakened and diminished. I see more impunity, more secrecy, more retaliation for telling the truth and more self-censorship.

“It is hard not to draw a line from the US government’s prosecution of me, it’s crossing the Rubicon by internationally criminalising journalism, to the chilled climate for freedom of expression that exists now.”

Assange said WikiLeaks had “obtained and published the truth about tens of thousands of hidden



Julian Assange addresses the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on Oct 1, 2024

casualties of war and other unseen horrors, about programs of assassination, rendition, torture and mass surveillance. We revealed not just when and where these things happened, but frequently the policies, the agreements and the structures behind them.”

He recalled how WikiLeaks’ Collateral Murder video published in 2010 – showing US Apache helicopter crew “eagerly blowing to pieces Iraqi journalists and their rescuers” – had exposed the reality of modern warfare and “shocked the world.”

Assange described the persecution that followed, including covert actions by the CIA: “It is now a matter of public record that under [CIA Director Mike] Pompeo’s explicit direction, the CIA drew up plans to kidnap and to assassinate me within the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and authorised going after my European colleagues, subjecting us to theft, hacking attacks and the

planting of false information.

“My wife and my infant son were also targeted. A CIA asset was permanently assigned to track my wife, and instructions were given to obtain DNA from my six-month-old son’s nappy. This is the testimony of more than 30 current and former US intelligence officials.”

He concluded: “The CIA’s targeting of myself, my family and my associates through aggressive extrajudicial and extra-territorial means provides a rare insight into how powerful intelligence organisations engage in transnational repression.”

In the Q&A period that followed, Assange responded to a question about his plans for the future. He spoke of the transformed political climate facing WikiLeaks: “Where we once released important war crimes videos that stirred public debate, now every day there are livestreamed

horrors from the wars in Ukraine and the war in Gaza. Hundreds of journalists have been killed in Gaza and Ukraine combined. The impunity seems to mount, and it is still uncertain what we can do about it.”

Asked whether he had known at the start how few legal protections were available to WikiLeaks in Europe, Assange said he had expected legal harassment and was prepared to fight. But he added: “My naivete was believing in the law. When push comes to shove, laws are just pieces of paper, and they can be reinterpreted for political expediency. They are the rules made by the ruling class more broadly, and if those rules don’t suit what it wants to do, it reinterprets them.”

Another PACE representative asked whether, in retrospect, Assange would have done anything differently. He replied: “Once I was trapped in the United Kingdom, it took me time to understand what UK society was about – who you could trust, who you couldn’t trust, the different types of manoeuvres that are made in that society. There are different media partners that perhaps we could have chosen differently.”

Assange’s then media partners, led by the *Guardian* newspaper and the *New York Times*, published WikiLeaks’ explosive revelations before promptly breaking relations with Assange. They conspired with the Pentagon, CIA and the British state in a decade-long slander campaign aimed at destroying Assange and contributing directly to the “chilling environment” of state terrorism and precision-guided assassination of journalists in Gaza and beyond, armed, financed and directed by the imperialist powers of Europe, the United States and Australia. **CT**

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BBC weaponises Lebanon reporting to help disguise Israel's war crimes

Western publics are being subjected to an unprecedented campaign of media propaganda to conceal Israel's true goals as it expands the slaughter

The more Israel expands its war across the Middle East, the more the western media intensifies its war on our minds.

Establishment media outlets like the BBC are weaponising the language of their reporting against audiences no less effectively than Israel weaponised primitive pieces of technology against the people of Lebanon.

Thousands of Lebanese were maimed by exploding pagers and walkie-talkies last month. Likewise, the media coverage is mangling the ability of western publics to understand how and why Israel is dangerously stoking fires across the region.

Words like “audacious,” “escalation” and “targets” have become tools to conceal meaning, not to illuminate – and for good reason. Because Israel's actions are so obviously criminal, so obviously horrifying, so obviously genocidal. Language becomes a weapon to hide the truth.

The media chorus goes like this: Israel is attacking Lebanon to stop Hezbollah rocket fire and allow the residents of Israel's most northerly communities to return home. Or

in the blunter, Orwellian language of Israeli officials framing this horror show: Israel must “escalate to de-escalate.”

Lebanese civilians are paying the heaviest price: some 550 of them were killed in the first day of Israel's bombing campaign alone. Many tens of thousands have been driven – ethnically cleansed – from the territory of south Lebanon.

Why? Because, says Israel, Hezbollah has hidden its cache of rockets in their homes. Those homes must therefore be destroyed. Strangely, Hezbollah seems to have forgotten that it has extensive rocky terrain across south Lebanon where it could more safely and wisely hide its arsenal.

If this story sounds familiar, that's because it is. It is the same script used to justify the slaughter in Gaza. Then, the media mindlessly reheated Israeli talking points about Israel destroying Gaza to “eliminate Hamas.”

Some 2.3-million Palestinians needed to be forced out of their homes for their own safety, even as Israel killed them in those very “safe zone;s.

Then, as now, the media subjected us to Israeli CGI-generated propaganda videos of underground “control and command centres” supposedly under hospitals and other vital infrastructure Israel wanted destroyed.

This time the media are uncritically broadcasting no less ridiculous Israeli propaganda videos of Hezbollah rockets stashed in Lebanese living rooms.

In fact, graphs showing “cross-border attacks” since October 7 last year – when Hamas broke out for one day from the concentration camp Israel had made of Gaza over decades – suggest how entirely bogus Israel's narrative of its bombing Lebanon to “stop the Hezbollah rocket fire” really is.

Of the 9,600 cross-border attacks, Israel committed 7,845 of them – or four-fifths – and began doing so on October 7 itself. Israel actually stepped up its attacks on Lebanon in early September, just as Hezbollah was dramatically reducing its rocket fire.

What the graphs cannot convey is the asymmetrical nature of those exchanges.

Hezbollah rockets caused far less damage to Israel than Israel's far



WAR CRIME:
Exploding pager
hits market
in Lebanon

larger number of, and far more powerful, bombs and missiles.

By the third week of September, Israel had killed more than 750 Lebanese, compared to 33 Israelis. The differential is even starker now.

And yet the western media has not framed Hezbollah's attacks as its "right to defend itself" – a right we are continuously reminded Israel has. Why has the priority been Israel's need to "stop" Hezbollah's fewer and mostly non-lethal rockets, rather than Lebanon's need to stop Israel's more plentiful and far more lethal Israeli bombs?

But more importantly, Israel does not want western publics to be exposed to other, more plausible reasons why Hezbollah has been firing rockets for the past year – or what it would take to make it stop. And the western media are ably assisting Israel in keeping those reasons shielded from view.

Hezbollah has repeatedly noted that its rocket fire would stop if Israel withdraws from Gaza and ends the slaughter of tens of thousands of

Palestinians there, as it is required to do under international law.

In two separate decisions, the International Court of Justice (ICC) has ruled that Israel's decades-long occupation of the Palestinian territories is illegal and an act of aggression against the Palestinian people that must end, and that a "plausible" case has been made that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.

Though no one at the BBC or elsewhere would ever admit it, Hezbollah is actually much closer to upholding international law than western states like the United States, Germany and Britain, all of whom are helping to arm and sustain Israel's "plausible" genocide.

With western media refusing to provide any meaningful context for Hezbollah's actions, Israel's self-serving narrative fills the vacuum: the assumption is that Hezbollah – and possibly all "Arabs" – are driven only by an irrational, antisemitic

desire to murder Jews in Israel.

The implication is that Lebanon deserves whatever it gets from Israel.

The BBC's Middle East editor Jeremy Bowen helpfully oiled that particular wheel on evening news on September 23 when he by described Hezbollah in the following terms: "Fighting Israel is in their DNA, why they exist."

Let's ignore Bowen's conflation of the military wing of Hezbollah and its political and welfare arms – precisely the Israel-centric view of Hezbollah imposed by the British government in designating the entire movement as "a terrorist organisation." Do Hezbollah's politicians, and the civil servants, police officers, doctors, teachers and administrators it employs to run Lebanon's institutions – the "state within a state," as media outlets call it – exist only to "fight Israel?" Is that really the sole reason they exist?

But even if we ignore all the civilians involved with Hezbollah and focus exclusively on its military wing,

is Bowen's characterisation impartial, fair, or even accurate.

Hezbollah isn't driven by a simple bloodlust to "fight Israel," as the BBC's Middle East expert suggests. For many Lebanese citizens, it is there to protect their country from an Israeli military that has aggressively interfered in its affairs for decades, long before Hezbollah even existed.

Israel has invaded Lebanon repeatedly, overseen horrifying massacres such as those at Sabra and Shatilla, occupied Lebanon's southern lands for nearly two decades, bombed its infrastructure, meddled in its politics, littered its territory with cluster bombs, and carried out aggressive flights by fighter jets over its territory, violating Lebanese airspace, non-stop all that time.

Hezbollah exists because Lebanon needed a credible military fighting force to push out Israel's occupation army – as it eventually managed to do in 2000 – and prevent any reoccurrence.

It exists to deter Israel from continuing to meddle in Lebanon – just as Hamas exists to try to exact a price for Israel's otherwise profitable brutalisation of Palestinians under occupation.

But if Bowen really imagines this kind of reductive reasoning about Hezbollah is fair, he should be consistent and describe Israel's military similarly. Does the so-called Israel Defence Forces exist only to "fight its Arab neighbours?"

There are many probable reasons why Israel is attacking Lebanon that have nothing to do with "ending the rocket fire" – and yet they all go unmentioned by the BBC and other western outlets. Israel has much to gain from expanding its genocidal war on Gaza to the wider region.

The new war is usefully deflecting attention from Israel's failure to realise its professed goal of "eliminating Hamas" in Gaza, and its war

Netanyahu cannot afford to ease up on his war-mongering, because any moves towards a ceasefire would put his coalition in danger of collapse

crimes, and at the very moment when the ICC is reported to be preparing to approve an arrest warrant against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his defence minister, Yoav Gallant, for crimes against humanity. In the current climate of war fever, those warrants may barely register.

Gaza's immense and ever-deepening suffering has entirely dropped off the news radar. The regional war is usefully lifting the – admittedly minimal – pressure on Netanyahu from western allies to end the slaughter in Gaza.

Netanyahu cannot afford to ease up on his war-mongering, because any moves towards a ceasefire would put his coalition in danger of collapse, potentially oust him from power, and accelerate his corruption trial and the likelihood of his being jailed.

The widening war has already revived support for Netanyahu and his government at a time when it was coming under growing strain domestically, led by the families of the Israeli hostages in Gaza, to reach a ceasefire. Now talk of a ceasefire in Gaza has been swamped by cheerleading for a second campaign of mass slaughter, this time in Lebanon.

And most importantly of all, a regional war provoked by Israel, one that drags in not just Hezbollah but

also Iran, would force Washington to become even more actively involved in a region in which it was gradually trying to outsource its massive military footprint to other actors, especially in the Gulf. The US would have to not just step up its arming of Israel's slaughter but join the slaughter directly.

Israel wants its war to become a US war, and hopes US muscle will force other regional players, not least the Gulf states, to join Israel's fight too.

Unlike the pretext of "stopping the rockets" supplied by Israel and echoed by the western media, all of these other reasons are transparently not defensive. They suggest Israel is waging a war of aggression. Which is precisely why they are unmentioned and unmentionable by the western media.

That was the context missing as Israel began raising the temperature dramatically in Lebanon by exploding pagers and walkie-talkies, killing dozens of people, including two children, and maiming thousands.

As Alistair Crooke, a former British diplomat based in Beirut, has observed, those using these old-tech devices were not elite Hezbollah fighters, as the western media has followed Israel in suggesting.

Many of those who lost hands and eyes were likely to be civilians working in emergency and civil service roles for Hezbollah's "state within a state": administrators, medical staff, teachers and police officers.

Booby-trapping mobile devices is in clear breach of international law – that is, it is a war crime. That is so obvious that even a former director of the CIA, Leon Panetta, readily conceded of Israel's pager attacks: "I don't think there's any question it's a form of terrorism."

Which meant the media faced a tricky task in reporting on what amounted to an act of state terror-

ism – and one that set a terrifying precedent for the rest of us: that the electronic devices we spend much of the day holding or carrying can be transformed into bombs to harm us.

That is not some idle worry. Warning that Israel had let a terrifying genie out of the bottle, Panetta urged states to find a way to reverse course. Without curbs on the weaponisation of electronic devices, he noted: “It is the battlefield of the future.”

Had any other state caused this much random, dystopian carnage – what if this had happened while a target was airborne in a plane? – the shock and revulsion would have been immediate and overwhelming.

But for the western media, Israel’s act of monstrous terrorism was uniformly greeted, not with abhorrence but with sneaking admiration. As if reading from a script, western outlets settled on exactly the same term to describe Israel’s move: it was “audacious.”

Like its right-wing counterparts, the supposedly liberal *Guardian* newspaper breathlessly recounted the details of what it called a “careful planned,” “sophisticated” and “audacious” operation by Israel to maim thousands of Lebanese. The BBC followed suit. Bowen once again assisted Israel, celebrating its terrorism as a “tactical triumph” and “the sort of spectacular coup you would read about in a thriller.”

The BBC has been exemplifying the weaponisation of language to erase Israel’s crimes in Lebanon, just as it earlier did in Gaza.

On the BBC News at Ten on September 23 as Israel launched a massive bombing campaign days after it had blown up pagers across Lebanon, the anchor led with this assessment: “Nearly 500 people are killed after heavy Israeli bombardment of

For the western media, Israel's act of monstrous terrorism was uniformly greeted, not with abhorrence but with sneaking admiration

Hezbollah targets.”

The next day its website took the same tack. A BBC headline all but answered its own question: “Where did Israeli strikes on Hezbollah hit yesterday?”

On the evening news a day later, the BBC’s Anna Foster, based in Beirut, stated breezily that Israel had “hit more than 2,000 Hezbollah targets.” She added that the waves of bombing had destroyed “rocket launchers, weapons storage sites and other infrastructure.” All unverified Israeli claims treated as facts.

Meanwhile, she noted Hezbollah was striking “civilian and military sites.”

Similarly in the rest of its reporting, the BBC’s default assumption has been identical to Israel’s: that whatever Israel hits is a Hezbollah “target” by definition. Israel’s claim is proof enough.

But if that were really the case, why have so many Lebanese women and children been killed by Israeli bombs – a repeat of Israel’s slaughter over the past year of tens of thousands Palestinian women and children in Gaza?

Could it be that Israel is randomly attacking south Lebanon to terrorise its inhabitants into flight – to ethnically cleanse them – just as it earlier terrorised the population of Gaza out of their homes? Might that explain why at least 90,000 Lebanese are reported to have fled their communities so far?

Could it be that Israel’s assertion that Hezbollah is hiding weapons in south Lebanon’s homes is just as self-serving and deceitful as its earlier claim that every hospital, university and mosque in Gaza had a Hamas command and control centre underneath?

Could it be Israel’s claim that Hezbollah, like Hamas, has turned its civilian population into “human shields” is a one-size-fits-all excuse, designed to obfuscate the very genocidal war crimes the World Court has put Israel on trial for.

More to the point: why is it so inconceivable to western media outlets like the BBC that any of these possibilities are worthy of consideration?

On September 23, Bowen appeared to weigh the wisdom of Israel’s actions while actually advancing its favourite talking point: “Israel effectively is gambling. What it is hoping is that by doing what it’s doing it will coerce Hezbollah to stop firing into Israel. I think that is probably unlikely. It means Israel will have to continue escalating.”

But in his “analysis,” Bowen, like the rest of the western media, was also weaponising the language of “conflict” in ways to help cloud Israel’s more likely goals. What exactly did the BBC editor mean by “escalating?”

The word is metamorphosing in disturbing ways. Once, “escalation” was invariably invoked in negative ways against Israel’s regional foes. Israel would strike with overwhelming force.

Only when an Arab state or group struck back, usually in fairly limited ways, would western politicians and media suddenly worry about a “dangerous escalation.”

The logic was clear: Arabs being killed by Israeli firepower was the norm; it was the background noise of the Middle East. But if Israel suffered a response, or simply faced threats of blowback, then concerns

about “escalation” were fully merited. Arabs escalated, Israel responded or retaliated.

But the BBC is now widening the use of “escalation” in novel ways to help disguise Israel’s crimes.

It is impossible for the media to ignore the fact that large numbers of civilians in Gaza and Lebanon are being slaughtered for no clear purpose. So a euphemism is needed to obscure those crimes.

“Israeli escalation,” in Bowen’s revised terminology, actually means “massacring civilians,” or “terrorising civilians from their communities,” or “destroying their homes” – or maybe all three. “Escalation” sounds more reasonable than the reality it obscures.

On News at Ten on September 24, Orla Guerin, reporting from Tyre, reinforced this new usage, rooted in Israel’s preposterous claim that it must “escalate to de-escalate,”

First, she too stressed Israel’s central talking point, intoning: “Hezbollah managed to fire 300 rockets across the border – the very thing that Israel wanted to stop.”

Notice: not what Israel says or claims it wants to stop. Guerin allows no possibility that Israel’s professed war aim might conceal other, less wholesome agendas.

Hezbollah’s DNA, remember, is “fighting Israel,” Israel’s DNA, apparently, is trying to stop rockets, trying to protect its citizens from Lebanese violence. In the looking-glass world created by the BBC, the good guys are the ones committing a “plausible” genocide. The bad guys are the ones opposing a genocide.

Guerin continued that Hezbollah had chosen not to fire its larger, longer-range, precision-guided missiles, which are capable of hitting anywhere in Israel.

She concluded: “It seems that still Hezbollah does not want an all-out war. Its sponsor Iran does not want an all-out war and has been saying

Embedding with the Israeli military, the BBC began conditioning its audience to accept an imminent slaughter of Lebanese civilians in an Israeli ground invasion

so. The question is: can a way be found to avoid this escalation getting even worse?”

There was that word “escalation” again. And once again it meant, if one could clear away the intentional fog shrouding it, the danger that Israel would murder more Lebanese civilians, even as Hezbollah and Iran were showing great reticence to be drawn into Israel’s escalatory trap.

Back in Beirut, Anna Foster again underlined the same point. She asked reporter Paul Adams in Jerusalem: “Israel has said that part of the idea behind this latest escalation is to enable people in the north to return to their homes. Is it likely to achieve that?”

Could she have been clearer? Israel’s “idea” was to escalate – kill and ethnically cleanse the Lebanese population in south Lebanon – so Israelis could return home. The only question worth considering was, would its “idea” work?

Adams’ response, like Guerin’s, was telling. He was perplexed by why Hezbollah was being so restrained – after all, “fighting Israel” is in its DNA. He suggested that there were only two possible answers: because Israel had destroyed most of Hezbollah arsenal, “or because they [Hezbollah] are holding back for some reason.”

That “for some reason” was as

far as BBC analysis dares go in trying to see things from Lebanon and Hezbollah’s perspective.

By the next day’s News at Ten, Adams was up at Israel’s border with Lebanon. Embedding with the Israeli military, the BBC began conditioning its audience to accept an imminent slaughter of Lebanese civilians in an Israeli ground invasion. Footage – supplied by the Israeli military? – showed a general, Herzi Halevi, tell his troops that they would soon be invading villages in Lebanon that “Hezbollah has prepared as large military outposts.”

In other words, Halevi was warning that the Israeli army would soon be behaving, just as it did in Gaza, as if there are no civilians in Lebanon, just “large military outposts.” Men, women and children would all be treated as legitimate military targets.

Adams didn’t interject a note of caution, or expand for his audience on what the general’s assessment would actually entail. Instead, Adams once again restated as objective fact Israel’s pretext for mass slaughter and ethnic cleansing in Lebanon. The threatened ground invasion’s “purpose is clear: to allow civilians to return to border communities evacuated a year ago.”

Next, Adams ventured to one of Israel’s near-empty border communities: Kiryat Shmona. There, Doron Spielman, an Israeli military spin doctor, told Adams: “The only way these people [residents of Kiryat Shmona] are ever going to come back home is if Hezbollah is nowhere even close to where they can shoot at them again.”

What did he mean? Adams did not seek clarification or appear concerned. But the intent could not have been clearer: That the people of south Lebanon – hundreds of thousands of them – must be ethnically cleansed for good, made homeless and landless, and their homes

destroyed to let the residents of Kiryat Shmona come home.

That was what Israel meant by “escalation.”

There was no time on the following day’s News at Ten for reporting more on the fresh trails of blood in both south Lebanon and Gaza – the possible trigger for a regional conflagration – because the BBC had more urgent matters to address.

It dedicated nearly 10 minutes of its half-hour programme to revisiting yet again the events of October 7 last year, when Hamas violently invaded southern Israel for one day.

In unprecedented fashion, it showed an extended clip from a new documentary on Hamas’ attack on the Nova rave next to the concentration camp of Gaza. Hundreds of Israeli partygoers were killed that day.

It is a story we have heard and re-heard endlessly over the past year. For months the one day of atrocities committed by Hamas – and some that were simply invented, such as its “beheading babies” and carrying out “mass rapes” – were reheated daily, presumably in the interests of supposed “balance” as Gaza endured days, then weeks, then months, and now almost a year of unmitigated death, pain and suffering.

On a day when Lebanese women and children were being killed in Israeli “escalations,” BBC viewers were encouraged to forget all that misery and cast their minds back nearly a year to historical crimes in which Israelis were the victims, not the perpetrators.

Doubtless, Israel could not have been more delighted had it been put in charge of setting the BBC’s news schedule itself.

A BBC spokesperson responded to these criticisms in a short statement to MEE: “The BBC holds itself to the

For the killing to end, we have to stop believing this storybook world presented to us by our media – one that benefits only a tiny western elite

highest editorial standards and reports without fear or favour. This conflict is a challenging and polarising story to cover. We listen carefully to feedback and are committed to providing impartial reporting for audiences in the UK and across the world.”

And yet I could have filled whole books deconstructing the BBC’s assault over the past few days on its viewers’ critical faculties – its constant oiling of the path to mass slaughter, ethnic cleansing and genocide. In a single article, it is possible only to scratch the surface of the media’s falsehoods, omissions, deceptions and misdirections.

But one more should be noted. On September 24, Sarah Smith was in New York reporting on the “international” dimension, meaning how the White House was handling matters as the world stands on the brink of a regional conflagration that could quickly turn into global or nuclear war.

Remember, Israel is entirely a creature of western colonial interference in the Middle East, an outpost of the West there, and today Washington’s foremost client state.

President Joe Biden, assuming this frail, confused figure is still capable of running the country, could stop Israel’s wars on Gaza and Lebanon at the drop of a hat. All he has to do is to refuse to send US weapons causing all the death and destruction and to signal to his European allies that they must do likewise.

But that is unmentionable too by the BBC, of course, for an all-too-obvious reason: it would remind viewers of who is really in charge of the genocide in Gaza and the wanton destruction of Lebanon.

Instead Smith’s job was to pretend to know Biden’s innermost thoughts, and reassure viewers that his intentions were entirely noble and kindly.

She told us: “President Biden really dearly wanted to try and achieve a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of the hostages before he left office.”

It is only because our minds have been so completely conditioned by this relentless battering of western propaganda that we neither laugh nor scream at our screens when this childish make-believe world of geopolitics – “really, dearly” – is presented as serious news reporting.

Israel is far from standing alone in waging a war on the region. And to gain the consent of western publics, or at least an absence of opposition, we must have our critical faculties pounded into submission just as aggressively as Israeli bombs are pounding the homes of Palestinians and Lebanese into rubble and tearing their bodies apart.

For the killing to end, we have to stop believing this storybook world presented to us by our media – one that benefits only a tiny western elite invested in endless war and resource grabs.

For the killing to end, we have to awaken from the dream world we have been lulled into over a lifetime.

CT

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► DIANE WINSTON

Born in the USA at 40: Still one of Bruce Springsteen's most misunderstood songs

Politicians saw it as a work of hope rather than a message against war

Elton John, Adele and R.E.M. did it. So did Rihanna and the Rolling Stones. If Donald Trump tried to use her music, Taylor Swift would likely do it, too.

Many musicians have said “no” when politicians try using their music for campaigning. But Bruce Springsteen may be the most famous naysayer of all.

In September 1984, Springsteen's *Born in the USA* was atop the charts, and Ronald Reagan, running for reelection against Walter Mondale, told a New Jersey audience that he and the singer-songwriter shared the same American dream.

Three days later, performing in Pittsburgh, Springsteen spoke about his version of that dream.

“In the beginning, the idea was we all live here a little bit like a family where the strong can help the weak ones, the rich can help the poor ones. You know, the American dream,” he said in between songs.

“I don't think it was that everybody was going to make a billion dollars but that everybody was going to have an opportunity and a chance to live a life with some decency and some dignity.”

June 4, 2024, marked the 40th anniversary of *Born in the USA*, Springsteen's top-selling album. In

my recent book, *Righting the American Dream: How the Media Mainstreamed Reagan's Evangelical Vision*, I describe the president's attempt to use Springsteen's lyrics to support that vision, which included cutting welfare, boosting the military and ending abortion – all positions dear to the religious right.

Springsteen had a different vision, and Reagan's attempt to co-opt it spurred the singer to be more explicitly political in his words and actions.

The confusion over *Born in the USA* is easy to understand. Just look at the album's cover art. Shot from the rear, Springsteen is facing a huge American flag. The flag's red and white stripes, along with Springsteen's white T-shirt, blue jeans and red baseball cap, all telegraph, “America.”

So why a butt shot of the blue-jeaned rocker whose pose screams youth, sex and swagger? The photo is a Rorschach test, a purposeful mixed message. Springsteen called the album's eponymous title song “one of my greatest and most misunderstood pieces of music.” It's driven by forceful, pummelling drums and a synthesiser's haunting refrain.

Springsteen's gruff rasp can make it difficult to hear the lyrics, which express the anguish of a Vietnam vet who regrets enlisting and faces unemployment at home.

Yet the song's chorus, which Springsteen sings proudly and loudly, fist in the air, repeats *Born in the USA, I was born in the USA*.

Springsteen was doing two things: criticising the war and subsequent treatment of veterans and affirming his American birthright. The song was, in his words, “a demand for a ‘critical’ patriotic voice along with pride of birth.”

But its message eluded many listeners, including conservative columnist George Will, whose wife had been given two tickets to a concert.

Afterward, Will told his *Washington Post* readers that Springsteen “is no whiner, and the recitation of closed factories and other problems always seems punctuated by a grand, cheerful affirmation: *Born in the USA!*”

Will, a favourite of the Reagan's inner circle, was the likely source for the president's mistaken view that he and Springsteen shared the same American dream.

Springsteen wrote about everyday people: bus drivers, factory workers, waitresses and cops. Reagan needed their votes, but not all of them were his people. His fiscal policies benefited wealthy Americans and corporations but did little for working families and the poor.

Springsteen said as much in a Rolling Stone interview at the end of 1984: “And you see the Reagan reelection ads on TV – you know: ‘It’s morning in America.’ And you say, well, it’s not morning in Pittsburgh. It’s not morning above 125th Street in New York. It’s midnight.”

In that same interview, Springsteen admitted that he last voted in 1972, when his candidate, George McGovern, lost to Republican incumbent Richard Nixon. His preference, he said, was “human politics” – concrete action with a direct effect on local communities.

He put that into practice at the Pittsburgh concert following Reagan’s shout-out. Making a \$10,000 donation to a food bank for unemployed steelworkers, he urged

Springsteen was doing two things: criticising the war and subsequent treatment of veterans and affirming his American birthright

his audience to also support the cause. His pitches for local food banks have been a concert staple ever since.

Reagan articulated his American dream in speeches and interviews. He believed God had blessed America with freedom – a freedom embodied in free markets, limited government and the freedom to live according to your religious beliefs.

Springsteen has made his American dream the subject of his music: a nation that welcomes immigrants, condemns racism and opposes economic inequality. Its people stand together even – especially – amid tragedy.

Before Reagan cited him as a Republican muse, Springsteen was content to let his music convey his politics. Afterward, he was more candid, often riffing on a favourite phrase, “Nobody wins, unless everybody wins.”

In 2004, he jumped into electoral poli-

tics, supporting John Kerry’s presidential bid. At a large Midwest rally, he warned that the ideals championed

in his music were at risk, ‘United We Stand’ ... and ‘one nation indivisible’ aren’t just slogans. They need to remain the guiding principles of our public life.”

Four years later, Springsteen campaigned for Barack Obama and again in 2012. He supported Hillary Clinton in 2016, and in 2020 he restyled *My Hometown* for a Biden campaign ad.

In May 2024, things came full circle when Donald Trump, the putative GOP presidential candidate, name-checked Springsteen at a New Jersey rally. But this time, the candidate wasn’t praising the Garden State troubadour.

He called Springsteen a “wacko,” before claiming that the Boss and other “liberal singers” had nonetheless voted for him in 2020. Then Trump falsely added that his crowds outnumbered Springsteen’s.

But Springsteen made his opinion on the candidate clear in a 2020 interview, when Trump was running for reelection: “I don’t know if our democracy could stand another four years of his custodianship.”

Springsteen’s recent collection of R&B standards is titled *Only the Strong Survive*, and on the cover, the rocker is dressed in black, grizzled but game, looking directly at the viewer. With the title, is he hinting that Reagan’s evangelical vision and Darwinian approach to economics had crushed Springsteen’s own American dream? Or does his assured pose convey his belief that there’s still “treasure for the taking, for any hard working man, who’ll make his home in the American land?”

CT

Diane Winston is professor and Knight Center Chair in Media & Religion, USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. This article was originally published at www.theconversation.com



► DOUGIE WALLACE

Desperately seeking Swiftie

It's all about the fans as Swiftmania storms London's Wembley Stadium

Taylor Swift's Eras Tour is zooming across the globe, expecting to gross over \$1-billion by the end of the year. But this era isn't just about cash or Taylor – it's about the fans, as London discovered when the American superstar played London's Wembley Stadium in August.

. Swifties don't just listen to the music; they're living, breathing Taylor Swift mood boards, a celebration of the connection fans feel to Taylor and her work. Every one of the star's musical eras has inspired a distinct style, creating a vibrant fashion culture that mirrors the evolution of their idol.

Attending a Taylor Swift concert isn't just about hearing the music; it's about cosplaying, with fans decked out in elaborate, era-specific outfits. From the cowboy boots of *Fearless* to the edgy black leather of *Reputation*, the vintage glam of 1989, the pastel dreaminess of *Lover*, or the cosy cottage-core vibes of *Folklore*, or a prom dress that recalls *You Belong With Me*, the outfits are as iconic as the songs themselves.

Slogan T-shirts feature memorable lyrics, quotes, and phrases from her songs, albums, or public statements. They've become a popular way for fans to express their connection to the music and person. Then there's the 'long suffering' dads, with slogans usually to do with 'forking out' the money for the concert. Alternatively, dads get a shout-out in the form of another popular slogan, *But daddy, I love him*.

The handmade friendship bracelets inspired by *Midnights* are a story in their own right. Nothing says "Swiftie for life" like trading homemade jewellery with strangers.

In the Taylor Swift Era, fashion isn't just about clothes – it's about living the stories and emotions her music brings to life. **CT**





I'M DESPERATELY
LOOKING FOR 2-2
TICKETS (ON A BUDGET)
FOR TAYLOR SWIFT
NIGHT 1 OR 2 IN
LONDON Please ♡



*Fashion
is
about
living
Swift's
stories*





*Nothing
says
“Swiftie
for life”
like
trading
homemade
jewellery*

*Even
dads find
a place
in
Swift
world*



Dougie Wallace is a London-based street photographer. He has published six photobooks, the latest of which, *East Ended*, was released by Dewi Lewis – www.dewilewis.com

● See more of Dougie Wallace's work at www.dougiewallace.com



➤ STAN COX

We're getting sick of noise pollution

Keeping our world cooler will also make it quieter

The most pressing environmental crisis of these times, our heating of the Earth through carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas pollution, is closely connected to our excessive energy consumption. And with many of the ways we use that energy, we're also producing another less widely discussed pollutant: industrial noise. Like greenhouse-gas pollution, noise pollution is degrading our world – and it's not just affecting our bodily and mental health but also the health of ecosystems on which we depend utterly.

Noise pollution, a longstanding menace, is often ignored. It has, however, been making headlines in recent years, thanks to the booming development of massive, boxy, windowless buildings filled with computer servers that process data and handle internet traffic. Those servers generate extreme amounts of heat, the removal of which requires powerful water-chilling equipment. That includes arrays of large fans that, in turn, generate a thunderous wall of noise. Such installations, known by the innocuous term “data centres,” are making growing numbers of people miserable.

Residents of Loudoun County, Virginia, the nation's data-centre epicentre, have filed dozens of com-

plaints about an especially loud facility located in the town of Leesburg. People living as much as three miles from the centre compared the noise from its giant cooling fans to the sounds of an airplane engine, a freight train, a huge leaf blower, or a helicopter hovering overhead, day and night.

Attorneys representing a group of Williston, North Dakota, homeowners argued last December that noise pollution from the nearby Atlas Power Data Center “is a continual invasion of their homes, their health, and their North Dakota way of life. They are now virtually shut-ins in the slice of North Dakota they once called their own.” In April, Gladys Anderson of Bono, Arkansas, told reporters that a nearby cryptocurrency-mining data centre was “like torture, like a form of military-grade torture.” Her neighbour complained, “It's caused problems for me with my hearing, my blood pressure, with the sweetheart where she gets migraine headaches.”

Chicago-based airline pilot Joshua Zhang – someone who (I'm betting) knows a thing or two about loud noise – told CBS News in 2021 that a new data centre in his Printers' Row neighbourhood whined like

a gigantic vacuum cleaner that never shuts off. “I try to fly as much as I can to stay away from here,” he said. “I can't really sleep well... and I have to operate a flight.” In other words, the data centre's ear-splitting noise was so bad that it drove Mr. Zhang to seek refuge at... O'Hare Airport.

The recent, rapid proliferation of data centres has been due, at least in part, to the similarly rapid growth of two types of enterprises: cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence (AI). Those voracious wastewasters of electricity were unasked-for inventions that filled largely non-existent human needs. And they're amplifying the very real problem of noise pollution.

Crypto and AI illustrate a larger issue. An all-out effort to curb climate change will require deep reductions in the use of fossil fuels, which will, in turn, require more frugal use of all forms of energy. And if that happens (as it should), it will have profound repercussions throughout society. As one of the more welcome consequences, our now-cacophonous world is likely to become easier on the ears.

With every AI project abandoned, every bitcoin not mined, every pickup truck not sold, every jet fighter not flown, people somewhere will get relief. With every bicycle that replaces a motorcycle, every garden



hose that supplants a power-washer, every rake that displaces a leaf blower, our world will both warm a little more slowly and become a little less noisy.

The severe impact of noise pollution on both mental and physical health is well documented. Hearing impairment is the most obvious malady it causes. The World Health Organisation (WHO) finds that noise pollution severely disrupts our quality of life in other ways, too, raising the risk of heart disease, childhood

cognitive impairment, sleep disturbance, and general annoyance. WHO notes that while

“... annoyance is not normally classified as a health effect, it certainly affects well-being and therefore is considered to fall within the WHO definition of health as being ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being.’ More importantly, however, it is the effect of noise that most lay people are aware of and concerned about.”

And annoyance can be a gateway

to much worse, to “feelings of disturbance, aggravation, dissatisfaction, concern, bother, displeasure, harassment, irritation, nuisance, vexation, exasperation, discomfort, uneasiness, distress, hate, etc.”

You might think I got that quote from a thesaurus, but, no, it’s from a study published in the journal *Noise and Health*. Any person living near a data center or other source of loud, continuous noise can, I expect, attest to having experienced most (or all) of those feelings. And it’s well known that such stresses can lead to physiological health problems.

When it comes to making people miserable, keep in mind that not all noises are created equal. The roar from data centres, vehicle traffic, commercial lawn-care operations, and other notorious disturbers of the peace is rich in low-pitched audible frequencies that travel much further than others and can even pass through walls. Such low tones also irritate us more, even when they aren’t all that loud. Consequently, and unfortunately, people complaining about their exposure to noise from data centres or other sources of low-frequency noise are all too often dismissed as hypochondriacs. In a recent, comprehensive article on noise pollution in the *Atlantic* magazine, Bianca Bosker told a gripping tale of how people in Chandler, Arizona, suffered for years as their complaints about data center noise were casually dismissed by local authorities.

For those of us not living near a data centre, road traffic may be the most pervasive, day-to-day source of unhealthful low-frequency noise. In the European Union, for example, 113-million people, or 20 percent of the population, live with noise pollution from road traffic that’s loud enough to raise risks of heart disease and

heart failure. The risk of developing diabetes, obesity, anxiety, depression, and of course, sleep disturbance also increases as traffic noise gets louder.

Of course, we produce traffic noise collectively and most, but not all, of us hate it. In an April essay entitled “What is Noise?,” *New Yorker* music critic Alex Ross observed that “if you elect to hear something, it is not noise, even if most people might deem it unspeakably horrible. If you are forced to hear something, it is noise, even if most people might deem it ineffably gorgeous.” Extra-loud vehicles, particularly en masse, richly illustrate Ross’s observation.

In recent decades, American pickup trucks and SUVs have grown steadily larger and heavier, with towering front ends and armouring that create a road-ruling mystique. Increasingly, to further satisfy consumer demand for big, intimidating vehicles, automakers equip many of them with high-decibel engines, turbochargers, and thunderous exhaust systems. Drivers all too regularly dial the volume up several more notches with muffler modifications that are often illegal. The automakers’ economic motivation for offering big, loud vehicles is clear (\$\$\$), but why exactly do their customers want them? The deafening din emanating from those trucks has distinct political undertones, but there may also be something deeper going on.

A 2023 study published in the journal *Current Issues in Personality Psychology* sheds some light on this. The researcher interviewed 529 people, split almost equally between the sexes, about their attitudes toward noisy vehicles. Then, using questionnaires, she evaluated the subjects for four “dark” personality traits: Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and sadism. It turned out (surprise!) that men liked loud vehicles significantly more than women did. Across both sexes, those who

The automakers’ economic motivation for offering big, loud vehicles is clear (\$\$\$), but why exactly do their customers want them?

expressed greater fondness for such vehicles also tended to score higher for two dark personality traits: psychopathy and sadism. The researcher drily observed that the results made perfect sense:

“Psychopathy reflects an up-close cruelty, whereas sadism includes viewing the harm to others from a distance... Modifying a muffler to make a car louder is disturbing to pedestrians, other drivers, and animals at a distance, meeting the sadism component, as well as startling when [the victim is] up close at intersections, meeting the psychopathy component.

The author of that study is not a medical professional (nor am I); still, it’s not exactly illogical to consider guys who alter their trucks to produce brain-rattling noise psychopaths. I’m not a lawyer either, but it still seems to me that labelling such practices a form of reckless indifference to human well-being is anything but unreasonable.

For decades, the environmental justice movement has been fighting a longstanding American tradition of locating dirty, dangerous industries and activities in low-income, ritualised communities. This is a problem that arises with every environmental issue, and noise is no exception. Alex Ross recognised that in his “What Is Noise?” essay when he observed, “Silence is a luxury of the rich... For the rest of society, noise is an index of struggle.”

In neighbourhoods with lower so-

cioeconomic status and/or large Indigenous, Asian, Black, or Latino populations, residents endure greater exposure to noise pollution, especially in areas where informal racial segregation is more severe. Not surprisingly, a separate study found that the same demographic groups experience highly disproportionate levels of annoyance from noise caused by road traffic or aircraft.

Consider it a certain irony then that, despite being exposed to less noise pollution, white Americans are subject to significantly higher rates of hearing loss than Black Americans – and it’s unclear why. Andrew Van Dam of the *Washington Post* complicated matters further when he noted that there’s also a political disparity: the higher the share of Republicans in a state or county, the greater the rate of hearing loss. He couldn’t fully explain this as a result of populations in redder states being generally whiter and older. There had to be some other factor. When Van Dam looked further, he found one that made a big difference in the prevalence of hearing loss: politically redder areas have higher rates of recreational firearm ownership than bluer areas, with lots more hunting and gun-range target practice – another kind of noise pollution entirely.

The US military also has lots of guns, as well as an enormous climate footprint. A dramatic downsizing of our war-making capacity (and the staggering Pentagon budgets that go with it) – badly needed for both humanitarian and ecological reasons – would have the salutary side-effect of shrinking one of our major sources of noise pollution and hearing loss.

It should come as no surprise that researchers in a wide range of countries have found that hearing loss is more common among military

personnel than in the general population. Among American service members, almost 15 percent suffer hearing impairment. Hearing loss is one of the most common health problems of veterans, especially those who served in special forces units (where it's twice as prevalent as elsewhere in the armed forces). The exposure of those in such units to large-calibre weapon fire, urban combat training, and the like clearly has a lot to do with that.

In military operations, jet aircraft are the most intense source of both greenhouse-gas emissions and noise pollution. Jets account for almost 80 percent of the military's fuel consumption. Their noise output is not as precisely quantified, but recent research in a study on civilian impacts around Naval Air Station Whidbey Island in Washington State found that, in the county where the base is located, two-thirds of the resident population were exposed to noise levels that could have negative health effects. One-fifth suffered high levels of annoyance and 9 percent were "highly sleep disturbed." Worse yet, according to that study, "the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community of the Swinomish Reservation [located northeast of the airfield] was extremely vulnerable to health risks, with nearly 85 percent of residents being exposed."

In Salina, Kansas, where Priti Gulati Cox and I live, we have less frequent but highly immersive experiences with military noise pollution every time the curiously named

Fire-engine sirens today are designed to be more than twice as loud as those of the 1970s, just so they'll be audible above the rising din of our cities and suburbs

"Jaded Thunder joint exercise" comes to town. In part of that "exercise," pilots from the Air Force, Army, Marines, and Navy take off from a nearby airfield in fighter jets and fly low over our city of 50,000. The noise hits you suddenly, like a roundhouse punch. It's like nothing I've heard or felt elsewhere. My own reaction to such overwhelming noise levels is similar to those found in survey responses from several residents of Madison, Wisconsin, who hear fighter jet noise much more routinely than we Salinians do. As one of them put it: "Everything I'm doing comes to a halt... my entire body tenses up and my heart starts racing... utterly jarring... impossible to make out dialogue... impossible to just continue any activity... reminds me of every innocent soul killed in a bombing by my home country." Finally, there was simply this: "Annoyed."

America was getting louder before the rise of data centres, but now it's getting louder faster. Unfortu-

nately, the research on that is sparse, but it's still a reasonable conclusion to draw. In her article, Bianca Bosker pointed out another intriguing indicator of our rising noise problem. Fire-engine sirens today are designed to be more than twice as loud as those of the 1970s, just so they'll be audible above the rising din of our cities and suburbs. And keep in mind that they're eight times as loud as the sirens of 1912.

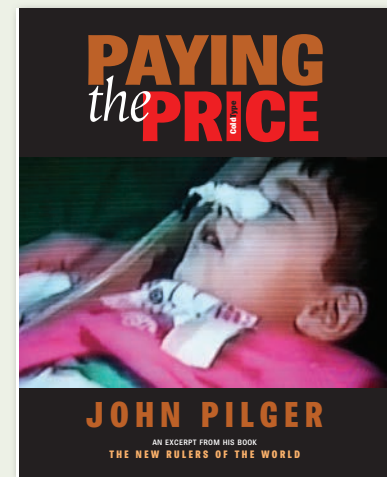
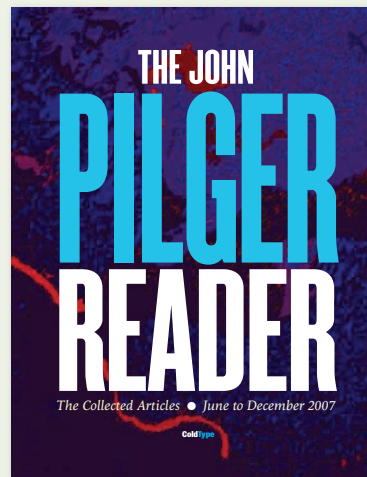
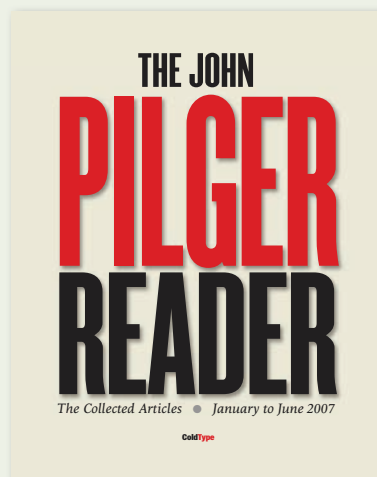
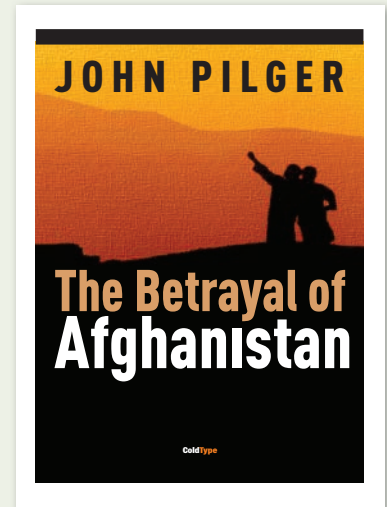
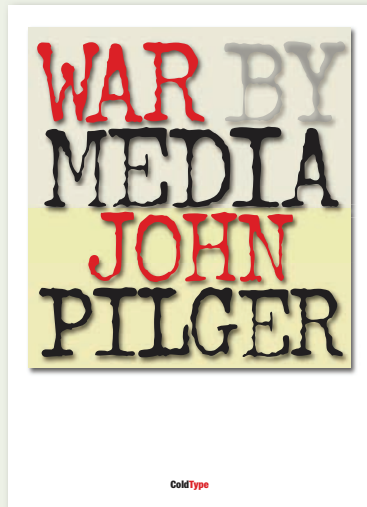
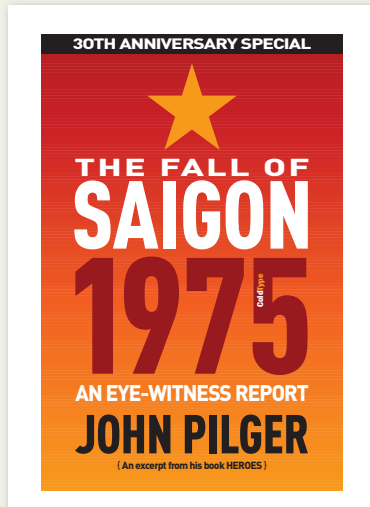
Climate mitigation is also noise mitigation. To avoid baking the Earth, governments must quickly phase out the use of oil, gas, and coal. With a slimmed-down energy supply, economies will need to direct fuels and electricity toward uses that meet more essential needs. Crypto and AI are not among such uses, nor can we afford to keep streets and highways crammed with gas- and diesel-guzzling private vehicles. For those and many other reasons, count on one thing: strong efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will also have striking beneficial side effects, including more peace and quiet. And that should be music to our ears. **CT**

*Stan Cox is the author of **The Path to a Livable Future: A New Politics to Fight Climate Change, Racism, and the Next Pandemic**, **The Green New Deal and Beyond: Ending the Climate Emergency While We Still Can**, and the current **In Real Time** climate series at City Lights Books. Find him on Twitter at @CoxStan. This article first appeared at www.tomdispatch.com*

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► TONY SUTTON

Tireless champion of the underdog

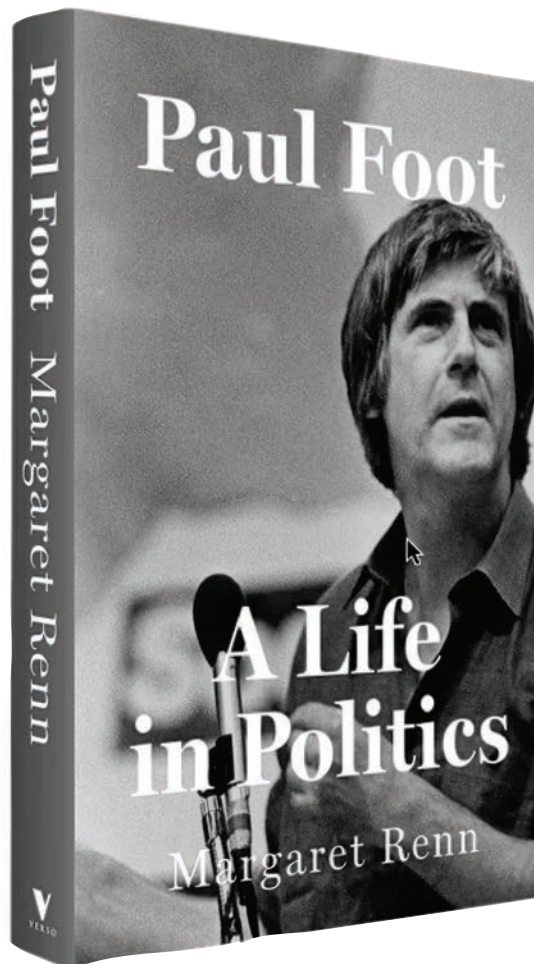
Remembering Paul Foot, the public schoolboy who became one of Britain's most celebrated campaigning journalists

Paul Foot was, at the time of his death in 2004, the top investigative journalist in Britain. Working mainly for non-mainstream media such as *Socialist Worker* and *Private Eye*, as well as the *Daily Mirror*, he brought justice to many people convicted for crimes they did not commit, earning the title of Journalist of the Year in 1972 and 1989, Campaigning Journalist of the Decade in 2020, and winning the Orwell Prize in 1994.

Now, an insightful biography, *Paul Foot: A Life in Politics* by Margaret Renn, his colleague for 10 years at *Socialist Worker* and the *Mirror*, paints a detailed and compelling portrait of the privileged son of a British diplomat who became a tireless campaigner against political thuggery, corporate greed and social injustice.

From Oxford to Glasgow

Foot was born in Haifa, Palestine, in 1937. He spent his early years in England and Jamaica before attending public school and Oxford University, where he told an interviewer, "It was not a very big step to become an editor of some newspaper or a Labour MP or a Labour minister" – just like his uncle Michael, a former editor of London's *Evening Standard*, who



PAUL FOOT A LIFE IN POLITICS

Margaret Renn
Verso / £30

become leader of the Labour Party in 1980.

Foot's first step on this political in-

itiation came in 1961 when Hugh Cudlipp, a family friend and boss of the *Daily Mirror*, offered him a job on Scotland's biggest tabloid, Glasgow's *Daily Record* where Cudlipp said, "he would learn a thing or two."

However, what he learned in Glasgow was not what Cudlipp had in mind. Any thoughts Foot may have had of becoming a Labour MP were discarded soon after he met Tony Cliff, a founder of what became the Socialist Workers Party, and socialist activist Harry McShane.

Convinced that real political change would come from below, he took over as editor of the International Socialist monthly paper *Labour Worker* (now *Socialist Worker*) and began a lifelong devotion pursuing the ideals of a worker-led social revolution.

Leaving Glasgow, Foot worked for the pre-Murdoch *Sun* and *Daily Telegraph* before joining public school colleague Richard Ingram at *Private Eye* in 1967.

This was, he said, his personal revolution: "I still recall the overwhelming sense of liberation. Off my back were the cloying hierarchies, the silly office intrigues and petty censorship which stifled so much writing in the official press."

This 'liberation' led to an endless

stream of exposees, including the Poulson affair – an investigation into top-level corruption in the construction industry, which led to the resignation of Home Secretary Reginald Maudling; and government collusion with the arms industry in supplying arms to Iraq.

Bottom of the pile

In 1972 Foot began a stint at the by-then-weekly *Socialist Worker* where he produced “by far the best work I did”, inspired by “the people who were fighting at the bottom of the pile,” before beginning a high-profile 14-year spell at the *Daily Mirror* in 1979.

However, four years after joining the paper, Foot raged in a column written for *Socialist Worker*: “I was bought last week by a bloke who hands over a banker’s draft for £113.4m.”

“That bloke,” writes Renn, “was Robert Maxwell, who drowned in 1991 after ‘falling’ from his yacht in the Mediterranean. Shortly afterwards, it was discovered he had plundered hundreds of millions of pounds from the company pension funds.” Renn recounts Foot’s jubilation in the months that followed the revelations, “not because Maxwell was dead or the pension fund empty, but because the editors took control: ‘We had a wonderful year, there was a democratic spirit because there was no one in charge, no corporate control.’”

The newspaper even “gave unconditional support to the miners’ strike, calling on its readers to march in their support.”

However, the euphoria didn’t last. The paper appointed a new proprietor, David Montgomery, a former editor with Murdoch’s *News of the World* and *Today* newspapers, to save the group from bankruptcy.

The new boss promised to retain jobs and union recognition but the sackings began almost immediately



Paul Foot: Essential reads

Paul Foot: A Life in Politics

provides an insightful immersion into the life of a journalist who was described by MP Tony Benn as “one of the most outstanding journalists of his generation: courageous, clear, principled and influential”.

Readers who may be unfamiliar with his work will find *Words As Weapons* (Verso 1990), and *Articles of Resistance* (Bookmarks 2000) – two volumes of his newspaper columns, investigations and essays provide valuable insights into the tireless work that led to his accolade as Britain’s Campaigning Journalist of the Decade in 2000.

as Montgomery got rid of everyone associated with the union, and what he called ‘the old *Mirror* culture.’

“Paul’s departure was spectacular,” writes Renn. “To prove a point about freedom of the press, he devoted his entire column to the bullying of his own management, the people discredited by their association with Maxwell who continued to sit on the board, and the raft of journalists from the Tory-supporting *Today* newspaper who were now working for the *Mirror*. Much to Montgomery’s annoyance, Paul also detailed the eye-watering share

options Montgomery had been given by the board: 1,475,409 shares, to be precise.

“But the bulk of the page was dedicated to the people who had been driven out. Just three weeks after Montgomery arrived at the *Mirror*, one hundred casual journalists had been locked out. No one bothered to forewarn them; their passes were simply cancelled, preventing them from getting through the front door,” she adds.

That page never appeared in the *Mirror*, but on the morning of March 26, “Paul stood on the steps of the Holborn building and gave out copies of his page to people going into the building, and to an array of journalists and news media outside.

“His final *Mirror* page was reproduced in the *Journalist*, the *Press Gazette* and *Socialist Worker*, where he was at pains to explain why he had continued to work for a monster like Robert Maxwell but could not go on any longer under David Montgomery. At first, he had thought it was about censorship. As long as Maxwell did not touch his page, it was worth keeping the column going. Silence about Maxwell’s own activities was worth the freedom to expose others, and to sustain the relationship he had with his working-class readers. What in fact changed was the appalling union busting,” adds Renn.

Foot’s response to his sacking? “When the editor, who is a ferocious defender of free speech, wouldn’t publish the page and then told the world I was off my rocker, there didn’t seem much point in hanging around.”

Once again, it was back to his old refuge at *Private Eye* – income supplemented by a fortnightly column in the *Guardian* – where he dug deep into child abuse scandals in North Wales, the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the Pan Am mid-air bomb explosion that killed

259 passengers and crew and 11 people on the ground at Lockerbie in Scotland.

Six years later, Foot spent six months in hospital after collapsing with a ruptured aorta, which left him disabled. He returned to work at *Private Eye* and the *Guardian*, and died, aged 66, on July 18, 2002, en route to a holiday in Ireland.

Superb craftsman

Paul Foot: A Life in Politics provides the first detailed analysis of the work of a superb craftsman who deployed his political eloquence and extraordinary passion in championing society's underdogs.

We can only imagine what Foot would have made of the shenanigans of the political and media charlatans whose lies derailed the social revolution promised by Jeremy Corbyn, helping give the UK 14 years of Tory



A delighted Paul Foot displays the *Daily Mirror* page that he handed out in the street outside the office after the paper refused to publish it in 1993

misrule, followed by the post-election blunders of recently-elected La-

bour PM Keir Starmer.

The last word belongs to his uncle Michael Foot who led the tributes at a memorial service after Foot's death: "It's very sad thing, indeed, to wake up in a world where there's no Paul Foot. I owed so much to Paul. We had a few arguments which were going on right up to the end. And I won't go into who was winning them."

CT

Tony Sutton is the editor of ColdType. Contact him at www.editor@coldtype.net

Paul Foot: His most important investigations

Paul Foot was the author of 12 books and many pamphlets. The following are full-length accounts of his most important investigations. All are available at Amazon and other sellers of used books..

- *Who Killed Hanratty?* Jonathan Cape, 1971
- *The Helen Smith Story*: Paul Foot in Cooperation with Ron Smith, Fontana, 1983
- *Murder at the Farm: Who Killed Carl Bridgewater?* Sidgwick & Jackson, 1986
- *Who Framed Colin Wallace?* Macmillan, 1989

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► NORMAN SOLOMON

Escalation dominance: 1,000 new holocausts?

At the State Department, the leadership talks about a “rules-based order,” which all too often actually means: “We make the rules, we break the rules”

This article is adapted from the keynote speech that Norman Solomon gave at the annual conference of the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation in Washington, DC on September 24, 2024.

Everything is at stake. Everything is at stake with nuclear weapons.

While working as a nuclear war planner for the Kennedy administration, Daniel Ellsberg was shown a document calculating that a US nuclear attack on communist countries would result in 600 million dead. As he put it later: “A hundred Holocausts.”

That was in 1961. Today, with nuclear arsenals vastly larger and more powerful, scientists know that a nuclear exchange would cause “nuclear winter.” And the nearly complete end of agriculture on the planet. Some estimates put the survival rate of humans on Earth at 1 or 2 percent.

No longer 100 Holocausts.

More than 1,000 Holocausts.

If such a nuclear war happens, of course we won’t be around for any retrospective analysis. Or regrets. So, candid introspection is in a category of now or never.

What if we did have the opportunity for hindsight? What if we could somehow hover over this planet? And see what had become a glob-

al crematorium and an unspeakable ordeal of human agony? Where, in words attributed to both Nikita Khrushchev and Winston Churchill, “the living would envy the dead.”

What might we Americans say about the actions and inaction of our leaders?

In 2023: The nine nuclear-armed countries spent \$91-billion on their nuclear weapons. Most of that amount, \$51-billion, was the US share. And our country accounted for 80 percent of the increase in nuclear weapons spending.

The United States is leading the way in the nuclear arms race. And we’re encouraged to see that as a good thing. “Escalation dominance.” But escalation doesn’t remain unipolar. As time goes on, “Do as we say, not as we do” isn’t convincing to other nations.

China is now expanding its nuclear arsenal. That escalation does not exist in a vacuum. Official Washington pretends that Chinese policies are shifting without regard to the US pursuit of “escalation dominance.” But that’s a disingenuous pretence. What the great critic of Vietnam War escalation during the 1960s, Senator William Fulbright, called “the arrogance of power.”

Of course there’s plenty to de-

plore about Russia’s approach to nuclear weapons. Irresponsible threats about using “tactical” ones in Ukraine have come from Moscow. There’s now public discussion – by Russian military and political elites – of putting nuclear weapons in space.

We should face the realities of the US government’s role in fuelling such ominous trends, in part by dismantling key arms-control agreements. Among crucial steps, it’s long past time to restore three treaties that the United States abrogated – ABM, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, and Open Skies.

On the non-proliferation front, opportunities are being spurned by Washington. For instance, as former CIA analyst Melvin Goodman wrote in September: “Iran’s Ayatollah has indicated a readiness to open discussions with the United States on nuclear matters, but the Biden administration has turned a deaf ear to such a possibility.”

That deaf ear greatly pleases Israel, the only nuclear-weapons state in the Middle East. On September 22, former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said unequivocally that Israel’s pager attack in Lebanon was “a form of terrorism.” The United States keeps arming Israel, but won’t negotiate with Iran. The US government has a responsibility to follow up on every lead, and respond to every overture. Without commu-



nication, we vastly increase the risk of devastation.

We can too easily forget what's truly at stake.

Despite diametrical differences in ideologies, in values, in ideals and systems – programs for extermination are in place at a magnitude dwarfing what occurred during the first half of the 1940s.

Today, Congress and the White House are in the grip of what Martin Luther King Jr. called “the madness of militarism.” In a toxic mix with the arrogance of power. Propelling a new and more dangerous Cold War.

And so, at the State Department, the leadership talks about a “rules-based order,” which all too often actually means: “We make the rules, we break the rules.”

Meanwhile, the Doomsday Clock set by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists is now just 90 seconds away from apocalyptic midnight.

Six decades ago, the Doomsday Clock was a full 12 minutes away. And President Lyndon Johnson was willing to approach Moscow with the kind of wisdom that is now absent at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Here's what Johnson said at the end of his extensive summit meeting with Soviet Premier Alexi Kosygin in June 1967 in Glassboro, New Jersey: “We have made further progress in an effort to improve our understanding of each other's thinking on a number of questions.” Two decades later, President Ronald Reagan – formerly a supreme cold warrior -- stood next to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and said: “We decided to talk to each other instead of about each other.”

But such attitudes would be heresy today. As each day brings escalation toward a global nuclear inferno, standard-issue legislators on

both sides of the aisle keep boosting the Pentagon budget. Huge new appropriations for nuclear weapons are voted under the euphemism of “modernisation.”

And here's a sad irony: The few members of Congress willing to urgently warn about the danger of nuclear war often stoke that danger with calls for “victory” in the Ukraine war. Instead, what's urgently needed is a sober push for actual diplomacy to end it.

The United States should not use the Ukraine war as a rationale for pursuing a mutually destructive set of policies toward Russia. It's an approach that maintains and worsens the daily reality on the knife-edge of nuclear war.

We don't know how far negotiations with Russia could get on an array of pivotal issues. But refusing to negotiate is a catastrophic path.

Continuation of the war in

Ukraine markedly increases the likelihood of spinning out from a regional to a Europe-wide to a nuclear war. Yet, calls for vigorously pursuing diplomacy to end the Ukraine war are dismissed out of hand as serving Vladimir Putin's interests.

A zero-sum view of the world.

A one-way ticket to omnicide.

The world has gotten even closer to the precipice of a military clash between the nuclear superpowers, with a push to greenlight NATO-backed Ukrainian attacks heading deeper into Russia.

Consider what President Kennedy had to say, eight months after the Cuban Missile Crisis, in his historic speech at American University: "Above all, while defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy, or of a collective death wish for the world."

That crucial insight from Kennedy is currently in the dumpsters at the White House and on Capitol Hill.

And where is this all headed?

Daniel Ellsberg tried to alert members of Congress. Five years ago, in a letter that was hand-delivered to every office of senators and House members, he wrote: "I am concerned that the public, most members of Congress, and possibly even high members of the Executive branch have remained in the dark, or in a state of denial, about the implications of rigorous studies by environmental scientists over the last dozen years." Those studies "confirm that using even a large fraction of the existing US or Russian nuclear weapons that are on high alert would bring about nuclear winter, leading to global famine and near extinction of humanity."

In the quest for sanity and surviv-

The chances of ICBMs starting a nuclear conflagration have increased with sky-high tensions between the world's two nuclear superpowers

al, isn't it time for reconstruction of the nuclear arms-control infrastructure? Yes, the Russian war against Ukraine violates international law and "norms," as did US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But real diplomacy with Russia is in the interests of global security.

And some great options don't depend on what happens at the negotiation table. Many experts say that the most important initial step our country could take to reduce the chances of nuclear war would be a shutdown of all ICBMs.

The word "deterrence" is often heard. But the land-based part of the triad is actually the opposite of deterrence – it's an invitation to be attacked. That's the reality of the 400 intercontinental ballistic missiles that are on hair-trigger alert in five western states

Uniquely, ICBMs invite a counterforce attack. And they allow a president just minutes to determine whether what's incoming is actually a set of missiles – or, as in the past, a flock of geese or a drill message that's mistaken for the real thing.

The former Secretary of Defense William Perry wrote that ICBMs are "some of the most dangerous weapons in the world" and "they could even trigger an accidental nuclear war."

And yet, so far, we can't get anywhere with Congress in order to

shut down ICBMs. "Oh no," we're told, "that would be unilateral disarmament."

Imagine that you're standing in a pool of gasoline, with your adversary. You're lighting matches, and your adversary is lighting matches. If you stop lighting matches, that could be condemned as "unilateral disarmament." It would also be a sane step to reduce the danger – whether or not the other side follows suit.

The ongoing refusal to shut down the ICBMs is akin to insisting that our side must keep lighting matches while standing in gasoline.

The chances of ICBMs starting a nuclear conflagration have increased with sky-high tensions between the world's two nuclear superpowers. Mistaking a false alarm for a nuclear-missile attack becomes more likely amid the stresses, fatigue and paranoia that come with the protracted war in Ukraine and extending war into Russia.

Their unique vulnerability as land-based strategic weapons puts ICBMs in the unique category of "use them or lose them." So, as Secretary Perry explained, "If our sensors indicate that enemy missiles are en route to the United States, the president would have to consider launching ICBMs before the enemy missiles could destroy them. Once they are launched, they cannot be recalled. The president would have less than 30 minutes to make that terrible decision."

The United States should dismantle its entire ICBM force. Former ICBM launch officer Bruce Blair and General James Cartwright, former vice chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wrote: "By scrapping the vulnerable land-based missile force, any need for launching on warning disappears."

In July, the Union of Concerned Scientists released a letter signed by more than 700 scientists. They not only called for cancellation of the

Sentinel programme for a new version of ICBMs – they also called for getting rid of the entire land-based leg of the triad.

Meanwhile, the current dispute in Congress about ICBMs has focused on whether it would be cheaper to build the cost-overrunning Sentinel system or upgrade the existing Minuteman III missiles. But either way, the matches keep being lit for a global holocaust.

During his Nobel Peace Prize speech, Martin Luther King declared: “I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of thermonuclear destruction.”

I want to close with some words from Daniel Ellsberg’s book *The*

The current dispute in Congress has focused on whether it would be cheaper to build the Sentinel system or upgrade the existing Minuteman III missile

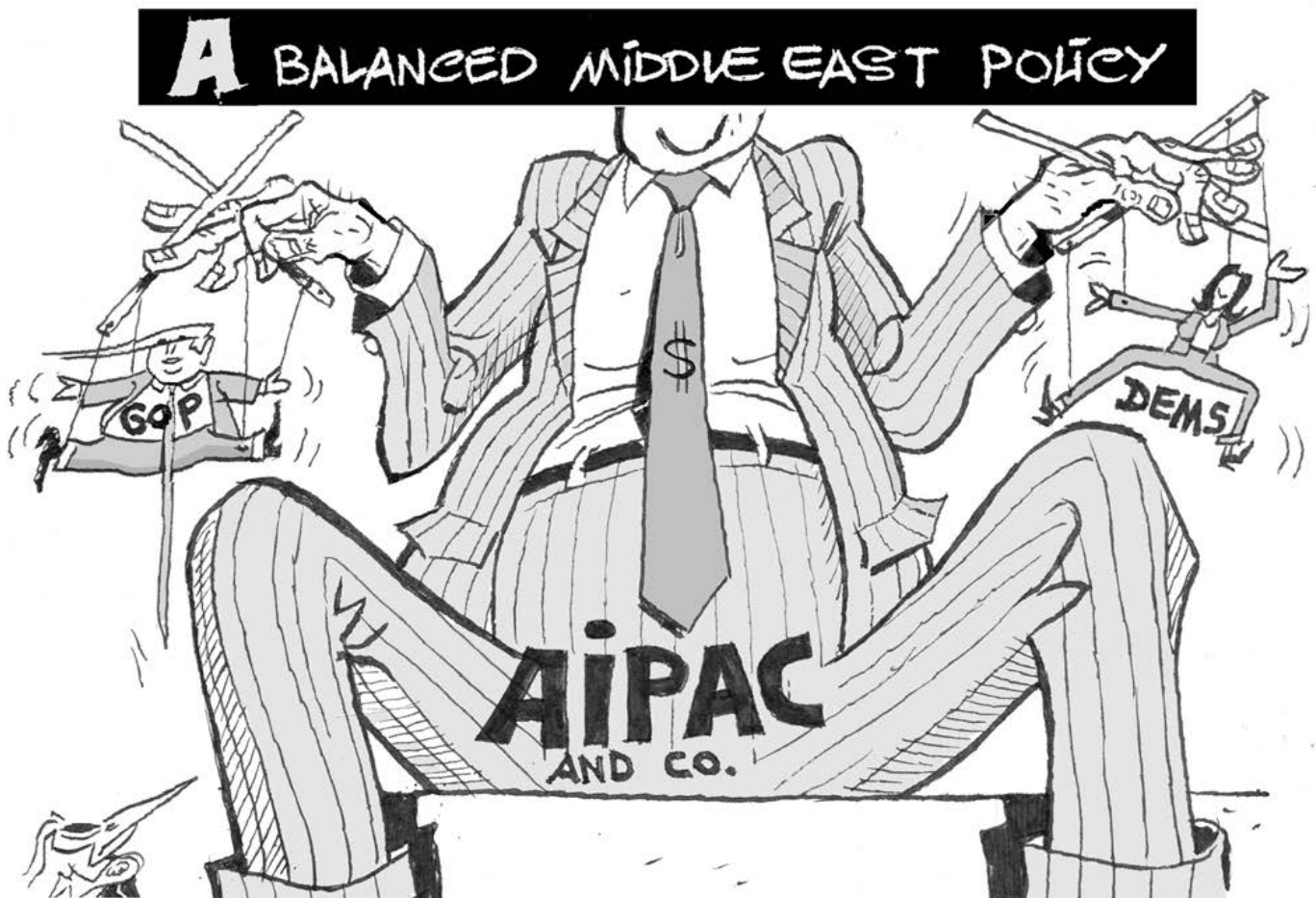
Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner, summing up the preparations for nuclear war. He wrote: “No policies in human history have more deserved to be recognized as immoral, or insane. The story of how this calamitous predicament came about, and how and why it has persisted for over half

a century is a chronicle of human madness. Whether Americans, Russians and other humans can rise to the challenge of reversing these policies and eliminating the danger of near-term extinction caused by their own inventions and proclivities remains to be seen. I choose to join with others in acting as if that is still possible.” **CT**

Norman Solomon is the national director of RootsAction.org and executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. His latest book, War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine, was published in paperback this fall with a new afterword about the Gaza war.

BENDIB'S WORLD

KHALIL BENDIB



➤ MARK CURTIS

‘Propaganda material will need to be disseminated’

UK officials and ministers connive with the BBC and the press during wars, to promote ‘propaganda’ to domestic and foreign audiences, declassified files show

Britain’s media is failing to report the true extent of UK support to Israel amid the genocide in Gaza.

This is not the exception in Britain’s wars, but the rule. When DeclassifiedUK.org revealed three years ago that the UK military had a secret team operating in Yemen, no British media outlet picked up the story. Neither are the UK press nor broadcasters showing how the government has been avoiding peace prospects in Ukraine.

One reason the UK media fail to report independently is that they are regularly willing participants in Whitehall’s ‘media operations’, especially in wars.

A major episode that sheds light on this is the 1991 Gulf war, on which some government files have now been declassified.

Iraq’s brutal tyrant Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990, claiming it as a province under Baghdad’s control and brutally repressing its small population. The US and UK began a massive military build-up, deploying their forces to Saudi Arabia to prepare to oust Iraq from Kuwait.

Alongside this military planning went extensive media operations.

Soon after the invasion, prime minister Margaret Thatcher told her ministers to begin a “counter-

propaganda” campaign against Iraq.

“The main targets for a propaganda effort should be the Iraqi people, other Arabs sympathetic to Iraq and the wider Muslim world,” wrote Simon Gass, adviser to foreign secretary Douglas Hurd.

Key themes would be that the crisis “is wholly Saddam Hussein’s fault because of the illegal and unjustified annexation of Kuwait” and “Saddam Hussein’s brutality. “All these themes need urgent amplification. Propaganda material will need to be disseminated,” Gass wrote.

The following month, Stephen Wall, Hurd’s private secretary, noted the campaign should promote three key arguments. These were: to maintain sanctions against Iraq; to avoid “Arab/compromise solutions” on a negotiated settlement to the crisis; and “justifying presence [sic] of Western forces in the Gulf.”

The allied bombardment of Iraq that took place from January 1991 – known as Operation Desert Storm – was ferocious. Intense bombing struck electricity, water, health care and industrial facilities, killing tens of thousands of people.

Yet the UK media covered the war in ways that would surely have delighted Whitehall planners. An academic study noted “a very successful campaign of mass persuasion by politicians, the media and others in

favour of military action.”

In particular, Saddam Hussein was portrayed as similar to Adolf Hitler and the war as against him personally rather than against the people of Iraq. The media pushed for war and were largely against negotiations, and then proceeded to support the devastating mass bombing campaign as it unfolded.

Des Freedman, professor of media at Goldsmiths, told us: “News coverage of the 1991 Gulf War was heavily stage-managed with a cast of military spin doctors, PR consultants and compliant journalists.

“UK media largely lapped up the narrative that this was a just war against an evil dictator, precisely as Whitehall had hoped. Headlines reproduced military boasts of precision bombing and cruise missiles that could turn left at traffic lights and minimised the terrible impact for civilians.”

He added: “Coverage was sanitised not simply because of pressure from the military but also because of editorial decisions taken to ‘protect’ readers and viewers from the catastrophic impact of the Allied attacks.”

When Douglas Hurd placed an article in the *Daily Mail* in January 1991, he was allowed to write: “No one wants war” and to claim that “a new world order of peace, trust and

security” might begin if the UK took further military action.

It was obvious nonsense. In private, officials knew what was coming. Charles Powell noted on October 22 that “we envisage massive destruction of military and strategic targets in Iraq by air action.”

US defence secretary Richard Cheney told Thatcher in a meeting on October 15 that plans for military bombardment “did not exclude attacking targets which could effect [sic] the civilian population like dams and power stations”.

The interests of the Iraqi people appear little in the available files, as far as I could see, and were rarely the concern of mainstream media coverage either, in 1991 as now in 2024.

To promote their ‘positive information campaign,’ as it was called, officials undertook activities such as “the supply of material to the press,” distributing videos to television broadcasters, and producing radio material to place with foreign broadcasters.

Also important was “placing in the press in target areas articles signed by ministers and articles commissioned through the COI” – the Central Office of Information (a government communications agency that was closed in 2011). Another aspect was “placing on TV stations in target areas specially prepared TV material.”

“We continue to place material about the government’s policy with radio stations in the Gulf area”, Wall noted in October. “The local media in the UAE and Egypt, among others, have made wide use of our output”, the Foreign Office observed.

By October 1990, as the military build-up increased, government information officers produced three television programmes about the occupation of Kuwait. “The whole series is being shown on the main evening news in Egypt and has been widely used elsewhere,” a Foreign

Office report noted.

In his August 1990 letter on the UK’s “propaganda effort,” Gass wrote that “the British press can best be targeted through briefings to reliable Middle East experts. A list is being drawn up.”

The UK files are heavily weeded and do not cover the actions of the UK intelligence services, which remain censored. It is impossible to know what covert media operations were undertaken and what if any false information UK planners put into the public domain.

Ahead of the bombing campaign, Douglas Hurd agreed to “brief senior journalists on the Gulf,” and identified six, each to be given a half hour session. These included the editors of the *Times*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Economist*.

By this time, the Foreign Office’s Information Department was noting it had produced two videos about the “array of weapons being assembled in the Gulf region” and Iraq’s destruction of Kuwait.

It hoped these would be “useful for briefing contacts in the British media” and that overseas distribution had been done to over 60 countries.

A particular domestic target is noted in the files. “British Muslims remain very susceptible to arguments for a compromise solution [to the conflict]; they are concerned that hostilities will divide their loyalties to Britain and the wider Muslim community,” a Foreign Office report in October 1990 had noted.

Three months later, government information officers were fixing meetings with “Middle East and other Moslem correspondents in London and editors of newspapers serving the Moslem communities in the UK [sic].”

In Whitehall’s campaign, the BBC would play a crucial role. “Wider Arab audiences can be reached through the BBC, the Arabic press and the British press,” Gass wrote.

He added that “we are already in close touch with the BBC and have set up weekly briefing sessions with them.

“The Arabic service are helpfully finding Arab and Islamic voices to put the case against Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. We can help them do this.”

Ministers were adamant the BBC should tow the government’s line. Soon after Iraq’s invasion, the BBC World Service reported two expatriates saying their impressions were that UK and US diplomats had left Kuwait after Iraq’s invasion or were on leave.

Thatcher was “incensed” by the BBC’s report and instructed foreign minister William Waldegrave to “take it up at the highest level with the BBC and insist upon a public apology.”

Thus the foreign minister “spoke in strong terms” to senior BBC executives David Witherow and John Tusa saying these claims were “utterly fallacious and that before publicising them the BBC should have checked with the Foreign Office.”

The note of this conversation, by Waldegrave’s private secretary, Dominic Asquith, observed that “Mr Tusa agreed that a refutation would appear in the 4pm World Service news report today. This has indeed happened”.

By September 1990, one aspect of the UK’s “overseas propaganda operations” noted by officials was “additional BBC World Service output.” The Arabic Service had been extended by one and a half hours a day and the World Service was carrying regular reports on British citizens in Kuwait.

CT

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Football: A new opiate of the masses

When you mix football with what they advertise – betting and drinking – it's quite a powerful opiate, distributed on a massive scale

I watched the 2022 World Cup when I was in pain, and football helped opiate it. Our uncle had just been murdered back home in Sri Lanka, my children had scarlet fever, and I was stuck in godless England. Football is the closest thing they have to a religion in Europe and is the most widely available opiate for the masses. So I took it.

When Karl Marx called religion the 'opiate of the masses' it was this effect that he was talking about. Relief from a world of suffering. Marx said, "Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."

This language of suffering pervades all religion as, indeed, suffering pervades life itself. The Buddha said the life is suffering, and offered a path out. Jesus Christ bore unbearable suffering upon his own body, and people still worship the cross he bore it on.

The language of suffering also permeates football, as you can hear from the post-modern messiah, Lionel Messi.

In his first interview after the World Cup, Lionel Messi said,

"There was so much suffering, because there were times when I suffered a lot with the national team, the finals we lost, being so close without it finally happening. I had so much criticism in every way possible. And my family suffered just like me, or even worse. And we closed that circle by winning the America Cup, the World Cup, and that's it, there's nothing left to win."

Messi, suffered and overcame, like a messiah of the meaningless. As a final trial, Messi had to experience the passion of the penalty kicks, while the spirits of a billion people hovered around him and watched. Messi explicitly thanked God and the unholy ghosts of a global television audience, saying, "all that energy, and everyone wanting this, that's what made this happen." If that wasn't a religious experience, what is?

To understand what a religious experience is, however, we'll turn to another source. Robert Bellah and his book *Religion and Human Evolution*. I have yet to finish the tome, but I've started it many times, and the book talks about football.

In *Religion and Human Evolution*, Bellah offers a few definitions of religion. Paraphrasing Clifford

Geertz, he said, "religion is a system of symbols that, when enacted by human beings, establishes powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations that make sense in terms of an idea of a general order of existence." Bringing in Émile Durkheim, he said, "Religion is a system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred that unite those who adhere to them in a moral community."

To use a modern metaphor, religion is a program which 'computes' across many human brains to produce results. In this sense, asking whether Jesus really rose from the dead or if the Buddha really had past lives is missing the point. The point is not the symbols but symbol manipulation to produce a result. For example, if you watch a video, it's actually a bunch of photographs and those photographs are a bunch of numbers (or chemicals). Nothing about the movie experience is true, but it feels true to life, truer than life even. A bunch of symbols which aren't 'true' (*ceci n'est pas un pipe!*) can produce an experience that is. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, as the holy emerges from its supplicants. This is the nature of the religious experience, and having experiences in general.

The fact is that we have no direct access to facts at all. Our entire per-



Casey Colton Deviant Art

MAN OR GOD?: Argentinean ace Lionel Messi

ceptual system is a sampling device as crude as the movie camera when faced with the great infinity in front of us. Our eyes sample a fraction of available light, encode it as a crude, wet map on the back of our retinas, then flip it right side up and

process it at the back of our brains. This produces a simulation of reality that's out of date as soon as we perceive it. Other creatures can see different things than us, or perceive at different speeds, we have no particular access to truth on any meta-

physical level. It's all a simulation, at the very base level of perception. We are all just wet sacks of temperature controlled ocean, moving towards or away from the light, not much different from the first life forms. Indeed, there's a convincing argument that we're just spaceships for microbes to walk about on land, with consciousness as a crude navigation system.

Out of this unreal individual experiences we build an even more complex realm of unreality we call daily life. The illusion of daily life starts from the 'photograph' of individual experience but it becomes a 'movie' through many shared experiences across a society. Humans are deeply social animals, and our cognition is deeply social. For proof of this, have someone die. We feel pain in other bodies.

In the artificial world we've created, stop signs, legal notices, and warnings are all social signs which are more life and death than any cues from the natural world. What humans casually call 'the real world' (get a job, pay your bills) is actually completely artificial. As Bellah said,

"If we follow the analysis of Alfred Schutz, the notion that the world of daily life is uniquely real is itself a fiction that is maintained only with effort. The world of daily life, like all the other multiple realities, is socially constructed. Each culture, each era, constructs its own world of daily life, never entirely identical with any other. Even the meaning of 'standard' time and space differs subtly between cultures, and fundamental conceptions of person, family, and nation are all culturally variable."

Now that we've deconstructed everything, we can return to Bellah's definition of religion (and connect it to football). He described religion as

a set of symbols which gives rise to a powerful sense of general order. He also described religion as related to 'the sacred', but then said, "Even this simple definition raises immediately a second definitional issue: What is the sacred?"

To me, you can understand what's sacred to a place by simply looking up. In ye olde days, the highest building would be a religious one. Today it's full banks and empty apartments. Today we obviously worship money, just look up. The critique of religion is complete in Europe, where it's viewed as an increasingly atavistic curiosity, or dangerous. Marx called it long ago when he said, "For Germany, the criticism of religion has been essentially completed, and the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism... The foundation of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man."

Our pride at discovering that religion is 'made up,' however, merely goeth before the fall. Everything is made up! The Buddha said everything is illusion, but he still used a name and told stories, because some illusions are useful. Science and secularism are not actually higher truths, they're just higher fidelity illusions. It's like bragging that you've built an 8K cinema and then screening a horror show where you kill 99 percent of life on Earth. The point of a movie is how it moves you, not how it moves pixels.

Even if the devil isn't 'real', such an idea can keep you from worshipping money and worldly things, which society now does as a matter of both interest and principal. They say the love of money is the root of all evil, and this is the square root of capitalism! Usury was forbidden in early Christianity, but now whole economies are based on such exploitation. Nothing is sacred in western civilisation, so that's where such civilisation leads, nowhere. The planetary

As Diego Maradona – the John the Baptist to Messi's messiah – said, "football isn't a game, nor a sport; it's a religion"

Ponzi called capitalism is crashing, and taking the whole planet with it. All people really have left is distractions. Nothing is sacred.

One of the few sacralised spaces in modern life is the football stadium. On the football pitch, rules are followed, workers are paid well, managers are fired, and everything isn't monopolised, it's a perfect simulation of capitalism not how it is, but how it's imagined. This simulation is one of the few places that make sense in a world gone mad, and is thus an escape for the masses. As Diego Maradona – the John the Baptist to Messi's messiah – said, "football isn't a game, nor a sport; it's a religion." The man was touched by the hand of God, and he had a point.

Now, finally, we can get to Bellah's direct comments on football. Bellah said,

"Games such as football artificially create a separate reality. Football operates not with standard time and space but with the bounded time and space of the game. Football events occur only on the football field. If, for example, a pass is caught out of bounds, it doesn't count as a catch, for it did not occur in game space. Game time is one hour, but it is suspended for a variety of reasons and usually lasts about three hours of standard time. Most centrally, football plays with the anxieties of the world of working, the striving

for pragmatic advantage. Unlike the world of daily life, one hour of game time produces a clear result: someone wins and someone loses, or occasionally there is a tie."

Bellah, of course, was talking about *American* football, but I'm going to lump them together because American football is just football inverted, where the fouls are rules. In American football you're supposed to use your hands and tackle people to the point of brain damage, and this is somehow still called football because Americans insist on being difficult. American football is the fentanyl to the opium of football football.

Football football is an artificial reality where men run around like demented penguins, tormenting an egg. In that bounded space, men do not have hands at all, except for the goalie. Football also operates outside of normal spacetime, with 'injury time' being added back to the self-contained universe at the end. It operates, as Bellah described, "not with standard time and space but with the bounded time and space of the game." And it plays with the "anxieties of the world of working," squeezing and releasing them in the simulated space-time of 90 minutes.

In one way or another, billions of people escape the 'real' world of daily life into this artificial reality they call football. As Bellah said, "one of the first things to be noticed about the world of daily life is that nobody can stand to live in it all the time." Or as the Buddha says, life is suffering and this (the dhamma) is a way out. As Messi showed, football is a simulated suffering which has the possibility of satisfaction in this life.

I don't share Marx's antipathy with religion, but I agree with his point that religion co-evolves with humanity. That ideas and reality are connecting, and shape each other in turns (material dialectics, as dimly as I understand it). Marx said,

“Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But, man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man—state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world.”

Marx might as well be describing the inverted football that Americans play. American football depicts the state of the place, a bunch of debt slaves (in college) playing gladiatorial games that lead to brain damage, with a tiny amount of obscenely wealthy people serving as proof of concept. European football also describes European states, completely dependent on foreign capital and foreign labour to produce anything interesting. If you look closely, sport is really all that's left of Roman civilisation after they ditched the Catholicism. As my old Roman *World Atlas* tells me about those, frankly, better times, “The plebs also received cash donations from time to time, and were kept entertained by games and shows. Their enthusiasm for the new regime was unbounded.” Today it's just circus without the bread.

Thus, in godforsaken Europe, enough people gather to overthrow their comically corrupt governments every weekend. Instead, they watch billionaires play with their millionaire toys, while gambling and drinking themselves into more poverty. Every football match is a deep display of class unconsciousness. People who earn £30,000 a year gamble on passport slaves earning £300,000 a week while billionaires lose millions on the whole thing and laugh. In states that consciously separate themselves from religion, football is something of a state religion. The secular distractions of the Roman Empire

Every football match is a deep display of class unconsciousness. In football, nobody decides to fire half the team and replace them with chatbots and call centres

are all that's left among its godless descendants.

In these ways, these states (really just one White Empire) produce a form of religion that matches them. As Marx said, “an inverted consciousness of the world.” Football is capitalism where managers are actually held accountable, where workers are paid exorbitantly, and which produces consistent results. It's a simulation of capitalism where capitalism isn't completely broken.

In football, unlike in the ‘real’ world, Black people and immigrants can get ahead on pure talent. If anything, they're over-represented. In football, nobody decides to fire half the team and replace them with chatbots and call centres. And, in football, the masses don't have to just take it. They can get the manager and sometimes the owners ‘fired’ if they yell enough. It's a deeply satisfying illusion that keeps men trapped in a deeply unsatisfying situation. As Marx said, “To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions.”

Football is not necessarily a capitalist expression anymore than Christianity is necessarily Roman, but it has been co-opted this way just as Christianity was into Roman society. As Marx said, describing football as well as European Christianity, “Religion is the general theory of this

world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification.”

Football has thus become the living logic of capitalism. Where competition actually A) exists and B) leads to workers getting rewarded. It is also its spiritual point of honour, in that fair play and hard work are measured and compensated. Any given match day – whether their team wins or loses – spectators can receive both consolation and justification. Whatever the result, people agree on the general rules, and in that they find communion. Everybody can walk away believing (most of the time) that the system is fair and makes sense, and deceived that this system is a reflection of the world they live in, and not, in fact, a perverse inversion.

Football is the opiate of the masses. You can always hope that your team will win. Football is the dopiate of the masses, especially if you mix it with drinking and gambling. Football is the copiate of the working classes, it's the one place a working man can catch a break

For godless nations, football is a religion. For suffering people, football is a drug. Marx thought some higher class consciousness would replace religion in Europe, but it obviously hasn't. People are just looking at their feet, while the world crashes down around them. Especially when you mix football with what they advertise – betting and drinking – it's quite a powerful opiate, distributed on a massive scale. Football, not religion, is the opiate of the masses. And, I must say, having tried it, the gear is good. **CT**

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