

Mainstream Media Propaganda: Breaking the Last Taboo - Gaza and the Threat of World War

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“There is a taboo,” said the visionary Edward Said, “on telling the truth about Palestine and the great destructive force behind Israel. Only when this truth is out can any of us be free.”

For many people, the truth is out now. At last, they know. Those once intimidated into silence can't look away now. Staring at them from their TV, laptop, phone, is proof of the barbarism of the Israeli state and the great destructive force of its mentor and provider, the United States, the cowardice of European governments, and the collusion of others, such as Canada and Australian, in this epic crime.

The attack on Gaza was an attack on all of us. The siege of Gaza is a siege of all of us. The denial of justice to Palestinians is a symptom of much of humanity under siege and a warning that the threat of a new world war is growing by the day.

When Nelson Mandela called the struggle of Palestine “the greatest moral issue of our time”, he spoke on behalf of true civilisation, not that which empires invent. In Latin America, the governments of Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, Bolivia, El Salvador, Peru and Ecuador have made their stand on Gaza. Each of these countries has known its own dark silence when immunity for mass murder was sponsored by the same godfather in Washington that answered the cries of children in Gaza with more ammunition to kill them.

Unlike Netanyahu and his killers, Washington's pet fascists in Latin America didn't concern themselves with moral window dressing. They simply murdered, and left the bodies on rubbish dumps. For Zionism, the goal is the same: to dispossess and ultimately destroy an entire human society: a truth that 225 Holocaust survivors and their descendants have compared with the genesis of genocide.

Nothing has changed since the Zionists' infamous “Plan D” in 1948 that ethnically cleansed an entire people. Recently, on the website of the *Times of Israel* were the words: “Genocide is Permissible”. A deputy speaker of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, Moshe Feiglin, demands a policy of mass expulsion into concentration camps. An MP, Ayelet Shaked, whose party is a member of the governing coalition, calls for the extermination of Palestinian mothers to prevent them giving birth to what she calls “little snakes”.

For years, reporters have watched Israeli soldiers bait Palestinian children by abusing them through loud-speakers. Then they shoot them dead. For years, reporters have known about

Palestinian women about to give birth and refused passage through a roadblock to a hospital; and the baby has died, and sometimes the mother.

For years, reporters have known about Palestinian doctors and ambulance crews given permission by Israeli commanders to attend the wounded or remove the dead, only to be shot through the head.

For years, reporters have known about stricken people prevented from getting life-saving treatment, or shot dead when they've tried to reach a clinic for chemotherapy treatment. One elderly lady with a walking stick was murdered in this way - a bullet in her back.

When I put the facts of this crime to Dori Gold, a senior adviser to the Israeli prime minister, he said, "Unfortunately in every kind of warfare there are cases of civilians who are accidentally killed. But the case you cite was not terrorism. Terrorism means putting the cross-hairs of the sniper's rifle on a civilian deliberately."

I replied, "That's exactly what happened."

"No," he said, "it did **not** happen."

Such a lie or delusion is repeated unerringly by Israel's apologists. As the former *New York Times* reporter Chris Hedges points out, the reporting of such an atrocity invariably ends up as "caught in the cross-fire". For as long as I have covered the Middle East, much if not most of the western media has colluded in this way.

In one of my films, a Palestinian cameraman, Imad Ghanem, lies helpless while soldiers from the "most moral army in the world" blew both his legs off. This atrocity was given two lines on the BBC website. Thirteen journalists were killed by Israel in its latest bloodfest in Gaza. All were Palestinian. Who knows their names?

Something is different now. There is a huge revulsion across the world; and the voices of *sensible* liberalism are worried. Their hand wringing and specious choir of "equal blame" and "Israel's right to defend itself" will not wash any more; neither will the smear of anti-Semitism. Neither will their selective cry that "something must be done" about Islamic fanatics but nothing must be done about Zionist fanatics.

One sensible liberal voice, the novelist Ian McEwan, was being celebrated as a sage by the *Guardian* while the children of Gaza were blown to bits. This is the same Ian McEwan who ignored the pleading of Palestinians not to accept the Jerusalem Prize for literature. "If I only went to countries that I approve of, I probably would never get out of bed," said McEwan.

If they could speak, the dead of Gaza might say: Stay in bed, great novelist, for your very presence smoothes the bed of racism, apartheid, ethnic cleansing and murder - no matter the weasel words you uttered as you claimed your prize.

Understanding the sophistry and power of liberal propaganda is key to understanding why Israel's outrages endure; why the world looks on; why sanctions are never applied to Israel; and why nothing less than a total boycott of everything Israeli is now a measure of basic human decency.

The most incessant propaganda says Hamas is committed to the destruction of Israel. Khaled Hroub, the Cambridge University scholar considered a world leading authority on

Hamas, says this phrase is “never used or adopted by Hamas, even in its most radical statements”. The oft-quoted “anti-Jewish” 1988 Charter was the work of “one individual and made public without appropriate Hamas consensus The author was one of the ‘old guard’”; the document is regarded as an embarrassment and never cited.

Hamas has repeatedly offered a 10-year truce with Israel and has long settled for a two-state solution. When Medea Benjamin, the fearless Jewish American activist, was in Gaza, she carried a letter from Hamas leaders to President Obama that made clear the government of Gaza wanted peace with Israel. It was ignored. I personally know of many such letters carried in good faith, ignored or dismissed.

The unforgivable crime of Hamas is a distinction almost never reported: it is the only Arab government to have been freely and democratically elected by its people. Worse, it has now formed a government of unity with the Palestinian Authority. A single, resolute Palestinian voice – in the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court – is the most feared threat.

Since 2002, a pioneering media unit at Glasgow University has produced remarkable studies of reporting and propaganda in Israel/Palestine. Professor Greg Philo and his colleagues were shocked to find a public ignorance compounded by TV news reporting. The more people watched, the less they knew.

Greg Philo says the problem is not “bias” as such. Reporters and producers are as moved as anyone by the suffering of Palestinians; but so imposing is the power structure of the media – as an extension of the state and its vested interests – that critical facts and historical context are routinely suppressed.

Incredibly, less than nine per cent of young viewers interviewed by Professor Philo’s team were aware that Israel was the occupying power, and that the illegal settlers were Jewish; many believed them to be Palestinian. The term “Occupied Territories” was seldom explained. Words such as “murder”, “atrocities”, “cold-blooded killing” were used only to describe the deaths of Israelis.

Recently, a BBC reporter, David Loyn, was critical of another British journalist, Jon Snow of Channel 4 News. Snow was so moved by what he had seen in Gaza he went on YouTube to make a humanitarian appeal. What concerned the BBC man was that Snow had breached protocol and been emotional in his YouTube piece.

“Emotion,” wrote Loyn, “is the stuff of propaganda and news is against propaganda”. Did he write this with a straight face? In fact, Snow’s delivery was calm. His crime was to have strayed outside the boundaries of fake impartiality. Unforgivably, he didn’t censor himself.

In 1937, with Adolf Hitler in power, Geoffrey Dawson, editor of *The Times* in London, wrote the following in his diary: “I spend my nights in taking out anything which will hurt [German] susceptibilities and in dropping in little things which are intended to soothe them.”

On 30 July, the BBC offered viewers a masterclass in the Dawson Principle. The diplomatic correspondent of the programme *Newsnight*, Mark Urban, gave five reasons why the Middle East was in turmoil. None included the historic or contemporary role of the British government. The Cameron government’s dispatch of £8 billion worth of arms and military equipment to Israel was airbrushed. Britain’s massive arms shipment to Saudi Arabia was

airbrushed. Britain's role in the destruction of Libya was airbrushed. Britain's support for the tyranny in Egypt was airbrushed.

As for the British invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, they didn't happen, either.

The only expert witness on this BBC programme was an academic called Toby Dodge from the London School of Economics. What viewers needed to know was that Dodge had been a special adviser to David Petraeus, the American general largely responsible for the disasters in Iraq and Afghanistan. But this, too, was airbrushed.

In matters of war and peace, BBC-style illusions of impartiality and credibility do more to limit and control public discussion than tabloid distortion. As Greg Philo pointed out, Jon Snow's moving commentary on YouTube was limited to whether the Israeli assault on Gaza was proportionate or reasonable. What was missing – and is almost always missing – was the essential truth of the longest military occupation in modern times: a criminal enterprise backed by western governments from Washington to London to Canberra.

As for the myth that “vulnerable” and “isolated” Israel is surrounded by enemies, Israel is actually surrounded by strategic allies. The Palestinian Authority, bankrolled, armed and directed by the US, has long colluded with Tel Aviv. Standing shoulder to shoulder with Netanyahu are the tyrannies in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar — if the World Cup ever gets to Qatar, count on Mossad to run the security.

Resistance is humanity at its bravest and most noble. The resistance in Gaza is rightly compared with the 1943 Jewish uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto – which also dug tunnels and deployed tactics of subterfuge and surprise against an overpowering military machine. The last surviving leader of the Warsaw uprising, Marek Edelman, wrote a letter of solidarity to the Palestinian resistance, comparing it with the ZOB, his ghetto fighters. The letter began: “Commanders of the Palestine military, paramilitary and partisan operations – and to all soldiers [of Palestine].”

Dr. Mads Gilbert is a Norwegian doctor renowned for his heroic work in Gaza. On 8 August, Dr. Gilbert returned to his hometown, Tronso in Norway which, as he pointed out, the Nazis had occupied for seven years. He said, “Imagine being back in 1945 and we in Norway did not win the liberation struggle, did not throw out the occupier. Imagine the occupier remaining in our country, taking it piece by piece, for decades upon decades, and banishing us to the leanest areas, and taking the fish in the sea and the water beneath us, then bombing our hospitals, our ambulance workers, our schools, our homes.

“Would we have given up and waved the white flag? No, we would not! And this is the situation in Gaza. This is not a battle between terrorism and democracy. Hamas is not the enemy Israel is fighting. Israel is waging a war against the Palestinian people's will to resist. It is the Palestinian people's dignity that they will not accept this.

“In 1938, the Nazis called the Jews Untermenschen – subhuman. Today, Palestinians are treated as a subhuman people who can be slaughtered without any in power reacting.

“So I have returned to Norway, a free country, and this country is free because we had a resistance movement, because occupied nations have the right to resist, even with weapons – it's stated in international law. And the Palestinian people's resistance in Gaza is admirable: a struggle for us all.”

There are dangers in telling this truth, in breaching what Edward Said called “the last taboo”. My documentary, *Palestine Is Still the Issue*, was nominated for a Bafta, a British academy award, and praised by the Independent Television Commission for its “journalistic integrity” and the “care and thoroughness with which it was researched.” Yet, within minutes of the film’s broadcast on Britain’s ITV Network, a shock wave struck – a deluge of emails described me as a “demonic psychopath”, “a purveyor of hate and evil”, “an anti-Semite of the most dangerous kind”. Much of this was orchestrated by Zionists in the US who could not possibly have seen the film. Death threats arrived at a rate of one a day.

Something similar happened to the Australian commentator Mike Carlton last month. In his regular column in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Carlton produced a rare piece of journalism about Israel and the Palestinians; he identified the oppressors and their victims. He was careful to limit his attack to “a new and brutal Israel dominated by the hard-line, right-wing Likud party of Netanyahu”. Those who had previously run the Zionist state, he implied, belonged to “a proud liberal tradition”.

On cue, the deluge struck. He was called “a bag of Nazi slime, a Jew-hating racist.” He was threatened repeatedly, and he emailed his attackers to “get fucked”.

The *Herald* demanded he apologise. When he refused, he was suspended, then he resigned. According to the *Herald*’s publisher, Sean Aylmer, the company “expects much higher standards from its columnists.”

The “problem” of Carlton’s acerbic, often solitary liberal voice in a country in which Rupert Murdoch controls 70 per cent of the capital city press — Australia is the world’s first murdocracy — would be solved twice over. The Australian Human Rights Commission is to investigate complaints against Carlton under the Racial Discrimination Act, which outlaws any public act or utterance that is “reasonably likely ... to offend, insult, humiliate another person or a group of people” on the basis of their race, colour or national or ethnic origin.

In contrast to safe, silent Australia — where the Carltons are made extinct — real journalism is alive in Gaza. I often speak on the phone with Mohammed Omer, an extraordinary young Palestinian journalist, to whom I presented, in 2008, the Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism. Whenever I called him during the assault on Gaza, I could hear the whine of drones, the explosion of missiles. He interrupted one call to attend to children huddled outside waiting for transport amidst the explosions. When I spoke to him on 30 July, a single Israeli F-19 fighter had just slaughtered 19 children. On 20 August, he described how Israeli drones had effectively “rounded up” a village so that they could savagely gunned down.

Every day, at sunrise, Mohammed looks for families who have been bombed. He records their stories, standing in the rubble of their homes; he takes their pictures. He goes to the hospital. He goes to the morgue. He goes to the cemetery. He queues for hours for bread for his own family. And he watches the sky. He sends two, three, four dispatches a day. This is real journalism.

“They are trying to annihilate us,” he told me. “But the more they bomb us, the stronger we are. They will never win.”

The great crime committed in Gaza is a reminder of something wider and menacing to us all.

Since 2001, the United States and its allies have been on a rampage. In Iraq, at least 700,000 men, woman and children are dead as a result. The rise of jihadists – in a country where there was none – is the result. Known as al-Qaeda and now the Islamic State, modern jihadism was invented by US and Britain, assisted by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The original aim was to use and develop an Islamic fundamentalism that had barely existed in much of the Arab world in order to undermine pan-Arab movements and secular governments. By the 1980s, this had become a weapon to destroy the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The CIA called it Operation Cyclone; and a cyclone it turned out to be, with its unleashed fury blowing back in the faces of its creators. The attacks of 9/11 and in London in July, 2005 were the result of this blowback, as were the recent, gruesome murders of the American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff. For more than a year, the Obama administration armed the killers of these two young men – then known as ISIS in Syria – in order to destroy the secular government in Damascus.

The West's principal "ally" in this imperial mayhem is the medieval state where beheadings are routinely and judicially carried out – Saudi Arabia. Whenever a member of the British Royal Family is sent to this barbaric place, you can bet your bottom petrodollar that the British government wants to sell the sheiks more fighter planes, missiles, manacles. Most of the 9/11 hijackers came from Saudi Arabia, which bankrolls jihadists from Syria to Iraq.

Why must we live in this state of perpetual war?

The immediate answer lies in the United States, where a secret and unreported coup has taken place. A group known as the Project for a New American Century, the inspiration of Dick Cheney and others, came to power with the administration of George W Bush. Once known in Washington as the "crazies", this extreme sect believes in what the US Space Command calls "full spectrum dominance".

Under both Bush and Obama, a 19th-century imperial mentality has infused all departments of state. Raw militarism is ascendant; diplomacy is redundant. Nations and governments are judged as useful or expendable: to be bribed or threatened or "sanctioned".

On 31 July, the National Defense Panel in Washington published a remarkable document that called for the United States to prepare to fight six major wars simultaneously. At the top of the list were Russia and China – nuclear powers.

In one sense, a war against Russia has already begun. While the world watched horrified as Israel assaulted Gaza, similar atrocities in eastern Ukraine were barely news. At the time of writing, two Ukrainian cities of Russian-speaking people – Donetsk and Luhansk – are under siege: their people and hospitals and schools blitzed by a regime in Kiev that came to power in a putsch led by neo-Nazis backed and paid for by the United States. The coup was the climax of what the Russian political observer Sergei Glaziev describes as a 20-year "grooming of Ukrainian Nazis aimed at Russia". Actual fascism has risen again in Europe and not one European leader has spoken against it, perhaps because the rise of fascism across Europe is now a truth that dares not speak its name.

With its fascist past, and present, Ukraine is now a CIA theme park, a colony of Nato and the International Monetary Fund. The fascist coup in Kiev in February was the boast of US assistant secretary of state Victoria Nuland, whose "coup budget" ran to \$5 billion. But there was a setback. Moscow prevented the seizure of its legitimate Black Sea naval base in Russian-speaking Crimea. A referendum and annexation quickly followed. Represented in

the West as the Kremlin's "aggression", this serves to turn truth on its head and cover Washington's goals: to drive a wedge between a "pariah" Russia and its principal trading partners in Europe and eventually to break up the Russian Federation. American missiles already surround Russia; Nato's military build-up in the former Soviet republics and eastern Europe is the biggest since the second world war.

During the cold war, this would have risked a nuclear holocaust. The risk has returned as anti-Russian misinformation reaches crescendos of hysteria in the US and Europe. A textbook case is the shooting down of a Malaysian airliner in July. Without a single piece of evidence, the US and its Nato allies and their media machines blamed ethnic Russian "separatists" in Ukraine and implied that Moscow was ultimately responsible. An editorial in *The Economist* accused Vladimir Putin of mass murder. The cover of *Der Spiegel* used faces of the victims and bold red type, "Stoppt Putin Jetzt!" (Stop Putin Now!) In the *New York Times*, Timothy Garton Ash substantiated his case for "Putin's deadly doctrine" with personal abuse of "a short, thickset man with a rather ratlike face".

The *Guardian's* role has been important. Renowned for its investigations, the newspaper has made no serious attempt to examine who shot the aeroplane down and why, even though a wealth of material from credible sources shows that Moscow was as shocked as the rest of the world, and the airliner may well have been brought down by the Ukrainian regime.

With the White House offering no verifiable evidence – even though US satellites would have observed the shooting-down – the *Guardian's* Moscow correspondent Shaun Walker stepped into the breach. "My audience with the Demon of Donetsk," was the front-page headline over Walker's breathless interview with one Igor Bezler. "With a walrus moustache, a fiery temper and a reputation for brutality," he wrote, "Igor Bezler is the most feared of all the rebel leaders in eastern Ukraine ...nicknamed The Demon ... If the Ukrainian security services, the SBU, are to be believed, the Demon and a group of his men were responsible for shooting down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 ... as well as allegedly bringing down MH17, the rebels have shot down 10 Ukrainian aircraft." Demon Journalism requires no further evidence.

Demon Journalism makes over a fascist-contaminated junta that seized power in Kiev as a respectable "interim government". Neo-Nazis become mere "nationalists". "News" sourced to the Kiev junta ensures the suppression of a US-run coup and the junta's systematic ethnic cleaning of the Russian-speaking population of eastern Ukraine. That this should happen in the borderland through which the original Nazis invaded Russia, extinguishing some 22 million Russian lives, is of no interest. What matters is a Russian "invasion" of Ukraine that seems difficult to prove beyond familiar satellite images that evoke Colin Powell's fictional presentation to the United Nations "proving" that Saddam Hussein had WMD. "You need to know that accusations of a major Russian 'invasion' of Ukraine appear not to be supported by reliable intelligence," wrote a group of former senior US intelligence officials and analysts, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. "Rather, the 'intelligence' seems to be of the same dubious, politically 'fixed' kind used 12 years ago to 'justify' the U.S.-led attack on Iraq."

The jargon is "controlling the narrative". In his seminal *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said was more explicit: the western media machine was now capable of penetrating deep into the consciousness of much of humanity with a "wiring" as influential as that of the imperial navies of the 19th century. Gunboat journalism, in other words. Or war by media.

Yet, a critical public intelligence and resistance to propaganda does exist; and a second superpower is emerging – the power of public opinion, fuelled by the internet and social media.

The false reality created by false news delivered by media gatekeepers may prevent some of us knowing that this new superpower is stirring in country after country: from the Americas to Europe, Asia to Africa. It is a moral insurrection, exemplified by the whistleblowers Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange. The question begs: will we break our silence while there is time?

When I was last in Gaza, driving back to the Israeli checkpoint, I caught sight of two Palestinian flags through the razor wire. Children had made flagpoles out of sticks tied together and they'd climbed on a wall and held the flag between them.

The children do this, I was told, whenever there are foreigners around, because they want to show the world they are there – alive, and brave, and undefeated.

This article is adapted from John Pilger's Edward Said Memorial Lecture, delivered in Adelaide, Australia, on 11 September.

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