

Puppet Theater of the Absurd, by Mr. Fish

In the last days of all empires the idiots take over. They mirror the collective stupidity of a civilization that has detached itself from reality.

By Chris Hedges

The last days of dying empires are dominated by idiots. The Roman, Mayan, French, Habsburg, Ottoman, Romanoff, Iranian and Soviet dynasties crumbled under the stupidity of their decadent rulers who absented themselves from reality, plundered their nations and retreated into echo chambers where fact and fiction were indistinguishable.

Donald Trump, and the sycophantic buffoons in his administration, are updated versions of the reigns of the Roman emperor Nero, who allocated vast state expenditures to attain magical powers; the Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang, who funded repeated expeditions to a mythical island of immortals to bring back a potion that would give him eternal life; and a feckless Tsarist court that sat around reading tarot cards and attending séances as Russia was decimated by a war that consumed over two million lives and revolution brewed in the streets.

In “Hitler and the Germans,” the political philosopher Eric Voegelin dismisses the idea that Hitler—gifted in oratory and political opportunism, but poorly educated and vulgar—mesmerized and seduced the German people. The Germans, he writes, supported Hitler and the “grotesque, marginal figures,” surrounding him because he embodied the pathologies of a diseased society, one beset by economic collapse and hopelessness. Voegelin defines stupidity as a “loss of reality.” The loss of reality means a “stupid” person cannot “rightly orient his action in the world, in which he lives.” The demagogue, who is always an idiot, is not a freak or social mutation. The demagogue expresses the society’s zeitgeist, its collective departure from a rational world of verifiable fact.

These idiots, who promise to recapture lost glory and power, do not create. They only destroy. They accelerate the collapse. Limited in intellectual ability, lacking any moral compass, grossly incompetent and filled with rage at established elites who they see as having slighted and rejected them, they remake the world into a playground for grifters, con artists and megalomaniacs. They make war on universities, banish scientific research, peddle quack theories about vaccines as a pretext to expand mass surveillance and data sharing, strip legal residents of their rights and empower armies of goons, which is what the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has become, to spread fear and ensure passivity. Reality, whether the climate crisis or the immiseration of the working class, does not impinge on their fantasies. The worse it gets, the more idiotic they become.

A society convulsed by disorder and chaos, as Voegelin points out, celebrates the morally degenerate, those who are cunning, manipulative, deceitful and violent.

The Disneyfication of America, the land of eternally happy thoughts and positive attitudes, the land where everything is possible, is peddled to mask the cruelty of economic stagnation and social inequality.

In an open, democratic society, these attributes are despised and criminalized. Those who exhibit them are condemned as stupid; “a man [or woman] who behaves in this way,” Voegelin notes, “will be socially boycotted.” But the social, cultural and moral norms in a diseased society are inverted. The attributes that sustain an open society—a concern for the common good, honesty, trust

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Soldiers Take a Stand Against Trump’s Abuses

On the Fourth of July, members of the military are calling on Congress to protect service members who disobey the president’s immoral or unlawful orders.

By Liza Featherstone

Kim, an aircraft mechanic, joined the military in 2019, at age 18. She and her mother had struggled to survive, even living in their car at times. She didn’t think she could afford college, so she didn’t apply. Like so many young Americans in that situation, she enlisted “to get a stable paycheck, a roof over my head, food in my stomach at the end of the day.” Deployed only once, Kim spent most of her time on base, but she enjoyed the routine: waking up early for 15-hour workdays, staying up late to earn an associate’s degree, making lifelong friends and “amazing mentors.” But in 2024, she began to worry about what a new administration might ask the military to do.

As Kim read Project 2025, the Heritage Foundation’s blueprint for Trump’s far-right authoritarian government, she became increasingly troubled about the prospect of unlawful orders, fearing especially that the president would use the military against American civilians. Though she’d been planning on staying 20 years in the Air Force, she decided to get out; now, she’s no longer active duty, but because she didn’t serve a full eight years, she could be redeployed. Kim is not her real name; she spoke anonymously to TNR anonymously so as not to jeopardize her future; a dishonorable discharge could harm her employment prospects and imperil her hard-earned military benefits. “I’ve done quite well for myself,” she told me.

She was right to worry about how Trump might mis-

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Guest Editorial

The Democrats: When Will They Ever Learn?

In March of 2015, my wife, Helene, and I shook the hand of Bernie Sanders as he began his campaign for U.S. President at the San Diego Convention Center to thousands of cheering fans. You know the rest of the story, as the Democratic Party betrayed Bernie and went with Hillary, the lady who said in 2003, as the Republicans under George Bush pushed for war with Iraq, “We have the weapons, why not use them.” Clinton lost to Trump (2015) and then Biden beat Trump (2019).

The Dems have consistently opposed anti-war candidates like Dennis Kucinich and Bernie Sanders. Dems support for the Bush wars in Afghanistan and Iraq matched their support for our massacre of Vietnamese people in the '60s and '70s.

Never a member of the military, war-hawk Joe Biden became the youngest U.S. senator and never considered peace as a prize. His long political history was one of voting for more weapons and more wars.

When will they ever learn? Oh when will the Dems ever learn?

Biden supported U.S. enlargement of NATO when the Russians were pleading not to encroach on their borders (1991) and (the Russians) actually wanted to be part of NATO since they ended their anti NATO Warsaw Pact.

The U.S. response to Russia backing off? Americans responded to the Russian peace proposal with nuclear weapon delivery systems to their borders. U.S. missiles. U.S. aircraft and even U.S. troops deployed to Poland and Romania.

Just imagine if Russia moved arms and troops near the U.S.

Well, no need to imagine if you were alive and alert in 1962, you remember the Cuban Missile Crisis.

A student in my homeroom class in October of 1962 was rushed to a hospital after taking a handful of aspirin—she didn't want to die in a nuclear holocaust.

Today, we are told by many analysts that we have never been closer to nuclear war. Sort of ho-hum. Like U.S. public concern for starvation and killing of the



Zohran Mamdani. Photo: Kara McCurdy, *The Independent*

people of Gaza?

Has all the killing and the threat of more violence desensitized us?

The Biden and Bill and Hilary Clinton Dems of the 1990's sided with the arms makers that more weapons and movement of troops and weapons to the very border of Russia was a better plan.

You know, the rest of the story. When the democratically elected President of the Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, was overthrown by the Americans backed coup in 2014 it was a game changer for Russia. Yanukovich wanted better relations with his neighbor Russia. The Americans would have no part of that. According to a report in Responsible Statecraft, the Ukrainian government entered into a wide-ranging partnership with the CIA against Russia. This cooperation, which involved the establishment of as many as 12 secret CIA “forward operating bases” along Ukraine's border with Russia, began not with Russia's 2022 invasion, but over 10 years ago.”

The U.S. Merchants of Death and stockholders smiled on the way to the bank. Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and others told stockholders how profitable the Ukraine-Russian War would be.

Our 155mm shell producing plant could not meet demands—General Dynamics had to do a seven day work week, three shifts a day and the cost of one 155mm shell went from \$2000 a shell to \$8000—supply and demand, don't you know? My local BAE Systems plant, just a walk away from my door, makes a more tech-sensitive 155 mm laser GPS guided for

\$100,000 each.

And where were the Dems when the Israelis began their genocide of the people of Gaza?

Biden, the Christian Zionist, announced he was in total support of Israel. Blinken, the Zionist, supported the genocidal criminal Netanyahu all the way.

Netanyahu, who unable to travel to places like Ireland for fear of arrest, has spoken to more Joint Sessions of Congress in the U.S. than any other individual (4 since 2001).

Netanyahu gets stand up applause from Congress while the people of Gaza get starvation and death.

Bernie Sanders. is a proud Jew. He knows the history and dreads what the Zionists have become since the Brits gave them a green light with the Balfour Declaration in Nov of 1917.

Trump promised an end to the wars but obviously, as expected by many, decided to be in on the American culture of proudly being “the mightiest military in the world.”

BRICS nations of Brazil, Russian, India, China, South Africa and a growing number of nations and peoples of the Global South call for friendship and diplomacy not diplomacy out of the barrel of a gun.

Bernie Sanders was gratified to see the victory of Zohran Mamdani

The victory of NYC mayor candidate Zohran Mandani, a Democratic Socialist like Bernie, is a hopeful sign that things may be changing for the criminal political system of Republicans and Democrats.

Our nation is under the influence of a foreign state, Israel. AIPAC has the vast majority of the U.S. congress under its financial and political thumb. AIPAC de-

mands that congressmembers support Israel or they will lose their seat in Congress. AIPAC has a major success rate of defeating those who do not support weapons and money to Israel.

Sanders commented positively on the victory of Mamdani- as opposed to the refusal of Governor Hochul to say anything and the racist comments of Sen Kirstin Gillibrand. “Mamdani's victory was largely about people power, about revitalizing democracy and opening the door for ordinary people to gain control over the decisions that affect their lives.”

He did not run away from a moral issue that is troubling millions in New York and around the country: the need to end U.S. military support for a Benjamin Netanyahu government in Israel that is obliterating the people of Gaza and starving their children. Mamdani understands that antisemitism is a disgusting and dangerous ideology, but that it is not antisemitic to be critical of the inhumane policies of the Netanyahu government.

It's past time to consider a new Democratic Party. Staying with the culture of war preparation, threat of war and actual war has been a dead end.

New voices. New plans to enhance life will make a better nation and a better people.

—Jack Gilroy

Jack Gilroy has been organizing justice actions since the 1960s. He was honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army Infantry, and converted to non-violence during the Viet Nam War. Non-violently standing for justice has led to him spending time in Southern jails, federal prisons, and more recently Jamesville Penitentiary.



Photo: Ellen Davidson

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Dreams of Escape

Why Black America is resisting the resistance

By Nicholas Powers

The police watched us. The march leaders chanted, “Tell me what democracy looks like!” We answered, “This is what democracy looks like!”

Ducking under signs and umbrellas, I saw us, the left, grim-faced and determined. The gray sky and rain added a heaviness. I pivoted and noted the absence of Black New Yorkers. Where were we?

I left the march, carried my sign on the A-train, then Brooklyn. A neighbor saw me. He is a tall brotha, rocks a fluorescent work jacket. “Mr. Activist! I saw the protest.” We stood on the corner, and I asked why he didn’t go. “White people made this problem.” He theatrically wiped his hands. “They can fix it.”

It’s the unofficial-official position of Black America. They can fix it. I hear it online. I hear it on phone calls. I read it on group chats. I hear it on the stoop and on the corner. They can fix it. Right after comes “and I’m getting the fuck out. Why stay? We did what we could. Amerikkka is a dead-end. Let’s leave while we can.”

Brothers. Sisters. Elders. Artists. Churchgoers. Hustlers. Homeowners. The just-getting-by. Everyone pulled back from politics. Sure, a fraction will move overseas. The risk is that by abandoning political struggle, we let American fascism build momentum. If it does, the vast majority of us, who can’t leave, will be attacked by a white-supremacist federal government. Even more than before. When the Trump administration implodes, it will take years to repair the damage.

We know this, but we are trapped in dreams of escape. Whether it’s going full expat or retreating into personal life. Wherever we go, there is no real escape. First, we look in the mirror and ask a hard question: Did we cause this? Did our support for neoliberal Black Democrats lead us here? Second, our backs are against the wall. Millions of us can’t just up and leave. We have to fight.

All God’s Children Had Wings

We dream of escape. We always have. At home, I stand at the bookcase. I can hear voices seeping from the pages. Slaves and freed echo across time. I take the Norton Anthology of African American Literature off the shelf and flip to the folklore “All God’s Children Had Wings.” It tells of slaves brutally beaten until an African elder tells them in the past they could fly but lost the gift when they forgot their true language. When a pregnant woman is whipped, he tells her the lost words; she awakens and flies away. Eyes wide, her family repeats the words and flies, too. The Africans soared upward as the slave owner cursed and yelled.

Closing the book, I imagine this being told centuries ago, around a fire as a griot holds enslaved friends spellbound. The re-

flection of the flames dances in their eyes. When he’s done, they go to sleep except a young woman who stares at her hands. The next day, she stops picking cotton and looks up, closes her eyes and recites new sounds. Wind rustles. An overseer shouts. A horse whinnies. She can’t hear them as she stands on her tip-toes in the middle of the field, reaching for sky.

The dream of escape is part of us; it’s part of our history and imagination. The where and how changes. During slavery, it was the Underground Railroad. After slavery, it was the Back to Africa Movement led by Marcus Garvey. Later, Rastafari called for a return to Zion. The Nation of Islam told us to return to our “true” religion. The Black Panther movies dazzled us with a beautiful two-hour dream of Wakanda, an escape into fantasy to feel, briefly, free.

And there was Obama. The brother’s election as president was a seismic shift in our imagination. For a few years, some, not all but a lot of us shed the dream of escape for the American Dream. It is as if we no longer listened to the old griot saying remember your true selves. We painted the stars-n-stripes on our souls. We wore the mask as if it was our real face. We became as respectable as possible. We let go of revolutionary politics to be good Democrats.

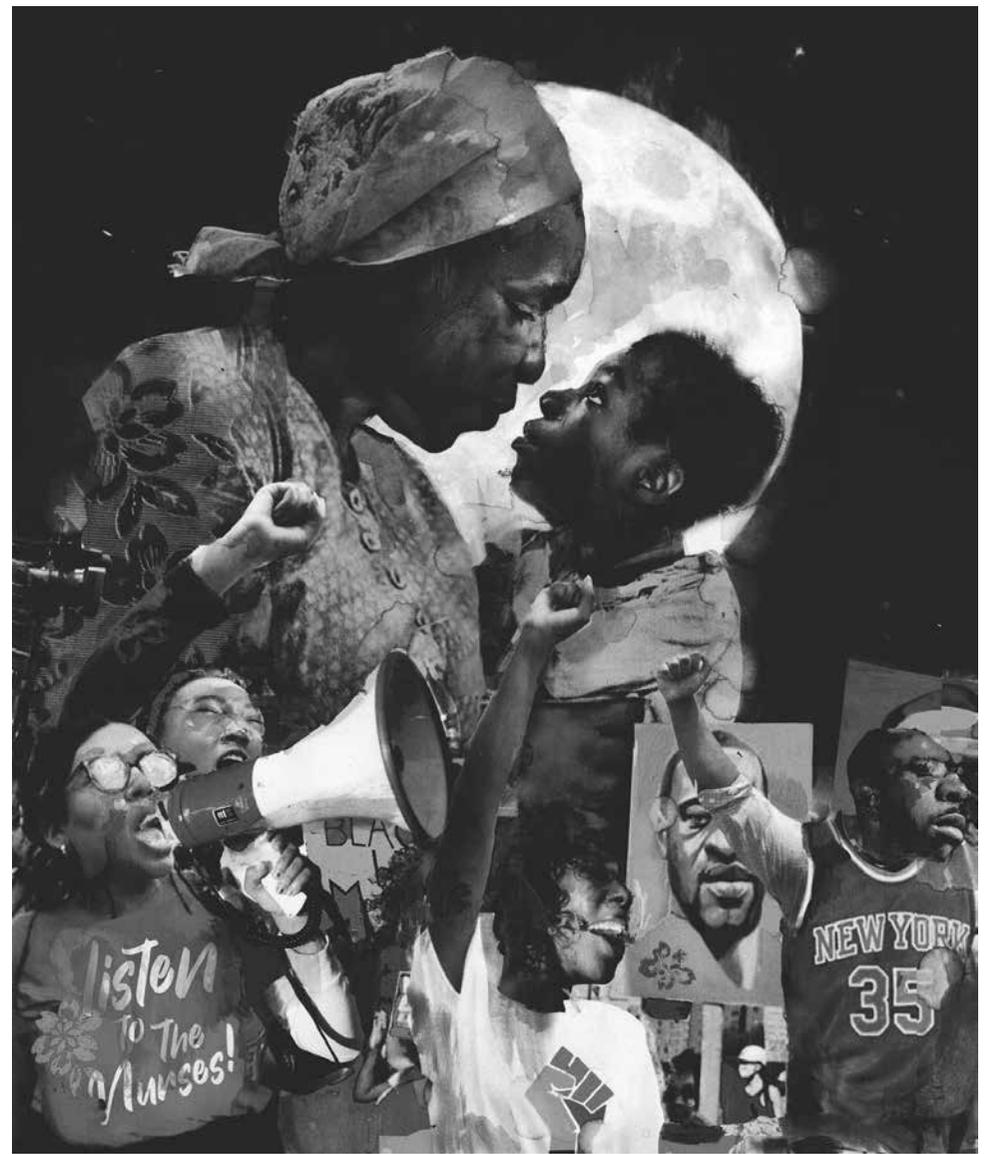
Our folktale was replaced by the ancient Greek myth of Icarus. Daedalus and his son Icarus escaped from the king’s prison. The father made them wings but warned his son not to fly near the sun, which of course he did. The wax holding his feathers melted. He plummeted

‘The core of the Black Freedom Struggle is democratic and communitarian,’ I lowered my voice. ‘We want freedom from fear and poverty. We want freedom from bigotry. We want the freedom to choose how to define freedom. And we want that for everyone else.’

into the sea. We, like Icarus, flew to the American Dream, bright and beautiful in the sky. We got closer and closer, then Trump got elected, twice, and we saw the truth. America is a big lie. We flapped our disintegrating wings. We fell. We are still falling.

“The street is not hot,” I said to my friend. “Yep,” she said, “We’re done. We’re doing mutual aid now, preparing for the recession. I mean this...” she waved at America. “We’re done. We. Are. Fucking. Done.”

She is Black, an activist and healer. She says what’s been said online, on the radio, on TV, on the stoop, on street corners, at barber shops and on the phone. Black America is quietly quitting politics. We haven’t shown up at protests. We haven’t



been filling Black Twitter with our creative call-outs. We haven’t really given a shit.

When the United States shifted rightward, we took a step back. Those who mused about life overseas are filing for visas to Canada, Mexico and West Africa. Those who can’t leave are Netflix-vanishing into the strobe light of the screen. Those who love God are churching hard, shutting the doors to the outside world. A

Back home, I stop at the bookcase. I add what we say now to what the ancestors said. We want to escape America. They did too. Outside, children play in the yard. The contrast is that our ancestors made clear the freedom we demand is never meant for us. It is meant for those who are not born. The beautiful ones, the ones who will know how to fly.

“No, I don’t want no scrub,” TLC sings from a passing car. “A scrub is a guy that can’t get no love from me.” The song echoed down the street.

My bestie and I watched the car turn as she pulled on a cigarette. We sat on the stoop. Her cinnamon tone, arrow-shaped face cracked an evil smile. “America can’t get no love from me.” She sang her version of TLC’s hit. “Poor ass whites on the passenger side of a rich man’s ride, waving the flag at me.”

“Wow,” I say. “Tell me how you really feel.”

She held out her hands like double-pan scales. “You had Trump, an oafish buffalo,” she said. “And a smart sistah—whatever her limits, she was up to the job. We’re just a hundred days in, and this piece of shit president nearly destroys the world economy.” She jabs her cigarette like a torch at a wild animal. “Racism. Sexism.”

I’ve known her for years, and I see in her eyes the pieces of broken hope. She can’t look at Trump and not feel pain. At times, it turns inward. She asks, “What else could we do? Don’t we prop up the Democrats? Don’t we do the work?” Other times, she lashes out. “So white people would rather destroy America than share it!” she will yell. “Fine, let it crash. When America is gone, then they’ll

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At a Bleak Political Moment, Zohran Mamdani Offers Hope

By Liza Featherstone

Zohran Kwame Mamdani won the Democratic mayoral primary. The socialist began this election with almost no name recognition. After his campaign prepared for weeks of uncertainty and vote-counting complexity, Mamdani won so decisively last night that his main opponent, former governor Andrew Cuomo, a man who famously does not take no for an answer, conceded the race before 11 p.m.

Mamdani has moved quickly from candidate to historic phenomenon. His campaign and personality give New Yorkers hope. Speaking to a union crowd on the sidewalk at a poll site near Union Square as temperatures climbed toward 100 degrees Fahrenheit, a beaming Mamdani, gamely wearing a “United Auto Workers for Zohran” T-shirt over a dress shirt, seemed to hardly break a sweat as motorists slowed their cars, honked their horns, and snapped pictures on their phones.

His victory is the biggest one yet for a socialist movement that has been building support steadily in New York City ever since Bernie Sanders ran for president in 2016. New York City’s Democratic Socialists of America (NYC-DSA) chapter, along with neighboring partners like Mid-Hudson Valley DSA, has won elected offices and legislative reforms, expanding renters’ rights, taxing the rich, and building publicly funded renewable energy, but before Mamdani’s campaign, had yet to become a mass movement.

The candidate is charming and surrounded by media geniuses. But more than anything, organizing—more than 40,000 volunteers—made this happen. And that organizing can’t be separated from the socialist vision that animates it.

That vision is big: a city that working-class New Yorkers could afford. At the same time, it’s specific: rent freezes; fast and free buses; affordable housing; a public option for groceries; and a clear commitment to public safety, investing in mental health responders for people in crisis, allowing police to focus on preventing and solving serious crimes.

This was a straightforward triumph of people over money, the kind that capitalist elites try so hard to convince is impossible. Cuomo’s campaign was bankrolled by \$25 million from some of the worst actors in American life—more than \$8 million from billionaire and for-

mer New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg; \$2.5 million from a landlord group; \$1 million from DoorDash, a food delivery app deeply dependent on the exploitation of low-wage workers; and half a million from Bill Ackman, a Trumpist hedge funder who has been attempting to destroy the campus Palestinian solidarity movement (and with it, all of American higher education)—in total comprising the largest super PAC in the history of New York City mayoral campaigns. Mamdani didn’t just beat money as usual; he beat an extraordinary mobilization of money.

Mamdani’s campaign shows that much of the canned conventional wisdom that consultants serve up to the Democratic Party is nonsense. Conventional politics decrees that door-knocking doesn’t work, that young people won’t vote no matter how hard you try to turn them out, that certain demographics (white men, very religious voters) are immutably conservative. And ever since Bernie Sanders inspired so many but did not become president, centrist Democratic leadership has insisted that improving people’s material conditions cannot form the basis of a winning politics. Mamdani’s victory shows they’re wrong about everything.

Mamdani’s victory also proved the Democratic establishment spectacularly wrong on Israel. The candidate who vowed to arrest Benjamin Netanyahu for war crimes if he came to New York, who wouldn’t agree to visit Israel if elected, beat Netanyahu’s lawyer. For his commitment to solidarity with Palestinians and opposition to the genocide, the candidate was constantly tarred as an antisemite by Israel’s apologists.

If anything, all those attacks seemed to actually help Mamdani, by letting voters know that he opposed the war in Gaza and refused to back away from a principled stance out of supposed political expediency.



Zohran Mamdani Speaking at a DSA 101 Meeting at the Church of the Village in NYC on November 11, 2024. (Photo: Wikimedia/Bingjiefu He)

If Mamdani does become mayor, the mass movement that elected him must be prepared to help him succeed, as the ruling class (especially the real estate industry), the Trump administration, and the police make every effort to make his mayoralty a failure. He will face much more pressure to succeed than ordinary mayors, to be able to stand up against backlash; he will need to appoint the most experienced team, drawing on the existing expertise of the city’s most dedicated civil servants.

He will need to work tirelessly not only on fulfilling his campaign promises but on issues that matter to the middle class, like K-12 education and cleanliness. Under austerity mayor Adams, we have had to step nimbly over human excrement on the stairs as we exit subway stations. Under a Mayor Mamdani, that same pile of excrement could easily become a symbol of why socialism doesn’t work. He needs to demonstrate that socialism—much more so than neoliberalism—can keep the shit off the steps.

Mamdani, NYC-DSA, and the broad New York City left have accomplished the hardest thing in American politics: convincing people that change is possible. When you talk to most people about socialist or social democratic ideas—from single-payer health care to free buses—they usually don’t dislike those ideas; they just don’t believe any of that can happen. This campaign showed that it can.

Liza Featherstone is a columnist for Jacobin, a freelance journalist, and the author of Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Workers’ Rights at Wal-Mart.

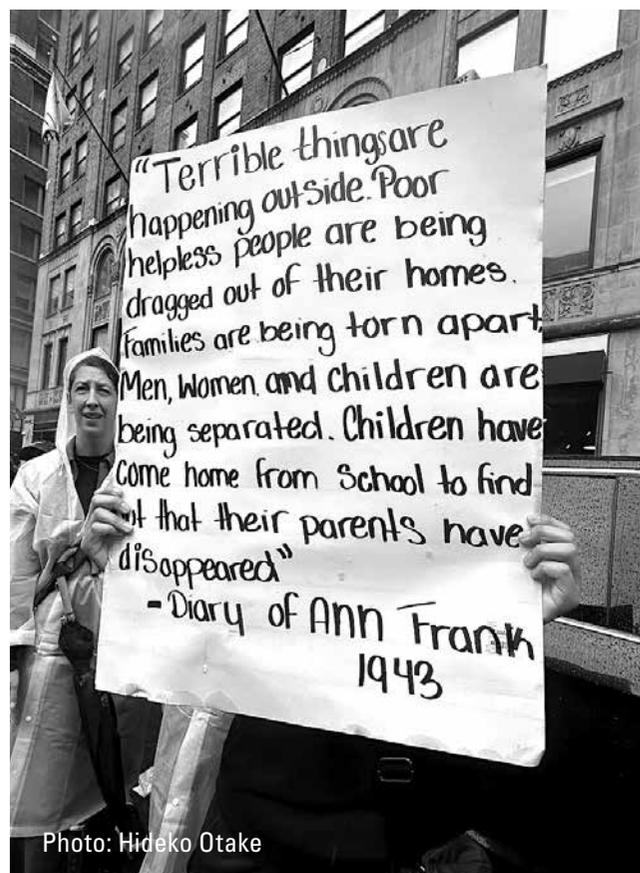


Photo: Hideko Otake

The Rage of Billionaires and the Frenzy to Stop Zohran Mamdani

By Norman Solomon

The Supreme Court’s first chief justice, John Jay, would have empathized with the billionaires who’ve been freaking out ever since Zohran Mamdani won the Democratic primary for mayor of New York last Tuesday. “Those who own the country ought to govern it,” Jay insisted. But now, oligarchs accustomed to such governance are furious that the nation’s capital of capitalism is in danger of serving people instead of megaprofits.

Meanwhile, among progressives, euphoria is especially fitting because the Mamdani campaign’s win was truly a people-powered victory. In a city where Democrats outnumber Republicans six-to-one, the Democratic nomination would ordinarily be a virtual guarantee of winning the general election. But the forces of oligarchy now mobilizing could disprove a claim that “Mamdani’s widespread appeal represents the total collapse of a Democratic Party establishment.”

Such a collapse is very far from certain.

On the surface, Andrew Cuomo’s decision to stay on the

fall ballot as an “independent,” while incumbent Mayor Eric Adams does likewise, seems to foreshadow splitting the anti-Mamdani vote. But Cuomo still has a substantial electoral following. And the corrupt Adams—who cut a deal with President Trump to viciously betray immigrants and got his criminal indictment thrown out by Trump’s Justice Department—has no better ethics than the disgraced former governor Cuomo. Bankrolled by wealthy donors, the pair might make some kind of pact, with one of them telling his followers to unify behind the other before voting begins this fall.

A social-media screed by hedge-fund manager Bill Ackman (net worth: upward of \$9 billion) was damn near apoplectic. Ackman described himself as “a supporter of President Trump” while expressing a fervent desire “to save the Democratic Party from itself.” Mamdani’s policies, Ackman wrote late Wednesday night, “would be disastrous for NYC. Socialism has no place in the economic capital of our country.”

But Ackman held out hope that those owning the city of

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Rule by Idiots

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and self-sacrifice—are ridiculed. They are detrimental to existence in a diseased society.

When a society, as Plato notes, abandons the common good, it always unleashes amoral lusts—violence, greed and sexual exploitation—and fosters magical thinking.

The only thing these dying regimes do well is spectacle. These bread and circuses acts—like Trump’s \$40 million Army parade held on his birthday, June 14—keep a distressed population entertained.

The Disneyfication of America, the land of eternally happy thoughts and positive attitudes, the land where everything is possible, is peddled to mask the cruelty of economic stagnation and social inequality. The population is conditioned by mass culture, dominated by sexual commodification, banal and mindless entertainment and graphic depictions of violence, to blame itself for failure.

Søren Kierkegaard in “The Present Age” warns that the modern state seeks to eradicate conscience and shape and manipulate individuals into a pliable and indoctrinated “public.” This public is not real. It is, as Kierkegaard writes, a “monstrous abstraction, an all-embracing something which is nothing, a mirage.” In short, we became part of a herd, “unreal individuals who never are and never can be united in an actual situation or organization—and yet are held together as a

whole.” Those who question the public, those who denounce the corruption of the ruling class, are dismissed as dreamers, freaks or traitors. But only they, according to the Greek definition of the polis, can be considered citizens.

Thomas Paine writes that a despotic government is a fungus that grows out of a corrupt civil society. This is what happened to past societies. It is what happened to us.

It is tempting to personalize the decay, as if ridding ourselves of Trump will return us to sanity and sobriety. But the rot and corruption has ruined all of our democratic institutions, which function in form, not in content. The consent of the governed is a cruel joke. Congress is a club on the take from billionaires and corporations. The courts are appendages of corporations and the rich. The press is an echo chamber of the elites, some of whom do not like Trump, but none of whom advocate the social and political reforms that could save us from despotism. It is about how we dress up despotism, not despotism itself.

The historian Ramsay MacMullen, in “Corruption and the Decline of Rome,” writes that what destroyed the Roman Empire was “the diverting of governmental force, its misdirection.” Power became about enriching private interests. This misdirection renders government powerless, at least as an institution that can address the needs and protect the rights of the citizenry. Our government, in this sense, is powerless. It is a tool of corporations, banks, the war industry and oli-



garchs. It cannibalizes itself to funnel wealth upwards.

“[T]he decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness,” Edward Gibbon writes. “Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the cause of the destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest; and, as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight. The story of the ruin is simple and obvious: and instead of inquiring why the Roman Empire was destroyed we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted for so long.”

The Roman emperor Commodus, like Trump, was entranced with his own vanity. He commissioned statues of himself as Hercules and had little interest in governance. He fancied himself a star of the arena, staging gladiatorial contests where he was crowned the victor and killing lions with a bow and arrow. The empire—he renamed Rome the Colonia Commodiana (Colony of Commodus)—was a vehicle to satiate his bottomless narcissism and lust for wealth. He sold public offices the way Trump sells pardons and favors to those who invest in his cryptocurrencies or donate to his inauguration committee or presidential library.

Finally, the emperor’s advisors arranged to have him strangled to death in his bath by a professional wrestler after he announced that he would assume the consulship dressed as a gladiator. But his assassination did nothing to halt the decline. Commodus was replaced by the reformer Pertinax who was assassinated three months later. The Praetorian Guards auctioned off the office of emperor. The next emperor, Didius Julianus, lasted 66 days. There would be five emperors in A.D. 193, the year after the assassination of Commodus.

Like the late Roman Empire, our republic is dead.

Our constitutional rights—due process, habeas corpus, privacy, freedom from exploitation, fair elections and dissent—have been taken from us by judicial and legislative fiat. These rights exist only in name. The vast disconnect between the

purported values of our faux democracy and reality means our political discourse, the words we use to describe ourselves and our political system, are absurd.

Walter Benjamin wrote in 1940 amid the rise of European fascism and looming world war:

“A Klee painting named Angelus Novus shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”

Our decay, our illiteracy and collective retreat from reality, was long in the making. The steady erosion of our rights, especially our rights as voters, the transformation of the organs of state into tools of exploitation, the immiseration of the working poor and middle class, the lies that saturate our airwaves, the degrading of public education, the endless and futile wars, the staggering public debt, the collapse of our physical infrastructure, mirror the last days of all empires.

Trump the pyromaniac entertains us as we go down.

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Presbyterian minister, author, and television host. His books include *America: The Farewell Tour*; *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America*; *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*. He previously worked for the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and *NPR*, and hosted the Emmy-nominated *RT America* show *On Contact*.

Pipe Dream

By Bill Ehrhart

First they came for the undocumented immigrants,
and I did not speak out because I was happy to get rid of them.

Then they came for the foreign students,
and I did not speak out because they were foreign.

Then they came for the green card holders,
and I did not speak out because they were taking Americans’ jobs.

Then they came for the Muslims,
and I did not speak out because they weren’t Christians.

Then they came for the judges who ruled against them,
and I did not speak out because judges are usually way too liberal.

Then they decided that my job was an unnecessary waste of money,
and they fired me.

Then they took away my VA benefits, Social Security, and Medicare,
and it dawned on me that I might have a serious problem.

Then they came for anyone who spoke out against them,
and I found myself in what we used to call in the Marines “the hurt locker.”

When they tore up the Constitution and burned the pieces,
I realized I’d never actually read the damned thing.

And as the rich white billionaires were stuffing the ashes down my throat,
it finally occurred to me that I had made a terrible mistake.

But by then I was screwed,
and there was nothing I could do about it.

ICE's War on Home

By Anahid Nersessian

A border," the poet Wendy Trevino wrote in 2018, "is a cruel fiction." California has five borders, and of them only the Pacific Ocean has not been wholly fabricated by war and conquest. First encountered by Europeans in 1542, when the Portuguese sea captain Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo led a Spanish expedition along its southern shoreline, California is the ancestral homeland of seventy different ethnic groups, including the Ohlone of the west-central region and the Tongva of the southern coastal area now known as Los Angeles. Until 1848, it was part of Mexico. Ceded to the United States of America following the Mexican-American War, it became the 31st state in the Union.

In the late 1960s, Chicano liberation movements began claiming it as part of Aztlán, the legendary kingdom of the Aztecs, as a symbol of an ancient right to the land. Nearly half the population of Los Angeles is Hispanic or Latino, and the city also has the largest Filipino population in the U.S. and the largest Armenian population outside Armenia. About a third of people living in LA were born outside the United States.

Recently [Trump] took to X to describe LA as a 'once great American City' that 'has been invaded and occupied by Illegal Aliens and Criminals,' before announcing that he would be taking 'all such action necessary to liberate Los Angeles from the Migrant Invasion.'

These demographics have made LA a favorite target of rightwing attacks on immigration both legal and informal. If President Donald Trump has long relished painting San Francisco as a drug-addled hellscape because of its many unhoused residents, he has attacked LA with equal if not greater intensity. Recently he took to X to describe it as a "once great American City" that "has been invaded and occupied by Illegal Aliens and Criminals," before announcing that he would be taking "all such action necessary to liberate Los Angeles from the Migrant Invasion."

Such fascist theatrics are nothing new from Trump, and it is imperative to recognise that the United States' recent crackdown on immigration began not with a Republican but a Democratic president. Under Bill Clinton, border patrol tripled in size to become the nation's second-largest law enforcement agency; under Barack Obama, the budget for the office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, began to outpace the budgets of the FBI, the CIA, and all other federal law enforcement agencies combined. During his two terms in the White House, Obama oversaw the removal of more than three million non-citizens, more than any

other president in history.

ICE—popularly known as "la migra"—is an artifact of the so-called war on terror. Founded in 2003, it swiftly went about detaining and deporting thousands of Muslim, Arab and South Asian men, all labelled as national security threats after 9/11. Earlier this year, ICE was involved in the arrest of Mahmoud Khalil, the Columbia University graduate student who was taken into custody as a result of his involvement in the Gaza solidarity protests and remains in an immigration detention centre in Louisiana. A green-card holder, Khalil is in the U.S. legally, as are many of ICE's recent targets. They include Kilmar Abrego Garcia, who was arrested without having been accused of a crime and deported to a maximum security prison in El Salvador. (The U.S. Supreme Court ruled Abrego Garcia's deportation illegal; he was returned to the U.S. on 6 June and is currently being held in a Tennessee prison.)

These high-profile cases are the tip of the iceberg, but they give some sense of ICE's primary targets under Trump: non-citizens involved in protests against Israel's war on Gaza and non-citizens who are Hispanic or Latino. ICE is also targeting immigrants of other ethnic backgrounds:

tween the U.S. and Mexico, it is Mexicans and people from its neighbouring countries who inflame the racist American imagination. These are the "bad hombres" to whom Trump infamously referred in his 2016 debate with Hillary Clinton, the drug lords and gang members who must be eliminated from the law-abiding and presumptively white population.

In a remark that has since gone viral, Conor Simon, a resident of Honesdale, Pennsylvania, observed: "It's really hard to fathom that the guy making my pizza for 25 years is a gangster and a terrorist, and the person who shows up in an unmarked car wearing a mask and body armour to take him away is somehow the good guy."

Trump may spin spine-tingling tales of "bad hombres," but videos of recent ICE

"less lethal" munitions, beaten, trampled with horses, hit by cars and taken into custody. The LAPD, like many police departments in the U.S., trains with soldiers from the Israel Defence Forces, and you can see, in their response to the protesters, the same libidinal thrust of disproportionate force that's turned against children throwing rocks at tanks in the West Bank. In LA, protesters have dug up stones from the landscaped medians that run down the middle of the larger boulevards and hurled them at ICE's unmarked cars, or else dropped them from highway overpasses onto LAPD vans.

On social media there are photographs of protesters with signs that say things like "National Guard LOL" and "I drink my horchata warm 'cause fuck ICE." The novelist Rachel Kushner, a longtime LA res-

Such fascist theatrics are nothing new from Trump, and it is imperative to recognise that the United States' recent crackdown on immigration began not with a Republican but a Democratic president.

raids tell a different story. The mother of a newborn is handcuffed and shoved, head down, into an unmarked vehicle, her family screaming, the neighbours filming, her baby cradled against a weeping woman's shoulder. A young boy wails as his father is thrown into the back of a van. Children whose parents have been taken into custody sob on the floor of a school gym, not knowing if they will ever see their families again. The raids have not been on drug dens or sex-trafficking rings. They have been on restaurants and schools, hospitals and court houses. ICE's war is not simply at home, but on home.

The protests that broke out last weekend in Los Angeles are at once an autonomous phenomenon and a continuation of the George Floyd rebellion of 2020 and the student-led campaign against the war on Gaza. They have been met with no longer shocking displays of state violence, including the arrival of the National Guard and seven hundred marines. Protesters have been gassed, shot in the head with

ident, posted a photograph of a lowrider three-wheeling past a trio of National Guardsmen standing in front of a tank: "from 2020 but says better than I could how I feel about the arrival of the National Guard," she wrote. (Lowriders, customised cars often with hydraulic systems, have been an important part of Chicano culture since the 1940s.) "This is for my dad!" says graffiti under a bridge. There are videos of people riding their bikes in circles around the police, waving enormous Mexican flags. A teenager, holding a skateboard as he walks through a hail of rubber bullets, turns around and flips off the dozens of police shooting at him. In another video, an older Black man scolds a Black officer in the LA County Sheriff's Department for doing the bidding of ICE, which he suggests is run by white supremacists. There is evidence to support this claim: the Boston Globe reported last week that an agent conducting a raid in Martha's Vineyard was sporting a tattoo popular among neo-Nazis, and in February a ICE prosecutor in Texas was linked to a white-supremacist account on X.

There have been some complaints about protesters' tactics, but they've been muted. Some demonstrators have sat on the freeway, blocking ICE vans from passing; others have stood barefaced, in T-shirts and jeans, in front of masked and heavily armed rows of cops, staring them down coolly. Others have thrown Molotov cocktails and set police cars—and the occasional Waymo—on fire. We have all spent the last year watching unarmed twenty-year-olds get beaten and shot for protesting a genocide, and we have all spent the last six hundred days watching a genocide. It is absurd to suggest that the state—any state—needs a pretext to maim or kill, to arrest or deport. ICE arrives, guns blazing, to pull children out of the arms of their parents, the LAPD shoots people in

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A Midnight Assassin, Masked Agents and Rising Political Violence

By Amy Goodman and Denis Moynihan

A terror campaign is sweeping the United States, orchestrated from inside the White House and waged by masked, militarized federal agents. Its primary targets are immigrants. Also included are those in solidarity with immigrants, and, increasingly, elected officials, all from the Democratic Party. This state repression has a dark and disturbing parallel: vigilante violence. Last weekend in Minnesota, a masked gunman posing as a police officer shot and killed a prominent Democratic elected official and her husband, and shot and almost killed another elected official and his wife. While a suspect has been arrested, the question remains: if masked agents come to your door, are they police, ICE, or could they be assassins?

Vance Boelter, 57, an white evangelical Christian preacher and mortuary worker, is accused of murdering Minnesota House Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband Mark in the middle of the night on Saturday, June 14. About 90 minutes earlier, Boelter, dressed as a police officer with a black SUV modified to look like a police car, banged on the front door of state Senator John Hoffman's home. Boelter allegedly shot Hoffman and his wife Yvette multiple times. He is also accused of seeking two other Minnesota elected officials that night.

While exiting the Hortman home, Boelter was confronted by local police. He retreated back into the house, firing his gun then fleeing out the back door, leaving the couple dead. He abandoned his SUV with its small arsenal of weapons and a notebook that contained a "hit list" of at least 45 elected officials—all Democrats—along with abortion providers and healthcare workers.

These political assassinations took place hours before millions of people across the United States—including in Minneapolis and St. Paul—would gather for the



Photo: Ellen Davidson

"No Kings" day of protests. The protests were held in response to President Donald Trump's military parade in Washington, DC, which he held on his 79th birthday. Boelter had "No Kings" flyers in his car, suggesting he also may have been targeting the protests. By late Sunday, after the largest manhunt in Minnesota history, Boelter had been caught. But in a nation awash with over 300 million guns and with Trump fanning the flames of division, the risk of political violence is extreme.

Meanwhile, Trump continues to promise to deliver "the largest mass deportation in U.S. history." Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller, considered the architect of Trump's anti-immigrant agenda, has demanded federal officers meet a daily quota of 3,000 arrests.

To meet that goal, ICE and agents from the Dept. of Homeland Security have been sweeping worksites, homes, restaurants, marketplaces and anywhere they think large numbers of undocumented immigrants might gather—also sweeping up citizens and documented residents as well, denying almost everyone their rights to due process.

Elected officials have challenged this lawlessness, and in some cases, been arrested as well. Most recently, New York City Comptroller Brad Lander, also a candidate in next week's Democratic mayoral primary, was in a Manhattan federal building on Tuesday, escorting asylum seekers from immigration court. ICE agents waiting by the elevator attempted to arrest a man, and, when Lander demanded to see a judicial warrant, they violently arrested him too.

Speaking the next morning on the Democracy Now! news hour, Lander said,

"Pam Bondi was very clear, they're trying to wreak havoc in cities. They say, to liberate Democratic cities from their duly-elected officials. This is part of what authoritarians do: strike fear into immigrant families and communities and try to undermine the rule of law and basic democracy by stoking conflict. Our challenge is to find a way to stand up for the rule of law, for due process, for people's rights, and to do it in a way that is nonviolent and insistent, demands it, but also doesn't help them escalate conflict."

Last week, California Democratic U.S. Senator Alex Padilla entered a press conference in Los Angeles, held by Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem. He was immediately tackled, handcuffed and detained. Speaking Tuesday on the Senate floor, Padilla emotionally recounted,

"I was forced to the ground, first on my knees and then flat on my chest. I was handcuffed and marched down a hallway ... If that is what the administration is willing to do to a United States senator for having the authority to simply ask a question, imagine what they'll do to any American who dares to speak up."

President Trump, Kristi Noem and Stephen Miller have proven over and over again that they will go to great lengths to silence their critics, which is all the more reason to speak out.

Amy Goodman is an American broadcast journalist, syndicated columnist, investigative reporter, and author. Her investigative journalism includes coverage of the East Timor independence movement, Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara, and Chevron Corporation's role in Nigeria. Since 1996, she has been the main host of Democracy Now!, a progressive global news program broadcast daily on radio, television and the Internet.

Denis Moynihan has worked with Democracy Now! since 2000. He is a bestselling author and a syndicated columnist with King Features. He lives in Colorado.

ICE's War on Home

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their homes, and the president and his cronies loudly announce their plans to suspend habeas corpus and throw dissenters in prison, whether they are citizens or not. Playing nice protects no one.

Last Thursday, just before the protests began, I walked across the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles, where I teach, to administer a final exam to my students. To prepare for the inauguration of the university's new chancellor, Julio Frenk, a former health secretary of Mexico, heavily armed members of the LAPD lined every path. Their guns were held across their bodies, ready to aim, and as I passed them I imagined a rookie officer, startled by the sound of a car backfiring or a branch snapping, shooting me in the head. When I arrived at my classroom, I asked my students if the police presence made them more anxious than the exam. They said they had a different fear. They're afraid ICE is going to raid their graduation.

Anahid Nersessian is an American writer and critic who served as the poetry editor of Granta Magazine. Her essays and reviews have appeared in The New Yorker, The New York Review of Books, The London Review of Books, The Paris Review, The Los Angeles Review of Books, Public Books, and New Left Review. In 2021 Nersessian's Keats's Odes: A Lover's Discourse was named one of the best books of the year by The Boston Globe. She is professor of literature at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Sonnet for the People

By Teresa Mei Chuc

My mother told me when the Vietnamese government took Father away at the Fall of Saigon, she was pregnant with me. Father fought in the Southern army that

was under the United States' control. Their strategy—divide and conquer us. We fled Vietnam in a refugee boat. In the sea, in Heaven we put our trust.

My father was imprisoned for nine years. Now flash forward, terror and ICE raids in our neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles, street vendors who sell flowers and fruits being

kidnapped by masked, armed men in unmarked cars, day laborers snatched from our Home Depot parking lots. To our streets were brought these wars, running for their lives, young children in tow.

This is not new, fascist, U.S. Empire, the state and the treatment of the people. Protest in peace while LAPD fires. On stolen land, no one is illegal.

Neighbors taken away in handcuffs while Gaza is bombed and the people starved



Protests erupt in Los Angeles over ICE raids,

using our tax dollars, dead bodies pile. Genocide in history's stone being carved.

Before our eyes as we scroll, babies die. The concrete of a building that was bombed, body parts scattered as we live a lie. Everything depends on how we respond.

U.S. marines deployed to L.A. streets. The government threatened by how much we take care of one another, our drum beats. We, the people, have the power TO BE.

Here, in L.A., in Vietnam, in Gaza 'round the world, "Solo el pueblo, salva

al pueblo."

The Political Prisoners Who Stopped a White Supremacist Attack

By Frances Madeson

An upcoming clemency hearing was scheduled for June 10 to determine the near-term fate of Christopher “Naeem” Trotter, a political prisoner who has been held captive for over 40 years as punishment for a spontaneous act of community self-defense inside prison walls.

On February 1, 1985, Trotter and another incarcerated man—John “Balagoon” Cole—led a rebellion within the prison now known as Pendleton Correctional Facility to protect a fellow prisoner, Lincoln “Lokmar” Love, who was being attacked with nightsticks by Indiana Department of Corrections prison guards. As Hammer and Hope recounts:

“According to Trotter and Cole, they fought several prison guards in self-defense and to protect Love from further beatings. To avoid being attacked themselves, they took two guards and a prison

just to get them off of him. They had his hands behind his back. ‘Why you keep beating that man like that with your sticks, even if he moves a little bit?’ He was like Rodney King moving a little bit, trying to get out of the way of all those hits.”

In the ensuing years he’s spoken on the phone with Trotter and Cole a couple of times, the men he credits with saving Love’s life. “We took their kin back down there to visit them. But, no, no way, I never went back inside,” he said.

On June 1, 2025, dozens of people came to Anderson, Indiana, in defense of Trotter and Cole. Those who answered the rallying call to uplift the sacrifices of the Pendleton 2 came from Georgia, Maryland, Missouri, California, Illinois, and beyond. The out-of-towners joined with Jones and dozens of Indianans at the government center in Anderson, the county seat of Madison County, to demonstrate that eyes beyond the state line are trained

Just weeks ago, the five-year anniversary of the murder of George Floyd thrust renewed questions about bystanders intervening to stop acts of state violence while they’re in process into the zeitgeist. In the film, Cole speaks about the anguish of the

organization of the Ku Klux Klan.

“These gentlemen have been in prison for over 40 something years, and you know, they were trying to stand up to protect another gentleman, and that gentleman was being harmed in such a way. And so they literally put themselves, their lives on the line, to help someone else,” she said.

“Everybody in this picture is human,” Dixon-Tatum said. Yet she’s concerned that there are bad actors working as guards and wardens who remain part of

Cole speaks about the anguish of the eyewitnesses who were not prepared to disrupt Derek Chauvin’s slow suffocation of Floyd, a heartache he didn’t have to suffer.

eyewitnesses who were not prepared to disrupt Derek Chauvin’s slow suffocation of Floyd, a heartache he didn’t have to suffer. Trotter declared himself in *They Stood Up*: “If I can be convicted for standing up and saving a person’s life, then convict me. But I know it was morally the right thing to do. And I will continue to fight, and I ask that you fight with me.”

Given these confluences so alive in the moment and the imminence of the clemency hearing, the defense committee decided it was finally time to bring the fight to ground zero.

“This is the county where this happened, and I think that’s the part we really need to stress,” Too Black told the rally. “We’ve done actions in the capital, we’ve shown the documentary across the world, but we’ve never really brought it here. But we’ve got to bring it here, because this is the place where they’ll be released.”

Tamie Dixon-Tatum, an Anderson city employee, told Truthout she would have gone to the rally even if she weren’t the director of the municipality’s Civil and Human Rights Department.

Another prison guard later testified that the guards who attacked Love were members of the Sons of Light, an offshoot or-

the picture. “Some of them were punished and removed from the prison system. Some of them are probably still there,” she said. “So, yeah, it’s scary.”

Michelle Smith, executive director of Missouri Justice Coalition, told Truthout she travelled from St. Louis to stand with the Pendleton 2 because the reality for Black men behind bars in Missouri is also very scary. Since 2023, her organization has been supporting the family of Othel Moore in the aftermath of his death. Moore was a Black man in a Missouri Department of Corrections prison who was assaulted by guards in a secure location where no fellow incarcerated people could possibly come to his aid.

“Othel was beaten severely with billy clubs, and then they restrained him, and they maced him in the face,” Smith said. “So he was subdued, he was shackled, and then they put a spit hood over his head, and he suffocated to death. And that is very similar to what happened with the Pendleton 2 case, or would have happened, if Cole and Trotter hadn’t stopped the guards. Because of that they saved Love’s life.”

Indiana is very similar to Missouri,
continued on next page ...



Holding images of John “Balagoon” Cole (left) and Christopher “Naeem” Trotter (right), known as “the Pendleton 2,” men who’ve been incarcerated with them over the past 40 years rally for their release.

“‘Why you keep beating that man like that with your sticks, even if he moves a little bit?’ He was like Rodney King moving a little bit, trying to get out of the way of all those hits.”

counselor hostage and negotiated with the prison. The hostages were released unharmed. No one died. Trotter was sentenced to an additional 142 years and Cole to an additional 84 years.”

Another prison guard later testified that the guards who attacked Love were members of the Sons of Light, an offshoot organization of the Ku Klux Klan. The fact that they continued to bring their truncheons down on Love’s head after having already subdued him is an undisputed fact of the case.

For people incarcerated alongside Love, the memories of the attack cut deep. The blood spilled that day has never really been stanching according to Rodney “Big R” Jones, who witnessed the prison guards’ attack from the cell across from Love’s.

Just days before our interview, Jones had a pacemaker implanted. Nonetheless, he exerted himself to share his memory of the 1985 attack and uprising, even though actively recalling those events takes its toll. He is no longer in prison, but the effects of witnessing the guards’ brutality against his neighbor, which are traumatic, are knitted with memory.

“Every time I talk about my life on that day, it’s like I’m looking at it,” Jones told Truthout. He said he saw the guards, whom he calls “soldiers,” rush Love with their “sticks,” and he recounted seeing the blood gushing out of Love’s head where they’d split his skull.

“I had tears in my eyes,” he said. “I was yelling at them to ‘give me some of that’

on local prosecutors, judges, and the clemency process as a whole, in advance of the parole board’s meeting on June 10 to consider Trotter’s clemency application.

National awareness has been roused in part by the 2023 release of *They Stood Up*, a documentary film that tells the mortifying story of what befell the Pendleton 2 after rescuing Love. There were months of routine assaults, months of being fully fettered (shackled by both hands and feet) and decades somehow surviving in solitary confinement. Too Black, one of the documentary’s co-directors and a member of the Pendleton 2 Defense Committee that formed in 2022, told the crowd, “We’re here because we want to save two human lives that the state is hell-bent on ending and exterminating in a quiet hole all by themselves because of what they inspire in us. Because what they inspire in us is heroism.”

When the guards attacked Trotter and Cole, they fought back, which led to the hostage situation, Too Black recounted. “But no one died,” he said. “Yet still they got 200 years for it.”

The defense committee is pulling out all the stops ahead of the June 10 hearing, including most urgently asking for signatories to a letter of support.

Another defense committee member told Truthout they’re looking to American Indian Movement (AIM) political prisoner Leonard Peltier’s recent release as a paradigm for their campaign, which like Peltier’s has to overcome entrenched institutional vindictiveness.

Monster

By Steppenwolf

Written in 1969 during the American war in Vietnam the lyrics still ring true, perhaps resonate more than ever.

Once the religious, the hunted and weary
Chasing the promise of freedom and hope
Came to this country to build a new vision
Far from the reaches of kingdom and pope
Like good Christians, some would burn the witches
Later some got slaves to gather riches

But still from near and far to seek America
They came by thousands to court the wild
And she just patiently smiled and bore a child
To be their spirit and guiding light

And once the ties with the crown had been broken
Westward in saddle and wagon it went
And 'til the railroad linked ocean to ocean
Many the lives which had come to an end
While we bullied, stole and bought our a homeland
We began the slaughter of the red man

But still from near and far to seek America
They came by thousands to court the wild

And she just patiently smiled and bore a child
To be their spirit and guiding light

The blue and grey they stomped it
They kicked it just like a dog
And when the war over
They stuffed it just like a hog

And though the past has its share of injustice
Kind was the spirit in many a way
But its protectors and friends have been sleeping
Now it's a monster and will not obey

(Suicide)
The spirit was freedom and justice
And its keepers seem generous and kind
It's leaders were supposed to serve the country
But now they won't pay it no mind
'Cause the people grew fat and got lazy
And now their vote is a meaningless joke
They babble about law and order
But it's all just an echo of what they've been told
Yeah, there's a monster on the loose
It's got our heads into a noose
And it just sits there watchin'

Our cities have turned into jungles
And corruption is stranglin' the land



The police force is watching the people
And the people just can't understand
We don't know how to mind our own business
'Cause the whole world's got to be just like us
Now we are fighting a war over there
No matter who's the winner
We can't pay the cost

'Cause there's a monster on the loose
It's got our heads into a noose
And it just sits there watching

(America)
America where are you now?
Don't you care about your sons and daughters?
Don't you know we need you now
We can't fight alone against the monster

Political Prisoners

... continued from previous page

Smith said, in terms of how anti-Black racism operates inside and outside of its prisons.

"Indiana's a Klan state. In Missouri, it's Proud Boys and Oath Keepers," she said. "Plenty of times I've been on the phone with men on the inside and heard the guards calling them the N-word. Are we tired of these injustices? Of course we are. So even from two states away, we're going to keep on fighting and advocating for these two men to come home," she said.

Representatives from the Atlanta-based National Black Food & Justice Alliance told Truthout that they came to the rally for the Pendleton 2 because both the food system and the legal system are designed to uphold white supremacy. Their organization's analysis is that police brutality, police violence, and the criminal legal system are all inherently violent in the same ways that the food system is, arguing that they are designed to kill Black people.

Underscoring that reality, Love never received any grace from the system that had dehumanized and brutalized him. He died from COVID in 2020, still captive, 1 of 143 people to succumb to the virus in Indiana prisons that year. Incarcerated Indianans died at a rate even higher than the coronavirus-skewed national average, researchers found.

Erica Caines, from the Baltimore chapter of Black Alliance for Peace, told Truthout she'd traveled to Anderson, Indiana, as part of her organization's commitment to freeing political prisoners because "of our understanding that resistance breeds repression." She likened the Pendleton 2 to journalist Mumia Abu Jamal, Black Panther Party member Jamil Al-Amin (formerly known as H. Rap Brown), and AIM member Leonard Peltier—all longtime captives of the state whose liberation Black Alliance for Peace has struggled for.

"In any war, you go and get your people back," Caines said. "You negotiate for your people."

There's a discipline involved in being part of a Black anti-imperialist, internationalist organization whose focus is to bring back the Black radical peace perspective, she explained.

"What's embodied by Balagoon and Naeem is the self-determination, the self-defense aspects we call for," Caines told Truthout. "What does it mean to forge your own way with your back against the wall, when you



Michelle Smith, who directs the Missouri for Justice Coalition, traveled from St. Louis, Missouri, to stand with "the Pendleton 2" on June 1, 2025, at a rally in Madison County, Indiana. Photo: Frances Madeson

know you can almost touch freedom, but you will risk it all for your person?"

At the time of the rebellion, Trotter only had three months remaining of his already onerous four-year sentence.

"That's the emphasis for our being out here," Caines said. "We thought it important to show Anderson that these men have our support." And, she added, "We can bring more people back if need be."

Anderson city employee Dixon-Tatum sees a chance for the Indiana Department of Corrections to repair past wrongs.

"I want to say that Madison County is a place where hope still lives," she said. "There were some bad officers, and people like to say 'allegedly,' but it's actually been proven at this point. This is about doing right."

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Frances Madeson has written about liberation struggles in the U.S. and abroad for Ms. Magazine, VICE, YES! Magazine, The Progressive Magazine, Tablet Magazine, American Theatre Magazine and Indian Country Today. She is also the author of the comic novel *Cooperative Village*.

Dreams of Escape

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know how it feels to be vulnerable."

I look at her in silence, weighing words. Vice President Kamala Harris' loss is an open wound. Some words are salt rubbed in.

"Yes, racism. Yes, sexism." I nodded. "I wanted to vote for Kamala Harris, but she was not on the ballot." She turned and stared a hole through me. "The real Kamala was replaced by a poll-tested, Republican-lite Kamala." I turned to her. "She chose to be a puppet. Why? Our political imagination is limited by what we think white people will accept. It's why we didn't fuck with Obama until he drew large white crowds. It's why our elders in South Carolina chose Biden over Bernie. And it's why Harris ran as a Republican-lite."

'When America is gone, then they'll know how it feels to be vulnerable.'

"That's not fair," she stubbed out the cigarette and pulled back her braids. She shook her head, no no no.

"The core of the Black Freedom Struggle is democratic and communitarian," I lowered my voice. "We want freedom from fear and poverty, We want freedom from bigotry. We want the freedom to choose how to define freedom. And we want that for everyone else." I opened up my hands like flowers. "Maybe we need to support leaders who share our values."

"America isn't ready for that," she slapped her hands, ready to leave. "This country hates us. Always has. Always will."

I tried to say something, but she stepped down and walked away. The sun was setting, and long shadows filled the street. The slave folktale flashed in my head. Can we fly again? I watched her, and for a moment, I swear, her silhouette looked like bird with folded wings.

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Nicholas Powers is the author of five books including *Black Psychedelic Revolution: From Trauma to Liberation* (North Atlantic Press, 2025).

40 Days of Compassion and Solidarity



The fast was the brainchild of veteran Phil Tottenham (right). Behind him, Mike Ferner carries the Veterans For Peace flag. Photo: Ellen Davidson

By Mike Ferner

On May 22, 2025, several members of Veterans For Peace, along with some allies, kicked off the 40-day, 250-calorie/day “Veterans & Allies Fast for Gaza.”

At the core were a handful of VFP members who travelled to New York to witness in front of the U.S. Mission to the U.N., across the street from U.N. headquarters. Hundreds of people started signing up to participate around the country, and to our surprise, also in Italy, Germany, Ireland, Canada, Hong Kong and Australia. We’re also finding out there are many more participants, likely double the 800 people registered, who have joined the fast.

People were encouraged to participate for any length of time, doing the type of fast they chose.

The 40-day fast ended with a bang on June 30 in New York and also in Washington, D.C. In New York, nearly 200 people, including a car caravan full of fasters from Maine, converged on the U.S. Mission for a morning news conference. Several fasters spoke behind a huge banner proclaiming opposition to the genocide in Gaza.

They then solemnly processed to Israel’s Mission to the U.N. on Second Avenue, where they blocked the street with a well-organized die-in as names of children killed in Gaza were read. Twenty-eight people were arrested in that action.

Back at the U.S. Mission, I arrived after everyone had left. When I bought the cow’s blood that morning to throw on the window, I had no idea it came frozen in a large plastic bottle! It took over an hour to shave it down and

melt it enough to fit in a gallon paint can. After splashing it on the window of the U.S. Mission, right where Trump and Vance’s portraits hung in the background, I was arrested.

Over this same period, in Washington, D.C., the Interfaith Action for Palestine (IAP) brought together a coalition of faith-rooted activist organizations for a critical intervention to counter Christians United for Israel (CUFI)—the largest “pro-Israel” organization in the United States.

Only a week into the effort, I emailed those registered to thank them, ask where they were from and what kind of fast they were doing.

Repliers wrote briefly about their motivation and the communities formed around the fast. People discovered it was a way to lessen the pain, anger and frustration they felt from the live-streamed genocide in Gaza, while enjoying the blessings found in Dr. King’s “Beloved Community.”

Here’s a small sampling of their email responses.

Tony, Utah: I am 84 years old. I started the fast on May 22 and plan to fast for 40 days. I will take Fathers’ Day off, so I will go one day longer.

Mike, Cincinnati: Thank you so much for inviting us to the fast. It is very meaningful to us.

I’m doing the full 40 days and fasting all day with only water and coffee, eating one meal at night. Yesterday we had friends over for a Buddhist meditation, reflecting on Gaza, the fast and how it is connecting us to you all in NYC and all of the other fasting participants and how much it is bringing awareness to the terrible plight of the citizens of

Gaza and Palestine. We reflected on how we are connected together not just by communication but physically in our lives.

Leah, Cambridge, MA: I’m doing the whole 40 days. I’ve opted for a timed fast, like Ramadan, fasting all day with one meal at night. And I’ve reached out to friends to try to create a chain. So far, three friends have each signed up for a few days, and on those days they fast in my place.

Thanks for everything.

Joyce, Akron: 3 of us are doing 40-day fast. I am doing 250 for the first 14 days and 600 calories for remainder of time because I lost 20 lbs in the first 2 weeks and am 78 years old

Trish, Maine: My name is Patricia Corkins and I am a retired Army ISG. I have a small farm here in Maine and spend much of my free time making banners and signs for MVPR (Maine Voices for Palestinian Rights) and attending protests.

I am doing the 250-calorie fast, eating a single meal after

sundown. It is Day 16 and I have lost 13lb, 8% of my body weight. My daughter works full time and is doing a 750-calorie fast, also Ramadan style. We both plan to continue until Day 40 if possible.

The rest of our crew are doing all of the various fasts. Little groups have formed to cover the days according to what each person can do. As a coalition, we plan to run, walk or crawl to the end and then begin the next stage, whatever that might be.

We have a chat set up for daily check-ins, recipe exchange, health tips, and announcements of anything going on to lift this action. We make contact with the local media and have had multiple interviews regarding our commitment.

We have held stand-outs, silent matches, a die-in (20 of us got arrested at that one and we got a lot of local coverage!) and, of course, we have spread the word to family, friends, and personal social media. We have a rally and march on 8 June in Bangor for ‘Let Gaza Live’ with speakers including an elected official and at least 2 fasters.

I am honored to be standing with you and with Gaza! Free Palestine!

Janette, Germany: I am writing from Germany, where I do the fasting since the beginning. From tomorrow on, I will switch every day with a friend, she is the only one who wants to join. But I also wrote an article

for Swiss anthroposophical magazine, which will be published this week. It tells about the campaign and why I joined. Thanks for organizing the fast!

Joshua, Edmonton, Alberta: Sending you good wishes and strength for the remaining days of the fast. We are a small cluster of 16 doing the fast in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada).

Bikshan Cheng, Hong Kong: Thank you for your information and your effort to host such a great event! I gathered a small group of another 3 trying out a chain fast for 40 days as well.

Many thanks to you and your teams. May God bless you.

Nasreen, South Africa: I’m Nasreen from South Africa and I started the fast before I even registered... but have not kept count... I will be continuing until aid is let into Gaza... I’m doing the Ramadan fast sunrise to sunset.

Additional heartfelt, eloquent words came from **Kathy Kelly**, a veteran of many such fasts for peace, who agreed to make her 94-pound frame go through one more.

“When the Fast for Gaza began, we had just learned that an Israeli airstrike, using weapons almost certainly provided by the U.S., had killed all but one of Dr. Ala al-Najjar’s nine children, and gravely injured her spouse, Dr. Hamdi al-Najjar. Two weeks later, he died.

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Photo: Ellen Davidson



Photo: Ellen Davidson



Conscientious objector Joy Metzler was one of the main organizers of the fast. Photo: Ellen Davidson

The Moral Imperative to Show Up Anyway

By Leah Hager Cohen

What good will it do? This is the question people ask upon learning I'm participating in a 40-day solidarity Fast for Gaza. I learned of the fast—organized by Veterans for Peace with 48 co-sponsor groups—just a day before it was set to begin on May 22. With little time to research, weigh the practicalities, or talk it over with friends, I committed immediately, impulsively. That is if it can be called impulsive when, like so many bearing witness to the horrific, entirely avoidable, and ever worsening suffering of Gazans, I have been anguished by my own helplessness, my own uselessness, for over 20 months now.

For me, the obligation to act is inextricable from my Jewish identity—in two distinct ways. First, it resonates with the Judaism that nourishes me: from Rabbi Tarfon of the 1st century, who taught, “It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it,” to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of the 20th century, who taught, “In a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible.”

Second, the fact that the eth-

nic cleansing of Palestinians—according to U.N. human rights chief Volker Türk, B'Tselem (Israel's leading human rights organization), and others—is being carried out in the name of protecting Jews implicates me directly. I have no question that I am responsible for doing something.

Yet I do not have a good answer to the question of how voluntary fasting might help alleviate the suffering of others. Almost five weeks into the fast, I find myself pondering it daily.

My mind goes to Simone Weil, the French philosopher, activist and mystic who, in 1943, at the age of 34, had a fatal heart attack. The coroner determined the cause of death to be self-starvation, writing, “The deceased did kill and slay herself by refusing to eat.” Weil died in a sanitarium near London after months of refusing to consume more calories a day than the rations allowed her comrades in occupied Europe. Self-denial in solidarity with those suffering had been a felt imperative since childhood. At age five, during World War I, she gave up sugar when told soldiers at the Western front had none. For Weil, these actions seem to have been less about their utility than about a profound, spiritual call to pay attention. “Attention,”

rare, compassionate and sometimes euphoric community of good souls who cared deeply and were richly rewarded. The suffering persists and so will we!

Mike Ferner was one of the organizers of the Veterans and Allies Fast for Gaza and is a long time member of Veterans For Peace. He fasted with the VFP contingent at the U.N. but stopped at 21 days when he was admitted to the Manhattan VA hospital due to underlying health conditions.

she famously wrote, “taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love.”

I am as moved by the stubborn fervor of her need to act as I am unsettled by the extremity of her actions. And I continue to puzzle over the questions raised by her life and death, among them: What good is self-deprivation?

I do know that numbness, whether caused by compassion fatigue or a sense that our efforts are futile, is of no use to anyone. As new horrors take over the headlines and competing tragedies mount, we must ward against the danger of letting ourselves go numb. One effect of fasting is that it keeps me constantly somatically uncomfortable. Although my hunger pangs are paltry beside the agony of those enduring forced starvation, they function as a quickening agent, a pricker keeping me awake. They are an antidote to numbness. An invitation to be creative, to lift up my head, to look to what others are doing.



Photo: Ellen Davidson

For most of us, most of the time, it is a bitter fact that in the face of great suffering there is little we can do. When that suffering is human-wrought and inflicted by the mighty, how can those of us who do not individually wield much power respond?

We can join together, to march and donate and boycott and sing and write letters and give testimony and carry signs and hold hands and pitch tents and fill the public square—city halls, train stations, lunch counters, plazas, parks, intersections, bridges—with our bodies. For most of us, in the end, our bodies—our brains and our hearts, yes, but also the poor, rude matter of our sinew and blood and bones—are what we have to offer. It's the one thing we all possess, the one thing we can all choose to put on the line to

try to heal what's broken.

Which leads to another question: What is the best way to put our bodies to use?

My mind goes to Noor Abdalla, the wife of Columbia University graduate student and Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil, who was held in ICE detention for 104 days. In a recent New Yorker profile, Dr. Abdalla, a dentist and a new mother, speaks about her past involvement in student activism, demonstrating as an undergrad against the Syrian war. “What can you do?” she is quoted as saying. “You go to protests, you plan vigils, you make sure that people keep talking about something that you care about and something that's important.”

If “What can you do?” evokes a sense of helplessness, the rest of her quote underscores the moral imperative to show up anyway. “Make sure that people keep talking” chimes with a tactic encouraged by the organizers of solidarity fasts: “fast loudly.” Take photos, record vid-

Gazans under Israeli blockade); partake in a time-based, dawn-to-dusk fast, like Ramadan; or initiate a chain in which a group of people share the 40 days, taking turns as the designated faster. I chose the last. The night before the fast began, I wrote to a circle of friends, inviting them to join me. One accepted, a few declined. Most didn't respond at all. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't disappointed.

But here's the thing. When we act on faith, when we ask for help, when we try oh so clumsily to be useful, there's never any guarantee our intentions will translate, be understood, or bring about desired results. I can live with that. After all, what's the alternative? To refrain from action?

Then something unexpected happened. Over the ensuing weeks, word kept rippling out. More and more people joined the fast, both globally—the Fast for Gaza website shows a rolling count of those officially registered—and in my own little chain, which has grown from a lonely single link into three and then seven and now a dozen. A few of them I've never even met, and now we are in community together.

My mind goes to the No Kings demonstrations, where it's estimated as many as 5 million people showed up, many of them first-time protestors. And to the growing numbers of people showing up at immigration court to accompany the vulnerable. And to the utterly unprecedented shift in Congress toward ending unconditional military support for Israel.

Cynics will scoff, “What good is a protest, a vote, a fast? They're mere drops in the ocean.” But as the Pete Seeger song reminds us, “drops of water turn a mill.”

We don't need to have answers to every question. We don't need to know how they will be received in order to make our offerings. We just need to feel what we feel, to soften our eyes and our jaws and our shoulders, to remain. This is the work. To pay attention, to look and look and not look away. To make ourselves vulnerable, to show up, to employ whatever tools we have at hand—our bodies, our hearts, our fervor, our doubts, our anguish, our stubbornness, our humility, our clear-eyed understanding of our relative uselessness and our unshakable, irrational belief that what we do nevertheless matters, holds meaning, might even, in time, translate.

Leah Hager Cohen is a Cognoscentitributor. She has written seven novels and five works of nonfiction, including I Don't Know. She is the Barrett Professor of Creative Writing at the College of the Holy Cross.

40 Days

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“Instead of stopping Israel's genocide, major governments partnered with Israel. Day after day, the carnage continues. The fast has helped us insist that peace and justice is possible; it starts with trying to protect the lives of innocent people while refusing, utterly refusing, to condone child sacrifice.”

Those of us who participated in the fast felt connected to a

Calls to GI Hotlines Rise as Service Members Consider Defying Trump's Orders

Conscientious objector applications surge under Trump

By Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg

As the country tumbles towards fascism, some members of the U.S. military have struggled with a choice: defy illegal orders, or participate in the dismantling of American democracy.

In June, over the objections of local leaders, including Gov. Gavin Newsom, President Donald Trump called up the National Guard and the U.S. Marines to quell protests in Los Angeles over immigration raids. That month, calls to the GI Rights Hotline spiked. The hotline provides information on military discharges and related issues; all calls are confidential. The hotline, which is jointly administered by a large consortium of nonprofit organizations, connects callers with resource counselors and experienced volunteers.

The consortium includes groups like Quaker House and The Center on Conscience & War, which assists service members with applications for conscientious objector status and has seen a similar uptick in requests for help. So far this year, the center has helped 30 service members submit applications—more than they typically submit in an entire year. A high percentage of these applications are usually successfully accepted, according to the center.

Steve Woolford, a counselor with the hotline, told Truthout in an email that his office, which is just one of the multiple sites that staff the hotline, received over 300 calls in June, a 94% increase in calls from the previous June.

“Overall callers have shared serious concerns that the president is moving the country away from a representative democracy altogether,” Woolford

“They are absolutely petrified of being put in a position in which they are the vehicle to advance further authoritarianism, and the proto-fascism that we’re seeing,” Betancourt told Truthout. “There is absolutely that fear that they’re going to be the pawns in this chess game that brings about the further expansion of authoritarianism.”

Betancourt said some service members fear the military will become Trump’s domestic police force, potentially in violation of the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878. He says this is a particularly fraught pros-



Veterans arrested on at the U.S. Capitol on June 13, the eve of Trump’s birthday parade.

pect for Latino personnel, who could be deployed to carry out Trump’s anti-immigrant agenda. Thousands of immigrants enlist in the military each year. In fiscal year 2024, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services naturalized more than 16,000 service members—a 34% increase from the previous year. Of those naturalized between fiscal years 2020 and 2024, the top five countries of origin were the Philippines, Jamaica, Mexico, Nige-

ria, and Ghana.

after Trump sent the National Guard to Los Angeles, several callers asked if they could wear face coverings if they were deployed to Los Angeles. He said they didn’t fear protesters knowing their identity—they feared their children would.

“They were worried that their children would see them and recognize them for what they were doing,” he added.

Concerns about being implicated in Trump’s attempts to use the military as a police force extend to family members of active duty personnel as well, according to Sarah Streyder, whose spouse is in the military. Streyder is the executive director of Secure Families Initiative, a nonpartisan group of military families that advocates for diplomatic solutions to global conflicts.

Many families believe that Trump is transforming the military into a “scary domestic policing force,” she said.

“Those lines are being blurred between

political, there’s no getting around that. I can’t believe whoever fell for the lie that the military is apolitical, but with Trump, it feels dangerously political, like we’re being used as pawns. We’re the saber that he’s rattling.”

Members of the military have options, albeit limited, to avoid actions that conflict with their conscience. Service members have the right to refuse an illegal order. But in reality, those who dissent can experience loss of benefits and pay, reduction in rank, and imprisonment.

James M. Branum, an attorney with the National Lawyers Guild Military Law Task Force, says a service member may be able to head off any potential issues by using their unit’s open-door policy, whereby a service member can meet with their commander. Army regulations direct commanders to publish an open-door policy although the specific procedures are determined by the commander. The regulations state that an open-door policy “allows members of the command to present facts, concerns, and problems of a personal or professional nature or other issues that the Soldier has been unable to resolve.”

Branum suggests they express their concerns preemptively, before orders come down.

“What I’m encouraging is, have a conversation,” he said. “Say, ‘I don’t want to be disrespectful. I don’t want to hurt morale of this organization, but I have serious concerns about this deployment. I’ve heard we may be going in, and so if you have any latitude on who goes on this deployment, please don’t send me.’”

However, if service members reach the point where they must refuse orders they believe are illegal, the terrain is “a little bit complicated,” Branum said. If a service member refuses an order they can be court-martialed, where a military judge rules on the legality of the order—a largely subjective determination.

In the early 2000s, several American soldiers refused to fight in Iraq because they believed it was an immoral and illegal war. Camilo Mejia Castillo, a U.S. National Guardsman, served one tour of duty in Iraq and refused to return. He was convicted of desertion and sentenced to a year in prison, a reduction in rank, and given a bad conduct discharge, which can result in loss of veterans benefits. In another case, Abdullah Webster refused to deploy to Iraq and was convicted of failing to obey commands from his superior and missing his brigade’s movements. Shortly before he was due to retire, he was sentenced to 14 months in prison. He also lost his pension and received a bad conduct discharge.

“When the military starts pushing the boundaries, pushing people to do things that are really outside the scope of what it has historically done in the past, that often leads service members to start asking broader questions,” Branum told Truthout. “Not just about the immediate deployment or the immediate issue in front of them, but about the nature of military service itself.”

Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg is a reporter based in New Jersey. Follow her on X, formerly Twitter: @elizabethweill.

law enforcement, immigration enforcement on one side and the military on the other,” Streyder told Truthout. “We fear that that’s going to erode our relationships with civilian neighbors. That’s the kind of fear we are hearing across the board, whether you are in California or Massachusetts or Alaska or Florida. I’m stationed overseas, and I have that fear.”

In addition to immigration raids, some service members have also opposed Trump’s changes to internal policies, such as his ban on transgender people serving in the military and the elimination of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs.

An airman who recently separated from the Air Force told Truthout that cutting DEI programs made her feel like “they hated me as a person, as a woman and as a woman of color.”

“I went and talked to a chaplain about how the rollbacks in DEI were scaring me,” she said. “He goes, ‘Oh, well, did you know that DEI actually harms minorities like you?’”

The airman’s spouse is still in the military and asked that Truthout not publish her name to protect her spouse from retaliation.

She says by the time she left the Air Force, a few months into Trump’s second term, “it was very, very bad vibes.”

“Trump is bringing such a toxicity to the military,” she said. “The military is

‘Trump is bringing such a toxicity to the military. ... [I]t feels dangerously political, like we’re being used as pawns. We’re the saber that he’s rattling.’

told Truthout in an email. “These callers believe that the military will determine what the United States becomes by deciding which side to follow. For them, having service members refuse to turn their backs on the constitution is the safeguard against martial law and dictatorship.

U.S. Air Force airman Juan Betancourt said his colleagues in the armed forces have expressed similar concerns. Betancourt is expressing his own views and not speaking on behalf of the military or the Department of Defense.

ria, and Ghana.

“They feel they’re betraying themselves,” said Betancourt, himself an immigrant from Colombia.

Betancourt is on his way out of the military. He applied to be a conscientious objector last year, spurred by the U.S. backing of Israel’s genocide in Gaza. After a prolonged bureaucratic delay, he says his commander agreed to administratively separate him.

Richard Morgan, the executive director of the Center on Conscience & War, said

At Drone War Protest, Small Is Beautiful

By Nick Mottern and Toby Blomé

I looked back over my shoulder, and was astounded to see Toby Blomé lying on the pavement, blocking a car trying to drive into the west gate of Holloman Air Force Base. Holloman is the home of the largest drone war training center in the U.S., graduating over 700 killer drone operators a year. In a call to conscience, Toby was interrupting the routine of the base, and was also demonstrating how no more than a dozen protesters can get people talking on a military base and in a military town. Alamogordo, N.M., is Holloman's hometown.

We had come to Alamogordo on Sunday, April 20, 2025 for a week-long "Shut Down Drone Warfare" protest, the third such protest in three years.

Each day during commute hours that week, we stood along Highway 70. Stretching flat, hot and dusty across the vast Tularosa Basin, running west from Alamogordo it went right past the main entrance to Holloman. Holding signs and banners, our themes connected the dots between militarism and ecocide, climate chaos, genocide in Gaza, political indoctrination and misinformation propaganda as well as the immorality and illegality of drone warfare.

This year we were determined to emphasize U.S. complicity in the horrific genocide in Gaza. U.S. drones are being used to aid and abet horrific war crimes against women, children and families by the Israeli military.

We called for an end to drone killing, an end to shipments of weapons to Israel and an end to war. Hoping to persuade base personnel as they sped to and from work, we received regular gestures of support, such as waves, peace signs, and honks from base personnel and other highway travelers, but most frequently from large commercial 18-wheelers.

As was the custom of the protest, on Wednesday we planned a direct action, blocking an entrance to the base and holding the blockade for as long as possible. Toby suggested that we go to the base's west gate instead of the main entrance as we had done in past actions. At 6 a.m. on Wednesday, 12 of us arrived at the west gate. As the sun rose bright over the Sacramento Mountains, we walked across the four-lane highway and quickly set up our signs, banners and Veterans For Peace flag directly across the driveway entrance to the gate, immediately creating a nonviolent, human blockade.

Toby was the only one who felt that she could fully risk arrest. There were five others who were willing to take a lower risk, and participate in the human blockade until county officers arrived to order us to disperse. Toby, standing in the middle, held the large sign "HOLLOMAN, NO DRONES 4 GENOCIDE." The others on either side held banners: "CEASEFIRE for the Children" and "Every 15 Minutes A Child in Gaza is Killed."

Unaware, all of us were standing on the "federal side"

of a new blue line painted expressly for us. In addition to the banners and signs, we each had small signs on our chests with the name and age of a young Gaza child killed in the genocide since October 7, 2023. Thus far there are well over 17,000 children killed since the Israeli genocide began. That's without taking into account the tens of thousands of unidentified other children buried under the rubble.

Soon a black sedan pulled into the short driveway, stopping just short of our blockade, unable to pass. None of us moved. MPs came from inside the base to talk with Toby as a line of cars and pickup trucks of base personnel began to back up on the highway. Toward the end of the jammed-up line, some drivers began to pull out of line, crossing into the eastbound lanes to head back to the base's main gate.

We were told that we were trespassing on federal property, and that we faced federal trespassing charges. At that point, those flanking Toby with banners stepped for-



ward onto Otero County property. Toby remained on the federal side of the line and continued to talk with the MPs, explaining the need to stop drone killing.

An MP warned Toby of her pending arrest and she immediately lay down in front of the black car, while the quartet of banner holders moved to the back of the car so that it could not back up. Meanwhile, more cars were getting out of the backed-up line and heading for the main gate.

Nick Mottern is co-coordinator with Kathy Kelly of BanKillerDrones.org and is an organizer of the Merchants of Death War Crimes Tribunal. He is a member of Veterans For Peace.

Toby Blomé works with Ban Killer Drones and as a lead organizer with CODEPINK Women for Peace.

Soldiers

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use the armed forces. Last month, the Marines were deployed against peaceful protesters in Los Angeles. "And now we have military in our streets," Kim said, "and that's not where you're supposed to see them." She still fears she could be asked to be party to it.

She's speaking out as part of a campaign launched by About Face, a veterans' group which today—July Fourth—is launching a "Right to Refuse" campaign arguing that service members deserve the right to refuse unlawful or immoral orders, in the hope that Congress will pass a law offering stronger protections to service members who do so. Founded by Iraq War veterans concerned about the immorality of that conflict, About Face has in recent years heard from service members with objections to sending weapons to Israel, dismantling DEI within the military, and especially, recently, the prospect of being pawns in Trump's authoritarian fantasy, whether in the crackdown in Los Angeles or the military parade in Washington, D.C.

Brittany Ramos DeBarros, organizing director of About Face, is an Afghanistan veteran who once faced court-martial for speaking out against that war while still in uniform. She acknowledges that Congress isn't going to pass this law quickly enough to deal with the current constitutional crises—if at all—but she sees it as a rallying point for military communities. Families and service members need support in trying to navigate this moment, she says, and many are finding each other and organizing. From her own experience, she knows that the military can make you feel crazy if you disagree with it.

"So I think it's profound," she said, "that people are organically breaking out of that enough to start talking to each other about, 'I'm really concerned about this. What are you thinking you're gonna do?'" DeBarros says many are wondering what is in their own best interests—but also what is the most moral choice: Is it better to resign publicly or "better to have more people within the military when that moment comes who are willing to stand up and do something and do the right thing? Which is a complicated question for people to sit with." On the one hand, service members risk losing their benefits and going to prison if they refuse orders; but if they don't refuse unlawful orders, she said, many will "live with the moral injury and consequences of carrying out something that

they knew was wrong."

Laura Dickinson, a law professor at George Washington University with extensive knowledge of the military, national security, and the law of armed conflict, said "the deployment of the federalized National Guard and the Marines to Los Angeles is quite unprecedented and has broken norms in our constitutional tradition. In our tradition, the United States federal government has been very cautious about using the federal military domestically for law enforcement purposes. It's norm busting and very concerning to people in the military." Deploying the military against Americans could fracture that trust terribly, Dickinson suggested: "We are seeing concerns about this from within the military now."

Dickinson points out that the deployment of the Marines and federalized National Guard in Los Angeles—they're still there—isn't "manifestly unlawful"; the state of California has been litigating it. DeBarros also noted that "there's not a clear consensus amongst lawyers around what right now constitutes technically legal orders and what constitutes illegal orders." But even if a service member faces an obviously unconstitutional order, it's not clear what she should do. Defying the U.S. military is one of the most intimidating prospects someone can face. Disobedient soldiers can be court-martialed and face prison. Yet if they do carry out unlawful orders, the fact that they were "just following orders" is no defense in a criminal trial. All this puts military personnel in an untenable situation.

Another fear is that Trump might invoke the Insurrection Act—which allows the president to deploy the military if there is unrest "against the authority of the United States"—simply to quash protests. The Marines aren't trained in policing, DeBarros points out: "Especially people in the military understand that there's probably no less equipped branch of the federal government to do de-escalation work than the Marines," who are trained for warfare, where the rules of engagement are very different. Trump fantasized during his first term about shooting protesters in the leg—a prime example, Dickinson notes, of what police are not allowed to do.

"I may not have joined the military out of the most patriotic of reasons," said Kim, the Air Force member, "but I still raised my right hand and swore an oath to the Constitution to defend it from all enemies foreign and domestic. But the American people are not the Constitution's domestic enemies."

Liza Featherstone is a contributing editor at The New Republic and the author of *Divining Desire: Focus Groups and the Culture of Consultation* (2018).



Young and Old Will Suffer the Consequences

Kaiserslautern: Protests against U.S. wars and the Ramstein base as a hub for arms deliveries.

By Gitta Düperthal

Gitta Düperthal: With the slogan “Stop Ramstein Air Base,” the anti-war movement will protest against the U.S.’s war-making this Saturday. What is the reason for this rally against the military base near Kaiserslautern?

Ann Wright: As the largest U.S. air base in Europe, Ramstein is a symbol of the use of European military bases for attacks around the world. The military base is allegedly being used to transfer weapons to Israel and also to fuel the Iran war with U.S. bombs. Ramstein serves as a logistical hub for many of the bloody U.S. wars. The air base is relevant to the U.S. war machine. It is important that the German public stands up against this—and does not accept that the U.S. continues to act as it has done so far.

SGD: You’re at the peace camp in Kaiserslautern. What’s the atmosphere like there?

the decency and backbone to stand up to him. The 5% of economic output has to come from somewhere: it will affect the future of people and their children, for whose education there will no longer be any money. Young and old people will suffer because health and welfare systems are impoverished. Europe’s rulers agreed to support their arms companies and those of the USA with taxpayers’ money because they believe the propaganda they themselves spread that Russia is a threat to all of Europe. Yes, Russia invaded Ukraine: but that can be no reason to more than double military budgets in all European countries.

Apart from the alleged Russian threat, U.S. peace movement participating in the current mass protests against the Trump administration?

AW: If the Trump administration bombs Iran, it will endanger national security. It’s a bitter irony that it’s doing so at a time when millions of people in more than 2,000 cities are protesting against the deployment of military forces to the U.S. border and the detention of migrants. However, it will only spur even more people to resist.

GD: What are the connections between



‘I Want a Death that the World Will Hear’

Journalist assassinated by Israel for telling the truth

By Caitlin Johnstone

Israel assassinated a photojournalist in Gaza in an airstrike targeting her family’s home on Wednesday, the day after it was announced that a documentary she appears in would premiere in Cannes next month.

Her name was Fatima Hassouna. Nine members of her family were also reportedly killed in the bombing. She was going to get married in a few days.

The documentary is titled *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk*, and it’s about Israel’s crimes in Gaza.

In an Instagram post from August of last year, Hassouna wrote the following:

“If I die, I want a loud death. I don’t want to be just breaking news, or a number in a group; I want a death that the world will hear, an impact that will remain through time, and a timeless image that cannot be buried by time or place.”

Hassouna said she viewed her camera as a weapon to change the world and defend her family, making the following statements in a video shared by Middle East Eye:

“As Fatima, I believe that the image and the camera are weapons. So I consider my camera to be my rifle. So many times, in so many situations, I tell my friends, Come and see, it’s not bullets that we load into a rifle. Okay, I’m going to put a memory card into the camera. This is the camera’s bullet, the memory card. It changes the world and defends me. It shows the world what is happening to me and what’s happening to others. So I used to consider this my weapon, that I defend myself with it. And so that my family won’t be forgotten. And so I can document people’s stories, so that my family’s stories too don’t just vanish into thin air.”

Israel saw Hassouna’s camera as a weapon too, apparently.

As Ryan Grim observed on X:

“For this to have been a deliberate act—which it plainly was—consider

what that means. A person within the IDF saw the news that Fatima’s film was accepted into Cannes. He/she/they then proposed assassinating her. Other people reviewed the suggestion and approved it. Then other people carried it out.”

Israel has been murdering a record-shattering number of journalists in Gaza while simultaneously blocking any foreign press from accessing the enclave because Israel views journalists as its enemy. And Israel views journalists as its enemy because Israel is the enemy of truth.

Israel and its western backers understand that truth and support for Israel are mutually exclusive. Those who support Israel are not interested in the truth, and those who are interested in the truth don’t support Israel.

That’s why the light of journalism is being aggressively snuffed out in Gaza while Israel massively increases its propaganda budget to sway public opinion.

It’s why journalists like Fatima Hassouna are being assassinated while the western propaganda services known as the mainstream press commit journalistic malpractice to hide the truth of Israel’s crimes.

It’s why western journalists are banned from Gaza while western institutions are silencing, deporting, firing and marginalizing those who speak out about Israel’s criminality.

Israel and truth cannot coexist. Israel’s enemies know this, and Israel knows this. That’s why Israel’s primary weapons are bombs, bullets, propaganda, censorship, and obstruction, while the main weapon of Israel’s enemies is the camera.

Fatima Hassouna’s death has indeed been heard. All these loud noises are snapping more and more eyes open from their slumber.

Caitlin Johnstone is a 100% ncrowd-funded rogue journalist, bogan socialist, anarcho-psychonaut, guerilla poet and utopia prepper living in Australia with her American husband and two kids. She writes about politics, economics, media, feminism and the nature of consciousness. She is the author of the illustrated poetry book Woke: A Field Guide For Utopia Preppers. Her website is caityjohnstone.medium.com.



Ann Wright at the anti-NATO camp in Kaiserslautern.

AW: Things are lively here. Activists are traveling from all over Germany to discuss the increasing militarization of society. There is dismay that at the NATO summit in The Hague on Wednesday, almost all European leaders supported spending 5% of their gross domestic product on military purposes. Whether in the U.S. or here in Germany: We cannot accept that governments misappropriate citizens’ money for their killing machines instead of spending it for the common good.

GD: What consequences do you fear?

AW: It is terrible that all European governments—except the Spanish one—have submitted to the absurd demands of the American president and lacked

the movements in the U.S. and Europe?

AW: Both peace movements are growing and will fight hard. The goal is to stop spending money on arms deliveries, neither for Israel’s war policy nor for bombing Iran. Since the U.S. bombing of Iran, activists from the climate and migrant movements have also been committed to peace. The goal here will be to ensure that European governments do not implement Trump’s calls for general militarization. In the U.S., we will also appeal to Congress to stop the use of the military against its own population.

Gitta Düperthal is a freelance journalist in Frankfurt, Germany. She writes for Junge Welt.

Days of Terror in 'Block 76'

My family clung to our hometown of Al-Fukhari for as long as we could, until Israel's evacuation orders and new assault left us with no choice.

By Ruwaida Amer

In Al-Fukhari, my town in southern Gaza, we had known this moment would come since April, when the Israeli army began systematically clearing and leveling the land between Khan Younis and Rafah to create their so-called "Morag Axis." On May 19, the order arrived. With a single stroke of the keyboard, Israeli army spokesperson Avichay Adraee stripped our hometown of its name, reducing a vibrant agricultural community of 7,000 people into a number on a military grid—"Block 76."

Our town, once brimming with life and generations of memories, has been lumped with the city of Khan Younis and the nearby towns of Bani Suhaila and Abasan as part of a "dangerous combat zone." We were told to flee westward, as the army prepares to launch an "unprecedented attack" on "terrorist organizations" supposedly located in the area.

Make no mistake, this renaming—the second time Al-Fukhari has received evacuation orders during the war—is no administrative formality; it is an act of dehumanization. It is a way of telling us, "You are no longer people with homes, histories, or futures, but coordinates in a machinery of destruction."

The past six weeks have been marked by constant tank shelling, airstrikes, and ambulance sirens transporting wounded to the nearby European Hospital. Around 80% of the people in our area have already fled to Al-Mawasi, the so-called "safe zone" where, just days ago, Israeli forces killed 25 displaced Palestinians

sheltering in homes and tents.

Until this morning, my family had hoped to stay in Al-Fukhari and try to maintain some semblance of normal life. But after an airstrike hit a school near our home, we decided to leave for my aunt's house in the Khan Younis refugee camp, west of the city.

My brother Muhammad continues providing logistical support to Doctors Without Borders at Nasser Hospital west of Khan Younis. Alongside my journalism work, I spend several days each week teaching students who gather at a tent cluster in western Khan Younis that serves as a temporary school.

Before the war, I worked full-time as a science teacher and part-time as a journalist. Now journalism occupies most of my time, though I still try to teach as much as possible in these conditions. Through an educational program run by Rebuilding Alliance, a U.S.-based NGO, I work with children who have missed nearly two years of schooling, yet maintain their desire to study. Many come to class hungry and thirsty. Some have lost their parents, siblings or friends. Their mornings begin not with schoolwork, but with searching for food and clean water.

Several students have told me directly how the conditions affect their learning. "I don't understand the science material because I'm hungry," one said to me recently. Another explained, "I'm tired. I came here to rest, to breathe."

Teaching hungry, exhausted children while they sit on burning sand in sweltering tents without desks, chairs, or proper facilities, mocks the very idea of education. Yet I continue, because their desire to learn is a form of resistance—and so is my teaching.

The Hospital Becomes a Target

Last Tuesday, May 13, began as normally as any day can in this impossible reality. I extended my teaching hours to free up time for my mother's urgent spinal

surgery scheduled the next morning. My siblings and I planned to accompany her to the European Hospital before dawn to prepare for the procedure.

Shortly after 6 p.m., as my sister Enas and I sat facing each other on our beds, deafening explosions suddenly shook our neighborhood. I rushed to her bed and hugged her tight, as we screamed uncontrollably. Our mother cried for help from her room and we ran to her, while desperately calling for our father and brother Muhammad, though he was far away at work. The bombing continued for long, terrifying minutes. We were certain the house would collapse on top of us.

These explosions, we later learned, were bunker-buster bombs, four striking near Al-Fukhari. When the bombing ceased, we emerged from the house to find chaos: terrified neighbors running through smoke-filled streets, choking on toxic air. "The bombing is in the European Hospital," someone shouted—just 300 meters from our home.

The panic intensified after we learned Israel's claim that the target of the attack was Hamas leader Muhammad Sinwar, and that the operation was ongoing. The bombs had devastated the hospital courtyard and adjacent residential entrance, killing 28. Around 20 more were buried under the Al-Afghani family's collapsed home.

My brother, unable to reach us due to a communications blackout, rushed home convinced our neighborhood had been obliterated. That night, we sat at home in shell-shocked silence, but at least we were together.

The next morning, we went to the Euro-

pean Hospital, unsure if my mother's surgery would proceed. I was not prepared for the devastation that awaited us: corridors overflowing with patients, medical staff navigating through debris, critical infrastructure in ruins. The damage from last night's bombing was worse than we'd imagined.

When it became clear that the operation had been canceled, we remained in the hospital for another 90 minutes, unsure when it would be safe to head out. Fearing that things would escalate and that we would be trapped in the hospital, we decided to leave—only to find a large crowd at the gates: neighbors assessing the damage, my sister and uncle arriving to help with my mother's now-cancelled procedure.

As we started making our way back home, we saw a bulldozer clearing rubble from yesterday's attack. As we passed by it, I had a sudden uneasy feeling, and told my mother and brother to take a different route. Five minutes later, we heard two consecutive explosions from the direction of the hospital. We turned to see medical personnel sprinting from the site, saying that Israeli forces targeted the bulldozer we just walked by.

Since May 13, we've lived in a state of relentless fear and anxiety. Our neighborhood's streets lie in ruins; even the local supermarket was hit. With Israel's "Gideon's Chariots" operation advancing nearby, we monitor developments closely, as we know that even outside of Al-Fukhari we are not safe. These are undoubtedly the war's worst days yet—and we have no idea what horrors tomorrow may bring.

Ruwaida Amer is a freelance journalist from Khan Younis.

Letter from Omar in Gaza

Perhaps tonight is the last night I write to you. I hope it isn't the last—or maybe it's better if I don't hope at all.

This soul is weary; it craves peace. The tanks are near. Their roar sits heavy in my lap, rattling this exhausted body. Gunfire crackles without end, everywhere. The grinding of treads devours what little memory remains—I hear it so clearly, crushing my dreams. My dreams! What a hollow word. I don't even know how it slipped through my fingers. A burst of bullets—first, second, third ... Dear God, what is this madness?!

My hand trembles again as Ahmed, my nephew, crouches like a hunted thing, clinging to his grandmother. Fear gnaws at him, crouching over his small body like a predator savoring its prey. Children are easy meat for terror. The tanks roll closer. The wail of ambulances swells. And I wonder: Will another image emerge? A man burning, his body torn open, while the world feasts on his agony—only to forget him in two days?

Has our suffering become a stepping stone for others' success? I don't know if morning will come. Not tomorrow's dawn—but the dawn of the sky, when my soul rises to a place wrapped in peace, where love flocks like doves. A place untouched by this screaming violence.

The price of sugar in Gaza is extremely high, and the Americans involved in the American aid know this very well. What happened today is one of the worst crimes ever committed. Read carefully what I'm about to say:

As soon as the first wave of American aid arrives, people rush to get sugar first. Today, the Americans deliberately placed the sugar in a separate area. Then, they dug a deep pit just before the sugar zone, covered it with nylon, and lightly sprinkled it with dirt so that no one would see it or notice. The starving reached the sugar first, and seven people fell into the pit. Then a bulldozer came and buried them alive. Meanwhile, a man in his 50s was returning from the aid area, nearly collapsing. I held him, and he said to me: "I'd rather die of hunger than go back to that aid—it's aid of death."

Omar's letter ends here.



The writer teaching in a tent classroom in southern Gaza, as part of a program run by U.S.-based NGO Rebuilding Alliance, May 2025. Photo courtesy of Ruwaida Amer

Hunger Games in Gaza



Starved for Peace, by Mr. Fish

Israel is weaponizing starvation. The objective is to dismantle all remnants of civil society and reduce Palestinians to herds of desperate scavengers who can be driven from historic Palestine.

By Chris Hedges

Israel's weaponization of starvation is how genocides always end. I covered the insidious effects of orchestrated starvation in the Guatemalan Highlands during the genocidal campaign of Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, the famine in southern Sudan that left a quarter of a million dead—I walked past the frail and skeletal corpses of families lining roadsides—and later during the war in Bosnia when Serbs cut off food supplies to enclaves such as Srebrenica and Goražde.

Starvation was weaponized by the Ottoman Empire to decimate the Armenians. It was used to kill millions of Ukrainians in the Holodomor in 1932 and 1933. It was employed by the Nazis against the Jews in the ghettos in World War II. German soldiers used food, as Israel does, like bait. They offered three kilograms of bread and one kilogram of marmalade to lure desperate families in the Warsaw Ghetto onto transports to the death camps. "There were times when hundreds of people had to wait in line for several days to be 'deported,'" Marek Edelman writes in "The Ghetto Fights." "The number of people anxious to obtain the three kilograms of bread was such that the transports, now leaving twice daily with 12,000 people, could not accommodate them all." And when crowds became unruly, as in Gaza, the German troops fired deadly volleys that ripped through emaciated husks of women, children and the elderly.

This tactic is as old as warfare itself.

The report in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, that Israeli soldiers are ordered to shoot into crowds of Palestinians at aid

hubs, with 580 killed and 4,216 wounded, is not a surprise. It is the predictable denouement of the genocide, the inevitable conclusion to a campaign of mass extermination.

Israel, with its targeted assassinations of at least 1,400 health care workers, hundreds of United Nations (U.N.) workers, journalists, police and even poets and academics, its obliteration of multi-story apartment blocks wiping out dozens of families, its shelling of designated "humanitarian zones" where Palestinians huddle under tents, tarps or in the open air, its systematic targeting of U.N. food distribution centers, bakeries and aid convoys or its sadistic sniper fire that guns down children, long ago illustrated that Palestinians are regarded as vermin worthy only of annihilation.

The blockade of food and humanitarian aid, imposed on Gaza since March 2, is reducing Palestinians to abject dependence. To eat, they must crawl towards their killers and beg. Humiliated, terrified, desperate for a few scraps of food, they are stripped of dignity, autonomy and agency. This is by intent.

Yousef al-Ajouri, 40, explained to Mid-

Next to me was a tall, light-haired young man using the flashlight on his phone to guide him. The others yelled at him to turn it off. Seconds later, he was shot. He collapsed to the ground and lay there.

dle East Eye his nightmarish journey to one of four aid hubs set up by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF). The hubs are not designed to meet the needs of the Palestinians, who once relied on 400 aid distribution sites, but to lure them from northern Gaza to the south. Israel, which on Sunday again ordered Palestinians to leave northern Gaza, is steadily expanding its annexation of the coastal strip. Palestinians are corralled like livestock into narrow metal chutes at distribution points which are overseen by heavily armed mercenaries. They receive, if they are one of the fortunate few, a small box of food.

Al-Ajouri, who before the genocide was

a taxi driver, lives with his wife, seven children and his mother and father in a tent in al-Saraya, near the middle of Gaza City. He set out to an aid hub at Salah al-Din Road near the Netzarim corridor, to find some food for his children, who he said cry constantly "because of how hungry they are." On the advice of his neighbor in the tent next to him, he dressed in loose clothing "so that I could run and be agile." He carried a bag for canned and packaged goods because the crush of the crowds meant "no one was able to carry the boxes the aid came in."

He left at about 9 p.m. with five other men "including an engineer and a teacher," and "children aged 10 and 12." They did not take the official route designated by the Israeli army. The massive crowds converging on the aid point along the official route ensure that most never get close enough to receive food. Instead, they walked in the darkness in areas exposed to Israeli gunfire, often having to crawl to avoid being seen.

"As I crawled, I looked over, and to my surprise, saw several women and elderly people taking the same treacherous route as us," he explained. "At one point, there was a barrage of live gunfire all around me. We hid behind a destroyed building. Anyone who moved or made a noticeable motion was immediately shot by snipers. Next to me was a tall, light-haired young man using the flashlight on his phone to guide him. The others yelled at him to turn it off. Seconds later, he was shot. He collapsed to the ground and lay there bleeding, but no one could help or move him. He died within minutes."

He passed six bodies along the route who had been shot dead by Israeli soldiers.

Al-Ajouri reached the hub at 2 a.m., the designated time for aid distribution. He saw a green light turned on ahead of him which signaled that aid was about to be distributed. Thousands began to run towards the light, pushing, shoving and trampling each other. He fought his way through the crowd until he reached the aid.

"I started feeling around for the aid boxes and grabbed a bag that felt like rice," he said. "But just as I did, someone else snatched it from my hands. I tried to hold on, but he threatened to stab me with his knife. Most people there were carrying knives, either to defend themselves or to steal from others. Eventually, I managed to grab four cans of beans, a kilogram of bulgur, and half a kilogram of pasta. Within moments, the boxes were empty. Most of the people there, including women, children and the elderly, got nothing. Some begged others to share. But no one could afford to give up what they managed to get."

The U.S. contractors and Israeli soldiers overseeing the mayhem laughed and pointed their weapons at the crowd. Some filmed with their phones.

"Minutes later, red smoke grenades were thrown into the air," he remembered. "Someone told me that it was the signal to evacuate the area. After that, heavy gunfire began. Me, Khalil and a few others headed to al-Awda Hospital in Nuseirat because our friend Wael had injured his hand during the journey. I was shocked by what I saw at the hospital. There were at least 35 martyrs lying dead on the ground in one of the rooms. A doctor told me they had all been brought in that same day. They were each shot in the head or chest while queuing near the aid center. Their families were waiting for them to come home with food and ingredients. Now, they were corpses."

GHF is a Mossad-funded creation of Israel's Defense Ministry that contracts with UG Solutions and Safe Reach Solutions, run by former members of the CIA and U.S. Special Forces. GHF is headed by Rev. Johnnie Moore, a far-right Christian Zionist with close ties to Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu. The organization has also contracted anti-Hamas drug-smuggling gangs to provide security at aid sites.

As Chris Gunness, a former spokesperson for the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) told Al Jazeera, GHF is "aid washing," a way to mask the reality that "people are being starved into submission."

Israel, along with the U.S. and European countries that provide weapons to sustain the genocide, have chosen to disregard the January 2024 ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which demanded immediate protection for civilians in Gaza and widespread provision of humanitarian assistance.

Haaretz, in its article headlined "It's a Killing Field: IDF Soldiers Ordered to Shoot Deliberately at Unarmed Gazans Waiting for Humanitarian Aid" reported that Israeli commanders order soldiers to open fire on crowds to keep them away from aid sites or disperse them.

"The distribution centers typically open for just one hour each morning," Haaretz writes. "According to officers and soldiers who served in their areas, the IDF fires at people who arrive before opening hours to prevent them from approaching, or again after the centers close, to disperse them. Since some of the shooting incidents occurred at night—ahead of the opening—it's possible that some civilians couldn't see the boundaries of the designated area."

"It's a killing field," one soldier told Haaretz. "Where I was stationed, between one and five people were killed every day. They're treated like a hostile force—no crowd-control measures, no tear gas—just live fire with everything imaginable: heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, mortars. Then, once the center opens, the shooting stops, and they know they can approach. Our form of communication is gunfire."

"We open fire early in the morning if someone tries to get in line from a few hundred meters away, and sometimes we

continued on next page ...

Israel's Latest Illegal Attack on Iran

by Vijay Prashad

Israel's consistent attacks on Iran since 2023 have all been illegal, violations of the United Nations Charter (1945). Iran is a member state of the United Nations and is therefore a sovereign state in the international order. If Israel had a problem with Iran, there are many mechanisms mandated by international law that permit Israel to bring complaints against Iran.

Thus far, Israel has avoided these international forums because it is clear that it has no case against Iran. Allegations that Iran is building a nuclear weapon, which are constantly raised by the United States, the European Union, and Israel, have been fully investigated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and found to be unfounded. It is certainly true that Iran has a nuclear energy program that is within the rules in place through the IAEA, and it is also true that Iran's clerical establishment has a fatwa (religious edict) in place against the production of nuclear weapons. Despite the IAEA findings and the existence of this fatwa, the West—egged on by Israel—has accepted this irrational idea that Iran is building a nuclear weapon and that Iran is therefore a threat to the international order. Indeed, by its punctual and illegal attacks on Iran, it is Israel that is a threat to the international order.

Over the past decades, Iran has called for the establishment of a Middle East Nuclear Free Zone, a strange idea coming from a country accused of wanting to build a nuclear weapon. But this idea of the nuclear free zone has been rejected by the West, largely to protect Israel, which has an illegal nuclear weapons programme. Israel is the only country in the Middle East with a nuclear weapon, although it has never tested it openly nor acknowledged its existence. If Israel was so keen on eliminating any nuclear threat, it should have taken the offer for the cre-

ation of a nuclear-free zone heartily.

Neither the Europeans, who so often posture as defenders of international law, nor the United Nations leadership have publicly pushed Israel to adopt this idea because both recognise that this would require Israel, not Iran, to denuclearise. That this is an improbable situation has meant that there has been no movement from the West or from the international institutions to take this idea forward and build an international consensus to develop a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.

Israel does not want to build a nuclear-free zone in the region. What Israel wants is to be the sole nuclear power in the region, and therefore to be exactly what it

Over the past decades, Iran has called for the establishment of a Middle East Nuclear-Free Zone, a strange idea coming from a country accused of wanting to build a nuclear weapon.

is—namely, the largest United States military base in the world that happens to be the home to a large civilian population. Iran has no ambition to be a nuclear power. But it has an ambition to be a sovereign state that remains committed to justice for the Palestinians. Israel has no problem with the idea of sovereignty per se, but has a problem with any state in the region that commits itself to Palestinian emancipation. If Iran normalised relations with Israel and ceased its opposition to U.S. dominion in the region, then it is likely that Israel would end its opposition to Iran.

In January 2020, the United States conducted an illegal assassination at Iraq's Baghdad Airport to kill General Qasim Soleimani, the leader of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Soleimani, through the

There is talk from the Trump White House about a ceasefire. But don't be fooled. Israel has nothing left to destroy. Its saturation bombing over 20 months has reduced Gaza to a moonscape. Gaza is uninhabitable, a toxic wilderness where Palestinians, living amid broken slabs of concrete and pools of raw sewage, lack food and clean water, fuel, shelter, electricity, medicine and an infrastructure to survive. The final impediment to the annexation of Gaza are the Palestinians themselves. They are the primary target. Starvation is the weapon of choice.

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Presbyterian minister, author, and television host. His books include America: The Farewell Tour; American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America; War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning. He previously worked for the Dallas Morning News, the Christian Science Monitor, and NPR, and hosted the Emmy-nominated RT America show On Contact.

Quds Force, had produced for Iran an insurance policy against further Israeli attacks on the country. The Quds Force is responsible for Iranian military operations outside the boundaries of the country, including building what is called the 'Axis of Resistance' that includes the various pro-Iranian governments and non-governmental military forces. These included: Hezbollah in Lebanon, various IRGC groups in Syria that worked with Syrian militia groups, the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, several Palestinian factions in Occupied Palestine, and the Ansar Allah government in Yemen. Without its own nuclear deterrent, Iran required some way to balance the mili-

tion of the Hezbollah leader Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah on 27 September 2024. This campaign, while it has not totally demolished Hezbollah, has certainly weakened it. Meanwhile, Israel began a regular bombing campaign against the Syrian military positions around Damascus and along the road to Idlib in the north. This bombing campaign, coordinated with the U.S. military and with the U.S. intelligence services, was designed to open the roadway for the entry of the former al-Qaeda fighters into Damascus and to overthrow the government of al-Assad on 8 December 2024. The fall of the al-Assad government dented Iran's strength across the Levant region (from the Turkish border to the Occupied Palestinian Territory) as well as along the plains from southern Syria to the Iranian border. The consistent campaign by the United States to bomb Yemeni positions further resulted in the loss of Ansar Allah's heavy equipment (including long-range missiles) that fundamentally threatened Israel.

What this meant was that by early 2025, the Iranian insurance policy against Israel had collapsed. Israel began its march to war, suggesting an attack on Iran was imminent. Such an attack, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu knows, would help him in a domestic political fight with the ultra-orthodox parties over the question of a military exemption for their communities; this will prevent his government from falling. Cynical Netanyahu is using genocide and the possibility of a horrendous war with Iran for narrow political ends. But that is not what is motivating this attack. What is motivating this attack is that Israel smells an opportunity to try to overthrow the Iranian government by force.

Iran returned to the negotiations brokered by the IAEA to prevent such an attack. Its leadership knew full well that nothing would stop a scofflaw such as Israel from bombing Iran. And nothing did. Not even the fact that Iran is still at the negotiation table. Israel has taken advantage of Iran's momentary weakness to strike. And that strike might escalate further.

Vijay Prashad's most recent book (with Noam Chomsky) is The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and the Fragility of U.S. Power.

Hunger Games

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just charge at them from close range. But there's no danger to the forces," the soldier explained, "I'm not aware of a single instance of return fire. There's no enemy, no weapons."

He said the deployment at the aid sites is known as "Operation Salted Fish," a reference to the Israeli name for the children's game "Red light, green light." The game was featured in the first episode of the South Korean dystopian thriller Squid Game, in which financially desperate people are killed as they battle each other for money.

Israel has obliterated the civilian and humanitarian infrastructure in Gaza. It has reduced Palestinians, half a million of whom face starvation, into desperate herds. The goal is to break Palestinians, to make them malleable and entice them to leave Gaza, never to return.

tary superiority of Israel and the United States. This deterrence was created by the 'Axis of Resistance', an insurance policy that allowed Iran to let Israel know that if Israel fired at Iran, these groups would rain missiles on Tel Aviv in retaliation.

The assassination of Soleimani began a determined new political and military campaign by the United States, Israel, and their European allies to weaken Iran. Israel and the United States began to punctually strike Iranian logistical bases in Syria and Iraq to weaken Iran's forward posture and to demoralise the Syrian and Iraqi militia groups that operated against Israeli interests. Israel began to assassinate IRGC military officers in Syria, Iran, and Iraq, a campaign of murder that began to have an impact on the IRGC and the Quds Force.

Taking advantage of its genocidal war against the Palestinians in Gaza, Israel, with full support from the United States and Europe, began to damage the 'Axis of Resistance', Iran's insurance policy. Israel took its war into Lebanon, with a ruthless bombing campaign that included the assassina-



Israeli Air Force F-15I gets ready to shoot down Iranian drones amidst the 2024 Iranian strikes, April 14, 2024. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

Greenland Will Never Be for Sale

By Dud Hendrick

President Trump, casting a covetous eye on Greenland, has my attention. I have a history in that place, so little known to Americans in general, having spent the entire year of 1964, at Thule Air Force Base, now Pituffik Space Base, 250 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The road I've traveled since has me deeply concerned about Trump in every respect believing that everything he represents and wants is contrary to the best interests of our country, to the world, and for man-kind altogether, excepting perhaps oligarchs.

At Thule I was responsible for over-seeing the maintenance of our air-to-air missiles and for supervising the loading of those missiles on board our F-102 fighter

to make an emergency landing at Thule, spreading radio-active debris across the land. Four nuclear weapons were on board; one, never to be recovered.

This history and my developing curiosity about the real stories behind our military empire, inspired my quest to visit Qaanaaq, a trip I was able to realize in 2008. Thanks to a serendipitous stroke of fortune, I had been able to meet and interview Aggaluk Lyngé, who, at the time was a visiting scholar at Dartmouth College. A former member of the Greenland Parliament and former chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Mr. Lyngé was a respected statesman among the indigenous populations of the frozen north around the globe. As the author of *The Right to Return: Fifty Years of Struggle by Relocated Inughuit in Green-*



Aggaluk Lyngé.

jets in the event of declared hostilities with our “forever” nemesis, the Soviet Union.

Many years later, after having volunteered for, and spending, a year in Vietnam, I had become a full-fledged peace activist, an adjunct professor of peace studies at the University of Maine, angry and in despair about this country's militarism and particularly agitated about our vast empire of military bases on foreign lands. My experiences in Greenland and Vietnam were surely foundational to my conversion. I had become well aware of the widespread anti-base movement and sympathetic with the neighbors of these bases who, so often, experienced profound environmental degradation, noise pollution, and violence.

The heartless displacement of the Inughuit people of Thule, done without forethought to enable the construction of a military base in 1951, thirteen years prior to my assignment there, offers a good case in point. The place they called Ummannaq had been their home for centuries, and was the sacred burial grounds of their ancestors. In May of 1953, three hundred men, women, and children, having been given four days to vacate their modest sod homes, set off by dog sled for a place called Qaanaaq, 150 kilometers across the icecap. No promised houses awaited them and they were forced to live thru the cold, wet summer in the tents they'd been given. They were denied the right to return to or hunt in their ancestral homelands.

I'd also learned that in 1968, a B52 had crashed on the icecap while attempting

land, he knew the story as well as anyone who had not actually lived it. Our meeting enabled my journey and subsequent meetings with Qaanaaq people who experienced the heart-wrenching dislocation.

Foremost among them would be Uusaqqak Qujaukitsoq: an Inughuit hunter, fisherman, and leader of the Hingitaq 53, a group of nearly 500 Inughuit survivors and descendants, who launched legal proceedings against Denmark seeking their right to return. Uusaqqak had been a 12 year old boy, living at Ummannaq at the time of the eviction.

Uusaqqak and his wife, Inger, invited me into their modest home and, though their English was limited, we spent many comfortable hours together, he sharing his life story to include the trauma of the dislocation, hunting and fishing, and education in Copenhagen. His travels had taken him far and wide. As a representative of the Inughuit people he had proudly once met Nelson Mandela. Their 30-year-old son, Magssanguaq, a renaissance man, spoke English and Danish, and was a teacher, a musician, a poet, and an accomplished photographer. “Mags” had a keen sense of the injustices his people had suffered as victims of colonialism and would become my interpreter and guide.

Mags and I devoted much of our time during my week-long stay in Qaanaaq to visiting and interviewing elders who had been victims of the displacement. Those sessions were, without exception, emotional in the telling and the listening,

On my final day in Qaanaaq, we visited Mags' Aunt Isigaitsoq Qujaukitsoq who had also been a victim of the expulsion from Thule as a child. Seemingly a pleasant spirit, she greeted me cheerfully, but when Mags explained the nature of my inquiry her mood took a dive. With tears streaming down her face she described her family's departure from their ancestral lands. Though I could not understand a word “Issi” spoke and though she was speaking of a day 55 years in the past, her emotion was profound. The three of us wept with the retelling.

My immersion into Inughuit culture, a deep and lasting one, leaves me believing that it will not come to pass that Trump's rapacious nature shall determine the eventual fate of Greenland.

I was made mindful of Syracuse University Scholar Philip Arnold's “The Urgency of Indigenous Values” in which he argues that the very future of the world is dependent upon the ascendancy of “green values” of indigenous populations everywhere, as opposed to the “raider” values of our dominant culture. The history of the Inughuits who had lived on their sacred lands at Ummannaq for centuries is known by all Greenlanders, 89% of whom are of Inuit descent. Trump represents, even personifies “raider” values, and is seen that way by a large majority of all people of Greenland.

I recently read that Trump is bringing Columbus Day “back from the ashes.” Hmmm! How might that play with indigenous people?

Speaking of Trump and his eye on Greenland, the senior statesman Aqqaluk Lyngé had this to say on 60 Minutes: “He mentioned Greenland like it was a toy or something. It was ugly!”

These were not words of casual sentiment.



Uusaqqak Qujaukitsoq.

In 2008 I came across the writings of the brilliant French cultural anthropologist, writer and iconic champion of the Inughuit people, Jean Malaurie. I would subsequently learn that he sits solidly in the pantheon of Arctic explorers along with the likes of Roald Amundsen, Robert Perry, and Richard Byrd. As a champion of the Inughuit he would be in the ethereal ranks. His two most widely praised works are *The Last Kings of Thule* and *Ultima Thule*, in which he writes extensively of the invasion and associated collision of cultures as seen

and experienced by the Inughuit.

On June 15th, after a year-long expedition to Ellesmere Island and returning to Ummannaq with his Inughuit friends and three dog teams, upon cresting a summit, Malaurie wrote, The great southward vista lay stretched before us, and the air seemed to be filled with Martians. In fact, what we were seeing was the airplanes of the U.S. Air Force, which, at a rate of one giant transport every 30 minutes, were swooping in to land with materials for building a giant military base...

Later, in Ultima Thule, he would write:

“Before 1951, there were, in total, 302 Inughuit, all of whom had been kept insulated from free markets and the industrial world. They now faced a brutal confrontation with Western civilization. The vast American garbage heaps became their new frames of reference. Boxes, cans, wood, tent canvas, plastic, tools, empty cans of food and carcasses of wrecked cars and planes accumulated in mountains. Along with illnesses like bulimia, schizophrenia, paranoia, manic depression, debility, cardiovascular disease and alcohol poisoning, the epidemic of suicides has decimated every one of the Arctic communities in Greenland, North America, Canada, and Siberia. Prisons and psychiatric hospitals, the proud symbols of civilization, are waiting in the wings. But all is not lost; at Qaanaaq, a resistance group has formed, uniting all those who wish to free the region of such horrors. They are in the minority, but who knows but the action of time, improved education, and an awareness of what is truly at stake will bring about a radical change of heart and instill a new sense of mission for the future.”

In a sense this is the fork in the icy landscape facing all Greenlanders today. May they choose the trail preferred by the majority—the nearly 90% of Inuit descent—and may those 90% hear the voices of their ancestors.

Dud Hendrick graduated from Annapolis Naval Academy in 1963 after lettering on the powerful Navy Lacrosse team for three years. He earning a honorable All-American mention his senior year. At graduation he transferred into USAF. He spent a year in Vietnam and then coached lacrosse at Dartmouth until 1983 as well as being the head woman's soccer coach from 1980 to 1982. In 1976 Dud founded the Cardigan Mountain Lacrosse Camp and was its director until 2016. Dud is a lifetime member of Veterans For Peace.

Framed by War

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the October 12 GI Peace March, which we dropped over five military bases in the San Francisco Bay area, including an aircraft carrier. I then marched in the demonstration in my uniform and spoke out against the war. I was tried by general court martial, dismissed from the Navy, and sentenced to six months' confinement.

Today, it is an honor for me to be part of an extraordinary and special group of people, Veterans For Peace. Many of our members are GIs and veterans who returned from war and armed conflict—from Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq—to work for peace and social justice in the United States and the world. For them it's been a wrenching, painful journey from war maker to peace-maker—to be able to question both themselves and their country, which has participated in unjust and immoral conflicts; to look at their adolescent selves and question their very identity; to take a moral journey back to a time when they were transported into countries thousands of miles beyond U.S. borders, part of a destructive military force tasked with killing the people in those far away countries.

The end of the American war on Vietnam occurred with the signing of a peace agreement on January 27, 1973, ratified by Congress in June 1973. But it was not until April 30, 1975, that the final U.S. diplomats, military personnel and civilians left Vietnam.

Why remember that war when we still haven't learned its lessons?

The lesson that should have been



Marines take cover on an invasion beach during initial landings, 21 July 1944.

learned from the war in Vietnam was not to interfere in the way another country wanted to define itself. Instead, even as Henry Kissinger and President Nixon were playing the peace card in Vietnam, they were already heavily involved in the destruction of the democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende.

As the Chilean government began to nationalize their industries to fund social programs, the World Bank refused to lend Chile money. So Chile initiated a land-reform program, nationalized copper mines, and increased workers' wages, which caused commercial banks to cut

off credit to Chile, as the United States directed disruption of the Chilean economy. When bread shortages occurred in the fall of 1973, the United States refused to provide the assistance that it later gave the government formed by the military coup it supported. On September 11, 1973, General Augusto Pinochet and his military took control of the country—following years of U.S. involvement in destabilizing Allende and his presidency, because he was a Marxist.

More than 10,000 Chileans were rounded up in the national stadium in Santiago and brutally, systematically tor-

tured and murdered. Seventeen years of the torture of Chilean citizens followed; young people “disappeared,” their bodies dumped from planes into the ocean. It was estimated that more than 60,000 people were “disappeared” with the support of the U.S. government. Chilean citizens were routinely picked up off the streets by the police and military and incarcerated, tortured, and killed.

Today I am reminded of that connection between the Vietnam War and our interference in Chile, as the tactics we encouraged against dissidents in Vietnam and Chile—and Nicaragua and Guatemala and El Salvador—are now being applied right here. We are seeing Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel (dressed in black uniforms, faces covered with masks) routinely kidnapping people from their homes, from work, in front of their children, whisking them away to detention centers or to a notorious prison in El Salvador, denying them due process and communication with family. We have a president who publicly stated he would use such tactics on American citizens, a president who is destroying the economy and disappearing people. American fascists are moving us toward a police state, promoting racism, creating more poverty, taking away health and medical care for the poor, disabled, and elderly, and putting more money and power in the hands of the corporate class and the arms industry. How did we become a society that supports the murder of children? The murder of medical aid workers? That destroys hospitals—that sends arms and 2,000-pound bombs to a country that is committing genocide against civilians in Gaza?

As a veteran who cared for soldiers during the American war in Southeast Asia—I have seen how war, even if it is survived, injures all who participate. It kills the body and soul, it damages communities and families. It impacts generations. And who profits? The war industry—merchants of death that produce and distribute armaments to the world.

Today I am left with the words my father wrote in his last letter: “I feel as though I have done my share and helped to give something to this world. In that respect I have been happy and regret nothing.”

But we have additional work to do. We must pledge to work together toward healing the lasting destructive legacy of American wars, to cleanse the lands of the contaminants we left behind in Southeast Asia, to heal the people. And we vow to continue the struggle for peace and justice in our own country, against fascism and against control by an oligarchy so fortified with money and power. We will fight together to stop this government from disappearing immigrants from the streets, from their places of worship, from their homes, from their work. And we will overcome.

Susan Schnall is president of the Veterans For Peace national board, as well as of its New York City chapter. She is a member of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign and Vietnam Veterans Against the War. In 2006, Susan was awarded the medal for peace and friendship between peoples by the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organization.

Billionaires

... continued from page 4

New York could continue to govern it: “Importantly, there are hundreds of million of dollars of capital available to back a competitor to Mamdani that can be put together overnight ... so that a great alternative candidate won't spend any time raising funds. So, if the right candidate would raise his or her hand tomorrow, the funds will pour in. I am sure that Mike Bloomberg will share his how-to-win-the-mayoralty IP [intellectual property] and deliver his entire election apparatus and system to the aspiring candidate so that the candidate can focus all of his or her energy on the campaign.”

In the Empire State, there are many ways for the empire to strike back. The forces now regrouping with a vengeance includes titans of Wall Street, enormous real estate interests, pro-Israel groups, corporate media, the anti-progressive rich and assorted smear artists.

In recent weeks, the false charge of anti-semitism has escalated against Mamdani. He has taken a principled and consistent stand on behalf of human rights for all—in the process, denouncing Israel's war on Palestinian civilians in Gaza—while at the same time opposing rapacious corporate power. So, it's no surprise that New York's most powerful Democrat, Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer, has been dodging the question of whether he'll en-

dorse Mamdani in the general election.

For decades, Schumer's campaign coffers have bulged while he has been hugely compensated by Wall Street. He has also remained a staunch supporter of Israel, despite its systematic ethnic cleaning and genocide against Palestinian people. A few months ago, Schumer declared: “My job is to keep the left pro-Israel.”

What happened in the state's second-largest city in 2021 is important to understand. Democratic socialist India Walton was the candidate of a grassroots campaign

Last weekend, I asked India (now a colleague at RootsAction, where she is senior strategist) how she saw the Mamdani campaign. “Watching the New York City mayoral primary from Buffalo last Tuesday gave me a familiar feeling,” she said. “A feeling of overwhelming joy and a fear that it would be snatched away despite my attempts to cling to it ... In 2021, Zohran Mamdani supported my run for Buffalo mayor; I was a first-time unknown candidate challenging a 16-year incumbent, and conventional wisdom said it was an

The forces now regrouping with a vengeance includes titans of Wall Street, enormous real estate interests, pro-Israel groups, corporate media, the anti-progressive rich and assorted smear artists.

that stunned the party establishment in the Democratic primary when she defeated Buffalo's corporate mayor, four-term incumbent Byron Brown. As the Democratic nominee, she seemed set to win the general election in the blue city. But a coalition of furious Democratic power brokers and deep-pocketed Republicans, including racists and vehement haters of the left, aided by much of the city's mass media, teamed up to smear her and ending up getting Brown elected as a write-in candidate.

impossible race to win. Now, in 2025, Zohran has once again toppled the establishment. . . populist policies that focus on working people are a winning strategy.”

That strategy is now striking fear into the hard hearts of insatiably greedy billionaires.

Norman Solomon is the national director of RootsAction and executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. His latest book is War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine.

87-Year-Old Veteran John Spitzberg Arrested at the Capitol

By Alina Hartounian

In the video, one officer wheels away John Spitzberg's walker, while the other zip ties his hands behind his back.

The 87-year-old veteran is unsteady on his feet—the result of several disabilities he suffers—as the crowd applauds, cheers and chants, “We won’t back down, we won’t retreat!”

Soon, the cheering turns to jeering and booing and chants of “Shame!” against the officers.

The scene has been shared widely across social platforms and viewed millions of times, becoming a crystalizing moment for those protesting the Trump administration. Now back at a care home in Florida, Spitzberg told NPR he's ready for what's next.

“I plan to be as active as I physically can be at my point in life and whatever the Veterans For Peace and the younger people who are activists, whatever they need, I'll do the best I can,” he said.

Anti-war groups Veterans For Peace and About Face: Veterans Against the War organized the June 13th Friday protest against America's peacetime military parade. It was held to mark the Army's 250th anniversary, but also President Trump's 79th birthday.

Spitzberg was among the sixty veterans who were arrested at the Capitol last Friday. The arrests came just half a day before millions of people flooded American streets for the No Kings protests, meant

to stand in contrast to the military parade being held the same day.

“I think the parade was a colossal slap in the face of the American people,” said Spitzberg, an Army and Air Force veteran. “And the president of the United States apparently sees himself as more than the people's president. He sees himself as a king or, I don't even know, an emperor.”

Capitol Police said officers arrested about 60 people last Friday who illegally crossed a police line while running toward the Rotunda steps.

Spitzberg said he crossed the barrier because he saw officers manhandling his fellow protesting veterans.

“I just couldn't stand there behind those barricades while my fellow veterans were being pummeled,” he said.

“My goal was to go and help the veterans so they wouldn't be hurt,” he added. He said police told him he would be arrested if he didn't go back behind the line.

Capitol Police, whose officers were at the center of defending the Capitol against Jan. 6 rioters, said the heightened political threat environment means that the officers were on high alert.

Spitzberg said he spent about 12 hours being transferred between holding facilities before his release. He had an emotional homecoming Wednesday at his care facility in Gainesville, Fla., where some residents had feared for his well-being.

“All they could do was hold me and cry. And it was very sad for me because I love them,” he said.



This was far from his first protest. He has been arrested before, in Zuccotti Park in New York, where Occupy Wall Street protests railed against economic inequality in 2011. And he stood at Standing Rock in 2016, reported the *Frontiersman* in Alaska.

He has also spent time helping Ukrainian refugees in Romania, according to the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*. He spent more than two years in Vietnam supporting people who suffered the effects of Agent Orange and worked as a teacher and a paramedic, he said.

And Spitzberg says despite his health challenges, he will continue to stand for

what he believes is right.

“The best thing for me to do at this point in my life is just to basically be a body,” Spitzberg said. “Because you need numbers and if they ever say we're doing something else again, God willing, I'll be there.”

Alina Hartounian is a supervising editor for NPR's NewsHub, an audience focused team of reporters and editors who largely write for NPR.org. Hartounian joined NPR from The Associated Press where she was a U.S. Assignment Manager who assigned stories, offered standards guidance, and helped mobilize teams to cover major breaking news.

A Life Framed by War

By Susan Schnall

My life is framed by war. My Marine father was killed in action on the beachhead of Guam, on July 22, 1944, while he was attempting to get his platoon dug in for the defense of a hill. Visibility was poor, and the enemy launched a surprise attack. My dad suffered a grave chest wound; he died before the next morning. My mother received a telegram delivered by Western Union on August 14:

“I deeply regret to inform you that your husband,——USMCR, was killed in action in the performance of his duty and service of his country. No information available at present regarding disposition of remains. Temporary burial in locality where death occurred probable. You will be promptly furnished any additional information received. To prevent possible aid to our enemies do not divulge the name of his ship or station. Please accept my heartfelt sympathy. A. Vandergrift, Lieutenant General USMC Commandant of the Marine Corps.”



An infant Susan Schnall with her father.

It took years to locate his remains.

War, for me, is very personal. World War II is a war I've lived my whole life. It was a war in which my father felt he had to do his share and give something to this world. He did, and I never knew him except through pictures and letters and

the memories of others. It was a war that destroyed my mother and her hopes and dreams for the future.

My mom never got over his death. She once told me: “The pain has come again and it flows over me in an endless succession of wave after wave. I feel weak and sick as though after a long illness—but this time is not the convalescent period for it won't release me from its tenacious grasp. It is brutal and heavy and dominating. The waves pound on my brain and there is no strength to combat this terror.”

April 30, 2025, was the 50th anniversary of Reunification Day in Vietnam, commemorating the end of the American war on Vietnam and the reunification of the country. I wonder about the people of the country we Americans tried to bomb back to the Stone Age, tried to destroy for eternity, of whom we murdered over three million, caused untold pain and agony, left scars on the bodies and souls of the living. I wonder, how do we ask for their forgiveness?

In 1967, I graduated from Stanford University, wearing a black armband signifying my objection to the War in Vietnam. I had become a nurse, and I joined the Navy Nurse Corps to care for the wounded

from war, to heal them and return them back home to family and friends.

From the summer of 1967 through June 1969, I was a nurse at the Oak Knoll Navy Hospital in Oakland, California. I was assigned to the surgical and orthopedic wards—World War II barracks crowded with 35 to 40 patients, all young men who had been wounded in Vietnam. They were very young—17, 18, 19 years old. Some were missing limbs; some were so shot up they had tubes coming out from various parts of their body, draining excess fluids. I couldn't protect them—from the war, from their fear, from dying—and knew that this war had to stop. These were the years 1967 and 1968, during the height of the war. I watched the battles on TV and lived the war at work.

But I learned that simply healing the soldiers from the war was not enough—that my being a part of the military machine enabled the war to continue.

In early October 1968, I began working with GI and Veterans March for Peace on publicity for our anti-war march in San Francisco. A friend was a pilot; we rented a plane and filled it with flyers announcing

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