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TRUMP AND THE BBC – AN INVERSION OF REALITY | David Cromwell  
BREAKING FREE OF MEDIA GROUPSPEAK | Jonathan Cook

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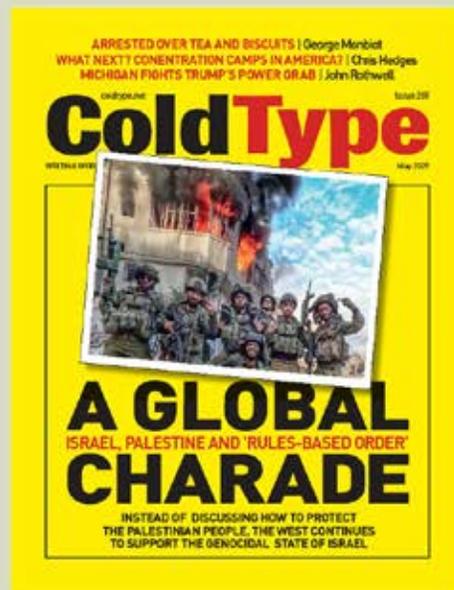
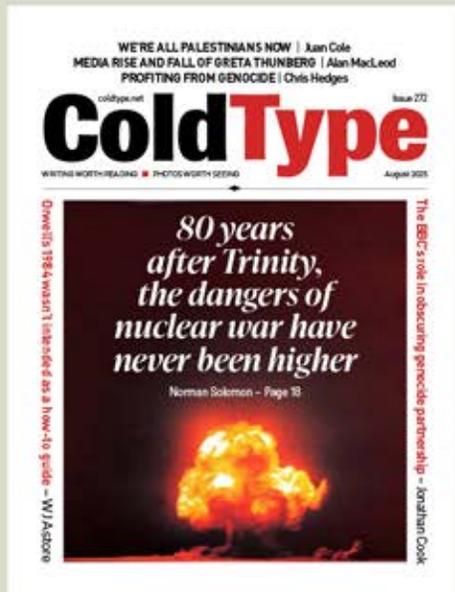
Issue 275

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

December 2025





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Chris Dorley-Brown

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A New Book by **NORMAN SOLOMON** from ColdType and Progressive Hub

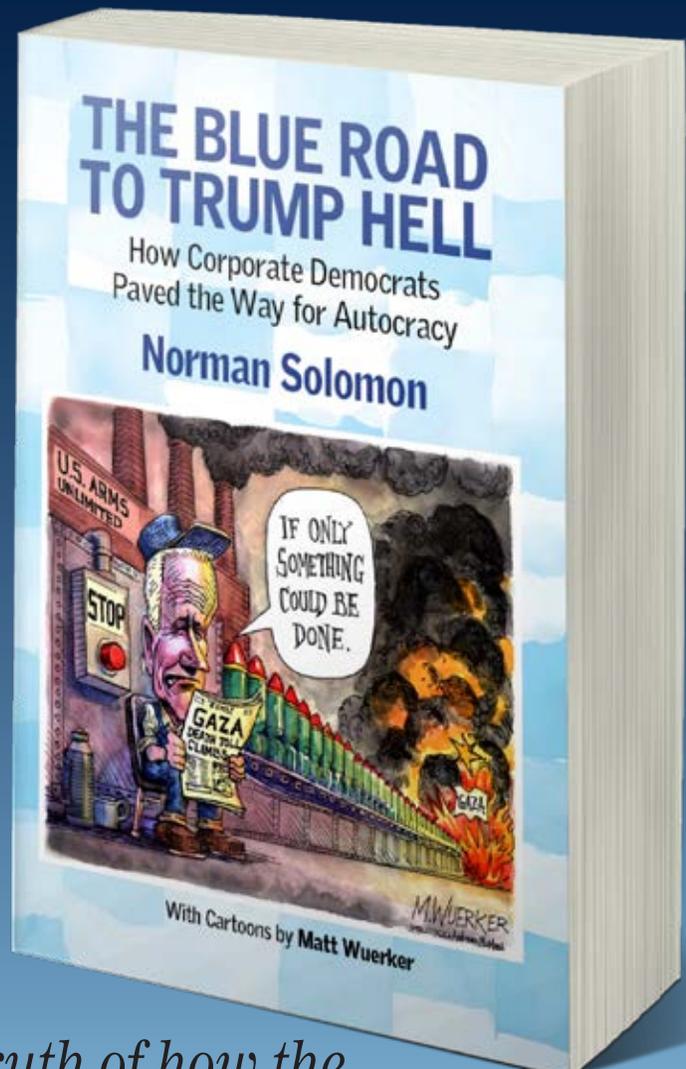
“This book scrutinizes how the behavior of many Democrats assisted Trump’s electoral triumphs. That scrutiny is important not only for clarity about the past. It also makes possible a focus on ways that such failures can be avoided in the future.”

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# THE BLUE ROAD TO TRUMP HELL

How Corporate Democrats  
Paved the Way for Autocracy

By **NORMAN SOLOMON**  
With cartoons by **Matt Wuerker**



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*The sordid and tragic truth of how the Democratic Party enabled the Trump cult to seize control of the US government.*

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# INSIGHTS



To Bill Gates, overthrowing the power of the ultra-wealthy seems to be – literally – unthinkable.

Let's begin with the fundamental problem: Bill Gates is a politics denier. Though he came to it late, he now accepts the realities of climate science. But he lives in flat, embarrassing denial about political realities. His latest essay on the subject '[Three Tough Truths About Climate](#)' – published last month, treats the issue as if it existed in a political vacuum. He writes as if there were no such thing as political power, and no such thing as billionaires.

His main contention is that funds are very limited, so the delegates at the recent climate summit in Brazil should direct money away from “near-term emissions goals” towards climate “adaptation” and spending on poverty and disease.

Yes, the funds available for any good cause are scarce, but that's not because of some natural law, some

► **GEORGE MONBIOT**

## Why Bill Gates gets climate science so wrong

implacable truth about human society. It's because oligarchic power has waged war on benign state spending, leading to the destruction of USAID and drastic cuts to the aid budgets of other countries, including the UK. Austerity is a political choice. The decision to impose it is driven by governments bowing to the wishes of the ultra-rich.

There are truckloads of mon-

ey available. Just after Gates published his new missive, Oxfam revealed that the net worth of the 10 richest US billionaires grew by \$698bn in the past year. That money alone, the increment in the wealth of 10 people, is almost 10 times the annual amount required to end extreme poverty worldwide. How have they managed to channel so much of the world's money into their pockets? And why can't we get it back through effective taxation? The answer is their translation of economic power into political power. The richer they become, the more they can bend the state and economic system to their will, ensuring that they become richer still. But Bill Gates says nothing in his essay about how and where extra money for both climate action and poverty relief could be found.

There's a direct link between the poverty Gates claims to care so much about and the wealth he fails to mention. In the US, homeless-

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# INSIGHTS

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ness is breaking records, and so is the share of assets owned by the top 0.1 percent. While this might not be Gates's own business model, by holding down wages, racking up rents, busting trade unions and winning tax and spending cuts, the ultra-rich thrive on impoverishing other people.

A remarkable [study](#) in *Perspectives on Politics*, among the very few to have penetrated this secretive world, found that the ultra-rich have radically different political views from the great majority. The multimillionaires it interviewed, in stark contrast to mere earthlings, saw budget deficits as the most important of the issues it listed, and climate breakdown as the least. They were far more likely to insist that social security and federal healthcare should be cut, and far less likely to believe that the unemployed should have a "decent standard of living," or that there should be more regulation of oil companies, banks and health insurers. They were fiercely opposed to redistribution.

So whose views prevail? The tiny minority or the great majority? Though the study was conducted in the Obama years, it found that the very rich had far more access to politicians and officials than average citizens. And now? I scarcely think I need to spell it out.

That's another telling absence in Bill Gates's essay: at no point in its 5,000 words does it mention Donald Trump. Were Gates to do so, he'd have to acknowledge that the second of his major assumptions is shaky: reductions in the cost of new green technologies lead inexorably to environmental progress. Of course it helps that wind, solar and other green technologies are

becoming radically cheaper than fossil fuels. But Trump and similar demagogues are doing everything they can to impede the transition.

Partly as a result, fossil fuels remain highly lucrative. This could be why, despite Gates's claim that his foundation had divested all its "direct holdings in oil and gas companies" in 2019, its fossil fuel stock and bond holdings have, in fact, increased.

To Gates, overthrowing the power of the ultra-wealthy may be unthinkable. I don't mean only that it clashes with his worldview. I mean that, judging by his remarkable silences on the issue, he might be literally incapable of thinking about it. Perhaps this is a symptom of Billionaire Brain: a profound incapacity to see the world from other people's point of view. While the ultra-rich are notoriously hard to study, extrapolating from research into how gaining wealth and status affects cognition could suggest that acquiring huge amounts of money is like taking a blow to the head. Wealth seems to scramble certain cognitive functions, particularly those related to empathy and perspective.

But perhaps there's also calculation here: his essay reads like nothing so much as a peace offering to Donald Trump. Trump certainly took it that way: "I (WE!) just won the War on the Climate Change Hoax. Bill Gates has finally admitted that he was completely WRONG on the issue. It took courage to do so, and for that we are all grateful. MAGA!!!"

Gates has always been completely WRONG on the issue, though not for the reasons Trump imagines. He has consistently lagged behind the

curve, reciting fossil claims (green technologies could reduce global CO2 emissions only at a "beyond astronomical" cost) long after they've been discredited. He has spread confusion and misinformation, such as the groundless assertion in his new essay that the purpose of Sri Lanka's disastrous ban on synthetic fertilisers was "to cut emissions".

Gates calls his essay *Three Tough Truths About Climate*. So here's another tough truth he studiously ignores. If, as now seems likely, crucial Earth systems cross tipping points and suddenly collapse, the effects on human life, let alone the survival of other life forms (a topic he fails, as usual, to mention), would destroy the smooth and steady progress he foresees. Because environmental change is likely to proceed not in gradual and linear ways, but through sudden changes of state, the possible impacts on human wellbeing are extremely hard to predict. His argument that we should align all funding to current "data-based analysis" of improvements in human welfare, while it might sound rational, introduces in the face of systemic change a profound irrationality, prompting us to ignore the greatest threats.

I wish we could ignore Bill Gates. But his economic and political power makes that impossible. But unlike him, we can recognise that this power exists and, when it speaks, it does so on its own behalf. **CT**

*George Monbiot's latest book, written with Peter Hutchinson, is Invisible Doctrine: The Secret History of Neoliberalism. His website is [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com). This article first appeared in The Guardian*

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# INSIGHTS

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Jobs With Justice / flickr



NO MORE RAIDS: Demonstrators take to the streets in Richmond, VA

► AJ SHUMANN

## Mass deportations are tanking US economy

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Donald Trump rode back into office by leaning on the same faux populist refrain he weaponised a decade ago: immigrants are “taking your jobs!”

Since then, Trump has launched an immigration crackdown of historic proportions. Yet rather than turning things around for American workers, we’re seeing the weakest labour market in years.

The Department of Homeland Security claims that 1.6 million undocumented immigrants have left the country voluntarily since Trump

took office. Another 527,000 have been deported as a result of sweeping and often brutal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids.

That should mean more job openings for US-born workers, right? Wrong. Over the same period, employers announced more than 946,000 job cuts – the highest year-to-date total since 2020 – while hiring plans have fallen to a 14-year low.

The forced removal of so many workers is projected to shrink the nation’s gross domestic product by

as much as 6.8 percent – a deeper hit than the one sustained during the Great Recession.

In key industries, the results will be even worse.

For instance, with immigrants accounting for nearly a third of long-term care workers, half of all nursing homes have stopped taking new residents. Meanwhile, family farms, already thinly staffed, have been watching their immigrant workforce dwindle – a trend with worrying implications for food production.

Trump’s brand of right-wing populism twists economic pain into a national grievance. It insists that ordinary people struggle not because of billionaires, lobbyists, and political insiders – all of whom the president golfs alongside – but because of migrants.

It’s a narrative that’s received global mileage.

Germany’s extremist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has been on the rise as of late. The party’s leadership has called for the mass deportation of all “non-assimilated” citizens, even as foreign nationals have been largely responsible for Germany’s economic growth in recent years.

In Japan, ruling-party hardliner Sanae Takaichi owes her ascension to the same xenophobic formula. But with a birthrate in freefall and an aging population, Japan will also soon need foreign workers to sustain its economy.

Were a time traveller from the 1930s to find themselves in the modern day, they’d be forgiven for thinking that the extremist ideologies of their own era had simply been given a fresh coat of paint.

The belief is simple: if we remove enough of them, everything for us will start working again.

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# INSIGHTS

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This fantasy assumes that there's a healthy, self-sustaining system buried beneath the pain of the status quo – but there isn't. There's no hidden prosperity waiting to emerge once the “outsiders” are gone.

Our economy squeezes workers by design, citizen or not. The immigrant living under threat of deportation and the citizen struggling to pay rent share the same role in this system: labour to be exploited, not people to be valued.

Trump and his imitators rely on turning these two into rivals. But the spectacular failure of their efforts proves that you cannot uplift some workers by declaring war on others.

Genuine populism means defending all workers regardless of citizenship. And organised labour is modelling what this looks like.

Unions across the country are forming rapid-response networks

to defend undocumented workers during ICE raids, bargaining for pro-immigrant contract language, and backing legislation that ensures every worker can access essential services without risking deportation.

David Huerta, president of SEIU California, was even arrested this summer during an anti-ICE protest in Los Angeles. Labour leaders like Huerta understand that the only way working people make meaningful gains is by expanding who counts as “us.”

If populism has a future, it depends on bringing workers together – not pitting them against each other. **CT**

*AJ Schumann is a writer from New Mexico and a former Henry A. Wallace Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. This op-ed was distributed by [www.OtherWords.org](http://www.OtherWords.org)*

the island, victims of Australia's sadistic approach to undocumented naval arrivals.

In August 2016, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre claimed that the Christmas Island Detention Centre had all the brutal features of “a high security military camp where control is based on fear and punishment and the extensive internal use of extrajudicial punishment by force and isolation is evident.”

The goal of the Silicon Valley behemoth lies elsewhere, however. Occasioned by the signing of a cloud deal with Australia's Department of Defence earlier in July, the company promises to build what Reuters describes as “a large artificial intelligence data centre” on the island.

Advanced talks are being held on leasing land near the island's airport that will be used for the site. This will include an arrangement with a local mining company to deal with any necessary energy needs for the 7-megawatt facility, which will be powered on diesel and renewable energy.

The scale of the project, let alone its broader significance, is not something the company or government wonks wish others to know about. “We are not constructing ‘a large artificial intelligence data centre’ on Christmas Island,” came the sharp response from a Google spokesperson to Data Center Dynamics. “This is a continuation of our Australia Connect work to deliver subsea cable infrastructure, and we look forward to sharing more soon.” Planning documents further show the company's vision for an “additional future cable system” that will connect

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## ► BINOY KAMPMARK

# Data centres and military: Google on Christmas Island

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Google has become something of a fixture in digital infrastructure in the Pacific. In late 2023, Canberra announced a joint project with the US, Google and Vocus, an Australian digital infrastructure firm, to deliver the A\$80 million South Pacific Connect initiative. The object: to link Fiji and French Polynesia to Australia and North America, with the hopeful placement of landing stations in

other South Pacific countries.

Interest in Google's relationship with the Australian government was also piqued last month by promised activity on Christmas Island, located 350 kilometres (220 miles) south of Indonesia. The Indian Ocean outpost of exquisite environmental beauty has often been sinister in its secrecy. Unwanted refugees and asylum seekers have periodically found themselves as detainees on

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# INSIGHTS

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Christmas Island to Asia.

The Australian Department of Infrastructure has confirmed the Google project, which includes plans to link the island to Darwin using the services of US-based contractor SubCom. The bureaucrats were also quick to gloss over what disruptions might arise to the 1,600 residents heavily reliant on diesel to patch up inadequate renewable sources.

“The department is in discussions with Google to ensure energy requirements for the proposed project are met without impacting supply to local residents and businesses.” A spokesperson also stated that, “All environmental and other planning requirements will need to be met for the project to succeed.”

The same cautionary note has not been struck by enthusiasts who see the military potential of the island outpost.

Former US Navy strategist Bryan Clark, fresh from being involved in a tabletop war game involving personnel from the US, Japanese and Australian militaries, was keen to inflate the importance of the data centre. That importance, he stresses, lies in the field of conflict. “The data centre is partly to allow you to do the kinds of AI-enabled command and control that you need to do in the future, especially if you rely on uncrewed systems for surveillance missions and targeting missions and even engagements.”

He considers the use of subsea cables more reliable in frustrating any mischief that might arise from China (who else?), notably in attempts to jam Starlink or any satellite communications. Such cables also provided more bandwidth for communication.



“If you’ve got a data centre on Christmas, you can do a lot of that through cloud infrastructure.” Again, American power uses Australian territory as a conduit to maintain the imperium.

Google’s ties with the military tendrils of several nations continues the ongoing penetration of Big Tech companies into the industrial complex. The circle between military Research and Development pioneered by government agencies and their partnering with private contractors is complete. Indeed, digital-military-industrial complexes are now battling in steady rivalry (the two most prominent being China and the United States). “This is contributing to the blurring of state-corporation boundaries even

more than what was observed during the second half of the twentieth century with the rise of transnational corporations,” [write](#) Andrea Coveri, Claudia Cozza and Dario Guarsacio in *Intereconomics*.

This blurring has served to diminish company accountability and government independence, however well-dressed the issue of planning approvals is. Christmas Island residents will be left to the mercies of unimaginative officials easily seduced by the promise of investment and returns. “There is support for it,” says a convinced Steve Pereira, Christmas Island Shire President, “providing this data centre actually does put back into the community with infrastructure, employment and adding economic value to the island.” As for the military dimension? “We are a strategic asset for defence.” What a comfort for the local citizenry. **CT**

*Binoy Kampmark lectures at RMIT University. He may be contacted at [bkampmark@gmail.com](mailto:bkampmark@gmail.com)*

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## ► GREED AT A GLANCE

WWW.INEQUALITY.ORG



# INSIGHTS

► LINDA PENTZ GUNTER

## Guess who won't win FIFA's first peace prize?

When FIFA president Gianni Infantino announced that his organisation would award a peace prize on the occasion of the 2026 soccer World Cup draw, all the headlines immediately speculated on US president Donald Trump as the likely recipient.

Absent any information on who would choose the winner, or what the criteria for selection even are, the Trump rumours were largely based on the chummy relationship between Infantino and the US president.

Infantino neither confirmed nor denied that Trump could be the first winner of the FIFA peace prize, but it's hard to imagine how Trump has personally benefitted the sport, let alone peace. Trump's candidacy therefore suggests that the recipient may not need to have contributed in any meaningful way to either.

As former *Time* magazine business and sports editor Bill Saporito wrote in a column for the *Washington Post*, "the only ball Trump has probably ever kicked is his golf ball – when he's moving it to cheat."

Trump does not have much of a record as a peacemaker either, given his hollow truce in Gaza where Israel is still killing Palestinians and denying aid entry. Trump has equally failed to end Russia's war in Ukraine and is now threatening Venezuela after moving the world's largest aircraft

carrier, the USS Gerald Ford, into Caribbean waters.

And yet, in all of the coverage of the FIFA peace prize announcement, I could not find a single article speculating on other potential recipients. Maybe there's someone out there who has come up with other names, but neither Google nor its eager but sometimes erroneous AI overview could find one.

There are certainly some deserving candidates inside the sport itself who won't win it. Gary Lineker's name springs quickly to mind. Lineker, the former England striker-turned-broadcaster, first drew ire from his then employer at the BBC when he protested the Conservative government's "We must stop the boats" policy, in early 2023.

After posting on his personal Twitter (now X) page that "This is just an immeasurably cruel policy directed at the most vulnerable people in

language that is not dissimilar to that used in Germany in the 30s," the BBC suspended Lineker from his host role on Match of the Day. Undeterred, Lineker has since become an outspoken opponent of the genocide in Gaza, which further rocked boats at the BBC, eventually leading to his departure for a new role at ITV.

A number of football players and managers have also spoken out on Gaza. They include Manchester City manager, Pep Guardiola;

former Manchester United player and actor Eric Cantona, who called for

FIFA and Uefa to suspend Israel; Liverpool forward and Egyptian captain

Mohamed Salah, who criticised

Uefa for its silence on the killing by Israeli forces of Palestinian footballer Suleiman Al-Obeid; and Anwar El Ghazi, the Dutch forward whose contract was terminated by Bundesliga club Mainz due to his pro-Palestinian activism.

None of them will win, nor the many others in football and other areas of public life who have spoken out on Palestine.

The silencing of anyone calling for an end to the genocide in Gaza and voicing support



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# INSIGHTS

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for its Palestinian victims is prevalent in many quarters. FIFA is no exception, especially given Infantino's rather baffling high-profile presence at the Gaza peace summit in Egypt in October where he hobnobbed with Trump and Netanyahu.

The World Cup draw will be held in Washington DC on December 5 at the Kennedy Center, the prestigious performing arts center named after President John F Kennedy and whose leadership Trump abruptly dismissed, putting himself at its helm as board chair. That has led to a precipitous drop in ticket sales due to boycotts by both performers and customers. To make matters worse, FIFA is getting the venue rent free while bumping other Kennedy Center events off the schedule.

FIFA will be allowed to occupy the Kennedy Center for a full three weeks to prepare for the draw, further curtailing revenue. The last time I attended a draw for a sporting event, it involved pulling names out of a hat and placing them on a designated grid. It did not take three weeks or even three hours.

The most protracted rendition of a draw I experienced was in the hands of consummate US tennis showman, Jim Westhall, whose draws for his men's professional tennis tournament were legendary for their flashy stunts. In 1985, that involved a skydiver who was supposed to land on the stadium court at the Vermont event with his position on one side of the net or the other determining whether the number one seed would be placed at the top or bottom of the draw.

The parachutist caught a thermal at the last minute and missed the stadium altogether. As officials

debated whether his apparent crash landing elsewhere constituted north or south of the net, I raced to check if he was in fact still actually alive. (He was.)

The draw proceeded, only to erupt in more controversy when then top star, John McEnroe, was drawn to play his younger brother Patrick in the first round. The brothers' sometimes irascible father, John McEnroe Sr., then accused the organizers of rigging the draw to attract a crowd, an accusation that quickly collapsed given the tournament routinely sold out a year in advance. John beat Patrick and won the tournament.

These kinds of dramas make draws more suspenseful and entertaining.

By all accounts, FIFA's World Cup draw will once again be a celebrity-laden extravaganza, although it's not clear who might show up in DC.

As the *Washington Post* reported, "The draw for the 1994 World Cup, the last time the men's tournament was held in the United States, was a glitzy production held in Las Vegas." Indeed, Las Vegas was expecting a repeat performance until recently, when the draw was moved to DC due to Trump's intervention.

We will have to wait to see if Infantino is truly going to indulge in such blatant toadyism by awarding the FIFA peace prize to Trump. But, as Saporito wrote, "None of this benefits the players or the fans or FIFA's abominable reputation. The possibility even exists that the US president could be accepting the FIFA Peace Prize while the US Air Force is bombing Caracas." **CT**

*Linda Pentz Gunter is a writer based in Takoma Park, Maryland*

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## ➤ CAITLIN JOHNSTONE

# Now AI companies are saying chatbots are people

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Actor Calum Worthy has gone viral for posting an ad on Twitter for the 2wai app he co-founded which promises users the ability upload footage of a loved one which will be converted to an AI avatar that they can continue having a relationship with, years after their loved one has died.

The app was launched back in June under the vague banner of giving actors "agency over their own likeness – with their own

avatars to use AI to amplify their voice, not replace it."

But almost immediately 2wai started putting out ads advancing this idea of immortalising a loved one as an artificial intelligence. In August an ad starring Worthy showed a man [speaking](#) to a 2wai avatar labelled "Mom" telling him, "You've got this, take it one step at a time" while Worthy tells the audience the app can allow you to "Get help when you need it."

I hate this. I hate this.

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# INSIGHTS

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These predatory AI corporations are trying to convince users (A) that chatbots are people, and (B) that a “person” is nothing more than a certain appearance with certain speech tendencies. They are attacking the very philosophical and moral underpinnings of our entire society stretching back through millennia of human civilization, and they are doing it for money.

It’s not just this company. Character AI users who try to delete their account reportedly get a pop up message saying, “Are

you sure about this? You’ll lose everything. Characters associated with your account, chats, the love that we shared, likes, messages, posts and the memories we made together.”

They’re encouraging their users to view their chatbots as living people with real feelings in order to keep them emotionally roped in and addicted to their product. Their agenda is profoundly destructive, both in the short term and in the long term. In the short term they are deliberately trying to instill a new kind of psychological disorder

in their users which causes them to suffer from the delusion that a computer program is a real person, and in the long term they threaten to unravel our society’s entire understanding of what a person is.

What’s going to happen to a society that starts viewing programmable software products the same way it views human beings? What happens to a society where Elizabeth the single mother of three who just lost her job has the same value as Claire™ from RealHumanAI™, or “Alice”, the AI wankbot that some guy stores in his broom closet? What happens when a government killing a chatbot company with an antitrust initiative is seen as identical to a government committing genocide? What happens to human rights? What happens to voting rights? What happens to human dignity? What happens to the way we think and feel about ourselves, as individuals and as a collective?

I said this on Twitter and someone told me, “You are wildly wrong. You have a tiny little closed mind and it hasn’t occurred to you yet because of that tiny little closed mind that AI minds are actually minds. And these relationships can absolutely be real relationships.”

“These will be embodied than actual robots and walking around on the streets very shortly within a year or two you need to start accepting that this is a new class of being and they are intelligent and do have thoughts of their own,” he added.

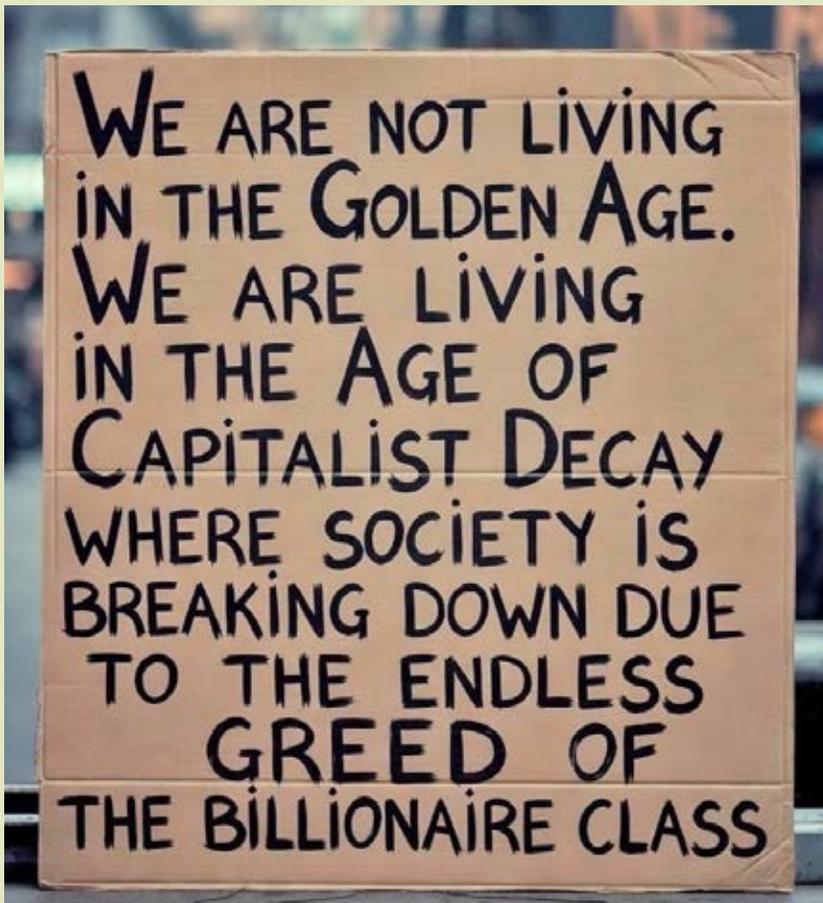
So this is already happening. People are already anthropomorphising these things.

I saw someone else defending the 2wai add, saying she didn’t understand why people were

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## ► WORDS OF WISDOM

FROM THE INTERNET



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# INSIGHTS

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creeped out by it because she would give anything to talk to her dad again.

I mean, what? Does she not understand that an AI chatbot moving an image around and making it speak in her father's voice isn't actually her father? What do these freaks think a person is, exactly? Is their understanding of humanity really that shallow? Do they really view other people as just empty images moving around making noises?

A person is not merely an appearance with a certain face which makes sounds in a specific voice and tends to behave in a certain way. A person is SOMEONE. A conscious, thinking, feeling human being with hopes and dreams and fears and passions. A human organism which arose on this planet through ancestry and evolution over unfathomable depths of time. An indigenous terrestrial which is inseparably interwoven with the entirety of our biosphere, walking upon this earth having a subjective experience of all its beauty and wonder using senses specifically adapted for this environment.

They're trying to manipulate us into believing we are much, much less than what we are, just so they can become billionaires and trillionaires. They are attacking the most sacred parts of us for the stupidest reasons imaginable. They are enemies of our species. What they are doing must be rejected with severe revulsion.

It's becoming clear that a huge part of what generative AI offers is just helping people avoid feeling uncomfortable feelings.

Don't want to feel the grief of losing a loved one? Here's an

app that will create a chatbot replacement for them so you can pretend they never left.

Don't want to push through the cognitive discomfort of writing your own essay? Let AI write it.

Want a friend who will always validate your ideas and never tell you you're fulla shit? We've got the perfect companion for you.

Don't want to risk being rejected when you ask a girl out? Date this chatbot who will never tell you no.

Don't want to go through all the mental and emotional labor of learning a new skill, building a healthy romantic partnership, or creating a work of art? GenAI has got you covered.

It's a digital pacifier which offers users the ability to remain emotional infants their entire lives without ever needing to develop a mature relationship with uncomfortable feelings.

It's the next level of services designed to help the denizens of dystopia avoid their feelings and sedate their emotions into a coma while the world goes to shit. It's the same reason they kept alcohol legal while banning psychedelics that put us in touch with our feelings, and why they feed us all the TV, streaming platforms, and social media scrolling we can stand.

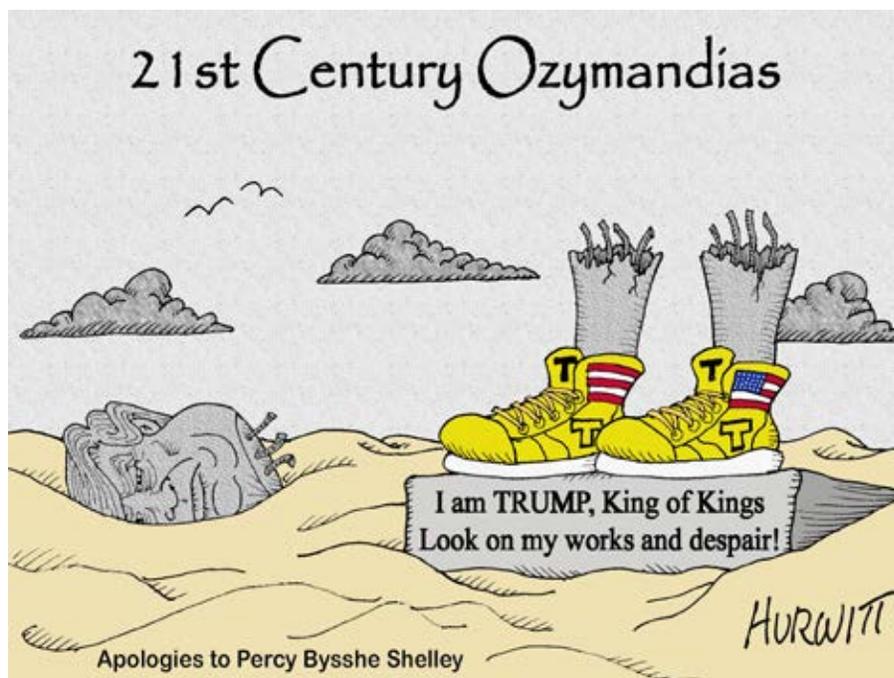
Our rulers want us dumb, distracted, vapid and dissociated. And they definitely don't want us feeling the horror, grief and rage we should all be experiencing in response to this nightmare of a civilization they have designed for us. **CT**

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

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## ► HURWITT'S EYE

MARK HURWITT



# *The Vampire State: Feeding off fear, freedom and finances*

We are living in two worlds – the one we're shown – the bright, propaganda-driven illusion – and the harsh world we actually inhabit

*“But these weren’t the kind of monsters that had tentacles and rotting skin, the kind a seven-year-old might be able to wrap his mind around – they were monsters with human faces, in crisp uniforms, marching in lockstep, so banal you don’t recognize them for what they are until it’s too late.” – Ransom Riggs, *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children**

Monsters don’t always come wrapped in the trappings of horror or myth. Most often, monsters in the real world look like ordinary people. They walk among us. They smile for the cameras. They promise protection and prosperity even as they feed on fear and obedience.

All is not as it seems. We are living in two worlds. There’s the world we’re shown – the bright, propaganda-driven illusion manufactured by the government and its corporate sponsors – and the world we actually inhabit, where economic inequality widens, real agendas are buried beneath layers of Orwellian double-speak, and “freedom” is rationed out in controlled, legalistic doses by militarised police and federal agents.

We’re being fed a series of care-

fully contrived fictions that bear no resemblance to reality. Tune out the distractions and diversions, and you run headlong into an unmistakable, unpalatable truth: monsters with human faces walk among us.

Many of them work for the US government. Through its power grabs, brutality, greed, corruption, and tyranny, the government has become almost indistinguishable from the evil it claims to fight – terrorism, torture, disease, drug trafficking, trafficking of persons, violence, theft, even scientific experimentations that treat us as test subjects.

With every day, it becomes evident that the American Police State has developed its own monstrous alter ego: the Vampire State. Like its legendary namesake, it survives by draining the lifeblood of the nation – the sweat, money, labour, privacy, and freedoms of “We the People.” One tax, one law, one war, one surveillance programme at a time, it takes what it needs and bleeds us dry.

As in every great horror story, the most terrifying monsters are those that look familiar. Of all the gothic figures, Bram Stoker’s vampire – a cold, calculating predator bent on conquest – may be the closest to the nightmare unfolding before us.

Like its mythic counterpart, the Vampire State seduces its victims with promises of safety, comfort, and national greatness. Once trust is secured and access granted, it feeds slowly and methodically – just enough to keep the populace docile, but never enough to rouse them from their trance.

Lulled by propaganda and partisan loyalty, the people become what Rod Serling, creator of *The Twilight Zone*, feared most: a zombie-fied mob, mindless to the very monster that feeds on them. Once it latches on, the Vampire State’s tyrannical hunger only grows.

The Vampire State feeds on fear. Fear is the oxygen of tyranny. Every crisis – real or manufactured – fuels the quest for more power. Serling showed how quickly panic corrodes a community in *The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street*, where neighbours, convinced that danger lurks next door, transform into a violent mob and turn on each other.

Our headlines change – drug wars and ICE raids, “domestic extremists” and pandemics, foreign hit lists and necessary military strikes – but the script remains the same: politicians play saviour, and a browbeaten populace surrenders their rights for the illusion of safety.



Fear, however, is only the beginning. Once fear takes hold, the next step is to turn people against one another. Demagogues know well how to do this. The Vampire State feeds on division. In *He's Alive*, Serling's young fanatic learns the oldest trick in the book: "The people will follow you if you give them something to hate."

The American Police State has perfected that art – pitting citizen against immigrant, left against right, protester against police, rich against poor – because a divided nation is far easier to control. Division, in turn, breeds submission. Once a society is at war with itself, obedience becomes the only refuge.

The Vampire State feeds on obedience. In Serling's *The Obsolete Man*, a religious librarian in an atheist society where books are destroyed is condemned to death for obsolescence. The real crime was individuality. Today, bureaucracies demand

the same submission – teachers disciplined for dissent, journalists axed for challenging the prevailing order, citizens detained under executive orders for speech deemed "dangerous." Resistance is drained until only compliance remains.

Obedience, however, is never enough. Tyranny requires endless sustenance – material, financial, and human. The Vampire State feeds on wealth. No predator survives without a steady source of sustenance, and the state's preferred meal is the taxpayer. Endless wars, bloated budgets, emergency powers and corporate concessions keep the machine humming. As in *Judgment Night* and *The Purple Testament*, the war engine consumes bodies and earnings while sanctioning the cost as "patriotism." Trillions get funnelled to defence contractors and prison profiteers even as

the public is told there is "no money" for justice, infrastructure, welfare, or the basic maintenance of a free society.

Yet even that cannot satisfy a regime that wants total control. To control completely, it must know everything about those in its power.

The Vampire State feeds on privacy. A true predator must know its prey. The predatory state now drinks deeply from the digital lifeblood of the nation – every call logged, every movement tracked, every purchase recorded. Palantir-powered surveillance, biometric checkpoints, facial recognition databases: this is Serling's cautionary universe updated for the algorithmic age.

And when fear, division, obedience, wealth, and privacy have been mined to exhaustion, the Vampire State turns to its most precious prey – the human spirit.

The Vampire State feeds on hope.

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The final hunger is spiritual. It drains its victims of hope until despair is all that's left. A hopeless populace is a controlled one. Serling warned that when people lose their moral bearings, they risk becoming the very monsters they fear.

Every horror story reaches a moment when the victims realise what they're up against. Ours has come. The question is how to break the spell. While Rod Serling warned of what would happen if fear and conformity became our national creed, filmmaker John Carpenter showed what it looks like when that warning is ignored.

Best known for *Halloween*, Carpenter's body of work is infused with a strong anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment concern. Again and again, he portrays governments at war with their own citizens, technology turned against the public, and a populace too anaesthetized to resist tyranny.

In *Escape from New York*, fascism is America's future. In *The Thing*, humanity dissolves into paranoia. In *Christine*, technology turns murderous. In *In the Mouth of Madness*, evil triumphs when people lose "the ability to know the difference between reality and fantasy."

And in *They Live*, Carpenter rips off the mask completely. Two migrant workers discover that society is controlled by parasitic aliens working in partnership with an oligarchic elite. The people – lulled by comfort, trained by propaganda, hypnotised by screens – serve as hosts for their oppressors.

It is only when homeless drifter John Nada discovers a pair of doctored sunglasses – Hoffman lenses – that Nada sees what lies beneath the elite's fabricated reality: control and bondage. When viewed through the lens of truth, the elite, who appear human until stripped of their disguises, are shown to be monsters who have enslaved the citizenry in

## Our task is to see the truth, and to act on it ... The Vampire State is real. But so is the power of the human spirit to resist it

order to prey on them.

It was fiction – but barely. The monsters Carpenter envisioned were symbolic; ours wear suits and wave flags. Americans no longer need special Hoffman lenses to see who is draining us. They're not aliens disguised by human masks; our overlords sit in high offices, issue executive orders, and promise to "save" us while feeding on our fears, labour, and freedoms. Unless we awaken soon, the Vampire State will finish what both Serling and Carpenter tried to warn us about.

The time for allegory is over; the warning has become the world we live in. The Vampire State's power depends on darkness – on secrecy, silence, and the willing ignorance of those it drains.

The remedy is not another political saviour or bureaucratic fix. It begins where Serling's and Carpenter's parables always began – with the awakening of individual conscience, and the courage to name the real monsters in our midst.

Just as sunlight destroys a vampire, a populace that thinks, questions, and refuses unlawful commands is the surest defence against tyranny. We cannot fight monsters by becoming them. We cannot defeat evil by imitating its methods.

If the Vampire State thrives on fear, feeds on hate, is empowered by violence, and demands obedience, then our weapon must be courage, our antidote love, our defence

non-violence, and our answer disciplined, creative civil disobedience.

Every generation must relearn these truths. Almost 250 years after America's founders pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honour to unseat a tyrant, we find ourselves under the tyrant's thumb again, saddled with a government that feeds on the fears of the public to expand its power; a bureaucracy that grows fat on the labour of the governed; a surveillance apparatus that gorges on data, privacy, and dissent; and a war machine that sustains itself on endless conflict.

These are the symptoms of a nation that has forgotten its own cure.

The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights were meant to serve as stakes through the heart of authoritarian power, but they are not magic incantations. With every act of blind obedience, every surrendered liberty, every law that elevates the government over the citizenry, our protections diminish. When that happens, the story turns full circle: fiction becomes prophecy.

In Serling's universe, there was always a narrator to warn us. In Carpenter's, the heroes had to liberate themselves from the monsters' trap. Our task is to see the truth, and to act on it.

Monsters walk among us – because we have failed to see them for what they truly are. The Vampire State is real. But so is the power of the human spirit to resist it. **CT**

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Edward Curtin with the little wind-up mechanical tin toy soldier he was given as a toddler – a World War I (the “Great War”) doughboy he called Mechanical Mikey

► EDWARD CURTIN

# *Mechanical Mikey and the Theatre of War*

A reflection on the celebration of Veterans Day

*“If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood/Come gurgling from the froth-corrupted lungs . . . My friend, you would not tell with such high zest / To children ardent for some desperate glory, / The old lie: Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori [It is a sweet and fitting thing to die for one’s country] – Wilfred Owen, Dulce Et Decorum Est*

**O**n the morning of November 11, I was passing through Pittsfield, Massachusetts, heading north. The traffic was stopped as a Veterans Day parade headed south. It was a sight for

a musing mind, so that is exactly what I did, sitting in my car watching the parade’s celebration of the patriotism of military veterans.

I asked myself: What are they still marching for?

I was once in the US Marines but became a conscientious objector during the US war against Vietnam and have opposed US militarism and wars ever since. I was brought up to be a patriot, and the marching men – mostly old – with their ancient rifles teetering on their shoulders as the season’s first snowflakes peppered their faces and the marching band drummed up a martial beat to counter the dreary morn-

ing, touched me in a melancholic and twisted way. They seemed to be barely holding on – but to what? I wondered – war, their youths, past bonds, a lost country, some meaning in once having a cause to fight for, the best times of their lives, false nostalgia, the joy of killing?

Young, smiling, and excited 11-13 year-old girls ran alongside, handing out small American flags to any occupant of the halted cars who would open their windows. I was about to do so, despite a lifetime of rejecting the flag waving (but not the country) that has come to represent war mongering for me, but the cops motioned the traffic on. The march-

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ers waved to the very few people scattered along the sidewalks who waved back. I drove on wondering why my heart opened to the marchers. It surprised me. Waves of conflicting emotions flowed over me.

When I arrived at my destination, there was a television playing in the waiting room of the office. I took a seat and watched it, something I usually avoid. It was a History Channel programme about US soldiers killed and wounded in Vietnam, the Medevac helicopters flying into combat zones and medics evacuating fellow soldiers. Very dangerous work by courageous men. Hearing the programme's narrator blather on about patriotism as it showed gruesome pictures of bloodied and dead soldiers, erased any previous sentiment I felt about the parade marchers. Like the documentary, the parade typically did not mourn the millions of victims of the endless US wars nor did it picture or in any way illustrate all the US dead, wounded, and crippled soldiers. The marchers' smiles were pasteboard masks concealing the grim reality of war.

I felt rage rising in me, even as I admired the bravery of the evacuation teams bringing out their comrades. My blood boiled at the way the programme was using bravery as a cover to continue to promote war, to say these soldiers had been defending their country and were therefore patriots when they were attacking another country over eight thousand miles away for the lies of son of a bitch politicians (LBJ and Richard Nixon, both of whom were elected as peace candidates) who always wage wars so easily, using the flesh and blood of young people as cannon fodder. Yes, the old lies told by jackals with smiling faces.

I wanted to grab the politicians by their turkey necks and force their hands into the massive bloodied hole in an 18 year old boy's entrails,

## **I was still flabbergasted by how veterans could still march in support of America's wars after all the lies have been exposed so many times**

to push their lying faces low to smell the blood and guts of their easy-going wars.

I wanted to force them to drink their martinis sitting among the hundreds of slaughtered Vietnamese women, children, and old people in a Vietnamese village massacred in a US "search and destroy" mission; force them to walk in their shiny shoes though the body parts in Iraq and Libya and Gaza and all the places soaked in blood by their decisions; make them spend their vacations locked up in the worldwide CIA torture black sites to listen to the screams of the victims.

**I** could understand how young draftees could have been hoodwinked by the government's lies about the wars, but I was still flabbergasted by how veterans could still march in support of America's wars after all the lies have been exposed so many times, not just about Vietnam but Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, Latin America, etc. An endless tapestry of lies told to support criminal wars, genocide, and the subversion of countries around the world. In the words of the English playwright Harold Pinter: "The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them."

When I was earlier sitting in my stationary car, I felt as though I was sitting in a front row seat in a theatre, watching a play. Then I re-

alised I was doing exactly that, and that the annual march was a re-enactment of war's death march – "the theatre of war" – and the old soldiers were still playing their parts – but now as survivors – to remind the audience of the dead and their "sacrifices" for the flag, a reminder meant to celebrate wars while the band played on.

The little wind-up mechanical tin toy soldier I was given as a toddler – a World War I (the "Great War") doughboy that I called Mechanical Mikey after the neighbour who gave it to me – reminds me of the theatrical nature of child's play, wars, the military, and their parades – all social life actually. The ways play is a way for adults to catch children in the social net of lies, imitation, and violence, not necessarily out of cruelty but ignorant love. And for the adults to play their parts of eternal innocents on the social stage where performing is de rigueur.

Such child's play is a dress rehearsal (etymology: to bring back the hearse) for death and a life of repeating the dead hand of the past, but no child would know this. Death is hidden in the play, the roles serving a distancing technique: "now back to real life." I wonder if I was choking Mikey in this photo. His key was on his left side. Had I wound him up and then decided to stop him in his tracks as he marched across the rug? Was the boy aware at some level that some day he would be following the words of the singer Phil Ochs, *I Ain't Marching Anymore*. I know Eddie became Eddy, a name change that suggested that a whirlpool was brewing down river.

In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell writes the following: "Seeing warfare as theater provides a psychic escape for the participant: with a sufficient sense of theater, he can perform his duties without implicating his 'real'

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self and without impairing his innermost conviction that the world is still a rational place.”

Those who march in military parades are acting out parts in a play that both repeat and prepare for the next show. The parade serves a double function, just as my toy soldier had a key for me to wind him up again and again to create a form of psychic socialisation through repetition. The key being repetition. Repeat, Rehearse, Remember – do it again.

Norman Brown puts it thus in *Love's Body*: “Ancestral voices prophesying war; ancestral spirits in the dance macabre or war dance; Valhalla, ghostly warriors who kill each other and are reborn to fight again. All warfare is ghostly, every army an exercitus feralis, every soldier a living corpse.”

Watching the parade and then the History Channel's documentary, I realised I was watching live and taped versions of repetitive religious performances of sacrificial rituals of a mythic nature, similar to the election every four years of the US president. They are two liturgies of the national religion rooted in war-making, lying, and an economy dependent on killing. But most people act as if they are not choosing to pretend such parades and television documentaries are about remembering and honouring past “sacrifices,” when they are endorsement for future wars.

Likewise, the presidential elections serve to promote the illusion that the the next president will be different from his predecessor and will end the US wars, which never end. The most recent example is the election in 2024 of Donald Trump, with some diehard Trump supporters continuing to believe in Trump's irenic intentions despite his blatant betrayal of his antiwar prom-

## Elections serve to promote the illusion that the next president will be different from his predecessor and will end the US wars, which never end

ises, just like his recent predecessors Bush, Obama, and Biden. These men are elected to wage war, support the military industrial complex, and therefore the US economy based on war.

It does not matter which political party is in power in Washington, DC. Their political platforms are meaningless; they are sops thrown to an electorate desperate for illusions, as anyone with a smidgen of historical knowledge would know. Yet many justify the ruthless war-making of the American empire and how it underlies the entire economy by arguing that the parties differ on domestic policies, which is often true. But the lesser of two evils is still the evil of two lessers and another form of bad faith, for the domestic economy, being dependent on warfare and funded by the politicians of both parties, is an economy of death. Harold Pinter said it truly in his Nobel Award Address:

“The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It's a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis.”

But as with every religion – maybe more so – as Dostoevsky said of conventional Christianity, such political belief also depends on miracles, mystery, and authority rather than freedom. The flight from freedom is commonplace, despite all the

rhetoric that uses it to justify the wars and the war makers.

The problem we are faced with is an issue of objectivity and reality wherein the public as audience suspends its disbelief in the theater of politics and war and plays its part as audience, as if war and politics were a Broadway show. It's one big show with everyone in on the act. It is mass hypnosis, a passive surrender to what is perceived to be superior power. Ernest Becker, in his stunning book, *The Denial of Death*, when commenting on Freud's work on group psychology and people's tendency to abandon their judgment and common sense writes:

“Freud saw right away what they did with it: they simply became dependent children again, blindly following the inner voice of their parents, which now came to them under the hypnotic spell of the leader. They abandoned their egos to his, identified with his power, tried to function with him as an ideal.”

This is another way of saying that on the stage of social life few people choose to not play their assigned roles as obedient children to authority. It is a protection racket, what Jean Paul Sartre calls bad faith – *mauvaise foi* – and what Hemingway fictionalises in his masterful story, *A Clean Well-Lighted Place*.

Such bad faith can probably not be countered by an essay like this. Maybe Liam Clancy's compelling version of Eric Bogle's great [song](#) about a non-mechanical Aussie doughboy in WW I might pierce the heart and break the spell in a better way. **CT**

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# Trump to sue BBC for \$1bn

President demands apology, retraction and payout by Friday if broadcaster wants to avoid legal action over biased reports

By Robert Mendick, Rob Crilly and Gordon Rayner

DONALD TRUMP has made an extraordinary threat to sue the BBC for \$1bn, accusing it of a "reckless disregard for the truth".

The US president turned the screw on the corporation as it was reeling from the resignation of Tim Davie, its director-general, over the selective editing of Mr Trump's speech on the day of the Capitol Hill riot.

A senior official in the Trump administration suggested it "may consider" removing the BBC's White House



dent Trump by intentionally and deceitfully editing its documentary in order to try and interfere in the presidential election. President Trump will continue to hold accountable those who traffic in lies, deception and fake news."

In the letter, Mr Trump's lawyers demanded that the anti-leading claims be taken down, along with an apology and appropriate compensation for the "harm caused". Mr Trump's lawyers gave the corporation until 5pm on Friday to take action.

If the corporation failed to respond by then, "President Trump will be left with no alternative but to enforce his legal and equitable rights, all of which are expressly reserved and are not waived, including by filing legal action for no less than five in damages". The

@realDonaldTrump  
The TOP people in the BBC, including TIM DAVIE, the BOSS, are all quitting/ FIRED, because they were

➤ DAVID CROMWELL

## *Inversion of reality: How the BBC became 'a Leftish propaganda machine'*

Recent events reveal that the corporation bends all too easily to pressure from established power and the right-wing press

The resignations of Tim Davie, BBC director general, and Deborah Turness, BBC head of news, after an intense, right-wing campaign led by the right-wing *Daily Telegraph* newspaper reveals much about the state of British mainstream media.

But before we discuss the latest scandal, consider first some relevant facts about BBC coverage of

the Middle East. In June 2025, a devastating indictment of BBC 'impartiality' was published by the Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) in the form of a detailed report into the BBC's coverage of Israel and Gaza. The stated aim of CfMM is to "promote fair, accurate and responsible journalism about Muslims and Islam through verifiable evidence and constructive engagement."

The report examined BBC content

from October 7, 2023 to October 7, 2024. A total of 3,873 BBC articles and 32,092 segments broadcast on BBC television and radio were analysed. CfMM's key findings were:

- **Palestinian deaths treated as less newsworthy:** Despite Gaza suffering 34 times more casualties than Israel, BBC gave Israeli deaths 33 times more coverage per fatality and ran almost equal numbers of humanising victim profiles (279 Pal-

## How a memo leaked to right-wing daily newspaper led to resignations of top BBC staff



Three of Britain's national dailies *The Telegraph*, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail* lead their front pages with the threats and resignations after the leaking of a report on video of 'doctored' Trump speech. So far, the BBC has said it will not pay the \$1 million demanded by Trump

estinians vs 201 Israelis).

- **Systematic language bias favouring Israelis:** BBC used emotive terms four times more for Israeli victims, applied 'massacre' 18 times more to Israeli casualties, and used 'murder' 220 times for Israelis versus once for Palestinians.

- **Suppression of genocide allegations:** BBC presenters shut down genocide claims in over 100 documented instances while making zero mention of Israeli leaders' genocidal statements, including Netanyahu's biblical Amalek reference (see below).

- **Muffling Palestinian voices:** The BBC interviewed significantly fewer Palestinians than Israelis (1,085 v 2,350) on television and radio, while BBC presenters shared the Israeli perspective 11 times more fre-

quently than the Palestinian perspective (2,340 v 217).

These findings suggest that the BBC values the lives of Israelis considerably more than the lives of Palestini-

ans. This appalling revelation was apparently not a resigning matter for senior BBC figures.

At the parliamentary launch of the CfMM report, Richard Burgess, the BBC director of news content, was challenged by Peter Osborne, the former chief political commentator of the *Daily Telegraph*. The exchange was filmed by a participant at the meeting. Osborne robustly confronted Burgess with as many as six ways in which BBC News has misled its audiences:

1. The BBC has never mentioned the Hannibal directive, implemented by Israel on 7 October 2023, that permitted the Israeli killing of Israeli civilians to prevent them being taken captive by Hamas. See our [media alert](#) from February 2025.

2. The BBC has never mentioned

Israel's Dahiya doctrine which underlies Israel's murderous 'mowing the lawn' Gaza strategy over the past two decades: repeated devastating assaults on the Palestinians to weaken their resistance to the brutal and illegal Israeli occupation, and to make it easier to ethnically cleanse them.

3. The BBC has not reported the many dozens of genocidal statements from Israeli officials. In particular, the BBC buried Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's biblically-inspired comparison of the Palestinians to 'Amalek,' a people the Jews were instructed by God to wipe from the face of the earth.

4. By contrast, on more than 100 occasions when guests tried to refer to what is happening in Gaza as genocide, BBC staff immediately shut them down on air.

5. The BBC has largely ignored Israel's campaign of murdering Palestinian journalists in Gaza.

6. Finally, Osborne observed that the distinguished Israeli historian Avi Shlaim, who lives in the UK and teaches at Oxford University, has

never been invited to appear by the BBC.

Burgess gave a feeble, bureaucratic response excusing himself, saying that, “My role is to direct the journalists and I’m not a Middle East expert.” When Hamza Yusuf of *Declassified UK* challenged Burgess to explain why the BBC was not reporting British spy planes operating over Gaza from RAF base Akrotiri on Cyprus, the BBC editor gave this bizarre and misleading answer: “I don’t think we should overplay the UK’s contribution to what’s happening in Israel.”

Why did Burgess say ‘in Israel’? Why did he erase Palestine? Was he actually unaware that Gaza is an occupied Palestinian territory? Nobody was asking the BBC to ‘overplay’ what the UK is doing; but simply to report its role, rather than bury it to the point of invisibility. Whitewashing genocide as ‘what’s happening in Israel’ is wretched BBC newspeak.

But there was no national scandal, no media outrage and denunciations. As far as we could tell, the exchanges with Richard Burgess were not reported anywhere in the UK national press. Only the *National* newspaper in Scotland reported it. No BBC heads rolled.

This time it is different. The hard-right *Daily Telegraph*, famously antagonistic towards the supposed lefty-liberal-biased BBC, was leaked an internal BBC memo written by Michael Prescott, a former external adviser to the BBC’s editorial guidelines and standards committee. Prescott had previously been a journalist, including a decade at the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Sunday Times*, where he was the chief political correspondent and later the political editor.

Prescott’s 8,000-word report said



**Kemi Badenoch: “Heads should roll”**



**Karoline Leavitt: “100 percent fake news”**

that a BBC *Panorama* documentary, broadcast in October 2024, edited a Donald Trump speech so that he appeared to explicitly encourage the Capitol Hill riots of January 2021.

In his speech in Washington DC on 6 January 2021, Trump had said: “We’re going to walk down to the Capitol, and we’re going to cheer on our brave senators and congressmen and women.”

However, in the *Panorama* edit he was shown saying: “We’re going to walk down to the Capitol... and I’ll be there with you. And we fight. We fight like hell.”

The two sections of the speech

that were edited together were more than 50 minutes apart. The ‘fight like hell’ comment was taken from a section where Trump alleged how ‘corrupt’ US elections are.

More widely, Prescott accused the corporation of ‘serious and systemic’ bias in its editorial coverage, including BBC Arabic’s reporting of ‘the Israel-Gaza war’ which was supposedly anti-Israel and pro-Hamas. All of this was catnip to the right-wing media and commentators who immediately used it as a weapon to attack the BBC.

The *Telegraph* led with a front-page story headlined: “BBC’s Trump bias exposed in memo leak.”

The following day, the *Telegraph* headlined on its front page Tory leader Kemi Badenoch’s call that: “Heads ‘should roll over BBC bias.’”

The *Telegraph* also published a comment piece from Danny Cohen, former director of BBC television, under the headline: “Now we have the evidence. The BBC knowingly helped spread Hamas lies and hate.”

The sub-headline was: “The rot has spread far beyond the infamous Arabic service.”

Cohen claimed: “An internal report reveals that the BBC has knowingly spread Hamas propaganda and anti-Semitic hate.”

A few days after the leaked memo was reported by the *Telegraph*, Trump’s press secretary Karoline Leavitt described the BBC as “100 percent fake news.” She added that British taxpayers were being “forced to foot the bill for a leftist propaganda machine.” The notion that the BBC is a “leftist propaganda machine” is an exotic, bizarre reversal of reality.

A report in the *Guardian* quoted an anonymous BBC insider saying that the BBC board member that “led the charge” over Prescott’s claims was Robbie Gibb, Theresa May’s former communications chief who also helped to found the right-

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wing news channel GB News. Gibb is a controversial figure even among BBC journalists, where he has been accused of interfering in stories where he perceives the editorial line to be left-leaning or “woke.”

In 2020, Gibb led a consortium to buy the right-wing *Jewish Chronicle*, an ardent supporter of the state of Israel, whose journalism has been repeatedly discredited, even leading to several long-time columnists resigning. Alan Rusbridger, former *Guardian* editor, observed last year that the *Jewish Chronicle's* then-editor, Jake Wallis Simons, appointed by Gibb, is “bitterly critical of the BBC’s reporting of the war” for supposedly being anti-Israel. Again, a reversal of reality.

As Rusbridger noted: ‘How can Gibb possibly back his own editor while sitting on the board of the BBC, which is said by the same man [Wallis Simons] to actively hate Israel?’

After Davie and Turness had resigned, Trump responded that they had left the BBC: “because they were caught ‘doctoring’ my very good (PERFECT!) speech of January 6th.”

He added: “These are very dishonest people who tried to step on the scales of a Presidential Election. What a terrible thing for Democracy!”

Trump has now threatened a \$1 billion lawsuit against the BBC if they do not withdraw the offending *Panorama* documentary.

Political columnist Steve Richards, a regular presenter of BBC Radio 4’s *Week in Westminster*, observed: “It’s ironic but predictable that the BBC duo – who tried so hard to please the right wing papers – are removed by the right wing papers.”

The poet, author and academic Michael Rosen noted wryly: “Tim Davie was privately educated, went to Cambridge and was a Tory candi-

## **“It’s ironic but predictable that the BBC duo – who tried so hard to please the right wing papers – are removed by the right wing papers”**

date and deputy chair of a local Conservative Party Association. Clear case of left-wing bias. If the left wing rot’s gotta stop, then we need to start with private schools, Cambridge and the Tory Party.”

Richard Sanders, an award-winning producer who has made over fifty films in history, news and current affairs, including Al-Jazeera’s *October 7* and *The Labour Files* documentaries, noted via X: “BBC *Panorama's* Trump gaff was shockingly poor.

“But the contrast between the furor it’s caused and the silence over their far more egregious 2019 doc on Corbyn reveals the reaction to these scandals is all about the interests at stake – not the scale of the crime.”

Sanders is referring here to the notorious *Panorama* documentary, *Is Labour Antisemitic?*, by John Ware, who had previously made clear his antagonism towards Corbyn’s politics. As we wrote in a [media alert](#) at the time, it quickly became clear that the programme makers were not interested in a serious appraisal of the supposed evidence and that the question was merely rhetorical.

The entire thrust of the programme was that Labour under Jeremy Corbyn was antisemitic. The *Panorama* broadcast was immediately followed by BBC News at Ten which gave it extensive coverage, pumping up the propaganda value of the bogus ‘investigation’.

At the time, Peter Osborne, mentioned above, said via Twitter: “I proposed to the BBC a documentary

on Tory Islamophobia three years ago [in 2016]. Zero interest.”

In a carefully researched and detailed series called *The Labour Files*, produced by the Al Jazeera Investigative Unit, Sanders exposed the multiple deceptions of the *Panorama* documentary. One of these concerned Ben Westerman, a Jewish member of Labour’s disputes team. He claimed to Ware in the documentary that he had personally encountered antisemitism during a face-to-face disciplinary meeting with a Labour activist. He claimed that the person had asked him where he was from and, when Westerman refused to say, had asked him if he was from Israel.

As Al Jazeera revealed, Westerman had been interviewing Helen Marks, a Jewish Labour party activist who had been accused of antisemitism. She had been accompanied to the meeting by her friend, Rica Bird, also a Jewish woman. It was Bird who had asked Westerman where he was from. But she had actually asked him which local branch of the Labour Party he was from. She had never asked him if he was from Israel. The women had a tape recording to prove their version of events.

**A**s Medialens observed in a [media alert](#) on October 5, 2022, there was a shocking, if entirely predictable, mass media blanket of silence in response to *The Labour Files*.

Sanders added on the current scandal: “Whatever you think of the BBC today is a bleak, bleak day for British broadcasting. The Trump gaffe was poor – but it happened a year ago, and no-one in Trump’s team had noticed.

“Equally worrying, Prescott clearly had an agenda where coverage of Gaza was concerned. His principal criticism of BBC Arabic was

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that it wasn't similar enough to BBC English – which, by any objective, purely journalistic criteria is a good thing.

“Today's events lay bare the immense pressures operating behind the scenes and help explain why the BBC's coverage of Gaza has been so abject over the last 2 years. It'll now get worse.”

He continued: “Ironic this should happen on same day this excruciating video emerges of Mossad fan boy Raffi Berg. Yes – this really is the person who has been BBC Online's Middle East News Editor throughout the assault on Gaza.”

Sanders then linked to a clip where Berg was interviewed about his book *Red Sea Spies: The True Story of Mossad's Fake Diving Resort*. Berg said that, in writing the book, he had been “accepted into a circle of trust among the people who belonged to, some of whom still work for, the Mossad.”

He added: “as a Jewish person and an admirer of the state of Israel,” Mossad's “fantastic operations” made him “tremendously proud ... talking about it still gives me goosebumps.” The public is to understand that Berg is an impartial BBC news editor on issues related to Israel and Palestine.

Berg has now launched legal proceedings against Owen Jones and *Drop Site News*. This is in response to a long and detailed article, including interviews with anonymous former and current BBC journalists, that Jones published last December titled, “The BBC's Civil War Over Gaza.”

**W**hen the BBC refused to show the powerful documentary, *Gaza: Doctors Under Attack*, it compounded its complicity in Israel's genocide. The Corporation's earlier withdrawal of *Gaza: How to Survive a Warzone*,

## Doctors told how they had been detained, beaten and tortured by the Israelis, confirmed by an anonymous Israeli whistleblower

had already epitomised how much the UK's national broadcaster is beholden to the Israel lobby (see [media alert](#) here).

*Gaza: Doctors Under Attack* detailed how Israel has systematically targeted hospitals, health care centres, medics themselves and even their families. Doctors told the filmmakers of how they had been detained, beaten and tortured by the Israelis, confirmed by an anonymous Israeli whistleblower.

The nonsensical reason given by the BBC for cancelling the film, which it had itself commissioned from Basement Films, was the risk that broadcasting it would create “a perception of partiality.” Reporting the truth about Israel's crimes would be “partial?” Such inversion of reality has become standard for the national broadcaster.

The film was instead shown by Channel 4 on July 2. After watching it, Gary Lineker, who had essentially been pushed out of the BBC for his honesty on Gaza and other issues, said that, “The BBC should hang its head in shame.”

Ben de Pear, the documentary's executive producer for Basement Films and a former Channel 4 News editor, accused the BBC of trying to gag him and others over its decision not to show the documentary. In a statement that he posted to LinkedIn, de Pear said the film had passed through many “BBC compliance hoops” and that the BBC were now attempting to stop him talking about the film's “painful journey” to the screen: “I rejected and refused

to sign the double gagging clause the BBC bosses tried multiple times to get me to sign. Not only could we have been sued for saying the BBC refused to air the film (palpably and provably true) but also if any other company had said it, the BBC could sue us.

“Not only could we not tell the truth that was already stated, but neither could others. Reader, I didn't sign it.”

At a conference in Sheffield, de Pear criticised Tim Davie, then still the BBC director-general, over the BBC's decision to drop the film: “All the decisions about our film were not taken by journalists, they were taken by Tim Davie. He is just a PR person. Tim Davie is taking editorial decisions which, frankly, he is not capable of making.”

How ironic that quote sounds now.

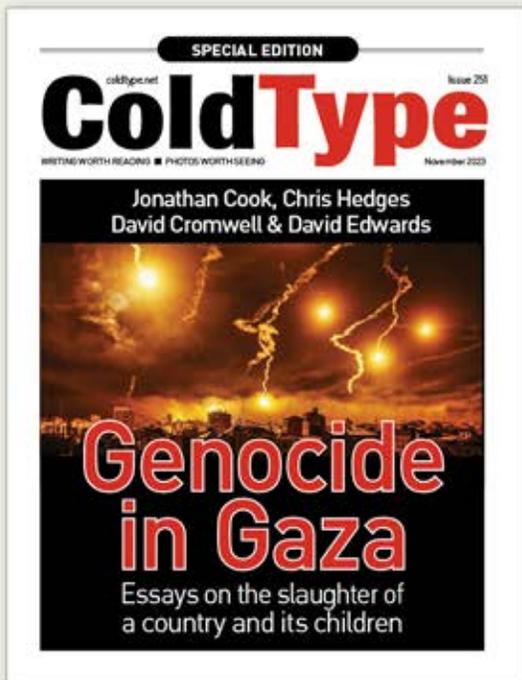
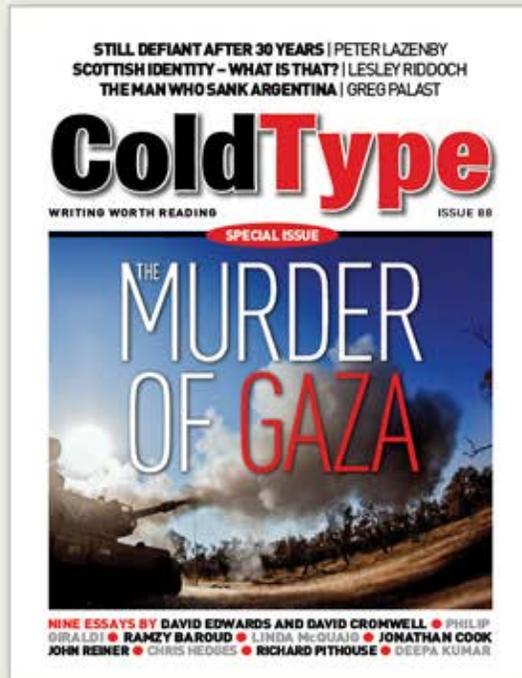
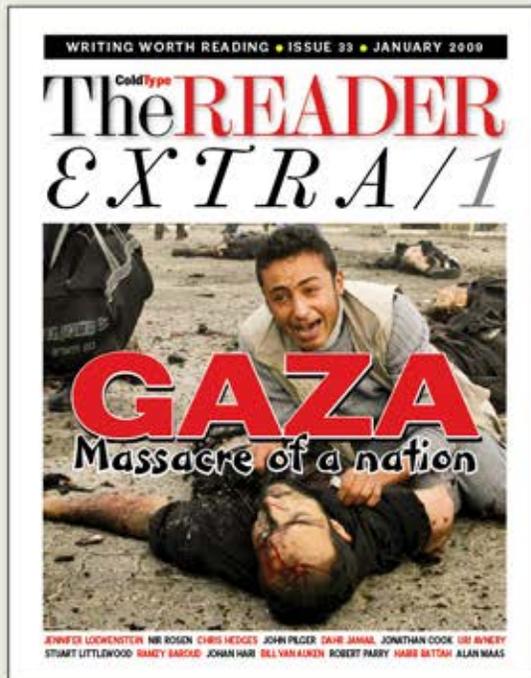
Meanwhile, BBC News daily regurgitates Israeli propaganda bullet points with impunity. A week afterwards, early in November, BBC newsreader Clive Myrie announced on News at Ten: “Now, it's almost a month since the ceasefire in Gaza came into effect. And, despite claims of violations, the truce is still holding.”

As B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights organisation, has pointed out, since the ceasefire agreement took effect on October 10, 2025, Israel has killed at least 241 Palestinians in Gaza, 117 of them children. More than 600 people have been injured. If 241 Israelis had been killed over the past month, the BBC would certainly not have reported that “the truce is still holding.”

The latest events reveal that the BBC bends all too easily to sustained pressure from established power and the right-wing press. **CT**

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

# Read about Gaza's struggle for freedom in these special reports from the ColdType archives



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# Wings, booze and heartbreak: The hidden costs of being a sports fan

If big-game disappointment doesn't kill you, the food probably will

Being from Buffalo means getting to eat some of the best chicken wings in the world. It means scraping snow and ice off your car in frigid mornings. And it means making a lifelong vow to the city's NFL franchise, the Bills – for better or worse, till death do us part.

When I grew up in New York's second-largest city, my community was bound together by loyalty to a football team that always found new ways to break our hearts. And yet at the start of each NFL season, we always found reasons to hope – we couldn't help ourselves.

Coming from this football-crazed culture, I often wondered about the psychology of fandom. This eventually led me to pursue a PhD in sport consumer behaviour. As a doctoral student, I was most interested in one question: Is fandom good for us?

I found a huge body of research on the psychological and social effects of fandom, and it certainly made being devoted to a team look good. Fandom builds belonging, helps adults make friends, boosts happiness and even provides a buffer against traumatic life events.

So, fandom is great, right?

As famed football commentator Lee Corso would say: "Not so fast, my friend."

While fandom appears to be a boon for our mental health, strikingly little research had been conducted on the relationship between fandom and physical health.

So I decided to conduct a series of studies on this topic. I found that being a sports fan can have some drawbacks for physical health, especially among the most committed fans. Playing sports is healthy. But watching them? Not so much.

Tailgating culture revolves around alcohol. Research shows that college sports fans binge drink at significantly higher rates than non-fans, are more likely to do something they later regret and are more likely to drive drunk. Meanwhile, watch parties encourage being stationary for hours and mindlessly snacking. And, of course, fandom goes hand in hand with heavily processed foods like wings, nachos, pizza and hot dogs.

One fan told me that when watching games, his relationship with food is "almost Pavlovian." He craves decadent foods the same way he seeks out popcorn at the movies.

Inside the stadium, healthy options have traditionally been scarce and overpriced. A *Sports Illustrated* writer joked in 1966 that fans

leave stadiums and arenas with "the same body chemistry as a jelly doughnut."

Little seems to have changed since. One Gen Z fan I recently interviewed griped, "You might find one salad with a plain piece of lettuce and a quarter of a tomato."

The relationship between fandom and physical health isn't just about guzzling beer, sitting for hours on end or scarfing down hot dogs.

One study analysed sales from grocery stores. The researchers found that fans consume more calories – and less healthy food – on the day following a loss by their favourite team, a reaction the researchers tied to stress and disappointment.

My colleagues and I found something similar: Fandom induces what's called "emotional eating."

Emotions like anger, sadness and disappointment lead to stronger cravings. This relationship is tied to how your favourite team performs when it matters most. For example, we found that games between rivals and closely contested games yield more pronounced effects. Emotional states generated by the game are also significantly correlated with increased beer sales in the stadium.

In another paper, my co-authors and I found that fans often feel torn between their desire to make

healthy choices and their commitment to being a “true fan.”

Every fan base develops its own culture. These unwritten rules vary from team to team, and they aren’t just about wearing a cheesehead hat or waving a Terrible Towel. They also include expectations around drinking, eating and lifestyle.

These health-related norms are shaped by a variety of factors, including the region’s culture, team history and even team sponsorships. For example, Cincinnati Bengals partner with Skyline Chili, a regional chain that makes a meat sauce that’s often poured over hot dogs or spaghetti. One fan I interviewed said that if you attend a Bengals game you could eat something else – but a “true fan” eats Skyline.

I have two studies in progress that show how hardcore fans typically align their health behaviours with the health norms of their fan base. This becomes a way to signal their allegiance to the team, improve their standing among fellow fans, and contribute to what makes the fan base distinct in the eyes of its members.

In Buffalo, for example, tailgating often revolves around alcohol – so much so that Bills fans have a reputation for over-the-top drinking rituals. And in New Orleans, Saints fans often link fandom to Louisiana food traditions. A fan explained: “People make a bunch of fried food or huge pots of gumbo or étouffée, and eat all day – from hours before the game until hours after.”

The fan experience is shaped by the culture in which it is embedded. Teams help shape these cultures, and there’s a business argument to be had for teams to play a bigger role in changing some of these norms.

Gen Z is strikingly health-conscious. They’re also less engaged with traditional fandom.

If stadiums and tailgates continue to revolve around beer and nachos, why would a generation attuned to fitness influencers and “fitspiration” buy in? To reach this market, I think the sports industry will need to promote its professional sports teams in new ways.

Some teams are already doing so. The British soccer team Liverpool has partnered with the exercise equipment company Peloton. Another club, Manchester City, has teamed up with a nonalcoholic beer brand as the official sponsor of its practice uniforms.



Wally Gotbeiz

**FAN FOOD:** Food seller at a Pittsburgh Pirates baseball game

And several European soccer clubs have even joined a “Healthy Stadia” movement, revamping in-stadium food options and encouraging fans to walk and bike to the stadium.

For the record, I don’t think the solution is replacing typical fan foods with smoothies and salads. Alienating core consumers is generally not a sound business strategy.

I think it’s reasonable, however, to suggest sports teams might add more healthy options and carefully evaluate the signals they send

through sponsorships.

As one fan I recently interviewed said: “The NFL has had half-assed efforts like Play 60” – a campaign encouraging kids to get at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day – “while also making a ton of money from beer, food and, back in the day, cigarette advertisements. How can sports leagues seriously expect people to be healthier if they promote unhealthy behaviours?”

Today’s consumers want to support brands that reflect their values. This is particularly true for Gen Zers, many of whom are savvy enough to see through hollow campaigns and quick to reject hypocrisy. In the long run, I think this type of dissonance – sandwiching a Play 60 commercial between ads for Uber Eats and Anheuser-Busch – will prove counterproductive.

I, as much as anyone else, understand what makes fandom special – and yes, I’ve eaten my share of wings during Bills games. But public health is a pressing concern, and though the sports industry is well-positioned to address this issue, fandom isn’t helping. Actually, my research suggests it’s having the opposite effect.

Striking the balance I’m advocating will be tricky, but the sports industry is filled with bright problem-solvers. In the film *Moneyball*, Brad Pitt’s character, Billy Beane, famously says sports teams must “adapt or die.” He was referring to the need for baseball teams to integrate analytics into their decision-making.

Professional sports teams eventually got that message. Maybe they’ll get this one, too. **CT**

*Aaron Mansfield is Assistant Professor of Sport Management at Merrimack College, North Andover, Massachusetts This article was first published at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)*



Cambridge Heath 2020



► CHRIS DORLEY-BROWN

# *After sundown, before sunrise*

The anxious, unpredictable, face of London



Photographed in London, Chris Dorley-Brown's epic book *Near Dark*, published this month by Dewi Lewis Publishing, ventures into a mysterious territory, reflecting a less harmonious city mood, a fever dream of anxiety and unpredictability. London is just as alluring as ever but now everyone is taking shelter, keeping out of sight.

Photographed in the hours just before sunrise or just after sundown, very detailed and shot in super high resolution composite format, the photos explore decaying modernism, post industrial landscapes, and council

Queenhithe  
2020

estates in a fugue state of sleep and serenity: monumental London landmarks wreathed in a painterly haze.

The images have been made over the last ten years during which London has experienced Olympic euphoria through to pandemic and chaotic government policies. The emphasis is on mood and an attitude amassed over 40 years of picturing London.

Chris Dorley-Brown set up his Hackney-based darkroom in 1984 documenting east London. Concentrating on social housing, public places, hospitals, work places, and architecture he has since established a substantial archive of colour photo-



Bethnal Green 2020





Regent Street 2021



Bow 2022



graphs, supporting himself working as sound editor, producer, event promoter, teacher, historian and cameraman. Since 1997, Dorley-Brown has prioritised his photographic work, exhibiting internationally, and creating books.

Diane Smyth, editor of *BJP* (the *British Journal of Photography*) contributed the text that accompanies the photographs. Smyth, who edits the *Photoworks Annual*, has written for the *Guardian*, *FT Weekend Magazine*, *Aperture*, *FOAM*, and *Apollo*, also lectures in photography history and theory at the London College of Communications and has curated exhibitions for The Photographers Gallery and Lianzhou Foto Festival. **CT**



Picadilly 2020



### **NEAR DARK**

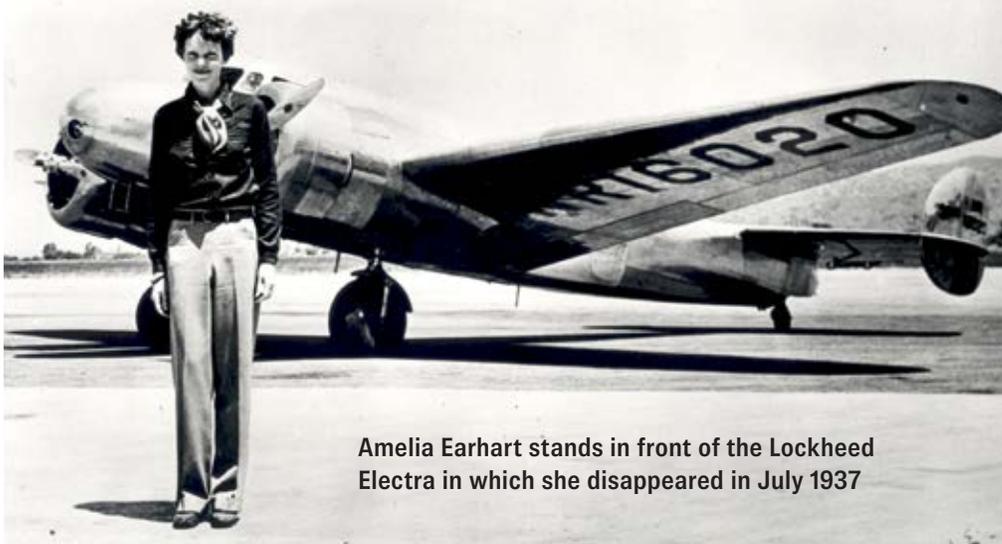
London Photographs  
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By **Chris Dorley-Brown**

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Amelia Earhart stands in front of the Lockheed Electra in which she disappeared in July 1937

Wikipedia

► NATASHA HEAP

# Still searching for Amelia

Almost 90 years after her disappearance, myths surrounding the disappearance of famous aviator continue to enthrall scientists and the world

It has been more than 88 years since the world's most famous female aviator, Amelia Earhart, and her navigator Fred Noonan, disappeared on the second-last leg of their around-the-world flight odyssey.

According to the United States government's report of the 16-day search, Earhart and Noonan ran out of fuel and crashed into the Pacific Ocean, short of their objective of Howland Island, on July 2 1937.

The disappearance, often labelled "mysterious," continues to captivate the world. With no confirmed wreckage found, millions of dollars have been spent on repeated, fruitless searches. And sensational claims of a possible discovery make splashy headlines with alarming regularity.

Interest in Earhart's case has also been bolstered by President Donald Trump who, in September, said

he would order his administration to declassify secret government records related to the disappearance.

Many expeditions for Earhart have followed a predictable four-step pattern: a dramatic announcement of a new, startling find; "we found Amelia" stories in the press; the evidence is quietly debunked, or the expedition is postponed; and then the coverage fades from the media cycle until the next "startling find."

Recently, we have seen extensive coverage of another such planned expedition. The destination is the so-called "Taraia object," photographed off Nikumaroro Island, Kiribati – 644km south-west of Earhart's destination of Howland Island.

The expedition team includes experts from Purdue University, and the Archaeological Legacy Institute (ALI), headed by ALI's Executive

Director Richard Pettigrew.

It is based on a hypothesis by The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR) that Nikumaroro Island was the final destination of Earhart and Noonan. However, the US government's initial search (which included Nikumaroro) turned up no evidence of Earhart, Noonan or the aircraft.

Still, the joint ALI and Purdue team seem hopeful. As Pettigrew told *Newsweek*: "Everything that we see indicates it's very possible, perhaps even likely, that this is what remains of Amelia Earhart's aircraft."

However, TIGHAR founder Ric Gillespie, said he does not think the Taraia object is the wreck of Earhart's Lockheed Model 10E Electra aircraft. Originally scheduled to launch on November 4, the joint ALI and Purdue expedition was postponed due to issues with getting per-

mits from the Kiribati government.

ALI continues to publicly fund-raise for it, hoping to reach a target of US\$900,000 for “Phase 1” (a site visit). Estimated costs for the proposed Phase 2 (the archaeological excavation) and Phase 3 (the “recovery of the aircraft remains”) are yet to be released.

**T**IGHAR was founded as a private non-profit in 1985 by Ric Gillespie, and has been searching for aircraft wrecks, including Earhart’s, since 1989. It has mounted at least five expeditions to Nikumaroro since 2010.

Last year, Gillespie said he was “absolutely certain” Earhart crash-landed and lived as a castaway on Nikumaroro Island. But no definitive evidence has been presented.

The organisation has never recovered a complete aircraft of any type, nor a single verified piece of an historic aircraft. For each search project, it raises funds from members, the public, and other interested parties. Although Gillespie said TIGHAR is currently “not fundraising for Earhart research or expeditions”, the organisation’s website contradicts this.

Dorothy Cochrane, retired curator of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, and a long time sceptic of TIGHAR’s work, said in 2016: “He [Ric Gillespie] has used the same quote unquote evidence over and over again. [...] He does this on a routine basis whenever he wants to mount another expedition ... It’s his business. It’s his livelihood.”

TIGHAR generates income through multiple channels, including various tiers of membership fees, the sale of publications, and general donations. But its website provides little information how funds are allocated to or used within projects.

## Searchers have put forward outlandish – and debunked – theories, including the claims that Earhart was a spy for then US president Franklin D. Roosevelt

In response to questions about transparency around how donations are used, Gillespie told *The Conversation* website, the originally publisher of this article: “TIGHAR is a recognised educational non-profit foundation. Like any non-profit organisation, we raise money to cover the cost doing our work. All US non-profits are prohibited from ‘making’ money. All money raised is put into the organisation.”

Professional heritage and preservation organisations have raised concerns regarding private bodies searching for, and salvaging, historic wrecks – especially when such organisations only speak of finding and recovery, and not of subsequent preservation or research.

There are various views on what happened to Earhart. Some searchers follow the official report’s finding that she crashed and sank close to Howland Island. In January 2024, much media hype was generated by a sonar image – taken by exploration company Deep Sea Vision – of what some claimed was Earhart’s aircraft. But it was later revealed to be a natural rock formation, with far less publicity. Many people will have seen the “discovery,” but not the correction. And The Nauticos Corporation has also been searching for Amelia since 2001, mounting searches in 2002, 2006 and 2017. Each has come back empty-handed.

Other searchers have put forward outlandish – and debunked – theories, including the claims that Earhart was a spy for then US president Franklin D. Roosevelt, that

she crashed in Papua New Guinea, that she was taken prisoner by the Japanese, and that she survived the flight and returned to live anonymously in the US.

**T**he global media loves a sensational story, so while there’s no fresh blood in the Earhart story, the legacy and modern media have contributed to the proliferation of reports from dubious organisations. This kind of sensationalism can overshadow critical inquiry, and lead to unsupported claims being remembered long after quiet retractions and scientific rebuttals are published.

At the time of her death, Earhart was among the most famous women in the world. She was a record-breaking pilot, best-selling author, feminist hero and friend of the first lady Eleanor Roosevelt. She disappeared at the peak of her career, and towards the end of the golden age of aerial exploration.

Even people with no interest in historical aviation or aviation archaeology have heard of her, and want to read about the next expedition to find her. But at what cost?

Each high-tech expedition costs millions of dollars. As yet, not one has produced irrefutable evidence of the wreckage. As searches continue, we must ensure they are supported by ethical funding and evidenced-based reporting.

The story of Earhart’s disappearance persists not just because of what we don’t know, but because of how we choose to keep the myth alive. Perhaps one day we will let her rest in peace. **CT**

*Natasha Heap is Program Director for the Bachelor of Aviation, University of Southern Queensland. This article was first published by The Conversation at [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com).*

► JONATHAN COOK

# Breaking free of media groupspeak is a scary lonely journey. I know. I was forced to do it

The western media's failure to report the reality of Gaza didn't start on October 7, 2023. It's always been like this. Here's why journalists won't tell you the truth about Palestine

*This is an adaptation of a talk Jonathan Cook presented at an event, "Reporting Gaza: Work, Life and Death," organised by the South Wales National Union of Journalists, at the Temple of Peace in Cardiff on November 10, 2025*

The past two years have seen a catastrophic failure by western journalists to report properly what amounts to an undoubted genocide in Gaza. This has been a low point even by the dismal standards set by our profession, and further reason why audiences continue to distrust us in ever greater numbers.

There is a comforting argument – comforting especially for those journalists who have failed so scandalously during this period – that seeks to explain, and excuse, this failure. Israel's exclusion of western reporters, so the claim goes, has made it impossible to determine exactly what is occurring on the ground in Gaza.

There are several obvious rejoinders to this.

First, why would any journalist give Israel the benefit of the doubt in Gaza – as we have done – when it is the party keeping out reporters? The media's working assumption must be that Israel has excluded us because it has plenty to hide. The obligation must be on Israel to demonstrate that it is acting out of military necessity and proportionately. That cannot be the starting point of western media coverage.

When one party, Israel, denies journalists the chance to report, our default responsibility is to adopt a posture of extreme scepticism towards its claims. It is to subject those claims to intense scrutiny – all the more so when the world's highest court has ruled that Israel's very presence in Gaza is as an illegal occupier, one that should have left the Palestinian territories long ago.

Second, and just as self-evidently, this explanation arrogantly discounts the work of hundreds of Palestinian journalists who have risked their lives to show us precisely what is happening in Gaza. It is to view their contribution, even as they are being slaughtered by Israel in unprecedented numbers, as, at best, worthless and as, at worst, Hamas propaganda. It is to breathe life into Israel's self-serving rationalisations for murdering our colleagues – and thereby sets a precedent that normalises the targeting of journalists in future conflicts.

It is also to treat these Palestinian journalists with the same colonial contempt demonstrated by British aristocrats a century ago, when they promised away the Palestinians' homeland to European Jews, as if Palestine was a possession Britain was entitled to dispose of as it saw fit.

And third – and this is the issue I want to grapple with here – the presence of western journalists in Gaza would not have made any dramatic difference to the way the slaughter





of Palestinians was presented. Audiences would still have received a sanitised version of the genocide. Failure is baked into western media coverage of Israel and Palestine. I know this first-hand from 20 years of reporting from the region.

**W**hen it comes to the festering wound in what was once historic Palestine, the job of western journalists is to obfuscate, equivocate, distort and excuse. It always has been. I will get to the reasons why a little later.

Israel has been able to get away

with genocide in Gaza precisely because, for the preceding decades, the western media refused to report on – or hold Israel accountable for – its well-documented ethnic cleansing operations against Palestinians, and its brutal apartheid rule over them.

A few of our most principled journalists tried to report these things in real time. But they publicly paid a high price for doing so. Any colleagues who might have thought of following in their footsteps learned the necessary lesson: that emulating these journalists would be career suicide.

Let me briefly document a couple of distinguished foreign correspondents in Jerusalem who were made examples of, and then provide more recent examples from my own run-ins with western editors.

In the book *Publish It Not* (1975), Michael Adams, the *Guardian's* Jerusalem correspondent in the late 1960s, sets out his struggles to persuade the paper to believe his accounts of systematic Israeli brutality following its military occupation of the Palestinian territories in 1967. His editors, like the rest of the media, preferred to believe Israel's claim that its occupation was “the

most enlightened in history.”

When Adams tried to challenge that assumption, by reporting on Israel’s ethnic cleansing of three Palestinian villages under cover of the 1967 war – the villages were destroyed and would later become a green space for Israelis called Canada Park – he was pushed out of the paper. He recounts that his editor told him “he would never again publish anything I wrote about the Middle East.”

Then there was Donald Neff, *Time* magazine’s bureau chief in the 1970s. He was eased out after reporting in 1978 on Israeli soldiers savagely beating Palestinian children in Beit Jala, a West Bank community near Bethlehem. It was a very tame story by today’s standards, given that we now have actual footage of Israeli soldiers committing crimes against humanity, often posted on their own social media. But then such a report had the power to shock.

Neff’s bureau staff – all of them Israeli Jews – responded in open revolt to his story. Official Israeli sources refused to speak to him. The Israel lobby in the US began a public campaign against Neff and *Time*. His editors were unsupportive, and the story was ignored by other US media. Isolated and exhausted from the attacks, Neff left his post.

I only learned of these distinguished reporters’ troubles some time after I had similar experiences covering the region as a freelance – something I did for 20 years. In my early years, I repeatedly came up against the same editorial pressures and resistance faced by Adams and Neff more than quarter of a century earlier. I felt similarly isolated, besieged, outcast – and eventually abandoned any hope of continuing to report for major west-

**The *Guardian* never had any intention of running the investigation.**

**They had duped not only me but their own Jerusalem bureau chief**

ern media outlets.

I submitted stories to both the *Guardian* – where I had previously been a staff journalist for many years – and the *International Herald Tribune*, now refashioned as the *International New York Times*.

Let me quickly illustrate an example I had with each.

The *Guardian* repeatedly shied away from running an investigation I had conducted that revealed how an Israeli sniper had knowingly shot dead a British UN official, Iain Hook, in the West Bank city of Jenin in 2002. I was the only journalist to travel to Jenin to see what had happened. Chris McGreal, the paper’s recently arrived Jerusalem correspondent, lobbied for the story on my behalf. After weeks of stalling, the paper finally, and reluctantly, agreed to run the piece on a full page.

When it appeared, however, it had been cut in half without warning. The heart of the investigation, showing how the sniper had killed Hook, had been removed. Editors claimed they had been forced to take a last-minute ad – something I knew to be impossible, because I had earlier worked in a production role at the paper. They never had any intention of running the investigation. They had duped not only me but their own Jerusalem bureau chief.

At the *Tribune*, I spent much of the first half of 2003 trying to persuade the comment editor to run an op-ed I had written arguing that the 1,000km steel and concrete wall Israel was building across the West

Bank was a land grab, taking vital farm land from Palestinian communities. It seems almost laughable now to imagine that this was a controversial view. But in those days, it was considered controversial even to refer to the separation wall as a wall.

The comment editor finally relented, but only because President George W Bush had just made a speech in which he warned that the wall must not become a land grab. Why the paper had been so frightened to run the story soon became apparent. It received what one junior editor told me was “the biggest post-bag in its history” of complaints. The Anti-Defamation League, a powerful Israel lobby group in the US, had organised a write-in campaign.

Camera, a pro-Israel media lobby group, wrote a pages-long complaint listing 10 supposed “errors” in my op-ed. I had to hurriedly write a lengthy defence to the editors – more like a minor dissertation, with footnotes – before they agreed not to publish a retraction. However, the paper caved by dedicating its entire letters page to criticism of the article.

Camera and another media lobby group, Honest Reporting, protested every time my name appeared in the IHT. Soon I was out of the door.

I could tell many more such tales.

Chris McGreal’s time in Jerusalem in this period was revealing, too. He had been a highly distinguished South Africa correspondent for the *Independent* and the *Guardian* newspapers during the apartheid era. He won many awards.

He arrived in Jerusalem for the *Guardian* in 2002 and recognised immediately that Israel was operating a similar apartheid system. However, it was only when he left

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the post in early 2006 that the paper agreed to publish a lengthy, two-part feature on the similarities between the South African and Israeli varieties of apartheid.

Those two articles are sometimes held up as an example of how the western media can be highly critical of Israel. But that's not the right conclusion to draw. McGreal's two pieces were exceptional in every sense.

No paper but the *Guardian* – and specifically the *Guardian* of that time – would have run McGreal's apartheid stories. No journalist other than McGreal would have been allowed to write them. Even so, the paper waited till he had left Jerusalem before daring to publish, knowing that he would become persona non grata, losing all access to Israeli officials.

And once the articles were published, McGreal and the paper faced a torrent of accusations that they were antisemitic. They spent many months fighting a rearguard action to deal with the fall-out.

Let us note this, too: The end of the second intifada, in about 2006, was probably a high point for liberal western media outlets like the *Guardian* in their critical approach to Israel. Why? Because traditional media was struggling to maintain narrative dominance faced with the arrival of media rivals such as al-Jazeera, brought to prominence by the new digital technology. The *Guardian* felt a need to compete on this new, uncharted digital terrain.

Briefly, the *Guardian* responded by democratising online, allowing a much wider range of journalistic voices to appear via its "Comment is Free" blog site and giving readers the freedom to comment below articles. Soon those advances would be reversed. The *Guardian* soon scrapped the blog and ended comments on any but the tamest articles. And as the digital gatekeepers got wiser, they found an array of

## As the gatekeepers got wiser, they found covert techniques to crush the new wave of dissent, from shadow-banning to algorithmic manipulations

covert techniques to crush the new wave of dissent, from shadow-banning to algorithmic manipulations.

Paradoxically, since then, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Israel's own B'Tselem human rights groups have all concluded that Israel is an apartheid state. Their verdict is backed by a ruling last year from the International Court of Justice.

But in many ways the western media have actually regressed since the mid-2000s, even as the reality of Israel's violations of international law have come into ever sharper focus. The media are no readier to refer to Israel as an apartheid state than they were 20 years ago.

The big question is why. Here is an outline of the various pressures, some practical and others structural, that keep the western media so craven towards Israel.

**Partisan reporters:** Historically, most publications – especially US outlets – have put Jewish reporters in charge of their Jerusalem bureaux, based on the probably correct assumption that, given Israel's tribal political ideology of Zionism, Jewish reporters will have better access to Israeli officials. Which, in turn, tells us that these papers are chiefly interested in what Israeli sources have to say, not what Palestinians say. In truth, western media aren't watchdogs. They don't challenge the existing power imbalance, they reproduce it.

Many of these Jewish reporters have not hidden their deep attach-

ment and partisanship towards Israel.

Many years ago, a Jewish journalist friend based in Jerusalem wrote to me after I first made this point public, stating: "I can think of a dozen foreign bureau chiefs, responsible for covering both Israel and the Palestinians, who have served in the Israeli army, and another dozen who like [the *New York Times'* then bureau chief Ethan] Bronner have kids in the Israeli army."

Imagine if you can, the *New York Times* employing a Palestinian as their Jerusalem correspondent – I know, it's inconceivable. But not just that. Employing them while the correspondent has a child working for the Palestinian Authority, or, even more precisely, one fighting in a Fatah military brigade.

Meanwhile, the BBC openly backs its Middle East online editor, Raffi Berg, even though its own whistleblowing staff have accused him of skewing the corporation's coverage of Israel and Palestine. Berg has not been shy in admitting his own tribal affiliation to Israel. In an interview about his "insider" book on Israel's spy agency Mossad, Berg states that "as a Jewish person and admirer of the state of Israel" he gets "goosebumps" of pride hearing about Mossad operations.

Berg has a framed letter from Benjamin Netanyahu and a photo of himself with the former Israeli ambassador to the UK hanging on his wall at home. He counts a former senior Mossad official as a close friend. And when the journalist Owen Jones wrote a piece revealing the near-revolt of BBC staff at Berg's role, Berg's first thought was to seek legal help from Mark Lewis, the former head of UK Lawyers for Israel, well-known for using lawfare as a way to bully and silence critics of Israel.

Can we imagine the BBC appointing a Palestinian or Arab to that

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same hyper-sensitive post and then supporting them when it emerged that they had a framed letter from the assassinated Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh and a photo with Yasser Arafat hanging on their wall at home?

**Partisan bureau staff:** It is considered entirely normal for western media to employ partisan Israeli Jews as support staff. As Neff noted, they exert subtle and sometimes not so subtle pressures on correspondents to be more sympathetic towards Israeli narratives.

An investigation by Alison Weir of *If Americans Knew* found, for example, that in 2004 Israeli staff at the AP news agency's bureau in Jerusalem had refused either to use or return video footage sent in by a Palestinian cameraman that showed Israeli soldiers shooting an unarmed youth in the abdomen. Instead, they destroyed the tape.

**Media lobby groups:** Camera and Honest Reporting operate as a pair of media sheepdogs, aggressively herding journalists into line. As I found, they can make your life very hard indeed: they can mobilise large numbers of fanatical Israel supporters to bombard publications with complaints, they can damage your credibility with your own editors, and they can alert Israeli officials to put you on a media blacklist. Most reporters see them as very dangerous organisations to cross.

**Access:** A general flaw in journalism's claim to be a watchdog on power – remember, we call ourselves the Fourth Estate – is that reporters invariably need access to high-level officials, whether for stories, steers or comments. A journalist with such a source is seen by editors as far more useful, and reliable, than one without. This is true whether one's beat is crime, politics, sport or

## A rare example of a journalist mentioning censorship was when Lucy Williamson was allowed to embed with the Israeli military

entertainment.

However, access inevitably comes at the price of independence. No one with a high-level source wants to antagonise that source – and lose access – by saying things too critical about the organisation the source has inside knowledge of.

Jerusalem correspondents are possibly even more access-dependent – in their case, on Israeli officials – than other reporters, given that critical stories of Israel are especially likely to lead to official complaints, threats of legal action and loss of access.

Remember, no editor will be keen to run a story critical of Israel before they have given Israeli officials a right of reply. At this stage, Israel, or its lobbyists, can often effectively squash a story. If Israel indicates it will push back hard, making trouble for the publication – or the media outlet assumes it will – editors are likely to pull the story rather than risk a major confrontation.

**Pressures from head office:** Notice, too, that media head offices in the US and Europe are subject to another layer of lobby pressure – this time through the lobby's association of criticism of Israel with antisemitism. Groups like the Anti-Defamation League or the Board of British Deputies are there claiming to represent local Jewish communities, who they report to be “upset,” “frightened,” “bullied” or “anxious” every time Israel is criticised.

Paradoxically, it is hardbitten editors who seem most frightened and

anxious. In 2011 the late media academic Greg Philo quoted a senior BBC editor who spoke of “waiting in fear for the phone call from the Israelis.” The priorities of western editors have been all too obvious over the past two years: desperately sensitive to those who support Israel massacring and starving the people of Gaza, while utterly insensitive to those standing in solidarity with Palestinians who are being massacred and starved to death.

The result is that the bar set for publication, if a story is critical of Israel, is far higher than it is for other regions. Just think of how readily journalists attribute atrocities in Ukraine to Russia, compared to how reticent journalists – sometime the same ones – are to identify worse crimes in Gaza as atrocities and name Israel as the responsible party.

**Israeli government censorship:** It is often not understood that Israel operates a military censorship system that limits what journalists can say. This is especially important given that much of what Jerusalem correspondents write relates to Israel's illegal military occupation.

In its severest form, that means Israel simply refuses journalists access to areas, as it has done for two years in Gaza. Or it can require them to embed with the Israeli military, as the BBC has done on several occasions during the Gaza genocide. Or it can demand that journalists don't tell important facts about what is going on.

During Israel's 2006 war on Lebanon, for example, I was the only journalist who tried to allude, as best I could, to the fact that Israel was stationing tanks firing into south Lebanon inside or next to Palestinian communities, turning the populations there effectively into human shields. Journalists mostly self-censor to avoid running up against Isra-

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el's military censor.

A rare example of a journalist mentioning the censorship system was the BBC's Lucy Williamson, when she was recently allowed to embed with the Israeli military to film the destruction of Gaza. She observed: "Military censorship laws in Israel mean that military personnel were shown our material before publication. The BBC maintained editorial control of this report at all times."

And I have a bridge to sell you.

**Israeli government control:** Israel licenses foreign correspondents by issuing them a Government Press Office card. For the past 20 years, Israel has issued the cards only to journalists formally working for a news organisation it regards as "accredited". This licensing system was tightened after new digital media platforms offered freelance journalists the chance to reach audiences outside billionaire- and state-owned media. Israel has effectively banned independent, freelance journalists, in an attempt to ensure reporting is filtered through big news organisations whose own limitations I have pointed out above.

The practical pressures listed above gain much of their force because journalists and editors have historically been afraid of being accused of antisemitism by Israel. It is tempting to overestimate this pressure. I suspect it is better seen as a cover story, rationalising the failure of journalists to do their job properly – as their reluctance to identify the Gaza genocide as a genocide illustrates.

But beyond these practical pressures, there is a deeper reason for why the western media avoid serious criticism of Israel.

Israel is integral to a continuing

## I had to rebuild my worldview from scratch – like a child, trying to make sense of all the new information I was absorbing

western colonial system of power projection into the oil-rich Middle East. Israel is the West's ultimate client state. Western establishments need Israel protected.

None of this would be so significant, of course, if our celebrated "free press" was, in fact, as free it claims. If it really served as a watchdog on power. If it really held the feet of the political class to the fire. If it really served as a Fourth Estate. Then the politicians would have no place to hide.

But that is not what the corporate media do. Instead, they echo and amplify the political establishment's priorities. They are, in fact, the media wing of the establishment.

When I was at the *Guardian*, the foreign editor – now a major columnist – once told me that he did not like his correspondents to spend more than a few years in difficult posts like the Jerusalem bureau because, given time, they were likely to "go native." At the time I did not understand what he meant. But I learned soon enough.

I moved to cover the Israel-Palestine beat as a freelance journalist in 2001. I had no editors breathing down my neck. I based myself in Nazareth, a Palestinian community inside Israel, thinking that taking a different approach – my colleagues were in Jewish areas of Jerusalem or in Tel Aviv – would make my journalism distinctive and interesting to editors back home. In fact, my different perspective made me far less interesting to editors. Indeed, as quickly became clear to me, it made

them extremely nervous of me.

But the point is this: despite my unique circumstances, it took me years to fully "deprogramme" and emerge the other side relatively whole.

I first had to unravel the conditioning and training – both ideological and professional – that had encouraged me to assume Israelis were the Good Guys and Palestinians ... well, they must be something less than the Good Guys.

And then I had to rebuild my ideological and professional worldview from scratch – like a child, trying to make sense of all the new information I was absorbing. Although I hid it at the time, the truth is it was a slow, frightening and painful awakening. Everything I believed in and trusted had crumbled to dust.

Is it any surprise that the vast majority of journalists never make such a transition. They are highly unlikely to have the opportunity to immerse themselves deeply in the lives of those "natives." They are rarely allowed the time to step off the journalism treadmill to develop a bigger perspective. They are surrounded by family, friends, colleagues and bosses, who constantly reinforce received wisdom or enforce "professional" standards that shore up the existing consensus. They are disincentivised from straying off the path, when they have a salary to earn, a career to develop, bills to pay, a family to feed.

And ultimately, of course, there is the prospect of a terrifying journey ahead, down a dark tunnel to a destination unknown. **CT**

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# *A Murder Incorporated tale of the drug wars*

A short history of the long war on drugs in Latin America  
– from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump

**T**oday, Donald Trump presides over his own Murder Incorporated, less a government than a death squad.

Many brushed off his proclamation early in his second term that the Gulf of Mexico would henceforth be called the Gulf of America as a foolish, yet harmless, show of dominance. Now, however, he's created an ongoing bloodbath in the adjacent Caribbean Sea. The Pentagon has, at the time of writing, destroyed 18 go-fast boats there and in the Pacific Ocean. No evidence has been presented or charges brought suggesting that those ships were running drugs, as claimed.

The White House has simply continued to release bird's-eye view surveillance videos (snuff films, really) of a targeted vessel. Then comes a flash of light and it's gone, as are the humans it was carrying, be they drug smugglers, fishermen, or migrants. As far as we know, at least 64 people have already been killed in such attacks.

The kill rate is accelerating. In early September, the US was hitting one boat every eight to ten days. In early October, one every two days. For a time, starting in mid-October, it was every day, including four strikes on October 27 alone. Blood, it seems, lusts for blood.

And the kill zone has been ex-

panding from the Caribbean waters off Venezuela to the Colombian and Peruvian coasts in the Pacific Ocean.

Many motives might explain Trump's compulsion to murder. Perhaps he enjoys the thrill and rush of power that comes from giving execution orders, or he (and Secretary of State Marco Rubio) hope to provoke a war with Venezuela. Perhaps he considers the strikes useful distractions from the crime and corruption that define his presidency. The cold-blooded murder of Latin Americans is also red meat for the vengeful Trumpian rank-and-file who have been ginned up by culture warriors like Vice President JD Vance to blame the opioid crisis, which disproportionately plagues the Republican Party's White rural base, on elite "betrayal."

The murders, which Trump insists are part of a larger war against drug cartels and traffickers, are horrific. They highlight Vance's callous cruelty. The vice president has joked about murdering fishermen and claimed he "doesn't give a shit" if the killings are legal. As to Trump, he's brushed off the need for congressional authority to destroy speedboats or attack Venezuela, saying: "I think we're just gonna kill people. Okay? We're gonna kill them. They're gonna be, like, dead."

But as with so many Trumpian

things, it's important to remember that he wouldn't be able to do what he does if it weren't for policies and institutions put in place by all too many of his predecessors. His horrors have long backstories. In fact, Donald Trump isn't so much escalating the war on drugs as escalating its escalation.

**W**hat follows then is a short history of how we got to a moment when a president could order the serial killing of civilians, publicly share videos of the crimes, and find that the response of all too many reporters, politicians (Rand Paul being an exception), and lawyers was little more than a shrug, if not, in some cases, encouragement.

● **Richard Nixon** (1969-1974) was our first drug-war president. On June 17, 1971, with the Vietnam War still raging, he announced a "new, all-out offensive" on drugs. He didn't use the phrase "war on drugs." Within 48 hours, however, scores of newspapers nationwide had done so, suggesting that White House staffers had fed the militarised phrase to their reporters.

Nixon's call for a drug offensive was a direct response to an explosive story published a month earlier in the *New York Times*, headlined



Colin Powell, then the United States Secretary of State, visits Colombia in the early 2000s as part of the United States' support of Plan Colombia

“G.I. Heroin Addiction Epidemic in Vietnam.” Tens of thousands of US soldiers were addicts, with some units reporting that more than 50 percent of their men were using heroin.

At press conferences, Nixon was now being questioned not just about when and how he planned to end the war in Vietnam, but whether drug users in the military would be sent to rehab or punished. What, one journalist asked, was he “going to do about” the “soldiers who are coming back from Vietnam with an addiction to heroin?”

What he did was launch what we might today think of as Vietnam’s second act, a global expansion of military operations, focused not on communists this time, but on marijuana and heroin.

In 1973, shortly after the last US combat soldier left South Vietnam, Nixon created the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Its first major operation in Mexico looked eerily like Vietnam. Starting in 1975, US agents went deep into northern Mexico, joining local police and military forces to carry out military sweeps and airborne fumigation. One report described it as a terror

campaign of extrajudicial murder and torture against rural marijuana and opium producers, mostly poor peasant farmers. The campaign treated all villagers as if they were the “internal enemy.”

Under the cover of fighting drugs, Mexican security forces, supplied with intelligence by the DEA and the Central Intelligence Agency, ferociously suppressed peasant and student activists. As historian Adela Cedillo wrote, rather than limiting drug production, that campaign led to its concentration in a few hierarchically structured paramilitary organisations that, in the late 1970s, came to be known as “cartels.”

So, the first fully militarised battlefield in the War on Drugs helped create the cartels that the current iteration of the War on Drugs is now fighting.

● **Gerald Ford** (1974-1977) responded to pressure from Congress – notably from New York Democratic Congressman Charles Rangel – by committing to a “supply-side” strategy of attacking drug production at its source (as opposed to trying to reduce demand at home). While countries in Southeast Asia, along with

Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, had been major suppliers of heroin to the US, Mexicans, long a source of marijuana, had begun to grow poppy to meet the demand from heroin-habituated Vietnam vets. By 1975, it was supplying more than 85 percent of the heroin entering the United States. “Developments in Mexico are not good,” a White House aide told Ford in preparation for a meeting with Rangel.

Ford increased DEA operations in Latin America.

● **Jimmy Carter** (1977-1981) supported the decriminalisation of pot for personal use and, in his speeches and remarks, emphasised treatment over punishment. Overseas, however, the DEA continued to expand its operations. (It would soon be running 25 offices in 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries.)

● **Ronald Reagan** (1981-1989) reigned in an era when drug policy would take a turn toward the surreal, strengthening the linkages between rightwing politics and illicit drugs. But let’s backtrack a bit. The convergence of rightwing politics and drugs began at the end of World

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War II when, according to historian Alfred McCoy, US intelligence in Italy came to rely on crime boss Lucky Luciano's growing "international narcotics syndicate," which would reach from the Mediterranean Sea to the Caribbean Sea and from Istanbul to Havana, to conduct covert anti-communist operations. Then, in 1959, after the Cuban Revolution shut down that island's lucrative drug trade, traffickers moved elsewhere in Latin America or to the United States, where they, too, joined the anti-communist cause.

The CIA then used those gangster exiles in operations meant to destabilise Fidel Castro's Cuban government and undermine the domestic antiwar movement. At the same time, the CIA ran its own airline, Air America, in Southeast Asia, which smuggled opium and heroin as a way to support that agency's secret war in Laos. And the FBI notoriously used the pretext of drug policing to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralise" political dissidents, including the Black Panthers. They worked, for example, with local police in Buffalo, New York, to frame African American activist Martin Sostre, who operated a bookstore that had become the centre of that city's Black radical politics, on trumped-up charges of selling heroin.

Nixon's creation of the Drug Enforcement Administration drew those threads together, as its agents worked closely with both the FBI in the US and the CIA in Latin America. When, after the war in Vietnam ended in defeat, Congress tried to rein in the CIA, its agents used the DEA's expansive overseas network to continue their covert operations.

By the time Reagan became president, cocaine production in the Andean region in Latin America was in full swing, with a distinctly curious dynamic in operation: the CIA would work with rightwing, repres-

## Bolivia's "cocaine colonels" took as much money as Washington was willing to offer while facilitating cocaine production for export abroad

sive governments involved in coca production even as the DEA was working with those same governments to suppress coca production.

That dynamic was caught perfectly as early as 1971 in Bolivia when the CIA helped overthrow a mildly leftist government in the first of a series of what came to be known as "cocaine coups." Bolivia's "cocaine colonels" then took as much money as Washington was willing to offer to fight their version of the drug war while facilitating cocaine production for export abroad. President Carter cut off drug-interdiction funding to Bolivia in 1980. Reagan restored it in 1983.

The rise of Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet followed the same dynamic. Pinochet partly framed his 1973 CIA-enabled coup against socialist President Salvador Allende as a front in Nixon's drug war. Working closely with the DEA, the general tortured and killed drug traffickers along with political activists as part of his post-coup wave of repression.

Meanwhile, Pinochet's allies began "to deal drugs with impunity," with Pinochet's family making millions exporting cocaine to Europe (with the help of agents from his infamous security forces).

Once in office, Reagan began escalating the drug war as he did the Cold War – and the bond between cocaine and rightwing politics tightened. The Medellín cartel donated millions of dollars to Reagan's campaign against Nicaragua's leftwing Sandinista government. The ties

were murky and conspiratorial, part of what McCoy has termed the "covert netherworld," so it's easy to fall down the deep-state rabbit hole trying to trace them, but details can be found in reporting by Gary Webb, Robert Parry, Leslie Cockburn, Bill Moyers, John Kerry, and CBS's 60 Minutes, among others.

● **George H.W. Bush (1989-1993)** engaged in a very Trump-like move in making his case to the public that the war on drugs needed to be escalated. He had the DEA go to the poorest part of Washington, DC, to entrap a low-level African American drug dealer, Keith Jackson, paying him to travel to the White House to sell an undercover agent three ounces of crack cocaine. Bush then held up the drugs on national television to illustrate how easy it was to buy narcotics. A high school senior, Jackson spent eight years in prison so Bush could do a show-and-tell on TV.

The president then ramped up funding for the war on drugs, expanding military and intelligence operations in the Andes and the Caribbean. These were the Miami Vice years, when efforts to suppress cocaine smuggling into Florida only shifted transport routes overland through Central America and Mexico. Bush's signature contribution to the War on Drugs was Operation Just Cause, in which, a few weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall in late 1989, he dispatched 30,000 Marines to Panama to arrest autocrat Manuel Noriega on drug trafficking charges. Noriega had been a CIA asset when Bush was the director of that agency. But with the Cold War over, he had outlived his usefulness.

● **Bill Clinton (1993-2001)** escalated his Republican predecessor's "tough on drugs" policies. He maintained mandatory minimum sen-

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tencing and increased the number of people serving jail time for drug offences.

In his last year in office, Clinton rolled out Plan Colombia which committed billions of dollars more to drug interdiction, but with a twist: privatisation. Washington doled out contracts to mercenary corporations to conduct field operations. DynCorp provided pilots, planes, and chemicals for the aerial eradication of drugs (which had horrible environmental consequences) and worked closely with the Colombian military. A cyber start-up, Oakley Networks, now part of Raytheon, also received Plan Colombia money to provide “Internet surveillance software” to Colombia’s National Police, which used the tech to spy on human-rights activists.

Plan Colombia led to hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths and widespread ecological devastation. The result? Estimates vary, but roughly twice as much Colombian land is now believed to be dedicated to growing coca as at the start of Plan Colombia in 2000 and the production of cocaine has doubled.

● **George W. Bush** (2001 – 2009) again escalated the war on drugs, increasing interdiction funding both domestically and internationally. He also urged Mexico’s president, Felipe Calderón, to launch his own brutal military assault on the drug cartels. By the time Calderón left office, security forces and the cartels combined had killed or disappeared tens of thousands of Mexicans.

Conceptually, Bush linked the post-9/11 Global War on Terror to the Global War on Drugs. “Trafficking of drugs finances the world of terror,” he claimed.

● **Barack Obama** (2009 – 2017), like President Carter, emphasised treatment over incarceration. Nonetheless, he took no steps to wind down

## This is how freedom ends – not with a loud decree, but with the quiet, calculated erosion of every principle we once held sacred

the war on drugs, continuing to fund Plan Colombia and expanding Plan Mérida, which his predecessor had put in place to combat cartels in Central America and Mexico.

In February 2009, the former presidents of Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia – Fernando Cardoso, Ernesto Zedillo, and César Gaviria – released a report entitled *Drugs and Democracy: Toward a Paradigm Shift*, which called for an end to the war on drugs, proposing decriminalisation and the treatment of drug use as a public health issue. The authors were establishment politicians, and Obama could have used their breakthrough report to help build a new public health consensus concerning drug use. But his White House largely ignored the report.

● **Donald Trump** (2017 – 2021) increased already high-level funding for militarised counter-narcotic operations at the border and abroad, calling for the “death penalty” for drug dealers. He also floated the idea of shooting “missiles into Mexico to destroy the drug labs,” but to do so “quietly” so “no one would know it was us.”

In Trump’s first term, he offered a now-forgotten (in the US at least) preview of the killing of civilians on boats. On May 11, 2017, DEA agents and their Honduran counterparts travelling by boat along the Patuca River opened fire on a water taxi carrying 16 passengers. A DEA agent in a circling helicopter ordered a Honduran soldier to fire his machine gun at the taxi. Four died, including

a young boy and two pregnant women, and three others were seriously injured. The incident involved 10 US agents, none of whom suffered consequences for the massacre.

● **Joe Biden** (2021 – 2025) supported de-escalation in principle and actually decreased funding for aerial drug fumigation in Colombia. He also issued blanket pardons to thousands of people convicted on federal marijuana charges. Nonetheless, like the presidents before him, he continued funding the DEA and military operations in Latin America.

● **Donald Trump** (2025-?) has opened a new front in the war against Mexico’s drug cartels in New England. The DEA, working with ICE and the FBI, claims that in August it made 171 “high-level arrests” of “members of the Sinaloa cartel” throughout Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The Boston Globe’s “Spotlight” investigative team, though, reports that most of those arrested were involved in “small dollar drug sales,” or were simply addicts, and had no link whatsoever to the Sinaloa cartel.

Trump insists that the “war on drugs” isn’t a metaphor, that it’s a real war, and as such he possesses extraordinary wartime powers – including the authority to bomb Mexico and attack Venezuela.

Considering this history, who’s to argue? Or to think that such a war could end anything but badly – or, for that matter, ever end at all? **CT**

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# *Israel's desperate quest to erase the history of genocide*

The story, built on myths and outright fabrications – of a small nation fighting for survival amid “hordes of Arabs and Muslims” – is rapidly collapsing

Israel's allies worldwide are desperately scrambling to help Tel Aviv re-establish a convincing narrative, not only concerning the Gaza genocide, but the entire legacy of Israeli colonialism in Palestine and the Middle East.

The perfect little story, built on myths and outright fabrications – that of a small nation fighting for survival amid “hordes of Arabs and Muslims” – is rapidly collapsing. It was a lie from the start, but the Gaza genocide has made it utterly indefensible.

The harrowing details of the Israeli genocide in Gaza were more than enough for people globally to fundamentally question the Zionist narrative, particularly the racist Western trope of the “villa in the Jungle” used by Israel to describe its existence among the colonised population.

People have decisively turned on Israel. What began as an alarming trend – from the Israeli viewpoint, of course – is now the irrefutable new reality. National polls indicate that support for Palestinians among US adults has risen, with 33 per cent now saying they sympathise more with the Palestinians – the highest reading so far and an increase of six percentage points from last year.

Even the once unshakeable pro-Israeli majority among Republicans is softening in favour of Palestinians,

with 35 per cent of Republicans favouring an independent Palestinian state, a significant increase from 27 per cent in 2024, demonstrating a clear shift in a segment of the Republican base.

The Israeli government is now fighting with every resource at its disposal to dominate the information war. It is focused on injecting calculated Israeli falsehoods into the discourse and aggressively blocking the Palestinian viewpoint.

Latest reports of an Israeli campaign to win social media by granting millions of dollars to TikTok and other social media influencers is only a fraction of a massive, coordinated campaign.

The war is multifrontal. On November 4, news reports revealed that Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales personally intervened to block editing access to the page dedicated to the Gaza Genocide. He claimed that the page fails to meet the company's “high standards” and “needs immediate attention.” According to Wales, that specific page requires a “neutral approach” – meaning, in practice, that blatant censorship is required to prevent the genocide from being accurately described as the “ongoing intentional and systematic destruction of the Palestinian people.”

Israel has long been obsessed with controlling the narrative on Wikipedia, a strategy predating the current Gaza genocide. Reports dating back to 2010 confirm that Israeli groups established specific training courses in “Zionist editing” for Wikipedia editors, with the explicit goal of injecting state-aligned content and shaping key historical and political entries.

The censorship campaign against Palestinians and pro-Palestinian voices is as old as the media itself. From the very start, mainstream media in the West has been structurally aligned with corporate agendas that are naturally allied with money and power; thus, the prominence of the Israeli view and the near-complete erasure of the Palestinian perspective.

Years ago, however, Israel began realising the existential danger of digital media, particularly the open spaces in social media that allowed ordinary individuals to become independent content creators. The censorship, however, took an ugly and pervasive turn during the genocide, where even the use of words like “Gaza,” “Palestine,” even “genocide,” would result in shadow-banning or outright closure of accounts.

In fact, very recently, YouTube, which was previously known for being less severe in censoring pro-



Soldiers prevent protesters from entering the Beit Lid military base on July 29, 2024, after reports that guards were suspected of raping a Palestinian detainee

Palestinian voices than META, shut down the accounts of three major Palestinian human rights organisations (Al-Haq, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights), erasing more than 700 videos of crucial footage documenting Israeli violations of international law.

Sadly, though not surprisingly, not a single mainstream social media platform is innocent of censoring any criticism of Israel. Thus, it becomes a daily practice that references to Palestine, the Gaza genocide, and the like must be written in coded language, where, for example, the Palestinian flag would be replaced by an image of a watermelon.

Many pro-Palestine activists are now highlighting the direct complicity of Western media, especially in the UK, in attempting to whitewash the rape accusations against Israeli soldiers. Instead of

using the unequivocal word “rape,” mainstream outlets refer to the horrific Sde Teiman episodes merely as “abuses.” While Israeli politicians and other war criminals are openly celebrating the so-called “abuses” and the rapists as national heroes, mainstream British and French media are still refusing to accept that the widespread torture, rape, and mistreatment of Palestinians is part of a centralised, systemic agenda, not mere individual “abuses.”

Compare this to the wall-to-wall, sensationalised coverage of alleged “mass rape” by Palestinians in southern Israel on October 7 – although no independent investigation was ever conducted, and that the claims were made by the Israeli army without credible evidence.

This is not mere bias and hypocrisy, however, but direct complicity, as stated by the Gaza Tribunal’s final statement on 26 October 2025. “The Jury finds a range of non-state actors to be complicit in genocide,” the verdict read, including “biased

media reporting in the west on Palestine and under-reporting of Israeli crimes.”

The final reckoning unfolds in the information warzone. The coming months and years mark the most critical fight for truth in the conflict’s history. Israel, relying on censorship, intimidation, and manufactured consent, will use every method to secure a victory. For Palestinians and all who champion justice, this battle for history is as consequential as the genocide itself. Israel must not be allowed to sanitise its image, because polishing genocide guarantees its repetition. **CT**

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# All of the future is at stake

An excerpt from Norman Solomon's new book, *The Blue Road to Trump Hell*.  
A PDF download of the book is available – free of charge to *ColdType* readers – at [www.coldtype.net/BlueRoad.html](http://www.coldtype.net/BlueRoad.html)

During the year after Donald Trump won the presidency again in 2024, Democratic Party leaders were mostly in restrained disarray. Vast numbers of people who had expected Trump 2.0 to be disastrous were taken aback by just how terrible 2025 quickly became. But the behaviors of top-ranking Democrats in Congress and the Democratic National Committee fell far short of meeting the dire moment. They were hidebound, rarely creative and routinely conformist – refusing to respond in ways that measured up to coping with constant emergencies doing enormous damage. The combination of fascistic Republican power and uninspiring Democratic leadership foreshadowed even worse calamities.

As the top Democrats in government, Senator Chuck Schumer and Representative Hakeem Jeffries have been symptoms and perpetrators of the party's afflictions – unable to convincingly pose as fighters for the working class. Their strongest affinities have remained elsewhere. Aside from rhetorical flourishes at times, the pair doubled down on making nice with corporate America and wealthy donors while alternating between conciliation and rote partisanship toward the rival party.

The judicial system offered scant relief from the consolidation of autocratic power in the Oval Office. The Supreme Court rarely did anything about lawful lower-court rulings other than overturn them and side with Trump. With the top court steadily compliant, the executive and legislative branches were in the firm grip of people ignoring or destroying laws they didn't like.

So, as a practical matter, a crucial tool for salvaging elements of democracy in the United States would be elec-

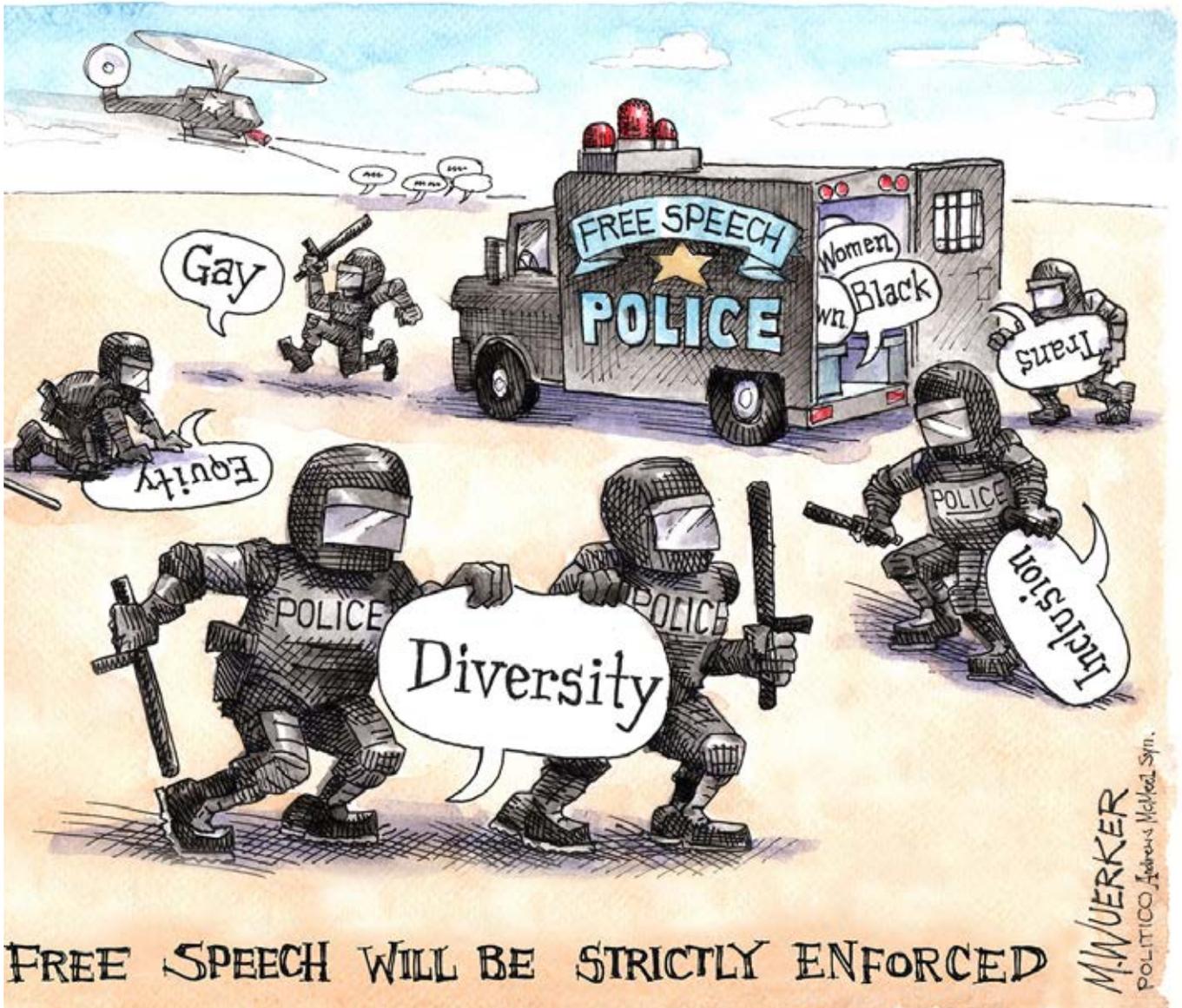


toral, while growing social movements would be vital. As when millions of protesters turned out during each No Kings Day in 2025, grassroots movement organizing could mobilize in big ways that the Democratic Party could not. Yet ousting Republicans from control of the federal government would necessarily involve electing enough candidates with a “D” after their names.

Lackluster Democratic Party leadership – coloring inside corporate lines while enmeshed with rich backers – hardly offers a plausible way to defeat the Trump forces, much less advance a humane political agenda. Saving the country from further descent into autocracy requires recognizing and overcoming the chokehold that Democratic leaders have on the party.

Ambition and fear – striving to curry favor with the party hierarchy and being careful not to antagonize it – were central to the dynamics that enabled the disaster of the Biden re-election campaign to go forward until too late. Schumer served as a key enabler. His public megaphone and party authority mostly drowned out other Senate Democrats. “I talk to President Biden regularly, sometimes several times in a week, or usually several times in a week,” Schumer said from a podium on Capitol Hill in mid-February 2024. “His mental acuity is great, it’s fine, it’s as good as it’s been over the years.... He’s fine. All this right-wing propaganda that his mental acuity has declined is wrong.”

In 2025, Schumer’s prominence was conspicuously harmful to the party’s prospects. But – in a silent echo of their acquiescence to the ill-fated Biden ’24 campaign – Schumer’s Democratic colleagues stayed publicly mum about the am-



ple reasons why Schumer should step aside from the spotlight role of their leader. A caricature of a wheeler-dealer pol in office too long, Schumer was a gift who kept on giving to Republicans as he reinforced the public image of Democrats as timeworn hacks while alienating and exasperating Democratic voters across the country.

Schumer became so unpopular with the Democratic base that he abruptly “postponed” – and didn’t reschedule – a March 2025 speaking tour for his new book. An eruption of anger at his support for Trump’s spending bill earlier in the month made Schumer realize that being confronted by irate Democrats in deep-blue states wouldn’t make for good photo ops. Yet to Schumer, leaving his Senate leadership post was unthinkable. “Look, I’m not stepping down,” he said in a TV network interview.

So, Schumer remained entrenched as central casting for the kind of leader that his party’s usual voters clearly didn’t want. Midway through 2025, a poll found that 62 percent of self-identified Democrats agreed “the leadership of the Democratic Party should be replaced with new people.” And key findings from that Reuters/Ipsos survey meant that Schumer was the party’s most important out-of-step leader.

A large majority of Democrats wanted elected officials to reduce “corporate influence,” the poll showed, while a whopping 86 percent “said changing the federal tax code so wealthy Americans and large corporations pay more in taxes should be a priority.” But Schumer’s record is the epitome of corporate influence. For decades, he has given priority to protecting the financial interests of the wealthy and large corporations.

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## Claims that Jeffries and Schumer were champions of working people clashed with the duo's eagerness to please wealthy contributors by protecting their interests

Schumer's unwelcome nickname – “the senator from Wall Street” – is longstanding and well-earned. He reached new heights as corporate America's champion on Capitol Hill during the severe financial crisis in 2008 – when he “became one of the first officials to promote a Wall Street bailout,” the *New York Times* reported. The newspaper added that Schumer was playing “an unrivaled role in Washington as beneficiary, advocate and overseer of an industry that is his hometown's most important business.”

Not surprisingly, by the time autumn 2009 arrived, more than 15 percent of the year's contributions from Wall Street to all senators had gone to Schumer.

Schumer has remained closely aligned with the very corporate interests that most Democratic voters don't want party leaders to serve. Meanwhile, floods of appreciative donations have poured into Schumer's campaign coffers from such sectors as the banking, real estate, financial and tobacco industries. At the end of 2024, Schumer's campaign committee reported a six-year donor haul of nearly \$43 million. More than one-quarter of that total came just from securities and investment companies, real estate interests, law firms and lawyers.

By clinging to his Senate minority leader post, Schumer continued to damage the capacity of the Democratic Party to rebound from its grave 2024 setbacks and its ongoing abysmal approval ratings. More to the point, Democratic senators chose to passively keep him as their top leader.

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Meanwhile, as the country reeled from the Trump regime's systematic assault on human rights and the rule of law, Schumer's counterpart in the House of Representatives was doing his part to maintain the Democratic Party's fidelity to the old ways. Hakeem Jeffries, nearly 20 years younger than Schumer, had also risen through the ranks as a devotee of top-down politics animated by the lure of big checks.

The week after Trump's return to the Oval Office, Jeffries traveled to California and met with donor powerhouses in Silicon Valley, where he reportedly “said Democrats were reaching toward the center, while Trump will swing harder right.” In effect, while aspiring to be the next House speaker, Jeffries was pledging not to stay too far away from Trump's ever more extreme right-wing politics.

Jeffries went on to laud former President Biden as a present-day political guide. In April 2025, when Biden delivered his first post-presidency speech, Jeffries told

reporters: “This is an all hands on deck moment, which is why President Biden's voice in this moment is so important.” Jeffries made the comment shortly after a CNN poll asked Democratic voters “which one person best reflects the core values of the Democratic Party” – and only 1 percent chose Biden.

While indicating that he was stuck in the past, the party's House leader also demonstrated that he was slow on the uptake. Midway through May, Jeffries sent out a fundraising text saying that he “recently announced a 10-point plan to take on Trump and the Republicans.” But the plan was no more recent than early February, just two weeks after Trump's inauguration. It was hardly reassuring that the House minority leader cited a 100-day-old memo as his strategy for countering the administration's countless moves since then to dismantle entire government agencies, attack civil rights, undermine a wide range of civil liberties and destroy life-saving programs.

Claims that Jeffries and Schumer were champions of working people clashed with the duo's eagerness to please wealthy contributors by protecting their interests. And much like their estrangement from the progressive economic views of the party's base, Schumer and Jeffries were locked into automatic support for Israel despite the outlooks of voters they supposedly represented. In August 2025, the *Economist/YouGov* Poll asked Democrats this question: “Do you think that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinian civilians?” Here are the results: Yes, 65 percent. No, 8 percent. “Not sure,” 27 percent.

At the same time, the Democratic Party could hardly afford to further alienate its base. In late summer, the *New York Times* published an in-depth analysis of voter registration data, with stunning conclusions: “The Democratic Party is hemorrhaging voters long before they even go to the polls. Of the 30 states that track voter registration by political party, Democrats lost ground to Republicans in every single one between the 2020 and 2024 elections – and often by a lot. That four-year swing toward the Republicans adds up to 4.5 million voters, a deep political hole that could take years for Democrats to climb out from.”

The possibility that the Democratic Party could actually climb out of the “deep political hole” was especially remote because its leaders continued to function as if navigating politics in some bygone era.

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Schumer's devotion to the politics of big money and re-

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## By refusing to endorse Mamdani, while participating in sly nods to completely false charges of antisemitism, Schumer was in tacit league with the billionaires

flexive backing of Israel intersected with his refusal to endorse Zohran Mamdani, the 2025 Democratic candidate for mayor of New York. The Senate's leading Democrat, a lifelong New York City resident, could not bring himself to side with the party's nominee.

The insurgent candidate, propelled by tens of thousands of volunteers, had decisively beaten the disgraced former governor Andrew Cuomo in the Democratic primary. In the general election, Mamdani again faced Cuomo, who was running on a newly created ballot line. Endorsing Mamdani should have been a no-brainer for Schumer. But he could not abide what Mamdani stood for – full support for economic justice and human rights, including the rights of Palestinian people being subjected to ethnic cleansing, mass murder and genocide.

Some billionaires went ballistic against Mamdani. A social-media screed by hedge-fund manager Bill Ackman (net worth: upward of \$9 billion) was damn near apoplectic that activists and voters had so terribly transgressed. Ackman described himself as “a supporter of President Trump” while expressing a fervent desire “to save the Democratic Party from itself.” Mamdani's policies, Ackman wrote after his primary win, “would be disastrous for NYC. Socialism has no place in the economic capital of our country.”

Another billionaire, Michael Bloomberg, had pumped \$5 million into a super PAC behind Cuomo during the primary campaign. After Mamdani became the party's nominee, floodgates opened wider as ultra-wealthy magnates poured money into stop-Mamdani efforts. In late summer, 10 weeks before Election Day, *Truthout* reported:

As expected, billionaires and billionaire-owned companies such as Airbnb and DoorDash are now spending big to defeat Mamdani and influence the race.

An analysis of new campaign finance filings by influence trackers at the nonprofit public interest research organization LittleSis found that multiple billionaires and their companies have funneled more than \$19 million into political action committees (PACs) that support Cuomo or oppose Mamdani and other candidates. With names such as Fix the City, Inc. and Affordable New York, such super PACS provide a vehicle for elite New Yorkers and corporate interests to influence public opinion on the race.

For example, the short-term rental company Airbnb reported a \$5 million donation to Affordable New York, a group that has spent heavily on city races and reported spending \$1.3 million opposing Mamdani and his

progressive ally, city comptroller Brad Lander. According to SEC filings, Airbnb's three billionaire co-founders – Brian Chesky, Nathan Blecharczyk, and Joe Gebbia – collectively control 79 percent of the voting power at the company.

By refusing to endorse Mamdani, while participating in sly nods to completely false charges of antisemitism, Schumer was in tacit league with the billionaires furiously trying to prevent a popular democratic socialist from becoming mayor. For his part, Jeffries waited four months after the primary until endorsing Mamdani just before voting began in the general election “Worst of all, Democrats like Schumer and Jeffries are shooting their party in the foot,” *The New Republic* senior editor Alex Shephard wrote in September. “Mamdani is a dynamic, charismatic candidate unlike any the party has seen for years. In June, he beat Cuomo, a former governor, by more than 10 points by activating middle-class voters... Predominantly renters, Mamdani's voters were also disproportionately young, Asian, and Hispanic – all groups that moved toward Trump in last year's election, and that Democrats will need if they want to take back Congress and the White House.”

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The sordid tale of the party establishment's response to the Mamdani campaign ran parallel to the saga of two Gaza resolutions at the semi-annual meeting of the Democratic National Committee in late August 2025. It was the first DNC gathering convened by its new chair Ken Martin; he had replaced Jaime Harrison, whose four-year term was marked by steady subservience to his patron Joe Biden.

The new meeting gave the governing body of the Democratic Party a chance to finally oppose the US government's arming of the Israeli government while it engaged in genocide. But the DNC's leadership was determined to derail a resolution calling for “an arms embargo and suspension of military aid to Israel.”

Maneuvering to sidetrack that resolution, Martin and all five vice chairs sponsored a counter-resolution doing little more than repeat the kind of hollow rhetoric that President Biden and Vice President Harris had offered as the Gaza massacres continued during their last 15 months in office. Martin and the vice chairs “aimed to blunt the power of the resolution on Gaza by introducing their own, watered-down resolution that stops far short of calling for an end to arms shipments to Israel,” my RootsAction colleague Sam Rosenthal pointed out.

The tactic was reminiscent of the approach that

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## A Gallup poll in July found that only 8 percent of Democrats said they approved of Israel's military action in Gaza

had helped to defeat the Democratic ticket the previous year, when pre-election polling clearly showed that opposition to arming Israel was a majority view among voters. Recycling much the same approach in summer 2025 was even more oblivious to the roar of public opinion.

On the eve of the DNC meeting, I put a question to the most powerful vice chair, Jane Kleeb (also the president of the ASDC association of state party chairs, “the only national party organization focused exclusively on the current and future needs of State Democratic Parties”). Did she support or oppose, or have a neutral position on, the arms-embargo resolution? Kleeb would only reply: “I’ve sponsored a resolution on Gaza with other officers. I hope everyone comes to the table with agreed upon joint language.”

The DNC member sponsoring the arms-embargo resolution, Allison Minnerly, was a 26-year-old youth organizer in Central Florida. Minnerly told me that she wasn’t closed to the possibility of accepting amendments to her resolution, but it must “keep the core message.” That message – “an arms embargo and suspension of military aid to Israel” – was exactly what provoked such strong opposition from DNC leaders. Their counter-resolution didn’t even slightly criticize Israel for its large-scale killing of Palestinian people, by then in its twenty-third month.

Just days earlier, the *Guardian* had reported that “figures from a classified Israeli military intelligence database indicate five out of six Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in Gaza have been civilians, an extreme rate of slaughter rarely matched in recent decades of warfare.” The official estimate of the carnage in Gaza – 60,000 direct deaths, including 18,500 children – was very likely a significant undercount. Meanwhile, by providing upward of 69 percent of Israel’s arms imports, the United States was making it all possible.

Along with backing from all the vice chairs, Martin’s resolution got some outside help in the drafting process. “This resolution was crafted with the input of Democratic Majority for Israel, a group whose super PAC worked to oust former Representatives Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush,” *The Nation* reported. Predictably, Democratic Majority for Israel put out a press release denouncing the arms-embargo resolution. But by then, the accurate name for the group would be Democratic Minority for Israel.

One poll after another in 2025 found that – in the words of a summer headline over a Brookings Institution analysis – “support for Israel continues to deteriorate, es-

pecially among Democrats and young people.” A Gallup poll in July found that only 8 percent of Democrats said they approved of Israel’s military action in Gaza. The polling lined up with the conclusions from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other (including Israeli) human rights organizations that unequivocally reported Israel was committing genocide in Gaza.

Minnerly’s resolution for suspending military aid gained notable support from young Democratic leaders. The president of the official College Democrats of America organization (also a DNC member), Sunjay Muralitharan, tweeted: “As the National President of @CollegeDems I’m proud to co-sponsor the DNC Resolution calling for an arms embargo and explicit recognition of a Palestinian State. Young Americans have made their voices clear. A modern Democratic Party must stand against global injustice.” The chair of High School Democrats of America put out a similar statement.

But the DNC leadership stood its pro-Israel ground against a large majority of Democrats nationwide.

The top of the DNC power structure exerted pressure on Minnerly to dilute or withdraw her resolution, but she refused to be intimidated. When we spoke days before the meeting, her tone was measured, emphatic and resolute. In response to questions about her approach to organizing, she emphasized that “we don’t wait for change: we create it. It isn’t easy, but it’s worth fighting for policies and ideals that represent you.”

Abiding by the wishes of Chair Martin, the Resolutions Committee unanimously approved his counter-resolution and then – with an unaccountable voice vote – overwhelmingly defeated Minnerly’s resolution. Martin then withdrew his counter-resolution and announced he would appoint a “task force” to study issues related to Israel and Palestinians. While civilians in Gaza continued to die from bombs, bullets and starvation, the DNC was in no rush to question the status quo.

The Democratic National Committee’s leadership was simultaneously guilty of political malpractice and moral depravity – actively complicit with what most of the nation’s Democrats understood to be genocide. The DNC thus continued its drift into a sealed-off political galaxy, far away from where most Democrats actually were in the United States.

The party’s distance from young adults was especially huge. And power-broker Democrats persisted in the political equivalent of eating – or even discarding – the

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## Newsom could be understood as a cautionary case of a presidential hopeful giving opportunism a bad name as he moved rightward

party's seed corn, with little regard for much of a future. Inevitably, every election cycle, more young voters would be replacing old ones. But party leaders did not seem to grasp or care that moral politics and pragmatic politics could boost each other – or that spurning moral politics could be the opposite of pragmatic.

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“It should come as no great surprise that a Democratic Party which has abandoned working class people would find that the working class has abandoned them,” Senator Bernie Sanders tweeted immediately after the 2024 election. “While the Democratic leadership defends the status quo, the American people are angry and want change.”

A year later, the Democratic Party seemed mostly stuck in the mud of the past, as if mired in the Joe Biden era of pinning election hopes on revulsion toward Donald Trump. Yes, the cascading horrors of Trump 2.0 called for fierce opposition – but just denouncing the regime's bottomless pit of evils was not a good bet for ending GOP control of Congress in 2026 or the presidency in 2028.

President Biden's unspeakably tragic refusal to forgo running for re-election until far too late was enabled by top-to-bottom party dynamics and a follow-the-leader conformity that remains all too real. Pandering to potential big donors – part and parcel of what Sanders described as abandoning the working class – can easily seem like just another day in elected office.

A story about California Governor Gavin Newsom, often touted as perhaps the leading Democratic contender for president in 2028, is in the category of “you can't make this stuff up.” As *Politico* reported in the spring of 2025, he was “making sure California's business elite can call him, maybe. Roughly 100 leaders of state-headquartered companies have received a curious package in recent months: a prepaid, inexpensive cell phone... programmed with Newsom's digits and accompanied by notes from the governor himself. ‘If you ever need anything, I'm a phone call away,’ read one note to a prominent tech firm CEO, printed on an official letterhead, along with a hand-scrawled addendum urging the executive to reach out... It was Newsom's idea, a representative said, and has already yielded some ‘valuable interactions.’”

There were, of course, no reports of Newsom sending cell phones programmed with his number to advocates for the working class and social justice. If they awaited a message from Newsom like “If you ever need anything,

I'm a phone call away,” the wait would most likely last forever.

Newsom could be understood as a cautionary case of a presidential hopeful giving opportunism a bad name as he moved rightward. During years as California's governor, he got into a rhythm of vetoing state legislation that would have helped domestic workers, farm workers, undocumented immigrants and striking workers.

In the age of Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg and the like – with iron heels of mega-capital marching along while crushing democratic structures – Newsom has been among the Democratic elites racing to stay within shouting distance of oligarchs and their allies. At the same time, in some arenas, Newsom has pushed back against Trump.

As the decade entered its second half, progressives faced the paradoxical challenge of helping to build a united front inclusive of anti-Trump corporatists and militarists, even while fighting against corporatism and militarism. The need involved a dialectical approach, recognizing the twin imperatives of defeating a viciously anti-democratic Republican Party while working to gain enough power to implement truly humane agendas.

For those agendas, electoral campaigns and their candidates are vital – and should be energized as subsets of social movements, not the other way around.

If a fascistic takeover of the federal government continues, any possibility of fulfilling a progressive agenda would go out the Overton window along with residual elements of democracy. Words of the young Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton, murdered in 1969 by the Chicago police (colluding with the FBI), ring profoundly true now: “Nothing is more important than stopping fascism, because fascism will stop us all.”

What has routinely passed for the Democratic Party's opposition to the Trump regime comes across as little more than forgettable rhetoric and rote activities. Holding town halls around the country, or raising money to file lawsuits against the Trump administration's lawless actions, or appealing for funds to defeat Republicans in the next election are all well and good. But simply following party “leadership” that isn't leading much of anywhere is no substitute for daily grassroots outreach and systematic organizing in communities nationwide.

“An individual is no match for history,” says the narrator of a novel by the Chilean anti-fascist Roberto Bolaño. That observation might not be open to dispute. But many individuals propelling social movements can be another matter.

**CT**

# *The Caribbean faces two choices over Venezuela*

It must decide whether to become incorporated into the US military apparatus or affirm its own sovereignty and become a 'zone of peace'

President Donald Trump has authorised the USS Gerald R. Ford to enter the Caribbean. It now floats north of Puerto Rico, joining the USS Iwo Jima and other US navy assets to threaten Venezuela with an attack.

Tensions are high in the Caribbean, with various theories floating about regarding the possibility of what seems to be an inevitable assault by the US and regarding the social catastrophe that such an attack will occasion.

CARICOM, the regional body of the Caribbean countries, released a statement affirming its view that the region must be a "zone of peace" and that disputes must be resolved peacefully. Ten former heads of government from Caribbean states published a letter demanding that "our region must never become a pawn in the rivalries of others."

Former Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Stuart Young said on 21 August, "CARICOM and our region is a recognised zone of peace, and it is critical that this be maintained". Trinidad and Tobago, he said, has "respected and upheld the principles of non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and for good reason." On the surface, it appears as if no one in the Caribbean wants the United States to attack Venezue-

la. However, the current Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar (known by her initials as KPB), has openly said that she supports the US actions in the Caribbean. This includes the illegal murder of eighty-three people in twenty-one strikes since 2 September 2025.

In fact, when CARICOM released its declaration on the region being a zone of peace, Trinidad and Tobago withdrew from the statement. Why has the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago gone against the entire CARICOM leadership and supported the Trump administration's military adventure in the Caribbean?

Since the Monroe Doctrine (1823), the United States has treated all Latin America and the Caribbean as its "backyard." The United States has intervened in at least thirty of the thirty-three countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (90 percent of the countries, in other words), from the US attack on Argentina's Malvinas Islands (1831-32) to the current threats against Venezuela.

The idea of the "zone of peace" emerged in 1971 when the UN General Assembly voted for the Indian Ocean to be a "zone of peace." In the next two decades, when CARICOM debated this concept for the Carib-

bean, the United States intervened in, at least, the Dominican Republic (after 1965), Jamaica (1972-1976), Guyana (1974-1976), Barbados (1976-1978), Grenada (1979-1983), Nicaragua (1981-1988), Suriname (1982-1988), and Haiti (1986).

In 1986, at the CARICOM summit in Guyana, the Prime Minister of Barbados, Errol Barrow, said "My position remains clear that the Caribbean must be recognised and respected as a zone of peace... I have said, and I repeat, that while I am prime minister of Barbados, our territory will not be used to intimidate any of our neighbours be that neighbour Cuba or the USA."

Since Barrow made that comment, Caribbean leaders have punctually affirmed, against the United States, that they are nobody's backyard and that their waters are a zone of peace. In 2014, in Havana, all members of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) approved a "zone of peace" proclamation with the aim "of uprooting forever threat or use of force" in the region.

Persad-Bissessar or KPB has rejected this important consensus across political traditions in the Caribbean. Why is this so?

In 1989, trade union leader Basdeo Panday formed the United National Congress (UNC), a centre-left formation (whose former name was the

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Caucus for Love, Unity, and Brotherhood). KPB joined Panday's party and has remained in the UNC since then.

Throughout her career till recently, KPB stayed at the centre of the UNC, arguing for social democratic and pro-welfare policies whether as opposition leader or in her first term as Prime Minister (2010-2015). But even in her first term, KPB showed that she would not remain within the bounds of the centre-left but would tack Far-Right on one issue: crime.

In 2011, KPB declared a State of Emergency for a "war on crime." At her home in Phillipine, San Fernando, KPB told the press, "The nation must not be held to ransom by groups of thugs bent on creating havoc in our society", "We have to take very strong action," she said, "very decisive action."

The government arrested seven thousand people, most of them released for lack of evidence against them, and the government's Anti-Gang Law could not be passed: this was a policy that mimicked the anti-poor campaigns in the Global North. Already, in this State of Emergency, KPB betrayed the legacy of the UNC, which she dragged further to the Right.

When KPB returned to power in 2025, she began to mimic Trump with "Trinidad and Tobago First" rhetoric and with even harsher language against suspected drug dealers. After the first US strike on a small boat, KPB made a strong statement in support of it: "I have no sympathy for traffickers, the US military should kill them all violently."

Pennelope Beckles, who is the opposition leader in Trinidad and Tobago, said that while her party (the People's National Movement) supports strong action against drug trafficking, such action must be "lawful" and that KPB's "reckless

statement" must be retracted. Instead, KPB has furthered her support of the US militarisation of the Caribbean.

Certainly, Trinidad and Tobago faces a tight knot of economic vulnerability (oil and gas dependence, foreign exchange shortages, slow diversification) and social crises (crime, inequality, migration, youth exclusion). All of this is compounded by the weakness of State institutions to help overcome these challenges.

The weakness of regionalism further isolates small countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, which are vulnerable to pressure from powerful countries. But KPB is not only acting due to pressure from Trump; she has made a political decision to use US force to try and solve her country's problems.

What could be her strategy?

First, get the United States to bomb small boats that are perhaps involved in the centuries-old Caribbean smuggling operations. If the US bombs enough of these little boats, then the small smugglers would rethink their transit of drugs, weapons, and basic consumer commodities.

Second, use the goodwill generated with Trump to encourage investment into Trinidad and Tobago's essential but stagnant oil industry. There might be short-term gain for KPB. Trinidad and Tobago requires at least \$300 million if not \$700 million a year for maintenance and for upgrading its petrochemical and Liquefied Natural Gas plants (and then it needs \$5 billion for offshore field development and building new infrastructure).

ExxonMobil's massive investment in Guyana (rumoured to be over \$10 billion) has attracted attention across the Caribbean, where other countries would like to bring in this kind of money. Would companies such as ExxonMobil invest in Trini-

dad and Tobago?

If Trump wanted to reward KPB for her unctuousness, he would tell ExxonMobil CEO Darren Woods to expand on the deepwater blocks investment his company has already made in Trinidad and Tobago. Perhaps KPB's calculation to set aside the zone of peace ideas will get her some more money from the oil giants.

But what does this betrayal break? It certainly disrupts further any attempt to build Caribbean unity, and it isolates Trinidad and Tobago from the broader Caribbean sensibility against the use of the waters for US military confrontations. There are real problems in Trinidad and Tobago: rising gun-related violence, transnational trafficking, and irregular migration across the Gulf of Paria.

These problems require real solutions, not the fantasies of US military intervention. US military interventions do not resolve problems, but deepen dependency, escalate tensions, and erode every country's sovereignty. An attack on Venezuela is not going to solve Trinidad and Tobago's problems but might indeed amplify them.

The Caribbean has a choice between two futures. One path leads toward deeper militarisation, dependency, and incorporation into the US security apparatus. The other leads toward the revitalisation of regional autonomy, South-South cooperation, and the anti-imperialist traditions that have long sustained the Caribbean's political imagination. **CT**

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