

The Long View

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Time to Uncover the Histories of Occupation and Oppression



OLSI JAZEXHI

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DENIJAL JEGIĆ

Liberating Lebanon and Decolonising the Discourse that Occupies It

IAN ALMOND

Terrorism Got COVID: Or, The Constant-Threat News-Culture We Live In

MASSOUD SHADJAREH

Why We Need to Get Beyond Regimes of Anti-terrorism, and Fast

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

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The recent Israeli war on Palestinians has highlighted once more – despite the best efforts of powerful countries and compliant media – the brutality of the Israeli project of occupation. As with previous such wars, the limelight soon fades as ceasefires are called, and the ongoing stifling of Palestinian life and aspirations, by routine physical and psychological violence remains invisible. The strategies – military and political – that mask this brutality and injustice feature in two of this issues' articles. The tropes used to justify such violence are identified in the dissection of news media and political tropes and processes that create the 'threat' of the Muslim / terrorist other.

Our lead essay focuses on the turnaround of Israel's fortunes and position in the Balkans, specifically in Albania and Kosovo. **Olsi Jazexhi** argues that the lobbying by the Israeli government and the cajoling of the US of Albania and Kosovo into striking vociferous pro-Israel alliances is a lesson for other Muslim majority countries. Such shifting of political cultures – from countries which had had pro-Palestinian governments, civil society and publics, to the current situation, was made with the help of well-worn Islamophobic tropes being adopted into official discourse and used to silence dissenting voices, particularly but not solely, amongst the religious Muslim population. Whilst much has been made of the recent 'normalisation' between certain Arab states and Israel, the lesser-known history of 'normalisation' in the Balkans is one that needs to be heeded and learned from. Alongside military partnerships, civil society finds itself often criminalised on the basis of Islamophobic tropes that recycle colonial motifs of the Muslim and Islam as violent, anti-Semitic and barbaric.

These tropes are also what has been internalised by mainstream media in its discussion – or in fact lack of discussion – of the almost daily violence inflicted by Israel on Lebanon. In our second essay in this issue, **Denijal Jengi** argues that the colonial project that is Israel relies upon the recycling and reproduction of such stereotypes, which serve to render invisible the military incursions perpetrated against Lebanon. Decolonising the region, he argues, relies on actors rejecting these tropes and resisting the representation of themselves and their aspirations. In this the fate of Lebanon and Palestine are intertwined, where liberation is not solely about physical sovereignty but also language and meaning.

Ian Almond highlights the pervasiveness of 'threat' in our culture, and specifi-

cally the 'threat' of terrorism that most of us in the Westernised world had become accustomed to on a daily basis for almost two decades. That is, until the beginning of the pandemic. Having fallen off the news agenda almost entirely, Almond argues that the Coronavirus crisis has exposed the news media as complicit in promoting an exaggerated image of the dangers society faces from 'terrorism'. This exaggeration serves the interests of elites, whilst simultaneously providing salacious ongoing news content that panders to the needs of a 24-hour news cycle. He hopes that the hiatus is noticed by the average news consumer, and that this is the start of a more critical evaluation on the part of the general public of the processes of big media organisations and the political agendas they serve.

Our final essay looks at the bigger picture behind and ahead of the anti-terrorism regime in the UK. Taking an overview of 20 years of laws and policies, **Massoud Shadjareh** argues that in challenging each incoming piece of legislation or new policy, we have lost sight of the shift in social and political mores. Those norms now suppress political dissent across the spectrum and police the thoughts and aspirations of many more than just the Muslims, for whom such laws and programs were initially designed. From the appointment of Islamophobes to key positions to the ever widening scope for being branded an extremist, the political landscape in the UK has narrowed, with Muslims now just one of many groups excluded from having any political and sometimes even social agency. As this edition goes to print, news that a(nother) 11-year-old child has been referred to Prevent – by their teacher – based on his comment that he wanted to 'give alms to the oppressed' – highlights the level of thought policing that exists in this country. It also evidences how the malign shadow of Islamophobia hangs large over all social settings from which even children are not safe.

Shadjareh ends with a plea to Muslim civil society to end its internalisation of the narratives that have led it to capitulate in large part to the Prevent agenda, and team up with other affected groups and like-minded activists to challenge what has been happening. As all our contributors argue, it is time to see and to make seen the injustices that have been hidden in plain sight. Help us to do so by joining this conversation.

Arzu Merali
Editor

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How did Israel go from Pariah to become God's Chosen Nation in the Balkans?

Olsi Jazexhi looks at the often overlooked history of pro-Palestinian sentiment and pro-Israel lobbying in the Balkans. This history, he argues, is an essential portent for other countries.

The demise of the Soviet Union constituted a turning point in the relations of many Balkan states not only with the West, the United States and NATO but even Israel. The establishment of US hegemony over the Balkans after the fall of communism brought along major political changes in the perception of Israel and the Palestinian issue. If during the era of communism most socialist Balkan states, Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia sided with the Arabs and Palestinians, after the American takeover of Eastern Europe most established relations with Israel,¹ which before the 1990s was considered a tool of Western imperialism against the Arab peoples and states.

Albania was one of the strongest denunciators of Israeli imperialism in the Middle East. Enver Hoxha described Israel as the gendarmerie of US imperialism in the region, armed to the teeth in order to make [bloody wars](#) against the Arabs. Socialist Albania which refused to have any diplomatic relations with Israel hosted and [supported the Palestinian resistance](#) during the Cold War. Albanians compared the resistance of the Palestinians against Israel to the Kosovar resistance against Serbian colonialism. Across the border in Yugoslavia, the Kosovar national movement which struggled against Serbian occupation of Kosovo shared the same views regarding Israel. The Palestinian struggle against Israel and their *intifada* inspired the Kosovar leadership in their resistance. The [V sign for victory](#) that Ibrahim Rugova and his Democratic League of Kosovo adopted during their protests against the regime of Slobodan Milosevic was taken from Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian resistance.

After the fall of communism, relations between Albania and Israel continued to be tense despite the establishment of formal diplomatic ties on August 19, 1991. Israel had always enjoyed good relations with Yugoslavia and this was not received well by the Albanians of Kosovo and Albania. From 1991 to 1997 Albania established excellent relations with the Islamic World. It joined the Organisation of Islamic Conference and dozens of Islamic organisations, foundations, banks and companies opened their branches in Albania. Thousands of Albanian students went to study in the Islamic world benefiting from generous scholarships from the Muslim

Ummah. Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia and Pakistan were some of the major Islamic countries which opened embassies in Tirana and supported Albanians with investments and training. These relations made Israel suspicious towards Albania.

The hostility between Albania and Israel was publicly demonstrated in 1999 when NATO intervened in Kosovo to stop the Serbian military suppression of ethnic Albanians. Israel did not welcome this. Its Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon protested the U.S.-led bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, [declaring that NATO intervention](#) could help transform an autonomous Kosovo into a springboard for Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. Sharon warned the American Jewish leaders that Kosovo could “turn into a part of Greater Albania, and to serve as a base for radical Islamic terrorism—a core of which already exists there—that may spread throughout Europe.”

Relations between Albania and the Islamic world changed after the civil war of 1997 sparked by the failure of pyramid schemes in the country.² The Socialist Party of Albania which came to power in 1997 was dominated by ex-Communist officials and Orthodox Christians. It accused the previous government of Sali Berisha of “Islamizing the country”. Fatos Nano, the chairman of the Socialist Party declared a war against the Islamic legacy of Albania. He declared that his government would reverse the effects of the last 555 years of history – referring to the Ottoman period – and would stomp out without mercy “political, ordinary and Islamic criminality”. After 1998 the Socialist Party and the US Embassy in Tirana “launched a war on the Arabs”. Hundreds of Arabs who were working for Muslim NGOs or running businesses were illegally targeted, killed and expelled from the country. Albanians who had finished their studies in the Islamic world were also targeted. They were depicted as a threat to national security, put under surveillance and some were jailed.³ During the United States’ “War on Terror” [Albania supported the US’ illegal torture and detention of Muslim prisoners](#).

The anti-Islamic policies of the Albanian governments were accompanied by the cooling of their relations with the Muslim world and warming with Israel. Countries like Pak-

istan and Malaysia closed their embassies and left the country. These policies were followed by the [government of Sali Berisha](#) (2005 – 2013) during which time Albania established direct flights with Israel (2008). In 2011 [Berisha declared Iran](#) a Nazi state and kept the side of Israel at the UN against the Palestinians bidding for statehood. The warming of relations culminated in 2012 when the Israeli Foreign Minister, Avigdor Liberman [announced the opening](#) of the Israeli Embassy in Tirana. A few months later, in 2013, the government of Sali Berisha turned Albania into one of the major allies of Israel in the Balkans in its war against Iran. It offered asylum to 210 members of the [Iranian terrorist organisation](#) the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MKO, MEK). The final settlement of MKO ended in 2016 when Edi Rama was Prime Minister and [3000 fighters](#) settled in the country. During the premiership of Rama, Albania became the only country in Europe to host an ex-terrorist organisation and a paramilitary base on its soil. MKO and its cult-leader Maryam Rajavi used Albania to launch online and probably even direct attacks against Iran and its supporters in the world. On the other hand the leadership of the Sunni Muslim Community of Albania has been given over to the Fetullah Gulen network, an organisation which is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, but in Albania receives full government support.⁴

Another important step that the government of Edi Rama undertook to further its anti-Islamic policies against the Muslim community was the [establishment](#) of the Counterterrorism Police Directorate in 2014. Its main work has been the mass surveillance, blackmail and persecution of the Muslim community and disruption of its social and political activities. Hundreds of imams and Muslim believers have been blacklisted, sent to police stations and questioned about their ideas about Palestine, Syria and Israel. Many are harassed and not allowed to leave the country. In 2016 the counterterrorism [police arrested](#) dozens of Albanian and Kosovar Muslim and [detained more](#) than 200 on orders from the Israeli secret service, Mossad. Israeli security services claimed that they were planning to attack the Israeli football team which had come to play in Albania. To appease Israel the government of Edi Rama

gave total control of the roads from Tirana to the city of Elbasan to the Israeli secret service which landed in Albania to 'protect its football team'. Kosovo arrested 19 of its citizens as well on behalf of Israel. The Albanians and Kosovars, who were arbitrarily arrested, were tortured and beaten with guns. After four years in detention the group which Israel accused of planning a terrorist attack against its football team was declared innocent by Albanian courts - Israel having provided no proof against them. Albanians have been outraged by this Israeli infringement on their country's sovereignty as well as the mass arrests and police violence. They protested the brutal surrender of their government to a foreign country which treated them like Palestinians. Israel was accused of humiliating and dividing the Albanians, while many social forums and fans' groups have denounced the fascist behavior of Israel and Edi Rama's government. Well-known public intellectuals like Fatos Lubonja and Andi Bushati have called the mass arrests on behalf of Israel clear violation of human rights and 'a fascist act'.

However, Israel repeated the same violent behavior with Albanians even in 2018 when its football team returned to play in Albania. Mossad agents and 1500 Albanian police turned the Elbasan Arena stadium into a military zone in order to 'provide safety' for the Israeli players. The schizophrenic behavior of Israel with Albanians was demonstrated even in November 2018 when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cancelled a planned visit to Albania 'for security reasons' and asked Albania to "take a harder hand against Iranian activity in its territory." In December 2018, Israeli media and security sources who in 2016 accused ISIS and Albanian Muslims of planning an attack against Israeli players in 2016, changed their story. Now they blamed Iran and its ambassador for planning the 2016 attack. Pressured by the Americans and Israel, Albania expelled the Iranian ambassador. After the expulsion, Benjamin Netanyahu thanked Albania. The attack on the Iranian diplomats was accompanied by many open and false flag attacks that the MKO and Israeli media carried out against Iranian cultural institutions in Albania. As a result of this pressure Kosovar and Albanian authorities have forced the cultural NGOs, Sufi orders and Darwish brotherhoods who were religiously and culturally connected to Iran since the Ottoman times to cut all their ties. The Bektashi Muslim Community which over the past three decades was heavily sponsored by Iran, has since 2018 sided with Israel and cut almost all its ties with Tehran. In 2015 Kosovan authorities closed down almost all the NGOs that were cooperating with Iran. In 2018 Albanian counter-terrorism police ordered all the banks to close the accounts of Iranian institutions and individuals in the country. The attack against Iranian institutions culminated in 2020 when Saadi Girl's Private High School was forced to close and leave the country and

Saadi Shirazi Cultural Foundation was told to close all its activities. The director of the foundation Ahmad Hosseini Alasat was declared persona non grata, 'an agent of Iran' and was deported from the country by counter-terrorism police.

Since the opening of the Israeli embassy in Tirana in 2012, the relations of Albania and Kosovo with Israel have reflected the war mentality of the Israeli state with its Arab, Turkish and Iranian neighbors. Albania and Kosovo have become proxy regimes which Israel uses in its war against Islamic political movements and states. Israel has invited dozens of Albanian and Kosovar journalists to Israel as part of a public relations offensive to burnish its image as a country of peace and tolerance. Apart from journalists, Israel has called Albanian ministers and chiefs of counter-terrorism police to Israel where they are instructed and trained to support Israel in its 'war against terrorism'. The International Institute for Counter Terrorism (ICT) which is hosted by the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya in the city of Herzliya in Israel has become one of the most important Israeli institutions to receive, train and host different security and public officials from Albania and Kosovo who are taught how to fight Arab, Islamic and Iranian NGOs in the Balkans. The ICT, which does not reveal its sources of funding, but receives grants from European and possibly American institutions, behaves like an agent of Mossad and the Israeli Defense Forces. Many of its lecturers are ex-IDF commanders or directors of Mossad. Its founding director Boaz Ganor is an Israeli government official on counter-terrorism and lecturer at the High Command Academic Courses of the Israel Defense Forces. The Board of Directors of ICT include Uriel Reichman, a lieutenant of the Israeli Army who fought against Egypt, Shabtai Shavit, former head of Mossad, Aharon Scherf former director of Israel's Foreign Affairs Division and senior official in Israeli prime minister's office, Boaz Ganor and Tal Avner.

In its articles and analysis ICT shows open hostility and Islamophobia against Balkan Muslims, the Arab World and Iran, while it defends the Iranian terrorist cult the Mujahedin-e-Khalq which it calls the "Iranian opposition". Dr. Shaul Shay an ex-IDF colonel and intelligence officer who now serves as Director of Research for the Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) of Herzliya is one of the most interesting researchers who writes about the Balkans. Shaul's analyses are quite extraordinary. He writes about Islamic terrorism and the Balkans on themes ranging from ISIS to Iran. His articles and books are published in media throughout the Balkans. Quoting Yellow Press journalism, local conspiracy theories and fake news articles he blames the government of Bosnia for the "Talibanization" of the Balkans, claims that ISIS has plotted to poison the water supply of Prishtina in Kosovo. Also, by relying on fake news produced by the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MKO) he claims that

Iran planned a "Nowruz terror plot" in Albania in March 2018, or that it plans to commit terrorist attacks in the Balkans. Dr. Shaul was contacted by the author of this article via e-mail (August 31, 2020) and invited for a debate on his findings about Albania and the Balkans. To date he has not responded to a request for a public conversation about his allegations.

The attitude of Dr. Shaul Shay or other research fellows of the International Institute for Counter Terrorism (ICT) reflect the general attitude of Israeli officials towards the Balkans. They are obsessed with Islamophobia, war against Islam, Muslims, Palestinians, Arabs, Turks and Iran. Most of their officials who deal with the Balkans including the present Israeli ambassador in Tirana, ex-IDF captain Noah Gal Gendler are ex-military officials. During an interview that ambassador Gendler had with Gazeta Shqiptarja on May 12, 2021 when he was defending the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, he said that his criteria for befriending the Albanians was their support for Israel during the war. The declaration of ambassador Gendler summarises the desperate mentality which drives Israeli policies in the Balkans. Israel wants to recruit allies in its wars against the Palestinians. Since the opening of their embassy in Tirana, Israel has indirectly supported the Iranian MKO and has tried to gain support from the Gulenist run Sunni Muslim Community and the Bektashi Muslim community. Gulenist and Bektashi clerics have been invited to Israel, sent to Jerusalem and Yad Vashem.

To convince the Arabs and Muslims that some Muslims have no problem with Israel, the Israeli government has promoted the myth of Besa which claims that Albanian Muslims saved Jews during the Holocaust. While this might be true of Albania (even though some of the Catholic clergy sided with Hitler and defended his extermination of the Jews), this is not true for Kosovo. Many Kosovars supported Hitler in his war against the Jews. The attempts of Israel to manipulate Albanian Muslims into supporting them against the Arabs has very often backfired. This is what happened on May 12, 2021 when the Bektashi Community organised an iftar with the US and Israeli ambassadors in Tirana. This iftar which critics dubbed the 'iftar of shame' was denounced by 50 Albanian imams in an open letter. They condemned the Mufti of Tirana for taking part in a gathering where the ambassador of Israel, whose regime was killing Muslims and desecrating Masjid al-Aqsa, was taking part. They asked for the resignation of the Mufti and a public apology by the Muslim Community of Albania.

The strategy of winning allies in its war against Arabs and Muslims can be seen even in Israel's relations with Kosovo. If in 1999 Israel stood against the independence of Kosovo since Sharon feared a 'Greater Albania' becoming a centre of radical Islamic terrorism, after the establishment of US hegemony, Israel and the Americans have done all they can to establish a secular anti-

Muslim regime in Prishtina.

In Albania as well as Kosovo, evangelical Christians have played a detrimental role in lobbying for Israel. After the fall of communism they have converted thousands of Albanians into Zionist evangelicals. They have established hundreds of foundations, churches, organisations, radio stations and even a university where they brainwash the Albanians with love for "God's chosen nation", Israel. Organisations like Ambasada Ndërkombëtare e Krishterë e Jeruzalemit në Shqipëri - [ICEJ Albania](#), pray for Israel and lobby local politicians to support Israel against the Arabs. US Embassies in Tirana and Prishtina and the US government have been instrumental in forcing the governments of Kosovo and Albania to support Israel against the Palestinians. The promotion of Israel has come in two forms. One through the promotion of evangelicals into Albanian politics. An example is Erion Veliaj, the mayor of Tirana and his group of evangelical supporters who now are deputies in the parliament and top officials in government. They were promoted and funded by different American institutions, inserted into politics and now have great influence in the ruling Socialist Party of Albania. The other example is in Kosovo, where during the era of the Trump administration top US state officials like the evangelical Richard Grenell, Special Presidential Envoy for Serbia and Kosovo, Ambassador Philip Kosnett and Matthew Palmer US Representative for Western Balkans on Kosovo did all they could to convince the Kosovar government to sign a "Normalisation Agreement" with Serbia and make Kosovo the first Muslim majority country [to send its embassy](#) to Jerusalem. In order to appease Israel, the Americans pushed the Kosovar government to [designate Hizbullah](#) as a terrorist organisation and Israeli lobbyists in Prishtina are [requesting that even Hamas](#) be officially designated a terrorist organisation.

The Americans' pressure on the government of Kosovo to move ever closer to Israel can be seen in their behavior towards Prime Minister Albin Kurti, whose party officials have declared in the past their support for the Palestinians. When Kurti won the general elections on February 17, 2021 he responded to a request by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who invited him to open the embassy in Jerusalem, by stating that his government will review the decision for opening the embassy, either in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. The deputy leader of Kurti's Vetevendosje Party and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Glauk Konjufca said that the decision to open the embassy in Jerusalem was not smart. Richard Grenell, the Evangelical representative of Trump who was the major architect of Kosovo's Jerusalem embassy affair, went mad. He [attacked Kurti](#) on twitter calling him an 'anti-American' who had 'resorted to terrorism'.

Facing all these open and hidden threats the government of Albin Kurti in Prishtina was forced to keep its embassy in Jerusalem and [even supported Israel](#) in its May 2021

aggression against Gaza. Prime Minister Albin Kurti and his Party, Levizja Per Vetevendosje (Movement for Self-Determination - LVV) have in the past [issued documents condemning](#) the Israeli aggression against Palestinians. During the latest Israeli aggression in Gaza, LVV MP's organised a [march in support](#) of Palestine and condemned the Israeli aggression in Gaza. However, the Kosovar government which was ousted from power by the Americans in 2020 has learned its lesson. Making a stand against Israel and being pro-Palestine in the Balkans is dangerous. The Americans will come after you and you will be ousted from power and probably end up in jail.

That is why politicians and the governments of Tirana and Prishtina have been siding with Israel over the past years. Albanian authorities are aware of massive [investment scams](#) that many Israelis and some Mossad and [military officials](#) are running in Albania but prefer to turn a blind eye. They believe that the Americans would never tolerate any politician, a prosecutor, a government or a political party in the Balkans that will dare for a moment to criticise what Israel does in the Middle East or what many Israeli officials do in the Balkans. If any politician or public figure thinks otherwise, he will face the consequences and end up like Adriatik Lalla, Albania's Prosecutor General who made public the illegal requests that the US Ambassador was making to him against the President.

Israel and the Americans are forcing Balkan countries to fear and cooperate with them. While many people and politicians

have sympathy for Palestine, as Niccolò Machiavelli would have put it, "fear triumphs over love."

Dr. Olsi Jazexhi

is a Canadian-Albanian historian who specializes in the history of Islam, nationalism and religious reformation in Southeastern Europe. His interests cover nationalism, radicalism, terrorism, religious and ethnic identities in the Balkans and in the late Ottoman Empire. He has taught history at University of Durres and Elbasan in Albania and now is teaching Ottoman history in Malaysia. He is also a freelance investigative journalist.

¹ Abadi, Jacob. "Israel and the Balkan States." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1996, pp. 296-320. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4283829. Accessed 7 June 2021.

² Christopher Jarvis, *The Rise and Fall of Albania's Pyramid Schemes, Finance & Development: A Quarterly Magazine of the IMF*, March 2000.

³ Jazexhi, Olsi. 2011. "The Muslim Community of Albania from the Turkish Caliphate to the Turkish Djemat." Presented at the Conference on Dealing with Change: Islamic Leadership in the Balkans and the Baltic, Sofia. Google Scholar

⁴ Olsi Jazexhi, "Albania" in the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, Vol 9, eds. Jørgen S. Nielsen, etc. Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 2017.

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Liberating Lebanon and Decolonising the Discourse that Occupies It

Whilst mainstream media has (often reluctantly) been forced to report major Israeli wars and attacks on Palestinians, the daily incursions into Lebanon are rarely acknowledged. This normalisation of colonial violence against the people of Lebanon is intertwined with the oppression of Palestinians, and the physical and ideological resistance to the former are also intimately linked to the liberation of the wider region argues **Denijal Jević**.

The sounds of Israeli fighter jets can disturb the peace on any day in Lebanon. Israel invades Lebanon, on average, several times a day by land, sea, and mostly by air, in flagrant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and international law. Israeli war planes have long become part of the Lebanese airspace. These invasions rarely make the headlines in mainstream media, nor do they trigger any impactful reaction from the international community. In fact, the illegal Israeli incursions are part and parcel of a structural aggression and tell a decades-long story of settler-colonialism and terrorism.

Israeli drones regularly spy on civilians, while Israeli fighter jets break the sound barrier, perform mock raids, and use Lebanese airspace for attacks on Syria.

Following the devastating Beirut port explosion on August 4, 2020, Israeli war planes flying at low altitude caused much unease. Residents of Beirut witnessed one of the greatest non-nuclear explosions in history, when 2,750 tons of stored ammonium nitrate caught fire and caused catastrophic damage in the city. The powerful blast was felt in neighboring

countries. More than 200 people died, thousands were injured, and around 300,000 lost their homes.

The explosion came at a time of heightened insecurity. Lebanon is in the grip of a financial crisis, economic collapse, and political instability, all compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Given the presence of Israeli war planes and the memory of past Israeli air strikes, many assumed an Israeli involvement in the disaster. This was initially ruled out and denied by Israel, but the circumstances around the explosion are still under investigation.

Routine Violence

The routine presence of Israeli fighter jets in Lebanon exemplifies the normalisation of colonial violence.

In the first five months of 2020 alone, the Lebanese government registered over a thousand Israeli violations. According to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), a daily average of [12.63 airspace violations](#) was recorded between June and October 2020. Lebanon's repeated complaints to the United Nations have not

resulted in any meaningful action being taken against Israel.

Israel remains unashamedly transparent about its invasions. When one of its military aircraft was intercepted on February 3, 2020, the Israeli "Air Forces" [stated](#) on Twitter: "A short while ago, during routine IAF UAV activity over Lebanon, anti-aircraft missiles were fired towards the UAV. The aircraft was not hit and continued its mission as planned." It matters little to Israel that its military presence in Lebanon is illegal.

The History of Israeli Violence in Lebanon

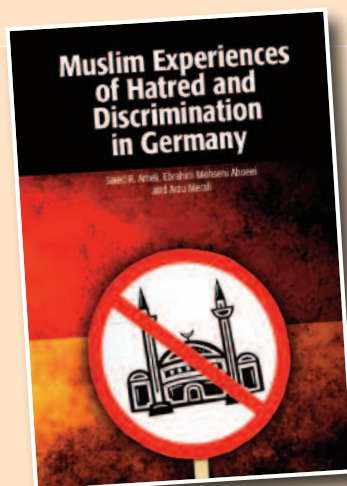
Israeli violence is not restricted to Palestine. Israel has never defined its borders and it keeps extending its already contested sovereignty beyond Palestine. Since the state of Israel was established through an ethnic cleansing known as the Nakba, i.e., the forced expulsion of the majority of Palestinians from Palestine in 1948, it has also been in an official state of war with Lebanon. Israel's aggressions on Lebanon cannot be detached from its oppressive policies in Palestine. The indigenous people

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in Palestine and Lebanon have been targeted for both standing in the way of the Israeli project and for actively resisting it.

As part of its ongoing campaign of infiltration into Lebanese territory, the Israeli military has on numerous occasions fired phosphorus bombs across the Lebanese border. For example, in August 2020, it targeted the small village of Hula sparking fires that kept citizens awake at night. In 1948, Zionist forces had carried out a massacre in the same village. Most women and children were expelled and the male population executed.

Hula is not an isolated case. It is one of many places that sustained a decades-long brutal Israeli military occupation and witnessed ongoing repetitions of Israeli violence.

As a result of the 1948 Nakba, thousands of Palestinians sought refuge in neighbouring countries, including Lebanon. Israel initially presented its incursions into Lebanese territory as acts of “retaliation” against organised Palestinian resistance. For example, in 1968, the Israeli military raided the airport of Beirut, destroying 14 passenger planes belonging to various Lebanese airlines, causing millions of dollars in damage. Israel claimed its raid was a “response” to an attack on an Israeli airplane conducted two days before by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The United States criticised that particular Israeli attack, as there was no proof to suggest any involvement by Lebanon.

Since its invasion of Lebanon in 1978, Israel has been trying to provoke reactions that would provide it with a pretext for increased military action. This has been a common pattern. Throughout these years, the Israeli regime would attack civilians and destroy civilian infrastructure in Lebanon, usually presenting atrocities as response or self-defence. As Israel consolidated its role as a regional power and became increasingly central as a proxy for U.S. endeavours in the Middle East, Western criticism of Israel decreased.

Israel played a destructive role in the Lebanese civil war. Seizing on internal conflict within Lebanon, Israel aligned itself

with a group of far-right Christian Lebanese forces in attempts to crush Lebanese and Palestinian resistance, at a time when the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was increasingly gaining international recognition. In the summer of 1982, Israel conducted a large-scale invasion of Lebanon, besieging the western half of Beirut, killing around 20,000 civilians.

The well-documented **genocide** of Sabra and Shatila gained particular international attention. On September 16, 1982, Israeli military captured the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in western Beirut. Under the supervision of Ariel Sharon and command of Elie Hobeika, around 150 Lebanese Christian Phalangist fighters massacred the inhabitants of the camps over three days. More than 3,000 Palestinian refugees and Lebanese civilians, most of whom were women, children, and elderly, were killed, tortured, sexually assaulted, and/or mutilated. A journalist, Janet Lee Stevens, **reported**: *“I saw dead women in their houses with their skirts up to their waists and their legs spread apart; dozens of young men shot after being lined up against an alley wall; children with their throats slit, a pregnant woman with her stomach chopped open, her eyes still wide open, her blackened face silently screaming in horror; countless babies and toddlers who had been stabbed or ripped apart and who had been thrown into garbage piles.”*

Israel tried to downplay its involvement and eventually found that Sharon carried a personal responsibility for the massacre. He was removed as “defense” minister. However, Sharon would still continue his political career, holding various positions in the government and eventually becoming prime minister two decades later. Israel continued to hold South Lebanon under illegal military occupation until the year 2000, with the help of its proxy, the South Lebanon Army. From the **Khiam** torture camp to the **Qana massacre**, people in Lebanon have suffered various injustices under the terror of Israeli occupation. Israel even bombed the **synagogue** in Beirut.

While Israel formally withdrew from Lebanon, it has never left. The Israeli regime

would create pretexts for further incursions through constant provocations and, in the case of a reaction, military attacks that are usually presented as the self-defence of an alleged victim.

The 2006 war was a brutal reiteration of this colonial tactic. Israel launched a large-scale military invasion, which was yet again presented as defense, exploiting the rhetorical framing of resistance as terrorism. The war saw the intentional destruction of civilian infrastructure and homes, particularly in Dahiye, the Southern Suburbs of Beirut, i.e., a densely populated residential area which Israel presents as a “terrorist” stronghold. The heavy destruction of civilian infrastructure and organised killings of civilians became known as the “Dahiye” (or Dahiya) doctrine. Israeli military commander Gadi Eizenkot **threatened** that the strategy “will happen in every village from which Israel is fired on.” Israel would “apply disproportionate force on it and cause great damage and destruction there,” since “these are not civilian villages, they are military bases... This is not a recommendation. This is a plan. And it has been approved.”

After being tested on Lebanese civilians, the doctrine was implemented in Gaza. Israel’s invasions have constantly created new refugee experiences and made many Lebanese internally displaced people within their own country. Thus, today’s airspace violations are but a manifestation of this decades-long structure of violence.

Colonial Rhetoric and Genocidal Threats

Through colonial rhetoric, Israel is constantly creating its imagery of the Orient. As a Western outpost that is still in the process of establishing its own narrative and founding myths, Israel defines itself as superior in regard to the backward, native ‘Other’. In many ways, the Israeli project is the contemporary culmination of Orientalist narratives.

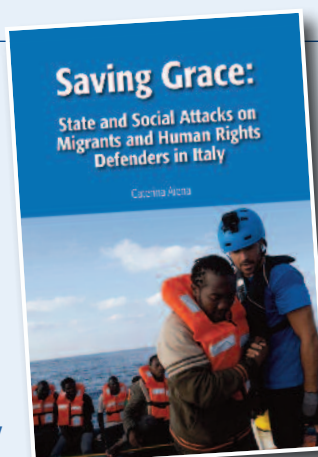
As Palestinian intellectual Fayeze Sayegh outlined in his seminal work *Zionist*

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Colonialism in Palestine (1965), Israel emerged as “an alien state” “in the land link between Asia and Africa without the free consent of any neighboring African or Asian country.” (Sayegh 17) It should be mentioned that Sayegh’s work was published by the Research Center of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in Beirut, which was attacked and looted by Israel, when it invaded the Lebanese capital. In his detailed reconstruction of Zionist colonial efforts, Sayegh elaborates on both the colony’s transnational dependence on Western powers and its exclusivist segregation in the Levant: “Not only its vital and continuing association with European Imperialism, and its introduction into Palestine of the practices of Western Colonialism, but also its chosen pattern of racial exclusiveness and self-segregation renders it an alien society in the Middle East.”

The narrative that Israel has employed to justify its actions has remained rather simplistic throughout the decades. In fact, it is largely based on continuous re-imaginings of Orientalist myths and Islamophobic fantasies that are used to dehumanise the indigenous people who represent obstacles in Israel’s settler-colonial endeavor. Exploiting the linguistic conceptual metaphor that equates resistance with terrorism, Israel constructs Lebanese and Palestinians in advance and posthumously as legitimate targets of state violence. Civilians are, thus, depicted as terrorists, while civilian infrastructure, including mosques, churches, hospitals and residential buildings are presented as weapons factories, human shields, and terrorist strongholds.

Within this narrative, Israel appears as a fragile, white, European outpost in an allegedly dangerous area of the world. Indigenous people are constructed as inherently evil, whose threatening character emanates from their culture, religion, or ethnicity. As a consequence, any Israeli aggression, in Beirut, Jerusalem, Damascus, or elsewhere, is presented as necessary self-defence or the restoration of freedom and order.

These propaganda efforts are lucidly

displayed in an opinion piece by Ariel Sharon, which the New York Times published shortly before the Sabra and Shatila genocide: *“Israel’s troops entering Lebanon were greeted as liberators for driving out the terrorists who had raped and pillaged and plundered. Our soldiers were welcomed despite the casualties that were the inevitable result of fighting against P.L.O. terrorists who used civilians as human shields and who deliberately placed their weapons and ammunition in the midst of apartment houses, schools, refugee camps and hospitals.”*

Notably, at that point, Sharon was already responsible for decades of violence against Palestinians, including massacres and destructions of villages. At the height of Israel’s terrorist campaign in Lebanon, he had prime access to major news outlets.

The recycling of this narrative is visible in the constant creation of threats of destruction aimed at Lebanon. The rhetoric employed by Israeli politicians in recent years amounts to threats of genocide.

Naftali Bennett, a far-right politician who headed numerous Israeli government ministries, and at the time of publication has just become Prime minister, for example in 2017, identified “[t]he Lebanese institutions, its infrastructure, airport, power stations, traffic junctions, Lebanese Army bases” as “legitimate targets if a war breaks out.” He targeted the Shia population in particular: “Lebanon’s civilians, including the Shi’ite population, will understand that this is what lies in store for them if Hizbullah is entangling them for its own reasons, or even at the behest of Iran.”

Bennett played an active role in the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and participated in the Qana massacre and 2006 invasion of Lebanon. Later, he boasted: “I’ve killed lots of Arabs in my life and there’s no problem with that.” On another occasion, he threatened to send Lebanon back to the Middle Ages.

Another example is the recent Israeli Intelligence Minister Yisrael Katz, who told Saudi media in 2017: “What happened in 2006 will be a picnic compared to what we can do. I remember a Saudi minister saying

they will send Hizbullah back to their caves in south Lebanon. I am telling you that we will return Lebanon to the Stone Age,” he said in reference to the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon.” He added: “We don’t want war, and we have no interest in destroying Lebanon, but we will not accept a Lebanese assault on us.

Benny Gantz threatened in 2021 he would make Lebanon pay a “heavy price” and inflict it with “enormous destruction” if war broke out.

These non-exhaustive examples show how the justification for genocidal actions is being constructed in advance. The threats of large-scale devastation are regularly accompanied by the allegation that Israel does not want war, but would be forced to invade, occupy, and attack. The Israeli regime is preparing the ground for blaming potential future victims for their own genocide.

Neither the Israeli threats of destruction nor the ongoing airspace violations seem to cause political issues internationally. They rarely become major events in the media. Despite Beirut being a prominent hub for Western, anglophone media outlets, journalists, correspondents and reporters, Israeli violence in Lebanon remains rather marginal in mainstream English-language media. In fact, the illegal presence of the Israeli military in Lebanon seems normalised. It does occasionally become a news story, but only when Hizbullah shoots down a drone or the Israeli army issues a statement.

The Fear of Indigenous Resistance

Currently, Israel focuses on the Lebanese resistance movement Hizbullah, attempting to portray it as a “terrorist” organisation. This is in large part due to Israel’s fear of Hizbullah. The movement initially emerged as a popular resistance from the context of the civil war and foreign occupation and eventually facilitated the liberation of the occupied Lebanese territory in May 2000. Throughout the years, Hizbullah has become



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a provider of social and economic services and a strong political party that represents a significant part of the Lebanese population. It is a powerful regional non-state actor that works in accordance with the Lebanese army.

Hizbullah, which emerged a century after the onset of settler-colonial Zionism, continues to represent a significant deterrent against Israel's endeavours and is the primary reason Israel's continuous colonial efforts have largely failed in Lebanon.

In fact, Lebanon is the only successful case of liberation from Zionist occupation. Hizbullah showed the Israeli army its own weakness. An example is the battle of Bint Jbeil in 2006. During its invasion of Lebanon, several Israeli brigades and battalions totalling around 5,000 troops tried to take over the town in South Lebanon. They were opposed by about a hundred Hizbullah fighters in a battle that lasted 19 days. Hizbullah successfully defended the town and defeated Israel.

As a result of its own contested existence, the colony is in perpetual fear of resistance. Within this context, Israel's daily incursions into Lebanon can effectively be read as a quest for control and containment.

A Transnational Outlook

Besides its human rights violations in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, the Israeli regime has established itself as a notorious producer of racist strategies and technologies far beyond the Levant. It has become a model for far-right movements in many parts of the world and has forged alliances with oppressive regimes.

Recent geopolitical developments in Western Asia have benefitted Israel. In the last months of the Trump presidency, the Israeli regime publicly announced its "normalisation" with several dictatorships. What was hailed internationally as a milestone in "Arab-Israeli" peace efforts is rather a publicising of already existing ties between Israel and unelected leaders, who have never been in conflict and whose decisions do not necessarily reflect the will of their populations. Through their dependence

on the United States, the governments of Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia appear as natural allies.

Israel and its Gulf partners have justified their economic and political cooperation as prosperous developments toward alleged peace and stability. In fact, the attempt to reframe Israel's settler-colonial expansion as a quest for peace is itself a colonial tactic that has been accepted quite successfully, at least in the Euro-American sphere. The rhetoric of "peace" in Western Asia has usually meant Western-backed peace for the Israeli coloniser and, thus, capitulation to and cooperation with Israel. The recent discourse around peace further obscures the underlying violence of colonisation and apartheid. Even in Lebanon, anti-Palestinian and anti-Iranian rhetoric as well as at least covert sympathy for Israel has at times been part of political and media discourses driven by particular ideologies.

A Way Forward

Despite its global prominence in oppressive policies, Israel never managed to defeat Lebanon. The current political and economic crises and isolation as well as Lebanon's significance for various regional and international actors are increasing the pressure. Israel's regional hegemony, its Western and Arab alliances, and the colonised dominant media discourse on victims of Israeli violence, have a negative impact on Lebanon.

The liberation of Lebanon cannot be detached from the liberation of Palestine, not least because of Israel's structural and transnational violence. The intimate connection between Lebanon and Palestine was again reiterated during the Israeli regime's latest war against Palestinians in May 2021. With violent expulsions of Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah in occupied East Jerusalem, attacks against Palestinians and the storming of the Al Aqsa Mosque, the Israeli regime created another crisis that extended into Gaza. Resistance efforts by Hamas were met with Israeli airstrikes. More than 240 Palestinians

were killed and over 70,000 were displaced as a result of Israeli attacks. The crisis highlighted the apartheid structures in the 1948 territories, as Palestinian citizens of Israel become victims of state-sponsored violence, which again showed that all Palestinians in historic Palestine are subjected to state violence and violence by settlers who are protected by the state.

The crisis was a setback for the Israeli regime. Besides its only strategy being the indiscriminate bombardment of Palestinians, Israel's propaganda efforts suffered. The recycling of the same Orientalist tropes to justify the killing of Gazans did not prevent people around the world from taking to the streets to protest in solidarity with Palestine. When Lebanese and Palestinians gathered at Lebanon's Southern border, a 21-year old Lebanese protester, Mohammad Tahhan, was martyred by Israeli forces.

The crisis lucidly displayed Israel's fragility and its continuous dependence on Western-backed state violence and subjugation of the indigenous people.

In a [speech](#) on the occasion of the Liberation and Resistance Day on May 25th, marking the 21st anniversary of the liberation of Lebanon, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, praised the Palestinian resistance and saluted Yemeni solidarity. He reaffirmed that the resistance in the region is strengthened today. Warning the Israeli regime, he said that any violation of Islamic and Christian sanctities would be faced by resistance not only in Gaza but would entail a regional war for Al-Quds.

The latest events emphasize how intertwined people and resistance in Palestine and Lebanon and beyond are and reaffirm that decolonization and liberation are concepts that extend beyond current borders.

Denijal Jegić

is a writer based in Beirut, Lebanon. He holds a PhD in American Studies and is currently a postdoctoral researcher in communication and journalism. His work focuses on colonialism, resistance, and media representations.



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Terrorism Got COVID: Or, The Constant-Threat News-Culture We Live In

The Coronavirus pandemic has had the effect of exposing the news culture that permeates first world life in a variety of ways, argues **Ian Almond**. Looking back at the development of the idea of 'threat', and the media's role in supporting political narratives, he suggests the break from non-stop coverage of 'terrorism' stories the pandemic has caused, may be a turning point in the way we understand and consume new media in the West.

We haven't heard from the terrorists for a while. The subject which was a daily staple of our newsday until 30th March, 2020 – not a day passed by without some reference of a possible threat, a planned threat, an arrest or an actual attack – disappeared from our screens over a year ago for reasons which are, in one sense, quite obvious. Up to a year ago, for most of us, the biological fact of our good health was a comfortable given in our lives – at least, in our developed, salaried, first-world lives. The virus whose name we did not even know in 2019 has come to dominate our news schedule – no item of daily news appears to be free of its influence.

Just to be clear from the outset: Coronavirus is real, our attempt to respond to it is real, and this is no anti-lockdown, conspiracy-theorist attempt to diminish the deathly reality of a viral disease.

What I am suggesting however, quite

soberly, is that the easy way COVID has knocked terrorism off its number one media spot exposes something quite profound about the news world we live in: news – and the extent to which the artifice of crisis-capitalism, thriving on a breaking-news, five story news day, has been revealed by actually having to deal with a real crisis for once.

The idea that our media keeps our attention by constantly alerting us to threats is hardly new – the most visceral example I remember feeling was back in the summer of 2006, when the World Cup came to Germany, and a German media flooded our screens for months leading up to it with horror scenarios about the bird flu – *Die Vogelgrippe!* – and how society was on the brink of collapse. Then the World Cup arrived, Klose and Zidane started scoring their goals, and the bird flu literally disappeared from one week to the next. I never heard of it again.

It is a mechanism we are forever dimly

half-aware of: most of us have some sense that the stream of images and warnings we are seeing across our screens (be it in our living rooms, in our laps or on top of our hands) have some element of artifice about them. And yet, even our cynicism cannot remove their frequency, their intensity, their ubiquity. Most of us know that our media is managed, that it is owned by incredibly powerful companies, and that its corporate visions have our personal well-being and education quite low on their agenda. But this knowledge, even in the most politically conscious of us, is a knowledge of the mind – and our bodies, their nerves and their stomachs and their skins – have a different knowledge. They respond pre-reflectively to images – whether it is a man sneezing on a plane, a tattoo on a forearm or a woman in a hijab – and these responses are not always rational.

There are some well-known studies of the disparity, in Western media coverage, between the statistical likelihood of actual

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threats and the percentage they share of the average media day. Cancer and heart disease, in the US, are responsible for nearly two thirds of all deaths, and yet they take up fifteen percent of news media coverage. Terrorism and homicide, which make up barely one percent of all deaths, constitute easily half of the news Americans consume. In other words, the phenomenon we are constantly warned about, whose developments fill our screens and whose sinister aims legitimize a whole range of security measures, actually has little to do with the very real threats to the well-being of ourselves and our children – heart disease, cancer, road accidents. Up until a year ago, we lived this social truth as a daily contradiction – being constantly warned and updated on a possible threat which, statistically, was as likely to happen as breaking our neck in the bathroom or being electrocuted by a kitchen appliance.

When did this threat culture start? A lazy google of the word ‘threat’ on the [Google Books Ngram viewer](#) – certainly no scientific truth in itself – shows a constant upward trend, with an exponential rise starting in the 1930s, and jumping again in the mid 90s to its present dizzy peak, which it has maintained for fifteen years. 9/11 is too easy an answer – in the early 80s, novels like Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* were already satirizing the way a constant sense of threat moulded Western societies. In the 1950s, the widespread hysteria about McCarthyism and “Reds under the Beds” was used to give American society a sense of social cohesion. One might argue that some kind of bogeyman has always been used to remind a society what We Are All Supposed To Believe In – and that the manipulation of this fear is as old as fear itself.

But with the invasive ubiquity of our 24-hour breaking-news day, subsequently enhanced by the immediacy of the smart phone, the threat to our society – increasingly, the masked/bearded terrorist who will bomb our schools and spike our yo-

ghurt and derail our train – was no longer something we were reminded of once a day on the six o’clock news or in the newspaper headlines over our breakfast. Our phones and laptops now deliver a constant sense of imminence, so that our connectedness to the world of instant media has amplified our sense of whatever threat we are being warned about.

The different thing about COVID, of course, has been its reality. Unlike terrorism, we are infinitely more likely to encounter it as a phenomenon – if not by actually contracting it, then by knowing someone who has. Whatever our frustrations may be with the lockdown, most of us know the seriousness of the disease – and its ability to kill. Perhaps it is this which has most effectively removed the terrorist from its no.1 media spot – what we have, in other words, is the irony of a cry-wolf, constant-threat news culture which now actually has a genuinely global threat to deal with and report on.

The arguments that terrorism has receded because of the pandemic, or because there is not enough news-oxygen to publicize their attacks, are unconvincing. That terrorist networks everywhere have put their plans on hold because there is no regular bus service, or no pop concerts, seems to be a little difficult to believe (it doesn’t seem to have stopped criminality in any significant way), as is the assumption that terrorist attacks are so easily disabled by the possibility of a busy newsday. The truth is rather that there was never a comprehensive, global, constant threat to begin with – only a series of inflated fears, fed by a much smaller number of actual situations and understandable concerns, but to hysterical dimensions which never really connected with statistical reality, because they were never meant to in the first place.

Even if most tabloid journalism here in the UK is grateful for COVID, as it is for most crises, the billionaire-owned press will be sad

that they have to report on a factual set of developments that can only be marginally skewed to reflect their own political interests. So-called “Islamic terrorism” was a win-win for the *Daily Mail* and the *Telegraph* – it fulfilled all functions of the usual threat-story (distraction from corruption/internal scandal, social cohesion, legitimization of prejudice, reinforcement of popular authoritarian tendencies), but with the added bonus of making people suspicious/resentful towards Muslims, foreigners and lefties thrown in. There was something supremely useful about choosing *one* community and relentlessly circulating stories which connected every social evil one could imagine right back to *one* source.

The disappearance of terrorism for a year, however, affords us a valuable moment in our development as a society. Rarely do we have the chance to see, so crudely and explicitly, how artificial and constructed our news-world is. Rarely does the opportunity arise to see the truth-taps of the media turned on and off so abruptly. Once the terrorists recover from their case of COVID – and they will, as soon as the virus is under control, you can be sure we will suddenly start to hear about suspected networks and sleeper cells all over again – we will see them on the news once more, leading the four or five stories of the day the media has decided to tell us about. I write these words, I admit, with a certain kind of naïve optimism – based on the idea that people notice processes, once they see them in action. When they understand why that process happens, what makes it happen and with what results, they never quite view it in the same way again. If anything ‘good’ can come from something as awful as the Coronavirus, it will be the nugget of cynical wisdom our year-long holiday from ‘terrorism’ has brought us.

Ian Almond

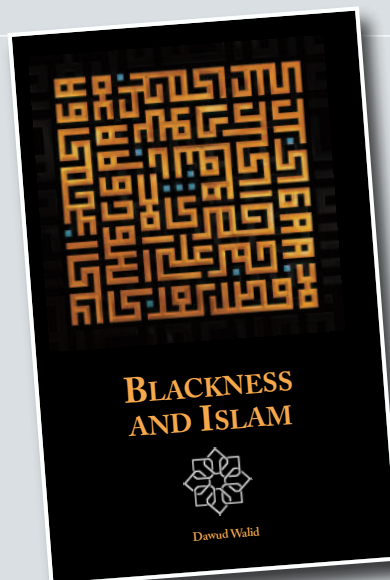
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Why We Need to Get Beyond Regimes of Anti-terrorism, and fast

From the unabashed appointment of an Islamophobe to review the UK's counter-terrorism laws, to the social engineering intentions and impacts, the British government continues to marginalise Muslims. **Massoud Shadjareh** argues that getting beyond the agenda set by the Prevent policy by looking at the bigger picture of what has happened as a result of two decades of counter-terrorism is an urgent exercise on the part of Muslim civil society.

In the not too distant past, when white colonialists wanted to buffer themselves from the consequences of the oppressive treatment they inflicted on their conquered victims, they employed intermediaries to do their dirty work. We had the Uncle Tom of pre-emancipation America and the corresponding 'chamcha' in colonial India who served as middlemen between ruler and ruled and also acted as role models for aspiring subjects.

These days we call them sell-outs or con-men and they are two a penny in the corridors of Whitehall and Westminster. Their role is still pretty much the same except that in an age where racial and religious persecution is less overt these useful idiots help to manufacture a façade of equality, their token presence shielding their paymasters from criticism.

However, it's a sign of how far Islamophobia has become institutionalised and mainstreamed when the government no longer considers it necessary to keep up appearances. The appointment of William

Shawcross as the 'independent' reviewer of the 'counter-terror' Prevent programme is not the first time in recent years that the fox has been put in charge of the hen house. Prevent is the part of the UK government's anti-terrorism CONTEST programme that is concerned with addressing the underlying triggers of terrorist activity. The 'Prevent Duty' refers to the obligations this strategy places on public bodies, which are collectively charged with having 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism', a task that now includes promoting 'Fundamental British Values' (FBV).

Despite widespread criticism from civil society and the Muslim community, Shawcross was appointed earlier this year to lead the review after the government was forced to remove its first choice Lord Carlile following a successful legal challenge on the grounds that as a staunch supporter of Prevent, he could not be considered independent. As things turned out, Carlile's removal was a case of be careful

what you wish for. Shawcross is a far more ferocious animal, his appointment a clear signal from the government to the Muslim community that there will be no respite despite the huge opposition to Prevent across society.

Between 2012-2018 Shawcross presided over the Charity Commission during which time he made it his business to systematically victimise Muslim organisations. In a damning report, the think tank Claystone found that Muslim charities were the subject of 38 per cent of all disclosed statutory investigations initiated after 1 January 2014 and still ongoing at 23 April 2014 despite Muslims representing less than 5% of the national population. It accused the Commission of institutional bias. Never far from the forefront of anti-Muslim hatemongering, the Eton and Oxford-educated Shawcross is a darling of the far right, the 'respectable' face of fascism. According to his writings, "Islam is one of the greatest, most terrifying problems of our future. I think all Eu-

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Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria
is an Assistant Professor at
University of Tehran, Faculty of Islamic
Knowledge and Thought.

European countries have vastly, very quickly growing Islamic populations.” And in 2014 he told the Sunday Times, “The problem of Islamist extremism and charities... is not the most widespread problem we face in terms of abuse of charities, but is potentially the most deadly.”

Putting Prevent in the hands of a rabid Islamophobe is only likely to make a toxic programme even worse. It's not just Muslims who have challenged Prevent. In April 2016 the UN Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Assembly, Maina Kiai, said that Britain's anti-terrorism (of which Prevent is a key part) policies were counter-productive, undermining democracy and victimising the Muslim community. In October the same year, a report by the George Soros funded Open Society Initiative concluded that Prevent undermined Muslims' right to manifest their religion, often targeting them for displaying increased religiosity. Another report in July 2016 by RightsWatch UK called for Prevent to be abolished saying that a strategy that “alienates vulnerable children is counterproductive and inconsistent with the very ‘British values’ that the Government is supposedly promoting.”

Like many other opponents of Prevent, IHRC has long recognised that it is more than a counter-terrorism tool. It is also an aggressive social engineering and spying exercise relying on surveillance and intrusion to transform attitudes in the Muslim community. The programme was introduced in 2003 as part of a four-part counter-terrorism strategy, evolving over time into a showpiece of muscular liberalism. Today Prevent requires Muslims not only to show deference to prescribed norms but to actively promote “fundamental British values”. It has also broadened the definition of extremism to cover what is deceptively called “non-violent extremism” such that today extremism covers such innocuous things as those who oppose government policies or hold normative or conservative Islamic views. The policing of communities has also been widened. Since 2015 it has been a statutory

duty for public sector workers to implement Prevent by identifying those at risk of extremism, effectively making every public official a spy and every Muslim a suspect. Cases which are deemed to require further intervention are referred to the ‘deradicalisation’ program known as Channel. Figures published by the National Police Chiefs Council show that the number of Muslims referred to Channel almost doubled in the first year after the duty came into force, to 2810 in 2015/16 from 1541 in the previous financial year (accounting for 68% of all referrals).

The extent to which Prevent has also helped change the landscape for genuine Muslim community engagement with government cannot be understated

Critics have not failed to notice the distinctively colonial modus operandi at play here by which minoritised communities are set against themselves and effectively controlled and moulded via a policy of divide and rule. First demonised and identified as problematic the majority is then contrasted with a selected class of opinion-making collaborators held up as ideal Muslims. The ‘counter-terrorism tsar’ Sara Khan and the members of the now defunct anti-extremism think tank, the Quilliam Foundation, typify such quislings. Shunned and discredited in their own communities, they are promoted by the state as model Muslim citizens to be followed and emulated. These individuals and organisations readily internalise official objectives and thereby serve the ultimate aim of Prevent which is to change the

normative social reference points for Muslims in order to make them more secular, less conservative and more politically compliant. According to [Fahid Qureishi](#), it is what Foucault identified as a process of ‘soul training’ that was aimed at the automatic functioning of power: to transform individuals so that they monitored their own behaviour in line with prescribed social norms, to the extent that there was a realignment of the boundaries between the ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’, and the ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’.

The extent to which Prevent has also helped change the landscape for genuine Muslim community engagement with government cannot be understated. As a gateway for funding for community projects the money it has disbursed has infected everything from youth clubs to mosque committees up and down the country, normalising the treatment of the community through a security lens. But more importantly the “change or be sidelined” logic that underpins Prevent has seeped into all government dealings with Muslim civil society activists and organisations. Invitations to closed government consultations, appointments to committees and research commissions are now conditional on Muslims internalising security and socialisation objectives. The 2018 review of ‘Shariah councils’ is a case in point highlighting an instance where the government appointed panel failed to include any CSOs or individuals that could be said to be representative of the Muslim community. Those who refuse to toe the government line are effectively delegitimised, often finding themselves on the receiving end of hostile media smear campaigns designed to jeopardise their funding sources. Even where Muslim CSOs face no apparent barriers to participation such as in public consultations they often find their expertise and views ignored. An IHRC [briefing](#) in 2019 reported that: “It has become standard practice for recent governments to ignore genuine Muslim voices in consultations that directly relate to their communities. Instead, officials have

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sought out deferent and conformist CSOs and activists that serve as an echo chamber for government intentions.”

The official redrawing of the boundaries of free speech as an instrument for re-socialising Britain’s Muslims properly began with the Terrorism Act 2000 (though earlier legislation in 1997 paved the way) introduced at the turn of the millennium. In the wake of the Al-Qaeda inspired attacks against the US in 2001 and later, other western countries, politicians opportunistically accelerated what amounted to a criminalising of dissent mainly in relation to expressions of support for the right of oppressed populations to resist state aggression or to pursue self-determination. The new legislative environment had the intended effect of forcing people to self-censor when discussing issues such as Palestine and the invasion of Iraq. Prevent has taken this to another level. The programme’s pervasive surveillance means that few areas of civilian Muslim life remain outside its purview. And with a lower ‘thoughtcrime’ threshold based on an elastic concept of ‘non-violent extremism’ the dragnet is wide enough to cover just about anything the authorities decide it should. The thinking that drives Prevent is brutally simple: if people are forced under pain of criminalisation to adjust their views and speech within limits prescribed by the state, in time undesirable thoughts will be washed out of the target population.

Certainly, Prevent has had a muzzling effect at all levels of education with students and teachers alike self-censoring to avoid being ensnared. [Research](#) led by Scot Bauman found that “applied within universities, Prevent faces the additional accusation of compromising academic freedom, and cases have come to light of course material being ‘flagged’ as ‘high risk’ and academics being deterred from researching or teaching certain ‘sensitive’ topics. We encountered a number of examples in our field research for this project, including Muslim students self-censoring in their working and personal lives in order to avoid being stigmatised as suspicious.” In 2019, the human rights group Liberty said Prevent had had a “chilling effect” on black and Muslim students, provoking self-censorship for fear of being labelled extremist. [It said](#), “the Prevent guidelines, which require administrators to identify and limit speakers with extremist views, were themselves the biggest hurdle to the operation of free speech within university communities”. Government guidelines for how higher education institutions should implement Prevent which cite among “contentious topics” things such as “vocal support for Palestine”, “opposition to Israeli settlements in Gaza”, “criticism of wars in the Middle East” and “opposition to Prevent” have led to universities cancelling many planned events and speeches.

A review of the evidence of how Prevent works in practice in schools by [Lee Jerome](#),

[Alex Elwick and Raza Kazim](#) also notes its gagging effect on teachers and children. They point to the on-line training module endorsed by the DfE that lists markers for someone’s vulnerability to radicalisation: “a need for identity, meaning and belonging... a desire for status... a desire for political or moral change”, all of which are so vague and inextricable from the process of growing up that they reduce the space for young people (especially from suspect communities) to espouse certain political positions. Thus, searching for radical change goes from being a process of self-discovery in young people to becoming a marker of

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their risk to others, and of their vulnerability to extremists. For their part, teachers often avoid any attempt to discuss the very issues which ostensibly gave rise to Prevent: extremism and terrorism. The authors express a certain degree of surprise that schools can pass Ofsted inspections of their implementation of Prevent without so much as mentioning some of the harrowing events that take place around the world about which pupils can readily access information via traditional media and social media. They write: “We have been struck that safeguarding seems to operate as a mechanism for removing the politics from a process which is fundamentally about evaluating young people’s emerging political views”, thus creating a situation whereby children are aware of global events but unable to understand them.

Without doubt the prospect of failing the Prevent test lies behind the overzealousness displayed by some schools in putting down the first signs of any pro-Palestine activities among pupils during the recent round of Israeli aggression in the Holy Land. Certainly, some schools were keen to quash any outbursts, however minor, and remind students that school was not the right setting to express their political views – a stance that they were reminded was at odds with their readiness to embrace student activism on the Climate Change and Black Lives Matter issues. Pupils around the country found themselves reprimanded and even suspended for showing solidarity with Palestine, even

before the education secretary Gavin Williamson deployed the red herring of increased anti-Semitism to scare schools into denying pupils their rights to free expression. At the Bushey Mead Academy in Leicester, staff called in police to monitor a peaceful playground protest and one teacher reportedly told a pupil, “this is why people don’t like Muslims”. UK broadcaster [Channel 4](#) reported on 25 June that some pupils had been referred for intervention under the Prevent programme. This is nothing new. Prevent views support for causes seen as “Muslim” as “risk factors” for terrorism. In 2016, teenager Rahmaan Mohammadi was questioned by anti-terrorism police for wearing a “Free Palestine” badge to school. In his [letter](#) Williamson effectively set out the parameters of acceptable expression on the issue, demanding that schools don’t work with or use materials supplied by groups which do not recognise Israel’s right to exist and even going as far as to recommend by name several pro-Zionist organisations. The message was clear: Mainstream Muslim views are extremist and should be ignored.

Two decades since its introduction, there are clear signs that Britain’s strategy to transform the religious, political and social attitudes of its Muslim population is yielding results, accelerated by a wider political assault on multiculturalism. Evidence is mounting that many sections of Muslim society have either been silenced or are moderating their behaviour to ward off scrutiny. While there are still isolated expressions defying the new order such as the direct action tactics of pro-Palestine supporters picketing or shutting down arms factories, by and large, Prevent’s ubiquitous gaze has effectively blunted the militancy that characterised the community’s politics before the new millennium. This threatens the very foundation of our presence in this country and demands a concerted and spirited response. Unless Muslims push back against the course hewed out for them, within a couple of generations the values and positions that we currently consider mainstream are likely to be seen as minority or fringe. On one level this involves drawing a line in the sand to say we will have nothing whatsoever to do anymore with malicious, Islamophobic government initiatives that legitimise or promote our social re-engineering. On another it means organising and engaging more closely with like-minded groups to challenge a strategy that is the thin end of a wedge that ultimately threatens everyone’s cherished freedoms.

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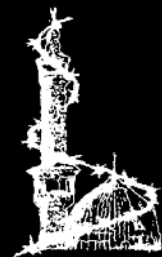


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"Whoever offers a sacrifice after the (Eid) prayer has completed his rituals (of Eid) and has followed the way of the Muslims." - Hadith



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