

Hicham Yezza and the current crisis in the Middle East

In the early stages of Operation Cast Lead – Israel’s illegal and devastating assault on the Gaza Strip from December 27th 2008 to January 18th 2009 – white phosphorous shells were used by Israeli forces against known civilian targets. These incendiary airburst weapons are designed to incinerate wide target areas, and throughout the impoverished Strip they did so with more than their usual generosity. Documented by respectable aid groups, this fact failed to impress BBC World News correspondent Ben Brown, who announced on January 9th that white phosphorous shells were being used ‘merely to illuminate targets in Gaza,’ according to Media Lens.

Hicham Yezza, who spoke at Nottingham University on Tuesday October 9th, sees a similar bias in much of the corporate media’s reporting of events in the Occupied Territories. Presenting a brief history of the Israel-Palestine conflict, Yezza, editor of Ceasefire Magazine, argues that although the emergence of Al Jazeera has forced many mainstream networks and newspapers to recalibrate their orientalist coverage of the conflict, a typical BBC report gives virtually no context and historical background (many today even believe the Palestinians are occupying Israeli land, not the other way round). Ehud Barak’s offer, for instance, of 97% of the West Bank and Gaza in 1999-2000 was either met with awe and praise or was at least frequently cited by the media. But not many journalists, Yezza points out, discuss the Arab offer of complete normalisation and peace with Israel in exchange for a return to the Green Line in 2001 (which UN Resolution 242 called for after Israel’s occupation of the territories in 1967).

With Palestine’s recent bid for statehood at the UN, the mainstream British media have continued to downplay US-British military and diplomatic support for Israel’s violence in the occupied territories and the expansion of illegally subsidised settlements. Contrary to the conventional pieties which portray Britain as a stern critic of Israel’s separation wall along the West Bank, in October 2003 (the same month Israel bombed a supposedly abandoned Palestinian ‘terrorist training base’ in Syria in retaliation for the bombing of a Haifa restaurant which killed 19 people, including four children) Britain abstained from the UN Security Council vote declaring the wall illegal. In the same year, it was revealed that British missile trigger systems were being used in the US Apache helicopters sold to Israel, with the image of Israeli pilots in US helicopters becoming a familiar one over the decades.

Living like dogs

When reporting the deaths of Israelis at the hands of Hamas, the BBC (and the liberal media generally) never fails to point out the number of children killed and infrastructure damaged. But when reporting the deaths of Palestinians at the hands of professionally-armed Israeli forces, an ‘impartial’ death toll is simply quoted, omitting the addendum ‘including X children.’ Here are Mike Berry and Greg Philo’s findings from their concise history of the conflict:

‘In our samples of news content, words such as “mass murder,” “savage cold-blooded killing” and “lynching” were used by journalists to describe Israeli deaths but not those of Palestinians/Arabs. The word “terrorist” was used to describe Palestinians, but when an Israeli group was reported as trying to bomb a Palestinian school, they were referred to as “extremists” or “vigilantes.”’

The possibility of trade sanctions against Israel has always been off the agenda. Instead, Israel ‘continues to receive preferential trade treatment by the British government and the EU. Britain has designated Israel one of 14 favoured “target markets,”’ Mark Curtis notes. In

a Joint Intelligence Committee report in 1969, Britain's ambassador to Israel commented on the economic motives for supporting Israel:

'Israel is already a valuable trading partner for Britain, and ... there is a high future potential for our economic relations with her ... On the other hand, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion ... that our prospects for profitable economic dealings with the Arab states are at best static, and may indeed over the long term inevitably decline.'

A pro-Arab policy in the region was rejected by the Foreign Office a year later largely 'because of the pressure which the United States government undoubtedly exert on HMG to keep us in line in any public pronouncements or negotiations on the dispute.' An early friend of the West, Rav Kook, the chief Ashkenazic rabbi from 1921-35, was convinced that 'the difference between the Israelite soul ... and the soul of all non-Jews, at any level, is greater and deeper than the difference between the soul of a human and the soul of an animal, for between the latter there is only a quantitative difference but between the former one there is a qualitative one.'

Contradicting Whitehall's formal commitment to nuclear disarmament, UN resolution 687, calling for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, is constantly undermined by US-British support for Israel's nuclear possessions (along with its own, increasing, supply). Noam Chomsky explains that 'from 1967 through 1981, the United States vetoed seven resolutions condemning Israeli practices in southern Lebanon, affirming Palestinian rights, and deploring Israeli's changing of the status of Jerusalem and its establishment of settlements in the occupied territories.' As one of the Labour party leaders Moshe Dayan once explained, Israel is quite happy for the Palestinians to 'continue to live like dogs.'

No sentimentalist, Churchill also clearly explained his views on the Jewish right to the holy land in comparing (like Dayan) the Palestinian Arabs to dogs: 'I do not agree that the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race to put it that way, has come in and taken their place.' His literary flair no doubt proves him worthy of the 1953 Nobel Prize for Literature, 'for his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values.'

A report in 1958 by the British Joint Intelligence Committee expressed, in terms more frank than today, Whitehall's distrust of Arab freedom:

'The maintenance of our interests in the Persian Gulf states is dependent on continued stability in the area. At present only the Rulers can provide this. No alternative regimes are in sight, certainly not regimes which could provide the stability on which the maintenance of British interests depends. A failure to support any one of the Rulers would weaken the confidence of the others in our ability and willingness to protect them.'

To the Economist, observing Palestinian teenagers throwing rocks at armed Israeli guards, the 'violence is not one-sided. It has, in point of fact, been initiated by the Palestinians ... Israel's aim is to stop them' (6 October 2001). A much more accurate comment was made by Ben Kaspi, for whom, unlike the Palestinian hordes, Israel is not a state with an army, but an army with a state.

As with Israel's strike on Gaza, white phosphorous was also used illegally in the US-UK attack on Fallujah in 2004, creating 'increases in cancer, leukemia and infant mortality and perturbations of the normal human population birth sex ratio significantly greater than those reported for the survivors of the A-Bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945' (according the careful research of Chris Busby, Malak Hamdan and Entesar Ariabi published in a 2010 volume of the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*)

– another footnote to history deemed noteworthy only by the Independent’s Patrick Cockburn. White phosphorous is in many ways a modern parallel to Churchill’s favourite toy, poison gas, the use of which he spent time mastering early in the 1920s. This, he believed, would spread a ‘lively terror’ amongst ‘uncivilised tribesmen and recalcitrant Arabs,’ beginning a harsh legacy of British violence against the Kurds and Afghans.

But these were more honest times, when ‘terrorism’ simply meant what a British army manual pretends it means; namely, ‘the threat or use of violence against a civilian population for religious, political or ideological goals.’ Today, as Yezza stresses, ‘terrorism’ in the occupied territories (and the Middle East more generally) is simply what ‘they’ do to ‘us.’

Cogs in a machine

With the recent resignation of Dr Rod Thornton from Nottingham’s department of Politics and International Relations, along with Yezza and Rizwaan Sabir’s nightmarish experiences on campus and at the local police station beginning in May 2008 after being arrested for downloading a public domain document (the Al-Qaeda training manual, which Sabir was using for his dissertation), the critical study of terrorism at the university has been hindered and permanently scarred. Through Nottingham’s failure to supply much formal stimulation to analyse terrorism, one could easily claim it’s inadvertently supporting and acquiescing in Britain’s aggressive foreign policy. Terrorism in particular is a crucially important topic, since the idea that Britain is a supporter of terrorism is an oxymoron in the mainstream political culture. Yet state-sponsored terrorism is by far the most serious category of terrorism in the world today, responsible for far more deaths than the likes of al-Qaeda. Considering similar hypocrisy, Dostoevsky pointed out in his *Notes from Underground* that ‘the most refined shedders of blood have been almost always the most highly civilized gentlemen,’ to whom their enemies ‘could not have held a candle.’

With the rise of extortionate tuition fees and decreasing funding for the arts and humanities (as well certain sciences, with even the Royal Society predicting ‘game over for British science’), Yezza argues that the marketisation of the university leads many students into political passivity: ‘Any attempt to engage with the world at large is seen as an unacceptable divergence from what you should be doing, which is to prepare yourself to be a cog in a machine.’ As Ken Robison has also claimed, the university is now a ‘conveyor belt’ of students who are trained to simply obey orders and acquire certain marketable skills. The idea of students working together to identify and dismantle illegitimate forms of authority through social activism and co-operation is seen as bizarre, even frightening, by many. Russell Group students are typically in ‘privileged circumstances protected from the horrors of the world at large,’ adds Yezza.

But having co-founded the Nottingham Student Peace Movement and the Arabic Society during his undergraduate and postgraduate years, Yezza sees this form of passivity as unacceptable (‘you can’t be neutral on a moving train,’ as the late Howard Zinn put it). These forms of popular organisation still have significant influence on campus, as the occupation of the Great Hall in late 2010 over the rise of tuition fees, and the protests against the largest British arms company, BAE-Systems, outside the Coates Building in February this year, demonstrate. The company’s Mantis and HERTI drones have been employed in Afghanistan, but as the research of Zahra Siddique and David A. Jaeger suggests, ‘in terms of affecting Taliban- and al Qaeda-initiated terrorism within Afghanistan and Pakistan, drone strikes at best have no effect and at worst increase terrorist activities in the short run. Using data from January 2007 to September 2011, we find that terrorist attacks by al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan are essentially unaffected by drone strikes. On the other hand, we find that in the weeks following a drone strike, terrorist attacks by the Taliban and al Qaeda increase in

Pakistan. This effect is even stronger we when look separately at drone strikes that were successful in killing their targets' (Foreign Policy, May-June 2012, Letters).

The Defence of Profit

More generally, Britain's 'see-no-evil' strategy towards the human rights records of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman, along with its strong arms trade with the Middle East encourages the violation of human rights, as the ruling elites continue to illegally torture detainees and oppress the rights of women. Throughout the twentieth century, Whitehall has continuously 'nurtured and promoted extremists for reasons of realpolitik often at a terrible cost to the population of those countries,' writes the Independent's Kim Sengupta. Britain's continued arms sales to the Gulf states, along with diplomatic and ideological support, has the effect of hampering democratic change in the region, while supporting police torture and brutality. The Middle East regimes the US and western Europe support are, in the words of US Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, 'local cops on the beat' keeping an eye out for our interests. This tactic is very much alive today, with BAE-Systems playing a large part in its survival, and has been a primary tactic of governments since the origins of the parliamentary system (that 'bedraggled and rather whorish old slut' pleasuring the many cowardly and greedy aristocrats, as Huxley accurately characterised it).

During the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, for instance, British arms were supplied to the fascist General Franco through the Strait of Gibraltar to help defend British interests in the region against the workers councils and anarchists. Illustrating further the integrity of the Great Powers, the late Chris Harman adds in his *People's History of the World* that 'the rulers of Western "democracies" were content for Hitler and Mussolini to flout a "non-interventionist" pact, since Franco was no danger to their empires.'

On August 14th 1938, Churchill claimed in an interview that 'Franco has all the right on his side because he loves his country. Also Franco is defending Europe against the Communist danger – if you wish to put it in those terms. But I, I am English, and I prefer the triumph of the wrong cause. I prefer that the other side wins, because Franco could be an upset or a threat of British interests, and the others not.' The proud Englishman also reportedly took his sweet time presenting a speech to his Cabinet friends in 1914 (quoted years later in the press, with any offending phrases omitted), concluding after much patriotic melodrama:

'We are not a young people with an innocent record and a scanty inheritance. We have engrossed to ourselves an altogether disproportionate share of the wealth and traffic of the world. We have got all we want in territory, and our claim to be left in the unmolested enjoyment of vast and splendid possessions, mainly acquired by violence, largely maintained by force, often seems less reasonable to others than to us.'

Feeling the timeless spirit of Churchill flowing through him, William Hague spoke in July 2010 of the government's efforts to 'elevate links with the Gulf' and of 'strengthening our ties across the board.' During the Libyan uprising a year later in June 2011, he also publically announced his deep feelings of inspiration after meeting with rebels in the northern city of Benghazi, tears running down his cheeks as he passed Gaddafi's armoured crowd control vehicles produced by the British defence company, NMS.

David Cameron also decided to show his support for Egyptian activists by being the first world leader to visit the country after the fall of Mubarak (who was 'immensely courageous and a force for good,' as his long-time ally Tony Blair put it in late 2010), bringing with him eight of Britain's leading arms manufacturers, including the bosses of Rolls-Royce and BAE. Leaving for Kuwait after securing further export licences for weapons

soon to be used by the belligerent police, there was something almost mystical about his complete lack of interest in the suffering of Egyptian protestors.

Over £110m worth of military and 'other' equipment was licensed for export to Israel from 1999 to 2006, throughout a period of offensive operations in the Occupied Territories and the war with Lebanon. British arms exports doubled during the second intifada from 2000 to 2001, reaching a massive £22.5 million. No eyelids in Whitehall batted after three British citizens were killed between December 2002 and May 2003. In the years up to the present, British supplies to Israel have included small arms, grenade-making kits, tanks, combat aircraft, electric-shock belts, chemical and biological agents such as tear gas, rocket launchers and anti-tank weapons.

Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions

One of the major points Yezza made in his talk was that those who claim Israel's conflict with the Palestinians is insoluble, due to intractable age-old religious and political differences, are simply detracting attention away from following the relatively simple steps to peace (namely, to enforce the law, which states that Israel must retreat to the June 1967 Green Line). As Chris Hedges often stresses, the problem is not an externalised religious evil, but rather revolves around issues of land rights. Yezza also tried to shift attention away from one of the other major myths that Israel and Palestine are opposing forces (with the US being an honest broker trying to unite both sides). As is often the case, the facts turn out to be something quite different from conventional narratives and dogma – such as the claim that the Palestinians are constantly fighting against the arbitrarily defined 'peace process' (i.e. 'whatever the US happens to be up to'), when in fact it's the US, Israel, and Britain who consistently veto General Assembly resolutions at the UN condemning Israel's illegal occupation.

The hypocritical denial that Israel's actions should be denounced often reaches impressive heights, as when Obama vetoed a resolution last February which affirmed the official US policy of condemning Israel's occupation. New Labour also chose to abstain from a UN resolution condemning Israeli violence in December 2001, evoking little comment in the media.

Yezza also claims, with more than enough evidence, that Israel is 'an artificial state' – largely an extension of the US, which donates an annual sum of \$3-4 billion to the self-appointed 'Jewish state.' This is largely spent on military transportation and weaponry manufactured by major American arms corporations like Lockheed Martin, which continue to be used – today, for instance, Friday October 12th – without any legal or moral pretext against the civilians of the impoverished Gaza strip (but if this is the will of the Lord, then let it be).

Britain's historical involvement in the Middle East is 'pretty damning' says Yezza, citing the Balfour Declaration and the Suez Crisis as primary examples. Popular opinion among Middle Eastern states views Britain's involvement in the region as exceptionally harmful. As Chomsky often points out, the majority of the Arab world believe the region would be better off if Iran had a nuclear weapon, acting as a deterrent to US-UK aggression. British foreign policy should instead, Yezza thinks, 'be geared towards friendship and solidarity and co-operation with other nations based on equality and respect, not based on domination and the right of one nation to decide the fate of another.'

Israel's occupation 'should be named and shamed in our daily lives,' he adds. One way of achieving this is by participating in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), a tactic Yezza endorses against Israel as strongly as he would have against apartheid South Africa. Norman Finkelstein's labelling of the BDS movement as a 'cult' earlier this

year has been ‘extremely unhelpful,’ for Yezza. Though it may not be entirely efficient, the claims that BDS is a definite road to failure are clearly misguided. And though it may be true, as Chomsky stresses, that certain elements of the BDS movement are harming the Palestinians, Yezza believes that fact alone shouldn’t warrant abandoning the tactic altogether. A few months ago the Palestinian Society led a popular BDS action against Sainsbury’s and Tesco, labelling with a BDS sticker any food sold which was grown in the occupied territories. This was met with great encouragement by many shoppers and students, and direct actions continue to be planned, with Monday October 15th being the first day of a week of lively BDS workshops on campus.

Yezza also notes the gross hypocrisy in Israel (one of the strongest military forces in the world) claiming Iran poses a threat to its survival. Like a teenage student of critical and literary theory, Israel often claims to suffer from ‘existential’ threats to its wellbeing. And thanks to the scholarship of mainstream media outlets like the BBC, who ‘impartially’ regurgitate government policy and equate it with the truth, and popular historians like Niall Ferguson, Iran (and China) is slowly overtaking al-Qaeda as the official ‘threat’ to civilization.

The Guardian Man & Co

Leaving the grim history of the sanctions on Iraq (responsible for the deaths of half a million children throughout the 1990s) carefully behind, the US, Britain and Canada have recently imposed a harsh round of sanctions on Iran for its alleged ‘nuclear weapons program.’ These have been condemned as ‘unacceptable and violate international law,’ as the Russian Foreign Ministry puts it. The sanctions also ‘target companies that provide goods or services to Iran’s oil and gas industries. Existing U.S. laws have forced most international oil companies out of Iran and the new measures aim to stop it from obtaining technology and money from smaller foreign companies,’ according to Bloomberg Businessweek.

With Britain’s armed forces increasing their contingency plans for an attack on Iran, the Stop the War Coalition released statement earlier this year noting that the ‘case being made for war ... is based on a series of speculations about ‘undisclosed nuclear-related activities’ reminiscent of the disproven ‘intelligence’ about weapons of mass destruction used to justify the disastrous attack on Iraq ... The British government must pledge to have no involvement in any military action against Iran, including not allowing Diego Garcia to be used as a launch pad for air strikes.’

In August 2004, the distinguished Israeli military historian Martin van Creveld explained in the International Herald Tribune that ‘the world has witnessed how the United States attacked Iraq for, as it turned out, no reason at all. Had the Iranians not tried to build nuclear weapons, they would be crazy.’ The exaggerated threat of Iran since the illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq is similar to Hitler’s portrayal of Czechoslovakia as ‘a dagger pointed at the heart of Germany.’

Though the Iranian threat is not military, an Iran with a successful deterrent would threaten US-British control of Middle East energy resources (of which they are the rightful owners, with mere geography being an insignificant distraction to multinational profits). The increasing threats of military action against Iran are also in violation of the UN Charter, and in specific violation of Security Council resolution 1887 of September 2009 which called on all states to resolve disputes related to nuclear issues peacefully and bans the use *or threat* of force.

In November 2007, George Monbiot wrote in the Guardian: ‘I believe that Iran is trying to acquire the bomb. ... Iran under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a dangerous and unpredictable state involved in acts of terror abroad.’ The editors of Media Lens wrote to Monbiot three

times asking him to supply the basis of his belief that Iran was trying to build a nuclear bomb, but received no reply. They describe Monbiot as ‘Far from being an “unreconstructed idealist, a professional trouble-maker,” as his Twitter bio would have it, Monbiot is a Guardian man, a corporate lightning rod conducting the raw energy of outrage and dissent down to the safe little “box” of the Guardian website. There his readers are regaled with state propaganda, corporate adverts and assailed by the poisonous, system-supportive beliefs of his corporate colleagues. The corporate system got us into this disaster and the corporate media is the last place to encourage people to look for answers.’”

In early November 2011, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released a report which the BBC claimed presented ‘new evidence suggesting that Iran is secretly working to obtain a nuclear weapon.’ Relying on ‘evidence provided by more than 10 member states as well as its own information,’ the IAEA said Iran had carried out activities ‘relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device.’

On November 8th, the Daily Telegraph’s front page was dedicated to the title ‘Iran’s nuclear menace’. The article claimed that the IAEA report ‘has for the first time acknowledged that Tehran is conducting secret experiments whose sole purpose is the development of weapons.’ A Guardian editorial the next day announced: ‘It really is time to drop the pretence that Iran can be deflected from its nuclear path.’

If we relied purely on the output of the mainstream media, even the most sceptical observer would find it hard to challenge the claim that Iran poses an imminent nuclear threat. But let’s assume a few things about mainstream journalists: let’s assume first that they can read, and let’s also assume that they’ve heard of WikiLeaks. What’s so striking about the current intellectual and political consensus over Iran is, similar to the consensus on Iraq, a complete fraud.

As the editors of Media Lens have pointed out, the corporate media’s coverage of the IAEA report completely omits the WikiLeaks disclosures concerning IAEA chief, Yukiya Amano. According to a US Embassy cable from a US diplomat in Vienna, where the IAEA is based, Amano described himself as ‘solidly in the U.S. court on every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program.’ After his election as IAEA chief (thanks to strong American lobbying), a US cable reported on a meeting with him: ‘This meeting, Amano’s first bilateral review since his election, illustrates the very high degree of convergence between his priorities and our own agenda at the IAEA. The coming transition period provides a further window for us to shape Amano’s thinking before his agenda collides with the IAEA Secretariat bureaucracy.’ The Americans understood that this ‘very high degree of convergence’ would be useful in exaggerating Iran’s alleged ‘nuclear threat.’

The Guardian did in fact report the Amano cable in a blog in November 2010, but not in the newspaper itself. If you do a database search of the mainstream media’s search engines you’ll find that not a single British national newspaper has mentioned the WikiLeaks cable revealing that Amano is ‘solidly in the U.S. court’ during the reporting of the recent IAEA report. The only exceptions are an article by Mehdi Hasan in the New Statesman on 11th November, and a Guardian piece by Julian Border earlier this year on March 22nd. Instead of pointing out this crucial fact revealed by WikiLeaks, the British media have decided instead to disparage and vilify Julian Assange.

Having considered the IAEA report, veteran journalist Seymour Hersh commented last November in an interview with Democracy Now that Iran did look ‘at the idea of getting a bomb or getting to the point where maybe they could make one ... but they stopped in 2003. That’s still the American consensus. The Israelis will tell you privately, “Yes, we agree.”’ He described the new IAEA report as ‘not a scientific report’ but ‘a political document,’ noting that ‘Amano has pledged his fealty to America.’

It's worth pointing out that a 'fuel-for-fuel' swap, through which Iran would exchange most of its current stockpile of low-enriched uranium for fuel rods from Russia and France, was proposed at the October 2009 Geneva talks, and this was largely accepted by President Ahmadinejad but he proposed that the IAEA assume control of the low-enriched uranium in Iran until the fuel rods were delivered. The Americans rejected this proposal. Reviving discussions around the fuel-for-fuel swap and reinstating the IAEA's international monitoring activities (which Iran has consistently agreed to), would seem to be a more sensible option than oil embargoes. But isolating Iran is much more important than making peace with Iran for Britain, the US and western Europe.

In an effort to outdo his predecessors, Israel's Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz rejected the European Union's ban on importation of Iranian crude oil in an interview with Bloomberg Businessweek on 26th January, insisting it doesn't go nearly far enough and arguing for the international community to impose a full naval and aerial blockade across all of Iran so that 'no one can even go out.'

In October 2010, John Sawers, the head of M16, publicly called for 'intelligence-led operations to make it more difficult for countries like Iran to develop nuclear weapons.' The Stuxnet computer virus introduced into Iranian nuclear facilities, the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists, the bombings inside Iran, are all clearly part of a focused military programme. Earlier this year the Pentagon decided that its current bunker buster bombs, the largest conventional bombs in the arsenal, aren't powerful enough to penetrate Iran's nuclear facilities, and so it submitted a request to Congress to request additional funding to build an even bigger bomb.

When the Shah was allied with the West, the German electronics corporation Siemens built the Bushehr nuclear facility in the 1970s. When Ayatollah Khomeini took power in 1979 he shut down Iran's nuclear project since he believed it to be 'the work of the Devil.' It was after Saddam Hussein invaded Iran with British and American weaponry that Iran decided to reopen its nuclear project – important facts which would be taught in school in a truly democratic and free society.

The US is also known to be funding separatist and fundamentalist terror groups inside the country, as Seymour Hersh has documented. He also exposed US covert operations against Iran in a New Yorker article in July 2008. One group the US is supporting is Jundallah, also known as the Iranian People's Resistance Movement, which describes itself as a resistance force fighting for the rights of Sunnis in Iran. Jundallah is classified as a 'Foreign Terrorist Organization' by the US State Department and is essentially an al-Qa'eda-type terror group.

This form of casual hypocrisy is almost the defining feature of the political theatre. The recent 'debate' between Barack 'Hope in the promise of tomorrow' Obama and Mitt 'Corporations are people, my friend' Romney was described by BBC in the following, gripping terms: 'The most dramatic clash came over foreign policy, and the attack last month on the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya, which left the US ambassador and three other Americans dead. Mr Romney sought to portray the attack as evidence of the Obama administration's failing foreign policy and he suggested Mr Obama had dithered over admitting a terrorist attack had occurred.' Obama stresses he did in fact call the attack an act of terrorism. But what's much more interesting is that at the beginning of the year the US also alleged that Iranian officials were involved in a thwarted plot to kill the Saudi ambassador to Washington, which was described across the spectrum as a 'terrorist plot' – no doubt accurate, but one will search in vain for a reference to the assassination of Iranian scientists being described as an act of 'terrorism.' The assassination of the Iranian scientist Mostafa Roshan earlier in the year was described as an act of terror only by one mainstream journalist, Mehdi Hasan. Julian Borger wrote in the Guardian that the assassination of Roshan might act

as a form of ‘goadings,’ a comment which was slightly more critical than most, but one can imagine the reaction in the West if the assassination of an American or British scientist was described as ‘goadings’ by the Iranian press. Borger added that Obama would have been ‘obliged to respond militarily’ to Iran if there had been a terrorist attack in a US restaurant, falsely presupposing aggression, and not diplomacy, to be the normal legal and moral response.

Unless further pressure is put on Whitehall through popular protest, writing to MPs, sit-down strikes and educational activities, New Labour’s bogus ‘evidence based policy-making’ towards Iraq could soon evolve – to use Richard Seymour’s phrase – into the Con-Dem coalition government’s ‘policy based evidence-making’ towards Iran. As Yezza stresses, pressure also needs to be put on Whitehall to sever its considerable economic and military ties with Israel, one of the most aggressive and erratic states in modern political history, if the white phosphorous is to be tamed, the Reaper drone attacks are to stop, and a peaceful settlement to the conflict is to be brought about. Organising protests and non-violent direct action with other students, largely through the avenues Yezza himself helped establish (such as the Nottingham Student Peace Movement and the Palestinian Society), are tactics which have been most effective in the past. These forms of persistent demonstration, patient explanation, and principled resistance can be tiring and boring at times. But the people who direct the Reaper drone attacks are not bored, and as long as they continue to do their work, so must we.