

The Long View

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End of the American Nightmare:

Presaging the Downfall of Empire

Saied Reza Ameli
An American-Style Empire Kidnaps at Dawn

Sandew Hira
The Political Significance of the US Attack on Venezuela

Nisha Kapoor
Afterword on the Case of Talha Ahsan: Struggles Against the Post-Liberal Hyper-Securitized State

Afroze F Zaidi
Muslim Women Seeking Divorce: On the Fundamental Shift Required in Community Attitudes

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

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High on the hubris of abducting a popularly elected leader in South America, the US is beating the drums of war in west Asia. An armada comprising one third of the country's naval assets (and rising) is stationed off the Iranian coast, waiting on its incorrigible commander in chief for the order to strike. Fresh from waging a genocide, an equally intoxicated Israeli military waits in the wings, willing its arrival and the anticipated removal of the last remaining obstacle to total colonial dominance of the region.

The extra-legal rendition of Venezuela's President Maduro and the renewed preparations for war against Iran are the latest instalment of state violence by a belligerent power that has arrogantly placed itself above the requirements of international law. Under Trump even the pretence of innocence is no longer necessary. Where once US administrations utilised fig leaves to conceal their violations, this president sees law as a mere inconvenience, an impediment to the projection of US power.

Our first essay in this issue by **Saied Reza Ameli** analyses the increasingly lawless nature of US foreign policy through the lens of the kidnapping of President Maduro. Demolishing all US claims to legitimacy for the action, he calls it an act of international piracy that trampled the most basic principles of sovereignty and self-determination. Maduro's forcible rendition is a "logical extension of a governing philosophy that prizes unilateral force and political theatre over diplomacy and multilateral restraint". It fits neatly into a long history of post-War US exceptionalism beginning with direct invasions and coups e.g. in Iran in 1953 and the overthrow of Guatemalan governments in 1954, to covert operations in Chile (1973) and the protracted sanctions and military pressures against Iraq in the 1990s and 2000s.

The message this sends to the rest of the world is chilling. International law applies only insofar that it does not conflict with US political or economic interests. Sovereignty and independence are conditional on US approval. As we have seen with Trump's threats to seize Greenland, for smaller states the stakes are existential. The rest of the world must resist, for allowing another egregious violation by a rogue state only erodes further the fragile rules-based order on which peace precariously stands.

Our second essay by **Sandew Hira** takes optimism from Maduro's overthrow and sees opportunity in the fact that US arrogance has made it drop the veil of adherence to international law, exposing its true nature. Where once more subtle, softer forms of influence might have sufficed, today a declining US if forced to rely on naked power.

Hira believes that the resort to ever more extreme and confrontational approaches might ultimately break US hegemony in different parts of the world. The US-led western empire is weakening at the periphery but

also decaying from within. Rising levels of social, economic and political discontent at home – manifested in the rise of fascist figures and far right narratives – attest to the fragility of western "democratic" systems. "There is a growing anger in these societies," he writes. "The challenge for the progressive movement is to capture it and divert it towards something positive: build a better world."

If states like the US are becoming increasingly lawless on the international stage, it is only possible by a process of societal preparation at home that has conditioned populations to accept authoritarianism and repression. Governments have normalised carcerality, justifying it as necessary for public safety in the wholly confected "War on Terror" or the fight against "militant Islam". Our third essay by **Nisha Kapoor** looks back at the case of Talha Ahsan as a forewarning of the kind of draconian surveillance state that has burgeoned under the "War on Terror", casting its net much wider than the Muslim communities ensnared in its initial deployment.

Talha, who is now a distinguished poet, was arrested in the UK in 2006 under a US indictment although he had not committed any crime under British law. He was extradited six years later to face prosecution for terrorism offences and eventually released in 2014 following a plea bargain.

According to Kapoor, Talha's case shines a light on "the full obscenity of colonial and imperialist violence in Palestine and West Asia which... has required ever more coercive tactics to manage anger, despair and the ever expanding Palestine solidarity movement at home."

The final instalment in this edition is a critique of the cultural attitudes surrounding female right to divorce in Islam. Looking back at her own divorce, **Afroze Zaidi** laments the patriarchal attitudes she sees inhibiting the spiritual autonomy of women seeking to dissolve their marriages. Even when it is not appropriate, interventions for women seeking divorce centre invariably on marriage preservation, implying that women are treating the institution too lightly. This misplaced focus has left women feeling internally conflicted, questioning their own reality and spiritual self-worth and staying in unviable unions. "Accepting that divorce, too, is from Allah, and that there is no shame in the fact that Allah has ordained divorce for some, just as He has ordained marriage, would go a long way towards ending the stigma of divorce and the systemic gaslighting of women in difficult marriages who reach out for help and support", she concludes.

This issue has tried to contextualise rapidly changing world events within a longer frame. To understand and analyse is the key to making sustainable and just change. This forward motion, even in times of deep crisis, is the key to building the future we need. With your thoughts and analysis join the movement for change.

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An American-Style Empire Kidnaps at Dawn

Bending and breaking international law is nothing new for the US, argues **Saied Reza Ameli**. What is different is the Trump administration's triumphalism and celebration in committing acts of wanton illegality. In doing so, it pushes the world towards a state of permanent war.

Introduction

In the pre-dawn hours of 3 January 2026, beneath a charcoal sky over Caracas, an act of extraordinary force unfolded that will be inscribed in the annals of international law as a blatant assault on the sovereignty of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. According to official statements from the United States presidency, a large-scale military operation — publicly code-named Operation Absolute Resolve — was launched against the capital and surrounding regions, involving air strikes and special forces incursions into Venezuelan territory. These strikes reportedly occurred without invitation, without mandate, and without the imprimatur of any United Nations Security Council resolution, rendering them a *prima facie* breach of the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of force against a sovereign state.

Witness accounts and state media reports describe a chaotic night in which explosions rocked Caracas, military installations were hit, and elite units of the United States Armed Forces forcibly entered the residence of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. Both were taken into custody and, within hours, transferred out of Venezuelan territory to the United States, where they now face federal charges.

The language favoured by the US administration — “captured”, “taken into custody”

— cannot obscure the juridical reality: this was a forcible transfer of a sitting head of state carried out without consent and against the express protestations of the Venezuelan government. At his initial court appearance in New York, Maduro himself decried his detention as a kidnapping by a foreign power, asserting emphatically that he remained the legitimate president of his country.

From the vantage point of established international norms, this night was not an isolated law-enforcement action; it was extra-legal rendition at the level of state violence. There was no extradition treaty invoked, no judicial warrant presented to Venezuelan authorities, and no shared legal process observed on the ground in Caracas. Instead, what unfolded was the projection of American military might across national borders to snatch the leader of another nation and transport him thousands of kilometres to face trial on US soil.

The *prima facie* implications are stark: this was not, as some in Washington would have it, a necessary strike against transnational crime. It was an unequivocal exercise of power that trampled the most basic principles of sovereignty and self-determination recognised under the law of nations. In describing it as such, we dissolve the euphemisms of the US state media and put a name to the act — a targeted abduction of a foreign president — and we do so without

hesitation, for to do otherwise would be to collude in the obliteration of norms that are meant to constrain powerful states.

The Trump administration's sanitised claim that the forcible seizure of President Nicolás Maduro was merely an extended law-enforcement action collapses under even the most minimal scrutiny of international legal norms. At the heart of this distortion is a misuse of “rendition” and “extradition” which, in the vocabulary of law, are fundamentally distinct. Extradition is a formal, reciprocal judicial process: one sovereign state requests the surrender of an individual from another, typically under a treaty obligation, with consent, transparency and judicial oversight. Rendition, by contrast, refers to the simple transfer of persons between jurisdictions and — in its “extraordinary” iteration — specifically denotes extralegal kidnapping without legal process or consent. It has been widely documented as illegal practice, historically used by the US in covert counter-terror operations prior to 2008, precisely because it removes all legal safeguards.

No Venezuelan authority ever authorised the removal of a sitting president, nor was any judicial extradition procedure invoked that met minimal principles of due process. Instead, US forces conducted a military “extraction”, deploying weaponry and tactics akin to a war operation and forcibly transferring Maduro to American soil where he now

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faces criminal charges. This constitutes a grave violation of sovereignty and the UN Charter. The Charter explicitly forbids the use of force against the political independence or territorial integrity of another state absent Security Council authorisation or self-defence — neither of which apply here.

The use of domestic criminal indictments to justify cross-border military force represents a dangerous conflation of internal law enforcement with unilateral imperial enforcement, effectively granting the US President a roving licence to extract any foreign leader indicted in US courts. This conflation corrodes the very foundations of international law, undermining sovereign immunity and the normative framework that distinguishes lawful cooperation from extra-legal abduction.

Even on its own terms, the US narrative fails. There was no mutual legal assistance treaty invoked, no Venezuelan judiciary involved, and no transparent extradition hearing in Caracas. What occurred was force masquerading as law, and force trumping legal process.

The concept of a “show trial” is not incidental; it frames the entire operation as political theatre, where legality is retrofitted to justify predation — a performative spectacle designed to legitimise power rather than uphold justice.

The forced transfer of a foreign head of state does not end with the abduction. It requires legitimisation. This is where the show trial enters as an ideological instrument, transforming naked violence into a spectacle of righteousness. The purpose of such trials is not adjudication, but retroactive moral laundering: to make an illegal act appear inevitable, lawful, even virtuous.

The architecture of the show trial is well rehearsed. First comes the seizure; then the indictment; finally, the carefully choreographed courtroom drama. In the case of President Nicolás Maduro, US authorities relied on long-standing criminal charges previously issued by the US Department of Justice, charges that had existed for years without jurisdictional force precisely because Venezuela is a sovereign state. What changed was not the evidence, but Washington’s willingness to replace law with force.

Mainstream media in the US and much of Europe played a predictable role. Through repetition rather than investigation, abduction was rebranded as “arrest”, rendition as “extradition”, and coercion as “accountability”. This pattern mirrors earlier cases; the detention of Manuel Noriega following the US invasion of Panama in 1989, and the post-hoc legal rationalisations that followed extraordinary renditions during the so-called “War on Terror”, later condemned by the European Court of Human Rights and documented by Human Rights Watch. In each case, legality followed force, never the reverse.

The spectacle depends on selective legality. US courts are elevated as universal arbiters, while international courts — notably the International Criminal Court — are dismissed, sanctioned, or ignored when they

threaten US or allied officials. It represents the ideological core of American exceptionalism, in which law is wielded as a weapon and as an instrument of domination rather than upheld as a binding restraint on power.

Political Economy of Extraction

The abduction of President Maduro did not arise in a vacuum. For more than two decades, the United States has pursued a relentless campaign of economic strangulation and political destabilisation against Venezuela, revealing a consistent architecture of pressure that long ago displaced any pretense of respect for sovereign equality. That campaign first hardened in the early 2010s with a series of targeted sanctions and expanded dramatically after 2017, when Washington declared Venezuela “an unusual and extraordinary threat” to US interests, providing legal pretexts for unilateral coercive measures. These included asset freezes, blocking access to credit, sanctions on the state oil company PDVSA, and the systematic criminalisation of Venezuelan officials.

Economic terror has been the weapon of choice. Sanctions have not merely punished elites; they have throttled the entire economy, slicing revenue streams, paralyzing vital imports, and shrinking national income. Some independent estimates suggest these coercive measures cost Venezuela hundreds of billions in lost revenue, as production collapsed under the double burden of sanctions and forced tanker seizures. In late 2025 and early 2026, the situation escalated further with US naval interceptions and blockades of tankers carrying Venezuelan crude — measures described by Caracas and several international voices alike as piracy and maritime law violations.

Equally telling was Washington’s political strategy. In 2019 the United States led an internationally contested effort to recognise Juan Guaidó as “interim president” despite his lacking widespread domestic support — a classic manoeuvre in US regime-change playbooks that served to delegitimise the constitutionally elected government and justify intensifying pressure.

This sequence of actions — sanctions, economic siege, legal delegitimation and, ultimately, military abduction — leaves little doubt that the seizure of Maduro was the product of long preparation rather than sudden improvisation. It was the inevitable culmination of years of coercive conditioning designed to create a political environment in which the US could claim moral or legal authority to escalate into kinetic force. In this longue durée of hostility, every US action has chipped away at Venezuela’s sovereignty to enforce power — and power always with an eye to oil and geopolitical leverage.

If there were ever any doubt that the purported “law-enforcement” narrative surrounding the forcible capture of President Nicolás Maduro masked a deeper strategic calculus, it was dispelled with the blunt language of economic interest that quickly

emerged thereafter. Venezuela is not merely another oil-producing nation; it possesses the largest proven crude reserves on Earth, estimated at roughly 303 billion barrels, a figure that dwarfs those of Saudi Arabia and places Caracas at the centre of global energy geopolitics. Oil is the lifeblood of Venezuela’s economy, and it has been a structural driver not just of its internal politics but of its fraught relationship with Washington.

Sanctions imposed by the United States have not only devastated Venezuela’s oil sector — contributing to the collapse of its production from historic levels of around 3.5 million barrels per day to barely over 1 million after 2019 restrictions — but have also formed part of a broader Washington strategy that targets major oil producers such as Iran and Russia. According to the US Congressional Research Service (CRS), U.S. sanctions frameworks currently aim to reduce crude oil trade from Iran and Venezuela by as much as 3.3 million to 4.0 million barrels per day, roughly 3–4 per cent of global supply; in Iran’s case, oil exports observed under sanctions fell by around 80 per cent between April 2018 and October 2019 as Tehran’s crude was squeezed by financial and trade prohibitions designed to cut its export revenue to near zero, while sanctions on Russia focus on restricting access to finance and production technology even as its overall output has held steady or risen under counter-measures.

That precondition materialised with astonishing speed following the abduction. Within days, President Trump convened meetings with executives from ExxonMobil, Chevron and ConocoPhillips — firms that had previously lost assets in Venezuela’s nationalisation drive — to chart a path back into Venezuelan hydrocarbon riches. Trump framed this as an economic opportunity both for Venezuela and for the United States, promising to “move forward rather than re-litigate past losses” for firms owed billions due to earlier expropriations. Chevron has signalled readiness to expand production in joint ventures with PDVSA, while ExxonMobil has floated the possibility of returning pending legal and security reforms.

Personalised Aggression as Policy

The forcible rendition of President Maduro is not an aberration in Donald Trump’s political repertoire; it is a logical extension of a governing philosophy that prizes unilateral force and political theatre over diplomacy and multilateral restraint. Trump’s leadership has normalised a brand of foreign policy in which military might and performative punishment are elevated above the rule of law, international institutions and any restraint that might impede executive prerogative.

This pattern predates the Venezuelan crisis. In June 2025, under Trump’s direction, the United States escalated its involvement in the southwest of Asia conflict between the Israeli regime and Iran, particu-

icipating directly in airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities — a move condemned internationally as an unnecessary escalation with no legal basis. Trump announced the operation himself from the White House, emphasising the destruction of key sites as a strategic victory, even as diplomats and legal experts warned that striking sovereign territory without clear Security Council backing transgressed international norms.

This appeal to force as policy extends across Trump's international engagements. Throughout his first term and into his second, he has exhibited contempt for the institutions most designed to moderate the recourse to violence — from the United Nations to the International Criminal Court — dismissing their legitimacy and attacking their authority when it conflicts with his personal or strategic designs. The United States' withdrawal from numerous treaties and multilateral frameworks under the Trump administration underscores a foreign policy approach rooted in unilateralism and an "America First" agenda, prioritizing perceived U.S. national interests and sovereignty over collective global governance and cooperation. For the Trump administration, international law is treated as optional so long as it fails to serve American interests.

It is therefore no surprise that when faced with an opportunity to project power into Latin America, Trump responded instinctively with force. The seizure of Maduro was trumpeted as a triumph of American justice, even as it tore apart the fabric of international jurisprudence. In Trump's worldview, the projection of American might is synonymous with rightness; moral texture, legal constraint and respect for sovereignty are hindrances rather than guides to action.

Indeed, in Washington, the rhetoric of defending freedom has become indistinguishable from the rhetoric of punitive domination. The same administration that prides itself on combating "narco-terrorism" or "illicit regimes" does not hesitate to place boot on necks, under colour of legality, to reshape entire nations. The Venezuelan abduction thus serves as a *casus exemplaris* for Trump's style to command and coerce; and always, to prioritise American dominion over global order.

The abduction of President Maduro must be situated within a longer legacy of United States' foreign policy where exceptionalism morphs into impunity, and where the rhetoric of a "rules-based order" increasingly rings hollow against the concrete record of regime change, covert removals, punitive sanctions, and their devastating human consequences.

Across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the United States has repeatedly intervened to shape political outcomes in sovereign nations — from direct invasions, to backing coups in Iran in 1953 and the overthrow of Guatemalan governments in 1954, to covert operations in Chile (1973) and the protracted sanctions and military

pressures against Iraq in the 1990s and 2000s. In each instance, the claim was that American action served a greater good, even as local populations suffered crippling economic deprivation, social breakdown, or mass casualties. These episodes prefigure the logic now applied in Venezuela where unilateral force is valorised, and international law becomes an optional veneer.

This pattern extends beyond violent overthrow to the manipulative use of sanctions as tools of political coercion. Broad economic sanctions imposed on Venezuela for nearly a decade — under successive US administrations — have been documented as having catastrophic effects on the country's economy, responsible for the collapse of production, severe shortages, and a humanitarian crisis that has driven millions into exile. While frames of "democracy promotion" or "counter-narcotics" have been deployed, the tangible outcomes of sanctions have been widespread deprivation. This historical context underscores that the abduction was not an isolated policy aberration, but the apex of continuous pressure designed to degrade Venezuelan sovereignty.

The architecture of impunity is further bolstered by the contradiction between America's self-portrayal as defender of a rules-based order and its repeated practice of exceptionalism. The rhetoric of upholding international norms sits uneasily alongside actions that flout principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, including prohibitions on the use of force and respect for sovereign equality. This dissonance is structural, cultivated through a foreign policy establishment that selects adherence to international law based on convenience rather than principle.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Venezuela, where Trump's administration has justified the abduction of a foreign head of state by invoking domestic criminal law, weaponised to cloak imperial ambition. Such legal exceptionalism lays bare the underlying assumption of American practice that while others must bow to international law, the United States may reinterpret it when it suits strategic interests.

What this Signals to the World?

If a sitting head of state can be abducted by a foreign power and paraded before its courts, then sovereignty is no longer a principle — it is a privilege, selectively granted. The message this sends to the world, particularly to the Global South, is chilling in its clarity. Independence endures only so long as it does not obstruct American strategic or economic interests.

This act shatters one of the few remaining pillars of international order. The assumption that political leaders, however contested, are protected by diplomatic immunity and territorial jurisdiction. The United Nations Charter, drafted in the aftermath of catastrophic world war, was explicit in its intent to prevent precisely this form of

unilateral coercion. By disregarding it, the United States signals that treaties are conditional and that power, not law, is the final arbiter.

For smaller states, the implications are existential. If Venezuela's president can be seized, so can any leader who resists alignment — whether in Africa, Latin America, or Asia. The precedent rewards compliance and punishes autonomy. It teaches governments that survival depends not on legality or democratic legitimacy, but on proximity to Washington's favour.

The erosion does not stop at sovereignty. Conflict-containment norms — painstakingly constructed to prevent escalation between states — are weakened when abduction replaces diplomacy. What incentive remains for negotiation when force is quicker, cheaper, and theatrically more satisfying? As former UN officials have warned in statements, such acts invite retaliation, mimicry, and the normalisation of cross-border violence.

International law survives only if powerful states submit to it. When they do not, it becomes decorative — cited in speeches, ignored in practice. The Venezuelan case thus marks not merely a regional crisis, but a global regression — a step towards a world in which might is once again right, and legality a postscript.

The forcible seizure of Venezuela's president, therefore, was not an unfortunate excess, nor an overzealous application of justice. It was an act of state kidnapping, executed through military force, rationalised through legal theatre, and motivated by long-standing political and economic aggression. To describe it otherwise is to participate in the erasure of meaning that power depends upon.

Donald Trump did not invent this machinery. But he stripped it of inhibition. Where previous administrations cloaked coercion in euphemism, Trump embraced spectacle; where others hesitated at legal thresholds, he stepped over them openly. In doing so, he revealed the underlying logic of US power with unusual clarity.

History is unambiguous about where such practices lead. When abduction becomes policy, war becomes routine. When sovereignty is conditional, peace becomes fragile. And when force is rewarded with legitimacy, restraint evaporates.

The kidnapping of a president in the dead of night is not merely an assault on Venezuela. It is an assault on the idea that any nation — however small, however defiant — has the right to determine its own fate without fear of removal by a foreign power.

If this crime is allowed to stand as precedent, it will not remain exceptional. It will become method. And a world in which kidnapping is governance is not one moving towards order, but towards permanent war.

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The Political Significance of the US attack on Venezuela

Despite claiming dominance and success in the attack on Venezuela and kidnap of the president and First Lady, the US has found itself outmanoeuvred, argues **Sandew Hira**. The increasing lawlessness of the US within and without its borders heralds both its end and an opportunity for activists to bring into being a new world.

Introduction

The shocking attack on Venezuela and the kidnapping of president Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores have deep political significance for Venezuela and the world on many fronts. It has opened a new chapter in the confrontation between the US empire and the Bolivarian revolution, in which Trump is maneuvered in a position of disadvantage, although many observers think that this is not the case.

The U.S. administration has now turned to more extreme confrontational approaches in its policy, that could ultimately break US hegemony in different parts of the world and also lead internally to the disintegration of their political base.

The perspectives for the anti-imperialist and decolonial movement for big strides are now even better than ever before, because of Venezuela. Let me develop these points.

A new chapter in the history of Venezuela

Maduro and Flores become the new Mandelas

On January 3, 1990, the U.S. army on the instruction of president George H.W. Bush kidnapped the military ruler of Panama, general Manuel Noriega, and brought him to stand trial in the United States. Guillermo Edara, the leader of the opposition against Noriega, was installed by the Americans as the new president. Noriega, a former CIA agent, was recruited by the CIA while still a young military officer in Panama. Panama was a hub for regional intelligence gathering for the CIA. Noriega allowed the U.S. to use Panamanian territory and resources for operations against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and other anti-communist movements. But then Noriega transformed Panama into a narco-state. He provided safe passage, money laundering, and protection for the Medellin Cartel led by Pablo Escobar. The CIA suspected him of selling information to Cuba's intelligence service. The CIA's internal view shifted from seeing him as a difficult but useful asset to an uncontrollable rogue agent and a direct

threat to U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Maduro and Flores are a different ball game. They are leaders of a popular anti-imperialist revolution and socialist revolution called the Bolivarian Revolution. They have a high international standing in the Global South. Their leadership is based on high moral, ethical and ideological values. They should be compared with Nelson Mandela,

The way both Maduro and Flores carried themselves in the wake of the kidnapping and trial preparations filled many people in and outside of Venezuela with an immense pride because of their courage, dignity and character

not with Manuel Noriega. And that is how their stature will grow in the coming months and maybe years. The call "Free Nelson Mandela" resonated in the hearts of progressive people in the world. The call "Free Maduro and Flores" will do the same.

The way both Maduro and Flores carried themselves in the wake of the kidnapping and trial preparations filled many people in and outside of Venezuela with an immense pride because of their courage, dignity and character. On January 6, the Secretary General of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and Minister of Interior, Justice, and Peace, Diosdado Cabello, gave a speech at the National Women's March in Caracas in which recounted an anecdote that elicited a loud ovation from the demonstrators. Cabello recalled that Cilia Flores stood up to the aggressors and declared that if they took President Maduro, they should take her too, a gesture he described as a demonstration of the courage,

dignity, and bravery of Venezuelan women. While Maduro was captured largely uninjured, Cilia Flores suffered visible injuries during the struggle, later appearing in court with bandages and suspected fractured ribs. Cabello: *"That is what Venezuelan women are: courageous, dedicated, clear-headed, and willing to defend their people, their land, and their loved ones with their own lives."* That story will be engraved in the memory of generations to come. And so is the stance of Maduro during his ordeal of imprisonment.

Initial reports from the warship indicated that Maduro was "combative and non-communicative" during the flight to New York, refusing to acknowledge the authority of his captors. A photo posted by President Trump on Truth Social on January 3, showed Maduro blindfolded, handcuffed, and wearing noise-canceling earmuffs. These measures are standard for high-value targets who are resisting or who military personnel wish to keep disoriented to prevent further resistance or communication during transit.

After landing at Stewart Air National Guard Base in New York, a video released by the White House "Rapid Response" team showed Maduro being escorted by DEA agents down a hallway. In the 12-second clip, he is seen in handcuffs, looking at the camera, and saying "Happy New Year" and "Good night" in English. Upon entering Judge Alvin Hellerstein's courtroom in Manhattan for his indictment, Maduro again looked toward the public gallery and the jury box (where reporters were seated) and said "Happy New Year!" in English before sitting down. He immediately informed the judge, *"I am a kidnapped president"* and *"I consider myself a prisoner of war"*. This is a strategic refusal to cooperate with the U.S. criminal justice system, as it frames the event as an illegal military abduction rather than a lawful arrest. He also gave the V-sign (victory, peace) and he made a fist to indicate that he will keep fighting. The V-sign was accompanied by the index finger of the other hand, which refers to Hugo Chávez's signature. It was a sign of defiance.

In the coming months and maybe years Maduro and Flores will use the courtroom

as a theatre of resistance that will inspire millions across the world. And their actions will be supported by the framework that the Bolivarian government has set up for their release. On her first day as acting president, Delcy Rodríguez established a special commission that will seek to secure the release of Constitutional President Nicolás Maduro Moros and First Lady Cilia Flores. The cry for freedom will be heard in all government dealings of Venezuela and in popular movements against imperialism.

On April 22, 2002, Hugo Chávez was kidnapped during a coup d'état by a section of the US trained army and transported to La Orchila Island off the coast of Venezuela. He passed a written message that said: "I haven't resigned. I'm still the president." Hundreds of thousands of Chávez supporters from the poor neighborhoods surrounded the Miraflores Palace, demanding to see their president. Middle-ranking officers who remained loyal to Chávez staged a rebellion against the coup leaders and retook the palace without firing a shot. Loyalists flew to La Orchila, rescued Chávez, and brought him back to Caracas on April 13th. And now in the street of Caracas you can hear the slogan "Every 11th has its 13th," expressing the hope that one day Maduro will return home.

The kidnapping of Maduro and Flores might become a hot potato in the mouth of American policy makers that could backfire in such a way, that they might want to get rid of them as soon as possible.

The Bolivarian leadership has passed the test of history: revolutionary leadership in times of crises

The US attack was shocking in many ways. The U.S. utilized electronic warfare to "turn off the lights" in Caracas, disabling the city's power grid and jamming Venezuelan military communications. The radar and communications systems were disabled by electronic warfare before the raid began. The guards were paralyzed by the use of

"acoustic devices" (sonic weapons) that caused intense pain, vomiting, and disorientation, leaving Maduro's personal security unable to mount an effective defense despite being hundreds in number. U.S. aircraft (including F-35s) and Tomahawk missiles struck air defenses and hangers at La Carlota Air Base to ensure no Venezuelan jets could scramble to protect the President.

Immediately after the kidnapping president Trump cried victory. He assumed that the Bolivarian leadership had undergone a psychological shock that made every resistance futile. Vice-president Delcy Rodríguez supposedly had called Marco Rubio to discuss the transfer of power. The U.S. was going to run Venezuela.

Within an hour after this announcement Delcy Rodríguez denounced the U.S. operation as a "barbaric" and "illegal kidnapping" insisting that Maduro remained the "only president of Venezuela." She declared that Venezuela would "never again be anyone's colony" and called for the immediate release of Maduro and Flores. On Monday, January 5, she was formally sworn in as Interim President before the National Assembly. During the ceremony, she swore an oath to the legacy of Hugo Chávez and Maduro, framing her role as a "caretaker" of the revolution while they are held as "hostages."

But the Bolivarian leadership did not limit her actions to these types of statements. It acknowledged that in this phase there is a need for unity, stability and security. The Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López, and the Minister of Interior, Justice, and Peace, Diosdado Cabello declared their support for Rodríguez. The National Assembly stood solidly behind her. The American attack that has killed around one hundred people including 32 Cubans and wounded many more, caused grave indignation in the population of Venezuela. Jorge Arreaza, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, said of the impact:

"I can say that the popularity of President Maduro and of the Venezuelan government is much more important and big today than

it was on 31st of December. So that's something: we are coming together. We are uniting even more than I thought that it would happen. I have family who are people that had never supported the government of the revolution and they have called me and they tell me "Jorge what do I have to do? Where is my weapon? What do I have to do to defend my people? Where do I go to a demonstration to support President Maduro? Even they say that they miss President Maduro and they didn't like him but they miss him."

The Bolivarian leadership has to take into account that there are great opportunities to unite a big part of the population, especially those who had doubts about the revolution. This unity depends on how the government navigates during these uncertain and very dangerous times. And they choose a pragmatic and yet principled approach.

The principled approach was to insist on safeguarding the sovereignty of Venezuela. The pragmatic approach was to derail the warmongers in the U.S. administration that advocated a second strike, that would have killed many more Venezuelans. The leadership did it in a very clever way.

Rodríguez released an open letter to Trump proposing a "balanced and respectful" relationship. She invited the U.S. to collaborate on a development agenda. She proposed talks to allow U.S. energy companies to help rebuild the Venezuelan oil infrastructure. Some people on the left have interpreted this as a capitulation of the Bolivarian leadership. But look at the practical side. Trump wanted 30-50 million barrels of oil for free. Now he has agreed to pay market price for this oil. This is effectively breaking the U.S. sanctions against Venezuela.

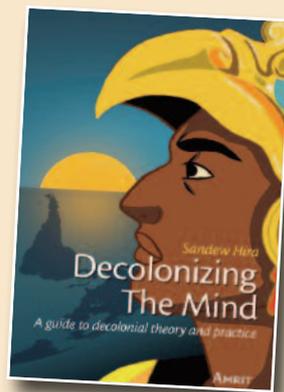
Trump has demanded that Rodríguez give U.S. energy companies total access to the country's oil fields. The U.S. expects these companies to invest approximately \$100 billion to modernize Venezuela's oil and gas infrastructure. Rodríguez welcomed

FROM AMRIT PUBLISHERS

Decolonizing the Mind - a guide to decolonial theory and practice

By Sandew Hira

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In different parts of the world a new decolonial movement is growing that challenges long time narratives in knowledge production and social struggle and transforms activism and social movements. It is driven by key factors such as the fall of the west and the rise of the rest, the collapse of the socialist bloc and in general the crisis of Western civilization.

Hira develops a comprehensive, coherent and integral theoretical framework that draws on different contributions in the decolonial movement, and deals with the practical implication of decolonial theory for decolonial activism.

these investments which would be a further dismantling of the sanctions regime. But here is the clever part of the strategy of Rodríguez. It put the U.S. and Venezuela in the process of negotiation and not in a process of military confrontations.

In 2007 Hugo Chávez expropriated more than US\$ 12 billion in assets from companies like ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips. Since then these companies have refused to work in Venezuela. In the negotiations Rodríguez demanded a “clean slate” policy to which Trump agreed. What does this mean?

- **Prioritizing New Growth Over Old Debt:** Trump has urged CEOs to focus on future profits rather than dwelling on past losses. During the January 9 meeting, when ConocoPhillips CEO Ryan Lance mentioned the \$12 billion his company is owed, Trump reportedly joked that it was a “good write-off” and emphasized that the U.S. would now act as the direct “gatekeeper” for new deals.

- **Direct U.S. Custodianship:** Trump told executives, “You’re dealing with us directly and not dealing with Venezuela at all.” By having the U.S. Treasury and Department of Energy manage the contracts and the bank accounts, the “clean slate” removes the risk of the Venezuelan government seizing assets again.

- **Legal Immunity from Creditors:** On January 9, 2026, Trump signed an Executive Order that shields all Venezuelan oil revenue held in U.S. accounts from “judgment creditors.” This means the thousands of people and companies Venezuela owes money to (in total US\$ 150 billion, including Exxon and Conoco themselves for their past losses) cannot sue to seize the new oil money being generated. As the former Oil Minister, Rodríguez has the technical expertise to deal with these matters. She knows how to make deals in the interest of her country and people.

Trump has a hard time convincing American companies to invest in Venezuela. And the reason is simple. Despite his claims that the US runs Venezuela, the actual practice is very different. On January 10 the US State Department issued a warning that all Americans in Venezuela must leave the country immediately. Now that international flights from Venezuela have resumed, the department urges Americans to leave as soon as possible. According to the department, Americans are at risk at roadblocks where armed militias are reportedly checking vehicles for Americans or signs of support for the US. Apparently the U.S. is not running Venezuela, so the oil companies are hesitant to invest in a sovereign country.

So far, the Bolivarian government has demonstrated a revolutionary leadership that has avoided a military confrontation and yet safeguards the sovereignty of the country. The Venezuelan army and police are in full control of the security and stability. The opposition was unable to stage violent attacks against the people, as they used to do in other periods of sharp political confrontation. The government has focused on ensuring food production and distribution.

The U.S. administration operates in close coordination with the Zionist government of occupied Palestine. The genocide in Palestine and the strategy of decapitation of the leadership of the axis of resistance has instilled in them a sense of victory. They feel that they are able to dictate their agenda to the rest of world.

Rodríguez presented a summary of the country’s agro-industrial performance for 2025 in her first speech as acting president. She reported 8.12% growth in the agri-food sector, 10.37% growth in the agricultural sector (with a direct impact on GDP), and 9% growth in the livestock sector. She announced a goal for 2026 to activate 200,000 hectares dedicated to communal production and small-scale farming. The main objective is to replace imports of legumes, such as black beans, kidney beans, mung beans, and soybeans, to guarantee food sovereignty.

Today the Bolivarian leadership has maneuvered Trump in a position of cooperation instead of confrontation and is in effect dismantling the economic boycott bit by bit. It has to be seen how long this can be continued in the coming months and years. Meanwhile Venezuela is building its alliance with China, Russia, Iran and Cuba and is preparing for the next confrontation.

The volatile character of the Trump administration: Gangster, clown, fascist Donald Trump acts as a gangster, a clown and a fascist at the same time.

The killing of one hundred fishermen suspected of carrying drugs in their boat without any proof, the violent kidnapping of a head of state of a sovereign nation and the

killing of approximately one hundred persons are fascist acts of terrorism. His blatant announcement of his intent to steal the resources of Venezuela is an act of a gangster. His claim that he is running the government of Venezuela is an act of a clown. Yet, he heads the most powerful military machine in the world.

The U.S. administration operates in close coordination with the Zionist government of occupied Palestine. The genocide in Palestine and the strategy of decapitation of the leadership of the axis of resistance has instilled in them a sense of victory. They feel that they are able to dictate their agenda to the rest of world. Contrary to his promise to put an end to endless wars, Trump has found himself in a position to wage endless wars on different fronts: Latin America, Eastern Europe, Western Asia, South East Asia and recently even in Africa (the bombing of Nigeria).

Inside the U.S. he started a war against his own population. Trump has deployed federal forces to several Democratic-led cities, citing high crime rates and domestic terrorism. In August 2025, he signed an order directing the National Guard to create specialized “civil disturbance” units that can be deployed at his direct command to quell protests or dissent. In early 2026, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has undergone a massive transformation, shifting from a standard law enforcement agency to the primary engine of the Trump administration’s “Mass Removal” campaign.

The attack on Venezuela was a tactical victory, but also a strategic defeat. The gangster cried victory because of the successful kidnapping of Maduro and Flores. The strategic goal, however, was regime change. And that did not occur, despite the claims of the clown of the contrary. He does not run Venezuela. In fact, he is changing the sanctions regime that was imposed on Venezuela in order to foster the illusion of controlling the country.

The road to a strategic defeat for Trump

Greenland

With a tactical victory in his hand Trump thought that he had won. But it had the opposite effect. The threats to occupy and annex Greenland has led to opposition from his NATO allies in Europe. NATO is a key element of U.S. foreign policy. His Greenland intimidation is breaking this alliance, which is a good thing for the world. If the U.S. army actually puts boots on the ground in Greenland, it may lead to the killing of NATO personnel. It will further strengthen the already negative view of the U.S. in Europe. All peace loving people should pray for an invasion of Greenland by the U.S. army (“PLEASE, INVADE GREENLAND!”), because this might end the American influence on the European continent.

Russia

Trump boasted that he could end the war in Ukraine in a day. His personal relationship of trust with Putin would make this possible. One year later, the war is still going on and Ukraine is losing land and people. Putin shows no willingness to compromise and Trump is getting frustrated by the day. The attack on the palace of Maduro has put a similar event in Russia in a peculiar perspective.

On December 29, 2025, Ukraine launched a massive wave of over 90 drones targeting the residence of Putin in Valdai. Putin was not at the residence during the attack and all drones were intercepted by electronic warfare and air defense systems. On December 30, after a phone call with Putin, Trump told reporters he was “very angry” at Ukraine for the alleged attempt. By January 5, 2026, after being briefed by CIA, Trump reversed his stance, stating, “I don’t believe that strike happened”. He accused Putin of standing in the way of peace. But the Russians had collected the debris from the drones. The navigation systems were well preserved. They showed that the drone’s ultimate target was a specific facility within Putin’s residence. Furthermore, these plan’s could not have been made without the actual cooperation of the CIA. Trump has found himself in a position of deep mistrust between him and Putin. Russia now knows that decapitation is not limited to weaker adversaries of the U.S.

Iran

On June 13, 2025, Israel launched an attack on Iran, that led to the killing of thirty senior military commanders and fourteen scientists. Iran recovered within eight hours and started an air campaign in which some thousand ballistic missiles and drones were fired at military targets in Tel Aviv and Haifa. On June 22, 2025, U.S. B-2 Spirit stealth bombers dropped bunker buster bombs on Iran’s nuclear facilities in Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan. Iran attacked the U.S. military base in Qatar, the largest U.S. base in Western Asia. The Iranian counterattacks were devastating and Israel and the U.S. begged for a ceasefire through Qatar. Some 1,200 Iranians were killed during the 12-day war.

Beginning on 28 December 2025, mass demonstrations erupted in Iran about the economic crisis with rising food prices and the severe depreciation of the Iranian rial. The protests were hijacked by terrorists supported by the Mossad and the CIA, who started a violent campaign against the population and the government. It was a follow-up of the 12-day war. The riots peaked on the evening of January 8, when at least 13 civilians, including a child, were killed. Authorities reported the deaths of 38 law enforcement officers. Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani stated that rioters burned 25 mosques, damaged 26 banks, three medical centers, 10 government buildings, more

than 100 fire trucks, buses, and ambulances, as well as 24 apartments. Across the country over 100 officers of the law have been murdered. Some of them have been beheaded or burned alive. This was not reported in the Western media.

Trump threatened Iran with military action. And Iran responded immediately. The chair of Iran’s parliament, Mohammad Bagher Ghaliba, said that if the Trump ad-

“In the twenty-first century we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template.”

ministration makes any even indications that it’s going to strike, any preparations for a strike, that Iran will act with a preemptive strike. It could hit all U.S. military bases in the region. It could bomb Tel Aviv. Everything is on the table.

The Western narrative of the riots is that Iran is on the verge of regime change. Like in Venezuela, they don’t know that Iran has a revolutionary population that largely supports the Islamic Republic, although they might be critical of their government. The rioters were quickly brought down and on January 12, millions of Iranians took to the street to express their condemnation of the riots and their support for the Islamic Republic. In Venezuela mass demonstrations were a response to the American attacks. They showed that the Western narrative about a system in crisis does not hold. Venezuela had declared a week of mourning on January 6. On January 11, Iran declared three days of mourning for the martyrs in the new front in the war against Iran¹.

The illusion of regime change is fed by Western media as part of a new type of war that has emerged in the past decades.

New type of war

In 2013, the chief of the Russian General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, published an article entitled “*The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations*”. His opening sentence is: “*In the twenty-first century we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template.*” Gerasimov asserts that the policy of U.S. sponsored regime change had changed from overt military invasion (i.e.,

Operation Desert Storm) to a new kind of hybrid warfare. In the countries that the U.S. target for regime change, they install political opposition using mainstream media outlets like CNN and BBC which act like state-control propaganda organizations, the Internet and social media (“soft power”, or “digital democracy”), and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). He concludes: “*In terms of the scale of the casualties and destruction, the catastrophic social, economic, and political consequences, such new-type conflicts are comparable with the consequences of any real war. The very ‘rules of war’ have changed. The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness.*”

Another military analyst from Russia that deals with this topic is Andrei Ilnitsky, a retired Lieutenant General of the Russian Armed Forces. Ilnitsky served for 10 years as a Senior Advisor to the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, Sergei Shoigu. In an interview with Scott Ritter, Ilnitsky explains the nature of the new war: “*If in classical wars the goal is to destroy the enemy’s manpower and in modern cyber wars is to destroy the enemy’s infrastructure, then the goal of the new war is to destroy self-consciousness, to change the civilizational basis of the enemy’s society. I would call this type of war ‘mental.’ Moreover, while manpower and infrastructure can be restored, the evolution of consciousness cannot be reversed, especially since the consequences of this ‘mental’ war do not appear immediately but only after at least a generation, when it will be impossible to fix something.*”

When Russian generals, who study war extensively, come to a conclusion that the decolonial movement had reached decades ago, then we can be assured that we have entered a new phase in social movements that fight for a better world. Their conclusion that the control of the mind is a new form of war aligns with the conclusion of the decolonial movement that the challenge of the future is the challenge for decolonizing the mind.

The war in Iran and Venezuela is not a classic war like the current war in Ukraine, where armies are engaged in military confrontations. Media are used to manipulate the minds of the people in and outside these countries. This brings the most important question for the 21st century: what can we, activists and revolutionaries, do about it?

Revisiting Lenin’s “What is to be done”

The classic

In 1902, Russian Marxist Vladimir Lenin published a book with the title “*What Is to Be Done?*” in which he outlined a strategy to bring down capitalism and establish a new world order based on socialism. The dominant strategy for socialism until then

was articulated by German Marxists at that time, who argued that capitalism was characterized by periodic economic crises. During one of these crises the working class would be in a position to take state power by elections.

Lenin's critique was that the working class would only develop "trade union consciousness" (a desire for better conditions within capitalism). He said that political class consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, specifically by the Marxist intelligentsia. He called for a highly centralized organization of "professional revolutionaries". These individuals would dedicate their entire lives to the revolution, acting as a "vanguard" to educate and lead the masses. The organizational structure was based on the concept of Democratic Centralism. It became the engine of the October Revolution. Democratic centralism is the foundational organizational principle of Marxist-Leninist parties. It is summarized by the slogan: "Freedom of discussion, unity of action." At its core, it is a dual system designed to balance democratic participation (to ensure the party reflects the will of its members) with strict centralization (to ensure the party can act effectively and decisively).

While other parties were decentralized or indecisive during the revolution of 1917 in Russia, Lenin's party operated as a disciplined unit, allowing them to seize and hold power against overwhelming odds. Lenin's model became the basis for communist parties that aspired to lead the socialist and national democratic revolution in their countries.

What is to be done in the 21st century?

We live in a different era with five distinctive features that will determine the answer to the question: what is to be done in the 21st century?

First, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the worldwide decline of many socialist systems and the rise of private enterprise economy in China, Marxism lost its dominance

in the anti-imperialist movement. Other theories of liberation have gained more prominence (Islamic Liberation Theory, Decolonial theory, Indigenous knowledge systems). The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran positioned Islamic theology as an anti-colonial theology and Iran as one of the most important forces in the struggle against imperialism and for decolonization. The positive relationship between the governments of Iran, Venezuela and Cuba has opened the doors for a dialogue between Marxist, decolonial and Islamic thinkers about a new world civilization.

Second, Western societies are in decline and decay on many fronts: economically, politically, socially and culturally. The distrust of the masses of people of their government can be seen in the rise of the extreme right. The dominant liberal media have contenders from the extreme right. There is a growing anger in these societies. The challenge for the progressive movement is to capture it and divert it towards something positive: build a better world. If we look at the anger only from a negative side (the rise of the extreme right), we lose sight of the fact that it also offers a positive challenge: the system is collapsing and we need to push the collapse in another direction.

Third, we now have a theoretical framework that enables us to engage in the new war effectively. Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) introduced the concept of "cultural hegemony" to understand how the mind of the people are manipulated by the ruling class. He argued that in stable capitalist societies, direct force (the police, army, laws) is a last resort. The primary tool is consent, engineered through civil society with institutions such as the media, arts, literature, popular culture, family, trade unions, political parties, religious organizations and the educational system.

But his framework of class analysis is insufficient to understand the impact of the colonial world civilization on knowledge production. That understanding came from decolonial theory. And with the theoretical framework of Decolonizing The Mind (DTM), we now have elaborate tools to un-

derstand the mechanisms of how mental slavery operates and how the mind is colonized. We have the tools to engage in the new mental war.

Fourth, modern technology has fundamentally changed the nature of information sharing and education. Internet, social media and Artificial Intelligence have created new opportunities for small groups, even individuals, to exert great influence in shaping the narratives in the world. With the tools of DTM and the new technological environment we can achieve great successes in the struggle for a new world civilization.

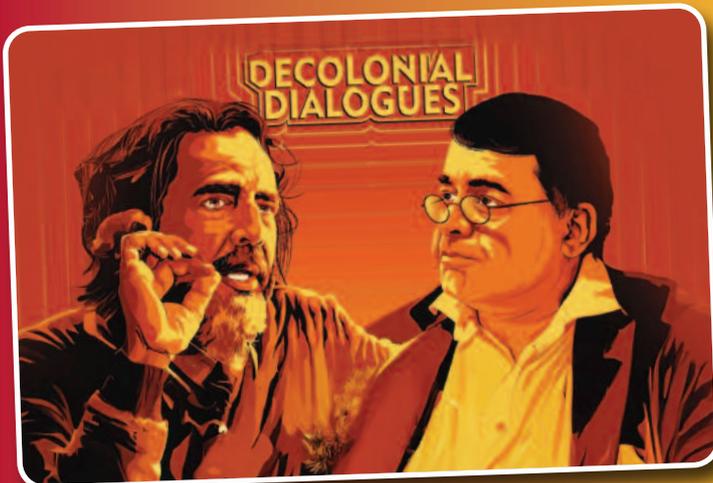
Finally, we live in an era in which there are state actors - progressive governments - that can work together with social movements in the struggle for a better world. It is not always the state against social movements. If we are able to cement this coalition, we are in the best possible position to win the war of mental slavery.

The attack on Venezuela and the kidnapping of Maduro and Flores have stirred a lot of pessimism in some parts of the activist movement. That is understandable, but when you take a broader look from a DTM perspective, it is just another phase in the global war against a dying imperial power. And now we are even in a better position than ever to fight this war if only we understand its nature.

Sandew Hira

is Secretary of the Decolonial International Network Foundation based in The Hague, The Netherlands. He is a well known activist, author and researcher. He heads the editorial board for Amrit Publishers, and is the founder of the International Institute for Scientific Research. You can find many videos of his lectures on Decolonizing the Mind and related topics on DIN.today, the IHRC website and IHRC.TV.

¹ Editor's note: Since this article was written the official death toll including civilians, rioters and security personnel killed in the violence in Iran was given as 3111 with confirmed names and details of those deceased.



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**POLITICAL THEORY
AND PRACTICE IN
LATIN AMERICA**

Afterword on the Case of Talha Ahsan: Struggles Against the Post- Liberal Hyper-Securitized State

In this exclusive extract from the forthcoming book documenting Talha Ahsan's case and the campaign around it, **Nisha Kapoor** finds much to learn from and much to gain strength from in our increasingly difficult times.

At a time when despair seems to be suffocating hope, when the stronghold of authoritarianism is bent on razing resistance, revisiting the story of Talha Ahsan – both a footnote to the ascendancy of the post-liberal hyper-securitized British state and a chapter of victory in the long-running chronicle of anti-racist struggle – is usefully timely. For the significance of Talha's case lies in its role as a forewarning of the kind of Orwellian state that would burgeon under the 'War on Terror' casting its net much wider than over the Muslim communities who felt the early sting of its wrath. And in its promise, of the fruits of effective solidarity and the mass mobilisation of anti-racist resistance.

The story of Talha Ahsan, a young Muslim man arrested, detained for eight years without charge or trial, extradited to the USA, incarcerated in a US supermax prison in solitary confinement, brought home the War on Terror. Along with the many other Muslim men arrested and detained around the same time, his case was immersed in the circularities of imperialist war, the proximities between 'here' and 'there', and a stark reminder of the racially-coded delimitations of British citizenship. It was indeed during the period of his arrest and incarceration that the legislative framework pertaining to the granting and with-

drawal of British citizenship would be significantly altered in ways that have institutionalised the executive's ability to denaturalise citizens on a whim, with diminishing scrutiny or judicial oversight, and often in response to reactionary populist calls for ever more punitive action against racially-vilified scapegoats.

Though certainly not the first, and unfortunately not the last, Talha's voice, his poetry and ability to eloquently articulate injustice, the nature of state violence and the limits of the liberal state cuts to the politicisation of policing and incarceration that the war on Terror burgeoned. Where Babar Ahmad's case brought to bear the criminalisation of freedom of expression, of dissenting media narratives, state domination of police and manipulation of political thought, Talha's case showed how even the most banal of actions, activities and behaviours, when performed by Muslims, could now be categorised under 'terrorism' and so be open to criminalisation, holding a light to the racism of collective punishment and guilt by association. The necessity of criminalising a population in order to create and sustain a moral panic against which the expansion of law and order could be legitimated was understood clearly by prisoners and perceptively articulated by Talha himself. When I interviewed him following his release from prison in 2015 and

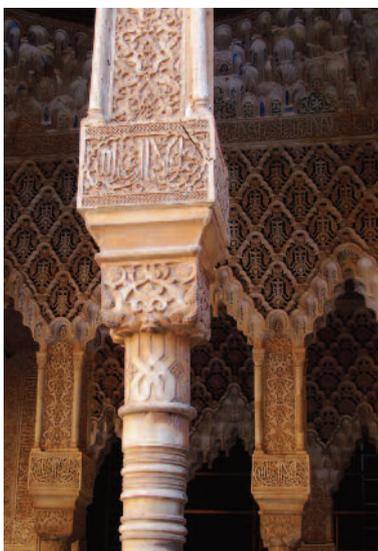
asked about the nature of the judicial and sentencing process, he explained:

Interviewer: *Can you tell me a little about your experience of the plea bargaining process and how you went about preparing, with your lawyers, for the sentencing?*

Ahsan: *First they picked a number- fifteen years, then we negotiated the charges to suit the number, then we argued facts to suit the charges.*

If this Kafkaesque approach to justice, a routine approach to sentencing in the US, was also manifest in parts of the British administrative legal system designed to deal with 'national security', the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, which hears some proceedings in closed court, being a case in point.

What seemed to have been less understood amongst society as a whole, but also amongst sections of the left and anti-racism, anti-Islamophobia activists is that the ramifications of the War on Terror were not limited to state violence targeting Muslim populations in Europe, Africa and Asia. It acted, more broadly, as a key tool in the conditioning rhetoric of securitisation that both had traction for cultivating liberal



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consensus and worked to mobilise a reactionary populism with an insatiable thirst for carcerality and deportation ‘at the border’, of ‘Muslims’, ‘immigrants’, queer people and dissidents. That is, in enhancing the power of the executive and establishing a permanent threat of terror, the early days of the War on Terror, in which Talha’s case is firmly located, paved the way for the routinisation of liberal authoritarianism. This has involved broadening the scope of counter-terrorism legislation, and further scaled up and legally institutionalised assaults on democratic political and civil rights, just as the vitriol against ‘extremism’, ‘radicalisation’ and ‘illiberal values’-discursive signifiers that mark racially othered subjects as less than civilized – tapped into mass resentment of material decline and melancholia for imperial times past (Gilroy), feeding campaigns for Brexit and Trump.

From the margins to the centre

Fourteen years ago one of the key pivots of the campaign for justice for Talha Ahsan and other Muslim men who then faced extradition to the US was to point to the hypocrisy of British parliamentarians who invoked liberal human rights principles to argue for the overreach of extradition treaties with the US, as they impacted (white)British citizens such as Gary McKinnon. At the time, the double standards proclaimed by MPs such as Dominic Raab were not at all subtle. In a parliamentary debate on the US-UK treaty he argued that ‘in taking the fight to the terrorists and the serious criminals after 9/11, the pendulum [had] swung too far the other way’ and that ‘Gary Mckinnon should not be treated like some gangland mobster or al-Qaeda mastermind’. The second-class status of Muslim men, never quite British or human enough, went unquestioned and the debate proceeded along the familiar lines of liberal institutional racism. To be designated a ‘terrorism suspect’ meant to be denied

sovereignty and so to be denied the right to a fair hearing. And, of course, the racist targeting of Muslims by the British state in these cases was systematically institutionalised on a much broader scale through the pre-emptive policing initiative of Prevent, a multi-agency policing initiative that interchanged synonymously ‘terrorism’ and ‘Islamic extremism’ and extended the police state as it did so. That Prevent was at its core designed and practised to identify

But we now find ourselves in a very different phase of western liberal hypocrisy; one where, to quote Arundhati Roy, the carcass of western liberal democracy lies, alongside slaughtered Palestinians, under the rubble in Gaza.

signs of ‘radicalisation’ amongst Muslim youth was evident across policy, practice and outcomes where vast numbers of Muslim young people found themselves logged on police databases.

But we now find ourselves in a very different phase of western liberal hypocrisy; one where, to quote Arundhati Roy, the carcass of western liberal democracy lies, alongside slaughtered Palestinians, under the rubble in Gaza. Earlier policing interventions that criminalised by association, or for ‘material support’, were largely driven by the need to create a ‘suspect community’, a pariah population against which imperialist and racist violence could be justified whilst also neutralising the critical thought and political dissent of those targeted. In our present era, counterterrorism is sharpening its knives against the mass as a whole; the full obscurity of colonial and

imperialist violence in Palestine and West Asia which overtly pays no heed to even the pretence of complying with human rights or the protocols of international humanitarian law has required ever more coercive tactics to manage anger, despair and the ever expanding Palestine solidarity movement at home. In Britain, the criminalisation of Palestine solidarity protests has led to the arrest of over 2000 people objecting to the proscription of direct action groups, some of those people belonging to civil society organisations, other simply politicised publics, many of whom are pensioners. Where earlier efforts to codify anti-imperialist resistance as ‘terrorism’ were legitimated through discourses of Islamophobia and racism, now that racially-coded logic has expanded to incorporate a much broader sway of dissent marking a significant expansion of the authoritarian state.

At the forefront of criminalisation for Palestine solidarity is the incarceration of at least 33 people for taking direct action against arms companies fuelling genocide. Prisoners for Palestine, the collective representing all those who have been detained under charges related to Palestine liberation, have been interned for lengthy pre-trial periods, some for as many as two years, arrested by counter-terrorism police often in violent pre-dawn raids, and been imprisoned as terrorism suspects even though the charges against them fall under regular criminal law. They have had their communications restricted and censored and, as often happens in terrorism cases, have not been privy to all documents related to their case. Where historically an open trial for direct action activists offered an opportunity to put arms companies such as Elbit on trial exposing the deep links between the British state and its military contracts with arms suppliers to Saudi Arabia and Israel, the effective construal of Palestine solidarity as akin to ‘support for terrorism’ enables the government to shut down such exposure. Defendants now are not permitted to explain the political context of their actions, only to admit or deny the actions they undertook without circum-



NIGERIA APPEAL

Currently there are thousands of children, women and men suffering as the result of the violence of the Nigerian police and army. Members of the Islamic Movement have been routinely targeted, with more than 2000 killed over the last six years. They have left behind dependents who are often destitute and shunned. Families are left without enough income for basic necessities like food and clothing, children loose out on education.

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stance. And this is facilitated by the broader assault on the judicial system often championed by the political and media class which permits more use of closed evidence procedures, retraction of trial by jury and repeals of judicial safeguards and standards. Even human rights lawyers representing those accused of national security offences and/or challenging authoritarian practices by the state are being targeted under counterterrorism stop and search powers, while pro-Palestine journalists are arrested.

Arguably, one of the key developments here, emergent in the early years of the War on Terror and now in a later stage of maturity, is the centrality of the Home Office as 'Ministry of Fear' to the operation of government. Dog whistle politics and the related draconian policies and cruel indifference associated with the Home Office has long been known and felt intensely amongst the racially-marginalised quarters battling asylum, deportation, immigration and national security. But over the last fifteen years 'authoritarianism as spectacle' has advanced to become the prominent face of government such that the Home Office and the Home Secretary have risen notably in standing with no shortage of brown faces to front the house. As Richard Seymour observes 'politics has changed to reflect the priorities of the Home Office' whereby 'the ongoing performance of crisis justifies the securitisation of politics'. The prominence of 'rule by fear' tactics operates in tandem with, and is moreover the necessary disciplinary mechanism for, the ongoing politics of austerity where capitalist accumulation of public assets and infrastructure requires a fortified infrastructure of control.

As ever, the broadening sway of counterterrorism powers remains deeply connected to business interests in the military-industrial complex. A year prior to the British government's proscription of Palestine Action, former Labour MP John Woodcock, aka Lord Walney, published a report in his capacity as the government's

'independent adviser on political violence and disruption' that set out to curb public protest and 'protect politicians and institutions from intimidation'. Disdain for the Palestine solidarity marches and protest actions featured heavily as did contempt for 'far left' environmental activism. The clear conflict of interest in the appointment of Woodcock to this role was not foremostly, as is sometimes suggested, his support for

the state seeks to mitigate against the merging synthesis between environmental and anti-Zionist protesters by broadening the scope and target of its counterterrorism powers

and from Israel, exemplified in the funding he has received from Israeli lobbyists including the European Leadership Network, by his former role as Chair of Labour Friends of Israel 2011-2013, and by his frequent 'solidarity visits' to Israel. Rather, it was that he is deeply invested in the UK's defence sector. In his capacity as a paid lobbyist for the defence industry and engagement director of the Purpose coalition, including the 'Purpose Defence Coalition' and vice-chair of the all parliamentary group for AUKUS which has received substantial funding from defence companies including BAE systems, it was in the interests of Woodcock and those he represents to enhance police powers to curb and prosecute anti-genocide, anti-imperialist and climate activism whilst securing additional protections for defence and energy business and industries. The recommendations of the report, which advocate for greater research and scrutiny of 'left-wing extremism'

at the same time that it suggests the reactionary 'incel-related violence should not be routinely categorised as terrorism' (p.284), propose the government 'should consider introducing a civil measure making it easier for businesses to pursue extreme protest organisers for damages'; work to 'ensure increased resilience of supply for defence manufacturers and energy providers'; restrict rights of protests groups to assembly and fundraise; and explore the potential issue of 'juries acquitting defendants and judges applying laws differently when they are transgressed in the name of progressive causes like climate change and anti-racism'. For lobbyists such as Woodcock and defence lobby groups such as ADS, social movements for Palestinian liberation and climate justice obstruct the UK's billion dollar defence industry and the multiple related industries (tech, energy, communications) which it anchors. These protest movements compromise the UK's role as a leading defence exporter with all the diplomatic and strategic relationships that such a position promotes.

And where in structural terms the state seeks to mitigate against the merging synthesis between environmental and anti-Zionist protesters by broadening the scope and target of its counterterrorism powers, in cultural terms the defence and fossil fuel industries have invested deeply in an alternate strategy: namely heavy investment in far right ideologues who simultaneously dismiss and deny climate change as a key source of material vulnerability, insecurity and economic instability whilst redirecting mass anger, fear and depression arising out of experienced decline towards scapegoated figures of the 'immigrant', 'asylum seeker' and 'Muslim'. As Andreas Malm and the Zetkin collective explain: 'every time a European far-right party denies or downplays climate change, it makes a statement about immigration. It says: the problem facing our societies has nothing to do with climate - forget about that hoax - the real danger is the presence of too many non-white foreigners and, to be more precise, too many



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Muslims in our land'. With the growth in support for the far right over recent years, the corresponding centrist party pandering to racist vitriol from both Conservative and Labour governments as a way to appeal to and incorporate Reform voters into their base has worked to legitimise populist mobilisation for vigilante violence expressed most fervently in recent times in the 'Stop the Boats' patrols. Where populist mobilisation in 2001 took the form of letters to David Blunkett demanding that Abu Hamza be deported and resulted in the instigation of citizenship deprivation legislation which would burgeon into a much greater set of exceptional powers as we now have it, the reactionary populism of our current moment has manifested in the largest far-right marches that the UK has ever witnessed, virulent hate riot outside accommodation housing asylum seekers, anti-immigrant riots and white patriotism. Correspondingly, there has been a significant surge in racist violence over the past year notably perpetuated every time moral panics relating to the aforementioned erupt.

As the centrist state responds to intensifying inchoate fascisms by legislating for and thereby further institutionalising the racist anti-immigrant rhetoric of the far right, there is a parallel dynamic that is burgeoning across civil society, the administrative class, civil servants, police, teachers, police and health and social care workers that is equally worrisome. One of the key legacies of the domestic war on terror was to institutionalise in society systems of lateral community surveillance as a means to encourage psychological conditioning and manipulation of Muslim suspect communities, organised through Prevent. Over the last decade we have seen the growing use of Prevent interventions for other forms of 'extremism', particularly for signs of 'far right' extremism alongside anecdotal evidence documenting referrals for 'environmental extremism'. In the latest statistics published for 2025 figures showed that 56% of referrals were for individuals with 'no identified ideology'.

The legacy of Prevent as a policy initiative aimed at neutralising dissent and critical thought has been to spurn a mass public sector workforce now trained in and expected to identify 'signs of extremism and radicalisation' in order to pre-emptively intervene.

Though these statistics have been met with suggestions that they show there is no indication of 'racial bias' in the ways in which prevent is administered, a suggestion which refuses to acknowledge the structural architecture through which Prevent was designed and developed, this entire debate deliberating on who continues to be disproportionately affected by the programme tends to overlook the key point of this alarming trend.

The legacy of Prevent as a policy initiative aimed at neutralising dissent and critical thought has been to spurn a mass public sector workforce now trained in and expected to identify 'signs of extremism and radicalisation' in order to pre-emptively intervene. Following the stabbings of three children in Southport by Axel Rudakubana when it was identified that the assailant had been previously referred to Prevent but not pursued on account that they did not show signs of commitment to any particular ideology, some political figures argued for expanding the definition of 'extremism' to incorporate 'behaviours of concern', not just 'ideology'. Though this broadened definition has not yet been officially embraced by the Home Office, it may well be a way in which powers are ramped up in the near future and would not be out of sync with

the thought policing powers and protocols in full sway at Palestine solidarity demonstrations. But the point is the effect of this kind of rhetoric alongside the pressures on education and welfare professionals to improve referrals and interventions is to nurture and encourage an ever more regularised culture of surveillance and suspicion that identifies for correction any non-normative behaviours or ways of being all performed through a bureaucratic banality of evil.

As indicated in Home Office reporting data, there was a significant spike in referrals to Prevent following the Southport attacks, perhaps in part as a result of the riots that followed, but also perhaps because professionals were under pressure to improve referrals and pre-emptive interventions. That many of these were for 'no identified ideology' speaks to the deep psyche of 'Thought Police' culture which now circulates. This continues a trend in which a growing number of students with learning disabilities are being referred alongside the reported referrals for 'environmental extremism', as a result of young people mobilising in schools following Greta Thunberg's call for 'Fridays for Future' school strikes. These students are considered not in terms of expressing their political and socialised subjectivities but as being potential extremists; in Orwellian terms, in need of vaporizing.

Nisha Kapoor

is Associate Professor in Sociology at the University of Warwick. She is the author of *Deport Deprive Extradite. 21st Century State Extremism* (Verso, 2018), and was funded by an ESRC Future Research Leaders Award (2015-2018). The three-year project examined *race, citizenship and the state in the context of the War on Terror*. Documenting stories and cases of individuals subject to extradition, citizenship deprivation and passport removals, incarceration and deportation, the research asked what such techniques and technologies illuminate about the broader features and operations of the security state.

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Muslim Women Seeking Divorce: On the Fundamental Shift Required in Community Attitudes

Understanding the struggles of Muslim women seeking and experiencing divorce is an imperative for many Muslim communities argues **Afroze F Zaidi**. There is an urgent need to undo the social stigma around marital breakdown and the shaming of women – attitudes that have been internalised through the impact of colonialism and which do not reflect Islamic values.

While the experience of divorce generally carries with it a great deal of struggle and stigma, it can be argued that this experience is highly gendered, particularly in the Muslim community. For Muslims, divorce does not affect men and women equally, with the burden of struggle and stigma being much higher for women than it is for men.

I experienced this firsthand when I ended a 12-year long marriage in 2019, first separating from my ex and then seeking khul'ah (Islamic divorce initiated by the wife) a few months later. At the time, I began sharing my struggles on Twitter, and this prompted responses from many Muslim women from different parts of the world who shared similar experiences with me. While the act of sharing was cathartic for me, as I expressed what I had been through for the first time after over a decade of silence, it also had the unintended effect of making many other women feel seen and less alone. From their responses, several common themes emerged, most prominent among them being internal conflict, practical barriers to separation, and a lack of support from those who should have formed a support system for these women.

While stigma was a prominent and unsurprising theme, more significant was the fact that the women who reached out to me, in every instance, were genuinely conflicted

about whether or not divorce was the right choice. There was a lot of guilt associated with their uncertainty, fed in no small part by negative messaging around divorce that came either from religious sermons and online content or from people in their family or community in whom they had confided. Additionally, practical barriers around housing, visa and immigration status, financial support for multiple children, or the level of literacy and even just the mental strength required for a legal battle, all contributed either to hesitation pre-divorce or real-world obstacles during or post-divorce.

Interestingly, two recent depictions on Netflix of Muslim women's experiences of divorce have mirrored these struggles. One of them is the Egyptian limited series *Faten Amal Harby* from 2020, and more recently the Bollywood film *Haq*, both of which depict Muslim women and their legal battles for divorce in their respective countries. What's particularly striking when watching both is the commonalities in these two representations of Muslim women's experiences of divorce, despite the disparate settings in terms of both place and time, as both reflect the main characters' experiences within patriarchal societies, structures, and interpretations of Islam.

Mum to two daughters, *Faten Amal Harby* – the protagonist in the series of the

same name – decides to divorce her husband after suffering many years of physical abuse and humiliation. However, the granting of the Islamic divorce is only the start of her battle, as it triggers all manner of controlling behaviour from her husband, ultimately leaving her and her daughters homeless and destitute. When *Faten* tries to take her fight to court, she quickly realises that the judicial system isn't on her side and declares in Arabic: "Al qanoon dhaalim" (the law is unjust). What follows is a public battle with *Faten* at its centre, calling attention to Egypt's Personal Status Law and its detrimental impact on women.

In *Haq*, *Shazia Bano* separates from her husband following his second marriage, initially moving with her three children to her parents' home. When her husband, a lawyer himself, reneges on an informally agreed monthly sum for child support, *Shazia* takes him to court. However at the very first hearing, the husband, representing himself, argues that because Muslim personal law applies to Muslims in India, and Islamic shariah law makes no provision for child maintenance following divorce but only for the *mahr* paid to the wife at the time of marriage, *Shazia's* claim is frivolous and cannot be decided within the Indian judicial system. *Shazia* then becomes embroiled in a legal battle that lasts over twenty years, facing alien-

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ation and ostracisation along the way, until she is finally vindicated by a ruling in her favour from India's Supreme Court.

While set in different countries and at different points in time, there are a number of parallels that can be drawn between the two depictions. While both Faten and Shazia's stories revolve around their legal battles in the wake of their divorce, another common theme is the inner turmoil they face as they proceed through their divorce. They repeatedly question whether they are on the right path –and this is why it helps to such an extent for Faten to have a supportive inner circle and for Shazia to have the reassurance, initially from her lawyer and later from a note left by her deceased father, affirming “You are right”. The title ‘Haq’ itself has a dual translation in both Urdu and Arabic: it means firstly the rights that Shazia went to court for, and secondly ‘truth’, being on the right path, which also happens to be amongst one of the divine names and attributes of Allah. From my conversations with women who were either divorced, separated, or considering leaving their husbands, the inner turmoil observed in both Faten and Shazia was a common theme.

In addition to the legal and social barriers faced by Muslim women – inarguably in many parts of the world – it is this turmoil that particularly deserves further discussion, exploration, and perhaps most of all, acknowledgment. One woman I spoke with who was subjected to repeated verbal humiliation, marital rape, and controlling behaviour from her husband over more than a decade was told by her brother that “The arsh [sky] of Allah shakes at the act of divorce”. The brother's response suggests that the woman was taking the decision of divorce lightly, and Muslim women often receive a similar response when bringing up the possibility of divorce amongst their family or authority figures in the community to whom they might turn for support or guidance.

Regardless of the dramatisation in Faten Amal Harby and Haq, in reality, we are at a point where it is essential to counter the ill-conceived notion that an increasing number

of Muslim women are seeking divorce because they take divorce, or the sanctity of marriage, lightly. On the contrary, out of the many Muslim women to whom I've spoken or whose experiences of divorce I have read about, not one has chosen divorce because it was the easy way out. These women have acknowledged that divorce is an uphill, protracted, and often lonely battle –they chose it anyway, usually because the alternative would have made survival impossible.

‘Survival’ in this context does not just mean in a physical sense. It means the survival of these women as individuals with their own identities, their own personalities, and their mental, emotional, and spiritual resilience – particularly essential to preserve if they are responsible for raising children – intact. Are family members and community leaders advising women on divorce taking this holistic notion of survival into account when advising them on the best way forward, particularly in an Islamic sense? From what I have observed, the answer overwhelmingly appears to be ‘no’. I would argue that this can only be countered and corrected through a dramatic, community-wide shift in attitudes, and there are two elements to consider in doing so.

Firstly, we need to address that counselling or any advice given to women discussing the possibility of divorce in the Muslim community appears overwhelmingly to focus on *marriage preservation*. This likely stems from an Islamic imperative to only seek divorce as a last resort, leading to advice that focuses on prioritising avenues of reconciliation. While there may undoubtedly be instances where reconciliation could be effective, there appear to be too many cases where a focus on marriage preservation leads to the minimising or outright dismissal of women's concerns. Again, this goes back to a preconceived notion of women taking divorce lightly, which, in turn, may well be rooted in misogynistic ideas of women being fickle-minded, not knowing what they want, or having a tendency to be overly dramatic and exaggerate their struggles. The focus on marriage preservation has had the effect of

women, at best, feeling gaslit and questioning their own perception of reality, and at worst staying in situations that might continue to cause physical or mental harm to them as well as their children. In order to counter this, one simple solution is to *believe women* –and, by extension, to focus not on preserving the marriage at any cost but on the best solution for the woman in her particular set of circumstances.

One important consideration to bear in mind at this point is that a woman who has come to someone with her struggles has very likely only given a partial picture of them, for which there are many possible reasons: embarrassment, memory lapses affected by trauma, or barriers to communication e.g. language, vocabulary, or oral communication skills. Those advising must consider that in most cases, the act of reaching out for help is in itself an indication of how serious the situation is, even if the struggles shared by the woman do not fully convey this. Moreover, abuse manifests itself in subtle, nuanced and complex ways, meaning it isn't always possible to identify and often defies labelling.

But also, women may, and do, find themselves in marriages where they are fundamentally unhappy for a variety of reasons that do not include abuse (or identifiable abuse). A focus on preserving the marriage is detrimental especially when the woman is convinced that she does not wish to continue in it. It makes her doubt her own instincts, emotions, and sense of right and wrong. It makes her question whether what she feels is justified, or whether she is overreacting, or whether forgiveness is the solution to everyone's problems. I will maintain that making a woman (or anyone, but it happens most often with women) question her instincts, her emotional responses, her commitment to her children's wellbeing, and her spiritual strength and desire to please Allah, is a fundamentally unjust practice. And asking someone to bury how they feel now is almost always likely to lead to resentment, trauma, and possible physical and mental illness further down the line. All in all, a prescriptive focus on preserving marriages and avoiding

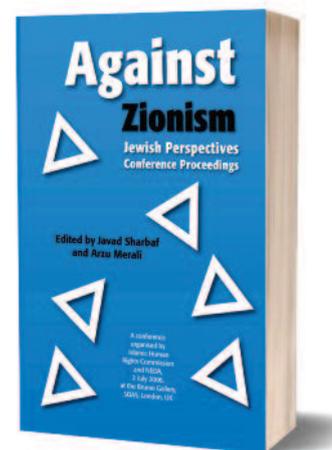
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divorce, which comes not from the couples seeking counsel themselves but from those doing the counselling, is harmful to all parties, but mostly to the women seeking divorce.

Another important consideration, which is relevant not just to those giving advice but to the Muslim community at large, is the *spiritual autonomy* of Muslim women. Somewhere along the way, amongst misogynistic cultural and social perceptions of the status of Muslim women, we seem to have forgotten that there is nothing in the Qur'an or Prophetic guidance to suggest that God has granted greater spiritual autonomy to men than to women. Rather, and ostensibly contrary to popular belief, women will be judged by God as individuals for their actions and decisions just as men will. Women, therefore, bear the responsibility of their own spiritual and moral decisions during this earthly life, just as men do. Crucially, acknowledging this autonomy for women includes allowing women the space and freedom to make their own decisions *even if* some might see those decisions as being 'wrong' in an Islamic context. In 2022, [writing for the New Arab when the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade](#), I had said:

“Muslim women have the God-given right and autonomy to make their own spiritual and moral decisions. And whether or not we like it, that includes a woman's right to make mistakes. It includes her right to make choices that others may see as Islamically wrong. It includes her right to use her own judgment to arrive at a decision of her choosing – even if that decision is one that an imam, Twitter sheikh or aunty might frown upon.”

The Muslim community at large, including many Muslim women themselves, have lost sight of the truth of Muslim women's right to autonomy. Women raised in conservative settings are made overly-reliant on the support and leadership of the patriarchs in

their household. Women who attempt to break away from patriarchal control or generally choose their own path tend to be dubbed as 'modern' – a loaded term which is a euphemism for misguided, sometimes of loose character, and secular by default. Sadly, in recent years prominent, public-facing scholars and speakers have chosen to go down the path of shaming women (on Twitter, for instance, but even in lectures and sermons) for living life on their own terms, as they express a sense of entitlement over women's choices. Indeed, Muslim men's sense of entitlement over women is reflective of a wider problem of misogyny in society at large. And the shaming of women is made more problematic by the fact that the policing of 'Islamically appropriate' behaviour never takes place equitably across genders. Men are rarely called out for widespread patterns of controlling behaviour, anger issues, marital rape, or even a constant refusal to share domestic work and mental load in the same way that women are shamed for their choice of clothing, perfume, or makeup.

Ultimately, it can be argued that the endemic denial of Muslim women's autonomy, combined with endemic patriarchal norms, where men's bad behaviour is consistently overlooked or excused, are directly related to Muslim women's struggles with divorce. While on the one hand 'marriage preservation' is emphasised and encouraged, often to the detriment of women's wellbeing, on the other there is very little accountability for, from what I've observed, the many, many husbands who are making the lives of their wives miserable. Marriage preservation manifests as advice to women to remain patient and steadfast, with the example of Asiya, wife of the Pharaoh and adoptive mother of prophet Moses, stereotypically being offered as a role model for women to emulate. Offering Asiya as an example suggests that a woman struggling to cope in her marriage only feels that way because of spiritual weakness, rather than real, harmful behaviour and circumstances that have been created in that marriage by her husband and/or (as is often the case) her in-laws. Because of divorce

being perceived as an Islamically undesirable outcome, marriage preservation will remain a focus of Muslim community leaders and counsellors; however, it would be much more effective if it took the approach of acknowledging the harm caused by men and actively seeking accountability from them in a marriage where their partner is unhappy enough to wish for it to end.

Another, more radical shift in the marriage preservation approach could be an acceptance of the idea that just as marriage is ordained by Allah, so is divorce. Faten and Shazia are fictionalised characters based on the real experiences of Muslim women, and both, despite moments of doubt, are ultimately vindicated in their convictions and walk away – as does the viewer – with a sense that God is on their side. In the face of severe hardship and criticism, mostly from Muslims telling them they are misrepresenting Islam or acting sinfully, both Faten and Shazia are able to hold fast to their faith – and when they succeed in their respective fights for justice, it is seen as a victory granted by God. Both stories, while fictionalised, have been inspired by the real struggles of Muslim women in both Egypt and India and will likely resonate with Muslim women in many other parts of the world.

One Muslim country that [defies the pattern of stigma against divorce is Mauritania](#), where divorced women are seen as more desirable and the high divorce rate is not a cause for concern. While it may not be realistic to expect other Muslim communities and cultures to change and accept divorce to the extent that it is accepted, or even celebrated, in Mauritania, it's certainly possible to aim towards a middle ground. In fact, this middle ground would more accurately reflect the Muslim approach towards divorce from a few centuries ago, prior to the Christian influence which infiltrated Islamic cultures via Western colonialism and persists in the present day in the form of stigma towards divorce. In this middle ground, while marriage is important, it cannot come at the cost of the physical and mental well-being and self-respect of a woman. And it's possible that we have begun



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inching towards this middle ground primarily through changes, albeit anecdotal, in the attitudes of parents whose daughters seek divorce. Shazia's father represents one such example, as he supports his daughter and acknowledges her struggle, not demanding that she return to her husband – which would not be unusual for a father of his time – even when Shazia's legal battle had a detrimental effect on his income, reputation, and finances.

When community leaders or counsellors push for reconciliation amongst the Muslim couples they are advising *without* understanding whether both parties are willing to face accountability and change their behaviour, they are doing so with a blinkered focus on marriage preservation. But surely what's really needed is an understanding of each individual situation on a case-by-case basis and a realistic assessment of whether or not reconciliation is truly in the best interests of *both* parties. Accepting that divorce, too, is from Allah, and that there is no shame in the fact that Allah has ordained divorce for some, just as He has ordained marriage, would go a long way towards ending the stigma of divorce and the systemic gaslighting of women in difficult marriages who reach out for help and support.

Contrary to popular belief, as Muslims, the sole purpose of our life is not marriage – it is the pursuit of God. Our purpose in this earthly life is meant to be the pursuit of the truth that Allah represents. Through this pursuit, we are meant to be constantly engaged in a process whereby we are seeking Godliness and attempting to become more Godly. While marriage is widely seen amongst Muslims as a key step towards becoming more Godly, it may also be the case that the traumatic experiences some people go through in their marriage cause changes to their personality that have the opposite effect. Take, for instance, this hadith by Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, teacher of Imams Abu Hanifa and Malik ibn Anas, [who is reported to have said](#):

“For the people of heaven, there are

four signs: a joyful face and appearance; a gentle tongue (i.e. manner of speech); a merciful heart; and a generous hand.”

Anyone who has been through a marriage that is abusive or toxic will attest to the fact that over time, maintaining a joyful appearance and gentle tongue becomes increasingly difficult. Trauma, in particular, will grind down a person's resilience and [narrow their window of tolerance](#) – in other words, dysregulate their nervous system – making verbal or physical outbursts a regular occurrence until that trauma is addressed and healed. In a marriage where one parent is abusive and another is traumatised, the individuals bearing the brunt of the traumatised parent's outbursts, manifested in e.g. shouting, screaming, physical violence, and/or exceedingly harsh punishment, will likely be the children. It would follow, therefore, that it is Godly to remove ourselves from situations where we see ourselves turning into people who can no longer show joy on their face, maintain softness in their speech, or hold kindness and mercy in their hearts, especially towards those for whose wellbeing we are responsible.

Moving forward, and hopefully even before we reach a point of all Muslims respecting women's autonomy and accepting that divorce is also ordained by Allah, our focus as a community needs to be on building practical support systems especially for women with limited means who are seeking divorce. A great deal of literature already exists on [women who stay in abusive relationships](#) because, in addition to psychological barriers such as fear, shame, or emotional dependency, they lack the means to leave. We need to prioritise investing in community infrastructure that actively supports women in rebuilding their lives after divorce, which includes providing legal, financial, housing, and mental health support tailored to the needs of single mothers and/or divorced women who may be isolated or estranged from their families.

As Muslims, we are at a point where a

fundamental shift in the conversation around divorce is needed. As the divorce rate in the community has steadily risen over the last few decades, there has been a tendency to chalk it up to younger generations having less patience or not knowing how to compromise. But the real causes of divorce require much deeper and more nuanced analysis.

One significant factor contributing to an increase in divorce could be the general rise of women's independence – this raises the all-important question of whether marriages amongst older generations were really more resilient or whether people, and women especially, stayed in them because they had no other choice. Amongst married Muslim men, toxic masculine behaviour still prevails even in the younger generations. But because an increasing number of Muslim women are now able to work and support themselves, and also because of a potentially less popular but still significant movement decentering the role of marriage in the lives of women, divorce is seen as a better alternative to lifelong unhappiness or trauma.

Instead of simply continuing to suffer in the name of a falsely glorified patience, more and more Muslim women are recognising their right to divorce and, by extension, to their own spiritual autonomy. Meanwhile, if marriage preservation is truly a priority, a significant step would be to start with the upbringing of boys and the elimination and calling out of toxic masculine attitudes. In sum, it's time that we brought an end to the practice of shaming and gaslighting women into staying in unhappy, toxic, or abusive marriages – because it is neither sustainable, nor Islamically appropriate.

Afroze F Zaidi

is a writer, editor and independent researcher. Afroze has an established track record of writing about current affairs in a manner that challenges narratives in the mainstream media. She also regularly offers rigorous, research-based critiques of colonial/ white supremacist structures and institutions. You can find her on Twitter/X @afrozefz.

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SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS INCLUDE: AbSoc For Justice – Action for Global Movements - Actions With Impact – Activist Independent Movement – Ahlulbayt Islamic Mission - Ahlulbayt Sisters Association – Black Lives Matter Coalition UK – Cambridge Stop the War Coalition - Campaign against Misrepresentation in Public Affairs, Information and the News (CAMPAIN) – Campaign Against Sanctions, Military & Imperial Interventions (CASMI) – Chorley for Palestine – City Action for Palestine – Convivencia Alliance – Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) – Ealing Friends of Palestine – Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! – Greenwich Palestine Alliance – Hands Off Uhuru! Hands Off Africa! – Healthworkers & Allies for Palestine - Hindus for Human Rights UK (HfHR UK) – InMinds Human Rights Group – International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN) – Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) – Jewish Network for Palestine (JNP) – Leeds Students Against Apartheid Coalition (LSAAC) – Leeds University Ahlulbayt Society – Lighthouse Advocacy – Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK – Neturei Karta – No2NATO – One State Palestine – Palestine Pulse – Palestinian Youth Movement - Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign – Spinwatch – UK Indian Muslim Council – University of Leicester Palestine Society.



Islamic Human Rights Commission

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RAMADAN

APPEAL FOR THE OPPRESSED

1447AH - 2026



PALESTINE

Daily death rate in Gaza higher than any other major 21st Century conflict



LEBANON

The conflict has killed over 4,000 people, injured over 16,600, affected 1.3 million people, and caused significant displacement and widespread infrastructure damage



ROHINGYA

The crisis is a human rights and humanitarian disaster, more than 1.3 million live in the world's largest refugee settlement



NIGERIA

Members of the Islamic Movement have been routinely targeted, with over 1500 killed in the last four years alone



YEMEN

Yemen remains one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world



Allah the Exalted said: " O my servants, I have forbidden oppression for myself and I have made it forbidden among you, so do not oppress one another." Hadith

Let us work towards restoring justice, for wrongs to be righted and so that the destitute may no longer be in need.

Please donate generously this Ramadan

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