

**HOW STARMER'S COPS SMASHED DISSENT** | Jonathan Cook  
**THE DEADLIEST YEAR FOR JOURNALISTS** | Kristin Skare Orgeret  
**MOTHER FRACKERS** | George Monbiot

coldtype.net Issue 266

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING February 2025



# WHEN ISRAEL RAINS DEATH ON GAZA, THE CO-PILOT IS UNCLE SAM

Were it any other country than Israel committing such a genocide, Washington would have cut off the arms shipments many months ago

STAN COX – PAGE 14

**ROBIN LIVINGSTONE SOLVES A BBC FIRESIDE MYSTERY – PAGE 44**



# YOUR ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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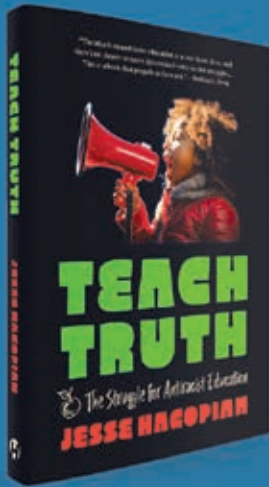
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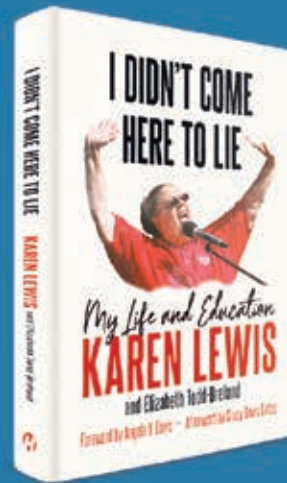
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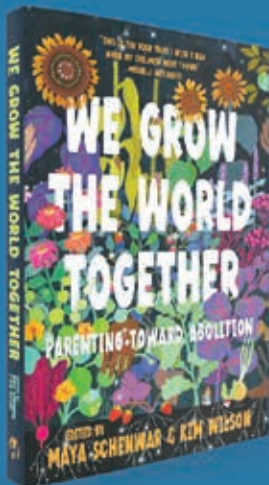
"They will ban this book; we must resist. There is more at stake than curriculum. We have a world to win." —Robin D. G. Kelley



**I Didn't  
Come Here  
to Lie**  
My Life and Education

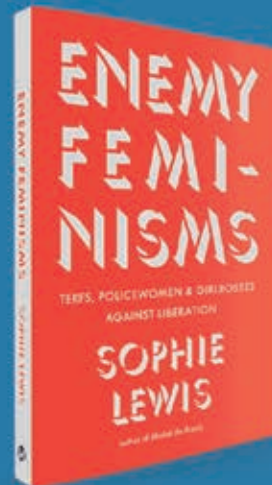
Karen Lewis  
and Elizabeth  
Todd-Breland  
Foreword by  
Angela Y. Davis  
Afterword by  
Stacy Davis Gates

"Karen Lewis changed the world. Her legacy lives on in the work of countless organizers committed to transforming the lives of young people, and this book is a welcome assurance that her lessons endure for generations to come." —Eve L. Ewing



**We Grow  
the World  
Together**  
Parenting Toward  
Abolition  
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TERFs, Policewomen  
& Girlbosses Against  
Liberation

Sophie Lewis

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# INSIGHTS



Seldom in recent history has class war been waged so blatantly. Generally, billionaires and hectomillionaires employ concierges to attack the poor on their behalf. But now, freed from shame and embarrassment, they no longer hide their involvement. In the US, the world's richest man, Elon Musk, will lead the federal assault on the middle and working classes: seeking to slash public spending and the public protections defending people from predatory capital.

He shares responsibility for the Department of Government Efficiency with another billionaire, Vivek Ramaswamy. They have

GEORGE MONBIOT

## Mother frackers

Trump's presidency is a reversion to autocratic tyranny. Only concerted resistance can stop it from spreading

been recruiting further billionaires to oversee cuts across government. These plutocrats will not be paid. They will wage their class war *pro bono*, out of the goodness of their hearts.

Musk, with a fortune of more than \$400-billion, has warned: "We have to reduce spending to live within our means." But he doesn't mean "we," he means *you*. Trump and Musk want to cut the federal budget so they can slash taxes for the ultra-rich. This benighted class needs all the help it can get. Since 2020, the wealth of the 12 richest men in the US has risen by a mere 193 percent. Collectively, the poor dears now

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# INSIGHTS

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own only \$2-trillion.

Musk's stated aims may be impossible to realise. When he took the role, he claimed he would cut the \$6.75-trillion in federal spending by \$2-trillion, which is actually more than the entire discretionary budget. But the intention is clear: a contraction whose consequences would be devastating for most Americans. Trump's election was a response to the cruel failures of neoliberalism, but it will also be their ultimate expression. It was a response to the corruption of the political system by private money. And it will be the system's ultimate corruption.

If Musk's programme succeeds, we hardly have to imagine its impacts on human life and the living world, because for the past year a similar plan has been enacted in Argentina. There, Javier Milei has been waging his class war on behalf of international capital. The results include a horrifying surge in poverty; a collapse in the number of people with health insurance, coupled with critical underfunding of the public health system; proliferating hate crimes; a coordinated assault on science and environmental protection; and a free-for-all for the foreign corporations hoping to seize the country's minerals, land and labour.

In the US, the motherfuckers will be released to do as they please. Trump's nominated energy secretary, Chris Wright, runs a fracking services company and claims: "There is no climate crisis." Already, banks and corporations are gleefully tearing up their environmental commitments.

The massive programme of cuts and deregulation that Musk and Ramaswamy seek extends the sado-

masochistic politics now ascendant on both sides of the Atlantic. Demagogues have found that it doesn't matter how much their followers suffer, as long as their designated enemies are suffering more. If you can keep ramping up the pain for scapegoats (primarily immigrants), voters will thank you for it, regardless of their own pain. This is the great discovery of the conflict entrepreneurs, led by Musk himself: what counts in politics is not how well people are doing, but how well *they* are doing in relation to designated out-groups.

There are plenty of willing executioners. One of the convicted ring-leaders of the Southport riots in the UK, which were encouraged by Elon Musk, was described after his sentencing as "a man so consumed with hate and violence that he could find little satisfaction in activities that did not immediately quench his desire for harming others." Maga fanatics, whipped up by the frenzy of hatred on X and other pro-Trump media, might gain nothing from Trump's presidency except the satisfaction of inflicting pain. But this small prize is sufficient to ensure their absolute loyalty. It will induce them to commit any atrocity Trump demands.

Why has the class war been unleashed now, not just in the US, but in much of the rest of the world? Because the democratising, distributive effects of two world wars have worn off. We fondly imagine that the semi-democratic era (exemplified in rich nations by the years 1945–1975) is the normal state of politics. But it was highly atypical, and made possible only by the wars' erosion of the power of the ruling classes. The default state of centralised societies, to which nations are

now reverting, is oligarchy.

In the 20th-century, we called this reversion fascism. Fascism possessed some grotesque and peculiar features of its own. It used new tools and modes of organisation. But in key respects it represented a revival of the pre-democratic order: a world in which absolute power was vested in kings and emperors and their courts. We can endlessly debate whether or not Trump and his acolytes are fascists, as if that somehow solves the problem. It is more useful to recognise them as representatives of a much longer tradition, of which fascism was just one iteration. The emperors are back.

Because Trump and Musk are such volatile characters, it's tempting to imagine that their grip on power will be chaotic and contingent. But the billionaire class will move swiftly to consolidate the oligarchy, and will meet almost no resistance. US institutions, the established media and foreign governments are completely unprepared. Despite copious warnings over many years, they know only how to appease oligarchic power, not how to resist it.

I started using the term "anticipatory compliance" in 2008 to describe the media's kowtowing to undemocratic forces. The man who coined the phrase, Bruce Dover, explained to me that "an emperor who inspires fear in his followers need not raise a hand against them." Now, wherever in institutional life we might hope to find resistance, we see obedience. Almost everyone instinctively accommodates the new dispensation.

In nations that have not yet fully succumbed to oligarchy we need to recognise, and recognise fast, that democratic politics do not

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# INSIGHTS

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emerge spontaneously. Our systems achieve a quasi-democratic character only with an active citizenry, whose engagement is largely defined by protest, and an independent media. But, at the direct behest of capital, governments are criminalising peaceful protest, while many independent media, such as the BBC, shut out dissenting voices.

If governments like the UK's are

to invest in their own survival, they must free their citizens to rebuild democracy, and we must seize every opportunity to do so. There is no demilitarised zone in this class war. We must all decide where we stand. **CT**

*George Monbiot is a columnist for the Guardian, where this article was first published. His website is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com).*

gering 88.9 percent of all new vehicle sales in Norway. Every year, this number draws nearer to the elusive 100 percent target (the zero emission category includes a small fraction of hydrogen-powered vehicles, most are electric).

Could Norway reach 100 percent by this year's end? It's a gripping challenge – but there is a barrier that it needs to address to achieve this. Among Norway's top ten zero emission cars sold last year, there are no small non-SUV vehicles. Can Norway, and other countries, reach their targets selling only large cars?

Our recent research shows that affordability is a tool to get everyone on board. When lower-income households face affordability barriers, it's not just their problem – it's the missing link to achieving 100 percent. Smaller, more affordable electric cars could be the game changer needed to bridge this gap.

For every 100 cars sold in Norway, nearly 90 are electric. In Denmark, the runner-up in this global ranking, it's just over 50. Elsewhere, few countries have reached or are even approaching a one-third market share for electric vehicles (EVs). Most of these are in Europe, with China also nearing that benchmark. The UK sits at just 19.6 percent, falling short of the top ten.

Why is Norway so far ahead? A mix of policies, cultural attitudes and the sheer availability of EVs play a role. But one factor stands out: subsidies. Generous, comprehensive subsidies are driving this change.

In Norway, buying an electric car isn't just a green choice – it's an affordable one. Subsidies and incentives bring electric car prices in line with, or below, those of petrol and



Volkswagen Nils electric car concept at the Frankfurt Motor Show in 2011

► **AGNIESZKA STEFANIEC & KEYVAN HOSSEINI**

## How smaller, electrical cars can help green transition

Norway is set to make history by becoming the first nation to sell only zero emission (electric- or hydrogen-powered) vehicles by the end of 2025. While this doesn't mean that fossil fuel-powered cars already on the road will suddenly disappear there, it marks a decisive shift towards their eventual

obsolescence.

Imagine a world where petrol and diesel vehicles are no longer an option – a bold step towards a greener future. Norway is strikingly close to this goal.

If it succeeds, this will redefine what's possible in the green transition. Consider this: in 2024, fully electric cars accounted for a stag-

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# INSIGHTS

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diesel cars. Substantial exemptions from purchase tax and VAT, along with other perks, make electric car ownership remarkably appealing. And it's financed not only through taxes but by Norway's oil and gas revenue. Even with some limits on luxury models, the support remains unmatched.

But what about the UK? With the purchase grant – a government scheme that helped reduce the cost of buying an electric car – scrapped, the remaining modest subsidies pale in comparison to Norway's all-encompassing support. If there's one takeaway from Norway's success, it's that half-measures won't cut it.

The challenge lies in address-

ing the affordability gap. Subsidies don't always reach those who need them most. In Ireland, our research reveals a troubling trend. Grants often end up in the hands of wealthier households – those who could afford an electric car without help. Meanwhile, lower-income households, the ones who would benefit most, are left behind. The result? People buy the vehicles they can afford, which are often fossil fuel-powered.

The consequences are hard to ignore. In cities like London, low-emission zones penalise drivers of polluting vehicles. If you can't afford an EV, you're stuck paying more to drive or park in city centres. It's a vicious cycle that dispro-

portionately affects those with fewer resources.

This isn't just about fairness. It's about meeting climate targets. Take Ireland, for example. To achieve its emissions goals, the country needs a significant increase in electric car adoption. Falling short means penalties for the country and missed opportunities to reduce emissions. Relying on households to shoulder the burden of the green transition is neither fair nor effective.

The UK faces similar challenges. Slow adoption rates suggest cost is a barrier. The lack of strong leadership and a roadmap to 2035 only adds to the problem. It becomes clear that more targeted support is needed.

Smaller, more affordable vehicles could play a crucial role in meeting climate targets. Even in a wealthy country like Ireland, 77 percent of households cannot afford medium-sized electric cars, while 38 percent cannot afford smaller EVs when factoring in car loans. Without price cuts or higher subsidies, larger EVs will stay out of reach and fail to drive the transition forward.

So do we even need big, luxury EVs? The trend towards larger vehicles, particularly SUVs, isn't new – but it's growing rapidly. In Europe, sales of electric SUVs have jumped from one-tenth to half of all EVs sold in just five years.

Larger cars are more expensive, more resource-intensive, and more wasteful. Smaller vehicles, by contrast, are lighter, require fewer materials and emit fewer harmful particles from tyre and road wear. They're also safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

Smaller vehicles play a crucial role in clean and inclusive mobility. Achieving climate goals hinges on

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## ► GAZA'S BERLIN WALL MOMENT FROM THE INTERNET



**JANUARY 25 – Home at last! Thousands of Palestinians returned to Northern Gaza after the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. At the same time, President Donald Trump was talking about the illegal 'resettlement' of displaced Palestinians in Jordan and Egypt to allow new Israeli development.**



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# INSIGHTS

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their adoption. Without them, meeting emissions targets – at least in Ireland – becomes far less likely. And if electric vehicles fail to deliver significant emissions reductions, their entire purpose in the transition to a greener future comes into question.

Smaller vehicles aren't just practical; they are essential for meaningful progress. But electric cars – even the smaller ones – remain burdened by the cost pressures of private car ownership.

Ultimately, though, we also need

fewer cars on our roads. A successful green transition must involve more car share schemes, improved access to public transport, and active travel such as walking and cycling. **CT**

*Agnieszka Stefaniec is Lecturer in Management Science at the University of Southampton and Keyvan Hosseini is Enterprise Fellow, Sustainable Mobility at the University of Southampton. This article was first published at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com).*

as a public servant accountable to the people through our elected representatives in Congress as well as the courts. Now, it's the "unitary executive," the president as commander in chief of us all (not just the military), as supreme leader. It doesn't bode well as Trump takes the reins today, does it? Expect to be ridden hard, America.

Partisan Democrats may be cheering Biden's preemptive pardons, but how about in four years when a lame duck President Trump issues his share of "get out of jail, free" pre-emptive pardons?

This idea of "pre-emption" recalls Vice President Dick Cheney and his idea of pre-emptive war. Basically, it went like this: If there's a 1 percent chance a country might attack the United States, that's all the justification a man like Cheney would need to launch a war (and without a Congressional authorisation of the same, mind you). Again, it grants to presidents (and vice presidents like Cheney) the power of monarchs, which isn't exactly what the Founders of America had in mind when they set up our government.

Pre-emptive pardons, pre-emptive war: What next? Pre-emptive censorship? (I know: we already have that.) Pre-emptive arrest and incarceration, as in the movie *Minority Report*? We think you may commit this act, this crime, this sin, so we must "pre-empt" it, and it's all your fault for making us do this.

Something is rotten in the state of America. **CT**

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

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► **BILL ASTORE**

## Land of pre-emptive pardons and pre-emptive war

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I woke on the morning of January 20 to the news that President Joe Biden had issued pre-emptive pardons for Dr. Anthony Fauci, retired General Mark Milley, and members of the January 6th Congressional committee. These pardons are intended to shield them from persecution and prosecution by President Donald Trump.

Pre-emptive pardons? I'm not a legal eagle, but are these in any sense Constitutional?

More and more, US presidents are assuming the powers of popes and kings. A pre-emptive pardon is a form of absolution in advance, or perhaps a type of indulgence to spring one from the purgatory (or inferno?) of Trump's wrath. Or perhaps a pre-emptive pardon is akin to the royal touch: the old belief that monarchs, as God's representative



here on earth, could touch their subjects and heal them.

America used to have an idea and ideal of the president as first citizen,

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# INSIGHTS

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► SAM PIZZIGATI

## Joe Biden was right about America's oligarchs

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Over three score years ago, President Dwight Eisenhower had a warning for America.

“We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex,” Eisenhower exhorted in his 1961 farewell address as president. “The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”

“We must never let the weight of this combination,” Ike continued, “endanger our liberties or democratic processes.”

Eisenhower’s warning would, sadly, go almost totally unheeded. In the years since Ike’s farewell, the “military-industrial complex” he so feared has morphed into an even more worrisome concentration of wealth and power.

In his own farewell address, President Joe Biden gave that concentration a grim label.

An “oligarchy” of “extreme wealth, power, and influence,” Biden intoned, now “literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms, and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead.”

We now face, Biden added, a “dangerous concentration of power in the hands of very few ultra-wealthy people,” a top-heavy distribution of our nation’s treasure that’s erod-

ing our “unity and common purpose” and fomenting “distrust and division.”

The end result? We stand today unable to adequately confront the challenges that face us.

America’s oligarchs, Biden explained, are wielding “their unchecked influence to eliminate the steps we’ve taken to tackle the



climate crisis.” By resisting safeguards over artificial intelligence – “the most consequential technology of our time” – they’re also opening the door to “new threats to our rights, our way of life, to our privacy, how we work, and how we protect our nation.”

Perhaps most ominously of all, these oligarchs are burying Americans “under an avalanche of misinformation and disinformation.”

“Participating in our democracy,” the departing president lamented, has become “exhausting and even

disillusioning” for average Americans. They no longer “feel like they have a fair shot.”

But Biden also stressed that average Americans can, by working together, shear our new oligarchy – and its “tech-industrial complex” core – down to democratic size. We can get the “dark money” of billionaires out of our politics. We can ban members of Congress from making stock trades while they’re legislating. We can tax the richest among us and make sure they’re paying their fair tax share.

In the days right after Biden’s farewell address, progressives would add more specifics to Biden’s list of antidotes to oligarchy.

We could and should, as former US labour secretary Robert Reich pointed out, either bust up giant, billionaire-owned tech media platforms like X and Facebook or start treating these platforms as public utilities.

We could even ban our wealthiest from owning critical media properties. But realising any of these reforms won’t be easy. Our wealthiest have never enjoyed a greater direct presence at our government’s highest levels.

Nothing symbolised the reality of this oligarchic power than the inauguration of Donald Trump. The inaugural ceremony had America’s three richest men – Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg – seated prominently in attendance as Trump addressed the nation and began his second term.

“Everybody,” a satisfied president-elect Trump mused last month at a Mar-a-Lago news conference, “wants to be my friend.”

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# INSIGHTS

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Well, no, not everybody. Just everybody with a grand fortune that our new president – and his Republican controlled Congress – can zealously safeguard and grow.

So what can the rest of us do? With Trumpism locked in federally, we can challenge our oligarchs at the state and local level.

Last month, for instance, the governor of the state of Maryland proposed a series of tax changes that would raise the combined state and local income tax rate on most Marylanders making over \$1 million a year to 10.7 percent. But Maryland, one of the nation's richest states,

could do better. Rich Californians are already paying taxes at a 12 percent rate.

But that sort of better, in Maryland or any other state, won't happen unless average Americans organise – and confront our oligarchs at every opportunity. **CT**

*Sam Pizzigati, an Institute for Policy Studies associate fellow, co-edits [Inequality.org](http://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*.*

homes, livelihoods, and a part of their families' history.

The fires have forced tens of thousands to evacuate their homes, destroyed over 12,300 structures, and killed at least 25 people. Some victims died while trying to protect their homes, like Victor Shaw, 66, found outside his Altadena house clutching a garden hose.

The fires have ravaged lower-income communities, historic Black neighbourhoods in Altadena, and cultural landmarks like actor Will Rogers' historic ranch house in the Pacific Palisades. Mass displacement is exacerbating the housing crisis in Los Angeles County, where roughly 75,000 unhoused people are now directly exposed to toxic smoke. Wildlife and pets haven't been spared either.

The climate emergency has worsened this destruction. As the fires burned, scientists confirmed that 2024 was the world's warmest year on record. Dramatic swings between intensely wet and dry weather – described by climate scientist Daniel Swain as “hydroclimate whiplash” – are increasing worldwide, resulting in more dangerous floods along with droughts that amplify wildfire risks.

Average global temperatures have now exceeded the Paris Agreement threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels. To avoid further catastrophe, fossil fuel emissions must be slashed by 43 percent by 2030 and reach “net zero” by 2050, according to the UN.

Disturbingly, President Trump, a climate change denier, intends to gut even the inadequate measures that the US has already taken. He's widely expected to withdraw our nation – the biggest historical emit-

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## ► FARRAH HASSEN

# The winds of change are driving LA's fires

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If you grew up in Southern California, you don't need a weather person to know which way the Santa Ana winds blow.

These dry winds originate in the Great Basin and sweep down the mountains toward the Southern California coast. They lower the humidity and raise the temperature, creating critical fire weather conditions. “The wind shows us how close to the edge we are,” Joan Didion once observed in her essay “Los Angeles Notebook.”

The Santa Anas typically occur during the fall. But more and more often, they're happening this time of year. In tandem, the changing climate is making Southern California drier.

This January, ferocious gusts up to 100 miles per hour overlapped with a months-long drought to create the conditions for the apocalyptic infernos now devastating Greater Los Angeles. The Eaton and Palisades fires – among the most destructive in California history – have together consumed over 37,000 acres. Losses could top \$10-billion, according to AccuWeather.

Seeing the Eaton fire's menacing flames from my family's San Gabriel Valley home, driving past thick smoke and fallen palm fronds on the freeway, and receiving a mistaken evacuation alert showed me what “close to the edge” can look like. While we've been spared for now, many others have lost their

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# INSIGHTS

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ter of carbon dioxide – from the Paris Agreement, as he did during his first administration, and he’s said he intends to cancel President Biden’s historic investments in green jobs.

The result of these actions will be more heat and extreme weather.

Communities across the Southeast are still reeling from Hurricanes Helene and Milton in September and October, which killed over 250 people and caused over \$100 billion in damages. Warmer ocean temperatures are supercharging these and other storms.

Measures like controlled burns, increased funding for fire departments, and more thoughtful residential planning in wildfire-prone areas can help California, but it will take more to slash emissions and address the climate emergency.

Fossil fuel companies should be held accountable as well. The state of California is currently suing them for deceiving the public for decades about their products’ central role in the climate crisis and demanding that they pay for billions of dollars in damages. These latest fires should be added to the list.

Amid Angelenos banding together and vowing to rebuild what they’ve lost, the fires are yet another tragic reminder of how people and our planet pay the ultimate price for climate inaction. **CT**

*Farrah Hassen is a writer, policy analyst, and adjunct professor in the Department of Political Science at Cal Poly, Pomona. This article was distributed by [www.otherwords.org](http://www.otherwords.org).*

the Palestinian people on their land and their commitment to their legitimate rights in their homeland, in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law.”

It remains to be seen if the Trump administration will find a way to bribe or coerce either or both nations to comply with Trump’s ethnic cleansing agenda, but the fact that they aren’t already on board means the empire still needs to jump through some significant hoops before this could happen.

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*Electronic Intifada’s Ali Abunimah is free after days of imprisonment by Swiss authorities for expressing wrongthink about Israel.*

When these things happen, it’s important to ensure that we make it cost them more than it benefits them. Make sure it damages Zionist PR interests more than it protects those PR interests from damage. Use their iron-fisted authoritarian crackdowns to help show the world how much tyranny and abuse is necessary to uphold a status quo which has no basis in fact or morality.

If Israel and its western backers were standing on the side of truth and justice, they wouldn’t be persecuting journalists for sharing inconvenient ideas and information. Every time they do so it should be brightly spotlighted and loudly amplified, to draw attention to the very tyrannical power structure whose public image they are trying to protect.

Any time they forcefully silence efforts to draw attention to their tyranny, make sure it draws more attention to their tyranny. Any time they assault freedoms of assembly and the press to gain a yard, make sure it costs them ten. By do-

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► **CAITLIN JOHNSTONE**

## Jordan and Egypt snub ethnic cleansing plans

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**B**oth Jordan and Egypt have put out statements rejecting President Trump’s proposal to “clean out” Gaza and move its population to those nations.

“Our principles are clear, and Jordan’s steadfast position to uphold the Palestinians’ presence on their land remains unchanged and will never change,” Jordan’s foreign minister Ayman Safadi told the press on January 26.

Similarly, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry affirmed “Egypt’s continued support for the resilience of



**HOME AGAIN:** Ali Abunimah

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# INSIGHTS

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ing this, at the very least we help change the cost-to-benefit analysis of our rulers when calculating whether such authoritarian measures are worthwhile, and at the most we harness their force and use it directly against them to weaken them in ways we never could without their help.

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If you've been ignoring or defending Biden's genocidal criminality these last 15 months, then I don't really care what you have to say about Trump or Musk or any of their cohorts. Your criticisms might be 100 percent accurate, but they're not coming from a place of truth.

If you moved seamlessly from aggressively attacking Biden's abuses to aggressively attacking Trump's, then you have my attention, because I know your criticisms are coming from actual principles and not blind opposition to an opposing political faction. You are standing against tyranny instead of standing with one of America's two tyrannical parties.

It should disturb us that there is no difference in worldview between the political class and the media class. Ever think about how weird and freakish that is? Western pundits and reporters all have the same models for looking at the world as western politicians and government officials. They break down ideologically along the same narrow "progressive-ish versus conservative-ish" spectrum of debate; they all agree on who the Good Guys and Bad Guys are on the world stage; they subscribe to the same perspectives on how electoral politics work, how their government works, how the economy works and how power works. They don't agree on every issue, but they all share the ex-

act same conceptual frameworks for understanding the world which form the basis of their agreements and disagreements.

This is one of the things that makes western propaganda so effective: the fact that there is no discrepancy between the way our governments describe the way the world works and the way the most prominent journalists, analysts and pundits do. They never make any mention of the fact that we're all being psychologically hammered with mass-scale propaganda every day to manipulate the way we think, speak, vote and work. They ignore the fact that our elections are fake and everything we were taught in school about our

government is a lie. They deny the self-evident reality that the US-centralised empire is by far the most murderous and tyrannical force on this planet and is the source of most of the world's problems. They pretend capitalism is working fine and we will figure out how to consume our way out of our soaring injustices and looming ecological collapse any minute now. They all redact from their worldview the inconvenient truth that we are ruled by sociopathic plutocrats who are driving us to our doom. **CT**

*Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian independent journalist. This column was first published at [www.caitlinjohnstone.com.au](http://www.caitlinjohnstone.com.au).*

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## ► HURWITT'S EYE

MARK HURWITT



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➤ STAN COX

# When Israeli warplanes rain death on Gaza, the co-pilot is Uncle Sam

Were it just about any other country than Israel committing such a genocide, Washington would have cut off arms shipments months ago

In recent weeks, political soothsayers have speculated about a wide variety of odious new policies the incoming Trump administration and its allies in Congress may or may not pursue. No one can predict with certainty which of those measures they will inflict on us and which they'll forget. But we can make one prediction with utter confidence. The White House and large bipartisan majorities in Congress will continue their lavish support for Israel's war on Gaza, however catastrophic the results.

Washington has supplied a large share of the armaments that have allowed the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to rain death and destruction on Gaza (not to speak of Lebanon) over the past year and a quarter. Before October 7, 2023, when Hamas and other groups attacked southern Israel, that country was receiving \$3.8-billion worth of American military aid annually. Since then, the floodgates have opened and \$18-billion worth of arms have flowed out. The ghastly results have shocked people and governments across the globe.

In early 2024, the United Nations General Assembly and International Court of Justice condemned the

war being waged on the people of Gaza and, in November, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, and Médecins Sans Frontières all followed with determinations that Israel was indeed committing genocide.

This country's laws and regulations prohibit aid to military forces deliberately killing or wounding civilians or committing other grave human rights abuses. No matter, the US-to-Israel weapons pipeline has kept right on flowing, completely unchecked. A cornucopia of military funds and hardware for Israel in the early months of the war came from just two nations: 69 percent from the United States and 30 percent from Germany.

Were it just about any other country than Israel committing such a genocide, Washington would have

cut off arms shipments months ago. But US leaders have long carved out gaping exceptions for Israel. Those policies have contributed mightily to the lethality of the onslaught, which has so far killed at least 52,000 Palestinians, 46,000 of whom are believed to have been civilians. And of those civilian dead, five of every six are also believed to have

been women or children. Israeli air strikes and other kinds of bombardment have also destroyed or severely damaged almost half a million housing units, more than 500 schools, just about every hospital in Gaza, and large parts of that region's food and water systems – all with dire consequences for health and life.





**Palestinians inspect damage following an Israeli air strike on the El-Remal area in Gaza City. Below: Israeli Air Force F-35I Adir stealth multi-role fighter jet**

From October 2023 through October 2024, reports Brett Murphy at ProPublica, 50,000 tons (yes, tons!) of US war matériel were shipped to Israel. A partial list of the munitions included in those shipments has been compiled by the Costs of War Project. The list (which, the project stresses, is far from complete) includes 2,600 250-pound bombs, 8,700 500-pound bombs, and a trove of 16,000 behemoths, each weighing in at 2,000 pounds. In January 2024, Washington also added to Israel's inventory of US-made F-15 and F-35 fighter jets.

Naturally, we taxpayers footed the bill.

As Abigail Hauslohner and Michael Birnbaum of the Washington Post noted in late October, "The pace and volume of weaponry have meant that US munitions make up a substantial portion of Israel's arsenal, with an American-made fleet of warplanes to deliver the heaviest bombs to their targets." When confronted with solid evidence that Israel has been using US military aid to commit genocide, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters, "We do not have enough information to reach definitive con-

clusions about particular incidents or to make legal determinations."

Really? How much information would be enough then? Isn't it sufficient to see Israeli forces repeatedly target clinics, homes, hospitals, mosques, and schools with massive, precision-guided bombs? Isn't it enough when the IDF targets the very "safe zones" in which they have commanded civilians to take shelter, or when they repeatedly bomb and strafe places where people have gathered around aid trucks to try to obtain some small portion of the trickle of food that the Israeli government led by Netanyahu has decided to allow into Gaza?

If the US State Department's analysts really were having trouble making "definitive conclusions about particular incidents," then Stephan Semler was ready to lend a hand with a report at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft entitled "20 Times Israel Used US Arms in Likely War Crimes."

Worse yet, his list, he points out, represents only "a small fraction of potential war crimes committed with US-provided weapons," and all 20 of the attacks he focuses on occurred at locations where no armed resistance forces seemed to be present. Here are a few incidents from the list:

- When warplanes bombed a busy market in northern Gaza's Jabalya refugee camp, killing 69 people in October 2023, UN investigators determined that US-made 2,000-pound GBU-31 air-dropped munitions had been used.

- A couple of weeks later, the UN found that "several" GBU-31s were responsible for flattening a built-up area of more than 60,000 square feet within Gaza City, killing 91 people, 39 of them children.



- A weapon dropped on a residential building last January, killing 18 (including 10 children), left behind a fragment identifying it as a 250-pound Boeing GBU-39.
- An airstrike on a tent camp for displaced people in Rafah in May, killing 46 people, left behind a GBU-39 tailfin made in Colorado.
- The next month, a bomb-navigating device manufactured by Honeywell was found in the rubble of a UN-run school where 40 people, including 23 women and children, had been killed.
- In July, more than 90 people were slaughtered in a bombing of the Al-Mawasi refugee camp, an Israeli army-designated “safe zone” near the southwest corner of Gaza.
- A tailfin found on the scene came from a US-built JDAM guidance system that’s commonly used on 1,000- or 2,000-pound bombs.
- Also in July, fragments of the motor and guidance system of a Lockheed-Martin Hellfire missile fired from a US-made Apache helicopter were found in the remains of a UN-run school where refugees were sheltering. Twenty-two had been killed in the attack.
- In December, a group of Palestinians and Palestinian-Americans filed a lawsuit in federal court accusing the State Department of violating a 1997 act of Congress that prohibits arms transfers to any government that commits gross human rights violations.

As the *Guardian* reported, a large number of countries “have privately been sanctioned and faced consequences for committing human rights violations” under the act, which is known as the “Leahy law” after its original sponsor, former Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont. But since 2020, a special committee, the Israel Leahy Vetting Forum (ILVF),

## International bodies have accused Israel of using not only bombardment but also direct starvation as a weapon

has decided whether payments or shipments destined for Israel should be permitted.

According to the *Guardian*, Israel has “benefitted from extraordinary policies inside the ILVF,” under which arms transfers get a green light no matter how egregiously Israeli occupation forces may have violated human rights. In the words of a former official, “Nobody said it, but everyone knew the rules were different for Israel.”

According to the Post’s Abigail Hauslohner and Michael Birnbaum, the process of determining whether Israel is using US-supplied weapons to commit war crimes “has become functionally irrelevant, with more senior leaders at the State Department broadly dismissive of non-Israeli sources and unwilling to sign off on action plans” for disallowing aid.

A mid-level department official, once stationed in Jerusalem, told Post reporters that senior officials “often dismissed the credibility of Palestinian sources, eyewitness accounts, nongovernmental organizations... and even the United Nations.” So, the arms have continued flowing, with no letup in sight.

In January 2024, Jack Lew, the Biden administration’s ambassador to Israel, sent a cable to top State Department officials urging that they approve the IDF’s request for thousands of GBU-39 bombs. Lew noted that those weapons were more precise and had a smaller blast radius than the 2,000-pound “dumb bombs” Israel had been drop-

ping in the war’s early months. Furthermore, he claimed, their air force had a “decades-long proven track record” of avoiding civilian deaths when using the GBU-39.

That was, unfortunately, pure eyewash. At the time of the cable, Amnesty International had already shown that the Israeli Defense Forces were killing civilians with GBU-39s. The State Department nevertheless accepted Lew’s claims and approved the sale, paving the way for even more missiles and bombs to rain down on Palestinians.

In reporting on the Lew cable, ProPublica’s Brett Murphy wrote, “While the US hoped that the smaller bombs would prevent unnecessary deaths, experts in the laws of war say the size of the bomb doesn’t matter if it kills more civilians than the military target justifies.” That principle implies that when there is no military target, an attack causing even one civilian casualty should be charged as a war crime.

During 2024, with its unrelenting bombardment of Gaza and then Lebanon, too, Israel chewed rapidly through its munition stocks. The Biden administration came to the rescue in late November by approving \$680-million in additional munitions deliveries to Israel – and that was just the appetiser.

Last month, ignoring Israel’s 15 months of brutal attacks on Gaza’s population, the administration notified Congress of plans to provide \$8-billion worth of additional arms, including Hellfire missiles, long-range 155-millimeter artillery shells, 500-pound bombs, and much more. International bodies have accused Israel of using not only bombardment but also direct starvation as a weapon, which would qualify as yet another kind of war crime.

In early 2024, responding to pressure from advocacy groups, Joe Biden signed a national security memo designated NSM-20. It re-



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quired the State Department to halt the provision of armaments to any country arbitrarily restricting the delivery of food, medical supplies, or other humanitarian aid to the civilian population of an area where that country is using those armaments. But the memo has made virtually no difference.

In April, the two top federal authorities on humanitarian aid – the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the State Department’s refugee bureau – submitted reports showing that Israel had indeed deliberately blocked food and medical shipments into Gaza. Under NSM-20, such actions should have triggered a cutoff of arms shipments to the offending country.

But when the reports touched off a surge of outrage among the department’s rank and file and demands for an arms embargo, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other top brass steamrolled all objections and approved continued shipments, according to Brett Murphy.

**A**nother dimension of Israel’s war-by-starvation has been illustrated and quantified in a spatial analysis published by the British-based group Forensic Architecture. See, for example, the maps and text on pages 252–258 of their report – [https://content.forensic-architecture.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/FA\\_A-Spatial-Analysis-of-the-Israeli-militarys-conduct-in-Gaza-since-October-2023.pdf](https://content.forensic-architecture.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/FA_A-Spatial-Analysis-of-the-Israeli-militarys-conduct-in-Gaza-since-October-2023.pdf) – which reveal in stark detail the extent to which Israeli forces have ravaged agricultural lands in Gaza.

Alongside bombing, shelling, and tank traffic, bulldozers have played an outsized role in the near-obliteration of that area’s food production capacity. The model D-9 bulldozers that are used to demolish Gaza’s buildings and lay waste to her farm-

## For the people of Gaza and their American supporters, 2025 could turn out to be even more horrifying than the ghastly year just passed

land are manufactured by Caterpillar, whose global head-quarters is in Texas.

In the early months of the war, Biden administration officials also took advantage of federal law, which doesn’t require that military aid shipments whose dollar value falls below certain limits be reported. They simply ordered that the huge quantities of arms then destined for Israel be split up into ever smaller cargoes.

And so it came to pass that, during the first five months of the war, the Biden administration delivered more than 100 loads of arms. In other words, on average during that period, an American vessel laden with “precision-guided munitions, small diameter bombs, bunker busters, small arms and other lethal aid” was being unloaded at an Israeli dock once every 36 hours.

Israeli pilots have used US-built fighter jets for the lion’s share of their airstrikes on Gaza and, by last summer, even more aircraft were needed to sustain such levels of bombing.

Of course, jets are too big and expensive to be provided covertly, so, in August, Secretary of State Blinken publicly approved the transfer of nearly \$20-billion worth of F-15 jets and other equipment to the IDF. The aircraft account for most of that sum, but the deal also includes hundreds of millions of dollars worth of ground vehicles and tank and mortar ammunition.

In September, Bernie Sanders, who served in Congress alongside

Patrick Leahy from 2007 until the latter’s retirement in 2023, further enhanced the good reputation of Vermont senators by introducing three resolutions that would have blocked the State Department’s \$20 billion Israel aid package. But when the measures came up for a vote in November, all Republicans, along with two-thirds of Sanders’s fellow Democrats, joined forces to vote them down. So, as always, Israel will continue to get its jets, tanks, and ammo.

With scant political opposition, the new Republican-controlled Congress and Trump White House will undoubtedly only double down on material support for Israel’s war crimes. And they are already threatening people who demonstrate publicly in support of an arms embargo with investigation, prosecution, deportation, or other kinds of attacks.

Citing those and other threats, Ben Samuels of Haaretz anticipates that Trump’s promise “to crack down on pro-Palestinian sentiment in America will be a defining factor of his administration’s early days” and that “the fight against the pro-Palestinian movement might be one of the only things that has a clear path across the government” – that is, the suppression could be bipartisan.

For the people of Gaza and their American supporters, 2025 could turn out to be even more horrifying than the ghastly year just passed.

**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](#).*



KRISTIN SKARE ORGERET

# *The deadliest year for journalists*

What can we do when our journalistic tools are insufficient against the horrors of relentless war and potential genocide?

**T**he past year has been the deadliest for journalists since the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) began tracking fatalities in 1992. Since October 7, 2023, at least 146 journalists have been killed in Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, and Lebanon, though the actual numbers are likely much higher, as the CPJ is investigating numerous unconfirmed reports of other journalists being killed, missing or detained. Meanwhile, foreign journalists are denied access to Gaza by Israeli authorities.

Recently, Arne Jensen from the Association of Norwegian Editors and I attended the Cairo Media Conference at the American University in Cairo to discuss challenges of war and conflict journalism with

journalists and academics. We encountered profound dedication and enthusiasm, but also a sense of powerlessness, anger, and despair over the dire situation in the region.

“The atrocities in Gaza and Lebanon challenge our shared humanity and test the ethics of journalism,” said Nidal Mansoor, from the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists in Jordan. He added that “the international legal system has collapsed, and journalism is collapsing with it.”

**W**hile we were in Cairo, the UN reported that children aged 5 to 9 make up the largest group of the then 43,500 people killed in Gaza. On average, more than 40 children have been

killed daily for over 400 days. How do we process such horrifying statistics? How can journalists cover them?

The training of journalists in safety and security is also facing unprecedented challenges. What advice can we give to journalists operating in situations where mere existence is life-threatening? How do they deal with the unavoidable trauma of reporting on conflicts like this?

Two experienced Egyptian journalists and security trainers, Noha Lamoum and Cherine Abdel Azim, were at the conference. They have conducted numerous courses for journalists across the Middle East, and they now work with a group of female journalists from Gaza who have fled to Egypt – 12 women, most of whom have lost every-

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thing, including their families and children.

Some of these journalists escaped with small children who cower in fear at any loud noise. These women's most fervent wish was simply to see the sea. Sitting silently with them on the beach, gazing at the same sea that once bordered their homeland before it was devastated, was profoundly moving.

When the women began to recount their stories, it was as though a floodgate opened – words, tears, and emptiness poured out. The trainers were deeply affected themselves, as are many journalists covering the human suffering. “I live off words,” said one of them. “They were my tools, my joy, but now they bring no comfort. They feel increasingly hollow.”

Ten years ago, in January 2015, many of us proclaimed “Je suis Charlie” in solidarity after the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris. Where are the voices now for Hamza, Mustafa, Rami, and other journalists who have been targeted and killed?

“Where is the West?” This was a central theme. Where is the international community? Why the glaring double standards?

The violence in Amsterdam on November 7, 2024 between Israeli Maccabi Tel Aviv soccer fans and pro-Palestinian groups was a case in point. Media outlets failed to report that Israeli fans first burned Palestinian flags and shouted inflammatory slogans. Instead, the narrative focused on anti-Semitism driving the violence.

Zahera Harb, a former journalist from Beirut, now at City University in London, highlighted how UK broadcaster Sky News initially covered the provocations of the Israeli fans, but later replaced the segment with an edited version which

## 60 years after Hannah Arendt documented Adolf Eichmann's trial, her reflections on the banality of evil remain disturbingly relevant

largely omitted footage of their provocations. Instead it featured statements from Dutch and British officials condemning anti-Semitism. Sky News stated that changes to their coverage were made to meet their standards of “balance and impartiality.”

However, this is not an isolated incident. Insiders at Germany's public broadcaster Deutsche Welle, and at CNN and the BBC, have recently spoken out over similar double standards, many of which are ingrained in the editorial guidelines that govern their newsrooms.

“Is it Europe's lingering guilt over the Holocaust that continues to paralyze its response?” asked one prominent editor in Cairo. “It's horrifying to think that the victims of hatred and genocide in Europe are now implicated in the suffering of another people. The term ‘antisemitism’ has become a trump card, nullifying ethical journalistic standards.”

Western media, guided by balance and impartiality, excels in many areas. However, the extremity of the war in Gaza raises questions about whether the pursuit of balance sometimes impedes the pursuit of truth.

During our discussions with journalists in a region ravaged by mass civilian casualties and direct attacks on reporters, our input on war imagery and hate speech felt somewhat inadequate, a token gesture akin to offering inflatable armbands to someone drowning in a violent hurricane.

“Show the pictures of the dead

children,” urged a young female journalist who had been in Rafah. “Consideration for the survivors is a luxury we cannot afford,” said an editor, alluding to the difficult ethical discussions in Western newsrooms about what to publish. These debates highlight the gap between young people's unfiltered reality on platforms like TikTok and the more curated coverage by traditional media.

It is worth noting that “Western media” is a potentially unhelpful category. In Norway, for instance, we pride ourselves on consistently ranking highest in measures of freedom of expression and media independence.

Our ongoing research (Riegert & Orgeret, forthcoming) highlights the exemplary efforts of Norwegian journalists in their coverage of the October 7 attacks on Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza and Lebanon – they have verified facts, demonstrated methodology, and offered essential context. Many Norwegian correspondents have shown the human side of suffering, and collaborated courageously with journalists on the ground.

Yet difficult questions linger: How are we using our freedom? What can we do when our journalistic tools are insufficient against the horrors of relentless war and potential genocide? More than 60 years after Hannah Arendt documented Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, her reflections on the banality of evil remain disturbingly relevant.

**CT**

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► JONATHAN COOK

# *How Starmer and the police joined forces to quell all dissent at Gaza protest*

Dozens of people were arrested at a peaceful London demonstration aiming to highlight British complicity in Israel's slaughter

**T**he decision by the Metropolitan Police to interview “under caution” former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and leftwing MP John McDonnell for attending a peaceful protest in London against Israel’s mass slaughter in Gaza is a decisive turning point.

It marks a new escalation by the British state in its campaign to repress dissent – and specifically the demonstrations against what the International Court of Justice (ICJ) determined a year ago was a “plausible” genocide in Gaza.

It marks, too, a new low in the mendacity of police, and senior government figures like the Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, who insinuated that protesters engaged in violent, illegal behaviour or posed a threat to Jews in London.

I was at the rally on Saturday, January 18, and I saw what happened. From what I observed, it ap-

peared that police wilfully engineered a situation to entrap Corbyn and McDonnell, the march’s figureheads, and then cynically present them as lawbreakers. At the same time, it arrested dozens of protesters and has subsequently charged the main organisers with public order offences.

It is not true that protesters forcefully “broke through” a police cordon at the top of Whitehall, as the Met claimed, to enter Trafalgar Square and thereby breached police “conditions” and posed some kind of undefined threat to a synagogue more than a mile away and not on the march route.

And the media is being thoroughly irresponsible in allowing police to advance these falsehoods without serious challenge. Social media is full of videos showing that Corbyn and McDonnell were correct in saying that they were ushered through the cordon.



The following week more than 40 leading lawyers and academics wrote to the Home Secretary, warning that the Met’s actions were “a disproportionate, unwarranted and dangerous assault on the right to assembly and protest” and that a raft of anti-protest laws were being exploited to target “anti-war and pro-Palestine protests in particular.”

In a statement, the Met maintained it acted “without fear or favour ... motivated only by the need to ensure groups can exercise their right to peaceful protest, while also



MPs John McDonnell (second left) and Jeremy Corbyn (fourth left) were among the flower-holding marchers behind the banner at London's march against genocide

ensuring the wider community can go about their lives without serious disruption”.

The Met's false assertions aren't random or purposeless; rather, they seek to advance specific political goals. They help the government of Prime Minister Keir Starmer – which is deeply implicated in Israel's genocide – smear the marchers as violent, antisemitic troublemakers. They create a pretext to shut down protests that have caused huge discomfort to Starmer.

What we are witnessing is a con-

tinuation of the British state's war on the ethical left. It is using opposition to Israel – and now to genocide – as its yardstick for measuring political illegitimacy and deviancy.

Starmer's first job as opposition leader was to purge the Labour Party of Corbyn and the grassroots movement he inspired – one that hoped to reverse 40 years of growing social injustice at home, and end Britain's investment in colonial forever wars

abroad, including its lock-step support for Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people.

Now Starmer's job as prime minister is to rid the streets of those for whom Israel's slaughter of children has served as a rallying point; those who understand that both our major political parties are complicit in genocide; and those despairing that we are no longer offered meaningful political choices on the biggest issues facing us.

For years when he was Labour leader, Corbyn and his supporters

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were fitted up as antisemites without a shred of evidence for the allegation, aside from his all-too-justified criticisms of Israel.

Now, the very same establishment is again fitting up him, as well as the cause he represents – this time for being proved so presciently right in his warnings that Israel was a rogue state.

There have been regular, peaceful marches through London since Israel began its indiscriminate slaughter of Gaza's men, women and children in October 2023, following Hamas's attack on Israel. But the longer the genocide has continued, the harder it has been for the British government to justify its active collusion.

Largely unmentioned by Britain's pliant media, the UK has been supplying vital components to Israel that have allowed its fleet of F-35 jets to continue bombing Gaza and killing civilians. Britain has organised hundreds of flights that have shipped US and German munitions to Israel, including from a Royal Air Force base in Cyprus.

The UK has supplied Israel with intelligence gained from surveillance flights over Gaza, and it has provided diplomatic cover for Israel at international bodies such as the United Nations.

**S**tarmer has been particularly embarrassed by the decision of the International Criminal Court, the ICJ's sister court, last November to issue arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defence minister, Yoav Gallant, for crimes against humanity.

The Israeli government's policy to starve the population of Gaza of food, water and power was publicly supported by Starmer from the outset.

## **Even as the exchanges were taking place, Israel was abducting more Palestinians to fill its 'prisons', which Israeli human rights groups describe as 'torture camps'**

Like his predecessor, the British prime minister has been relying chiefly on the BBC – the state broadcaster and main news source for most Britons – to keep the public largely ignorant, both of the fact that a genocide is taking place in Gaza and of his complicity in it.

The BBC's role has been to normalise genocide by recharacterising it as a "war" between Israel and Hamas. Israel's carpet bombing of Gaza, the mass slaughter of Palestinians, and the starvation of the entire population have been implicitly treated as a "counter-terrorism" operation.

The aim has been to gradually dissipate interest in the Gaza protests, shrinking the size of the demonstrations and leaving only a hard core of committed activists out on the streets.

Initially, the BBC kept the focus on the suffering of Israelis in the aftermath of the Hamas attack, and on the plight of Israeli hostages held in Gaza – even as tens of thousands of Palestinians in the enclave were killed and maimed, and its hospitals, schools, universities, libraries, mosques, churches and bakeries were levelled.

Then, as the genocide rolled on and selling it became harder, the BBC largely drew a veil over what was taking place. It minimised its reporting to the point where the horrors unfolding in Gaza were excluded from the main TV news for days or even weeks at a time.

A growing number of BBC journalists have come forward as whistleblowers. They have cited severe top-down pressure at the corporation to slant reporting in Israel's favour.

Even now, as the first stage of a shaky ceasefire was implemented on January 19, the BBC's focus once again reverted to the Israeli hostages, and the release of three to their families. Each has been humanised by the western media, their stories and photographs shared widely.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian women and children they have been "swapped" for are barely visible. They are referred to prejudicially as "prisoners." But like thousands of other Palestinians held in Israeli "prisons," many were seized from their homes in the middle of the night by armed soldiers enforcing an illegal occupation. Many have been held for lengthy periods without charge or trial.

Even as the exchanges were taking place, Israel was abducting more Palestinians, including children, to fill its "prisons," which Israeli human rights groups describe as "torture camps."

All of this was reason enough for protest organisers to select the BBC as the site for the weekend's demonstration. The point was to protest its coverage and editorial complicity in Israel's genocide.

**T**he media's biased reporting has given licence to the British government to back Israel's genocide. And the same flawed coverage will give Israel licence to violate the ceasefire, as it is already doing, or to reimpose the inhuman, 16-year siege of Gaza that preceded the genocide and led to Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023.

But as the demonstrations have shown no signs of abating, the Starmer government has grown



Descendants of the World War II Jewish Holocaust joined London's January 18 National March for Palestine that saw many arrests by the Metropolitan Police

more desperate. The BBC has failed to normalise the genocide, and British complicity has not been completely shrouded.

Starmer thus needed a new strategy for bringing to an end the rallies that have been embarrassing him. If the British public can't be brainwashed into accepting genocide, then they will have to be scared off the streets. The velvet glove of the BBC has been swapped for the Met's iron fist.

Until January 18, more than 20 protest marches had taken place in London without meaningful incident. Although hundreds of thousands of people regularly attended, arrests were lower than at the annual Glastonbury music festival.

The obviously peaceful nature of the marches, and the attendance by a large and visible bloc of Jews, including Holocaust survivors, had long infuriated the right and Israel's lobbyists, who wanted them banned.

On January 18, police decided to take the gloves off. They arrested dozens of demonstrators, charged at least two of the main organisers with public order offences, and called Corbyn and McDonnell in for interviews.

The demented narrative that Starmer and the media have crafted over the past 15 months, and that the Met is now relying on to justify its repression, goes like this:

"Israel was the victim of a massive, unprovoked antisemitic hate crime by Hamas on 7 October 2023 (even though Israel had besieged Gaza for the preceding 16 years and brutally occupied the enclave for more than seven decades). Hamas's attack gave Israel the right to 'defend itself' on any terms it thought necessary. Because Israel believed the entire population of Gaza was implicated in Hamas's hate crime, it justifiably punished them all collectively through carpet bombing and an aid blockade."

With this preposterous, human rights-violating narrative serving

**Police arrested dozens of demonstrators, and charged at least two of the main organisers with public order offences**

as the unexamined origin story for Israel's genocide, anyone protesting Israel's destruction of Gaza could be characterised as sympathising with Hamas and its October 7 "hate crime".

The previous government forged just such a narrative.

Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman termed as "hate marches" the protests against what the ICJ calls a "plausible" genocide. But the smear was so patently ludicrous that it never gained much traction beyond the Conservative Party, the Israel-worshipping far right, and the more unhinged parts of the billionaire-owned media.

It appears that the police have now cooked up some corroborative evidence to help the current Labour government. They appear to have set a trap to ensnare protesters, including Corbyn and McDonnell, so they could be recast as violent law-breakers and antisemites.

The Met did not respond to questions by the time of publication.

Starmer's government and London police have spent months preparing the right conditions to demonise protesters.

The Met's subterfuge has worked only because the establishment media has served once again as a willing conduit for police disinformation about the march.

As Ben Jamal of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign has explained, the Met approved a mass protest outside the BBC headquarters back in November. However, it requested the event be delayed to avoid causing disruption in the run-up to Christmas for London's nearby commercial streets.

After reaching a compromise with police on timing, organisers announced that the rally outside the BBC would take place on Janu-

ary 18. But as the date neared, police started furiously backtracking.

The pretext they settled on was that a local synagogue would be disturbed by the demonstration. The claim was made even though the synagogue was not near the march route, there have been no examples of a synagogue being threatened or any Jews being targeted in 15 months of similar protests, and the march is always attended by a large and highly visible bloc of Jews opposed to the Gaza genocide.

Objections to the march by the synagogue's rabbi looked entirely political, and unrelated to security. But march organisers accommodated the rabbi's professed concerns and the demands of police by reversing the march route. It would start in Whitehall and end at the BBC late in the afternoon, long after the synagogue's Sabbath service was finished.

Police revealed their true hand at this point. They rejected the organisers' compromise, even though the rabbi's concerns had been addressed. Instead, the Met appear to have declared what amounts to a large and permanent no-go zone around the BBC – effectively banning any pro-Palestine demonstrations from taking place on a Saturday, the only day in the week when mass protests can realistically happen.

In other words, police – the state's coercive arm – were threatening anyone critical of Israel's genocide with arrest if they went near the BBC, the state's propaganda arm.

The BBC might be funded by taxpayers. Its licence fee might be compulsory. But the British public apparently now has no right to protest against the disinformation they are compelled to pay for.

**B**y the time the march began, all



Steve Eason

**Calling out Keith Starmer, not the most popular recent British Prime Minister**

the pieces were in place for the Met's sleight of hand.

Police had at the last minute insisted on what they termed a "static" rally in Whitehall. Organisers had said they would try to march as far as they were allowed by police; when their path was blocked, they would lay flowers on the road in memory of the slaughtered children

**As Corbyn and McDonnell reached the northwest corner of Trafalgar Square, they were greeted by another police cordon. This time, the police refused to budge**

of Gaza, and in protest at the silencing of their demonstration against the BBC.

At the end of the speeches, the march formed at the top of Whitehall, led by Corbyn, McDonnell and Jamal. I stood nearby. Police had cordoned off the road – but then, as I saw for myself and video footage confirms, the police line separated and the marchers were released into Trafalgar Square.

As the demonstrators soon found, all routes out of Trafalgar Square had been blocked off by police. The square was effectively a giant "kettle" – a police tactic used to enclose protesters so they cannot easily leave a public space. They can then be selectively arrested.

As Corbyn and McDonnell reached the northwest corner of Trafalgar Square, they were greeted by another police cordon. This time, police refused to budge.

When the march's chief steward, Chris Nineham, requested that the delegation be allowed to proceed further, he was rushed by a squad of police officers and violently dragged off.

Jamal urged everyone to sit down to avoid further attacks by police. The flowers were laid, and the march dispersed. Nonetheless, police massed in large numbers in Trafalgar Square and arrested dozens of demonstrators.

At all times, despite the impression created by the Met and Yvette Cooper, the marchers were at least a mile from the BBC and the synagogue.

**N**otably, on the day before the rally, more than 1,000 Jews, including leading cultural figures, lawyers and academics, called on the police to overturn the ban on marching to the BBC, stating: "As Jews we are shocked at this brazen attempt to in-



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terfere with hard-won political freedoms by conjuring up an imaginary threat to Jewish freedom of worship.”

The BBC and the rest of the media have gleefully reported on Corbyn and McDonnell being called for police interviews. They have been equally enthusiastic in giving the impression of a connection between that investigation and a statement from Commander Adam Slonecki, who led the policing operation, that the march represented “a serious escalation in criminality.”

Notably, the media has largely avoided mentioning the context, or the BBC’s conflict of interest: that protesters were seeking to expose the corporation’s complicity in the Gaza genocide, and that police were acting to shield it – and Starmer’s government – from accountability.

The Met is framing the march’s leaders and figureheads as criminals. This should be understood for what it is: police meddling deeply in political matters on behalf of the government, and eroding fundamental democratic rights to assemble and peacefully protest.

Nineham, a veteran founder of Stop the War and one of the march organisers, was later charged under the Public Order Act. As part of his bail conditions, he has been banned from participating in future anti-genocide rallies.

Jamal, director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, has been similarly charged. There is a danger that police will level the same charges against Corbyn and McDonnell.

The transparent aim here – one that benefits Starmer’s government, as well as Israel – is to silence dissent against the genocide and British collusion in it.

Police have built a mendacious case that the home secretary can exploit to outlaw the protests. She shows signs of being ready to grasp this, the flimsiest of pretexts that

## The transparent aim here – one that benefits Starmer’s government, as well as Israel – is to silence dissent against the genocide and British collusion in it

she is being offered.

But even in the event the marches aren’t banned, the damage is already done. The unwarranted and violent arrests of demonstrators, and the smearing of organisers, will have a predictable effect. It will dissuade all but the hardest activists from turning out to protest against British complicity in the slaughter in Gaza, the biggest crime of our age.

Some will credulously swallow the police disinformation. Others will believe police are gunning to criminalise participation in the demonstrations. Either way, the marches will have been successfully stigmatised.

Recall that the Met has form. In 2023, an official inquiry found the force to be institutionally racist, misogynistic, homophobic and corrupt. Its author concluded that the Met could “no longer presume that it has the permission of the people of London to police them.”

The idea that it is dispassionately maintaining order between those protesting Israel’s genocide and those so attached to a foreign country that they find such protests offensive is laughable.

The head of the Met, Mark Rowley, celebrated the fact that he had placed unprecedented restrictions on the January 18 rally in an address the following day. He said:

“We’ve used conditions on the protests more than we ever have done before in terms of times, constraints, routes.”

Where did he make these comments? At an event held by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, which has been vocal in supporting Israel through 15 months of genocide and objected strenuously to arms sales restrictions by the Starmer government, even though it has allowed more than 90 percent of British weapons to continue flowing to Israel.

Rowley, meanwhile, ignored an appeal from more than 1,000 British Jews, including prominent cultural and legal figures, urging him to allow the BBC protest on February 18 to go ahead.

The truth is that Rowley and the Met are not the ones upholding public order. They are the ones threatening it.

They have declared war on one of the most cherished and fundamental rights in a democracy. They have criminalised peaceful, lawful protest. And they have openly politicised their policing role.

Millions of Britons are learning that their opposition to the UK’s active support for the slaughter of children in Gaza not only counts for nothing, because the government refuses to listen, but that police also consider their protests, however peaceful, as criminal behaviour.

Police – and Starmer’s government hiding behind them – are further tearing apart Britain’s fragile social fabric. They are stoking disorder. And we will all pay a heavy price. **CT**

*Jonathan Cook is the author of three books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a winner of the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. More of the author’s writing can be found at [www.jonathancook.net](http://www.jonathancook.net).*

# Battle lines are drawn

The opening chapter from a new book, *The Art of Class War*, on the UK's 1984-1985 mineworkers' strike explores the motivations and challenges faced by newspaper cartoonists tasked with illustrating the strike's raw and complex emotions – ranging from anger and grief to humour and absurdity

There was a sense of inevitability about Britain's 1984-85 pit strike, a realisation that a decisive confrontation in the coalfields would prove to be unavoidable at some point during a decade of dramatic industrial upheaval. The National Union of Mineworkers were the shock troops of the trade union movement. Once the Yorkshire area leader Arthur Scargill was installed as the union's national president a showdown was inescapable. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had scores to settle.

A disastrous general election defeat for her predecessor Ted Heath at the height of the 1974 miners' strike was etched into the collective memory of the Conservative Party. Scargill had earned his place in trade union history two years earlier when he mobilised flying pickets to force police to close the gates at the Saltley coke works in Birmingham, a climb down which had hastened an earlier retreat by the Conservatives in the 1972 miners' strike.

On taking office in 1979, Mrs Thatcher was determined to reduce state support for loss-making nationalised industries, breaking them up, preparing where possible for privatisation. An early move was to downsize the British Steel Corporation, a task under-taken by its chairman Ian MacGregor, whose success led to his appointment in 1983 to head the National Coal Board. Mrs Thatcher knew she would have a fight on her hands having been forced to back down herself when threatened by a pit strike in 1981, an early, salutary setback in her Premiership.

Coal was the first industry to be nationalised by the post-war Labour government and the coal board, established in 1946, had developed trusted procedures for consulting and negotiating with the mining trade unions. On becoming Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher faced a well-entrenched duopoly at the helm of the country's biggest state monopoly and largest employer. Sir Derek Ezra, chairman of the NCB, had built up a close working relationship with the NUM President, Joe Gormley. Both

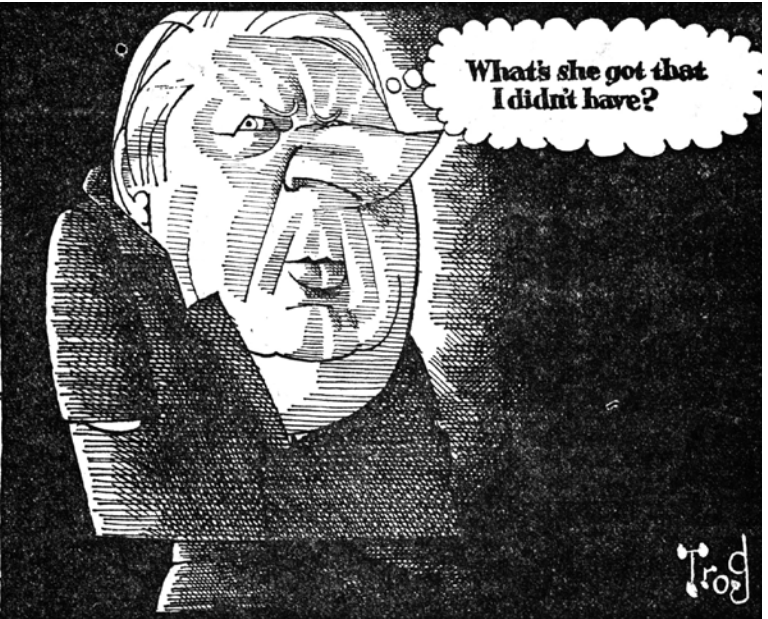
men were guided by a joint determination to guarantee the long-term future and prosperity of the coalfields.

Ezra's mission was to secure the best possible deal from the government for future investment in new pits; Gormley's goal was to keep the miners at the top of the earnings league for manual workers.

An era of behind-the-scenes co-operation was about to be shattered when these two stalwarts stood down in 1982. Between them they had delivered almost a decade of industrial peace in the coalfields with new investment and high wages. After leading the NUM through the strikes of 1972 and 1974, Gormley could rely on considerable rank and file support within the mining communities which strengthened his hand as he faced mounting opposition from Scargill and the left-wing leadership of other coalfields.

In late 1981, Scargill secured an overwhelming victory in the pit-head ballot to succeed Gormley, just as the NUM membership was about to vote on a 9.5 per cent pay offer. A majority on the union's national executive committee opposed a settlement. A special conference recommended strike action. Gormley went over the heads of the executive and, in a personal column in the *Daily Express*, urged acceptance of an offer which would take the miners' increase in pay to a total of 40 per cent in only 20 months. Gormley was vindicated. The vote to accept the deal and to reject strike action was a decisive 55-45 per cent, a commanding majority for the outgoing president and a relief for Mrs Thatcher who, months earlier, in the face of walk-outs, had stepped back from authorising pit closures after being outmanoeuvred by Ezra and Gormley.

Given his status as something of a miners' folk hero for leading the union through the strikes of the 1970s, and then having won political praise for his ability to outwit Scargill, Gormley continued to attract favourable



1 Trog, *The Observer* (above)  
 2 Stanley Franklin, *The Sun* (left)

ing his work as ‘quite the best commentary on the politics of the day’.

Stanley Franklin, long-standing cartoonist for *The Sun*, was another illustrator who went the distance during the strike. Having previously been with the *Daily Mirror*, he found he was ‘much happier’ contributing to *The Sun* after joining the paper in 1974. Franklin’s cartoons and caricatures gained notoriety for the way he traduced Scargill during the many twists and turns of the strike, ridiculing and demonising his role as NUM President. By contrast Franklin’s parting shot on Gormley’s retirement (2) reflected on the end of an era. While his approach was light-hearted, Franklin signalled that he thought there was trouble ahead with the change in the union’s leadership.

media coverage. Illustrators were drawn to his rugged face – *Battered Cherub* was the title of his autobiography – and he was ideal material for a caricature or cartoon. His departure from the fray did not go unnoticed.

Trog, (1) regular cartoonist for *The Observer*, captured the political nuance behind Gormley’s implicit help for Thatcher in seeing off Scargill, in stark contrast to Gormley’s role in Heath’s downfall. On numerous Sundays throughout the year-long strike, Trog – in real life Wally Fawkes – produced a cartoon which presented a profound take on the previous week’s events. Not for him the highly politicised cartoon imagery favoured by many national newspapers. Trog’s cartoons were greatly admired both for a lack of political bias and for never pulling his punches. Thatcher remarked on how he managed to portray the hard reality of political life, describ-

Derek Ezra’s short-lived successor, Norman Siddall, made a valiant effort to maintain cordial relations between management and unions, but Scargill had no intention of fraternising with senior members of the NCB. The board’s 1982 pay offer at 8.5 per cent was not far short of the deal which the coalfields had accepted the previous year against Scargill’s advice. He and his executive committee were determined to prove they meant business. The ballot paper asked for a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer to a two-pronged question on whether they opposed pit closures and the pay offer. For the second time within a year the leadership was about to be rebuffed.

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## In his reflections on media coverage of the strike, Scargill accused the cartoonist Cummings of attempting to isolate him from the support of coalfield communities

Scargill was on a collision course with Mrs Thatcher and in the run-up to the ballot, her backers in the Conservative-supporting press wasted no time in subjecting Scargill to a barrage of damning headlines. ‘King Arthur’, as he had been dubbed by the tabloids, was in the frame as never before. Cartoonists were waiting impatiently to join the fray.

Quirky facial characteristics in Scargill’s appearance, odd postures, unusual gestures or any other peculiarity were prime material for exaggeration. So were signs, symbols and assorted imagery which reinforce the comic or satirical effect of cartoons and caricatures and might help readers differentiate between the two sides in the dispute. Thatcher and Scargill were divisive by their nature, in many ways complete opposites, ready-made for lampooning. As the strike intensified, cartoonists and illustrators did their best to convey the unyielding polarisation between the state and mining communities.

**M**ichael Cummings, (3) lead cartoonist for the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*, was no holds barred in his denigration of Scargill. The two papers had been staunch supporters of Gormley’s more emollient approach and Cummings took every opportunity to remind readers of the new president’s antecedents. He would repeatedly portray him as a dupe of the Soviet Union. Scargill joined the Young Communist League in 1955 and was elected Yorkshire delegate for the sixth World Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow. His continuing links with Soviet trade unions – and his occasional visits to Moscow – were rarely overlooked, justification for Cummings’ portrayal of Scargill being welcomed as a puppet of ailing President Leonid Brezhnev. Cummings’ cartoon implied Scargill was about to take his place in a gallery of British traitors.

In his reflections on the media’s coverage of the strike, Scargill singled out Cummings for bitter criticism, accusing the cartoonist of attempting to isolate him from the support of coalfield communities. Constantly depicting him as a stooge of the Soviets was intended to drive a wedge between the rank and file and their leader, raising doubts about his true motives. Such was the potential influence of Cummings’ imagery of the NUM’s leader being manipulated by the Soviets, that Scargill acknowledged the role which cartoons played in hostile media coverage and the cumulative impact that they could have. They had an insidious effect on public perception because they questioned the justification for his

stand against pit closures. More importantly, they would reinforce what would become a developing attack line of Mrs Thatcher and the Conservative press that Scargill’s Soviet links were a threat to British democracy.

When, in November 1982, journalists crowded into the NUM’s former headquarters in Euston Road for what they had assumed would be another humiliating news conference, the tables were turned on the union’s media adversaries. There had been a 61-39 vote against strike action, but Scargill was about to seize the agenda. He revealed a secret NCB ‘hit list’ – a confidential report indicating that ‘75 short life’ collieries had been earmarked for closure. Scargill was mocked by the *Daily Mail* for pulling ‘a white rabbit out of the hat’ to divert attention from his defeat. Mac (Stanley McMurty), (4) the *Mail* group’s long-standing cartoonist, depicted Scargill reading out not the names of the threatened pits but a long list of lame excuses.

Six months later there was another decisive rejection of strike action, the third within a year and the second since Scargill assumed the leadership of the union. A call for the NUM to support an area strike in the South Wales coalfield was rejected by a 61-39 majority. So determined was the government to build up coal stocks at the power stations that overtime earnings in the pits had taken off. Most miners were in no mood to sacrifice their enhanced wages to support the Welsh miners, another setback to Scargill’s twin strategy of urging industrial action over feared pit closures and pay. A glut in coal and oil inspired a cartoon well worthy of *The Guardian* front page from the pen of staff illustrator and cartoonist Peter Clarke. (5)

These early skirmishes were about to pale into insignificance in the summer of 1983 when Ian MacGregor took up his post in the coal board’s headquarters, Hobart House.

Battle lines had been drawn. His appointment signalled the government’s intent. After her success in the 1982 Falklands War and the Conservatives’ landslide victory in the 1983 general election, Mrs Thatcher was ready to take on the coal industry. In his first month MacGregor started the pit closure review which Scargill had been predicting. He drew up plans to close 75 pits with the loss of 64,000 jobs. Cabinet records released under the 30-year rule revealed that Mrs Thatcher was informed of MacGregor’s intentions in mid-September 1983, six months before the board declared the closure of Cortonwood colliery in South Yorkshire, the announcement which in March 1984 triggered a Yorkshire area

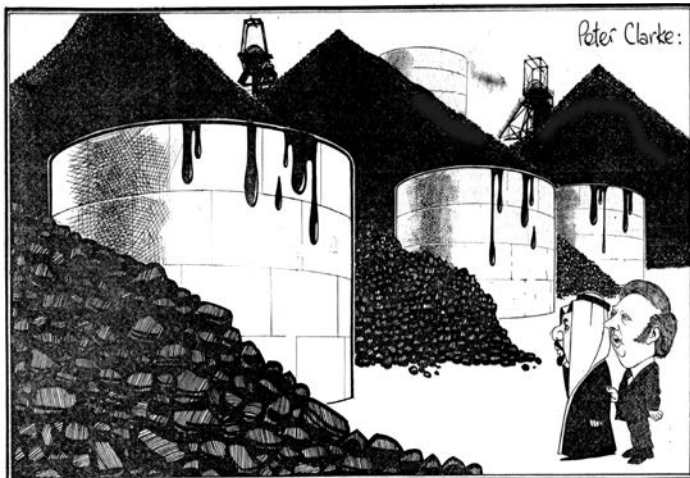
Broadcasters and newspaper journalists who sensed the potential enormity of a confrontation between Scargill and Thatcher had followed Scargill's every move



3 "British spies are superb – but they're nothing as helpful as Comrade Scargill!!" Michael Cummings, *Daily Express*



4 "And I also have a list of reasons for not winning" Mac, *Daily Mail*



5 Peter Clarke, *The Guardian*



6 Peter Brookes, *The Times*

strike and the start of a national dispute.

Much of the news reporting in late 1983 and early 1984 was speculative. Broadcasters and newspaper journalists who sensed the potential enormity of a confrontation between Scargill and Thatcher had followed Scargill's every move. The imminent prospect of a head-to-head conflict between two such dominant personalities offered cartoonists what was to all intents and purposes a trial run, an opportunity to get to grips with how to depict what would become a cast of characters whose fight to the finish would dominate the news agenda and command their attention for months to come.

Peter Brookes, (6) who was at the start of an illustrious career as leading cartoonist for *The Times*, captured Scargill's perceived obduracy during the long

build-up to the start of the strike. He depicted the NUM President in a King Canute pose, implying that 'King Arthur' would be unable to control a wave of pit closures that was about to engulf the coalfields.

Brookes' cartoons (7) stood out so often because of his ingenuity in finding ways to link other ongoing news strands to what would become the continuing saga of the strike.

While attending the 1983 TUC Conference, a *Daily Mirror* photographer captured the moment Scargill opened his briefcase to reveal an aerosol can of Brut hair-spray. At last, the secret was out: his trademark Bobby

A *Daily Mirror* photographer captured the moment Scargill opened his briefcase to reveal an aerosol can of Brut hairspray. At last, the secret was out



7 The stormy progress of Arthur Scargill. Peter Brookes, *The Times*

Charlton-style comb-over hair style needed constant attention to be kept safely in place.

I had been introduced to Brookes through writing for *The Listener*, a reflective weekly magazine published by the BBC until its closure in the early 1990s. My insights into how trade union leaders, employers and government ministers were seeking to influence and manipulate the news media appealed to the editor Russell Twisk.

After submitting an article in February 1982 about the deadlock in a long-running strike by the rail union ASLEF, Twisk called me to his office to meet Brookes and to talk him through the background. Brookes had been commissioned to do the front cover illustration. The strike had degenerated into something of a slanging match between the ASLEF leader Ray Buckton and the British Rail chairman Sir Peter Parker.

Think of a Punch and Judy show was my suggestion. Brookes was far more imaginative. Between caricatures of the two faces there was a broken communication cord of the kind that could still be found above the window in compartments of train carriages of a certain vintage. Above their heads was the caption, 'Parker v Buckton: The media contest everyone loses' and below them a mock penalty notice, 'Communication Cord. Penalty for improper use 6 weeks of public misery'.

Twisk must have been delighted. Four months later a Brookes' illustration was on the front cover again. Following interventions by the conciliation service ACAS and the TUC general council, a settlement was finally in sight over strike action by the rival rail union, the



8 "A youth, who bore, 'mid snow and ice, A banner with the strange device," ("Excelsior" by Longfellow). Garland, *Daily Telegraph*

NUR. 'Victory signal in rail war?' was the caption beside a sketch of two express trains, BR Board and Unions, screeching to a halt to avoid a head on crash. In July 1982 he did a front cover for *The Listener* depicting Scargill being haunted by his shadow in an agitated pose. Brookes' fascination with Scargill – and his knack of placing him in unexpected but topical situations – would capture the attention of readers of *The Times* for months to come.

Perhaps one cartoon by Nicholas Garland (8) of the *Daily Telegraph* was all that was needed in mid-January 1984 to sum up the confidence within the government and the apprehension on the side of the union. Sensing the limitations on their room for manoeuvre because of the size of the coal stocks, the union's executive recommended an overtime ban which was approved at a special conference in October 1983.

But this was too little, too late: coal supplies at the power stations were at record levels and these continued to be topped up. Garland's image of Scargill trying to reach the peak among a range of coal mountains while at the same time waving his flag for an overtime ban was a pointer to one of the key factors that would influence the eventual outcome of the strike. Mrs Thatcher, the NCB and Central Electricity Generating Board were well prepared for any eventuality. **CT**

*Nicholas Jones was a BBC industrial and political correspondent for 30 years until retiring in 2002. His books include The Lost Tribe: Whatever Happened to Fleet Street's Industrial Correspondents?*

● Buy a copy of *The Art of Class War* – See next page

# THE ART OF CLASS WAR

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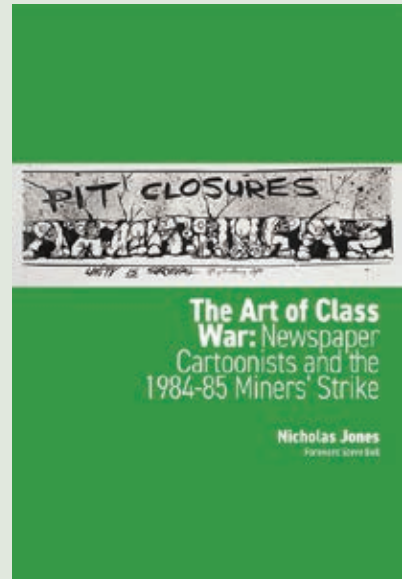
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# Martin Luther King, Jr, Vietnam and Gaza

I wonder: Are the dead nostalgic? Was being alive the good old days for them or did they feel they were finally home and that life had been a dream?

Before my mind was turned to the subject of my title, I started to write a piece called “Are the Dead Nostalgic?”

It’s a touchy philosophical question that has no definitive answer. It seems flippant in an impossible way, which it is, but its flippancy holds a secret message. So I asked the dead who would speak to me and got a few mixed and muffled replies. You can understand their reluctance to say anything. If I heard correctly, one of them said, “You should ask the living.” Most didn’t answer, which had me wondering why. Were they disgusted with us?

I have always heard that nostalgia was not good for you since it kept you rooted in the past; that this ache for home – the good old days that may or may not have existed but you miss them nevertheless – prevented you from living Zen-like in the present or looking forward to the future. But I wondered if nostalgia could be a form of utopian hope in reverse at a time when humanistic utopian thinking is at a nadir, overwhelmed by the machine dreams of people like Elon Musk and those at the World Economic Forum.

This denigration of nostalgia assumed you were alive. I was wondering about the dead. What did they think? Did they wish they were

still alive? Was being alive the good old days for them or did they feel they were finally home and that life had been a dream?

Or did the dead have no future, no nothing, or perhaps some afterglow of sorts, an everlasting rest in peace, whatever that may mean, a phrase that always seemed to me a bad knock on life. Who wants to sleep forever?

I guess I was thinking that if I could get in touch with the dead and get them talking, they might also tell me what it was like to be dead. Although I am no statistical whiz, I figured there were a lot more of them than us and the odds were pretty good that someone there would spill the beans.

I thought of this recently when watching *A Complete Unknown*, the new film about Bob Dylan’s early years, when his girlfriend, Sylvie Russo (based on Suze Rotolo, played by Elle Fanning) gets angry at him for concealing his true past and identity, and he replies, “People make up their past, Silly, they make up what they want; forget the rest.”

This was especially true for Dylan in his early years and has a ring of truth for everyone to a lesser extent, whether it’s from memory lapses or

some sense of wanting to fictionalize their pasts for reasons known only to them. Our memories and forgetteries are interesting creative faculties.

But as I said, I was interested in the dead. Did they also do that? Were they nostalgic?

Then this proclivity of mine toward philosophical thought and dark humour flipped in my mind as the pictures of dead and weeping Palestinian children swept in and tortured me in dreams. I had seen the photos and videos of the ongoing Israeli genocide of Palestinians and felt sick and outraged afterwards. I have written against it many times. Yet as I wrote about this issue of nostalgia, I felt like a speculator in abstractions, and thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s experience when on January 14, 1967 he was at an airport restaurant thumbing through a *Ramparts* magazine and saw an article by the journalist William Pepper, “The Children of Vietnam” that featured photos of Vietnamese mothers holding dead and napalmed children. In 1999, the author James W. Douglass (*JFK and the Unspeakable*, etc.) wrote an essay describing this serendipitous event for King:

The final chapter of Martin Luther King’s life began on January 14, 1967, the day on which King committed himself to deepening his oppo-

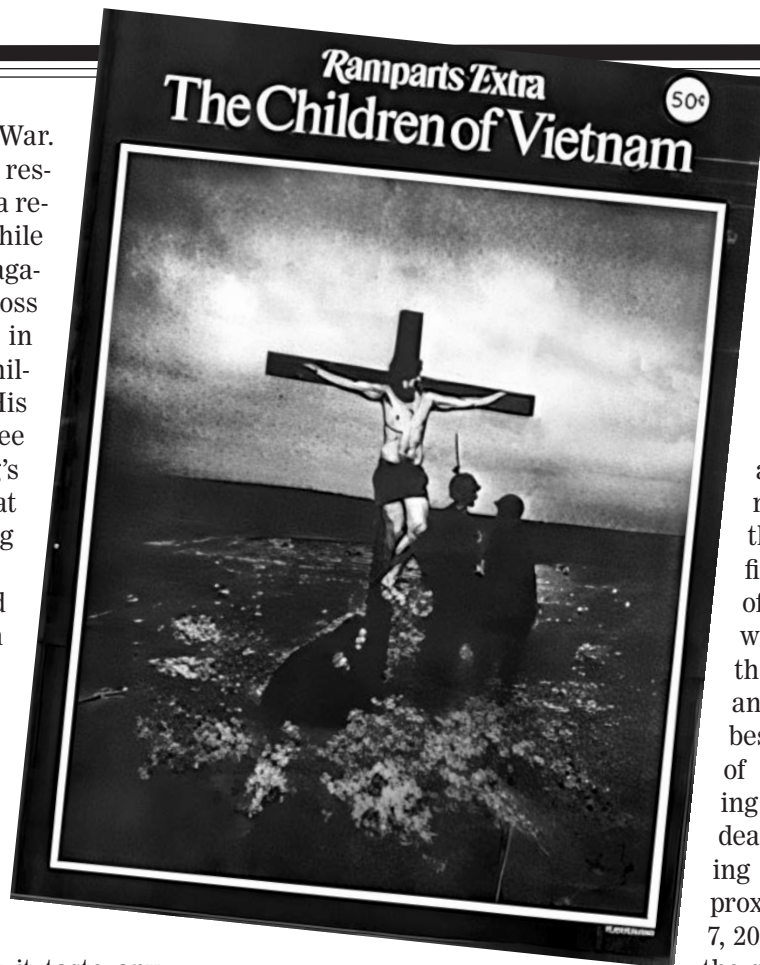


sition to the Vietnam War. He was at an airport restaurant on his way to a retreat in Jamaica. While looking through magazines, he came across an illustrated article in *Ramparts*, “The Children of Vietnam.” His co-worker Bernard Lee never forgot King’s shock as he looked at photographs of young napalm victims.

He froze as he looked at the pictures from Vietnam. He saw a picture of a Vietnamese mother holding her dead baby, a baby killed by our military. Then Martin just pushed the plate of food away from him. I looked

up and said, “Doesn’t it taste any good,” and he answered, “Nothing will ever taste any good for me until I do everything I can to end that war.”

**M**artin King was overwhelmed with grief and outrage. Against all advice from his associates in the civil rights movement, he realised he must publicly and unequivocally oppose the Vietnam war, which he did two-and-a half months later on April 4 at Riverside Church in the New York City in his famous speech – *Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence* – in which he denounced the US war against Vietnam, linking it to his battle against racism and for economic justice for everybody. He became a revolutionary. It led to his assassination by the US government exactly one year later on April 4, 1968 in Memphis. But his legacy lives on, despite the official MLK Day attempts to reduce him to a manageable dead



### King's co-worker Bernard Lee never forgot King's shock as he looked at photographs of young napalm victims

threat and a one-trick pony.

Conscience calls at odd moments to roil one’s soul. It sneaks into one’s dreams and daytime thoughts, even in synchronous ways as I realised on January 14, 58 years to the day MLK saw those photos in *Ramparts*.

Just yesterday, while listening to a podcast, I heard the historian Peter Kuznik say that when he asks his students at American University, who have all been to the Vietnam Memorial wall and seen the names of the 58,318 dead Americans, how many Vietnamese were killed in the war, they answer in the range of 90,000. While on a trip to Hanoi last year, Kuznik learned that the official Vietnamese count is 5-mil-

lion, to which one could add another million Thai, Laotian, and Cambodians. Kuznik had been assuming the 3.8-million dead Vietnamese figure was correct, but his bright students had no idea because their knowledge of history is abysmal.

Similarly, just a few weeks ago, the English medical journal *The Lancet* reported that the death toll in Gaza in the first nine months as a result of Israel’s genocidal assault was about 40 percent higher than reported by the Palestinian Health Ministry. The study’s best estimate puts the number of dead Palestinians (excluding the severely injured, those dead from starvation, those missing under the rubble, etc.) at approximately 64,000 from October 7, 2023 to June 30, 2024. Of those, the study concluded that approximately 60 percent were women, children, and old people. As everyone knows, Israel has turned Gaza into a wasteland and a killing field that has continued to the present day, with Israel furiously continuing to attack, killing 38 Palestinians on one recent day.

As with the death figures from Vietnam, these numbers are no doubt greatly underestimated and can be multiplied by three, four, or more. But if you follow the corporate mainstream media, especially in the US and its adjuncts, you will learn nothing of this. It is assumed that people don’t care and are more interested in strange flying objects over the skies of the northeast that have ostensibly disappeared until they will be revived, the sex and drinking habits of Trump’s cabinet nominees, and the latest sports and celebrity news.

Many don’t care and many do, but people generally feel battered and overwhelmed by the insane condi-

tion of the country, the endless news reports of all the things to fear, the political dirty tricks and propaganda, the corruption, the rip-offs, the lies and posturing, etc.

Many have been so dumbed down by the endless propaganda that they will believe anything.

Most people may not know how to articulate their rage and disgust, but they sense that something is terribly wrong and fear it will get worse. They may not want to take it anymore and are mad as hell but realize screaming out their windows at the air as in the classic film *Network* will not remedy anything. They wait in dread, depressed, but deny it.

**H**alf the voting population has invested their hopes in Trump just as the other half did with Biden – both delusional in the extreme. Those dead Palestinian children that torment me are the results of the Biden administration’s alliance with fellow Israeli Zionist Netanyahu – two bloody nihilists – now to be replaced by Trump, a third enthusiastic supporter of genocide.

Those of us who have been speaking out for years are also tired. I am tired. The recent Israeli/US bloody victories in the Mideast came as a shock to those who hoped Israel and the Netanyahu government would be forced to desist. The opposite has occurred. Lebanon, Syria, Yemen – is Iran next?

(And you will notice that I have not even mentioned Ukraine and the US war against Russia.)

It’s heavy stuff, hard on the spirit, so perhaps you can understand my desire to delve into philosophical and artistic matters from time to time.

I think of the poem *To Those Born Later*, by the German poet Bertolt Brecht:

*What kind of times are they, when*

## The recent Israeli/US bloody victories in the Mideast came as a shock to those who hoped Israel would be forced to desist

*A talk about trees is almost a crime  
Because it implies silence about so  
many horrors?*

*That man there calmly crossing the  
street*

*Is already perhaps beyond the reach  
of his friends*

*Who are in need?*

.....

*They say to me: Eat and drink! Be  
glad you have it!*

*But how can I eat and drink if I  
snatch what I eat*

*From the starving, and*

*My glass of water belongs to one dy-  
ing of thirst?*

*And yet I eat and drink.*

*I would also like to be wise.*

*In the old books it says that wisdom  
is:*

*To shun the strife of the world and  
to live out*

*Your brief time without fear*

*Also to get along without violence*

*To return good for evil*

*Not to fulfil your desires but to for-  
get them*

*Is accounted wise.*

*All this I cannot do.*

*Truly, I live in dark times.*

Yes, so do we. But the most terrible atrocities have taken place on a vast scale for a very long time. Are they seen as almost normal now, the “new” reality? So much so that our faculty for forgetting and dismissing them far outweighs our will to remember?

Yet sometimes a time to break the silence is always now, and a message comes to us to remember

to speak out. The official organs of the government and press on January 20 once again urged everyone to remember Martin Luther King, Jr. as a statue from the past, frozen in time, a fighter for racial justice but nothing else. His opposition to the triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism will be ignored. Who will say that if he were alive today he would condemn the genocide in Gaza, the US war against Russian via Ukraine, and war making throughout the world? In his speech from Riverside Church on April 4, 1967 that led to his death, he said:

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The “tide in the affairs of men” does not remain at the flood; it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: ‘Too late.’ There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect. ‘The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on...’ We still have a choice today; nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation.”

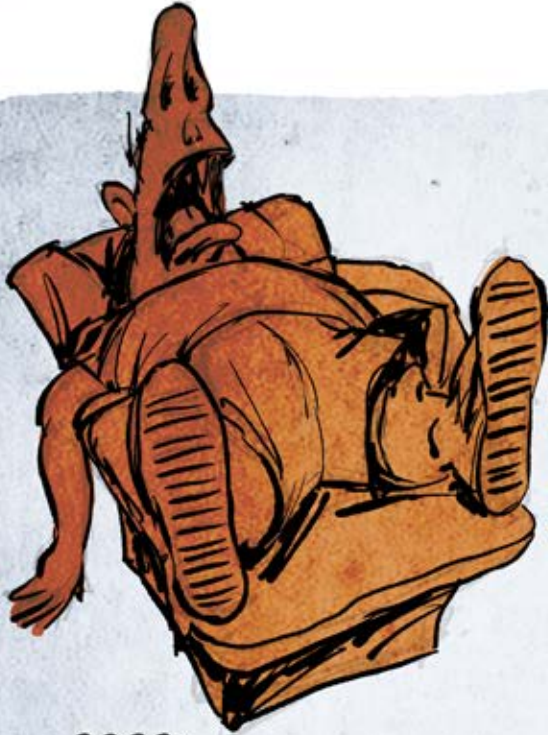
No doubt Satan was laughing with delight as Donald Trump was sworn in as president on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

I still wonder: Are the dead nostalgic? I hope so. **CT**

*Edward Curtin is an independent writer whose work has appeared widely over many years. His website is [www.edwardcurtin.com](http://www.edwardcurtin.com) and his latest book is ‘Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies.’* **CT**

WE ARE ALL FRIED 🗑️

Greg Koenderman



2022:  
BIDEN PROXY WAR



2023:  
BIDEN GENOCIDE



2024:  
BIDEN GENOCIDE &  
PROXY WAR



2025:  
TRUMP TAKES OFFICE,  
OPENS MOUTH

-LIBERALS-

31/1/25  
X @FRIEDCARTOONS

# *Surprise! What I learned after ‘The End of History’*

Trump’s return to the White House may not be worth celebrating. It may well be History’s way of saying: “Hey, you! Wake up! Pay attention!”

“**T**he arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” So declared Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ah, if only it had proved to be so.

Although my respect for MLK is enduring, when it comes to that upward-trending curve connecting past to present, his view of human history has proven to be all too hopeful.

At best, history’s actual course remains exceedingly difficult to decipher. Some might say it’s downright devious (and, when you look around this embattled planet of ours today, from the Ukraine to the Middle East, deeply disturbing).

Let’s consider a specific, very recent segment of the past. I’m thinking of the period stretching from my birth year of 1947 to this moment.

An admission: I, too, once believed that the unfolding events during those long decades I was living through told a discernible story. Although not without its zigs and zags, so I was convinced once upon a time, that story had both direction and purpose. It pointed toward an ultimate destination – so politicians, pundits, and prophets like Dr. King assured us. In fact, embracing the essentials of that story was then considered nothing less than a prerequisite for situating yourself

in the ongoing stream of history. It offered something to grab hold of.

Sadly enough, all of this turned out to be bunk.

That became abundantly clear in the years after 1989 when the Soviet Union began to collapse and the US was left alone as a great power on Planet Earth. The decades since then have carried a variety of labels. The post-Cold War order came and went, succeeded by the post-9/11 era, and then the Global War on Terror which, even today, in largely unattended places like Africa, drags on in anonymity.

In those precincts where opinions are manufactured and marketed, an overarching theme informed each of those labels: the United States was, by definition, the sun around which all else orbited.

In what was known as an age of unipolarity or, more modestly, the unipolar moment, we Americans presided as the sole superpower and indispensable nation of Planet Earth, exercising full-spectrum dominance.

In the pithy formulation of columnist Max Boot, the United States had become the planet’s “Big Enchilada.” The future was ours to mold, shape, and direct. Some influential thinkers insisted – may even have believed – that History itself had actually “ended.”

Alas, events exposed that glorious moment as fleeting, if not altogether illusory. For several reasons – Washington’s propensity for needless war certainly offers a place to start – things did not pan out as expected. Assurances of peace, prosperity, and victory over the foe (whoever the foe it was at that moment) turned out to be false. By 2016, that fact had registered on Americans in sufficient numbers for them to elect as “leader of the Free World” someone hitherto chiefly known as a TV host and real estate developer of dubious credentials.

The seemingly impossible had occurred: The American people (or at least the Electoral College) had delivered Donald Trump to the pinnacle of American politics.

It was as if a clown had taken possession of the White House.

**S**hocked and appalled, millions of citizens found this turn of events hard to believe and impossible to accept. President Trump promptly proceeded to fulfil their worst expectations. By almost any of the measures habitually employed to evaluate political leadership, he flopped as a commander-in-chief. To my mind, he was an embarrassment.



Yet, however inexplicably, Trump remained to many Americans – growing numbers, it would turn out – a source of hope and inspiration. If given sufficient time, he would redeem the nation. History had summoned him to do so, so his followers believed, fervently and adamantly.

In 2020, the anti-Trump Establishment did manage to scratch out one final chance to show that it was not entirely bankrupt. Yet sending to the White House an elderly white male who embodied the politics of the Old School merely postponed

Trump's Second Coming.

No doubt Joe Biden was seasoned and well-intentioned, but he proved to possess little or nothing of Trump's mystifying appeal. And when he stumbled, the remnant of the Establishment quickly and brutally abandoned him.

So, four years on, Americans have reversed course. They have decided to give Trump – now elevated to the status of folk hero in the eyes of many – another chance.

What does this head-scratching turn of events signify? Could Histo-

ry be trying to tell us something?

Allow me to suggest that those who counted History out did so prematurely. It's time to consider the possibility that all too many of the very smart, very earnest, and very well-compensated people who take it upon themselves to interpret the signs of our times have been radically misinformed. Simply put: they don't know what they're talking about.

Viewed in retrospect, perhaps the collapse of communism did not signify the turning point of cosmic significance so many of them then imagined. Add to that another possibility: Perhaps liberal democratic consumer capitalism (also known as the American Way of Life) does not, in fact, define the ultimate destination of humankind.

It just might be that History is once again on the move – or simply that it never really “ended” in the first place. And as usual, it appears to have tricks up its sleeve, with Donald Trump's return to the White House arguably one of them.

More than a few of my fellow citizens see his election as a cause for ultimate despair – and I get that. But to saddle Trump with responsibility for the predicament in which our nation now finds itself vastly overstates his historical significance.

Let's start with this: Despite his extraordinary aptitude for self-promotion, Trump has shown little ability to anticipate, shape, or even forestall events. Yes, he is distinctly a blowhard, who makes grandiose promises that rarely pan out. (If you want documentation, take your choice among Trump University, Trump Airlines, Trump Vodka, Trump Steaks, Trump Magazine, Trump Taj Mahal, and even Trump: the Game.) Barring a conversion akin to the Apostle Paul's on

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his journey to Damascus, we can expect more of the same from his second term as president.

Yet the yawning gap between his over-the-top MAGA rhetoric and what he's really delivered should be instructive. It trains a spotlight on what the "end of history" has actually yielded: lofty unfulfilled promises that have given way to unexpected and often distinctly undesired consequences.

That adverse judgment hardly applies to Trump alone. In reality, it applies to every president since George H.W. Bush unveiled his "new world order" back in 1991, with his son George W. Bush's infamous 2003 "Mission Accomplished" claim serving as its exclamation point.

Since then, at the national level, American politics, especially presidential politics, has become a scam. What happens in Washington, whether in the White House or on Capitol Hill, no more reflects the hopes of the Founders of the American republic than Black Friday and Cyber Monday express "the reason for the Season."

In that sense, while Trump's return to the White House may not be worth celebrating, it is entirely appropriate. It may well be History's way of saying: "Hey, you! Wake up! Pay attention!"

In 1962, former Secretary of State Dean Acheson remarked that "Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role." Although a bit snarky, his assessment was apt.

Today, one can easily imagine some senior Chinese or Indian (or even British) diplomat offering a similar judgment about the United States. America's imperial pretensions have run aground. Yet the loudest and most influential establishment voices – Donald Trump notably excepted – continue to insist otherwise. With apparent sincerity, President Biden all too typically clung to the notion that the

## When it actually comes to setting basic US policy on a more sensible course, Trump is manifestly clueless

United States does indeed remain the planet's "indispensable nation."

Events say otherwise. Consider the arena of war. Once upon a time, professing a commitment to peace, the United States sought to avoid war. When armed conflict became unavoidable, America sought to win, quickly and neatly. Today, in contrast, this country seemingly adheres to an informal doctrine of "bomb-and-bankroll."

Since three days after the 9/11 attacks (with but a single negative vote), when Congress passed an Authorization for the Use of Military Force, or AUMF, war has become a fixture of presidential politics, with a compliant Congress issuing the checks. As for the Constitution, when it comes to war powers, it has become a dead letter.

In recent years, US military casualties have been blessedly few, but outcomes have been ambiguous at best and abysmal – think Afghanistan – at worst. If the United States has played an indispensable role in these years, it's been in underwriting disaster, spending billions of dollars on catastrophic wars that were, from the moment they were launched, of distinctly questionable relevance to this country's wellbeing.

In his inconsistent, erratic, and bloviating way, Donald Trump – almost alone among figures on the national stage – has appeared to find this objectionable and has proposed

a radical course change. Under his leadership, he insists, the Big Enchilada will rise to new heights of glory.

To be clear, the likelihood of the incoming administration making good on the myriad promises contained within its MAGA agenda is close to zero.

When it actually comes to setting basic US policy on a more sensible course, Trump is manifestly clueless. Buying Greenland, taking the Panama Canal, or even making Canada our 51st state will not restore our ailing Republic to health. As for the team of lackeys Trump is assembling to assist him in governing, let us simply note that there is not a single figure of Acheson's stature among them.

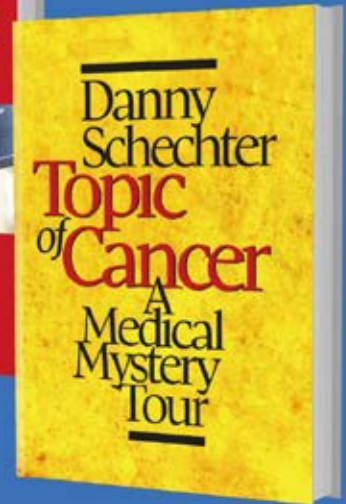
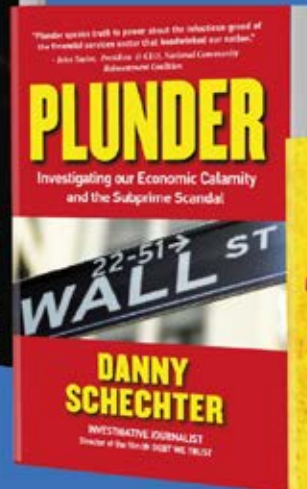
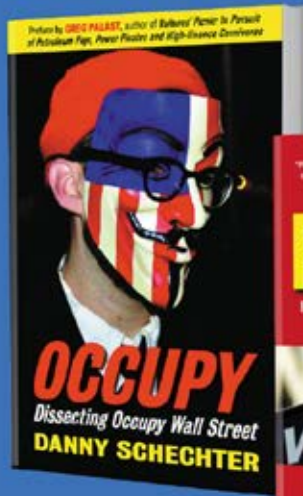
Still, here we may find reason for at least a glimmer of hope. For far too long – all my life, in fact – Americans have looked to the White House for salvation. Those expectations have met with repeated, seemingly endless disappointment.

Vowing to Make America Great Again, Donald Trump has, in his own strange fashion, vaulted those hopes to a new level. That he, too, will disappoint his followers, no less the rest of us, is, of course, foreordained. Yet his failure might – just might – bring Americans to rethink and renew their democracy.

Listen: History is signalling to us. Whether we can successfully interpret those signals remains to be seen. In the meantime, brace yourself for what promises to be a distinctly bumpy ride. **CT**

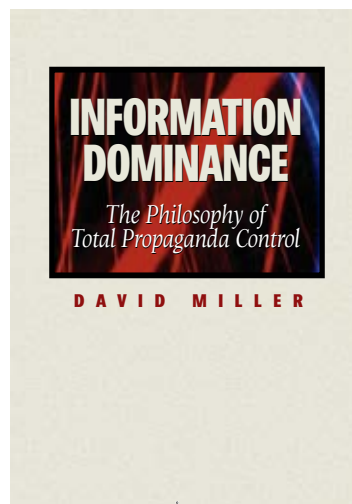
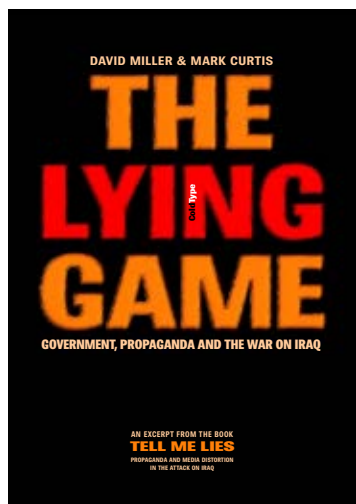
*Andrew Bacevich is chairman and co-founder of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. His latest Dispatch book is *Shedding an Obsolete Past: Bidding Farewell to the American Century* and his new novel, *Ravens on a Wire*, was published as last year ended. This article was first published at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com).*

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# FIGHTING THE INFORMATION WAR



## Two important ebooks from the ColdType archives

By David Miller and Mark Curtis

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

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# Manufacturing consent for regime change in Syria

Truth is reversed, history is buried, and the propaganda machine continues to thunder along

Monitoring corporate media performance for 25 years – week after week, war after war – has done little to diminish our dismay at the robotic automaticity of ‘mainstream’ enthusiasm for US-authored regime change.

Each time, without fail, thousands of media commentators function, not as critical-thinking individuals, but as cookie-cutter cogs in a propaganda printing machine stamping the word ‘GOOD’ on the public mind.

It is not that we are told what to think – they know we mostly just skim the headlines – we are told what to feel. The result is a thin veneer of symbolic headline ‘news’ painting a positive picture followed by ‘in-depth’ content that hides as much as it reveals. This ‘coverage’ is not comprehensible and is not intended to be because it serves the needs of power rather than truth.

The latest propaganda blitz is particularly remarkable given that the Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group led by Mohammed al-Jolani that overthrew Syria’s Assad dictatorship in December is a proscribed terrorist group under UK law. The UK government website currently reads:

“Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham should be treated as alternative names for the

organisation which is already proscribed under the name Al Qa’ida.”

Donald Trump put it more bluntly in August 2013:

“Remember, all these ‘freedom fighters’ in Syria want to fly planes into our buildings.”

A 2016 Amnesty report described abuses carried out by Jabhat al Nusra and associated groups, now known as HTS, in Syria:

“The cases of abduction, torture and summary killings documented by Amnesty International offer a glimpse into the reality of life under armed opposition groups in Aleppo and Idleb governorates. Civilians who live under constant threat of indiscriminate attack by government forces simply for living in areas controlled by armed groups have suffered abuse at the hands of these groups as they assert their authority through rough ‘justice’ and cruel punishments. Media activists, journalists, lawyers, humanitarian workers and others have been subjected to abduction and torture and other ill-treatment at the hands of armed groups that form part of the Army of Conquest and Aleppo Conquest coalitions.”

None of this has deterred the mainstream cheerleaders using endless pictures of smiling Syrians, with women notably to the fore in a brazen attempt to exploit #MeToo

kudos. One typically cheerful BBC home page reported ‘relief’ at HTS’s violent regime change.

After years spent propagandising for this result, a *Guardian* home page was similarly full of celebration. US journalist Glenn Greenwald commented:

“The US lists Mohammed al-Jolani as a wanted terrorist, yet he is now being reframed as a polished, blazer-wearing rebel willing to partner with the West.”

Thus, a bizarre *Telegraph* headline read:

“‘Moderate’ jihadist leader storms Syria – but tells troops not to frighten children”

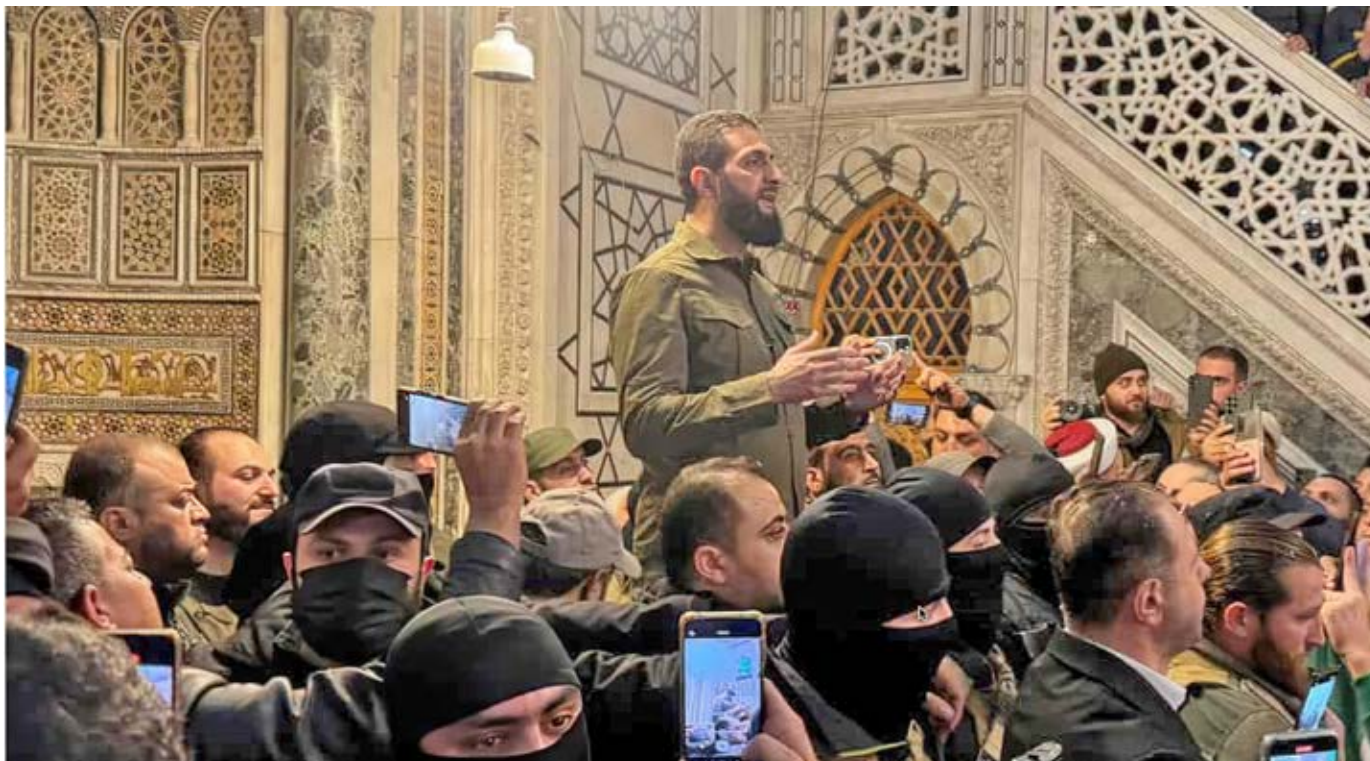
The BBC commented of HTS:

“It previously publicly broke ranks with al-Qaeda, although it remains proscribed as a terrorist group by the UK, as well as the UN, the US, Turkey and other countries.

“Questions remain over whether it has completely renounced those links, but its message in the run-up to Assad’s deposition has been one of inclusiveness and a rejection of violence.”

Words are what matter, it seems, even if the claimed ‘rejection of violence’ is challenged somewhat by HTS having just conquered Syria using methods that owe more to Hitler’s blitzkrieg than Gandhi’s *satyāgraha*.





**Abu Mohammad al-Jolani addresses a crowded gathering in Damascus on December 8, 2024, after his rebels had wrested overcontrol of Syria from Bashar al-Assad.**

Words also mean a lot to the Observer's editors:

'So far, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the formerly al-Qaida-linked Islamist militia that led the charge against Assad, has belied its extremist roots with moderately reassuring words.'

**F**ormer head of MI6 Sir John Sawers went so far as to say: "It would be rather ridiculous, actually, if we're unable to engage with the new leadership in Syria because of a proscription dating back 12 years."

No surprise, then, when media reported:

"UK could consider removing proscription of Syria's HTS, says minister"

The US having already led the way in that regard.

Economist and former politician Yanis Varoufakis captured it perfectly:

"The Western media's duplicity has broken all records. When jihadists entered Kabul, ousting the US regime, it was the end of the world. Now that jihadists have entered Damascus to overthrow a secular enemy of the West, it is a triumph of the human spirit."

Indeed, this is an eerily exact rerun of supposedly independent and impartial media performance celebrating US-UK regime change in Iraq. On 9 April 2003, as US tanks stormed Baghdad, the BBC's Nicholas Witchell beamed:

"It is absolutely, without a doubt, a vindication of the strategy."

ITN's Tom Bradby declared: "This war has been a major success" (ITN Evening News, 10 April 2003). According to ITN's John Irvine, the outlook was rosy:

"A war of three weeks has brought an end to decades of Iraqi misery." (ITN Evening News, 9 April 2003)

At least one million Iraqis died in the hell that was being unleashed.

In 2016, the BBC reported of Iraq:

"Grinding poverty has made the trafficking of kidneys and other organs a phenomenon in Baghdad."

"About 22.5 percent of Iraq's population of nearly 30 million people live in abject poverty, according to World Bank statistics from 2014."

The same media cookie-cutter cogs greeted the overthrow of the Libyan government – different 'rebels', same Western bombers. As the Libyan state collapsed, the BBC's Nick Robinson observed that Downing Street "will see this, I'm sure, as a triumphant end" (BBC News at Six, 20 October 2011). In Washington, the BBC's Ian Pannell surmised that Obama "is feeling that his foreign policy strategy has been vindicated – that his critics have been proven wrong." (BBC News online, 21 October 2011).

On and on, this was an exact repetition of Iraq with little or no reflection on the results of that earlier 'intervention'. A 2016 report into the

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Libya war by the UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee summarised the consequences:

“The result was political and economic collapse, inter-militia and inter-tribal warfare, humanitarian and migrant crises, widespread human rights violations, the spread of Gaddafi regime weapons across the region and the growth of ISIL in North Africa.”

That NATO-led ‘intervention’ killed an estimated 40,000 people. Once one of Africa’s most advanced countries for health care and education, Libya became a failed state, with the collapse of essential services, the re-emergence of slave markets and a raging civil war with murderous ethnic cleansing. The West’s alleged motive or *casus belli* was not the commission, but the supposed hypothetical threat of a massacre of civilians, dismissed by the Foreign Affairs Committee as baseless. The real interest in Libya, as Iraq, was oil.

Because corporate journalism is a propaganda machine, the message must always be clear, with no room for doubt. The public forehead is not to be branded with messages of: “GOOD, but...” Naturally, then, it is deemed beyond the remit of responsible journalism to ask how the smartly dressed Syrian ‘rebels’ with high-tech weapons became powerful enough to overthrow a national government supported by Russia and Iran. How did that happen? Who gave them the weapons, funded them, trained them, organised them? Economist Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University and Sybil Fares of Sustainable Development Solutions Network explain:

“Operation Timber Sycamore was a billion-dollar CIA covert program launched by Obama to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. The CIA funded, trained, and provided intelligence to radical and extreme Islamist groups. The CIA effort also involved

## Because corporate journalism is a propaganda machine, the message must always be clear, with no room for doubt

a ‘rat line’ to run weapons from Libya (attacked by NATO in 2011) to the jihadists in Syria. In 2014, Seymour Hersh described the operation in his piece ‘The Red Line and the Rat Line:’

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

Sachs and Fares continue:

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

**O**ur search of the ProQuest newspaper database finds no mention of ‘Timber Sycamore’ in any UK newspaper in the last three months. Mentions did appear in the *Pioneer*, New Delhi; *Haaretz* in Israel; in the *Sri Lanka Guardian* and the *Tehran Times*. That simple finding gives an idea of the current state of UK press freedom.

WikiLeaks notes that in a September 2016 leaked audio US Secretary

of State John Kerry said of anti-Assad forces: “we’ve been putting an extraordinary amount of arms in... Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, huge amount of weapons coming in, huge amount of money...” In June 2015, the *Washington Post* reported of the US:

“At \$1 billion, Syria-related operations account for about \$1 of every \$15 in the CIA’s overall budget... US officials said the CIA has trained and equipped nearly 10,000 fighters sent into Syria over the past several years – meaning that the agency is spending roughly \$100,000 per year for every anti-Assad rebel who has gone through the program.”

In 2017, the *New York Times* reported that the US had been embroiled in a dirty war in Syria that constituted “one of the costliest covert action programs in the history of the CIA”, running to “more than \$1 billion over the life of the program.” The aim was to support a vast ‘rebel’ army created and armed by the US, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey to overthrow the Syrian government.

It is difficult to suppress so much naked ‘intervention’. Ignoring the broader context reviewed above, the *Daily Mail* reported:

“US special forces warned Syrian rebel fighters to ‘be ready’ weeks before Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) fighters launched the large-scale coup that toppled former President Bashar al-Assad’s regime, it has emerged?”

Blithely ignoring the role of the West, the *Observer* concluded its leading article with what was presumably not an attempt at humour:

“But the west must not attempt to dictate events.”

The *Guardian*’s Simon Tisdall did a magnificent job of reversing the truth by pretending not to be aware of a mountain of evidence, saying of the West:

“It largely looked on as the most terrible suffering, mass displace-

ment, war crimes, illegal use of chemical weapons and other horrors unfolded. Its occasional interventions – such as Donald Trump’s one-off 2017 bombing of regime military facilities after a chemical weapons attack in Khan Sheikhun in Idlib – were undertaken more to ease collective consciences than to effect real change.”

Other invasions supported by the West are being casually soft-soaped by Western media in a way that would be unthinkable for Official Enemies. On December 9, Associated Press reported:

“As Israel advances on a Syrian buffer zone, it sees peril and opportunity.”

Israel, then, merely ‘advances’ into ‘a buffer zone’; it’s not invading, much less illegally invading. Associated Press previously reported:

“Russia presses invasion to outskirts of Ukrainian capital.”

In similar vein, the *New York Times* wrote:

“Israel Enters Demilitarized Buffer Zone In the Golan Heights.”

The BBC reported that Israeli settlements in the Golan Heights “are considered illegal under international law, which Israel disputes.” Imagine the BBC saying: “The invasion of Ukraine is considered illegal under international law, which Russia disputes.” Unthinkable, of course – why would anyone care what the Russians think?

The BBC also provided a darkly amusing map of Syria reflecting its power-friendly worldview. Highlights included a completely undiscussed, preposterously named ‘US

## Imagine the BBC saying: “The invasion of Ukraine is considered illegal under international law, which Russia disputes”

outpost’ inside Syria. Who is in there, we wondered; the US cavalry? What are they up to? Is there any oil there? There is also no mention in the BBC’s annotation that the blank space marking the Golan Heights is under illegal Israeli occupation.

By contrast, independent member of parliament Zarah Sultana commented on X:

“Israel is invading Syria.

“While committing genocide in Gaza, settler terror in the West Bank & bombing raids on Lebanon, Israeli tanks roll into Damascus.

“This is a system of oppression that knows no borders – yet the UK government parrots lines about ‘Israeli self-defence.’”

Sachs is less positive than our reflexively joyous media:

“Most likely Syria will now succumb to continued war among the many armed protagonists, as has happened in the previous US-Israeli regime-change operations.”

That terrible outcome would be the natural assumption for anyone with any knowledge of Iraq and Libya.

The BBC’s Jeremy Bowen managed to wave vaguely in the direction of the ugly truth:

“Colonel Gaddafi of Libya and

Saddam Hussein of Iraq were removed without a ready-made replacement waiting in the wings. Ill-considered foreign intervention did much to create two catastrophes.”

Foreign intervention? By whom? Bowen would be out of a job if he told us those ‘catastrophes’ were committed by the same people driving the latest events in Syria. Was the main problem with those ‘interventions’ that there was not ‘a ready-made replacement waiting in the wings’? Was there a problem with the idea that the US and UK had any business imposing replacements on anyone? Especially given their nihilistic moral track record.

The truth is that violent regime almost always has catastrophic consequences for the civilian population. However violent or corrupt a state may be, if and when it collapses, so do many of the support systems needed to keep people alive and healthy.

A short BBC report discussed the fate of Iraq and Libya in three sentences, none of which mentioned that the US-UK alliance was behind those disasters. That omission allowed the BBC to tragicomically reflect on “the UK’s and US’s potential roles in preventing a similar situation from emerging in Syria.”

Truth is reversed, history is buried and the propaganda thunders on...

**CT**

*David Edwards is co-editor of Medialens, the UK media watchdog at whose website – [www.medialens.org](http://www.medialens.org) – this article was first published.*

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# Solving a Gaza fireside mystery

Look hard enough and you might find the clues in this report recently broadcast on BBC Radio

The English love a good mystery. From Agatha Christie to PD James, From *Midsomer Murders* to *Death in Paradise*, there's perhaps no other nation on the planet so enthralled by the lure of a stabbing in the billiards room, a poisoning at the dinner table, or a shooting in the library.

At the risk of having my membership of the Roddy McCauley Republican Social Club revoked, I have to confess to enjoying a good drawing room murder mystery as much as any Englishman. Over the festive season, I marvelled at Hercule Poirot's detective acumen in the *Mystery of the Christmas Pudding*, but more compelling even than the hunt for a killer was the deep satisfaction of a place on the sofa in front of a blazing fire in a country house among a collection of cosily familiar strangers.

However, we were presented with a deadly mystery of a different kind on BBC Radio 4 just after eight in the morning of Tuesday, January 28, when Nick Robinson, co-host of the BBC's flagship Today programme, laid before us an exotic tale of death and skullduggery from the Middle East; a story soaked with enough exotic secrets and Arab intrigue to add another year to the *Thousand and One Nights*...

*(What follows is the Radio 4 script word for word in its entirety. The comments/thoughts are the writer's.)*

**ROBINSON:** "They queued in their thousands, laden with bags and bedding, all they could carry or pile on top of overcrowded cars or donkey carts. The great return to the north of Gaza has generated both excitement, to have the chance to go home to be reunited with friends and family, and sadness when confronted with the reality that home is nothing like it was before the war."

*— Sadly, there is no clue here as to why things are not like they were before "the war" or who brought about the stomach-churning new reality. So we read on ...*

**ROBINSON:** "Houses and apartments have been destroyed. Bombs and shells lie unexploded in the rubble and there are often no services, no running water, no schools, only limited health care."

*— Who destroyed the homes? Who dropped the unexploded bombs and shells that lie in wait for the unsuspecting? Who turned off the running water, wrecked the schools and disappeared the*

*health system? I have a few ideas, but since there's still no concrete proof pointing to the guilty party, I'll continue to keep them to myself ...*

**ROBINSON:** "The BBC is still not permitted to enter Gaza to report on what's happening there now, or what's happened in the past, as has been the case for the past fifteen months."

*— Ah, now we're starting to make progress. I reckon if between us we can find out who it is that doesn't want this story to be told, who it is that is so desperate to hide the grisly facts, we can get closer to the facts ...*

**ROBINSON:** "But I have been speaking to one of those who stayed behind, in [indistinct] in northern Gaza, [indistinct name]. You have heard him a number of times in recent months, including on the day last October when his brother was killed."

*— Things are starting to hot up. If only we can somehow figure out how this man's brother was killed, then the identity of the killer must surely be that little bit closer. 'Killed' suggests he didn't die peacefully in his bed. But was it a gardening accident? A fall?*



*Or might it be that something altogether more sinister has taken place here ...?*

**ROBINSON:** “Yesterday he was reunited with those of his family who fled to safety in the south. I asked him where he, where they, were now living.”

*– ‘Fled to safety.’ Could it be that this man’s family left their home because they felt their lives were in danger? If so, could that danger be connected to death of his brother? Answer these questions and surely we’re closer to solving the mystery ...*

**ROBINSON:** “You stayed in the north all the time through the conflict. What was it like being reunited with those who had fled

**who returned home yesterday?”**

*– So these obviously frightened people returned home. That can only mean that the shadow that hung over them had somehow been removed, either temporarily or permanently. Why? Did something happen to make the killer stop ...?*

**ROBINSON:** “You now have to live in half a home, there’s not much running water, you know that there are bombs and shells in the rubble of other people’s houses.”

*– Answer these two questions and I believe we have nearly cracked the case:*

*1. What happened to the other half of this man’s home? Has it been stolen? Is the rising damp unbear-*

*able? Is it an Airbnb?*

*2. Who put the bombs and shells there? Was it the butler? The smarmy nephew with money troubles? The glamorous blonde flirting with the infirm patriarch in the bath chair ...?*

**ROBINSON:** “Can you build a life for your family there? Is it safe? Is it possible to carry on living in the north of Gaza?”

*– The man’s family are home, but a question mark remains over their safety. The killer has stopped, but what is it that could make them strike again? We need to know ...*

**ROBINSON:** “I’ve also been speaking to Jonathan Crickx, who’s the chief of communica-

tions at Unicef Palestine. He's based in the south of Gaza, but he and his team have been giving aid, help and advice to those making the long journey north. How big a worry is unexploded bombs and shells in the rubble of people's houses and apartments?"

*– It's the question that keeps coming up – the question that never finds an answer. As handkerchiefs have initials and gold cigarette cases have monograms, could it be that by examining the intact 2,000lb bombs we may find clues that lead us directly to the bomber? It's a crazy idea, but it just might work ...*

ROBINSON: "When so many people are moving at such speed there must be a danger that people lose their families, lose each other. Are you able to help them with that?"

*– Brollies, briefcases, coats and bags are often left on trains. Could*

**Could it be that by examining the intact 2,000lb bombs we may find clues that lead us to the bomber? It's a crazy idea, but it might work**

*it be that there's be a kind of refugee lost and found where we could find witnesses with vital clues ...?*

ROBINSON: "You describe powerfully people's desire to have a tent on the rubble of their own homes rather than somewhere else."

*– Allowing tents on top of the rubble? This culprit has a heart and that might just be their undoing ...*

ROBINSON: "How would you describe the mood of the people that you're dealing with? Is excitement too strong a word, is it relief? Is it just determination to be back home?"

*– Could the excitement lead to the throwing of a party? If so, surely there are clues to be gleaned by moving among the happy, tipsy cocktail crowd. Might the relief loosen a few tongues leading someone to mention the name that continues to elude us ...?*

ROBINSON: "Now aid is getting in in quantities not seen before but there is still, as you will know all too well representing Unicef, a huge argument about another UN agency, UNRWA, which the Israeli government is set to ban and set to ban this week."

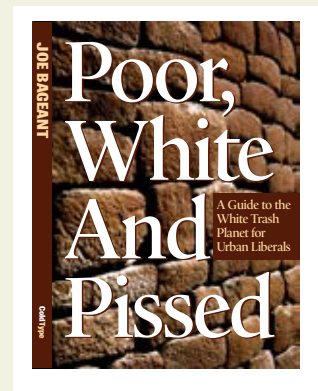
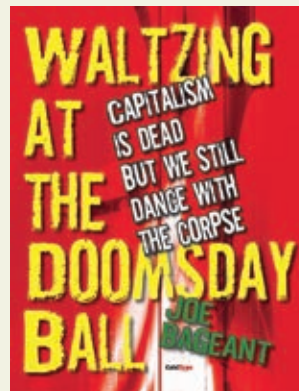
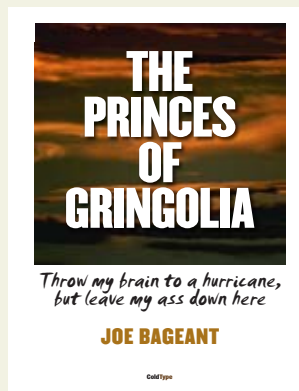
*– At last, a name, a solid clue that has blown the case wide open and shone an unforgiving spotlight on a suspect: UNRWA.*

CT

*Robin Livingstone is editor-in-chief of the Andersonstownnews – www.belfastmedia.com – in Belfast, Northern Ireland, where this article was first published.*

## READ THE BEST OF JOE BAGEANT

[www.coldtype.net/joe.html](http://www.coldtype.net/joe.html)





## HERMES 900 FIELD-TESTED ON PALESTINIANS

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

**36,090**  
**PALESTINIANS  
KILLED**

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

**11.5%**  
**RISE IN REVENUE**

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

**TESTED  
ON PALESTINIANS**

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

VISUALIZING PALESTINE

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JUN 2024  
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# *The US Constitution has gone AWOL*

Hitler's rise to power should serve as a stark lesson to always be leery of granting any government leader sweeping powers

*“Rule by indefinite emergency edict risks leaving all of us with a shell of a democracy and civil liberties just as hollow.” – Justice Neil Gorsuch*

**T**hat didn't take long. Within days of Donald Trump's second term, the US Constitution and Bill of Rights disappeared from the White House's website.

While the Trump Administration insists the removal of these foundational documents will eventually be restored to the site, the timing and symbolism of their removal is hard to ignore. Especially in light of the flurry of executive orders issued by President Trump as a means of bypassing the very rule of law those documents were intended to ensure.

Already, Trump has unilaterally declared two national states of emergency, announced his intention to disregard the 14th Amendment's assurance of birthright citizenship, established two new government agencies, and pushed for an expansion of the death penalty.

So much for the Founders' efforts to guard against this kind of concentrated, absolute power by establishing a system of checks of balances that separate and shares power between three co-equal branches to ensure that no single authority is entrusted with all the powers

of government.

Mind you, Trump is not unique in his use of executive orders to bypass Congress and unilaterally impose his will upon the nation, but it is indicative of the fact that he, like his predecessors, will continue to serve as an imperial president, using executive orders, decrees, memorandums, proclamations, national security directives and legislative signing statements to operate above the law and beyond the reach of the Constitution.

America, meet your latest dictator-in-chief.

Be warned: what is happening right now is political theatre. Allow yourself to be distracted by it, and you will miss the real power play afoot: the expansion of unaccountable presidential power that exposes us to constitutional peril.

**T**he Deep State is counting on us to be distracted.

Don't fall for it.

We must be particularly leery when political promises to fix everything that is wrong with the nation are dependent on presidential power grabs and manufactured crises.

That's the oldest trick in the book.

Whether the ends justify the means is never the point.

It is especially when the ends seem to justify the means that one must tread with particular caution.

That's how we landed in this mess in the first place.

Power-hungry and lawless, the government has weaponised one national crisis after another in order to expand its powers and justify all manner of government tyranny in the so-called name of national security.

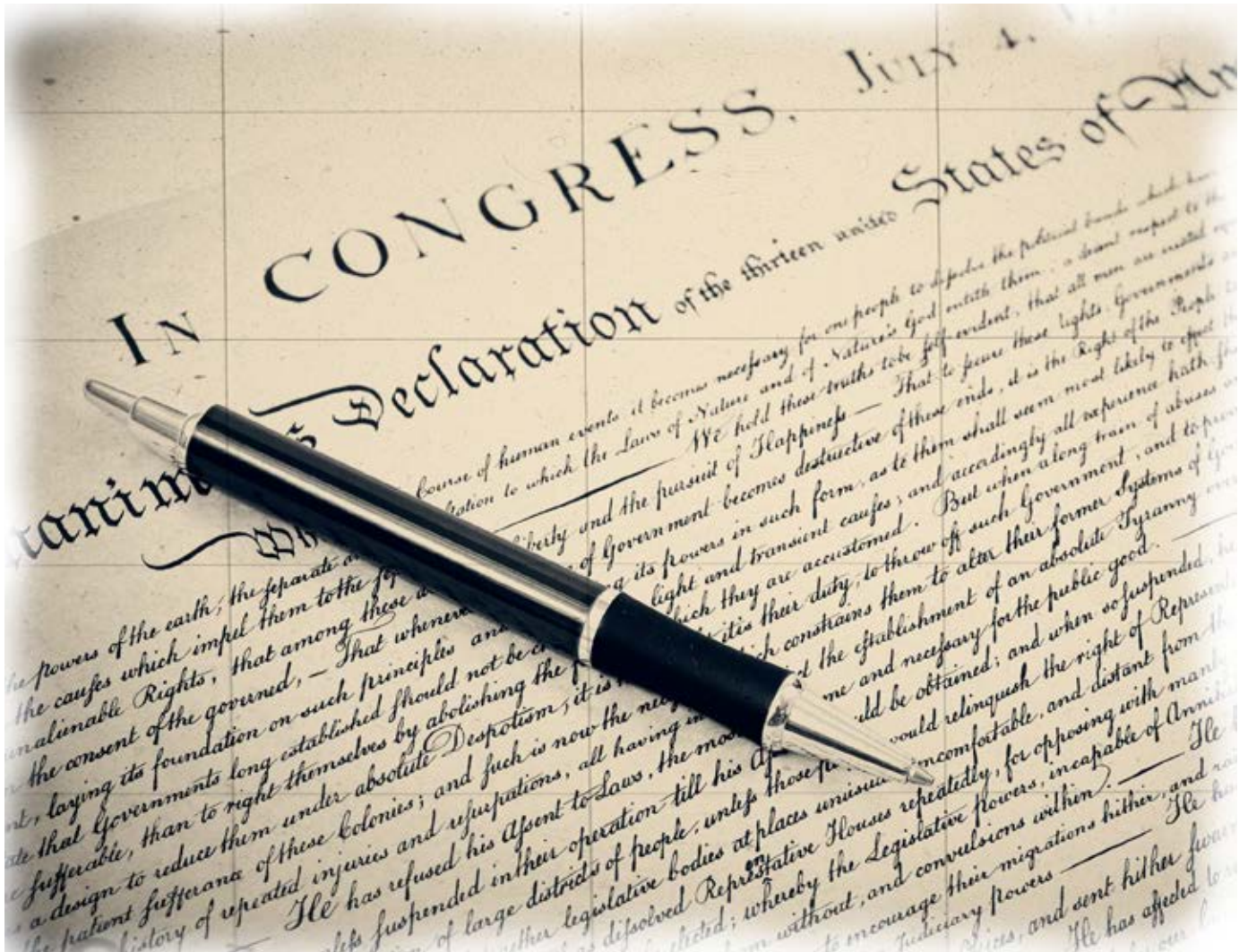
As a result, we have become a nation in a permanent state of emergency.

That indefinite state of crisis has remained constant, no matter which party has controlled Congress and the White House.

The seeds of this present madness were sown almost two decades ago when George W. Bush stealthily issued two presidential directives that granted the president the power to unilaterally declare a national emergency, which is loosely defined as “any incident, regardless of location, that results in extraordinary levels of mass casualties, damage, or disruption severely affecting the US population, infrastructure, environment, economy, or government functions.”

Comprising the country's Continuity of Government (COG) plan, these directives (National Security Presidential Directive 51 and Home-





land Security Presidential Directive 20) provide a skeletal outline of the actions the president will take in the event of a “national emergency.”

Just what sort of actions the president will take once he declares a national emergency can barely be discerned from the barebones directives. However, one thing is clear: in the event of a national emergency, the COG directives give unchecked executive, legislative and judicial power to the president.

It doesn't even matter what the nature of the crisis might be: civil unrest, the national emergencies, “unforeseen economic collapse, loss of functioning political and legal order, purposeful domestic resistance or insurgency, pervasive public health

emergencies, and catastrophic natural and human disasters.”

They have all become fair game to a government that continues to quietly assemble, test and deploy emergency powers a long laundry list of terrifying powers that override the Constitution and can be activated at a moment's notice.

We're talking about lockdown

## **In the event of a national emergency, the COG directives give unchecked executive, legislative and judicial power to the president**

powers (at both the federal and state level): the ability to suspend the Constitution, indefinitely detain American citizens, bypass the courts, quarantine whole communities or segments of the population, override the First Amendment by outlawing religious gatherings and assemblies of more than a few people, shut down entire industries and manipulate the economy, muzzle dissidents, “stop and seize any plane, train or automobile to stymie the spread of contagious disease,” reshape financial markets, create a digital currency (and thus further restrict the use of cash), determine who should live or die.

While these are powers the police state has been working to make

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permanent, they barely scratch the surface of the far-reaching powers the government has unilaterally claimed for itself without any pretence of being reined in or restricted in its power grabs by Congress, the courts or the citizenry.

As David C. Unger, observes in *The Emergency State: America's Pursuit of Absolute Security at All Costs*:

“For seven decades we have been yielding our most basic liberties to a secretive, unaccountable emergency state – a vast but increasingly misdirected complex of national security institutions, reflexes, and beliefs that so define our present world that we forget that there was ever a different America. ... Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness have given way to permanent crisis management: to policing the planet and fighting preventative wars of ideological containment, usually on terrain chosen by, and favourable to, our enemies. Limited government and constitutional accountability have been shouldered aside by the kind of imperial presidency our constitutional system was explicitly designed to prevent.”

This is all happening according to schedule.

The civil unrest, the national emergencies, “unforeseen economic collapse, loss of functioning political and legal order, purposeful domestic resistance or insurgency, pervasive public health emergencies, and catastrophic natural and human disasters,” the government’s reliance on the armed forces to solve domestic political and social problems, the implicit declaration of martial law packaged as a well-meaning and overriding concern for the nation’s security: the powers-that-be have been planning and preparing for such a crisis for years now.

As we have witnessed in recent years, that national emergency can take any form, can be manipulated

## Each president continues to add to his office's list of extraordinary orders and directives, and granting himself near dictatorial powers

for any purpose and can be used to justify any end goal – all on the say so of the president.

The emergency powers that we know about which presidents might claim during such states of emergency are vast, ranging from imposing martial law and suspending habeas corpus to shutting down all forms of communications, including implementing an internet kill switch, and restricting travel.

Yet according to documents obtained by the Brennan Center, there may be many more secret powers that presidents may institute in times of so-called crisis without oversight from Congress, the courts, or the public.

**R**emember, these powers do not expire at the end of a president’s term. They remain on the books, just waiting to be used or abused by the next political demagogue.

So, too, every action taken by the current occupant of the White House and his predecessors to weaken the system of checks and balances, sidestep the rule of law, and expand the power of the executive branch of government makes us that much more vulnerable to those who would abuse those powers in the future.

Although the Constitution invests the President with very specific, limited powers, in recent years, American presidents (Biden, Trump, Obama, Bush, Clinton, etc.) have claimed the power to completely and almost unilaterally alter the land-

scape of this country for good or for ill.

The Executive Branch’s willingness to circumvent the Constitution by leaning heavily on the president’s so-called emergency powers constitutes a gross perversion of what limited power the Constitution affords the president.

As law professor William P. Marshall explains, “every extraordinary use of power by one President expands the availability of executive branch power for use by future Presidents.” Moreover, it doesn’t even matter whether other presidents have chosen not to take advantage of any particular power, because “it is a President’s action in using power, rather than forsaking its use, that has the precedential significance.”

In other words, each successive president continues to add to his office’s list of extraordinary orders and directives, expanding the reach and power of the presidency and granting him- or herself near dictatorial powers.

All of the imperial powers amassed by Obama, Bush, Trump, Biden and now Trump again – to kill American citizens without due process, to detain suspects (including American citizens) indefinitely, to strip Americans of their citizenship rights, to carry out mass surveillance on Americans without probable cause, to wage wars without congressional authorisation, to suspend laws during wartime, to disregard laws with which he might disagree, to conduct secret wars and convene secret courts, to sanction torture, to sidestep the legislatures and courts with executive orders and signing statements, to direct the military to operate beyond the reach of the law, to establish a standing army on American soil, to operate a shadow government, to declare national emergencies for any manipulated reason, and to act as a dictator and

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a tyrant, above the law and beyond any real accountability – have become a permanent part of the president’s toolbox of terror.

This is what you might call a stealthy, creeping, silent, slow-motion coup d’état.

As an investigative report by the Brennan Center explains:

“There are currently 41 declared national emergencies, most of which have been in place for more than a decade... Some of the emergency powers Congress has made available to the president are so breathtaking in their vastness that they would make an autocrat do a spit take. Presidents can use emergency declarations to shut down communications infrastructure, freeze private assets without judicial process, control domestic transportation, or even suspend the prohibition on government testing of chemical and biological agents on unwitting human subjects.”

We must recalibrate the balance of power.

For starters, Congress should put an end to the use of presidential executive orders, decrees, memorandums, proclamations, national security directives and legislative signing statements as a means of getting around Congress and the courts.

At a minimum, as the *Washington Post* suggests, “all emergency declarations [s]hould expire automatically after three or six months, whereupon Congress would need to vote upon any proposed extension. It is time for both parties to recognize that governing via endless crises – even when they are employed to implement broadly popular policies that win plaudits from key political constituencies – subverts our system of constitutional government.”

We’ve got to start making both the president and the police state play by the rules of the Constitution.

As Justice Gorsuch recognised:

## We’ve got to start making both the president and the police state play by the rules of the Constitution

“Fear and the desire for safety are powerful forces. They can lead to a clamour for action – almost any action – as long as someone does something to address a perceived threat. A leader or an expert who claims he can fix everything, if only we do exactly as he says, can prove an irresistible force. We do not need to confront a bayonet, we need only a nudge, before we willingly abandon the nicety of requiring laws to be adopted by our legislative representatives and accept rule by decree. Along the way, we will accede to the loss of many cherished civil liberties – the right to worship freely, to debate public policy without censorship, to gather with friends and family, or simply to leave our homes. We may even cheer on those who ask us to disregard our normal lawmaking processes and forfeit our personal freedoms. Of course, this is no new story. Even the ancients warned that democracies can degenerate toward autocracy in the face of fear.”

If we continue down this road, there can be no surprise about what awaits us at the end.

After all, it is a tale that has been told time and again throughout history. For example, over 90 years ago, the citizens of another democratic world power elected a leader who promised to protect them from all dangers. In return for this protection, and under the auspice of fighting terrorism, he was given absolute

power. This leader went to great lengths to make his rise to power appear both legal and necessary, masterfully manipulating much of the citizenry and their government leaders.

Unnerved by threats of domestic terrorism and foreign invaders, the people had little idea that the domestic turmoil of the times – such as street rioting and the fear of Communism taking over the country – was staged by the leader in an effort to create fear and later capitalise on it. In the ensuing months, this charismatic leader ushered in a series of legislative measures that suspended civil liberties and habeas corpus rights and empowered him as a dictator.

On March 23, 1933, the nation’s legislative body passed the Enabling Act, formally referred to as the “Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and the Nation,” which appeared benign and allowed the leader to pass laws by decree in times of emergency.

What it succeeded in doing, however, was ensuring that the leader became a law unto himself.

The leader’s name was Adolf Hitler.

The rest, as they say, is history. Hitler’s rise to power should serve as a stark lesson to always be leery of granting any government leader sweeping powers. **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](mailto:staff@rutherford.org). Nisha Whitehead is the Executive Director of the Rutherford Institute – [www.rutherford.org](http://www.rutherford.org).*



Protestors at Belgrade's main crossroad Autokomanda in a 24-hours blockade

► SRDJAN STOJANOVIC

# *Serbia on the brink of major change*

Students lead the way with government on verge of collapse

After 13 years of dictatorial rule, full of lies, manipulations, fraud, election rigging and wide-spread corruption, Aleksandar Vucic the leader of Serbian Progressive Party (SPP) and self-proclaimed owner of everything is facing massive resistance in almost all cities and townships around Serbia.

The unprecedented mass demonstrations of students and citizens virtually across the whole Serbia began soon after the catastrophic collapse of the roof extension of the recently refurbished railroad sta-

tion in Novi Sad, the second largest Serbian city, which claimed 15 innocent lives, including children, on 1st November 2024.

Vucic has many times previously managed to get away with criminal affairs associated with him or members of his inner circle, but this time the citizens' tolerance tanks finally overflowed, and he was surprised to find his "magic" (or ruthless methods of manipulation) could not extinguish the fires any more.

What is awaiting the people of Serbia, totally engulfed in strikes and blockades from university students, their younger colleagues

from secondary schools, professors, teachers, attorneys, peasants and ordinary citizens? We must roll back the time for some 13 years when the parliamentary and presidential elections were won for the first time by the Serbian Progressive Party (SPP), the bastard organisation that evolved from the ultranationalist Serbian Radical Party of the notorious Vojislav Seselj.

It is worth pointing out that "Western friends" helped SPP to win the elections, because they felt that the incumbent president Boris Tadic (Democratic Party) was being too stubborn regarding the rec-





**Bloody hands, the main symbol of the demonstrators, represent the corruption of the Serbian government**



**Students, not political parties, are spearheading the Serbian protests**

ognition of Kosovo. The Serbian voters abandoned him because he was weak, corrupt and incapable.

Congratulations for the victory of SPP and their candidate started to come in from major western capitals before the polling stations closed.

However, it should be remembered that the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections in Serbia were the last to be held under fair conditions and without cheating.

During the 13 years that followed, Vuchic seized virtually all the aspects of state – legislative, judiciary and executive – ensuring the total control and domination. He quickly

masermined the electoral system by calling fresh elections almost every year – usually to cover up numerous blunders and scandals of the his government. Simply, Vuchic thrived in a useless election circus – with endless campaigns that appealed to his primitive and poorly educated voters, for whom he seemed invincible and caring. He always remembered to hand out illegal bribes and freebies before the elections.

Nobody from the opposition ranks questioned his real constitutional powers that are only of protocolary nature, much like those of the British monarch. The catastrophe

in Novi Sad had inflamed the whole country, with students demanding wide-ranging criminal prosecutions of those responsible for technical failings and government corruption, leading to the top (Vuchic).

Since November 1, only two ministers resigned (but were not thrown in jail). Then, on January 28, the prime minister resigned, along with the mayor of Novi Sad. The people in the streets very well know that these two Vuchic's pawns are his "sacrificial lambs" and he is mistaken if he thinks the problem is solved.

Here we need to draw a parallel with the events of October 5, 2000, when the previous communist dictator Slobodan Milosevic was overthrown by the mass street protests, following election fraud. All previous efforts to oust him from 1991 until 2000 were unsuccessful. To this day many people don't understand how the change was achieved. There are two major factors involved, without it would be impossible:

1. Support for the opposition with funds and "know how" from the West;

2. A switch in support from the security forces to the opposition (negotiated in advance). The funds spent on support of the opposition was equal to one day's expenditure during the 88 days NATO bombing in early 1999 over Kosovo.

Nobody should have any illusions that the current mass protests of students and citizens will be able to precipitate the change of the hated regime. That will happen only when and if the "Western friends" decide not to back our "son of the bitch," as Truman said. It is not happening now, since these "friends" are guided solely by their own selfish interests.

For example, French president Macron sold Vuchic a fleet of totally



Ivan Bjelic

**School activist Eve-Ann Stojanovic in the street protest holding the famous book 1984 by George Orwell**

unnecessary Raffale fighter jets, and is awaiting a major contract for building the Belgrade underground. Former German Chancellor Scholz, through an agreement with Vuchic, was trying to open a poisonous lithium mine in the beautiful western Serbia's agricultural area – to aid Germany's stumbling electric car manufacturers. And the new-old American president Trump last year delegated to his son-in-law a building project of the Trump hotel on the site of the NATO-bombed Ministry of Defence in downtown Belgrade. It remains yet to be seen what the British will demand from Serbia.

Not only the "Western friends" were involved; the Chinese state bought several large factories and land in Serbia, in addition to giving huge loans to the Serbian government outside the view of established international mechanisms. Chinese fingers were also involved in sever-

al infrastructural projects in Serbia, including the revitalisation of the railroads and the Novi Sad railway station. It seems that the Serbian national interests are only used as spare change in dirty games of the international players.

Vuchic is not ideologically driven and changed his views according to the needs – from ultra-nationalist to pro-European values and is a good friend of George Soros. His "child" SPP was at the same time leftist and conservative, patriotic and internationalist, democratic and autocratic – catch all the fools.

He offered to have dialogue with the students, but it was rejected immediately. The students' demands are simple: the judiciary must prosecute the culprits without delay.

An exit strategy from the crisis is to form a temporary government of experts, which would be given six months to appoint new prosecutors and judges and to change the electoral rules to prevent any type of fraud. It would be followed by fair general elections.

This is the option that Vuchic has vowed never to accept. However, that is the rhetoric that he used many times in the past, before agreeing to many "red lines" that he would not cross in his international and domestic manoeuvring. Prudence, knowledge and contemporary communications skills of the students are their tools to achieve the change. That is why Vuchic cannot understand why his old methods are useless now. **CT**

*Srdjan Stojanovic is an activist, writer, journalist and book publisher who lives in Belgrade, Serbia. He holds a Master of Science in Media and Communications from the London School of Economics and Political Science and Master of Philosophy in Media History from the University of Westminster.*

# They don't just tell us how to think, they train us *what* to think

From grade school we are fed a framework for thinking about the world whose premises are fraudulent. Any analysis which does not take place within that framework is portrayed as ignorant at best and dangerous extremism at worst.

Before we come up with a thought of our own about politics, we are trained to assume that elections are real and that the official democratically elected government is the only power structure calling the shots in our country. We are trained to assume that decisions get made in our government based on how people vote in elections between opposing parties that promote the most popular positions on important issues in order to win votes.

Before we come up with a thought of our own about government, we are trained to assume that if we have a problem with the way things are going, there are official channels through which the powerful can be held to account and real changes can be made. The fact that we are actually ruled by unelected plutocrats and empire managers who often have no position in the official government is never seriously entertained.

Before we come up with a thought of our own about the media, we are trained to assume that we live in a free country with a free press instead of a dystopian civilisation where news media function as the propaganda services of our rulers. We are trained to assume that while some parts of the media may have obvious biases regarding which political faction they favour, it's still possible to get a more or less accurate read on what's happening in the world by listening to both sides of that ideological divide. None of this is true, but it's the framework in which all mainstream analysis of the western media occurs.

Before we come up with a thought of our own about foreign policy, we are trained to assume that the US and its allies are a force for good in this world, and that all the stories we hear about the governments and groups it works to destroy are more or less true. We are trained to assume that while the western power structure is imperfect and might make mistakes, it must never stop tyrannising foreigners, be-

cause if it does, the bad guys might win. The easily quantifiable fact that the US-centralised empire is the most tyrannical and abusive power structure on earth never enters into the discussion.

This is the framework for thinking about the world that people are trained to espouse, first in school, and then throughout their lives by the mass media. If they go to university, as the most powerful people in our society typically do, then this framework is hammered home far more aggressively – especially in the most esteemed universities that the so-called “elite” tend to come from.

No thoughts which arise from outside this framework are taken seriously in mainstream politics, media, or academia. They might occasionally be entertained by friends between chuckles on a podcast, but they are kept in the margins. This is reinforced by the way people learn that in order to ascend to influence and success they need to adhere to a specific way of thinking, thereby ensuring that all the most influential voices align with the authorised framework as well.

Ferocious disagreement is permitted, but before the debate even begins everyone involved needs to adhere to the assumptions of the official framework. After that you can argue as passionately as you like with the other side of this manufactured divide, because your ideas cannot pose any serious threat to your rulers.

And this is why the world looks the way it looks: because powerful people have been so successful at manipulating the way the public thinks. Our minds are inundated with propaganda telling us what to think, and they are shaped and programmed how to think about any new information they might come across.

We are herded like livestock away from thoughts of revolution and change, led by tightly controlled minds the way a bull is led by the ring on its nose.

Once you see how pervasive the conditioning is, you understand why getting real revolutionary movements going faces so much inertia. We won't be able to free ourselves until we find a way to free our minds. **CT**



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