



MAGAZINE

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*“But the millions of
protestors on the
streets of Europe and
the US are the hope
for the future of the
world”*

-Arundhati Roy



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Dodging Biden's Moral Collapse Is No Way to Defeat Trump

Norman Solomon

For more than four months, President Biden has been the main enabler for Israel's mass murder of Palestinian people in Gaza. Every day, hundreds of civilians are killed by U.S. weaponry and, increasingly, by hunger and disease. The cruelty and magnitude of the slaughter are repugnant to anyone who isn't somehow numb to the human agony.

Such numbing is widespread in the United States. Some factors include ethnocentric, racial and religious biases against Arabs and Muslims. The steep pro-Israel tilt of news media runs parallel to the slant of U.S. government officials, with language that routinely conveys much lower regard for Palestinian lives than Israeli lives.

And while the credibility of the Israeli government has tumbled, the brawny arms of the Israel lobby — notably AIPAC and Democratic Majority for Israel — still exert enormous leverage over the vast majority of Congress. Few legislators are willing to vote against massive military aid that makes the carnage in Gaza possible.

A chilling example is Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland. On Monday night, he took to the Senate floor and condemned Israel in no uncertain terms. "Kids in Gaza are now dying from the deliberate withholding of food," he said. "In addition to the horror of that news, one other thing is true. That is a war crime. It is a textbook war crime. And that makes those who orchestrate it war criminals."

Watching video from Van Hollen's impassioned speech, you might assume that he would vote against sending \$14 billion in further military aid to those "war criminals." But hours later, he did just the opposite. As journalist Ryan Grim noted, "the senator's speech pulsed with moral clarity — until it petered

out into a stumbling rationale for his forthcoming yes vote."

In contrast, three senators in the Democratic caucus — Jeff Merkley, Peter Welch and Bernie Sanders — voted no. Sanders delivered a powerful speech calling for decency instead of further moral collapse from the top of the U.S. government.

While the Senate deliberated, the White House again made clear that it wasn't serious about getting in the way of Israel's planned assault on the city of Rafah. That's where most of Gaza's 2.2 million surviving residents have taken unsafe refuge from the Orwellian-named Israel Defense Forces.

An exchange at a White House news conference on Monday underscored that Biden is determined to keep enabling Israel's continuous war crimes in Gaza:

Reporter: "Has the president ever threatened to strip military assistance from Israel if they move ahead with a Rafah operation that does not take into consequence what happens with civilians?"

Spokesman John Kirby: "We're going to continue to support Israel. They have a right to defend themselves against Hamas and we're going to continue to make sure they have the tools and the capabilities to do that."

Later this week, Politico summed up: "The Biden administration is not planning to punish Israel if it launches a military campaign in Rafah without ensuring civilian safety." Citing interviews with three U.S. officials, the article reported that "no reprimand plans are in the works, meaning Israeli forces could enter the city and harm civilians without facing American consequences."



Biden continues to serve as an accomplice while mouthing platitudes of concern about the lives of civilians in Gaza. Month after month, he has done all he can to supply the Israeli military to the max.

Under an apt headline — “Biden Is Mad at Netanyahu? Spare Me.” — The Nation senior editor Jack Mirkinson wrote this week: “In the real world, Biden and his legislative partners have continued to arm Israel; the Democratic leadership in the Senate actually brought people in on Super Bowl Sunday to take a vote on a bill that would, along with rearming Ukraine, send Israel another \$14.1 billion for what is euphemistically dubbed ‘security assistance.’”

Ever since October, inspiring protests and activism in the United States have challenged U.S. support for Israel’s military assault on Gaza. However, boosted by revulsion at the atrocities that Hamas committed against Israeli civilians on October 7, the usual rationales for supporting Israel’s violence against Palestinians have been hard at work.

In this election year, an additional factor looms large. With just eight months until the voting starts that could propel Donald Trump back into the presidency, the prospect of his return to power is all too real. And with Biden set to be the Democratic Party’s nominee, countless individuals and groups are careful to avoid

saying much that’s critical of the president they want to see re-elected.

Instead of candor, the routine choices have been euphemisms and silence. But — morally and politically — that’s a big mistake.

The electoral base that Biden is going to need for re-election is heavily against his support for Israel’s war on Gaza. Polling shows that young people in particular are overwhelmingly opposed. Most have seen through the thin veneer of his weak pleas for Israel to not kill so many civilians.

No amount of evasions, silences or doubletalk can make Biden’s policies morally acceptable. But — while the administration combines its PR hand-wringing with military arms-supplying — Biden apologists go on and on with evasion and verbal gymnastics to defend the indefensible.

A far better course of action would be actual candor about current realities: Joe Biden’s moral collapse is enabling the Israeli government to continue, with impunity, its large-scale massacre of Palestinian people. In the process, Biden is increasing the chances that the Republican Party, led by fascistic Donald Trump, will gain control of the White House in January.

Election 2024: Dealing With Devils

Michael Albert

Did you see Trump say police incinerate homeless people? Did you see, Biden forgot his own name? Might AI deceptions so flood media outlets that election 2024 gets postponed while some kind of guardrail is put in place to prevent blatant manipulations? That's probably not likely, but it's certainly not impossible.

Suppose election 2024 does happen. Will who wins matter? Will it make sense to proceed to the voting booth to cast a ballot, much less to urge others to do so as well? The argument in the U.S. that says don't bother to vote says we have a government that has structure, relationships, and history that together determine outcomes more than who is in office. And even when who is in office somewhat matters, that person typically differs greatly from the person whose campaign we voted for. Candidates routinely promise X but then do Y. To vote seeking X involves magical thinking that we will get what we were told we would get. To vote legitimates fraud.

In contrast, those in the U.S. who say the electoral realm matters say "okay, we agree that Democrats and Republicans each exist to maintain society without fundamental changes to misogyny, racism, and the hierarchy of economic classes. However, we also think that even though non-voters' criticisms are true, sometimes who wins can significantly affect people's lives and later agendas. In the U.S., for example, the voting matters view says if we elect Trump in 2024 people will suffer and subsequent activism will only try to prevent and reverse changes made by the extreme off-the-rails wing of our one-party state. In this situation, electoral activity becomes highly relevant.

These two views certainly seem contradictory and often even assault one another, but in fact one can rightly believe that the United States government is a gigantic apparatus constrained in countless ways by dynamics built into its operations so that most of the time who wins elections will barely matter. And one

can simultaneously believe that sometimes the gap between candidates predictable actions if elected is so great that effects on people and on the conditions under which people have to operate will matter greatly. More, to sensibly hold both views implies that the electoral realm is neither always irrelevant nor always highly relevant. Instead, it implies that in some places and at some times, elections are sufficiently important to warrant close attention and effort. Sometimes a candidate might even go so completely off the rails as to function way beyond otherwise system-preserving behavior. Trump, for example, is not a typical political candidate. He is instead an emissary of an extremely dangerous fascist project. Someday we will hopefully have a different kind of atypical candidate, an extremely worthy emissary of a revolutionary project, but that is not now.

So, all right, the key question remains. Should we vote and work to get out the vote in U.S. election 2024? Should person X or movement Y or organization Z engage with the 2024 U.S. presidential election even though to do so will take some time and take some energy that could have gone somewhere else? More, should X, Y, or Z participate even though electoral involvement not only takes time and energy, but can also adversely affect those who do it? How should we navigate our situation? Should we vote, saying it takes very little time and that to do so won't overly alter our values and broader commitments? Or should we not vote, saying that engaging in the electoral realm might blunt our critique of government, distort our commitments, and legitimate injustice?

I think a plausible if not definitive answer is that—it depends. We should engage when to vote really matters, and so, for example, need not engage when we're in a state where the outcome is a foregone conclusion or if the difference between the candidates in office would be nearly indiscernible. If we want to vote in those cases, okay, but it's not urgent. On the other hand, in a situation where who wins could seriously

undermine people's lives and restrict the subsequent orientation and prospects of movements, we should vote. But, even when that is the case, how should we then vote and/or engage with phone calling or just talking to other people about voting so that our participation doesn't become a slippery slope that takes us away from our broader and more fundamental understanding of how society works and what society needs?

In the 2024 election, isn't at least part of the answer that we shouldn't say "vote Biden, he's great." We should instead call Biden any name we want. We should proclaim what's wrong with his policies and what's wrong with the electoral system. But we should also say that because which candidate wins will greatly affect people's well-being and what people will seek during the next four years, we should participate. And we should not just hold our nose when we vote in a swing state or work on the election, but we should organize toward the future.

Indeed, isn't that the way we should do all things activist? If we pursue better wages at work, a reduction of racist police behavior in communities, or sane policies vis-a-vis the survival of the whole planet, shouldn't we simultaneously try to build our collective capacity to go further? Shouldn't we try to affect consciousness and understanding of the world not in a way that wins an immediate change and then goes back to business as usual, but in a way that wins immediate changes and keeps fighting to win more? So too for an election. If we cast a ballot, work to get the vote out, advocate among our friends, or write essays on behalf of keeping the worse candidate out of office, shouldn't we do it in a way that doesn't manipulate and lie about the candidate who we want to help win, but that tells the truth? Shouldn't we vote or even make phone calls or write essays on behalf of voting, but never obscure what we need to do to move toward fundamental change? That seems to me why, when, and how to be electoral.

But that's too abstract, it's too general. What about the specific situation we now find ourselves in? A lot of people now say, totally understandably, "never Biden." They say "of course I'm not going to vote for Trump, but I'm not going to vote for Biden either because how

can I decide that the lesser of these two evils is Biden when Biden is financing, cheerleading, alibing for, and arming the genocidal behavior of Israel in Gaza? When somebody is abetting, financing, and arming genocidal brutality, how can we call that 'lesser'?"

I have to admit, that feels like a compelling argument. Should I just hold my nose to vote for Genocide Joe? Is to hold my nose enough to justify that choice? No, it isn't, but what can justify voting for Biden is not that we hold our nose to display that we hate him, but that we understand that to ignore the pain people will suffer under Trump but that they might not or will not suffer under Biden means that we care about human well-being. Someone might reply, "to not vote doesn't mean I don't care." And I might respond, of course, "but what will your not voting and telling others to not vote look like to somebody who is concerned about abortion rights, labor struggle, global warming, or Fascist take over if a leftist in a swing state says "I'm not going to vote for Biden to beat Trump because even though polling is close in my state I don't care about the election's outcome as much as I care about the fact that I just can't stand Genocide Joe." Mightn't that suggest to people that I operate aloof from their concerns? Mightn't it be a bit like if during the recent UAW strike, a leftist comes along and says, "Hey, wait a second. The auto industry is a vile, disgusting capitalist, racist, sexist institution. Your strike is not going to change that. It may win some better circumstances and better income for some deserving people, but it won't address anything fundamental. Worse, it might even ratify the idea that owners should dish out salaries, bosses should make decisions, and workers should obey them. For those reasons I don't want to be a part of it. I don't want to advocate it. I don't want to give my time to it." Mightn't that lead striking workers to feel that leftists are divorced from their reality? That leftists don't give a shit about workers? Mightn't they reply that "you leftists say you're for fundamental change, but you're not willing to participate in this strike to improve our lives and by which people can come to be radical and revolutionary just because you want to appear more radical than us." These are real feelings that many workers have about a left that seems to be concerned with everything but them. It seems to them that we

dismiss or even just ignore them. And couldn't dismissing stopping Trump send a similar message?

For these reasons I think to favor electing a lesser evil is not crazy. But okay, to get specific about 2024, suppose you feel you're sensibly advocating voting for a lesser evil because Biden is way better than Trump on many issues, but, then your friend says, "wait a minute. He's Genocide Joe. Genocide is maximally evil. And it isn't just that he's part of the system, it's that he's aggressively abetting genocide. "So, again, why will you vote for Genocide Joe?" Well, the reason that I urge is because consequences matter, and the lesser evil's consequences can be less bad for people now and less of a setback for continuing efforts to get better consequences later.

Could the election process be better? Of course, it could. One thing people propose is ranked choice voting which would allow us to vote for what we really want and when it comes down to two left still have our preference register. Another thing is finance reform. Elections would be better if candidates weren't allowed to raise money at all and couldn't spend on the election other than what is provided by the government. The government would provide the funds elections run on. Media wouldn't profit but would have to provide the same ample space for both candidates, and if there are multiple candidates, then a framework that makes sense should be adopted. For that matter, is the Electoral College ludicrous? Of course, it is. And so is the Senate's anti-Democratic structure, and of course we could just keep on listing things we could change until we finally propose an assembly structure that would enable real participatory democracy. But right now we don't have any of that, and since to not have any of that means 2024 will have a ridiculously crazy election after which, nonetheless, people are going to take office, we have to ask ourselves will it matter who wins? Will it matter if Donald Trump becomes president again or if Joe Biden continues as president? Well, will Biden continuing as president be wonderful? Of course not. Will it automatically be bearable? Well, no, not really. Will movements keep seeking to end global warming? Yes, certainly. On the other hand, with Trump in power, movements will try to prevent him from

sending police into the houses of people who organize against global warming. Trump in office will be very significantly different than Biden in office. With Biden we would seek positive gains. With Trump, we would seek to limit escalating losses.

So what's going to happen if it is Trump versus Biden? Many people believe that the "Never-Biden" sentiment will cause him to lose. The totally justified horror and outrage that people feel about Biden's grotesque Mideast policies will certainly hurt him, and his also grotesque policies about global warming will certainly hurt him, and together many people think those choices will cause him to lose. But at the same time, Trump is slowly but surely unraveling, and he too is losing support, perhaps not from his most fundamentalist base, but certainly from his less zealous support. So who is going to lose more and therefore lose the election? I suspect that as time gets closer to November, the lesser evil argument, which is currently seen as insane by a lot of people on the left who instead say "come on, you've got to be kidding, how much worse can we get than genocide," is going to pick up momentum as being not insane. The world is insane. Our situation is insane. Our circumstances are insane. Fascism is insane. But voting for a lesser evil to prevent more damage and to create conditions for winning more benefits is not insane.

So can we understand our conditions and act in light of our estimate of consequences and retain our principled commitments? It is certainly possible. Countless people have faced horrible circumstances, horrible political arrangements, and fought those arrangements, including trying to get better ones that are short of revolution. Revolution is not going to come tomorrow. I wish it was, but making believe it's going to come tomorrow and therefore saying that seeking anything less than revolution today is reactionary, is deluded. And since revolution is not going to come tomorrow, to try and move toward the fundamental change we seek we have to develop a basis for winning more on that road, for advocating more on that road, and for getting more people to want to travel that road. We have to look at the conditions that now exist and try to change them in a manner that gives us better circumstances for fighting on for

comprehensive change.

It's a horrible thing, but today's issue isn't just are the two parties not two parties but two wings of one corporate, racist, sexist party? Yes, they are and many have said so for decades. But 2024's issue isn't just is the process of elections corrupt, bent upside down, vile, and not remotely democratic much less self-managing? Yes, that is all certainly the case. And is Biden despicable? I don't know how else to summarize what his policies in the Middle East say about him. So yes, he is despicable. Is Trump way beyond the pale? I mean completely off the rails? Is he a fascist? Yes, as best I can tell, the only argument against deciding he is fascist is to say he's an entirely narcissistic egomaniac and he doesn't care about a fascist vision because he doesn't care about anything other than where he winds up and how much power and wealth he has. Okay, perhaps that is an argument against him personally being a fascist. He's not sophisticated enough. He doesn't care enough about anything beyond himself, but nonetheless, the process that he's furthering is a fascist process. So all of that is true and it informs why I not only hate Trump but I also hate Biden. It informs why I can't stand our electoral system but recognize that election 2024's issue involves two candidates, Trump and Biden, who can become president. So how should we think about that?

Shouldn't we think about it the same way we think about fighting for higher wages, fighting for better conditions, fighting for a change in policing, fighting for a change in courtroom dynamics, fighting for better housing, fighting for sane policies regarding immigration, fighting for labor rights and higher wages, fighting for abortion rights, and fighting against sexism in all its forms? That is, shouldn't we think about elections the same way we think about all of that which is to ask how we can best impact outcomes in ways that help people in need and that help prepare means to win more?

We shouldn't say Biden's all you can get. Biden's the best there is. The Democratic Party is our party. The Democratic Party is what we need. We shouldn't say Boss's boss. That's the way it is. Owners own. That's

the way it is. Humans being greedy. That's the way it is. Racism, ethnocentrism, religious bigotry. That's the way it is. Men rape. That's the way it is. The best we can do is to ameliorate some pain. That's the way it is. We don't say all that because all that is false. We should know enough to know that one is not denying the possibility of better to vote for Biden in swing states. We do that to reduce pain. But will it reduce the pain of the Palestinians to elect Biden? Not directly, but he's more possible to force into reducing their pain than Trump is. And it is more possible to impact his foreign policies than Trump's, which God only knows what they would lead to? Will it be easier to fight against fossil fuels and for ecological sanity with Biden in office than with Trump? We should vote Biden and urge that others do so too while we simultaneously say this is a disgusting, grotesque thing that we have to do and that we urge others to do because our choice is this or something much worse. And because the time that it takes us to vote in swing states, or, if we're moved to it, the time that it takes us to help get out the vote, will be time well spent as long as we simultaneously advance what we really do believe in.

And finally, let's consider one last observation. When we do advance what we believe in, in my case for example, participatory society, but in somebody else's case participatory socialism, and in somebody else's case just socialism, or in somebody else's case feminism or anarchism or both, and so on, most of the time we do so for a very small audience hoping it will percolate out from there. In the electoral season, however, if we can psychologically and emotionally simultaneously engage in the electoral process and also advocate what we really want, then we will advocate what we really want to many many more people than usual. The incredible thing is that that will not only not ethically compromise, and not programmatically compromise, instead it will enhance our ability to ethically and programmatically reach out better. That, to me, is the last, I suppose, I don't know what to call it—clinching argument.

I guess we'll see who is actually running, how people decide to engage, and what the outcome is in the future. Meanwhile, maybe we can avoid having the discussion of our options become *ad hominem*.

On Hypocrisy and Genocide—How Gaza Has Exposed the West Like Never Before

Ramzy Baroud

The Israeli genocide in Gaza will be remembered as the moral collapse of the West.

As soon as the Israeli war began, following the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation on October 7, every moral or legal frame of reference that Washington and its western allies supposedly held dear was suddenly dropped. Western leaders rushed to Israel, one after the other, offering military, political and intelligence support – along with a blank check to rightwing Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu and his generals to torment the Palestinians.

The likes of the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, went as far as joining Israel's first war council meeting, so that he could take part in the discussion which directly resulted in the Gaza genocide.

"I come before you not only as the United States Secretary of State, but also as a Jew," he said on October 12. The interpretation of these words is disturbing, no matter how it is spun, but it also ultimately means that Blinken has lost all credibility as an American, as a politician or even as a fair-minded human being.

His boss, President Joe Biden, as if in an infinite loop, has been, for years, repeating that "You don't have to be Jewish to be a Zionist". Indeed, he has lived up to his maxim, declaring, time and again, "I am a Zionist". Indeed, he is.

Like many other US and western officials and politicians, the US President abandoned international and humanitarian laws altogether, even the law of his own country. The Leahy Law "prohibits the US Department of State and Department of Defense from providing military assistance to foreign



security force units that violate human rights with impunity." Instead, he, like Blinken, subscribed to tribal affiliation and ideological notions, which simply added fuel to the fire.

Though "protected persons" under international law, Palestinians seem dispensable, in fact, irrelevant to the point that their collective death appears critical for Israel to regain its 'deterrence', and to protect itself, in the words of Israeli Minister of Defense, Yoav Gallant, against the "human animals" of Gaza.

If there is a stronger word than hypocrisy, one would have used it. But, for now, it would have to suffice.

At the beginning of the war, many rightly drew a parallel between the West's reaction to Gaza and their enraged response to the war in Ukraine. However, as the death toll grew, this comparison seemed inadequate. Over 12,000 children have been killed in Gaza in 140 days

of war, compared to 579 in the two-year Russia-Ukraine war.

Yet, when the EU Foreign Policy Chief, Josep Borrell, was asked, point blank, in an Al-Jazeera interview on November 20 about the violations of international law in Gaza, he offered two completely different answers. “I am not a lawyer,” he said, when the legality of Israel’s atrocities in Gaza were questioned. When the interviewer shifted to talk about Al-Aqsa Flood, Borrell had no qualms about the issue. “Yes, we consider that a war crime, for killing civilians in this apparent way without any reason,” he said.

This episode has not been repeated often in the US media, simply because few mainstream media journalists are bothered or, more accurately, dare to question Israel’s grisly behavior in the Gaza Strip.

However, when such opportunities arose, the flagrant hypocrisy was impossible to hide. Marvel, for example, at Matthew Miller, spokesperson for the US State Department, in response to rape allegations in both Gaza and Israel. When he was asked, on February 18, about allegations of rape by Israeli soldiers of Palestinian women in Gaza, his answer was that the US has urged Israel to “thoroughly and transparently investigate credible allegations”.

Compare this to his response to a question about unverifiable allegations of sexual assaults made by Palestinians against Israelis, although debunked even by Israel’s own media. “They’ve committed rape. We have no reason at all to doubt those reports,” he said at a press conference on December 4.

Such examples are produced daily by hundreds of western leaders, top officials and media organizations. Even now, when the death toll has broken all records of brutality in recent human history, they still speak of Israel’s “right to defend itself”, willfully ignoring the fact that Israel has forfeited this right as soon as it engaged in this prolonged aggression, starting in 1948.

Indeed, international law on the rules of wars and military occupation is situated within a framework – notably laid out by the Fourth Geneva Convention – that exists to defend the rights of the occupied, not the right of the Occupier.

This time-honored truth is obvious to the vast majority of humanity, save Washington and a few others.

As dozens of envoys from around the world testified before the International Court of Justice from February 19 to 26, protesting Israel’s horrific violence, protracted occupation and racial system of apartheid, the US sent its envoy to the highest Court in the world to lobby for something else entirely.

With the ironic title of “Acting legal adviser for the US State Department”, Richard Visek bizarrely urged the ICJ to ignore international law altogether. “The Court should not find that Israel is legally obligated to immediately and unconditionally withdraw from Occupied Territory,” he said.

For far too long, but especially since October 7, Western governments, starting with the US, have violated every last set of ethics, morality and laws that they themselves developed, drafted, promoted, even imposed on the rest of the world for many decades. Currently, they are practically dismantling their own laws, and the very ethical standards that led to their formation.

Now that some western leaders have begun to feel increasingly uncomfortable as the enormity of the Gaza genocide unfolds, a few, though bashfully, are declaring that Netanyahu may be ‘going too far’. Even so, not even an outright admission of responsibility would erase the fact that they are active participants in Netanyahu’s killing campaign.

When all is said and done, the blood of the horrifyingly high number of Palestinian victims will be shared equally between Tel Aviv, Brussels, London, Sidney and all other genocide apologists. A crime of this magnitude will never be forgotten or forgiven.

Madmen Arsonists Strike Again: Statement from Veterans For Peace about Aaron Bushnell

Veterans for Peace

Aaron Bushnell just couldn't take any more.

He couldn't bear to see any more people eviscerated and incinerated by American bombs dropped by Israelis on innocent Palestinians.

So, in his Air Force uniform, he walked determinedly to the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C. and set himself on fire.

What can we say about a young man who would do that to protest his government's acts of cruelty and genocide?

It is important we say nothing before quoting his own calmly spoken, final words to the world:

"I am an active-duty member of the United States Air Force and I will no longer be complicit in genocide. I am about to engage in an extreme act of protest. But compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonizers, it's not extreme at all. This is what our ruling class has decided will be normal. Free Palestine!"

You can see Aaron's last minute of life in a video, blurred out after he strikes the match.

In it, he shouts, "Free Palestine" six times. The last five are combined with screams of agony before he falls silent.

A voice off-camera, shouts repeatedly, "Get him on the ground...on the ground," which is the correct thing to do when someone is on fire.

People frantically rush in with a fire extinguisher. A police officer or uniformed guard appears and points a gun in Aaron's direction. Someone calls out "I need a fire extinguisher...a fire extinguisher...another

one...I don't need guns; I need a fire extinguisher."

Why would Aaron do something this extreme?

More of the "why" may come to light. But what he said in that video is sufficient. He could "no longer be complicit in genocide."

Aaron's motivation is strikingly similar to that of Norman Morrison, a 35-year-old, Quaker activist who set himself ablaze in the Pentagon parking lot below Secretary of War McNamara's office, November 2, 1965.

In a letter to his wife, Morrison had written, "Dearest Anne, For weeks, even months, I have been praying only that I be shown what I must do. This morning with no warning, I was shown ... Know that I love thee but must act for the children in the Priest's village," in reference to an article he had read in which a Catholic priest described Vietnamese "women and children blown to bits" from U.S. bombing and napalm.

Too many of us in VFP have seen the suffering war creates and it never leaves our memories. All of us agonize over our government's aiding and abetting the slaughter of innocents.

We prod ourselves, "what is the most, the very best thing, I can do?"

That question moves some to learn the history of Palestine that they've too long ignored; some to contact elected officials; some to join a public protest; some to go on fasts; some to block roads or congressional offices and go to jail. But it never feels like enough.

Some may perceive fasting to the death or self-im-



Vigil for Aaron Bushnell in Washington DC, February 26th 2024 Photo: Elvert Barnes/flickr

molation as crazy and extreme beyond measure. Others see it as entirely appropriate because the horror protested is itself insane and extreme beyond measure.

Few who care deeply will have the courage to fast to the death or do what Aaron Bushnell did. But in addition to whatever inadequate things we already do, we can, we must, do two more things.

The first is to consciously let people who are pained and grieving at what our government does know that they are not alone. We should not assume our colleagues and comrades know we are aware of their anguish.

Secondly, we can resolve that we will move beyond simply reacting to bestial policies.

We could call our policymakers “madmen arsonists” because they go around the globe setting fires much faster than we can extinguish them.

These policymakers, swaddled in privilege, take their orders from those who profit from death and suffering. We know who they are: the people who run Boeing, Raytheon, General Dynamics and their fellow merchants of death, and the people who finance what the merchants do.

These madmen arsonists operate on a grand scale internationally but also on a singular, small scale as in front of the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C. They as much as lit the match for Aaron Bushnell. The fire that killed Airman Bushnell was simply the “collateral damage,” as it’s so callously called, of the ongoing conflagration in Palestine.

Our firefighting will never keep up with arsonists who operate on a global scale. We are long overdue to learn the fire prevention skills needed to halt them.

Fire prevention in this context means prohibiting the lobbying, advertising, vote buying, campaign funding and actual legislation writing that corporations do behind constitutional shields given them by the Supreme Court, like free speech and protection.

Until we strip corporations of their shields, they will continue to amass economic and political power to govern us, to set fires large and small, while we run frantically for fire extinguishers until we are exhausted, penniless and gone.

Veterans For Peace is learning the necessary fire prevention skills we need as we continue fighting fires set by the madmen arsonists. It is simply our responsibility to do both at the same time.

Hamas: From Candidate Enforcer to Implacable Foe

Assaf Kfoury

Hamas was formed in the late 1980s as an armed wing of the Gaza branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood, a transnational Islamist organization founded in Egypt in 1928, had a small organized presence in Palestine since at least the 1940s. From Gaza, it later spread to the West Bank and nearby places of the Palestinian diaspora, notably Lebanon. To better understand Hamas's history, one needs to examine the socioeconomic conditions which made Gaza fertile ground for its birth and later development. However, a full treatment of this issue lies outside the scope of this essay, although I provide references to further reading on this topic at the end, which goes a long way in explaining the profound despair of a closed horizon that the people of Gaza have had to endure over the years, both literally and figuratively, since at least the 1960s.

Instead, this article is a chronology of the main events prior and leading to Hamas's emergence, and later until it became Israel's implacable foe by the end of the 1990s. I briefly brush over consolidation of Hamas as the leading resistance organization since the early 2000s, largely a result of misfiring Israeli policies. And I entirely omit Hamas's evolution over the last two decades, as it became more pragmatic, more distant from its religious roots, and more conciliatory towards secular strains of Palestinian resistance. In fact, it also became open to negotiations with Israel for a de-facto permanent division of the land – which, of course, runs counter to the common view propagandized by mainstream circles in the United States that Hamas is “dedicated to wiping Israel off the map” and that nothing short of that goal will satisfy it. This is another important topic outside this article's scope: How Hamas has turned around and accepted the idea of a two-state solution, and what makes American policymakers – against all available evidence – persistently insist that it has not.

If there is one thing that stands out in Israel's policies regarding Hamas, and the Brotherhood in Gaza of which it is an offshoot, it is that they repeatedly backfired on their originator. This happened predictably time and again – not always immediately, but within months or years or decades – with catastrophic consequences for the Palestinians, of course, but ultimately for the Israelis too.

Biding its time and avoiding armed resistance

In September 1973, a pious Palestinian schoolteacher, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, presided over the founding of al-Mujamma al-Islami (the “Islamic Gathering” or the “Islamic Gathering Center”) – or al-Mujamma for short – at a mosque in Gaza. Yassin was a refugee from al-Jura, a village destroyed in 1948 near the present-day city of Ashkelon in Israel. When he was a university student in Cairo in the late 1950s, Yassin joined the Muslim Brotherhood. After his return to Gaza in 1960, Yassin attracted a growing number of loyal followers. Although the Brotherhood had had a presence of sorts in Gaza and the rest of Palestine dating back to the earliest years of its founding, al-Mujamma became henceforth the Brotherhood's front and public face in Gaza.

In contrast to other earlier Palestinian members of the Brotherhood, Yassin adhered to a strict moralizing line in his sermons and preaching, which prioritized spiritual revival over active militancy. He maintained the same moralizing line even after Israel wrested control of Gaza from Egypt in 1967. Earlier Palestinian members of the Brotherhood, who had advocated active militancy and armed struggle, defected from the organization and were among those who founded the Fatah group in 1959. By the end of



Hamas women rally for Palestinian detainees and martyrs in Gaza (Photo: Joe Catron)

the 1960s, Fatah had become the largest and dominant party of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

It was Fatah and other nationalist groups under the PLO's umbrella, such as the Marxist-oriented Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which bore the brunt of resistance to Israel's occupation of Gaza after 1967. Yassin, by-now head of the Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip, categorically refused to join the resistance in any form, despite repeated urgings by the others. Some members of the Brotherhood even saw Egypt's defeat and humiliation in 1967 as deserved punishment of "false prophets of liberation and revolution, deceitful heroes who have misled their people, exiled the preachers of Islam, [and] thrown into prison the purest Muslim youth."

The Israeli army under the command of general Ariel Sharon, then head of the southern region,

led a brutal campaign for four long years 1969-1973 to completely pacify Gaza. Known for his ruthlessness and praised by his fellow generals ("the greatest field commander in our history," according to Yitzhak Rabin), Sharon was a man who believed that "our main weapon" for dealing with Palestinians was "the fear of us." True to his word, Sharon's campaign culminated in the killing of several of the nationalist leaders, the deportation of several hundreds of their followers from Gaza to Jordan, and the forced relocation of tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees within the Gaza Strip. Muhammad al-Aswad, known as "Gaza's Guevara" and head of the PFLP's military wing at the time, was killed in March 1973, which marked the end of Gaza's open armed resistance. Yet even after this defeat, the smoking embers of resistance would inevitably reignite in later years under new leadership.

While the nationalist resistance groups were systematically dismantled and decimated, Yassin was taking advantage of Israel's deliberate benign neglect. He was patiently expanding his network of charitable and social activities throughout the Gaza Strip. At the inauguration of al-Mujamma in September 1973, one of the guests of honor was none other than the Israeli military governor of Gaza at the time, general Shmuel Gonen. Israel's obvious aim was to weaken the nationalist camp by encouraging the Islamist alternative. Six years later, in September 1979, the Israeli authorities went even further in boosting al-Mujamma, by recognizing it as a charity organization which could expand its social services openly, including the setting up of schools, clubs, and mosques. Among other significant developments during that period, from 1967 to 1987, the number of mosques in the Gaza Strip more than doubled, all with al-Mujamma's patronage, well-lubricated with funds from reactionary Saudi and Gulf sources.

Israel's divide-and-rule policy was also facilitated by intra-Palestinian conflicts. There were conflicts between Islamists and secular nationalists. There were conflicts between pro-communists and anti-communists within the PLO. Palestinians were thus broadly divided into three political groupings and tendencies. Two of these, the Islamists and the pro-communist nationalists harbored long-standing mutual animosity and irreconcilable differences, with the Islamists at this stage playing a negligible role in resisting Israeli occupation. The third and largest grouping in the middle whose mainstay was Fatah – secular with various strains of third-world leftism – often played an ambiguous role in this array of forces, sometimes pursuing its own divide-and-rule policy within the Palestinian arena.

In December 1979, Fatah, with strong backing from al-Mujamma, tried and failed in an election to win the presidency of Gaza's Red Crescent Society, whose pro-communist president, Haydar Abdel Shafi, was overwhelmingly reelected. A little over three years later, in January 1983, Fatah tried to turn the tables on al-Mujamma in student elections. Fatah lost again, beaten by a coalition (the "Islamic Bloc") organized by al-Mujamma at the Islamic University,

one of the two oldest and largest universities in the Gaza Strip.

Aiming itself against the PLO

This kind of backstabbing and backstage maneuvering led to frequent clashes between the Islamists of al-Mujamma and the other Palestinian groups in Gaza, throughout the first half of the 1980s. Partly in self-defense, al-Mujamma started to arm itself and gradually moved away from its earlier quietist, culturalist stance. One reason for this shift was competition from a smaller, more radical Islamist group, Islamic Jihad, which was also founded by former members of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1981, outside and against the PLO. Initially al-Mujamma focused its attacks on the PFLP and other pro-communist adversaries, but it soon extended its attacks to Fatah and other members of the PLO. Throughout these disturbances in the early 1980s, the Israeli army mostly remained on the sidelines and did not intervene in any decisive way, letting the internal Palestinian bloodletting take its own course unhindered, if not outright encouraging it.

In June 1984, a stealth raid by the Israeli army uncovered dozens of pistols and machine guns hidden in Yassin's mosque. Though primarily intended to intimidate other Palestinian factions, possession of those weapons led to Yassin's arrest and sentencing to thirteen years in prison. He did not complete more than a year of his prison term and was freed in a prisoner exchange in May 1985. But that episode also had a beneficial effect for Yassin. The imprisonment somewhat tempered accusations he had long endured of profiting from the Israeli occupation and allowed him to polish his reputation and that of al-Mujamma outside Islamist circles.

Following his release from prison in May 1985, Yassin set up an auxiliary security apparatus, Majd (acronym for Munazzamat al-Jihad wa al-Da'wa), headed by former student leader Yehya Sinwar

(Hamas's current leader in Gaza). The function of Majd was to protect Islamist social networks from other Palestinian factions and to suppress social

deviance (drugs, prostitution, adultery, etc.). Around the same time, increasingly challenged by Islamic Jihad to mount armed resistance, Yassin set up another armed apparatus, al-Mujahidoon al-Filastiniyyoon (the “Palestinian fighters”), headed by another former student leader Salah Shehade (assassinated by Israel in 2002). Israeli authorities quickly rounded up this second group and confiscated their weapons. For Majd, which was then al-Mujamma’s first and only functioning armed branch, the priority thus remained the enemy within, not the Israeli occupier.

Notwithstanding those incidents, the Israeli authorities were still banking on Yassin and al-Mujamma to become willing Israeli enforcers, or if not, then to supplant the PLO which they kept on viewing as the more formidable enemy. In the words of Gaza’s military governor (general Yitzhak Segev) in 1986: “We extend some financial aid to Islamic groups via mosques and religious schools in order to help create a force that would stand against the leftist forces which support the PLO.”

In an internal memorandum dated March 1984, an advisor (Avner Cohen) of Gaza’s Israeli commander described al-Mujamma and the rest of the Islamist network as a golem – a creature in Jewish folklore formed out of lifeless substance which, when brought to life by ritual incantations, ultimately escapes (and in this case, turns against) its creator. From today’s vantage point, forty years later, this sounds uncannily prophetic. Perhaps the Islamist threat was not quite a golem as described, i.e., not a total creature of Israel, but a preexisting genie which would soon be out of the Israeli bottle, with nothing able to push it back in.

The first Intifada and Hamas’s late official beginning

Against the background of a cruel settler-colonial occupation, coupled with deteriorating economic conditions, tensions had been slowly building up to the boiling point by the mid 1980s. The pent-up frustrations, grievances, and endless humiliations, erupted on 8 December 1987: The trigger was an incident in which four Palestinian laborers from Gaza

were killed when an Israeli military truck smashed into their cars. Demonstrations broke out in Gaza’s Jabaliya refugee camp on the very next day, resulting in more Palestinians injured or killed by the Israeli military. Protests immediately spread like wildfire to the rest of the Gaza Strip and then to the West Bank. The first Intifada had begun.

Yassin and al-Mujamma were then posed with a dilemma: Either forgo their de-facto accommodation with the Israeli authorities or lose support among Palestinians in general, for whom legitimacy derived from national resistance to occupation, not from piety. After initial hesitation and internal deliberations, Yassin, with the majority of al-Mujamma’s most prominent members, resolved the contradiction by announcing the formation of Hamas on December 14, 1987. The new group’s goal now included national liberation. Hamas only published a founding manifesto eight months later in August 1988, entitled the Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement. The Hamas Covenant was a scrambled mixture of the Brotherhood’s socially puritanical version of Islam, several concessions to the nationalism espoused by the PLO, and a superficial rehash of Euro-centric antisemitism. It retained all of al-Mujamma’s pre-Intifada social agenda, while also blurring the distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism that the PLO’s National Charter had insisted on.

The first Intifada was a remarkable uprising, spearheaded by young Palestinians, organized in networks of popular committees throughout the occupied territories. They defied the Israeli military with stones and slingshots, not with guns and firearms, thus giving the uprising its commonly used second name, the “Stone Intifada.” The Israeli military’s violent repression involved the use of live ammunition against protesters, the break-their-bones policy initiated by then-minister of defense Yitzhak Rabin, the mass jailing of demonstrators, punitive curfews and closures. Yet the consensus among local PLO-affiliated groups was against the use of firearms, which remained in place for the entire five-year duration of the uprising. Clandestine communiques were distributed at night throughout the territories bearing the signature



GAZA, PALESTINE, May 1st, 2012- Following a May Day march and rally, Palestinians hold a sit-in at Unknown Solider's Square (al-Jundi) in support of Palestinian prisoners' movement hunger strike. (Photo: Joe Catron)

of a newly formed underground Unified National Command of the Uprising (UNCU), which comprised the four principal PLO-affiliated groups: Fatah, the PFLP, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP, later renamed Palestinian People's Party).

Significantly, Hamas kept its separate identity and was not part of the UNCUC. It could not remain on the sideline indefinitely without hurting its own standing as a resistance group. Hamas thus joined protests and boycotts, while also issuing its own separate communiques, only sometimes concordant with those of the UNCUC. The formation of Hamas's military wing, Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades, was more than three years later, in the summer of 1991. Al-Qassam Brigades would inaugurate a new more violent phase in Hamas's trajectory, although Hamas members had already

engaged in isolated armed actions in earlier years of the Intifada, as when it carried out two separate armed abductions in 1989 resulting in the killing of two Israeli soldiers.

Unable to decapitate the local Intifada leadership of the UNCUC – secretive, disciplined, and tightly knitted – Israel blamed the uprising on the PLO leadership in its Tunisian exile. "There's a few hot-heads being roused by phone calls from Abu Jihad in Tunis," declared Yitzhak Rabin. Misidentifying the true local leaders of the uprising, Israel started to target PLO officials in the Palestinian diaspora, culminating in the assassination of several top leaders, including one of Fatah's co-founders (Khalil al-Wazir aka Abu Jihad) in April 1988.

Despite the vitriol of its propaganda against Israel, Hamas's relations with the Israeli authorities remained quietist for many months into the first

Intifada. The Israeli army “never [interfered] with Hamas’s strike days.” In March 1988, Mahmoud Zahar, a prominent Islamist and co-founder of Hamas, even met with Shimon Peres, then Israel’s minister of foreign affairs. Zahar offered a tacit recognition of Israel in exchange for a return to the 1967 borders. And again, in the summer of 1988, Mahmoud Zahar and Ibrahim Yazouri, another prominent Islamist figure, had meetings with Yitzhak Rabin. For a keen observer at the time, “the purpose of these meetings was to politically undermine the PLO’s claim to being the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people,” it was not to negotiate an end to the Intifada, as there was no realistic expectation for any group outside the UNCU to be able to single-handedly contain and stop the turmoil in the Intifada’s early stages.

In late 1988, Hamas chose to abandon those contacts with Israeli officials and to openly demarcate its position from the PLO’s position. Hamas was banking on the failure of any PLO-led negotiation with Israel, while the PLO was now in pursuit of a diplomatically-negotiated independent state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It was not until June 1989, on discovery that Hamas members were behind the abduction and killing of two Israeli soldiers, that Israel finally declared Hamas an illegal movement. This was a year and a half after the uprising’s outbreak, and nearly one year after Israel’s banning of all popular committees affiliated with the PLO and the UNCU. Until then, the Israeli mindset vis-à-vis Hamas had persistently believed it could manipulate a socially conservative movement from morphing into a lethal religious-based armed group.

Hamas takes center stage after the Oslo Accords

The Declaration of Principles (DOP), a prelude to the first of two Oslo Accords, was signed by Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin in September 1993. It was celebrated with much fanfare and believed by many to usher in a new era of Israeli-Palestinian coexistence. However, the process that culminated

with the signing of the DOP – and that famous handshake between Arafat and Rabin, presided over by US President Bill Clinton, on the White House lawn – did not start in Oslo thanks to a Norwegian initiative or the benevolence of some other party. It started in order to overtake and sideline another process – potentially more promising, had it been allowed to succeed – which preceded it by more than two years and culminated with a conference in Madrid in early November 1991. This conference inaugurated a series of meetings over several months attended by both Israeli and Palestinian delegates. The period of the Madrid conference and post-Madrid joint meetings overlapped with the last two years of the Intifada which, in no small measure, made them possible.

The Palestinians involved in formulating the DOP in Oslo were a handful of Arafat loyalists, selected and directed by the Tunis-based PLO, who did not coordinate with the delegates at Madrid and post-Madrid meetings. The Palestinian delegation in Madrid consisted of Palestinians from the occupied territories, unaccountable to the Tunis-based PLO authority though publicly upholding their allegiance to it and led by Haydar Abdel Shafi, probably the most respected figure in Palestine at the time. The DOP negotiators effectively blindsided the Madrid delegates, at least the Palestinians among them, as well as those who had led the Intifada on the ground. The secretive Oslo meetings were in part an attempt to reestablish the Tunis-based PLO authority, which had tried (with US prodding) to exert some control over the Intifada from its Tunisian exile but with little success.

The two letters exchanged by Arafat and Rabin prior to the DOP were an omen of things to come, none too hopeful from a Palestinian perspective. Intentionally or not, their contents reflected the extreme imbalance between the two sides – which side would dictate the terms of post-Oslo Israeli-Palestinian relations and which side would submit to those terms. Rabin’s letter was just one sentence, stating that “the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people,” and said nothing

about the history of violence and dispossession inflicted on the Palestinians. Arafat's letter was more than 15 lines long, pledging to renounce many things inimical to Israeli policies, including "the use of terrorism and other acts of violence and will assume responsibility over all PLO elements and personnel in order to assure their compliance, prevent violations and discipline violators." The stage was now set for turning the PLO, and its successor Palestinian Authority (PA), into an enforcer of Israeli rule. As expressed by a prominent leftwing Palestinian activist, "Oslo was the greatest idea Israel ever had. It let them continue the occupation without paying any of the costs."

By the time the second Oslo Accord was signed in September 1995, the spirit and hopes that motivated the Madrid conference had effectively evaporated on the Palestinian side. Trust in the Tunis-based PLO leadership was irrevocably broken, now out in the open, which marked the beginning of a Palestinian unraveling whose effects persist to this day. Haydar Abdel Shafi had already refused to attend the celebrations on the White House lawn in September 1993. Several members of the PLO executive committee had resigned, including Mahmoud Darwish, widely viewed as Palestine's national poet. And the co-opting of the first Intifada's legacy had been bitterly and publicly denounced by many Palestinians, most eloquently by Edward Said, who called the Oslo Accords "an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles."

If the foregoing text reflects a negative assessment of Madrid and Oslo by prominent Palestinians, it is worth noting that some Israelis shared that assessment, even when they drew different implications for the future. On the Madrid conference, the journalist Danny Rubinstein, a well-informed analyst of the occupied territories at the time, wrote that the US and Israel would agree to some form of Palestinian "autonomy," but that it would be "autonomy as in a POW camp, where the prisoners are 'autonomous' to cook their meals without interference and to organize cultural events." On the Oslo process, the historian and later government minister Shlomo Ben-Ami wrote (approvingly!) that

"in practice, the Oslo agreements were founded on a neo-colonialist basis, on a life of dependence of one on the other forever," designed to impose on the Palestinians "almost total dependence on Israel," creating "an extended colonial situation." An exponent of the anti-Zionist Marxist left, Moshe Machover, wrote that "the sad truth is that Yasser Arafat signed on the dotted line, if not as a conscious act of capitulation then as a result of self-delusion," and that the aim of the Oslo Accords "was evidently the creation of a kind of Indian reservation, or a disconnected set of such reservations, policed on Israel's behalf by Arafat and his CIA-trained security forces." A tiny glimmer of hope perhaps: When free of ideological blinders, Israelis can join Palestinians in seeing eye to eye on the latter's plight – as in this case, when some Israelis (admittedly, a tiny few!) recognized the ominous reality that Madrid and Oslo portended.

A major beneficiary of the Oslo agreements and post-Oslo period was undoubtedly Hamas, as the main party that did not fall for an illusory peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. The banner of resistance was now left to an emboldened Hamas, further enhanced by its exclusion from a discredited PLO. While Islamism had been a minor, if not insignificant, strain in Palestinian politics up until the late 1970s or early 1980s, Hamas became the main party of resistance to Israeli occupation by the early 2000s.

Boosted by Israel's campaign of assassinations

The Israeli investigative journalist Ronen Bergman reported that Israel carried out more than 2,700 targeted killings since its founding in 1948 – with the target ending up being shot, poisoned, or blown up to pieces, most often along with several "collateral" victims. This is a terrifying history that dwarfs the records of all of Israel's opponents put together. The eagerness to murder, as opposed to pursue other options such as diplomacy or compromise, appears compulsive – and pointless given the unavoidable reactions after every assassination. While the con-

sequences may be infuriating for the Palestinians and satisfying for the Israelis, they are only so in the immediate term, as they are counterproductive in the long run for Israel itself.

For a particular case that boomeranged spectacularly, one needs to look no further than Lebanon. In 1992, the Israelis decided to kill Abbas Musawi who was the leader of a nascent Hezbollah, and they did indeed kill him, along with his wife and five year-old son. But the leader who replaced him, Hassan Nasrallah, turned out to be a far more formidable opponent. In addition to organizing a powerful guerilla force and deftly inserting himself in internal Lebanese politics, Nasrallah has surrounded himself with a team of sophisticated advisors. Some of these aides have the sole function of reading and summarizing the Israeli (Hebrew) press on a daily basis for his perusal.

For years, Israel has targeted and killed Hamas leaders, just as it had targeted and killed PLO leaders in earlier decades, up until the Oslo Accords. In the words of Andrew Cockburn, a long-time commentator on military affairs: “Israel has long been addicted to assassination.” He calls it an “addiction” because Israel has never seemed to take pause to assess and reconsider its strategy of targeted killings, even when it has suffered immediate disastrous blowback effects. Israel has repeatedly failed to decapitate Hamas because “over the decades Hamas has developed (a) a resilient and notably collegial leadership that is not destroyed by the killing of one or even half a dozen individuals, and (b) a very effective leadership-training process that means that for any one leader killed there are a dozen with the capacity to take over. The effectiveness of this process was clearly demonstrated in Hamas’ intricately planned and devastating assault on October 7.”

So, when Israel decided to assassinate Hamas’s deputy political leader, Saleh al-Aroui, in Beirut on January 2 of this year, one is at a loss to understand what Israel was trying to achieve – why in that precise place and time – unless it acted out of sheer compulsive vendetta and damn all possible

consequences. The stakes are very high this time, as the assassination of al-Aroui may be the trigger for an all out war with Hezbollah.

Boosted by Israel's divide-and-rule policies

Playing on internal Palestinian tensions to weaken resistance to its rule has been a constant of Israel’s policies. Until the beginning of the first Intifada and for more than a year after it, Israel still banked on Hamas and the Islamists to counter the nationalists and the leftists affiliated with the Fatah-dominated PLO. Hamas and the Islamists came out stronger by the end of that game.

After the Oslo Accords, Israeli policy took a different turn. The Israeli government was now dealing with two rival Palestinian centers of authority, the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas. In 2006 Hamas beat Fatah in Legislative Council elections, as the latter was increasingly perceived as a subcontractor for Israeli occupation. This soon led to factional fighting and the eventual division of the Palestinian territories under two separate administrations: Hamas in Gaza and the Fatah-led PA in Ramallah. Even though the PA acted in coordination with Israel and as enforcer of the latter’s rule, Israel also worked on keeping it weak and unable to compete with Hamas in Gaza.

All Israeli leaders have tried to play the divide-and-rule game, but perhaps none played it as deviously and myopically as Netanyahu. “Anyone who wants to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian state has to support bolstering Hamas and transferring money to Hamas,” he told an audience of Likud members in March 2019. “This is part of our strategy – to isolate the Palestinians in Gaza from the Palestinians in the West Bank,” he declared. The strategy bolstered Hamas indeed, as expected, until it blew up in Netanyahu’s face on October 7.

Arundhati Roy on Gaza: ~~Never~~ Again

Arundhati Roy

The richest, most powerful countries in the western world, those who believe themselves to be the keepers of the flame of the modern world's commitment to democracy and human rights, are openly financing and applauding Israel's genocide in Gaza. The Gaza strip has been turned into a concentration camp. Those who have not already been killed are being starved to death. Almost the entire population of Gaza has been displaced. Their homes, hospitals, universities, museums, infrastructure of every kind has been reduced to rubble. Their children have been murdered. Their past has been vaporised. Their future is hard to see.

Even though the highest court in the world believes that almost every indicator seems to meet the legal definition of genocide, IDF soldiers continue to put out their mocking "victory videos" celebrating what almost look like fiendish rituals. They believe that there is no power in the world that will hold them to account. But they are wrong. They and their children's children will be haunted by what they have done. They will have to live with the loathing and the abhorrence the world feels for them. And hopefully one day everybody – on all sides of this conflict – who has committed war crimes will be tried and punished for them, keeping in mind that there is no equivalence between crimes committed while resisting Apartheid and Occupation, and crimes committed while enforcing them.

Racism is of course the keystone of any act of genocide. The rhetoric of the highest officials of the Israeli state has, ever since Israel came into existence, dehumanised Palestinians and likened them to vermin and insects, just like the Nazis once dehumanised Jews. It is as though that evil serum never went away and is now only being recirculated. The "Never" has been excised from that powerful slogan "Never Again". And we are left only with "Again".

~~Never~~ Again.

President Joe Biden, head of state of the richest, most powerful country in the world, is helpless before Israel, even though Israel would not exist without US funding. It's as though the dependent has taken over the benefactor. The optics say so. Like a geriatric child, Joe Biden appears on camera licking an ice-cream cone and vaguely mumbling about a ceasefire, while Israeli government and military officials openly defy him and vow to finish what they have started. To try and stop the hemorrhaging of the votes of millions of young Americans who will not stand for this slaughter in their name, Kamala Harris, US vice-president, has been tasked with the job of calling for a ceasefire, while billions of US dollars continue to flow to enable the genocide.

And what of our country?

It is well known that our prime minister is an intimate friend of Benjamin Netanyahu and there is no doubt where his sympathies lie. India is no longer a friend of Palestine. When the bombing began, thousands of Modi's supporters put up the Israeli flag as their DP on social media. They helped spread the vilest disinformation on behalf of Israel and the IDF. Even though the Indian government has now stepped back into a more neutral position – our foreign policy triumph is that we manage to be on all sides at once, we can be pro- as well as anti-genocide – the government has clearly indicated that it will act decisively against any pro-Palestine protestors.

And now, while the US exports what it has in abundant surplus – weapons and money to aid Israel's genocide – India too is exporting what our country has in abundant surplus: the unemployed poor to



replace the Palestinian workers who will no longer be given work permits to enter Israel. (I'm guessing there will be no Muslims amongst the new recruits.) People who are desperate enough to risk their lives in a war zone. People desperate enough to tolerate overt Israeli racism against Indians. You can see it expressed on social media, if you care to look. US money and Indian poverty combine to oil Israel's genocidal war machine. What a terrible, unthinkable, shame.

The Palestinians, facing down the most powerful countries in the world, left virtually alone even by their allies, have suffered immeasurably. But they have won this war. They, their journalists, their doctors, their rescue teams their poets, academics, spokespeople, and even their children have conducted themselves with a courage and dignity that

has inspired the rest of the world. The young generation in the western world, particularly the new generation of young Jewish people in the US, have seen through the brainwashing and propaganda and have recognised apartheid and genocide for what it is. The governments of the most powerful countries in the western world have lost their dignity, and any respect they might have had. Yet again. But the millions of protestors on the streets of Europe and the US are the hope for the future of the world.

Palestine will be free.

Statement by Arundhati Roy at the meeting of Working People Against Apartheid and Genocide in Gaza, at the Press Club, New Delhi, on March 7. Transcript via Scroll.

DRC Bleeds Conflict Minerals For Green Growth

Alexandria Shaner

“Inside every phone there is the blood of a Congolese person.” These words from Pascal Mirindi, a student and activist in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), encapsulate the deadly links between war, the plunder of resources, and climate breakdown.

Nowhere is this more devastatingly clear than in the DRC, where M23 militias financed by the Rwandan government, which is in turn funded by the UK, USA, EU, and many more, are committing mass murder and ecological destruction as they surge into the east of the country.

On the rare occasion that the mainstream media covers the DRC, it is portrayed as a poor nation with a “complicated” conflict-riven backstory. But this framing omits the catalyst for the region’s violence since its colonization - resource robbery.

“The conflict, which has persisted in the east of the DRC for almost 30 years, and is the deadliest since the Second World War, is mainly economic,” explains Nobel Laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege. Since 1996, more than 10 million people have been killed, with countless more being displaced, raped, or forcibly recruited (even as children) into armed groups. “The link between exploitation and the illegal trade in minerals is recognized as a root cause.”

Rich nation, poor nation

The current fighting has now displaced more than 10 million people, triggering another wave of indiscriminate killings, mass rape, and disease, while militia armies ransack the country’s rainforests with illegal logging and poaching.

Though the Congolese people have long been vampirized by extractivism, with over 70% living on less than \$1.90/day, the DRC is not a poor nation – it is a robbed nation. In fact, the DRC is considered the world’s richest country in terms of wealth in natural resources.

DRC’s fossil fuels have been profitably exploited by foreign corporations and co-opted local elites for decades, leaving communities like Muanda, which is uncoincidentally both the original site of fossil fuel extraction and the poorest city in the country, scarred by dispossession, disease, and environmental degradation.

After the deadly Kalehe flood in South Kivu province last May, which killed hundreds and affected another 50,000 people in the flood zone, student activists from Extinction Rebellion Goma University launched the Pétrole Non Merci campaign in order to highlight that the DRC is already suffering the effects of climate catastrophes and that this suffering will only increase if the fossil fuel industry’s expansion is not stopped.

The students traveled thousands of miles across the width of the country, mobilizing communities to oppose the sale of 30 new oil and gas blocks, most of which overlap protected areas and would be transported by the ecocidal EACOP pipeline. A major focus of their efforts was to facilitate ongoing educational exchanges on how to claim their rights through nonviolence and to hold officials and corporations accountable to local communities.

The continued work of building grassroots power to counter resource and human exploitation is now facing crucible conditions. Goma activists



Activists in Goma denounce state and international inaction after savage attacks by a Rwandan-backed militia. Photo: LuchaCongo.org

are spending long hours caring for the massive influx of internally displaced people amid food shortages and cholera outbreaks. Others in their networks have been displaced and suffered violence and even death. “This crisis only reinforces that the struggle for environmental justice is inextricably linked to the struggle against the cycles of violence that we continue to experience,” explains an activist with LUCHA, a non-violent and non-partisan youth civil society movement in Goma.

Green growth, red trail

As global finance gears up for “green growth”, the DRC’s resource wealth has again brought violence, robbery, and ecological destruction. The world’s largest coltan reserves, vast caches of copper, diamonds, tin, gold, and more than 63% of global cobalt are prized by armed gangs who sell them to corporations and wealthy states wanting to manufacture phones, computers, batteries and increasingly, renewable energy technologies.

In the chaos orchestrated by the militias, minerals are more easily siphoned to Rwanda, where they are exported and bought by multinational firms like Glencore. Nicolas Kazadi, DRC’s finance minister, claims that Rwandan mineral smuggling costs the DRC \$1bn per year. The US Treasury estimated that last year more than 90% of DRC’s gold was smuggled to countries including Rwanda and Uganda, where it is refined and exported, mainly to the United Arab Emirates. Rwanda is also somehow the world’s primary exporter of coltan, despite being one of the lowest mineral producers in Africa. Without conflict minerals, the numbers just don’t add up.

Efforts to regulate conflict minerals and ensure responsible supply chains have been laughable in their inadequacy, and typical in their market-oriented approach that prioritizes profits while ignoring Congolese perspectives and outcomes. “The case of conflict minerals poses questions about how global supply chain capitalism, conflict resolution, and consumer ethics intersect with postcolonial friction and violence,” writes Josaphat Musamba and Christoph Vogel in Dis-



A rally in Nairobi, Kenya calls out Rwandan aggression in DRC. Photo: @luchaRDC

sent Magazine. “Both international and Congolese interveners and elites have contributed to simplistic and misleading imageries of the problem and its solution, in a quest for a quick and seemingly hands-on, human rights-inspired PR operation.”

Until a decolonized approach that centers communities and ecology is adopted, extraction will inevitably lead to conflict. It is not possible to clean up a supply chain that begins with dirty motives, just as it is not possible to build regional stability and heal generations of trauma in the context of manipulation and structural inequity, better known as ‘development and aid’.

Donor darling, donor orphan

Though this long regional conflict is often portrayed as Rwandans vs Congolese, Hutu vs Tutsi, or even Muslim vs Christian, the primary generator of endless suffering is a more universal clash - power and profit vs people and planet. Colonialism never really ended, it simply now works remotely via economic imperialism. A look at the

history of foreign intervention in the region clearly shows that the sources of underlying tensions, that have so far been inescapable, are not due to some inherent failing of Congolese or Rwandan people - it’s structural.

“Several studies point to the erroneous perceptions of outsiders to explain why their interventions have been unable to address the root causes of conflict in the African Great Lakes region. However, few authors focus on the impact of UN and donor activities on regional fragility,” says policy analyst Léopold Ghins at the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa. “It is chiefly through these activities that outsiders have become part of the problem they [supposedly] seek to resolve.”

One way in which the imperial core exacerbates regional fragility is through unbalanced aid allocations. From 2003-16, Rwanda received about 130% and 50% more aid in per capita terms than the DRC and Burundi respectively. Rwanda was dubbed a ‘donor darling’, while the DRC and Burundi were considered ‘donor orphans’.



Donors now see Rwanda as a useful regional hegemon through which to carry on with the plunder of African resources. Its economy is growing, its infrastructure is developing at speed, and yet this celebrated growth has only benefitted a tiny elite.

It's first necessary to look up from the accounting books, step out of the board room and into the streets to take notice - but if Rwandans are so happy with their "development success", why is there a black-clad, machine-gun toting policeman on every second street corner in Kigali? Over the last 24 years under President Kagame, the government has become unashamedly authoritarian with mounting human rights abuses.

Unhoused Rwandans and those caught begging have been forcibly exiled to a "rehabilitation island" in the middle of Lake Kivu, also known as Rwanda's Alcatraz. Dozens of journalists have been banned from the country, arrested, and killed. Opposition politicians are routinely locked up, while civil society groups are not allowed to operate independently. Rwanda's involvement in

the destabilization of the DRC, the plundering of its resources, and the commission of the most serious crimes, including the use of sexual violence as a method of war and as a strategy of terror, is widely documented, notably by the United Nations.

Yet this outcome is touted a development success as the EU and other international institutions cozy up to Kigali for more business as usual, even striking a high-profile advertising deal with FC Arsenal where players wear a "Visit Rwanda" slogan on their jerseys. Sure, visit Rwanda - but only if you don't plan on asking too many questions and steer clear of the military's infamous detention and torture camps (whose existence is formally denied by the government). They will really ruin your holiday.

Again, activists seem to be doing better investigative journalism than the mainstream media, and are not fooled by spectacle. In a recent solidarity action both outside and inside the UK's Parliament, activists from Extinction Rebellion UK denounced their government for giving Rwanda



Democratic Republic of Congo players silently protested before their AFCON semi-final match against Ivory Coast. Photo: @fecofootcg

vast sums to service its extreme asylum policies, and therefore indirectly enabling mass violence and the theft of \$24 trillion in natural resources from the DRC.

Zoom in, zoom out

The closer you look, the more you see when it comes to the ripple effects of foreign intervention - but out of the complexity, a clear pattern of disregard and disrespect emerges to untangle the mess.

For example, a second by-product of donor policies is the core-periphery structure that has emerged in the Great Lakes. At the core is the Kigali-Kampala axis, with eastern DRC, Burundi, and North-Western Uganda together forming the periphery. Mirroring global relations, people living in the regional core face lower security risks and have higher incomes in comparison to those in the periphery. “This situation has entrenched the notion that areas in the periphery are ‘lagging behind’, and reinforces perceptions of the DRC as ‘an inscrutable and unimprovable mess’,” explains Ghins.

If we turn from development to peacekeeping, the effects of MONUSCO (Mission des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo) were yet another channel through which outsiders aggravated regional fragility. With a budget of \$1.5bn a year, and employing 20,000 uniformed staff, the UN peacekeeping force was the largest mission in the organization’s history. Yet, over its 14+ years in the DRC, it was infamous for protection failures and struggled for credibility.

Of course, 20,000 staff can’t exist in a vacuum. The presence of large numbers of UN personnel in cities like Goma created dual labor markets for service sector jobs like cooks, cleaners and drivers. High expatriate salaries led real estate prices to plummet. Yes, billions of dollars were spent on “peacekeeping”, but it was not guided by affected communities and could not be responsive to their realities or needs. Ghins describes the outcome: “Not only did MONUSCO divert resources away from productive foreign investments in the Congolese economy, but it distorted local markets and may have impeded on the kinds of ‘autono-



On International Women's Day, Congolese activists in the city of Beni demand justice for the women suffering violence in DRC. Photo: @luchaRDC

mous recovery' processes that conflicts are sometimes found to induce."

Today, we are witnessing the eruptions that have been kept simmering, waiting for ignition, in no small part by a paradigm of imposed peacekeeping which is ineffective in community-driven peacebuilding. Relying on MONUSCO, Kinshasa also had limited incentives to expand its own military capacity in the east. By protecting the main urban centers, MONUSCO bases mostly prevented any armed group from overpowering others. "Even if the UN mission played an essential role in civilian protection, it also 'condemned' myriad rebel formations to coexist indefinitely," says Ghins.

A 2019 independent strategic review of MONUSCO agreed that the military aspect of the peacekeeping mission had come to overshadow its civilian and political components. The political process to demobilize and negotiate with armed groups had, in actuality, been stuck for several years. As MONUSCO's presence has come to a close, it is that lack of interconnected peace-

building which is being exploited for profit by President Kagame and other local elites who use a combination of hate speech, scarcity, and fear to ignite passions on their behalf. The international community, or more specifically the imperial core, seems to find the situation amenable to an easy flow of cheap and minimally regulated resources. A united region that could leverage its own collective power over the largest trove of natural resources on the planet, would be far less convenient.

Over thousands of pages, a complex and detailed analysis of policy would reveal something fundamentally wrong with a development model that benefits a tiny few at the expense of most. This structural error would also become equally apparent via a handful of case studies - and perhaps be less likely to get lost in the details. Over the decades, a series of top-down imposed "solutions", whether in the name of peace or development, were consistently unaccountable to and unrepresentative of the actual communities at which they were aimed. They never failed to do more harm than good.

First justice, justice first

Whether a political economy of war was intentionally arranged, a result of good intentions but ill-conceived policy, or a combination of both - it clearly exposes a structure that has driven endless conflict. Underlying racism and the blanket pursuit of growth to fuel profits, regardless of social and ecological costs, created this context and continues its reproduction.

“We see the height of cynicism in terms of geo-strategy and a policy of double standards,” says Mirindi in Goma. “We see what is happening in Ukraine, what is happening in Gaza. Why not, what is happening in the DRC? Why aren’t there sanctions against Rwanda which officially, visibly, supports these militias?”

The security and humanitarian situation is becoming more and more dire each day. Clashes have intensified in recent days between M23 and Congolese government forces in the territories surrounding Goma, the regional capital home to over a million people. Goma airport was bombed twice. Internally displaced people continue to arrive in droves.

On his way back to one of the crowded refugee camps on the outskirts of the city, Mirindi describes an outbreak of a skin infection that is spreading like wildfire among the displaced children. He is seeking a way to organize medical aid - he is not a doctor. Out of a resilience born both of necessity and of vision, he and fellow activists, artists, students, and friends are experienced in organizing as a practice of strategy as well as care, yet stress is taking its toll.

In between patient explanations of history, context, corruption, and atrocities, snippets of existential concern very near at hand slip into focus: “Last night and again today it has become more complicated with the security situation.” And, “The price of food has almost tripled in Goma. We fear that this will continue because all of the surrounding territories and villages that produce

food for the city are under M23 control and the population has fled.” Heartwrenchingly, “Young children are dying of dehydration from cholera.” Yet in every conversation, we inevitably return to ordinary people aiding one another in extraordinary ways - the makings of a paradise built in hell.

Speak truth, act now

From this brutal context, activists in the DRC are calling for the international community to immediately stop funding Rwanda’s aggression and to hold themselves accountable for their complicity. Refusing to abandon their right to a future, they are urgently calling for a green transition that puts justice first, not new revenue streams, and that dismantles colonial exploitation once and for all. “Otherwise,” warns Dr. Mukwege, “the so-called green energy transition will remain red with the blood of Congolese men, women, and children” - collateral damage to enrich the same old racist elites.

In a silent protest in February, DRC soccer players stood before their Africa Cup of Nations semi-final match against Ivory Coast. They chose not to sing their national anthem, opting instead to cover their mouths with their hands and place two fingers from their left hands to their temples, a display of unity and solidarity with all Congolese people - silenced, with a gun to their heads.

This hand gesture is not a resignation, it is condemnation and a challenge. The DRC will no longer be silenced. When asked for the first step towards solidarity, Mirindi urges that, “It is really essential that we talk about this situation again and again, to attract the attention of the international community, organizations, public figures and to have more mobilization. If we can continue like this... that way, it will be better.”

Goma Actif is organizing a fund drive
‘SOS Congo’ to help support displaced people.

www.gofundme.com/f/sos-congo-deplaces-du-kivu

Kosovo in Retrospect: Rise and Fall of the ‘Rules-Based Order’

Phillip Hammond

Phillip Hammond reflects on the significance of the Kosovo war, which began 25 years on March 24th.

NATO expansion, Western leaders vaunting wars for values, international judges ruling on accusations of genocide, calls to defend civilisation against barbarism — it sometimes feels as if we are still in the 1990s. Yet looking back to the 1999 Kosovo conflict reveals how much has changed in the past quarter century. Then, the West’s post-Cold War ‘rules-based order’ was at its height. Today, it is slowly, violently collapsing as a new, multipolar world emerges.

Dawn of the rules-based order

The Kosovo conflict was the key event in establishing the ‘rules-based order’. The term sounds like it might just be a synonym for ‘international law’, but is in fact its antithesis — as legal scholars have belatedly begun to notice. Specifically, the ‘rules-based order’ entails a break from the post-1945 UN system, which was premised on the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.

In 1999 the UN was bypassed, to avoid a Security Council veto by Russia, and the bombing of Yugoslavia was instead carried out by NATO. Even its supporters admitted this was illegal under international law, but argued it was nevertheless ‘justified on moral grounds’. This was the era of what in Britain was called ‘ethical foreign policy’, when conscience was said to compel military action in defence of universal moral values.

In a famous April 1999 speech, Prime Minister Tony Blair claimed NATO was waging a ‘just war’ which laid the basis for a ‘new doctrine of

international community’. The doctrine essentially consisted of a globalist perspective on the economy, the environment and ‘international security’: Blair said the ‘most pressing foreign policy problem’ was to ‘identify the circumstances in which we should get actively involved in other people’s conflicts’.

This was a vision of a ‘community’ that would be policed by the dominant military states since, as Blair explained, ‘nations which have the power, have the responsibility’. This is the essence of the rules-based order: in line with their own self-proclaimed ‘values’, the powerful decide where and how to ‘get actively involved’ in the affairs of the less powerful.

A ‘right to intervene’

Less than a fortnight before it started bombing Yugoslavia, NATO completed its first wave of eastward enlargement, admitting Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. Already it appeared that, as Secretary of State Anthony Blinken put it recently, ‘if you’re not at the table in the international system, you’re going to be on the menu’.

The same month as Blair was preaching his ‘doctrine’, Czech president Vaclav Havel similarly envisaged a future world governed by ‘cooperation between larger, mostly supranational, entities’, in which ‘the notion that it is none of our business what happens in another country’ would ‘vanish down the trapdoor of history’. Conceding that Yugoslavia was being ‘attacked ... without a direct mandate from the UN’, Havel maintained that this was because of NATO’s ‘respect ... for a law that ranks higher than the law which

protects the sovereignty of states' — the 'higher value' of universal human rights.

The logic was drawn out by Bernard Kouchner, the first governor of post-war Kosovo. He claimed it was time for a 'decisive evolution in international consciousness', whereby a 'new morality' would be 'codified in the "right to intervention" against abuses of national sovereignty'. Mere humanitarianism was not enough: 'we need to establish a forward-looking right of the world community to actively interfere in the affairs of sovereign nations'.

After 9/11, ethical justifications for war were incorporated into the 'war on terror', despite occasional incongruities of tone. Washington reportedly spent hundreds of thousands of dollars hiring public relations consultants to 'humanise the war' in Afghanistan, where US planes dropped aid as well as cluster bombs (both in yellow packaging) in an effort to save some Afghans while killing others. According to US Secretary of State Colin Powell, the bombing was 'a triumph for human rights'. Similarly, in Iraq president George Bush Jr. promised 'liberation' while Blair emphasised the 'moral case for removing Saddam'.

'Benign' dictatorship

Many observers criticised what they saw as the cynical, instrumental use of humanitarianism in the war on terror, yet the problem is not simply that interventions are selective, poorly implemented or undermined by ulterior motives. Rather, the core problem is that the best one can hope for under such a system is a benign global dictatorship. The rules-based order returns us to a neo-colonial world where the powerful decide which people need to be 'helped' and abrogate to themselves the right to do so.

It is the polar opposite of sovereign equality, a world of international protectorates (in Bosnia and Kosovo) and regime-change wars (in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya). The latter have pro-



Building of Radio Television of Serbia bombed-out 23th April 1999

duced nothing but bloody chaos; the former have merely frozen conflicts rather than resolving them. In Kosovo, a quarter century of Western state-building has produced a 'failed state' where the Serbian minority still endures daily harassment and violence.

None of this is to idealise the UN, where real power has always resided in the Security Council. Before Kosovo, interventions under the UN banner were launched against Iraq, Somalia and Haiti, and Western powers took it upon themselves to decide where to draw the borders of new states in the former Yugoslavia, knowingly exacerbating conflict as they did so. For much of the 1990s it looked like a retooled UN might

provide the framework for the 'new world order' proclaimed by George Bush Snr. at the start of the decade, but the logic of a unipolar world pointed in the opposite direction.

During the Cold War, although the post-1945 conventions of sovereign equality and non-interference were often infringed, they were nevertheless important in delegitimising aggressive foreign policy, and represented an historic gain for states which were previously mere colonial possessions. The 'Illegal yet legitimate' formula used for Kosovo showed how far this had unravelled in the 1990s.

The propaganda war

Critics of Western policy in the 1990s tended to argue that it was not forceful enough; that terrible things were allowed to happen while the Western powers were constrained by the unwieldy UN system. In 1999, NATO leaders were largely successful in presenting themselves as the solution to this problem, thanks to the extreme subservience (with a few honourable exceptions) of Western journalists.

The claim that NATO bombing was morally justified, even if illegal, meant the media presentation of the war was crucial. Yet virtually everything NATO said about Kosovo was either misleading or outright false. NATO supposedly went to war reluctantly, after diplomatic efforts had been exhausted, but the so-called 'peace agreement' was designed to be rejected. A US official explicitly told reporters at the time that 'We intentionally set the bar too high for the Serbs to comply. They need some bombing, and that's what they are going to get.' To keep this information from the public, journalists were simply told not to report it, and they complied.

The other key claim in the build-up to war was that Yugoslav forces were massacring ethnic-Albanian civilians, notably at the village of Račak on 15 January 1999. William Walker, the American head of the Organisation for Security and

Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission in Kosovo, visited the scene and immediately declared it an 'unspeakable atrocity' and a 'crime against humanity'. The New York Times ran a front-page story about 'mutilated bodies' with 'eyes gouged out' and 'heads smashed in'. President Bill Clinton described 'innocent men, women and children taken from their homes to a gully, forced to kneel in the dirt, sprayed with gunfire'.

These accounts bore little relation to what actually happened at Račak — a firefight between Yugoslav security services and Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) guerrillas — but most Western journalists just repeated them. One of the few who did contest the official version of events, French reporter Renaud Girard, said he was rounded on by British and American colleagues who complained 'You're killing our story'. As one study of this and other episodes in the propaganda war notes, the media created an 'illusion of multiple sources' as different outlets reproduced the same distorted accounts, and an 'illusion of independent confirmation' as officials cited news reports as corroboration of stories they had fed to journalists in the first place.

NATO also repeatedly claimed it had to start bombing to prevent a refugee crisis. State Department spokesman James Rubin, for example, said on 25 March 1999 that if NATO had not acted, 'you would have had hundreds of thousands of people crossing the border'. Privately, however, they knew they were about to cause just such a crisis. A US diplomat with the OSCE, Norma Brown, later said that 'everyone knew there would be a humanitarian crisis of massive proportions if NATO bombed. It was discussed in NATO; it was discussed in the OSCE'. Yet as the crisis unfolded, journalists treated it as confirmation that the airstrikes were necessary and right, 'forgetting' that preventing it had ever been a justification for bombing. One British TV journalist claimed afterwards: 'This is why NATO went to war: so the refugees could come back to Kosovo'.

NATO of course denied any responsibility, insisting the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Kosovo Albanians was the result of a premeditated policy and would have happened anyway. On cue, secret documents outlining just such a Serbian plan – ‘Operation Horseshoe’ – were revealed by the German government. This supposed ‘blueprint for genocide’ was exposed as a fake concocted by the German intelligence services – but only months after the war ended.

Germany was also among the first Western states to start arming and training the KLA from the mid-1990s. In addition to building a guerrilla army, NATO powers also undermined what remained of the Yugoslav state by funding political opponents of the regime, leading to the overthrow of President Slobodan Milošević in 2000 — a blueprint for subsequent ‘colour revolutions’.

The fall

The propaganda surrounding the current wars in Ukraine and Israel can sometimes make it seem as if little has changed politically in the West, but of course much has. We are long past the messianic zeal of liberal interventionism or the hubris of war-on-terror attempts to remake reality. The West is even more risk-averse than in 1999, when NATO did its own high-altitude bombing. Now it sends weapons and celebrates what a ‘good deal’ this is for arms manufacturers.

Blair’s description of the Kosovo war as ‘a battle between good and evil; between civilisation and barbarity; between democracy and dictatorship’ was an attempt to sell NATO bombing as an epic struggle for values. Now, just beneath the surface of the values-talk, commentators promote the West’s proxy war against Russia on the grounds that it is ‘cheap’ and that it is somebody else’s sons who are being killed.

Some have taken up Israel’s claim to be waging an ‘existential struggle between civilisation and barbarism’ in Gaza, but Israeli actions — killing more than 30,000, injuring twice as many again,

and displacing most of the population — present an even less attractive advertisement for ‘civilisation’ than NATO’s 78-day bombing of Serbia. As one assessment puts it, whatever the outcome of current conflicts, ‘the West seems to have already lost on the normative and narrative front’.

In part, this is due to the affordances of social media and the increasing irrelevance of the ‘legacy’ gatekeepers, though of course governments are seeking new means of control. But there are two more fundamental changes. The first is the underlying shift in geopolitical power and a growing willingness to challenge Western hegemony. The second is the rise of populism and the rejection of globalist elites within Western countries. When Donald Trump was elected in 2016, one of the elite’s greatest worries was that this would be a setback for globalism. The influential writer (and husband of Victoria Nuland) Robert Kagan, for example, said he feared that ‘America may once again start behaving like a normal nation’, pursuing its own interests but not taking ‘responsibility for global order’.

There is no room for complacency. As a new, multipolar order begins to take shape, it sometimes seems that we are entering a period of heightened danger with little to look forward to but a choice between different kinds of authoritarianism. And populist leaders have mostly so far failed to live up to their promises — in Britain, for example, the post-Brexit political class has done everything possible to reinforce the UK’s involvement in trans-national institutions, particularly NATO.

Yet the decline of Western dominance and the rise of multipolarity are inherently positive insofar as they represent a challenge to globalism and offer new possibilities for smaller states to reassert their sovereign independence. Today there is new hope that Kagan’s nightmare — that the US and its allies will get ‘out of the world order business’ — may yet come true.

Portugal: Three Reflections on an Uncertain Future

Boaventura de Sousa Santos

The results of the last general elections on March 10 call for a reading that goes beyond the froth of the results. The resounding victory of the right and extreme-right (133 seats in a parliament of 230 deputies) with the extreme-right being one of the largest in Europe in a country that until a few months ago was governed by the Socialist Party with an absolute majority. I propose three reflections: non-democracy; the non-national; the non-present.

Non-democracy is the set of factors that, not being subject to democratic scrutiny, significantly influence political and, above all, electoral processes. They are the elephants in the room. The judicial system is the proximate cause of some recent political crises. It is important to ascertain whether cases of lawfare are not occurring in Portugal, as they have in other countries. This is the use of the judicial system, not to investigate legal wrongdoing, but to neutralize political opponents. This new weapon has been used preferentially against left-wing politicians and is based on the political use of the fight against corruption. The second elephant is the media. Without calling into question the fundamental public service of the media, we cannot fail to recognize that in the last twenty years there has been a shift to the right in the treatment of news and political commentary. The way the issue of TAP (the state-owned Portuguese airline) has been dealt with in recent years and the issue of delays and scarcity of medical personnel in the state hospital emergency rooms in recent months are examples of this. The repetitive and spectacular detailing of the cases, rather than enlightening citizens, was aimed at wearing down the government. The third elephant is the social networks, which have been used mainly by Chega and IL (the two ultra-rightist parties) to create social polarization, turning political opponents to be confronted with into enemies to be destroyed. A tribal logic eager for

adherence and averse to confronting the facts creates the voracious destruction of what is in force in a dominant way, without bothering to know what (and how) to build to replace it.

The non-national is the component of globally organized interests that actively interfere in the political processes of the different countries selected for intervention according to global strategies. Intervention in networks, the funding of extreme right-wing or ultra-right-wing parties, as well as supposedly research institutes, but in fact think tanks and strategic communication centers, are some of the mechanisms of interference. The Atlas Network (formerly the Atlas Economic Research Foundation) is one of the best-known global players, a US-based non-governmental agency that “provides training, contacts and funding to libertarian, pro-free market and conservative groups around the world”. The ultra-conservative international aims to turn Europe into an unconditional ally of the US, to create anti-Russia panic in order to justify arms investments at the expense of social and environmental policies, and to put the brakes on China.

The non-present is the way in which a people’s memory is treated, valued or manipulated to produce concrete political results. In Portugal, this memory is based on three pillars, each with its own temporality. The first pillar is the memory of the revolution of April 25, 1974, whose fiftieth anniversary we are celebrating this year. The Portuguese see April 25 as the founding act of the modernity in which they live today. In Portugal, democracy is not yet an emotionally neutral or pragmatically disposable formal regime. Despite all its limitations, evaluating politicians and voting is the manifestation of an existential power that, although often frustrated in its expectations, has not yet become a collective frustration. A

few million Portuguese who voted for the first time in 1976 are alive and active. This founding emotion has been aggressively manipulated by Chega, but, contradictorily, Chega feeds on it, bringing many citizens who disbelieve in democracy to the polling stations (the lowest abstention rate in many years). The protest vote is as democratic a vote as any other. The problem is that the entrepreneurs behind it use it to destroy democracy.

The second pillar of the Portuguese memory is the existential crisis of 2011 financial collapse: the tutelage of the Troika (European Commission, International Monetary Fund, and European central Bank) and a right-wing government for whom the austerity imposed externally on workers and the middle class was not enough and had to be made even worse on its own initiative. Workers and pensioners, young and old, remember what happened then. What went down the memory flow was not just the cuts in pensions, the loss of employment rights, the abrupt poverty and the inequity with which suffering was distributed between the different social classes. It was above all the wound to the sovereignty and self-esteem of a people who had freed themselves from the colonial nightmare to embrace the European dream shortly afterwards, and who now saw that dream converted into a new nightmare (many remember the colonialist terms used by German and English newspapers to refer to Portugal and the Portuguese). It was also the destruction of a very concrete materiality in the form of the increase in well-being that the working classes had been experiencing for only three or four generations. The moderate right-wing forces are linked to this memory and during the election campaign they did everything they could to revive it (the champion of austerity, Passos Coelho, in the campaign). Resounding success, which was within their grasp, eluded them (the moderate right, Democratic Alliance, ended up almost tied with the socialist Party). Less visible for now is that the moderate right thought that by respecting the first memory (of April 25) they could disqualify the memory of 2011. With the same certainty that they rejected Chega, they accepted the Liberal Initiative (IL), whose electoral program is much more frightening than Chega's in social terms. If Chega represents the political

destruction of April 25, IL represents the socio-economic destruction of April 25. Its program is a version of the ultra-liberal paradigm of Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, ridiculed in the 1930s and rehabilitated forty years later in the Chile of dictator Augusto Pinochet (1973). The IL program means the privatization of everything that moves and can make a profit. The leaders and voters of the IL profess democracy, but perhaps they don't even realize that their program is inapplicable in a democracy. The same cannot be said of its mentors. Hayek admitted the collapse of democracy as collateral damage of his economic policies, the implementation of which was by far the most important. He wrote to the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1977 to protest against the paper's unfair criticism of Pinochet's regime in Chile; he considered Pinochet's Chile to be a political and economic miracle and railed against Amnesty International, considering it "a weapon for defaming international politics".

The third pillar of Portuguese memory concerns the government's performance during the coronavirus pandemic. It was an excellent performance as an exemplary link between politicians, health professionals and citizens aware of the seriousness of the public health emergency. Lives were saved that were lost in other, richer countries. This memory was devalued and the government that made it possible squandered the capital of trust it had earned by not knowing how to adequately compensate the enormous sacrifices made by the SNS in a context where private healthcare disappeared as if by magic. If the government had increased the salaries of all NHS professionals by 100% the day after the pandemic ended, the Portuguese people would have given it a standing ovation.

With the exception of the Communist Parties, all the other small parties to the left of the Socialist Party maintained their electoral weight; one of them, the ecologist and Europeist party called *Livre*, even grew from one to four seats in the parliament. It is unlikely that the moderate right enters a coalition with the extreme right of Chega. In such case, Portugal will be governed in the next months by a minority government. A period of high instability is in sight.

A New Life for Mexico's Oldest Union

David Bacon

Humberto Montes de Oca is the Secretary for Internal Relations of the Mexican Union of Electrical Workers (SME). He was originally a working-class art student who became active in the left-wing political movements of the period of Mexico's Dirty War (1970s to early 1980s). He joined the SME as a political act to become part of the country's radical working-class movement, and he became one of its most important leaders.

In 2009 the administration of Felipe Calderón dissolved the Power and Light Company of Central Mexico, one of the country's two national providers of electrical power. He then declared the union non-existent and terminated the jobs of its 44,000 members. While other administrations had regarded the SME, one of Mexico's oldest, and most democratic and radical unions, as a political opponent, no government before had taken such an extreme step.

About 16,000 of the union's members decided to resist the attack, and they began an effort that continues today to recover their jobs and workplace rights, including the union contract. They kept the union's structure and headquarters intact, and then set up an allied workers' cooperative to generate work and help members survive. The other members took the government's severance package and gave up their union and job rights.

In this interview, presented as a first-person narrative, Montes de Oca describes the current state of the union and its relationship with the progressive administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO).

The Current State of Labor Reform

Today we are in a situation created by the 2019 freedom of association reform. To some degree that reform was forced on the government by the pressure of unions in Canada and the United States, as part

of the negotiation of the new free trade agreement T-MEC (Tratado–Mexico Estados Unidos Canada, USMCA in English). Pressure was put on Mexico to make changes in union representation because *charismo* and the employer protection contracts were used to cheapen the labor of Mexicans. Workers in Canada and the United States were at a disadvantage. Capital investment comes to Mexico because of these more favorable conditions.

In Mexico, those unions argued, workers should have greater ability to defend their interests to increase their benefits and income. This reform was implemented using this logic. It requires all unions to show that they are legitimate representatives of workers, and to create legitimate collective labor contracts. The corporate and employer protection unions opposed this reform because it goes against their interests. But they have also adjusted by inventing a strategy in which they go through the process, even though everything actually remains the same.

It is true that U.S. and Canadian unions sought to integrate the labor reforms in Mexican legislation into the labor chapter of the T-MEC. But it is also true that in Mexican unionism there is a tradition of democratic struggle. Our very survival as a union has been a fight for union democracy in tough battles in the 70s, 80s, and 90s.

But the reform created bodies, like the Federal Labor Registration Center, which exercise very arbitrary power in a way that does not correspond to the spirit of the law. There is a danger that unions themselves will lose their autonomy and the labor movement its independence.

Yet there are groups of workers who are taking advantage of the situation to free themselves from *charro* unions. The example of the independent union victory at the General Motors plant in Silao is the clearest. We can see that it is possible for workers,

using this legitimization process, to displace charro unions and achieve authentic collective bargaining.

So there are two kinds of outcomes. On the one hand a sham process allows charro unions and protection unions to become legitimate through a fraudulent procedure. On the other hand, an authentic process makes it possible to displace the charros and create new democratic unions.

Unfortunately, there is as yet no commitment to a widespread challenge by established independent unions to the old Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) structure. Democratic unions are fragmented.

At the same time, the Left no longer talks about unions. It is losing its link with the workers. We need a workers' movement that thinks of itself as a class, beyond individual sectors or branches. The new Central Obrero, and organizations in other sectors who want a movement for union democratization in our country, should come together. We have common issues: freedom of association, union democracy, social security, pensions, retirements, salaries—the basis for generating a movement. In that movement there's room for many efforts, including the Casas Obreras, the new emerging unions and federations of unions, and the old pillars of democratic unionism such as the SME.

Perhaps in the medium- and long-term there will be a regrouping. Even if some are not moving in that direction now, perhaps later they will be convinced that this is needed, and they can help to build that process.

Nationalizing the Energy Industry

We share with the government the idea of nationalizing the electrical industry. In the past, we defended the nationalized electricity industry against the gradual privatization that took place in previous administrations.

Today we call for reversing Enrique Peña Nieto's structural privatization reform, imposed in 2013.

But we want to add a social dimension, the recognition of the human right to energy as a constitutional right, and the social management of this strategic area, with broad participation of technicians, workers, and energy users. We need researchers who can manage this public company and not turn it into a political instrument of the state and the party in power. This is what we've frequently seen in our country, in the case of public companies.

It is not enough to nationalize or renationalize the energy industry. We need the social management of strategic industries for the common good, with the broad participation of society, of workers, of specialists, of the energy consumers themselves. The right to energy is an inalienable human right. The solution is not as simple as saying, "let it be made public and that's it." What we have now is the bureaucratization of the management—public officials who obey commercial logic rather than the general interest of society.

The Federal Electricity Commission, the company that supplies electric energy, is a public company, but that does not mean that it has a social character. The company will still cut you off if you don't pay.

Difficult Relations with the Lopez Obrador Administration

AMLO was running for office in 2010, during the hunger strike in which our union fought the attack meant to destroy us. On one occasion he came to be with us. He gave us a letter in which he promised that when he became president, he would reintegrate us into the workforce. To date he has not fulfilled this commitment, and he has not given the union a hearing.

Instead, AMLO has supported the former leaders of our union, who in 2009 called for the capitulation of the SME. They wanted to collect severance pay, so they resigned from the union and tried to dissolve it, liquidating its assets and distributing the money among the workers. We made a commitment to resist, and to fight against the extinction decree. They

abandoned this fight and yet, after we fought for 14 years, they are the ones close to the president.

Some officials, like presidential spokesperson Jesús Ramírez Cuevas and the director of the Federal Electricity Commission, Manuel Bartlett Díaz, are using these dissident groups to attack the union. They threaten to take over our facilities by violence and mount a media campaign of slander.

People in this government believe that the governing party should have unions that are useful, loyal, and subordinate. To them, a corporatized SME would be useful. Since we have not shown any subordination, and we safeguard our autonomy, they don't like this.

Our organization has always been critical. We recognize that the president is making an effort to recover the country's energy sovereignty, but we also have criticisms of its labor policy. There are many unresolved conflicts and strikes, like the three-year strike in Sur Notimex and the miners' strike in Cananea. There is no solution for our colleagues of the National Coordination of Education Workers. In short, the regime's labor policy is not what one might hope for from a democratic government.

The current government has little dialogue with social movements, unlike the progressivism in South America, where presidents like Lula, Chávez, and Evo Morales have had a lot of communication with them. In Mexico, many social movements that supported MORENA [the current governing party] in 2018 feel disappointed because they have not seen their situation improve or attention to their demands. The government proposes a direct relationship with the population without intermediaries. In its view, a union, a neighborhood organization, or an organization of academics or researchers is an intermediary. Instead, the government supports the people through its social policy and assistance programs.

This is a clientelistic electoral policy, and in Mexico City, MORENA lost the majority of the mayoralties in the last election. The city has been the cradle of the left-wing social movement in Mexico, but there is

not a good relationship between the government and its social movements.

The Status of the SME Today

Currently we have a membership of approximately 15,000 active workers and 10,000 retirees, who come from the former company Luz y Fuerza del Centro. We have work in the generation plants recovered from that public company, and other economic ventures where we have collective contracts. We have a collective bargaining agreement with Generadora Fénix and a contract with the Portuguese company Mota-Engil, where we are part of the public limited liability company that generates electricity. We have the right to 50 percent of the company's profits.

We have other collective contracts with other companies, smaller agreements, which enable us to keep the national industrial registry of our union. We also have people working in the LF del Centro cooperative. The union is made up of workers who work under a collective labor contract, cooperative workers who work in the union's social and solidarity economy projects, and workers who do not have a job.

We are incorporating the children of the workers in resistance as members, not only in terms of looking for a job, but creating spaces for our young people and children. We have groups for women and for pensioners and retirees. Under Mexican law we have a legal and legitimately constituted, democratically elected leadership. We want to provide spaces for participation.

We have a strong presence in the central states of Mexico, with a union structure in Morelos, Michoacán, Hidalgo, the State of Mexico, and Mexico City. We maintain a strong strategic alliance with the users of electrical energy—the National Assembly of Electrical Energy—and we hold days of struggle on the 11th of each month. Our objective is labor reintegration in the nationalized electricity industry. For users, we want recognition of the human right to energy. Users need a clean slate so their debts are forgiven.

We have very good relations with the unions in the United States and Canada. We were able to present a complaint under the labor chapter of the old NAFTA because of help from the unions in both countries. That complaint helped us put pressure on the Peña Nieto government to find a political solution to our conflict. We work to maintain those relationships.

This link between unions is necessary to defend the interests of the working class in our three countries. There is actually greater protection and more freedom for workers in Mexico than in the United States, where labor rights are very restricted. Article 123 of our Constitution and the Federal Labor Law are the products of our social movements. Paradoxically, however, our income levels are much lower, and unions in our country often operate on behalf of employers' interests and not those of the majority of workers. And there is no authentic respect for the autonomy of unions.

We are part of the process of change in Latin America. We have scheduled several events bringing together international energy workers. We try to support the workers of France, who are defending their retirement system, and the Peruvian people who are being massacred. We just signed a statement opposing the attacks on the Indigenous Zapatista communities by paramilitary groups linked to the political elite in the state of Chiapas.

Creating a Class-Conscious Membership

Before the government's attempt to destroy the union in 2009, we had a school for union activists, organized by retired colleagues with a political background. All union representatives had to participate in this mandatory training school. We had an escalating series of general modules, from the history of the labor movement and of our union to the study of political economy, historical materialism, and Marxism.

When I held the position of departmental representative, I was a rank-and-file underground distribution worker in the underground cable department.

As soon as I began to represent my colleagues, I immediately began to attend these classes.

Trainers came from the national university and other higher education institutions, like Alejandro Álvarez and Andrés Barrera. We had workshops on the human right to energy. But it was often a very stuffy, dogmatic education, in the sense that reality was interpreted with the eyes of the past. The proof of the dogmatism was that the teachers who taught those classes were among the first to give up when the government attacked us in 2009.

What had to be done was to create theory and practice based on new challenges and conditions—a new situation with new goals. The challenge is to understand the reality we are living in, and use Marxism as a methodological tool to interpret and change it. What happened 100 years ago can't just be duplicated now. There are many changes in the economy, in politics, in ideology, that need a contemporary analysis from a revolutionary perspective, trying to formulate an alternative.

We are capable of creating and recreating revolutionary ideas based on the needs of our time.

We are going to reactivate and restructure the school for activists. We have to deal with the reality of generational change, and make sure our leaders have the tools and knowledge that will allow them to give the right direction to our union.

We have scholarships for the children of workers who belong to the union. We call them the children of the resistance, the sons and daughters of the workers who resisted the extinction of our source of work and the forced dissolution of our union during the past 14 years. We are incorporating them into our training program. They get an introduction about unions, and then an explanation of how our union was born and its history over 100 years. We talk about the most important moments of struggle, how we created a process of resistance to prevent its disappearance, and our perspective for the future.