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Shock and Awe in Gaza

How the Media and Human Rights Groups Cover for Israeli War Crimes

By JONATHAN COOK

On July 8, as Israel officially launched its most recent attack on Gaza, the BBC published an online report noting that some of the graphic images trending on social media were not in fact the result of the latest air and sea strikes battering the Palestinians' besieged coastal enclave. Its analysis "found that some [images] date as far back as 2009 and others are from conflicts in Syria and Iraq."

The implication, amplified by pro-Israeli websites, was that social media activists were trying to deceive the watching world into believing that Gaza was suffering a greater onslaught than was really the case. This was more "Pallywood", as Israel's supporters like to deride the increasing visual documentation of Israeli war crimes in an age of smartphone cameras.

Probably unthinkingly, the Huffington Post echoed these sentiments, arguing that the BBC report suggested "images shared across social media purportedly showing death and destruction caused by Israel in Gaza were fake." But in truth, the images covered in the report were not "fake" in any meaningful sense of the word.

The misattributed explosions and crushed bodies showed the real suffering of Palestinians in Gaza during earlier Israeli attacks—Operations Cast Lead of winter 2008-09 and Pillar of Defence four years later—or of victims caught in recent fighting in Syria and Iraq.

Nor were the solidarity activists who shared these images resorting to them because there was a dearth of horrifying visual evidence from Israel's latest bombardment of Gaza.

It was simply that Gaza's "shock and awe" destruction by an almost invisible Israeli aerial presence, and the effects on Palestinian bodies of missile blasts and collapsing homes, looked much as it did in 2008 and 2012. The names of the operations may change—Israel dubbed this latest one "Protective Edge" in English, avoiding a literal translation of the more menacing Hebrew title "Solid Cliff"—but the toll on civilian lives were inevitably the same.

The images, however misattributed, were a far more honest record of Israel's latest orgiastic bout of slaughter in Gaza than the media's obfuscatory references to an ongoing "cycle of violence".

Israel's missing arsenal

There was a rich irony to the BBC, which has done so much to veil the realities of Israel's ritual war-making, criticising social media users. To take just one example of many,

the corporation's diplomatic correspondent, Jonathan Marcus, promised in an online article to explain "What weapons are being used in the Israel-Gaza conflict".

At length he enumerated the kinds of rockets in Hamas' hands and their range. But what of Israel's massive offensive arsenal? This was the extent of his disclosure: "The full panoply of Israeli air power has been used in a steadily escalating series of attacks against rocket launch sites, weapons stores, and the command elements of Hamas and other groups." Note there was no mention, despite documentation, of strikes on civilians.

He then quickly switched to Israel's "defensive" weapons. "As important in determining Israel's strategic outlook as its offensive operations is the reliance that it places on missile defence—the Iron Dome system—to defend its civilian population." The rest of the article continued in the same vein.

Marcus could hardly have done a better job of promoting the idea of the Palestinians as aggressors and Israelis as the victims had he been paid to do so by Israel's ministry of hasbara (propaganda). The article concealed the fact that by the time of its publication, on July 10, dozens of Palestinians, including many children, had been killed by Israel's "defensive" operation.

Meanwhile, Hamas' fearsome arsenal had by this time killed precisely no Israelis—and barely any had been harmed, excepting the reports of numerous Israeli victims of "anxiety", many of them presumably provoked by reports like Marcus'. (During these operations no one has the time or resources to record the vast number of Palestinians in Gaza suffering from anxiety.)

As the explosions and disfigured bodies from Gaza blurred into an almost indistinguishable collage of suffering for social media activists, I too watched the coverage and analysis of the past weeks' events with a weary sense of *deja vu*.

When Hamas was not being presented as the aggressor, forcing Israel to "respond" and "retaliate", it was apparently a military leviathan. With its lightly armed cadres and the off-the-back-of-a-truck rockets, Hamas "exchanged fire" and "traded blows" with one of the most powerful armies in the world. A headline on yet another "balanced" BBC story declared: "Israel under renewed Hamas attack".

The dissembling, as ever, reached its apotheosis in the U.S. media. *The New York Times*, for example, offered headlines that stripped Israeli atrocities of their horrific import while invariably removing Israel from the scene entirely. A missile strike on July 10 that wiped out a family of nine Palestinians watching the World Cup was titled "Missile at beachside Gaza cafe finds patrons poised for World Cup", as if the missile itself took the decision to "find" them.

Similarly, when four children were hit by a missile on July 16, as they played football on a beach in full view of international correspondents in a hotel nearby, the *Times* editors changed an already weak headline—"Four young boys killed

playing on a Gaza beach”—to the downright mendacious: “Boys Drawn to Gaza Beach, and Into Center of Mideast Strife”. No blast, no deaths or injuries and, of course, no Israeli responsibility in sight. All of it whitewashed with that weasel word “strife”.

And what was the seemingly innocuous word “drawn” supposed to convey? Did it not hint that the boys had gone somewhere forbidden; that, in short, it was their fault for being in the wrong place, as though in Gaza there was a right place to be under the rain of Israeli missiles? Or maybe the *Times* editors hoped we would infer that they had been lured there by a more sinister, local hand.

Interventions by U.S. media organisations were not restricted to word games. NBC’s experienced Gaza reporter Ayman Mohyeldin, who has been the most even-handed of the U.S. correspondents, was told by studio executives he was being pulled from Gaza because of “security” concerns. The decision happened the same day he landed possibly the biggest scoop of his career: he had been playing ball with the boys moments before they were slaughtered. He never got to file his horrifying exclusive.

Strangely, however, Gaza was safe enough for Richard Engel, NBC’s correspondent in Tel Aviv, who immediately took Mohyeldin’s place in the tiny enclave. A storm of protest from viewers forced NBC to relent a few days later, allowing him back as inexplicably as they had required him to leave.

Diana Magnay also felt the long arm of the executives at CNN. During a live link located on a hill in Israel overlooking the Gaza Strip on July 17, the CNN correspondent had talked to anchor Wolf Blitzer as a missile slammed into Gaza behind her. As the explosion lit up the night sky, loud cheers could be heard just off-camera. A visibly discomfited Magnay was forced to explain as delicately as she could that crowds of Israelis came to watch and celebrate Gaza’s suffering.

A short time later she tweeted behind-the-scenes information. The mob had threatened her and her crew if they broadcast “a word wrong”. She described them, not ungenerously, as “scum”. Her tweet survived 10 minutes, suggesting just how closely U.S. correspondents are being policed by station executives. Shortly afterwards, CNN announced that she had been reassigned to Moscow, apparently the US media’s equivalent of a Siberian re-education camp.

But the treatment of Mohyeldin and Magnay doubtless served a larger purpose, reminding the US media corps of the limits of acceptable discourse when it comes to Israel.

Abductions set the scene

For much of the media, the starting-point for the latest “escalation” was the abduction on June 12 of three Israeli teenagers while hitch-hiking from a seminary located in a notoriously violent settler enclave in the Palestinian city of Hebron. For nearly three weeks, Israeli troops scoured the West Bank, raiding thousands of homes and making hun-

dreds of arrests, on the pretext of searching for the youths. Their bodies were eventually found in a shallow grave near Hebron, on June 30.

(In turn, though largely ignored by the media, the inciting cause of the abductions was most likely the execution by Israeli soldiers of two unarmed Palestinian youths taking part in a protest on May 15, Nakba Day, near Ramallah. The moment of the boys’ deaths was caught on film from various angles, showing they had posed no threat to the soldiers stationed nearby. Israel again suggested that the video evidence—some of it provided by CNN—was faked.)

Opportunistic as ever, Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, imposed a gag order on reporting a phone call made to the emergency services by one of the Israeli youths shortly after the abduction. Gunshots can be heard. The abandoned car, found the next day, had eight bullet holes and the teenagers’ blood on it. In short, Israeli officials knew from the outset that the three youngsters were dead.

Israel also quickly determined who they thought were the suspects: two or three young men from Hebron, who went underground almost immediately afterwards. They were from a family loosely affiliated with Hamas but also with a history of being, in the words of one Israeli analyst, “trouble-makers”. This tenuous link appears to have been the sole evidence for Netanyahu’s strident and oft-repeated claim that Hamas had ordered the abductions and that it alone would be held accountable—first in the West Bank, then in Gaza.

Mass raids across the West Bank, dubbed Operation Brother’s Keeper, rounded up hundreds of Hamas activists, most of them with no ties to the movement’s military wing. Netanyahu had good reason to wish to exploit the teenagers’ deaths as a way to eradicate Hamas’ infrastructure—from charities to newspapers—in the West Bank and turn the screws on the Islamic group in Gaza.

Scuppering Palestinian unity

After the collapse in late April of the U.S.-imposed peace talks—for which Israel, unusually, had taken most blame—the endlessly accommodating Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas had partially reversed course, launching initiatives without Netanyahu and Washington’s prior approval.

It had applied to join a handful of international bodies, hinting that it might go so far as to join the International Criminal Court in the Hague, thereby exposing Israel to possible war crimes trials. Equally significantly, Abbas’ Fatah party, which dominates the West Bank, had signed a reconciliation agreement with Hamas, its chief political rival in Gaza, after seven years of bitter discord. The two groups set up a unity government of technocrats in early June and promised to arrange national elections for the first time since 2006.

Israel’s assault on Hamas in the West Bank—and, by stepping aside, the PA’s security forces’ implicit assent—were the first prong in Netanyahu’s plan to undermine the unity gov-

ernment. The attack on Gaza the second.

But the Israeli public's thirst for revenge—stoked by incitement from the prime minister down – was not slaked by the ransacking of the West Bank. Israeli mobs patrolled the streets of Jerusalem seeking out Palestinians to attack. One group went a step further: on July 2, they grabbed a 16-year-old boy, Mohammed Abu Khdeir, close to his home in the Shuafat neighbourhood, and drove off with him to a forest. On the way, they beat him and made him drink flammable liquid. At their destination, they set him on fire.

conventions, which is the vast majority—to interpret and enforce as best it can their provisions on behalf of the victims of armed conflict.

Its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been notoriously difficult, given that Israel signed the conventions early on but has refused to accept that their provisions apply in the occupied Palestinian territories.

To the causal observer, an ICRC statement issued on June 15 appeared routine. It expressed concern for the three Israeli teenagers abducted three days earlier and called for their



CASUALTIES FROM IDF STRIKE ON UN SCHOOL IN GAZA. PHOTO: AFP

Red Cross urges release

Into this medley of deceptions and bad faith stepped the guardians of our moral scruples: the international human rights organisations. They are beholden to the system of international humanitarian law that is supposed to govern the relations between states, and offer guidance in circumstances of war and occupation. Our politicians and media may not be trusted, but surely these exponents of an ethical global order can be.

The foundational statutes of international law—the Geneva Conventions—are upheld by the Swiss-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). It has been given the responsibility—at least by those states that have signed the

“immediate and unconditional release”, noting that international law prohibits abductions and the taking of hostages. The ICRC also offered to act as a “neutral intermediary” to achieve the youths’ release.

But in practice, the statement was an exceptional departure from the ICRC’s customary behaviour, at least towards Palestinians.

In the wake of the three youths’ abduction, as already noted, Israel launched a wave of raids in the West Bank, effectively kidnapping anyone with the faintest connection to Hamas, including journalists, charity workers, students and politicians. Within days, dozens of Palestinians had been seized and transferred out of Palestinian territory into Israel, in violation of international law. Soon the number would

reach more than 500. Most were held without charge or access to lawyers.

These prisoners joined thousands of others in Israel's jails, including some 200 inmates held without charge. Many of them were in the midst of a protracted hunger strike that was endangering their lives.

Further, Israel had in its jails a similar number of Palestinian children—all illegally held in Israel—who were rarely able to see their families. As groups like Defence for Children International had observed, these children were routinely abused. They were often seized from their beds in the middle of the night, and then once in detention subjected to torture and solitary confinement. What did the ICRC have to say about their condition? Had it called for their immediate release or offered to act as mediator?

Asked about this by Ali Abunimah of *Electronic Intifada*, an ICRC spokeswoman said: "ICRC doesn't usually call for the release of detainees in general. We monitor their condition and if we have any concerns we discuss with the authorities issues regarding their treatment."

That fitted with the kinds of statements more usually associated with the ICRC. Relating to Israel's rampage through the West Bank and its mass arrests, ICRC tweeted dryly on June 18: "Military operations in the West Bank and Gaza: ICRC steps up its activities." Regarding the hunger-strikers, the ICRC's concern amounted to nothing more than a supremely disinterested humanitarianism. On June 17, the Red Cross offered a typical update: "We visited 27 hunger-strikers so far this week in Assaf Harofe, Poriya, Tel Hashomer and Wolfson hospitals."

Secret prison comes to light

The ICRC's traditional justification for such studied detachment was explained to me back in 2003, when I investigated a secret prison in Israel, known as Facility 1391.

The role of 1391 was to disappear Arab prisoners that were not covered by Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power. Many of the inmates were from Lebanon, seized by Israel during its long occupation of the country that ended in 2000. It was Israel's Abu Ghraib, and as in its Iraqi counterpart torture as common.

During my research I was told that the ICRC were aware of the prison. When I called the office in Jerusalem to find out what they knew, a spokesman refused to say anything on record. In fact, he refused to say anything apart from confirming that they knew of the prison's existence and location, although he claimed they had not had any access.

The ICRC's justification to me for refusing to speak further or to criticize Israel for what amounted to a gross violation of international law was that they believed it was essential to maintain a position of "absolute political neutrality". I was told it was in the vital interests of the Palestinian prison population that the ICRC keep Israel's trust so that Red Cross

access would not be withdrawn.

But the principle of "absolute political neutrality" that was so crucial to the ICRC back in 2003—and has directed their policy for decades, given their almost complete silence on Israel's belligerent occupation—had been jettisoned with shocking alacrity in defending the rights of the three Israeli teenagers. Did the ICRC not also owe "absolute political neutrality" towards the Palestinians?

Power-friendly humanitarians

The truth is that the ICRC's role in safeguarding international humanitarian law is subject to its careful assessment of where power resides in the international system. Making an enemy of Israel is extremely risky for an organization that relies on the support of major western powers. Making an enemy of the Palestinian people, a nation-in-waiting that needs every scrap of help it can get from the international community, is cost-free. Moral scruples can go hang.

That was also presumably why Navi Pillay, the United Nations' respected high commissioner for human rights, adopted the stale language of diplomacy rather than an expression of moral outrage over the attack on Gaza. An anaemic statement issued on July 11 carefully avoided identifying Israel's actions as war crimes, as they clearly were.

Instead Pillay noted that the reports of civilian casualties "raise serious doubt about whether the Israeli strikes have been in accordance with international humanitarian law". It was a familiar soundtrack of muted disapproval, one that for decades has endorsed international inertia.

Human Rights Watch, based in New York, performed no better. It issued a statement on the fighting on July 9 that was barely distinguishable from press releases published by the organisation during Israel's operations in 2009 and 2012.

I have had run-ins with HRW before, not least in 2006 when I took issue with its lead researcher Peter Bouckaert. In the immediate wake of Israel's attack on Lebanon that year, Bouckaert opined to the *New York Times*: "I mean, it's perfectly clear that Hezbollah is directly targeting civilians, and that their aim is to kill Israeli civilians. We don't accuse the Israeli army of deliberately trying to kill civilians. Our accusation, clearly stated in the report, is that the Israeli army is not taking the necessary precautions to distinguish between civilian and military targets."

This seemed a grossly presumptuous statement, as I observed at the time. Bouckaert made his claims, even though Israel's precision strikes had killed many hundreds of Lebanese, a majority of them again civilians, while Hizbullah rocket attacks had killed only small numbers of Israelis, a majority of them soldiers. This is what I wrote:

How does Bouckaert know that Israel's failure to distinguish between civilian and military targets was simply a technical failure, a failure to take precautions, and not intentional? Was he or another HRW

researcher sitting in one of the military bunkers in northern Israel when army planners pressed the button to unleash the missiles from their spy drones? Was he sitting alongside the air force pilots as they circled over Lebanon dropping their US-made bombs or tens of thousands of “cluster munitions”, tiny land mines that are now sprinkled over a vast area of south Lebanon? Did he have intimate conversations with the Israeli chiefs of staff about their war strategy? ...

He has no more idea than you or me what Israel’s military planners and its politicians decided was necessary to achieve their war goals. In fact, he does not even know what those goals were.

In bed with the State Dept

In its July 9 statement, HRW trod the same ground, beginning: “Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel appear to be indiscriminate or targeted at civilian population centers, which are war crimes.” Meanwhile, the Israeli offensive was characterised in the following terms: “Israeli attacks targeting homes may amount to prohibited collective punishment.”

So for HRW, Palestinian rocket attacks that had killed no one were “war crimes”, while Israel’s massive assault on Gaza, which quickly led to the deaths of dozens of Palestinians, many of them women and children, was simply “collective punishment”. Both were violations of international law, of course. Put another way, both were war crimes. But, as so often before in this conflict, HRW could only find the courage to articulate the accusation when it referred to Palestinians.

Similarly, in an outrageous mangling of international law, the statement also suggested that Hamas leaders were legitimate military targets even when not involved in combat. Israel, on this reckoning, was entitled to strike Hamas figures even as they slept or ate in their family homes. The problem was that, were such an interpretation to be consistently applied by HRW, it would sanction Hamas to target any home in Israel where a family member serves in the armed forces or is a reservist—that is, most Israeli homes.

As Helena Cobban, a Middle East expert, noted of a subsequent report by HRW, published on July 16, that made the same error:

How many times do we have to spell this out? The essential distinction in international law is not between ‘fighters’ and ‘civilians’ – which are the categories used throughout this HRW report – but between “combatants” and “noncombatants”. A fighter who is not currently engaged in either the conduct, the command, or the planning of military operations is not a combatant. ...It is quite illegal to target such an individual.

Dragging their heels

HRW’s July 16 report was at least an improvement on its earlier one, not least because it included actual case studies in Gaza, in which the evidence of war crimes was indisputable. But this is a pattern too: groups like HRW wade in at the beginning of an Israeli attack with equivocations, only finding their moral backbone later on, as the mounting evidence of Israeli war crimes starts to discomfort the international community. HRW does not lead the opposition to war crimes, as it should; it merely provides the excuse to seek a way out, but only after nearly everyone is agreed that it is time to bring things to an end.

In short, HRW is not the voice of a global moral conscience; it is an organisation keen to keep its access to, and credibility with, policy elites.

That is hardly surprising given that HRW, while styling itself as “one of the world’s leading independent [human rights] organizations”, has a virtual revolving door policy with the foreign policy establishment, especially the US state department.

The cosy ties between the U.S. administration and HRW have become so glaring that it prompted a recent letter of complaint signed by more than 100 public figures, including Nobel peace prize laureates Adolfo Perez Esquivel and Mairead Maguire, and the former UN Assistant Secretary General Hans von Sponeck.

They noted that HRW’s recently departed Washington advocacy director, Tom Malinowski, was a former special assistant to President Bill Clinton, and speechwriter to former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Last year, he left HRW to become an assistant to the current Secretary of State, John Kerry. But not before he had used his role at HRW to justify “under limited circumstances” the legitimacy of extraordinary renditions – the kidnapping and smuggling of individuals to torture sites out of official U.S. oversight.

Meanwhile, the vice-chair of HRW’s board of directors is Susan Manilow, who describes herself as “a longtime friend to Bill Clinton”. Also, HRW’s Americas’ advisory committee includes Myles Frechette, a former U.S. ambassador to Colombia, and Michael Shifter, a former director for the US government-funded National Endowment for Democracy. A recent member of the committee was Miguel Diaz, a CIA analyst in the 1990s who now works at the State Department.

Similarly, Suzanne Nossel, an exponent of pre-emptive war, left her senior position at HRW in the late 2000s to join the State Department. She later went on to join another leading human rights group, Amnesty International USA, this time as its executive director.

The rest of HRW’s board may not be so tainted by direct political connections, but most are hardly champions of the common man either. A significant number are millionaires who made their fortunes in the financial industries.

This incestuous relationship between the elite policy-

makers and the elite human rights community is endemic. Consider Unicef, the humanitarian children's fund of the UN. It has been virtually silent on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite masses of evidence of systematic abuse of children by Israel. Local watchdogs have tried to raise a cry about Israel's imprisonment and torture of children, and about the blockade of Gaza that has led to widespread and chronic malnutrition. Unicef has uttered barely a word in support.

Might that have anything to do with the fact that Anthony Lake is its executive director? That is the same Lake who served as National Security Advisor to Bill Clinton in the 1990s; and the same Clinton who has repeatedly declared his fealty to Israel.

International human rights monitors have adopted a bland, risk-averse "humanitarianism" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a way to avoid engaging with the conflict's more profound, and urgent, political dimensions. Like the media and the politicians, the great fear of international human rights groups is running foul of the Israel lobby.

Shaping the elite discourse

Nonetheless, Israel is in difficulty. It is gradually losing the battle for public opinion. Grandly, Israel calls this development "delegitimization", but in truth it simply a growing popular awareness of the realities of Israeli occupation, fueled by the more plentiful opportunities for the public to bypass official sources of information.

The task of Israel's lobbyists is to slow down this awakening as much as possible and to insulate policy-makers from its effects. That is the stated mission, for example, of Britain's fledgling pro-Israel media lobby, known as BICOM or the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre. BICOM is a product of Israel's concern at the increasingly globalized nature of English-language media.

For decades, the Israel lobby focused its work almost exclusively on the United States, expecting its super-power patron to keep it out of diplomatic, military and financial trouble. It developed a political lobbyfuelled—AIPAC, or the American Israel Public Affairs Committee—that worked to intimidate the U.S. Congress and, alongside it, the White House. No U.S. president, certainly not one up for re-election, dares turn down an invitation to speak at AIPAC's annual conference.

Less visible but just as important are Israel's lobbying organisations targeting the US media. The best known, the Anti-Defamation League, is led by Abraham Foxman, whose own bigotry should have discounted him from the job were the ADL really interested in defamation. But Foxman is an arch-exponent of defamation as long as it is directed at Israel's opponents.

In early July, for example, he wrote a commentary for the Huffington Post berating Palestinians for a culture "that espouses pure hatred of Israelis, and often Jews, regardless of their actions, and is wholly uninterested in living at peace

with its neighbors".

But the ADL has two other major allies in its campaign of intimidation of the U.S. media: Honest Reporting and Camera, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting. The latter has a journalists' "hall of shame" on its website that documents its run-ins with most of the major journalists who have covered the region for U.S. audiences.

I should disclose that I have a small place of honor there too for my brief flirtation with the *International Herald Tribune* after it was taken over by the *New York Times*. My two entries for supposed "inaccuracy" pale next to the current 33 listings for Jodi Rudoren, the *New York Times*' correspondent. Her appearances reflect neither a documented failure of accuracy (or rather, not in the way the lobby claims) nor a pro-Palestinian bias in her reporting. In fact, Rudoren has been almost as much of an Israel partisan as her predecessor, Ethan Bronner.

Rather, Camera's relentless campaign against Rudoren is a measure of the *New York Times*' critical role in shaping elite opinion. The lobbyists' goal is either to hound her into submission—to encourage her to self-censor more effectively than she already does—or to pressure her editors into moving her elsewhere, on the assumption that her replacement will find their room for journalistic integrity even further circumscribed.

Breach in the dam

With the U.S. Congress and media bullied into submission, Israel was largely able to shape elite opinion in the U.S. But a breach in the dam has grown over the past two decades. With the rise of the internet and social media, Americans enjoy access to a much more diverse media than they once did, including to liberal—at least by U.S. standards—publications in Britain such as the BBC and the Guardian.

Israel's lobbyists identified this danger early on, shortly after the outbreak of the second intifada in late 2000. Soon Israel had started to replicate the U.S. lobby in Britain, creating BICOM in 2002. It and other Israel lobby groups have over the years battered the BBC into submission, turning it into another mouthpiece for Israeli propaganda.

The extent of the corporation's capitulation became impossible to ignore in early 2009, when it refused for the first time in its history to broadcast adverts for the disaster emergencies committee's appeal, because the selected charitable cause was Gaza, which had just been laid waste by Israeli bombing. Even British politicians lambasted the BBC for its craven decision.

The lessons learnt by BICOM were no doubt derived from the lobby's long experience in the U.S. In 2010 BICOM staff joined Israeli strategists in drafting a paper called "Winning the Battle of the Narrative". In it, they made the following observation:

The political elites in Europe and in the U.S. are much more tolerant towards Israel's policies than [sic] the

wider public in those same countries; however, the public's mood and the media's coverage (especially in the U.K.) determine the government's leeway to pursue a pro-Israeli foreign policy agenda.

Jonathan Cummings, the former director of BICOM's Israel office, noted the same year that British media were influencing elites outside the U.K., presumably a reference to the U.S. "With media outlets like the BBC, the Guardian, and the Financial Times playing an increasingly significant part in framing the issue well beyond its own borders, British attitudes carry far."

He suggested that pro-Israel lobbyists should therefore reinvigorate their efforts to "create barriers to delegitimation, insulating policy-making environments" from public opinion.

This activity is effective. It is the reason why the policymakers, the media and the most influential international human rights organisations still consistently fail to convey the shocking reality of what Israel is doing on the ground to Palestinians. It is why public opinion is still rarely reflected in foreign policy decisions affecting Israel.

This assault on Gaza, like the earlier ones, will leave hundreds of Palestinians dead, a majority of them civilians. It will end neither the siege nor the resistance to it. It will outrage public opinion around the globe. But our elites will carry on giving Israel financial, military and diplomatic cover, as they have now done for more than six decades. **CP**

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Let's Stop Calling It a Drought

The Crisis Over California's Water

BY JOSHUA FRANK

"Whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting over."
- Mark Twain

It doesn't take long once you've left the greater Los Angeles area, away from all the lush lawns, water features, green parkways and manicured foliage to see that California is in the midsts of a real, and potentially deadly water crisis. Acres and acres of abandoned farms, dry lake beds, empty reservoirs—the water is simply no longer there and likely won't ever be back.

What's happening here in California is far more than a 'severe drought' as the media has dubbed the situation. The

word 'drought' gives the impression that this is all short-lived, an inconvenience we have to deal with for a little while. But the lack of water isn't temporary, it's the new norm. California's ecology as some 38 million residents know it is forever changing—and climate change is the culprit. At least that's the prognosis a few well-respected climatologists have been saying for the last two decades, and their predictions have not only been accurate, they've been conservative in their estimates.

UC Santa Cruz Professor Lisa Sloan co-authored a 2004 report in which she and her colleague Jacob Sewall predicted the melting of the Arctic ice shelf would cause a decrease in precipitation in California and hence a severe drought. The Arctic melting, they claimed, would warp the offshore jet stream in the Pacific Ocean. Not only have their models proved correct, Prof. Sloan recently told Joe Fromm of *ThinkProgress* she believes "the actual situation in the next few decades could be even more dire" than their study suggested.

As they anticipated ten years ago, the jet stream has indeed shifted, essentially pushing winter storms up north and out of California. As a result, snowpack in the Sierra Nevadas, which feeds water to most of Southern California and the agricultural operators of the Central Valley, have all but disappeared. Winters are drier and springs are no longer wet, which means when the warm summer months roll around there's no water to be cultivated.

The Los Angeles basin is a region that has long relied on snowmelt from mountains hundreds of miles away to feed its insatiable appetite for development, but that resource is rapidly evaporating. It is, perhaps, a just irony for the water thieves of Southern California that their wells are finally running dry. Prudence and restraint in water usage will soon be forced upon those who value the extravagant over the practical. It's the new way of the West as climate change's many impacts come to fruition.

Not that you'd notice much of this new reality as you travel L.A.'s bustling streets. Pools in the San Fernando Valley remain full, while tanned Californians wash their prized vehicles in the streets and soak their green lawns in the evenings. A \$500 fine can be handed out to residents who don't abide by the outdoor watering restrictions now in place, but I've yet to see any water cops patrolling neighborhoods for water wasters. In fact, in Long Beach, where I live, water managers have actually admitted they aren't planning to write any tickets. "We don't really intend to issue any fines, at least right now," said Matthew Veeh of the Long Beach Water Department.

Meanwhile up in Sacramento, Gov. Jerry Brown has called on all those living in the state to reduce their water use by 20 percent. That's almost one percentage point for every California community that is at risk of running out of water by the end of the year. Gov. Brown's efforts to conserve water

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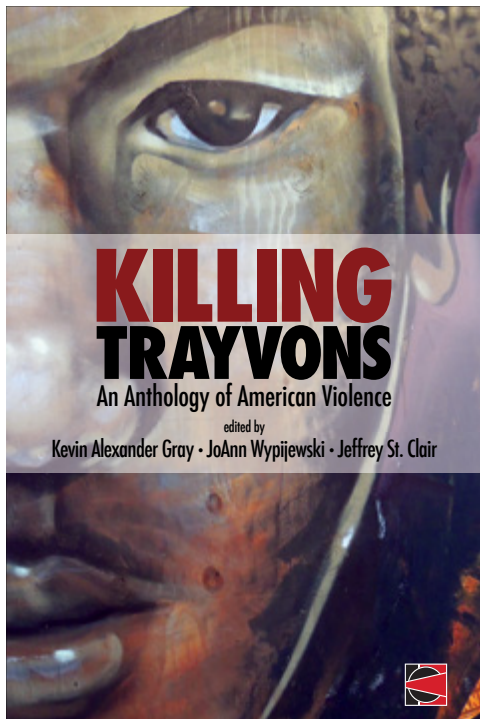
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Killing Trayvons tracks the case and explores why Trayvon's name and George Zimmerman's not guilty verdict symbolized all the grieving, the injustice, the profiling and free passes based on white privilege and police power: the long list of Trayvons known and unknown. With contributions from Robin D.G. Kelley, Rita Dove, Cornel West and Amy Goodman, Thandisizwe Chimurenga, Alexander Cockburn, Etan Thomas, Tara Skurtu, bell hooks and Quassan Castro, June Jordan, Jesse Jackson, Tim Wise, Patricia Williams, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Vijay Prashad, Jesmyn Ward and more, *Killing Trayvons* is an essential addition to the literature on race, violence and resistance.

Edited by
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