

VOLUME 19 ISSUE 4 | FALL 2025

*in*FOCUS

QUARTERLY

Identity, Borders, and Conflict



Shoshana Bryen on End of the Western Conceit | **Nicholas Rostow** on Genocide in International Law | **Arsen Ostrovsky** on Israel's Lawful Operations in Gaza | **Donald L. Losman** on the Cause of War | **Stephen Blank** on Russia's War Against Ukraine | **Lela Gilbert** on Christians in the Middle East | **Antonio Graceffo** on Christians in Africa | **Kyle Shideler** on the Left's Anagnorisis | **Sinan Ciddi** on Turkey's Malign Influence in Syria | **Ariel Cohen** on Engagement with Central Asia | **Shoshana Bryen** reviews *The David Discovery* and *Israel Strikes Iran*

An Interview with **Tamir Murad**

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Deeply focused on the progress of Israel's war against Hamas and its allies, and watching Israel bear the often ridiculous, disproportionate, and simply antisemitic disapprobation of the "international community," we have drawn two basic conclusions. First, the conflict about borders and identity is not unique to Israel and those who want to establish another Arab state or to erase the State of Israel. Therefore, second, understanding the history of war, colonialism, and international relations, as well as specific cases of each are essential to keeping our heads straight.

In this issue, JPC Senior Director Shoshana Bryen starts with the premise that the post-colonial border-drawing by colonial countries themselves was ahistorical and a doomed exercise from the start. Nicholas Rostow explains what "genocide" is – devoid of the political goal of damning Israel – and Arsen Ostrovsky gives examples of what is and is not actually genocide. Donald Losman cuts through the rhetoric to consider the one true cause of war. People under threat in Ukraine, and Syria, as well as Christians across the Middle East and Africa, are described by Stephen Blank, Tamir Murad (in our interview with Shoshana), and Lela Gilbert. The



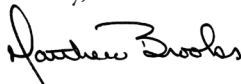
plight of Christians in Central Africa is the focus of Antonio Gracefo.

As the fall season of anti-Israel and antisemitic protests gets under way, Kyle Shideler tells us who pays. And, in a negative-positive dichotomy, Sinan Ciddi and Ariel Cohen explain Turkey's renewed Ottoman aspirations and the potential for peace and progress between historic enemies Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Two books this time: *The David Discovery* by inFOCUS Associate Editor Eric Rozenman, for those who appreciate the intricacies of Jewish history and culture, and the special place America's founding has in Jewish history and thinking. *Israel Strikes Iran* by Edwin Black is the twenty-year backstory of Israel's – and America's – preparation for reducing or eliminating Iran's ability to build and use a nuclear weapon. Prepare to be surprised by both authors.

If you appreciate what you've read, I encourage you to make a contribution to the JPC. You can use our secure site: www.jewishpolicycenter.org/donate.

Sincerely,



Matthew Brooks
Publisher

inFOCUS Quarterly
Volume 19 | Issue 4

Publisher
Matthew Brooks

Editor
Shoshana Bryen

Associate Editor
Michael Johnson
Eric Rozenman

Published by:
Jewish Policy Center
PO Box 77316
Washington, DC 20013

(202) 638-2411

Follow us:

JewishPolicyCenter 

@theJPC 

The opinions expressed in inFOCUS do not necessarily reflect those of the Jewish Policy Center, its board, or its officers.

To begin or renew your subscription, please contact us: info@jewishpolicycenter.org

© 2025 Jewish Policy Center

www.JewishPolicyCenter.org

FEATURING

SHOSHANA BRYEN is Senior Director of The Jewish Policy Center and Editor of inFOCUS Quarterly. (3, 37)

NICHOLAS ROSTOW is Senior Research Scholar at Yale Law School. (7)

ARSEN OSTROVSKY CEO of the International Legal Forum. (10)

DONALD L. LOSMAN, Ph.D., worked 37 years in professional military education. (12)

STEPHEN BLANK, Ph.D., is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI). (15)

LELA GILBERT is Senior Fellow for International Religious Freedom at the Family Research Council. (18)

ANTONIO GRACEFFO, Ph.D., is a China economic analyst teaching economics at the American University in Mongolia. (20)

TAMIR MURAD is a former Israeli diplomat and advisor to the spiritual leader of the Druze community. (22)

KYLE SHIDELER is Senior Analyst for Homeland Security and Counter Terrorism at the Center for Security Policy. (27)

SINAN CIDDİ, Ph.D., is a senior fellow at The Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). (30)

ARIEL COHEN, Ph.D., is a Senior Fellow with the International Tax and Investment Center. (33)

End of the Western Conceit

by SHOSHANA BRYEN

The war against Hamas has not gone as Israel wished, for a variety of reasons, but in fact, Israel has emerged as the Strong Horse of the region. And the old colonial mega-powers, France and Great Britain, are struggling madly for relevance.

The August signing of a 15-year, \$35 billion Israel-Egypt natural gas deal tells you what you need to know. Egypt had been signaling (saying outright) that Israel could become an enemy again; now it appears to be linking its energy future to Israel. The participation of certain Gulf States in the negotiation is also a reminder that not a single Abraham Accords country withdrew because of the Israeli-Hamas war – and Saudi Arabia remains a potential partner.

As for the rest of the region, since Oct. 7, 2023 the Israel Defense Forces have destroyed the majority of Hamas tunnels and killed the majority of Hamas leadership. The pagers sabotage and destruction of Hezbollah missiles and launchers in Southern Lebanon, plus the elimination of Hezbollah leadership have led to (at a minimum) the Lebanese government demanding that the Lebanese Armed Forces remove Hezbollah weapons from their south. The decimation of Hezbollah and Iranian military assets in Syria opened the path for the ouster of the Assad regime and the Iranians – which may not be altogether beneficial for the people. Houthi assets have been destroyed in Yemen, including Sanaa airport.

Throw in the humiliation of UNRWA, exposed as an active Hamas partner.

And Iran.

Following President Donald Trump's ultimatum on Iranian nuclear weapons capability, the IDF attacked air defense capabilities, missile launchers,

drone factories, missile factories, nuclear facilities and nuclear scientists. The US Air Force performed precise hits on Iran's nuclear reactor and enrichment sites. The cooperation and coordination between US and Israeli forces in the region was amazing.

Watching it, King Abdullah II of Jordan announced that Jordan would not support Iran, but it also turned out that Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates actively assisted Israel's forces. Saudi Arabia and Lebanon are considering the Abraham Accords. Syria opened a conversation with Israel about ending hostilities – which is looking distinctly less viable these days with Syria's attacks on its Druze population, but remains on the table.

On the other side, Russia condemned the US strikes but took no action to support Iran, and indeed, told Iran that Russia would not support

US was also a setback for traditional colonial powers.

■ *The Western Conceit*

Boundaries were historically drawn by warfare. Every border in Western and Central Europe and North America was determined by a series of wars and population exchanges. But post-World War I, the belief emerged among the conquerors – primarily colonialist France and Britain in the Middle East – that “countries” were comprised of people who lived within set lines that could be drawn by the colonialists when they left or by the United Nations (UN), which brags that, since its founding in 1945, “80 former colonies have gained their independence.”

Because they could, out-going colonial powers simply told people who ended up within a particular boundary they drew to give their allegiance to

The August signing of a 15-year, \$35 billion Israel-Egypt natural gas deal tells you what you need to know.

nuclear weapons for Iran. China offered Iran exactly nothing. Africans are watching – the Democratic Republic of Congo-Rwanda agreement presented by President Trump is a signal. It was followed by the Armenia-Azerbaijan agreement.

The three putative empires – Iran, Russia and China – were set back in ways not imagined beforehand. But it turns out that the rise of Israel and the

“the government” whose powers they set up. But these governments may or may not have represented them, resembled them, shared their goals, or even liked them. Religion matters here as well. Sometimes, enemies ended up within the same boundaries, engendering hideous territorial or religious wars that, to this day, include slavery, starvation, and massacres.

If you're thinking about Africa

here, add Germany, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal to the list of colonial powers. Once colonized Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Chad, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo all have vicious wars and suffering populations. In China, the post-colonial, Communist Party-decreed Great Leap Forward killed between 15 and 50 million people in a few years, and the Cultural Revolution killed another half-million to 2 million people. In this decade, Muslim Uyghurs have been subjected to genocide, and in Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau the US State Department says people face “severe human rights issues.”

And don’t forget the targeting of indigenous people in South America or the Rohingya in Myanmar by ruling classes and castes. Or Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

All places with post-colonial issues.

The United States was not a major colonial overlord, although it did participate enthusiastically in post-colonial map-making, promoting territorial compromise, constitutions, and elections as essential to a peaceful future. And ignoring the actual people of the region.

America and the UN drew boundaries for an Arab group called “Palestinians” and promised to make it a country. The Jews would get boundaries as well. “Palestine” failed for so many reasons: The “Palestinians” were a segment of “the Arabs,” the larger group that didn’t want to split territory with Jews or, for that matter, a new Arab subgroup. For the emergent Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its components, governance was secondary to self-aggrandizement and, for some, jihad. Terror and corruption flourished because the “leadership” was largely disconnected from the people who had long before left the space.

But the Western conceit lives as France, the United Kingdom, and Spain – all former colonial powers – aided by Australia, Ireland, Norway, and others today demand that Palestine be a considered a state ruled by people chosen

by the outsiders (a “reformed” PA or, perhaps, the remnant of Hamas), without regard to the failure of both to serve their people. The US rejects the proposition – in this administration.

■ *How Did We Get Here?*

The 2011 broad uprising of Arab people was tagged “The Arab Spring” to associate it with the 1968 Prague Spring and the sort of romantic and mostly non-violent collapse of the Soviet Union and the freeing of Central Europe twenty-odd years later. But it is not the same, and Western confusion caused enormous upheaval for the Arab people – and an enormous, but different threat

mercantilism; journalism; a middle class; the role of women; experience with kings, princes, and parliaments; and the Church all correlated on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Removing the Soviet Union – and the collapse of communism – allowed the eastern half to reattach itself to the western half.

The Yugoslav breakup was a bloody anomaly, but reaffirmed the enduring nature of sub-state ethnic and national identities. The attachment of the Baltic States, Ukraine, and Georgia to the West was an added benefit of Soviet collapse. Today, Russia is attempting to pull its colonies back in – witness Georgia and Ukraine.

Lifting the yoke of the Soviet Union from its western colonies simply restored those countries to their former position as part of “Europe, whole and free,” as the Atlanticists said – correctly.

than Israel had faced before. On the other hand, it led directly to the Abraham Accords and growing acceptance of Israel in the region.

Unsurprisingly, the Arab Spring splintered in vastly different directions because societies of the Arab Middle East, North Africa and the non-Arab Muslim societies of Turkey and Iran are vastly different and have vastly different requirements for societal control.

Lifting the yoke of the Soviet Union from its western colonies simply restored those countries to their former position as part of “Europe, whole and free,” as the Atlanticists said – correctly. Before Soviet domination, the history, economy, society, religion, and national development of the eastern part of the European continent was essentially the same as the western part – capitalism;

It is a mistake to think of the so-called Arab Spring in any such nationalist or capitalist or ideological terms; think tectonic plates. Since 3000 BCE, the broader Middle East has been governed by outside forces, mostly colonial forces based elsewhere. The occupiers have included:

- Egyptians
- Hittites
- Assyrians
- Babylonians
- Persians
- Macedonians
- Romans
- Byzantines
- Sassanids
- The Caliphate
- Seljuks
- Crusaders



A US Air Force B-2 Spirit is prepared for strikes against Iran's nuclear program as part of Operation Midnight Hammer at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, in June 2025. (Photo: US Air Force)

- Saladin
- Mongols
- Ottomans

And finally, Europeans, primarily the British and French after WW I.

Some of those colonial empires lasted hundreds of years.

The Arab Spring was the separation or pulling apart of the boundaries and societies stitched together primarily by the British and the French in the post-colonial period in the Middle East and North Africa. One hundred years ago – that's all.

But it is the last 100 years in a 3,000-year process.

The Bush and Obama administrations both insisted that the people of the region wanted something called “democracy.” Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called freedom a “yearning in every human heart.” The Obama people wanted to “atone” for what they thought was white – and American – colonialism.

They were wrong.

The Arab Spring turned ugly. It removed the government of Hosni Mubarak (with American help) and created the terror of a Muslim Brotherhood state that was itself ousted in 2013. Libya (under American military assault) crashed in 2011 and the wars since then

the US supported and armed militias it did not understand) that killed more than 600,000 people, displaced more than half of the pre-war Syrian population of 22 million, and included the use of poison gas. Much of this was funded by Iran's largesse (which was partially

With only a few actual soldiers or weapons, Iran created what we know as the “Shiite Crescent” anchored by the radical Shiite supremacists in Iran and ending at the Mediterranean Sea.

have killed thousands, wrecked industry, fueled the migrant crisis and provided weapons for ISIS and al-Qaeda in Syria. And, of course, in Syria, the promise of the Spring encouraged the uprising that led to civil war (in which

American largesse). Syria is now “governed” by an ISIS-adjacent militia.

■ **On the Other Hand**

In response to Western colonial failures in the latter half of the 20th century,

regional actors began to reconsider empires as a mechanism for control. Two putative, violent empires emerged.

The putative Shiite Empire centered in Iran, and

The putative Sunni Empire – which has two branches

- The non-Arab neo-Ottoman Empire centered in Turkey
- And mostly-but-not-completely Arab ISIS, which has lost its land base but is moving through Africa

Both use the old empire-building scheme of using relatively few of their own troops working with a large series of proxies and mercenaries to create instability across huge swaths of territory.

It will take time and clever diplomacy for the results to be fully cemented. But for now, precision bombs and clever diplomacy are working for the good guys for the first time in a long time.

With only a few actual soldiers or weapons, Iran created what we know as the “Shiite Crescent” anchored by the radical Shiite supremacists in Iran and ending at the Mediterranean Sea. It provided Tehran not only with closer access to Israel but also spread across the northern borders of two key Sunni adversaries – pro-American Jordan, and Iran’s most important enemy, Saudi Arabia, guardian of Mecca and Medina. It further split Sunni Turkey (a historic foe) from the other Sunni Middle East states.

The Crescent was, for Iran, a single battlefield and the Islamic Republic spent decades successfully undermining and wrecking each subsidiary member.

Israel put an end to it after Oct. 7, decimating Hamas, Hezbollah, and the

remains of the Syrian Assad regime, and vastly curtailing Iran’s nuclear blackmail threat.

■ *Under the Crescent*

The underside encircled the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia in the Gulf of Aden with a base in Yemen and a Houthi proxy at the bottom of the Red Sea, disrupting seaborne traffic for Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia to the Gulf and the Indian Ocean, and reducing shipping (and revenue) from the Suez Canal for Egypt.

And Africa: Iran incubated Sunni jihadists in the poor, corrupt, and vulnerable states of the second tier – Sudan,

Chad, Niger, and Mali. The result was waves of migrants headed north. The North African countries – Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria – were all in the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue group that helped control safety and security in the sea until the Obama administration toppled the Libyan government in 2011. Libya, no longer a member of the Dialogue, became the hole in the dam through which hundreds of thousands of African and Middle Eastern migrants reached Europe.

ISIS lost its territorial base in the Middle East, but remains active and murderous in Africa, where Turkey is also working to establish itself as a military power, particularly in Libya. This goes along with Turkish aspirations in Syria and Iraq, as well as its open ties

with Hamas and Hezbollah.

■ *Rebellion Against Empires*

At some point, for some governments, the allure of war and the ideological principle of throwing the Jews into the sea paled in comparison with figuring out how to stay in power and determine the role of the people under their systems of rule. Technology, water, and the fight against radical ideology – both Shiite and Sunni – were other priorities, and Arab states began to see Israel as a potential partner in their pursuit.

It was not about what we call “democracy” or democratic revolution – it was and remains about survival for the people and about survival for the regimes. The smaller Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan didn’t want to be like Syria, if they had a choice.

They did have a choice. The Abraham Accords.

■ *The Empire Replied*

The Hamas orgy of murder and destruction in Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, was designed to prevent Israel and Saudi Arabia from reaching an agreement. Hamas leadership assumed everyone would help – specifically, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran. Hezbollah did, for a minute, and the Houthis did. But Israel sequentially decimated their leadership and their capabilities.

And the colonial has-beens, France and the UK, and their minions, from Ireland to Australia to Canada, are embarrassed and angry with Israel’s success. Turkey a once-and-hoped-for-future colonial power, remains problematic.

It will take time, bombs, and clever diplomacy for the results to be fully cemented. But for now, precision bombs and clever diplomacy are working for the good guys for the first time in a long time.

SHOSHANA BRYEN is Senior Director of The Jewish Policy Center and Editor of inFOCUS Quarterly.

What is Genocide? Beyond “I Know It When I See It”

by **NICHOLAS ROSTOW**

“Genocide” is a crime under international law and in most national legal systems. As in the prosecution of all crimes, the elements of genocide must be proved beyond a reasonable doubt. Today, it has become more than a legal term; outside courthouses, in some circles, genocide has become a slogan. As this essay argues, using genocide as a slogan or label cheapens the currency of what has been called the “crime of crimes.”

This essay starts with the legal definition of genocide, not because it is dispositive, but because it is the only agreed definition we have. It then considers how impossible it is to discuss the subject without addressing the allegations of genocide thrown at Israel. It concludes with reflections on the use of “genocide” as a term in political discourse.

■ *Genocide as a Matter of International Law*

International law contains a formal definition of genocide. As set forth in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Convention or, simply, the Convention), genocide is the commission of acts with “the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.” The specified acts include killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, imposing conditions designed to destroy the group, intentionally preventing births, forcibly transferring children to another group, or engaging in a conspiracy to commit genocide. The parties – more

than 150 states out of 193 UN Member states – to the Convention “undertake to prevent and to punish” the crime of genocide. Pursuant to the Genocide Convention, jurisdiction to try genocide is the province of courts in the territory where the genocide has taken place or of an international tribunal for which purpose parties to the Genocide Convention have agreed, or, of course, pursuant to applicable domestic law. The states that created the International Criminal Court (ICC) conferred on it jurisdiction to try allegations of genocide.

“Crimes against humanity” are not so different as a matter of substance although a wider array of tribunals may have jurisdiction. In the words of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, which was the

intention. Case-by-case application of the Genocide Convention and the prohibition of crimes against humanity law is essential.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) affirmed that an applicant alleging genocide has to establish by convincing proof the elements of the crime. Such proof does not require showing an ambition to kill all members of a defined group everywhere in the world, but members of the group within reach of the perpetrators. That was true of German genocides against Jews and Roma (or Romani), for example, in World War II. In reaching its conclusions, the ICJ relied on findings by the International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), for example, in regard to the genocide at Srebrenica: the trial court determined

As set forth in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide... genocide is the commission of acts with “the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.

first international tribunal to specify the character of such crimes, crimes against humanity include “murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population...” Genocide and crimes against humanity require

that the perpetrators had the requisite specific intent to kill Bosnian Muslim males to meet the requirements of the Genocide Convention. As the ICTY held, killing part of a group because the victims were part of the group could qualify as genocide if the people killed

were emblematic of the group and the killing also was emblematic of the fate the group could anticipate – intentional physical destruction.

other fighters based in the Gaza Strip, in its list of genocides. Unless one includes Hamas's fighters and aiders and abettors as forming a group protected by

to its destruction.

Today, Iran and Hamas stand out among such states and non-states. Given that Israel calls itself a "Jewish" state and has a substantially Jewish citizenry, their goal should be considered genocidal intent as a matter of law.

Governments and commentators have hesitated to say so. Perhaps the consideration behind this reluctance is prudential. It is difficult to negotiate or make peace with those accused of genocide. In a discussion in 2003 of the UN role in restoring peace and justice to war-torn societies, then-Secretary General Kofi Annan made this point: "There should be no amnesties for war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity or other serious violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law." Yet, some commentators and others have not hesitated to turn a blind eye to such crimes where Israelis are the victims.

In the wake of Hamas's attacks on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and Iran's and Iran's other proxies' attacks in the following days, Israel responded with force. That response, particularly in the Gaza Strip, prompted immediate claims that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza. Stenciled messages appeared overnight on New York's sidewalks calling on walkers to stop the Gaza genocide. No such messages ever have greeted Iran's or Hamas's calls for the destruction of Israel or Russia's aggression against Ukraine or the kidnapping and removal to Russia of Ukrainian children. The immediate appearance of such messages and protests suggested an organized, well-funded effort to discredit Israel's right to defend itself, indeed, to exist at all.

At the end of December 2023, moreover, not even two months after the Hamas attacks on Israel of October 7, and the commencement of Israel's counterattacks, South Africa brought a case – some have suggested that Iran or others have funded the case – against Israel before the ICJ alleging that those counter-attacks violated the Genocide

It is probably impossible to consider our subject without noting the singular role of Jews in creating the law against genocide. Europe's Jews were the principal victims of Hitler's extermination plans.

Wikipedia lists at least 20 "genocides" since 1900. They include, of course, the Holocaust, in which at least two-thirds of Europe's Jews were murdered, and the Roma genocide, involving at least 250,000 murdered including at the killing centers established principally to kill Jews. Raphael Lemkin, who came up with the word "genocide" to describe the intentional killing of a people with the goal of eliminating that people, was quick to note that Jews were not history's first victims of genocide or the only victims of genocide in World War II. In the twentieth century, there were genocidal murders of Armenians and Ukrainians before the Holocaust. In previous centuries, African, American, Asian, Middle Eastern, and European groups, including Jews, had suffered mass murder deserving to be called "genocide."

Wikipedia does not discuss whether Hamas's or Iran's repeated insistence that Israel be destroyed constitutes genocidal intent. Without analyzing Israel's actions compared to the elements of the crime of genocide or in any way acknowledging uncertainty with regard to facts on the ground in Gaza, Wikipedia includes Israel's response to the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks by Hamas and

the Genocide Convention, it is hard to equate Israel's intended killings of these lawful military targets with, for example, the murder of some 7-8,000 Bosniak Muslim men and boys at Srebrenica in 1995 or the slaughter a year earlier of some 900,000 Tutsis in Rwanda.

■ Israel

It is probably impossible to consider our subject without noting the singular role of Jews in creating the law against genocide. Europe's Jews were the principal victims of Hitler's extermination plans. Jewish lawyers were among those who successfully advocated for inclusion of crimes against humanity in the Nuremberg Charter, and the 1948 conclusion of the Genocide Convention and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On January 30, 1939, Adolf Hitler told the Reichstag that, "If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!" Ironically, Israel, since 1948 has been subject to armed attacks by states and non-state actors committed



IDF troops in Gaza as part of operation Swords of Iron in 2024. (Photo: IDF)

Convention. The South African representative illuminated the true point of the litigation:

At the outset South Africa acknowledges that the genocidal acts and omissions by the State of Israel ('Israel') 'inevitably form part of a continuum', of illegal acts perpetrated against the Palestinian people since 1948. The Application places Israel's genocidal acts and omissions within the broader context of Israel's 75-year apartheid, 56-year occupation and 16-year siege imposed on the Gaza Strip – a siege which itself, has been described by the Director of UNRWA Affairs in Gaza, as 'a silent killer of people.'

In short, he argued, the existence of Israel constitutes a continuum of illegality of which “genocide” in the Gaza Strip is merely the culmination.

■ Cheapening the Currency

In 1951, the ICJ noted that the Genocide Convention defined genocide as a crime under international law because it involved “a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, a denial which shocks the conscience of mankind . . .” That fact caused the ICJ

subsequently to observe that the prohibition of genocide “assuredly” was a peremptory norm of general international law (*jus cogens*) – a mandatory norm

that overrides all others that might conflict with it. Among the most frequently cited such norms are those at the core of the UN Charter – the prohibition on the threat or use of force except in self-defense. The UN Charter itself suggests this idea by stating that treaties inconsistent with the Charter are without force and effect. From outside the UN Charter, the list of peremptory norms usually includes the prohibitions on genocide, the slave trade and slavery, torture, and, often, apartheid and other offenses.

However defined, *jus cogens* norms are fundamental, part of the bedrock of the international system. Violations

do not invalidate the mandatory norm. Accusing a government of violating one of them should not be done lightly. In recent years, such accusations, particularly of genocide, frequently have appeared in public discourse. When this usage occurs, the elements of the crime are not specified.

■ Conclusion

Genocide is a real crime with real elements. In this respect, it is like murder, although on a larger scale and with a larger purpose. In ongoing conflicts, facts having to do with intent, the identity of victims, and the circumstances under which people were harmed are difficult to determine. Our information technology context adds to the ordinary fog and uncertainties of war by increasing the means, and access to them, of deception and misrepresentation. Propagandists for a particular

Propagandists ... exploit the uncertainties and these new technologies. Those who make accusations of genocide, whatever the circumstances, rarely if ever express doubt about the evidence. Or the need for more.

view exploit the uncertainties and these new technologies. Those who make accusations of genocide, whatever the circumstances, rarely if ever express doubt about the evidence. Or the need for more.

We live at a time where words of opprobrium are used where effect is more important than accuracy.

NICHOLAS ROSTOW is Senior Research Scholar, Yale Law School; Fellow, Institute for Security, Technology, and Society, Dartmouth College; and Executive Partner, Zumpano Patricios, PA. The views expressed are his own.

Lawful and Unlawful Operations in Gaza

by ARSEN OSTROVSKY, JOHN SPENCER, AND BRIAN COX

Editor's Note: The term "genocide" has been misapplied to Israeli military actions in Gaza. That is a deliberate ploy and one that appears to work. We are pleased to bring you two short pieces by international human rights lawyer and CEO of the International Legal Forum, Arsen Ostrovsky. In the second, written in January, but with continuing relevance, Ostrovsky is joined by military experts John Spencer, chair of urban warfare studies at the Modern War Institute at West Point and co-director of MWI's Urban Warfare Project, and Brian Cox, adjunct professor of law at Cornell Law School and retired US Army judge advocate.

I'm a Human Rights Lawyer: What's Happening to the Druze in Syria Is a Real Genocide. Gaza Is Not.

(July 2025)

Right now, in southern Syria, a genocide is unfolding in real time.

In the last week, hundreds of Druze civilians in Sweida, have been hunted, humiliated, and murdered by forces loyal to the Syrian regime of Ahmad al-Sharra.

Men, women, children, elderly - entire families are being wiped out. Yet the world looks the other way.

Where are the mass marches, the campus encampments at Columbia and Harvard, and all the human rights champions? Why is no one chanting for the Druze?

Their silence is deafening. And the hypocrisy is staggering.

Now contrast this with the obsessive focus on Israel's war against Hamas

in the Gaza Strip, where armchair activists, academics and press are hurling baseless claims of genocide.

I am an international human rights lawyer, and Sweida is what an actual genocide looks like: a deliberate and systematic attempt to eradicate a group of people.

That is not what is happening in Gaza, and saying so is not just factually and legally wrong, it is morally obscene and a complete distortion of truth.

Under the 1948 Genocide Convention, genocide is clearly defined as acts committed with "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." At its core, genocide requires "intent."

The war in Gaza is many things - ugly, tragic, and devastating - but it has been fought by Israel entirely in self-defense, after Hamas launched the single worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust on Oct. 7, 2023.

Israel's objective has never been to wipe out the Palestinian Arab people, but to dismantle Hamas' military and governing capabilities, stop further terrorist atrocities, and return the hostages.

In war, innocent civilians die. That is a tragedy. But it is also the inevitable consequence of Hamas using its own people as human shields and embedding rocket launchers, tunnels and weapons inside and underneath homes, schools, hospitals, and mosques.

Despite this, Israel has taken unprecedented steps, unmatched by any military in modern history, to uphold the laws of armed conflict and mitigate civilian harm, including issuing warnings, dropping leaflets, establishing

humanitarian corridors, facilitating aid and foregoing the pursuit of legitimate military targets to spare civilians.

This is the exact opposite of genocide. This is a state doing everything possible to avoid civilian casualties.

That is a world apart from what al-Sharaa's forces are doing in Sweida: mercilessly targeting a minority group for extermination, an actual genocide. And yet the world, apparently, couldn't care less.

Why? Because condemning Ahmad al-Sharaa, the jihadist-turned-wannabe-statesman, and new darling of the international community, doesn't make headlines? Or perhaps the Druze aren't a trendy cause in the progressive elites?

Perhaps it's just far easier to bash Israel than confront the real monsters perpetrating heinous crimes.

Sadly, today the word "genocide" is being tossed around like a political football by those who care more about scoring ideological points than about actual human suffering.

Those levelling the genocide accusation against Israel don't care about law or facts. For them, the label is a propaganda weapon, a tool of lawfare aimed at vilifying Israel and absolving Hamas of its actual genocidal intent, which it acted out during the Oct. 7 massacre, and has vowed to repeat "again and again" until Israel is "annihilated."

Genocide is not a political weapon - it is "the crime of crimes." And when it is falsely and maliciously applied to Israel, it not only distorts the truth, it cheapens and demeans the suffering of real victims, like the Druze, who are being massacred before our eyes in Syria.

Don't Blame Israel – Hamas Put Every Gaza Hospital in Danger

(January 2025)

There has been intense discussion focused on Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip, reportedly one of the last functioning hospitals in the area. This has been part of a broader ongoing debate in the war between Hamas and Israel, on the status of hospitals in wartime and under what circumstances they might become objects of legitimate military operations.

Under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), it is a foundational principle that hospitals receive special protected status. For example, Article 8(2) of the Rome Statute prohibits “intentionally directing attacks against” hospitals provided “they are not military objectives.” Article 11 of the Second Protocol to the Geneva Conventions provides that medical units shall be “protected at all times.”

However, this protection ceases if they are “used to commit hostile acts.” These rules of international law are recognized by Israel and implemented during its conflict with Hamas in Gaza.

Hamas, a ruthless terrorist organization, operates without any regard to the norms of international law or value of human life, with a longstanding practice of systematically embedding its operations in hospitals, using civilians as human shields and building military tunnels underneath hospitals.

Fifteen months into the war initiated by Hamas, there is hardly a hospital or medical facility in Gaza the terror group has not turned into a military command center, including the Kamal Adwan Hospital. There, Israel has detained over 240 Hamas terrorists, including some disguised as patients, and found caches of weapons, including guns and explosives. Each of these acts is an undisputed violation of the law of armed conflict.

Among the suspects taken for questioning was the director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital, Hussam Abu Safiya,

who is suspected of being a Hamas terrorist leader, in addition to approximately 15 terrorists who infiltrated Israel during the Oct. 7, 2023 massacre. In these circumstances, during which Hamas turned Kamal Adwan Hospital into a terrorist staging ground, the hospital lost its protected status under international law and become a legitimate target for military operations.

Israel’s military objective is clear and defined: to eliminate the military capabilities of Hamas, which continues to use hospitals and other civilian areas in Gaza to plan and execute acts of terror against Israel, as well as to rescue the remaining hostages that the terror group is holding captive.

However, merely because Hamas has seized hospitals as its own personal launching pads and terrorist command centers does not provide *carte blanche*

Quite simply, Israel has gone to unprecedented lengths to comply with its obligations pursuant to the law of armed conflict, whereas Hamas is doing everything possible in order to maximize casualties.

to conduct military operations. Nor does it mean that patients and staff inside the hospital immediately lose their civilian status. Under humanitarian law, Israel must still abide by fundamental rules such as distinction, proportionality, and precaution. In each case, it has acted in accordance with its obligation.

Based on clear intelligence, Israel targeted a military objective used by Hamas terrorists, as evinced by the approximately 240 operatives arrested. There were hardly any civilian injuries in the operation, indicating that the expected incidental damage was not excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated from the operation.

Israel also took ample precaution, including providing advanced warning, evacuating civilians and providing additional medical supplies to the hospital.

Prior to the beginning of the targeted operation, as well as the process during, approximately 450 patients, as well as caregivers and medical personnel, were evacuated, while tens of thousands of liters of fuel, food and medical supplies for the essential functioning of the hospital were also delivered to Kamal Adwan.

Quite simply, Israel has gone to unprecedented lengths to comply with its obligations pursuant to the law of armed conflict, whereas Hamas is doing everything possible in order to maximize casualties.

In the wake of the targeted counterterrorism operation at Kamal Adwan Hospital, the World Health Organization (WHO) said that “the systematic dismantling of the health system in Gaza is a death sentence for tens of thousands of Palestinians in need of health care.”

To date, WHO has not condemned Hamas for the systematic use of hospi-

tals in Gaza for military purposes. The global call to Hamas should be “Stop putting hospitals in danger.” Many ignore that Hamas has systematically dismantled the health system in Gaza, with the acquiescence of an international community that refuses to call it out.

WHO also fails to acknowledge that Israel is trying to bolster the health system in Gaza, working with many groups to supply the five active hospitals in Northern Gaza and almost 20 field hospitals.

Those who truly care about the well-being of civilians in Gaza, and who are rightfully aghast at the scenes coming out of Kamal Adwan Hospital would be well advised to direct their outrage at Hamas, which continues to unconscionably and illegally turn hospitals into its personal control and command centers and severely risk the lives of innocent civilians.

The Cause of War: Fable and Fact

by DONALD L. LOSMAN

Editors Note: For an unabridged version of this article visit our website at www.jewishpolicycenter.org.

Conventional explanations of state-against-state war are misleading and erroneous, despite their widespread embrace. Wars rarely begin by accident or result primarily from one side's aggressive impulses. Instead, combat is almost always a choice that nations make.

There always exists some desire to redefine interstate relations. A nation may believe neighboring countries are unstable or that its dependence upon foreign suppliers makes it vulnerable, or one nation's borders are too porous. Some nations have elements that believe they are superior people – morally, intellectually, or physically – and accordingly should control their neighbors.

But are they the causes of war? Historically, these motivations can endure over very prolonged periods of peace. For example:

■ Shatt-al-Arab

The Shatt-al-Arab separates Iran and Iraq and is coveted by each. In 1639 in a broader agreement between the Ottoman and Persian empires, the Shatt-al-Arab was first formally addressed, although the border was nonetheless left vague, ill-defined. In the 1800s hostilities broke out, culminating in a second treaty in 1847, but there were still unresolved territorial issues, leading to yet another agreement in 1913. The outbreak of World War I, however, disrupted its implementation. After the war, Britain established border delineations, with a commission formed to establish borders.

But little progress was achieved. In the 1950s, Iraq experienced a revolution, and intermittent hostilities again took place. By 1970, Iran was in a clearly superior military and tactical position. Yet war between the two states was averted by the 1975 Algiers Agreement, which, under Iranian pressure, imposed a border at the middle of the waterway.

Clearly, desires for control of water or other resources can exist for prolonged periods without war.

■ Resource Wars

War for resources has intermittently been a widely embraced theme. "Water wars," tied to climate change issues emerged in the 1990, specifically in relation to the Middle East. But none of the many Middle East wars were caused by water scarcity. Turkey's huge GAP project altered water in the Tigris and Euphrates, to the detriment of Syria and Iraq. There had been harsh words, some "mock" warfare in terms of airplanes scanning the

our economy going and to provide access to critical military resources. Indeed, the Clinton administration implied that the US would kill for oil. Without those exact words, of course, but with these: the US may "utilize our military forces in order to maintain the free flow of oil at reasonable prices." (May 1997, *National Security Strategy for a New Century*, p. 26.)

But war is a choice, and a very bad one if it is resources that nations seek. Regarding oil in particular, the US will always get oil, sometimes cheaper, sometimes more expensive, but oil will always flow. It is the lifeblood of the oil producers – what else will they do with it, drink it? No, they must sell it, and they will. Iraq's Saddam Hussein hated the United States, but in the 1990s was America's seventh largest supplier.

Resource wars are only a subset of the broader category labeled the "economic causes of war," popularized by Marx and Lenin and almost the domi-

War derives from conflicting perceptions of national power, specifically, contradictory assessments of war-fighting capabilities and broadly defined national power.

disputed areas, but no war. And none of the Arab-Israeli wars centered on water, though Syria's attempt to divert Jordan River sources from Israel contributed to pre-1967 Six-Day War tension.

For Americans, certain imports are considered "must haves," both to keep

nant global explanation for a time. Marx was an economic determinist who believed that internal contradictions in the capitalist economic system would create war. Lenin added the theory of imperialism. Capitalist states would wage war with each other over foreign markets.

None of this has occurred, despite the global rise of capitalist, market-oriented economies.

■ **Scapegoat Theory**

The outbreak of war often is attributed to unpopular regimes that launch combat to redirect domestic criticism onto neighboring states.

Scapegoat rhetoric is easy to dish out. Castro railed for decades against the United States, blaming it for almost all of Cuba's problems; the Iranians do it all the time, railing against the Great Satan, yet neither launched a war against the US.

And for democracies, disunity at home is hardly cured by foreign adventurism. Indeed, internal disunity is exacerbated and the ability to successfully prosecute a war is weakened. The American experience in Vietnam is a prime example.

■ **Poverty/Economic Distress**

It is often suggested that relatively poor nations with great needs develop jealousy and uncontrollable desires, inevitably leading to attempts to seize the wealth of their more affluent neighbors. But there are few examples, in large measure because poor countries cannot afford formidable militaries.

Economics, however, does count. A concern with sufficient finances to generate war-fighting capabilities is historically very common. In 18th and 19th century Europe, war-finance considerations always weighed heavily on military deliberations.

■ **The Hero Theory**

The hero theory of history claims that remarkable individuals intermittently appear on the human stage and leave a tremendous imprint – wars caused by evil leaders including Hitler, Stalin, Saddam and Kim Il Sung – and periods of peace are attributed to Lord Palmerston of England and Chancellor Bismark of Germany.

This is suspect. Those who kept the

peace were probably only able to do so because they had the power to do so. Palmerston had the world's most powerful navy; Bismark could deploy the world's most powerful army. Hitler was willing to go to war because he believed Germany was more powerful than any of its intended victims and that external assistance to those victims would not be forthcoming.

■ **Other Explanations**

Many stories purport to explain the causes of war. "Misunderstanding" was once a popular one. The *prima facie* logic of this argument soon fades with both reasoning and historical experience. English-speaking nations have fought each other, the American North and the American South, German-speaking nations have battled each other, as have Arabic-speaking states. While it is certainly true that nations have differing perspectives/desires, there is no reason to believe that they fail to understand each other's positions. It is unlikely that the Iraqis and the Iranians misunderstood each other and thus had an eight-year war. Does anyone believe that Palestinians and Israelis are in conflict due to misunderstanding?

■ **The Real Cause of War**

War derives from conflicting perceptions of national power, specifically, contradictory assessments of war-fighting capabilities and broadly defined national power. Anwar Sadat went to the peace table not because Egypt suddenly saw Israel in a new, favorable light, but because he recognized that the scales of international power were such that conquest of Israel would not and could not occur.

Previously, Arab leaders assessed that they had sufficient power to quickly destroy Israel. Israel, on the other hand, believed it could survive. It is under such conflicting assessments of national power that war becomes likely. Since the Israelis kept winning, while wars were both expensive and embarrassing, Sadat recognized that the Arabs

had miscalculated. Having restored Egyptian honor with the 1973 Yom Kippur War, he opted for peace, which was another means of attaining several important ends, most specifically a return of the Sinai.

In Vietnam the French believed they could defeat the Viet Cong; the Viet Cong had the opposite assessment. The French ultimately left, being replaced by the US, which believed it would defeat the Viet Cong with the aid of Vietnamese allies. Here too the Viet Cong had an opposite assessment and war ensued.

Inconsistent power assessments are the real cause of war.

It merits noting that in addition to military capabilities, an important element in relative power assessment is the commitment of allies as well as possible third party influences. Sadat's 1973 war was not waged to defeat Israel nor to be prolonged. He correctly counted on his Soviet allies and likely American influence on Israel to force a relatively early war termination.

■ **1936 Britain & Germany**

If one nation perceives a significant advantage in relative power and believes it can quickly and easily achieve its aims via war, it may be inclined to try. However, if both nations perceive that same war outcome, the weaker side is likely to grant concessions or surrender, as Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg did after the Nazi Luftwaffe flew over their borders. No war: they surrendered.

But when perceptions differ significantly, war becomes likely. While it may be that British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain really hoped that conceding Czech territory to Germany in 1938 would appease Hitler and end German adventurism, it is also very likely that he assessed that the Allied powers either could not or would not stop Germany. So, Hitler believed he could win, and Chamberlain agreed. Accordingly, no war occurred then – the chosen policy response was appeasement.

In the early 1980s Saddam Hussein attacked Iran under the assumption he would quickly achieve his aims, but he clearly underestimated the tenacity of Iran's resistance. Recognizing this, he several times offered to end the war, but was rejected because the Iranians, having mobilized nearly everyone, including children, believed Saddam could be defeated. That assessment, too, was in error, so the war dragged on for eight years until the Ayatollah Khomeini realized that he could not win. And Saddam recognized that he could not win. Accordingly, congruent power assessments led to a cessation of hostilities.

■ *Hezbollah and Israel*

Hezbollah, led by Hassan Nasrallah, had been shelling Israel's northern cities for years and employing other forms of harassment, to include a July 2006 killing of eight Israeli soldiers and kidnapping two others. He apparently believed that Israel would continue to be passive, either lacking the stomach for war or the ability to stop him. His assessment, however, conflicted with that of Israel, which by that time had literally "had it." Israel unleashed its armed forces, and great damage was done to Lebanon as well as to Hezbollah. The 2024 "pager war" resulted from the same miscalculation.

■ *Calculation of National Power*

Military power, while hardly the only means whereby nations transact their mutual affairs, is nonetheless an often-used tool, either passively (deterrence) or actively (use of war-fighting capabilities). Such power, however, cannot be objectively measured. It can only be approximated, and all such estimates are not only influenced by objective, quantifiable conditions, such as numbers of divisions, air wings, submarines, etc., but also colored in their subjective assessments by a wide array of other factors such as the capabilities and reliability of allies.

The degree of subjectivity cannot

be overemphasized. Given adequate intelligence – of course, all intelligence is subjective and imperfect – one can try to compare armies, navies, and air forces, but even such "objective" factors require subjective assessment. Critical assumptions concerning the behavior of third-party states must be made – will they remain neutral or participate? Perceptions of national will are also critical – will the people support the war? Ideology, state of the economy, and previous war experience can be listed as coloring power assessment lenses.

For example, if it is perceived that economic conditions or internal strife have seriously weakened the relative power of an adversary nation, new power assessments by rivals may result in selection of the military option.

Historically, most such assessments have been wrong. Most wars have taken longer than expected, with confident nations often finding themselves on the losing or non-winning side, as in America's involvement in Vietnam and Saddam's of Iran. This may also become the case with Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Why? There is an almost irrepressible optimism which often characterizes the assessment process. Optimistic leaderships tend to go to war; pessimists tend to negotiate. The historical frequency of war attests to an over-abundance of optimists.

How is this explained? In large measure, optimism derives from the nature of most military and many political organizations. In each there is a strong desire for an individual to demonstrate his or her capabilities. A "can do" philosophy pervades both political and military institutions. Individual excellence is often demonstrated by returning with positive, not negative, answers. It is in this assessment process that economic conditions play their biggest role. Nations enjoying prosperity and a large national treasury are already in the throes of optimism. Similarly, beguiling ideologies – racial supremacy, "G-d is on our side," etc. – also tint relative power conclusions.

■ *Conclusions*

If nations perceive essential parity in international power, as was likely in the Cold War case of the United States and the Soviet Union, while they may maneuver against each other, they avoid direct military confrontation, instead opting for negotiation, espionage, technological leaps, delay tactics or other non-military tools. Motivation should not be confused with, or equated to, remedial actions, for which there is always a menu of policy choices, only one of which is war. Accordingly, traditional explanations confuse ends with means and fail to recognize that the alleged causes of war can also be pursued within a peaceful framework. War is only one of several means of attaining ends.

While there may be many motivations, the issue remains as to how best to achieve desired goals. If war is selected, it will ultimately be based on relative national power assessments. A country feeling immensely stronger than a rival becomes more inclined to the war option. But even so, for war to actually take place, it takes two. War need not result if the weaker rival agrees with that assessment, thus eliciting concessions or surrenders. On the other hand, if the rival does not share that assessment, war becomes a real possibility.

Russia's February 2022, invasion of Ukraine was based on an assessment that Ukraine would quickly fall or release significant territories. Clearly, the Ukrainians had a contradictory assessment, hence war became inevitable. Ukraine chose war rather than submit – no doubt counting on Western help.

The war continues because the belligerents' power assessments remain contradictory. Wars always reveal multiple motivations, but their true cause derives from contradictory estimates of relative national power.

DONALD L. LOSMAN, PhD, worked 37 years in professional military education, finishing his teaching career at the George Washington University where he taught political economy of the Middle East.

Ukraine: Russia's Genocidal War

by STEPHEN BLANK

The word genocide has become a politicized label often wrongly applied to score partisan political points. Nevertheless, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which has morphed into a prolonged war of attrition, fully deserves to be called a genocide. Russia's conduct of this war conforms in great detail to the definition of genocide approved by the United Nations (UN) in 1948. Russian war aims include the elimination of the territorial, political, economic and cultural basis of Ukrainian statehood. Vladimir Putin himself has often declared that Ukrainians are really Russians ("one people") and has argued at length that Ukraine has no right to exist as an independent and sovereign state. In other words, this is a genocidal war in line with the terms of the 1948 Genocide Convention. It is being waged with the explicit intention to "completely or partially destroy a group based on its nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion."

Talk of limited territorial concessions therefore makes little sense. Nor should the international community be concerned about humiliating Putin or allowing the Russian dictator to save face. In reality, the stakes are far higher and include the survival of the Ukrainian nation and the fundamental principles of the international order.

Putin's own words and writings, not to mention those of his subordinates, point to their belief that Ukraine is really Russia, that it therefore has no right to an independent existence. In this context, the idea and belief system stemming from it that Ukraine has a right to

a sovereign, independent existence as a state represents a betrayal of Russia, its statehood, civilization, and not least, Putin's autocracy as a modern tsar.

Putin has publicly stated that the Soviet Union was Russia—which is not true since the USSR was a multinational state—but according to his logic, the lands belonging to all the post-Soviet states from the Baltic to Central Asia were really gifts from Russia. As he memorably told President George W. Bush at the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, "You have to understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a country. Part of its territory is in Eastern Europe and the greater part was given to us." He then warned that if there was any attempt to take Ukraine into NATO, he would dismember it. This outlook persists to this day.

All the efforts to foster negotiations to end this war have failed, not least due to Putin's refusal to talk before conquering ever more territory. Putin continues to state that Ukrainians, and thus

soldier's foot steps is Russia.

Given Putin's hardened conviction that he is the latest incarnation of the Tsars, whose mission is the regathering of Russian lands (i.e. those lands that Russia covets) and his status as a contemporary Tsar, retreating and surrendering any of the lands conquered to date or yet to be conquered is out of the question.

Therefore, this genocidal war will continue.

■ Genocide

This war is by no means Russia's first attempt at genocide. Indeed, the early tsars created the paradigm for this in 1478 when Ivan III (The Great) captured Novgorod, killed or deported its inhabitants and resettled the territory with his own subjects.

In more recent times, Josef Stalin conducted a series of genocides against various smaller nationalities of the Soviet Union beginning in 1928. According to Norman Naimark, the foremost histo-

All the efforts to foster negotiations to end this war have failed, not least due to Putin's refusal to talk before conquering ever more territory.

Ukraine, are one people with Russians and he employs the biblical commandment given to Joshua upon entering Israel to aver that anywhere a Russian

rian of these genocides, the Soviet elimination of an entire class of peasants, the so-called Kulaks (allegedly "rich peasants") "and the subsequent killer famine

among all Ukrainian peasants—as well as the notorious 1937 order No. 00447 that called for the mass execution and exile of ‘socially harmful elements’ as ‘enemies of the people’ – were, in fact, genocide.”

Apart from starvation or other forms of mass extermination, these genocides were also reflected in mass deportations of entire families, including children. In many cases, including that of the Crimean Tatars, who had lived in Crimea for centuries, Stalin deported native populations to Central Asia, and moved in Russians whose descendants cleave to the land and constitute the basis of the argument that Crimea was and is a Russian land, even a sacred one.

Thus, genocide and genocidal political processes have been used by the Russian state for decades – if not centuries – as a technique of self-colonial rule intended to eliminate “dissident” ethnic identities.

As the distinguished historian Timothy Snyder notes, denial that a Ukrainian state or that a Ukrainian people exist reveals an intention toward genocide. Putin’s ongoing remarks and written works, notably his 2021 screed denying the existence of an independent Ukraine, abundantly prove that point. Further evidence can be adduced from the Independent Legal Analysis of the war published already in May 2022 by the Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights in Sweden and the Newlines Institute in the US. Merely two months after the invasion they found abundant evidence of mass killings, deliberate attacks on evacuation routes, shelters, and humanitarian corridors as well as attacks aimed at destroying vital civilian infrastructure, including residential areas, hospitals, etc. They also found evidence of mass rapes and sexual violence along with the telling and traditional Russian tactic of mass deportations. In particular, by that time they found that thousands of children had been forcibly deported to Russia to be brought up as Russians. One year later their subsequent



A Ukrainian soldier comes to pay his respects at the “Wall of Heroes” in Kyiv, Ukraine. (Photo: Adrien Vautier / Le Pictorium)

report found that Russian legislation was legalizing these deportations while Russian media conducted systematic efforts to portray Ukrainians as Nazis and dehumanize them, another typical indicator of intent to commit genocide.

These are not isolated reports, as the International Criminal Court (ICC) has formally indicted Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, Commissioner for Children’s Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation, for the crimes of mass deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia. More recently, in an even more truly gruesome tide of events, Russia has even begun to conscript some of these children to fight against Ukraine once they turn 18. There also is no doubt that many other individuals should and might possibly be indicted for these and other crimes. For example, as of this writing the United Nations’ Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has identified damage to 501 Ukrainian cultural sites. So, we see here much evidence of a truly comprehensive plan to destroy the culture of Ukraine, the idea of Ukrainian independence, and its physical or biological future.

Yet while there have been

indictments from the ICC, there has not been the outcry we see in cases of other genuine genocides or even alleged genocides. Much of this indifference stems either from Russian information warfare or from the fact that in practice, bringing Putin and the other perpetrators of these war crimes to trial is impossible unless Ukraine wins, and nobody seems willing to provide Kyiv with the where-withal to accomplish that task.

Nevertheless, a just peace for Ukraine is inconceivable without reparations and without holding those who committed these crimes to account.

■ **Putin’s Goals**

This genocide appears to be a deliberately orchestrated one, perhaps even more than the Holocaust, for it appears to have been part of the advance preparation for the war itself. Putin’s ideas about Ukraine have clearly long been marinating in the overheated stew of Russian imperial nationalism to the point where, as his Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, his three advisors were Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Catherine the Great – all of whom fought for years to add territory to Russia. Indeed, another advisor said that, “Putin really

believes all the stuff he says about Peter the Great. He thinks he will be remembered like Peter.”

However, these observers failed to notice Putin's equal admiration for Stalin. Indeed, just as Stalin in 1929 portrayed himself as the Lenin of his time,

calls to regain Moldova, reassimilate Belarus, and even to take on the Baltic States, which Putin and his henchmen already accuse of mistreating Russians and attacking Russian culture, the eternal pretext of tsarist and Soviet imperialism. Should that happen, the current

world politics. That trend abets Russia's ambition because defeat risks the arrest, incarceration, and trial of all those who have been indicted, starting with Vladimir Putin. So clearly Putin, by starting and continuing war, has no incentive to stop or negotiate in good faith with Ukraine—let alone accept defeat.

The evidence, ethnic and national, of this genocide is incontestable, so Putin's ambition to reclaim the tsarist and imperial legacy at home and abroad must be recognized as more than an invasion of Ukraine but also as a threat to any concept of international law and/or order. Failure to support Ukraine's just cause opens the door to future such wars and genocides across the globe, not only in Europe. As the history of the world since the Holocaust shows, there are far too many actors in world politics who entertain notions about eliminating ethnic, religious, class, national or other minorities who could be deemed to be troublesome or dissident.

In this context we need only cite China's slow-motion genocide against the Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang, following the decades-long erasure of Tibetan life. If we fail to suppress the malefactors of these great crimes their successors will be emboldened. Indeed, here we may only remember Adolf Hitler's remarks about the Armenian genocide that Turkey still refuses to acknowledge. On Aug. 22, 1939, nine days before he launched World War II, Hitler told his officers that he was ready to emulate Genghis Khan and slaughter millions and that they should not flinch from this need to gain *lebensraum* (living space) for Germany in the East, for, “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”

If the Ukrainian genocide is not stopped, then future generations of despots may well pose this same question. And nobody will question them.

STEPHEN BLANK, Ph.D., is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI).

This genocide appears to be a deliberately
orchestrated one, perhaps even more than the
Holocaust, for it appears to have been part of the
advance preparation for the war itself.

Putin is the Stalin of our day and his increasingly repressive rule along with this war and its genocide resemble ever more Stalin's dictatorship. In that context, the resort to genocide is just one more example of this nightmarish resemblance, for Putin has not only rehabilitated Stalin and many of his excesses, including genocide, he—like Stalin—has bet the farm, so to speak.

■ The Broader War

Since Putin views himself as the latest of the Tsars whose mission it is to regather Ukraine into Russia, he cannot afford to lose Ukraine. Consequently, he has tied both his and his state's destiny to victory and will not stop unless his forces are decisively defeated, i.e. they leave Ukraine and Russia is compelled to accept and recognize an independent sovereign Ukraine. Neither will he (or probably his successors) stop equating Russian lands with those of the USSR. This means permanent warfare in Europe. And indeed, we are already seeing Russian-sponsored forces carrying out a continent-wide campaign of arson, crime, assassinations, subversion, cyberstrikes, etc.

Victory in Ukraine will generate

genocide in Ukraine will not be the last one unleashed by Russia in an effort to reclaim its empire, imperial privileges, and status.

Therefore, future commentary on this war needs to make the argument that this war, apart from its extremely dangerous geopolitical implications, has been an intended genocide in the original sense of that word, since its inception. It is threatening not only because of its efforts to upend the post-Cold War European settlement but because it represents another manifestation of the criminalization of politics and the triumph of that process. As we and others have shown, the Russian genocide in Ukraine is linked as well to the recrudescence of Stalinism in Russia. Therefore, if Russia is not stopped in Ukraine, that revival of Stalinism will not be confined to Russia but its advocates will attempt to forcibly impose it on millions of people.

Indeed, this war represents a continuation of the depressing trend in the last 30 years towards the return of genocide, for example in Rwanda, South Sudan, etc. The fact that little has been done either to publicize the fact of this genocide attests to the continuing dominance of force and power over law in

Are Christians Disappearing in the Middle East?

by LELA GILBERT

“America remains today substantially what it has always been, namely a Christian country. That observation can sound aggressively partisan or intolerant, since some extremists believe that Americans are a Christian people who require a Christian government, with all that implies about religious exercises in schools and public displays. I make no such assertion, since I believe that religion flourishes best when it is kept farthest away from any form of government intervention, even the best-intentioned.” – Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*.

It is entirely accurate to say that Christianity continues to thrive as an international religion, spanning vast regions across the world. But it is also necessary to acknowledge that the global Christian community is not without its travails. And it is increasingly necessary to take a careful look at the “world’s largest religious group,” revealing not only thriving communities across several continents, but also increasing numbers of endangered religious believers who continue to face real threats to their survival.

Historically, Christianity has been viewed as a Western religion, despite its earliest beginnings in the Middle East. However, today, sub-Saharan Africa has surpassed Europe as home to the world’s largest Christian community. Between 2010 and 2020, the population of sub-Saharan Africa grew by 31 percent to 1.1 billion. As of 2020, most people living in the region are Christians (62 percent), while Muslims make up about a third of the population. Religiously unaffiliated

people and followers of other religions (which include African traditional religions) each account for roughly 3% of the overall population.

At the same time, as Pew Research reports, “Places such as Iraq, Syria, the Palestinian territories, and, to a lesser degree, Egypt and Lebanon have seen a continuation of the historic exodus of Christians during the past decade alone. The decline is especially significant when one considers that these communities are among the oldest Christian communities in the world. Amid all the modern political forms that have shaped the Middle Eastern geopolitical order, the Christian presence in the region pre-dates Islam, Zionism, Arab nationalism, European

killing of Christians by the Islamic State, along with other ideologically and religiously hostile groups and organizations. Such violence has been formally recognized as an ongoing genocide by the United States, European Union, and United Kingdom.

However, despite their deeply rooted biblical history, Christians remain the most persecuted religious group in the Middle East. In fact, Christians in Iraq are “close to extinction,” Wikipedia recently reported. Meanwhile, according to US State Department estimates, the number of Christians in Iraq has reportedly fallen from 1.2 million in 2011 to 120,000 in 2024, and the number in Syria from 1.5 million to 300,000 – diminishing numbers driven by persecu-

...according to US State Department estimates, the number of Christians in Iraq has reportedly fallen from 1.2 million in 2011 to 120,000 in 2024...

colonialism, Western Christianity, and the modern missions movement. It also gives us a unique perspective on geopolitical forces and persecution.”

Persecution continues to be an ever-increasing threat to communities of Christian believers in the Middle East. No doubt the most glaring example of such violence is the ongoing abuse and

tion by terrorist groups and repression by authoritarian regimes.

Although laws vary from country to country, some enforce strict restrictions on religious practices, and specifically on Christianity. One organization monitoring religious freedom abuses, Global Christian Relief, exposes the severity of some restrictions:



Iraqi policeman stands guard at Mar Youssif Chaldean Church in Baghdad, Iraq. (Photo: Ameer Al Mohmmedaw/dpa/Alamy)

Laws regarding Christianity in the Middle East vary widely, but many countries impose severe restrictions on religious practices. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, public Christian worship is strictly prohibited. Churches cannot be built, and even private religious gatherings can lead to arrest. Owning or displaying Christian symbols, such as a crucifix or a Bible, is illegal. This lack of religious freedom underscores the harsh reality for Christians in the region. In Iran, while Armenian and Assyrian Christians are recognized as religious minorities, they still face significant restrictions. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is forbidden, and converts can be subjected to imprisonment or even execution. Similarly, in Iraq, Christians have faced intense persecution, especially from extremist groups like ISIS, which have targeted Christian populations, resulting in mass displacements and destruction of churches.

■ **Christian Communities in the Middle East**

Despite these challenges, there are still significant Christian populations in the Middle East. Lebanon is home to a considerable number of Christians, including Maronite Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Protestant communities. Those Lebanese Christians enjoy a relatively higher degree of religious freedom and political representation. In Egypt, the Coptic Orthodox Church is the largest Christian community. However, Copts often face discrimination and violence, including attacks on churches and kidnappings.

Meanwhile, the State of Israel provides a safe haven for Christians, who enjoy both freedom of travel and residency there. The Christian population in Israel continues to grow, and now numbers 190,000. However, those Christians face additional challenges due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which can affect their mobility and access to religious sites.

Another significant group of Christians resides in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where they can face serious and largely unreported abuse. The following is reported by the European Union:

Only 2 percent of the population of the Gaza Strip consists of Palestinian Christians. Since the consolidation of power by Hamas, there has been repeated violence against this community. Between 2007 and 2011, there have been acts of vandalism and bomb attacks on Christian schools, homes and institutions, as well as cases of murder and, recently, attempted murder against members of the Christian community. The failure to carry out investigations or arrests following these incidents suggests that Hamas has no intention of intervening to stop this persecution of Christians. ...In addition, it was confirmed by a Canadian

NGO towards the end of 2009 that members of Hamas have repeatedly desecrated Christian graves and exhumed the bodies, in order to 'decontaminate' the soil from the corpses of Christians who they believe to be unworthy of burial on Palestinian land.

In light of the ongoing mistreatment, Middle East Christians have limited options. Presently, an estimated 18,480,000 believers have been displaced or killed. Thousands have died in the Democratic Republic of Congo, more than a million have been depopulated from Iraq, and another 1,200,000 from Syria – according to a recent Wikipedia report.

In Iran, while Armenian and Assyrian Christians are recognized as religious minorities, they still face significant restrictions. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is forbidden, and converts can be subjected to imprisonment or even execution.

In her book *The Vanishing*,² Janine di Giovanni described the plight of persecuted believers she met in the Middle East.

There was a young man in Cairo who belongs to a Christian Copt community in which people make their living picking garbage. He told me how while growing up, he always felt like 'the other.' I also think of the Christians in Gaza who are caught between the Israeli siege and the rule of Hamas. Due to the severe travel restrictions placed on Palestinians, they can't leave Gaza to visit Bethlehem at Christmas. And I think of an ancient monastery in Iraq that I visited one evening. It was about six o'clock, maybe later, and the sun was setting. I heard this ethereal singing. I entered the

monastery and found a room where a Chaldean monk was chanting in Aramaic. It was the evensong, which is the evening prayer. He sat with me and spoke to me about faith and about being rooted to this land and how vital it was that Christian people remain there. I recall the Christians who told me about how they fled ISIS, taking nothing and leaving their homes in the middle of the night.

As Western Christians, most of us face little more than mockery or disappointing attitudes among friends and family toward our walk with the Lord.

It is stories such as this that call us to remember – and pray for – our brothers and sisters across the world. What can we do for them? It's up to us to make their plight known – to speak up about the injustices and abuses they face every day as outspoken believers in dangerous places. And above all else, to remember them in our hearts and our daily prayers and to remind the world of their names. They are facing persecution and dangers we can hardly imagine.

LELA GILBERT is Senior Fellow for International Religious Freedom at the Family Research Council and Fellow at Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom and is the author of "Saturday People, Sunday People: Israel through the Eyes of a Christian Sojourner."

Christians are Being Slaughtered in Central Africa

by Antonio Graceffo

In recent months, Christians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have faced escalating violence, primarily from an Islamist militant group affiliated with ISIS called the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF),

On February 12, ADF militants abducted at least 70 Christians from the village of Mayba in Lubero Territory, North Kivu. The captives were taken to a Protestant church in Kasanga, where they were executed by beheading. The bodies were discovered on February 14. Many of the victims were women, children, and the elderly. This attack is part of a broader pattern of violence against Christians in the region, which has seen over 200 killed in the past month alone.

In late December, the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) claimed responsibility for a series of attacks on Christian villagers in the eastern DRC. On December 28 and 29, ISCAP militants captured, beheaded, and executed over 30 Christians in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. They also set fire to homes and vehicles, causing widespread destruction. On December 31, ISCAP militants killed 12 people in Lubero territory and burned over 20 homes and vehicles.

In June and July 2024, over 30 people were killed, many of them decapitated, in the Batangi-Mbau area of the Beni territory. A month earlier, at least 80 Christians were killed in a series of attacks across North Kivu province. The deadliest day occurred on June 7, when ADF militants attacked the villages of Masala, Mahihi, and Keme, killing over 50 Christians. Homes were burned, and several people went missing. The violence, which targeted members of various Christian denominations forced them to flee their homes and contributed to the closure of churches, schools, and health centers.

In January 2024, another deadly assault took place in Beni, where at least eight people, including five Pentecostal Christians worshipping in a church, were killed by ADF militants. Thirty others were taken hostage.

...in Sudan, Christians have long faced persecution, initially with state-sponsored violence under former president Omar al-Bashir and now with attacks from militant Islamist groups in regions like Darfur.

The ADF, which has terrorized Christian communities for years, was originally formed as a Ugandan Muslim rebel group in 1995, and later moved to eastern DRC. In 2018, the group officially pledged allegiance to ISIS, which has since claimed responsibility for many of its atrocities. The ADF has been targeting Christians in the Rwenzori Mountain area, aiming to establish Islamic law. When they take civilians captive, they often release Muslims and kill Christians who refuse to convert to Islam. The ADF was responsible for the killing of 355 Christians in 2024 alone, and since 1996, the conflict in the region has killed an estimated 6 million people.

Catholic Church sources have referred to the violence as a “silent genocide” and have compared it to the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Pope Francis has condemned the exploitation of the region’s resources, calling the violence an overlooked genocide and urging international action to prevent further bloodshed.

Across Africa, several regions have seen Christians targeted by extremist groups, particularly those with ties to radical Islam. In Nigeria, groups like Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), have waged violent campaigns against Christians, responsible for mass killings,

abductions, and attacks on churches and villages, particularly in the northeastern states of Borno and Adamawa. In the Central African Republic, sectarian violence between Christian and Muslim groups, fueled by local and international

extremist organizations, has led to widespread persecution, displacement, and church destruction, especially in areas controlled by Muslim militias like Seleka.

Similarly, in Sudan, Christians have long faced persecution, initially with state-sponsored violence under former

Somalia remains one of the most dangerous places for Christians due to the influence of al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda-linked group that targets Christians through kidnappings, executions, and attacks on churches.

president Omar al-Bashir and now with attacks from militant Islamist groups in regions like Darfur.

Somalia remains one of the most dangerous places for Christians due to the influence of al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda-linked group that targets Christians through kidnappings, executions, and attacks on churches. In Mali and Burkina Faso, affiliates of al-Qaeda and ISIS have also targeted Christian communities, contributing to massacres and church attacks.

This chaos is driven by a

combination of religious, political, and economic factors. Radical Islamist groups, such as Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, and ISIS affiliates, view non-Muslims, especially Christians, as enemies of their interpretation of Islam. These extremists often frame violence as a religious duty which helps them recruit more followers and destabilize weak national governments.

Additionally, ethnic and regional tensions can exacerbate the violence, as seen in Nigeria’s north-south divide and in the Central African Republic’s sectarian struggles. The fight for control over resources, such as land, wealth, and mineral deposits, further fuels the conflict, with extremist groups using religious divides to justify violence over territory. In the DRC rival militias, including the ADF, are fighting over cobalt and other rare metals.

Furthermore, global jihadist influences, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, provide funding and support, radicalizing local factions and encouraging violence

against Christians as part of a broader religious and ideological struggle.

Ultimately, the violence against Christians in Africa is a complex issue but it remains rooted in extremist ideologies and the government instability that allows these groups to proliferate.

ANTONIO GRACEFFO, *Ph.D.*, is a China economic analyst teaching economics at the American University in Mongolia. Reprinted with permission of Mercator.

Focus on the Druze

An *in*FOCUS interview with Tamir Murad

Editor's Note: Tamir Murad is an advisor to the spiritual leader of the Druze community, Sheikh Muwaffaq Tarif. A former Israeli diplomat, he is engaged in international activity focused on Israeli advocacy, while highlighting the contribution and role of the Druze community, promoting dialogue and regional cooperation. He comes from a family with four generations of military service and has a deep understanding of the complexities of the Middle East. He serves in an elite IDF counterterrorism undercover unit and has been on reserve duty since October 7. *in*FOCUS editor Shoshana Bryen had an opportunity to speak with him recently.

***in*FOCUS QUARTERLY:** TAMIR, THANK YOU FOR JOINING US.

Tamir Murad: Thank you for the opportunity to raise the voice of the Druze – to explain what is happening to our families, literally our families, in Syria. I have family on the other side of the border, the Murad family in Syria.

***iF:* THE DRUZE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AN INTEGRAL PART OF ISRAEL. THERE ARE DRUZE IN LEBANON AND THERE ARE DRUZE IN SYRIA AS WELL. ARE THE DRUZE CITIZENS IN EACH OF THOSE COUNTRIES?**

Murad: Indeed, we are citizens of each of these countries. If there is one thing that we take from our religion, it is that we are loyal to the country we live in. My grandfather joined the IDF before it was mandatory. We asked why. He said, “We are living in the state of Israel. We need to build it together, shoulder to shoulder with the Jewish community.” My other grandfather wasn’t with us for three or four months at a time. We asked why. He had the same answer. “We are here living in the state of Israel. We need to help to build it.” So, he went to the south to work at building the state of Israel.

That’s who we are. You can find us everywhere, doctors, engineers, teachers. We are an integral part of the state of Israel.

***iF:* SYRIA IS A MULTI-ETHNIC COUNTRY, SO DO THE DRUZE HAVE COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERS THERE?**

Murad: Indeed. Before we talk about the Druze in Syria or the Druze in Israel, I want to mention a few things about the Druze community in the world. We are a minority, approximately 2 million people in total. The largest community is in Syria, which is about 1.2 million people. Then you go to Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and then you can find us in Venezuela, the US, and other countries.

Syria is a unique place. We have to talk about the Druze community before the Arab Spring in 2011 and after. Before 2011, the Druze were an integral part of the Syrian government and the country. After 2011, when Bashar Assad attacked his own people, about 70,000 soldiers didn’t follow him – and the Druze community didn’t follow Assad. A lot of refugees came to Sweida, where the massacre is happening right now, to find shelter. We didn’t ask their religion – there were Sunnis, Muslims, Christians, Alawis. We helped them in Sweida because they were human beings.

***iF:* THE DRUZE BACKED AWAY FROM THE GOVERNMENT?**

Murad: Indeed. We had no intention of hurting civilians.

***iF:* SINCE THAT TIME, HAVE YOU BEEN UNDER PRESSURE? HAVE YOU BEEN SEPARATE FROM THE GOVERNMENT?**

Murad: I wouldn’t say we were separate from the government; we’re still part of the government. Under the Assad regime, all of the Syrian people were suffering, not only the Druze community.

***iF:* THEN THE GOVERNMENT CHANGES AND DICTATOR BASHAR AL-ASSAD FLED TO MOSCOW. AND NOW THERE IS A NEW GOVERNMENT. HOW DID THE NEW GOVERNMENT APPROACH THE DRUZE INITIALLY?**

Murad: It’s a good question, but we need to talk about all the minorities. On the outskirts of Damascus is a place called Jaramana. There are about 300,000 people there, the majority are Druze. A minority are Christian. During December, after Abu Mohammad Al-Jolani [*Editor’s Note: leader of the formerly al-Qaeda affiliated rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, real name Ahmad al-Shara’a*] came to rule in Damascus, the Christians wanted to celebrate Christmas, so they lit a Christmas tree. Al-Jolani’s people came to Jaramana, to Sahnaya, to burn that Christmas tree. Who stood against Al-Jolani’s people? We, our families, the Druze community. We have been always there for other minorities. We know how minorities feel, that’s why we will never

allow someone to hurt others.

They bombed churches. The last church was in Damascus where 80 people were murdered. We didn't know that we were next as the Druze community in Syria or in Israel. From our side, the Druze community in Israel, our spiritual leader, Sheikh Muwaffaq Tarif sent money with our leaders in Syria to rebuild that church. We didn't know that we were next.

iF: THERE WERE PEOPLE HERE WHO SAID, "OH, AL-SHARA'A, AL-JOLANI, WHATEVER YOU CALL HIM, IS JUST TRYING TO GET ORGANIZED." IT WAS NOT WELL UNDERSTOOD. WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THAT IT WAS WELL UNDERSTOOD THERE, IN SYRIA AND IN ISRAEL.

Murad: The attacks were against all minorities. They started with the Alawis, they moved to the Christians, they moved to the Yazidis, and then the Druze. They want to finish with the Druze.

Who attacked the minorities in Syria? I can tell you 100 percent. We on the Israeli side, the Druze community, opened an operation room where we collect information and intelligence. All of us are ex-military, each one of us a high commander, and we're collecting information. And you can see, when people entered Sweida, they were wearing uniforms. After the world saw that, they left Sweida, took the uniforms off, but you see the same faces. So again, to the question, who is attacking the Druze? It's 100 percent Al-Jolani's people. They call him "Ahmad al-Shara'a," and people think when he put on a suit, he became normal. It doesn't work like that. He still has the same ideology; nothing has changed.

iF: THE GOVERNMENT WAS THE ORGANIZER.

Murad: One hundred percent. We have videos of people in a church, Christians,



Tamir Murad

living side by side in Sweida, next to the Druze community, saying the ones who saved their lives are the Druze community. They went to fight, to help. And they were saying the people who were focusing on us, attacking us, killing us, it was the Jolani people.

iF: TALK, IF YOU CAN, ABOUT OUTSIDE POWERS. TURKEY, IRAN, RUSSIA.

Murad: Turkey is part of NATO. You can see what is tying Israel's hands in helping the Druze community, is the West and the Americans. But Turkey is a major player in Syria. It supported and trained Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which is Al-Jolani's people, and Jabhat al-Nusra, which has a negative role for our community. We all understand why Turkey has an interest in Syria when it comes to the Kurds. And I heard some sources that the militias, the Bedouin militias, were paid by Turkey – and Qatar – to attack the Druze.

iF: ARE THE KURDS AN ALLY OF THE DRUZE? I REALIZE YOU'RE IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF SYRIA.

Murad: It's far, but still, we meet with the Kurds; we have the same interests – stability, security, and to live in peace. But, again, since Turkey is part of NATO and it's a major player, the West is tying the Kurds' hands. The Kurds have a huge army, some 145,000 soldiers. They can solve the problem in Sweida, but someone is tying their hands.

iF: WE'RE VERY CLEAR THAT THE TURKS HAVE BEEN ATTACKING THE KURDS IN NORTHERN SYRIA AND SOUTHERN TURKEY FOR A VERY LONG TIME. I DON'T THINK OUR GOVERNMENT PLANS TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.

Murad: Unfortunately, we do understand why the West sees Al-Jolani or Ahmad Al-Shara'a as a partner. During Assad's time, [Syria was] going with Iran, with Russia and all of the eastern countries, and now he's giving his hand to the Western countries. But the Druze community has been in the Middle East for thousands of years, since Jethro's [Editors Note: Moses' father-in-law] time.

Which I see, unfortunately, is what the West is missing. I'll give you an example. Europe opened its doors for refugees that came from Syria and now you hear a lot of stories about what's going on there. The German ambassador

before Al-Jolani, the Iranians were here on our borders. My nephew just finished an officer's course in the IDF. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was there, and he was on the podium saying that we won't let anyone touch the Druze

The first wave of attacks on the Druze happened at the end of April and the beginning of May, on the outskirts of Damascus. There were 300,000 Druze living there in Sahnaya and Jaramana. They faced a massacre, they were murdered, raped, and killed, and Israel didn't do anything. We were mad, but has anything affected our relationship between us and the Jewish community or the state of Israel? No. The relationship is so strong that nothing can change that, basically.

What is tying Israel's hands in helping the Druze community, is the West and the Americans. But Turkey is a major player in Syria. It supported and trained Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)...

to Israel told me, "not all of the refugees are terrorists." I said that's true. He said, "90 percent of them are fine, 10 percent are not." But 10 percent is a huge number. In 2015 alone, during the Syrian civil war, more than one million Middle Eastern refugees, mostly Syrian, moved to Germany.

iF: ENOUGH TO BE DISRUPTIVE.

Murad: Indeed.

iF: ISRAEL IS ENGAGING IN HIGH-LEVEL TALKS WITH AL-JOLANI TO FIND SOME WAY TO CREATE STABILITY OF SOME SORT. I DON'T THINK THEY WANT TO DO IT BY ABANDONING THE DRUZE. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATING WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF SYRIA?

Murad: First of all, we are aware of the negotiations. Our spiritual leader has a direct line to everyone here in Israel; we are part of the government. People need to understand that we are everywhere here in Israel. We have a line to everyone.

We understand what the Israeli interest is. You know, if you're going back

community in Syria.

But a couple of months later, we faced a massacre.

Israel attacked Damascus on July 16, but it was after the second wave. We do understand that it's hard for Israel to attack. Unfortunately, the Western media and Western governments see Al-Jolani as someone that we can talk to. And Israel is following the Western governments now.

Al-Jolani had an opportunity to show the whole world that he was someone

Al-Jolani had an opportunity to show the whole world that he was someone else. But he didn't. At the same time, he's saying, "It's hard for me to control the people on the ground in Syria." But that's not true.

We know it's his people..

else. But he didn't. At the same time, he's saying, "It's hard for me to control the people on the ground in Syria." But that's not true. We know it's his people..

■ **Beyond the Borders**

iF: THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO SAY ISRAEL CAN'T BE RESPONSIBLE BEYOND ITS BORDERS AND PERHAPS THE COMMUNITIES OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL, EVEN IF THEY'RE IMPORTANT, CAN'T BE ISRAEL'S RESPONSIBILITY. MAYBE IF AL-JOLANI IS WILLING TO HAVE QUIET ON THE BORDER OF ISRAEL, THAT'S THE BEST ISRAEL CAN DO.

Murad: I think it does make sense. But I want to start with what our PM Netanyahu said recently. "The brothers of my brothers are my brothers." And if you're talking about Israel's interest, we have videos of ISIS people murdering our people; our families in Syria and in Sweida, raping,

killing, doing everything, burning people alive, taking video of what they are doing, and they are super proud about that. Not one video, but many.



Members of the Druze community gather at the Israel-Syria border at Majdal-Shams following violence targeting the religious minority in Syria earlier this year. (Photo: Ilia Yefimovich/dpa/Alamy)

Yes, they're laughing. It's like October 7th. It's the same twisted kinds of people. So, if anybody understands the Druze position, I dare say it is the government of Israel. When October 7th happened, my brother and I put on our uniforms, and we went to fight. That's who we are. We went to help our brothers and sisters here in Israel. That's how we see our families.

The second thing that I would say, is that the attacks happened 62 kilometers from Israel's border. And getting back to the people that were shooting videos while they were murdering and raping, they were saying, "Now we're doing this to the Druze community here in Syria. Next, it's going to be Jerusalem and Tel Aviv."

So, is it in Israel's interest?

iF: IT'S DEFINITELY IN ISRAEL'S INTEREST TO PROTECT THE DRUZE. BUT WHAT IF YOU LOOK AT YOUR RESOURCES AND YOUR ASSETS AND

CAN'T MAKE YOUR INTERESTS AND YOUR ASSETS BALANCE?

Murad: I think Israel has enough power to do that.

■ **The Humanitarian Corridor**

iF: TALK ABOUT THE HUMANITARIAN CORRIDOR, THAT'S IMPORTANT.

Murad: The humanitarian corridor we're seeking is from the Druze in Israel to the Druze villages on the Syrian Golan Heights. We Israeli Druze will take humanitarian aid to the Druze in these towns and villages, and they will deliver it to Sweida. It's from the Druze to the Druze. But it has to be secured.

iF: THERE WAS A RUMOR THAT THERE WAS A US COMPANY THAT DOES DEFENSE SECURITY WORK, OPERATING IN COOPERATION WITH THE US STATE DEPARTMENT IN NORTHERN ISRAEL TO DO THAT JOB.

Murad: I met them. They were here, and we took them on a tour inside a Druze town in Syria, which is on the Golan Heights. All of the towns that we spoke about on the Golan Heights are under Israeli protection these days. They met and spoke to everyone – the US government, Western governments – telling them we should open the humanitarian corridor. But, in the end, they got zero interest.

I work as an advisor to Sheikh Muffawaq Tarik, our spiritual leader in Israel and among all the Druze communities around the world. Last week, we met Ambassador Tom Barrak, the US ambassador to Turkey, in France. He heard from us and saw the videos – everything. He was shocked. He promised to do everything in his power within 24 hours to change the situation in Syria. And, I would say that he did a couple of things. In the first hours, we saw the UN enter Sweida to bring aid. But still, we are stuck without a corridor.

In Sweida, there were 38 occupied villages and towns. More than 230,000 people were displaced. More than 2,000 people were murdered and burned alive. And these are only the numbers that we know at the moment. We think there are still thousands murdered that we don't know about yet. More than 700 people were kidnapped, 109 of them women. Their kidnappers say, "Maybe if you will get them back, it will be after nine months after they deliver our babies." They raped a five-year-old child. That's what's happening on the ground. And Ambassador Barrak saw all of that.

iF: ARE THE UN HUMANITARIAN PEOPLE STILL THERE?

Murad: Things are very difficult. In Sweida, there were 30 resources for water; 27 of them were destroyed or poisoned. There are more than 800,000 Druze people living there. The Druze community here in Israel is buying things in Damascus from a third party, and we're delivering them through the Red Cross; flour, milk for kids. There is a siege now in Sweida. They're saying now there's a ceasefire, but people are dying of starvation.

iF: WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THERE'S A FAILURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL "AID" AGENCIES TO PROVIDE HELP. THIS IS WHAT WE'VE KNOWN ABOUT GAZA FOR A LONG TIME.

Murad: You know what's ironic? We ask them why they aren't there, and they say, "It isn't safe in Sweida." How stupid is that? We ask, "How do you know it's not safe?" They say, "We ask Al-Jolani's people, Ahmad Al-Shara'a, whether it's safe or not." They're murdering our people – how can you ask them?

■ The Poll

iF: THERE WAS A POLL TAKEN IN SYRIA THAT SAID 76 PERCENT OF SYRIANS VIEW ISRAEL AS THEIR PRIMARY THREAT, MOSTLY

BECAUSE OF ISRAEL'S SUPPORT FOR THE KURDS AND THE DRUZE. DO YOU THINK THAT MOST SYRIANS SEE ISRAEL AS THE PRIMARY THREAT TO THEIR WELL-BEING?

Murad: Forty percent of the Syrian population are minorities. They are not Sunnis. And I would say even in the other 60 percent, people are not happy with what Al-Julani is doing. They have been through so much since 2011. I'm

her brother was three years old. She met him for the second time when he was 53 years old. My grandmother passed away less than a year ago. She said she loved this country, but in her heart, she wished she could see her family on a daily basis.

That's what we wish for.

But we are living in the Middle East. Let's talk about the near future. First of all, we need to have the siege of Sweida relieved and later we'll see.

Al-Jolani, Ahmad al-Shara'a, should be made to prove to everyone that he will respect all of the minorities. First, by releasing all of the Druze hostages, then by ending the siege in Sweida, and opening the humanitarian corridor.

telling you, most of the people in Syria seek to have a peace agreement with Israel, to be part of the Abrahamic Accords. And they see and they understand what's happening to the Druze community. It's not the correct thing and that's not how it's supposed to be.

iF: HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE OF THE DRUZE ACROSS THE REGION – IN LEBANON, WHICH SOME PEOPLE ARE RATHER OPTIMISTIC ABOUT RIGHT NOW, IN SYRIA, WHERE THEY'RE LESS OPTIMISTIC, AND IN ISRAEL?

Murad: My grandmother came from Syria. She was married to my grandfather in 1947, a few months before the state of Israel. The next time she saw her family was 50 years later. She left when

Maybe we can build trust. I don't know. But if the West sees Al-Jolani as someone it can work with, it is a problem. Everyone understands what's happening within the Druze community in Syria. No one can say that they don't understand. The government, not the people. Al-Jolani, Ahmad al-Shara'a, should be made to prove to everyone that he will respect all of the minorities. First, by releasing all of the Druze hostages, then by ending the siege in Sweida, and opening the humanitarian corridor.

iF: TAMIR, ON BEHALF OF THE JEWISH POLICY CENTER AND THE READERS OF inFOCUS QUARTERLY, THANK YOU FOR AN IMPORTANT CONVERSATION AND A GREAT ADDITION TO OUR EDUCATION.

Anagnorisis: It's Time to Wake Up

by KYLE SCHIDELER

You cannot subvert an enemy who does not want to be subverted. – Yuri Bezmenov

In Christopher Nolan's 2010 thriller, *Inception*, a freelance corporate espionage team constructs dream narratives into which they slip unnoticed to manipulate the intentions of their target. In 2025, that seems less far-fetched, as more people spend their lives in a dream-world of social media. The constant inundation of deepfake videos, massive controlled "bot" swarms orchestrated by both domestic and foreign actors, and a growing marketplace of disingenuous paid influencers makes it increasingly difficult to determine what is real.

Much like a dream, one of the best ways to pierce the veil is to look to the edges of the narrative, where improbable and inexplicable things start to happen. Like in the dream where you show up to high school naked and all the co-workers from your present job are in the crowd laughing at you.

When individuals or groups that share no apparent common interests suddenly seem to be reading from the same script, it suggests there is some third unidentified actor that unites the two.

Or, like a nightmare when you open the creaking door to the basement, only to find yourself walking in a creepy forest, the sudden introduction of a narrative that has no relation to the existing media environment is a good indicator that all is not as it seems.

Oct. 7, 2023 opened just such a nightmare door.

Bloodcurdlingly pro-Hamas sentiment appeared to suddenly boil up from the bowels of America's elite institutions.

Coordinated demands for an immediate ceasefire were displayed on banners throughout the country, even while the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were still beating back the last of the Hamas' invasion force, as if the organizers of the protests knew about the attack before it happened.

Perhaps they did.

■ *Former Israeli Hostages*

Abdallah Aljamal, a Hamas activist and journalist for the US-based *Palestine Chronicle* and Qatari-based al-Jazeera network, held three Israeli hostages captive in Gaza. The trio was rescued last year after being held for eight months. During their time with Aljamal, who was killed in the IDF raid that freed the hostages, he reportedly told them the terror group was in close cooperation with its US-based allies, and that "Hamas was in contact and actively coordinating with its affiliates in the media and on college campuses," according to a civil complaint filed against *The Chronicle*.

Indeed, evidence suggests that student protest organizations operating on college campuses from New York to California were tightly networked into actual terrorist organizations. Student protestors were, in some cases, provided with near real-time updates from Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) commanders regarding the status of the "resistance" during protest encampment events and "teach-ins."

In one example, documented by the citizen journalist Stu Smith on X.com (formerly Twitter), UCLA Students for

Justice in Palestine (SJP) published updates from the media spokesman for Palestinian Islamic Jihad during a 2024 "People's University for a Liberated Palestine summer school." The ten-week program included everything from Communist Party propaganda produced by the Filipino Communist Party to anti-police protest training tactics straight out of the Antifa playbook.

Even more curiously, several of the major actors behind protests, including the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) and the activist group CODE PINK, were already preparing to initiate a major ceasefire protest campaign even before the war started.

But not for Israel.

Rather, the campaign was intended to push for a ceasefire agreement in the Russia-Ukraine War, launched in Washington, DC at an event on Oct. 3, 2023, featuring then-presidential candidate Cornell West.

Five days later, these organizations shifted seamlessly to focusing a campaign against Israel, demanding a ceasefire even before the IDF had launched a counteroffensive and while Israeli soldiers were still pursuing Hamas terrorist cells in Israel proper.

■ *The Role of China*

The organizations behind this ceasefire campaign also have extensively documented links to the People's Republic of China. According to an August 2023 *New York Times* investigative report, Shanghai-based tech millionaire Neville Roy Singham is a vital node in a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda apparatus that spans the globe. Singham's outfit is closely

linked to CODE PINK, whose co-founder, Jodie Evans, is his wife. Singham has also been identified as a massive financial contributor to the PSL, according to Republican members of the House Oversight Committee, which referred Singham to the US Attorney General Pam Bondi for further investigation. Indeed, China reportedly released a flood of pro-Hamas and increasingly antisemitic rhetoric on its social media app TikTok, according to an article by then Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), now secretary of state, published in *The Washington Examiner*.

That hate campaign is seeing tangible results. In May of this year, former PSL member Elias Rodriguez allegedly shot and killed two Israeli embassy staffers at a Jewish event in Washington, DC. He currently faces a federal trial on murder and hate crimes charges. Rodriguez's attack was endorsed by Unity of Fields, a pro-terrorist propaganda outlet, formerly called Palestine Action US, whose British parent organization has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United Kingdom.

The fundamental goal is ... the subversion of the
American public and its confidence, not just in
individual leaders but in our reality.

Unity of Fields' main figurehead, Calla Walsh, got her start in far-left political organizing as a leader of the National Network on Cuba (NNOC), a pro-Cuba organization with ties to Cuban intelligence through the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), a propaganda outlet that works with foreign students. After being stopped by the Department of Homeland Security on the way back from Cuba, Walsh would

later make waves for traveling to Iran to participate in a propaganda campaign following the June 2025 US-Israel joint operation against the Islamic Republic's nuclear weapons program.

CCP-funded campaigns to support Hamas; Cuban assets serving up propaganda for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC); and Filipino Communist propaganda for the benefit of Palestinian terrorism. At the fringes of the narrative – while supposedly reflecting American youth's rejection of Israel and endorsement of revolutionary violence – the meddling hand of foreign actors begins to take shape.

■ **Subversion on the Right**

But perhaps all this seems obvious. Foreign Communist and Islamist subversion of the American left-wing to the benefit of Palestinian terrorism is traditional Cold War fare. The old high school buddies in the naked at high school dream, characters in the narrative acting as one might expect.

But how does one explain the sudden appearance of pro-Hamas and pro-Irani-

have a visceral aversion to conflict and an emotional longing for peace. Such a sentiment has a long pedigree in American discourse, even if, as an operational foreign policy, it lacks specificity. But this change is something different.

■ **Steve Bannon**

Consider former Trump insider Steve Bannon, host of the War Room on the Real America's Voice network. In 2018, *Newsweek* reported on Bannon's full-throated support for moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem and calling for an end to the long-time US policy of endorsing "a two-state solution." In 2017, Bannon identified himself as a "Christian Zionist" at the annual Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) dinner, according to *The Times of Israel*, where he praised pro-Israel conservative donor Sheldon Adelson.

But post-October 7, Bannon labelled Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (whom President Trump recently described as a "war hero") as a "war criminal." He further utilized his platform to savage the US-Israel relationship, in comments swiftly redistributed globally through Turkish and Qatari media outlets including *The Middle East Eye* and *TRT News*.

Given China's hand in anti-Israel sentiment on the left, is it reasonable to ask whether Bannon's about-face on Israel has any relation to his ties to Chinese billionaire Miles Guo, currently in federal custody for a conviction for fraud? Guo notoriously pleaded the Fifth Amendment when asked about detailed allegations that he served as a CCP spy and "dissident hunter" during a federal civil trial in New York in 2019. Bannon was so close to Guo that he was arrested while residing aboard the Chinese billionaire's 150-foot yacht.

■ **Tucker Carlson**

Much critical ink has been spilled regarding former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, now the star of the Tucker Carlson Network. Carlson's network

an talking points on America's right?

Supposedly Pro-Trump figures, and even communications media personalities with established track records of being pro-Israel, made a sudden about face to savage the administration for its military action against Iran's nuclear weapons.

Was this a legit, if long-dormant sentiment?

Certainly, there are well-meaning people (on the right and left) who simply

has devoted unprecedented time to covering increasingly anti-Israel positions, in between fawning soft-ball interviews of Vladimir Putin, Qatari Emir Sheik Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

On US-Israel relations, Carlson emphasizes the principled position espoused by President George Washington that America should avoid “entangling alliances.” However, when discussing Qatar, Carlson is effusive about the small Gulf emirate’s role as a US ally, a curious inconsistency that may provoke those with a suspicious mind.

News reports show that Carlson and other conservative media figures were the targets of an extensive blitz orchestrated by Qatar’s registered foreign agents.

Carlson denies receiving money from Qatar, and he may be telling the truth. But perhaps that’s not the whole story. According to the Network Contagion Research Institute, foreign-backed “bot farms,” many linked to Russian or Iranian intelligence, have been flooding the “America First” social media space, attempting to manipulate the discourse.

■ **Social Media Networks**

Because of the nature of social media monetization methods, one could hypothetically use bots to drive millions of clicks to an influencer who is repeating key propaganda themes, spreading the message while also “paying off” the influencer for parroting the right words.

Is it entirely a coincidence that those who most aggressively pivoted to these antisemitic and pro-foreign government messages are almost all operating as independent social media content producers reliant upon clicks to literally sing for their supper?

Carlson, for example, devoted an entire show to the case of Chairman Omar Yeshitela of the African People’s Socialist Party (APSP), an organization indicted for operating as an unregistered Russian agent, seeking to push Russian

agitprop themes about black reparations in exchange for cash from an agent of the FSB (Russian Federal Security Service, successor to the KGB). Yeshitela is an unrepentant 1960s Black Power pan-African socialist who thinks Black Lives Matter is too soft in its calls to defund police. Carlson was a strong voice for law and order during the BLM riots of 2020, yet Carlson called Yeshitela’s indictment, “the most important criminal case you’ve probably never heard of.”

The post received more than 3.3 million views, 53,000 retweets, and 57,000 likes. Were there really that many Americans waiting with bated breath to hear the sad tale of a ‘60s black radical socialist run afoul of the FBI?

Perhaps it is not even the money that drives influencers to increasingly inexplicable positions. Could the mere dopamine-inducing promise of foreign-backed bot swarms sending a tweet or video into viral stardom be enough for some influencers?

■ **Weakening Your Own Side**

Whatever the proximate cause, on both the right and the left, the common theme is the gradual sabotage of their own political side from within. During the 2024 presidential race, the pro-Palestinian radical left aggressively targeted President Joe Biden, and later heckled Vice President Kamala Harris as insufficiently radical. This undermined their own side in a race against former President Donald Trump, even while they described him literally as a fascist dictator.

Similarly on the right, defectors like Bannon, Carlson, and others are directing their agitation at President Trump and his base. They pay no mind to apparent successes, like the ongoing deportation campaign or crackdown on crime, instead focusing on repeating discredited Hamas death statistics, World War II revisionist history, complaining about insufficient transparency in the Jeffrey Epstein case, or conducting interviews about bizarre UFO conspiracies.

Fundamentally, these foreign campaigns are not really about specific issues, whether it’s Israel, Iran, Russia, or anything else. The fundamental goal is broader and far more dangerous. It’s the subversion of the American public and its confidence, not just in individual leaders but in our reality.

Expect matters to get only more bizarre. Consider a recent example. “Groypers” (a term used for fans of antisemitic podcaster Nick Fuentes) launched an online campaign endorsing Democrat Governor Gavin Newsom for president in 2028, a move curiously boosted by the X account of Zhao DaShuai, representative of the People’s Armed Police Propaganda Bureau of the PRC, an active X user. Coincidentally – or not – these efforts were synchronized with Newsom’s launch of a deliberately imitative “Trump-style” social media blitz. Newsom has been on a publicity tour targeting right-wing social media influencers and podcasters for months, who have largely greeted the liberal governor with open arms.

If the United States continues to funnel politics through the looking glass of social media, our policy debates, whether foreign or domestic, will continue to take on nightmarish qualities. As more think tank leaders, members of Congress, and even agency and cabinet secretaries are increasingly treating their social media platforms as auditions to be the “influencer in chief,” expect the situation to deteriorate.

As Soviet defector and subversion specialist Yuri Bezemenov noted, a country’s citizens must want to be subverted. As long as Americans continue to insist on engaging in politics almost exclusively in the online dream realm, we will find foreign bad actors prepared to turn it into a nightmare.

KYLE SHIDELER is Senior Analyst for Homeland Security and Counter Terrorism at the Center for Security Policy.

Turkey's Push for Jihadi Regime Change in Syria

by SINAN CIDDI

Syria's civil war broke out in March 2011, in reaction to the brutal crackdown by the regime of Bashar al-Assad of popular protests that were part of the wider Arab Spring.

In supporting the Syrian rebels, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan initially used the language of humanitarian intervention, claiming to protect civilians from the Assad regime's repression. But it soon became clear that Erdoğan was also seeking regime change, motivated by an ideological goal: replacing Assad's secular Arab nationalist regime with an Islamist government. This new Syria would then support Turkey's leadership of a new Sunni Muslim order in the Levant.

Early in the conflict, Erdoğan and then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu declared that Turkey could not stand idly by while Assad's regime silenced the cries of freedom of Syria's Sunni majority. Publicly, they urged Assad to implement democratic reforms. Privately, Davutoğlu assured Erdoğan that Assad's fall was imminent, either through internal collapse or Western intervention, as had occurred in Libya and Egypt.

But Turkey lacked the capacity to orchestrate regime change in its southern neighbor. What it possessed was a growing willingness to support jihadist elements in the Syrian opposition.

■ Support for Jihadists

By mid-2011, Turkey transitioned from diplomatic pressure to active support of the rebels. Ankara allowed the Syrian opposition to organize on Turkish soil, enabling the formation of

groups like the "Friends of Syria" and the Free Syrian Army. Foreign fighters traveled to Turkey to join the anti-Assad ranks. Turkey became a hub for Syria's rebellion.

Turkey, led by the AKP, cast itself as the model Sunni democracy – exporting this "Turkish Model" to Arab Spring nations.

In October 2011, Turkey helped launch the Syrian National Council in Istanbul. Though intended as a broad opposition umbrella, it became dominated by the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. At a 2012 State Department meeting, Syrian Kurdish representatives complained that "with the support of Turkey," the Brotherhood had sidelined other opposition voices. One US official summarized Ankara's vision as "a centralized Islamist government backed by a constitution."

When Turkey convened the Syrian opposition in Antalya in December 2012 to form a new command structure, nearly two-thirds of the delegates invited were Muslim Brotherhood members. Turkey's vision for Syria was now plainly visible: a Brotherhood-led regime beholden to Ankara.

But Assad did not fall. As the civil war dragged on, Turkey doubled down, providing covert aid to rebel groups. Hakan Fidan, head of Turkey's intelligence agency MIT, directed this support. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, MIT became a "traffic cop" coordinating weapons shipments and directing convoys across the 565-mile Turkish-Syrian border.

By early 2012, the insurgency had changed. Extremist factions, initially

peripheral, began to dominate, including Jabhat al-Nusra [al-Nusra Front]. It established cells across Syria, in Aleppo, Idlib, Deir al-Zor, and Dera'a. Another Islamist group, Ahrar al-Sham, formed in January 2012. By the end of the year, it joined ten other militias to create the Syrian Islamic Front. In 2013, it evolved into Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya and collaborated with jihadist and US-backed groups alike.

All these groups benefited from Turkey's open-door policy. One US official described Turkey's border approach as a revolving door: "They more or less let all kinds of people in – al-Nusra was among them." Turkish border guards "looked the other way," allowing jihadists to cross with impunity. In December 2012, the US designated al-Nusra as a foreign terrorist organization highlighting its ties to al-Qai'da.

By May 2013, the White House was alarmed. President Obama reportedly warned Erdoğan that Turkey was "letting arms and fighters flow into Syria indiscriminately and sometimes to the wrong rebels, including anti-Western jihadists." US officials pressed Ankara to "tightly control the arms flow."

■ The Jihadi Highway

Turkey was the central artery of what analysts dubbed the "jihadi highway." Norwegian terrorism expert Thomas Heghammer noted, "Turkey is to Syria now what Pakistan was to Afghanistan in the 1990s. Antakya is the Peshawar of Syria." Fighters flowed in from across the world. Turkish border towns became staging grounds for Islamist militias. Local shops sold

smartphones and supplies to jihadists. Hospitals treated wounded fighters from both ISIS and al-Nusra. Mehmet Ali Ediboğlu, a Turkish member of parliament from the opposition CHP, told *The Wall Street Journal* that he personally tracked “a convoy of more than 50 buses carrying radical fighters” to the border, escorted by Turkish police.

Weapons also streamed across the border. Reuters reported in 2012 that Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar had established a secret operations center near the border to coordinate arms and communications for Syrian rebels. Washington was complicit. Francis Ricciardone, former US ambassador to Turkey, said in 2014 that Ankara “worked with groups for a period, including al-Nusra,” and hoped to “moderate” them.

When Davutoğlu was pressed about al-Nusra’s links to al-Qaeda, he merely admitted, “declaring them [al-Nusra] a terrorist organization has resulted in more harm than good.”

Erdoğan and Davutoğlu’s pursuit of regime change was not a defensive reaction to Assad’s brutality. It was an effort to remake the region in the AKP’s Islamist image. And in that reckless endeavor, they opened the gates to forces far beyond their control, including the terrorist ISIS caliphate.

■ *The Collapse and the Rise*

When Bashar al-Assad’s regime abruptly collapsed in December 2024, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan saw more than just a regional upheaval. He saw a long-awaited opportunity.

With Iran’s influence waning and Russia distracted by internal instability and foreign entanglements, a rare power vacuum emerged in Syria. Erdoğan moved swiftly. For over a decade, Ankara had supported Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the al-Qaeda offshoot that ultimately toppled Assad’s regime, under the leadership of Muhammad al-Jolani (who would drop this nom de guerre in 2025 and re-assume his birth name, Ahmed al-Shara’a). HTS was just



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, right, shakes hands with Syria’s President Ahmed al-Shara’a during their meeting in Ankara, Turkey, February 4, 2025. (Photo: Turkish Presidency)

one of several Sunni Islamist factions that Turkey had backed since the earliest days of Syria’s civil war, beginning in 2011.

For Erdoğan, the war in Syria was never simply about toppling a brutal dictatorship. It was a generational chance to reshape the Middle East, fulfilling a vision rooted in establishing a neo-Ottoman regional order with Turkey at its helm.

Beginning in 2012, Ankara openly aligned itself with the Syrian opposition, betting that Assad’s days were numbered, much like the authoritarian regimes that had fallen in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia during the Arab Spring. Erdoğan miscalculated. Assad endured, thanks to backing from Tehran and Moscow.

It would take another twelve years for Erdoğan’s vision to find traction. By March 2025, a new interim government led by Ahmed al-Shara’a had taken charge in Damascus. This political outcome was the culmination of Turkey’s long-standing efforts to influence Syria’s post-Assad trajectory. And yet, this strategy marked a profound evolution in Erdoğan’s approach to Damascus. Before the civil war, between 2004 and 2011, he had in fact pursued a pragmatic detente with Assad, signaling a very different strategic calculus.

The notion that Erdoğan and Assad

once embraced as allies may now seem surreal, but it reflects a brief window of diplomatic realignment. To understand that moment, one must consider the deeper ideological fault lines that have long defined Turkish-Syrian relations.

■ *Ideological Fault Lines*

Turkey’s hostility toward the Assad regime predates Erdoğan. Ideologically, it is rooted in the worldview of the National View Movement, the Turkish Islamist tradition from which Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) arose. Since the rule of Hafiz al-Assad (1971–2000), these Turkish Sunni Islamists regarded Syria’s Alawite-dominated Ba’athist regime with suspicion and disdain, as secular socialists who were dangerously close to the Soviet Union. They supported the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, especially after the Ba’athists banned the group in 1964.

Among the most vocal critics of the Syrian Ba’ath was Necmettin Erbakan, founder of the Islamist Welfare Party and Erdoğan’s political mentor. Erbakan deeply resented the Ba’athist crackdown on Sunni Islamist forces and privately cheered the Brotherhood’s calls for jihad against Damascus. Although he refrained from open confrontation with

the Syrian state, Erbakan's ideological hostility was clear. Following this line, Erdoğan and his foreign policy architect Ahmet Davutoğlu, saw the Assad regime as secular tyrants and, in the words of one Turkish analyst, as "illegitimate elites of a minority sect that had done more damage to Islam as a religion than had the West."

That historical resentment fueled Turkey's antagonistic posture during the Cold War, when Ankara and Damascus frequently found themselves on oppo-

normalize relations with regional adversaries, including Syria.

Erdoğan's pivot toward Damascus was also driven by his deepening disillusionment with Europe. After the European Union effectively stalled Turkey's accession process in 2007, Ankara's foreign policy began to shift decisively toward the Middle East. The 2008 global financial crisis further weakened Turkey's economic alignment with Europe, accelerating Erdoğan's

ideology to the imperatives of national interest.

So, what changed?

■ *The Civil War*

The answer lies not only in the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, but in Erdoğan's strategic recalibration. By 2011, the Arab Spring had dramatically altered the political landscape across the region. Erdoğan, emboldened by the downfall of Arab autocrats, assumed Assad's regime would follow suit. His support for oppositionist forces, including jihadist groups like HTS, was less about democracy and more about engineering a Sunni realignment in Syria that would align with Ankara's regional ambitions.

The Syrian war became, for Erdoğan, both a proxy conflict and a proving ground for a new Turkish sphere of influence. The fall of Assad in 2024 vindicated a long and risky bet. The rise of Ahmed al-Shara'a, a former jihadist handpicked and mentored by Ankara, now in power in Damascus, signals the culmination of a strategy that began not with the first shots of civil war, but with decades of ideological suspicion and a fairly brief, ill-fated experiment in pragmatism.

In the end, Erdoğan preferred a Syria that would be closely aligned with his Islamist worldview, rather than one that was merely aligned with Turkey's national interests. He would spend over a decade attempting to overthrow Assad in pursuit of this goal. Since the founding of Turkey as a republic in 1923, no Turkish leader had ever engaged in a process of regime change in a foreign country. Erdoğan would defy this trend. When Assad eventually fell, Erdoğan did not merely react to Syria's collapse. He had prepared for it, waited for it, and helped shape it.

SINAN CIDDI, *Ph.D.*, is a senior fellow at *The Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD)* and director of the *Turkey program*. This article is reprinted by permission of the *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*.

The notion that Erdoğan and Assad once embraced as allies may now seem surreal, but it reflects a brief window of diplomatic realignment.

site sides of geopolitical and ideological divides. Most explosively, Syria served as a patron for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), offering sanctuary to its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, and providing logistical support for the group's separatist campaign inside Turkey. The PKK's operations from Syrian soil brought the two countries to the brink of war in 1998, a confrontation only defused when Damascus expelled Ocalan under Turkish pressure. As a result, it is worth pointing out that Turkish elites' suspicion of Syria was not limited only to the Islamist camp: it was shared across Turkey's political spectrum.

■ *Erdogan's Rise*

Yet when Erdoğan assumed office as prime minister in 2003, he temporarily shelved those long-standing grievances in favor of a pragmatic reorientation. Early in his tenure, Erdoğan cultivated a reputation in Western capitals as a capable leader willing to sideline ideology for realpolitik. This image was embodied in the "zero problems with neighbors" doctrine, a cornerstone of Davutoğlu's foreign policy vision. Its aim was to

pursuit of new trade and political alliances in the Arab world, with Syria at the center of this new orientation.

Between 2004 and 2010, bilateral relations between Turkey and Syria improved dramatically. The two countries formed a high-level Strategic Cooperation Council and signed a series of free trade and visa liberalization agreements. Trade volume more than doubled – from \$800 million in 2003 to \$1.8 billion in 2010. Syrian tourists flocked to Turkish cities such as Gaziantep, spurring local economic booms and the construction of shopping malls tailored to Syrian consumers. For a brief moment, Syria served as a critical land bridge for Turkish truckers bringing goods to Jordan and the Gulf, an economic artery that gave substance to the improving relations.

The warm rapport between Erdoğan and the Assad family during this period led some observers to question whether ideologically committed Islamist leaders like Erdoğan could, in fact, evolve into pragmatic statesmen once in power. Until 2012, there was reason to believe that Erdoğan might subordinate

The US Needs to Engage Central Asia

by ARIEL COHEN

Central Asia, the vast geographic region bordering both Russia and China, is a Washington policy stepchild, often assigned low priority on the American strategic agenda, regardless of which party is in power in the White House. Washington's attention has fluctuated with the tide of geopolitical events, such as America's long war and eventual withdrawal from Afghanistan. Similarly, immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, post-9/11, and after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, American interest briefly focused on Central Asia only to slide away again. Result: Washington has little to show in terms of lasting engagement with this resource-rich region despite its strategic position as the heartland of the Eurasian landmass.

Recently, President Donald Trump played a key role in facilitating peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the South Caucasus, another strategic region, located between Turkey, Iran, and Russia. The Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), briefly explained in a White House memorandum issued August 8th, will create a nexus to normalize economic activity in the region, provide America a frontier from which to pressure Iran, and signal America's growing strategic edge in the area. If successful, it will help keep Russia and Iran out of the South Caucasus. US policy aimed at expanding the Abraham Accords to include Azerbaijan and possibly Central Asian countries suggests a bold diplomatic vision that develops a Eurasia-Middle East land bridge under American aegis.

Now America's national security posture, defined by the competition with

China, has compelled the Trump administration to focus on strategic minerals. China's dominance gives it critical advantages across many high-tech sectors crucial to national security, including IT, aerospace, and advanced weapons systems. Additionally, improving the US trade balance and striking trade deals have become the White House's top priorities.

Central Asia can address both imperatives. It has abundant critical minerals and other energy resources, and largely secular societies willing to cooperate with the US and the West while maintaining cordial relations with their former imperial powers, Russia

Concerning critical minerals, simply put, either the uranium and other key resources that Central Asia can provide will go to the US and the West, or they will go to Beijing.

and China. The region is landlocked by China, Russia, Afghanistan, and Iran, making it vital for future engagement between Washington and its rivals, Beijing and Moscow. Concerning critical minerals, simply put, either the uranium and other key resources that Central Asia can provide will go to the US and the West, or they will go to Beijing. What they will not do is remain underground. The Central Asian economies are under too much pressure to grow, and Beijing is too eager to buy.

After his second term inauguration, one of the first world leaders that

President Trump called was Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio emphasized the importance of the region during his confirmation hearing and has followed up on this in several meetings with Central Asian officials. Rubio called Uzbekistan's foreign minister, Bakhtiyor Saidov, in February and met him in April to discuss anti-terrorism and economic cooperation. He met with Murat Nurtleu, Kazakhstan's Deputy Prime Minister-Foreign Minister, this past June to discuss expanding bilateral ties, and with Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov in August to

promote regional integration and commend Turkmenistan's assistance in repatriating Americans during the Iran-Israel conflict. At the July 2025 State Department Senate budget hearings, Rubio and Senator Steve Daines (R-MT) had a direct exchange about diplomatic priorities in the greater Caspian region – an encouraging sign.

■ Security Above All

Geographically and historically, Russia and China have had the strongest influence over Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan,



Russian President Vladimir Putin stands for a group photo with the Heads of State at the Summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Astana, Kazakhstan. (Photo: Kremlin.ru)

and Uzbekistan – also known as the C5), which is why the C5 seeks Western investment and support. For the US, investing in Central Asia can weaken Sino-Russian cooperation and even increase competition between Beijing and Moscow. It is a key region where the West should consistently work to limit Russian and Chinese power.

China currently dwarfs American trade in the region. The volume of US-C5 trade was approximately \$4.1 billion in 2024; the volume with China reached \$94.8 billion. The China-C5 relationship is based mainly on trade and investment. The Belt and Road Initiative, now at its second iteration, is a key vector of Beijing's global influence. Kazakhstan was the starting point for the Belt and Road Initiative, setting the stage for China to become the chief regional economic power. Projects ranging from the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway to electric vehicle factories are set to expand Beijing's clout. Meanwhile, the US has removed sanctions exemptions for Iran's port of Chabahar, a key transit destination in India's International North-South Transport Corridor that

would allow Central Asian countries to export to the Indian Ocean. By eliminating such options, American policy has jeopardized cooperation with India on Central Asia, and lent China even more power over regional trade.

Russia's trade with Central Asia has also, to a minor extent, helped Moscow hedge against loss of revenue from sanctions incurred after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Russian companies such as Gazprom, Rosatom, and Lukoil are major commercial presences in C5 states, particularly Uzbekistan. Only Western involvement in the region's economies and the threat of further sanctions prevent Central Asian trade from becoming an unchecked method of sanctions evasion.

The Kremlin's leadership of several regional intergovernmental organizations, like the Eurasian Economic Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the Commonwealth of Independent States, enables it to maintain a high level of diplomatic presence and strengthen defense ties, even if only aspirationally. Russia also has the most significant military presence in the

region, stationing troops on the Tajik-Afghan border, training officers, maintaining foreign military bases, and being responsible for the largest share of weapons imports.

Central Asia also borders Iran, an actor that ratcheted up tensions with the US in recent months, culminating in Israeli and American airstrikes on Tehran's nuclear facilities. While these attacks diminished the immediate nuclear threat, Tehran still projects power by funding Islamist proxy groups. Intelligence cooperation between the US and the C5 can be mutually beneficial to mitigate the spread of these and other extremist groups. The presence of the Afghan Taliban to the south further underscores the need for partners to combat terrorist encroachment through diplomatic engagement and intelligence cooperation.

■ **US Economic Opportunities in Central Asia**

To thrive in peace or win in war in the 21st century, rare earths are essential. However, thanks partly to Western obliviousness and partly to Chinese

mastery of playing the long game, over 60 percent of mining and 80 percent of global refining of strategic minerals are in the hands of the CCP. The 2025 US Department of Interior report prioritizes the following strategic minerals based on the modelled impact of potential disruption: samarium, rhodium, lutetium, terbium, dysprosium, gallium, germanium, gadolinium, tungsten, and niobium.

As America seeks to reduce its dependence on Chinese supply chains, the most pressing need Central Asia can help satisfy is for critical minerals from sources outside China (“friend-shoring”). The C5 hold 38.6 percent of global magnesium reserves, 30.07 percent of chromium, 20 percent of lead, 12.6 percent of zinc, and 8.7 percent of titanium, as well as significant reserves of rare earth elements such as scandium, yttrium, and lanthanides. Kazakhstan, the regional leader in mining since the 1930s, is a major producer and exporter of many of these.

The US has already taken steps to engage Central Asian states in critical mineral production. In 2024, following

Relations between the US and the C5 also have room for development in the energy sector. As the world’s leading uranium producer, representing 14 percent of the world’s reserves and responsible for over 40 percent of global production, Kazakhstan can help meet America’s demand for uranium, especially as big tech looks to nuclear power to fuel AI-driven data centers and the country cuts off Russian supplies. Uzbekistan, holding one percent of global reserves and accounting for seven percent of the world’s production, is also interested in working with the US.

Turkmenistan, with some of the largest natural gas reserves on the planet, is a key supplier of to China. However, as the European Union (EU) seeks to eliminate its dependence on Russian natural gas, which fuels the Kremlin’s war on Ukraine, American help to introduce Turkmen gas to the European market, in addition to its Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) supply, would create a friction point between China and Europe in the region and help ensure Brussels and

alternative to Russia’s Northern Corridor expanded in the wake of Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine. American investment in the Middle Corridor could promote American interests on multiple fronts, bolstering a trade route allowing for better access to energy resources and minerals for global markets while competing with robust Chinese investment in the region’s transportation infrastructure. Connecting TITR to the newly announced TRIPP in the Caucasus could expand the throughput of the combined transportation arteries and further economic development of both the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The fact that this geoeconomic competition is happening in an arena amenable to Western investment is a huge boon. The region’s cultural tolerance is a model for the Islamic world. Successful cooperation between the US and any state actors would be invaluable. The region convenes the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, is a destination of pilgrimage for the Chabad Lubavitch branch of Hassidic Judaism, and is home to a variety of ethnic groups practicing multiple faiths.

Central Asia is also a lynchpin in the modern transportation landscape. The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), or Middle Corridor, links China to Europe overland while avoiding Iran and Russia.

a dialogue the US signed memoranda of understanding with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to diversify mineral supply chains. Under President Trump, America’s need for secure critical minerals supply chains has become paramount. Washington’s efforts to secure these recently included the US-Ukraine minerals deal, mediation between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and expanded funding for the Lobito Corridor in Central Africa.

Washington remain aligned. This would require a relatively short undersea pipeline from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan’s Trans-Anatolian pipeline (TAP) via the Caspian Sea, a venture that could benefit both American and European companies.

Central Asia is also a lynchpin in the modern transportation landscape. The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), or Middle Corridor, links China to Europe overland while avoiding Iran and Russia. Its role as an

■ **Obstacles to Cooperation**

To reap the benefits of engaging with Central Asia, the Trump Administration must address issues souring relations with countries in the region and fostering mistrust toward the US. None of these involve vital American interests; all are eminently solvable.

First is the Jackson-Vanik amendment, a Cold War-era relic originally legislated to punish nonmarket economies for limiting the emigration of Jews and other religious minorities. Still on the books without reason, it is denying states like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan from Permanent Normal Trade Relations status. While waivers are granted annually to these countries, the lack of political will from American leadership to grant PNTR is neglectful and breeds distrust.

Though Secretary of State Marco

Rubio has voiced support for repealing Jackson-Vanik, referring to it as a “relic of the past,” the power to do so lies with Congress. Currently, two bills, H.R.1024 - US-Kazakhstan Trade Modernization Act and H.R.2329 - Uzbekistan Normalized Trade Act, have been introduced to remove all Jackson-Vanik restrictions on Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, with 22 and two cosponsors, respectively. They have been stuck in the House Ways and Means Committee for several months. There is no reason to delay.

Next, Trump’s levy of tariffs impacted the Central Asian states, with Kazakhstan receiving a 25 percent tariff and the other countries receiving the baseline 10 percent tariff. While 95 percent of Kazakhstan’s key exports, like uranium, ferroalloys, and oil, are tariff-exempt, this measure only plays to Beijing’s advantage and creates unnecessary uncertainty surrounding trade with the US.

Finally, the US is being overly intrusive in domestic C5 policies as states in the region combat the threat of radical Islam. Terrorist jihadist groups like ISIS-Khorasan have been growing in the area. Yet, the US Commission for International Religious Freedom published a report in December of 2024 criticizing the C5 for enforcing policies meant to combat these threats within their borders. Accusing the C5 governments of restricting religious freedoms and human rights while failing to consider the dangers that extremists pose to these same human rights and liberties, to say nothing of their threats of violence, is short-sighted and thwarts efforts to build relations and establish business ties.

■ **Central Asia Engagement**

The repeal of Jackson-Vanik restrictions would signal receptivity to C5 concerns while indicating US readiness to expand trade.

Additionally, the US needs to pursue a comprehensive economic and business strategy to invest in the region. President Trump’s trade deals thus far have been effective in securing commitments for

resources like natural gas and critical minerals, while changing tariff rates on trade partners. Mixed signals don’t work well.

Actively pursuing deals across the region and in more economic sectors beyond energy can provide American companies with investment opportunities across the transportation, mining, and energy sectors while making progress toward limiting Russian and Chinese influence and solidifying new sources of critical minerals outside of China. This can play a vital role in engaging the region following the freeze of USAID funding; and collaborative platforms like the B5+1, in which Secretary

efforts. Expanding the Abraham Accords to Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, would create more outside parties with a stake in peace in the Middle East while simultaneously building a structure for more routine multilateral cooperation between the US and Central Asian states. Expanding the Accords would also encourage congressional action in the US as the strategic importance of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan becomes clearer.

To establish a new chapter in the US-Central Asia relationship, a visit by President Trump would demonstrate a commitment to invest in the region and

To establish a new chapter in the US-Central Asia relationship, a visit by President Trump would demonstrate a commitment to invest in the region and make history as the first visit from a sitting American president.

Rubio has expressed interest, can help redefine American investment relationships. American international financial institutions, such as the US International Development Finance Corporation and EXIM Bank, supported by the US Trade Representative, the US Department of Commerce, the US Chamber of Commerce, and the respective industries, can and should expand American economic engagement in the region.

To tackle terrorism in Central Asia, the US can provide counterterrorism support through intelligence sharing, education and training, and contributing to practical solutions to fight extremist rhetoric and recruitment, rather than just criticizing measures the C5 take to address threats. This also presents an opportunity to collaborate with Central Asia on security, an area traditionally dominated by Moscow.

The region can also be integrated into broader American diplomatic

make history as the first visit from a sitting American president.

Reaping the benefits of deeper C5-American relations is well within reach, especially as steps such as a presidential visit and repealing Jackson-Vanik are low-hanging fruit – high-dividend measures that would demonstrate America means business.

The Trump administration has the opportunity to usher in a new era of relations with Central Asia, making significant progress toward its strategic and economic goals in a region the US has neglected for too long, and sending a message that Moscow and Beijing cannot ignore.

ARIEL COHEN, Ph.D., is a Senior Fellow with the International Tax and Investment Center and Managing Director of its Energy, Growth and Security program. He also serves as a nonresident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council.

Widen Your Focus: Two Books You Need

review by SHOSHANA BRYEN

The old Jewish joke is: They tried to kill us. They failed. Let's eat.

That's not quite right. It should be:

They did kill us, men, women and children, over and over in every generation in the most brutal and disgusting ways possible.

They failed to erase us, Judaism, and our belief in the Messiah

Let's eat.

Eric Rozenman's *The David Discovery* is the fictionalized story of generations of the Davidic Dynasty; a phantom-like intergenerational Special Operations team that tries to protect King David's lineage; and parts of Jewish history you may well have forgotten. It is sad, bloody, and remarkably moving. And, in this period of rising antisemitism not only in the Middle East and Europe, but in the US as well, it is remarkably timely.

For American Jews – the most likely readers, but others should read it as well – there is resonance in the chapters set in the present.

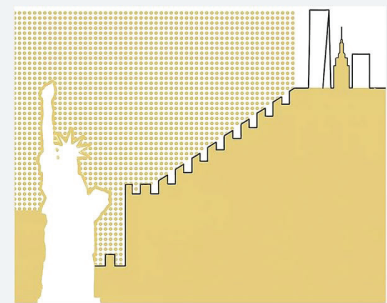
Rozenman is the author of *From Elvis to Trump, Eyewitness to the Unraveling: Co-Starring Richard Nixon, Andy Warhol, Bill Clinton, The Supremes and Barack Obama!* and *Jews Make the Best Demons: "Palestine" and the Jewish Question* (reviewed in the Summer 2019 issue of *inFOCUS Quarterly*). His

commentaries have appeared across the American and Israeli media and, full disclosure, after a career at B'nai B'rith and CAMERA, he was Communications Consultant at the Jewish Policy Center.

Jumping from present to past to another past to present to a different past, you find a remarkable group of rabbis who work to track the descendants of King David from the Roman expulsion of 70 CE to the present day. They are aided by a formidable group of protectors/enforcers. Sometimes, they find the right man. Sometimes they protect the wrong man. It doesn't really matter. They are working with what they have, which is a fascinating group of men. [Note: Yes. Men. There is a discussion early on about why the Moshiach will be a man and cannot be a woman. Women, however, function as they always have in Jewish history, as indispensable parties to Jewish existence – and sometimes to the Organization.]

For American Jews – the most likely readers, but others should read it as well – there is resonance in the chapters set in the present. You will recognize the liberals, traditionalists, feminists, rabbis, nasty people on the streets, and the wafting through of Sunday School and Jewish summer camp lessons.

The David Discovery



A Novel of the Near Future

Eric Rozenman

But the real lessons are in the chapters set in the past.

Be honest, how much did you know about the Jews of North Africa? Yes, you knew they were expelled in the late 1940s and 1950s as a reaction to the establishment of the state of Israel. But their history, their connection with the Berber communities in the 8th century CE?

Or what about the rabbis and mystics of Palestine in the 16th century? If you ever sang "L'cha Dodi" or "Yedid Nefesh" at Kabbalat Shabbat, here are your people. The words were composed by Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz of Sfat - putting the lie to the anti-Israel calumny that Jews came to the Middle East as 20th century colonists; they were always there. The focus here is the 1799 Napoleonic colonialist attempt to invade what was then the Sanjak of Acre, held by Ottoman Turks and British colonialists.

European history tells you how the French fared, but two modern points emerge: 1) the indigenous presence of Jews and their relationship with indigenous Muslims, and 2) the absence of anything resembling “Palestine,” “Palestinians,” Palestinian statehood/governance/nationality.

The Spanish Inquisition? Yes, you knew it was nasty, but Rozenman’s description will turn you off of lunch. On the other hand, he launches into the fabulous story of Jewish Caribbean pirates. Expelled from Spain and then from Portugal, Jews went to the Caribbean and South America. Beth Israel of Aruba

places – Europe especially, but not only. American founding principles are Jewish principles.

In a memorable speech, Rabbi Sacks explained contracts and covenants:

In a contract, two or more people come together to make an exchange... which is to the benefit of the self-interest of each.

A covenant isn’t like that. It’s more like a marriage than an exchange... A covenant isn’t about me, the voter, or me, the consumer, but about all of us together. Or in that lovely key phrase of American politics, it’s

Jumping from present to past to another past to present to a different past, you find a remarkable group of rabbis who work to track the descendants of King David from the Roman expulsion of 70 CE to the present day.

was formed in the 16th century; it is still there. But the story in this chapter is the actual story of Jewish dispossession – the hero becomes a pirate because he wants to kill Spaniards who killed his mother and his sister.

Follow this one to today’s Cuba, with its small, poor Jewish community bolstered by American Jewish congregations.

As you get closer to the 21st century, something else emerges. America.

The first Jews arrived in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam in 1654, fleeing Brazil when Portugal ousted the Dutch, making it as unsafe for Jews as it had been in Portugal itself. Does that change your conception of American Jews as European-based immigrants of the 20th century?

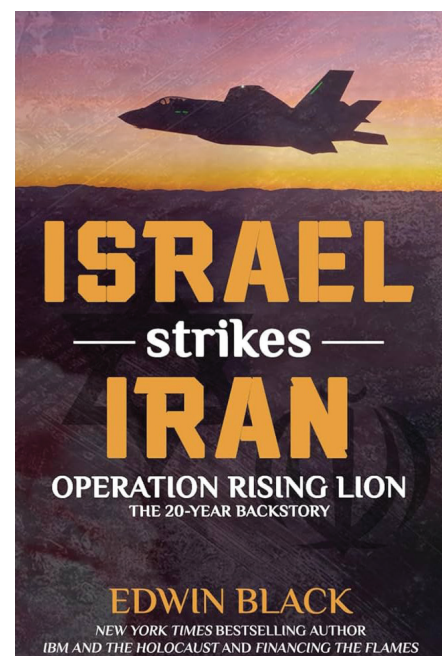
Throughout the stories, the life and work of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (z”l) is discussed – how Jewish history and writing influenced America’s Founding Fathers and why the Jewish experience in the United States is different from other

about “We, the people.”

Biblical Israel had a society long before it had a state... And there is only one nation known to me that had the same dual founding as biblical Israel, and that is the United States of America which has its social covenant in the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and its social contract in the Constitution in 1787.

An extraordinary lesson and a grave warning for all Americans today. If we lose the connection between our Constitution and our people, lose the concept of a covenantal relationship between G-d and man, America will lose what made it the “Goldene Medineh” and the “City on the Hill.”

Buy this one. Buy several copies – one for you, one for each of your children, one for your parents. And worry over the warning inherent in Jewish history. Even in America.



Edwin Black’s new book, *Israel Strikes Iran: Operation Rising Lion – The 20-Year Backstory*, is a must-read. Don’t let the fact that you are unlikely to understand the details (unless you are a defense analyst or a nuclear weapons specialist) deter you.

The lessons are in plain English.

Iran’s intention to enrich uranium and build nuclear weapons was clear long before the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Iran’s scientists were pretty good. With the help of other countries, plus funding by the West in the form of “sanctions relief” or waivers, or by ignoring violations of sanctions, the Iranian scientists created weapons and plans.

- Iran cheated before, during, and after the JCPOA.

- A lot of people knew that – and didn’t act on what they knew.

- But there were other people, and we should be forever grateful to them.

Black, the award-winning investigative journalist and *New York Times* (NYT) bestselling author, has been watching and writing about Iranian nuclear progress for decades.

The introductory chapter, “The Twenty-Year Wait,” is Black’s timeline, putting forward bits and pieces of

information that culminated in Operation Rising Lion. He notes, “*Israel Strikes Iran* has been almost ready to publish for years ... I wrote all but the final chapter material back in 2021 and 2022.”

Yes, it is a bit self-aggrandizing, but he’s more than entitled. Author of a dozen books – including the terrifying *IBM and the Holocaust* and equally terrifying *Financing the Flames* – Black is the master of the back story.

You know the Russian S-300 air defense system, right? But did you know that in 2008, Greece, which owned S-300s, held joint Air Force exercises with Israel? The *NYT* reported on them, but Black added, in *The Cutting Edge News* (TCEN) in July of that year, “Pivotal information ... has remained below the radar. By swarming its jets into the S-300s massive electronics, Israel was able to record invaluable information about defeating, jamming and circumventing the Russian system.” Oh.

The article outlines Israel’s leaps in air superiority, but notes that Israel presumed heavy Iranian retaliation. “Israel considers itself to be in a no-win situation because years of sanctions and intense diplomacy have not stopped Iran’s cyclonic nuclear progress... More than one Israeli official has stated that the only thing worse than attacking Iran is not attacking Iran.”

Then his 2025 update.

Iran’s home-built air defense system, Bavar, was rushed to deployment. Israel’s air defense systems surpassed all prior understanding and, Iran’s April 2024 barrage of 30 cruise missiles, 120 ballistic missiles, and 170 drones managed to injure a seven-year-old Bedouin girl in Arad. Israel’s retaliation was much more effective.

Israel eliminated Hamas’ Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, carried out the pager attacks on Hezbollah operatives in Lebanon on September 17, and then took out Hezbollah headquarters in Beirut on the 27th. Iran responded and Israel responded.

Now you start to see how this works.

Chapter Two is the story of the development of the Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) bunker buster, which began in 2004, as Black reported in a TCEN story in September 2009. You don’t need to understand the details to understand their success.

But in the 2025 update, you will get the details, and – as hard as it is to imagine – discover that hundreds, if not thousands, of US Defense Department personnel, other government officials, and staffers kept their mouths shut about

Obama through Trump 1 through Biden and into Trump 2. For 12 of those years (guess which), the US doesn’t look too good. But remember, during all that time, the military establishment was improving MOPs and plans – silently.

As you read on, you get a comforting feeling, actually, that people in the US and Israel were determined to protect us all.

Chapters Four and Five don’t require much technical knowledge. They are the best chapters and maybe should

All the groundwork, the science, the diplomacy and lack thereof, the activities carried out in secret and in public, the coordination and cooperation between the United States and Israel becomes the stage on which Operation Rising Lion and Operation Midnight Hammer played out.

it for more than 20 years. Spoiler alert: Jump to the last chapter and read the paean to our people by General Dan Caine, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The result: “Operation Midnight Hammer played out as one of the most sophisticated and synchronized military operations since World War II... within the space of minutes, twelve MOPS dropped on Fordow, two MOPs plunged into the Natanz facility, and the Tomahawks [cruise missiles] pounded Isfahan.”

The development of Iran’s bomb is Chapter 3, starting with an article in *The Times of Israel* in 2012. The article also shows the development of the Shehab-3 missile. The chapter begins with Pakistan, but it is actually a timeline on Israel’s ops inside Iran – from stealing the nuclear archive in 2018, to the assassination of Iranian scientists, to sabotage of facilities across the country. It details American policy toward Iran – from presidents

have come first – we know the end of the story. But as you read them, everything you read before comes into focus. All the groundwork, the science, the diplomacy and lack thereof, the activities carried out in secret and in public, the coordination and cooperation between the United States and Israel becomes the stage on which Operation Rising Lion and Operation Midnight Hammer played out.

Don’t cheer yet. Black is nothing if not a realist, ending with a cautionary note: “The most important warning of this book is contained not in the text written above, but the text yet to be written below ... Our destiny paragraph is yet to be written.”

Wait for it.

SHOSHANA BRYEN is Senior Director of The Jewish Policy Center and Editor of *inFOCUS* Quarterly.



PO Box 77316
Washington, DC 20013



SCAN ME!

Donate to the Jewish Policy Center

■ *The Last Word ...*

Regime Change for Iran?

American and Israeli operations in Iran were extraordinary, but a ceasefire is not victory. Victory is much harder. It was not achieved in Israel's War of Independence, the Six-Day War or the Yom Kippur War. It wasn't achieved in Lebanon, Gaza, or in Judea and Samaria, or by the United States in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq or Afghanistan. Victory is when your enemy is not only unable to fight you now but agrees in a verifiable way that it will not fight you in the future. World War II, the Camp David Accords, the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, and most recently, the Abraham Accords, were victories.

But as long as the mullahs of Iran – with their multigenerational death wish and willingness to torture and murder their own people in pursuit of some phantasmagorical end – remain in power, this is an interregnum only.

That is not an American or Israeli problem to solve; neither country will nor should put “boots on the ground.” Neither should tell the Iranian people who should govern them.

Israel and the US opened the door as wide as they could for the Iranian people to take their lives into their own

hands. Dozens of the ugliest tools of oppression in Tehran's hands were attacked. No one can expect more than that – and if you do, don't.

Why? History.

Former President George W. Bush tried to bring “democracy” to Iraq.

Former President Barack Obama bombed Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, Philippines, Mali and Niger with varying degrees of congressional agreement. The Libya bombings precipitated a civil war that continues to this day. Coups and attempted coups across Somalia, Mali and Niger resulted in the US and France being ousted from the latter two; the United States still trains troops in Somalia, the hellhole of Blackhawk Down.

Not one had a regime change that created a democracy.

Israel's experiences with both the PA and with Hamas in Gaza, were an attempt to provide assets to ruling cadres in hopes that they would decide that joining the modern world and providing for the people was better than killing Jews. It didn't work.

Pray for the people of Iran.