

JEREMY CORBYN, BENJAMIN NETANYAHU AND THE SUFFERING PEOPLE OF GAZA

Jonathan Cook | Yvonne Ridley | Ramzy Baroud

ColdType

ISSUE 167

WRITING WORTH READING ● PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

SEPTEMBER 2018

A private investigator
shows how privacy
is impossible in today's
surveillance culture

DO WE
HAVE THE
RIGHT
TO BE
FORGOTTEN?



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Do we have the right to be forgotten?

A private eye explains why privacy is impossible in today's surveillance culture

NOW that we know we are surveilled 24/7 by the National Security Agency, the FBI, local police, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google, hackers, the Russians, the Chinese, the North Koreans, data brokers, private spyware groups like Black Cube, and companies from which we've ordered swag on the Internet, is there still any "right to be forgotten", as the Europeans call it? Is there any privacy left, let alone a right to privacy?

In a world in which most people reveal their intimate secrets voluntarily, posting them on social media and ignoring the pleas of security experts to protect their data with strong passwords – don't use your birth date, your telephone number, or your dog's name – shouldn't a private investigator, or PI, like me be as happy as a pig in shit? Certainly, the totalitarian rulers of the 20th-century would have been, if such feckless openness had been theirs to abuse.

As it happens, tech – or surveillance capitalism – has disrupted the private investigation business as much as it's ripped through journalism, the taxi business, war making, and so many other private and public parts of our world. And it's not only celebrities and presidential candidates whose privacy hackers have burned through. Israeli spyware can steal the contacts off your phone just as LinkedIn did to market itself to your friends. Google, the Associated Press reported recently, archives your location even when you've turned off your phone. Huge online database brokers like Tracers, TLO, and IRB-

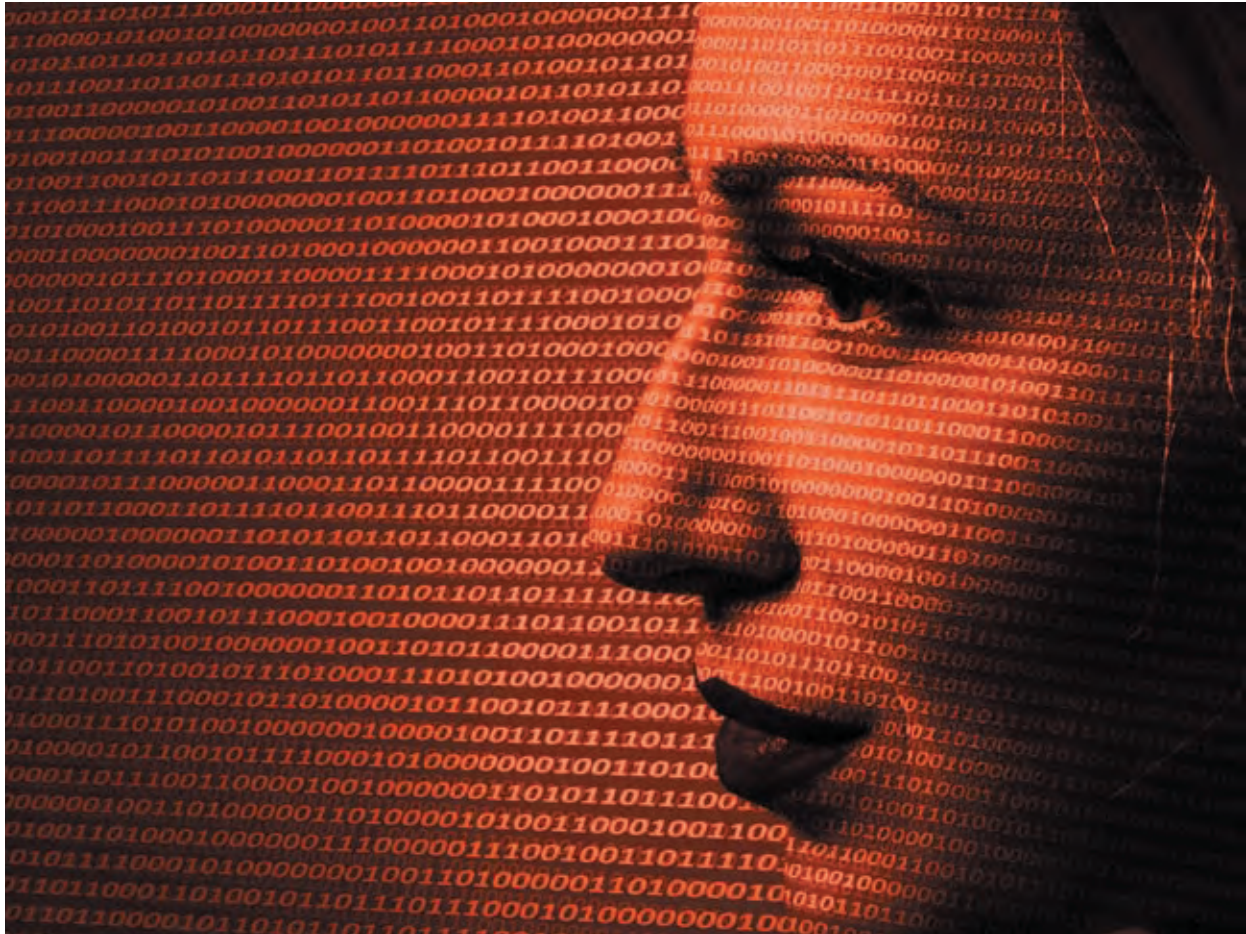
search that law enforcement and private eyes like me use can trace your address, phone numbers, email addresses, social media accounts, family members, neighbours, credit reports, the property you own, foreclosures or bankruptcies you've experienced, court judgments or liens against you, and criminal records you may have rolled up over the years.

Ten years ago, to subscribe to one of these databases, I had to show proof that I was indeed a licenced investigator and pass an on-site investigation to ensure that any data I downloaded would be protected. I was required to have a surveillance camera and burglar alarm on the building where my office was located, as well as a dead bolt on my office door, a locked filing cabinet, and double passwords to get into my computer. Now, most database brokers just require a PI or attorney licence and you can sign right up online. Government records – federal and state, civil and criminal – are also increasingly online for anyone to access.

Smartphones have become one of the primo law enforcement tools other than the Internet

The authoritarian snoops of the last century would have drooled over the surveillance uses of the smartphones that most of us now carry. Smartphones have, in fact, become one of the primo law enforcement tools other than the Internet. "Find my iPhone" can even find a dead

JUDITH COBURN



Art: Alexander / 123RF Stock Photo

body – if, that is, the victim left her iPhone on while being murdered. And don't get me started on the proliferation of surveillance cameras in our world.

Take me. I had a classic case that shows just how traceable we all now are. There was a dead body, a possible murder victim, but no direct evidence: no witnesses, no DNA, no fingerprints, and no murder weapon found. In San Francisco's East Bay, however, as in most big American cities, there are so many surveillance cameras mounted on mom-and-pop stores, people's houses, bars, cafes, hospitals, toll bridges, tunnels, even in parks, that the police can collect enough video, block by block, to effectively map a suspect driving around Oakland for hours before hitting the freeway and heading out to dump a body, just as the defendant in my case did.

Once upon a time, cops and dirty private eyes would have had to attach trackers to the under-

carriages of cars to follow them electronically. No longer. The particular suspect I have in mind drove his victim's car across a bridge, where cameras videotaped the licence plate but couldn't see inside the car; nor, he must have assumed, could anyone record him on the deserted road he finally reached where he was undoubtedly confident that he was safe. What he didn't notice was the CALFIRE video camera placed on that very road to monitor for brush fires. It caught a car's headlights matching his on its way to the site he had chosen to dump the body. There was no direct evidence of the murder he had committed, just circumstantial, tech-based evidence. A jury, however, convicted him in just a few hours.

In our world of the unforgotten, tech is seen as a wonder of wonders. Juries love tech. Many jurors think tech is simply science and so beyond

disbelief. As a result, they tend to react badly when experts are called as defence witnesses to disabuse them of their belief in tech's magic powers: that, for instance, cellphone calls don't always pinpoint exactly where someone was when he or she made a call. If too many signals are coming in to the closest tower to a cell phone, a suspect's calls may be rerouted to a more distant tower. Similarly, the FBI's computerised fingerprint index often makes mistakes in its matches, as do police labs when it comes to DNA samples. And facial recognition systems, the hottest new tech thing around (and spreading like wildfire across China), may be the most unreliable of all, although that certainly hasn't stopped Amazon from marketing a surveillance camera with facial recognition abilities.

Should I rush to a belly-dancing class to see if his fiancée and the teacher go back to her motel?

These days, it's hard to be a PI and not become a tech junkie. Some PIs use tech to probe tech, specialising, for example, in email investigations in big corporate cases in which they pore through thousands of emails. I recently asked a colleague what it was like. "It's great", he said. "You don't have to leave your office and for the first couple of weeks you entertain yourself finding out who's having affairs with whom and who's gunning for whom in the target's office, but after that it's unspeakably tedious and goes on for months, even years".

When I started out, undoubtedly having read too many Raymond Chandler and Sue Grafton novels, I thought that to be a real private eye I had to do the old-fashioned kind of surveillance where you actually follow someone in person. So I agreed to tail a deadbeat mom who claimed to be unemployed and wanted more alimony from her ex. She turned out to be a scofflaw driver, too, a regular runner of red lights. (Being behind her, I was the one who got the tickets, which I tried to bill on my expense report to no avail.) But tailing her turned out to make no difference, except to my bank account. Nor did tech. Court papers had already given us her phone and address but no

job information. Finally, I found her moonlighting at a local government office. How? The no-tech way: simply by phoning an office where one of her relatives worked and asking for her. "Not in today", said the receptionist helpfully and I knew what I needed to know. It couldn't have been less dramatic or noir-ish.

These days, tech is so omnipresent and omnivorous that many lawyers think everything can be found on the Internet. Two lawyers working on a death-penalty appeal once came to see me about working on their case. There had been a murder at a gas station in Oakland 10 years earlier. Police reports from the time indicated that there was a notorious "trap house" where crack addicts were squatting across from the gas station. The lawyers wanted me to find and interview some of those addicts to discover whether they'd seen anything that night. It would be a quick job, they assured me. (Translation: they would pay me chump change.) I could just find them on the Internet.

I thought they were kidding. Crack addicts aren't exactly known for their Internet presence. (They may have cellphones, but they tend not to generate phone bills, rental leases, utility bills, school records, mortgages, or any of the other kinds of stuff databases collect that you might normally rely on to find your quarry.) This was, I argued, an old-fashioned shoe-leather-style investigation: go to the gas station and the trap house (if it still existed), knock on doors to see if neighbours knew where the former drug addicts might now be: Dead? Still on that very street? Recovered and long gone?

In a world where high-tech is king, I didn't get the job and I doubt they found their witnesses either.

You'd think that, in a time when tech is the story of the day, month, and year and a presidential assistant is even taping without permission in the White House Situation Room, anything goes. But not for this aging PI. I mean, really, should I rush over to a belly-dancing class in Berkeley to see if some guy's fiancée and the teacher go back to her motel together? (No.) Should I break into

JUDITH COBURN

an ex-lover's house to steal memos she'd written to get him fired? (Are you kidding?) Should I eavesdrop on a phone call in which a wife is trying to get her husband to admit that he battered her? (Not in California, where the law requires permission from every party in a phone call to be on the line, thereby wiping out such eavesdropping as an investigative tool – only cops with a warrant being exempt.)

I certainly know PIs who would take such cases and I'm not exactly squeaky clean myself. After all, as a journalist working for *Ramparts* magazine back in the 1960s, I broke into the basement of the National Student Association (with another reporter) to steal files showing that the group's leaders were working for the CIA and that the agency actually owned the very building they occupied. In a similar fashion, on a marginally legal peep-and-trespass in those same years, another reporter and I crawled through bushes on the grounds of a VA Hospital in Maryland where we had been told that we could find a replica of a Vietnamese village being used to train American assassins in the CIA's Phoenix program. That so-called pacification programme would, in the end, kill more than 26,000 Vietnamese civilians. We found the "village", secretly watched some of the training, and filed the first piece about that infamously murderous program for New York's *Village Voice*.

Those ops were, however, in the service of a higher ideal, much like smartphone videographers today who shoot police violence. But most of surveillance capitalism is really about making sure that no one in our new world can ever be forgotten. PIs chasing perps in divorce cases are a small but tawdry part of just that. But what about, to take an extreme case in which the sleazy meets the new tech world big time, the FBI's pursuit of lovers of kiddy porn, which I learned something about by taking such a case? The FBI emails a link to a fake website that it's created to all the contacts a known child pornographer has on his computer or phone. It has the kind of bland come-on pornographers tend to use. If you click on that link, you get a menu advertising yet more

links to photos with titles like "my four-year-old daughter taking a bath." Click on any of those links and you'll be anything but forgotten. The FBI will be at your door with cuffs within days.

Does someone who devours child porn have a right to be forgotten? Maybe you don't think so, but what about the rest of us? Do we? It's hardly a question anymore.

When all the surveillance techniques on those information databases work, it's like three lemons lining up on a one-armed bandit. Recently, for instance, a California filmmaker called me, desperate. She was producing a movie about the first Nepalese woman to climb Mount Everest. Her team had indeed reached the summit, but were buried in an avalanche on the way down with only one survivor. The filmmaker wanted to find that man.

Could I do so? She didn't have enough money to send me to Nepal. (Rats!) But couldn't I find him on the Internet? His name, she told me, was Pemba Sherpa. What's his family name, I asked? That's when I found out that "sherpa" isn't just a Western term for Nepalese who guide people up mountains; it's the surname of many Nepalese. Great! That's like asking me to find John Smith with no birth date, social security number, address, or even the Nepalese equivalent of the state where he lives. In my mind's eye, I could instantly see my database search coming up with the always frustrating "your search criteria resulted in too many records found". I also had my doubts that, despite the globalisation of our tech world, most Nepalese were on the Internet.

Amazingly, however, checking out "sherpas", I promptly found a single Pemba in my search, unfortunately with – the bane of a PI's life – not another piece of information.

I suddenly saw a link to a Portland alternative newspaper story from the mid-1990s

Okay, Google, I thought, it's all yours. No Pemba on the first five pages of my search there. (Groan.) But it was late at night and I was feeling obsessive, so I kept going. (Note to home investigators: don't give up on Google after those first few pag-

JUDITH COBURN

es.) From earlier research, I had discovered that one of the main Nepalese communities outside that country was in Portland, Oregon, where many mountaineering companies are also based. On maybe my 28th Google page, I suddenly saw a link to a Portland alternative newspaper story from the mid-1990s. (Who was even scanning in such articles back then?)

I clicked on it. The piece was about a Portland Pemba Sherpa who had gone back to his native village to help its inhabitants get electricity. The article went on to say that he had left Nepal “because too many of his friends had died on the mountain”. Hmmm. It also reported that he was married to a mathematics teacher at a Portland community college.

We’re talking about a more-than-20-year-old article! Still, the next morning I doggedly called the college and yes, his wife was teaching math there. I was patched through to the math department where, yes again, the wife picked up and, yes, her husband was the sole survivor of that climb, and she was sure he’d want to be interviewed for the movie.

Bingo! The actual wonders of the Internet and a heartwarming story about someone who needed to be found. Finding an ancient nanny to invite to the wedding of a guy she had raised – after they had been out of contact for decades – proved a similarly happy search. But that’s rare. The question, not just for PIs but for all of us, is this: Should everyone be so track down-able, even if they don’t wish to be? Some investigators, in the spirit of the moment, think that if there’s

an unknowable about anyone, it should be uncovered. The journalist who outed novelist Elena Ferrante really thought he’d done something, but it was just another in an increasing number of mean-spirited gotchas of our era.

Why do people need privacy anyway? The freedom and community that Internet utopians promised us has led instead to the scraping open of our lives by law enforcement, social media, hackers, marketers, and the world’s governments. Now we’re left largely to our own devices when it comes to what little we can do about it and the global surveillance culture that it’s enmeshed all of us in.

Back in the late 1960s, Erwin Knoll, editor of the *Progressive* magazine, made President Richard Nixon’s enemy list. That qualified him to be wiretapped by the FBI, so he asked his wife Doris to call female friends every day and discourse on grisly gynaecological matters to disturb the listening agents (mostly male in those days). Erwin wondered if they wouldn’t think it was some kind of code.

Alexa! I just got back from my gynaecologist and ...

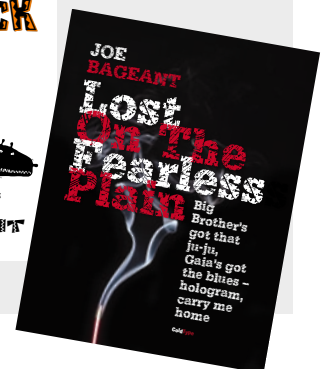
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Judith Coburn spent 40 as a journalist before becoming a private eye, specialising in death-penalty cases and searches for people whom filmmakers and writers want to find for their movies and books. This essay first appeared at www.tomdispath.com

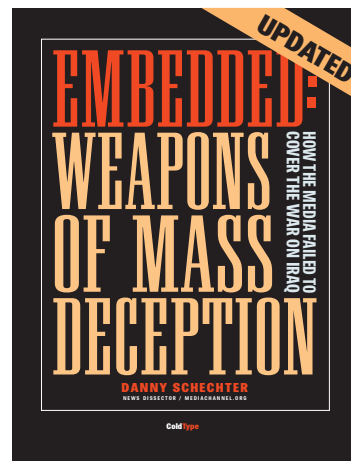
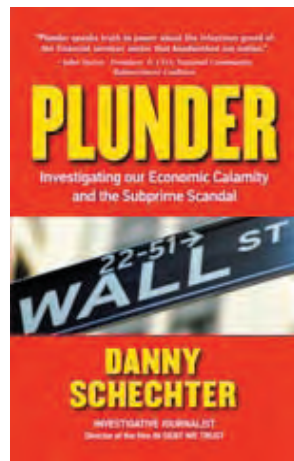
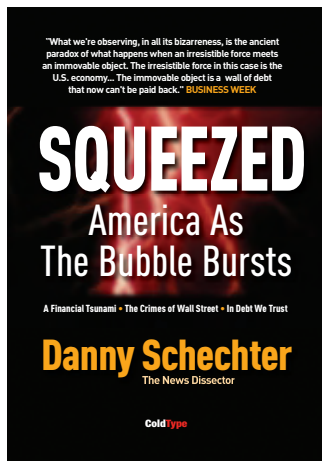
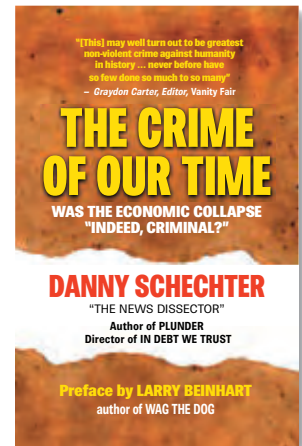
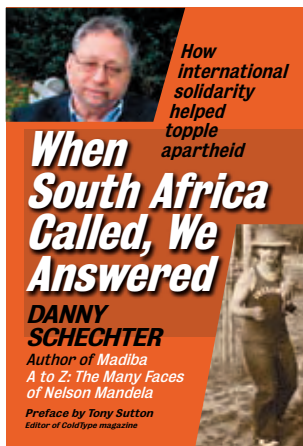
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REMEMBERING DANNY SCHECHTER 1942 - 2015



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Danny Schechter, the NewsDissector, was acclaimed as one of the most politically astute journalists in recent memory. As a tribute to him and an appreciation of his work with ColdType, we are giving away free downloads of these seven books, all published in association with ColdType.net. Download them at:

<http://coldtype.net/SchechterBooks.html>

JACKIE SLOAN

The bomb that ended the Troubles

Newspaper photographer captures the horror of a bomb blast that killed 31 people in a small town in Northern Ireland on August 15, 1998.

10 **T** was the worst single atrocity of the Northern Ireland Troubles, a devastating explosion in the heart of a small market town on a busy Saturday afternoon 20 years ago. Four months after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement offered a political future, this final act of terror was the full stop on a 30-year sentence of death.

The Omagh bombing by the renegade “Real IRA” group claimed 31 lives: young and old, male and female, Catholic and Protestant, unionist and nationalist, republican and loyalist, local and foreign, born again and unborn.

In the shocked aftermath of a blast which left scores maimed by serious injuries and thousands more coping with trauma, nobody this time could claim exclusive victimhood in an act of terror perpetrated by ‘them’ against ‘us’. For in this single act of cruelty that brought a small town to its knees, the Real IRA bombers unintentionally brought Northern Ireland to its senses. – *Darach MacDonald*

● Jackie Sloan was the chief photographer of the Ulster Herald at Omagh. He died on December 24, 2017

● Darach MacDonald is a former editor of the Ulster Herald. He is the author of five books, including *Hard Border: Walking Through a Century of Irish Partition*.



Rescue workers remove the body of one of the victims of the bombing.





Firemen use cranes
in search for victims

JACKIE SLOAN



ABOVE: An exhausted fireman takes a break from the exhausting task of sifting through the rubble at Market Street.
BELOW, RIGHT: Tearful remembrance as three police officers take flowers to the scene of the tragedy.

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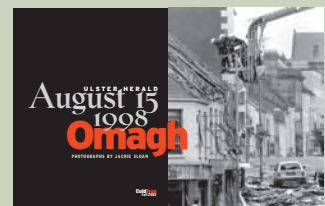


A child reaches out to touch one of the floral tributes.



See more of Jackie Sloan's photographs and reporting of the Omagh bombing from the Ulster Herald in ColdType's special report, from published in 2002, at:

[http://coldtype.net/Assets/pdfs/0.Omagh\(02\).pdf](http://coldtype.net/Assets/pdfs/0.Omagh(02).pdf)



Jeremy Corbyn hit by Israel's 'dirty tricks'

Israeli group submits freedom of information request as evidence grows of Netanyahu government's meddling in UK politics

HAS Israel been covertly fuelling claims of an “antisemitism crisis” purportedly plaguing Britain’s Labour Party since it elected a new leader, Jeremy Corbyn, three years ago?

That question is raised by a new freedom of information request submitted by a group of Israeli lawyers, academics and human rights activists. They suspect that two Israeli government departments – the ministries of foreign affairs and strategic affairs – have been helping to undermine Corbyn as part of a wider campaign by the Israeli government to harm Palestinian solidarity activists.

The Israeli foreign affairs ministry employs staff of the country’s embassy in London, which was at the centre of suspicions of meddling in UK politics provoked by an Al Jazeera undercover documentary aired last year.

Eitay Mack, an Israeli lawyer, has written to both ministries requesting information on Israel’s contacts and possible funding of anti-Corbyn activities by pro-Israel lobby groups in the UK. The letter specifically seeks information on possible ties with the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Community Security Trust, Labour Friends of Israel and Conservative Friends of Israel. It also requests information on any efforts by the two Israeli ministries and the Israeli embassy to influence journalists and civil society groups in the UK.

The move follows an outburst by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on social media

last month, in which he accused Corbyn of laying a wreath at a cemetery in Tunisia in 2014 for a Palestinian faction that took hostage Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972. Eleven Israelis were killed during a bungled rescue bid by the German security services.

Netanyahu’s high-profile intervention followed days of similar claims in the British media against Corbyn. The Labour leader has insisted that the wreath was laid for Palestinian and Tunisian victims of an Israeli attack on Tunisian soil in 1985, an operation that was denounced by most Western leaders at the time.

The suggestion that Corbyn supported Palestinian terrorists is an escalation in long-running allegations of a dramatic rise in antisemitism in the Labour Party since he became leader. Such claims have been rife despite statistics showing that the party has less of a problem with antisemitism than both the ruling Conservative Party and British society generally.

While initial charges of antisemitism in the party targeted mostly Corbyn supporters, the focus has increasingly shifted to the Labour leader himself.

At the end of August, Labour MP Joan Ryan, who heads Labour Friends of Israel, wrote a commentary in the *Jewish Chronicle* newspaper directly blaming Corbyn for the party’s so-called antisemitism crisis. She said the party’s problems had grown out of his “past associations

JONATHAN COOK



NETANYAHU: High-profile meddling in UK politics.

with ‘Holocaust deniers, terrorists and some out-right anti-Semites’”.

Fellow MP Margaret Hodge had earlier called Corbyn “an anti-Semite and racist”.

Marie Van Der Zyl, president of the Board of Deputies, appeared this week on i24, an Israeli English-language channel, to berate Corbyn: “It’s like Jeremy Corbyn has declared war on the Jews. ... We as the Jewish community are spending our time fighting the leader of the opposition.”

A recently created British group, the Campaign Against Antisemitism, solicited testimony this week from British Jews in a case it has submitted to the UK’s Equality and Human Rights Commission alleging “institutional racism” in the Labour Party.

Netanyahu’s tweet is far from the first example of public meddling by Israel in Labour politics. Last December Gilad Erdan, Israel’s strategic affairs minister and a close ally of Netanyahu’s, all but accused Corbyn of being an anti-Semite.

He was reported saying: “We recognise and we see that there are antisemitic views in many



CORBYN: Erroneous criticism amplified.

of the leadership of the current Labour Party.”

An Israeli app developed by Israel’s strategic affairs ministry was reportedly used this month to amplify erroneous criticism of Corbyn on social media for making supposedly antisemitic comments at a 2010 meeting.

A “mission” issued to Israel lobbyists urged them to spread claims that Corbyn had compared Israel to Nazi Germany, based on a misreading of a report in London’s *Times* newspaper. In fact, Corbyn had attended an anti-racism event at which a Holocaust survivor, Hajo Meyer, made such a comparison. But, while these interventions have angered Corbyn and many of his supporters, there are suggestions that, behind the scenes, Israel has been playing a much larger role in helping to stoke the party’s “antisemitism crisis,” as the freedom of information request suggests.

The main source of Labour’s current woes looks to be Israel’s strategic affairs ministry, which has been headed by Erdan since 2015.

It was set up in 2006, mainly as a vehicle to prevent far-right politician Avigdor Lieberman from breaking up the governing coalition. Lieberman and his successors used it chiefly as a platform from which to stoke concerns either about Iran building a nuclear bomb or about a supposed problem of “Palestinian incitement”.

But more recently, Netanyahu has encouraged the ministry to redirect its energies towards what he terms “delegitimation”, chiefly in response to the growing visibility of the international Boycott, Disinvestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, which promotes boycott, divestment and sanctions of Israel.

As a result, the strategic affairs ministry has moved from being a relative backwater inside the government to playing a starring role in Israel’s struggle on the world stage against “enemies” damaging its image. It is hard to determine precisely what the ministry is up to, so sensitive is its work. Even the names of many of its staff are classified. In the summer of 2016, it advertised a position for an intelligence operative to head a “tarnishing” – or dirty tricks – unit. Its role, according to Amir Oren, a commentator on Israel’s security services, was to “establish, hire or tempt nonprofit organisations or groups not associated with Israel, in order to disseminate the sully material”.

The ministry now has an annual budget of tens of millions of dollars, and there are clues aplenty that it is playing a leading, if covert, role in shaping public perceptions of Israel around the world. Erdan’s number two, Sima Vaknin-Gil, a former military intelligence officer, told a parliamentary committee in 2016 that most of the ministry’s activities had to stay “under the radar” because of “sensitivities”. “I can’t even explain in an open forum why there are such sensitivities,” she said. The ministry’s job, she added, was to build a “community of warriors”.

Yossi Melman, a veteran Israeli analyst who has spent decades covering Israel’s intelligence services, reported at the time that the ministry was receiving help from a “special unit” of military intelligence to run “black ops” that might include “defamation campaigns” and “harassment”.

The ministry’s underhand methods were alluded to two years ago, at a conference in Israel against BDS. A colleague of Erdan’s, intelligence minister Yisrael Katz, called for “targeted civil eliminations” of high-profile proponents of BDS.

That could be achieved, he suggested, by drawing on information provided by the Israeli intelligence services he oversees.

Katz used language intended to play on the term “targeted assassinations” – how Israel describes its extrajudicial execution of Palestinian leaders. Katz appeared to be calling for “black ops” designed to character-assassinate Israel’s leading critics.

If Israel regards it as necessary to go to such lengths against BDS activists, it seems reasonable to ask: what is it prepared to do to undermine Corbyn, who heads the largest political party in Europe and was in sight of winning last year’s British general election?

If Corbyn eventually becomes prime minister, he would be the first European leader to prioritise the cause of justice for Palestinians over Israel’s continuing occupation.

Clues are provided in a report written last year by two prominent pro-Israel lobby groups, the Anti-Defamation League and the Reut Institute, in collaboration with Israeli government “experts” and endorsed by the ministry of strategic affairs. The report was leaked to the *Electronic Intifada* website.

It warned that solidarity with Palestinians had “migrated into mainstream left-wing parties in Europe”. The damage could be curtailed, according to the report, by “driving a wedge” between what it termed “harsh critics” and “soft critics” of Israel.

It proposed “professionalising” the existing network of pro-Israel lobby groups and improving “information-gathering” to target Palestinian solidarity activists – or what it called a “delegitimation network”. Such work needed to be done “covertly” and “uncompromisingly,” the authors stated.

Harsh critics, the report concluded, could then be “marginalised to a point where it [their criti-

cism] is considered socially inappropriate”.

The report praises the Israeli ministry of strategic affairs for having “inserted a great degree of sophistication and creativity to the pro-Israel network”.

Vaknin-Gil, the ministry’s director-general, is quoted in the document as endorsing its findings: “I am glad to see that we share a very similar point of view regarding the challenge and desired strategy.”

Whether connected or not, much of the report reads like a playbook for what Israel lobbyists have been doing to promote the idea of an “antisemitism crisis” in the Labour Party. The issue has indeed driven a wedge between “harsh critics” of Israel – Corbyn and his supporters – and much of the rest of the party bureaucracy.

Asa Winstanley, an investigative journalist who has extensively covered the claims of an antisemitism crisis in the Labour Party for the *Electronic Intifada*, argues that Corbyn is viewed by Israel as effectively the “figurehead of the delegitimisation network”.

“They hope that by taking action against him, they can decapitate what they see as the most powerful figure in this network,” he told Middle East Eye. “By making an example of him, they can sow division, spread fear and suppress speech on Israel.”

Certainly, Israel’s fingerprints look to be present in the current claims of an antisemitism crisis supposedly revolving around Corbyn.

Active interference by the Israeli government in British politics was highlighted last year in a four-part undercover documentary produced by the Qatari channel Al Jazeera. It secretly filmed the activities of an operative in Israel’s embassy in London named Shai Masot.

The Al Jazeera investigation provoked numerous complaints that it breached broadcasting rules relating to antisemitism, bias, unfair editing and invasions of privacy. However, Ofcom, the British broadcasting regulator, cleared the programme of all charges.

What little coverage there was of the documentary in the British media focused on Masot’s meetings with pro-Israel activists in the Conservative Party. Masot is shown plotting to “take

down” a junior foreign office minister, Alan Duncan, who was seen by Israel as too sympathetic to the Palestinians.

But the documentary itself concentrated on Masot’s much more extensive meetings with pro-Israel activists in the Labour Party. One of his main efforts was to establish a front organisation, a youth wing of Labour Friends of Israel that would have been opposed to Corbyn.

Masot was also filmed collaborating with two key Israel lobby groups within the party, the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM) and Labour Friends of Israel – membership of the latter includes dozens of Labour MPs.

Winstanley, of the *Electronic Intifada*, observed that the JLM had in recent years become a largely defunct organisation until it was revived in February 2016 – just as claims of an antisemitism crisis in Labour took off.

Those who have tried to investigate how the JLM expanded its operations so rapidly say its funding sources are “completely opaque”.

Shortly after the JLM became more active, a new director, Ella Rose, was appointed. It was Winstanley who revealed that Rose had been recruited straight from Israel’s London embassy, where she worked as its public affairs officer.

Although the JLM has argued it represents the diversity of Jewish opinion in the Labour Party, that has come under challenge since the Al Jazeera investigation. A new faction, Jewish Voice for Labour, has since been established with a declared intention to show that many of the party’s Jewish members are supportive of Corbyn.

“It looks suspiciously like the JLM has become a proxy of the Israeli state,” Winstanley said.

“It is not an organic grassroots movement, as it likes to claim. And it is no accident that it has been the driving force behind the claims of an antisemitism problem under Corbyn.”

Both Ella Rose and the JLM were contacted for comment on these allegations, but neither had responded at the time of publication.

Who was Masot working for? Perhaps not

surprisingly, Israeli officials and the Israeli media have downplayed his significance, portraying him as a minor player at the embassy who pursued a rogue, personal policy. That view appeared to be accepted by the British government and the British media, which allowed the controversy to quickly die down after Masot was sent back to Israel.

But there is considerable evidence that Masot's collaborative work with British pro-Israel organisations against Corbyn was being carried out at the direction of the Israeli ministry of strategic affairs. In September 2016, as Al Jazeera was filming its undercover documentary, *Haaretz* reported on a growing turf war in Britain between the Israeli foreign ministry and the ministry of strategic affairs, the two groups targeted in the freedom of information request.

In a leaked cable sent to the Israeli foreign ministry and obtained by *Haaretz*, its senior staff at the London embassy complain that Erdan's strategic affairs ministry is "operating" British Jewish organisations behind the embassy's back.

The embassy's apparent concern is that such operations are likely to break British law and could have "dangerous" repercussions for the embassy's work. "Britain isn't the US!" the cable states.

Haaretz explained the concern behind the cable: "The potential legal problem stems from the fact that most British Jewish organisations are defined as charities. As such, they are barred from activity of a political nature unless it is directly connected to the organisation's charitable goals."

According to the *Haaretz* report, strategic affairs minister Gilad Erdan had visited Britain two weeks earlier to try to iron out differences. His advisers in the UK had promised "not to pose as the embassy," though the cable identifies an incident shortly afterwards when one such adviser did so.

Was Masot another of Erdan's "advisers" in the UK, operating out of the embassy? His covert operations – caught on camera – are of precisely the kind his own embassy was complaining about.

At one point during Al Jazeera's many weeks

of secret filming, Masot dramatically changes direction. He announces to the undercover reporter that he can no longer be directly involved in creating a Labour youth movement and must remain in the background. He is seen winking at the reporter. His sudden change of tune appears to coincide with the spat between the embassy staff and the strategic affairs ministry.

One Labour activist, who did not wish to be named given the purges taking place inside the party, told *MEE*: "Corbyn is up against an unholy, ad hoc alliance of right-wing MPs in both the Labour and Tory parties, the Israeli government and its lobbyists, the British security services and the media.

"They have settled on antisemitism as the best weapon to use against him because it is such a taboo issue. It's like quicksand. The more he struggles against the claims, the more he gets sucked down into the mire."

That has been all too evident in months of wrangling inside Labour about how to define antisemitism. Under pressure from Corbyn's critics, the party approved a new code of conduct in July based on a highly controversial "working definition" drafted in 2016 by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

The adoption of the IHRA definition, however, did nothing to placate Jewish leadership organisations, such as the Board of Deputies, or the JLM. They objected because Labour's code of conduct excluded four of the IHRA's 11 possible "examples" of antisemitism – the main ones that relate to Israel.

Labour officials feared that including them would severely curtail the party's ability to criticise Israel. Experts agree. David Feldman, director of the Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism at Birkbeck College, London University, has warned of "a danger that the overall effect will place the onus on Israel's critics to demonstrate they are not anti-Semitic".

Under pressure from pro-Israel groups, however, Labour looks close to adopting all of the IHRA examples. Israel's fingerprints are evident in these recent efforts to redefine antisemitism

JONATHAN COOK

in a way that moves the centre of gravity away from hatred of Jews towards criticism of Israel.

That shift inevitably ensnares any political leader who, like Corbyn, wishes to express solidarity with Palestinians.

The IHRA's definition is itself based on one proposed in 2004 – and discarded after much criticism – by a now-defunct European Union body called the Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). That definition was derived from the work of Israeli academics such as Dina Porat, who was part of an Israeli foreign ministry delegation to an anti-racism conference in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. At that time Israel was facing a barrage of criticism for its use of lethal force to put down a Palestinian uprising.

Nathan Thrall, an analyst in Jerusalem with the International Crisis Group, has noted that the aim of Porat and others was to create “a new definition of antisemitism that would equate criticisms of Israel with hatred of Jews”. They were largely responsible for the way the EUMC’s “working definition” was formulated.

But Israel and its lobbyists were frustrated by the definition’s failure to gain traction. That began to change in 2015. A conference in Jerusalem sponsored by the Israeli foreign affairs ministry, the Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism, recommended that year that the working definition of antisemitism “be reintroduced into the international arena with the aim of giving it legal status”.

The task was taken up by a senior pro-Israel lobbyist, Mark Weitzman, of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Centre. As chair of the IHRA’s committee on antisemitism and Holocaust denial, he lobbied on behalf of the discredited EUMC definition. The IHRA formally adopted it in 2016.

In a new book, *Cracks in the Wall*, analyst Ben White points to an Israeli government document that approved the change of emphasis in the definition. The document states: “The main innovation in the working definition is that it also includes expressions of antisemitism directed against the state of Israel, when it is perceived as

a Jewish collective.”

A tool originally intended to suppress student debates about Israel and block Israel anti-apartheid week on campus has now been successfully pressed into service against the leader of a major British political party.

According to Winstanley, if the full IHRA definition is approved by Labour: “It will be open season on Corbyn and his supporters in the party.” He added that the strategy outlined in the report by the Anti-Defamation League and the Reut Institute was being closely followed. “Well-tested disinformation strategies are being used to isolate Corbyn from his base of support,” he said.

The Israeli academics and lawyers seeking access to information on the activities of the two Israeli ministries – foreign affairs and strategic affairs – believe that official documents could help to expose a role played by Israel in fomenting the current problems facing Corbyn.

The foreign ministry has demonstrably been at the centre of efforts to expand the definition of antisemitism from hatred of Jews into a catch-all for criticism of Israel – a definition that Corbyn and his supporters are bound to fall foul of.

The role of the strategic affairs ministry, given its covert nature, is harder to assess. But the existence of a “dirty tricks” unit points towards a strategy to vilify and isolate high-profile Palestinian solidarity activists such as Corbyn.

There is evidence that, in cooperation with the foreign affairs ministry, it has run at least one agent out of the London embassy assisting and possibly directing pro-Israel lobby groups to amplify a supposed antisemitism crisis in the Labour party.

Given his long track record of being at the forefront of anti-racism initiatives that have emphasised Palestinian solidarity and criticism of Israel, Corbyn may find there is an endless supply of readily mined “scandals” the two ministries can keep digging up. **CT**

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So, who supports terror, Mr Netanyahu?

Israel's prime minister should be careful when he accuses others of supporting terrorists

BENJAMIN Netanyahu has dived headlong into the furore engulfing UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, revealing the most blatant meddling to-date by Israel in British politics. What's more, he's done it armed with lies and distortions.

The Israeli Prime Minister blasted Corbyn for apparently paying tribute to those behind the 1972 Munich massacre in which 11 Israeli Olympic athletes were killed. The allegations were thrown at Corbyn after photographs emerged in the right-wing media of him attending a wreath-laying ceremony in 2014 at a cemetery in Tunisia.

Incorrect reports suggested that Corbyn had joined a ceremony eulogising the Palestinians who took part in the Munich atrocity. Their bodies, though, are buried in Libya, where they were flown after being killed German security forces in an ill-fated attempt to rescue the Israeli athletes. A funeral procession was held from Tripoli's Martyr's Square to Sidi Munaidess cemetery back in 1972.

While Corbyn protested that the Israeli leader's "claims about my action and words are false", Netanyahu himself had already taken to the social networks.

"The laying of a wreath by Jeremy Corbyn on the graves of the terrorists who perpetrated the Munich massacre and his comparison of Israel to the Nazis deserves unequivocal condemnation from everyone – left, right and everything in between", he wrote on Twitter.

The wreath laying in question was actually marking the 1985 air strike by Israel on the Tunisian capital which was condemned around the globe at the time. Details of exactly what took place at the memorial ceremony have been confirmed by Dr Mohammed Shtayyeh, a minister from the Palestinian Authority, who stood next to Corbyn in 2014.

Despite the Labour leader's efforts to clear his name, a tsunami of condemnation has been raised on the social networks by supporters of Israel and British politicians, including some within Labour ranks who want to oust Corbyn. The direct involvement of both Israel and Netanyahu in the plot to remove Jeremy Corbyn is now apparent following the prime minister's inaccurate contribution to the Twitter storm which has been concocted with a plethora of fake details.

Corbyn was in Tunisia in 2014 for a conference aimed at solidifying relations between the Palestinian factions Fatah, which controls the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and Hamas, which has effectively formed the government in the Gaza Strip since it won the 2006 Palestinian elections. During the conference, delegates went to the Palestinian cemetery at Hammam Chott to pay tribute to those killed in the 1985 Israeli air strike on what was then the PLO headquarters.

Eight fighter jets of the Israeli Air Force took part in the raid on October 1 1985; the operation was codenamed Wooden Leg. The F-15s took off



TABLOID TALES: Never let the truth get in the way of a knife in the back ...

from Tel Nor airbase near Tel Aviv and flew low over the Mediterranean Sea to avoid detection by Egyptian, Libyan and US radar. The six-minute attack on the PLO HQ in the seaside town killed 47 people, including 15 Tunisian civilians, and injured another 65.

The rogue action was condemned worldwide; even British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher joined in by criticising the Israelis, something else that Netanyahu has chosen to forget in his rush to attack Corbyn.

The UN Security Council also registered its anger and “condemned vigorously the act of armed aggression” by Israel in Resolution 573 on October 4. Although the US abstained from the 14-0 vote, it did not use its veto to block the resolution, which branded the deed as an “act of armed aggression perpetrated by Israel against Tunisian territory

in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, international law, and norms of conduct”. US President Ronald Reagan changed his original position, and instead of calling the bombing a “legitimate response”. he said that it “cannot be condoned”.

Anti-Corbyn individuals and groups, in their desire not to let the facts spoil a good story, have been posturing and gesturing since the Tunisian photographs were published, and calling on Corbyn to resign.

Among them has been Home Secretary Sajid Javid, whose Conservative Party has sought to exploit the controversy by choosing – conveniently some might say – to forget Thatcher’s words at the time of the Israeli air strike on Tunisia. The late prime minister’s speech was made on the 40th anniversary of the UN, where she contested the assertion of the then Israeli leader Shimon Peres that the attack was justified.

Archives reveal that at a meeting with Peres, held at the UN Plaza Hotel on October 23 1985, Thatcher is reported (by Charles Powell) to have said she had “recoiled” from Israel’s attack on Tunis with the killing of many civilians. “There was no legal or historical justification for Israel’s occupation of the West Bank. Nor was it right that Israel should now deny the Palestinians the rights which Israel had sought for herself for more than 2,000 years”, she added.

For those left in any doubt at her feelings about the issue, the so-called Iron Lady went on to condemn the Israeli air strike during a meeting in

YVONNE RIDLEY

the House of Commons on 29 October when – according to Hansard, the official parliamentary record – she was asked during Prime Minister’s Questions to comment on the Israeli bombing of Tunis. “We have in fact condemned the attack on Tunis”, she told the House.

In conclusion, it is clear that Corbyn did not lay a wreath at the Tunisian graveyard, nor was the event held to commemorate those from the Black September group who carried out the terror attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics. Their graves are in Libya.

For Corbyn to travel to Tripoli to lay a wreath at the graves of those responsible for the Munich massacre would be regarded as offensive as, for example, Israeli terrorists and their supporters from Irgun gathering annually at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem to celebrate the killing of 91 people, including 28 Britons, in a bomb attack on July 22 1946. Oh, but hang on a minute... that’s exactly what has been done in Jerusalem for decades.

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While most of the perpetrators were not around for the 70th anniversary of the terrorist atrocity in 2016, a plaque was unveiled by former Irgun terror gang members and right-wing politicians at the King David Hotel 10 years earlier on the 60th anniversary. It reads: “The hotel housed the Mandate Secretariat as well as the Army Headquarters. On July 22, 1946, Irgun fighters at the order of the Hebrew Resistance Movement planted explosives in the basement.

Warning phone calls had been made urging the hotel’s occupants to leave immediately. For reasons known only to the British, the hotel was not evacuated and after 25 minutes the bombs exploded, and to the Irgun’s regret and dismay 91 persons were killed”.

To kill 91 innocent people and then blame the victims for not acting on the warning is deplorable. But to then go on to hold annual gatherings to commemorate the event and even unveil a plaque on the 60th anniversary is even more disturbing.

Netanyahu and Britain’s anti-Corbyn Lobby should tweet about that. They won’t, of course, because they are fully at ease with Israel acting with impunity, even to the extent that Israel’s prime minister commemorates the killing of British citizens by “Jewish terrorists” in 1946, and interferes blatantly in the affairs of an independent sovereign state as part of the efforts to have the leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition discredited and thus less likely to win the next general election.

Such interference in British democracy is totally unacceptable; Netanyahu has dug himself into a hole in a graveyard full of untruths, but Britain, as all Members of Parliament must make clear to Israel’s lobbyists, is not the United States of America. His words just won’t wash here. **CT**

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Gaza goes without cancer medicine

UN ambassador Nikki Haley blames Arabs for Washington's sins

ON Sunday, August 12, news from Gaza was distressing: The Ministry of Health announced that it would no longer be able to treat cancer patients in the Israel-besieged Strip.

“Colon and lung cancer, as well as lymphoma patients, cannot be provided with the necessary therapy now,” said Dr. Mohammed Abu Silmiya, director of Abdulaziz Al-Rantisi Hospital for Children.

Israel is ultimately responsible for the Gaza siege which has extended for more than 11 years. With direct US backing, Israel has launched three major wars on Gaza in the name of fighting terrorism, destroying much of the tiny region's infrastructure. A hermetic siege has punished ordinary Gazans, who are now lacking everything, including the most basic needs of clean water and electricity.

Now, even chemotherapy is no longer available.

But the war on the Palestinians has been a joint venture right from the start. The US has stood by Israel for many years and, as of late, orchestrated the demise of Gaza.

Washington has done everything in its power to isolate the impoverished Strip: It warned Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah Party against reconciliation with its Hamas rivals. It fuelled and sustained the Israeli war and siege on Gaza. It backed Israel politically on every available platform to shield Tel Aviv from its war crimes in the Strip and throughout

Occupied Palestinian Territories.

For many years, the US acted as if a peace broker. Although the American act failed to impress Palestinians, it perpetuated the illusion in the minds of US allies that US administrations are forces for good, standing at an equal distance between two parties in an even-handed 'conflict'.

The arrival of Donald Trump's to the White House has ended the charade. While the new administration brazenly defied international law by moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, it also took a series of measures to financially punish international bodies that extended recognition, political support or any sort of aid to Palestinians. In the course of a few months, the US took on the United Nations culture agency, UNESCO, pulled out of the UN Human Rights Council and has cut aid to the Palestinian refugee agency, UNRWA.

The attack on UN organisations was led by the US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, who has played a central role in the new, anti-Palestinian discourse.

But she is not alone. In an article for CNN, Haley, along with US ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, Jared Kushner, senior adviser to the President and Jason Greenblatt, US representative for international negotiations, articulated an American point of view that read like textbook Israeli Zionist narrative.

They placed all the blame on Palestinians and

spared Israel from any wrong-doing.

“Unfortunately,” they wrote, “ Hamas’ malign activity is pushing Israel to engage in increasingly significant acts of self-defense. As in the case of past conflicts, Hamas starts a clash, loses the battle and its people suffer. That is the reality that needs to change”.

That was on July 23. A day later, Haley, using twisted language, chastised Arabs for failing Palestine and the Palestinians. In an eight-minute address to the UN, Haley spoke as if a pro-Palestinian activist, agonising over the losses and suffering of the Palestinian people.

“Country after country claims solidarity with the Palestinian people ... Talk is cheap. No group of countries is more generous with their words than the Palestinians’ Arab neighbours,” she said.

She lamented: “But all of the words spoken here in New York do not feed, clothe or educate a single Palestinian child. All they do is get the international community riled up.”

Welcome to ‘post-truth’ America.

While the Arabs are expected – in fact, required – to stand in solidarity with their Palestinian brethren, the primary reason for the subjugation of the Palestinian people is the continued US support for Israel.

Since 1999, the US has supported Israel through 10-year long Memorandums of Understanding. According to these arrangements, support for Israel does not require Senate approval and, despite the massive aid, it still does not include missile defense funding.

The last US president to sign a decade-long commitment of funding to Israel, which is set to last between 2019-2028, was President Barack Obama, who provided Israel with more money than any other president in US history.

According to US Congressional Research Service, as of April 2018, “Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of US foreign assistance since World War II.” This means that, to date, “the United States has provided Israel \$134.7-billion in bilateral assistance and missile defence funding.”

Most of that military assistance has been used to fight Palestinians and Arab neighbours, to support the Israeli military occupation of Palestine and to reinforce the Israeli blockade of Gaza. For Haley to rebuke Arabs for not doing enough to help Palestinians is simply disingenuous.

As harmful as US military support for Israel and the manipulation of the comparatively limited aid to Palestinians as it has been, US interference in Palestinian political affairs has been equally destructive.

The blatant American interference in Palestinian politics is juxtaposed with complete subordination to the Israeli government, regardless of the fact that Tel Aviv has moved sharply to the right, and is increasingly shedding any claims to true democracy. Considering that the US anti-Palestinian and pro-Israel stances have accentuated in recent months, one is hardly moved by Haley’s false sympathy with Gaza and the Palestinians. Only weeks before she criticised the lack of Arab support, she lectured the international community on Israel’s benevolent approach to what she saw as Palestinian violence.

“No country in this chamber would act with more restraint than Israel has,” she said on May 15, shortly after many UN ambassadors stood up for a minute’s silence to mourn 60 Palestinians who were killed while peacefully protesting the siege at the fence separating Gaza from Israel.

Haley’s peculiar attacks on unsupportive Arab governments is designed to distract from the US’s own role that has emboldened Israel and held Palestinians prisoners to military Occupation and an inhumane siege for far too long.

CT

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Ven Ho 47 (Edge of the Lake 47), a beer joint in my new home town, Ea Kly in Vietnam.

Of ants and asskicking

Welcome to my new neighbourhood: the Vietnamese town of Ea Kly,
241 miles from Saigon (and 14,500 miles from my old haunt in Philadelphia)

TRINH CONG SON, the great songwriter, poet and soul of Saigon, said that he got his heart and mind revving each morning by watching frantic life unfurling all around him, while sitting in a sidewalk cafe. Lesser Vietnamese do exactly the same, however, for to be among one's own kind is practically an hourly necessity here. The second they're free, most head straight for the nearest cafe, eatery or beer joint, which is still most

likely on the sidewalk, or open to it.

At the next table here in Ea Kly, my new home in Vietnam, there is a man, woman and a baby girl, nursing from a bottle. Sunlight floods in, ceiling fans barely cool, while just outside, motorcycles swarm past, beeping too often. Up and down the street are scores of similar joints, with most specialising in just one or two noodle or rice dishes.

There is also a McDonald's, overpriced by lo-

LINH DINH



Dai Su Huynh meets the Equalizer.

cal standards, yet still filled, for it's a destination for the nouveau riche, and for regular people to sometimes treat their kids, to expose them to how white people eat. Just out of sight is a billboard showing Denzel Washington, looking super cool with some sort of mean-assed rifle.

A dark, wiry, dude rides by on a bicycle with a speaker that repeats, "I buy air conditioners, refrigerators and sewing machines". Now and then, a lottery ticket seller strays in, but none are children, as in the '90's, and there are almost no beggars left, and gone, absolutely, is the appalling spectacle of kids in rags, waiting for a diner to finish his meal, so they can eat whatever's leftover, even if it's just a bit of broth.

This eatery is known for its braised pork offal served with French bread, and for its cubed beef, presented on a cow-shaped skillet. I like to write here because it's free from distracting music, and because a can of Tiger beer is a reasonable 73 cents. Seeing me typing, the owner asks, "Do you need me to turn on the light, brother?"

"No, I'm fine, sister. Thank you!"

It's this comfort with being on top of each other all the time that has helped the Vietnamese to survive, I think, for their togetherness is constant and literal. To the Vietnamese, the masses are not an abstraction, but a relentless experience they actually enjoy. By contrast, most Americans would not put up with this nonstop proximity of other bodies. Americans only get a chance to belong to a crowd at a rare football game, NASCAR rally, Insane Clown Posse concert, Burning Man or George Soros-sponsored protest, etc.

The Vietnamese eagerness to merge doesn't make them natural Communists, however, for outside of any collective crisis, they're individualistic enough, as evidenced by the maddening proliferation of small businesses everywhere, from pushcarts to neighbourhood factories. To be his own boss, a Vietnamese would sell ten old pairs of shoes and assorted junk, displayed on a tarp, as he sits in the sun on the sidewalk.



“SUPER SALE on Genetically Modified Corn.” Monsanto deformed Vietnam and Vietnamese with Agent Orange and was first to develop genetically modified corn, but the seeds being pushed in Vietnam are produced by Syngenta, a Chinese company.

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In the Christian West, the first person was one lonely man, Adam, while in the Vietnamese creation myth, a woman gave birth to 100 eggs, which hatched into the very first mob of Vietnamese.

Noticing the Vietnamese’ compulsion to cluster, foreigners have repeatedly compared them to ants or other insects. “The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer,” goes the biblical proverb, but it’s always summer here, so the Vietnamese are prepared year-round, year in and year out, for whatever calamities await them. Stoic and always stocked up on the basics, they are perennial preppers.

Many Vietnamese towns have “an,” “yên” or “bình” in their name, with each meaning “peaceful”, but all these Peacevilles have been sacked, looted, burnt or bombed through the centuries, as is typical of all settlements worldwide, except, of course, for those in the USA.

During my two years in Certaldo, Italy, I lived a block away from the rebuilt house of Boccaccio, destroyed by American bombs. The town itself had been erected on a hill, with a defensive wall,

for war was always nearby, and not something overseas or on television.

The most typical Vietnamese male name is Hùng, meaning heroic, for it’s not just a masculine ideal, but a societal necessity. Without enough heroic men, your nation will be snuffed out, as countless have been. Wherever you are, you’re living on a graveyard of obliterated societies.

This week came news that Nguyen Văn Thong, a Vietcong spy during the Vietnam War, had died at age 80. In 1969, Thong was trying to smuggle documents from Saigon when he was spotted by American helicopters. With his AK-47, Thong shot one down, killing three Americans, but finally he was captured by a swarming posse of 72 helicopters, an ARVN division and a US Army regiment, it is said.

Trying to win over this invaluable intelligence asset, the Americans offered Thong \$100,000, a car, a villa and the rank of ARVN colonel, but



RAMBO LIVES: US army clothing for kids on sale in Saigon

he would not switch sides, so they locked him up for four years while subjecting him to all sorts of torture, including, get this, the sawing off of his legs six times, one chunk at a time, until all Thong had left were two pitiful stumps.

I'm not going to conjecture how embellished all this is, but it can't be more preposterous than any Rambo movie. The key takeaway is that both characters are meant to inspire, but there is a key difference between them. Whereas Rambo's role is to reassure Americans they are still invincible, that they'll always kick ass if not for a backstabbing bureaucracy, Thong reminds Vietnamese that an individual or nation may have to endure unspeakable pain and sacrifice to possibly survive another day.

It's more than curious that many Americans are still willing to be sent anywhere to fight anybody, for any reason, no matter how bogus, but this can be partially explained by the myth of American invincibility. Young American males will sign up tomorrow to be dispatched to Timbuktu, North or South Korea, Saskatchewan,

Mars, Atlantis, wherever, because they've been brainwashed into thinking they will quickly kick ass then go home to a hero's welcome. Bring it on!

A concomitant factor is sadism. Conditioned from infancy to enjoy seeing bodies maimed in every which way imaginable, many Americans welcome the chance to blow up, shred or chop up a few, and though this mindset is certainly pathological, it's a prerequisite of any empire.

Everybody else on earth will only fight to defend their nation, however, but this is exactly what gung-ho Americans have failed to do, paradoxically, for as they bomb away everywhere, their homeland is raped and disfigured beyond recognition. But I'm no longer appalled by this: a population so meekly clueless deserves its doom.

CT

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Linh Dinh's latest books are Postcards from the End of America (non-fiction) and A Mere Rica (poetry). He maintains a photo blog at www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.ca

Where did all the Nazis go?

Antifa was looking forward to some hardcore "preventative self-defence" at Washington rally. All they needed were a few hundred Nazis. But what happened to them?

So it appears Antifa has scared Trump's army of emboldened Nazis back into their hidey holes, or at least that's the spin the Resistance is putting on the deeply weird events of August 12. In case you missed it, what happened was, thousands of "anti-fascist" protestors converged on the streets of Washington to deny a platform to (or just beat the snot out of) 20 or 30 racist idiots who were trying to assemble in Lafayette Square and stand around shouting racist slogans at each other. The organiser of this idiotic fiasco (ie, the racist fiasco, not the protest thereof) was the same attention-seeking, racist idiot that had organised the original "Unite the Right" event in Charlottesville in 2017. During that weekend, as I'm sure you'll recall, a white supremacist drove his car into a crowd of protesters, killing a woman, numerous other people were assaulted, and a few hundred racists in polo shirts and khakis marched around with tikki torches hollering neo-Nazi gibberish in an attempt to launch some sort of race war, or protest the removal of a statue, or something.

This year's event was a bit less dramatic. Basically, these 20 or 30 racists were escorted by hundreds of riot police and Secret Service to Lafayette Square, where they found themselves surrounded by thousands of protesters, many of whom intended to stomp their guts out. This must have been a bit unsettling, because the racists reportedly fled their own "rally" before they had even had the chance to holler any Nazi gibberish

at each other. This was extremely disappointing for the militant "anti-fascist" contingent, which had been counting on another balls-out street fight. According to the *New York Times*, a group of frustrated militant types tried to burn a Confederate flag, but it wouldn't catch fire, so they were forced to rip it apart with their hands and jump up and down on it.

Other militant "anti-fascists" threw anti-Nazi eggs at the cops, presumably as a form of "preventative self-defence," or just to ensure that Breitbart had some video to paint them as "terrorists" with. The not-quite-so-militant "anti-fascist" contingent, most of whom never even caught a glimpse of the "emboldened" Nazis they had come to resist, apparently dispersed without incident.

The corporate media and the rest of the Resistance had been flogging this event for months. That infamous photo of the tikki torch Nazis had been repeatedly reprinted all summer long. Features on Kessler, the organiser, whose activities seem to have been mostly funded by his grandmother, with whom he had also been living, had been published in major international broadsheets. The coverage peaked going into the weekend. On August 11, he was featured on National Public Radio, where he shared his views on "racial intelligence". Go ahead, google him, and marvel at the amount of free publicity bestowed on this geek.



Thousands of counter-protesters took to the parks and streets of Washington, DC, on August 12 in response to a planned “Unite the Right 2” rally of white nationalists on the first anniversary of deadly violence in Charlottesville, VA. However, the event proved to be a failure for the right wing as no more than 30 people turned up. Photo: Mobilus in Mobili / Flickr.com

And it wasn’t just the corporate media. No, the militant “anti-fascist” left had also been also promoting this so-called “rally” as the Return of the Revenge of the Bride of Charlottesville. Affinity groups had been activated. “Anti-fascist” posters had been printed. Militant Twitter hashtags created. Snappy “anti-fascist” slogans, like “It takes a bullet to bash the fash”, and “Drive out Trump/Pence fascist regime”, had been applied to signs and banners. By the morning of August 12, social media was buzzing with thousands of tweets and posts by people hoping to “punch a Nazi”. Antifa was obviously looking forward to some hardcore “preventative self-defence” ... all they needed were a few hundred Nazis.

So it was a little embarrassing, to put it mildly, when only a dozen or two racists showed up, instead of the hordes of swastika-tattooed, Sieg-heiling Nazis the Resistance was hoping for. After all the energy and money they’ve invested in convincing millions of credulous liberals that America is being existentially threatened by legions of fascists “emboldened” by Trump (and

somehow connected to Vladimir Putin), to then have this paltry bunch of racist misfits show up for “the big Nazi rally” ... well, it kind of makes a mockery of the official narrative they’ve been selling everyone.

According to that official narrative, which the global capitalist ruling classes and the corporate media have been disseminating since Hillary Clinton lost the election, America and democracy are under attack by a vast conspiracy of Russians and Nazis (I’ve been referring to them as “the Putin-Nazis”), nominally led by Donald Trump, but actually controlled by Vladimir Putin, who is trying to annihilate “the West” and establish a Russian-Nazi Empire which he will personally rule with an iron fist.

As the story goes, back in 2015, Putin and his Russian Nazis, infuriated at us for fomenting a coup with our Ukrainian Nazis on their southern border, finally activated Donald Trump, who they had recruited back in the 1980s (then

blackmailed with a sex tape 20 years later) and who had been posing as a narcissistic billionaire ass clown while awaiting the “go code” from his handlers in Moscow. Trump sprang immediately into action, announcing his candidacy on June 16, and set about “emboldening” the millions of American Nazis who had been patiently waiting for the day when a racist New York real estate huckster would rise from the depths of reality television to lead them to victory in RaHoWa, or whatever.

Up until Trump announced his run, these American Nazis had been keeping a low profile by having swastikas tattooed on their faces, flying Confederate flags in their yards, burning crosses, posting calls for genocide on Nazi websites, and occasionally murdering people of colour and bombing churches and day care centres. Once Trump hit the hustings, however, the Nazis abandoned all restraint and got right down to the business of posting Nazi frogs on social media, touring campuses with Nazi book tours, and gathering in upscale Italian restaurants to be photographed mimicking Hitler-salutes.

All this emboldenment culminated in the infamous rally in Charlottesville last summer, which, as the Resistance pointed out, was just like Kristallnacht ... except that Charlottesville was not a pogrom and 91 Jewish people weren't murdered. But, aside from that, it was exactly the same. Trump emboldened it, then openly condoned it, and given that he's a Russian agent, we can assume the orders came directly from Putin, who presumably has agents in the fascist underground, possibly in Kessler's grandmother's basement, and who's been poisoning people randomly in Salisbury, England (ie, Putin has, not Kessler's grandmother), and possibly orchestrating Jeremy Corbyn's Nazification of the British Labour Party, and who has been influencing people with Facebook posts, and God knows what other horrors he's been up to ... at this point, it's hard to keep it all straight.

In any event, following the Charlottesville Kristallnacht, the Resistance went to work hunting down Nazis, getting them arrested or fired from their jobs, or just showing up at their pathetic little gatherings and stomping the living

Hitler out of them. Being mostly idiots, they weren't hard to find ... or at least not the tikki torch Kessler variety. We're not talking about the Aryan Brotherhood here; we're talking about creeps like the Crying Nazi, Richard Spencer (another media darling), Andrew Auernheimer, aka “weev”, groups like the Proud Boys (who you've probably never heard of unless you travel in “anti-fascist” circles), and other such idiots who have absolutely nothing to do with actual power in the United States, or anywhere else.

Which, of course, is the point of the Nazi hysteria the Resistance has been barraging us with, that is, when they are not too busy barraging us with the Trump-is-a-Russian-Agent hysteria. As I have outlined in several other essays, there is no “Russian Attack on Democracy”, nor is there any “blood-dimmed tide” of emboldened Naziism menacing the West. All that is really happening is, the global capitalist ruling classes are conducting a counterinsurgency PSYOP, the objective of which is to put down “populist” resistance to the spread of global capitalism. There is no clutch of global capitalists sitting in a room conspiring to do this. It is simply the system responding (as a system) to eliminate an internal threat, and reestablish control of its environment, which in this case happens to be the whole planet (as global capitalism has no external enemies).

One part of this counterinsurgency PSYOP is to delegitimise anyone and anything that stands in the way of global capitalism. It does not matter one iota whether the opposition stems from what most of us think of as the “left” or the “right.” Global capitalism does not care. It simply cannot have major disruptions like the Brexit referendum and the election of Trump screwing with its Privatisation of Everything (which it began in the early 1990s, immediately after the end of the Cold War).

Such populist insurgencies feed each other. One day, it's the nationalists abandoning the EU, the next day, it's socialists boycotting Israel, the day after that it could be Americans demanding universal healthcare, subsidized college education, or demilitarisation of the nation's police.

CJ HOPKINS

Things could get out of control pretty quickly.

The other part of this counterinsurgency PSYOP is manufacturing as much mass hysteria and paranoia about Russian agents and emboldened Nazis as humanly possible. This aspect of the PSYOP sells itself ... opposing global capitalism is difficult work and not very rewarding. It's so much easier (and much more fun) to hunt down imaginary Russians and Nazis. And if you don't know any Russian operatives, or can't find any actual Nazis, no worries, there are plenty of Assad-apologists, Putin-apologists, Alex Jones-apologists, terrorist-apologists, transphobic racists, antisemitic British socialists, and crypto-Red-Brown fascist entryists, not to mention Susan Sarandon and everyone else who didn't vote for Clinton. You can hunt them down and call them names on Facebook from the comfort of your home. I'm relatively sure the Internet monitors at the Atlantic Council won't mind if you do.

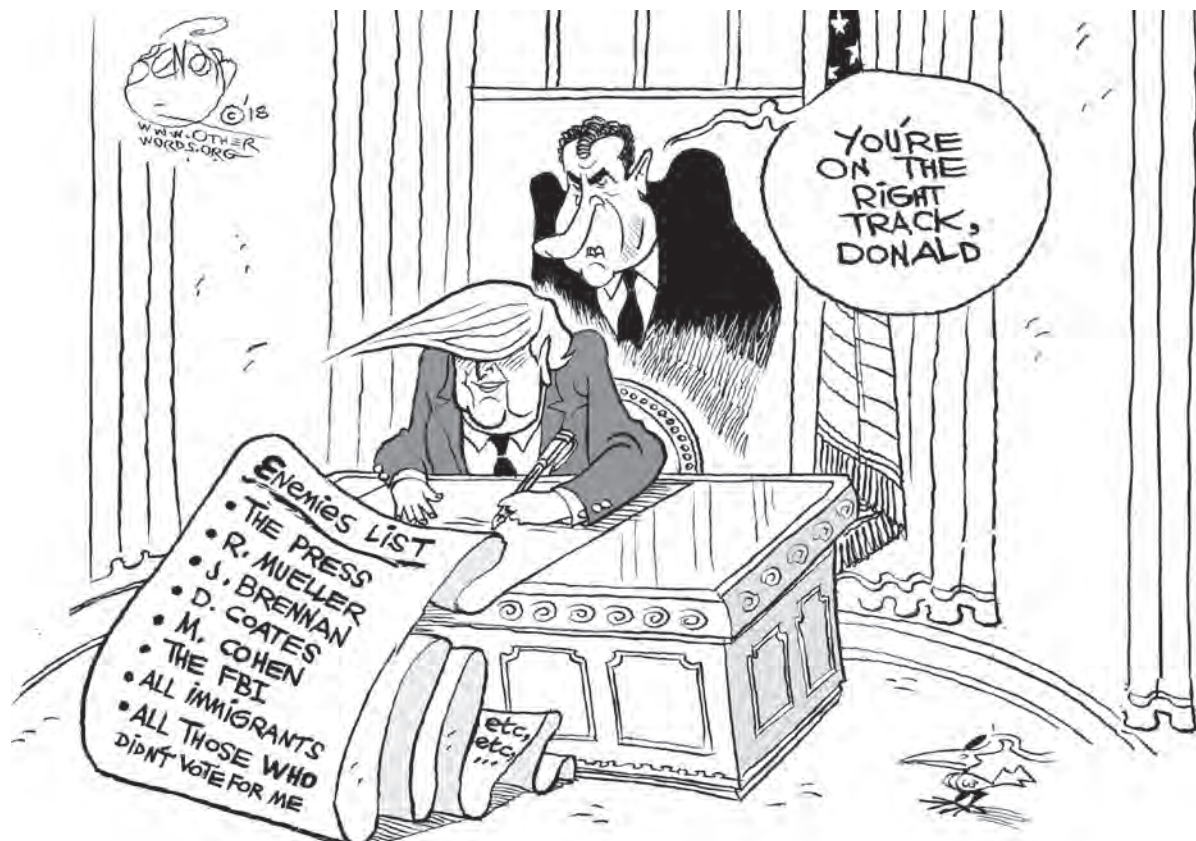
Just watch what you say about the CIA, the FBI, the NSA, and the other valiant corporations and non-governmental organisations that are "working together to secure the future."

Oh and if you do see any of those actual Nazis crawling up out of their hidey holes, or anyone who looks they might be about to commit an act of verbal genocide, go ahead and gouge their eyes out or something ... because we can't afford to give these Nazis an inch. Have a nice day, and happy hunting! **CT**

CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, ZONE 23, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant. He can be reached at www.cjhopkins.com or www.consentfactory.org.

BENDIB'S WORLD

Khalil Bendib / www.otherwords.org



Inside the mind of the mass media

A revealing e-mail exchange with Michael Birnbaum,
a leading *Washington Post* foreign policy reporter

DEAR Mr. Birnbaum – You write Trump “made no mention of Russia’s adventures in Ukraine”. Well, neither he nor Putin nor you made any mention of America’s adventures in the Ukraine, which resulted in the overthrow of the Ukrainian government in 2014, which led to the justified Russian adventure. Therefore ...?

If Russia overthrew the Mexican government would you blame the US for taking some action in Mexico? – **William Blum**

Dear Mr. Blum – Thanks for your note. “America’s adventures in the Ukraine”: what are you talking about? Last time I checked, it was Ukrainians in the streets of Kiev who caused Yanukovich to turn tail and run. Whether or not that was a good thing, we can leave aside, but it wasn’t the Americans who did it.

It is, however, Russian special forces who fanned out across Crimea in February and March 2014, according to Putin, and Russians who came down from Moscow who stoked conflict in eastern Ukraine in the months after, according to their own accounts. – Best, Michael Birnbaum

To MB, – I can scarcely believe your reply. Do you read nothing but the *Post*? Do you not know of high State Dept official Victoria Nuland and the US Ambassador in Ukraine in Maidan Square to encourage the protesters? She spoke of 5 billion (sic) dollars given to aid the protesters

who were soon to overthrow the govt. She and the US Amb. spoke openly of who to choose as the next president. And he’s the one who became president. This is all on tape. I guess you never watch Russia Today (RT). God forbid! I read the *Post* every day. You should watch RT once in a while. – **William Blum**

To WB, – I was the Moscow bureau chief of the newspaper; I reported extensively in Ukraine in the months and years following the protests. My observations are not based on reading. RT is not a credible news outlet, but I certainly do read far beyond our own pages, and of course I talk to the actual actors on the ground myself – that’s my job.

And: yes, of course Nuland was in the Maidan – but encouraging the protests, as she clearly did, is not the same as sparking them or directing them, nor is playing favorites with potential successors, as she clearly did, the same as being directly responsible for overthrowing the government. I’m not saying the United States wasn’t involved in trying to shape events. So were Russia and the European Union. But Ukrainians were in the driver’s seat the whole way through. I know the guy who posted the first Facebook call to protest Yanukovich in November 2013; he’s not an American agent. RT, meanwhile, reports fabrications and terrible falsehoods all the time. By all means consume a healthy and varied media diet – don’t stop at the US mainstream media. But ask yourself how often RT reports critically

WILLIAM BLUM



Assistant US Secretary of State Victoria Nuland delivers a parcel of cookies to demonstrators on the Maidan in Kiev in December, 2013

Photo: RT

on the Russian government, and consider how that lacuna shapes the rest of their reporting. You will find plenty of reporting in the Washington Post that is critical of the US government and US foreign policy in general, and decisions in Ukraine and the Ukrainian government in specific. Our aim is to be fair, without picking sides.

– Best, **Michael Birnbaum**

End of exchange.

Right, the United States doesn't play indispensable roles in changes of foreign governments; never has, never will; even when they offer billions of dollars; even when they pick the new president, which, apparently, is not the same as picking sides. It should be noticed that Mr Birnbaum offers not a single example to back up his extremist claim that RT "reports fabrications and terrible falsehoods all the time." "All the time", no less! That should make it easy to give some examples.

For the record, I think RT is much less biased than the *Post* on international affairs. And, yes, it's bias, not "fake news" that's the main problem – Cold-War/anti-Communist/anti-Russian bias that Americans have been raised with for a full century. RT defends Russia against the countless mindless attacks from the West. Who else is there to do that? Should not the Western media be held accountable for what they broadcast? Americans are so unaccustomed to hearing the Russian side defended, or hearing it at all, that when they do it can seem rather weird.

To the casual observer, THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA indictments of July 14 of Russian intelligence agents (GRU) reinforced the argument that the Soviet government interfered in the US 2016 presidential election. Regard these indictments in proper perspective and we find that election interference is only listed as a supposed objective, with charges actually being for unlawful cyber operations, identity theft, and conspiracy to launder money by American individuals unconnected to the Russian government. So ... we're still waiting for some evidence of actual Russian interference in the election aimed at determining the winner.

The Russians did it (cont.)

Each day I spend about three hours reading the *Washington Post*. Among other things I'm looking for evidence – real, legal, courtroom-quality evidence, or at least something logical and rational – to pin down those awful Russkis for their many recent crimes, from influencing the outcome of the 2016 US presidential election to use of a nerve agent in the UK. But I do not find such evidence.

Each day brings headlines like these:

"US. to add economic sanctions on Russia: Attack with nerve agent on former spy in England forces White House to act"

"Is Russia exploiting new Facebook goal?"

"Experts: Trump team lacks urgency on Russian threat"

These are all from the same day, August 9, which led me to thinking of doing this article, but similar stories can be found any day in the *Post* and in major newspapers anywhere in America. None of the articles begins to explain how Russia did these things, or even WHY. Motivation appears to have become a lost pursuit in the American mass media. The one thing sometimes mentioned, which I think may have some credibility, is Russia's preference of Trump over Hillary Clinton in 2016. But this doesn't begin to explain how Russia could pull off any of the electoral magic it's accused of, which would be feasible only if the United States were a backward, Third World, Banana Republic.

There's the Facebook ads, as well as all the other ads ... The people who are influenced by this story – have they read many of the actual ads? Many are pro-Clinton or anti-Trump; many are both; many are neither. It's one big mess, the only rational explanation of this which I've read is that they come from money-making websites, “click-bait” sites as they're known, which earn money simply by attracting visitors.

As to the nerve agents, it makes more sense if the UK or the CIA did it to make the Russians look bad, because the anti-Russian scandal which followed was totally predictable. Why would Russia choose the time of the World Cup in Moscow – of which all of Russia was immensely proud – to bring such notoriety down upon their head? But that would have been an ideal time for their enemies to want to embarrass them.

However, I have no doubt that the great majority of Americans who follow the news each day believe the official stories about the Russians. They're particularly impressed with the fact that every US intelligence agency supports the official stories. They would not be impressed at all if told that a dozen Russian intelligence agencies all disputed the charges. Group-think is alive and well all over the world. As is Cold War II.

But we're the Good Guys, ain't we?

For a defender of US foreign policy there's very little that causes extreme heartburn more than someone implying a “moral equivalence” between American behaviour and that of Russia.

That was the case during Cold War I and it's the same now in Cold War II. It just drives them up the wall.

After the United States passed a law last year requiring TV station RT (Russia Today) to register as a “foreign agent”, the Russians passed their own law allowing authorities to require foreign media to register as a “foreign agent”. Senator John McCain denounced the new Russian law, saying there is “no equivalence” between RT and networks such as Voice of America, CNN and the BBC, whose journalists “seek the truth, debunk lies, and hold governments accountable”. By contrast, he said, “RT's propagandists debunk the truth, spread lies, and seek to undermine democratic governments in order to further Vladimir Putin's agenda”.

And here is Tom Malinowski, former Assistant Secretary of State for democracy, human rights and labor (2014-2017) – last year he reported that Putin had “charged that the US. government had interfered ‘aggressively’ in Russia's 2012 presidential vote,” claiming that Washington had “gathered opposition forces and financed them”. Putin, wrote Malinowski, “apparently got President Trump to agree to a mutual commitment that neither country would interfere in the other's elections”.

“Is this moral equivalence fair?” Malinowski asked and answered: “In short, no. Russia's interference in the United States' 2016 election could not have been more different from what the United States does to promote democracy in other countries”.

How do you satirise such officials and such high-school beliefs?

We also have the case of the US government agency, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which has interfered in more elections than the CIA or God. Indeed, the man who helped draft the legislation establishing NED, Allen Weinstein, declared in 1991: “A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA”. On April 12, 2018 the presidents of two of NED's wings wrote: “A specious narrative has come back into circulation: that Moscow's campaign of political warfare is no different from US-supported democracy assistance”.

WILLIAM BLUM

“Democracy assistance”, you see, is what they call NED’s election-interferences and government-overthrows. The authors continue: “This narrative is churned out by propaganda outlets such as RT and Sputnik [radio station]. ... it is deployed by isolationists who propound a US. retreat from global leadership”.

“Isolationists” is what conservatives call critics of US foreign policy whose arguments they can’t easily dismiss, so they imply that such people just don’t want the US to be involved in anything abroad. And “global leadership” is what they call being first in election-interferences and government-overthrows.

What God giveth, Trump taketh away?

The White House sends out a newsletter, “1600 daily”, each day to subscribers about what’s new in the marvellous world inhabited by Donald J. Trump. On July 25 it reported about the president’s talk before the Veterans of Foreign Wars national convention in Missouri: “We don’t apologise for America anymore. We stand up for America. And we stand up for our National An-

them,” the president said to “a thundering ovation”.

At the same time, the newsletter informed us that the State Department is bringing together religious leaders and others for the first-ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom. “The goal is simple”, we are told, “to promote the God-given human right to believe what you choose”.

Aha! I see. But what about those who believe that standing for the National Anthem implies support for America’s racism or police brutality? Is it not a God-given human right to believe such a thing and “take a knee” in protest? Or is it the devil that puts such evil ideas into our heads?

CT

William Blum is the author of Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II, Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Super Power, West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Political Memoir, and America’s Deadliest Export – Democracy: The Truth About US Foreign Policy and Everything Else. His website is www.williamblum.org

LEFT, RIGHT

Marching to the Beat of Imperial Canada

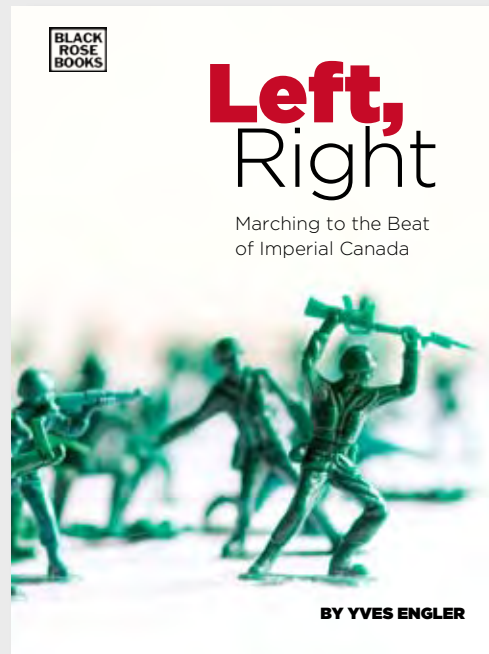
YVES ENGLER

After exposing this country’s real role in the world in **Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy** and **Canada in Africa — 300 Years of Aid and Exploitation**, **Yves Engler** shines a light on supposedly progressive groups and individuals who support war, interference in other country’s affairs and exploitation in his new book

Left, Right — Marching to the Beat of Imperial Canada
Paperback \$21.99 / Cloth \$81.99

For more information and to order directly from the publisher, Black Rose Books, please **CLICK HERE**

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Living in an age of obesity

In 1976, we ate more than we do today. So why are we fatter?

WHEN I saw the photo, I could scarcely believe it was the same country. The picture of Brighton Beach in 1976 featured in the *Guardian* a few weeks ago appeared to show an alien race. Almost everyone was slim. I mentioned it on social media, then went on holiday.

When I returned, I found that people were still debating it. The heated discussion prompted me to read more. How have we changed so far, so fast? To my astonishment, almost every explanation proposed in the thread turned out to be untrue.

Unfortunately, there are no consistent obesity data in the United Kingdom before 1988, at which point the incidence was already rising sharply. But in the US, the figures go back further. They show that, by chance, the inflection point was more or less 1976. Suddenly, at around the time the photograph was taken, people started becoming fatter, and the trend has continued ever since.

The obvious explanation, many of those debating the photo insisted, is that we're eating more. Several pointed out, not without justice, that food was generally disgusting in the 1970s. It was also more expensive. There were fewer fast food outlets and the shops shut earlier, ensuring that if you missed your tea, you went hungry. So here's the first big surprise: we ate more in 1976.

According to government figures, we currently consume an average of 2131 kcals per day, a figure that appears to include sweets and alco-

hol. But in 1976, we consumed 2280 kcal, excluding alcohol and sweets, or 2590 when they're included. Can this really be true? I have found no reason to discredit the figures.

Others insisted that the cause is a decline in manual labour. Again, this seems to make sense, but again the data don't support it. A paper in the *International Journal of Surgery* states that "adults working in unskilled manual professions are over four times more likely to be classified as morbidly obese compared with those in professional employment".

So how about voluntary exercise? Plenty of people argued that, as we drive rather than walk or cycle, are stuck to our screens and order our groceries online, we exercise far less than we did. It seems to make sense – so here comes the next surprise. According to a long-term study at Plymouth University, children's physical activity is the same as it was 50 years ago. A paper in the *International Journal of Epidemiology* finds that, corrected for body size, there is no difference between the amount of calories burnt by people in rich countries and in poor ones, where subsistence agriculture remains the norm. It proposes that there is no relationship between physical activity and weight gain. Many other studies suggest that exercise, while crucial to other aspects of good health, is far less important than diet in regulating our weight. Some suggest it plays no role at all, as the more we

exercise, the hungrier we become.

Other people pointed to more obscure factors: adenovirus-36 infection, antibiotic use in childhood and endocrine-disrupting chemicals. While there is evidence suggesting they might all play a role, and while they could explain some of the variation in the weight gained by different people on similar diets, none appear powerful enough to explain the general trend.

So what has happened? The light begins to dawn when you look at the nutrition figures in more detail. Yes, we ate more in 1976, but differently. Today, we buy half as much fresh milk per person, but five times more yoghurt, three times more ice cream and – wait for it – 39 times as many dairy desserts. We buy half as many eggs as in 1976, but a third more breakfast cereals and twice the cereal snacks; half the total potatoes, but three times the crisps. While our direct purchases of sugar have sharply declined, the sugar we consume in drinks and confectionery is likely to have rocketed (there are purchase numbers only from 1992, at which point they were rising rapidly. Perhaps, as we consumed just 9kcal per day in the form of drinks in 1976, no one thought the numbers were worth collecting). In other words, the opportunities to load our food with sugar have boomed. As some experts have long proposed, this seems to be the issue.

The shift has not happened by accident. As Jacques Peretti argued in his film *The Men Who Made Us Fat*, we have been deliberately and systematically outgunned. Food companies have invested heavily in designing products that use sugar to bypass our appetite control mechanisms, and packaging and promoting them to break down what remains of our defences, including through the use of subliminal scents. They employ an army of food scientists and psychologists to trick us into eating more junk (and therefore less wholesome food) than we need, while their advertisers use the latest findings in neuroscience to overcome our resistance.

They hire biddable scientists and thinktanks to confuse us about the causes of obesity. Above

all, just as the tobacco companies did with smoking, they promote the idea that weight is a question of “personal responsibility”. After spending billions on overriding our willpower, they blame us for failing to exercise it.

To judge by the debate the photo triggered, it works. “There are no excuses. Take responsibility for your own lives, people!” “No one force feeds you junk food, it’s personal choice. We’re not lemmings”. “Sometimes I think having free healthcare is a mistake. It’s everyone’s right to be lazy and fat because there is a sense of entitlement about getting fixed”. The thrill of disapproval chimes disastrously with industry propaganda. We delight in blaming the victims.

More alarmingly, according to a paper in the *Lancet*, over 90 percent of policymakers believe that “personal motivation” is “a strong or very strong influence on the rise of obesity.” Such people propose no mechanism by which the 61 percent of English people who are overweight or obese have lost their willpower. But this improbable explanation seems immune to evidence.

Perhaps this is because obesophobia is often a fatly-disguised form of snobbery. In most rich nations, obesity rates are much higher at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale. They correlate strongly with inequality, which helps to explain why the UK’s incidence is greater than in most European and OECD nations. The scientific literature shows how the lower spending power, stress, anxiety and depression associated with low social status makes people more vulnerable to bad diets.

Just as jobless people are blamed for structural unemployment and indebted people are blamed for impossible housing costs, fat people are blamed for a societal problem. Yes, willpower needs to be exercised – by governments. Yes, we need personal responsibility – on the part of policymakers. Yes, control needs to be exerted – over those who have discovered our weaknesses and ruthlessly exploit them. **CT**

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George Monbiot’s latest book, How Did We Get Into This Mess?, is published by Verso. This article was first published in the Guardian. Monbiot’s web site is www.monbiot.com

Saudi complicity limits Canada's response

Foreign Minister's Tweet gives Canada chance to distance itself from a violent, misogynistic and repressive regime. But will it?

GOVERNMENTS, like gardeners, reap what they sow. Justin Trudeau's continuation of Stephen Harper's Conservative Mideast foreign policy has reaped the current mess with Saudi Arabia.

The Liberal brain trust must be wondering, "what do we have to do? We slavishly back the odious Saudi regime and they freak over an innocuous tweet."

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The Trudeau government has largely maintained the Conservative government's pro-Saudi policies and support for Riyadh's belligerence in the region. They've mostly ignored its war on Yemen, which has left 15,000 civilians dead, millions hungry and sparked a cholera epidemic. Rather than oppose this humanitarian calamity, Ottawa armed the Saudis and openly aligned itself with Riyadh.

Some of the Saudi pilots bombing Yemen were likely trained in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Since 2011 Saudi pilots have trained with NATO's Flying Training in Canada (NFTC), which is run by the Canadian Forces and CAE. The Montreal-based flight simulator company trained Royal Saudi Air Force pilots in the Middle East, as well as the United Arab Emirates Air Force, which joined the Saudi-led bombing of Yemen.

As Anthony Fenton has demonstrated on Twitter, Saudi backed forces have been using Canadian-made rifles and armoured vehicles in Yemen. Saudi Arabia purchased Canadian-made Streit Group armoured vehicles for its war, which have been videoed targeting Yemeni ci-



Canada has signed a \$15-billion contract to supply more than 1,000 vehicles equipped with machine guns and medium or high-calibre weapons to Saudi Arabia.

Photo: Wikimedia.org

vilians. The Trudeau government signed off on a \$15 billion Canadian Commercial Corporation Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV) contract with the kingdom. Over a decade and a half, General Dynamics Land Systems Canada is to provide upwards of a thousand vehicles equipped with machine guns and medium or high calibre weapons. The largest arms export contract in Canadian history, it includes maintaining the vehicles and training Saudi forces to use the LAVs.

With the LAV sale under a court challenge, in late 2016 federal government lawyers described Saudi Arabia as "a key military ally who backs efforts of the international community to fight the

Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the instability in Yemen. The acquisition of these next-generation vehicles will help in those efforts, which are compatible with Canadian defence interests.” In a further sign of Ottawa aligning with Riyadh’s foreign policy, Canada’s just-expelled ambassador, Dennis Horak, said in April 2016 that the two countries have had “nearly similar approaches on Syria, Yemen, Iraq and the Middle East Peace Process” and the Canadian Embassy’s website currently notes that “the Saudi government plays an important role in promoting regional peace and stability.”

Within six weeks of taking up his new post, Trudeau’s first foreign minister Stéphane Dion met his Saudi counterpart in Ottawa. According to briefing notes for the meeting, Dion was advised to tell the Saudi minister, “I am impressed by the size of our trade relationship, and that it covers so many sectors ...You are our most important trading partner in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.” The Trudeau government also sought to deepen ties to the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whose members almost all intervened in Yemen. Announced in 2013, the Canada–GCC Strategic Dialogue has been a forum to discuss economic ties and the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Dion attended the May 2016 meeting with GCC foreign ministers in Saudi Arabia.

Canada is a major arms exporter to the GCC monarchies. Canadian diplomats, the Canadian Commercial Corporation (CCC), and the Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries (CADSI) promoted arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the rest of the GCC. With support from Global Affairs Canada and the CCC, a slew of Canadian arms companies flogged their wares at the Abu Dhabi-based International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) in 2016, 2017, 2018 and are already preparing for 2019.

Canadian companies and officials sold weapons to monarchies that armed anti-government forces in Syria. In an effort to oust the Bashar al-Assad regime, GCC countries supported extremist Sunni groups, which have had ties to Daesh/

Islamic State.

The Trudeau government continued with the previous government’s low-level support for regime change in Syria. It provided aid to groups opposed to Assad and supported US cruise missile strikes on a Syrian military base in April.

With the Saudis, Israel and the US generally antagonistic to Iran, there has been only a minor shift away from the Harper government’s hostile position towards that country. The Trudeau government dialed down the previous government’s most bombastic rhetoric against Tehran but has not restarted diplomatic relations (as Trudeau promised before the election) or removed that country from Canada’s state sponsor of terrorism list. One aim of the Canada-GCC Strategic Dialogue is to isolate Iran. A communiqué after the May 2016 Canada-GCC ministerial meeting expressed “serious concerns over Iran’s support for terrorism and its destabilising activities in the region.” An April 2016 Global Affairs memo authorising the LAV export permits noted that “Canada appreciates Saudi Arabia’s role as a regional leader promoting regional stability, as well as countering the threat posed by Iranian regional expansionism.”

The Trudeau government continued to criticize Iran for their human rights abuses while regularly ignoring more flagrant rights violations by the rulers of Saudi Arabia. In the fall of 2017, Canada again led the effort to have the United Nations General Assembly single Iran out for human rights violations.

Saudi Arabia’s over-the-top response to an innocuous tweet has given the Liberals a unique opportunity to distance Canada from the violent, misogynistic and repressive regime. If there were a hint of truth to Trudeau’s “feminist”, “human rights”, “Canada is back”, etc. claims the Liberals would seize the occasion. But the Saudis are betting Canada backs down. Based on Trudeau’s slavish support for the kingdom so far it is a safe bet. **CT**

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Yves Engler is a Montreal-based activist and author. His latest book is *Left, Right: Marching to the Beat of Imperial Canada* (see Page 37). His web site is www.yvesengler.com

The market made them do it!

Corporate boards are asking us to blame sky-high CEO pay on the laws of supply and demand. Who are they trying to fool?

BACK in 1999, near the dizzying height of the dot.com boom, no executive in corporate America personified the soaring pay packages of America's CEOs more than Jack Welch, the chief exec at General Electric. Welch took home \$75-million that year.

What explained the enormity of that compensation? Welch didn't claim any genius on his part. He credited his success, instead, to the genius of the free market.

"Is my salary too high?" mused Welch. "Somebody else will have to decide that, but this is a competitive marketplace".

Translation: "I deserve every penny. The market says so".

Top US corporate execs today, on average, are doing even better than top execs in Welch's heyday. In 1999, notes a just-released new report from the Economic Policy Institute, CEOs at the nation's 350 biggest corporations pocketed 248 times the pay of average workers in their industries. Top execs last year averaged 312 times more.

What explains this growing generosity to America's top corporate chiefs? Today's apologists for over-the-top CEO compensation, like Jack Welch a generation ago, point to the market.

One leading critic of these apologists, the Dutch management scientist Manfred Kets de Vries, neatly summed up this market world view earlier this year: Big CEO pay packages "reflect market demands for a CEO's unique skills and

contribution to the bottom line". Mega-million executive paychecks "merely represent the market forces of supply and demand".

Or, as the University of Chicago's Steven Kaplan puts it, "The market for talent puts pressure on boards to reward their top people at competitive pay levels in order to both attract and retain them".

In the world that CEO cheerleaders like Kaplan inhabit, impartial, unbiased markets determine executive compensation. Corporate boards simply play by market rules. They pay their execs what the market says their execs deserve. If they don't, they risk losing their executive talent.

The numbers of people qualified to run multibillion-dollar companies have never been more plentiful

American corporate leaders take scarcity — of CEO talent — as a given. How else, in a market economy, to explain rapidly rising CEO pay? If quality CEOs abounded, executive compensation would not be soaring. But that compensation is soaring, so qualified CEOs obviously must be few and far between — and totally deserving of whatever many millions they receive. Simple market logic.

And simply wrong. American corporations today confront no scarcity of executive talent. The numbers of people qualified to run multibillion-dollar companies have never, in reality, been more plentiful. These numbers have been grow-

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ing steadily over recent decades, in part because America's graduate schools of business have been graduating, year after year, thousands of rigorously trained executives.

America's first graduate school for executives, the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, currently boasts an alumni network over 10,000 strong. MBAs in the equally prestigious Harvard Business School alumni network total over 46,000. Add in the alumni from other widely acclaimed institutions and the available supply of executives trained at America's top-notch business schools approaches several hundred thousand.

Just how many of these academically trained executives have the skills and experience really needed to run a Fortune 500 company? Let's assume, conservatively, that only 1 percent of the alumni from the "best" business schools have enough skills and experience to run a big-time corporation. That arithmetic would give Fortune 500 companies that go looking for a new CEO at least several thousand eminently qualified candidates. No supply shortage here.

Indeed, today's business world is overflowing with eminently qualified CEO candidates, once you add in the grads from business schools abroad. INSEAD, perhaps the most prominent of these international schools, now has over 56,000 active alumni.

In the past, to be sure, American corporations seldom looked beyond the borders of the United States for executive talent. That tunnel vision made some sense. Executives inside the United States and executives outside worked in different business environments. Foreign executives could hardly be expected to succeed in an unfamiliar American marketplace, even if they did speak flawless English.

But today, in our celebrated "globalised" economy, that distinction between domestic and foreign executives no longer matters nearly as much. In dozens of foreign nations, in hundreds of foreign corporations, executives are competing in the same global marketplace as their American counterparts. They're using the same

technologies, studying the same market data, and strategising toward the same business goals. Together, taken as a group, executives from elsewhere in the world constitute a huge new pool of talent for American corporations.

Pay consultants in the United States, for their part, do acknowledge the reality of this global marketplace for executive talent. In fact, they cite global competition as one important reason why executive pay in the United States is rising. American companies, the argument goes, now have to compete against foreign companies for executive talent, the argument goes. This competition is forcing up executive pay in the United States.

Really? What ever happened to market logic? If corporations all around the world paid their executives at comparable rates, market competition would certainly force up executive compensation worldwide. But corporations don't all pay executives at comparable rates.

American executives take home far more compensation than their foreign counterparts, on average over triple the pay of execs in America's peer nations. By classic market logic, any competition between highly paid American executives and equally qualified but more modestly paid international executives ought to end up lowering, not raising, the higher pay rates in the United States.

Why, after all, would an American corporation pay \$50-million for an American CEO when a skilled international CEO could easily be had for one-fifth or even one-fiftieth that price?

We have here, in short, a situation that a deep, abiding faith in the "market" does not explain. In the executive talent marketplace, American corporations face plenty, not scarcity, yet the going rate for American executives keeps rising.

Has someone repealed the laws of supply and demand? How else could executive pay in the United States have ascended to such lofty levels?

Some analysts do have an alternate explanation to offer. Markets, they point out, still operate by supply and demand. But markets don't set executive pay.

"CEOs who cheerlead for market forces

SAM PIZZIGATI

wouldn't think of having them actually applied to their own pay packages", as commentator Matthew Miller has noted in the *Los Angeles Times*. "The reality is that CEO pay is set through a clubby, rigged system in which CEOs, their buddies on board compensation committees and a small cadre of lawyers and 'compensation consultants' are in cahoots to keep the millions coming".

"CEO compensation", agree Lawrence Michel and Jessica Schieder, the authors of the new Economic Policy Institute executive pay report, "appears to reflect not greater productivity of executives but the power of CEOs to extract concessions".

If CEOs earned less, the pair add, we would see "no adverse impact on output or employment". Instead, they go on, lower executive paychecks would mean higher rewards for corporate workers, since the huge paydays that go to CEOs today reflect "income that otherwise would have accrued to others".

How could those "others", the rest of us, best go about lowering CEO compensation? Michel and Schieder offer a variety of promising proposals, ranging from higher marginal income tax rates to higher corporate tax rates on companies with excessively wide CEO-to-worker compensation ratios.

And what might a reasonable CEO-to-worker pay ratio be? The new Economic Policy Institute research suggests one plausible goal. Back in 1965, Michel and Schieder calculate, America's top execs only pulled down 20 times more pay than the nation's average workers. **CT**

Sam Pizzigati co-edits Inequality.org. His latest book, The Case for a Maximum Wage, has just been published. Among his other books on maldistributed income and wealth: The Rich Don't Always Win: The Forgotten Triumph over Plutocracy that Created the American Middle Class, 1900-1970. Follow him at @Too_Much_Online.

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How to create a coup for fun and profit

Lee Camp has a new game that explains how America tries to save Latin America from its socialistic tendencies

NICARAGUA just defeated a US-backed violent coup attempt, and no one cares. Well, let me revise that:

Very few care. English teachers may care because they may find it fascinating the phrase “violent coup” is one of the only English phrases often introduced with the prefix “US-backed”. But I can tell you for certain the mainstream media don’t want you to care. They don’t even want you to know it happened. And they certainly don’t want you to know that it followed a simple formula for US-backed coups in leftist and anti-imperialist nations throughout Latin America, a formula our military intelligence apparatus has implemented in numerous countries tirelessly, like an overused football play.

On the corporate airwaves you won’t

hear about US-backed anything. If the US military backed up a truck, CNN wouldn’t mention it, NPR would tell you the truck was dealing with an “organic internal protest movement” and Fox News would blame a black person.

For example, there’s the US-backed genocide going on in Yemen right now. As a recent Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting study made clear, over the 12 months prior to July 7, MSNBC aired a grand total of

zero stories about Yemen while it spewed forth 455 stories about the porn star our president pooned.

Back to Latin America. The US has had a long policy of undermining, infiltrating and bringing down any Latin American government that doesn’t line up with our unfettered capitalistic neoliberal policies. If a leader says, “Hey, let’s live a different way in which everyone is taken care of and we help out our brothers and sisters,” then the US will make sure he or she ends up wearing cement shoes at the bottom of a lake somewhere. (And those cement shoes won’t even be crafted by union cement workers because all the unions have been destroyed. So you’ve got freelance underpaid children making the shoes –

probably part of the “gig economy” with some sort of cement shoe app that tricks cement layers into working for pennies because they don’t understand the algorithm is screwing them hard!)

Anyway, Nicaragua is the latest US-backed attempted coup. So, this seems like a good time to present: *How to Create a US-Backed Government Coup!* You can play along at home – especially if your home is in Nicara-



FIGHTING BACK: A woman stands near a burning barricade holding the national flag of Nicaragua. Photo: Wikipedia

gua or Venezuela.

STEP ONE: Create a strong US-backed "fifth column"

Don't tell me you don't know what a "fifth column" is. How could you be so naive! (This is the part where I mock you for lacking knowledge that I myself learned only last week.)

As smart person Peter Koenig explains, "A Fifth Column is a group of people who undermine the government of a country in support of the enemy. They can be both covert and open".

There are various ways to create fifth columns. We here in the US like to create ours with a good, wholesome front: nonprofit organisations. Our two favourites are USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). What is the NED? Well, as editor of *Consortium News* Robert Parry put it, "In 1983, NED essentially took over the CIA's role of influencing electoral outcomes and destabilising governments that got in the way of US interests, except that NED carried out those functions in a quasi-overt fashion while the CIA did them covertly. NED also serves as a sort of slush fund for neocons. ...".

So we use NED and USAID to destabilise countries. Keep in mind, though it may not sound like much, there are consequences to destabilising countries. By doing it, we indirectly kill a lot of people, or at least ruin their lives, leaving them poor or destitute. But to create a successful coup, it's important you don't care about any of that stuff. If

babies die because they can't get the medical treatment they need, not your problem. You've got other stuff to do – like wipe bird shit off your \$1,200 loafers.

STEP TWO: Undermine the country's economy.

This can be done via sanctions, as we are currently doing in Venezuela and Iran. Simultaneously, use the fifth column and the obedient American media hacks (CNN, Fox News, MSNBC) to convince the people of said country that their economic troubles are the fault of only their president.

"It's the Venezuelan president's fault you don't have toilet paper! He's hoarding all the toilet paper. He's sitting up there on a throne made of Angel Soft triple ply!" But, what our corporate media really don't want you to know is the truth. Peter Koenig, who was also an international observer for the Presidential Economic Advisory Commission (showoff), stated, "It is absolutely clear who is behind the food and medicine boycotts (empty supermarket shelves), and the induced internal violence [in Venezuela]. It is a carbon copy of what the CIA under Kissinger's command did in Chile in 1973 which led to the murder of the legitimate and democratically elected President Allende and to the Pinochet military coup. ...".

So you create economic troubles, which make people hungry and angry, and that leads to ...

STEP THREE: Wait for internal protests and/or create them.

Basically, there were legitimate protests in Nicaragua because what country doesn't have protests now and again? But then the US and our front groups threw kerosene on the situation. The NED-funded publication *Global Americans* actually bragged about the kerosene it threw. In an article titled, "Laying the groundwork for insurrection: A closer look at the US role in Nicaragua's social unrest," it said, "... the NED has funded 54 projects in Nicaragua between 2014 and 2017".

So various US-backed groups redirected the protests against the Daniel Ortega government. Some protesting students were even flown to the United States for further instruction from Freedom House, which has deep ties to the CIA.

So, as with Syria, after genuine protests began in Nicaragua, the US used the fifth column to exacerbate the tension and channel the protests toward a violent showdown.

STEP FOUR: Get violent while accusing the government of getting violent.

We've seen this tactic in Nicaragua and Venezuela. There was violence on both sides of the protests, but far more on the US-backed sides, sometimes with help from the CIA or alumni from our military training facilities such as the School of the Americas. But because of media propaganda, many believe there is primarily violence on the government side, when in fact it's the opposite.

STEP FIVE: If steps 1 through 4 don't work, kidnap or assassinate.

The time may come when you've exhausted other options and simply must whack a dude. Don't feel bad. It happens to the best of us. Or, if you're feeling generous, you can put said target on a US military plane and fly him to Africa against his will – as happened in 2004 to the president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. He was kidnapped by our military and taken on one of the most awkward 14-hour flights one can imagine.

There is an endless number of examples. Want some more? How about the 1973 CIA-backed overthrow and killing of socialist President Salvador Allende in Chile? But have no fear, he was

replaced by murderous dictator Augusto Pinochet, whom the US liked A LOT better. (We shared the same taste in death squads.)

Ecuadorean President Jaime Roldos Aguilera died in an airplane "accident" in 1981 after going forward with a plan to reorganise Ecuador's fossil fuel industry, which US interests were very much against. His airplane fell out of the sky after coming down with a bad case of the CIA.

Even NBC has recounted the bizarre CIA plots to assassinate Fidel Castro in Cuba, some of them involving exploding cigars. And a few weeks ago, we saw an attempt to kill President Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela with a small explosive drone. While there's no indication the US military was directly

involved, that's not really how it rolls. The military prefers to fund front groups so it looks like the US had nothing to do with it. And keep in mind there WAS a US-backed coup against Hugo Chavez, Maduro's predecessor, in 2002. So taking out the Chavez-Maduro government has been a long-term goal of the US deep state.

There you have it – thanks for playing. **CT**

Lee Camp is an American stand-up comedian, writer, actor and activist. A former comedy writer for the Onion and the Huffington Post, Camp is the host of the weekly comedy news TV show Redacted Tonight With Lee Camp on RT America. A longer version of this article first appeared at www.truthdig.org

Why I want a public inquiry into Orgreave

John Dunn was beaten by police during the British miners' strike. Along with many others, he's still searching for justice

IF I ever needed a reason for campaigning for justice for those of us involved in the Great Strike then Halloween 2016 provided it. Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, rises in the chamber of the House of Commons to announce that she sees "no need for an enquiry into the events at Orgreave on June 18th 1984".

She went on to explain her

reasoning, "it was a long time ago.... No one died ... there was no miscarriage of justice ... the police have learned lessons..."

The fact that 95 miners, dressed in tee shirts, shorts and trainers were arrested, beaten to the edge of death, framed, many imprisoned in Armley jail, only to walk free after 15 months

of hellish limbo, fearing life imprisonment, when their trial collapsed after police collusion and perjury was proven, meant nothing to Rudd. She represents a class that hates the working class and its' trade union movement, her predecessors, again representing their class, used every organ of the state to attack my union, the NUM.

Part of that attack was the orchestrated police riot of Orgreave but, as miners we know, in our communities, on a daily basis throughout that fateful year 1984-5 we experienced far more than miscarriages of justice. Orgreave, whilst being the most talked about event was just the



Insights

most obvious tip of a mountain of attacks upon our union, our members, our families and our communities.

Police occupations of our villages, roadblocks, vicious attacks upon pickets and cavalry charges through our streets were the norm that fateful year.

For myself, the violence of the state was forcibly shown on April 9, 1984, at a picket at Creswell Colliery. Walking back from the picket line I felt my head explode. With the world rapidly spinning and turning dark I fought to stay on my feet, fearful that I might never get up if I fell.

Turning I saw a policeman covered in blood. My blood! I was grabbed and thrown into a police bus. With blood pouring down my body and on the verge of passing out I was told I could “fucking bleed to death...”

Only the intervention of my late brother, branch delegate at Ireland Pit, forced them to take me to hospital.

On arriving in the casualty department I was surrounded by six CID officers who forced a nervous doctor to sew me up without anaesthetic. I was then thrown into a cell with a stinking blanket.

After a doctor sympathetic to our fight told the police I was severely concussed and should be admitted to hospital they called out the police surgeon who gave me two aspirin and told them I needed constant observation. That took the form of a banging on my cell door every 15-20 minutes with a shout of “Are you



ATTACK: Strike poster features a photo by John Harris of a mounted policeman attacking a woman photographer.

Photo from In Loving Memory of Work: A Visual History of the UK Miners' Strike 1994-85, by Craig Oldham.

still alive?”

The next day I appeared in court, still covered in blood, to be charged with ‘threatening behaviour’ and, like all my fellow arrested pickets, placed on bail conditions preventing me from going anywhere near NCB property.

I was eventually convicted of ‘threatening behaviour’ and ‘watching and besetting’.

I was not unique, over 7000 of us were similarly convicted.

The reality is our only crime was that of defending our jobs and communities. Our taste of British ‘justice’ meant that, where striking miners were concerned, we were, as Thatcher famously declared “The Enemy Within”.

So in fighting for an inquiry into those awful events at Orgreave, for me, means that we can open the door a little and begin to cast some light onto the whole Thatcher governments conspiracy against we miners and expose the massive injustices meted out to our union throughout that whole year.

It is too late to save our industry but an inquiry would mean we might then start to right all those terrible wrongs inflicted on our people and our communities. That is why I fight alongside my comrades in the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign and am proud to do so.

If the Tories thought that a statement in parliament would be the end of us, they are sadly wrong. Our crowning achievement since Halloween 2016 has been a commitment in the Labour Party Manifesto guaranteeing us, like all our fellow justice campaigners, to a full public enquiry.

The election of Jeremy Corbyn, who supported us constantly throughout the strike, as LP leader has both ensured that and given a fillip to our struggle.

The lesson is simple, they only win if we give up.

While we live we fight on. Thanks everyone for your ongoing support.

SOLIDARITY!! CT

.....
John Dunn is an ex-Derbyshire miner. This article was first published in At The Coalface, the newspaper of the Orgreave Truth & Justice Campaign
– www.otjc.org.uk

Seeking a future beyond the ghouls

Trevor Grundy reads a new book that tells us why we must beware of the tyrants who are destroying democracy

UNTIL recently, progressives believed the retreat of liberal democracy after the end of the Cold War would be like water running uphill. “There is no coherent alternative to liberal democracy,” wrote Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History* (1992). A better quote to describe large parts of the world as it is now came from George Orwell half a century ago in his long essay, *Inside the Whale*. “Almost certainly we are moving into an age of totalitarian dictatorship – an age in which freedom of thought will be at first a deadly sin and later on a meaningless abstraction. The autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence.”

Today, the danger is not a bit of water flowing upstream. Instead, the threat we’re facing is a tsunami – the age of the truly weak but media-manufactured “strongman” who climbs to power on the back of new forms of strident nationalism that remind us of the inter-war years of the last century and its “saviours/strongmen”, Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Stalin and Mao.

This is the message that freezes your bones in this absorbing new book, edited by the Marxist thinker and author, Vi-

STRONGMEN

Edited by Vijay Prashad

Published by OR Books
www.orbooks.com \$16 / £13

jay Prashad. After three readings of *Strongmen*, I wanted more – a follow-up publication about other countries, different writers with the same wholeness as the ones who wrote this one.

Strongmen deserves a place on the shelves of schools, colleges, universities and public libraries in those countries who treasure their democratic heritages and who don’t want to see them destroyed by men like this lot.

The multi-billionaire swaggering loud-mouth and pussy-grabbing Donald Trump (America), the tribalist and Hindu religious fanatic, Narendra Modi (India), the Muslim fantasist and self-elected “man of the people” dictator and exterminator of any form of opposition Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Turkey), the shirtless, horse-riding Vladimir Putin (Russia), and the boastful and dangerous Punisher, Rodrigo Duterte, who came to power by promising to slaughter drug dealers –and anyone else who gets in his way (Philippines).

Each section is a timely, well thought out and at times highly amusing, send-ups of a new generation of Adolf and Benito wannabes. The five writers are the American playwright Eve Ensler (*The Vagina Monologues*); Danish Husain, the Indian storyteller and actor, Burhan Sonmez, the Turkish novelist, the Russian-American writer Lara Vapnyar and the Filipina novelist Ninotchka Rosca.

As the publisher’s blurb insists, these essays do not presume to be neutral. They are by partisan thinkers, magical writers, people who see not only the monster but a future beyond the ghouls.

But it’s not enough to mock, ridicule, condemn, laugh at these tyrants. If it’s true that we are edging towards a new kind of global fascism, we all need to know where it comes from and where it’s heading.

If we want to win the political battles, says Yascha Mounk in his new book *The People vs. Democracy*, “we need to fight for the interpretation of what nationalism should look like, rather than running away from nationalism altogether”.

Strongmen helps us do just that. **CT**

Trevor Grundy is an English writer who lived and worked as a journalist in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa from 1966-1996. He is the author of Memoir of a Fascist Childhood published by William Heinemann in 1998 and by Arrow Books in 1999.

Zimbabwe's coup didn't bring democracy

Robert Mugabe has gone, but his successor doesn't offer much hope for Zimbabwe's future, writes **Steven Feldstein**

MANY citizens and international observers cautiously hoped that the southern African nation of Zimbabwe would find its way from dictatorship to democracy this year. President Robert Mugabe was militarily removed from office in November 2017 after 37 years in office, opening the door for the country's first real leadership transition since 1980.

50 Elections were set for July 30. And, for the first time in many Zimbabweans' lives, Mugabe was not on the ballot.

Election turnout was high, with over 70 percent of the country's 16-million eligible voters participating. Zimbabweans waited in long lines to choose between Mugabe's replacement, the 75-year-old acting President Emmerson Mnangagwa, and a young lawyer named Nelson Chamisa, who promised economic revival and political change. "What everyone had hoped for was a turning of the page in Zimbabwe," observed Michelle Gavin, an Africa specialist at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Election day was peaceful enough, but the high spirits wouldn't last long. But, after Chamisa's party alleged fraud,



ZIMBABWE'S HARD MEN: Emmerson Mnangagwa (top), and Robert Mugabe.

Photos: Wikipedia/Wikimedia

the election commission said it would take days to finalise the vote count. When people in the capital of Harare protested the delay, police and soldiers fired, killing seven unarmed citizens.

On August 2, the election commission declared Mnangagwa president with 50.8 percent of the vote – just enough to avoid a run-off. Chamisa's party rejected the results and, a week later, filed a legal challenge in court.

Mugabe was a violent, repressive ruler. And Mnangagwa – whose nickname is "the Crocodile" – was his vice president and enforcer. In the weeks since the election, the government has ruthlessly cracked down on the opposition.

Police have beaten and arrested dozens of Chamisa supporters, and groups of Mnangagwa's backers have conducted house-to-house searches for opposition leaders.

Tendai Biti, a well-known opposition figure, fled to Zambia, but was turned over by the Zambian government to Zimbabwe's security forces. Mnangagwa's government charged him with inciting public violence. He was released on a US \$5,000 bond only after a global outcry.

Today, Zimbabwe remains tense as it awaits the results of the court battle over the presidency. Most observers expect Chamisa's case will fail, and that Mnangagwa will officially be installed as Zimbabwe's third president since 1963.

Having spent considerable time studying Zimbabwe's politics as a US State Department official, I found the contested result and election-day violence saddening but not surprising.

Insights

Mnangagwa struck a conciliatory tone in the months leading up to the election. Declaring that Zimbabwe was “open for business,” he amended a law requiring local ownership of diamond and platinum mines. He signalled his intent to end farm seizures and vowed to sell off failing state enterprises.

He even wrote a *New York Times* op-ed calling for democracy and equal rights for all citizens. But Mnangagwa is tied to human rights abuses, including overseeing a series of government-ordered massacres between 1982 and 1986 known as the “Gukurahundi”, in which an estimated 20,000 civilians from Zimbabwe’s Ndebele ethnic group were killed.

Behind his seemingly reasonable rhetoric, there were signs that Mnangagwa would stoop to win Zimbabwe’s election at any cost. Human rights groups reported widespread voter intimidation, especially in rural areas, where the government deployed plainclothes security forces to “remind” people to vote – for Mnangagwa. Zimbabwe’s state-controlled media relentlessly broadcast pro-Mnangagwa messages. And, according to civil society groups, the election commission kept the voter registration roll under wraps until it was too late for voters who discovered their names were missing to re-register.

Zimbabwe’s recent history mirrors a pattern familiar to other authoritarian countries undergoing a transition. Research shows that authoritarian

leaders almost always contend with two major political pressures: challenges from within their regime, which rarely trigger a democratic transition, and popular challenges from outside the system, which might.

Mugabe succumbed to pressure from within his party last year after a succession battle between his wife, Grace, and Mnangagwa’s faction. The military settled this struggle decisively in November 2017, putting Mugabe under house arrest. Grace fled the country, and Mnangagwa was installed as acting president.

Once he assumed office, Mnangagwa worked resolutely to guarantee he could quash the next challenge facing him: popular opposition. Even as he cited the importance of human rights and invited international observers to monitor Zimbabwe’s presidential election, he was working with allies to lay a repressive groundwork that would ensure he stayed in power as the standard-bearer of the ruling ZANU-PF party.

After the electoral commission announced his tenuous victory, Mnangagwa reacted in classic authoritarian fashion: he deployed police and military forces to repress street protests, driving would-be challengers into hiding.

Zimbabwe held an election without Mugabe. Unfortunately, all it got was another despot in Mugabe’s mould.

It wasn’t crazy to imagine

things turning out differently. Zimbabwe’s political system had actually been getting slightly more democratic in Mugabe’s final years. According to the Varieties of Democracy index, one of the world’s largest social science databases on democracy, Zimbabwe’s electoral system remains squarely in the “illiberal” category. But its score has improved 20 percent since 2007, particularly on freedom of expression.

The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index shows Zimbabwe making similar modest progress since 2006.

These small improvements in Zimbabwe’s political system, coupled with Mugabe’s demise, convinced some diplomats and experts that the July 31 election might open the door for real democratic change rather than a continuation of electoral autocracy.

But recent events have confirmed that Mnangagwa and his allies did not force the ailing Robert Mugabe out of office to transform Zimbabwe’s political system. Rather, they sought to ensure their continued control over the nation.

After 38 years of authoritarian rule, one election simply does not create democracy from dictatorship. **CT**

Steven Feldstein is Frank and Bethine Church Chair of Public Affairs, and Associate Professor, School of Public Service, at Boise State University. This article first appeared at www.theconversation.com

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