

A New Neocon Push for Syrian War

The neocon agenda of “regime change” in disfavored countries continues unabated with new pressure for a U.S. military intervention in Syria, billed as “humanitarian” and coupled with ridicule for anyone who favors the frustrating course of diplomacy, as ex-FBI agent Coleen Rowley explains.

By Coleen Rowley

The propaganda that continues to flourish for war on Syria shows many Americans fail to understand the problems posed by “U.S. Empire-building” believing it to be an altruistic force, toppling other governments and starting wars for the good of all mankind.

Two recent articles in the New York Times: “Use Force To Save Starving Syrians” and “U.S. Scolds Russia as It Weighs Options on Syrian War” are typical of the concerted efforts underway to ramp up U.S. military intervention despite overwhelming opposition voiced by Congress and the American public thwarting Obama’s plan to bomb Syria announced in late August last year.

The “U.S. Weighs Options” news piece is easier to expose since it employs an obviously twisted and one-sided reporting lens that puts the primary blame on Russia for the violent conflict in Syria. It was apparently fed to Michael R. Gordon and his NYT colleagues by anonymous Administration officials as well as the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the neocon think tank nefariously founded by the Israeli American Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to deceptively appear to be independent of its parent. (AIPAC has been revealed by scholars as the most powerful force in recent decades on U.S. foreign policy, repeatedly pushing the U.S. into wars for Israel.)

It should be recalled that Gordon himself is the same NYT reporter who gave a big assist back in 2002 to Judith Miller, notoriously collaborating with Vice President Dick Cheney’s aide Scooter Libby and other neoconservatives to gin up war on Iraq by writing false front page stories about Saddam’s WMD.

Unfortunately Gordon never was held accountable (in contrast to Miller who was eventually forced out of the NYT and even did some jail time for refusing to testify about one of Libby’s other illegal leaks). It’s therefore not surprising that Gordon and others continue to carry water and blatantly skew the facts for AIPAC and the neocons.

The other push for increased military intervention in Syria, however, could be categorized as “neo-lib.” The “Use Force” op-ed by long-time advocates of “Right to Protect (R2P)” who want Syrian regime change, Danny Postel and Nader Hashemi,

current heads of the University of Denver's Korbel School of International Studies, is even more insidious. As Professor Rob Prince explains in his insightful counterpoint, "Military Humanitarian Intervention: the Shock Doctrine Applied to Syria:"

"In calling for military intervention in Syria, something not even the U.S. military itself is particularly enthusiastic about, Hashemi and Postel cozy up, as they have before on Iran in 2009 and Libya in 2011, with the likes of AIPAC, along with this country's band of intrepid and misdirected neoconservatives. These are the same elements that pushed this country into invading Iraq and continue to push the Obama Administration to intervene militarily in Syria."

Close examination of the facts rather than shock doctrine emotion is indeed required because R2P is based on a form of ends-justify-the means, concocted utilitarianism, i.e. Orwellian-type propositions that killing can save lives, that war can bring human rights, democracy and peace. It's not different from the prevalent argument that torture can be justified as saving lives or "we must destroy the village to save it," designed to prey on people's emotions instead of facilitating critical thinking based on actual facts or research.

These two writers urging U.S. military force admit "political interests" typically lie behind R2P interventions. But they fail to recognize how their own long-standing political interest in toppling the current Syrian government undercuts their own claimed morality mantel. It also casts doubt on their suggestion that such force and aerial bombardment would be used evenhandedly against both Syrian regime forces and/or rebel militias, upon whichever side blocks the delivery of food and humanitarian supplies.

Any "humanitarian" proposal emanating from Obama and Kerry who similarly announced "Assad must go" from early on would naturally face equal skepticism. Russia and China certainly remember how they were deliberately misled in UN Security Council discussions to not veto what then U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice sold as a limited "no fly zone" humanitarian mission to protect Libyans in Benghazi but which morphed within days of that vote into thousands of NATO bombing sorties over six months to take out Qaddafi and force regime change upon Libya.

In the case of Libya, a right to "protect" turned out to mean the right to destroy. That probably explains why Postel-Hashemi do not point to Libya as their precedent for R2P success but, rather bizarrely, to Somalia and "Black Hawk Down."

It's long been observed that "truth is the first casualty of war." So fact-checking is needed when these R2P-regime change proponents point to the

“humanitarian nightmare in Syria, replete with refugee flows, sarin gas, barrel bombs, and ‘industrial-scale’ killings and torture, (which have) horrified the world.”

Facts are inherently scarce in the fog of war enveloping Syrian atrocities. Eventually truth may emerge. But for starters, very little solid evidence exists as to who was responsible for the sarin attack on Ghouta on Aug. 21, 2013. Despite John Kerry’s initially bold claims that the U.S. possessed “undeniable” evidence that Assad’s forces were responsible “beyond any reasonable doubt,” Seymour Hersh and other investigative journalists have reported that U.S. intelligence was never conclusive. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Deceiving the US Public on Syria.”]

Evidence does exist of a few hundred Syrians dying in the August chemical attack but the (overly precise) figure the U.S. cited of 1,429 victims is now widely viewed as exaggerated since it stemmed from a sloppy, rushed counting of shrouded images in various videos by U.S. intelligence agencies.

The U.N. too has already backtracked on several of its original key findings about this sarin attack. Whatever bits of intelligence the U.S. does possess remain classified and secret to this day so it’s hard to assess but, at very least, the trajectory “vector analysis” referred to by the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power and relied upon by the NYT and Human Rights Watch (HRW) has been significantly discredited.

The NYT had to print a retraction of its initial map showing trajectories of sarin-loaded missiles traveling 9 kilometers after it was determined the range of the actual missiles used was no more than 2.5 kilometers. The NYT’s and HRW’s concocted maps were further undercut by the fact that no sarin was found at the site of the supposed missile landing in Moadamiya, south of Damascus. The only rocket tested and found to be carrying sarin was the one that landed in Zalmalka/Ein Tarma, east of Damascus.

HRW’s errors and, even worse, their failure to admit these errors when they knew their map was being relied upon to justify U.S. bombing of Syria, also calls their agenda into question. HRW’s hypocrisy using human rights as a pretext for military intervention and its directors’ conflicts of interests is documented elsewhere.

In late January 2014, two weapons experts challenged the ballistic data, concluding “that under no circumstances can Syria be held accountable for the massacre” (see Flawed US intelligence on Ghouta massacre based on MIT report: “Possible Implications of Faulty US Technical Intelligence in the Damascus Nerve Agent Attack of August 21, 2013”³)

War crimes should, of course, always be brought to light and prosecuted. But the recent “smoking gun” report accusing Assad and conveniently made public just when the Geneva II peace negotiations were getting underway is suspicious on many levels. Reportedly commissioned and funded by Qatar, a country arming and funding Syria’s rebels, the report lacks independent, unbiased sources and omits evidence of war crimes being committed by rebel factions in Syria. (Also see “Is Syrian peace conference laying the foundation for war?”)

It’s no secret that the U.S. has a long history of toppling governments that it doesn’t like, even democratically elected ones. And Syria is not the only place right now where the official goal is regime change! The coup orchestration department is working overtime these days with reports of U.S. attempts to topple governments in Venezuela and Ukraine.

(U.S. meddling in the latter, despite the complexity of the situation, see here and here, was recently confirmed through interceptions of Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, formerly Dick Cheney’s principal deputy foreign policy advisor and married to neocon Robert Kagan, co-founder of the Project for the New American Century.)

The use (abuse) of human rights law as justification for orchestrating such “regime changes” in Syria and around the world exemplifies a dangerous form of hypocrisy as it serves to deprive these international principles of legitimacy.

As retired CIA analyst Paul Pillar recently wrote, it is a mistake to see “the United States as an omnipotent global savior or policeman. We ought to bear this principle in mind in contemplating policy about problems anywhere on the globe. It certainly should be borne in mind with the Middle East, where there is a still fairly recent history of forceful U.S. action doing more harm than good”

Coleen Rowley is a retired FBI agent and former chief division counsel in Minneapolis. She’s now a dedicated peace and justice activist and board member of the Women Against Military Madness and works with the Veterans for Peace chapter in Minneapolis, Minnesota. [This story previously appeared in Foreign Policy in Focus and will appear in the next issue of the Veterans for Peace newsletter.]

Six Decades of H-Bomb Cover-ups

Hydrogen bomb explosions six decades ago gave the world a glimpse into the apocalypse and spread radioactive fallout around the globe but the worst

suffering was inflicted on natives of U.S. protectorates in the Pacific Ocean, writes Beverly Deepe Kever.

By Beverly Deepe Kever

Sixty years ago on March 1, 1954, in the heart of the Pacific Ocean, the United States detonated the most powerful nuclear weapon in its history.

Codenamed Bravo, the 15-megaton hydrogen bomb was 1,000 times more powerful than the atomic bomb that devastated Hiroshima nine years earlier. The Bravo blast “represented as revolutionary an advance in explosive power over the atomic bomb as the atomic bomb had over the conventional weapons of World War II,” historian-lawyer Jonathan Weisgall notes.

Also unlike Hiroshima’s A-bomb, Bravo was laced with plutonium, a most toxic element with a radioactive existence of half a million years that may be hazardous to humans for at least half that time.

And, unlike the atomic airburst above Hiroshima, Bravo was a shallow-water ground burst. It vaporized three of the 23 islands of tiny Bikini Atoll, 2,600 miles southwest of Hawaii, and created a crater that is visible from space.

A fireball nearly as hot as the center of the sun sucked unto itself water, mud and millions of tons of coral that had been pulverized into ash by the incredible explosion; these clung to tons of radioactive uranium fragments. The fireball swooshed heavenwards, forming a shimmering white mushroom cloud that hovered over the proving grounds of Bikini and Enewetak atolls, whose inhabitants had earlier been evacuated.

Wafting eastward, the cloud powdered 236 islanders on Rongelap and Utrik atolls and 28 U.S. servicemen. The islanders played with, drank and ate the snowflake-like particles for days and began suffering nausea, hair loss, diarrhea and skin lesions when they were finally evacuated to a U.S. military clinic.

These islanders had become a unique medical case. As scientist Neal Hines explains, “Never before in history had an isolated human population been subjected to high but sublethal amounts of radioactivity without the physical and psychological complexities associated with nuclear explosion.”

Bravo bequeathed the world a new word: *fallout*. Even before Bravo, experts, but not the public knew that the radioactive powder of atmospheric nuclear weapons explosions was invisibly dusting the continental U.S. and touching others worldwide. But Bravo for the first time revealed to the world a new kind of invisible menace, a danger that could not be smelled, seen, felt or tasted.

Bravo exposed radioactive fallout as, what Weisgall calls, “a biological weapon of terror.” It visibly ushered in the globalization of radioactive pollution.

For the islanders, Bravo also ushered in 60 years of sufferings and a chain reaction of U.S. cover-ups and injustices, as detailed below. Over the decades, their pleas for just and adequate compensation and U.S. constitutional rights they had been promised were rejected by the U.S. courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, by Congress and by executive-branch administrations headed by presidents of both parties.

Snubbed by Obama

The continued silence from today’s administration of President Barack Obama is acutely embarrassing, given that shortly after his election he described himself as “America’s first Pacific president,” and promised to “strengthen and sustain our leadership in this vitally important part of the world.”

Since then, Obama has initiated a “pivot” to the Pacific by beefing up and re-positioning U.S. military units in the region. But he failed to acknowledge or recognize that these remote Pacific atolls had served after World War II as proving grounds vital for U.S. superpower status today.

They provided sites for nuclear-weapons tests too powerful and unpredictable to be detonated in the 48 contiguous states and for tests enabling the transition in nuclear delivery systems.

More recently, also ignoring the moral implications undergirding Marshallese pleas, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel called on U.S. military leaders to better instill ethics in their services so as to ensure “moral character and moral courage.”

He issued his instructions for more accountability in the wake of investigations into cheating scandals on proficiency and training tests given to nuclear-related personnel in the Navy and Air Force. The Pentagon is also investigating possible illegal drug violations by 11 Air Force officers, including some responsible for launching America’s deadly nuclear missiles.

U.S. on Human Rights

If U.S. nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific is un-remembered by the American government, it has not been forgotten internationally.

While the U.S. regularly castigates the governments of China and Russia for human rights abuses or violations, a special United Nations report urges the U.S. government to remedy and compensate Marshall Islanders for its nuclear

weapons testing that has caused “immediate and lasting effects” on their human rights.

“Radiation from the testing resulted in fatalities and in acute and long-term health complications,” according to the report presented to the U.N. Human Rights Council in September 2012 by Special Rapporteur Calin Georgescu. “The effects of radiation have been exacerbated by near-irreversible environmental contamination, leading to the loss of livelihoods and lands. Moreover, many people continue to experience indefinite displacement.”

The report also urged the U.S. to provide more compensation and to consider issuing a presidential acknowledgment and apology to victims adversely affected by its tests.

The international community and the U.N. “has an ongoing obligation to encourage a final and just resolution for the Marshallese people,” the report reads, because they placed the Marshallese under the U.S.-administered strategic trusteeship for 40-plus years from 1947 until 1990. These international groups might consider a more comprehensive compilation of scientific findings “on this regrettable episode in human history.”

As the sole administrator for the U.N.-sanctioned trust territory, the U.S. government pledged in 1947 “to protect the inhabitants against the loss of their lands and resources.” Instead, the U.S. from 1946 to 1958 conducted 67 atomic and hydrogen tests in the Marshall Islands, with a total yield of 108 megatons, which is 98 times greater than the total yield of all the U.S. nuclear tests conducted in Nevada and is equivalent to 7,200 Hiroshima-size bombs. That works out to an average of more than 1.6 Hiroshima-size bombs per day for the 12 years.

In addition, the U.S. as the trust administrator was obliged “to protect the health of the inhabitants.” But the Bravo blast, more than any other single detonation, made visible to the world the adverse health and environmental effects these islanders suffered.

Bravo was the first U.S. hydrogen device that could be delivered by airplane and was designed to catch up with the Soviets who had six months earlier exploded their aircraft-deliverable hydrogen bomb.

A Chain Reaction of Cover-ups

A U.S. cover-up began just hours after the Bravo weapon was detonated. Hardly a “routine atomic test” as it was officially described, Bravo initially created a radioactive, leaf-shaped plume that turned into a lethal zone covering 7,000 square miles, that is, the distance from Washington to New York.

Then, radioactive snow-like particles began descending 100 to 280 miles away over lands, lagoons and inhabitants of Rongelap and Utrik atolls. Within three days, 236 islanders were evacuated to a U.S. Navy clinic.

The U.S. had hoped to keep the evacuation secret but a personal letter from Corporal Don Whitaker to his hometown newspaper in Cincinnati shared his observations of the distraught islanders arriving at the clinic. The U.S. then issued a press release saying the islanders were "reported well."

But gripping photographs taken at the time and later published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* documented a 7-year-old girl whose hair had tufted out and a 13-year-old boy with a close-up of the back of the head showing a peeling off of the skin, a loss of hair and a persistent sore on his left ear. Others had lower blood counts that weaken resistance to infections.

Decades later, in 1982, a U.S. agency described Bravo as "the worst single incident of fallout exposures in all the U.S. atmospheric testing program."

Just days after the Cincinnati newspaper exposé, another surprise stunned the U.S. government and the world. News accounts reported 23 crew members of a Japanese tuna trawler, the *No. 5 Fukuryu Maru* (the "Lucky Dragon") had also been Bravo-dusted with what is known in Japan as *shi no hai*, or "ashes of death."

When the trawler reached home port near Tokyo two weeks after the Bravo explosion, the crews' radiation sickness and the trawler's radioactive haul of tuna shocked U.S. officials and created panic at fish markets in Japan and the West Coast. The Japanese government and public described the *Lucky Dragon* uproar as "a second Hiroshima" and it nearly led to severing diplomatic relations.

A U.S. doctor dispatched by the government to Japan predicted the crew would recover within a month. But, six months later, the *Lucky Dragon's* 40-year-old radio operator, Aikichi Kuboyama, died. The *New York Times* described him as "probably the world's first hydrogen-bomb casualty."

The U.S. cover stories for Bravo's disastrous results plus subsequent official cover-ups at the time, and continuing today were that the might of the Bravo shot was greater than had been expected and that the winds shifted at the last minute unexpectedly to waft radioactivity over inhabited areas.

Both cover stories have since been rebutted by revelations in once-secret official documents and by testimonies of two U.S. servicemen who were also Bravo-dusted on Rongerik Atoll.

Unending Injustices

Within days after the Bravo explosion, the U.S. cover-up had secretly taken a more menacing turn. In an injustice exposing disregard for human health, the Bravo-exposed islanders were swept into a top-secret project in which they were used as human subjects to research the effects of radioactive fallout.

A week after Bravo, on March 8, at the Navy clinic on Kwajalein, E.P. Cronkite, one of the U.S. medical personnel dispatched there shortly after the islanders' arrival, was handed a "letter of instruction" establishing "Project 4.1." It was titled the "Study of Response of Human Beings Exposed to Significant Beta and Gamma Radiation Due to Fallout from High Yield Weapons."

To avoid negative publicity, the document had been classified as "Secret Restricted Data" until 1994, four years after the end of U.S. responsibilities for its trusteeship at the U.N. and when the Clinton Administration began an open-government initiative.

It would be 40 years before islanders learned the true nature of Project 4.1. Documents declassified since 1994 show that four months before the Bravo shot, on Nov. 10, 1953, U.S. officials had listed Project 4.1 to research the effects of fallout radiation on human beings as among 48 experiments to be conducted during the test, thus seeming to indicate that using islanders as guinea pigs was premeditated.

However, an advisory commission appointed by President Bill Clinton in 1994 indicated "there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate intentional human testing on Marshallese."

For this human-subject research, the islanders had neither been asked nor gave their informed consent, which was established as an essential international standard when the Nuremberg code was written following the war crimes convictions of German medical officers.

Under Project 4.1, the exposed Rongelapese were studied yearly and so were the Utrik Islanders after thyroid nodules began appearing on them in 1963. The islanders began complaining they were being treated like guinea pigs in a laboratory experiment rather than sick humans deserving treatment.

A doctor who evaluated them annually came close to agreeing when he wrote 38 years after Bravo, "In retrospect, it was unfortunate that the AEC [Atomic Energy Commission], because it was a research organization, did not include support of basic health care of populations under study."

During this time, Bravo-dusted islanders developed one of the world's highest rates of thyroid abnormalities; one third of the Rongelapese developed abnormalities in the thyroid, which controls physical and mental growth, and

thus resulted in some cases of mental retardation, lack of vigor and stunted development. Islanders complained of stillborn births, cancers and genetic damage.

Seven weeks after Bravo, on April 21, Cronkite recommended to military officials that exposed Marshallese generally "should be exposed to no further radiation" for at least 12 years and probably for the rest of their natural lives.

Yet, three years later, U.S. officials returned the Rongelapese to their radioactive homeland after they had spent three months at the Kwajalein military facility and at Ejit Island. Besides being Bravo-dusted, their homeland by 1957 had accumulated radioactivity from some of the 34 prior nuclear explosions in the Marshall Islands. Utrik Islanders were returned home by the U.S. shortly after their medical stay on Kwajalein.

For 28 years the Rongelapese lived in their radioactive homeland until 1985. Unable to get answers to their questions, they discounted U.S. assurances that their island was safe.

Failing to provide the Rongelapese "information on their total radiation condition, information that is available, amounts to a coverup," according to a memo dated July 22, 1985, written by Tommy McCraw of the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Nuclear Safety.

In mid-1985, when the U.S. refused to move them, 300 Rongelapese persuaded the environmental organization Greenpeace to transport them and 100 tons of their building materials 110 miles away to Majetto Island. Many of them have since stayed there because they fear their homeland is still too radioactive even though the U.S. has funded resettlement facilities.

New Agreements Built on Secrecy

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed the Compact of Free Association with related agreements after its ratification by the central government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and the U.S. Congress, thus ending bilaterally America's trusteeship arrangement, which was continued by the U.N. Security Council until 1990.

The Compact recognizes RMI as a sovereign, self-governing independent nation in terms of internal management and international relations but with significant U.S. economic aid and services and continues to reserve to the U.S. government sole military access to RMI's 700,000 square miles used still for long-range missile tests.

Yet, during the Compact negotiations, the U.S. government failed to disclose

material information about its testing program to the Pacific Islanders. Not until 1994 did the U.S. government respond favorably to RMI's Freedom of Information Act request for details about the total number of nuclear tests conducted in its territories as well as the kind and yield of each test.

Newly declassified information then also revealed that more islanders were exposed to radiation than previously admitted by the U.S. As late as June 2013, the U.S. gave RMI officials 650-plus pages detailing freshly declassified fallout results of 49 Pacific hydrogen-bomb blasts with an explosive force equal to 3,200 Hiroshima-size bombs conducted in only two years 1956 and 1958.

While the Marshallese were kept in the dark during negotiations about material information, the U.S. crafted Compact agreements that included a provision prohibiting those inhabitants from seeking future legal redress in the U.S. courts and dismissing all current court cases in exchange for a \$150 million compensation trust fund to be administered by a Nuclear Claims Tribunal.

However, that trust fund is now depleted. That fund proved inadequate to pay \$14 million in monies already awarded for personal health claims and 712 of those granted awards (42 percent) have died without receiving their full payments.

The nuclear-weapons tests are presumed by the U.S. to have afflicted many Marshallese with various kinds of cancers and other diseases. A Congressional Research Service Report for Congress in March 2005 indicates that "as many as 4,000 claims may have yet to be filed among persons alive during testing."

A Marshallese petition sent to U.S. officials on Sept. 11, 2000, states that circumstances have changed since the initial agreements and the Marshallese government demands far more in just and adequate compensation for health and property claims. But those demands for justice have thus far gone unanswered.

This March 1 will be solemnly remembered in Asia and the Pacific. In the Marshall Islands flags are flown at half-mast during the Nuclear Memorial and Survivors Remembrance Day. Last year on the anniversary of the Bravo explosion, Marshallese President Christopher J. Loeak described March 1 as "a day that has and will continue to remain in infamy in the hearts and minds of every Marshallese." He renewed his call for President Obama and the U.S. government for justice.

Beverly Deepe Kever is the author of *News Zero: The New York Times and The Bomb* and the newly released *Death Zones and Darling Spies: Seven Years of Vietnam War Reporting*. [This article originally appeared in Civil Beat Hawaii and is reprinted with the author's permission.]

The Future of the Palestinians

Many analysts expect Secretary of State Kerry's Israeli-Palestinian peace talks to fail like all previous ones, but there is a chance that the isolated Palestinian Authority will acquiesce to Israeli demands. If so, what's the future of the BDS movement, asks Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Much has been made of the [rising influence](#) of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel. Indeed, there is a growing sense that the boycott power of civil society, particularly as it is manifesting itself in Europe, is on track to repeat history, to do to Israel what it once did to South Africa.

Simultaneously, there is the persisting assumption that the latest effort at negotiating a settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, now being managed by Secretary of State John Kerry, [will go down the same ignoble](#) path as all its predecessors, i.e. failure.

€€

But not everyone agrees with this. In [an interview](#) given to the New Left Project, posted online on Jan. 11, Norman Finkelstein (a well-published critic of Israel) presents a different scenario. Finkelstein firmly believes that Kerry's efforts will bear fruit and thus, before the end of President Barack Obama's term in office, Israel and the frankly unrepresentative Palestine Authority (PA) will come to terms.

€€

Finkelstein explains that the classic debate over Israel's illegal settlement blocs is over and, on this issue, Israel has won. It will be allowed to absorb the major settlements and thus render any Palestinian entity geographically dubious. The right of return so dear to Palestinian refugees will also be abandoned by the PA.

€€

As a consequence, "negotiations" have boiled down to two issues: the Israeli demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a "Jewish state" and the final status of the Jordan Valley. Finkelstein predicts that the first issue will be solved by describing Israel as "the state of the Jewish people and its citizens," thus affording alleged legal protection to Arab-Israelis, and

correspondingly, Palestine will become “the state of Palestinians and its citizens.”

Regarding the Jordan Valley, Israel will slowly withdraw from the area. Finkelstein’s comment on this is that “Israel is adept at ‘conceding’ things to which it has no title in the first place.”

€€

Finkelstein describes the “Palestinian leadership” as “irredeemably corrupt, incompetent and stupid.”

He is only slightly kinder in his description of “Palestinian supporters abroad,” who, he says, are “not acting smartly.” He discounts boycott achievements in the U.S. and believes that those in Europe should be thought of as pressure tactics in support of Kerry’s efforts.

Palestinian solidarity groups “carry on as if the Kerry process is a meaningless sideshow, something that can safely be ignored,” Finkelstein said, calling this attitude a big mistake. He added that the possibility of real Palestinian self-determination will be gone before these supporters know what has hit them.

€€

What If That’s Right?

Whatever one might think of Norman Finkelstein and his prognostications, it would be wise for those supporting BDS and Palestinian rights to consider how they might react if, against all odds, Secretary of State Kerry succeeds. So let’s think about this.

€€

Such a settlement (at least as described by Finkelstein) would transform a good part of the West Bank’s occupied territory into “sovereign” Israeli land and set up a truncated Palestinian entity to which Palestinian refugees could “return.” Some might question whether there would remain a rationale for continuing to boycott Israel. The BDS movement could lose steam, at least temporarily. But would it and its goals dissipate all together?

€€

Probably not. What would ultimately save the BDS movement is Israel’s leadership itself, driven as they are by the inherently racist nature of the Zionist ideology. In other words, Israel’s policymakers can be safely relied upon to be true to character.

Take the “politically moderate” Finance Minister Ya’ir Lapid ,who [recently told](#) an Israeli audience, “the issue [is] we need to get rid of the Palestinians. It threatens us, it chokes us.” As a result of this commonly shared attitude, the

ethnic cleansing of Palestinians (and other non-Jews such as asylum seekers from East Africa) within Israel's territory will continue apace.

To put it another way, the 67-year-old effort to harass most non-Jewish citizens and residents out of the country will greatly intensify. The BDS campaign conducted against South Africa was a reaction against that society's racist culture and policies. There is no reason why a powerful BDS movement cannot be sustained against Israel on the same basis.

€€€

But Norman Finkelstein may be wrong. It might be that the well-informed journalist Jonathan Cook is correct when he observes that "despite outward signs [Israeli Prime Minister] Netanyahu [is] far from ready to compromise."

Cook claims that Netanyahu has "the bulk of the Israeli public behind him. But most importantly he has a large chunk of the Israel's security and economic establishment on his side too." As a result, Cook says, "These negotiations may not lead to an agreement, but they will mark a historic turning-point nonetheless. The delegitimization of Israel is truly under way, and the party doing most of the damage is the Israeli leadership itself."

I think that the BDS movement, and more generally the movement for Palestinian rights, should be able to survive either way. If Cook is right, not only survival but rapid growth of the movement can be expected. If Finkelstein is correct, the situation will prove more complicated.

Cook is certainly right about one thing: we are at a crossroads, but where exactly the situation might lead us is not as clear as he and Finkelstein suggest. This means that those who support the Palestinians no matter in what format should think about these possibilities. There is as yet lead time to formulate suitable contingencies.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of [Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest](#); [America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood](#); and [Islamic Fundamentalism](#).
