

WAR CULTURE HATES THE ETHICAL PASSION OF THE YOUNG, IN THE THRALL OF A DOMINANT DEATH CULTURE

By Norman Solomon

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Persisting in his support for an unpopular war, the Democrat in the White House has helped spark a rebellion close to home. Young people — least inclined to deference, most inclined to moral outrage — are leading public opposition to the ongoing slaughter in Gaza. The campus upheaval is a clash between accepting and resisting, while elites insist on doing maintenance work for the war machine.

I wrote the above words recently, but I could have written very similar ones in the spring of 1968. (In fact, I did.) Joe Biden hasn't sent U.S. troops to kill in Gaza, as President Lyndon Johnson did in Vietnam, but the current president has done all he can to provide massive quantities of weapons and ammunition to Israel — literally making the carnage in Gaza possible.

A familiar saying — “the more things change, the more they stay the same” — is both false and true. During the last several decades, the consolidation of corporate power and the rise of digital tech have brought about huge changes in politics and communications. Yet humans are still humans and certain crucial dynamics remain. Militarism demands conformity — and sometimes fails to get it.

When Columbia University and many other colleges erupted in antiwar protests during the late 1960s, the moral awakening was a human connection with people suffering horrifically in Vietnam. During recent weeks, the same has been true with people in Gaza. Both eras saw crackdowns by college administrators and the police — as well as much negativity toward protesters in the mainstream media — all reflecting key biases in this country's power structure.

“What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic,” Martin Luther King, Jr., said in 1967. “Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.”

DISRUPTING A CULTURE OF DEATH

This spring, as students have risked arrest and jeopardized their college careers under banners like “Ceasefire Now,” “Free Pales-



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

tine,” and “Divest from Israel,” they’ve rejected some key unwritten rules of a death culture. From Congress to the White House, war (and the military-industrial complex that goes with it) is crucial for the political business model. Meanwhile, college trustees and alumni megadonors often have investment ties to Wall Street and Silicon Valley, where war is a multi-billion-dollar enterprise. Along the way, weapons sales to Israel and many other countries bring in gigantic profits.

The new campus uprisings are a shock to the war system. Managers of that system, constantly oiling its machinery, have no column for moral revulsion on their balance sheets. And the refusal of appreciable numbers of students to go along to get along doesn't compute. For the economic and political establishment, it's a control issue, potentially writ large.

As the killing, maiming, devastation, and increasing starvation in Gaza have continued, month after month, the U.S. role has become incomprehensible —

without, at least, attributing to the president and the vast majority of Congressional representatives a level of immorality that had previously seemed unimaginable to most college students. Like many others in the United States, protesting students are now struggling with the realization that the people in control of the executive and legislative branches are directly supporting mass murder and genocide.

In late April, when overwhelming bipartisan votes in Congress approved — and President Biden eagerly signed — a bill sending \$17 billion in military aid to Israel, the only way to miss the utter depravity of those atop the government was to not really look, or to remain in the thrall of a dominant death culture.

During his final years in office, with the Vietnam War going full tilt, President Lyndon Johnson was greeted with the chant: “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?” Such a chant could be directed at President Biden now. The number of Palestinian children killed so far by the U.S.-armed Israeli military is estimated to be almost 15,000, not counting the unknown number still buried in the rubble of Gaza. No wonder high-ranking Biden administration officials now risk being loudly denounced whenever they speak in venues open to the public.

Mirroring the Vietnam War era in another way, members of Congress continue to rubberstamp huge amounts of funding for mass killing. On April 20th, only 17% of House Democrats and only 9% of House Republicans voted against the new military aid package for Israel.

Higher learning is supposed to connect the theoretical with the actual, striving to understand our world as it truly is. However, a death culture — promoting college tranquility as well as mass murder in Gaza — thrives on disconnects. All the platitudes and pretenses of academia can divert attention from where U.S. weapons actually go and what they do.

Sadly, precepts readily cited as vital ideals prove all too easy to kick to the curb lest they squeeze big toes uncomfortably. So, when students take the humanities seriously enough to set up a protest encampment on campus and then billionaire donors demand that a college president put a stop to such disruption, a police raid is likely to follow.

A WORLD OF DOUBLETHINK AND TONE DEAFNESS

George Orwell's explanation of "doublethink" in his famed novel *1984* is a good fit when it comes to the purported logic of so many commentators deploring the student protesters as they demand an end to complicity in the slaughter still underway in Gaza: "To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it."

Laying claim to morality, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has, for instance, been busy firing media salvos at the student protesters. That organization's CEO, Jonathan Greenblatt, is on record flatly declaring that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" — no matter how many Jews declare themselves to be "anti-Zionist." Four months ago, ADL issued a report categorizing pro-Palestinian rallies with "anti-Zionist chants and slogans" as antisemitic events. In late April, ADL used the "antisemitic" label to condemn protests by students at Columbia and elsewhere.

"We have a major, major, major generational problem," Greenblatt warned in a leaked ADL strategy phone call last November. He added: "The issue in the United States' support for Israel is not left and right; it is young and old... We really have a TikTok problem, a Gen-Z problem... The real game is the next generation."

Along with thinly veiled condescension toward students, a frequent approach is to treat the mass killing of Palestinians as of minimal importance. And so, when *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat wrote in late April about students protesting at Columbia, he merely described the Israeli government's actions as "failings." Perhaps if a government was bombing and killing Douthat's loved ones, he would have used a different word.

A similar mentality, as I well remember, infused media coverage of the Vietnam War. For mainline news outlets, what was happening to Vietnamese people ranked far below so many other concerns, often to the point of invisibility. As media accounts gradually began bemoaning the "quagmire" of that war, the focus was on how the U.S. government's leadership had gotten itself so stuck. Acknowledging that the American war effort amounted to a massive crime against humanity was rare. Then, as now, the moral bankruptcies of

the political and media establishments fueled each other.

As a barometer of the prevailing political climate among elites, the editorial stances of daily newspapers indicate priorities in times of war. In early 1968, the *Boston Globe* conducted a survey of 39 major U.S. newspapers and found that not a single one had editorialized in favor of an American withdrawal from Vietnam. By then, tens of millions of Americans were in favor of such a pullout.

This spring, when the *New York Times* editorial board finally called for making U.S. arms shipments to Israel conditional — six months after the carnage began in Gaza — the editorial was tepid and displayed a deep ethnocentric bias. It declared that "the

A pro-Palestine camp was set up on UT-Austin's South Mall where over 40 protesters were arrested. —Naina Srivastava, *The Daily Texan* [Photos on this page were not part of the original article.]

Hamas attack of October 7 was an atrocity," but no word coming anywhere near "atrocity" was applied to the Israeli attacks occurring ever since.

The *Times* editorial lamented that "Mr. Netanyahu and the hardliners in his government" had broken a "bond of trust" between the United States and Israel, adding that the Israeli prime minister "has been deaf to repeated demands from Mr. Biden and his national security team to do more to protect civilians in Gaza from being harmed by [American] armaments." The *Times* editorial board was re-

markably prone to understatement, as if someone overseeing the mass killing of civilians every day for six months was merely not doing enough "to protect civilians."

LEARNING BY DOING

The thousands of student protesters encountering the edicts of college administrations and the violence of the police have gotten a real education in the true priorities of American power structures. Of course, the authorities (on and off campuses) have wanted a return to the usual peaceful campus atmosphere. As military strategist Carl von Clausewitz long ago commented with irony, "A conqueror is always a lover of peace."

Supporters of Israel are fed up with the campus protests. The *Washington Post* recently featured an essay by Paul Berman that deplored what has become of his alma mater, Columbia. After a brief mention of Israel's killing of Gazan civilians and the imposition of famine, Berman declared that "ultimately the central issue in the war is Hamas and its goal... the eradication of the Israeli state." *The central issue.* Consider it a way of saying that, while unfortunate, the ongoing slaughter of tens of thousands of children and other Palestinian civilians doesn't matter nearly as much as the fear that nuclear-armed Israel, with one of the most powerful air forces in the world, is in danger of "eradication."

Pieces similar to Douthat's and Berman's have proliferated in the media. But they don't come to grips with what Senator Bernie



Texas State Troopers form a line on 22nd street in Austin, Tx on April 29, 2024. They broke up an encampment on UT's South Mall lawn shortly after.



Sanders recently made clear in a public message to the Israeli prime minister: “Mr. Netanyahu, antisemitism is a vile and disgusting form of bigotry that has done unspeakable harm to millions. Do not insult the intelligence of the American people by attempting to distract us from the immoral and illegal war policies of your extremist and racist government.”

College protesters have shown that they will not be distracted. They continue to insist — not flawlessly, but wonderfully — that all people’s lives matter. For decades, and since October in a particularly deadly fashion, the U.S.-Israel alliance has proceeded to treat Palestinian lives as expendable. And that is exactly what the protests are opposing.

Of course, protests can flicker and die out. Hundreds of U.S. campuses shut down in the spring of 1970 amid protests against the Vietnam War and the American invasion of Cambodia, only to become largely quiescent by the fall term. But for countless individuals, the sparks lit a fire for social justice that would never be quenched.

One of them, Michael Albert, a cofounder of the groundbreaking *Z Magazine*, has continued with activist work since the mid-1960s. “A lot of people are comparing now to 1968,” he wrote in April. “That year was tumultuous. We were inspired. We were hot. But here comes this year and it is moving faster, no less. That year the left that I and so many others lived and breathed was mighty. We were courageous, but we also had too little understanding of how to win. Don’t emulate us. Transcend us.”

He then added:

“The emerging mass uprisings must persist and diversify and broaden in focus and reach. And hey, on your campuses, again do better than us. Fight to divest but also fight to structurally change them so their decision makers — which should be you — never again invest in genocide, war, and indeed suppression and oppres-

sion of any kind. Tomorrow is the first day of a long, long potentially incredibly liberating future. But one day is but one day. Persist.”

Persistence will be truly essential. The gears of pro-Israel forces are fully meshed with the U.S. war machinery. The movement to stop Israel’s murderous oppression of Palestinians is up against the entire military-industrial-congressional complex.

The United States spends more on its military than the next 10 countries combined (and most of them are allies), while maintaining 750 military bases overseas, vastly more than all of its official adversaries put together. The U.S. continues to lead the nuclear arms race toward oblivion. And the economic costs are stunning. The Institute for Policy Studies reported last year that 62% of the federal discretionary budget went to “militarized programs” of one sort or another.

In 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr., described this country’s spending for war as a “demonic, destructive suction tube,” siphoning tremendous resources away from human needs.

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

With transcendent wisdom, this spring’s student uprising has rejected conformity as a lethal anesthetic while the horrors continue in Gaza. Leaders of the most powerful American institutions want to continue as usual, as if official participation in genocide were no particular cause for alarm.

Instead, young people have dared to lead the way, insisting that such a culture of death is repugnant and completely unacceptable.

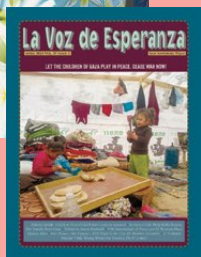
This column is distributed by TomDispatch.

BIO: *Norman Solomon is the national director of RootsAction.org and executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. His latest book, War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine, is published by The New Press.*

Update on Rolla Alaydi - Dianne Monroe - 4/30/24



EDITOR’S NOTE: *In the April 2024 issue of La Voz de Esperanza, Dianne Monroe wrote about her friend Rolla in the article, To Save a Life: Help Rolla Rescue Her Family from Gaza. An update follows...*



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The BIG NEWS is that on Saturday Rolla left for Egypt to meet her family when they leave Gaza! Huge thanks to all of you who helped to make this possible – by contributing money (some of you more than once) and by sharing my messages by email, social media and in other ways. You are part of something pre-

cious and meaningful. You have touched and changed the course of 21 lives.

And if you are someone who was not able to donate or share (for whatever reason) you are also part of this success, and have also contributed, by being here to witness this incredible story. Now comes the difficult part – Rolla’s family actually getting out of Gaza. We hope everything will go smoothly. But given the difficult situation, we know there may be some twists, turns and complexities.

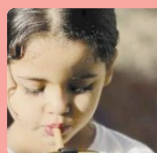
If you are a person who prays, please pray for Rolla and her

family. And if you reach out in a different way, please hold this family in your heart and send caring support their way.

Over 1.6k people donated the money needed to help this family leave Gaza! This is truly a group effort and an accomplishment to celebrate!

Yet, the family will still need some initial funds to settle once they are out of Gaza, plus some urgent medical expenses (one brother with diabetes, one brother with cancer and one child with epilepsy, all untreated since Israel invaded Gaza). Plus unexpected things that may (and likely will) come up in the course of them getting out of Gaza. So additional donations are still very much needed. So, please, continue to donate as you are able, and share this story and link widely.

I invite you to watch the small video at; bit.ly/rollas-bag, of Rolla’s bags packed with things she is bringing her family (Hint: vitamins, immune system support, fish oil and more). In the meantime, we continue to collect contributions at



**My Family is Trapped in Gaza.
Help Me Get Them Out**

<https://amzn.to/3ID1Zpy>



With gratitude and hope,
Dianne