

'BRING BACK MY DAD – AND MY HAND' | Nick Turse
MEETING THE PEOPLE WHO REFUSE TO CONFORM | Daz Smith
ISRAEL'S WAR ON JOURNALISM | Bridget Marshall

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WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

November 2024



**“TEXT ME IF YOU
HAVEN'T DIED”**

How my sister became the
166th doctor to be murdered in Gaza

RAMZY BAROUD | PAGE 14

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ColdType

7 Lewis Street, Georgetown, Ontario,
Canada L7G 1E3

Contact: Tony Sutton
editor@coldtype.net

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MANY “CIDES” OF GENOCIDE

ISRAEL'S TARGETING OF ALL
ASPECTS OF LIFE IN GAZA

1. DOMICIDE

MASS DESTRUCTION
OF HOMES
70% of homes in Gaza
damaged / destroyed

2. URBICIDE

DESTRUCTION OF
WHOLE CITIES
Gaza's largest cities
flattened

3. ECOCIDE

SEVERE, LONG-TERM
ENVIRONMENTAL
DAMAGE
38-48% of Gaza's
tree cover & agricultural
land destroyed
/damaged

4. CULTURE- CIDE

ATTACKS ON THE
CULTURAL LIFE
OF A GROUP
200+ heritage sites
in Gaza damaged /
destroyed

5. SCHOLA- STICIDE

SYSTEMIC ATTACKS
ON EDUCATION
85% of schools in
Gaza and all universities
damaged / destroyed

INSIGHTS



Florida Fish and Wildlife

Do you know that you're in good hands with Allstate? Or how about State Farm? Do you know that, like a good neighbour, State Farm is there? Of course you do. Insurance companies have been blasting slogans like these at us for years now. In 2022 alone, Allstate spent \$617- million on advertising. State Farm spent an even more whopping \$1.05-billion.

But if insurance giants like State Farm truly rated as our “good neighbours,” they’d be behaving – in real life – quite a bit differently than their award-winning advertising suggests.

In hurricane-plagued Florida, for instance, State Farm last year denied 46.4 percent of homeowner claims, refusals that directly im-

SAM PIZZIGATI

Two words that haunt hurricane survivors: ‘Claim Denied’

pacted over 76,000 households.

“Property insurers who deny legitimate claims,” notes Martin Weiss, the founder of the nation’s only independent insurer rating agency, “are sending the implicit message, ‘If you don’t like it, sue us.’”

To add injury to that insult, Weiss adds, Florida governor Ron DeSantis had just before last year signed into law new legislation that makes policyholder lawsuits against insurers “far more difficult.”

For recently retired Allstate CEO Michael Tipsord, insurance industry lobbying victories along that Florida line have helped him pocket some stunning personal rewards. Tipsord pulled down \$24.4-million in compensation two years ago, almost \$4-million more than his in-

INSIGHTS

dustry's second-highest 2022 CEO pay total. Tipsord had pocketed even more, \$24.5-million, in 2021.

"CEOs are living high on the hog while increasing insurance premiums for people living paycheck to paycheck," the Consumer Federation of America's Michael DeLong charged in October last year. "Insurers are telling regulators that ordinary consumers have to pay much more for auto and home insurance because the companies are struggling with inflation and climate change, but they are quietly handing CEOs gigantic bonuses."

Overall, DeLong's Consumer Federation reports, the chief execs at America's ten largest personal insurance lines collected over a quarter-billion dollars in CEO compensation for their services in 2021 and 2022.

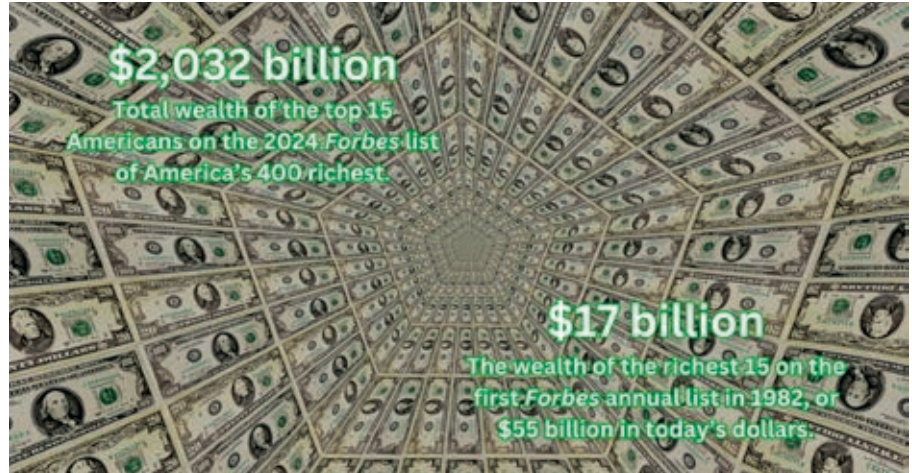
If we really had a "good neighbour" at Allstate – or any other insurance giant – those companies wouldn't have been spending recent years denying relief to the victims of climate change. They would have been insisting instead that lawmakers crack down on the fossil-fuel corporate giants doing so much to foul our planet.

Top insurers did make an early feint in that direction over a half-century ago. Way back in 1973, notes Peter Bosshard, the global coordinator of the US-based Insure Our Future campaign, "the insurance industry first warned about climate risks." But that warning, in the years to come, wouldn't stop insurers from "underwriting and investing in the expansion of fossil fuels."

Giant insurance companies that actually took climate science seri-

INEQUALITY BY NUMBERS

WWW.INEQUALITY.ORG



ously, Bosshard observes, would have been "suing fossil fuel companies, to make polluters pay for the growing costs of climate disasters and keep insurance affordable for climate-affected communities."

Insurers haven't been doing any of that.

"Insurers talk a lot about their climate commitments and supporting their clients through the energy transition, but this is plain greenwashing," charges Ariel Le Bourdonnec, a Reclaim Finance insurance activist. "They are still profiting from providing cover that allows companies to develop new fossil fuel projects. Insurers could be a force for change, but instead they are undermining climate action."

Other critics are emphasising that insurance industry execs have gone beyond "greenwashing" to "bluelining," as Lilith Fellowes-Granda, a Center for American Progress associate director, points out. These execs are increasing prices and withdrawing services "from regions they perceive to be at high environmental risk." These moves

typically hit hardest on the "communities most vulnerable to the effects of climate change."

Climate activists are advocating for a variety of policy changes to reverse these dynamics, everything from making sure property insurers must share the risks they cover to ensuring underserved communities access to affordable insurance.

Another reform approach might more quickly catch the attention of top insurance industry boards of directors: tying an insurance company's tax rate to the ratio between that company's CEO pay and the paychecks of the firm's workers.

Inside the insurance industry, as in every other major US economic sector, that ratio between CEO and worker has soared over recent decades.

In 2023, the chief executive at Chubb Ltd., Evan Greenberg, took home \$27.7-million, enough to make him that year's top-paid American property and casualty insurer. Those millions added up to 452 times more than the annual pay of the typical Chubb employee. In 2022, Greenberg pocketed a mere

INSIGHTS

346 times his company's typical employee pay.

Back in 1965, the Economic Policy Institute noted last month in its latest annual CEO pay report, the top execs at major US corporations only averaged 21 times what typical American workers earned. Nearly a quarter-century later, in 1989, CEOs were still only averaging 61 times worker pay.

How could we restore greater equity to corporate compensation and, at the same time, give top corporate executives an incentive to care about more than simply maximising their own personal compensation? Lawmakers at the state and federal levels have over recent years advanced dozens of proposals that tie corporate tax rates to the size of the gap between top executive and worker pay.

In all these proposals, the higher a corporation's CEO-worker pay

ratio, the higher that corporation's tax rate.

The Institute for Policy Studies has compiled an exhaustive guide to these CEO-worker pay gap proposals. Maybe the winds of Hurricane Milton will help give these moves the momentum they need to turn into law – and give top execs a reason to care about something more than the size of their own personal pay. (Read the guide at <https://inequality.org/action/corporate-pay-equity/#federal-proposals>). **CT**

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

Nuclear Paul Gunter points out, it is nothing of the sort. As should be obvious by now, our ever more frequent climatic disasters are entirely human-caused.

Acts of God, whether you are a believer or not, have absolutely nothing to do with it. Try telling that to our political leaders. No matter who wins in November, we are looking at drilling (Trump) or fracking (Harris) or possibly both. And, of course, more nuclear power!

The fact that all of these will obviously make the climate crisis far worse far faster does not pass these people by. They know it. But they push both fossil and fissile energy anyway, submitting willingly to the bidding of their corporate paymasters who would rather celebrate near-term greed and gain than leave a livable world to their children and grandchildren.

This means we are led by climate criminals who go not only unpunished, but who are routinely re-elected.

The push for licence extensions for our aging reactor fleet is particularly heinous. The lapdog nuclear regulator, the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, has been exposed by the Government Accountability Office in a damning report as entirely uninterested in how the ravages of the climate crisis might jeopardise the safety of nuclear power plants.

"NRC doesn't fully consider potential increases in risk from climate change," wrote the GAO. "For example, NRC mostly uses historical data to identify and assess safety risks, rather than data from future climate projections."

Instead, the NRC is intent on colluding with the nuclear industry to sell us nuclear power as some sort

► LINDA PENTZ-GUNTER

A nuclear warning from Hurricane Helene

As no one can have failed to notice, the US has been ravaged once again by violent weather extremes, most recently by Hurricane Helene, which left areas in the south submerged and destroyed, and led to a significant number of deaths.

The press has routinely been describing the extreme flooding, especially in places such as North Carolina, as 'Biblical'. But, as my partner and colleague at Beyond



INSIGHTS

of answer to the climate crisis.

Apart from the fact that nuclear power is too expensive and too slow, it is actually a hazard under climate chaos conditions. And we got the perfect demonstration of this from Hurricane Helene.

First of all, because of the extreme radiological risks, some nuclear power plants in the path of the hurricane were shut down as a preemptive precaution including Hatch in Georgia. This makes them useless in the wake of the storm's onslaught when people are desperate for electricity.

Then take the case of the Crystal River nuclear power plant on Florida's Gulf Coast. Floodwaters swamped the site. Fortunately the

plant has been shuttered since 2013 but all of the high-level irradiated radioactive fuel waste is still stored there.

"The whole site was flooded, including buildings, sumps, and lift stations. Industrial Wastewater Pond #5 was observed overflowing to the ground due to the surge," read a report filed by plant owner, Duke Energy.

Given the present enthusiasm for extending the licences of the still operating US nuclear reactor fleet – and they are talking about out to 80 or even 100 years for reactors that were never designed or intended to run that long – Crystal River might easily still have been operating.

Under today's rush to relicence –

and even reopen the country's most dangerously degraded reactors including Palisades in Michigan – it probably would be.

Did nuclear waste escape as a result of the Crystal River nuclear site flood?

"We are still in the process of obtaining access and assessing the damage, but due to the nature of this event we anticipate difficulty with estimating the total discharge amount of wastewater, and impacts are unknown at this time," wrote Duke in its report. In other words, we may never know.

The implication of a nuclear plant inundated by a massive storm surge does not have to be imagined. We saw it at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in Japan on March 11, 2011, when a 50-foot tsunami swept over the inadequate sea wall and knocked out the backup onsite power after the earlier earthquake had already severed the offsite power connection.

Meanwhile, Crystal River owner Duke is the same company that is trying to secure a licence extension for its three Oconee reactors in South Carolina that sit downstream from not one but two dams!

The three reactors are sited 300 feet below the water level in Lake Jocassee behind Jocassee Dam and five feet below the water level in the immediately adjacent Lake Keowee.

What could possibly go wrong? Nothing, argues Duke, for whom the idea of a dam overtopping or breaking, sending a wall of water directly at the plant – effectively an inland tsunami – just isn't a credible possibility.

Out of our scope, declares the NRC, which contends it cannot include an assessment of likely climate change impacts on Oconee op-

ON THE SHELF

FROM THE INTERNET



The WH Smith bookshop at Milton Keynes railway station in England has won praise for the creative way in which it has put former Tory PM Boris Johnson's new book *Unleashed* on display. Presumably ordered by head office to stock the book, someone decided to make the best of the situation and to remind would-be buyers that Johnson's tenure as PM led to 100,000 deaths through his and his cronies' mismanagement of the coronavirus pandemic, including thousands of pensioners who died after patients known to be infected were sent to old people's homes to clear space in NHS beds for PR purposes. – www.skawkbbox.org

INSIGHTS

erations within its environmental review for licence renewal.

Beyond Nuclear and the South Carolina chapter of the Sierra Club have been fighting this through legal channels and will continue to do so.

After last September, you might expect such a blinkered view of current – never mind future – climatic conditions to change. But it won't.

Retrofitting an old nuclear plant to adequately protect it against the impacts of a climate crisis never prepared for, costs money.

Gambling with hundreds of thou-

sands of lives by doing nothing and keeping it running, doesn't.

Until something goes wrong. But then, of course, thanks to the Price-Anderson Act, the hundreds of billions of dollars in costs that could be the consequence of such a risk, will be paid mostly by the taxpayers. **CT**

Linda Pentz Gunter is a writer based in Takoma Park, Maryland. She is the international specialist at Beyond Nuclear. This article first appeared in Beyond Nuclear International – www.beyondnuclearinternational.org

► CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

And now the maniacs want to start a war with Iran

Israel appears to have begun its long-planned ethnic cleansing of northern Gaza, with the IDF dropping bombs, issuing evacuation orders for multiple hospitals, attacking civilians with sniper drones, and besieging civilian populations in order to force tens of thousands of people to either move south or die. Israel has reportedly been dropping leaflets on the Jabalia refugee camp ordering people to leave, and then shooting anyone who tries to.

Since October 7 last year Israel has committed roughly 100 October sevenths in Gaza; scores of American medical workers who volunteered in the enclave signed an open letter to president Biden estimating the real death toll from Israel's onslaught at over 118,000. Israel



Propaganda: Benjamin Netanyahu

has also committed about two October sevenths in Lebanon during that time, with the majority of the 2,100 Israeli killings in that country coming just in the past month.

As Israeli murderousness ramps

up in both Gaza and Lebanon, Benjamin Netanyahu has issued a statement addressed to the Lebanese people telling them that they need to somehow defeat Hezbollah in order to “save Lebanon before it plunges into the abyss of a long war that will lead to destruction and suffering like we see in Gaza.”

Israeli officials have been saying they're going to destroy Lebanon like they destroyed Gaza for months. Back in December Israel's defence minister Yoav Gallant said, “Every person in Lebanon can take the map, the aerial photograph of Gaza, place it on an aerial photograph of Beirut, and ask themselves if this is what they want to happen there.” Now Netanyahu himself is saying this.

Notably, Netanyahu's statement was delivered in English, with English subtitles. This wasn't actually a plea made to the people of Lebanon, it was propaganda made for western consumption. Netanyahu does not actually believe the Lebanese people are going to take up arms against Hezbollah to stop their country from being destroyed, he's just creating a narrative to justify what he already plans on doing to Lebanon.

And the US is encouraging Israel to move forward. State Department Spokesman Matthew Miller told the press that the Biden administration no longer supports a ceasefire with Hezbollah, saying “We support Israel's efforts to degrade Hezbollah's capability” instead. Two weeks ago CNN reported that the administration has also essentially given up on a ceasefire in Gaza.

And we haven't even talked about Iran yet. NBC News reports that

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US military officials have been discussing directly joining in Israel's planned attack on Iran, potentially launching their own airstrikes on the Iranian military whenever Israel begins its attack.

Whether the US joins with Israel in its coming attack or not, Iran has already made it clear that it will retaliate against any further aggressions by Israel, and Israel has made it clear that if Iran strikes back it's going to ramp up its aggressions and perhaps start attacking Iranian energy infrastructure.

If this blows up into full-scale war, as looks increasingly likely, it's inevitable that the US will come to Israel's defence.

Axios and its Israeli intelligence insider Barak Ravid have a new re-

port out on how super duper frustrated the Biden administration is becoming with Israeli warmongering. In typical Axios fashion the outlet reports that the White House is becoming "increasingly distrustful" of Israel's planned military operations against Iran and Lebanon, but that, in typical Biden administration fashion, its American sources admit that the US "would very likely help Israel defend itself regardless" of whatever happens.

Whoever wins the US election in November appears to be committed to riding with Israel down this path into the depths of hell.

In an interview with *60 Minutes*, Vice President Kamala Harris defended the Biden administration's genocidal support for Israel, say-

ing the weapons it has been giving them "allow Israel to defend itself." She also named Iran as the number one enemy of the United States.

In an appearance on *The View*, Harris was asked what she would have done differently from President Biden, and she said "There is not a thing that comes to mind." Then later she added, "You asked me what is the difference between Joe Biden and me, that will be one of the differences: I'm going to have a Republican in my Cabinet."

And lest you make the mistake of thinking Trump would be any better, last month the former president said that Israel should attack Iran's nuclear facilities, and criticised the Biden administration for not being sufficiently aggressive on this front.

"They asked [Biden], what do you think about Iran, would you hit Iran?" Trump said at a campaign event. "And he goes, 'As long as they don't hit the nuclear stuff.' That's the thing you want to hit, right? I said I think he's got that one wrong."

Anyone who still says Trump is a peacemaker is a damn fool. Statements like this are in full alignment with the absolute worst warmongers in Washington like John Bolton or Lindsey Graham.

Anyway, that's where we're at right now. That's the trajectory the US empire has us on. An active genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza, the threat of another extermination campaign in Lebanon, and acceleration toward a direct war of unimaginable horror with Iran.

These psychos must be stopped.

CT

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

FRONT PAGE NEWS

FROM THE INTERNET



INSIGHTS

► JOHN McEVROY

UK government tried to discredit John Pilger

Recently declassified files show how the UK government covertly monitored Australian journalist John Pilger, and sought to discredit him by encouraging media contacts to attack him in the press.

Pilger, who died in London on December 30 at the age of 84, was best known for his numerous documentaries exposing US, UK and Australian government policies.

His film, *Stealing a Nation*, showed how Britain expelled the native population of the Chagos Islands to make way for a US military base, while *Death of a Nation* exposed how the genocide in East Timor “happened with the connivance of Britain, the US, and Australia.”

In 1975, the Foreign Office’s secret cold war propaganda unit, the Information Research Department (IRD), opened a file on Pilger.

That year, IRD official Mrs J. O’Connor Howe complained that Pilger’s television programme *A Nod and a Wink*, broadcast in the UK, had given “entirely sympathetic treatment to the Shrewsbury pickets,” when several trade unionists were wrongfully convicted and imprisoned.

Howe added: “It must be hoped that John Pilger and his sort do not become influential in their cur-

rent affairs coverage.” Another official responded that “Pilger’s nods and winks need more careful watching.”

Though the IRD was shut down in 1977, Pilger’s file was transferred to its successor organisation, the Special Production Unit (SPU), and the Foreign Office continued to track his movements over the following years.



Monitored: John Pilger

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Pilger visited southeast Asia to film *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* and *Cambodia: Year One*.

The documentaries covered Washington’s secret bombing campaign of Cambodia during the Vietnam War, and the partial responsibility of the US and Britain for the brutality under the Pol Pot regime.

Throughout this period, the UK

government monitored Pilger’s activities and plotted to launch counter-measures against him.

The office of then prime minister Margaret Thatcher privately asked the British embassy in Bangkok for “information on Pilger’s journalistic background.” It specifically requested “examples of any Pilger material on Vietnam/Cambodia over the period 1968-78, and examples of his work criticising UK domestic policies.”

In September 1980, Thomas J. Duggin, a British embassy official in Bangkok, noted that Pilger’s work on Cambodia “deserves a rejoinder [response] before his film is shown – a subject worthy of Peter Joy’s attention perhaps.”

Peter Joy was no ordinary diplomat. He had been the head of the IRD’s top-secret Special Editorial Unit (SEU), which planned and executed “black propaganda” operations worldwide against those deemed to threaten Britain’s interests.

In this effort, the SEU worked closely with MI6 to produce reports from fake sources and fictitious organisations, and planted strategically valuable information into the press. What Duggin was seemingly suggesting, in

other words, was that the Foreign Office covertly inspire a hit-job on Pilger before the release of his film.

The Foreign Office subsequently compiled a charge sheet on Pilger, and sought out a journalist who would be prepared to carry out a “hatchet job” on him.

Such an article could draw on “the commentaries from the two Bangkok Embassies [the UK and the US] to counter the impressions

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created by Pilger's reporting."

The embassy also obtained information from "one of Pilger's associates" who privately told them "about his motives and activities" in the region. It is unclear who this was.

Ultimately, "the reluctance of one journalist" to carry out the hatchet job scuppered the Foreign Office plan to counter Pilger's reporting on Cambodia.

It nonetheless remains unclear whether the Foreign Office succeeded elsewhere in inspiring attack pieces on Pilger.

Many of the documents in Pilger's file have been removed, with some due to remain classified until 2041.

The Foreign Office frequently discussed Pilger in seething terms. His work on Southeast Asia read like a "cynical voice from the Kremlin," one Foreign Office official argued, with another complaining that it "looks like a PR job on behalf of Hanoi and Moscow."

Before his death, Pilger responded to these revelations: "Some of the documents on me going back to the eighties – and that was when I was reporting from Southeast Asia, Cambodia, Vietnam.

"My reporting, which was really exclusive, it was telling people something that they didn't know, it was exposing a great deal, it was exposing the tyrants, but it was also exposing who was backing the tyrants secretly – it's rather embarrassing.

"I was described in one of these documents as pro-Kremlin. I mean, when I read this, I say many years later, I can only burst out laughing... But we must never make light of it."

John Pilger told me that he was aware of a Foreign Office campaign against him, linked to the US, but had few supporting documents.

"The stories of mine that stung them was their involvement with the Khmer Rouge and Suharto's

war on East Timor," he said. **CT**

John McEvoy is an independent journalist. This article was originally published by Declassified UK at www.declassifieduk.org.



► W.J. ASTORE

Bombs land softer when a lesbian Latina drops them

Listening to Chris Hedges and Cornel West the other day, I heard them use the term "multicultural militarism" to describe the Democratic Party's embrace of war and the US military. It fits. Consider Kamala Harris as commander-in-chief. She'll be celebrated as the first woman of colour, the first black and South Asian president, even as she embraces and boasts about the "lethality" of the US military and the utility of war. And by "utility," I mean Harris' support of Ukraine and Israel to the tune of \$200-billion in weapons and other forms of mainly military aid.

But do the bombs and missiles land softer because a Latina lesbian Air Force pilot drops and launches them?

Speaking of the Air Force, my old service, I caught this cartoon (above) by Pia Guerra ...

The US government really believes it can have it both ways. It can provide bombs to Israel to annihilate Gaza while at the same time dropping care packages among the wounded and desperate. Call it feel-good militarism. Have some MREs with your HE.* A new form of American (un)happy meal.

Harris and Trump reflect the bi-

INSIGHTS

partisan consensus in DC that Pentagon budgets must always go up. They both boast and brag about the US military and its deadliness. They mainly disagree on which enemy is the most serious, with Harris favouring Iran and Russia while Trump hypes China. Neither candidate sees militarism as a problem: they see it as something to celebrate. It's just that Harris and the Democrats prefer "diverse" militarism.

Trump, of course, has said he wants to end the Russia-Ukraine War. He also raised the spectre of nuclear war. Harris, apparently,

seems to think she must be more hawkish than Trump, hence her embrace of generals and her talk of lethality.

Whether Harris or Trump wins, higher military budgets are guaranteed and probably more war too. Interestingly, Trump talks more of the enemy within than the enemy without, though his "enemy within" is typically a caricature of woke liberals out to destroy America by forcing your kids to undergo gender-reassignment surgery. Just as Trump is using threat inflation for the enemy within, Harris is inflating the Iranian and Russian threats

from without.

Civil discord within America or more war outside of America? That may be our "choice" on November 5. Or maybe we'll get both.

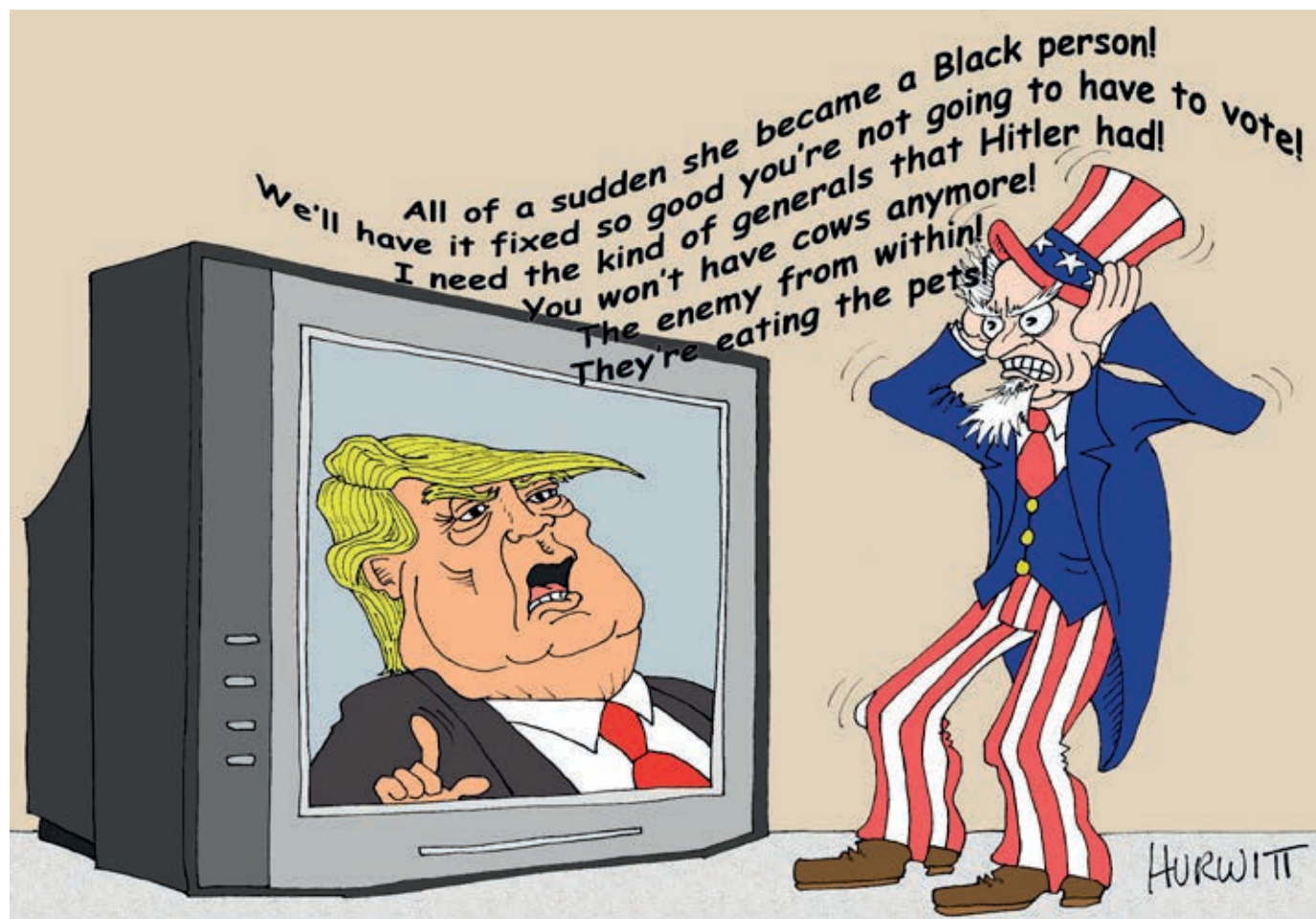
One thing is certain: A B-52 with a rainbow flag and a BLM slogan is still a B-52.

** That's meals ready to eat (MRE), or rations, with your high explosives (HE). CT*

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

HURWITT'S EYE

MARK HURWITT



► RAMZY BAROUD

‘Text me if you haven’t died’

My sister was the 166th doctor to be murdered in Gaza

*“Your lives will continue.
With new events and new faces.
They are the faces of your
children, who will fill your
homes with noise and laughter”*

Those were the last words written by my sister in a text message to one of her daughters.

Dr Soma Baroud was murdered on October 9 when Israeli warplanes bombed a taxi that carried her and other tired Gazans somewhere near the Bani Suhaila roundabout near Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip.

I am still unable to understand whether she was on her way to the hospital, where she worked, or leaving the hospital to go home. Does it even matter?

The news of her murder – or, more accurately assassination, as Israel has deliberately targeted and killed 986 medical workers, including 165 doctors – arrived through a screenshot copied from a Facebook page.

“Update: these are the names of the martyrs of the latest Israeli bombing of two taxis in the Khan Yunis area ...,” the post read.

It was followed by a list of names. “Soma Mohammed Mohammed Baroud” was the fifth name on the list, and the 42,010th on Gaza’s ever-growing list of martyrs.

I refused to believe the news, even

when more posts began popping up everywhere on social media, listing her as number five, and sometimes six in the list of martyrs of the Khan Yunis strike.

I kept calling her, over and over again, hoping that the line would crackle a bit, followed by a brief silence, and then her kind, motherly voice would say, “Marhaba Abu Sammy. How are you, brother?” But she never picked up.

I had told her repeatedly that she does not need to bother with elaborate text or audio messages due to the unreliable internet connection and electricity. “Every morning,” I said, “just type: ‘we are fine.’” That’s all I asked of her.

But she would skip several days without writing, often due to the lack of an internet connection. Then, a message would arrive, though never brief. She wrote with a torrent of thoughts, linking up her daily struggle to survive, to her fears for her children, to poetry, to a Qur’anic verse, to one of her favourite novels, and so on.

I refused to believe the news, even when socialmedia posts listed her as number five, in the list of martyrs of the Khan Yunis strike

“You know, what you said last time reminds me of Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*,” she said on more than one occasion, before she would take the conversation into the most complex philosophical spins. I would listen, and just repeat, “Yes ... totally ... I agree ... one hundred percent.”

For us, Soma was a larger-than-life figure. This is precisely why her sudden absence has shocked us to the point of disbelief. Her children, though grown up, felt orphaned. But her brothers, me included, felt the same way.

I wrote about Soma as a central character in my book *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter*, because she was indeed central to our lives, and to our very survival in a Gaza refugee camp.

The first born, and only daughter, she had to carry a much greater share of work and expectations than the rest of us.

She was just a child, when my eldest brother Anwar, still a toddler, died in an UNRWA clinic at the Nuseirat refugee camp due to the lack of medicine. Then, she was introduced to pain, the kind of pain that with time turned into a permanent state of grief that would never abandon her until her murder by a US-supplied Israeli bomb in Khan Yunis.



MY SISTER, DR SOMA BAROUD: “The news of her murder – or, more accurately, targeted assassination – arrived through a screenshot copied from a Facebook page.

Two years after the death of the first Anwar, another boy was born. They also called him Anwar, so that the legacy of the first boy may carry on. Soma cherished the newcomer, maintaining a special friendship with him for decades to come.

My father began his life as a child labourer, then a fighter in the Palestine Liberation Army, then a police officer during the Egyptian administration of Gaza, then, once again a labourer; that’s because he re-

fused to join the Israeli-funded Gaza police force after the war of 1967, known as the Naksa.

A clever, principled man, and a self-taught intellectual, my Dad did everything he could to provide a measure of dignity for his small family; and Soma, a child, often barefoot, stood by him every step of the way.

When he decided to become a mer-

chant, as in buying discarded and odd items in Israel and repackaging them to sell in the refugee camp, Soma was his main helper. Though her skin healed, cuts on her fingers, due to individually wrapping thousands of razors, remained a testament to the difficult life she lived.

“Soma’s little finger is worth more than a thousand men,” my father would often repeat, to remind us, ultimately five boys, that our sister will always be the main heroine in

the family's story. Now that she is a martyr, that legacy has been secured for eternity.

Years later, my parents would send her to Aleppo to obtain a medical degree. She returned to Gaza, where she spent over three decades healing the pain of others, though never her own.

She worked at Al-Shifa Hospital, at Nasser Hospital among other medical centres. Later, she obtained another certificate in family medicine, opening a clinic of her own. She did not charge the poor, and did all she could to heal those victimized by war.

Soma was a member of a generation of female doctors in Gaza that truly changed the face of medicine, collectively putting great emphasis on the rights of women to medical care and expanding the understanding of family medicine to include psychological trauma with particular emphasis on the centrality, but also the vulnerability of women in a war-torn society.

When my daughter Zarefah managed to visit her in Gaza shortly before the war, she told me that “when aunt Soma walked into the hospital, an entourage of women – doctors, nurses, and other medical staff – would surround her in total adoration.”

At one point, it felt that all of Soma's suffering was finally paying off: a nice family home in Khan Yunis, with a small olive orchard, and a few palm trees; a loving husband, himself a professor of law, and eventually the dean of law school at a reputable Gaza university; three daughters and two sons, whose educational specialities ranged from dentistry to pharmacy, to law to engineering.

Life, even under siege, at least for Soma and her family, seemed manageable. True, she was not allowed

**“I am exhausted.
All I want from life
is for this war to end,
for new cozy pyjamas,
my favourite book,
and a comfortable bed”**

to leave the Strip for many years due to the blockade, and thus we were denied the chance to see her for years on end. True, she was tormented by loneliness and seclusion, thus her love affair and constant citation from García Márquez's seminal novel. But at least her husband was not killed or went missing. Her beautiful house and clinic were still standing. And she was living and breathing, communicating her philosophical nuggets about life, death, memories and hope.

“If I could only find the remains of Hamdi, so that we can give him a proper burial,” she wrote to me last January, when the news circulated that her husband was executed by an Israeli quadcopter in Khan Yunis.

But since the body remained missing, she held on to some faint hope that he was still alive. Her boys, on the other hand, kept digging in the wreckage and debris of the area where Hamdi was shot, hoping to find him and to give him a proper burial. They would often be attacked by Israeli drones in the process of trying to unearth their father's body. They would run away, and return with their shovels to carry on with the grim task.

To maximise their chances of survival, my sister's family decided to split up between displacement camps and other family homes in southern Gaza. This meant that Soma had to be in a constant state of moving, travelling, often long distances on foot, between towns, villages and refugee camps, just to check on her children, following eve-

ry incursion, and every massacre.

“I am exhausted,” she kept telling me. “All I want from life is for this war to end, for new cozy pyjamas, my favourite book, and a comfortable bed.”

These simple and reasonable expectations looked like a mirage, especially when her home in the Qarara area, in Khan Yunis, was demolished by the Israeli army 9n September.

“My heart aches. Everything is gone. Three decades of life, of memories, of achievement, all turned into rubble,” she wrote.

“This is not a story about stones and concrete. It is much bigger. It is a story that cannot be fully told, however long I wrote or spoke. Seven souls had lived here. We ate, drank, laughed, quarrelled, and despite all the challenges of living in Gaza, we managed to carve out a happy life for our family,” she continued.

A few days before she was killed, she told me that she had been sleeping in a half-destroyed building belonging to her neighbours in Qarara. She sent me a photo taken by her son, as she sat on a makeshift chair, on which she also slept amidst the ruins. She looked tired, so very tired.

There was nothing I could say or do to convince her to leave. She insisted that she wanted to keep an eye on the rubble of what remained of her home. Her logic made no sense to me. I pleaded with her to leave. She ignored me, and instead kept sending me photos of what she had salvaged from the rubble, an old photo, a small olive tree, a birth certificate ...

My last message to her, hours before she was killed, was a promise that when the war is over, I will do everything in my power to compensate her for all of this. That the whole family would meet in Egypt, or

Türkiye, and that we will shower her with gifts, and boundless family love. I finished with, "Let's start planning now. Whatever you want. You just say it. Awaiting your instructions..." She never saw the message.

Even when her name, as yet another casualty of the Israeli genocide in Gaza was mentioned in local Palestinian news, I refused to believe it. I continued to call. "Please pick up, Soma, please pick up," I pleaded with her.

Only when a video emerged of white body bags arriving at Nasser Hospital in the back of an ambulance, I thought maybe my sister was indeed gone.

Some of the bags had the names of the others mentioned in the social media posts. Each bag was pulled out separately and placed on the ground. A group of mourners, bereaved men, women and children would rush to hug the body, screaming the same shouts of ag-

Only when a video emerged of white body bags arriving in the back of an ambulance, I thought maybe my sister was indeed gone

ony and despair that accompanied this ongoing genocide from the first day.

Then, another bag, with the name 'Soma Mohammed Mohammed Baroud' written across the thick white plastic. Her colleagues carried her body and gently laid it on the ground. They were about to zip the bag open to verify her identity. I looked the other way.

I refuse to see her but in the way that she wanted to be seen, a strong person, a manifestation of love, kindness and wisdom, whose "little finger is worth more than a

thousand men."

But why do I continue to check my messages with the hope that she will text me to tell me that the whole thing was a major, cruel misunderstanding and that she is okay?

My sister Soma was buried under a small mound of dirt, somewhere in Khan Yunis.

No more messages from her. **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

BENDIB'S WORLD ? KHALIL BENDIB



► DAVID CROMWELL

The complicity of mainstream media: ‘Part of the mechanism of genocide in Palestine’

Propaganda often works in subtle ways. Consider a BBC News headline on its website on October 3: “Israeli air strike kills 18 people in occupied West Bank”

This was noteworthy in that, for once, the BBC had made it clear that Israel was responsible for killing people, rather than using a contorted form of wording that obscured culpability as it so often does: “18 people die in latest violence in the West Bank.”

However, by the next day, the BBC headline read: “Israeli strike kills Hamas commander in occupied West Bank”

Greg Philo, head of the Glasgow Media Group, who died earlier this year, noted as long ago as 2011 that senior BBC News staff speak of “waiting in fear for the phone call from the Israelis.” Did such a phone call lead to the change to a more Israel-friendly headline?

Consider, too, a recent interview by BBC international editor Jeremy Bowen with Khalil al-Hayya, the deputy leader of Hamas. It was broadcast on the flagship BBC News at Ten on October 3. BBC news-reader Clive Myrie prefaced the interview with this remarkable caution: “Many will find his comments

abhorrent.”

It is unimaginable that BBC News would ever introduce an interview or a speech by a Western leader or Western ally with a similar remark.

Recall that Israel’s leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, justified Israel’s genocidal attack on Gaza in a speech to a fawning US Congress in July “It’s a clash between barbarism and civilisation. It’s a clash between those who glorify death and those who sanctify life.”

When the BBC reported Netanyahu’s words, it did not provide an editorial warning that many would find such words abhorrent. That Israel could slaughter, by the time of Netanyahu’s speech, almost 40,000 Palestinians – likely several times more – and yet describe itself as “those who sanctify life” is certainly abhorrent.

Similarly, when has the BBC felt the need to editorialise whenever

When has the BBC felt the need to editorialise whenever Biden, Harris or Starmer declares that, “Israel has a right to defend itself”

Joe Biden, Kamala Harris or Keir Starmer declares that, “Israel has a right to defend itself,” effectively giving a pass to the genocidal actions of an apartheid state?

Indeed, since October 7 last year, BBC news presenters have relentlessly inserted the phrase, “Israel argues that it has a right to defend itself,” whenever Palestinian or pro-ceasefire spokespeople are interviewed. A BBC journalist who requested anonymity told Al Jazeera that the phrase had been: “drilled into us, into all our coverage. It was really an integral part of our editorial stance. To a guest talking about Israeli air strikes killing Palestinians in Gaza, that would be the response from our presenters.”

This is the bogus version of ‘impartiality’ practised by the BBC: a supposed balance between the large-scale violence meted out by Israel, the massively-armed occupier, supported in multiple ways by the United States, and the violence inflicted by Palestinians, the occupied, traumatised, dispossessed and far less powerful population.

When Myrie asked Bowen how the interview with the deputy leader of Hamas came about, he replied: “You know, at the BBC, we believe very strongly in impartial report-



Art: Carlos Latiff,
MintPress News

ing which means, ideally, you have to sit down with people. Try and find what it is they believe in; what it is they say. And, if necessary, interrogate and challenge those statements which is what I was seeking to do in that interview in Doha.”

But how often does the BBC really ‘interrogate and challenge’ statements made by Netanyahu, his ministers, Israeli spokespeople or their Western allies? A solid body of evidence shows, in fact, that BBC journalists have been repeating and amplifying Israeli disinformation and propaganda bullet points; and not merely since October 7 2023, as shown over many years by the Glasgow Media Group, for example.

Craig Mokhiber, who resigned last October as the director of the New York office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in protest at the UN’s weak

response to Israel’s ‘textbook genocide’ in Gaza, wrote that: “western media companies have made themselves a part of the mechanism of genocide in Palestine.”

He pointed to: “the role of complicit Western media corporations [in] knowingly disseminating Israeli disinformation and propaganda, justifying war crimes and crimes against humanity, dehumanizing Palestinians, and blacking out information on the genocide in the West. From the perspective of international human rights law, such actions could and should be subject to sanctions.”

He included the BBC in his criticism: “CNN, Fox, BBC, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal* know what they are doing. This is not to say that these Western outlets are in every sense the modern equivalents [of] *Der Sturmer* and

[Rwanda’s] *Milles Collines* (they are not). But, like these historic examples, they have recklessly crossed the boundaries of ethical journalism and, in some cases, may find themselves legally exposed as well.”

Needless to say, these news organisations, the BBC included, have never critically appraised their own role in promoting Israel’s propaganda.

On the first anniversary of the October 7 attack on Israel, the BBC published a major piece by Bowen on its website titled, “Year of killing and broken assumptions has taken Middle East to edge of deeper, wider war.”

The vast majority of the killing has, of course, been perpetrated by Israel – including an estimated 17,000 children. Another 26,000 children have been made orphans.

Bowen noted that around 1,200 people, mostly Israeli civilians, were killed on October 7. He neglected to mention that there is strong evidence, including reports by Israeli news media, that Israel forces themselves killed many civilians by implementing the deadly, so-called ‘Hannibal Directive’.

It was first implemented during Israel’s occupation of southern Lebanon in 1986. The directive, which

was kept secret and never published, allowed Israeli forces to use any force necessary to prevent Israeli soldiers from being captured and taken into enemy territory, even if such action would lead to those captives' deaths. After being revised several times, the directive was dropped in 2016.

However, according to the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, it was once again implemented on October 7 last year, and extended to the killing of Israeli civilians if that was deemed necessary to prevent them being abducted by Hamas. In an article for the *World Socialist Web Site*, Jean Shaoul observed: "As yet, the number of civilians and soldiers killed by Israeli fire is unknown, in part at least because there have been no autopsies identifying the cause of death, such as the type of weaponry used."

Nor does Bowen refer to the discredited false stories that were manufactured by Israel about beheaded babies, civilians burned alive and the systematic use of sexual violence on October 7 – stories that were shared credulously around the world by major news media, including the BBC.

Bowen said of the deputy leader of Hamas: "He denied his men had targeted civilians – despite overwhelming evidence."

By striking contrast, Bowen did not refer to the overwhelming evidence that Israel has targeted Palestinian civilians and vital infrastructure, including hospitals.

US journalist Jeremy Cahill, co-founder of *The Intercept*, told Al Jazeera that there was a deliberate attempt by the Israelis to portray hospitals as 'terror bases' for Hamas: "The Israelis were pumping the public with information that was meant to convince people that hospitals are not really hospitals."

Netanyahu claimed: "Hamas was using patients in that hospital [Al-

"I've seen more shredded children in just the first week ... missing body parts, being crushed by buildings, or bomb explosions"

Shifa] as human shields."

As Cahill noted: "This was a narrative that we saw unfolding almost from the beginning."

He added: "The *New York Times* and other news organisations began to then create their own renditions of what they, I guess, imagined, Hamas had underneath Al-Shifa hospital, promoting the narrative that something very nefarious is taking place. That was the moment. And you can trace it, that the floodgates were opened for the Israelis, that they perceived that they now had a green light to wage war against Palestinian hospitals and medical facilities in Gaza."

There is also no mention in Bowen's piece of the shocking testimony of surgeons that they have treated Palestinian children with headshot sniper wounds; or, worse, that children have been killed by Israeli snipers who targeted them deliberately.

Jewish American doctor Mark Perlmutter, an orthopedic surgeon and vice president of the International College of Surgeons, who volunteered in Gaza from the end of April until mid-May, told CBS News: "I have two children that I have photographs of that were shot so perfectly in the chest, I couldn't put my stethoscope over their heart more accurately, and directly on the side of the head, in the same child. No toddler gets shot twice by mistake by the 'world's best sniper.' And they're dead-centre shots."

He continued: "All of the disasters I've seen, combined – 40 mission trips, 30 years, Ground Zero,

earthquakes, all of that combined – doesn't equal the level of carnage that I saw against civilians in just my first week in Gaza."

Dr Perlmutter noted that the civilian casualties he saw were "almost exclusively children ... I've never seen that before. I've seen more incinerated children than I've ever seen in my entire life, combined. I've seen more shredded children in just the first week ... missing body parts, being crushed by buildings, the greatest majority, or bomb explosions, the next greatest majority." Another grievous omission in Bowen's article is the eyewitness evidence that Israeli troops carried out executions of Palestinians, including doctors and healthcare workers. If these had been crimes committed by Russian troops in Ukraine, it would have been headline news, night after night.

BBC's spurious and misleading notion of 'impartiality' yields 'both-sidesisms' in Bowen's account: "Both sides deny accusations they have broken the laws of war. Hamas claims it ordered its men not to kill Israeli civilians. Israel says it warns Palestinian civilians to get out of harm's way but Hamas uses them as human shields."

Bowen is silent about Israelis using Palestinians as human shields in Gaza, including children.

What about the US role in funding Israel, arming it to the hilt, providing intelligence and defending the apartheid state robustly through its usual 'diplomacy' at the UN? This was given a token passing mention in Bowen's article. But he omitted that the US has just approved a massive \$8.7-billion military 'aid' package to Israel.

Bowen's 'balanced' piece contains nothing about the intentions of Netanyahu and other Israeli politicians for a 'Greater Israel' which would require the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the Jordan

to the sea, other than one fleeting comment: “Ghosts of the past tormented Palestinians as well. Raja Shehadeh, the celebrated Palestinian writer and human rights campaigner believes that Israel wanted to make another Nakba – another catastrophe.”

Crucially, there is no explanation from Bowen that Netanyahu and his Israeli ministers are simply not interested in a peaceful, negotiated settlement between Israel and Palestine. They would rather that Palestine is eradicated from the map of the Middle East.

Moreover, as long as the genocide continues, as long as there is war, now expanded to Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, then Netanyahu can likely cling on to power. This has the added benefit of shielding him from the corruption charges that may well land him in prison, once he leaves office.

As Jonathan Cook observed recently: “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.”

This is a rational perspective that Bowen, along with the rest of BBC News, has no interest in pursuing.

Another major omission in Bowen’s piece is any analysis, or even mention, of the role played by major news media in its reporting of Gaza. Greg Philo and co-author Mike Berry analysed the first four weeks of BBC One daytime coverage of Gaza following the October 7 Hamas attack. They sought to identify which terms were used by journalists themselves (not in direct or reported statements) to describe Israeli and Palestinian deaths:

“We found that ‘murder,’ ‘murder-

“People [at the BBC] were terrified of using the word ‘genocide’ in coverage. They still are. You will very rarely see it in any BBC coverage”

ous,’ ‘mass murder,’ ‘brutal murder’ and ‘merciless murder’ were used a total of 52 times by journalists to refer to Israelis’ deaths but never in relation to Palestinian deaths. The same pattern could be seen in relation to ‘massacre,’ ‘brutal massacre’ and ‘horrific massacre’ (35 times for Israeli deaths, not once for Palestinian deaths); ‘atrocities,’ ‘horrific atrocities’ and ‘appalling atrocities’ (22 times for Israeli deaths, once for Palestinian deaths); and ‘slaughter’ (five times for Israeli deaths, not once for Palestinian deaths).”

They added: “But the issue goes beyond these differences. The Palestinian perspective is effectively absent from the coverage, in how they understand the reasons for the conflict and the nature of the occupation under which they are living.”

A new investigation by Al Jazeera’s *Listening Post* team reveals testimony from inside Western media organisations reporting on Gaza. An anonymous BBC journalist, Sara (not her real name), told Al Jazeera that: “People [at the BBC] were terrified of using the word ‘genocide’ in coverage. They still are. You will very rarely see it in any BBC coverage. And if an interviewee says the word ‘genocide,’ the presenter will almost always panic.”

Imagine if an Official Enemy of the West – say, Iran or Russia – was inflicting comparable carnage, the BBC would be terrified of challenging the use of the word, ‘genocide’.

Sara observed that: “Gaza has massively exposed the hypocrisies at the heart of the BBC.”

She continued: “Many of our own presenters when faced with an interviewee who was Palestinian or who had lost family in Gaza, there was just such a lack of compassion.”

An infamous video clip, mentioned in a previous media alert, was then shown of BBC Newsnight’s Kirsty Wark interviewing Husam Zomlot, the head of the Palestinian Mission to the UK. He had lost several members of his family during the early days of Israel’s bombing campaign. Zomlot told Wark of his emotional pain, and he listed his relatives who had been killed, describing them as “sitting ducks for the Israeli war machine.”

Wark replied with appalling lack of empathy: “I am sorry for your own personal loss. I mean, can I just be clear though, you cannot condone the killing of civilians in Israel, can you? Nor the killing of families?”

Sara noted: “As a result, a number of producers were really reticent about putting a vulnerable Palestinian guest in front of a BBC presenter.”

The BBC journalist observed that double standards could be seen in the selection of interviewees, and how they were treated. After October 7, the BBC set up an internal group chat in which producers could vet potential interviewees based on their online footprint.

Sara told Al Jazeera that defenders of Palestinian rights were discriminated against during this vetting process: “It was overwhelmingly guests on the Palestinian side of things who were being looked into. Palestinians being flagged up for using the word ‘Zionist,’ which isn’t something to flag necessarily. Even the occasional NGO was thrown in, for example Human Rights Watch.”

She continued: “These are organisations that we’ve really relied on in terms of covering Ukraine and various other conflicts. And now

and again they would check an Israeli guest. But there was no balance in what was going on. Israeli spokespeople who we did have on were given a lot of free rein to say whatever they wanted with very little pushback. Whereas any Palestinian guest was asked to condemn Hamas, almost as though condemning Hamas was the sort of price to pay before they could be humanised in our coverage.”

Ghassan Abu Sitta, a British-Palestinian reconstructive surgeon who worked in Gaza hospitals and who is the current Rector of the University of Glasgow, told Al Jazeera: “One of probably the most distressing aspects about that period when I was working at Shifa Hospital is that we were getting hundreds and hundreds of wounded. The bombing around Shifa was continuous. And so, you’d get phone calls and all the Western journalists wanted to ask about was, ‘when you walk around, do you see any tunnels?’”

Israel had relentlessly claimed that ‘Hamas tunnels’ under hospitals and other civilian buildings were part of an underground ‘command and control’ network used to launch attacks on Israel. This became a dominant theme diverting attention from Israel’s war crimes, including on the BBC. Abu Sitta added: “And if you say that I’ve never seen any of these tunnels, then you are dismissed immediately.”

Al Jazeera noted that internal BBC dissent had led to some BBC journalists writing letters to senior BBC management, including director-general Tim Davie, warning that BBC coverage risked ‘aiding and abetting genocide.’ This action was reportedly ‘considered inflammatory by recipients’, according to an article published by Hollywood-based *Deadline*, billed as ‘the definitive choice for industry insiders’.

When shared on internal BBC distribution lists, Jewish employees

“For staff to acquire editorial power, they must demonstrate their adherence to a mode of journalism that is cautious”

were said to have taken ‘extreme offence’ to the language used: “It was extraordinarily egregious,” says a non-Jewish insider who read the letter. Another recalls senior management being “quite shaken” by the accusations: ‘They were properly outraged that [people thought it was] acceptable to make these kinds of incendiary and unpleasant remarks about colleagues and send them around the BBC.’”

The carefully considered content of the BBC dissident letters, comprising solid evidence and rational analysis, and the conclusion that BBC News coverage “aligned with Israel’s propaganda strategy,” was missing from the *Deadline* piece.

Sara summed up her experience inside the BBC: “Multiple journalists in emails, in meetings, have raised concerns about a lot of the things I’ve said in this interview – the disparity in the language used, the inconsistency in approach compared to other story areas like Russia and Ukraine, the lack of humanisation when it comes to Palestinians, the lack of context about this conflict before the 7th of October. And it hasn’t really made a difference because there’s just a sort of unwillingness among the executive to accept evidence. For me personally, it meant I could no longer see my future at the BBC.”

Why does the BBC behave this way? Earlier this year, the *Jacobin* website published a piece by an anonymous BBC journalist who

wrote: “The BBC is, in many respects, an organ of the British state. As such, its journalism is enduringly informed by an intra-institutional connection to ideas of Western hegemony. This is a paradigm maintained through being deeply encoded in the corporation’s organisational structure.”

The BBC journalist added: “For staff to acquire editorial power, they must repeatedly demonstrate their adherence to a mode of journalism that is cautious and doesn’t damage political relationships while – crucially – upholding the veneer of impartiality. These are prerequisites for advancement at the BBC. Only those who have consistently proven they will uphold the supremacy of these principles will be elevated to positions of control.”

This, of course, was put more succinctly to a young Andrew Marr when he failed to run rings around Noam Chomsky in a classic interview on BBC2 in 1996:

Marr: “How can you know that I’m self-censoring?”

Chomsky: “I’m not saying you’re self-censoring. I’m sure you believe everything you’re saying. But what I’m saying is that if you believe something different, you wouldn’t be sitting where you’re sitting.”

Let us conclude with the words of surgeon Ghassan Abu Sitta. “In the future, when we have a museum for this genocide, we will have a special place where we put the pictures of the journalists who allowed it to happen. There will be a wing for the CNN and the BBC and the [*New York*] *Times* journalists who were the enablers of the genocide. The Palestinian people will remember them.” **CT**

David Cromwell is co-editor of Medialens, the UK media watchdog at whose website – www.medialens.org – this article was first published



Ayman Baalbaki (Lebanon), *Untitled*, 2020.

► VIJAY PRASHAD

They now know what real bombing means

Over the past year, the US has provided Israel with a record \$17.9-billion in military aid as it commits genocide

On October 1, US Representative Michael McCaul, chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee issued a statement urging US President Joe Biden to “place maximum pressure on Iran and its proxies, rather than pressure Israel for a ceasefire. We need to expedite arms transfers to Israel that this administration has delayed for months, including 2,000-pound bombs, to ensure Is-

rael has all the tools to deter these threats.”

McCaul’s belligerent call came days after Israel used more than 80 US-made 2,000-pound bombs and other munitions on September 27, to strike a residential neighbourhood in Beirut and kill – amongst hundreds of civilians – Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah (1960–2024), the leader of Hezbollah. In this one bombing raid, Israel dropped more of these ‘bunker buster’ bombs than the United

States military used in its 2003 invasion of Iraq.

A former US aviator, Commander Graham Scarbro of the US Navy, reviewed the evidence of the Israeli strikes for the US Naval Institute. In a very revealing article, Scarbro notes that Israel “seems to have taken a notably different approach to collateral damage than US forces over the past few decades.” While the US has never demonstrated any significant concern for civilian cas-

ualties or 'collateral damage', it is worth noting that even senior US military officials have raised their eyebrows at the degree of Israel's disregard for human life. Israel's military, Scarbro writes, "seems to have a higher threshold for collateral damage... meaning they strike even when chances are higher for civilian casualties."

Despite Washington's knowledge that the Israelis have been bombing Gaza, and now Lebanon, with complete abandon – and even after the International Court of Justice ruled that it is 'plausible' that Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza – the United States has continued to arm the Israelis with deadly weaponry.

On October 10 2023, Biden said, "We're surging additional military assistance," which has amounted to a record-level of at least \$17.9-billion during the past year of genocide.

In March 2024, the *Washington Post* reported that the US had "quietly approved and delivered more than 100 separate foreign military sales to Israel that amounted to 'thousands of precision-guided munitions, small-diameter bombs, bunker busters, small arms and other lethal aid.'" These 'small' sales fell below the minimum threshold under US law which requires the president to approach Congress for approval (which anyway would not have been denied). These sales amounted to the transfer of at least 14,000 of the 2,000 pound MK-84 bombs and 6,500 500-pound bombs that Israel has used in both Gaza and Lebanon.

In Gaza, the Israelis have routinely used 2,000-pound bombs to strike areas populated by civilians – who had been told to take refuge at these locations by the Israeli authorities themselves. "In the first two weeks of the war," the *New York Times* reported, "roughly 90 percent of the munitions Israel dropped in Gaza were satellite-guided bombs of 1,000

"The US cannot beg Netanyahu to stop bombing civilians one day and the next send thousands more bombs that can level city blocks"

or 2,000 pounds." In March 2024, US Senator Bernie Sanders tweeted, "The US cannot beg Netanyahu to stop bombing civilians one day and the next send him thousands more 2,000lb. bombs that can level entire city blocks. This is obscene." A 2016 report by Action on Armed Violence offered the following assessment of these weapons of mass destruction:

"These are extremely powerful bombs, with a large destructive capacity when used in populated areas. They can blow apart buildings and kill and injure people hundreds of metres from the point of detonation. The fragmentation pattern and range of a 2,000lb MK 84 bomb are difficult to predict, but it is generally said that this weapon has a 'lethal radius' (i.e. the distance in which it is likely to kill people in the vicinity) of up to 360m.

The blast waves of such a weapon can create a great concussive effect; a 2,000lb bomb can be expected to cause severe injury and damage as far as 800 metres from the point of impact."

I have several times walked around the Beirut neighbourhood of Haret Hreik in Dahiyeh, which was struck by Israeli bombs in the attack on the Hezbollah leadership. This is a highly congested area, with barely a few metres between high-rise residential buildings. To strike a complex of these buildings with over eighty of these powerful bombs cannot be called 'precise.' Israel's bombing of Beirut mirrors its harsh attacks on Gaza and symbolises the

disdain for human life that characterises both Israeli and US warfare. On September 23, Israel bombarded Lebanon at a rate of more than one airstrike per minute. In days, Israel's 'intense airstrikes' displaced over a million people, a fifth of the entire population of Lebanon.

The first bomb to ever fall from an aircraft was a Haasen hand grenade (Denmark) dropped by Lt Giulio Cavotti of the Italian Air Force on November 1 1911 onto the town of Tagiura, near Tripoli, Libya. A hundred years later, in a grotesque commemoration of sorts, French and US aircraft bombed Libya once more as part of their war to overthrow the government of Muammar Gaddafi. The ferocity of aerial bombing was understood from the very outset, as Sven Lindqvist documented in his book, *A History of Bombing* (2003). In March 1924, UK Squadron Leader Arthur 'Bomber' Harris authored a report (later expunged) about his bombings in Iraq and the 'real' meaning of aerial bombardment:

"Where the Arab and Kurd had just begun to realise that if they could stand a little noise, they could stand bombing... they now know what real bombing means, in casualties and damage; they now know that within forty-five minutes a full-sized village ... can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines which offer them no real target, no opportunity for glory as warriors, no effective means of escape."

These words of 'Bomber' Harris aptly describe the kind of ruthlessness inflicted on both Palestine and Lebanon.

You might ask: what about the rockets fired on Israel by Hezbollah and Iran? Are they not part of the brutality of war? Certainly, these are part of the ugliness of war-

fare, but an easy parallel cannot be drawn. Iran's ballistic missiles followed Israel's attack on an Iranian diplomatic facility in Syria (April 2024), the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran following the inauguration of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (July 2024), the assassination of Nasrallah in Beirut (September 2024), and the killing of several Iranian military officials. Significantly, whereas Israel has launched countless strikes targeting civilians, medical personnel, journalists, and aid workers, Iran's missiles exclusively targeted Israeli military and intelligence facilities and not civilian areas.

Hezbollah, meanwhile, targeted Israel's Ramat David Airbase, east of Haifa, in September 2024. Neither Iran nor Hezbollah have fired their munitions into congested neighbourhoods of Israeli cities.

Since October 8 2023, Israeli airstrikes against Lebanon have far outnumbered Hezbollah's strikes against Israel. Before the current wave of hostilities, by September 10, Israel had killed 137 Lebanese civilians and displaced hundreds of thousands of Lebanese from their homes; meanwhile, Hezbollah rockets had by then killed 14 Israeli civilians, with their rockets leading to the evacuation of 63,000 Israeli civilians.

Israel launched countless strikes targeting civilians, journalists and aid workers, but Iran targeted Israeli military and intelligence facilities

There has been not only a quantitative difference in the number of strikes and death toll, but a qualitative difference in the use of violence. Violence that is directed largely at military targets, is permissible in certain conditions under international law; violence that is indiscriminate, such as when massive bombs are used against civilians, violates the laws of war.

Etel Adnan (1925–2021), a Lebanese poet and artist, grew up in Beirut after her parents fled the collapsing Ottoman Empire that became modern day Turkey. She dug deep into the soil of conflict and pain, the ingredients for her poetry. Her voice resonated from the balcony of her apartment in Ashrafieh, the 'little mountain', from where she could see the ships come in and out of the port.

When Etel Adnan died, the novelist Elias Khoury (1948–2024), who himself died just before Beirut was again bombarded, wrote that he

mourned a woman who would not die, but he feared for his city which was suffering alone.

Here are a few extracts from Etel's poem, *Beirut, 1982*, to remind us that we are as angry as a storm.

*I never believed
that vengeance
would be a tree
growing in my garden
...*

*Trees grow in all directions
So do Palestinians:
uprooted
and unlike butterflies
wingless,
earthbound,
heavy with love
for their borders and their
misery,
no people can go forever behind
bars
or under the rain.
...*

*We shall never cry with tears
but with blood.
...*

*It is not on cemeteries that we
shall plant grain
nor in the palm of my hand
We are as angry as a storm. 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 is a senior non-resident fellow at Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China. 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*

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GOD BLESS ISRAEL-L-L

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ACCUSED: The six Al Jazeera journalists pictured above were named by the IDF as members of terror groups in this image released on October 23, 2024.

► JONATHAN COOK

Israel kills journalists. Western media kills truth about Gaza genocide

Western publics are being subjected to a campaign of psychological warfare, where genocide is classed as 'self-defence' and opposition to it 'is terrorism'

Israel knew that, if it could stop foreign correspondents from reporting directly from Gaza, those journalists would end up covering events in ways far more to its liking.

They would hedge every report of a new Israeli atrocity – if they covered them at all – with a ' Hamas claims' or 'Gaza family members allege.' Everything would be presented in terms of conflicting narratives rather than witnessed facts. Audi-

ences would feel uncertain, hesitant, detached.

Israel could shroud its slaughter in a fog of confusion and disputation. The natural revulsion evoked by a genocide would be tempered and attenuated.

For a year, the networks' most experienced war reporters have stayed put in their hotels in Israel, watching Gaza from afar. Their human-interest stories, always at the heart of war reporting, have fo-

cused on the far more limited suffering of Israelis than the vast catastrophe unfolding for Palestinians.

That is why western audiences have been forced to relive a single day of horror for Israel, on October 7, 2023, as intensely as they have a year of greater horrors in Gaza – in what the World Court has judged to be a 'plausible' genocide by Israel. That is why the media have immersed their audiences in the agonies of the families of some 250

Israelis – civilians taken hostage and soldiers taken captive – as much as they have the agonies of 2.3 million Palestinians bombed and starved to death week after week, month after month.

That is why audiences have been subjected to gaslighting narratives that frame Gaza's destruction as a 'humanitarian crisis' rather than the canvas on which Israel is erasing all the known rules of war.

While foreign correspondents sit obediently in their hotel rooms, Palestinian journalists have been picked off one by one – in the greatest massacre of journalists in history.

Israel is now repeating that process in Lebanon. On October 24, it struck a residence in south Lebanon where three journalists were staying. All were killed.

In an indication of how deliberate and cynical Israel's actions are, it put its military's crosshairs on six Al Jazeera reporters, smearing them as 'terrorists' working for Hamas and Islamic Jihad. They are reportedly the last surviving Palestinian journalists in northern Gaza, which Israel has sealed off while it carries out the so-called 'General's Plan'.

Israel wants no one reporting its final push to ethnically cleanse northern Gaza by starving out the 400,000 Palestinians still there and executing anyone who remains as a 'terrorist'.

These six join a long list of professionals defamed by Israel in the interests of advancing its genocide – from doctors and aid workers to UN peacekeepers.

Perhaps the nadir of Israel's domestication of foreign journalists was reached last month in a report by CNN. Back in February whistleblowing staff there revealed

While foreign correspondents sit obediently in their hotel rooms, Palestinian journalists have been picked off one by one

that the network's executives have been actively obscuring Israeli atrocities to portray Israel in a more sympathetic light. In a story whose framing should have been unthinkable – but sadly was all too predictable – CNN reported on the psychological trauma some Israeli soldiers are suffering from time spent in Gaza, in some cases leading to suicide.

Committing a genocide can be bad for your mental health, it seems. Or as CNN explained, its interviews "provide a window into the psychological burden that the war is casting on Israeli society."

In its lengthy piece, titled "He got out of Gaza, but Gaza did not get out of him," the atrocities the soldiers admit committing are little more than the backdrop as CNN finds yet another angle on Israeli suffering. Israeli soldiers are the real victims – even as they perpetrate a genocide on the Palestinian people.

One bulldozer driver, Guy Zaken, told CNN he could not sleep and had become vegetarian because of the 'very, very difficult things' he had seen and had to do in Gaza.

What things? Zaken had earlier told a hearing of the Israeli parliament that his unit's job was to drive over many hundreds of Palestinians, some of them alive.

CNN reported: "Zaken says he can no longer eat meat, as it reminds him of the gruesome scenes he witnessed from his bulldozer in Gaza."

Doubtless some Nazi concentration camp guards committed suicide in the 1940s after witnessing the horrors there – because they were

responsible for them. Only in some weird parallel news universe, would their 'psychological burden' be the story.

After a huge online backlash, CNN amended an editor's note at the start of the article that originally read: "This story includes details about suicide that some readers may find upsetting."

Readers, it was assumed, would find the suicide of Israeli soldiers upsetting, but apparently not the revelation that those soldiers were routinely driving over Palestinians so that, as Zaken explained, "everything squirts out."

Finally, a year into Israel's genocidal war, now rapidly spreading into Lebanon, some voices are being raised very belatedly to demand the entry of foreign journalists into Gaza.

In a move presumably designed, as November's elections loom, to ingratiate themselves with voters angry at the party's complicity in genocide – dozens of Democratic members of the US Congress wrote to President Joe Biden asking him to pressure Israel to give journalists 'unimpeded access' to the enclave.

Don't hold your breath.

Western media have done very little themselves to protest their exclusion from Gaza over the past year – for a number of reasons.

Given the utterly indiscriminate nature of Israel's bombardment, major outlets have not wanted their journalists getting hit by a 2,000lb bomb for being in the wrong place.

That may in part be out of concern for their welfare. But there are likely to be more cynical concerns.

Having foreign journalists in Gaza blown up or executed by snipers would drag media organisations into direct confrontation with Israel and its well-oiled lobby machine.

The response would be entirely

predictable, insinuating that the journalists died because they were colluding with ‘the terrorists’ or that they were being used as ‘human shields’ – the excuse Israel has rolled out time and again to justify its targeting of doctors in Gaza and UN peacekeepers in Lebanon.

But there’s a bigger problem. The establishment media have not wanted to be in a position where their journalists are so close to the ‘action’ that they are in danger of providing a clearer picture of Israel’s war crimes and its genocide.

The media’s current distance from the crime scene offers them plausible deniability as they both-sides every Israeli atrocity.

In previous conflicts, western reporters have served as witnesses, assisting in the prosecution of foreign leaders for war crimes. That happened in the wars that attended the break-up of Yugoslavia, and will doubtless happen once again if Russian President Vladimir Putin is ever delivered to the Hague.

But those journalistic testimonies were harnessed to put the West’s enemies behind bars, not its closest ally.

The media do not want their reporters to become chief witnesses for the prosecution in the future trials of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his defence minister, Yoav Gallant, at the International Criminal Court. The ICC’s prosecutor, Karim Khan, is seeking arrest warrants for them both.

After all, any such testimony from journalists would not stop at Israel’s door. They would implicate western capitals too, and put establishment media organisations on a collision course with their own governments.

The western media does not see its job as holding power to account when the West is the one commit-

“Is the *Guardian* more worried about the reaction to what is said about Israel than Palestine? Absolutely”

ting the crimes.

Journalist whistleblowers have gradually been coming forward to explain how establishment news organisations – including the BBC and the supposedly liberal *Guardian* – are sidelining Palestinian voices and minimising the genocide.

An investigation by Novara Media recently revealed mounting unhappiness in parts of the *Guardian* newsroom at its double standards on Israel and Palestine.

Its editors recently censored a commentary by preeminent Palestinian author Susan Abulhawa after she insisted on being allowed to refer to the slaughter in Gaza as ‘the holocaust of our times.’

Senior *Guardian* columnists such as Jonathan Freedland made much during Jeremy Corbyn’s tenure as leader of the Labour party that Jews, and Jews alone, had the right to define and name their own oppression.

That right, however, does not appear to extend to Palestinians.

As staff who spoke to Novara noted, the *Guardian*’s Sunday sister paper, the *Observer*, had no problem opening its pages to British Jewish writer Howard Jacobson to smear as a ‘blood libel’ any reporting of the provable fact that Israel has killed many, many thousands of Palestinian children in Gaza.

One veteran journalist there said: “Is the *Guardian* more worried about the reaction to what is said about Israel than Palestine? Absolutely.”

Another staff member admitted it would be inconceivable for the paper

to be seen censoring a Jewish writer. But censoring a Palestinian one is fine, it seems.

Other journalists report being under ‘suffocating control’ from senior editors, and say this pressure exists “only if you’re publishing something critical of Israel”.

According to staff there, the word ‘genocide’ is all but banned in the paper except in coverage of the International Court of Justice, whose judges ruled nine months ago that a ‘plausible’ case had been made that Israel was committing genocide. Things have got far worse since.

Similarly, ‘Sara’, a whistleblower who recently resigned from the BBC newsroom and spoke of her experiences to Al Jazeera’s *Listening Post*, said Palestinians and their supporters were routinely kept off air or subjected to humiliating and insensitive lines of questioning.

Some producers have reportedly grown increasingly reluctant to bring on air vulnerable Palestinians, some of whom have lost family members in Gaza, because of concerns about the effect on their mental health from the aggressive interrogations they were being subjected to from anchors.

According to Sara, BBC vetting of potential guests overwhelmingly targets Palestinians, as well as those sympathetic to their cause and human rights organisations. Background checks are rarely done of Israelis or Jewish guests.

She added that a search showing that a guest had used the word ‘Zionism’ – Israel’s state ideology – in a social media post could be enough to get them disqualified from a programme.

Even officials from one of the biggest rights group in the world, the New York-based Human Rights Watch, became persona non grata at the BBC for their criticisms of Israel, even though the corporation had previously relied on their re-

ports in covering Ukraine and other global conflicts.

Israeli guests, by contrast, “were given free rein to say whatever they wanted with very little pushback,” including lies about Hamas burning or beheading babies and committing mass rape.

An email cited by Al Jazeera from more than 20 BBC journalists sent last February to Tim Davie, the BBC’s director general, warned that the corporation’s coverage risked “aiding and abetting genocide through story suppression.”

These biases have been only too evident in the BBC’s coverage, first of Gaza and now, as media interest wanes in the genocide, of Lebanon.

Headlines – the mood music of journalism, and the only part of a story many of the audience read – have been uniformly dire.

For example, Netanyahu’s threats of a Gaza-style genocide against the Lebanese people earlier this month if they did not overthrow their leaders were soft-soaped by the BBC headline: “Netanyahu’s appeal to Lebanese people falls on deaf ears in Beirut.”

Reasonable readers would have wrongly inferred both that Netanyahu was trying to do the Lebanese people a favour (by preparing to murder them), and that they were being ungrateful in not taking up his offer.

It has been the same story everywhere in the establishment media. In another extraordinary, revealing moment, Kay Burley of Sky News announced this month the deaths of four Israeli soldiers from a Hezbollah drone strike on a military base inside Israel.

With a solemnity usually reserved for the passing of a member of the British royal family, she slowly named the four soldiers, with a



Harassed: Asa Winstanley (above) and Richard Medhurst

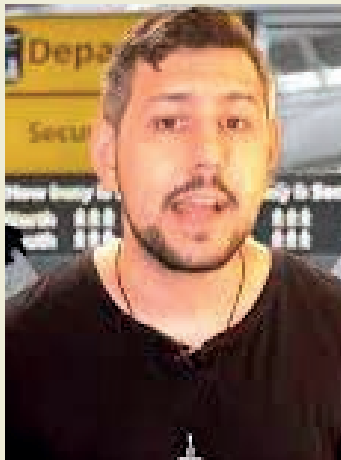


photo of each shown on screen. She stressed twice that all four were only 19 years old.

Sky News seemed not to understand that these were not British soldiers, and that there was no reason for a British audience to be especially disturbed by their deaths. Soldiers are killed in wars all the time – it is an occupational hazard.

And further, if Israel considered them old enough to fight in Gaza and Lebanon, then they were old enough to die too without their age being treated as particularly noteworthy.

But more significantly still, Israel’s Golani Brigade to which these soldiers belonged has been centrally involved in the slaughter of Pales-

tinians over the past year. Its troops have been responsible for many of the tens of thousands of children killed and maimed in Gaza.

Each of the four soldiers was far, far less deserving of Burley’s sympathy and concern than the thousands of children who have been slaughtered at the hands of their brigade. Those children are almost never named and their pictures are rarely shown, not least because their injuries are usually too horrifying to be seen.

It was yet more evidence of the upside-down world the establishment media has been trying to normalise for its audiences.

It is why statistics from the United States, where the coverage of Gaza and Lebanon may be even more unhinged, show faith in the media is at rock bottom. Fewer than one in three respondents – 31 percent – said they still had a “great deal or fair amount of trust in mass media”.

Israel is the one dictating the coverage of its genocide. First by murdering the Palestinian journalists reporting it on the ground, and then by making sure house-trained foreign correspondents stay well clear of the slaughter, out of harm’s way in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

And as ever, Israel has been able to rely on the complicity of its western patrons in crushing dissent at home.

Last month, a British investigative journalist, Asa Winstanley, an outspoken critic of Israel and its lobbyists in the UK, had his home in London raided at dawn by counter-terrorism police.

Though the police have not arrested or charged him – at least not yet – they snatched his electronic devices. He was warned that he is being investigated for ‘encouragement of terrorism’ in his social media posts.

Police told *Middle East Eye* that his devices had been seized as part of an investigation into suspected terrorism offences of ‘support for a proscribed organisation’ and ‘dissemination of terrorist documents’.

The police can act only because of Britain’s draconian, anti-speech Terrorism Act.

Section 12, for example, makes the expression of an opinion that could be interpreted as sympathetic to armed Palestinian resistance to Israel’s illegal occupation – a right enshrined in international law but sweepingly dismissed as ‘terrorism’ in the West – itself a terrorism offence.

Those journalists who haven’t been house-trained in the establishment media, as well as solidarity activists, must now chart a treacherous path across intentionally ill-defined legal terrain when talking about Israel’s genocide in Gaza.

Winstanley is not the first journalist to be accused of falling foul of the Terrorism Act. In recent weeks, Richard Medhurst, a freelance journalist, was arrested at Heathrow airport on his return from a trip abroad. Another journalist-activist, Sarah Wilkinson, was briefly arrested after her home was ransacked by police. Their electronic devices were seized too.

Meanwhile, Richard Barnard, co-founder of Palestine Action, which seeks to disrupt the UK’s supply of weapons to Israel’s genocide, has been charged over speeches he has made against the genocide.

It now appears that all these actions are part of a specific police campaign targeting journalists and Palestinian solidarity activists: ‘Operation Incessantness.’

The message this clumsy title is presumably supposed to convey is that the British state is coming after anyone who speaks out too loudly against the British government’s continuing arming and complicity

The raid on Winstanley’s home and the arrests are intended to intimidate others, including independent journalists, into silence

in Israel’s genocide.

Notably, the establishment media have failed to cover this latest assault on journalism and the role of a free press – supposedly the very things they are there to protect.

The raid on Winstanley’s home and the arrests are intended to intimidate others, including independent journalists, into silence for fear of the consequences of speaking up.

This has nothing to do with terrorism. Rather, it is terrorism by the British state.

Once again the world is being turned upside down.

The West is waging a campaign of psychological warfare on its populations: it is gaslighting and disorientating them, classing genocide as ‘elf-defence’ and opposition to it a form of ‘terrorism.’

This is an expansion of the persecution suffered by Julian Assange, the Wikileaks founder who spent years locked up in London’s Belmarsh high-security prison.

His unprecedented journalism – revealing the darkest secrets of western states – was redefined as espionage. His ‘offence’ was revealing that Britain and the US had committed systematic war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now, on the back of that precedent, the British state is coming after journalists simply for embarrassing it.

Last month I attended a meeting in Bristol against the genocide

in Gaza at which the main speaker was physically absent after the British state failed to issue him an entry visa.

The missing guest – he had to join us by Zoom – was Mandla Mandela, the grandson of Nelson Mandela, who was locked up for decades as a terrorist before becoming the first leader of post-apartheid South Africa and a feted, international statesman.

Mandla Mandela was until recently a member of the South African parliament.

A Home Office spokesperson told MEE that the UK only issued visas “to those who we want to welcome to our country.”

Media reports suggest Britain was determined to exclude Mandela because, like his grandfather, he views the Palestinian struggle against Israeli apartheid as intimately linked to the earlier struggle against South Africa’s apartheid.

The echoes from history are apparently entirely lost on officials: the UK is once again associating the Mandela family with terrorism. Before it was to protect South Africa’s apartheid regime. Now it is to protect Israel’s even worse apartheid and genocidal regime.

The world is indeed turned on its head. And the West’s supposedly ‘free media’ is playing a critical role in trying to make our upside-down world seem normal.

That can only be achieved by failing to report the Gaza genocide as a genocide. Instead, western journalists are serving as little more than stenographers. Their job: to take dictation from Israel. **CT**

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



Flag Man: UK Patriot Demo, Westminster, London, June 2024

DAZ SMITH

Documenting the lives of people who refuse to conform

In 2006, I picked up a camera again for the first time in over twenty years. This time, it wasn't to document family moments but to explore something deeper. I began with local camera clubs, sharpening my eye for composition, light, and focus. Soon, I mastered the polished, picture-perfect landscapes, portraits, and textbook images, but something was missing.

These flawless shots felt clinical – too easy, too structured. They lacked the spark, the chaos, the life I was searching for.

It was the internet that eventually pointed me toward *The Americans* by Robert Frank. The first time I flipped through its pages, it was as if my world had cracked wide open. What I saw wasn't sharp or clean; the photos were gritty, raw, and messy, yet they were filled with a strange, mesmerising power. Frank's images didn't obey any conventional rules; they weren't about technical perfection. Instead, they captured fleeting moments of people's lives in an unfiltered, intimate way, each photograph a brief window into the soul of a passing stranger.

For me, it was a revelation – and the beginning of my journey.

You Rebel Scum is my ongoing quest to document the lives of people who refuse to conform – those who live on the fringes, in the cracks between society's expectations. From street photography to documentary work, I've moved from the predictable and the pretty, gravitating instead towards the raw, unscripted beauty of those who stand out in this fast-moving, ever-changing world.

I've always been drawn to rebels in stories, which is why the Star Wars-inspired title felt fitting. In many ways, the individuals I photograph – the homeless, the

street performers, the activists – are rebels, too.

Their lives may be different from my own, but what draws me to them is their resilience, their refusal to bend to societal norms. Over the past eight years, I've sought out these moments of defiance, these glimpses of lives lived against the grain, even if only for the briefest moment.

My camera has taken me onto the streets of the UK, where I've shared meals with the homeless and heard their stories. I've marched alongside both Anti-Brexit and Pro-Brexit supporters. I stood in the midst of tens of thousands of Anti-Trump protesters, wrapped in their Stars and Stripes in central London. I've captured the determined faces of children fighting for climate action and the masked figures of anarchists burning flags in Trafalgar Square. More recently, I've documented the emotional outpouring of Ukrainian war protesters and the voices raised against the violence in Israel and Palestine. I even found myself in the heart of Westminster, photographing far-right demonstrators clashing with police on Armistice Day.

But it's not all conflict and protest. There's beauty and light too – the liberating expression of self that shines through at World Naked Bike Rides and

Pride marches, where bodies of all shapes, sizes, and identities boldly celebrate their freedom.

My journey continues. It's a journey to capture the rebels among us, those who challenge the norm and show us that there is more than one way to live, to express, and to exist.

CT



THE BOOK: Cover of Daz Smith's latest photobook *You Rebel Scum!* More details on Page 38

*Daz Smith is a photographer based in Bath, England. This article and the photographs in this feature are from his new photobook, *You Rebel Scum!**



Trump Stinks: Anti Trump Demo, London, July 2018



Our Future: Youth Strike for Climate Change Demo, Bath, September 2019



Killing your Planet, Westminster, London, October 2023



I Can't Look: The World Naked Bike Ride, Bristol, 2022.



Brexit: Is It Worth It? Bristol, July 2018



No to Racism. No to Trump: London, July 2018



One Helluva Summer: Extinction Rebellion, Takeover of Westminster, London, 2023



Hold the Line: Far Right Demo, Westminster, London, Armistice Day 2023



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Mankini: Million Mask March, London, November 2018



The Handmaids Tale: Anti Trump Demo, London 2018, July, 2018

► STAN COX

Outrageous laws can't silence climate movement

Nonviolent climate protest is being subjected to prosecution and punishments are being ratcheted up to levels befitting violent and far more serious crimes

In August, climate activist and cellist John Mark Rozendaal was arrested and charged with criminal contempt for playing a few minutes of Bach outside Citibank's headquarters in New York City. Rozendaal, 63, was prominent in the "Summer of Heat on Wall Street" campaign that targeted Citibank for its prolific financing of fossil-fuel projects. He and a co-defendant now face up to seven years imprisonment if convicted.

Meanwhile in Atlanta, more than 50 justice and environmental activists are awaiting trial on domestic terrorism and other charges arising from their years-long defence of the city's South River Forest against the construction of an 85-acre police training centre there. They are being prosecuted under Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) law. Any of them found guilty of 'racketeering' would have five to 20 years of imprisonment added to their sentences for the alleged underlying crimes.

Such situations are symptomatic of a grim trend in both the United States and Europe. Nonviolent, nondestructive climate protest is increasingly being subjected to criminal prosecution, while punishments are being ratcheted up to levels befitting violent and far more serious crimes.

Across the Global South, such en-

vironmental protests are all too often being met by corporate and state forces with extreme extrajudicial violence, especially in Indigenous communities.

Here in the Global North, however, the clampdown on protest has largely been through legal action, at least so far. But that might – especially in an America with Donald Trump as its president again – only be a prelude to more violent kinds of suppression as global warming accelerates.

For embattled American climate activists, this trend further raises the stakes of the November 5 election. The crackdowns on climate protest are so far being carried out by state and local governments. But the state abuses described in this article should be considered a preview of what is almost guaranteed to be even worse to come if Donald Trump does retake the White House and the Republicans win majorities in the House and Senate. As recently as October 13, in fact, Trump in-

These state abuses are a preview of what is almost guaranteed to be even worse if Donald Trump retakes the White House

sisted that, once back in the White House, he'd call in the military to quash domestic dissent of any sort.

In addition, a Trumpian Congress would be likely to pass laws gutting federal climate policies and imposing extreme penalties on future climate protestors. Both prospects also feature prominently in the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, produced in part by a gaggle of former Trump officials. That now-infamous blueprint for his possible second administration calls explicitly for – as the Center for American Progress describes it – "suppressing dissent and fomenting political violence." Among other things, Project 2025 suggests that a future President Trump could invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807, which would indeed allow him to use the military to punish lawful nonviolent protest. And count on it, he's almost certain to exploit that act if he does indeed become president again.

Since 2016, 21 states have passed a total of 56 laws criminalising protest or dramatically increasing the penalties for engaging in it. To be sure, John Mark Rozendaal was arrested in New York, a city located in a blue state, but all the states that have adopted new anti-protest laws are governed by Republican-majority



WRONG NOTE: John Mark Rozendaal was arrested in August and charged with criminal contempt for playing a few minutes of Bach outside Citibank's headquarters in New York City

legislatures. And the specific activity most frequently targeted for prosecution is protesting the construction or existence of oil and gas pipelines. (Note: all state laws mentioned below are described in detail in a recent report by the International Center for Not-For-Profit Law, or ICNL.)

The state of Alabama, for example, can now punish a person who simply enters an area containing “critical infrastructure,” including such pipelines, with up to a year in jail and a fine of up to \$6,000. If you go near a pipeline in Arkansas, you’re at significantly higher risk: imprisonment of up to six years and a \$10,000 fine. Impeding access to a pipeline or a pipeline construction site in Mississippi carries a sentence of up to seven years. Do that in North Carolina as a member of a group and you’ve got even bigger problems. As the ICNL reports, “[A] group of people protesting the construction of a fossil fuel pipeline could face more than 15 years in prison and a mandatory \$250,000 fine if they impede or impair the construction of a pipeline.”

Many such sentences for protesting are wildly disproportionate to the severity of the act committed. In Florida, trespassing on property that contains pipelines can result in up to five years imprisonment, compared to only 60 days for trespassing just about anywhere else. Enter a pipeline facility in Ohio with the intention of tampering with it in any way and face a potential 10-year sentence. Simply spraying graffiti on an Ohio pipeline installation can carry a six-year sentence, while anyone who “conspires” with the person creating such graffiti could be fined an eye-popping \$100,000.

Many climate marches or demonstrations involve walking or standing in roadways. Politicians

have been exploiting the fact that “automobile supremacy is inscribed in law by every branch of government and at every level of authority” (in the words of law professor Gregory Shill) to pass highly punitive measures against street protests with little fear of having them overturned. In effect, the laws privilege fossil-fuelled vehicles over the human beings who speak out against them.

In May, the Tennessee legislature passed a law that mandates a prison sentence of 2 to 12 years for protesters convicted of knowingly obstructing roadways.

In Florida, groups of 25 or more protesters impeding traffic can be charged with “rioting” and face up to 15 years imprisonment.

Anyone in Louisiana who does no more than help plan a protest that would impede traffic can be charged with conspiracy or with “aiding and abetting,” even if the protest ends up not hindering traffic or not occurring at all.

In Iowa, being on the street or sidewalk during a vociferous but nonviolent protest can cost you five years in prison, yet (believe it or not) a driver who runs into you during a protest, causing injury, is immune from civil liability if that driver can convince authorities that he or she had taken “due care.”

Laws that permit drivers to run into or over pedestrians engaged in protest have been passed in four states.

Three of those laws hit the books in 2021 in the midst of a 16-month period during which American drivers deliberately rammed into groups of protesters a whopping 139 times, according to a *Boston Globe* analysis. Three victims were killed and at least 100 injured. Drivers were criminally charged in fewer than half of the ramming incidents and in only four was a driver actually convicted of a felony. In other words, even as protest is being criminalised, as

**In other words,
even as protest is
being criminalised,
assaulting protesters
by car is, in effect,
being decriminalised**

saulting protesters by car is, in effect, being decriminalised.

Finally, Louisiana can file RICO charges against people who, as part of a “tumultuous” demonstration, block roads or damage oil or gas pipelines. And protesters beware, since that state’s RICO law carries the possibility of 50 years in prison at hard labor and a \$1 million fine. (And yes, you read that right!)

Many laws that impose severe penalties for protest were passed in the wake of the Indigenous-led campaign against the Dakota Access oil pipeline in 2016–2017. Hundreds of people were arrested in that struggle. More than 700 protesters with the Indigenous Environment Network have been criminalised for their untiring efforts to impede or halt pipeline projects across North America.

If the dozens of state anti-protest laws display many suspicious similarities, that’s no coincidence. In response to pipeline protests, oil and gas companies teamed up with the American Legislative Exchange Council, which draws up “model legislation” for Republicans in statehouses across the country to use as templates for bills that push various corporate and hard-right priorities. Once this genre of legislation was directed toward on-site pipeline protests and passed in state after state, it was also seized upon to criminalise street marches and demonstrations, including those

against racist violence, fossil fuels, and other ills – all with “traffic safety” as a pretext.

Following the lead of their kindred state legislators, Republicans in Congress have proposed their own raft of bills criminalising protest. Fortunately, they haven’t succeeded in getting any of them passed – yet.

Many of the bills were prompted by campus protests against US-supported genocide in Gaza or over climate policy and against the fossil-fuel industry.

Some of the congressional bills amounted to less-than-serious grandstanding. One, for instance, would have required a person convicted of “unlawful activity” on a university campus at any time since last October 7 to perform six months of “community service” in Gaza. But there were also dead-serious bills like the one prescribing a prison sentence of up to 15 years for inhibiting traffic on an interstate highway.

Other proposed bills would have withheld federal funding (in one case, even pandemic aid) from states that refused to prosecute people who took part in protests on public roadways.

Punitive measures against climate protest are reaching new extremes in Europe, too. Since the British Parliament passed harsh new anti-protest laws in 2022, more than 3,000 activists associated with the Just Stop Oil movement have been arrested. According to CNN, “Most of those arrests have been for planning or carrying out direct actions, including slow marching,” which impedes traffic.

In response to such repression, Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders, wrote that under the Aarhus Convention (a 1998 agreement most European countries have signed but not the United States),

“Whether intended or not, any disruptions that [environmental] actions may cause, such as traffic jams or disturbances to normal economic activity, does not remove the protection for the exercise of fundamental rights during such action under international human rights law.”

In defiance of that principle, the new British laws prescribe a sentence of up to 10 years imprisonment for those convicted of planning protests judged to be a “public nuisance” (which often means disrupting traffic). Such prison terms, noted CNN, are comparable to those for aggravated robbery or rape under British law.

When the climate change group Extinction Rebellion announced an action near The Hague in September 2023, more than 10,000 people of all ages showed up. They’d come to protest the more than \$40-billion in subsidies that the Netherlands government gives fossil fuel companies annually. The police blasted the crowd with water cannons, then arrested and hauled away 2,400 protesters, including children.

The group Climate Rights International (CRI) reports that “some democratic countries are even taking measures designed to stop peaceful climate protests before they start.” In June 2023, for instance, German police detained an activist before he could even leave his home to join a climate protest.

Five months earlier, a Dutch activist was held in custody for two days to keep him from an action by Extinction Rebellion. He ended up being convicted of sedition (yes, sedition!) for encouraging others to attend the protest. None of that sounds like something “democratic countries,” as CRI called them, should be doing.

People charged with nonviolent

Laws threatening long-term imprisonment for nonviolent dissent are being put on the books to cow the climate movement into silence

protest often invoke the “necessity defence,” declaring that they committed a minor law violation to stop a far greater crime. Unfortunately, that defence almost never succeeds and judges often forbid defendants from even explaining their motives during a trial.

That’s what happened to members of the group Insulate Britain who stood trial this year for a climate protest that disrupted traffic by nonviolently occupying streets and climbing onto overpasses along a major London ring road in 2022.

The judge presiding over their trials ordered the defendants not to mention climate change in court. Several of the activists defied that order, citing the climate emergency as their motivation, so the judge promptly held them in contempt of court and sent two of them to jail for seven weeks.

One of the protesters cited for contempt, Nick Till, told CRI that, while trying to bar him and the others from explaining the purpose of their actions, the judge allowed the prosecutors to depict the defendants as threats to society.

“There’s an attempt to insinuate we’re a ‘cell,’” Till said, “which is language that implies some kind of revolutionary group. They had an expert in counterterrorism testify. They tried to portray us as dangerous extremists.”

In July, four people who planned the London protests were convicted and sentenced to a draconian four years in prison. A fifth defend-

ant, Roger Hallam, one of the most prominent British climate activists, was sentenced to five years even though, bizarrely enough, he was neither a planner of the protest nor a participant.

He was charged instead for a speech he gave regarding civil disobedience as an effective form of climate action in a Zoom call with that protest’s planners.

In their trial, the five defendants represented themselves. Over the course of four days, with the judge repeatedly trying and failing to silence them, they presented what could be the most extensive and compelling version of the necessity defense ever heard in a courtroom. (Later, in his prison cell, Hallam wrote up an account of the trial. It’s well worth reading.)

On both sides of the Atlantic, volleys of laws threatening long-term imprisonment for nonviolent dissent are being put on the books to cow the climate movement into silence. So far, European protesters who dare to resist are getting hit hardest with convictions and sentences.

Though also being threatened with increasing penalties under state laws, Americans have somewhat stronger protections under the First Amendment.

But how long will dissent continue to enjoy such protections in this country? That largely depends on how we all vote between now and November 5.

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 was first published at www.tomdispatch.com

How dogs were implicated during Salem's witch trials

In an environment of fear and distrust, even man's best friend could be suspected of dealings with the devil

I teach a course on New England witchcraft trials, and students always arrive with varying degrees of knowledge of what happened in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692.

Nineteen people accused of witchcraft were executed by hanging, another was pressed to death and at least 150 were imprisoned in conditions that caused the death of at least five more innocents.

Each semester, a few students ask me about stories they have heard about dogs.

In 17th-century Salem, dogs were part of everyday life: People kept them to protect themselves, their homes and their livestock, to help with hunting, and to provide companionship.

However, a variety of folklore traditions also associated dogs with the devil – beliefs that long predated what happened in Salem. Perhaps the most famous example of such belief is the case of a poodle named Boy who belonged to Prince Rupert, an English-German cavalry commander on the Royalist side during the English Civil War. Between 1643 and 1644, stories spread across Europe that Boy the poodle had supernatural powers, including shape-shifting and prophecy, that he used to aid his master on the battlefield.

There is no mention in the official

records of Salem's trials of any dogs being tried or killed for witchcraft. However, dogs appear several times in the testimony, typically because an accused witch was believed to have had a dog as a "familiar" who would do her bidding, or because the devil appeared in the form of a dog.

Numerous testimonies in the Salem trial records claim that dogs were in league with the devil, adding to the paranoia of this community that was spinning out of control.

On May 16, 1692, John Kimball a 45-year-old from Amesbury, Massachusetts testified against Susanna Martin, a 71-year-old widow, saying, among other things, that she had caused a "black puppy" to appear before him when he was alone in the woods. Kimball testified that he was terrified by the dog, which he thought would tear out his throat. The dog disappeared when he began to pray.

This, among other testimony, would contribute to Martin's conviction for witchcraft in June 1692; she was hanged on July 19, 1692.

In several instances recorded by the courts, accused witches confessed that the devil had appeared to them in the form of a dog. In September 1692, 19-year-old Mercy Wardwell testified that she had been con-

versing with the devil, and that he had appeared to her in the shape of a dog. Her confession caused her to be jailed, although she was later released when the hysteria died down.

During the same proceedings that September, 14-year-old William Barker Jr. testified that the "shape of a black dog" appeared to him and provoked anxiety; soon after this, the devil appeared. It's hard to know if he was suggesting that the dog was the devil himself or his companion. Barker confessed that he had "signed the devil's book," meaning that he had made a covenant with the devil and was a witch. Barker was jailed, though he would later be acquitted.

Tituba, a woman of colour enslaved in the Rev. Samuel Parris' household, also testified about a dog. When she was examined by magistrates on March 1, 1692, Tituba recounted how the devil had appeared to her at least four times, "like a great dog" and as "a black dog." She also said she saw cats, hogs and birds, an entire menagerie of animals working for the devil.

Kimball's, Wardwell's, Barker's and Tituba's testimonies may have contributed to the ongoing alarm that the residents of Salem were being led astray by a devil who might appear to them in the shape of a dog.

Some accounts of the trials also suggest that at least two dogs were



BAD DOG:
An accused
witch was
believed
to have
a dog or
another
animal
as a 'familiar'
who would
do her
bidding

Art: The
Trustees of
the British
Museum

killed during the trials, but there is no evidence supporting this in the official legal testimony of the time. There is some local legend that supports the claim, and many accounts of Salem have included these dog deaths as a part of the story.

According to local historical researcher Marilynne K. Roach's 2002 book, *The Salem Witch Trials: A Day-by-day Chronicle of a Community Under Siege*, some of the afflicted girls claimed a man named John Bradstreet had bewitched a dog. Although the dog was a victim, it was killed. Roach's history also notes that another dog was shot to death when a girl claimed that the dog's spectre

had afflicted her.

Witchcraft belief at the time held that witches could send their "spectres," or spirits, out to do their bidding.

While these are compelling stories, neither of these events can be verified in any existing official trial documents. The source that Roach cites for the Bradstreet case is Robert Calef's book *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, which was published in 1700. Calef, who was a Boston merchant, objected to how the trials were conducted. However, he was not present at the trials, and it is not clear what his source was for the dog stories. Such stories – and Calef's uncited retelling of it – do not have the same authority as the legal documents in the case.

The earliest account of a dog being shot for being a witch appears in a commentary on the Salem trials, *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits*, published in 1693, in which the clergyman Increase Mather claims that "I am told by credible persons" that a dog was shot for bewitching a person.

But significantly, Mather did not name the human victim or the person who told him the story. Surprisingly, Mather actually defended the dog, saying that the fact that they had successfully killed it meant that "this dog was no Devil."

Nearly every history of Salem recounts how when Samuel Parris' daughters were having terrible fits that led people to believe they were bewitched, Tituba, the enslaved woman who lived in the household, baked a "witch cake" using urine from the afflicted girls and fed it to the family's dog.

Somehow, this was supposed to cause the dog to reveal the identity of the witch. Indeed, Reverend Parris condemned the ritual, which itself seemed to be its own kind of witchcraft.

All around, Salem's witch trials seem to have been bad for dogs. Although there is no official legal evidence that dogs were killed for being witches, it's clear that there were strong associations between dogs and the devil, and that dogs were sometimes treated poorly because of superstition.

The Salem trials are a horrifying example of what happens when people use terrible logic and leap to indefensible conclusions with shoddy evidence. In an environment of fear and distrust, even man's best friend could be suspected of dealings with the devil. **CT**

Bridget Marshall is Professor of English, at UMass Lowell. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

► NICK TURSE

‘Will you bring back my Dad and give me my hand back?’

According to Save the Children, about 468 million children – about one of every six young people on this planet – live in areas affected by armed conflict

“War is not healthy for children and other living things,” reads a poster titled *Primer* created by the late artist Lorraine Schneider for an art show at New York’s Pratt Institute in 1965. Printed in child-like lowercase letters, the words interspersed between the leaves of a simply rendered sunflower, it was an early response to America’s war in Vietnam.

“She just wanted to make something that nobody could argue with,” recalled Schneider’s youngest daughter, Elisa Kleven, in an article published earlier this year. Six decades later, Schneider’s hypothesis has consistently been borne out.

According to Save the Children, about 468 million children – about one of every six young people on this planet – live in areas affected by armed conflict. Verified attacks on children have tripled since 2010. Last year, global conflicts killed three times as many children as in 2022.

“Killings and injuries of civilians have become a daily occurrence,” UN human rights chief Volker Türk commented in June when he announced the 2023 figures. “Children

shot at. Hospitals bombed. Heavy artillery launched on entire communities.”

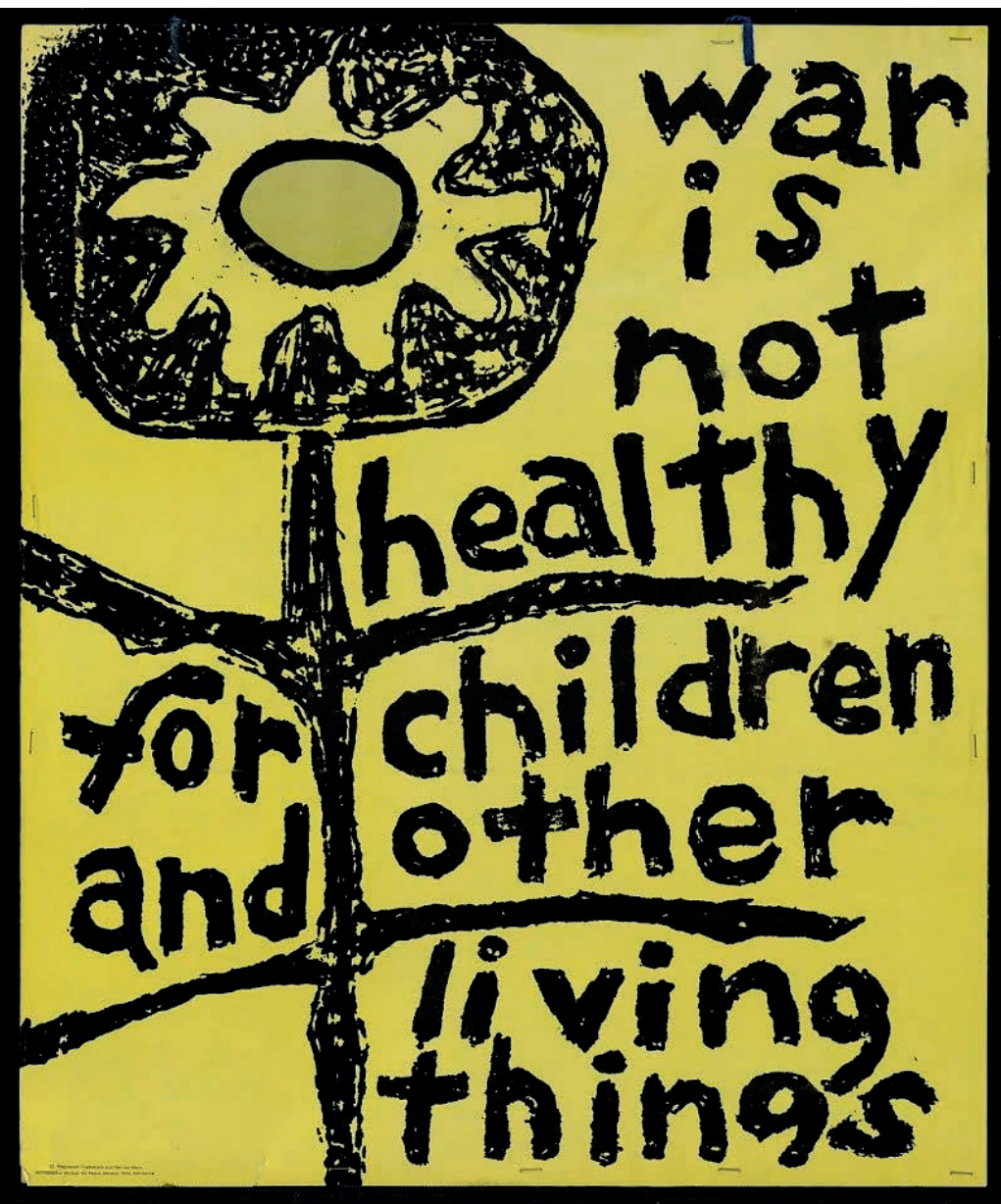
It took four decades for the United Nations Security Council to catch up to Schneider. In 2005, that global body identified – and condemned – six grave violations against children in times of war: killing or maiming; recruitment into or use by armed forces and armed groups; attacks on schools or hospitals; rape or other grave acts of sexual violence; abduction; and the denial of humanitarian access to them.

Naming and shaming, however, has its limits. Between 2005 and 2023, more than 347,000 grave violations against youngsters were verified across more than 30 conflict zones in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, according to UNICEF, the UN agency for children. The actual number is undoubtedly far higher.

From the extreme damage explosive weapons do to tiny bodies to the lasting effects of acute deprivation on developing brains, children are particularly vulnerable in times of conflict. And once subjected to war,

they carry its scars, physical and mental, for a lifetime. A recent study by Italian researchers emphasised what Schneider intuitively knew – that “war inflicts severe violations on the fundamental human rights of children.” The complex trauma of war, they found, “poses a grave threat to the emotional and cognitive development of children, increasing the risk of physical and mental illnesses, disabilities, social problems, and intergenerational consequences.”

Despite such knowledge, the world continues to fail children in times of conflict. The United States was, for instance, one of the members of the UN Security Council that condemned those six grave wartime violations against children. Yet the Biden administration has greenlit tens of billions of dollars in weapons sales to Israel, while US munitions have repeatedly been used in attacks on schools, that have become shelters, predominantly for women and children, in the Gaza Strip. “Make no mistake, the United States is fully, fully, fully supportive of Israel,” President Joe Biden said recently, even though his administration acknowledged the likelihood that Israel had used American weaponry in Gaza in violation of in-



WAR IS NOT HEALTHY:The poster, titled *The Primer*, designed by Lorraine Schneider for a New York art show in 1965.

ternational law.

And Gaza is just one conflict zone where, at this very moment, children are suffering mightily. Let me offer you a hellscape tour of this planet, a few stops in a world of North Gaza war to glimpse just what today's conflicts are doing to the children trapped by them.

Gaza

The Gaza Strip is the most dangerous place on Earth to be a child, ac-

cording to UNICEF. Israel has killed around 17,000 children there since the current Gaza War began in October 2023, according to local authorities. And almost as horrific, about 26,000 kids have reportedly lost one or both parents. At least 19,000 of them are now orphans or are otherwise without a caregiver. One million children in Gaza have also been displaced from their homes since October 2023.

In addition, Israel is committing

“scholasticide,” the deliberate and systematic destruction of the Palestinian education system in Gaza, according to a recent report by the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, a Palestinian advocacy group. More than 659,000 children there have been out of school since the beginning of the war. The conflict in Gaza will set children's education back by years and risks creating a generation of permanently traumatized Palestinians, according to a new study by the University of Cambridge, the Centre for Lebanese Studies, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East.

Even before the current war, an estimated 800,000 children in Gaza – about 75% of the kids there – were in need of mental health and psychosocial support. Now, UNICEF estimates that more than one million of them – in effect, every kid in the Gaza Strip – needs such services. In short, you can no longer be a healthy child there.

Lebanon

Over four days in late September, as Israel ramped up its war in Lebanon, about 140,000 children in that Mediterranean nation were displaced. Many arrived at shelters showing signs of deep distress, according to Save the Children staff. “Children are telling us that it feels like danger is everywhere, and they can never be safe. Every loud sound makes them jump now,” said Jennifer Moorehead, Save the Children's country director in Lebanon. “Many children's lives, rights and futures have already been turned upside down and now their capacity to cope with this escalating crisis has been eroded.”

All schools in that country have been closed, adversely affecting every one of its 1.5 million children. More than 890 children have also been injured in Israeli strikes over

the last year, the vast majority – more than 690 – since August 20th, according to the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health. Given that Israel has recently extended attacks from the south of the country to the Lebanese capital, Beirut, they will undoubtedly be joined by all too many others.

Sudan

Children have suffered mightily since heavy fighting erupted in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. More than 18,000 people have reportedly been killed and close to 10 million have been forced to flee their homes since the civil war there began. Almost half of the displaced Sudanese are – yes! – children, more than 4.6 million of them, making the conflict there the largest child displacement crisis in the world.

More than 16 million Sudanese children are also facing severe food shortages. In the small town of Tawila in that country's North Darfur state, at least 10 children die of hunger every day, according to a recent report in the *Guardian*. The population of the town has ballooned as tens of thousands fled El Fasher, North Darfur's besieged capital. "We anticipate that the exact number of children dying of hunger is much higher," Aisha Hussien Yagoub, the head of the health authority for the local government in Tawila told the *Guardian*. "Many of those displaced from El Fasher are living far from our clinic and are unable to reach it."

More than 10 million Sudanese children, or 50% of that country's kids, have been within about three miles of the frontlines of the conflict at some point over the past year. According to Save the Children, this marks the highest rate of exposure in the world. In addition, last year,

Syria remains the world's largest refugee crisis. More than 14 million Syrians have been forced from their homes

there was a five-fold increase in grave violations of Sudanese children's rights compared to 2022.

Syria

More than 30,200 children have been killed since the Syrian Civil War began in 2011, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. Another 5,200 children were forcibly disappeared or are under arrest.

However little noticed, Syria remains the world's largest refugee crisis. More than 14 million Syrians have been forced from their homes. More than 7.2 million of them are now estimated to be internally displaced in a country where nine in 10 people exist below the poverty line. An entire generation of children has lived under the constant threat of violence and emotional trauma since 2011. It's been the only life they've ever known.

"Services have already collapsed after 14 years of conflict," Rasha Muhrez, Save the Children's Response Director in Syria, said last month. "The humanitarian crisis in Syria is at a record level." More than two-thirds of the population of Syria, including about 7.5 million children, require humanitarian assistance. Nearly half of the 5.5 million school-aged children – 2.4 million between the ages of five and 17 – remain out of school, according to UNICEF. About 7,000 schools have been destroyed or damaged.

Recently, Human Rights Watch sounded the alarm about the recruitment of children, "apparently for eventual transfer to armed

groups," by a youth organisation affiliated with the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration for North and East Syria and the US-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, its military wing.

Ukraine

Child casualties in Ukraine jumped nearly 40% in the first half of this year, bringing the total number of children killed or injured in nearly 900 days of war there to about 2,200, according to Save the Children. "This year, violence has escalated with a new intensity, with missiles, drones, and bombs causing an alarming rise in children being injured or killed in daylight blasts," said Stephane Moissaing, Deputy Country Director for Save the Children in Ukraine. "The suffering for families will not stop as long as explosive weapons are sweeping through populated towns and villages across Ukraine."

There are already 2.9 million Ukrainian children in need of assistance – and the situation is poised to grow worse in the months ahead. Repeated Russian attacks on the country's infrastructure could result in power outages of up to 18 hours a day this winter, leaving many of Ukraine's children freezing and without access to critical services. "The lack of power and all its knock-on effects this winter could have a devastating impact not only on children's physical health but on their mental well-being and education," said Munir Mammadzade, UNICEF representative to Ukraine. "Children's lives are consumed by thoughts of survival, not childhood."

Ukraine also estimates that Russian authorities have forcibly removed almost 20,000 children from occupied territories there since the February 2022 invasion. A *Financial Times* investigation found that Ukrainian children who were abducted and taken to Russia early

in the war were put up for adoption on a Russian government-linked website. One of them was shown with a false Russian identity. Another was listed using a Russian version of their Ukrainian name. There was no mention of the children's Ukrainian backgrounds.

West and Central Africa

Conflicts have been raging in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for decades. World Vision has called the long-running violence there “one of the worst child protection crises in the world.” A 2023 UN report on children and armed conflict documented 3,377 grave violations against children in the DRC. Of these, 46% involved the recruitment of children – some as young as five – by armed groups.

Violence and intercommunity tensions in the DRC have forced 1,457 schools to close this year alone, affecting more than 500,000 children. And sadly, that country is no anomaly. In May, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA, reported that more than 5,700 schools in Burkina Faso had been closed due to insecurity, depriving more than 800,000 children of their educations.

By mid-2024, conflicts had shuttered more than 14,300 schools in 24 African countries, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council. That marks an increase of 1,100 closures compared to 2023. The 2024 closures were clustered in West and Central Africa, mainly in Burkina Faso, the DRC, Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria, and Niger. They have affected an estimated 2.8 million children.

“Education is under siege in West and Central Africa. The deliberate targeting of schools and the systemic denial of education because of conflict is nothing short of a catastrophe. Every day that a child is kept out of school is a day stolen from their future and from the future of

Today, almost 100 years after the young Art was forced from her home by violence, children continue to suffer in the very same ways

their communities,” said Hassane Hamadou, the Norwegian Refugee Council's Regional Director for West and Central Africa. “We urgently call on all parties to conflict to cease attacks on and occupation of schools and ensure that education is protected and prioritised.”

Feet of Clay

It's been six decades since Lorraine Schneider unveiled her poster and her common-sense wisdom to the world. She's been proven right at every turn, in every conflict across the entire planet. Everywhere that children (not to mention other living things) have been exposed to war, they have suffered. Children have been killed and maimed. They have been physically, psychologically, and educationally stunted, as well as emotionally wounded. They have been harmed, assaulted, and deprived. Their bodies have been torn apart. Their minds – the literal architecture of their brains – have been warped by war.

In the conflict zones mentioned above and so many others – from Myanmar to Yemen – the world is failing its children. What they have lost can never be “found” again. Survivors can go on, but there is no going back.

Schneider's mother, Eva Art, was a self-taught sculptor who escaped pogroms in Ukraine by joining relatives in the United States as a child. She lost touch with her family during World War II, according to her

daughter Kleven, and later discovered that her relatives had been killed, their entire shtetl (or small Jewish town) wiped out. To cope with her grief, Art made clay figurines of the dead of her hometown: a boy and his dog, an elderly woman knitting, a mother cradling a baby.

And today, the better part of 100 years after the young Art was forced from her home by violence, children continue to suffer in the very same ways – and continue to turn to clay for solace.

Israa Al-Qahwaji, a mental health and psychosocial support coordinator for Save the Children in Gaza, shared the story of a young boy who survived an airstrike that resulted in the amputation of one of his hands, while also killing his father and destroying his home.

In shock and emotionally withdrawn, the boy was unable to talk about the trauma. However, various therapeutic techniques allowed him to begin to open up, according to Al-Qahwaji.

The child began to talk about games he could no longer play and how losing his hand had changed his relationship with his friends. In one therapy session, he was asked to mold something out of clay to represent a wish. With his remaining hand, he carefully shaped a house. After finishing the exercise, he turned to the counsellor with a question that left Al-Qahwaji emotionally overwhelmed. “Now,” the boy asked, “will you bring my dad and give me my hand back?” **CT**

*Nick Turse is the managing editor of TomDispatch and a fellow at the Type Media Center. He is the author most recently of *Next Time They'll Come to Count the Dead: War and Survival in South Sudan* and of the bestselling *Kill Anything That Moves*. This article was first published at www.tomdispatch.com*

Disinformation isn't the biggest threat to freedom

The real issues Americans face in our increasingly authoritarian world are government cover-ups and censorship

"What makes it possible for a totalitarian or any other dictatorship to rule is that people are not informed; how can you have an opinion if you are not informed? If everybody always lies to you, the consequence is not that you believe the lies, but rather that nobody believes anything any longer... And a people that no longer can believe anything cannot make up its mind. It is deprived not only of its capacity to act but also of its capacity to think and to judge. And with such a people you can then do what you please."

– Hannah Arendt

In a perfect example of the Nanny State mindset at work, Hillary Clinton insists that the powers-that-be need 'total control' in order to make the internet a safer place for users and protect us from harm.

Clinton is not alone in her distaste for unregulated, free speech online. A bipartisan chorus that includes both presidential candidates Kamala Harris and Donald Trump has long clamoured to weaken or do away with Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which essentially acts as a bulwark against online censorship.

It's a complicated legal issue that involves debates over immunity,

liability, net neutrality and whether or not internet sites are publishers with editorial responsibility for the content posted to their sites, but really, it comes down to the tug-of-war over where censorship (corporate and government) begins and free speech ends.

As Elizabeth Nolan Brown writes for *Reason*, "What both the right and left attacks on the provision share is a willingness to use whatever excuses resonate – saving children, stopping bias, preventing terrorism, misogyny, and religious intolerance – to ensure more centralised control of online speech. They may couch these in partisan terms that play well with their respective bases, but their aim is essentially the same."

In other words, the government will use any excuse to suppress dissent and control the narrative.

The internet may well be the final frontier where free speech still flourishes, especially for politically incorrect speech and disinformation, which test the limits of our so-called egalitarian commitment to the First Amendment's broad-minded principles.

On the internet, falsehoods and lies abound, misdirection and mis-

information dominate, and conspiracy theories go viral.

This is to be expected, and the response should be more speech, not less.

Justice Brandeis wrote nearly a century ago: "If there be time to expose through discussion, the falsehoods and fallacies, to avert the evil by the processes of education, the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence."

Yet to the government, these forms of 'disinformation' rank right up there with terrorism, drugs, violence, and disease: societal evils so threatening that 'we the people' should be willing to relinquish a little of our freedom for the sake of national security.

Of course, it never works out that way. The war on terror, the war on drugs, the war on illegal immigration, the war on COVID-19: all of these programmes started out as legitimate responses to pressing concerns only to become weapons of compliance and control in the government's hands.

Indeed, in the face of the government's own authoritarian power-grabs, cover-ups, and conspiracies, a relatively unfettered internet may be our sole hope of speaking truth to power.

The right to criticise the government and speak out against govern-



ment wrongdoing is the quintessential freedom. Disinformation isn't the problem. Government cover-ups and censorship are the problem.

Unfortunately, the government has become increasingly intolerant of speech that challenges its power, reveals its corruption, exposes its lies, and encourages the citizenry to push back against the government's many injustices. Every day in this country, those who dare to speak their truth to the powers-that-be find themselves censored, silenced or fired.

While there are all kinds of labels

being put on so-called "unacceptable" speech today, the real message being conveyed by those in power is that Americans don't have a right to express themselves if what they are saying is unpopular, controversial or at odds with what the government determines to be acceptable.

Where the problem arises is when you put the power to determine who is a potential danger in the hands of government agencies, the courts and the police.

Remember, this is the same government that uses the words 'anti-government,' 'extremist' and 'terrorist' interchangeably.

This is the same government whose agents are spinning a sticky spider-web of threat assessments, behavioural sensing warnings, flagged "words," and "suspicious" activity reports using automated eyes and ears, social media, behaviour sensing software, and citizen spies to identify potential threats.

This is the same government that keeps re-upping the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA),

which allows the military to detain American citizens with no access to friends, family or the courts if the government believes them to be a threat.

This is the same government that has a growing list – shared with fusion centres and law enforcement agencies – of ideologies, behaviours, affiliations and other characteristics that could flag someone as suspicious and result in their being labelled potential enemies of the state.

For instance, if you believe in and exercise your rights under the Constitution (namely, your right to speak freely, worship freely, associate with like-minded individuals who share your political views, criticise the government, own a weapon, demand a warrant before being questioned or searched, or any other activity viewed as potentially anti-government, racist, bigoted, anarchic or sovereign), you could be at the top of the government's terrorism watch list.

Thus, no matter how well-meaning the politicians make these encroachments on our rights appear, in the right (or wrong) hands, benevolent plans can easily be put to malevolent purposes.

Even the most well-intentioned government law or programme can be – and has been – perverted, corrupted and used to advance illegitimate purposes once profit and power are added to the equation. For instance, the very same mass surveillance technologies that were supposedly so necessary to fight the spread of COVID-19 are now being used to stifle dissent, persecute activists, harass marginalised communities, and link people's health information to other surveillance and law enforcement tools.

We are moving fast down that slippery slope to an authoritarian society in which the only opinions, ideas and speech expressed are the

Even the most well-intentioned law or programme has been perverted, and used to advance illegitimate purposes

ones permitted by the government and its corporate cohorts.

The next phase of the government's war on anti-government speech and so-called thought crimes could well be mental health round-ups and involuntary detentions.

Under the guise of public health and safety, the government could use mental health care as a pretext for targeting and locking up dissidents, activists and anyone unfortunate enough to be placed on a government watch list.

This is how it begins.

In communities across the nation, police are already being empowered to forcibly detain individuals they believe might be mentally ill, based solely on their own judgment, even if those individuals pose no danger to others.

In New York City, for example, you could find yourself forcibly hospitalised for suspected mental illness if you carry 'firmly held beliefs not congruent with cultural ideas,' exhibit a 'willingness to engage in meaningful discussion,' have 'excessive fears of specific stimuli,' or refuse "voluntary treatment recommendations."

While these programmes are ostensibly aimed at getting the homeless off the streets, when combined with advances in mass surveillance technologies, artificial intelligence-powered programmes that can track people by their biometrics and behaviour, mental health sen-

sor data (tracked by wearable data and monitored by government agencies such as HARPA), threat assessments, behavioural sensing warnings, precrime initiatives, red flag gun laws, and mental health first-aid programs aimed at training gatekeepers to identify who might pose a threat to public safety, they could well signal a tipping point in the government's efforts to penalise those engaging in so-called 'thought crimes.'

As the Associated Press reports, federal officials are already looking into how to add " 'identifiable patient data,' such as mental health, substance use and behavioural health information from group homes, shelters, jails, detox facilities and schools," to its surveillance toolkit.

Make no mistake: these are the building blocks for an American gulag no less sinister than that of the gulags of the Cold War-era Soviet Union.

The word 'gulag' refers to a labor or concentration camp where prisoners (often political prisoners or so-called 'enemies of the state,' real or imagined) were imprisoned as punishment for their crimes against the state. The gulag, according to historian Anne Applebaum, used as a form of "administrative exile – which required no trial and no sentencing procedure – was an ideal punishment not only for troublemakers as such, but also for political opponents of the regime."

This age-old practice by which despotic regimes eliminate their critics or potential adversaries by making them disappear – or forcing them to flee – or exiling them literally or figuratively or virtually from their fellow citizens – is happening with increasing frequency in America.

Now, through the use of red flag laws, behavioural threat assessments, and pre-crime policing prevention programmes, the ground-

work is being laid that would allow the government to weaponise the label of mental illness as a means of exiling those whistleblowers, dissidents and freedom fighters who refuse to march in lockstep with its dictates.

Each state has its own set of civil, or involuntary, commitment laws. These laws are extensions of two legal principles: *parens patriae* *Parens patriae* (Latin for 'parent of the country'), which allows the government to intervene on behalf of citizens who cannot act in their own best interest, and police power, which requires a state to protect the interests of its citizens.

The fusion of these two principles, coupled with a shift towards a dangerousness standard, has resulted in a Nanny State mindset carried out with the militant force of the Police State.

The problem, of course, is that the diagnosis of mental illness, while a legitimate concern for some Americans, has over time become a convenient means by which the govern-

The diagnosis of mental illness has allowed government and its corporate partners to penalise 'unacceptable' social behaviours

ment and its corporate partners can penalise certain 'unacceptable' social behaviours.

In fact, in recent years, we have witnessed the pathologising of individuals who resist authority as suffering from oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), defined as 'a pattern of disobedient, hostile, and defiant behaviour toward authority figures.'

Under such a definition, every activist of note throughout our history – from Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King Jr. to John Lennon – could be classified as suffering from an ODD mental disorder.

Of course, this is all part of a larger trend in American governance whereby dissent is criminalised and

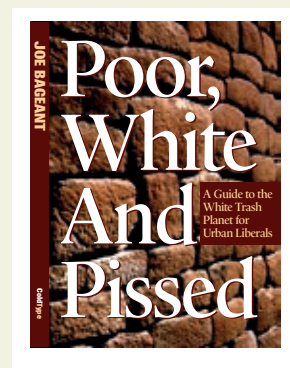
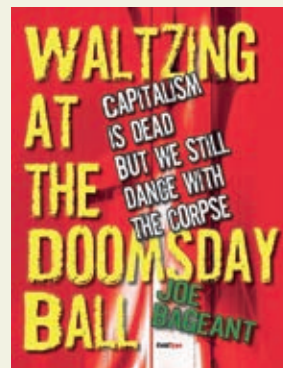
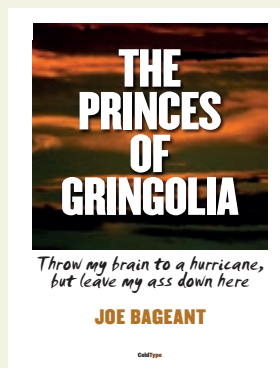
pathologised, and dissenters are censored, silenced, declared unfit for society, labelled dangerous or extremist, or turned into outcasts and exiled.

As I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and in its fictional counterpart *The Erik Blair Diaries*, this is how you subdue a populace. The ensuing silence in the face of government-sponsored tyranny, terror, brutality and injustice is deafening. **CT**

John W. Whitehead is founder and president of the Rutherford Institute. His most recent books are the best-selling Battlefield America: The War on the American People, the award-winning A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State, and a debut dystopian fiction novel, The Erik Blair Diaries. Whitehead can be contacted at staff@rutherford.org. Nisha Whitehead is the Executive Director of the Rutherford Institute – www.rutherford.org

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