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**COVER** Graffiti on the Palestinian side of the Israeli separation wall, Bethlehem, West Bank. (Ahikam Seri/Panos Pictures)

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The arrival of the Donald J. Trump presidency shook the foundations of US domestic politics but also rattled the Middle East. The chaotic administration regularly sends mixed messages and sows confusion as the president's erratic tweets and off-the-cuff comments contradict statements by administration officials. Trump is confident of his own brilliance, but in the region he is viewed as either shrewd and ruthless or as a buffoon (but by no means a harmless one). Yet even with his chronic dishonesty, Trump is seen by many across the region as ironically more honest than previous US administrations.

Democrats and Republicans alike have long maintained the fiction (or self-delusion) that the United States is a global champion of liberalism, democracy and human rights as well as an unbiased broker on Israel and Palestine. Few in the region ever believed these cultivated myths. But for this administration, US priorities are clear. The administration makes no claim that the massive arms sales to Saudi Arabia make the region safe or peaceful; rather, arms sales are good for American jobs and exports. And while no formal peace plan has been presented to Palestinians, if one does emerge it will be a take-it-or-leave-it proposition that ends the possibility of a viable Palestinian state and gives Israel everything it wants—save the full expulsion of Palestinians from Israel and the Occupied Territories.

During the administration of President Barack Obama, the use of torture in places like Guantanamo Bay was regarded as anathema to the US image as the global leader of human rights. Yet Obama's commitment to human rights and his receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize did not make the exercise of US power any less lethal at home or abroad. In Chicago's Homan Square, a police-run "black site," many of the techniques employed in Guantanamo Bay during the Bush administration were deployed on mostly black crime suspects. Overseas, Obama escalated a different kind of lethal violence by sanctioning drone warfare.

Under Trump, the critique of human rights violations is far more minimal, erratic and short-lived. He cares little for citizens demanding basic rights unless it fits his agenda. Such an exception was his defense of protesters in Iran in early 2018. He is so obsessed with tearing up the Iran nuclear deal, despite evidence that it is working, that his sudden concern for Iranian people was transparently self-serving.

Beyond the nuclear deal, Trump appears committed to abandoning any policy associated with Obama, without understanding how much he does not understand. His decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel—undermining half a century of US policy—is but one egregious example of his ignorance. He cares little about understanding the international condemnation of the move by close US allies. Indeed, he seems to relish the outrage because it focuses attention on him.

Trump is also less comfortable with leaders who have had close personal relationships with Obama, including US allies like King Abdullah II of Jordan. He is most at ease with those whom he sees as strong men in his own grandiose self-image: Vladamir Putin in Russia, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt, Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel and the Gulf monarchs. Yet even these regimes, closest in temperament to Trump's ideal style of rule, seem to recognize him as weak and self-absorbed. On his state visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017, for example, the Saudi regime provided Trump with the pageantry, effusive praise and shiny gold awards needed to win his favor. In exchange for such

*Continued on page 46.*

A US Army adviser for the Afghan Air Force signals the Afghan crew chief during a training mission outside of Kabul, Afghanistan, 2017. ANDREW RENNEISEN/GETTY IMAGES

# Trump's Drone Surge
## Outsourcing the War Machine

Steve Niva

President Donald Trump entered office in early 2017 having campaigned on an "America First" foreign policy that promised a creed of isolationism and "anti-globalism" at odds with his predecessor's overseas military interventions and costly entanglements. "We cannot be the policemen of the world" Trump said at the first presidential debate. "We cannot protect countries all over the world."[1] Noting the over $3 trillion spent on recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Trump asserted: "We're destroying our country."

Less than a year into Trump's presidency, the world's policeman is back, now armed with a Twitter account. Flying largely under the media radar, the US military is flexing its muscles around the world—and in some areas it is going on the offensive. Since Trump took office, the United States has quietly increased the number of troops in the Middle East by 33 percent and there are plans for an "enduring presence" in both Iraq and Syria.[2] More troops and yet another supposedly new strategy are being deployed for the endless war in Afghanistan. US soldiers are fanning out across an archipelago of bases in Africa to conduct what they call "train, advise and assist" missions with nearly 1,000 soldiers in Niger. In Somalia the numbers are also climbing: Troop levels are the highest since the "Black Hawk Down" incident in 1993. The United States has even flown the flag in Europe, as 4,000 soldiers landed in Poland to demonstrate an "iron-clad commitment" to NATO allies. Elsewhere, US support for the Saudi-UAE bombing campaign on Yemen is drawing the United States deeper into that ongoing civil war, and assistance is flowing to the Philippines' military fight with Islamist militants.

**Steve Niva** *is associate professor of international politics and Middle East studies at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington.*

An aggressive surge of lethal drone strikes and clandestine missions led by the military's elite Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and a reinvigorated CIA in far-flung corners of the world outside of America's declared battlefields marks the widest departure from Trump's ostensible isolationism. This surge signals, paradoxically perhaps, an embrace of both Obama's drone warfare presidency and a more naked militarization of US foreign policy. In both tempo and geography, Trump's drone blitz is on track to surpass, by many measures, that of President Obama. According to the calculations of Council on Foreign Relations fellow Micah Zenko, Trump authorized 75 drone strikes in his first 74 days in office, about one strike a day on average, which represents a five-fold increase over Obama's rate.[3] As Trump's offensive ranges across zones of southern Arabia, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands, the Horn of Africa and North Africa, it is likely extending to other parts of Africa and Asia as well, further militarizing the planet.

Thus, despite Trump's rhetoric of isolationism and alleged break with the past, current US operations resemble a fusion of George W. Bush-era "world is a battlefield" global militarization with Obama-era tools of remote warfare, with its "light footprint" and aversion to ground operations—a transactional neoconservatism for the post-imperial era.

## Global Drone Surge

In one respect, President Trump has no doubt kept his word. Trump promised during the campaign to "bomb the shit" out of ISIS and it appears to be one of the few promises he has kept. Trump inherited from Obama an escalating war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, but both conventional bombing and drone strikes have significantly increased under Trump as a result of his new ISIS battle plan, whose strategy Defense Secretary James Mattis defines as "annihilation tactics." According to *Newsweek*, the United States under Trump has dropped a record number of bombs on the Middle East, roughly 10 percent more than under his predecessors. Trump also loosened rules of engagement that protect civilians and, unsurprisingly, civilian casualties from the US-led war against ISIS will, at this pace, double under Trump.[4]

But taking the fight to ISIS is not the same as enlarging America's global military footprint nor is it the same as launching an aerial offensive against an expanding list of foes in an expanding list of countries. Neither scenario would have been expected from Trump's "America First" campaign proclamations. Yet US airstrikes have surged in Afghanistan dramatically since Trump authorized 4,000 additional American troops to join the existing 11,000 troops. The US military has already dropped twice as many bombs on the Taliban and the newly formed branch of ISIS in Afghanistan than it did in all of 2016. Moreover, in the past three years, the number of military drone strikes there has also climbed, from 304 in 2015, to 376 last year, to 362 through the first eight months of Trump's presidency. At this pace, 2017 will exceed previous yearly tallies.[5]

Outside of America's official battlefields, Yemen has been a central target of Trump's drone blitz. The first three drone strikes conducted under Trump targeted al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in central Yemen, followed a few days later by the deadly and compromised JSOC raid in Yemen that left one Navy SEAL and dozens of Yemeni civilians dead. Since then, the United States has conducted over 100 airstrikes and raids against AQAP and an emergent ISIS branch in Yemen, a figure that surpasses any previous year of strikes under Obama.

Somalia has also been a major target of renewed drone strikes and clandestine operations by JSOC against both the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab and a small local branch of ISIS that has emerged in the north. In all, over 30 airstrikes have been launched against Somalia in 2017, along with a number of US military Special Operations Forces raids, including one that took the life of a Navy SEAL. That figure already eclipses the 14 strikes carried out in 2016, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism database of US military actions in Somalia.

There has been a marked increase in US drone strikes in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region in the second half of 2017 following the roll out of President Trump's Afghanistan strategy, in which he vowed to "no longer be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organizations."[6] A March 2 drone strike in Pakistan was the first in that country since May 2016. After a September 15 drone strike in Pakistan, the CIA declined to comment when asked if they had carried out a strike, suggesting that in fact they had. Trump has reportedly returned authority to conduct drone strikes to the CIA, which the Obama administration had limited in its second term, with CIA Director Mike Pompeo promising to make his agency more "vicious."[7]

In Libya, the United States has renewed the bombing and drone campaign against ISIS targets that had been a central focus of Obama's last year in office. The Pentagon's Africa Command (AFRICOM) conducted drone strikes on an ISIS training camp in Libya in September, killing 17 militants in the first American airstrikes there since January. The United States has conducted several more drone strikes on alleged ISIS camps and targets in central Libya as part of a widening campaign.

There has also been a surge of US military operations across the expanding archipelago of outposts and drone bases that AFRICOM has set up to patrol the Sahel and Central Africa region. Following the ambush by Islamist militants that killed four Special Operations Forces soldiers in October, the Trump administration is moving closer to arming the surveillance drones that now fly over Niger and Mali in search of suspects, which would extend the drone war into new areas not previously targeted. The administration is also considering new rules that could permit AFRICOM to carry out offensive ground combat operations in North and West Africa, escalating deployments in a region that key lawmakers seem to have been only


**Graffiti denouncing strikes by US drones in Sanaa, Yemen.** KHALED ABDULLAH/REUTERS

dimly aware of before the deaths of the four soldiers. The hub of these activities will be a $100 million drone base in Agadez, Niger that is under construction.

The Trump administration is even stepping up its drone war capabilities in East Asia: The United States has declared it will permanently station weaponized drones in South Korea and announced that it had begun deploying upgraded unmanned aircraft systems in the Philippines to assist the growing confrontation with Islamist militants there.

It is not surprising, then, that civilian casualties from US strikes are on track to double under Trump, according to the monitoring group Airwars. Their data suggests that Trump's drone strikes have already resulted in more civilian deaths than the entirety of strikes under the Obama administration. In a *Newsweek* report, Yale law professor Oona Hathaway commented that, "One unusual civilian casualty event is bad luck; this looks more like a pattern."[8] The "bottom line," Micah Zenko tweeted in late August 2017, is that "Trump has now expanded US military presence and/or airstrikes in every combat theater he inherited from Obama."[9]

## Outsourcing War to the Generals

Trump's unanticipated military interventionism and drone offensive across several continents does not necessarily mean that he has become, in former chief strategist Steve Bannon's lexicon, a "globalist," but it is a puzzling development. Rather than being the product of a grand strategy or a coherent doctrine, however, the source of this remarkable about face appears more prosaic: Trump has simply outsourced his authority as commander in chief for war making to the Pentagon and the global apparatus that conducts the "war on terrorism."

In other words, if there is a Trump Doctrine regarding military force more generally, it amounts to "letting the generals handle it." This laissez-faire approach to national security delegates war-making responsibilities to the phalanx of generals surrounding Trump, including Secretary of Defense James Mattis, a retired Marine Corps general; National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster, a uniformed lieutenant general in the army; Chief of Staff John Kelly, a retired Marine Corps general; and Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a Marine Corps general. Trump has already granted Defense Secretary Mattis and commanders on the ground the authority to raise troop levels in the wars in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, a power usually held closely by the White House, and has deferred to them in nearly every matter of policy.

Moreover, in his first five months in office, President Trump had reportedly yet to meet or speak with either his commanders

in Iraq or Afghanistan even though he signed off and granted authorization for them to take actions as they see fit. "What I do is I authorize my military," Trump said after the Air Force dropped the most powerful conventional bomb in its arsenal on an ISIS complex in Afghanistan without his input. "We have the greatest military in the world, and they've done the job, as usual," Trump said. "We have given them total authorization, and that's what they're doing."[10] A similar authorization has been reported at the CIA, where CIA director Mike Pompeo claimed that, "When we've asked for more authorities, we've been given it. When we ask for more resources, we get it."[11]

This "total authorization" has even led to the strange sight of the president distancing himself from actions he actually approved and ordered such as the Special Operations Forces raid in Yemen which claimed the life of Navy SEAL Ryan Owens. "This was something that was, you know, just—they wanted to do. They came to see me and they explained what they wanted to do, the generals, who are very respected… And they lost Ryan."[12]

Trump's outsourcing of war to his national security team—to the comfort of many—may avert the risk of an impulsive leader with no military experience ordering a reckless war in response to the latest slight. But the irony is that Trump's top military leadership are the epitome of what Bannon would term "globalists." They are pragmatic internationalists deeply committed to the United States' leadership role within the global alliance structure that the US military built after World War II, along with a penchant for military solutions to global problems.

Trump's generals and others in his national security leadership are a group deeply invested in the "long war" against terrorists, extremists and instability, however coded. They see this war in terms of generations—as both global and permanent. They embrace what Micah Zenko has described as a counterterrorism ideology within the national security state whose mindset is bipartisan and transcends presidential administrations, and which "is virulent and extremist, characterized by tough-sounding clichés and wholly implausible objectives."[13] As military historian Andrew Bacevich has critically noted, the same group of generals who oversaw the counterproductive "global war on terror" are only proposing a more muscular version of the same approach.[14]

Trump's array of generals have another characteristic in common, which most likely attracted them to Trump but which runs counter to a neo-isolationist foreign policy. Nearly all of them have expressed public opposition to aspects of Obama's second-term foreign policy that included an alleged hesitancy to use force or commit troops, which many allies perceived as a retreat from traditional US commitments in the world. For example, they publicly faulted Obama for setting a deadline for withdrawing troops from Afghanistan, blamed his decision to pull all US troops out of Iraq in 2011 for the rise of the ISIS, and have been critical of the White House's sensitivity to "boots on the ground" in the anti-ISIS campaign.

Additionally, nearly all of them echo the sentiments of many senior Pentagon officials who often chafed under Obama's centralized decision making, including Obama's first three secretaries of defense—Robert M. Gates, Leon E. Panetta and Chuck Hagel—who all accused the administration of excessively interfering in military matters. Robert Gates, for example, claimed in his memoir that the "controlling nature of the Obama White House and the staff took micromanagement and operational meddling to a new level."[15]

The irony, which seems to have been lost on Trump, is that "his" generals' views would not only have been quite compatible with a Hillary Clinton presidency, but they are more fully in line with Republican "globalist" hawks like Lindsey Graham, who came out of a meeting with Mattis about more aggressive deployments in Africa brimming with confidence. "The war is morphing," Graham said. "You're going to see more actions in Africa, not less; you're going to see more aggression by the United States toward our enemies, not less; and you're going to have decisions being made not in the White House but out in the field."[16]

## Deregulating the Global Battlefield

Trump's global surge in drone strikes and clandestine operations is also being driven by concerted deregulation. Under the mantra of enhancing operational autonomy and flexibility, the Pentagon is, in effect, outsourcing aspects of their own war-making authority and decision making even further down the chain of command, which has opened the throttle on drone strikes and more offensive operations.

As is well known, President Obama oversaw the massive expansion and geographical reach of drone warfare as well as JSOC man hunting operations, creating what *The Washington Post*'s Greg Miller termed a "global apparatus for drone killing."[17] The use of drones and Special Operations Forces aligned with Obama's ambition to keep up the war against al-Qaeda while extricating the US military from costly ground wars in the Middle East. Shuttering the CIA's detention program and halting transfers to Guantanamo Bay further incentivized "targeted killing" as a viable option. Nevertheless, Obama embraced the drone war with gusto. He authorized more strikes in his first year than Bush carried out during his entire presidency. He escalated the covert CIA-led drone campaign in Pakistan and opened up new drone campaigns, often led by JSOC, in Yemen, Somalia and eventually Libya and Syria by the end of his second term.[18]

Obama's embrace of drone warfare faced mounting criticism—both within and outside the administration—that drone strikes were causing too many civilian casualties, driving terrorist recruitment and undermining support among allies. Thus, in his second term, Obama worked to impose more restrictive rules on drone strikes and kill-or-capture operations outside of war theaters like Iraq and Afghanistan, in an effort to create a more principled and pragmatic framework to govern their use.

**The Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, which provides command and control of air power over Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and 17 other nations.**
US AIR FORCE PHOTO BY TECH. SGT. JOSHUA STRANG VIA THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

First, Obama centralized the highly classified practice of targeted killing which, according to Greg Miller, had the effect of "transforming Bush's ad-hoc global man hunting program into a counterterrorism infrastructure capable of sustaining a seemingly permanent war."[19] Obama's national security team developed a new targeting procedure called the "disposition matrix" in which the multiple drone programs and separate but overlapping kill lists of the CIA and JSOC were brought together in a single evolving database of biographies, locations and affiliated organizations. It included the preferred strategies for taking targets down, such as extradition, capture operations and drone strikes. Targets were vetted in a highly bureaucratic process among various agencies and the decision to strike a target was made during a meeting of National Security Council officials along with the president in what became colloquially known as "Terror Tuesdays."

Second, all drone strikes and operations outside of official war zones were subjected to more restrictive rules of engagement than allowed by the law of armed conflict that governs conventional war zones, or what the administration called "areas of active hostilities." These rules were outlined in the still largely classified Presidential Policy Guidance or PPG of 2013 that became known as the counter-terrorism "playbook" that Obama hoped would both guide and tie the hand of his successors. Among its most important rules are that cabinet officials must agree in high-level deliberations that a proposed target away from a traditional war zone poses a "continuing and imminent" threat to American national security and that there must be "near certainty" that no civilians will be harmed or killed.[20]

Finally, the Obama administration began to roll back the CIA's quasi-military role and move control over the drone program to the Pentagon in the name of transparency and centralization, although political resistance slowed the process considerably. Once the war with ISIS began to heat up in 2015, for example, the Obama administration implemented a new hybrid model in which JSOC exclusively carried out drone strikes and the CIA helped with targeting through the CIA's Counterterrorism Center so that the CIA was "finding and fixing" targets while JSOC would "finish" them.

Obama's bureaucratic attempt to reign in the sprawling "war on terror" with its multiple commands and authorities, and his belated effort to create a patina of legality and accountability for drone strikes, generated resistance in many quarters, which has blossomed under Trump. Trump's "total authorization" has allowed hawkish officials and senior military commanders to forward a wish list of plans and authorities that dilute or circumvent Obama-era rules and release the throttle on America's immense capabilities for global strikes.

The centerpiece of reversing Obama-era restrictions has

been the increasing designation of geographical zones outside of existing battlefields as "areas of active hostilities." This move literally makes them temporary undeclared war zones where the military can launch up to six-month wars without congressional approval, and where less restrictive targeting rules apply.[21] For example, immediately upon taking office, Trump granted requests to declare three provinces in Yemen to be areas of active hostilities. In March, Trump designated large parts of Somalia as areas of active hostilities for at least 180 days in which local commanders were given the authority to carry out offensive strikes against al-Shabaab militants—even if it was not certain they posed an "ongoing and imminent threat" to American national security interests.

Through such actions, Trump's Pentagon has largely superseded Obama's so-called playbook. Trump's national security advisers have also reportedly taken steps to replace Obama's PPG with what they have called Principles, Standards and Procedures, or PSP, which gives the US military broader latitude to conduct drone strikes and covert operations outside of conventional battlefields than the PPG. Under the PSP, the military and the CIA will no longer need a high-level vetting of the targets of proposed strikes or need to show that potential targets actually pose a specific threat to Americans. The one rule that was maintained in the PSP was the PPG's standard of "near certainty" that civilians would not be injured or killed in a strike. In sum, Trump's new playbook authorizes a "persistent campaign of direct action" in a variety of countries against any suspected member of a group deemed a terror organization by the authorization for the use of military force that was passed by Congress in the days following September 11, 2001.

The Trump White House has also taken steps to loosen Obama-era restraints on the CIA, which would open the way for CIA strikes in Libya, Somalia, Yemen and elsewhere. Reversing Obama's "hybrid model," Trump authorized the CIA to resume drone strikes in Syria, and the CIA is reportedly seeking authority to conduct its own drone strikes within the conventional battlefield of Afghanistan, a first if approved. With Pompeo in charge, the agency appears to be aggressively renewing its paramilitary role, and pushing limits on other forms of covert operations outside conflict zones, including in Iran. CIA control of the drone program means the strikes will remain covert and cannot be discussed, or even publicly acknowledged, by those in the US government.

With these latest actions, the Trump administration stopped short of completely reversing Obama-era restraints, but they have moved swiftly away from them. One senior official bluntly asserts that the latest changes are intended to make much of the "bureaucracy" created by the Obama administration rules "disappear."[22] Of course, the novelty of the new Trump-era rules regarding such strikes should not be overstated; It is at most a return to a policy that Obama created and then claimed to have ended. In essence, Trump's approach amounts to a "state of exception" to Obama's "state of exception"; both of which are at odds with international human rights laws and standards that should be applied outside of official war zones. As Letta Taylor of Human Rights Watch notes,

> The US government has yet to make the case that such hostilities outside conventional war zones have reached the threshold and intensity of an armed conflict. Until and unless the government does so, the default legal framework within which the United States operates should be the law enforcement model of international human rights law, which in contrast to the less restrictive laws governing armed conflict only allows lethal targeting in order to protect an imminent threat to life.[23]

Nevertheless, as the Trump White House dissolves the existing bureaucracy and relinquishes civilian oversight of its lethal drone program, the United States is embarking on a slippery slope toward major diminution of civilian protections, and less accountability and transparency regarding parts of the world declared to be areas of active hostilities.

## Outsourcing to the War Machine

The relentless outsourcing and deregulation of war-making authority under Trump raises all the familiar problems that go along with outsourcing and deregulation whether it is the global garment industry or the Pentagon—lack of oversight, accountability, transparency and ultimately, justice. But this development becomes particularly concerning when it brings war-making authority closer to the battlefield and to those actually pulling the trigger. Although framed as welcome liberation from alleged micro-managing and political interference in military matters, outsourcing executive power for targeted killing raises the fundamental question of who really is in charge of the global apparatus for drone killing and other lethal operations. This question is even more important when the trigger puller is a machine, or an extension of a machine.

As many critics have pointed out, drones enable a form of remote killing that may make such killing only more likely by removing the realities of war from those who pull the trigger and the various sectors of the public who allegedly authorize them. Moreover, as French philosopher Gregoire Chamayou has argued, drones change the nature of warfare from a martial dual or conflict between two sides, to a unilateral form of war as "man hunting"—a predator-prey relationship that transforms warfare into preemptive "campaigns of extrajudicial executions."[24] Even more troubling is the way drones accelerate the distancing of late modern warfare from humans to machines by potentially taking humans out of the decision-making cycle. Like the science fiction film *Terminator*, the problem becomes precisely one of autonomy and how the tools of war can embody a kind of machine-like momentum of their own.

Although unmanned systems like drones have yet to become autonomous in a technical sense, a great deal of

evidence suggests that the global apparatus of transnational man hunting that the United States has created since the September 11 attacks—of which drones are just one part—has itself become increasingly autonomous and machine-like in its functioning and operation. A central aspect of this man hunting form of war is its networked operational style of largely autonomous war fighting units "swarming" together to bring all nodes in the network to bear on target lists. The methodology behind this is often attributed to former JSOC commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal and his top intelligence officer, then-Brig. Gen. Michael Flynn. While in Iraq they introduced the concept of "F3EA" (find, fix, finish, exploit and analyze), which meant striking targets and then obtaining new data from each raid to add to the target list for future raids, often within hours of the previous one.[25] Driven by McChrystal's central idea that an insurgency could only be defeated by a relentless tempo of operation that takes down opponents faster than they can regenerate, JSOC swarmed against opponents' networks through accelerating kill/capture campaigns. John Nagl, a top counterinsurgency adviser, declared that the United States was creating "an almost industrial-scale counterterrorism killing machine."[26]

This is the form of war that is being unleashed under Trump across the world, whether in Yemen, Somalia, Libya or beyond. It is accomplished by labeling them "areas of active hostilities" and delegating authority to an increasingly autonomous war system that prioritizes killing adversaries faster than they can regenerate. The machine-like nature of this war is evident in the oddly agent-less language of official military spokespersons who seem to suggest that no actual decision making is even involved. For example, Lt. Gen. Kenneth McKenzie Jr., director of the Pentagon's Joint Staff, denied that there has been a "ramp-up" in activity in Somalia, saying, "There's no particular rhythm to it, except that as they become available and as we're able to process them and vet them, we strike them."[27] Such sentiments are evidence of what political geographer Ian Shaw calls the "rationalized death management" that lies at the heart of US man hunting warfare.[28]

Although largely responsible for the expansion and consolidation of this form of war, President Obama took some steps towards establishing a more benevolent ghost in the machine in his second term. Under Trump, there is an increasing distance from political and, ultimately, human controls. The rapid evolution of this new way of waging war has largely escaped public scrutiny due to its secretive nature and origins as a deeply clandestine counterterrorism program. Public criticism, to the extent it has been aired, has largely focused on legitimate concerns about civilian casualties and the dangerous automation of warfare possible through these technologies, but not the form of war itself. War is taking the form of a globally expanded and increasingly autonomous policing operation intended to regulate, discipline and pacify rebellious populations in far corners of the globe, often out of sight of American public awareness. In science fiction terms, it is becoming more *Minority Report* than *Terminator*. As Gabor Rona, head of the Law and Armed Conflict Project at the Cardozo Law Institute in Holocaust and Human Rights, concluded in a recent commentary on the Trump Doctrine: "Bottom line: Look for ever more death and destruction against civilians and the inevitable blowback that sends us into a downward spiral of violence, all accompanied by an increasingly robust offer of 'alternative facts' on civilian casualties."[29] Although Trump still talks about "winning" such a war, this is less a war to be won than a permanent war to be administered, but the question we should increasingly ask is, by whom? ■

## Endnotes

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**An alt-right demonstration, Charlottesville, Va., August 12, 2017.** EDU BAYER/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

# The Old "New Anti-Semitism" and Resurgent White Supremacy


## Amy Kaplan


Torch-bearing white supremacists and neo-Nazis marching in Charlottesville, VA in August 2017 shocked many with their chants of "blood and soil" and "Jews will not replace us." Days later, white nationalist Richard Spencer was interviewed on Israeli TV about the role of the so-called "alt-right" in Charlottesville rally that turned deadly. When pressed about their anti-Semitic slogans, he asserted that Jews are overrepresented both on the left and in the "establishment" as "Ivy League-educated people who really determine policy," while "white people are being dispossessed from this country."[1] He excluded Jews from this circle of persecuted "white people." Indeed, he implied that Jews were the persecutors, dispossessing white people of their country by imposing a multicultural regime that allowed black and brown people to displace whites and deprive them of their national heritage. Despite his overt anti-Semitic rhetoric, Spencer called on Israelis to "respect someone like me, who has analogous feelings about whites" to theirs about Jews. "You could say that I am a white Zionist," he proudly stated, "in the sense that I care about my people, I want us to have a secure homeland for us and ourselves. Just like you want a secure homeland in Israel."

Spencer's combination of anti-Semitic stereotypes with emulation of Israel has been legitimated by President Donald Trump. Trump's campaign used symbols with anti-Semitic overtones, he adopted the slogan "America First" from an anti-Semitic movement of the 1940s, and on Holocaust Remembrance Day he refused to mention Jews or anti-Semitism. Spencer, for one, praised Trump for this "de-Judaification" of the Holocaust. The evocation of the Holocaust hurts people


**Amy Kaplan** *is the Edward W. Kane Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania.*

like him he wrote, "We can't limit immigration, *because Hitler*. We can't be proud of ourselves as a Europeans, *because Holocaust*. White people can be Christian, but not *too* Christian, *because Auschwitz*" [errors and emphasis in original].[2]

While using anti-Semitic dog whistles for his followers, Trump at the same time has overtly championed Israel's most right-wing agendas. During the campaign, Trump lauded Israel as a model for policing in America when he called for racial profiling to prevent terrorist attacks by Muslims. "You know, in Israel they profile," he said, "they've done an unbelievable job, as good as you can do." If a person looks suspicious in Israel, "they will take that person in." America is weak in contrast, he added, because "we're trying to be so politically correct in our country and this is only going to get worse."[3] Once in office, Trump appointed a Likud supporter, Daniel Friedman, as ambassador to Israel and he put his son-in-law, Jared Kushner—a donor to the Israeli settlement movement—in charge of the Israeli-Palestinian "peace process." And of course, by recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel Trump fulfilled a right-wing dream in the US and Israel, shattered the liberal veneer of an American-led peace process leading to a two-state solution, deeply offended Palestinians, antagonized Muslims around the world and violated an international consensus.

This combination of anti-Semitism at home and hyper-Zionism abroad may sound strange. History shows, however, that pro-Zionism and anti-Semitism have never been mutually exclusive, even though the Zionist movement arose as a response to the persecution of Jews in Europe. Early advocates for a Jewish state enlisted stereotypes of Jews—wittingly or not—to further their cause. Theodor Herzl appealed to anti-Semitism by promising European leaders that Zionism would resolve the "Jewish Question" by sending Jews elsewhere. British supporters of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which proclaimed support for a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, drew on an inflated image of hidden Jewish financial power that could sway the US government to enter World War I. As historian Timothy Snyder recounts, the Polish government in the 1930s supported revisionist Zionism as a rationale for ridding Poland of Jews. It is well-known that the US turned away Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany during the 1930s. After WWII and the revelation of the death camps, anti-Semitism continued to fuel American rejection of Jewish refugees. Some American congressmen called loudly for the British to open the gates to Palestine so that Jews in displaced persons camps would not try to enter the US and thereby contaminate the country with their perceived communist sympathies. Only when conservative groups like the American Legion were reassured that Jewish refugees would go to Palestine rather than the US did they endorse the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which nonetheless heavily discriminated against Jews.

Consider the case of right-wing evangelical Christians, who formed the Moral Majority in the 1980s and the Christian Zionist movement in the 1990s. They are among the strongest supporters of Israel today and a major constituency backing Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as its capital. They meld strident endorsement of Israel's right-wing policies with anti-Semitic attitudes toward Jews. Theologically, they love Jews to death. According to End Times prophecy—a nineteenth-century belief system that preceded and contributed to Christian support for political Zionism—the ingathering of Jews to the Holy Land is a precondition for the Second Coming, at which point a select group of Jews will convert to Christianity, and the rest will be killed with all unbelievers.

Here on earth, conservative evangelicals have cast secular Jews both as subversive amoral influences from below—responsible for the depredations of the counterculture—and also as powerful bankers in the shadowy upper reaches manipulating the New World Order for their own financial gain. There are good Jews and bad Jews, as Spencer also implied. The good ones are marked by their nationalist identification with the State of Israel, the bad by their liberal cosmopolitanism. A striking example can be found in the late Tim LaHaye's enormously popular *Left Behind* series of novels about the End Times. A small militia group leading the fight against the Antichrist consists of rugged, born-again white Americans and brainy Israeli converts to Christianity, but not one American Jew appears in the 16 volumes.

This pattern of admiring Israel while denigrating American Jews resonates with alt-right white supremacists today. Spencer may believe that Jews have no place in the resurgent white nation, but he views Israel as a model for an ethnically homogeneous state. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, Spencer's mission is "to inspire whites with the dream of such a homeland just as Zionism helped spur the establishment of Israel. A white ethno-state would be an *Altneuland*—an old, new country—he said, attributing the term to Theodor Herzl, a founding father of Zionism."[4]

The parallels between white supremacy and Zionism have shocked many liberals. When Spencer spoke at Texas A&M University, Hillel Rabbi Matt Rosenberg stood up to decry racial hatred and he invited Spencer to study the Jewish tradition of "radical inclusion and love." Spencer's response literally left him speechless: "Do you really want radical inclusion into the State of Israel?....and by that I mean radical inclusion. Maybe all of the Middle East could go move in to Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. Would you really want that?"[5] In a rally later that year at the University of Florida, Spencer asserted that he respected Jews for not assimilating and wanted America to be a country for whites just like "The Jewish state of Israel is not just another country in the Middle East," but "a country for Jews around the world." He called Israel the "most revolutionary ethno-state, and it's one that I turn to for guidance, even though I might not always agree with its foreign policy decisions." In addition, he spoke of the "moral legitimacy" of other "ethno-states," naming Russia, Poland and Hungary as supposed examples.[6]


**Activists led by the If Not Now Jewish social justice group rallied at the Grand Hyatt Hotel where Steve Bannon was attending a Zionist Organization of America gala, New York, November 12, 2017.** REX FEATURES VIA AP IMAGES

## Islamophobia and White Zionism

What white nationalists have in common with right-wing evangelicals is not only pro-Zionism but also Islamophobia, and they are less circumspect about expressing antagonism toward Muslims—a centerpiece of Trump's appeal and policy—than they are about anti-Semitism. They admire Israel not only for what they see as its ethnic homogeneity but also for its gutsiness in dominating or expelling Muslims to keep the Jewish nation pure. Conservative evangelicals propound the idea of the "Judeo-Christian tradition" less as an inclusive attitude toward Jews and Catholics, as the idea developed in 1950s America, than as rallying cry for a civilizational conflict against Islam.

Mainstream Jewish organizations have been somewhat divided about pro-Zionist white supremacists. To be sure, all Jewish leaders condemned the violence of neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan in Charlottesville, and most condemned Trump for his outrageous response of blaming "both sides." The Zionist Organization of America, however, refrained from criticizing Trump, and indeed echoed him by denouncing the anti-fascist activist group Antifa as also responsible for the violence in Charlottesville.

A year earlier, the appointment of Steven K. Bannon as Trump's chief strategist generated more controversy among Jewish organizations. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) opposed the appointment of the man who as founding editor of Breitbart News "presided over the premier website of the 'alt-right'—a loose-knit group of white nationalists and unabashed anti-Semites and racists."[7] Jewish Voice for Peace and J Street also condemned the Bannon appointment. Breitbart did indeed bring white nationalism into the mainstream from the political fringes, although Bannon has since tried to distance himself from overt forms of racism by calling himself an economic nationalist. At the 2016 Republican Convention, however, Bannon did boast: "We're the platform for the alt-right."[8]

While the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a lobbying group for pro-Israel policy in the US, remained silent on the appointment, the president of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), Morton Klein, defended Bannon from the personal charge of being an anti-Semite on the grounds of his staunch partisanship toward Israel: "Every article about Israel and the Palestinian Arabs he has published are all supportive of Israel," said Klein. These include "fighting anti-Semitic rallies at the City University of New York," "courageously…reporting that the Palestinian Authority defames Israel," "bravely" publicizing "Iran's violations of the nuclear rollback deal that pose an existential threat to Israel" and "sympathetically" reporting on the "scourge of anti-Semitic, anti-Israel boycotts, divestment and sanctions."[9] ZOA's evidence that Bannon could not be anti-Semitic was simply that Breitbart News hurled that label at those who oppose the Israeli occupation and support Palestinian rights.

What draws together the ZOA, Bannon, white nationalists and evangelicals behind Trump is the melding of Zionism with a virulent Islamophobic agenda. The president of the ZOA, for example, sees Israel and America sharing a common fight to defend the homeland against Islam: "In an era in which the vast majority of terrorism is committed by Muslims, in order to protect American citizens, we should adopt the same profiling policies as Israel and be more thorough in vetting Muslims."[10]

## The Old "New Anti-Semitism"

The logic of defending right-wing groups that espouse anti-Semitism on the grounds of their support for Israel follows the logic of conflating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Simply put, if anti-Semitism is defined as criticism of Israel, then anyone who supports Israel is immunized from this charge. Although the ADL has openly opposed Trump and condemned Bannon and Breitbart for anti-Muslim extremism, the same organization bears some historical and contemporary responsibility for the pervasiveness of this logic.

In 1974, the ADL published *The New Anti-Semitism,* a book that radically redirected its meaning away from prejudice against Jews and toward animus against the State of Israel, and simultaneously, away from the political right toward the left. "Classic anti-Semitism" was on the wane, the book claimed. Espoused by older right-wing groups such as the KKK, and relegated to the margins by the civil rights movement, the old stereotypes of Jews appeared as an anachronistic throwback in an America where Jews had made it.

Instead, the new dangers of anti-Semitism, according to this book, came from the radical left and Black Power movements. In the context of the Vietnam War and the 1967 Six Day War, some radicals condemned Israel's conquests as imperialist and championed Palestinian resistance as an anti-colonial liberation movement. Rather than respond to these political critiques, the ADL read them as warning signals of a virulent new strain of anti-Semitism on the rise. As Noam Chomsky pointed out at the time, the charge of anti-Semitism also served to tar more broadly the anti-war movement. Since the 1970s, the ADL has wielded this new definition of anti-Semitism to monitor and suppress groups supporting Palestinian rights throughout the liberal left, especially Arab-American and Muslim organizations.

Ironically, the "new anti-Semitism" has been discovered again and again, decade after decade. It has come to a hysterical crescendo in the twenty-first century. To name a few titles, there is *The Real Anti-Semitism in America* (1982), and more recently *The New Anti-Semitism* (2003), *Never Again: The Threat of the New Anti-Semitism* (2003), *The Return of Anti-Semitism* (2004) and *Resurgent Anti-Semitism* (2013).

The argument is always the same: Israel is the victim of international persecution as the "Jew among nations." The circle of persecutors expanded beyond 60s radicals to include Third World nations and the United Nations in the 1970s, for their support of the PLO and the declaration that Zionism was a form of racism; and to the mainstream media in the 1980s, for broadcasts of Israeli brutality in Lebanon and during the first Palestinian Intifada. New accusations of new anti-Semitism started targeting human rights groups in the 1990s. The term became capacious enough to include Jewish critics of Israel, who had once been considered merely "self-hating." Since 2001, the new anti-Semites have taken the stereotypical form of "Islamofascists," who purportedly fuse anti-Semitism with anti-Americanism. In this decade, the ADL and other organizations have launched campaigns to criminalize the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement as the newest of the new forms of "anti-Semitism."

The ascription of "new anti-Semitism" became all the more important as Israel's military predominance became undeniable to the world. As the earlier image of Israel as David versus the Arab Goliath became increasingly untenable, especially after the 1979 treaty with Egypt and the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Israel's defenders insisted that Israel had become existentially vulnerable to discourse, and that certain kinds of speech had to be policed to defend Israel's existence.

The "new anti-Semitism," according to its definers, is immutable. Since they started defining it as an attack on

a nation, they stopped understanding it as a prejudice that could be educated away, a set of stereotypes that could be challenged, or discrimination that could be remedied by law, alongside other forms of bigotry—which is the way the ADL approached anti-Semitism for decades. Consequently, believers in the "new anti-Semitism" have little hope that criticisms of Israel might abate if its policies change, and they believe that murderous hatred of Jews is the major obstacle to peace in the Middle East.

The history of the ADL's response to Christian Zionism is instructive of its willingness to embrace right-wing supporters of Israel, no matter what their attitudes toward Jews. In 1982, ADL director Nathan Perlmutter wrote that he wasn't worried about Evangelical theology because of the more pressing needs to fund Israel's military. In his words: "We need all the friends we have to support Israel…If the Messiah comes, on that day we'll consider our options. Meanwhile, let's praise the Lord and pass the ammunition."[11] In 1994 Abe Foxman, the next director, showed more concern about Pat Robertson's popular *New World Order*, which condemned "cosmopolitan liberal Jews" for their "assault on Christianity." Foxman responded with *The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance and Pluralism in America*, warning of the imposition of a "Christian nation" on America's democracy.[12] By 2002, when the US imagined itself to be fighting the same war on terror that Israel was fighting against Palestinians during the Second Intifada, Foxman reconsidered and published the 2002 article in the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin*, "Why Evangelical Support for Israel is a Good Thing." In 2010 the ADL joined right-wing politicians and anti-Muslim groups to oppose the construction of an Islamic Center in lower Manhattan, on the grounds that it would offend survivors of September 11, 2001 by its location "in the shadow of the World Trade Center."[13]

During the Trump candidacy and presidency, the ADL, under its new director, Jonathan Greenblatt, seems to have shifted course by working with coalitions against the Muslim ban and other forms of white supremacy. This may be a response in part to Trump's overt appeal to Islamophobia and other forms of racism as a rallying cry and policy. It may also be a recognition that Trump has sanctioned his supporters' expression of the "old anti-Semitism" directed against American Jews, while at the same time he has given Israel everything its right-wing supporters want.

The same ADL director, however, has continued the organization's tradition of targeting left-wing critiques of Israel as the most threatening form of anti-Semitism. Jumping on the bandwagon against Palestinian American activist Linda Sarsour and the longstanding antagonism against Jewish Voice for Peace, he derided their participation in a forum on anti-Semitism. As he tweeted: "Having Linda Sarsour & head of JVP leading a panel on #antisemitism is like Oscar Meyer leading a panel on vegetarianism." These panelists, he added, "know the issue, but unfortunately, from perspective of fomenting it rather than fighting it."[14] Ironically, the approach to anti-Semitism taken by Jewish Voice for Peace and activists like Sarsour recalls the principles that once gave the ADL great moral authority in the US: they view the struggle against anti-Semitism as part of a broader alliance fighting all forms of racism, bigotry, xenophobia and Islamophobia.

The ADL today has joined AIPAC and the ZOA in supporting the 2016 Anti-Awareness Act, a benign-sounding congressional bill that would direct the Department of Education to investigate criticism of Israel, using the State Department's definition of anti-Semitism. This bill is also supported by attorney Kenneth L. Marcus, Trump's appointee to the post of assistant secretary for civil rights in the Department of Education. Marcus has led the way in legal campaigns to criminalize criticism of Israel, especially the BDS movement and particularly on college campuses. Both the ADL and Marcus concede that not all criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic. They claim that this bill would clarify the distinction and would identify, in the words of the bill, "discriminatory anti-Israel conduct that crosses the line into anti-Semitism." But the definitions the bill refers to have the opposite effect. They collapse that distinction into the broad categories of "double standards," "demonization" and "delegitimization." These terms have no objective or agreed-upon meanings in legal, diplomatic or scholarly discourse. Their alliteration suggests the mnemonic strategy of a public relations campaign. They blur any distinctions between thought, speech and action. There is a further irony in that one of the major definitions of the "new anti-Semitism" holds that Israel is treated differently from all other nations, according to a double standard. But these three definitions together, and the bill itself, create a double standard by legalizing criteria that only apply to criticism of the State of Israel and not to any other nation.

Recent history is instructive here as well. The "3D's" were codified in 2004 by Natan Sharansky, a Soviet dissident who became a Likud official in Israel and was greatly admired by President George W. Bush and his neoconservative supporters. The essay, "3D Test of Anti-Semitism: Demonization, Double Standards, Delegitimization," introduced a special issue of *Jewish Political Studies Review* on "Emerging Anti-Semitic Themes." Sharansky stated two major concerns. First, that the new anti-Semitism poses a unique challenge: "Whereas classical anti-Semitism is aimed at the Jewish people or the Jewish religion, "new anti-Semitism" is aimed at the Jewish state. Since this anti-Semitism can hide behind the veneer of legitimate criticism of Israel, it is more difficult to expose."[15] This is a key part of the narrative about the new anti-Semitism, that it is concealed and lurking behind the mask of reputable speech, such as human rights discourse, and thus it must be rooted out and exposed. But who gets to determine the real intention behind the humanitarian statements, who gets to strike through the mask? This claim of veiled anti-Semitism is wielded primarily against the left in the US and Europe. Sharansky's second concern was "the rise of Arab and Islamic Anti-Semitism." Overt rather than covert, deploying violence rather than words alone, Arab and Islamic anti-Semitism

"viciously" and "expressly" calls for "massive terrorism and genocide against Jews, Zionists, and the State of Israel."[16]

What's more, at the time of mass global protests against the impending invasion of Iraq, Sharansky, along with other neoconservatives in Europe and the US, found anti-Semitism to be indistinguishable from anti-Americanism among European leftists, as well as Arabs and Muslims. In a 2003 essay, "On Hating Jews," he wrote that "Anti-Americanism was a continuation of anti-Semitism by other means."[17] In 2004, the US State Department issued its first *Report on Global Anti-Semitism* and identified one of the four sources of rising anti-Semitism as, "Criticism of both the United States and globalization that spills over to Israel, and to Jews in general who are identified with both." This report also established the new position of Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, one of the many posts that Trump and Secretary of State Tillerson have left unfilled.

In Trump land today, the unholy alliance of white supremacy, anti-Semitism and pro-Zionism has forced a reckoning with the single-minded definition of the "new anti-Semitism" as criticism of Israel. As Toni Morrison wrote, "definitions belong to the definers—not the defined."[18] The current effort to legalize specious definitions of anti-Semitism that criminalize pro-Palestinian activism and suppress debate must be resisted. To be sure, there are critics of Israel who also express hostility toward Jews, and anti-Semitism should not be tolerated on the left or right. Working against anti-Semitism today can only be effective as part of a broader struggle against white supremacy, anti-black racism, xenophobia against immigrants and Islamophobia. We cannot allow blind allegiance to Israel to excuse bigotry of any kind. ■

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**The Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba.** RICHARD PERRY/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

# The Afterlives of Torture

## Putting the US War on Terror in Historical and Global Context


### Lisa Hajjar


Donald J. Trump ran for president on a platform that included a pledge to bring back the torture technique of waterboarding and "a hell of a lot more." On the campaign trail, Trump told his supporters: "We have to fight so viciously and violently because we're dealing with violent people…We have to fight fire with fire…or we are not going to have much of a country left."[1] Clearly, he was operating on the premise that these techniques work, that the kinds of people subjected to waterboarding and other forms of custodial violence in the "war on terror"—namely, Muslims—deserve it, and that the cancellation of the George W. Bush administration's torture program by Barack Obama in 2009 was a mistake. The crowds cheering on Trump's pro-torture rhetoric reflect the way in which popular support for torture has become a


**Lisa Hajjar** *is professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a former member of the editorial committee of this magazine.*

litmus test for a brand of hard-eyed patriotism in which the universal principal of human dignity is scorned as a politically correct liberal fiction.

The day after winning the election, Trump listed the resurrection of waterboarding as one of his top five policy priorities. In a late November 2016 interview with *The New York Times*, he reported a conversation he had with his choice for secretary of defense, Gen. James Mattis. According to Trump,

> Gen. Mattis found it [waterboarding] to be…much less important than I thought he would say. I thought he would say—you know he's known as Mad Dog Mattis, right? Mad Dog for a reason. I thought he'd say "It's phenomenal, don't lose it." He actually said, "No, give me some cigarettes and some drinks, and we'll do better."

But then Trump added, "I'm not saying it changed my mind."[2]

In that *Times* interview, Trump said something else about waterboarding—which functions rhetorically as a stand-in for torture more broadly. "If it's so important to the American people, I would go for it. I would be guided by that." This statement reveals at least two features of Trump's approach to power, which he now exercises as president. First, he has cultivated a form of populist appeal—which some refer to as Trumpism—that does not just nourish popular prejudices and ignorance but relies on and elevates them as a justification for some of his policies. If the people want torture, then he will give it to them. Second, by saying that he would be guided by popular sentiment on this matter, he is implying that he would not be guided by the law, which categorically prohibits torture. Nor would he be influenced by expert opinion or the abundant evidence that torture is ineffective in producing accurate "actionable intelligence," as the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence concluded in its report on the CIA program. Indeed, President Trump appears to be either uninformed or indifferent to the fact that the post-September 11, 2001 torture program was strategically disastrous for US national security interests.[3]

Why would President Trump and the people to whom he appeals want to resurrect waterboarding? This desire and possibility are suggestive of how torture haunts US politics today. Desire for waterboarding denotes public attitudes that have shifted toward a pro-torture position in recent years, and the reasons for that shift. The possibility of resurrecting waterboarding reflects changes in the understanding and exercise of executive power, and reinterpretations of the law to rationalize, excuse or immunize strategies and practices that deviate from international norms and even from bedrock constitutional norms. Resurrection suggests something that came and went but threatens to return, what might be called the afterlives of torture. But to set up the "after" in "afterlives," it helps to begin with a chronology of events relevant to the US history of torture in the context of war and conflict. This excludes torture within the domestic national context—from slavery to mass incarceration.

## Torture in the Context of War and Conflict

By the turn of the twentieth century, torture was prohibited by law in many countries and widely regarded as morally unacceptable—even before the major developments in international law following the end of World War II. Yet the use of torture spiked around the globe during the twentieth century. Why? The answer relates to the rise of the national security state and the prevalence of unconventional or asymmetric wars pitting states against non-state groups. Torturing people for information or punishment was common in anti-colonial wars across the global south, and in civil wars pitting repressive states against rebellious or ideologically suspect domestic groups.

Indeed, the United States entered the twentieth century engaged in an asymmetric war in the Philippines, during which US soldiers were documented employing waterboarding. One US major was suspended and fined for using "the water cure," as it was then described, but President Theodore Roosevelt defended the practice in a 1902 letter in which he wrote, "Nobody was seriously damaged."[4] At the Tokyo Tribunal following World War II, the United States charged a Japanese officer with war crimes for waterboarding a US civilian. He was sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor.[5] During the Vietnam War, *The Washington Post* published a front-page photo of US soldiers waterboarding a North Vietnamese soldier in December 1968. The photo prompted an Army investigation that led to the court martial of a soldier. These three events signal official recognition that waterboarding specifically, and torture more generally, were not only unacceptable but criminal.

But there is another history of torture, one that begins with the Korean War—the conflict that ushered in the Cold War era. An American soldier was captured four days after the start of US involvement, and two days later he delivered a radio speech in which he espoused North Korean propaganda.[6] The speed of his indoctrination was alarming to US officials, and this alarm was heightened by the fact that thousands of other American prisoners of war were "broken" in captivity, often at similarly hasty interludes.

Such unprecedented behavior among POWs seemed to indicate that the Communists had developed highly effective and fast-working techniques that could be applied successfully to "brainwash" Americans. After the war, it was estimated that one out of every ten of the 4,428 American POWs had "collaborated with the enemy," of whom approximately 13 percent were deemed "guilty of serious collaboration."[7] What made these rapid breakdowns so baffling was that the treatment to which POWs were subjected did not look like conventional torture. Indeed, US officials acknowledged that physical torture of POWs was rare. The core methods of the perplexingly successful process of breaking people involved a combination of surveillance, protracted isolation, physical deprivation and exhaustion, psychological humiliation and coercion and endless demands for autobiographical minutiae.

The US military took a lesson from the Korean War and in 1955 established a program titled Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE). The goal of SERE was to train elite Air Force units to withstand abusive practices, including waterboarding, in the event that they were captured by enemies who did not abide by the 1949 Geneva Conventions that prohibit torture and cruel treatment. This anti-torture training program was extended to the other three branches of the military during the Vietnam War. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, these SERE training techniques were "re-engineered" for the Bush administration's torture program.

The CIA took a different lesson from the Korean War. In 1953, the Agency began investing in mind control research under the MK-ULTRA program. The earliest phase involved experiments in hypnosis, electroshock and hallucinogenic drugs and evolved into experiments in psychological torture that adapted elements of Communist models. The CIA's secret program soon became an applied "science" in the Cold War.[8] The laboratories included interrogation centers in various hot wars where the United States intervened directly and locales where the United States supported or colluded with right-wing regimes.

In 1963, the CIA, which operated under the code name Kubark, produced a manual titled "Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation" to guide agents and allies in the art of extracting information from so-called resistant sources. In Vietnam, these techniques were field tested in the CIA's Phoenix program, which combined psychological torture with brutal interrogations, human experimentation and extrajudicial executions. The CIA trained more than 85,000 South Vietnamese police, who operated a network of sites across the country where more than 26,000 prisoners were either tortured to death or summarily executed after interrogation.

The Phoenix program was an intelligence gathering failure, and the United States lost the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, the model was transported to Latin America later in the 1960s through Project X, a secret program to train the security forces of US-allied military regimes and dictatorships. The Kubark manual techniques were incorporated into the curriculum of the School of the Americas—a military training and ideology maintenance institution catering to US allies in the Western Hemisphere. In the context of the Cold War-era war on communism, as Alfred McCoy and others have argued, the United States was a major force in propagating torture worldwide.

In the mid-1980s, CIA activities became the subject of congressional investigations into US-supported atrocities in Central America. In 1997, the original Kubark manual and one surviving later edition became public as a result of Freedom of Information Act litigation by *The Baltimore Sun*. By that time, the Cold War had ended and the CIA's main methods of intelligence gathering had shifted from human intelligence (HUMINT) to electronic signals intelligence (SIGNIT). The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, however, revealed that the lack of human intelligence about al-Qaeda was a monumental weakness, and acquiring it became a driving imperative for the first few years of the war on terror.

## Torture and the War on Terror

Five days after the attacks of September 11, 2001, President Bush signed a secret memorandum that served to paramilitarize the CIA with "kill or capture" authority to establish a secret detention and interrogation operation overseas. The Clinton-era rendition program, which involved transfer of captured terror suspects to third countries for trial, was revamped as a program called "extraordinary rendition" to permit the CIA to kidnap people from foreign countries and disappear them into black sites (secret prisons) where they could be held incommunicado as so-called ghost detainees, or transferred extra-legally to the security services of other states for interrogation.

In the division of interrogational labor between the military and the CIA, the latter was vested with primary responsibility for high value detainees (HVD)—people assumed to be terrorist leaders or planners of the September 11, 2001 attacks, or to have knowledge about terrorist operations and plots. On March 28, 2002, the first HVD, Abu Zubaydah, was captured in Pakistan and transported to a black site in Thailand—the first of several where he was detained over his years in CIA custody. The escalating harshness of Abu Zubaydah's treatment was due to two factors. First, top officials assumed, incorrectly, that he was a major figure in al-Qaeda (he was not even a member at the time of the September 11, 2001 attacks) and demanded actionable intelligence from him. Second, the CIA hired two psychologist contractors, James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, to run the HVD program, despite neither having relevant interrogation experience or expert knowledge about terrorism. Their prior experience had been with the SERE program, and thus their hiring to run the HVD program is how the re-engineering process began. The brutal and dehumanizing methods authorized for Abu Zubaydah, which included waterboarding him 83 times and placing him in a coffin-like "confinement box," set the stage for the CIA's new torture program designed to create and exploit conditions of "disability, disorientation and dread."[9] The guiding theory, if one can call it that, was derived from experiments on dogs and aimed at producing "learned helplessness."[10] This approach was applied to people held captive by the CIA on the presumption that once they were broken, they would reveal a bounty of actionable intelligence. In this sense, the CIA's torture program was another chapter in the history of government-supported human experimentation.

By mid-summer 2002, some CIA agents were growing anxious about their vulnerability to future prosecution under

federal anti-torture laws. In response, lawyers in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) produced two memos dated August 1, 2002. One memo narrowed the definition of torture to exclude anything but the most extreme forms of physical pain and prolonged mental suffering; the other memo provided legal cover for the tactics already in use, including waterboarding. The memos also articulated a theory of presidential power, termed the "unitary executive thesis," which was already functioning as a guiding principle for the Bush administration's war on terror. This thesis asserts that the president, as commander-in-chief, cannot be fettered by any laws or subject to separation-of-power oversight in his pursuit of national security. The unitary executive thesis was unabashedly hyper-sovereigntist in conception and imperial in intention. The thesis also could be interpreted as an attempt to return to an era before the major reforms and developments of international law after World War II.

Although these OLC memos were written for the CIA, the White House forwarded them to the Pentagon. In December 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld authorized a three course menu of reverse engineered SERE tactics for use on detainees held at Guantánamo Bay. Top legal officers of all four branches of the military protested, but they were ignored by the civilian leadership. The permissive approach to torture authorized for the CIA spread to the military in Guantánamo and subsequently migrated to Iraq in 2003.

**Suleiman Salim, a Tanzanian who was held prisoner in Afghanistan by the CIA. Salim is a plaintiff in a lawsuit against two psychologists regarded by some as the architects of the CIA's brutal interrogations; he says he was beaten, isolated in a dark cell for months, subjected to dousing and deprived of sleep.** BRYAN DENTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

## Fighting over the Torture Program

Several events served to force the military out of the torture program. The first was the April 2004 publication of photos from the Abu Ghraib prison of naked Iraqi prisoners being

humiliated and assaulted by US soldiers. The photos created a scandal of global proportions. Another key turning point was instigated by Sen. John McCain, himself a torture survivor from the Vietnam War. In 2005, he pushed through legislation known as the McCain Amendment to re-prohibit tactics that violated Geneva Convention rules. McCain wanted to include the CIA as well, but Vice President Dick Cheney—the top intellectual author of the torture program—lobbied the Republican-dominated Congress to incorporate a "CIA exception" to the torture ban, which they did. Another piece of legislation, the 2005 Detainee Treatment Act (DTA), further confirmed the prohibition of torture by the military, but also prohibited any Guantánamo prisoners from ever challenging their detention or treatment in US courts. When President Bush signed the DTA into law he also signed a statement that he would not necessarily regard himself as being bound by the ban. One of the people pushing that 2005 signing statement was Neil Gorusch, at the time a top Justice Department official and now the newest member of the Supreme Court.

The beginning of the end of the CIA's torture program could be dated November 2005, when *The Washington Post* reported that the Agency engaged in kidnappings and ran black sites in Europe (subsequently revealed by Human Rights Watch to be in Poland, Romania and Lithuania). A more decisive blow was leveled by the Supreme Court in June 2006. In *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* the Court ruled that Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions—the so-called humanitarian baseline—applies to all people in US custody. At a press conference in September, President Bush derided the decision and complained about the vagueness of Common Article 3's prohibition on "outrages on personal dignity," while claiming that enhanced and alternative interrogation techniques (preferred euphemisms for torture) had been effective in keeping Americans safe. Nevertheless, the black sites were emptied and 14 HVDs were relocated to Guantánamo, including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, alleged mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks, who had been waterboarded 183 times.

In October 2006, Congress passed and President Bush signed the Military Commissions Act (MCA), which permitted the Guantánamo military commissions to use confessions and other evidence elicited by coercive means. Another feature of the 2006 MCA was the provision of ex post facto immunity for any war crimes committed, abetted or ordered by US officials since 1997, the year after Congress passed the War Crimes Act. According to national security law expert Scott Horton, the 2006 MCA is "a piece of legislation that will stand in history alongside the Alien and Sedition Acts and the Fugitive Slave Act as a reminder of the kind of constitutional vandalism that Congress is capable of when it really tries."[11]

In 2006, the Council of Europe reported that 100 people had been kidnapped on the continent. The European Parliament's 2007 investigative report exposed extensive collusion by some European security services with the CIA's extraordinary rendition program. In 2005, an Italian court issued indictments for 23 CIA agents (along with four Italians) who had kidnapped Hassan Mustafa Osama Nasr (aka Abu Omar) in Milan in February 2003 and transported him to Egypt where he was brutally tortured. In 2007, a German court issued arrest warrants for 13 CIA agents involved in the December 2003 kidnapping of Khaled El-Masri, a German citizen, from Macedonia. El-Masri was transported to Afghanistan where he was tortured and held incommunicado for months before being secretly dumped without papers or money in a remote spot in Albania. The German case was ultimately derailed as a result of political pressure.[12]

## The Afterlives of Torture

Although the CIA's torture program stopped while President Bush was still in office, it was canceled decisively in January 2009 when President Barack Obama signed an executive order on his second day in office. It is at this juncture that the "afterlives of torture" becomes relevant. The famously secretive Cheney came out of the shadows to mount a public campaign deriding President Obama's cancellation order as evidence that the new president was "soft on terror." Cheney, who described waterboarding as "a dunk in the water" and its use "a no-brainer" for him,[13] saw the repudiation of torture as a reversal to the inroads he and his ideological allies had made in building up an imperial presidency unfettered by law. He asserted repeatedly from the bully pulpit of Fox News and various right-wing think tanks that enhanced interrogation techniques had been used only as a last resort—a flagrant falsehood—and had been amazingly effective—also flagrantly false. Other right-wing politicians and pundits followed Cheney's lead and public support for torture, which had been increasing slowly since 2004, tipped over the 50 percent mark after the program was canceled. Among Republicans, support lurched upward,[14] indicating that partisan adherents take their cues on such matters from political and media elites.

In this afterlives era, American pro-torture attitudes can be divided into two general categories: One category, exemplified by Cheney and other champions of the unitary executive thesis, is the quasi-intellectual project to legalize the illegal—for example, denying that waterboarding is torture when Americans do it, and even if it is, to assert that the US government's pursuit of national security should not be constrained by international law. The other category, which President Trump exemplifies, is the aggressively anti-intellectual position characterized by ignorance about torture and the law, and indifference to the principal of human dignity. According to Darius Rejali, who has done extensive research on public attitudes about torture:

> We discovered that, when it comes to torture, people appear to be driven more by social cues, superstition, resentment and indecision

> than by philosophy, morality or rational outcomes…In…our controlled survey experiments, so far we have found that respondents who favor torture don't care whether it produces a positive or negative security outcome.[15]

To say that torture haunts US politics like a ghost is to emphasize that torture still exists but is hidden, repressed, denied and lied about. Avery Gordon's concept of haunting in *Ghostly Matters* is helpful in illustrating this idea. As she explains:

> [H]aunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with…or when their oppressive nature is denied…Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view.[16]

Many such specters haunt US politics. When President Obama took the decision not to prosecute those responsible for the torture program, he rationalized this refusal as a form of bipartisan restorative justice, telling the nation that it was time to look forward, not backward. Yet his move was a "ghostly matter" in Gordon's sense because the existence of the torture program was not negated by its official cancellation. Likewise, the torture memos—although most had been withdrawn or canceled—were key to President Obama's rationalization that state agents who abetted or engaged in torture had acted in good faith, thus giving the memos their intended "golden shield" power. He pledged in an executive order signed in January 2009 to close Guantánamo within one year, but by May of that year he was already walking back that pledge. That October he signed a revised Military Commissions Act that, while tightening the evidentiary rules on coerced confessions, did nothing to withdraw the ex post facto immunity for war crimes clause in the 2006 version.

Moreover, the Obama administration relied on the Bush administration's thesis for executive power and territorially boundless war to justify the drone program, which supplanted the interrogation and detention program to become the strategic cornerstone of his administration's counterterrorism warfare model. Drone warfare and extrajudicial executions rely on the same contra-legal rationales that the United States can pursue its national security interests globally in a manner unconstrained by international law.

## Secrecy, Unaccountability, Lies

There are three main reasons to speak about the afterlives of torture haunting US politics today. The first reason is secrecy. Although the CIA program was canceled, information about it remains classified, including all but a heavily redacted executive summary of the SSCI's authoritative report. Classification of information turns it into subjugated knowledge, hidden away but not gone. Some people know it exists, but others do not believe what they cannot see. Because the SSCI report contains the truth of that secret history, CIA defenders and pro-torture enthusiasts in Congress attempted to have every copy of that report destroyed. They failed, but only because President Obama, during his last days in office, ordered that his copy be preserved in the presidential archives. Yet he also ordered that it remain classified and access be restricted for 12 years, the maximum time allowed by law.

The issue of secrecy includes the people who embody the knowledge: the individuals who were tortured by the CIA, some of whom remain imprisoned at Guantánamo, who are living ghosts. Their memories of torture were classified as state secrets by the Obama administration. They are not permitted to communicate their experiences to anyone who does not have top security clearance and some direct, authorized relation to the military commissions. Even those who have such clearance, such as their lawyers, are gagged from ever speaking about it publicly. The military commission trials for those accused of responsibility for the September 11, 2001 attacks have dragged on for years in the pre-trial phase because the government has committed itself to preserving the CIA's secrets. Consequently, every witness and every piece of evidence pertinent to the interrogation and detention of those on trial must be litigated, requiring judges to figure out how to reconcile the government's will to secrecy with an appearance of due process. More broadly, this regime of secrecy creates opportunities to advance the false narrative in the public domain that torture worked, that it "kept Americans safe," and that its cancellation has diminished our capacity to fight terror.

The second way in which the afterlives of torture haunt US politics today is the lack of accountability. Torture is a federal crime and a gross crime under international law. According to Kathryn Sikkink, who has done comparative transnational research on the prosecution of officials responsible for human rights violations, the Latin American region is a global leader in what she terms the justice cascade[17] because dozens of former leaders have been put on trial and convicted. She found that the effects of prosecutions include lower levels of repression and better human rights records in those countries. However, the real test, as she and others have noted, is whether international law and the norms associated with retributive justice for gross crimes does, or even could, influence a powerful state like the United States. None of the US officials responsible for the torture program have been held accountable. And because of the power and influence of the United States, this lack of accountability undermines the power of international law and the strength of the anti-torture norm globally. Moreover, letting officials of past administrations get away with torture does nothing to deter the possibility of a future administration attempting to do it again, and this is where the possibility of resurrection of torture in the future has a disrupting effect on the present.

The third way in which the afterlives of torture haunt US politics today is that the failure to acknowledge the truth has a distorting effect on reality. Although Obama canceled the CIA's torture program in 2009, his administration made every possible effort to thwart any justice for victims in domestic or foreign courts, and most of those efforts were successful. It was not until August 2014 that he officially acknowledged torture not just as a policy he had canceled but as the intentional actions of people. But even this acknowledgment was done in the most toothless and anodyne way, with President Obama saying, "We did a whole lot of things that were right [after the attacks of September 11, 2001]. But we tortured some folks." Thus, while Obama's record is not pro-torture per se, neither is it boldly anti-torture. He did not use his power to kill the ghost through any one of the three courses available to him: declassification, accountability or acknowledgement. The secrets remain secret, and the lies and fabrications about the efficacy of torture or its compatibility with the law continue to be bought and sold in public discourse.

In the United States, not only has there been no accountability, but some people responsible for the torture program continue to work in the government and have been promoted to even higher levels of authority. One example is Trump's appointment of Gina Haspel as deputy director of the CIA. She was directly involved in the black site torture program and shared responsibility for the order to destroy 91 videotapes of several prisoners being waterboarded and tortured by other means. The pro-torture camp sees her elevation within the CIA as a vindication of, if not the torture program itself, at least of its legitimacy in history.

There have been several recent positive developments in the realm of accountability, however: The two psychologist contractors who were hired and paid $81 million to design and run the CIA torture program, James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, were sued in the state of Washington by several victims. The court not only allowed this case to proceed, which in itself was a novel break from the trend of accepting the government's states' secrets arguments to shut cases down, but also ruled that several top officials from the CIA could be called as witnesses to testify. The case ended when Mitchell and Jessen settled with the plaintiffs, thus conceding at least some degree of culpability for this gross crime. And in October 2016, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated a previously dismissed lawsuit by victims of torture at Abu Ghraib against the private contractor firm CACI Premier Technology. In a concurring ruling, one judge emphasized, "It is beyond the power of even the president to declare [torture] lawful."[18]

## Killing the Ghost of Torture

We are living in an era in which, when it comes to torture, truth and justice are illusive. And so torture haunts our politics. Like a ghost that threatens to take over the house, President Trump elicits big cheers when he tells crowds he wants to bring back the waterboard. Whether he or a future president would ever be able to resurrect such a program remains an open question. Although military and CIA officials have declared that they would not endorse or institute a return to torture, public opinion has swung the other way.[19]

This growing public desire for torture underlines the importance of civic education about the lessons of history. Civic education begins with a battle for narratives with the goal to inform and contribute to a greater public understanding about what is wrong with torture. Civic education also includes empowering people to aggressively assail the vocal pro-torture constituency. This is where students and scholars can play an important role. It is incumbent upon those who care about these issues to produce empirically solid and analytically persuasive arguments against torture—and against those who support it—because this is a way of demonstrating a respect for democracy and the rule of law in the United States, and for human rights and humanitarian principles on a global scale. Given the outcome of the 2016 election and the victory of an ardently pro-torture candidate, civic education about torture and organizing against it may very well become the twenty-first century version of the abolition movement. ■

### Endnotes

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# Being Muslim in the Trump Era

## An Interview With Moustafa Bayoumi

Moustafa Bayoumi is author of the award-winning books *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America* (2009) and *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches From the War on Terror* (2015). He is professor of English at Brooklyn College. In this interview with MERIP editorial committee member Alex Lubin, Bayoumi reflects on the changing nature of anti-Muslim racism and the so-called war on terror.

**The year 2018 marks a decade since the initial publication of *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem*? Is today's United States what you expected ten years after your book appeared?**

I'm very fortunate that *How Does It Feel To Be a Problem?* has achieved the measure of success that it has. Penguin will be issuing a tenth anniversary edition of the book later this year. Any author would be gratified by the publication of an anniversary edition. But to be perfectly frank, I'm also depressed by this fact. When I wrote the book, I believed I was writing a book about our present, a time that with luck and effort would soon be moving into our past. But, ten years later, things have only gotten worse. By all the standard measures, life for Muslims and Arabs in the United States has gotten more rather than less difficult since 2008. Hate crimes are up. Levels of employment discrimination are up. Hostility and misunderstandings abound. And anti-Muslim sentiment has now become instrumentalized into our national politics in a way that it hadn't been ten years ago. These downward trajectories are likely to continue, especially under a Trump presidency, which feeds off such hatred while making the world increasingly insecure. The conclusion to draw from this sorry state of affairs is not merely that Islamophobia exists but that there is a real need for an authentic anti-war movement in the country to emerge. In other words, what the study of Islamophobia reveals is the pressing need to fight all forms of racism, bigotry and inequality, both at home and abroad.

**How do you define Islamophobia in your work? Is it a useful term?**

I've never been fond of the term "Islamophobia." (Anti-Muslim bigotry is a better term.) I use Islamophobia mostly because of its widespread adoption, but the antipathy toward Muslims that characterizes Islamophobia is not borne simply out of an irrational fear, as "-phobia" suggests. Many reasons animate the differential treatment of Muslims. Some of those are historic, such as legacies of Orientalism that continue to inform public perceptions of Muslims. Others are structural, such as the ways that Muslims are thought of in the United States in almost exclusive terms of national security. Others are individual, including the ways that people carry their own assumptions about Muslims around with them on a daily basis. Islamophobia as a term can't cover all of this complexity, but perhaps no single term can.

**Islamophobia seems to place a spotlight on certain Muslims, but ignores others. I'm thinking of how black American Muslims (not to mention white Muslims in America) are not targeted by Islamophobia in the same ways as Arab and South Asian Muslims. What does this tell us about Islamophobia?**

Well, I respectfully disagree with the premise of the question. While it's certainly true that the idea of "the Muslim" conjured in the American imagination since 2001 is probably a brown-skinned immigrant, structural anti-Muslim bigotry does not seem to have a brown bias, as it were. Quite the

contrary. The sociologist Saher Selod, for example, has found that what most frequently triggers anti-Muslim discrimination is how one dresses or what one is called. Women who wear hijab and people with Muslim-identified names are often the most vulnerable, and neither one's dress nor name is a racially unique category. Selod is not an outlier in her research, either. Several studies have found that having a Muslim name is a barrier to employment. Or consider how the New York Police Department divided Muslims into different categories for their surveillance purposes, with one category being "American Black Muslim." Furthermore, when white people become Muslim in the United States, they often leave much of their white-skin advantage behind them.

Within Muslim communities in the United States, there are certainly problems of racism and privilege. To be African American and Muslim, for example, would be to confront both anti-Muslim and anti-black biases. To be Mexican American and Muslim is to be Mexican, American and Muslim, with all the density and prejudice that that combination brings. So, I agree that Islamophobia is another layer we should consider to understand how oppression works. But I don't agree that Islamophobia ignores certain groups.

**Given that Islamophobia has a longer history than Trump, and given that Trump extends many of the policies embraced by Bush and Obama, what would you say to liberals and leftists expressing shock about Trump's policies with regard to Muslims and the war on terror?**
What took you so long?

**How do you understand the Trump administration's approach to the war on terror and to Muslim Americans?**
The biggest difference between Trump and both Bush and Obama is that at key moments our prior presidents articulated words of support for Muslims, even while pursuing policies—at home and abroad—that adversely affected Muslim populations. But Bush and Obama did so out of a need to reinforce the state's monopoly on violence while also convincing Americans and global publics of the essentially liberal nature of the US state. Trump is different. He doesn't seek to unify the country but to divide it. And his political instincts are like those of the sectarian politicians of the Arab world. Trump flirts with the far-right fringes in this country and around the world in the same way a sectarian politician surrounds himself with thugs and militia members to buttress his power. The analogy is not farfetched. And if we underestimate Trump's sectarian impulses, we do so at our peril.

**In *This Muslim American Life* you document several ways that you encounter what if feels like to be a "problem." Looking back over that collection of essays, in what ways have things changed for you, or for Arabs or Muslims in general, during the course of the war on terror?**
One big change in American culture over the last decade and a half has been the various threats that are associated with Muslims in the United States. In the early years of the war on terror, Muslims were seen almost exclusively through the lens of a national security threat. The discourse in the early George W. Bush days acknowledged American religious pluralism but worried about things like "sleeper cells" in mosques. But since those days, threats associated with Muslims in the United States have multiplied.

Muslims today are collectively seen as a cultural threat, a democratic threat and a demographic threat. The cultural threat can be seen in the fear that Muslims are stealthily destroying American values with Islam. (Recall the 2011 fiasco when the right-wing tried to boycott Butterball because the company was selling halal turkeys, for example.) The democratic threat exists in the discourse that Muslims will use the tools of democracy to install "sharia-law" all over the country. The demographic threat explains, in part, Trump's Muslim ban and his massive reduction of refugee admissions (about 40 percent of refugees have been Muslim in recent years). And the discourse that Muslims are a national security threat has remained constant since 2001. I'm almost curious as to what kind of threat Muslims will be next.

**You write powerfully about the double standard that treats Muslim violence as terrorism and white American violence as psychological pathology. What does this reveal about the war on terror?**
I think the answer is clear: the war on terror is grounded in racism.

**Do you see any signs of hope to challenge the predicament of anti-Muslim sentiment and policies in the United States today? Does protest against the Trump administration open avenues to engage with the legacy and presence of Islamophobia?**
I am increasingly coming to the conclusion that hope and optimism are American diseases. Why does every interview have to end on a message of hope? Why do social movements always have to be full of optimism? Yes, we have to struggle to make a better world, to alleviate the suffering of others, to find and restore the dignity of ourselves and everyone around us. But it's also true that the struggle is never-ending. You don't hope for a better world, achieve it and then go on vacation to celebrate. And what exactly is "hope," anyway? Hope can mobilize us to necessary action, but it can also demobilize us from what we have to do (think of the Obama years, premised on hope). If you're considering getting involved in social change because you're hoping you'll succeed, you might as well buy lottery tickets instead. Yes, we have to improve our world and fight the forces of regression and repression. But we do so not because we may win if we do, but because we will lose if we don't. This may sound depressing until you realize that the struggle itself brings joy, justice is found only in the midst of the search for justice, and change only happens by engaging in change. That's all that matters. Everything else is marketing. ■

**Girls attend a class at their school, damaged by a recent Saudi-led air strike, in the Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, Yemen, October 24, 2017.** ABDULJABBAR ZEYAD/REUTERS

# Dispatches to Trumpland

**Knowledge production about the Middle East, Edward Said argued, has been a geopolitical project of empire. This is why the following dispatches to Trumpland provide a crucial intervention. Collectively, the dispatches ask the following: What does Trumpism mean from the peripheries of US empire? How is it felt and experienced? Does it diverge from previous administrations and in what ways? In other words, how does the greater Middle East define Trumpism?**

**These dispatches are snapshots of a dynamic and transforming region. In some cases, political contexts have already transformed from the moment the dispatch was written. In all cases the snapshots are just that: fleeting moments of experience that are moving at rapid speed. What we gain from them is a sense of what US empire looks and feels like from the vantage point of the Middle East region, and this is a view all too frequently overlooked in the story of Trumpism.**

***—Alex Lubin***

# Lebanon Dispatch

## Karim Makdisi

Trumpism as experienced from Lebanon is inextricably linked to the effects of the Trump administration's positions and policies in the broader Middle East. The complexities of Lebanese politics and intrigue, and the social and economic challenges faced by the Lebanese as well as the country's huge refugee population, however, are of little interest to President Donald Trump and his inner circle. Their de-contextualized fixation on Hizballah reflects US domestic politics and parochial Israeli anxieties rather than broader US geopolitical interests.

The early phase of President Trump's first year was marked by his relatively muted rhetoric and an overall foreign policy continuity with the Obama administration. Even the war on ISIS in Iraq and Syria—initiated by Obama, but which Trump claimed as his own to give his vision, such as it is, shape and meaning—was uncontroversial and internationally sanctioned and legitimized. Space for contesting the region's status quo (a violent and manifestly unjust one to be sure) remained narrow, much to the frustration of those Lebanese who viscerally hated Obama for his apathy on Syria, and, ironically, for his one clear policy success in the region: the Iran nuclear deal. For those Lebanese, Trumpism represented a welcome antidote to Obama's putative weakness towards Iran and its regional role.

Trumpism did not effect much change in the region geopolitically during this initial phase. The United States maintained a status quo that protected the gains of Russia, Iran, Syria and Hizballah in the aftermath of Russia's 2015 intervention in Syria, which aimed to preserve a weak state there. Similar dynamics applied in Iraq. Trump seamlessly continued direct US support for Saudi Arabia's catastrophic war on, and military failure in, Yemen. This war, in turn, continues to inadvertently showcase Saudi Arabia's impotence in political and strategic terms, and boost Iran's perceived geopolitical gains in the region. Meanwhile, Trump remained relatively silent on Palestine, Israel and even Hizballah and Iran, both of which the United States was cooperating with indirectly in the war against ISIS. It is no coincidence that it was under Trump's administration that the Lebanese army, explicitly supported by a visibly triumphant Hizballah, was finally permitted to rout al-Qaeda and ISIS forces occupying towns in northern Lebanon in August 2017.

Curiously, in its first year the administration's approach to the Middle East eschewed the inflammatory religious rhetoric that has been Trump's signature domestic strategy towards Muslim Americans. Instead, Lebanon and the Middle East have been instrumentalized to conjure up images of the region as a breeding ground for hordes of extremist Muslims in order to mobilize his national base, foster national Islamophobic sentiment, and justify the war against an ISIS that, in Trumpist terms, represents an existential threat. For many Lebanese, however, Trump's early agenda in the region was initially seen to reflect primarily his personal business interests and nepotistic inclinations (not unfamiliar concepts in Lebanese politics); and secondarily geopolitical motives that were intertwined with US domestic controversies and priorities. People of all stripes initially followed Trump's naked pursuit of both, and his overall buffoonery, as they did popular Turkish and Egyptian television soap operas.

Trumpism appears now to be revving up in the Middle East, as US foreign policy is increasingly liberated from Obama's conservative, status-quo-based course. It seems to have entered a new, post-ISIS phase with re-energized attacks on Iran and Hizballah; unprecedented support for the increasingly erratic Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his regional hubris; hesitant confirmation of a long-term military presence on Syrian territory; and ill-conceived intervention in Palestine with the December 6, 2017 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and promises of an (already defunct) "ultimate deal" for the Middle East under a presumed Israeli-Saudi agreement.[1] Trump has also issued threats against the vast majority of United Nations (UN) member states that voted to condemn the US Jerusalem decision and proceeded to cut off significant aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) that provides crucial support for Palestinian refugees.[2]

While all this has polarized debates in geopolitical terms, it has still not had an effect on religious or sectarian dynamics. In Lebanon, there has been relatively little sectarian mobilization such as that which marked earlier periods of instability—most notably in the aftermath of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the first phase of the Syria war. Even the US rhetoric against Iran, currently the main target of Trump's vitriol, has not, at least not yet, been cast in specifically sectarian language despite Israeli and Saudi agitation to do so.

US policy in the region now seems to reflect Trump's persona more faithfully: bullying, impulsive, uninformed and yet also curiously dynamic. It is an unpredictable mix of authoritarian tendencies, capricious reactions and tweets based on delusions of grandeur and an alarming ignorance of the Middle East. The latter is epitomized by the deeply incompetent duo who have had a significant impact on Trump's Middle East policy: US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner. Trump's ignorance is amplified by his pandering to Zionist extremists within his

**Karim Makdisi** *is associate professor of political studies at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon.*

own circles—including Sheldon Adelson, Trump's and Haley's biggest single financial backer—and concurrent emasculation of the US State Department and its Middle East apparatus of experts and coterie of associated think-tank pundits.

Crucially, this more aggressive phase has opened the door to renewed crisis and contestation in the region. Some in Lebanon hoped that this upheaval would, at least inadvertently, produce a new international dynamic that opens up space for reinvigorated opposition action against the Asad regime in Syria, Hizballah in Lebanon or even in Iran itself. Others see these new dynamics as the last throes of a dying US-led order, with the consolidation of an effective Resistance Axis from Iran and Iraq through Syria and Lebanon to Palestine. The emergence of Hizballah as a major regional player arguably best symbolizes this axis's current success in defying the previous order and imagining a new one.

The spectacular rise of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is perhaps the purest expression of this new, more dynamic Trumpism in the region. Taking his cue from Trump emissary Jared Kushner, Mohammed bin Salman's modus operandi is a mix of ambition, rashness and uninformed short term thinking, all of which have resulted in a failure to achieve regional goals and a consolidation of Iran's favorable position. First tested in Yemen under Obama, the Saudi approach was upgraded during the latter part of 2017 under Kushner to fuel rapid regional destabilization under the banner of fighting Iran, terrorism, obstacles to Middle East peace and domestic corruption all at once. These stated objectives have not deceived many in Lebanon on either side of the Iran-Saudi rivalry who see this as a pure power grab.

Mohammed bin Salman's handling of Qatar, particularly the imposition of harsh sanctions and blockade in 2017 as punishment for its reluctance to toe Saudi Arabia's anti-Iran line, first bemused then shocked many Lebanese who worried about similar moves against Lebanon and its fragile economy that relies on the uninterrupted flow of expatriate remittances from the Gulf. The senior Saudi minister leading the Lebanon file issued a series of vitriolic statements against Hizballah and Lebanon, which echoed precisely Israeli threats against the country, its infrastructure and its people as a whole. There was even a brief moment where many Lebanese thought a joint Saudi-Israeli attack on Lebanon was possible, if not imminent.

Mohammed bin Salman-ism, however, most notably played out in the spectacle of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri's forced resignation speech of November 4, 2017, dramatically delivered from Riyadh on the Saudi-owned al-'Arabiyya television station. In that now infamous speech, intended to pressure Hizballah and unsettle its ally Lebanese President Michel Aoun, a visibly weary Hariri reluctantly channeled his Saudi handlers' unsubtle threats to stoke sectarian tensions in Lebanon, undermine its fragile economic stability and bring down its national unity government.

Just as it had done in Yemen and Qatar, this Saudi bullying backfired spectacularly. Rather than mobilizing pressure for a favorable change in Lebanon, Mohammed bin Salman's tactics


AMR ABDALLAH DALSH/REUTERS

**A poster for the campaign titled "'Ala shan tabneeha" (To Build It), in Cairo that demands President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi run in next year's presidential election, October 2017.**

led to unexpected and unusually resolute demonstrations of national unity, including popular and elite support across (most of) the political spectrum for the status quo in Lebanon. The strong joint stance in support of Hariri—including a rejection of his resignation—by Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah and President Aoun was very well received even by their political opponents. Hariri's own Future Party, long supported and funded by Saudi Arabia, angrily denounced alleged Saudi plans to replace Hariri with his more hawkish brother. Mohammed bin Salman is also alleged to have threatened to re-arm jihadists in Palestinian refugee camps to fight Hizballah on behalf of "Sunnis," an extremely dangerous proposition that most Lebanese, weary of such wars, rejected out of hand.[3] Remarkably, there was virtually no traction, even among the more hard-line Islamists, to provoke the sectarian tension that the Saudi Crown Prince had intended his actions to create. Hariri returned to Beirut, still a prime minister, to a triumphant, nationalist reception. The symbolism of his arrival in time for Lebanon's Independence Day ceremonies on November 22 were not lost on anyone.

The Lebanese reaction also internationalized Hariri's quasi-abduction and hastened French and Egyptian mediation. Even US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson took advantage of Mohammed bin Salman's, and Kushner's, failure by chastising them in private and getting Trump to support Lebanon's "sovereignty" in public.[4] The popular backlash, American rebuke and resulting Saudi backtracking of its threats against Lebanon, demonstrated bin Salman's political immaturity and poor strategic thinking. But this odd Lebanon episode also exposed Mohammed bin Salman-ism's limits within the clear, although wide, parameters set by a United States that itself is not so much retreating from an increasingly contested and multipolar region as quickly losing its grip.

To be sure, US imperial inclinations in the Middle East have not been dimmed. In the broader context, Trumpism represents a clear continuity with the long-standing main pillars of US "divide and rule" foreign policy in the Middle East: protection of US oil interests and routes, unquestioned support for Israel, and combating de-contextualized "radical Islam" and "terrorism."

Each US president's approach, however, differs in style, calculus and application from that of their predecessors. The ominous turn in the region over the past few months merely reflects Trump's agenda, which is centered on an explicit Israeli-Saudi patrolled order and the capitulation of an otherwise ascendant Iran—and its allies such as Hizballah—by any means necessary. By, unsuccessfully so far, seeking to scupper the Iran nuclear deal and (successfully) administrating the final blow to the moribund "peace process," Trumpism thus promises more violence, upheaval, contested regional politics and struggles for legitimacy. It also promises failure. Since at least 2003, the US no longer has the sole power to frame regional dynamics, as the Syria war has clearly shown.

Meanwhile, from Lebanon, all eyes are on the southern front once more. ■

## Endnotes

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**3** Anne Barnard and Maria Abi-Habib, "Why Saad Hariri Had That Strange Sojourn in Saudi Arabia," *The New York Times*, December 24, 2017.

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# Egypt Dispatch

## Abdullah al-Arian

Last April, an Egyptian court acquitted Aya Hijazi and seven others of charges related to their work with a charitable foundation for Cairo's street children. After nearly three years in prison, Hijazi, a dual US-Egyptian citizen, was released and allowed to return to the United States where President Donald J. Trump welcomed her with a visit to the White House. "We are very happy to have Aya back home," Trump exclaimed while seated next to Hijazi during a photo opportunity in the Oval Office.[1] Even by the standards of an already unorthodox presidency, the scene was a strange one.

Reporting on Hijazi's release, Egyptian state media vacillated between viewing the case as an affirmation of the Egyptian judiciary's impartiality, and signaling that US-Egyptian relations were improving under Trump. The Trump administration was careful not to frame its calls for Hijazi's release as part of a wider critique of Egypt's abysmal human rights record under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. In fact, Hijazi later told the American PBS television station that in her brief conversation with Trump it was clear that he believed her imprisonment came at the hands of the Muslim Brotherhood government led by Mohamad Morsi and not, as had been the case, by the resurgent authoritarian regime that brought Sisi to power following a July 2013 military coup that removed the Morsi government.

At the time of her release, Hijazi was one of an estimated 60,000 political prisoners arrested since Sisi upended the post-Mubarak transition and repressed all forms of dissent. Meanwhile, amid celebrating his ability to secure Hijazi's return, Trump was embattled in legal challenges to his controversial executive order banning immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries. The Hijazi affair, as an opportunity to spin a highly politicized trial into a political victory, was a joint co-production by two presidents whose particular brand of politics revels in sensationalist distractions while masking the deeper destruction caused by their policies.

To be sure, Egypt's recent trajectory predated Trump's unexpected rise. Upon extinguishing the revolutionary aspirations of Egyptians who mobilized against the Mubarak regime, Sisi sought to legitimize his claims to power on the basis of restoring security and economic prosperity to an ailing nation. In doing so, he employed many of the same tactics that would come to define his American counterpart's brash entry into US politics—launching an aggressive counter-terrorism campaign, particularly in the face of a growing militant insurgency in Sinai, and announcing large scale development projects such as the $8 billion expansion of the Suez Canal. Trump aimed to pursue both goals of security and economic prosperity in one fell swoop with his calls for the construction of a border wall with Mexico. In fact, last November Trump seized on an attack on a Sinai mosque that killed over 300 people to restate his case for the wall and the travel ban.

To claim that Trump's election was a boon to authoritarian forces across the Arab region would be to state the obvious. Not that Trump's predecessor obstructed the ambitions of regional autocrats, but in consolidating his control Sisi advanced a narrative that viewed Barack Obama's supposed embrace of the Arab uprisings with deep suspicion and fueled anti-American resentment. In contrast to the mild protestations of the Obama administration, Sisi found a more sympathetic ear in Trump, who pledged that his administration would not "lecture" Arab leaders, a statement interpreted by many observers as a green light for authoritarian regimes to continue their repressive policies without fear of admonishment. Undoubtedly excited by this prospect, Sisi became the first head of state to congratulate Trump on his electoral victory.

Indeed, Trumpism represents a departure from the traditional American posture toward regimes that fulfill US strategic aims but engage in unsavory practices in the process. Whereas successive US administrations have preferred to look away, uncomfortable with openly endorsing authoritarian policies while nonetheless offering crucial military, economic and diplomatic support, Trump has removed the veneer of deniability and embraced the worst excesses of his Arab allies, especially Sisi.

The two share a deep affinity for sweeping emotional appeals that feed into hyper-nationalist popular sentiments. In an eerie parallel of Trump's trademark slogan vowing to "Make America Great Again," Sisi has been fond of reminding supporters that "Egypt is the mother of the world, and will be as great as the world." But like the breathtaking speed with which Trump diminished US diplomatic standing globally, Egypt's regional position has never been as weak or as irrelevant as it is under Sisi, who has done little more than enlist Egypt as a junior partner in the recently formed US-Saudi-Emirati-Israeli axis. Sisi appeared front and center alongside Trump and King Salman of Saudi Arabia in the infamous glowing orb photo from last spring's Riyadh summit that was widely ridiculed as gratuitous exhibitionism masquerading as renewed American leadership.

As Trump's first year became notable for his failure to pass a series of policy initiatives—such as the repeal of the Affordable Care Act—and also saw him hounded by an investigation into his campaign's links to Russia, he utilized his social media clout to distract from these unflattering headlines through

**Abdullah al-Arian** *is an assistant professor of history at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar.*

high profile feuds with celebrities and athletes. For a former military man who has traditionally shunned the spotlight, Sisi has surprisingly masked his own failures—from the struggling economy to the continued security crisis—through a series of spectacles that have consumed public attention. Egyptian authorities banned a singer from performing because of a joke she made about drinking water from the Nile River. Another pop star was sentenced to two years in prison for "inciting debauchery" in a music video, while a well-known actor faced accusations of "contempt of religion" over the content of his latest film and was summoned for questioning.

Indeed, the regime's attempts to construct an image of itself as the enforcer of public morality has resulted in a brutal crackdown against Egypt's gay community even as Sisi positioned himself as the moderate alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood's supposed fanaticism. Trump's audacious posturing to his conservative base has similarly found him in unfamiliar territory, issuing a ban on transgender Americans serving in the military and rolling back reproductive rights.

Meanwhile, as he rails against his treatment at the hands of the US media, Trump can only admire from afar as Sisi confronts unflattering media reports by arresting journalists, usually on the charge of "disseminating false news," leading Egypt to become the world's third largest jailer of journalists according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.[2]

If Sisi has found a kindred spirit in Trump and embraced a presidential style that thrives in bombastic pronouncements and calculated deflections, it has become all too tempting for observers to focus their attention on such antics rather than on the subtle ways in which his autocratic impulses have manifested. For all of their protestations, both Sisi and Trump would rather keep eyes transfixed on "fake news" headlines than on what the scholar Nathan Brown has termed "boring news," that is, the incremental structural transformations to governing institutions that embed authoritarian practices. It is those developments and their destructive consequences that aim to ensure that the Trump phenomenon and its emboldening effects on Egypt's ruler leave a permanent imprint on the lives of Egyptians. ■

## Endnotes

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**2** Saba Aziz, "Record High 262 Journalists Imprisoned in 2017: CPJ," *Al-Jazeera*, December 13, 2017.

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**Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighters celebrate victory against ISIS in Raqqa, Syria, October 17, 2017.** ERIK DE CASTRO/REUTERS

# Syria Dispatch

## Samer Abboud

A common criticism of the Obama administration's foreign policy on Syria is that the decision not to intervene militarily in the civil war starting in 2011 prolonged the conflict and paved the way for the Syrian government's external allies to alter its course. This formulation contains two related, but false, assumptions. First, it assumes that the administration was either confused or indecisive about how to approach the complexities of the conflict, and second, that US policy was vacuous and thus immaterial. A closer look at the Obama administration's policy, however, reveals forms of political and military engagement that were anything but inconsequential and demonstrate that the choice was never simply between intervention and non-intervention.

The Obama administration's involvement in Syria included a sustained military campaign against ISIS in the northeast, the imposition of a sanctions regime against the government, participation in the Geneva talks led by the United Nations and structured around Syrian opposition demands, and the turning of a blind eye to—or outright support of—the flooding of weapons, money and fighters into Syria from US regional allies. These actions were policy choices that were not driven by indecision or confusion but by a particular vision of the Syrian conflict that favored destabilization over resolution. The Russian intervention that began in September 2015 subsequently reordered the conflict's geography and military balance, which created new realities. But these changes did not necessarily challenge existing US forms of intervention or force a dramatic shift in US policy.

The Trump administration has thus inherited a basket of policies that were largely focused on narrowly targeted US military intervention against ISIS, and the acceptance of continued violence and instability in Syria even amidst Russian military intervention into the conflict. In the first year of the Trump administration, these policies, for the most part, have been continued and expanded. Candidate Donald Trump's promise to "bomb the shit" out of ISIS bore fruit in the first few months of 2017 as American military attacks intensified[1] and coalition planes killed an increasing number of Syrian civilians.[2] The intensification of US bombing occurred alongside the Trump administration's increased coordination with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a multi-ethnic fighting force dominated by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), in order to battle ISIS forces in the northeast.

The Trump administration's relationship with Russia and the Syrian government is complex. At times, it has accepted Russia's military role in Syria while continuing to pay lip service to the need for a political settlement through the Geneva process, much like its predecessor administration. On the ground, the battle against ISIS has also become a complex battle for leverage with Russia and the Syrian government over strategic territory. The reality is that the Russian-US convergence on Syria policy was taking shape well before the Trump administration assumed office.

Moving forward, it is likely that US policy will be shaped by two major processes: a looming confrontation, after the retreat of ISIS, between the SDF and forces aligned with the Syrian government; and the repercussions of the Astana process. This process is composed of talks being held in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana, between the Syrian opposition and government, sponsored and guided by Russia, Turkey and Iran, which has emerged as the most substantive mechanism to end the conflict. To date, on both fronts, there appear to be no signs of a break from existing US policy. The United States remains committed to not challenging the order established by Russian intervention to stabilize the Syrian government, while maintaining its own intervention capacity.

Once the military tide began to shift in favor of Syrian government forces, around 2015 when Russian military intervention intensified, it became apparent that another major military campaign would target those aligned with the SDF over areas they govern as the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS), also known as Rojava, which was created in 2012 and has since been expanding geographically. The war of words between the Syrian government and Kurdish officials has only intensified as the campaign against ISIS comes to a close and the government's allies take aim at what they see as a project of sedition and fragmentation couched in the language of federalism and decentralization. A political compromise over the future of the DFNS in this context may be unlikely. Most recently, in late 2017 when the campaign against ISIS was all but declared over, the Trump administration suggested it would cease support and coordination with the SDF,[3] thus leaving them militarily and politically vulnerable in the event of confrontation with the Syrian government and its allies. It remains to be seen whether this policy of disengagement from the SDF holds, but it is unlikely that this administration will remain invested in what was merely a relationship of convenience.

Perhaps slightly more uncertain is how the Trump administration will address the consequences of the Astana process, which—as a counterweight to the Geneva talks—is producing regional consensus around the future of the Syrian conflict

**Samer Abboud** *is associate professor of historical and political studies at Arcadia University, Pennsylvania.*

and providing legitimacy to the military interventions of the tripartite powers of Russia, Iran and Turkey. Unlike the Geneva talks, which at least have the pretense of negotiation, the Astana process is not deliberative in any meaningful way. The creation of de-escalation zones, the rejection of a political transition, and the imposition of a political order that sanctions continued violence against recalcitrant communities and geographic areas represent the emergence of an authoritarian peace. Through this process violence is normalized and sanctioned against amorphous enemies subsumed under the label of terrorists. The US administration has done little to challenge this new order, including by not incentivizing or encouraging a reinvigoration of the Geneva talks. Thus, much like its Russian counterpart, the Trump administration pays lip service to the illusions of a peace process in Geneva, while it will need to contend with the realities that Astana advances. How the US response materializes, and whether the administration becomes a willing participant in the tripartite group's designs, is unclear. What is clear is that it is unlikely to militarily or politically challenge this emergent order.

In the absence of a continued ISIS threat—notwithstanding the celebration of their demise and the fear mongering about their return—the US administration will have to face the realities of a confrontation between the Syrian government and the SDF, and a post-Astana order, both of which represent new regimes of violence and a reordering of the Syrian conflict. The United States recently announced in November 2017 that it was maintaining a military presence, including troops, inside Syria indefinitely and for unspecified purposes,[4] in a sort of waiting game. Such moves should not be confused with inaction, in the way that the Obama administration's positions on Syria were misunderstood, but rather they should be seen as specific US policy choices advanced since 2011 that privilege instability over resolution. This approach is premised on the idea that a destabilized Syria negatively impacts and weakens Iran's role in the region: a shared goal of Israel, the Arab Gulf states and the United States. As a major battleground of regional confrontation, Syria has emerged as a space for the Obama, and now Trump, administrations to impact Iranian policy and power in the region. In the absence of any viable alternative to the Syrian government, either militarily or politically (let alone one palatable to Western states), any resolution to the conflict was bound to maintain Iranian influence in Syria. Destabilization has thus become a more productive means of influencing the regional order than active resolution of the Syrian conflict. ■

### Endnotes

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# Iraq Dispatch

## Haydar al-Mohammed

*"He's a murderer, a criminal … So many people were killed because of him!" Umm Ahmed asserts. "OK. Forget about Obama, he's gone. What about Trump? What do you think of him?" I ask. "… I'm … we're … he's crazy, no?"*[1]

I have been conducting research in Iraq—in Basra and the outskirts of Tikrit—for roughly the last six months. Since Donald Trump's election as US president in November 2016, when someone discovers that I live and work in the US, I am usually asked, "That friend of yours [Trump], what's wrong with him?" Regardless of a person's politics and where one falls (or not) on the spectrum of confessional and sectarian identities in Iraq, the general consensus currently seems to be that President Trump is, at the very least, a bit odd as a person and, more importantly, as president.

Among those I have been working with, from senior figures in Iraqi Shi'i political parties, to the Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces) fighters, mention of President Trump is oddly omitted in their accounts. Rather, much of their focus is on the experience of American involvement in Iraq and Syria under Barack Obama's presidency, which is reported in highly negative terms. For example, the Obama administration and western media outlets were circumspect, if not outright silent, about the emergence of ISIS in Iraq—particularly from 2012 until 2016. This silence included almost no mention of the more than 1,500 Iraqi trainee policemen who were massacred by ISIS at Camp Speicher in Tikrit within a 48-hour period in 2014. The administration and the media were at the time focused on the regional roles of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and Iran. The reluctance during the Obama years to talk much about ISIS—while the United States was attacking the Asad regime and Syrian citizens—created a clear narrative that the violence and murder in Syria was almost exclusively perpetrated by the state itself.

**Haydar al-Mohammed** *is assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.*


**Soldiers with Iraq's Federal Police at a checkpoint in Mosul, heavily damaged by the fight to remove ISIS. December 2017.** IVOR PRICKETT/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

This US framing of the situation in Syria would reach its preposterous nadir with the so-called "Khorasan Group"—allegedly an al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria—which the United States bombed in 2014 and 2015 despite a lack of evidence that Khorasan was plotting anything against the US, or anyone else for that matter. The threat posed by the Khorasan Group, if it ever existed at all, was exaggerated to generate support for sustained American attacks in Syria.

Hashd fighters, and those working indirectly in the fight against ISIS in Iraq, faced American bombing campaigns during the Obama years that killed thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians and anti-ISIS fighters, many more than the United States admitted at the time.[2] According to more than 100 interviews I have conducted since 2014, these fighters assert that the United States constrained the Russian campaign against ISIS—a campaign that was much more targeted in its attacks and killed fewer civilians and Hashd fighters. This constraining of Russia's military role under Obama was loosened under President Trump. As a result, many Hashd fighters assert, the tide began to turn quickly in their favor in their fight against ISIS in 2017. Ultimately, however, because President Trump is an American, they believe he will also be indifferent to the plight of Iraq and Iraqis. Most likely, they explain, he will one day turn his back on Iraq entirely.

In Tikrit, President Trump is a regular topic of conversation and mirth. While watching the local television station in a tea shop, news broke of Sebastian Gorka's firing from the Trump administration on August 25, 2017. Those of us in the shop could not help but break out into laughter. "Farce," several said, while shaking their heads with incredulity. Yet another firing! In conversations with people around the city, people describe President Trump as weak and likely to further exacerbate problems in the region. But they also see him as amusing and clown-like, in the same vein as Libya's late ruler Muammar Qaddafi. Many Iraqis remember Qaddafi's long and rambling addresses as experiences akin to an onslaught difficult to sit through.

Yet, both Trump and Qaddafi seemed unable to stop the odd nuggets of actual insight and inadvertent truths from tumbling out of their mouths in their rambles—their own internal censors and sense of propriety clearly not fit for the typically guarded and reticent presidential style. President Trump's announcement of US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and intention to relocate the American embassy has brought tremendous outrage and anger from much of the Iraqi population. Yet, in moments of more quiet reflection and discussion, Trump's actions are seen as being more honest about US priorities and commitments than previous administrations.

As many Iraqis have said to me, and as people say in discussions on Iraqi political shows and websites: why should we pretend that the Americans and Israelis cannot do what they want? President Trump's presentation of himself contains kernels of truth about the ambitions and practices of the United States government, at home and abroad, in pursuit of its interests. This candor can help a country such as Iraq make the decision, as much as it is able to, about whether it wants—or can even afford—to have the US, its main tormentor of the last three decades, as an "ally."

The Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations all inflicted tremendous violence on Iraq during their combined 24 years in power, yet it seems that it is the rhetoric of President Trump that raises the ire of much of the Global North, even though militarily his first year was relatively quiet compared to recent American presidents. Though many Iraqis believe that Hillary Clinton as president would have meant even more violence in the region, the fear remains that simply because he is an American president, Trump will likely also attack and bomb Iraq. Iraqis have experienced this fear and violence under five consecutive US presidents, and they know that there is unlikely to be any pushback from American citizens, liberal or otherwise.

Thus, it is not so much President Trump himself that keeps Iraqis awake at night. Instead, his actions and words expose what is more frightening—the American empire behind him. Trump reveals the moral corruption that comes with any imperialist, expansionist force. Armed with warships, destroyers, aircraft carriers and tens of military bases in and surrounding Iraq, high levels of violence against Iraq can be sustained for decades, as were sanctions, from 1990–2006, and wars. Iraqis know that there is little they can do to stop it. It is this long experience of the United States waging war in and against Iraq, with little hope of change, which continues to limit the dreams and hopes of many Iraqis. ■

### Endnotes

**1** Interview by author, conducted in Baghdad, November 2, 2017.

**2** Azmat Khan and Anand Gopal, "The Uncounted," *The New York Times Magazine*, November 16, 2017.

# Iran Dispatch

## Kaveh Ehsani

Trumpism has discombobulated Iran. Revulsion against President Donald J. Trump's rhetoric and policies has achieved the rare feat of unifying the disgruntled Iranian public and the fractious ruling elite. This nationalist backlash barely conceals the internal crises facing Iran at every level—social, political, environmental and economic. In January 2018, these frictions exploded in widespread protests across the country. Predictably, the Trump administration's hypocritical declaration of solidarity with Iranian protesters exacerbated the situation, especially for the protesters. Iran's security apparatus reacted with the usual repression and mass arrests, pointing to Trump's rhetoric as proof the protests were a foreign conspiracy. Military generals, Friday prayer leaders and Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, lined up to blame the United States, Saudi Arabia and even Saddam Hussein's family as the forces behind the domestic traitors who had taken to the streets.

President Hassan Rouhani and his fellow establishment reformists and pragmatists paid lip service to the protesters' legitimate grievances against the poor economy, systemic corruption and political repression, but they warned that the "Enemy"—the United States—was taking advantage of the situation. There is no evidence that ordinary people or protesters have been hoodwinked by the Trump administration's empty declarations of solidarity. Trump's discriminatory anti-Muslim travel ban remains in place, affecting the sizeable Iranian immigrant population in the United States, their families, students and other travelers. The ever-expanding sanctions, eagerly backed by both parties in Congress, further consolidate domestic, politically connected mafias who control the economy, while increasing the impoverishment of working people, professionals and legitimate independent entrepreneurs. Trump's continuous attempts to scuttle the Iran nuclear accord, his sabre rattling anti-Iran alliance with Saudi Arabia and Israel, and his odious travel ban have marked a serious setback for the Rouhani administration.

Rouhani had staked his cards on diplomacy to undermine his domestic hardline rivals. The 2015 international accord to scale back Iran's nuclear program was supposed to smooth the way for the lifting of sanctions and attracting foreign investments to help the ailing economy. Ordinary people anticipated a political Glasnost would follow, easing the chokehold of the military and various security apparatuses on the economy and everyday life. Instead, the United States has continued to impose further unilateral sanctions, citing Iran's missile program and its "disruptive role" in the region. The fact that the United States, European Union, Russia and virtually all major states in the Middle East are eager contributors to the ongoing strife across the region is conveniently overlooked. In imposing sanctions, both parties in Congress eagerly compete to take

**Kaveh Ehsani** *is assistant professor of international studies at DePaul University in Chicago and a contributing editor of* Middle East Report.

the lead. The main difference is that President Barack Obama embraced the nuclear accord, while Trump has been trying to revoke it. As a result, little foreign investment materialized after the accord was signed, aside from some cautious commitments from French oil and automotive companies. Iran managed to purchase some passenger airplanes but access to international capital markets remains blocked as banks fear a backlash from the United States. The collapse of oil prices further restricted revenues at a time when Iran had committed itself to costly interventions in the region.

The behavior of the United States has allowed Iranian hardliners—generals and commentators led by Ayatollah Khamenei himself—to ridicule Rouhani for his belief that reaching a nuclear agreement or moderating foreign policy would reduce international pressures. A scathing editorial in the hardline official newspaper *Kayhan* titled "Overcoming the Regionwide Conspiracy," accused Rouhani of being duped: "you were the one to opt for diplomacy, the US was never committed to it."[1] Yet, Rouhani has won two elections, the second a landslide in summer 2017. The majority of Iranians felt at the time that Rouhani was the most realistic option for what his campaign was promising: normalizing relations with the rest of the world from what he called a "dignified position," jumpstarting the economy after a decade of crippling sanctions, addressing corruption, unemployment and systemic inequality for women and ethnic and religious minorities, and dealing with critical environmental crises caused by poor development policies. Rouhani, a hard-nosed apparatchik who has been close to the center of Iran's decision making and security apparatus for the past four decades, has been snapping back: "The greatest plague of our policy making system is the existence of rival centers of power, which has inflicted irreparable damage to our regime."[2]

Rouhani labels himself a "moderate," not a reformist. Yet even his timid attempts at putting the house in order after the devastating eight years of his predecessor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–2013) continue to be frustrated by vested interests that point to the longstanding threat of "the Enemy" to justify repression and their monopoly chokehold over vast swaths of the economy. By the end of autumn 2017, Rouhani's post-election grace period was over. His predecessor Ahmadinejad had gutted the administrative capacities of the public sector and left a legacy of widespread corruption. Ahmadinejad's populism had been a combination of rhetorical postures against the United States and Israel and illusory promises of helping the poor—not by improving the real economy, but by privatizing public assets and loosening financial restrictions. Privatized public assets mainly went to cronies with close ties to the establishment. A series of shoddy and ill-conceived public development schemes were launched in housing, transportation, irrigation and finance that haunt his successor. At the same time, Ahmadinejad managed to slash a range of subsidies for basic goods and replace them with cash handouts to all citizens.[3]

Rouhani thus faced enormous deficits and empty coffers. His inability to dislodge the grip of his rivals or to jolt the game by opening the economy to foreign investors, led his administration to adopt austerity measures. At the same time, Khamenei and his military allies diverted enormous resources to their military and strategic engagements in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. While people gave Rouhani credit for the welcomed defeat of ISIS, ordinary people resented that their material lives were deteriorating by the day as the state imposed further austerity measures. Political repression continues unabated, while the rise of Trumpism has meant that peace and security are as distant as ever.

For the past four decades, the Islamic Republic's unique and highly fractious political system has been a key to its survival. Limited electoral politics have acted as a safety valve for a discontented but politically engaged population, while the judiciary and military centers of power remain the monopoly of an increasingly isolated and corrupt elite. This system seems stretched to its limit under the external threats of Trumpism and regional rivals and the internal crises of legitimacy and structural dysfunction. Earlier in 2017, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, one of former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's key lieutenants and the center of gravity for reformists and pragmatists, died suddenly (under suspicious circumstances). Khamenei, whose health is now in decline, became leader in 1989 when his rival Rafsanjani forced a consensus through the Assembly of Experts, the elected clerical body that appoints the leader and is supposed to exercise oversight. Against widespread objections that Khamenei did not have the religious qualifications for the job, the wily Rafsanjani argued that Khamenei's qualifications were political (Khamenei was president at the time) rather than clerical, and hinted that this would be a wise and practical temporary solution during a dangerous transition. Once Khamenei is gone, few believe that Velayat-e Faqih, the pillar of the system, will be sustainable in its present form.

Meanwhile, Khamenei retains his chokehold over the leadership, as well as the Assembly of Experts, the military, the judiciary and official television and radio. The question of transition is again high on the agenda, although this time rival factions are jockeying not to stir the waters and risk being eliminated. But contrary to 1988–89, there are no authoritative consensus figures like Rafsanjani able to impose a compromise. Already there is talk of abolishing the presidential system and returning to the more pliable parliamentary system of the 1980s, with a prime minister leading the cabinet. After decades of fractional tensions and experimentations, however, and the spectacular recent explosion of protests in nearly 80 cities and towns across the country, mere administrative tinkering will not likely resolve the country's numerous structural problems. A new social contract, based on more open political participation, accountability and social and economic justice, is the only realistic solution to prevent further upheavals—but there is little evidence that is in the cards.

Ironically, on the foreign policy front the regime appears to have come out the relative winner in the regional bloodbath of the past few years. At various stages during the Syrian civil war, the Iranian regime signaled that it was open to a negotiated solution, including the possible removal of President Bashar al-Asad. However, the regime realized that Obama, like his predecessors, had no intention of negotiating. This realization reinforced the hardliners' conviction that, regardless of the administration in charge, the United States is intent on changing regimes hostile to it. In reaction, the Islamic Republic dedicated itself fully to creating strategic depth in neighboring countries in order to engage the United States and its allies away from its own borders. In the short term, this containment policy seems to have borne fruit. Iran has struck unlikely alliances with Russia, Turkey and Qatar. It committed itself to the bloodbath in Syria and Iraq, as did the United States, European Union, Russia and all rival regional powers. Iran's actions, controversial at home and abroad, have proved more nimble and successful than others. It claims to have led the vanquishing of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. It succeeded in neutralizing, with Turkey, the short-lived Kurdish independence drive in Iraq, and it has bogged down Saudi Arabia in the murderous war in Yemen. Yet, these military and strategic victories may prove short lived as the appalling human and material costs of these conflicts will have further regional and global repercussions.

The combination of internal crises of legitimacy, the existential threat posed by Trumpism and a region in apparent meltdown may well create the conditions for a perfect storm. ■

### Endnotes

**1** "Overcoming the Regionwide Conspiracy," *Kayhan,* December 19, 2017.

**2** "Rouhani's Speech Highlighted the Law, Transparency, and Rival Centers of Decision Making," *Raahe Rooz*, December 20, 2017, http://raaherooz.com/fa/news/18634/.

**3** Kaveh Ehsani, "Survival Through Dispossession: Privatization of Public Goods in the Islamic Republic," *Middle East Report* 250 (Spring 2009).

# Saudi Arabia Dispatch

## Sultan Alamer

President Donald J. Trump is known for breaking norms of domestic and foreign policy in his first year in office. In terms of US-Saudi relations, however, his policy has been relatively standard. Although he chose Saudi Arabia as his first international destination as president—breaking the pattern of a new president visiting either Canada or Mexico first—little else in the existing US-Saudi relationship has changed. During that May 2017 trip, Trump attended three summits, oversaw the signing of several lucrative military and economic deals, adopted counter-terrorism measures and articulated a stronger stance against Iran. None of these were new to the Saudi-US relationship.

It was only after Trump left the region that massive events unfolded inside Saudi Arabia. Most notable in terms of foreign policy were the rapprochement with Iraq and the Qatar boycott by four Arab countries. Domestically, King Salman replaced Crown Prince Mohammed bin Naif with his own son, Mohammed bin Salman, who enacted numerous changes such as lifting the bans on cinemas and women driving. Moreover, there were two major waves of arrests. The first targeted Islamists, liberal-Islamists and reformers, while the other targeted numerous princes, businessmen and bureaucrats on corruption charges. Finally, several economic megaprojects were announced.

How do we make sense of these unusual events in Saudi Arabia, and did Trumpism play a role in their occurrence?

**Sultan Alamer** *is a political science PhD student at George Washington University.*

Most US media commentators on Saudi Arabia trace the causes of these events by emphasizing the personalities of President Trump, his son-in-law Jared Kushner and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Yet such explanations are flawed in that they ignore the broader regional context and challenges these actors face. In fact, Trump's election played at best a very minor role in shaping events inside of Saudi Arabia. Deeper regional and domestic structural changes were much more influential—notably the Qatar crisis and the ascendance of Mohammed bin Salman to power.

After the end of the Gulf War in the early 1990s, the United States contained the three main regional powers: Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. President Bill Clinton's Dual Containment policy constrained Iran and Iraq, whereas Saudi influence in the Gulf was limited by a significant US military presence in each of the smaller Gulf emirates. This new structure gave these Gulf states freedom to adopt foreign policies relatively independent of influence by Iran, Iraq or Saudi Arabia. Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the United States ceased to be a guarantor of the regional status quo; indeed, the United States became a regional disrupting force.

By 2007, Saudi Arabia's regional influence had been weakened by these new US policies, while Iran became the main regional beneficiary, as evident in Iraq and Lebanon. The US invasion of Iraq led to the establishment of a pro-Iranian regime, whereas the successful US-backed international efforts to expel Syrian forces from Lebanon led to the growing

**The King Abdullah Financial District in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, October 2017.** FAISAL AL NASSER/REUTERS

influence of Hizballah. This structural shift in regional powers, and its influence on Saudi Arabia, was compounded by the fact that following its economic crisis and US military failure in Iraq, the United States moved to disengage from much of the region. Saudi Arabia began to take a more assertive, interventionist position to pursue its interests and secure its hegemony in the region. But it was not alone in doing so. Between 2008 and 2011, three axes emerged in the region: the Saudi axis, which included Egypt and Jordan; the Qatari axis, which included Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood parties across the Arab World; and the Iranian axis, which included Syria, Iraq and Hizballah.

For each of these axes, the Arab uprisings were akin to an earthquake. From 2011 to 2013, the Qatari axis expanded to include Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen. The Syrian revolution caused a blow to the Iranian axis, but the main loser immediately following the uprisings was the Saudi axis, which lost its allies in Egypt and Yemen. Beginning in 2013, however, Saudi Arabia allied with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to regain influence over Egypt and partial influence in Libya and Tunisia. The kingdom designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization and in March 2015 launched a war against the Houthis in Yemen, who had moved against the pro-Saudi government there. As a consequence of these Saudi moves, the Qatari axis was dramatically weakened. The Qatar crisis emerged as a result of this context of US disengagement from the region while rivalries between the regional axes escalated. These shifting structures of power in the region meant that these conflicts were almost inevitable, regardless of who is living in the White House.

Mohammed bin Salman's ascendance to power was not merely a result of his own agency, but also was predicated on the regional context of shifting structural arrangements. In the mid-2000s, the Saudi king and his two potential successors were in their 70s and 80s. This predicament of the Saudi state only having aged statesmen was a by-product of the brother-to-brother succession order established by King Faisal. This policy of succession was successful to the degree that even Faisal's assassination did not cause a disruption in Saudi rule. As the brothers aged,

however, the specter of death loomed and a succession crisis emerged in the 2000s.

To solve that crisis, King Abdullah created two mechanisms. In 2007, he established the Allegiance Authority as a tool to designate the new crown princes, with clear rules that permitted each branch of the royal family to have an equal say in the matter. But by 2014, two of King Abdullah's crown princes—Sultan and Naif—had died, and Salman became the new crown prince. That year, King Abdullah created a new royal position of deputy crown prince, which was designated to Mugrin, the youngest brother of King Abdullah. In doing so, King Abdullah attempted to ensure that in the event of his death the Allegiance Authority would choose the first deputy crown prince from the new generation. Upon Abdullah's death in 2015, however, the newly crowned King Salman used the tools that Abdullah had created to solve the succession problem in a less consultative way: he appointed his son as crown prince, and amended the Basic Law to state that, after his death, the king and crown prince should not be from the same royal branch. In doing so, he assured the other branches of the royal family that his son is not allowed to choose his successor from Salman's royal branch.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is young and relatively new to the Saudi leadership. He has sought to secure his position by adopting seemingly populist policies against the established elites—a complex network of constituencies that combines old princes, powerful bureaucrats and wealthy businessmen. These new policies appeal to a new generation—drawn from the 70 percent of the population that is under the age of 35—who are active in business and government. Islamists are perceived as a potential threat. This is because they are the only powerful and relatively organized social force in the kingdom, and because they are considered allies to either certain royal rivals, or to the Qatari regime. To contain their influence, the newly emerged Saudi nationalist, populist discourse adopted an anti-Islamist agenda. A crackdown on Islamists, liberal-Islamists and reformers came at the same time as the decisions regarding Saudi women and entertainment were issued.

Trump's election contributed little to these events in Saudi Arabia. The larger explanation has to do with the structural conditions of a changed US role in the region after the US invasion of Iraq, as well as the Saudi succession problem and Mohammed bin Salman's power consolidation. Of course, the agency of individuals such as the crown prince do play a significant role in historical processes. But the preoccupation with certain personalities can lead to exceptionalist explanations to the neglect of precursor events and other structural factors at work. Orientalist explanations also render events beyond comparative analysis, when in fact these recent events in Saudi Arabia are readily comprehensible as a set of shifting structural relations of power alliances domestically, regionally and internationally. ■

# Turkey Dispatch

## Kerem Oktem

Turkey's Islamist hegemons in the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) have been losing their grip on reality for some time. Anti-Western conspiracy theories have multiplied in the country since the attempted coup by Turkish military officers on July 15, 2016. Members of the religious-political Gülen movement, which split from the AKP in 2013, were involved in the power struggle with the AKP government that culminated in the coup attempt. Since the leader of the Gülen movement, Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, is based in Pennsylvania, suspicion has also fallen on the United States. Further confounding the AKP-led government and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan are the mixed messages coming out of Washington. Initially, the AKP believed that Trump as president would help their efforts to extradite Gülen. Yet, Turkey's rulers cannot square their assumption of Trump's sympathy for them with his decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and his inability (or unwillingness, in Erdoğan's eyes) to put an end to the politically sensitive US trial of Turkish banker Hakan Atilla.

The Turkish ruling party is unable to grasp the monstrosity of Donald Trump's assault on diplomacy and constitutional arrangements precisely because the AKP has already achieved in Turkey what the Trump administration can only dream of: a thorough destruction of independent institutions, the suspension of democratic process, the dismantling of the separation of powers, and a government conducted on the basis of interpersonal relationships. The Turkish regime shares Trump's dislike for established conventions, his disdain for democracy and dissent,[1] and his attempts at advancement by wilful destruction of official arrangements. Both leaders hold revisionist perspectives on the global order and both fight challenges to their pursuit of power. The Turkish hegemons do not seem to understand the geopolitical and world historical shifts that underlie President Trump's term in office. The same

**Kerem Oktem** *is professor for Southeast Europe and Modern Turkey at the Centre for Southeast European Studies, University of Graz, Austria.*

**A protest against the Turkish government's plan to extend the state of emergency imposed after the 2016 coup attempt, Istanbul, January 14, 2018.** OSMAN ORSAL/REUTERS

can probably be said for the Trump administration's inability to understand developments in Turkey and beyond.

Uncovering how power is wielded in Turkey is not a straightforward business. At first glance, the extreme concentration of power in the hands of President Erdoğan and his immediate circle of advisers, business associates and family is obvious. Yet, delving deeper, uneasy coalitions and ideologically irreconcilable actors abound—to the point of making the current power arrangements look incredibly fragile. It is not exactly clear where power is located in Turkey at the moment. But it is evident that in addition to Erdoğan's inner circle and an array of Islamist groups, extreme nationalists and a strong pro-Russia faction, known as Eurasianists, are exerting a growing influence over the making of foreign policy.[2] Their perspective on the Trump administration is framed by a set of entangled ideological ambitions and short-term concerns.

Ideologically, Islamists, nationalists and the so-called Eurasianists want Turkey's ties with the West cut, its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) terminated, and its accession process to the European Union reversed. The Eurasianists are Turkish nationalists, influenced by former Kremlin ideologue Alexander Dugin, who see a future for Turkey in an expanded Eurasian space, stretching from Russia and China through the Turkic republics of Central Asia. This Eurasian undercurrent in Turkish politics bears a close family resemblance to early twentieth century pan-Turkism. It has survived in the ideologies of extreme nationalist parties well into the 2000s. The contemporary, expanded version only came out into the open forcefully after the failed coup. Since that time, the anti-Western position has become the government's default position—pronounced audibly and repeatedly in the now dominant pro-government media. The Eurasianists around Erdoğan are believed to be using disagreements and miscommunications between Turkey and the West to create conditions for a conflict that would provoke the United States and European countries to force Turkey out of the NATO alliance. Russian actors, including Russia-based social media and news media, plus their outlets in Turkey such as the Sputnik news agency, are a major force supporting this anti-Western current.[3] The purchase of the Russian-made S400 air defence system has to be seen in this context.

More important for the Erdoğan government than long-term strategy, however, is its short-term survival—a trait it shares with the Trump administration. Two immediate concerns frame the Turkish view of the Trump White House and the United States more generally: Turkey's request for extradition of the cleric and alleged coup leader Fethullah Gülen from the United States, and the fallout from the US sanctions case that recently convicted the Turkish banker

Hakan Atilla, and which involves the Turkish-Iranian businessman Reza Zarrab. The fact that Gülen remains in the United States is read in Ankara as proof of US complicity in the coup attempt. Seemingly in response to the US refusal to extradite Gülen, Turkey arrested a US consular staff member in Istanbul, which then sparked the temporary mutual suspension of the visa regime in October 2017. Hakan Atilla has been convicted of infringement of the US sanctions against Iran.[4] Yet, it is the major corruption allegations against Erdoğan's inner circle, which emerged from the proceedings, and the revelations of key witness Reza Zarrab that are cause for concern at the "palace"—Erdoğan's new residence in Ankara. Sanctions could, in theory, also be applied to Turkey. Hefty fines for Turkish banks are more likely. In any case, more anti-Americanism is unavoidable.

Turkey, it is important to remember, is officially still an ally of the United States and in fact the only country in the region whose relationship with Washington has been conducted through NATO. Unlike Middle Eastern client states such as Egypt, Turkey has had a say, albeit limited, in the decisions on military and security policies to which it is subjected. This position of relative autonomy vis-à-vis the United States, however, is now coming to an end. Turkey is gradually absconding from the transatlantic alliance, which indicates a new and unpredictable phase in Turkey's international orientation as much as it is a sign of the relative decline in importance of the United States in the world.

The increasingly unclear location of real power in Turkey applies to the United States too. How much power the Trump administration is really able to exert through foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East, remains to be seen. So far, Turkey has been treated with a strange mix of ignorance and an absence of long-term strategy. The two states are involved in major disagreements, from the role of Kurdish military units in the Syrian war and against ISIS, to the detention of American citizens in Turkey. It would be naive to believe that Turkish-American relations can survive this current situation without lasting damage. Yet, as seen from Ankara, the short-term problem is not Trump, but Gülen and Atilla. From the strategic long-term angle, the problem is again not Trump, but America and the West in its entirety, whose global power Turkey's current hegemons see as a thing of the past. They may not be entirely wrong, but they are unlikely to be around long enough to witness its demise. ■

### Endnotes

**1** Stephen M. Walt, "Trump Isn't Sure if Democracy Is Better Than Autocracy," *Foreign Policy*, November 13, 2017.
**2** Metin Gurcan, "The Rise of the Eurasianist Vision in Turkey," *Al Monitor*, May 17, 2017.
**3** Metin Gurcan, "Russia's Winning the War for Turkish Public's Trust," *Al Monitor - Turkey Pulse*, November 20, 2017.
**4** Semih Idiz, "Erdoğan Trouble Continues with US Indictment," *Al Monitor - Turkey Pulse*, September 13, 2017.

# Morocco Dispatch

## Brian T. Edwards

"At first, we saw him and we didn't think he was good (*mezian*). But it was none of our business," the woman says, referring to President Trump.[1] She is in her mid-70s. Her husband, a retired civil servant just a couple of years older, sits next to her. I am in the small Moroccan city of Taza, about an hour and a half east of Fez.

"But after Jerusalem, we knew he was *hmoq*," she says, using the word for lunatic. We are speaking in the Moroccan dialect, *darija*. "*Marid al 'asab*," she adds (mentally deranged). Just the day before, on December 7, 2017, President Trump had announced that the United States now recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and intends to move the embassy there from Tel Aviv. During the week I was in Morocco, split in half by this news, no one I spoke to had anything good to say about Trump. After the declaration on Jerusalem, it only got worse.

The Tazia septuagenarian was energized. "I don't understand politics, but this guy is just zero. He is the worst president ever," she says. "He hates all Muslims and Arabs and creates problems for us. At least he could keep his feelings to himself." When I ask for clarification, she explains that by his "feelings," she is referring to Trump's hatred of Muslims. She and many others I spoke to in December were firmly convinced of his animosity.

The Al Jazeera television station is on in the background. Reactions in Gaza and Ramallah to Trump's Jerusalem announcement cycle on screen every few minutes. This couple has satellite TV in their home but, she adds, "no Wi-Fi." Her adult son, who lives in another city, interjects: "How do you use WhatsApp then?" She uses the 3G service on her cell phone, she explains. Even among the older generation, Morocco is fully in the digital age, which allows for a steady connection to the world. For younger Moroccans, smartphones, texting and Facebook are all part of the fabric of everyday life.

Moroccans have been consuming regular coverage of Donald Trump since the US presidential campaign heated up. I was here in Fez in December 2015 when candidate Trump called for the United States to bar entry to Muslims—his notorious "Muslim

**Brian T. Edwards** *is Crown Professor in Middle East studies and director of the Middle East and North African Studies Program at Northwestern University.*

ban." News of it spread quickly. Moroccan students asked me pointedly and poignantly what he had against Muslims, and why Islam was a special target of his campaign. But if they were aware of the Islamophobia sweeping America in 2015, they also were familiar with his reality show, *Celebrity Apprentice*.

Now, two years later, I was back at Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah University in Fez on the day President Trump announced his Jerusalem decision. Among students at this large state university, not a single one thought positively of him. Nor, when I asked, could they think of any person they knew in their families or their neighborhoods who did either.

In Rabat, an Amazigh (Berber) intellectual in his fifties confirmed: "Ordinary people hate [Trump] because he has said negative things about Islam. The main thing for them is that he's anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant." The impact on Moroccans who aspire to travel to the United States for work or for study is felt personally, he explained, whether or not they might have the opportunity anyway. The green card lottery offered only miniscule chance of success, but now that hope is reduced to nil.

Most demoralizing, for a longtime Morocco observer, is a pervasive sense that President Trump represents a generalized and expanding American hostility toward Muslims. The immediate effect of the much-discussed "Muslim ban" among young Moroccans is a growing sense of alienation from the United States. This alienation is all the more poignant given the long-standing amicable relationship between the two nations, the many points of contact with Moroccans who have successfully immigrated to cities such as Boston or Minneapolis, and the good impressions generations of Americans have made through the Peace Corps and Fulbright Scholarship program. What matters most about the fact that the Kingdom of Morocco was the first nation to recognize the independence of the United States in 1777 is that most Moroccans know it and still express pride about the long official friendship.

Still, one of the most notable changes among Moroccans between the ages of 18 and 25 as they discuss President Trump is the shift away from national questions toward identification as Muslims. One after another, the students generally agreed that they identified as Muslims first, and as Moroccans second. Trump's Jerusalem announcement apparently exacerbated this shift. A Moroccan academic tells me a few days later in Casablanca that Moroccans are "now talking more and more again about Palestine as a cause. It was sleeping, but now it is revived."

National concerns are not gone, however: A number of informants this December referred to perceived tensions between Morocco's King Mohammed VI and President Trump. Several spoke of an incident from last April, when the Moroccan monarch vacationed in Cuba. President Trump was at Mar-a-Lago, a resort in Palm Beach, Florida, at the same time. In what may have been merely speculation, on April 14 the news magazine *Jeune Afrique* reported that the king would be meeting with President Trump in Florida. When no meeting transpired over the following days, Moroccan news sources began to question why. Was it the king's support for presidential candidate Hillary Clinton? What did the slight portend? It remains unclear whether the alleged meeting was itself only a rumor (some sources backed off from their original claims), but the widespread speculation is a window into Moroccan thinking.

During the US presidential campaign, it was widely reported that King Mohammed VI had donated $12 million to the Clinton Foundation. The Clintons in general, and Hillary Clinton in particular, had a generally good reputation in Morocco. As secretary of state, Clinton paid Morocco a much-celebrated visit. Moroccans expected good things should Clinton emerge victorious. The geopolitical issue that matters first to the state—support for its side on the Moroccan Sahara issue, known elsewhere as the Western Sahara—was in the balance. As one commentator told me, "Republicans tend to be more supportive of Morocco on the Sahara issue." But a victory by Clinton was expected to be good for the Moroccan side due to the perception of her good relations with the country generally.

President Trump's surprise victory set back this line of thinking. Still, his administration has not yet made any public statements about the Western Sahara. Indeed, President Trump took nearly a year to name a US ambassador to Morocco, and only did so in November when he appointed David Fischer, a Michigan car dealer and major contributor to President Trump's campaign. This delay led some in the Moroccan press to speculate about why he had appointed an ambassador to Algeria months earlier. Did the delay signal a shift toward Algeria? Or was it retaliation for the king's donation to the Clinton Foundation?

Whatever the speculation in Rabat, those in Fez cared little about issues that might matter to government. "A priority for us is how he talks about Muslims and Arabs. We don't give a damn about Western Sahara," said a graduate student in his 20s. One woman in her early 20s put it this way: "Neither from a Muslim point of view nor a nationalist point of view, but from a human point of view, he must be rejected." Another woman commented: "As an Amazigh, I don't support Trump because he is anti-Muslim." Another claimed that President Trump was "running the United States like he runs a business [meaning that] what comes first is money, not human rights." An academic I spoke to in Fez put it bluntly: "Trump is grotesque."

Back in Taza, the *hajja* (older woman) offers hope that Moroccans may still be able to distinguish President Trump as an aberration. "Americans are good people. But the rulers are not." Yet, her husband interjects to disagree about the goodness of the American people, referencing mass killings and shootings in the United States. "If America says its aim is to establish peace in the world, and it sides with Israel, it is only pretending." ■

## Endnotes

**1** All quotations are from conversations conducted in Morocco by the author in December 2017.

# Palestine Dispatch

## Mouin Rabbani

Palestinian adherents of what is known as the peace process never quite entertained the illusion that the United States is a neutral arbiter, let alone honest broker in matters Israeli-Palestinian. Rather, they allowed themselves to believe that, precisely on account of its close relationship and therefore influence over Israel, Washington would be an effective mediator and as such serve as the midwife of Palestinian statehood. It was on this basis that Palestinians embraced the framework of exclusive American sponsorship of bilateral Israel-Palestinian negotiations divorced from the existing international consensus, devoid of a clear timeline or agenda, and lacking effective arbitration or meaningful enforcement mechanisms.

As evidence mounted that successive American administrations were using their influence to support rather than temper Israel's policies in the Occupied Territories, the dwindling band of advocates of the 1993 Oslo Accords, most prominently Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, held fast to their convictions, much as late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was fond of asserting that in the Middle East, the United States holds "99 percent of the cards."

President Donald J. Trump's December 6, 2017 recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem, and of the Holy City as Israel's capital, without any commensurate recognition of Palestinian rights, in this context disrobed not one but two emperors. For Palestinians, it represents the terminus of Abbas's pursuit of unicorns. They have almost unanimously come to understand that he not only has no alternatives, but is incapable of changing course and presiding over the implementation of a different strategy. This realization explains why Abbas's approval ratings are even lower than Trump's, and why his condemnations of Trump's forfeiture of Washington's assigned role have done nothing to revive his credibility or legitimacy.

It has been evident for some time that there is a need to develop a new strategy to more effectively confront Israel. Trump's December declarations made it a matter of urgency. Whether one believes the "Deal of the Century" allegedly being prepared by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner is as lopsidedly pro-Israeli as press reports have indicated, or dismisses it as hot air by a Metternich wannabe, Palestinians have come to realize they are facing a collective moment of truth. The challenge they face is to transform the various and often contradictory political slogans being circulated into a coherent program.

In this respect, talk of a "third intifada" falls considerably wide of the mark. In contrast to the 1987–1993 and 2000–2004 uprisings, Palestinians today lack both the organizational infrastructure that sustained the former and supportive leadership that nurtured the latter. To the contrary, the Palestinian body politic remains bitterly divided, and whether formally or otherwise, its various leaderships are committed to maintaining quiet with Israel. They fear that popular mobilization will serve their Palestinian rivals and undermine their authority rather than Israel's control.

From the vantage point of the Occupied Territories and the Palestinian diaspora, the Trump era presents Israel with a unique opportunity to liquidate the Palestinian cause, and to do so at a moment of unprecedented Palestinian weakness and Arab disinterest—or worse. Thus, Trump's Jerusalem declaration, which US officials asserted does not seek to pre-determine the final status of the occupied east of the city, was claimed by Israel as doing precisely that. It has also emboldened Israeli leaders to formulate further proposals to annex additional West Bank territory and, in what is best described as an attempt at demographic engineering, redraw Jerusalem's boundaries in order to increase the number of Jewish residents and reduce the proportion of Palestinians in the city.[1]

Similarly, the campaign led by Nikki Haley, the extraordinarily vulgar US envoy to the United Nations, to terminate US contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has led to renewed efforts by prominent elements of the Israeli leadership to abolish altogether the agency that serves Palestinian refugees. Palestinians, in other words, are experiencing 2018 as a year in which Israel, supported to the hilt by Washington, is seeking to permanently settle the status of the West Bank and transform the Palestinian refugee question into a matter to be resolved by the Arab states.

The existential threats and enormous challenges notwithstanding, many Palestinians nevertheless see a silver lining to Cloud Trump. His proclamations, it is widely believed, have driven the final nail into the fantasy that Oslo can lead to an end to the Israeli occupation, and made it impossible for the Palestinian leadership to participate in further attempts to revive its framework or engage with Plan Kushner. The purported American proposal whereby a Palestinian entity based in the Gaza Strip and extending into Egyptian territory in the Sinai Peninsula would cede the West Bank to Israel and renounce refugee rights, is therefore seen as stillborn.[2]

On the ground, Palestinians note they successfully defeated Israel's attempts to alter the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif (also known as the Temple Mount) during the summer of 2017, and did so without effective support from their leaders or political movements. Since that time, there has

**Mouin Rabbani** *is a senior fellow at the Institute for Palestine Studies and a contributing editor of* Middle East Report.


**A protest against Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Near the US embassy, Lebanon, December 10, 2017.** MOHAMED AZAKIR/REUTERS

been continuous talk that the status quo could not hold for much longer. Few ventured an opinion on what form the next eruption would take or how it would come about, but many suggested it would need little more than a spark. Trump has delivered what might better be characterized as an explosion, and Palestinians throughout the Occupied Territories, and indeed around the world, have consistently taken to the streets since then. Whether they can sustain prolonged mobilization independent of existing political movements, compel the latter to actively participate, or develop alternative frameworks of their own, will become apparent in the coming weeks and months. ■

### Endnotes

**1** Ilan Ben Zion, "New Israeli Law Would Make It Harder to Divide Jerusalem," *The Washington Post*, January 2, 2018.

**2** Ben Caspit, "Trump's Peace Deal: A Gaza-centered Palestine," *Al-Monitor*, January 8, 2018.

# Israel Dispatch

## Rebecca L. Stein

Among the numerous ideological affinities and governing styles shared by President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is a commitment to the rhetoric of "fake news."[1] In the last year, Netanyahu has increasingly borrowed this Trumpian formulation in an attempt to quell dissent and undercut critical Israeli and international media scrutiny. Netanyahu is not unique in this regard. Over the course of the last year, authoritarian regimes across the globe—including Syria, Russia and Malaysia—have adopted the fake news script to silence detractors and critics, frequently in response to the charge of human rights violations.

But while the global scale of this accusation may be unprecedented, charges of fake news have a long history, considerably preceding the Trump era. In Israel, the accusation of fraudulence, employed against political critics and foes, can be traced to the onset of the Zionist settler-national

**Rebecca L. Stein** *is Nicholas J. & Theresa M. Leonardy Associate Professor of cultural anthropology at Duke University.*

project. As postcolonial studies show, the repudiation of indigenous claims (to history, land, humanity and so on) was a foundational logic of colonial projects, enabling the violence of colonialism in its various forms. This formulation was also at work in the history of Zionism and has had a lasting hold on dominant Israeli ideology. Over the course of the last two decades, amidst the ascendance of nationalist extremism in Israel, the fraudulence charge has grown ever stronger among the Jewish right-wing public as a popular means of indicting critics and undercutting Palestinian claims, particularly where Israel's military occupation is concerned.

Video footage of Israeli state violence against Palestinians has been a favorite target of this accusation—footage shot by international journalists and human rights workers and increasingly, as cameras have proliferated in the West Bank, by the cameras of Palestinians living under occupation. It was in the language of fake news that Israelis famously responded to the killing of twelve-year-old Mohammad al-Dura by the Israeli security services in 2000, in the early days of the second Intifada.[2] His killing was filmed by French television and was replayed around the world in the aftermath of the event, becoming no less than a viral global icon of the Israeli military. What ensued was an organized campaign by the Israeli right wing, and their international supporters, to debunk the images as fake. Netanyahu convened an Israeli government committee of inquiry in 2012 to investigate the incident, and the committee eventually endorsed the popular discourse of fakery, blaming manipulative editing for falsely producing the damning images. The state committee did more than exonerate the Israeli security services in al-Dura's death; indeed, they argued that he was not actually dead. Right-wing Israeli newspapers put it succinctly in their headlines: "Mohammed al-Dura: The Boy Who Wasn't Really Killed."[3] Pleas by the al-Dura family to exhume the boy's body were declined.

Despite the Israeli response to the al-Dura affair in 2000, it would take nearly two decades for this argument about Palestinian fakery to become commonplace where video evidence of Israeli state violence is concerned. By 2014, amidst the ascendance of far-right politics in Israel, and the threatening spread of cameras among Palestinians living under occupation, the argument finally gained a mainstream foothold. For example, the charge of fake news would predominate in Israel following the killing of two Palestinian youths in the West Bank town of Beitunia in 2014, fatally shot by the Israeli security services during an annual demonstration commemorating the *Nakba*. The military denied responsibility, claiming that their forces had only used non-lethal rubber bullets that day, in compliance with regulations governing engagement in protest contexts.[4] But the scene had been filmed by numerous on-site cameras, including four security cameras, and those of CNN and a Palestinian photojournalist. The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem took on the case, believing that the unusually high volume of associated footage conclusively established military responsibility for the deaths.

But mainstream Israelis felt differently, and the volume of footage from Beitunia did little to persuade them of the military's responsibility. To the contrary, the videographic evidence fueled a widespread repudiation campaign. State actors and institutions were among the first to join the fake news chorus, including the defense minister, the foreign minister and official military spokesmen.[5] All argued that "the film was edited and d[id] not reflect the reality of the day in question."[6] Their assertions were parroted by the national media, who insisted that the shootings were "staged and faked."[7] That accusation was then picked up by right-wing Israelis and supporters internationally. Some focused on the image of the falling body, arguing for its self-evident theatricality (yet another case of what many called "Pallywood"—the purported Palestinian Hollywood-like industry in manufactured images of Palestinian victims). Others claimed there was a lack of adequate blood in the footage, proof that the victim had not been killed. Most proponents of the fraudulence charge did not dispute the deaths themselves, as they had in the al-Dura case, but focused on exonerating the IDF through a re-reading of the footage, arguing that the bullets had come from other sources. The charge of fraudulence haunted the case as it wound its way through the Israeli legal system. The Beitunia case established the fake news charge as a default Israeli script for responding to videographic evidence of state violence against Palestinians.

For Israelis who support the fake news accusation, the stakes are considerable—just as they are in Trump's America for those who parrot this rhetoric. In the Israeli context, these accusations aim to protect the image of Israel by stripping Palestinian victims and Israeli perpetrators from the videographic scene of the alleged crime—and to do so in a way that removes all traces of repressive Israeli military rule and its histories. The charges of fraudulence, forgery or Palestinian theatrics are an attempt to correct the record, to right the wrongs done by a libelous Palestinian public that is intent on Israel's defamation by means of fictive image-making—or so many believe. In this way, the discourse of fake news is just another tool in the Israeli struggle against the so-called existential threat. ■

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**4** Rebecca Stein, "GoPro Occupation: Networked Cameras, Israeli Military Rule, and the Digital Promise," *Current Anthropology* 58/S15 (February 2017).

**5** Jack Khoury and Chaim Levinson, "IDF Says Forgery Likely in Video Showing Palestinian Teens' Deaths," *Haaretz*, May 22, 2014.

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# Europe Dispatch

## Kathleen Cavanaugh

Within Europe, the election of Donald J. Trump as president of the United States has been met with a mix of disbelief (surely this did not just happen), hope (surely, he will not last long) and increasing resignation (this is the new normal). Despite public assertions about Europe's so-called special relationship with the United States, the US commitment to its European partners was fraying long before Trump became president. Trump's "America First" campaign and unilateral approach to foreign policy do not mark a significant shift in US rhetoric or policy. US skepticism toward international structures, legal regimes (including those governing human rights) and its European partners is both "longstanding and deeply culturally embedded."[1] Under Trump, such exceptionalism is just more visible and entrenched. It is this worldview that led to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with devastating effects still felt in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

In the post-September 11, 2001 landscape, the United States made clear its intent to go it alone—even if that meant operating outside the doctrines of international law and international institutions. While President Barack Obama, to some degree at least, endeavored to re-situate the United States within the international community, Trump has embraced Bush-era doctrines. This approach, combined with a US-Russia alliance and failure to understand the refugee crisis as a global crisis that requires a global plan, has had significant repercussions for Europe, which is keenly aware that the problem extends far beyond Trump. The US Republican Party and the foreign policy establishment, for a variety of reasons, have enabled Trump to work outside supranational controls and agreements. Against this backdrop, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's view that, "the times when we could fully rely on others are to some extent over…We Europeans must really take our destiny into our own hands," captures a change in European attitudes toward the United States.[2]

The public shift in US-European relations suggests that Trump's election has woken Europe from its slumber—a political awakening that is mapped out in three specific ways. First, as the full horror of right-wing populism plays out across the United States, the advance of Trump-like nationalist political movements in Europe has been halted, at least temporarily, with defeats to far-right movements in France, Austria, Great Britain and the Netherlands. Second, US disengagement from its international responsibilities along with the new Trump alliance with Russian President Vladimir Putin comes at a time when European integration is under threat. BREXIT, Great Britain's own "first" movement, exposed deep divisions between European Union (EU) member states. Somewhat ironically, however, Trump's election may have provided incentive for EU members to rediscover a common purpose. Third, the Trump administration's disengagement from the international stage and return to a unilateralist foreign policy, combined with trade protectionism and climate denial, provide opportunities for the EU to develop a coherent foreign policy that, especially for the Middle East, may well produce policies that depart from this current US administration.

There are signs that this departure has already begun. For example, the differing approaches of the EU and the United States to the Iran nuclear deal—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—was made clear in the wake of Trump's October 2017 decision to decertify Iran's compliance with JCPOA. EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherini publicly stated that the EU remained committed to the agreement, citing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) certification, on eight different occasions, of Iran's compliance with the terms of the JCPOA.[3] For Trump, the decision appears to be less about compliance or the specifics of the agreement than about Trump's worldview—one that is increasingly informed by the interests of Israel and Saudi Arabia. Unsurprisingly, these are the only two countries to endorse Trump's actions toward Iran.

The JCPOA is a multilateral agreement signed by all five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, and cannot be unilaterally abrogated by the United States or any signatory. While the US decision has no legal standing, it may prompt a reconfiguration of alliances—one that could, as German Foreign Secretary Sigmar Gabriel suggests, posit the EU, Russia and China against the United States. It may also shift some diplomatic leverage to the EU. Mohammad Hassan Habibollahzadeh, the Iranian ambassador to Norway, has stated that, "If the EU gives us enough reason to continue with the nuclear agreement, we will continue."[4] The point was echoed by the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Ali Salehi, who stated that Iran would comply with its obligations even if the United States withdrew, so long as Europe remains party to the agreement.[5] Whether the EU can provide enough incentive for Iran to continue to comply with the JCPOA remains to be seen. That said, the unified rebuke by the EU and the European Economic Area (EEA) to the US administration's approach to Iran suggests that Europe may be ready to shed its junior partner status.

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process is a second area where, absent a coherent and viable US approach, the EU may be poised to play a stronger role. Although the United States has

**Kathleen Cavanaugh** *is college lecturer at the Irish Center for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland, Galway.*

long been considered to be the only viable third party that can bring pressure to bear on Israel, its position with regard to Palestine has never been one of neutral arbiter. Trump's unilateral decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel—in clear breach of international law and UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions—has only reinforced a view of a US-Israeli alliance. Given the political dynamics within the current US administration and the close working relationship between Trump and the Israeli government, there is no incentive for either side to resume negotiations. While Europe's engagement on Palestine has been at best tentative, within the European public sphere there long has been support for a more equitable and less Israeli-leaning approach. The EU could use the current diplomatic vacuum, and its leverage with both Israel and the Palestinians, to push the two parties toward a deal.

Europe has close economic ties with Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Roughly one quarter of Israeli goods are exported to EU member states.[6] Israel also participates in a range of EU programs, including the Horizon 2020 scientific research program. On the Palestinian side, the EU provided €170 million (around $204 million) to the PA in 2016, which accounted for approximately 20 percent of all external support for the budget. Additionally, EU member states, especially Great Britain and France, contribute significant sums independently. The EU and the PA signed an Interim Association Agreement on Trade and Cooperation in 1997, which provides for trade between the EU and PA.

To date, however, the EU has made only limited use of its economic pressure points—through differentiation, applying different policies in the Occupied Territories from those in Israel proper. This approach has had minimal success. The 2015 EU guidelines that call for differential labeling of agricultural produce from Israeli settlements, and a prohibition of entities operating in the settlements from accessing Horizon 2020 funds, have only been implemented by a handful of member states. Moreover, settlements make up less than 4 percent of Israel's economy.[7] Given the number of ways in which Europe connects with Israel economically, and Europe's ability to exercise diplomatic pressure internationally, much more could be done to put pressure on Israel. For example, the EU could pressure member states to implement the 2015 guidelines fully and consistently. The EU could also extend these measures to the financial sector—a recommendation made by the EU Heads of Mission in a 2012 report and one likely to have more substantial consequences.

On the Palestinian side, the Interim Association Agreement has not resulted in significant trade with the PA. In the short term, the EU and EEA countries could work to improve trade with the PA. In the medium to long term, European states could also provide increased financial and technical support to foster economic development in both the West Bank and Gaza. Improving trade and economic ties would make an independent Palestinian entity—either statehood or something in between—more viable. This additional support may be necessary should Trump follow through on his threat to withdraw all future US aid payments to the Palestinians.

It remains to be seen whether Europe can independently play a more constructive role in foreign policy—not just on Iran and Palestine, but throughout the region. What is clear is that the US retreat from the international arena leaves a leadership gap that the EU, its member states and others (including China) have the potential to fill. If the EU is to be successful in assuming this new role, however, it must reimagine a foreign policy agenda that recognizes that safeguarding European interests is inextricably linked to respecting fundamental human values and legal norms, both inside and outside its borders. Adopting this approach would indeed be a significant departure from current US policies, but this transatlantic divorce is long overdue. ■

## Endnotes

**1** Ruth Jamieson and Kieran McEvoy, "State Crime by Proxy and Juridical Othering," *The British Journal of Criminology* 45/4 (July 2005) p. 519.

**2** "Germany Steps up Attack on Trump for 'Weakening' the West," *The Guardian*, May 30, 2017.

**3** "Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini following the Ministerial Meeting of the E3/EU + 3 and Iran," September 9, 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/32546/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-following-ministerial-meeting_en.

**4** *Dagbladet* newspaper, Norway, October 19, 2017.

**5** "Our Partners Have More To Lose Than We Do," *Der Spiegel*, September 8, 2017.

**6** "Exports of Goods by Industry and Country, 2015," Bureau of Statistics (Israel), July 27, 2016.

**7** "Study on the Geographical Coverage of Israeli Data," OECD, January 31, 2012 and "Fact Sheet," EEAS, November 11, 2015.

**Editorial** *continued from page 1.*

flattery, the region's most brutal autocracies see in Trump a green light for their own worst behaviors.

The Trump effect on the region is not limited to support for autocracies. The president views himself as a master deal maker, but when he does not get his way, he quickly rages about US military power or the size of the nuclear button on his desk. As the president's scandals and legal troubles at home mount, a diversionary war with either Iran or North Korea is a chillingly real possibility.

Domestic racial politics and imperial foreign policy have always been intertwined. Trump's Muslim travel bans sparked outrage but registration for Muslims had been developed under previous administrations. Similarly, while his disparaging comments about immigrants and Mexican Americans stoked outrage, more Mexican Americans were deported during Obama's last year in office than in Trump's first. And while the Trump Justice Department has attacked Black Lives Matter protesters as "black identity extremists," it was Obama's Justice Department that designated former Black Panther Party member Assata Shakur among the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists.

Where Trumpism seems to diverge from the contours of American empire is in his embrace of racial nationalism, white supremacy and anti-Semitism. And it is in his embrace of these

**Pamela Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activism, Allies, and their Fight Against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s–1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).**

Pamela Pennock positions her new book, *The Rise of the Arab American Left*, as a corrective to what she characterizes as a near omission of Arab American activism in histories of the left in the United States. She notes that ethnic studies literature on Third World left movements "dutifully examines" African American, Latino American, Asian American and Native American activism, yet leaves out histories of Arab American activism and the centrality of Palestine to coalitional organizing during this time. This omission, she contends, overlooks Arab American activists' role in the anti-imperial movements of the 1960s through 1980s and misses an opportunity to understand histories of Arab American coalition building in spite of escalating government surveillance.

Pennock shows that a central organizing strategy for many Arab American activists was to simultaneously work to combat racism in the United States (as one iteration of "home"), while also organizing against US and Israeli ravaging of their countries of origin. In this way, the book contributes meaningfully to conversations on displacement and diaspora in ethnic studies by creating a more complex understanding of what constitutes home for populations in the United States that are subject to state-sanctioned racism within the nation's borders and must also contend with the long-term, intergenerational ramifications of US empire.

Pennock's narrative weaves together news briefs, memos, periodicals, court cases, Arab American activist papers, and student organizing flyers from archives in Michigan, Kansas and California. She supplements this archival work with interviews with Arab American activists in Detroit, New York and Chicago. The effect is a cumulative revealing of the depth and breadth of Arab American activism from 1967 until the first intifada in 1987—and the tensions, collaborations and coalitions among Arab American activists and between Arab American activists and other activists of color in the United States.

Although neither her title nor the book's cover details suggest that this is a book about Palestine, Pennock shows that Palestine—and its erasure, both on the ground and in historical narratives—is at the center of Arab American anti-racist and anti-imperial organizing. At the same time, she positions Arab American actors at the center of the story she tells about Palestine solidarity organizing, instead of foregrounding non-Arab Jewish anti-Zionist or white leftist support for Palestine. She structures the book's narrative around Palestine and begins with the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and its afterlife in Arab American, and particularly Palestinian, communities in the United States.

Part I follows Arab American student associations as they sought to place the struggle for freedom in the Arab world in the same analytic frame as the struggle for equality in the United States and anti-colonial struggles against US imperial rule. Pennock shows how organizations like the Association of Arab American University Graduates fielded critiques that their work either focused too much on Palestine, and not enough on the rest of the Arab world, or was not sufficiently focused on identity and rights for Arabs in America. She also charts attacks on student activists, from the Anti-Defamation League's infiltration of the Organization of Arab Students (OAS) convention to then-congressman Gerald Ford's attack on Arab students as radical agitators and potential terrorists in a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Including New Left flyers likening Palestine to Vietnam, Algiers and Angola, and material on coalition building between black radicals and Palestinians, she traces how OAS chapters partnered with Third World liberation organizations on university campuses. She also shows how these alliances were often tenuous and characterized more by shared ideological commitments to anti-imperialism than in-person coalitional organizing. The broader American left's commitment to Palestine, meanwhile, remained "soft and somewhat perfunctory" at best. They embraced an idealized image of Third World guerillas that they applied superficially to Palestine in lieu of nuanced historical understandings of the region.

forms of discrimination and racism where his Middle East policies and domestic policies converge. His comfort with anti-Semitic chants of "Jews will not replace us," in Charlottesville, Virginia, goes along with his admiration for Israel and its occupation of Palestine. While he makes space for anti-Semites within his White House, he also embraces Israel supporters and bends to the wishes of the Israeli government. Similarly, Trump's fawning over the Saudi leadership and Gulf monarchs works alongside a racist travel ban and special targeting of Muslims. He makes exceptions to his racism for those who have something valuable to offer him.

Trumpism gives official sanction to racist, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic currents in American society, currents that long have existed but were repressed because they undermined the public image of American exceptionalism. The transparency is jarring, but with the sheen of liberal internationalism and benevolent imperialism washed away, what remains are the stark realities of a country whose foreign and domestic policies have been structured in various forms of racism for a long time. But Trump not only lacks the finesse of previous administrations in masking the racism, he calls it forth in the name of protecting the homeland from threats near and abroad. The America he wants to make great again is white, Christian and patriarchal, with little regard for the actual demographics of American citizens. ■

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Part II begins with Palestinian American Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, who shot and killed presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy in June of 1968. Pennock traces how the impact of his "lone, isolated act of political violence" forced Arab American activists to disassociate from Sirhan while still attempting to confront American ignorance of the question of Palestine. Significantly, Pennock shows how many of her interlocutors saw the assassination as a pretext for heightened government surveillance and harassment of Arab Americans. After the Munich massacre in 1972, when members of the Palestinian militant group Black September kidnapped and murdered Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, the Nixon administration launched the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism (CCCT). The CCCT initiated Operation Boulder, under which the government scrutinized the visas of Arab nonresidents and subjected Arab American students and activists to sustained investigative sweeps. According to Pennock, the effects of these government initiatives fell largely on students, who faced political intimidation meant to suppress organizing and generate suspicion between and among Arab Americans.

In Part III, Pennock shifts to look at community and labor organizing in Dearborn, Michigan, where Arab American activists collaborated with black radical labor activists to protest predatory housing practices in their neighborhoods. Simultaneously, Arab American activists were working to build community centers to connect local issues with transnational ones. Pennock also charts widespread Palestinian organizing beyond Dearborn in the 1970s and 1980s, such as education campaigns, delegations to occupied Palestine, and organizing at national academic conferences like the National Women's Studies Association. In addition, she details the widespread backlash to Palestine activism, citing, for example, *Ms. Magazine* founding editor Letty Cottin Pogrebin's 1982 claims that the PLO had "monopolized" the 1975 World Conference on Women and panelists had "dragged Israel through the mud."

In this way, Pennock's book is a history of knowledge about Palestine that was produced and policed in university settings from the 1960s through 1980s, which lays bare the often-false dichotomy between scholarship and activism. Her work is thus necessary reading in the current era of coordinated attacks against faculty and students producing scholarship on Palestine and working in solidarity with Palestinian freedom struggles. For this reason, *The Rise of the Arab American Left* provides an important addendum to works like Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar's *Anthropology's Politics: Disciplining the Middle East* (Stanford University Press, 2015) and Maryam Griffin and William Robinson's *We Will Not be Silenced: The Academic Repression of Israel's Critics* (AK Press, 2017). These books trace the compulsory Zionism and censorship of scholarship on Palestine in US university settings and the harassment and intimidation of scholars who center Palestine in their work or activism.

Though Pennock positions Arab American organizing as progressively less radical and more pragmatic in the years between the 1980s and the present, her book in fact allows for a consideration of the sustained relevance—and persistence—of radical Arab American activism on and off college campuses. Arab American activists and their allies continue to resist coordinated attacks on Palestinian scholars and scholarship on Palestine, President Donald Trump's repeated attempts to institute a Muslim ban, and the colonial logics and statecraft shared between the United States and Israel. In this landscape, Pennock's book highlights the importance of centralizing Palestine, historicizing contemporary Arab American activism, and tracing the intersections between the many homes that diasporic activists occupy in their fight against racism within the United States and warfare within its imperial reach.

*—Jennifer Lynn Kelly*

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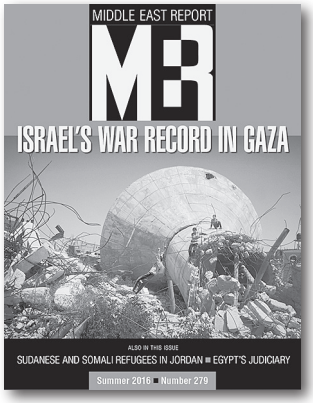


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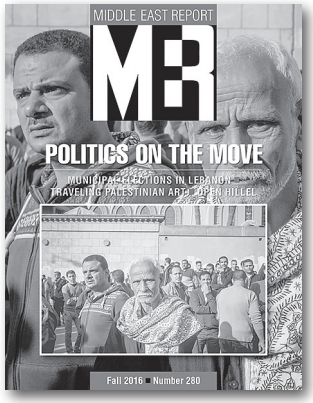


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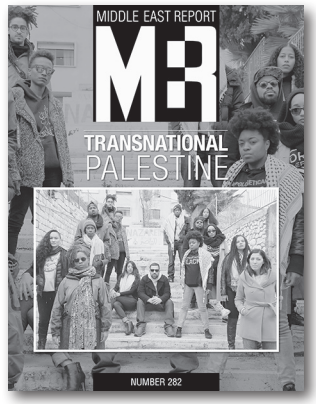


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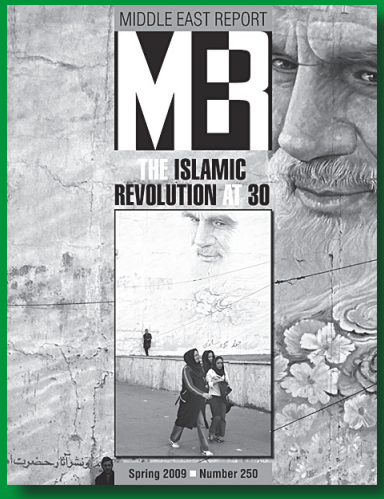



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