THE WORLD HAS CHANGED AND WE MUST CHANGE ALONG WITH IT

BY ELI LAKE

PUTIN’S AMERICAN APOLOGISTS
JOSHUA MURAVCHIK

NEOCONSERVATISM: A VINDICATION
JOHN PODHORETZ
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MARK TWAIN said that history doesn’t repeat itself, but that it often rhymes. We're rhyming today with the late 1970s, in uncanny ways. To take the most obvious: Inflation is on the rise and is about to skyrocket due to a disruption in the global oil market, just as was the case in 1979. Crime is on the rise as well.

There are other parallels. But history is moving faster.

History: In 1975, the United States bugged out of Saigon and seemed to be embracing a full-scale retreatment from its role in the world. Four years later, at the end of 1979, Moscow invaded Afghanistan.

Rhyme: In 2021, the United States bugged out of Kabul, producing images horrifyingly similar to those of April 1975. A mere six months later, Moscow invaded Ukraine.

The 1979 invasion of Afghanistan was a hinge moment. It reawakened America to the existential threat posed by the world-dominating ambitions of the Soviet Union. And it came as a terrible shock to the sitting president, who had centered his foreign policy on an arms treaty with the USSR that he viewed as so essential that he had agreed to enshrine Soviet numerical superiority when it came to the number of nuclear warheads.

After the invasion, Jimmy Carter notoriously said he’d learned more about the Soviet Union in a week than he’d learned in his lifetime—a sentence that, in retrospect, crystallized the reasons for his humiliating 10-point defeat at the hands of Ronald Reagan less than a year later.

In 2022, the idea that Vladimir Putin’s Russia would actually roll the tanks and march the soldiers across the border into Ukraine seemed so irrational and peculiar to the Western consciousness that most of us—and in that “us” I would even include the heroic Volodymyr Zelensky—were living in a kind of weird haze of disbelief and denial that it could even happen. Then it did.

And the surprise Jimmy Carter had felt in 1979 was as nothing compared to the shock wave across Europe in 2022. It took the United States three years to double its defense budget after the Soviet invasion. It took Germany three days. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced his country would increase its defense spending from 47 billion euros to 100 billion euros 72 hours after the Russians crossed the Ukrainian border.

History. Speeding up. And rhyming.

Will this be a hinge moment in history as well? If so, the rhymes of history may be heard in the surprising present urgency of neoconservatism.

Throughout the 1970s, the band of writers and thinkers who came to be known as “neoconservatives” had taken defiantly unfashionable positions when it came to matters of defense and foreign policy. The neoconservatives opposed negotiations and treaties with...
the Soviet Union, which they considered a great evil. They reviled the United Nations for its “Zionism is racism” resolution at a time when the UN was almost sacrosanct (millions of little boys and girls across America, including me, had proudly toted orange tsedakah boxes on Halloween to raise money for UNICEF). And they feared that the United States had, in the wake of Vietnam, undergone what a 1975 symposium in this magazine called “A Failure of Nerve” that would have global consequences.

The general opinion among the American cognoscenti was that the neoconservatives were hysterics and vulgarians incapable of seeing shades of gray. A more mature sense of the world’s complexity was supposedly represented first by the hard-won realism of the establishmentarians who had embraced the policy of détente with the Soviet Union—and second, by hipper foreign-policy thinkers whose worldview was encapsulated by Carter’s May 1977 declaration that America had gotten over its “inordinate fear of Communism.”

Then came 1979. The year began with the Iranian revolution engendering an oil crisis. By the end of the year, Iran’s fundamentalists had taken 52 American diplomats hostage as crowds chanted “Death to America” in the greatest public humiliation the United States had ever experienced as a nation. A thousand miles from the U.S. border, Nicaragua fell to a puppet guerrilla army of the Cubans and the Soviets while a similar puppet force was threatening to do the same in El Salvador—thus potentially creating a Soviet-friendly anti-U.S. bloc on the American subcontinent.

Suddenly the vulgarity of the neoconservatives didn’t seem quite so vulgar. But they remained prophets without much honor in the quarters in which they had traveled for most of their adult lives. Both the old and new establishments were largely impervious to the way history was vindicating their warnings and fears.

Thus began the integration of the neoconservatives into the conservative movement and the Republican Party by Ronald Reagan, who became the dominating figure in both in the 1980s. What they brought to Reaganism was one simple policy approach: deterrence.

This magazine was the epicenter of foreign-policy neoconservatism. Irving Kristol’s magazine, the Public Interest, was dedicated to domestic-policy neoconservatism. Commentary hammered home the flawed ideas of the prevailing consensus on world order. The Public Interest did the same on matters ranging from housing policy to urban policy to energy policy to criminal justice. What they had in common was this: Neoconservatives believed that the purpose of government was both to defend and protect our liberties from threats at home and abroad. How could this best be effected? Deterrence.

If the greatest threat to our liberty abroad from the end of World War II until the end of the Cold War was the Soviet Union, the only effective way to face it down was to work to deter its ambitions and its influence. You could not do so by entering into agreements with it. You needed to match its aggressions with countermeasures that would make those aggressions costly.

If they invade Afghanistan, you arm the Afghan rebels. If they seek beachheads in the Americas, you arm the Nicaraguan rebels even as you support the El Salvadoran government against their Communist rebels. Install medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe to counteract the huge Soviet military presence in the East. The ultimate move in this regard was the Strategic Defense Initiative, which sought to use American ingenuity and scientific knowhow as a countermeasure against the Soviet nuclear arsenal.

These policies were wildly controversial, even though their aims were actually rather modest: Pin the bad actors down and raise the cost of their bad conduct to unacceptable levels. But for those who believed the best way to deal with the Soviet Union was to imagine that it was not an enemy or even an adversary but simply a nation with a different approach to things with which we could still do business, the neoconservative notion of matching Soviet moves pawn by pawn seemed openly belligerent and crazy.

Domestically, deterrence was achieved by countering the worst human impulses through the proper use of defensive protocols that would prevent the bad behavior from taking place. Contain the impulses and you could let everybody go on with their lives. In practical terms, that meant eyes on the street and cops on the beat.
There had been a policy revolution in the 1960s known as “911 policing” that essentially changed the nature of policing—cops were to respond to crimes after they happened, to wait for the call after the violence had been done. It was the domestic neoconservatives who laid the groundwork over more than 20 years for the crime drop that changed America for the better beginning in the early 1990s. Every one of the ideas they presented—broken-windows theory, COMPSTAT-driven deployment of police forces—was designed to enhance deterrence. So too with the way America dealt with wrongdoers: It criticized the movement toward more lenient sentencing because it limited the deterrent effect of punishment, even going so far as to say it would be dangerous to eliminate the death penalty because without the ultimate sanction all other forms of punitive incarceration would gradually be compromised.

Deterrence in domestic matters went beyond crime. The general proposition that good policy largely involved containing dangerous human impulses meant also grappling with the unintended consequences of well-intentioned social policy gone awry—as when cradle-to-grave welfare made it a benefit to be a single parent. The problems brought about by welfare policy also led to revolutionary changes no one really believed would ever take place, such as the welfare reform Bill Clinton signed into law in 1996—just as no one really believed the Soviet Union would collapse or that crime would drop by 80 percent.

It turned out that deterrence was not only simple but very powerful. And very practical. But the criticism persisted even as deterrence showed its value. Take stop-and-frisk, the most controversial policing behavior during the crime-drop period. It was ground-level deterrence at its most basic. It warned you not to carry a gun if you don’t want it taken away from you and don’t want to get arrested for possessing an illegal firearm. And second, it removed the gun from circulation before it could be used. Nonetheless, stop-and-frisk was largely eliminated. Now, with the crime surge in New York City and elsewhere, it’s coming back. But with a new name. Because history rhymes.

All of this had a clear moral superstructure. Domestically, there were good guys (people who went about their daily lives) and bad guys (people who preyed on them). Perhaps more important, there were bad guys abroad (the Communists, the Arab oil states). And there was a giant Good Guy—the United States.

That was the hardest pill of all for the cognoscenti to swallow, because they did not believe that the United States was good—and their moral frame was much more about restraining American ambitions rather than the ambitions of those who would do ordinary Americans harm.

Deterrence is what America lost in the years before Vladimir Putin took the gamble of going into Ukraine, and it is deterrence we need to restore. That is why this is a neoneoconservative moment.

And one of the reasons Twain was right about history not repeating itself but rhyming instead is that the key foes the neoconservatives face when it comes to the moral frame of deterrence—the idea that America is and should be a force for good—are no longer hip liberals but rather “traditional conservatives” who have taken their place as the leading anti-American voices of our time.

And we will prevail over these anti-Americans just as the neocons of the 1970s defeated the cognoscenti of their day, because our approach is right and our cause is just. 

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To the Editor:

A BE GREENWALD is correct that a counter-revolution is underway (“Yes, There Is a Counter-Revolution,” February). And the left is terrified that the gains they’ve made in the past couple of years will be lost. In response, they have launched a campaign to delegitimize the counter-revolution as an extremist, conspiracy-theorizing, violent, far-right threat to democracy. This line of argument is popular in national media and is trickling into coverage of local politics as well. In reading a local California newspaper about the successful recall effort against Shasta County Supervisor Leonard Moty, I noticed that the authors emphasized that those conducting the recall were “extremists” or “militia” members who deal in “conspiracy theories.” This was just the reporting. To drive home the point, the same paper featured an editorial decrying how “extremists” are putting democracy itself in danger. Seems like recalling a supervisor is the very essence of democracy, but such is the response to the counter-revolution.

BRECK HENDERSON
Arlington, Texas

To the Editor:

A BE GREENWALD’s “Yes, There Is a Counter-Revolution” gives a clear view of the macro events and cultural patterns of the present-day U.S. It’s a great piece. I just wish balance between good and bad news was better. There can be no doubt that the enemies of liberalism are winning right now. But Greenwald is right that the battle is joined. And Commentary is on the front lines, which gives me hope.

DAVID BRECKMAN
Los Angeles, California

April 2022
Atlantic Anxiety

To the Editor:

I APPRECIATED Christine Rosen’s fresh, incisive thoughts on the ever-darkening tone of the Atlantic (“The Atlantic’s Nervous Breakdown,” February). What didn’t make sense, however, was her criticism of the magazine’s having a target audience—educated, affluent, left-leaning readers. Serving the needs and interests of a target audience is a foundational principle of magazine publishing. Additionally, Rosen’s final line left me in disbelief. The starkly real possibility that America is on track to becoming an autocracy is anything but an “astonishingly petty anxiety.”

Deborah Boldt
Santa Fe, New Mexico

To the Editor:

THANKS FOR publishing Christine Rosen’s column on the Atlantic. What she writes is entirely true. I am a political conservative and thought, last year, that I should read more of what’s being written on the other side of the ideological divide. I subscribed to the Atlantic and have found it very depressing. So much so that I sometimes don’t even want to open it. At first I diagnosed the problem as merely Trump Derangement Syndrome, but even now, with Donald Trump mostly gone, the Atlantic continues to be depressing. I greatly appreciate Rosen’s thoughts on the matter.

Mark Green
Los Altos, California

Commentary

April 2022 Vol. 153 : No. 4

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To the Editor:

I AGREE WITH Christine Rosen, and I cancelled my subscription to the Atlantic because I cracked the code on its teeter-totter trope: Brace thyself! The end of civilization is nigh! And now in happier news, squirrels, BBQ potato chips, and naps bring unexpected joys.

May the managers responsible for debasing this once-proud journal move elsewhere to peddle their alarmism. Perhaps a periodical titled Exploding Sun—a guide to living, laughing, and learning during the pre-vaporization epoch—would best suit their talents.

Jeff Kramer
Jamesville, New York

To the Editor:

Hear, hear for Christine Rosen’s incisive, entirely deserved, and timely takedown of the Atlantic. As someone who fits Rosen’s description of the Atlantic’s target liberal demographic, I recognized the problem in the past few months and became a former subscriber. While substantive insight into legitimate concerns is always welcome, the clickbait that the magazine promulgates isn’t worth the time or money of a subscription.

Christopher Smith
Lake Forest, California

Christine Rosen writes:

I APPRECIATE Deborah Boldt’s reminder that most magazines aim to reach a target audience. Where we differ, however, is that she assumes that the Atlantic aims to speak only to that target audience, when in fact the magazine’s writers and editors frequently scold the general public for failing to conform to their own more narrow (and largely elite) concerns. If these writers and editors were only proffering advice to one another, there would be little to admonish. But in seeking to tell everyone else how to live, they often overstep. Additionally, I did not label the particular idea that America is on track to becoming an autocracy “astonishingly petty.” I disagree with that premise entirely and seek to challenge the Atlantic’s constant doomsaying about democracy. I am far more optimistic about our democracy’s ability to overcome challenges and thrive, as are, I believe, many of the Atlantic’s readers.

Mark Green is quite right to identify Donald Trump as someone the Atlantic loves to loathe—and someone to whom it devotes a great deal of time and energy, even after he lost reelection. One would hope that the magazine would spend as much time analyzing the political decisions (and missteps) of the current president as they do those of the former one. Likewise, Jeff Kramer is correct that alarmism fuels a great many narratives in the Atlantic’s stories these days. Those narratives, as well as the clickbait articles that Christopher Smith notes, are the lifeblood of the website. If that alarmism and apocalypticism are alienating thoughtful liberal readers like Mr. Smith, as well as driving away potential conservative readers such as Mr. Green, the magazine will ultimately lose its broader general-interest appeal, to say nothing of its subscriber base.

Eric Nelson argues convincingly that, for Wagner, Wotan and his regime of laws and contracts represents the liberal world order as corrupted by the influence of “Jewishness” (“Wagner and the Anti-Semitism of ‘The Ring,’” February). And this Jewishness is traditionally thought to be embodied by Wotan’s nemesis, Alberich. It’s interesting to observe that these two characters are much more profound and convincing artistic creations than the “free hero” Siegfried, the young idol who defies the manipulations of gods and dwarves and yet seems to exist more as an abstract ideal than a real person. I’ve long thought that the milquetoast Siegfried predicted the banality and unironic kitsch of Nazi-sponsored art, with its wholesome specimens of German manhood. The fact that it’s Wotan’s struggles and despairs that capture modern audiences’ sympathies (more so than Siegfried’s death) redeems the Ring as a work of dramatic art, despite the repugnant views of its creator.

Elie Glyn
Watertown, Massachusetts

Wagner's Music is undeniably marvelous. Siegfried’s
death and funeral march, the Entrance of the Guests in Tannhäuser, and the Sailor's Chorus “Steurmann, las die wacht” come back to me undiminished after all the years.

Of course, I had encountered various theories of Wagner’s anti-Semitism filtered through friends and intermission lecturers. Eric Nelson’s analysis is the most coherent analysis I’ve read or heard. That it appears in our era of leftist dogma is an encouraging omen that the truth will yet unravel the fabric of lies, the orchestrated narrative from which we hope to extricate ourselves.

Michael Dodaro
Seattle, Washington

To the Editor:

I THANK Brian Stewart for his article on Ukraine, and I commend COMMENTARY for publishing it ("Protect Ukraine Now," February). I joined the Army National Guard in 2014 after watching with shock and horror the annexation of Crimea and the hybrid war started by Russia in eastern Ukraine. I saw a bully and a victim, and I felt a very American rage. Alas, I was never sent to Ukraine. Crimea is still Vladimir Putin’s, and Joe Biden is now bungling the larger affair. It isn’t entirely his fault, of course. Many factors went into where we are now. But he’s not doing a good job of dealing with Putin.

Biden’s disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan sent me spiraling into despair, and I continue to be eaten up with dread that more of the same is coming. It used to feel as if the U.S. stood for something, but we are becoming just another wishy-washy, wealthy country, bloated on the successes of our glory days, and slowly succumbing to cultural decay. If we’re not trying to make other people’s lives better, what’s the point of being such a powerful country?

All this is to say, I’m glad some people are honest about what needs to be done. I just wish I could believe that we’ll do the right thing.

Thanks for all the good that COMMENTARY does.

Samantha D.
Hometown withheld

Brian Stewart writes:

A TIME when many Americans have grown weary of global leadership, it’s heartening to see that some still believe in the concept and are capable of mustering outrage at the sight of authoritarian bullying against a sovereign nation on the edge of Europe.

This aggression should evoke the strongest possible response from the West that prudence allows. Thus far, in the councils of Western governments, that response has been mixed. Some of the policies I endorsed in my essay to deter and counter Russian aggression—from suspending the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to providing military equipment to Ukraine—have begun to be implemented by Washington and its NATO partners. Nonetheless, much more remains to be done to check the Kremlin’s ambitions and wear down its morale. A coordinated program to reduce Europe’s dependence on Russian oil and gas is also long overdue.

Russia’s aggression in Ukraine today poses the most severe challenge to the notion of a Europe “whole, free, and at peace” that we have witnessed in the post–Cold War era. The United States and the rest of the free world should regard and treat it as such.

CORRECTION: An editing error introduced some confusion into Kevin D. Williamson’s review of Sam Quinones’s The Least of Us. It was Ricardo Quinones, not his son, Sam, who was president of the Association of Literary Scholars and who served on the board of the National Council for the Humanities. COMMENTARY regrets the error.
SOME EVENTS seem impossible right up to the minute that they take place. The idea that terrorists might turn airliners into missiles was relegated to novels until the morning of September 11, 2001. The global financial system seemed impregnable before Lehman Brothers collapsed on September 15, 2008. For many people, the chances that a reality-TV star would become the first president without any experience in government or the military seemed less than zero until 2:29 a.m. on November 9, 2016. For decades, a pandemic that would kill 6 million people worldwide in two years and unleash long-lasting social, economic, and cultural havoc was the basis of science-fiction movie plots. Then the first case of Covid-19 was confirmed in the United States.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is another crisis that looked like an unlikely prospect for months but now seems inevitable in retrospect. In the run-up to the war, President Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken issued warning after warning that Russia was preparing to attack its neighbor. Not everyone agreed. The notion that Russia would launch the largest military offensive in Europe since the end of World War II seemed fantastic, unreal. Tank columns seizing territory? That’s anachronistic, the skeptics said. The bombing of population centers? This is the 21st century. We know better. Vladimir Putin is a risk-taker. He’s not a maniac.

The experts said that Putin did not have enough troops to change the Ukrainian regime and occupy a sovereign nation. They said that U.S. intelligence had failed in the past and could well be wrong again. They noted that Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky was minimizing tensions between his country and Russia. They observed that most Ukrainians did not act as if war was imminent. They cited Putin’s record of opportunism, of “gray-zone” tactics, of cyberattacks, propaganda, and disinformation as evidence that he would pull back from a full-scale offensive. “Why Putin Won’t Invade Ukraine,” read the headline of a representative article published on the website of the Atlantic Council on February 16. The piece listed all the reasons an invasion would be bad for Putin. The author proposed a scenario that “suits Putin’s interests far better than an uncertain military adventure, which is why he will choose it.”

Putin chose war instead. He chose to follow the logic he had set out in a 5,000-word essay published in July 2021. Its title was “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.” It’s where Putin made his ghoulish case that the borders of Ukraine are illegitimate. Where he asserted that Ukrainians and Russians are “one people.” Where he admonished readers that the Ukrainian nation-state exists at Russia’s pleasure.

Putin never wavered from these arguments. Throughout the buildup of Russian forces on Ukraine’s borders, despite Biden’s threat of sanctions and French president Emmanuel Macron’s shuttle diplomacy, Putin continued to say that Ukrainian nationhood was a fiction. He called Ukraine’s democratic government fascist. He blamed America and the West for leaving

Matthew Continetti is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Matthew	Continetti

WASHINGTON COMMENTARY

Believe Them

MATTHEW CONTINETTI

April 2022
him no other option than conquest. “The so-called Western bloc, formed by the United States in its own image and likeness, all of it is an ‘empire of lies,’” he said during his February 24 speech announcing the “special military operation” against Ukraine. He would “de-Nazify” a country with a Jewish president. He would retaliate if the “empire of lies” got in his way.

In launching his war, Putin did exactly what he had shown every indication of preparing to do for some time. Why, then, was it so difficult for so many experts to take him seriously? Why did so many people, including this writer, look with incomprehension and disbelief upon his statements and actions in the final days before the beginning of operations? Why were we unable to assimilate into our picture of reality a dictator who would coldly unleash premeditated hell on 44 million men, women, and children?

“In the face of unfathomable evil,” wrote the late Charles Krauthammer, “decent people are psychologically disarmed.” And when autocrats resort to violence, citizens of democracies that enjoy the rule of law are shocked. That’s not how we resolve disputes. For us, organized violence is rare. Terrible outcomes are uncommon. We seldom believe what our own elected officials say, anyway. Don’t expect us to take seriously the ravings of despots.

But it’s about time we started doing so. After Ukraine, there is no excuse for downplaying or ignoring authoritarian rhetoric and malevolent deeds. After Ukraine, we know that tyrants mean it when they make audacious claims and demand remarkable concessions. Putin acted just as he said he would. Many of us wouldn’t listen. Many of us didn’t want to.

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In November 2021, Chinese state media reported that Xi had told President Biden, “Should the separatist forces for ‘Taiwan independence’ provoke us, force our hands, or even cross the red line, we will be compelled to take resolute measures.” Should other parties enter the conflict, Xi went on, well, “whoever plays with fire gets burnt.”

After Ukraine, we need to listen to the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has spent decades calling for the end of Israel. Last May, for example, Khamenei gave a lesson in Jew-hatred and anti-Zionism when he said that Iran has no greater enemy than Israel and that “the fight against this despotic regime is the fight against oppression and the fight against terrorism. And this is a public duty to fight against this regime.”

Even as President Biden punished Russia for its actions, however, he was relying on Russia as the intermediary in nuclear talks with an Iranian government that poses an existential threat to Israel. Even as Biden rallied the world in support of Ukrainian freedom, his intermediaries prepared to lift sanctions on the world’s largest state sponsor of terrorism. The same administration that turned out to be right about Vladimir Putin’s program in Ukraine lives in la-la land when it comes to the stated intentions of a theocracy whose malign behavior in the Middle East aims at regional hegemony and the eradication of the Jewish state.

What proof is there that Xi Jinping and Ayatollah Khamenei are any less committed to their diabolical ideologies than Vladimir Putin is? Why should we be less worried about a Chinese invasion of Taiwan or an Iranian attack on Israel than about Putin’s designs in Ukraine? When strongmen tell you they are about to sow chaos, don’t close your ears. What they say might sound unlikely. It might strike you as out of this world. It isn’t. Don’t dismiss the leaders of rogue states. Don’t doubt them. Believe them.
ON FEBRUARY 26, 2022, as Russian tanks rolled somewhat haltingly toward Kiev, Germany was fighting a battle of its own. It was trying to keep the lights on. Since 2000, Germany has spent 500 billion euros on its Energiewende program, a campaign to replace fossil fuels and nuclear power mostly with wind and solar energy. That Saturday was a typical winter day in northern Europe, with temperatures in the thirties and forties and light winds. But as the sun settled toward the west, Germany’s vast phalanxes of wind turbines and solar panels performed exactly as they so often have in the past: poorly. By 5:15 p.m., wind and solar combined were producing less than 7 percent of the electricity the country needed. Coal and natural gas made up most of the balance.

The lion’s share of that coal and gas came from Russia. Which was, to put it politely, a geopolitical inconvenience for the richest, and supposedly most powerful, country in Western Europe.

Energy has always been a motivation for war. During World War II, energy hunger was one of the reasons Japan occupied the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and why Germany tried, and failed, to take Russia’s oil-producing Caucasus region. But energy can also be a motivation for war when one nation has a surplus and its neighbors don’t have enough. An energy-rich country can act with impunity, while countries dependent on imports need to tread delicately. Vladimir Putin knows this. But Germany and the rest of Europe seem to have forgotten.

When Germany launched its Energiewende program, it hoped to become the world leader in developing a zero-carbon economy—a green beacon unto the nations. For years, Germany basked in the praise of climate activists and environmental NGOs. As recently as this past month, the New Yorker asked, “Can Germany show us how to leave coal behind?” (Hint: When a publication puts a question mark at the end of a headline, the answer is almost always “no.”) The country didn’t just build wind and solar farms, it also shut down most of its perfectly good, perfectly safe nuclear reactors.

If you look at a globe, you will see that Germany is closer to the latitude of Anchorage than to that of New York. Winter days are short and gloomy. As for the wind? Let’s just say it comes and goes. So whenever Germany’s renewable sources fall short—which is often—the country turns to reliable sources: coal and gas. And it seems the more “renewable” Germany’s grid becomes, the more it needs those fossil fuels for backup.

Germany is not alone. Most of Europe is in the same leaky boat. (France, which went on a nuclear-plant-building spree in the 1980s, is happily immune to these problems.) In a post on Bari Weiss’s Common Sense Substack, renewable-energy skeptic Michael Shellenberger lays out the numbers: “In 2016, 30 percent of the natural gas consumed by the European Union came...
from Russia. In 2018, that figure jumped to 40 percent ... and by early 2021, it was nearly 47 percent.” It still wasn’t enough. That’s why Germany was desperate to see the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline designed to bring in even more Russian gas. (Trump tried to stop the pipeline with sanctions; Biden lifted the sanctions early in his administration.)

Putin wasn’t just aware of this trend; he engineered it. Today, Russia is one of the world’s top producers of fossil fuels. But it uses less than half of what it takes out of the ground. The rest it exports. Meanwhile, as Shellenger documents, Europe consumes 15 million barrels of oil a day, but produces less than four. It consumes 560 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year but produces only 230 billion.

While Europe was buying solar panels, banning fracking, and shuttering nuclear plants, Russia was drilling wells and building nuclear plants. It’s a funny thing: In the West, the smart set will tell you that nuclear-power plants are too expensive and take too long to build. They also claim that wind and solar have made nuclear obsolete. And yet in Russia—a country awash in dirt-cheap gas, oil, and coal—Putin found it worth his while to double the country’s nuclear capacity in just a couple of decades. Having more nuclear power at home meant he could send more fossil fuels to his increasingly needy European customers. He didn’t do that out of generosity.

It’s not like Germany wasn’t warned. In 2013, Holman Jenkins wrote an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal titled, “Germany Reinvents the Energy Crisis.” That piece was one of many pointing out the engineering and economic pitfalls in trying to create a mostly renewable power grid. President Trump ruffled European sensibilities when he repeatedly cautioned that Germany was becoming “a hostage of Russia.”

But Germany is a nation with a lingering reverence for a romantic notion of nature, and a strong anti-capitalist tradition. And, of course, the country had been literally on the front lines of the Cold War. One can understand how a fear of nuclear annihilation could evolve into a revulsion toward nuclear energy. As far back as the 1970s, a popular meme in German youth culture was a pin depicting a smiling sun with the words Atomkraft? Nein, Danke!—”Nuclear Power? No, Thanks!” The country’s influential Green Party grew out of that movement. Even nominally conservative leaders such as former chancellor Angela Merkel have proved powerless to challenge this ingrained bias. Wind and solar became the only energy option that one could discuss in polite company.

By late 2021, it was obvious Energiewende was faltering. Renewable energy production dropped that year while coal use climbed 18 percent. Prices were spiking and the cold weather was coming on. Putin was limbering up his military. Still, the green juggernaut rolled on: On January 1, 2022, Germany closed three of its last six nuclear power plants, promising to shutter the rest by year’s end. In geopolitical terms, it was the equivalent of a dog rolling over to expose its belly.

Putin surely drew a lesson from Germany’s self-defeating energy policies—and those of Europe as a whole: No matter what values Europe says it believes in, he must have thought, it will compromise them for energy. Germany wasn’t going to allow its lights to go out on behalf of Ukraine. And it might have worked, too.

If Ukraine had crumbled overnight as Putin expected, Germany and other European nations might have huffed, issued a few token sanctions, and then gone back to business. But Putin didn’t count on the stunning bravery of the Ukrainians and their inspiring president. It turns out that the Europeans still have the capacity to feel shame—and empathy. Almost overnight, Germany announced it was halting the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, increasing its military spending, and even sending weapons to Ukraine. The whole of Europe quickly agreed on a deep and painful array of sanctions.

There are limits, of course. Concerning banking sanctions, German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock warned, “We buy 50 percent of our coal from Russia. If we exclude Russia from SWIFT, the lights in Germany will go out.” In the end, carve-outs were arranged to let Europe keep buying Russian fuel. So Putin will keep earning his billions (which will come in handy now that his invasion has turned into a grinding slog rather than a quick decapitation). The U.S. might have responded to the crisis by lifting Biden’s restrictions on natural-gas drilling, approving the Keystone Pipeline, and restoring energy independence. Instead, in his State of the Union address, the president promised to “double America’s clean energy production in solar, wind, and so much more.” The German model, in other words.

You’d think the Ukraine crisis would spur a more sensible approach to energy. Germany did briefly consider a plan to keep its remaining nuclear plants open. But Green Party officials quickly shot down that proposal. Here at home, the Biden administration keeps responding to surging fuel prices by touting the benefits of electric cars.

Meanwhile, France has announced a plan to build more than a dozen new nuclear reactors. So while Germany and the U.S. cling to unattainable renewable fantasies, French citizens get energy that is both clean and bon marché. Who would have guessed that France—France!—would emerge as the West’s leader in hard-headed energy pragmatism? But here we are.
AS I WRITE THESE words, the war in Ukraine continues, producing images harrowing, terrifying, and at times inspiring. The outcome, at this point, is uncertain. Yet I am certain that this Passover, as I sit at the seder, one image will be on my mind. It is a video of a Jewish bakery in Dnipro, Ukraine, with the war already begun, working to produce shmurah matzah, the unleavened bread eaten at the seder Passover evening, bread that is still baked by hand. The Jerusalem Post profiled the bakery, explaining that these Jews bake not for themselves, but for the Jewish world. “The bakery was established more than 20 years ago in the city of Dnipro in the Dnipropetrovsk region, bordering the separatist province of Donetsk,” the Post reported. “A few months ago, a branch of the Ukrainian Matzah Bakery was also opened in the city of Uman.” It continued:

“The two bakeries employ about 90 people, most of them members of the local Jewish community,” said the new branch manager, Mendy Stumble. “The bakery’s target this year is 100 tons of handmade matza. Most matzahs are exported to the former Soviet Union, Western Europe and other countries. A small portion of the Matzah are intended for use by the 160 communities united by the Jewish Federation of Ukraine.”

The story highlighted simultaneously the crisis in which the several hundred thousand Ukrainian Jews now find themselves—along with everyone else in the country—but also the miracle that is the rebirth of religious fortitude, and Jewish faith, in a land where once all such faith was forbidden.

Anyone familiar with history must be surprised by the fact that today, the Jewish community in Ukraine bakes matzah on behalf of much of the Jewish world. I remember the shock in discovering this myself when, shopping before Passover several years ago, I pondered the supermarket’s list of prices of what is known colloquially as “hand matzah.” I recognized the names of Hasidic bakeries in Borough Park and Williamsburg. And then, I suddenly saw: “Ukraine.” Intrigued, I discovered an article that described how the bakery sustains Jew and non-Jew alike:

Production costs and taxes in Ukraine are so low that the factory can still afford to charge customers significantly less than its competitors in the West....Rabbi Meir Stambler, the

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owner of the matzah factory, notes that even as the Jewish law requires that the handling of matzah and its ingredients be done by Jews only, the factory also employs more than a dozen non-Jews who perform other tasks, including distribution, and this, he says, means the bakery “not only puts matzah shmurah on Jewish tables, but also helps build bridges and do mitzvot [good deeds] with non-Jews.”

This is the bakery that is continuing to bake with war upon them. Strikingly, as Dovid Margolin has written, in the early Soviet era, the Jewish community of the region was led by Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneerson, the father of the late Lubavitcher rebbe, and it was this rabbi’s dedication to ensuring the kosher status of the matzah made there that landed him in Stalin’s prison. Now the Jewish community of that very same site makes matzah for the Jewish world.

Since then, I have often gone out of my way to purchase this matzah of Ukraine for Passover. To me, the historical poetry was profound. Matzah is the food of freedom, eaten as a reminder of the Israelites hurriedly preparing bread for their journey without waiting for it to rise, as liberty suddenly descended and they hurriedly departed Egypt.

But matzah embodies something more. The reading of the Haggadah at the seder begins by holding aloft the purported bread of freedom and announcing (in Aramaic) ha lachma anya—this is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. We are remembering the first Passover celebration, when unleavened bread was eaten with the paschal lamb by ancient Israelites in Egypt, during the plague of the firstborn. Freedom would not arrive until the morning; death stalked outside, and the Israelites were still enslaved. Nevertheless, the Israelites that fateful night were still sustained by their bond to God and to one another; and suddenly, by morning, they were baking matzah in freedom.

The “bread of affliction” prayer was recited at the opening of the seder by Jews who, for centuries throughout the world, celebrated the festival of freedom when they were not free, yearning for another liberation yet to come. Matzah thus embodied the essence of Jewish resolution and hope. Hence the prayer concludes: “Now we are here; next year, the Land of Israel. Now we are slaves; next year, free individuals.” Could there be any greater embodiment of the spirit of this opening prayer than the fact that Jews living in a land where Judaism had been banned for decades would suddenly serve as a source of matzah for the world?

As war threatens these very same Jews, another reflection of Jewish resilience was made manifest in their continuing to produce the bread of faith. And as the crisis worsened, a usually fractured Jewish world came together to support and sustain the Ukrainian Jewish community, to support those staying in Ukraine, to welcome those fleeing, and to help settle those who have arrived in Israel.

Here too the poetry is profound. Many Sephardic Jews precede the reading of the Haggadah with a re-enactment of the Exodus in which one seder celebrant places a matzah on his back and is asked, Where are you from? “I am from Egypt,” comes the reply. Another question is asked: Where are you going? And the answer: “I am going to Jerusalem. Will you come with me?”

Matzah represents the Jewish journey of generations and how the hope for redemption bound Jews to one another. We would be remiss if we did not reflect this year, on the vindication of these hopes. Speaking after the war in Ukraine began, Natan Sharansky, who was born in the region, noted that growing up, the ethnic identities listed on one’s Soviet passport—words such as “Russian,” “Ukrainian,” or “Georgian”—made little difference. But one appellation was the kiss of death: “When it came to a university application, for example, no one tried to change his designation from Russian to Ukrainian because it did not matter. However, if you could change your designation of ‘Jew,’ it substantially improved your chances of university admission.”

Sharansky, who is greatly concerned about all that is unfolding in the land of his birth, could still not refrain from reflecting with wonder. According to reports of those who heard him, Sharansky essentially said this: “This week I was reminded of those days, when I saw thousands of people standing at the borders of Ukraine trying to escape. They are standing there day and night, and there is only one word that can help them get out: ‘Jew.’ If you are a Jew, there are Jews outside who care about and are waiting for you. There is someone on the other side of the border who is searching for you. Your chances of leaving are excellent. The world has changed. When I was a child, ‘Jew’ was an unfortunate designation. No one envied us. But today on the Ukrainian border, identifying as a Jew is a most fortunate circumstance. It describes those who have a place to go, where their family, an entire nation, is waiting for them on the other side.”

This year, here; next year, the Land of Israel. The crisis continues, and the attention of the West is rightly upon Ukraine and battles unfolding there. That must not stop us, this Passover, from reflecting on the resilience of Jewish faith, from reminding ourselves of Jewish bonds of brothers, and from marking miracles in our own age.  

**Commentary**
WHEN RUSSIA invaded Ukraine in late February, many news networks and print media did their best to convey accurate information about what was happening on the ground. Thanks to the brave and dogged reporting of journalists such as CNN's Clarissa Ward, and the efforts of many Ukrainians who took to social media to document the attacks, the world witnessed the brutality of Vladimir Putin and his army.

And then there was National Public Radio, which thought it would be a good idea to post a story on its website about “5 Ways to Cope with a Stressful News Cycle.” NPR must have assumed its audience wouldn't be curious about the many lives at risk in Ukraine, or the danger of an escalation of the conflict with a nuclear-powered Russia. Rather, NPR seemed to be suggesting that the appropriate questions one might ask would include, “What does this mean for my life?”

NPR had lots of ideas. “Don't forget to care for yourselves,” the story urged and offered some helpful examples, such as performing a “five-finger breathing exercise that can bring you back to the moment.” You should also “nourish yourself,” since “the kitchen is a safe space for a lot of us.” Ukrainian children might be cowering in terror in subway stations to avoid being killed by Russian bombs, but for the NPR listener, “this is the weekend that you finally re-create Grandpa's famous lasagna or learn how to make a prettier pie.”

While NPR-listening adults were urged to self-soothe with meditation and baking, their children were evidently tough enough to hear the real news in lieu of bedtime stories. “If your little ones are struggling to go to bed at the end of the day,” NPR suggested, “try talking to them about the heavy news head-on.” Sweet dreams, kids!

NPR was appropriately mocked for the tone-deafness of the piece. Even one of its own producers, Monika Evstatieva, was baffled. “I have no idea who allowed this to be published,” she tweeted. “It’s not a reflection of what we’ve been doing every day for the past 6 weeks.”

But NPR's brand of navel-gazing has become more the rule than the exception among journalists of late. The profession has been steeping in self-care and self-care training sessions, and classes for overburdened journalists have increased significantly in recent years. The NPR story was part of a series called “Life Kit,” produced by a “service journalism team” whose members “deal not only in cold hard facts but also in caring and in kindness” and who “in this turbulent time...invite you to do the same.”

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia Journalism School has extended its scope beyond teaching reporters how to report accurately on traumatic events. The school now offers self-care seminars for reporters, such as the one in 2020 that promised to “explain the rationale for good self-care.” Similarly, the Poynter Institute, a nonprofit journalism organization, offers a course called “Journalism and Trauma” that examines “how covering traumatic events affects journalists.” Among the pieces of advice? “Give yourself affirmations, praise yourself,” and “Find

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Self-care now imbues reporting in mainstream media. The New York Times website features many stories that cultivate an intimate tone: “Hey friend,” the “self-care” home page beckons readers. The section features luxury advertisers and stories about cold-water plunge baths and collagen supplements. Editors doubled down on the self-focus during Covid-19 lockdowns with stories such as “How will you look when you emerge from the pandemic?” and a lengthy examination of burnout among TikTok influencers by reporter Taylor Lorenz. Similarly, the Washington Post has featured numerous self-care stories and even sponsored a live event on the value of self-care with Deepak Chopra and Arianna Huffington.

And why not? Self-care is a conveniently vague yet ubiquitous cultural force these days. In an interview with the Washington Post last year, communications professor Karla Scott offered this tautology: “If you perform any action that constitutes caring for yourself, you are doing self-care.” Much of this is harmless (and lucrative for purveyors of self-care products), and some of it is even useful for journalists. Reporters who cover war or natural disasters do bear witness to terrible things, which can affect their mental health. There is nothing wrong with encouraging greater awareness of the challenges they face.

But very few of the mainstream media journalists invoking the need for greater self-care are the ones reporting from the front lines of wars. Rather, they are like CNN’s Jim Acosta, whose preening self-importance saturates every page of Enemy of the People, his book about “surviving” the Donald Trump years as a highly paid television journalist. Or Brian Stelter, who experienced similar trauma having to talk about Covid on television. “I crawled in bed and cried for our pre-pandemic lives,” he tweeted.

In fact, there has been a notable uptick since Trump’s election in journalists’ focus on their own supposed trauma, a development that the pandemic only exacerbated. Writing in Slate in the immediate aftermath of Trump’s victory, Aisha Harris argued that “in 2016, self-care officially crossed over into the mainstream.” She went on: “It was the new chicken soup for the progressive soul. The week after the election, Americans Googled the term almost twice as often as they had in years past.” Journalists were uniquely victimized, however, because they had to report on Trump. One young journalist who described herself as “a queer, Muslim woman of color” said that she turned to self-care “to find real ways to block the toxicity I felt from the world around me” after the election.

Journalists are supposed to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable,” as the saying goes. Now, however, an increasing number of them view themselves as the afflicted merely for having to do their jobs, even as the money they earn places them among the elite they are charged with afflicting. A new generation intent on promoting ideological narratives often invokes the notion of reporting “my truth” as superior to old-fashioned objective reporting; in a similar vein, the journalism of self-care claims that the old way of doing things (i.e., keeping one’s personal struggles private) is unsustainable given the uniquely stressful demands journalism places on its workers. These demands are supposedly so terrible that sufferers require the language of trauma to complain about them on social media.

NPR’s article explaining how war offers an opportunity to give yourself a much-deserved spa day is the logical conclusion of this trend. Journalists cease to afflict the comfortable (or, in Putin’s case, the murdously authoritarian) in favor of comforting themselves and their audience. This approach has the added benefit of harvesting profitable clicks from those consumers least likely to get hard news from traditional sources and most keen on tending to their self-care gardens: younger Americans.

But it does not come without a cost. From a reader’s or viewer’s perspective, it is difficult to trust the judgment of a reporter whose Twitter timeline reads like a therapy session sponsored by Goop. And as stories increasingly include emotional opinions about events rather than objective analysis, feelings are elevated over facts.

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This Passover, connect the exodus to today’s refugees.

Make a gift to help families rebuild their lives in safety.

Emergency: Support HIAS’ response to the crisis in Ukraine

HIAS is the international Jewish organization that provides critical support to refugees in the United States and 15 countries around the world.
As Russian tanks and commandos invaded Ukraine last month, the UN Security Council held an emergency session. Vladimir Putin had just set the United Nations Charter ablaze, and there was nothing the ambassadors gathered in Turtle Bay could do about it.

Presiding over this impotent pageant was Russia’s envoy, Vassily Nebenzia. He looked alternately bored and bemused as the diplomats on the Security Council pleaded with him to stop a war that they had gathered to prevent. Nebenzia insisted that Russia’s maneuvers were defensive and limited to the Donbas region even as events in Ukraine discredited him in real time.

All of it was too much for Ukrainian ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya. As his Russian rival gazed at his phone, Kyslytsya pleaded with him to call Russia’s foreign minister and stop the invasion. But the Ukrainian’s most profound question was not for the Russian ambassador, but for the United Nations itself. Why

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should Russia retain the Soviet Union’s permanent seat and veto on the Security Council more than 30 years after the end of the Soviet Union? And what did it say about the UN that an arsonist was chairing a meeting of the fire department?

This is the kind of question America and her allies need to study in the weeks ahead. Whatever the outcome of the war for Ukraine, we are living in a different world now. In the new world, Putin’s Russia is not a part of the community of nations. It is a threat to the community of nations. Consequently, the international system created after World War II must be revised. The free world is again engaged in a cold war with a country whose capital is Moscow.

None of this should have come as a surprise, though it clearly has for many people. Putin has probed the West’s resolve for nearly 20 years. He launched wars of aggression against Georgia in 2008 and against Ukraine in 2014. But there was always a fig leaf to mask the obscenity of Putin’s acts when it came to international law. In 2014, Putin did not acknowledge that Russian military forces had entered Ukraine. Instead, he used “little green men,” soldiers and mercenaries without uniforms or insignia, to annex Crimea. In Georgia in 2008, he baited Tbilisi to strike first at separatists his spies had supported.

His other predations have also featured plausible deniability. Putin has launched cyberattacks on pipelines and banks. He has ordered assassinations of political foes abroad. His regime has flooded social media with conspiracy theories and lies. His hackers have interfered in Western elections. But now Putin is not bothering to hide his hand. Annexing Crimea and recognizing the independence of separatist states in Donetsk and Luhansk were not enough. He was determined to swallow all of Ukraine in plain sight for the world to see, betting that the world would do nothing to stop him.

Putin miscalculated. Ukraine’s government didn’t collapse in the first days of the war. President Volodymyr Zelensky did not flee Kiev. Instead, he filmed cellphone videos of himself and his cabinet promising to keep fighting. And despite its dependence on Russia’s natural gas, Europe unleashed unprecedented economic warfare on Moscow, banning some Russian banks from the SWIFT financial-messaging system, banning Russian flights in European airspace, and freezing the assets of the Russian billionaires who have enjoyed comfortable lives in London, Paris, and Rome for more than two decades. President Joe Biden has also unleashed sanctions on Russia and promised that Putin would now be treated like a pariah.

Even Putin’s erstwhile allies have been shocked by his brazen aggression. Hungary’s Viktor Orban condemned Putin’s war. Germany has now committed to spend 2 percent of its gross domestic product on defense, a revolutionary change. It has also suspended construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Even historically neutral Switzerland, a country that hid Nazi gold in World War II, agreed to freeze the assets of Russian oligarchs. The International Olympics Committee voted to ban Russia from international competition. And Russian citizens, at great personal risk, took to the streets in protest.

This was a hinge moment. The response to Putin’s war has been the equivalent of an economic and diplomatic blockade, forcing Russia into the arms of a dangerous neighbor, China. The prosperous countries where Russia’s most talented citizens would rather live are now closed off.

As I write, the blockade is reactive. It is aimed at coercing Russia to withdraw from Ukraine. This is what President Joe Biden had in mind when he mused, just as the war was breaking out, that the new sanctions might force Putin to reevaluate his choices “in a month.” But they also should be the first steps in a break with the autocratic world.

Such a break will require a commitment to isolate Russia in the near term, and, over time, China, from the international system and global economy; deter future aggression with a credible threat of military force; and nurture freedom movements in the autocratic world with a long-term goal of democratic change. It requires a combination of strategic separation, national resilience, and international solidarity.

This is the strategy to accomplish it.

1. RESIST THE CHINA DELUSION

Since Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon opened relations with China a half century ago, American strategists have tried to play China against Russia. At a moment when Putin himself is broadcasting wild theories about Russian history and threatening to use nuclear weapons, there is a temptation to continue this approach. Since China might now have reason to also fear Putin, we could isolate Russia by reaching out to China—or so the theory goes.

It won’t work.

China and Russia have already started aligning. In January, both countries, along with Iran, held their third joint military exercises in the Indian Ocean. Before the opening of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, Putin met with Xi Jinping and released a joint state-
ment declaring that the partnership between their two countries knew no limits. A few days after Germany suspended the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, Russia’s Gazprom consortium announced a new contract to build a pipeline to China. We can expect China to offer Russia loans to keep its economy afloat. China may even make good on its threat to build an alternative to the SWIFT financial-messaging system.

This cooperation is happening not because America has missed diplomatic openings. Rather it is because China and Russia share a common interest in thwarting the U.S.-led international order. Neither country wants to live in a world where the sovereignty of weaker and smaller nations is inviolable. Neither country wants to play by common rules of trade, banking, and international finance. Neither country wants to respect the freedom of its citizens. And both countries need an enemy to justify their autocratic rule.

For now, the priority must be stopping Russia. But the West must prepare to make a break with China as well.

Since the end of the Cold War, American and Western strategy has sought to tame China and Russia through inclusion in the international system. If we could entice China and Russia, so the theory went, to cooperate when it came to threats to the global commons and induce them to join international institutions such as the World Trade Organization, both nations would be obliged to play by the same rules that restrain democracies. And if over time the West traded with Russia and China to make their countries more prosperous, then a middle class would emerge demanding more freedoms at home.

This strategy has failed. Chinese and Russian elites grew fabulously wealthy and used their wealth to corrupt Western democracies. America and Europe grew dependent on Chinese manufacturing and investment and on Russian natural resources. All the while, both countries have eroded the international institutions the West had hoped would constrain them.

Consider what has happened to Interpol, the organization that is supposed to share real-time information on criminals between federal police. In 2018, China disappeared the president of the organization, a Chinese national named Meng Hongwei, on a visit back home. He only emerged in public two years later for a politicized trial where he was sentenced to 13 years in prison for alleged corruption. So did China lose its seat on Interpol, after effecting such regime change? Of course not. To this day, China, Russia, and other dictatorships continue to abuse Interpol’s system for alerting the world about criminal fugitives, issuing so called “red notices” for their political opponents, all the while harboring hackers, arms dealers, and other thugs.

Another example of how selective engagement with China and Russia failed is the deal the Obama administration struck in 2013 to rid Syria of chemical weapons. Here, the Russians played an important role. After Barack Obama threatened military strikes against Syria’s regime to punish its use of chemical munitions, the Russians brokered a deal for Syria to give them up. But there was a hitch. Syria’s dictator, Bashar al-Assad got to keep some of them and indeed would use them again and again. It would be nice to believe that Assad had fooled America and Russia back in 2013. But when Assad began gassing his people again, Russia had already sent its air force into Syria to fight on Assad’s side. Not surprisingly, Russia has used its veto at the UN Security Council to shield its Syrian client.

2.

**ALTER THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM**

A new strategy should seek to limit diplomatic engagement with China and Russia, but not to entirely cut it off. All three countries should remain engaged in nuclear arms control. The hotlines and transparency...
measures the Soviet Union and America created in the 20th century show that it’s possible to wage a cold war and still reduce the risk of nuclear war. Democracies should also keep their embassies open to monitor the stirrings of freedom movements inside Russia and China.

But the days of seeking Russian and Chinese support for UN Security Council resolutions about Iran’s nuclear program, to name one example, should be over. Russia and China see such cooperation as leverage over the West. It’s troubling that the Biden administration is still seeking to finish an Iran nuclear deal brokered by Russia. It sends the message that Putin’s regime is not really the pariah Joe Biden now says it is and should be.

Along these same lines, America should conduct an audit of all international organizations to determine where it is possible to expel Russian and Chinese diplomats or whether there is a need to create new institutions to replace them.

This has happened before. After the Third Reich took control of Interpol’s predecessor in 1938, several allied countries began to withdraw their membership. Interpol was not reconstituted until after World War II. Following that model, the State Department should declare a new policy toward the UN Security Council. It’s time to stop pretending that it is a font of international law when a country like Russia remains a veto-wielding permanent member. With that in mind, Western diplomats should explore the prospect of de-moting Russia’s status on the grounds that there was no General Assembly vote for Russia to join the UN after the collapse of the Soviet Union. If that doesn’t work, America and its allies should issue an ultimatum: It’s us or Russia. If the UN cannot or will not demote Russia’s status, then the West should undertake to build an alternative to the United Nations that excludes Russia and eventually China.

A successor to the UN would have many long-term advantages for the free world. It could introduce clarifying standards for states to enjoy a kind of first-class global citizenship. Countries that launch aggressive wars, violate nonproliferation agreements, or extinguish internal political opposition would be ejected. Their seats would go to free governments in exile. So Belarus, for example, would be represented by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the school teacher who won her country’s 2020 election.

3. END OUR DEPENDENCY ON THEIR MARKETS

We need to separate ourselves from Russia and China economically, to the extent possible. This has already begun to happen with Russia and to a degree with China. But the free world must do more. This means removing restrictions on fracking and fossil-fuel exploration in the U.S. and Europe and revitalizing the nuclear-power industry on both sides of the Atlantic. French president Emanuel Macron has already started this process. Germany should follow his lead. Europe and America should also support Israel’s natural-gas pipeline to the continent. None of this should preclude efforts to find sources of alternative green energy. But until wind and solar can power nation-states, the West has to focus on freeing itself from Russian energy by producing its own.

Economic separation also demands a strategy to address China’s and Russia’s control of the global market for rare earth minerals and metals. Those materials are needed for everything from the production of car batteries to guided missiles. Today, to take one example, China alone could disrupt America’s aircraft industry if it decided to stop selling neodymium and praseodymium to the West. And so the allies need to form a consortium to create a secure supply chain of these materials that bypasses China and Russia. It should form part of a broader campaign, already underway for the past few years, that frees the supply lines for critical industries such as military, computer...
technology, aircraft, and auto sectors from dependence on China.

Finally, a policy of economic separation should also take on China's campaign to build digital and physical infrastructure in the Third World by offering a better deal. America and its allies are already behind in this game, but they are not out of it. For instance, the U.S. and European allies should subsidize Western telecom companies so that they are in a position to provide emerging markets an alternative to China's cheap 5G cell towers produced by Huawei.

4. FOCUS ON DETERRENCE AND RESILIENCE

Energy independence and new supply chains are two crucial elements when it comes to protecting the free world's economies from China and Russia. But the West also has to prepare for the prospect of military confrontation. Here, the goal should be both deterrence and resilience.

This means, first, that America should prepare for the possibility that China and Russia will launch European and Pacific wars at the same time. The Pentagon must revive long-standing American doctrine that was ended in 2014—the doctrine that says we must be ready to fight and win two wars at once. That would require a significant buildup of forces to Cold War levels, along with committing at least 5 percent of GDP to defense spending (it's currently about 3.75 percent). Along these lines, NATO allies should authorize a permanent presence in states that border Russia. A similar strategy should be pursued against China. Now would be a good time to knit together the mutual-defense agreements that the U.S. already has with Australia, South Korea, and Japan and renew a military alliance in the Pacific. Over time, the alliance should expand to include the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

A new military strategy should also prepare for the unconventional threats that China and Russia pose to America. For instance, China has, in the past decade, developed anti-satellite missiles capable of blinding America in time of war. In response, the Pentagon should build up the capability to rapidly relaunch communications satellites in such an event.

The new military mobilization should also provide anti-ballistic-missile defenses to major cities in America, Europe, and the Pacific. Ronald Reagan's pursuit of missile defense terrified the Soviets. A commitment to deploy these systems should remind the Kremlin that it stands to lose much more than the West in the horrific event of a nuclear exchange.

The U.S. government has over the past decade bolstered the defense of the computer networks that control everything from the electrical grid to the U.S. banking system, or what is known as critical infrastructure. Comparatively little has been done to prepare for the chance that hackers will succeed in disabling them. Doing so requires the revival of the Cold War concept of civil defense. Every American city, town, and county should designate officials to take charge in the event of a cyber-created natural disaster, from blackouts, floods, or the contamination of the water supply. In addition, the federal government should begin to build more redundancy into electrical grids, gas pipelines, and water reservoirs, with a plan to restore infrastructure that could be disabled through cyber war. We established some of these emergency procedures after 9/11 and could adapt them.

5. DEMONSTRATE SOLIDARITY

The most potent advantage the West has over autocracies is that the free world is a magnet for genius fleeing tyranny. This human capital has been an engine of American ingenuity and creativity since its founding. In this respect, it is not enough to quarantine Russia and China. America should also welcome their dissidents, artists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, poets, and scientists—and offer them a better life in the United States rather than sending them home to use our knowhow to their native advantage. Over time, this brain drain will weaken China's and Russia's ability to keep pace with Western innovation.

There is an opportunity for creative statecraft.

To wit: The children of Chinese and Russian elites should be barred from U.S. universities. But the children of Chinese and Russian dissidents should be given scholarships. Immigrants to the free world are also an important window into the tyrannies they have fled. At moments when tyrants teeter and demonstrations fill the streets, the U.S. government should consult with the Americans who know these countries best. It's important in this respect to distinguish between solidarity and regime change. The goal is to support democratic movements as they arise, not to direct them. But the long-term strategy should be to align with Russian, Chinese, Iranian, Venezuelan, Cuban, and North Korean movements that demand citizens' rights as free peoples.

America also should strengthen Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Asia to meet the demands of the
21st century. This would entail building on existing programs to help dissidents and activists shield their electronic communications from their regime’s secret police and pursue satellite technology to provide uncensored Internet in Russia, China, and other despotic countries. This is especially urgent in Russia, where Putin has banned most Western social media.

This approach should also be adopted by Silicon Valley, which should be actively discouraged from serving as tyranny’s cat’s-paw. In 2021, Google and Apple both removed an app from their online stores in Russia that had been developed by the organization of dissident politician Alexei Navalny. This should never happen again. Russia seeks to erase Navalny from its Internet. American tech companies should make it a priority to amplify his organization online in Russia.

Finally, solidarity programs—modeled on the heroic work that Jewish Americans did to help free refusenik Jews during the Cold War—should be adopted by American civil society. Newspaper editors should partner with what is left of a free press in China and Russia. Lawyers and scientists should do the same with their counterparts. This would raise the costs of extinguishing freedom for the Chinese and Russian regimes.

Some may dismiss a solidarity strategy as a form of hopeless idealism. And it’s true that in the past decade dictators have proven more resilient than democracy movements. But this calculation discounts a lesson of history. Tyrants will always view the example of free peoples determining their own destiny as an existential threat, lest their own citizens demand those freedoms for themselves. America’s leaders should never forget this and understand that alliances with tyrants are temporary, but the bonds with free peoples endure.

6.

ASSERT MORAL CONFIDENCE

Zelensky’s bravery in the face of overwhelming odds has proved a reminder that great peril can produce great leaders. America is in desperate need of such leadership today. Our country has been mired in self-doubt. We have forgotten who we are. The nationalist right and the socialist left don’t agree on much, but they both regard America's recent wars as moral abominations and the country's economic realities as marks of an irredeemable corruption. Who are we to judge or intervene, when we have tortured prisoners and droned wedding parties? Who are we to promote equality when we have income inequality?

It’s time for both parties to soundly reject this myopic politics. American global leadership is the only way that weaker democracies can survive. It is the only chance for long-term peace. And for all the ugly chapters in American history, our enemies have done and are doing and will do worse. We remain a beacon of hope for all people who struggle for freedom, whether we know it or not.

Rejecting the recent myopia and division requires some faith in the American people as well. The campaign against “disinformation”—much of it based in the idea that stupid Americans were wildly susceptible to Russian manipulation—has resulted in pointless censorship. We should not make that mistake again. Consider that all of Russia’s propaganda and bribery in Europe, aimed at weakening the continent’s resolve during a war like this, has failed miserably. Putin’s menace and Zelensky’s heroism galvanized Europeans and their leaders to impose unprecedented sanctions on Russia and reinvestment in their militaries in record time. There is no need to ban Russian state propaganda from the Internet. Moscow's lies are self-discrediting.

This moment should also stir the Republican Party to take a hard look at its future. Donald Trump is too enamored with strong men to carry on America’s tradition of fighting tyranny. He views their amorality as a new kind of realism. Republicans have every reason to look higher.

And so, too, does Joe Biden. He is the leader of the free world—but he seems be more concerned about his position as the leader of a domestic political party whose elites have spent the past two years embracing the idea that America was born in evil and is awash in racist sin even now. He has greeted the challenge from Putin with resolve, but he has also defaulted to a strangely passive notion that Putin will fail in his goals because “freedom” will somehow triumph over “tyranny.” That’s not how it works. Tyranny must be resisted and boxed in as a precondition for freedom’s eventual victory. It will not happen on its own. It never does, and it never will.

If Biden cannot find a way to greet this moment by saying unambiguously that we are the good guys, that our cause is just, and that we are engaged in a titanic struggle with evil regimes that believe that the only way they can rise is if we fall, history will dub him a dominated weakling.

We must prepare for the long struggle ahead. The world has changed. We must change along with it.
Putin’s American Apologists

A collection of voices on the left, right, and center have found a way to blame the United States and the West

By Joshua Muravchik

THE WORLD HAS responded with unwonted unity and determination to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, while in the U.S., opinion polls show a substantial margin viewing Ukraine with favor and Russia with disfavor. A large majority even assesses Russia’s action as threatening to U.S. vital interests. Nonetheless, just as Belarus, Syria, North Korea, and Eritrea dissented from the international consensus to vote with Russia at the UN, so here at home, a miscellany of voices demurred, pointing fingers of blame in other directions, expressing sympathy for Russia’s position, or warning against any strong reaction from Washington.

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Almost none offered words of worship to Vladimir Putin, as many had to Joseph Stalin in Soviet days, and none declared outright support for his actions. But still, a number of writers, political groups, and politicians offered a counterpoint to the broad chorus of indignation at Putin’s action. They came from both political poles, as well as from the camp of isolationist ideologues difficult to locate on a left-to-right spectrum. Some registered their disapproval of Russia’s attack before proceeding to their main point: warning against a U.S. response stronger than admitting refugees. Others offered up outright apologetics for Putin’s actions.

ON THE LEFT, the Democratic Socialists of America—once a fringe group but that now boasts in its ranks four members of the U.S. House of Representatives (Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Cori Bush, and Jamaal Bowman) as well as dozens of state legislators and many local officials—
Writing in the *Nation*, Rajan Menon described the original sin that led to today’s crisis in Ukraine. As always in that journal, America was the sinner.

issued a statement on January 31 in response to Russia's massing its army on Ukraine's borders. It began:

Following months of increased tensions and a sensationalist Western media blitz drumming up conflict in the Donbas, the US government is responding to the situation in Ukraine through the familiar guise of threats of sweeping sanctions, provision of military aid, and increased military deployment to the region. [DSA] opposes this ongoing US brinkmanship, which only further escalates the crisis, and reaffirms our previous statement saying no to NATO and its imperialist expansionism and disastrous interventions across the world.

Nowhere did the document attempt to explain what had caused the sudden “increased tensions,” or so much as mention the Russian forces. It called instead on the U.S. “to reverse its ongoing militarization of the region.”

When the Russians attacked, DSA issued a new statement, which did indeed condemn the invasion while opposing any “coercive measures... economic or military” to counter it. In contrast to the UN General Assembly, which voted almost unanimously to “demand” the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces, DSA merely “urge[d]” this. It went on to “reaffirm our call for the USA to withdraw from NATO, and to end the imperialist expansionism that set the stage for this conflict,” and it declared “solidarity with...antiwar protestors in both countries [Russia and Ukraine],” although it did not explain where the latter had been sighted.

Others on the left were less flagrant but also assigned more blame to Washington than Moscow. Noam Chomsky, in a lengthy interview in the online journal Truthout, explained:

The crisis has been brewing for 25 years as the US contemptuously rejected Russian security concerns, in particular their clear red lines: Georgia and especially Ukraine. There is good reason to believe that this tragedy could have been avoided.

Now, he said, focus must turn to the future. He warned, “repeatedly, [America’s] reaction has been to reach for the six-gun rather than the olive branch.” But the superior wisdom of a gentler approach, he explained, had been taught to him personally during his wartime travels to North Vietnam by representatives of the Viet Cong, a group whose penchant for gentleness was lost on less acute observers than Chomsky. Moreover, he added, “like it or not, the choices are now reduced to an ugly outcome that rewards rather than punishes Putin for the act of aggression—or the strong possibility of terminal war.” In short, our only sure path to avoid nuclear Armageddon is one that “rewards” Putin.

Writing in the *Nation*, Rajan Menon described the original sin that led to today’s crisis. As always in that journal, America was the sinner:

Instead of seizing the opportunity to create a new European order that included Russia, President Bill Clinton and his foreign-policy team squandered it by deciding to expand NATO threateningly toward that country’s borders. Such a misbegotten policy guaranteed that Europe would once again be divided, even as Washington created a new order that excluded and progressively alienated post-Soviet Russia.

That magazine’s publisher, Katrina vanden Heuvel, has recently been awarded a weekly column in the *Washington Post*. There, at the end of January, she warned of the danger of war and of “screeching hawks.”

In Russia, Putin is already under fire for not having taken Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region in 2014....In Washington, Biden is under fire for not being tough enough...For all its hysteria about imminent war, it’s clear that the Biden administration believes Putin is bluffing....the danger is that Putin will face escalating pressure from more hawkish factions within Russia.

When the Russians attacked, she spoke for the *Nation*, “condemn[ing]” the invasion in somewhat
According to the Progressive Caucus, the way to stymie Putin would be to go about reforming America or saving the planet and to ignore his belligerent actions entirely.

roundabout words, before resuming her theme that equal or greater blame lay with the West:

Putin's actions are indefensible, but responsibility for this crisis is widely shared. This magazine has warned repeatedly that the extension of NATO to Russia's borders would inevitably produce a fierce reaction. We have criticized NATO's wholesale rejection of Russia's security proposals. We decry the arrogance that leads U.S. officials to assert that we have the right to do what we wish across the world, even in areas, like Ukraine, that are far more important to others than they are to us.

A week later, in her Washington Post column, she advised against countering Russia. “By invading Ukraine,” she opined, “Putin demands a return to [an] archaic and obsolete Cold War order. The world would be wise not to accede.” In other words, Putin is trying to start a fight; we could frustrate him by turning the other cheek. She counseled out-of-the-box thinking:

What's needed above all is a courageous and transnational citizens’ movement demanding not simply the end of the war on Ukraine but also an end to perpetual wars. We need political leaders who will speak out about our real security needs and resist the reflex to fall into old patterns that distract from the threats we can no longer afford to ignore [i.e., “pandemics and climate change”].

The Nation's competitor among left-wing journals, Jacobin, took a similar tack. Staff writer Branko Marcetic asserted that Putin's invasion was “reckless and illegal,” before going on to argue that it might have been averted by “a different set of US policies over the past few months.” He explained:

Already, the army of war-hawk pundits that has been predicting—salivating over, may be more accurate—a Russian invasion has seized on this latest move as vindication of their usual talking points: Putin is Hitler, he seeks to revive the glory of the Soviet Union, he can’t be reasoned with, and only a show of force, not further “appeasement” or negotiations that “reward” his behavior, can make him stop. This is...exactly the approach Washington and its allies...have taken to get us to this point.

If readers wondered whether it wasn't Moscow, rather than Washington and its allies, who had gotten us to this point, Marcetic offered an example of “the most over-the-top of Western predictions” that had inflamed the situation, namely, the image of Russian soldiers “marching to Kiev and toppling the Ukrainian government.”

Elected officials on the left tended to be more forthright in denouncing the Russian invasion, while often adding caveats. Senator Bernie Sanders, for example, called it “premeditated aggression,” but he did not retract his previously expressed sympathy for Russia's adamancy about Washington's refusal to rule out NATO membership for Ukraine. “Does anyone really believe,” he asked, “that the United States would not have something to say if, for example, Mexico was to form a military alliance with a U.S. adversary?”

Sanders is a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Its chair, Representative Pramila Jayapal, together with the chair of its Peace and Security Taskforce, Representative Barbara Lee, spoke for the caucus during this crisis. As Russian forces poised on Ukraine's borders, they issued a statement voicing “alarm,” although this seemed to be mostly about possible American reactions. “We have significant concerns that new troop deployments, sweeping and indiscriminate sanctions, and a flood of hundreds of millions of dollars in lethal weapons will only raise tensions and increase the chance of miscalculation,” they said.

They offered an interpretation of the mobilization on Ukraine's borders akin to vanden Heuvel's: “Russia's strategy is to inflame tensions; the United States and NATO must not play into this strategy.” Apparently, the way to stymie Putin would be to go about our business of reforming America or saving the planet and to ignore his belligerent actions entirely.

Their colleague Rashida Tlaib seconded this, adding: "Enough of rushing to war... Diplomacy and de-escalation must be the focus, not 'lethal' aid. My
In the run-up to the Russian invasion, Quincy’s website was replete with items diverting blame from Russia, casting aspersions on Ukraine and its sympathizers.

constituents are tired of war and are demanding we use everything in our toolbox to prevent conflict.”

When the Biden administration began warning of an imminent Russian invasion, and Congress rushed to enact emergency legislation to shore up Ukraine and deter Russia, caucus member Ilhan Omar voiced her opposition:

The proposed legislative solution to this crisis, escalates the conflict without deterring it effectively....The consequences of flooding Ukraine with half a billion dollars in American weapons, likely not limited to just military-specific equipment but also including small arms and ammo, are unpredictable and likely disastrous. It also threatens unbelievably broad and draconian sanctions that will utterly devastate the Russian economy, likely doing very little to deter Putin's aggression while causing immense suffering among ordinary Russian civilians who did not choose this.

After the Russian forces rolled across the border, caucus members were clearer in “condemning the violent invasion of Ukraine,” while still focusing most of their appeals on the need to restrain the U.S. response. In their new statement, the caucus said:

We urge the Biden administration to be guided by two goals: to avoid dangerous escalation that is all too easy in the chaos of war, and to ensure we are minimizing harm to civilians. We applaud President Biden for rightly saying there can be no military solution to this conflict, and wisely committing to not deploying U.S. troops.... The president must seek congressional authorization...before any U.S. troops deploy into areas or situations where there is a risk of imminent hostilities.

Since deploying U.S. forces to Ukraine had already been ruled out, the latter sentence seemed to aim at the movement of several thousand troops into frontline NATO states. In addition to objecting to these deployments designed to deter the Russians from moving against the Baltic states, the progressives also were chary of economic sanctions. They said: “The goal of any U.S. sanctions should be to stop the fighting and hold those responsible for this invasion to account, while avoiding indiscriminate harm to civilians or inflexibility as circumstances change.”

These attitudes on the left, if in some ways shocking, are not surprising. And the same might be said about the camp of ideological isolationists. It is centered today in the Quincy Institute, a D.C. think tank of relatively recent vintage, lavishly funded from the two extremes, George Soros on the left and Charles Koch on the right.

In the run-up to the Russian invasion, Quincy’s website was replete with items diverting blame from Russia, casting aspersions on Ukraine and its sympathizers, and warning against U.S. involvement. Research fellow Ben Freeman posted an exposé, claiming to reveal that “lobbyists from Ukraine are working feverishly to shape the U.S. response.” It went on: “Firms working for Ukrainian interests have inundated congressional offices, think tanks and journalists with more than 10,000 message and meetings in 2021.” Freeman added, “With U.S. weapons manufacturers making billions in arms sales to Ukraine, their CEOs see the turmoil there as a good business opportunity,” citing another Quincy exposé by another staff member.

In addition to the various writings of Vanden Heuvel, a Quincy board member, that are posted on its site, its other principal commentators on this issue were Andrew Bacevich, the institute’s president, and senior fellow Anatol Lieven.

As the Biden administration issued warnings in February, citing intelligence that Putin was intent on war, Bacevich published an op-ed debunking it, warning that “a full-fledged war scare is upon us.” He likened the administration’s revelation of Russian plans for staging a false-flag attack to the Bush administration’s erroneous 2003 warnings about Iraqi nuclear weapons. And he vented anger at news organizations for reporting the Russia story. “The incessant warmongering of the American media [is] disturbing and repugnant,” he lamented, protesting reports that 130,000 Russian troops had massed on Ukraine’s borders. He didn’t dispute this number but rather the verb, “massed,” which he called “a favored media mis-
The Quincy Institute’s most prolific commentator on the Ukraine crisis was senior research fellow Anatol Lieven. He sounded a note of contempt for Americans.

characterization.” He suggested no preferable term, but reporters might have said more neutrally that Russian soldiers “convened” or “congregated” or “flocked” or “disembarked” at Ukraine’s border.

Two weeks later, as the crisis intensified, Bacevich took to print again, adding to his indictment of the media and of America more broadly. “Some members of the American commentariat will cheer” war, he said, owing to “the depth of their animus toward Putin.” This in part reflected “the unvarnished Russophobia pervading the ranks of the America political elite” and “disdain for Russia” that has “roots going at least as far back as the Bolshevik Revolution.” However, the “deeper” source of “our present-day antipathy toward Russia [lies in] a desperate need to refurbish the concept of American exceptionalism.” In “our collective identity [w]e Americans...are the Chosen People.” It would be more accurate, he went on, to characterize ourselves as “reckless,” “incompetent,” “alienated,” “extravagantly wasteful,” and “deeply confused.” Rather than “flinging macho-man insults,” Bacevich concluded, the U.S. should “acknowledge the possibility that Russia possesses legitimate security interests” in Ukraine.

The day after Russia’s assault began, Bacevich published yet another op-ed. “The eruption of war creates an urgent need to affix blame and identify villains,” he began, with gentle sarcasm that then grew stronger. “Russia is the aggressor and President Vladimir Putin a bad guy straight out of central casting: on that point, opinion in the United States and Europe is nearly unanimous. Even in a secular age, we know whose side God is on.” It would be better, he said, to avoid a “rush to judgment.”

Yes, Russian aggression deserves widespread condemnation. Yet the United States cannot absolve itself of responsibility for this catastrophe.... By casually meddling in Ukrainian politics in recent years, the United States has effectively incited Russia to undertake its reckless invasion.

Quincy’s most prolific commentator on the Ukraine crisis was senior research fellow Anatol Lieven. He, too, sounded a note of contempt for Americans. “A mythological monster is haunting the fevered imagination of the West,” a cartoon image of a creature whose name Americans ignorantly mispronounce “Put’n.” In contrast, the real Putin is cautious and levelheaded—too much so, in the view of more ambitious and hotheaded members of the Russian elite. ...This should give confidence that we can emerge from the present crisis without disaster.... Only the mythological Putin would March into Kiev and central Ukraine, let alone attack Poland or the Baltic states. These are ridiculous Western fantasies generated partly by genuine paranoia, partly by members of the US and European blobs who need to demonize Russia in order to cover up their own appalling mistakes and lies over the past 30 years and to parade heroic resistance to a threat that does not in fact exist.

The recurrent theme of Lieven’s many articles was that Western anxieties were unwarranted. In early February, he wrote:

One Western line about Russia’s demands has already been proved false, namely that they were never intended as a serious basis for negotiations; and that Russia always planned to use their rejection as a pretext to invade Ukraine. Clearly if that were the case, Russia would have invaded by now.

Then, when their intelligence prompted Western governments to withdraw diplomatic personnel, Lieven wrote mockingly that Russia therefore had no need to invade. “Western policy towards Ukraine is evolving from the ridiculous to the positively surreal.... Putin can enjoy a quiet cup of coffee while Western governments run around squawking hysterically and NATO’s credibility collapses along with the Ukrainian economy.” And a week after that, he forecasted: “If by the time of the Blinken-Lavrov meeting, Russia has not in fact invaded Ukraine except for the Donbas, then all these Western warnings about an imminent Russian invasion will start to look a bit silly.”

When the invasion finally came, Lieven did not
If the stance of the isolationist Quincy Institute as well as that of the left was to be expected, the response on the right was less predictable, but here, too, Putin found apologists.

stop to acknowledge who it was that now looked silly, but he did condemn it in clear terms before proceeding to suggest the outline of a negotiated settlement in which Ukraine would cede substantial territory and a bit of sovereignty.

Finally, once the war was underway, two other Quincy authors, Matthew Burrows and Christopher Preble, chimed in airily that “one way or another, the Russian war in Ukraine will wind down” and the really important thing was to avert “a new Cold War between Russia and the West.” In other words, Ukraine's cities could end up resembling Grozny after Putin finished suppressing the Chechen uprising, but then we could move on.

If the stance of the isolationist Quincy Institute as well as that of the left was to be expected, the response on the right was less predictable, but here, too, Putin found apologists. Foremost among them was Donald Trump. In the first two days after Putin announced diplomatic recognition of the two breakaway “people's republics” in Donbas, Trump several times called it “smart” and “genius” that Russian troops were going in as “peacekeepers.” He gushed that Putin is “very savvy,” although his words of admiration stopped short of directly endorsing or defending Putin's action.

Indeed, characteristically, he added that the invasion wouldn't have happened if he were president. He didn't explain why that would have been so, beyond sneering that Biden “has no concept of what he's doing.” Would he have mollified Putin? After all, he had recently recalled aloud that he “got along great with President Putin,” and said, “I liked him. He liked me.” Or would Putin have been afraid of him? He had once boasted of having a bigger “nuclear button” than Kim Jong Un (before he and Kim “fell in love”). Credulous admirers were left to fill in their own scenarios.

Within a week, however, as, at home and abroad, a near-consensus of indignation at Russian actions crystallized, and Ukrainians heroically stalled Russia's advance, Trump switched the script. He branded the Russian rampage a “holocaust” and demanded that it stop. Then he claimed that the Ukrainians were able to hold off the invaders because of weapons that he had provided them.

General Mike Flynn, Trump's first appointed national security adviser, spoke more coherently than Trump and defended Putin entirely:

Russia has...one core concern... If Ukraine were admitted into NATO...the Russians understand that would likely result in nuclear weapons being placed at its doorstep—closer to Russia than Cuba is to the United States.... If president John Kennedy was justified in risking war to prevent nuclear missiles from being installed in Cuba in 1961, then why exactly is Russian president Vladimir Putin being reckless in risking war to prevent NATO weapons from being installed in Ukraine in 2022? Would any great nation allow the development of such a threat on its border?

Another former Trump aide, now a social-media figure with a large following, Candace Owens, took a similar stance:

I suggest every American who wants to know what's *actually* going on in Russia and Ukraine, read this transcript of Putin's address. As I've said for month [sic]—NATO (under direction from the United States) is violating previous agreements and expanding eastward. WE are at fault.

Various Trump acolytes in the media adopted similar positions. As Christopher Roach suggested on the website American Greatness: A war of some kind has been going on for eight years in Ukraine. “While the West is now hyper-focused on the Russian invasion...the people of Donetsk have been shelled nearly every day by Ukrainian forces since 2014,” he wrote. “As Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman described the matter, the war began eight years ago and Russia is ending it.” Drew Allen, another contributor, did not condone the Russians but proposed that Biden might be complicit. The president's warnings that a Russian invasion was imminent, said Allen, “began to sound more like a wish.” He elaborated:

We know that the Democrats are using this conflict to escape blame for their policies,
which are ruining the American economy. We know Biden has failed to prevent a Russian invasion. But the question remains: is Biden simply taking advantage of a crisis or did Biden have a role in creating the crisis?

In the *American Conservative*, Patrick J. Buchanan explained:

> When Russia's Vladimir Putin demanded that the U.S. rule out Ukraine as a future member of the NATO alliance, the U.S. archly replied: NATO has an open-door policy… Russia—believing its back is against a wall and the United States, by moving NATO ever closer to Russia's borders, put it there—reached the point where it chose war with Ukraine rather than the accept the fate the West had in store for it.

Also in that publication, Rod Dreher saw an interesting analogy: “As a great power, Russia claims a right to secure, peaceful, and friendly borders, free of military alliances designed to circumscribe, contain and control it. And the protests that Moscow is making are not without validity?” Dreher likened the possibility of Ukraine's joining NATO to the 1917 Zimmerman Telegram, in which Germany invited Mexico to ally against the United States in World War I.

Dreher made an additional point that illustrated the connection between the passions of the populist right on various domestic issues and their temptation to view America's foreign adversaries with sympathy. “I adamantly oppose risking the lives of boys from Louisiana and Alabama to make the Donbas safe for genderqueers and migrants.” This thought was generalized by Scott McConnell, a founder of Buchanan's *American Conservative* magazine, who tweeted that he was put in mind of Muhammed Ali's quip about refusing the draft: “No Viet Cong ever called me a n--r.” (The quip is apocryphal.) Turning upside down the patriotic American tradition that politics stops at the water's edge, McConnell's tweet suggested that opponents in disputes over domestic issues warrant more passionate antipathy than our country's foreign enemies. This balance of values seemed to run through much of the Trumpist right.

At David Horowitz's website Frontpage, Robert Spencer quoted Putin's declaration of war: “In December 2021 we once again made an attempt to agree with the United States and its allies on the principles of ensuring security in Europe and on the non-expansion of NATO. Everything was in vain. The US position did not change.” Then Spencer offered this gloss:

> If this is an accurate summation of what happened, and there is no reason to believe that it isn't, then...the questions must be asked: was it really necessary to begin maneuvering to incorporate Ukraine into NATO, and to ignore all Russian entreaties...? Were State Department officials too preoccupied with implementing the woke agenda to bother to negotiate with Putin over NATO?

The most baroque of these apologetics for Putin appeared in Tablet, of all places, from the pen of Lee Smith. His account is filled with dark insinuations about covert machinations in which the main victims are Russia, Putin, and Trump.

*Writing in Tablet, of all places, Lee Smith’s account is filled with dark insinuations about covert machinations in which the main victims are Russia, Putin, and Trump.*

> Putin...finds the U.S. government's relationship with Ukraine genuinely threatening. That's because for nearly two decades, the U.S. national security establishment...has used Ukraine as an instrument to destabilize Russia, and specifically to target Putin. [It was secretly behind] two separate, destructive coups: the first, in 2014, targeting the government of Ukraine, and the second, starting two years later, the government of the United States.

> "And that," confides Smith, “was only the beginning.” He explains:

> Just as Russiagate seemed to be coming to a close in July 2019, U.S. national security of-
The most dramatic and demagogic Putin apologist appeared not in print but on screen, Fox News’ Tucker Carlson, who is said to boast an audience second to none.

Officials injected yet another Ukraine-related narrative into the public sphere to target the American president.... [When it was learned that] Trump had asked the Ukrainian president for information regarding allegations about the Biden family's corrupt activities in Kiev, [U.S. officials panicked]. In order to cover up for what the Bidens...had done in Ukraine, a Democratic Congress impeached Trump for trying to figure out what American policymakers had been doing in Ukraine over the past decade. As for the Ukrainians, they again put themselves in the middle of it, when they should have stayed home.... The 2020 election victory of Joe Biden.... can have done little to quiet Putin's sense that Ukraine needed to be put in its place before it was used yet again as a weapon against him.

The most dramatic and demagogic Putin apologist appeared not in print but on screen, Fox News' Tucker Carlson, who is said to boast an audience second to none. In 2019, when the conflict between Russia and Ukraine became entangled in U.S. presidential politics, leading to Trump's first impeachment, Carlson had announced that he was “rooting for Russia.” This year, the day Putin announced recognition of the Donbas “people's republics,” paving the way to pouring his forces across the border two days later, Carlson devoted his show to the subject. He began his monologue with these remarks:

Since the day that Donald Trump became president, Democrats in Washington have told you it’s your patriotic duty to hate Vladimir Putin. It’s not a suggestion. It’s a mandate. Anything less than hatred for Putin is treason. Many Americans have obeyed this directive. They now dutifully hate Vladimir Putin. Maybe you’re one of them. Hating Putin has become the central purpose of America’s foreign policy.

Why? Carlson and Lee Smith offered similar explanations, but they spoke to disparate audiences. Smith’s version was aimed at the cognoscenti, Carlson’s at the man in the street. Carlson offered this tutorial:

The main thing to know about Ukraine for our purposes is that its leaders once sent millions of dollars to Joe Biden's family. Not surprisingly, Ukraine is now one of Biden's favorite countries. Biden has pledged to defend Ukraine's borders....

How will this conflict affect you? It will affect you quite a bit, actually. Energy prices in the United States are about to go way up, and that means that everything you buy will become much more expensive....You’re about to become measurably poorer.... It seems like a pretty terrible deal for you and for the United States. Hunter Biden gets a million dollars a year from Ukraine, but you can no longer afford to go out to dinner.

Carlson topped this off with an interview with Representative Tulsi Gabbard, who sought the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination by appealing to the party's peacenik wing and who now has made herself a darling of the Conservative Political Action Committee, a daredevil leap from one end of the spectrum to the other.

Gabbard took Carlson's common-man shtick to a whole new level, limning a nightmare scenario. Economic sanctions, she said, “are not going to cost [Biden] or Kamala Harris or the power elite in this country [or] even the power elite in Russia; it is the people who will suffer.” What’s more,

Putin...will respond, and it's likely he'll retaliate, using cyberattacks on our financial systems, our communication systems, [and] our basic infrastructure. Biden will then be forced to respond....We end up in this endless tit for tat that leads [to the] likelihood of this thing going nuclear.

And then, she served up a “pretty terrible deal” even worse than the one Carlson had sketched:

If there is a nuclear attack, the power elite... are going to go hide in their bunkers [where] they’ll have their shelter...their food and water and everything that they need [while] you
and I and the American people, we will be left out... to suffer and deal with that destruction and death.

As the war has put on display a stunning contrast of Russian viciousness and Ukrainian valor, the global and American consensus of sympathy for Ukraine has crystallized further. What motivates the voices to the contrary? The left has long nurtured an anti-war reflex that entails aversion to all robust measures when interstate interests clash. This is coupled with the idea that the American system, as an avatar of capitalism and systemic racism, is inherently malign. Therefore, as Jeane Kirkpatrick put it nearly 40 years back, “they always blame America first.”

The ideological isolationists don’t share the anti-capitalist views of the left, but they do share the left’s contempt for America. The Trumpist right is harder to understand. Its adherents like to identify themselves with the moniker “patriots.” But their passions focus powerfully on disputes with other Americans rather than those between our country and current or potential adversaries.

The arguments brought by these camps are mostly flimsy, at best. Their most plausible one was that Putin is genuinely afraid of NATO and wants only to keep Ukraine from joining it. If true, it was in any case nonsensical: NATO does not threaten Russia and has never threatened it. Even in Cold War days, it was entirely a defensive alliance, with its forces configured and designed for defense, while those of the Warsaw Pact were the opposite. Adding Ukraine to NATO would not change this a whit. Perhaps Putin does not believe this, but as his speech recognizing the Donbas “people’s republics,” and in effect launching his war, made clear, his possessive thoughts toward Ukraine go much deeper: “It is,” he said, “an inalienable part of our own history, culture, and spiritual space.” Putting deeds to words, the actions of his armies make clear that their goal is to conquer that space, not merely to coerce a promise to eschew NATO.

Thus far, pace Trump, Putin’s war appears to have been anything but a “savvy” stroke of “genius.” The Ukrainians are suffering terribly although heroically. Putin has his apologists, but decent people everywhere hope that he will end up suffering terribly, too.
The Revolution
Inside the ADL

How Jonathan Greenblatt is makin’ Whoopi

By Seth Mandel

WHEN Whoopi Goldberg said that the Holocaust was “not about race” but rather “two white groups of people” fighting, the actress and chat-show maven was shocked by criticism she received. Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, reprimanded Goldberg the following day on her morning program, The View. One thing Greenblatt did not do was ask Goldberg where on earth she could have gotten such a preposterous and offensive idea. That’s too bad, because if he had, Goldberg could have responded like the teenager in the classic anti-drug ad from the ’80s when confronted by his father: “You! All right? I got it from you!”

For on the very day that Goldberg made her comments about the impossibility of a conflict being racial in nature if the perpetrators and victims had similar complexions, the definition of the word “racism” on the ADL’s website read as follows:

“The marginalization and/or oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people.”

Follow the logic: According to the Anti-Defamation League itself—the Jewish organization set up in 1915 specifically to combat anti-Semitism—Whoopi

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Goldberg’s remarks were accurate. The Holocaust couldn’t have been about race, under the ADL’s definition of the word “racism,” because American Jews cannot be victims of racism.

In the wake of the controversy, the ADL hastily revised its wording and offered a more benign “interim definition.” The organization’s understanding of racism, we are made to understand, is evolving.

The hypocrisy and shamelessness on display here are not the most important aspects of this debacle. It’s the fact that the definition of “racism” that the ADL decided it would be prudent to revise was itself a revision. Greenblatt himself admitted in a blog post that during his tenure, the ADL had changed its “racism” entry “a few years ago.” The ADL’s pre-Greenblatt definition of “racism,” according to the <em>Jerusalem Post</em>, reads as follows: It is “the belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to another, [and] that a person’s social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics.”

Why did the ADL abandon that perfectly reasonable and clear definition? It did so, he wrote in a blog post, to “reflect that racism in the United States manifests in broader and systemic ways and to explicitly acknowledge the targeting of people of color.”

This admission was a rare acknowledgment from Greenblatt of the seismic nature of the changes taking place within the ADL under his stewardship. Almost from the moment he took over in 2014, the ADL has been mired in accusations of political bias, of providing cover for anti-Semites on the left from the kind of accountability the organization doggedly pursues for anyone on the right. Those accusations are true. But the organization is in the middle of a more consequential turn. To gain admission to the new progressive pantheon, the ADL has found itself compelled to jettison its century-old mission and become a different kind of organization entirely.

In the wake of l’Affaire Whoopi, an impression took hold that until the controversy, the ADL’s redefinition of “racism” had gone mostly unnoticed—and that the organization was caught off-guard by the attention it attracted once people started pointing it out on social media. That’s not the case.

In May 2020, a video surfaced showing teenagers drawing a swastika on the back of a teen in or near Mountain Brook, Alabama, home to a slight majority of the Birmingham area’s 5,000 Jewish residents. That same month, a police officer in Minneapolis killed George Floyd, a black man in custody. According to the <em>Atlanta Jewish Times</em>, the combination of both these events led the Mountain Brook school district to convene a “diversity committee.” That committee recommended the involvement of the ADL.

Into this tension-filled atmosphere, the ADL brought every divisive tool in its box. The district had been resisting the introduction into its curricula of ideas inspired by critical race theory, which reduce people to immutable characteristics, with a special focus on skin color. By the end of the ensuing school year, parents were fed up, writing up a 12-page complaint alleging that the ADL was “a highly partisan group that promotes views like Critical Race Theory” as well as late-term abortion and such culture-war fire starters as transgender accommodations for minors.

In response, Allison Padilla-Goodman, vice president of the ADL’s Southern Division—which includes the organization’s offices in Atlanta, Florida, New Orleans, and St. Louis—griped that “these parents are struggling to understand the future of the nation and their own futures and are taking it out on their own children and their future.” Thus, according to a senior ADL official, parents opposed to race essentialism and radical abortion politics are just on the wrong side of history. One particular point of contention raised by the parents: the ADL’s redefinition of racism that had portrayed only “white” people as capable of racism. Eventually the Mountain Brook school severed its connection to the ADL.

So no, the ADL’s leadership could not have been surprised to find itself mired in controversy relating to race politics, since it had just happened. Nor did it even attempt to hide its promulgation of critical race theory. “CRT helps us understand how and why racial injustice continues to persist in the U.S. despite the progress that has been made towards racial equity,” according to an explainer on the ADL’s website. As for those concerned with the preachment of race essentialism in schools, the ADL has this to say: “The term ‘critical race theory’ is being used in the media and in political campaigns to incite fear and misinform parents and the public.” According to another page on
its site, parents protesting CRT and Covid-19 restrictions at school board meetings should be treated as borderline terrorist, for “extremist entities have also seized on these heightened tensions around COVID-19 mandates and anti-CRT laws as fertile ground for recruitment efforts.”

It’s no wonder parents were put off by the ADL’s involvement in Alabama’s curriculum fight. The ADL portrays criticism as organized and dangerous. And that’s how we should understand the group’s reaction to the Whoopi controversy.

The faddish racial politics dominating progressive institutions has no room for Jews qua Jews. But it does have a use for Jews who can still fit into one of its favored racial categories. Enter “Jews of color.”

The tactic of dividing Jews by their skin color furthers the aims of leftist politics in two ways. The first is that it reinforces the ahistorical fabrication that “Jewishness” is “whiteness” from a racial and political perspective. People “who have become white should not be lecturing Black ppl about oppression,” tweeted the writer and professor Natalie Hopkinson in response to Jewish criticism of a positive New York Times essay she wrote on Louis Farrakhan. This is an old calumny. “Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They’re Anti-White,” declared a James Baldwin essay in 1967. “In the American context,” Baldwin explained, “the most ironical thing about Negro anti-Semitism is that the Negro is really condemning the Jew for having become an American white man—for having become, in effect, a Christian. The Jew profits from his status in America.”

Tema Smith’s harassment of pro-Israel advocates is legendary. Those who point out the divisiveness of race essentialism are a popular target of hers.

The second way in which dividing Jews helps the left is that it sows suspicion and hatred within the Jewish community, which robs our historically persecuted people of their communal solidarity—an essential survival mechanism since the outset of the Diaspora. In late January, the ADL announced its new Collaborative for Change Fellowship program, to tell the stories of “Jews of color.” Buried in the announcement was the coup de main, surprising even those who have followed the ADL’s antics for years.

Running the program would be the ADL’s new director of Jewish outreach, Tema Smith. She is a Canadian, which means Greenblatt chose to reach outside the United States to engage someone whose purpose is Jewish outreach inside the United States. Clearly she must be something special, and she is.

Here is one example of Smith’s Jewish outreach, as seen on Twitter: “One of these days we need to talk about how the Jewish community’s reactions to anti-Semitism coming from Black people is inherently tied to (implicitly racist) fears of Black violence,” she wrote.

Here’s another: After the Biden administration hired someone who had, in the past, defended Palestinian terrorism, Smith tweeted that “Jews *have* to be ok with Palestinians *explaining* why some turn to terrorism.”

More than anything, Smith’s habit of gleefully trying to call down the Twitter mob on Israel’s defenders makes clear the purpose of her hire. If you spend enough time on social media calling out anti-Semitism, Smith will appear, as if summoned, to publicly brand you a racist and open the floodgates of Twitter liberals ready to follow her lead. Smith’s harassment of pro-Israel advocates is legendary. Those who point out the divisiveness of race essentialism are a popular target of hers.

By bringing in Tema Smith, Greenblatt’s ADL has not only embraced the racial paradigm holding that the Jew is now an all-powerful oppressor; it has hired a cyberbully to police dissent—as the director of Jewish outreach. Moreover, this was the organization’s response to the warnings it received and the lessons it didn’t learn in Alabama. And it did not go unnoticed.

Rabbi Adam Wright is the spiritual leader of Alabama’s largest synagogue, Temple Emanu-El of Birmingham, which dates back to 1882. In an extraordinary sermon on February 4, Wright recalled the era during which the ADL was led by Abraham Foxman. “For many of us, the ADL is the go-to for combating Jewish hate and all forms of bigotry,” he told his congregation. “For a 120-year organization, their efforts, a lot of them, should be celebrated…. But there’s a certain realization that we need to come to. That the post-Foxman tenure is different… and I am not the only one who shares this assessment.”

Indeed he is not. Wright singled out the ADL’s redefinition of “racism” as indicative of how far it has strayed from its mission. Under Greenblatt, he said, “the literature, some of the positions, are not in the core belief system of the Jewish people.” Instead, it is furthering an ideology “that is simply angering more
Jews and not protecting us.” He noted the “deeply troubling” hiring of Tema Smith, recalled some of her greatest hits, and said overall that the new ADL is “siding with a certain political ideology, one which I believe and many Jews believe is harming their mission.”

Wright’s choice of words is important, because this is not about Greenblatt’s favoritism toward his fellow Democrats—though he certainly displays that bias as well—but rather adherence to an ideology, a new way of thinking. It is a worldview. As the linguist John McWhorter has written, in its dogmatic and ritualized praxis, anti-racism is a religion. Not like a religion: “I mean that it actually is a religion. An anthropologist would see no difference in type between Pentecostalism and this new form of antiracism.”

Which brings to mind one last comment by Wright, near the end of his sermon: “People were concerned that if I talked about these topics, that there could be some type of backlash. For those who know me, I’m not afraid.” That is, Wright correctly understood that the ADL, as part of the progressive woke world, seeks to enforce conformity not just within its ranks but without.

In July 2021, the ADL announced it had formed a partnership with PayPal, the massive online payment vendor that plays a key role in e-commerce worldwide. The organization is now helping PayPal identify what it considers “extremist” actors and groups, whom PayPal would then bar from its financial services. The point is to obliterate sources of revenue for whomever the ADL decides is a bad actor. And its long-standing relationships with law enforcement make this much more than a private concern. “My office stands ready to assist financial institutions and businesses of all kinds in this urgent fight to stop hate and protect members of historically marginalized communities,” pledged then-Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. in a statement that was part of the press release announcing the collaboration. Greenblatt has also been at the forefront of efforts to pressure Facebook and other social-media sites to censor political debate under the guise of “misinformation.”

For proof of this, look to the recent controversy over Joe Rogan. The popular podcaster, and the Spotify streaming service that pays Rogan a hefty sum for his show’s exclusivity, came under fire for hosting a couple of guests who cast doubt on the Covid-19 vaccines. Some musicians pulled their songs from Spotify in protest. The ADL swooped in and “analyzed” Spotify’s content rules. Its number-one complaint, leading off its findings, was this: “Spotify’s policies on deceptive election-related content don’t specify who they are intended for and whether they meaningfully combat ongoing election misinformation.” An organization whose ostensible purpose is the fight against anti-Semitism has now reoriented itself into becoming a watchdog determined to regulate and censor political speech.

It’s tempting (and accurate) to say that a curtailment of free-speech rights is bad for the Jews—as it would be for any minority group. But the ADL’s censor-

Jonathan Greenblatt has been at the forefront of efforts to pressure social-media sites to censor political debate under the guise of ‘misinformation.’

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of attention to Israel and nearly always attack Israel.”

Thus, it seems inevitable that the ADL’s commitment to this new progressive religion combined with its role as a leading censor of dissension is going to legitimize the targeting of Jews and Israel. And legitimization is precisely what Greenblatt offers them. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, last seen claiming at a rally that Israel keeps Palestinian children in cages in the West Bank, declared the Whoopi Goldberg matter closed because Greenblatt had spoken for all Jews.

“Whenever there’s a moment like this, or a learning moment like this, what’s super important is the relationship between that person and the community they’re making amends with,” she told TMZ. “So, the last I read, Jonathan Greenblatt, who is the head of the Anti-Defamation League, which is a champion in the fight against anti-Semitism across the country, he accepted her apology. And I think we really kind of take the Jewish community’s lead on this, and they seem to, you know, see that her apology was authentic and want to move on.”

Defending his decision to bring unrepentant Jew-hater Al Sharpton on his show to discuss anti-Semitism, NBC’s Joe Scarborough noted that Greenblatt joined Sharpton on the show and thus the ADL welcomed him: “Good enough for me.”

The American founding was a revolutionary political event because it was an attempt to create a modern republic around the ancient Greek and Roman idea of citizenship rather than tribe, family prestige, religious affiliation, and the like. The reason that America became a blessing for the Jews was that it erected barriers to the kind of racial and ethnic tribalism that always ends badly for us. Brick by brick, adherents of the new woke religion are dismantling those barriers, with the blessing and the active cooperation of the Anti-Defamation League.
True Crime Trashes the Holocaust

A much-touted investigation into the identity of Anne Frank’s betrayer fuels anti-Semitic stereotypes

By Jonathan S. Tobin

BOOKS, MOVIES, and television shows about actual murder cases have been a staple of popular culture ever since Truman Capote turned the story of a gruesome Kansas family slaying into his mammoth 1966 bestseller, In Cold Blood. Capote launched a genre, now commonly known as “true crime.” As the available fare on 2022 cable and streaming services demonstrates, the public’s appetite here is insatiable.

It was therefore inevitable that sooner or later an author or a team of would-be detectives would take up the case of who was responsible for betraying the teenage girl whom Dara Horn aptly described in her book People Love Dead Jews as “everyone’s (second) favorite Jew”: Anne Frank.

Among the most frequently asked questions by tourists who visit the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam is who was responsible for the raid on the secret annex behind the false bookcase at Prinsengracht 263 on August 4, 1944. For more than two years, eight Jews (Otto, Edith, Margot, and Anne Frank; Herman, Augusta, and Peter van Pels; and Fritz Pfeffer) had hidden in the annex above the warehouse where Otto Frank had run his business. All were arrested. Only Otto survived their imprisonment in the Westerbork Camp and then their subsequent transport to Auschwitz.
The Betrayal of Anne Frank: A Cold Case Investigation was rolled out in January 2022 by its American publisher with the kind of ballyhoo most authors could only dream of.

The other seven, including Anne, perished in the death camps. Her diary, found later, would immortalize all of them.

Dutch authorities conducted two investigations into the betrayal, one in the immediate postwar era and another in 1963, but no culprit was discovered. Over the years, suspicion has fallen on several figures. Willem van Maarten, a warehouse employee who had asked a lot of questions of those who were helping the hidden Jews, was long considered the most likely betrayer. Other suspects included Lena Hartog, the wife of the assistant manager of the warehouse; Anton Ahlers, a notorious criminal; Nelly Voskuil, the sister of one of the helpers; and Anna van Dijk, a Jewish woman later convicted of helping the Nazis find hidden Jews and the sole Dutch woman executed for the crime of collaboration.

But conclusive proof or anything close to it has always been lacking. The only real clue was the fact that the Nazi SD officer who led the raid on the annex, Otto Silbernauer, claimed it was prompted by a phone call from a source with information about hidden Jews. Silbernauer survived the war and even the subsequent infamy of being discovered as the man who arrested Anne Frank and went on to live a long and uneventful life back home in Austria.

Since we know the identity of the true culprit—Hitler—the mechanics of the Frank family’s exposure would not really seem to matter much. But for True Crime obsessives, an unsolved mystery is a challenge not to be ignored. In 2016, Dutch filmmaker Thijs Bayens and journalist Pieter van Twisk assembled a team to investigate. Former FBI agent Vince Panoke, who had used profiling techniques and technology to combat drug traffickers and Wall Street swindlers in America, subsequently joined them. The team was completed when Canadian non-fiction author Rosemary Sullivan, who had previously written a book about escape from France during the Holocaust, joined their ranks in 2019 as the Cold Case Team’s (the term is used in initial caps by Sullivan) Boswell.

Sullivan turned the team’s six years of labor into a book called The Betrayal of Anne Frank: A Cold Case Investigation.* According to Sullivan, after considering the case from every angle and even employing an artificial intelligence program specially created for them by Microsoft and metadata analysis to make sense of the mountains of information about the Holocaust in the Netherlands, the team produced an answer to the mystery. The team was “85 percent” sure that the person who betrayed the Franks and the others in the annex was someone even those well-versed in the lore of the diary had never heard of. His name: Arnold van den Bergh. He was a Dutch-Jewish notary and a member of the Jewish Council of community members that had, like similar councils in every other occupied country and ghetto, collaborated with the Germans.

The sole piece of evidence for this claim was an anonymous note sent to Otto Frank after the war. The note claimed that van den Bergh had given the Germans information about Prinsengracht 263, which led to the raid. While it is possible that Frank believed the claim, he did not publicize it in any way or present it or the note when van den Bergh was put on trial by a Jewish honor court after the war.

The assumption here is that van den Bergh had somehow obtained the addresses of Jews living in hiding and passed them on to his German interlocutors so that he could escape the fate of deportation and murder that would be the lot of 75 percent of Dutch Jews. Though van den Bergh survived the war, he died of cancer in 1950.

SULLIVAN’S BOOK was rolled out in January 2022 by its American publisher with the kind of ballyhoo most authors could only dream of. An exclusive segment on 60 Minutes highlighted the book and its findings while asking no tough questions about the broad conclusions Sullivan and her Cold Case Team heroes had reached. Laudatory reviews in the New York Times, the Guardian, and many other publications soon followed.

In the initial surge of good publicity, some did note that the evidence pointing to van den Bergh’s guilt was, at best, flimsy. But the book was praised for Sullivan’s narrative skills and the picture she painted of life in wartime Holland as seen through the prism of detectives searching for the truth about the identity of the person who cut short the life of a beloved figure.

* Harper Collins, 383 pages
Stories in newspapers around the world heralded their achievement, with some, like Britain's Daily Mail, employing headlines that proclaimed, “Anne Frank was betrayed by a JEWISH notary.”

The book seemed to be a classic example of what Horn has called “Holocaust inversion”—the perverse rendering of the Shoah in which Jews are blamed for their own fate. Just as Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann in Jerusalem had focused on the notion that “without Jewish help,” the murder of the 6 million would not have been possible, the idea that van den Bergh, and not a Dutch traitor, had been responsible for the fate of the Franks was the latest example of how the Diary of a Young Girl had become a means by which the non-Jewish world could absolve itself of any responsibility for what happened during the Holocaust.

It would take only a couple of weeks for all the good feelings about Sullivan and the book to evaporate. Once the Harper Collins publicity blitz had run its initial course, the book stayed in the news—but for reasons that were not to the liking of the author or her publisher.

Holocaust historians including the Dutch author David Barnouw pointed out that there is no real proof that the Jewish Council in Amsterdam had possessed the addresses of the Jews who were hiding there, least of all the address of Otto Frank, who had plotted his escape with his former employees and not with the Dutch resistance. Moreover, the Jewish Council had been disbanded in 1943, with most of its staff deported and murdered; the Franks were betrayed in 1944.

Van den Bergh was a shady character who had profited from the sale of Jewish property to Nazis before having to go underground himself to save his life and that of his wife and daughters. But nothing uncovered in the investigation linked him to the possession of such addresses or any knowledge of Jews in hiding other than his own family. And though Sullivan writes that van den Bergh “lived openly in the last year” of the German occupation of Holland, neither she nor the detectives back up this statement with any evidence.

It is also worth noting that the software and the FBI crime-solving techniques the team employed did not advance the case a jot. And while the team did locate a copy of the anonymous accusation against van den Bergh, its members were not able to discover who had sent it or why its author believed him to be guilty.

Like those who had come before, the team came to the conclusion that the more obvious suspects, like Maarten, were probably innocent. Some historians, faced with the same evidence, have come to believe that, with other scenarios ruled out, the most likely answer to the puzzle is that there was no betrayer. It may have been that the raid was an accident caused by a series of robberies of the warehouse that had come to the attention of the police. Though this theory, like all the others, is unproven, it does make sense that authorities might have concluded that thieves were using a secret hiding place in the building to escape detection or for storing loot and that they happened upon the hidden Jews without being tipped to their presence there.

But a True Crime tale simply cannot allow for the possibility that a mystery may never be solved. Its heroes these days are primarily dogged people who take up heretofore cold cases and bring the truth behind them to light. For the Cold Case Team to come to the end of its labors without producing a murderer would have been unthinkable—not to mention that it would have ended any hope of its investigation being considered a success and Sullivan’s book a commercial triumph. And so they implicated a Jew in the murder of a secular saint at a time of rising anti-Semitism in America, Europe, and across the globe.

Neither Sullivan nor Harper Collins backed down in the face of a torrent of criticism, including a highly negative New York Times article on the controversy. Sales have been brisk, helped along by the Costco discount outlet making the book a “buyer’s pick.” But the German division of Harper Collins has not been so sanguine. It released a statement that it would reconsider the book’s findings before publishing it in March. Even worse for the book, Ambo Anthos, a publishing firm that had produced a Dutch translation of The Betrayal of Anne Frank on the same date as the U.S. release, halted publication entirely. That was in keeping with the demand of the European Jewish Congress, which believes that the book’s unproven accusations are “potentially incendiary” in the current climate in which Jews have been under siege in Western Europe.

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Sullivan and the investigators spent too little of their time trying to make sense of the complicated dilemmas faced by the various Jewish Councils set up by the Germans.

This ALL MATTERS because Anne’s diary is the best-known example of Holocaust literature. Rather than just the jottings of a bored teen trapped in an intolerable rabbit warren where she, her family, and a few others were forced to live in silence, The Diary of a Young Girl is a genuinely great work of literature. Anne’s keen powers of observation and honesty, mixed with the hopes and dreams of a teen who still envisioned a productive life once her ordeal was over, have made the Diary immortal. Its unique power is rooted in the way ordinary readers, especially young ones, can identify with Anne and the idea of having to hide to avoid being murdered by totalitarian thugs.

The Diary subsequently was adapted into a hit play and then movie—with much of the specifically Jewish content edited out by authors who, acting with the approval of Otto Frank, wanted to make Anne into a universal heroine rather than a Jewish one. Frank had also seen to it that Anne’s thoughts about her sexuality and some of the more bitter criticisms of her mother were not included in the first published editions.

The universalist theme is reinforced by the much-quoted line toward the end when Anne writes, “I still believe, that in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.” As Dara Horn notes, Anne thereby became “the innocent dead girl” who “offered us grace” for the slaughter of 6 million Jews, and thereby allowed readers to glide past and through the brutal facts of a genocide. As more than a few Jewish commentators have noted, Anne would soon be given every reason to understand that people are not good of heart—especially when the fate of powerless Jews is at stake—when she had to watch her mother and sister succumb to disease and hunger before herself dying at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. But that grim truth is not a lesson as easy to stomach as the one that tells us that we can all prevent Holocausts by being nice to one another.

Otto Frank and many Jews since his time have preferred to speak of the Holocaust as simply a very bad example of man’s inhumanity to man rather than to understand it as a function of the way anti-Semitism works as a political ideology. This has rendered most Holocaust education programs largely useless in reducing Jew-hatred, let alone mobilizing the world to prevent other genocides. As we have seen in Rwanda, Sudan, and now in Western China against the Uyghurs, they continue with little interference from the enlightened West.

In this context, treating what happened to the Franks as just another cold-case story rather than the inevitable result of what the historian Lucy Dawidowicz rightly referred to as the Nazi’s war on the Jews is just another way to dumb down the greatest crime in history.

What makes The Betrayal of Anne Frank so extraordinarily tone-deaf to the implications of its conclusion is not just the paper-thin nature of the case it makes against van den Bergh. Leave aside the fact that there’s no reasonable basis to conclude with 85 percent (or any other arbitrary number) certainty that van den Bergh was the culprit. What’s worse is the fact that Sullivan and the investigators spent so little of their time trying to make sense of the complicated dilemmas faced by the various Jewish Councils (or Judenrats, as they were called in Eastern Europe) set up by the Germans in every occupied country.

Though Judenrats were reviled by the Jews they governed for the Nazis and especially by those who chose the more heroic path of resistance, Holocaust scholars now see the members of the councils as just a different class of victim rather than active collaborators. Many of those on the councils were given little choice about joining. And even if some did volunteer, few if any of them knew enough about what was going on to be considered shameless criminals by history.

In Isaiah Trunk’s 1972 book Judenrat—the single best study of the topic—he outlines the three basic questions that needed to be asked about the members of these bodies. One was whether they should have revealed to the Jews in their communities any knowledge they might have had of the impending disaster facing them. The second was whether any Jew, however reluctantly, lent a hand in the “selection” of Jews for the deportations that meant almost certain death. The third—and the one that applies almost across the board to all those placed in such positions, including non-Jewish authorities who either chose or were forced to collaborate with the Germans—is whether they were right to offer up some victims to be sacrificed in order to rescue others.

It is breathtakingly easy for contemporary readers to come to definitive answers to those questions, but
doing so in the years from 1941 to 1944 was far harder. Many of those placed on Jewish Councils believed that the Nazis were still more interested in profiting from exploiting the Jews rather than killing them all, and therefore genuinely believed they could save many lives by acting as intermediaries.

Far more notorious examples of these dilemmas exist than the case of van den Bergh. Hungarian Zionist leader Rudolf Kastner negotiated with Final Solution mastermind Adolph Eichmann for the lives of a trainload of Jews who, along with him, did wind up surviving the Holocaust. But Kastner, unlike many others who were placed in such positions, did likely know what awaited those who could not escape. The descendants of those who were saved by him still honor his memory. But his failure to raise awareness among the Jews left behind so that they might seek some method of escape or resistance embittered those who were not so fortunate. He was also accused of betraying the martyred resistance heroine and Hebrew poet Hannah Senesh to the Germans.

After the war, Kastner became a prominent Labor Zionist who served in the Israeli government led by David Ben-Gurion. But in 1953 Kastner was accused of collaboration and assisting the mass murder of Hungarian Jews by Malchiel Gruenwald, a survivor and right-wing critic of the Labor Party who was subsequently put on trial for libeling him. Despite the government's support of the prosecution, Kastner's accuser won his case. It would be ultimately overturned on appeal. Kastner was assassinated four years later by former members of the right-wing Lehi underground, carrying out what they considered to be belated justice. His killers were given life sentences, then pardoned after seven years.

Kastner's accusers saw his case in black and white, not the shades of gray in which historians now view the Jewish Councils. Though some Jews behaved disgracefully, it's morally dubious to judge—several decades later when armed with knowledge of the Final Solution that no Judenrat member could have had—those who believed they could save some at the expense of others or who chose methods of escape that were less than heroic. And it is an act of historical malpractice for writers and scholars to do so. Yet even if one agrees with those who damn the Judenrat members as cowards, thieves, or fools, placing the responsibility for the murder of the Jews on them rather than on the actual murderers misses the point about who actually is to blame for the Holocaust.

All dramatic depictions of the Holocaust must wrestle with the reality that fiction is ultimately incapable of capturing what Elie Wiesel called “the kingdom of death” the Nazis created—a network of mass murder unlike anything else that had ever existed. A play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett adapted from Anne's diary, which debuted to rave reviews in 1955, is a key example of the banality that can ensue. The novelist Meyer Levin, who believed Otto Frank had swindled him out of the rights to produce a theatrical version of the diary after he had promoted the book in the United States, viewed the Goodrich-Hackett work as an outrage, a homogenized and de-Judaized version of Anne that betrayed her spirit and identity. The Goodrich and Hackett play, which has since been revised many times, ends with the quote about people being good at heart. This has the effect of sending audiences home happy even though they know Anne is doomed.

If that is so of even the most well-intentioned depictions of the Holocaust, it is especially true of one that views the murder of even the most famous victim of the Nazis as fodder for True Crime exegesis. Sullivan's excited prose, peppered throughout with the sort of clichés that might not pass muster in a Law & Order episode (such as her description of an ex-FBI sleuth Panoke as someone who “believes in evil and has seen a lot of it”), sometimes suggests that she's writing the treatment for a movie script rather than a work of nonfiction.

Her book is best viewed as a standard police-procedural mystery. Attention is lavished on unimportant details about the investigators' work to draw the reader's attention more to the process by which they arrive at their conclusion than to the facts of the case, let alone the history. Sullivan purposely leads her readers down dead ends in the investigation for the sake of maintaining a false tension in the narrative.

The claim that an anonymous, untraceable, and unverifiable letter is “the only real physical evidence in their case” is risible. Each effort to build an argument for the team's assertion of van den Bergh's guilt is so peppered with ifs, maybes, and probablies that
The investigation’s purpose was to exploit and profit from the story of Anne Frank’s fate in a familiar manner—to portray it as just another notorious homicide.

it’s hard to see how it stood up to a fact check or serious editorial scrutiny. With so little to go on, to focus so relentlessly on one admittedly unheroic Jew to the exclusion of so much other depravity and criminality is as outrageous as it is irresponsible.

While Sullivan speaks of the team’s awareness that blaming the crime on a Jew would be controversial, both they and she are clearly oblivious to the way such Holocaust inversion is employed as ammunition by anti-Semites and is used to distract attention from the real criminals: the Germans who plotted and carried out the mass extermination of European Jewry.

What in another context might be forgiven as mere authorial excess or True Crime faux drama in an ordinary murder mystery is, when applied to the story of Anne Frank, an unforgivable bowdlerization of a topic that requires both humility and seriousness from those who venture onto what ought to be considered sacred space.

The problem here is not that the Cold Case Team and Sullivan failed to provide a convincing answer to the question asked by those who visit the Anne Frank House. Regardless of what might well have been their good intentions, by the time their investigation concluded, its purpose was not to honor Anne’s memory or that of the millions of other Jewish victims. Rather, it was to exploit and profit in a familiar manner from the story of their fate—to portray it as just another notorious homicide. That they did so by ultimately coming up with a Jewish villain for their drama makes it even worse. For that sin, Sullivan and her publishers deserve far more opprobrium that they have thus far received. While Hannah Arendt’s claim that Eichmann illustrated the “banality of evil” was an intellectual crime of its own, *The Betrayal of Anne Frank* is an example of how banal depictions of evil can do far more harm than any possible good that could ever have come from an investigation into this case. 🤔
Writers Lost and Found
On Johanna Kaplan and Bette Howland

By Joseph Epstein

I DON’T KNOW whether the writers Bette Howland and Johanna Kaplan ever met, but if they had, they would have been unlikely to run out of things to talk about. Both had a spell as contributors to Commentary. In March 1975, Johanna Kaplan even reviewed, on the whole favorably, Bette Howland’s memoir, W-3. Perhaps most notable of all, both women suffered decades-long writer’s block, though Kaplan is said to be working on a new novel, which would be her second. Each has recently had a portion of her writings reissued,* doubtless as part of the heightened interest in the work of women writers. Finally, each might have made a convincing character in the fiction of the other. Bette Howland was five years older than Johanna Kaplan and died in 2017 at the age of 80, the age Kaplan is now. She published three rather slender books before her death, one about her stay on a psychiatric ward (W-3) after an attempted suicide, another a book of essays (Blue in Chicago), and the third a collection of three longish stories (Things to Come and Go). Kaplan published a collection of short stories (Other People’s Lives) and a novel (O My America!). Neither writer went unrewarded. Howland won Rockefeller and Guggenheim grants and, in 1984, a MacArthur “genius

* Blue in Chicago: And Other Stories, by Bette Howland (Picador), Loss of Memory Is Only Temporary, by Johanna Kaplan (ecco)
grant.” Kaplan’s book of stories and her novel were finalists for the National Book Award in 1976 and 1981, and both won the Jewish National Award for Fiction. They wrote in distinctive styles, rich in observation and laced with humor.

I know Johanna Kaplan only from her prose, but I knew Bette Howland well enough to think of her as a friend. I met her sometime in the middle 1970s through Saul Bellow. “Oh,” she said, when Saul intro-duced me to her, “I was expecting a much older man,” then added, “Oh, God, that sounds like a line from some bad movie.” Smallish, zaftig, with a winning smile, thick dark hair, high cheek bones but slightly blotchy skin, she was a live wire, intellectually effervescent. Her career, right up to the end, was inextri-cably connected with Saul. “Bette Howland, Author and Protégée of Bellow’s, Dies at 80” ran the headline to her obituary in the New York Times. Bette could be astute about Bellow. “Saul doesn’t really do plots,” she once told me. “Reading a Bellow novel is like going to hear Yehudi Menuhin play Mozart. Who cares about the Mozart?”

At dinner one night with Saul at Gene & Georgetti’s west of the Loop, I mentioned Bette’s name. “Ah, Bette,” said Saul, “my working-class queen. She expected me to marry her, but I would never marry a woman who tried to kill herself.” He neglected to mention that Bette may well have attempted suicide, which she did in his apartment during his absence, precisely because he wouldn’t marry her. Not the most sensitive of guys, Saul, certainly not for one so relentlessly self-advertised in his own novels as extraordinarily sensitive.

Everything in Bette Howland’s early life seemed accelerated. At 15, she departed John Marshall High School in Chicago to become a student in the three-year undergraduate program at the University of Chicago (known as Robert Hutchins’s Children’s Crusade). At 19, she married a biologist named Howard Howland, with whom she had two sons, Frank and Jacob, but was divorced from him five or so years later. As far as I know, she never had full-time custody of her sons, but was with them every chance she had and was devoted to them.

I was myself between marriages when I met Bette but, somehow, our relationship never went beyond friendship. She could be dazzlingly brilliant in conversation, but given to moodiness, not to mention streaks of neuroticism. Neal Kozodoy, then editor of Commentary, once called to ask if I knew how he could reach Bette, who had not returned galley proofs on an essay and apparently wasn’t answering her phone. The one time I was in her studio apartment, on the top floor of a high-rise building in Hyde Park, supplied strong evidence that Bette laid no claim to being a balabusta, or efficient homemaker. Emerging from the bathroom, I felt a silkiness on my hand, which turned out to be Bette’s underpants left on the inside doorknob.

One summer, when I was going off on a two-week vacation with my own sons, I offered Bette and her boys the use of my Evanston apartment, which was only three short blocks from Lake Michigan. She was, she told me, delighted to have it. When I returned, my kitchen sink had somehow turned orange, the sheets were off my bed with a note of apology from Bette for her not having had time to launder them, my older son’s baseball glove was missing, and an open and half-eaten can of tuna was in the refrigerator with another note that read, “In case you’re hungry when you return.”

When I published my first book, Divorced in America (1974), I gave Bette a copy, signed, “To Bette, In Friendship, Joe.” Two or three years later I found this signed copy for sale in a used bookshop and have ever since regretted not returning it to Bette with the postscript, “Still friends.” She would, I like to think, have appreciated the joke.

Bette departed Chicago in 1975 and, far as I know, never for long had a permanent residence after that. She stayed at Yaddo, Bread Loaf, MacDowell, Ragdale, and other writers’ colonies; she lived in other people’s apartments; her last years were lived with her son Jacob in Tulsa. She seemed cut off, her own life permanently impermanent. The last time I saw Bette, I picked her up at her sister’s house in Chicago. Wearing a heavy mutton-lamb coat, she hugged me with so great an ardor that I feared I might never escape. Over lunch at the Ashkenaz Delicatessen in Rogers Park, one sensed her discontent with the way her life was going. Among other things, she noted that, though she had published three books, no men were attracted to her. “A man in his early fifties who had published three books wouldn’t be in the same condition,” she com-
plained. I spoke to her only once, over the phone, in the last year of her life, when she called me from Tulsa. That she was suffering from dementia was, sadly, obvious. I subsequently learned that she had multiple sclerosis and had also been hit by a pickup truck.

On the back cover of Loss of Memory Is Only Temporary, the new volume featuring Johanna Kaplan’s shorter writings, mention is made of her having worked for many years as a teacher of emotionally disturbed children. Many of the characters in her stories are themselves, in rather a different way, emotionally disturbed. All live in New York. Toward the close of her memoir “Tales of My Great Grandfathers” (originally published in the July/August 2000 Commentary), she writes: “I am the great-granddaughter at once of an eccentric, lofty-minded rabbi who rescued abandoned children and of a desolate, kidnapped child conscript whom no one attempted to save. How could I not, then, as a writer, be drawn to the paradoxes and disruptions that stumble through generations of Jewish family lives? How could I not be preoccupied, in my fiction, with the terrible deforming power of history’s privations when I know that its remnant and anachronistic tendrils are still so alive in me?”

Kaplan writes chiefly about Jewish immigrants who fled Hitler to arrive in America, some of them with the telling tattoo of the death camps on their forearms. The land of the free and the home of the brave for these migrants is never easy. They tend to live on the old, pre-gentrified West Side of Manhattan. They worry about muggers, but even more about the thinness of American culture and the confusion of the country’s values. Many are what were once known as “kooks,” the neurotic element strong in them. “Forgive yourself your neuroses,” one character in her novel advises another. They do not let their awkwardness with English get in the way of their complaints. “Kaplan has an almost uncanny ear for the way language is fragmented by those whose command of English is imperfect, and for the speech rhythms of people who don’t know the difference between logorrheic monologue and conversation,” the novelist Francine Prose writes in her introduction to Loss of Memory Is Only Temporary. They are preponderantly women, while the narrators of her stories are often young girls, American-born, trying to understand a world larger than the one they were born into.

A passage from Howland’s essay “Golden Age” well describes many of Kaplan’s characters: “These people were all old Jews. Judging from the accents I heard around me, most of them had come over on the boat. They were not, as the jargon goes, assimilated…. And yet their status is symbolic. This is no country for old men. All of them must be in the same boat; they are not entirely of America, either.”

Neither Howland nor Kaplan wrote about sex, at least not in any direct way. Ezra R. Slavin, a central character in Kaplan’s novel, O My America!, an intellectual and guru of sorts, is many times married, but his attraction to women is less than clear. The novel is organized around Slavin’s wives and children. A self-acclaimed anarchist known to his readers as “the subway Thoreau,” he is a character constantly on the qui vive for American behavior that goes against what he thinks are basic human needs. “Inauthenticity kills” is among his mottoes. “When I hear the word technology,” he says, “I want to reach for my Yo-Yo.” Ezra Slavin sounds in some ways rather like the famous radical essayist Paul Goodman, without Goodman’s polymorphous perversity. (The old joke about Goodman has a man at a cocktail party ask another man where Paul is. When told he last saw him by himself at the buffet, the first man replies: “You mean you left Paul alone with the chopped liver?”)

Part of Howland’s style plays off clichés and infuses them with new comic meaning: “Only that he [her father] didn’t know his own strength.” Pause for new paragraph. “But I did.” Or: “But you know your mother. It’s her way or nothing.” Pause. “Usually it’s nothing.” Or writing of Victor Lazarus, the hero of her novella Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, who is dying of cancer: “Rivets in your ribs. Staples in your lungs, man-made esophagus, stitched-up stomach…. Victor Lazarus was a man of parts.”

Johanna Kaplan’s characters worry about muggers, but even more about the thinness of American culture and the confusion of the country’s values.

Howland also had what seems an unusual enthusiasm for describing decrepitude, sagging skins, slumping posture, failing eyesight, missing teeth. She could go on for pages describing the inmates in an old people’s home or the sad fogeys who daily inhabit a public library in a shabby Chicago neighborhood, or the hopeless men and women who show up in Chicago criminal courtrooms. Of a minyan in her story “Aronesti,” she characteristically writes: “The old men
smelled like wet crushed cigars; their white beards were stained with yellow streaks of nicotine, and they coughed up white-yellow phlegm.”

The Howland family, nuclear and extended, appears throughout Bette’s work. In her essays her father is portrayed as an earnest but hopeless lummox, her mother an ineffectual shrew. Aunts, uncles, and cousins do not fare much better. In a long essay about the death of her grandmother called “How We Got the Old Woman to Go,” she expends 35 pages describing the physical and psychological oddities of her family. One rather hopes that those family members still alive when she wrote about them never read these devastating prose portraits.

Bette developed a prose style that resembles nothing quite so much as riffing in jazz. She would depart an essay or story to riff on Judaism, hospital life, WASP culture, and scores of other things. Here is a brief sample about a woman who insists on an orthodox Jewish divorce, a get, from the husband who is the main character in “Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage”: “As a good Jewish daughter, X could not in good conscience consider her divorced without a get... All these people with their good consciences. Where do they dig them up? Is God holding a garage sale? I tell you, Victor, these good consciences will be the death of us.”

For her part, Kaplan’s prose is laden with metaphor and simile, which can sometimes, to avail myself of both a metaphor and a cliché, send her off the rails: “Merry listened to Charlotte, whose voice kept floating on in sighing cloudy rapture—as if at any time she might turn into a daffodil.” Or: “Louise heard the various zippers on her fatigue jacket jangling in the darkness like the key chain of a Victorian housekeeper.”

**The work of both Bette Howland and Johanna Kaplan is laced with humor and high spirits; talent and wit play through their writings.**

SEVERE WRITER’S BLOCK, which both women suffered, is a malady with many possible causes: illness, exhaustion, depression, financial and various other external pressures and impediments. The standard story for Howland’s block, which I find less than convincing, is that it derived from her feeling not able to live up to the half-million-dollar MacArthur “genius” grant she received, with Saul Bellow’s support, in 1984.

My own, doubtless harsh, view is that writer’s block is most often a synonym for absence of ideas. “Every writer has only one story to tell,” James Baldwin once wrote, “and he has to find a way of telling it until the meaning becomes clearer and clearer, until the story becomes at once more narrow and larger, more and more precise, more and more reverberating.” Bette Howland’s one story was that of her nuttily obtuse family and down-but-not-quite-out people in Chicago, told less successfully in her fiction than in her essays. Her few attempts at fiction, alas, never quite come to life.

Johanna Kaplan’s one story is that of the wonderment of girls and young women at the unease, often full-out wretchedness, of adults struggling to make sense of the world. Her fiction does indeed come alive, often soars, her problem being landing the story once she sends it aloft—her stories, that is, seldom arrive at satisfying resolutions. Is it possible that both Howland’s and Kaplan’s awareness of this, their bone knowledge that they could not take their chosen stories any further despite their considerable talents, caused their long silences?

Johanna Kaplan and Bette Howland are women of my own generation, a generation that did not produce all that many women writers, and among those it did, depression seems to have ridden high. I think of Joyce Carol Oates, or “the three saddest words in the English language,” as Gore Vidal referred to her. Then there are Joan Didion and Renata Adler, about whom I wrote an essay in the June 1984 issue of *Commentary* to which I gave the title “The Sunshine Girls.” In the first paragraph of that essay, I wrote: “I think of them as the Sunshine Girls, largely because in their work the sun is never shining. If weather reports were offered in novels, in their novels the forecast would almost always be gray, mostly cloudy, chill winds, with a strong chance of rain. They seem, these two writers, not really happy unless they are sad. They keep, to alter the line from an old song, a frown on their page for the whole modern age.”

Neither Bette Howland’s nor Johanna Kaplan’s writing is marked by depression of this sort. The work of both is laced with humor and high spirits; talent and wit everywhere play through their writings. Yet their stories and essays do not bring a lot in the way of good news, or pay much attention to the rich variety and amusement of modern life. Each is the master of her milieu: Bette Howland’s lower-middle-class life and below in heartless Chicago, Johanna Kaplan’s immigrant Jewish life in crowded New York. Each can
strike off brilliant passages. Here is Bette Howland on cancer patients waiting in hospital oncology departments: "Among the couples in the waiting room—no one comes to oncology alone—there is no telling which was which; which was the one. The one whose name was written on the charts; the one they had the contract out on. No one looks sick or scared or in pain. But then again, pale rider, neither are you. What they look was weary. They were waiting, waiting the way people wait in airports, bus terminals, other places of arrival and departure."

And here is Johanna Kaplan on life in a Jewish tenement in New York: “It sometimes seemed to Miriam that if a person from a foreign country—or even a miniature green man from Mars—ever landed by accident in her building and by mistake walked up the six flights of stairs, all he would hear was screaming and crying: mothers screaming and children crying, fathers screaming and mothers crying, televisions screaming and vacuum cleaners crying; he could very easily get the idea that with all these noises there were no lives."

Style is a great preservative in literature and the quality that both Bette Howland’s and Johanna Kaplan’s writing possess in abundance, and the reason their work has proved worth preserving.\[►\]
IN the spring of 2017, Rasmea Odeh's reputation on the left was in full flower. On April 2, she earned multiple standing ovations at the membership conference of the anti-Israel group Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). At the time, Odeh was on trial for immigration fraud, having omitted from her 2004 application, among other things, a ten-year stint in an Israeli prison. Before she got sprung in a 1979 prisoner exchange, Odeh had been serving two life sentences and then some for her role in two 1969 bombings, one of which took the lives of Hebrew University students Edward Joffe and Leon Kanmer. That bombing took place at a Jerusalem supermarket packed with shoppers preparing for Shabbat. Only the sharp eye of a rescuer and the defects of an operation meant to kill as many Jews as possible prevented a mass slaughter.

It may seem strange that JVP, which claims to stand for non-violence and presumably had many non-murderers to choose from, selected Odeh as a keynoter. But JVP, the Women's March, and other activist groups that embraced Odeh had a ready answer: Odeh got a bum rap. She was framed by the Israelis, who tortured a false confession out of her, and then was mistreated by the racist, Zionist American justice system. An onlooker, dependent on mainstream he-said-she-said coverage, might be forgiven for not knowing what to think. Steven Lubet, in The Trials of Rasmea Odeh, puts matters beyond a reasonable doubt.

A professor at Northwestern University's Pritzker School of Law, an expert on trial advocacy, and a former defense attorney, Lubet offers a dispassionate assessment of the evidence, wherever it points, and an engaging blow-by-blow of the legal action that resulted in Odeh's pleading guilty and eventually being deported. Here is what he establishes.

First, Odeh was guilty of the crime to which she pleaded guilty: "procuring citizenship contrary to law." She falsely denied, in writing and in person, being arrested, convicted, and jailed in Israel. That lie, without which she would not have obtained citizenship, was

Guilty
illegal. After her grudging plea was accepted, Odeh rushed to the courthouse steps to take it back in the presence of her fans. But Lubet shows that Odeh pleaded out for a good reason, namely, the weakness of her defense.

At trial, Odeh claimed that she misread her naturalization application, which asked such unambiguous questions as “Have you EVER been convicted of any crime or offense.” That boldfaced, capitalized “ever,” she said, referred only to convictions in the United States, she had thought. The official who conducted her naturalization interview testified to having clarified, as a routine practice, that the word “ever” included “anywhere in the world.” Odeh asserted that the official never did so, which is why she reaffirmed, under oath and line by line, the lies in her application.

When she was reminded that she had lied in the same way in 1994 to obtain a visa, Odeh explained that her brother had filled out the application and that she had uncomprehendingly signed it. She testified that she knew only “some words and basic sentences” in English at the time. But Lubet’s research shows that Odeh likely graduated high school with “at least two thousand hours of English instruction,” that she later took English classes in Jordan, and that her post-secondary studies included English materials.

Odeh went with these weak defenses only after the court judged another weak defense inadmissible. An expert witness was willing to say on her behalf that Odeh, diagnosed with chronic PTSD, might “cognitively process questions about her past to avoid recalling traumatic experiences.” The three “nationally prominent experts on PTSD” Lubet consulted dismissed that speculation; there is no evidence to support it. In any case, Odeh has often discussed her experiences, leaving one to conjecture that her form of PTSD affects the sufferer’s memory only when forgetting might be a ticket to citizenship.

Second, Lubet shows, Odeh had a fair trial in the United States. Her defense team antagonized Judge Paul Borman, the first judge to supervise her case, by claiming that his contributions to Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces and the Detroit Jewish Federation required his recusal. In fact, the contributions had been made by the judge’s cousin, who shared his name. Judge Borman, nonetheless, diligently found another reason to recuse himself: an old investment in the supermarket Odeh helped bomb. Some of Odeh’s defenders, including her attorney, Michael Deutsch, had complained from the beginning that she couldn’t get a fair trial because of the machinations of the Israeli government and the “Israel lobby.” But, Lubet reports, “the Israeli government had been decidedly cool about cooperating in the prosecution” and “had done nothing to initiate the case.” And, as Lubet also observes, Judge Borman’s “scrupulous” investigation into “connections that the defense had not raised” vindicated “the court and judicial system.” That didn’t stop Odeh’s “defense committee,” a group of activists organized in her support, from crowing that Judge Borman’s recusal proved the defense’s “claims of pro-Israel bias.”

Gershwin Drain was the next judge assigned to Odeh’s case. Judge Drain, “an African American native of Detroit,” “a lifelong Democrat,” and an Obama appointee, had been “a public defender for twelve years” before he became a judge. This did not stop Odeh and her supporters from invoking racism to explain their team’s losses in court. Never mind that a three-judge panel, including two Republican appointees, actually overturned an initial verdict against Odeh. And never mind that Judge Drain ordered a new trial that would have permitted Odeh to present her expert PTSD witness, as well as evidence that she had been tortured. Never mind that the plea deal she eventually took, after lying repeatedly to the court, was the same deal she had been offered before she went to trial. Her prosecutors, said one prominent supporter, “were doing the bidding of Israel,” which is why Odeh found it necessary to take a plea rather than telling her story and “putting Israel on trial” in court.

Third, Rasmea Odeh was guilty of the crimes she lied about, including her participation in the operation that killed Edward Joffe and Leon Kanner. Lubet counts the ways in which this should be ob-

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vious. Both of the women who worked with Odeh and planted the bombs have implicated her in the operation, not under duress but during interviews with friendly interlocutors. In one such interview, Odeh herself sits, smiling and denying nothing, as her accomplice thanks her for “dragging [her] into military work.” After Odeh went to prison, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) named a hijacking unit after her and made her release a high priority. Odeh, who portrayed herself to “European and American audiences” as an innocent victim caught up in an Israeli dragnet, told a sympathetic interviewer that she was a member of PFLP’s central committee, and she gave several “Arabic-language television interviews recounting her involvement in ‘military work,’” a euphemism for the PFLP’s attacks on civilians. And why not? Before she came to the United States, Odeh was celebrated in the Arab world.

Lubet also looks carefully at Odeh’s story of torture at the hands of Israeli interrogators. He finds some important details of that story to be implausible but others to be credible. Which should come as no surprise, considering the 1987 Landau Report that was endorsed by Israel’s government. That report determined that Shin Bet interrogators “routinely lied in court about the treatment of detainees.” While the report endorsed the use of “moderate physical pressure” in the interrogation of terrorist suspects, it “tacitly admitted that even more brutal measures had been employed in the past and banned their use in the future.” Judging by consistent elements in Odeh’s multiple accounts of her experience, the “corroboration of verifiable details,” and “other circumstantial evidence,” Lubet concludes that Odeh “was fiercely brutalized by her interrogators, leading to a confession that would not be admissible in American courts.”

Nonetheless, he adds, she confessed to a crime she had committed. It’s hard to say, Lubet reflects, who among Odeh’s cheerleaders knew or suspected that she was lying about her innocence. Her “closest comrades,” he thinks, were aware, at least, of “Odeh’s participation in armed struggle.” Others “accepted her at her word, perhaps having willingly suspended disbelief out of antagonism toward Israel.” What Lubet’s book makes clear is that they all should have known—for while Lubet uncovers new information, some of the most damning evidence he explores came out during the trial. In any case, the embrace of Odeh by advocates of “nonviolence” is less paradoxical than it seems. To embrace nonviolence as a strategy for winning favor in one context in no way precludes embracing violence in others. Even outside her close circle, some of Odeh’s supporters, one suspects, would have admired her no less had they known she was a killer.

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### Head Stop

**The Parent Trap: How to Stop Overloading Parents and Fix Our Inequality Crisis**

By Nate G. Hilger

MIT Press, 285 pages

Reviewed by Naomi Schaefer Riley

CAN anything dampen the left’s enthusiasm for universal early childhood education? When a recent study from Tennessee found that kids who attended the state’s pre-K program were actually doing worse both on academic achievement and disciplinary measures than their peers who didn’t attend, progressive policy wonks simply refused to believe it. Beth Meloy, who consults for the Early Learning and Care Division at the California Department of Education, told a reporter: “We need to look into the context of these studies....There are many factors that influence a child’s development and later academic achievement.” Maybe, but the study’s release was delayed by two years and was made public only after researchers at Vanderbilt had produced 26 supplementary tables to test all possible explanations for the divergence.

As a matter of fact, the results were not all that different from those of other programs designed to help disadvantaged kids become more prepared for school. One particularly damning study from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that Head Start produced about the same results as regular exposure to Sesame Street. Head Start costs around $7,000 a
Commentary

The premise of *The Parent Trap* is that we are asking parents to do too much. Sure, they should provide their kids with love and affection. But to be a halfway adequate parent today requires building skills, the author says.

The Brown University economist Nate Hilger is aware of the studies that puncture holes in the effectiveness of these programs, but like a committed Communist who believes we simply haven't tried a pure enough form of the political arrangement to render judgment, he argues that these programs simply don't have enough funding.

In his new book, *The Parent Trap*, Hilger proposes a “Familycare” program that would “cost something like 2 percent of GDP,” an expenditure he characterizes as “modest.” Indeed, it could hardly be unreasonable, he says, to devote such resources to helping families when we spend 3.2 percent of GDP on the military: “If we want, we can think of Familycare like a new military, but instead of protecting us from foreign threats, Familycare protects us from a dire domestic threat—the destruction caused by foregone investments in children's skill growth.” If all this sounds like the kind of thing an earnest high-school student might say in a debate, keep in mind that Hilger was an adviser to Pete Buttigieg's presidential campaign.

The premise of *The Parent Trap* is that we are asking parents to do too much. Sure, they should provide their kids with love and affection. But to be a halfway adequate parent in 21st-century America requires building skills, Hilger says. And while many wealthy and middle-class parents know how to build those skills in their kids or can figure it out—or pay others to do it—there are millions of parents who can’t.

What are these skills? Hilger doesn’t come out with a list, but we can discern that they are the qualities that lead people to become economically successful. He says that we require parents to “act as pediatricians, nutritionists, college counselors, tutors, real estate agents, and chief executive officers.” Whether it’s managing a child’s health conditions or finding the right elementary school or filling out a college financial-aid form, these tasks have become too complicated, and it’s time for the government to step in and help.

Hilger doesn’t blame schools for these problems. He notes that students spend only a small fraction of their lives in school. Much of the learning gap is in place long before students even get to kindergarten. And he goes to great pains to explain to readers that funding of schools is not the issue, since he clearly assumes that his audience will find it hard to believe that some of the best-funded schools in this country are also the worst-performing.

The other thing he feels that he needs to establish for his audience is that poor children—and, in particular, poor black children—can actually be helped, that it is possible to change the trajectory of these kids’ lives. Does he think his audience is made up of all white supremacists? No, it’s just that they believe systemic racism will always prevent black people from getting ahead. But when blacks and whites have the same skills—for instance, when they score the same on the Armed Services Qualification Test or they graduate from the same college with the same major—the income gap largely disappears. “Equalizing opportunities for skill growth in Black communities would eliminate much more than half of Black-white income inequality and would do so even if racial prejudice remained prevalent,” he writes.

One wonders whether Hilger will get into trouble among his progressive friends for such assertions. Of course he pays homage to the idea that black people are only poor today because of slavery and Jim Crow—by suggesting that it is those very things that have historically prevented them from learning the skills they needed to succeed. He doesn’t acknowledge that black incomes were growing faster in the 1950s when prejudice was much more of an issue.

But don’t worry, he assures his readers. There are professionals who can help: “When we look for good investments both before and after kids enter K12 schools, we find extravagantly high-return opportunities foregone by millions of families.” Take for instance a program called BAM, which stands for “Becoming a Man.” He quotes its founder as saying that when growing up, he “sorely missed a father figure.”

This passage, which occurs more than three-quarters of the way through the book, is the first time that we hear that some children in
this country face another kind of disadvantage—one that is the result of neither their skin color nor their parents’ income. It is the result of growing up without a father.

Four of every 10 children in this country are born to single mothers. And those kids are less likely to graduate high school, more likely to end up abusing drugs, more likely to end up being disciplined in school, and more likely to wind up in jail. And they will start having sex at an earlier age than their peers. It never occurs to Hilger to see how much of the inequality gap could be fixed if parents followed the “success sequence”—graduating high school and getting married before having children. But here’s a hint: Among graduates of selective colleges, three-quarters were from families in which their birth parents were married to each other. Hilger mentions none of this. There is no discussion of marriage in this book. He thinks that we can fix the issues of family structure just by signing kids up for mentoring programs.

Similarly, he suggests that housing segregation in the past is the reason that so many black Americans live in poor neighborhoods near bad schools. But he never asks why it is that a child’s zip code should prevent parents from picking any school they want to for their children or which interest groups have ensured that it is all but impossible for parents to use their tax dollars for private schools or charter schools that would serve their kids better.

Hilger is convinced that parents need their own movement, “an organization that advocates for them in all aspects of child skill development, makes their lives as parents simpler and more manageable, and inspires fear in elected officials.” He has somehow missed the fact that such a movement has been forming over the past two years. The shutdowns of schools, the nonsense being taught in them, and the way that children have been treated have inspired parents across the country to rise up as never before. And as for inspiring fear in elected officials? Well, these parents have been designated domestic terrorists by the Justice Department. Need we say more?

The problem for Hilger and his friends, though, is that these parents have not been agitating for the things he wants them to agitate for. He believes they should want more government-funded day care, someone to provide their children with healthy meals, and someone to explain to them which extracurricular activities to sign up their kids for. But what they actually want is the freedom to be able to spend their money—including their tax money—on programs that work for them. For the most disadvantaged kids, of course, there is every reason to provide programs and policies that will help them to mimic the lives of the middle class, including access to high-quality private and public schools. But there are some things, such as fatherlessness, that even 2 percent of GDP will not be able to solve.
“When you work in a normal job and you mess up, you get fired. But when you’re a cop, it’s a little more complicated,” he says. “The policeman’s union is very clear: If you catch a cop in the act of breaking the law or acting improperly or can prove he or she has done some fireable offense, you can fire them. But if you can’t, then it’s going to be a long and expensive process with appeals and investigations and union trouble. So what the police department does is put bad cops—and in this show, these are bad cops—on ‘desk duty.’ They’re sent to a long-unused precinct house and told to sit. All day. Doing nothing. They must clock in, they must show up, and they must behave.

“The old precinct house is barely up to code. The department doesn’t cool it in the summer, doesn’t heat it in the winter, doesn’t clean it. The department’s strategy here is simple: Get these cops to quit. But they won’t. What they want is to reclaim their honor, do what it takes to restore their good names. So they investigate and solve crimes—sometimes working clandestinely for cops still on the job, sometimes on their own—and every week they try to get pulled off ‘desk duty’ and put back on the job they love.”

At this point in the pitch, you should lean back in your Aeron chair, maybe gaze thoughtfully across the busy 134 Freeway at the convoy of black limousines moving along the Lake of Reflection and say, *I just don’t think this is the moment for this show.*

Look, it may be a terrible idea for a cop show—well, not too fresh or original, it was basically *The Dirty Dozen* with cops—and it rattled the executives. It’s one thing to extend a franchise that already exists and that comes from a powerful producer—Dick Wolf at NBC, Jerry Bruckheimer at CBS—but it’s another to ask a network exec to lean back in his Aerom and take a chance on something, especially when all the cultural indicators he follows are sending the loud message that cops are radioactive.

And yet: The ratings for these shows in general have been steady-as-she-goes, even during 2020, the tumultuous year that saw protests, riots, and the defund-the-police movement take hold of American culture. Well, certain parts of American culture. According to my rough math, based on weekly Nielsen ratings, about 75 million people watch police dramas every week. They may be out of step with the moment, but that’s a lot of people. Enough to make a difference in things that depend on getting a large group to agree with you, as in election results.

If the brain trust behind the Democratic Party would spend the next week watching prime time broadcast television, they’d be treated to the biggest and most popular shows on television that feature unfashionable and practically reactionary depictions of law-enforcement officials doing a pretty good job. They might rethink their party’s deeply held association with the idea that “defund the police” is a winning and popular strategy.

There are signs that they are coming around. Eric Adams, the newly elected mayor of New York City, coasted to victory promising his constituents more police, not fewer. And President Joe Biden tried to drive a stake through the heart of the idea in his State of the Union speech on March 1 by declaring *fund the police* in his signature rasp. They are learning—perhaps too late—that a lot of Americans watch *Law & Order* because a lot of Americans like law and order. They are learning what it feels like to miss the moment.
How You Know Americans Like Cops

ROB LONG

I REMEMBER A FEW years ago a network executive telling me that the traditional multi-camera situation comedy was dead. “It’s just not the moment for that kind of comedy,” he said. “The audience hungers for something more than just jokes.”

One of the reasons I remember the conversation so well is because that kind of show—the traditional multi-camera situation comedy—is pretty much the way I make my money. We were in his office on one of the upper floors of a building in Burbank, and his window looked out over the hills beyond, so as he spoke I saw a funeral procession snaking up one of the paths of the Forest Lawn Memorial Park. It was the perfect Hollywood way to learn that your career is over: pompous business jargon punctuated by a too-on-the-nose metaphor.

Hollywood loves a happy ending, of course, so it was barely a year later that I got a call from that same executive telling me that the traditional multi-camera comedy was back. “We really feel like the audience is ready to watch that kind of show again,” he said. “We really think that this is the moment for the traditional multi-cam situation comedy.”

For reference purposes, the call came a few months after the 2018 reboot of Roseanne premiered on ABC and got 20 million viewers.

This is not the moment for this show are the weasel words we use in Hollywood after we hear a pitch for a series that we are convinced is unfashionable or out of step with prevailing political currents. And this is the moment for this show are the weasel words we use when we’re convinced of the opposite.

These “moments,” as you may have guessed, are declared and undeclared by examining certain cultural indicators—the New York Times, public radio’s This American Life, contemporary novels on the senior-year reading list at expensive secondary schools—that rarely intersect with the tastes of the television audience, which has a wide and varied appetite. They like game shows and contests, magazine-y news shows, comedies, soaps, and every now and then something scary.

And they like cop shows. Take the Law & Order franchise, which has been broadcast and in continuous reruns for more than 30 years. Audiences love its dark and gritty realism, though it’s always made me laugh to see how civilians on the show act when homicide detectives interview them. If a hardboiled Law & Order cop interrogated me, I’d be nervous. I might even think, Hey, maybe I did it and just don’t remember. But on Law & Order, witnesses are always cool and hardboiled: I don’t know, detective, this is New York, I don’t keep track of all of the dead bodies I step over.

Cop shows are a very good business, so for the next few moments, pretend you’re sitting behind the desk at a network executive’s office, maybe even the one with the view of a famous Hollywood cemetery. In front of you is a friend of mine—a veteran writer and showrunner who has made a career out of writing police dramas. He pitches you a

Rob Long has been the executive producer of six TV series.

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The Israel Genocide Slander

Of all the lies told by Israel’s enemies, the accusation of genocide is the greatest falsehood—refuted by the word’s meaning and all facts. Why do they repeat it?

Despite a complete absence of aggression targeting any people based on religion or ethnicity, despite unmatched efforts to spare the lives of enemies bent on Israel’s destruction—and make peace with them—the world’s only Jewish state still draws the unjust accusation of genocide.

What are the facts?
In May 2021, as Israel defended itself against 4,500 Hamas missile attacks from Gaza, actor Mark Ruffalo accused Israel of genocide. Later, Ruffalo retracted, saying the accusation is “not accurate, it’s . . . being used to justify antisemitism.” Later that year, a college student told Vice President Kamala Harris that Israel is involved in “ethnic genocide.” Harris responded that “your voice, your truth, should not be suppressed.” Unlike the Vice President, Ruffalo was correct: The statement is anti-Semitic, because it’s slanderous—a lie.

What is genocide? “Genocide” defines “acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.” The Jews of Europe are the best-known victims of genocide. Hitler’s Germany tried to eliminate the Jewish people—killed six million for their “crime” of being Jewish. Likewise, the Armenian genocide: In World War I, Ottoman Turks targeted Armenians in order to reduce their population to prevent an Armenian state. Some 600,000 to 1.5 million Armenians were killed. More recently, East Timor, with a population of 650,000, was invaded by Indonesia in 1975. In the next 25 years approximately 18,600 people were killed and another 84,200 deaths were caused by Indonesia’s starvation campaign to exterminate the East Timorese.

While many other modern incidents have been termed genocide, they all have in common the intentional murder or physical displacement of a national, ethnic or religious group.

Are Palestinians victims of genocide? Since Israel’s founding, an estimated 20,000 Palestinians have been killed in military conflicts—the majority in wars or terror attacks initiated by Palestinians against Israel. Of these, an estimated 4,000-5,000 Palestinians died as non-combatants involuntarily exposed to battle, usually as human shields. Clearly, combatants killed in their own aggressive attacks are not examples of genocide—nor are unintentional civilian casualties of such battles.

Has Israel tried to eliminate the Palestinian people? There’s zero evidence that Israel has intentionally targeted innocent Palestinians. Indeed, Israel’s attacks on its enemies are uniformly defensive responses to unprovoked aggression. In addition, Israel famously avoids harming civilians during its battles with Hamas and other terrorists—even issuing advance warnings of retaliation. Israel also annually donates thousands of tons of medicines, food and other essentials to sustain Palestinians in Gaza—despite regular attacks on Israel by Hamas. Thousands of Palestinians also travel to Israel every year to receive free medical care.

Have Palestinians been illegally removed from their land? While Israeli courts do evict Palestinian “squatters” from lands owned by Jews and from Israeli public lands, this is simply rule of law. Palestinians also claim to “own” vast territories on which they have never had sovereignty and to which they have no legal claim.

In addition, about 750,000 Arabs left Israel during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence—when Arab armies invaded. At least half fled of their own free will. Others were removed by Israel for their safety or they were suspected enemies. (Some 156,000 Arabs chose to remain in Israel during this war and have thrived.) Such dislocations take place in all major military conflicts—millions of Europeans in World War II and between 10-20 million people when India and Pakistan became independent in 1947. Dislocation as a result of war—rather than as its goal—is not genocide.

Facts completely refute the anti-Semitic lie.

Palestinian-Arabs have multiplied with no interference from Israel: Palestinian population at Israel’s birth in 1948 was about 1.3 million—today it’s about 6.8 million, of which some two million are Israeli Arab citizens. Such robust population growth alone refutes accusations of genocide.

Why do Israel’s enemies repeat the anti-Zionist slander? Those who oppose Israel’s existence cannot use honest facts to convince people of good will that Israel is evil. In fact, Israel wants peace and has offered it many times to Palestinians over 74 years. Yet, the Palestinians have greeted these offers with thousands of terrorist attacks, killing some 3,500 Israeli civilians.

Time to refute the Israel genocide lie. False accusations of genocide are attempts to delegitimize the Jewish state, demonize Jews and destroy Israel. These tactics perfectly fit the globally accepted definition of anti-Semitism. Those who attack Israel with this falsehood fully deserve the label of anti-Semite.

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