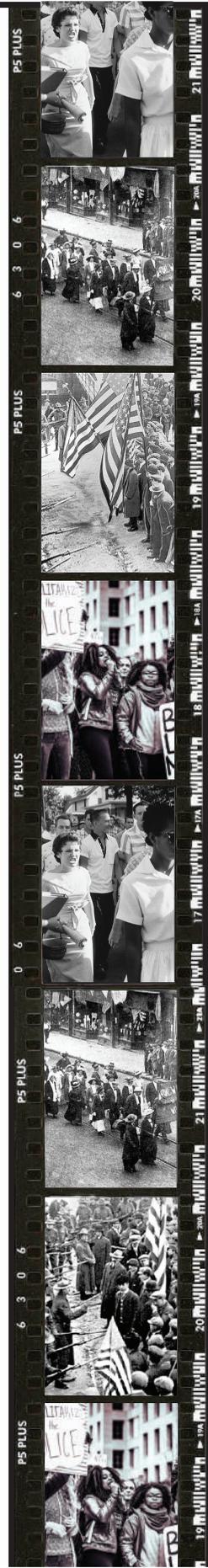


In the early days of this century, the great American studies theorist and teacher George Lipsitz located the field as existing in a “moment of danger,” one in which the task at hand was to discover “how we can use the experiences and understandings of the past to prepare ourselves adequately for the challenges that the future seems certain to present to us.” Now a quarter-century into that future, two things are clear: The United States has slid from a moment of danger to one of direct imperial decline, and the need to grasp the past in order to face the future is more fiercely urgent than ever. By way of introducing this set of conference papers, we will first survey several recent moments representative of US decline in order to argue that studying the United States from beyond its borders is now imperative. These conference proceedings cover an array of themes and expressions surrounding hero and villain characters and states. The articles compiled in this volume span different yet significantly inter-related topics ranging from superhero to anti-hero tropes in films tackling Marvel and political figures, challenging and reshaping the hero-villain dichotomy in American pop culture and politics. Some articles are endowed with an internationalist perspective on the creation of narratives positioning countries into hero/villain binaries reinforcing, and at times undermining, US Global Leadership and roles. Contributors to this volume also examined the conflicting narratives surrounding metaphors of heroism and villainy in the context of the American presidential elections and also explored visual, editorial, televised and theatrical representations of these elections providing a special insight into their impact on voter behavior. The contributors also dealt with historical and cultural manifestations of the hero-villain dichotomy in controversial representations of American presidents.

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HEROES AND VILLAINS IN AMERICAN CULTURE, HISTORY, AND POLITICS  
Tunis 2025



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Edited by:  
**Wassim Daghbir**  
University of Sousse

**John Munro**  
University of Birmingham

Coordination:  
**Tarek MANI**

**Tunis  
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**Conference Proceedings**

(7-8 November 2024)

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Tél. : (00216) 71.241.123

E-mail: [contact@latrach-edition.com](mailto:contact@latrach-edition.com)

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# Heroic Protests, Villainous Policy: The United States and Greater Israel

**Lowell Gustafson**

University of Villanova  
lowellgustafson@gmail.com

## Abstract

Jewish critics of Israeli policies, students in U.S. universities, and numerous U.S. administrative officials have heroically protested U.S. complicity in the ethnic cleansing and genocide in Gaza. Villainous U.S. policies have provided arms and diplomatic cover for Israeli policies in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and other areas. U.S. policies are supported by Christian and Jewish Israelists, an Israel Lobby, deficient media coverage, and subservient Congressional hearings and resolutions. Support for Israeli policies has come at the expense of the U.S. Constitution's first amendment right of free speech, principles in U.S. founding documents, and international law. Changing U.S. public opinion and reduced economic capacities may diminish future U.S. support of Israel.

**Keywords:** Accountability; Advocacy; Heroes; Lobbying; Protest; Villains.

## Introduction

Those within the United States who have been protesting U.S. policy toward Greater Israel have been advocating for the government's actions that would correspond more closely to U.S. values and interests. They have alleged, at risk and cost to themselves, that U.S. policy has supported an apartheid state in Israel, war crimes and genocide in Gaza and Lebanon, and wars on Israel's behalf in many Middle Eastern countries. They fear that current U.S. policy risks once again pulling the United States directly into a war against Iran on behalf of Israel. They discuss an explanation for why the U.S. acts against its own interests and professed values, if there is

anything that might bring its policy into line with them, and if the United States is undermining a liberal rules-based international system.

## 1. Heroic Protests

Protesters have publicly expressed their positions at risk and cost to themselves. There are many examples of this. The interns at the progressive magazine, *The Nation*, wrote in opposition (Birmingham et al.) to its editorial endorsing Kamala Harris for U.S. president in the 2024 elections (Editors). Interns for a magazine are chosen and work at the pleasure of the editors. Their future careers in the highly competitive field of journalism are influenced by the recommendations they receive or by the lack of such. The interns not only disagreed with their magazine's editors, but they also criticized them for not signing their endorsement of Harris. They wrote

We do not support Donald Trump, but to champion Harris at this moment is to ignore the atrocities that are being carried out with weapons supplied by the Biden-Harris administration [...] since she effectively became the Democratic nominee, Harris has failed to differentiate her policies from Joe Biden's blank-check support for genocide. [...] It is in seeking to follow their lead that we, as journalists, refuse to promote Harris. When we think of her, we do not think of the redemption of American democracy. We think of mangled bodies. Press jackets buried with shredded remains in shoeboxes. Hospital patients, still attached to IVs, burning alive. Grieving mothers wailing until they pass out. The haunted eyes of a Palestinian prisoner. We think of pigtailed and lifeless eyes, the smell of rot over mass graves, bodies without heads.

We think of ashes, dust, and blood.

In 2024, Ana Maria Monjardino went beyond speaking out against her employer; she resigned from her position as an intern-turned-freelancer at CNN International (CNNi). This was not easy for her since like everyone, she had bills to pay and personal aspirations for her future in journalism. Nevertheless, she wrote in her resignation letter that "the pro-Israeli rhetoric at CNN/CNNi is far too deep-rooted and unwilling to change fast enough to stop what is now a genocide of the Palestinian people." She found it to be immoral to continue in her position at CNN (Monjardino).

## **A- Jewish Critics of Israel**

There is a wide spectrum of opinions among Jewish-Americans. Well-known Jewish intellectuals and organizations, including Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), Jewish Peace Lobby (JPL), Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), IfNotNow, and others express opposition to Israeli policy and call for an end to Israel's oppression of Palestinians. At a "Seder in the Streets" event on April 23, 2024, held near Senator Chuck Schumer's residence, the Jewish author Naomi Klein spoke about the contemporary meaning of Passover

I've been thinking about Moses, and his rage when he came down from the mount to find the Israelites worshipping a golden calf. The ecofeminist in me was always uneasy about this story: what kind of God is jealous of animals? What kind of God wants to hoard all the sacredness of the Earth for himself? But there is a less literal way of understanding this story. It is about false idols. About the human tendency to worship the profane and shiny, to look to the small and material rather than the large and transcendent. What I want to say to you tonight at this revolutionary and historic Seder in the Streets is that too many of our people are worshipping a false idol once again. They are enraptured by it. Drunk on it. Profaned by it.

That false idol is called Zionism (Klein).

## **B- Tent Camps**

Beginning in the spring semester of 2024, the example of students setting up pro-Palestinian tent camps on the campus of Columbia University spread across more than 100 other colleges and universities. Approximately 18% of these encampments ended with the university agreeing to at least some of the protesting students' demands to divest from Israel and companies that support Israel. (51%) were forcibly disbanded by local or campus authorities (Bryant and Attridge). For example

April 30, Columbia leadership authorized a New York Police Department (NYPD) sweep of the campus to clear protesters barricaded in Hamilton Hall and in the Gaza Solidarity Encampment. Police arrested dozens of protesters, slammed them with barricades, and threw one protester down the stairs, according to the *Columbia*

*Spectator*, the university's student newspaper. Police would not allow any other media organizations or outside observers (Boatner).

On the other side of the country on April 30, a group of pro-Israeli activists attacked a pro-Palestinian encampment at UCLA. Security guards were at the scene but did not intervene for hours. In October, three of the pro-Israeli activists were arrested on felony charges and another for a misdemeanor. One had used tear gas, another a metal pipe (Gurvis). "Law enforcement stood by for hours as counter-protesters attacked the pro-Palestinian encampment at UCLA on April 30, which erupted into the worst violence stemming from the ongoing college protests around the country over Israel's war in Gaza" (Ellis et al.). In addition to enduring aggressive arrests and attacks by pro-Israeli thugs, pro-Palestinian protesters also often were denied their diplomas at graduation ceremonies. Others had their names publicized to encourage pro-Israeli employers to not hire them, a process called doxing (Borter et al.; Sherfinski).

### **C- Administrative Official Resignations**

In addition to the *Nation* and *CNN* interns, progressive Jewish Americans, and many U.S. students, and a number of Biden administration officials have resigned due to their opposition to U.S. policy toward Gaza and Israel (Singh; *Democracy Now*). Josh Paul, who resigned from the State Department and others went on to organize an effort to change U.S. policy (Pamuk). Voluntarily leaving one's career and accepting the costs of that decision due to personal commitment is heroic.

The most recent State Department resignation that came to light as of this writing is that of Mike Casey, who was the State Department's deputy political counselor on Gaza. He resigned in July of 2024, but this became known only in December. He said, "I got so tired of writing about dead kids [...]. Just constantly having to prove to Washington that these children actually died and then watching nothing happen." He was discouraged when the casualty numbers in Gaza that he had documented were publicly questioned by Biden. "I was the one writing the reports," he said. "What's the point of me writing this stuff, if you're just going to disregard it?" He concluded, "We don't have a policy on Palestine. We just do what the Israelis want us to do." The White House National Security Council did not comment on the resignation. Israel's spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Oren Marmorstein dismissed Casey's concern, saying:

“We see no need to respond to baseless accusations stemming solely from the frustration of a former employee” (Gedeon).

Two American Jews, Simone Zimmerman and Eitan went beyond a critique of Israeli policy. They sought “to redefine Judaism’s relationship with Israel, revealing a deepening generational divide over modern Jewish identity” (Israelism). They disputed what they saw as many having identified Judaism with unwavering support for the modern state of Israel. Zimmerman and Eitan challenged the view of Jewish nationalism and called for a return to much longer-standing Jewish values of justice and *tikkun olam*, the commitment to heal the world. This led to some calling them “self-hating Jews.”

### **D- Protesters’ Purposes**

Protesters were not only against U.S. policy, but they were also in favor of U.S. policy living up to the best of the American tradition. The 1776 Declaration of Independence affirmed the truth that all people are created with the unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, not a policy that led to tens of thousands of deaths, forced occupation, and the despair from month after month of U.S. arms raining down on defenseless civilians. It spoke to a “decent respect to the opinions of mankind,” not the endless diplomatic protection of a nation whose policies were overwhelmingly opposed by most UN members. The U.S. constitution stated its purpose to include establishing justice, not the injustice of being complicit in ethnic cleansing and genocide. The U.S. rightly celebrates Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation’s call that “all persons held as slaves [...] shall be henceforth and forever free”; not the denial of freedom and dignity and self-determination of Palestinians.

For all his many problems, Woodrow Wilson too is celebrated for his assertion in his address to Congress of January 18, 1918 that “the day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone,” that the U.S. desired “a just and stable peace such as can be secured only by removing the chief provocations to war.” This stood in stark contrast to a U.S. ally’s conquest of Gaza and the West Bank and its occupation and assaults on them. The U.S. rightly takes pride in its central role in establishing the Geneva Conventions after World War II, with their intent to “alleviate the sufferings caused by war” and their desire to protect both captured soldiers

and civilians during war, not abuse enemy combatants and entire populations. Many Americans saw Jimmy Carter as our best former president for his many human rights efforts throughout his post-White House years. In his book about Palestine, he called for peace, not apartheid. Protesters wanted U.S. policy to Palestine to be consistent with his advice.

## **2. Villainous Policies**

### ***A- U.S. Policy Makers' Rejection of International Law***

On January 26, 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that it is "plausible" that Israel has committed acts that violate the Genocide Convention. The ICJ also ordered Israel to take steps to prevent genocide. (ICJ) U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken denounced Israel being referred to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for alleged genocide during its war in Gaza, calling the claim "meritless" and without any factual basis (PBS). On March 5, 2024, 210 members of the U.S. House of Representatives signed a letter addressed to Biden and Blinken, affirming U.S. support for Israel in response to the "meritless and counterproductive" ICJ case.

On May 20, the International Criminal Court prosecutor, A.A. Khan KC, told the court

I have reasonable grounds to believe that Benjamin NETANYAHU, the Prime Minister of Israel, and Yoav GALLANT, the Minister of Defense of Israel, bear criminal responsibility for the following war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on the territory of the State of Palestine (in the Gaza strip) from at least 8 October 2023:

- Starvation of civilians
- Willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to the body or health
- Willful killing
- Intentionally directing attacks against a civilian population as a war crime
- Extermination as a crime against humanity
- Persecution as a crime against humanity
- Other inhumane acts as crimes against humanity (Blinken)

Secretary of State Antony Blinken retorted, “The United States fundamentally rejects the announcement today from the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) that he is applying for arrest warrants for senior Israeli officials, together with warrants for Hamas terrorists. We reject the Prosecutor’s equivalence of Israel with Hamas. It is shameful” (Blinken). When the ICC’s prosecutor first recommended that the court issue these warrants, President Joe Biden said, “The ICC prosecutor’s application for arrest warrants against Israeli leaders is outrageous” (Biden, ICC). On June 4, 2024, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution calling for sanctions on the ICC. The act included

The ICC’s actions against Israel are illegitimate and baseless, including the preliminary examination and investigation of Israel and applications for arrest warrants against Israeli officials, which create a damaging precedent that threatens the United States, Israel, and all United States partners who have not submitted to the ICC’s jurisdiction (U.S. House).

On November 21, 2024, the International Criminal Court unanimously accepted the prosecutor’s request and issued warrants for the arrest of Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, the former Israeli Minister of Defense. President Biden’s response was unchanged since May. On November 21, he said: “The ICC issuance of arrest warrants against Israeli leaders is outrageous. Let me be clear once again: whatever the ICC might imply, there is no equivalence — none — between Israel and Hamas. We will always stand with Israel against threats to its security” (Biden 2).

In November 2024, the Pope called for an investigation into whether Israel’s actions constitute genocide in Gaza (Ventre). Then, in December the Vatican hosted a nativity scene in which baby Jesus was lying on a keffiyeh, a national symbol for the Palestinians. U.S. officials made no response to either, but the *Times of Israel* headlined the response that “With genocide comments, nativity visit, Pope sows doubts about commitment to Jews: Francis, who sees himself as a friend of the community, has had an increasingly patchy record on statements relating to Jews and Israel, and may be causing irreversible damage to ties.” The “International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations called the claim Israel was committing genocide “categorically false” (Berman).

The major human rights organization, Amnesty International, concluded on December 4, 2024, that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza (Amnesty 2). The U.S. State Department spokesman, Vedant Patel, rejected Amnesty's finding. "We disagree with the conclusions of such a report. We have said previously and continue to find the allegations of genocide to be unfounded," Patel said (AFP and ToI).

On December 19, 2024, Human Rights Watch found that Israel was guilty of extermination and acts of genocide by deliberately depriving Palestinians in Gaza of water (Human Rights Watch.) Patel again rejected the finding that Israel was guilty of committing genocide, saying that, "When it comes to a determination of something like genocide, the legal standard is just incredibly high, and so the finding in this scenario we just disagree with" (Barron's). The ICJ found it plausible enough that Israel was committing genocide to go on to a full trial. The ICC issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant. U.S. officials expressed opposition to these. The Pope called for an investigation into whether or not Israel was committing genocide, to which the Biden administration remained silent.

### ***B- U.S. Policy Supporting Israel and Selective Attention***

Instead of accepting the rulings of the world's highest courts, the Biden administration has strongly supported Israel, routinely ignoring or rejecting that Israel was violating human rights. Shortly after the brutal Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, Joe Biden flew to Israel on October 18 and greeted Netanyahu with a bear hug upon arrival at Ben Gurion International Airport. Over the next year, the U.S. sent some \$18 billion in military aid to Israel. The U.S. was already obligated to send \$3.8 billion per year through 2028 due to an Obama-era agreement. Since 1946, Israel has been the top recipient of U.S. foreign aid, topping \$300 billion (Masters).

Much of the economic aid to Israel comes in the form of credits that Israel can use to buy arms from the United States. The country imports 78% of its arms from the U.S. These include more than 50 F-15 fighter jets, B-52 bombers, Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles, or AMRAAMs, 120 mm tank ammunition and high explosive mortars, tactical vehicles, and other weapons. In October of 2024, the U.S. sent Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) antimissile system to Israel along with the U.S. military personnel needed to operate it. In

addition to all this, the U.S. maintains an Amphibious Ready Group Marine Expeditionary Unit (ARG/MEU), guided missile destroyers, aircraft carriers and other navy capabilities in the posture in the Eastern Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Gulf of Oman (Ives).

The United States provides vigorous diplomatic protection of Israel. As of December 18, 2023, the U.S. vetoed UN Security Council resolutions that were critical of Israel 45 times, using its veto power more than any other member (O'Dell). While this ensures that no Security Council resolution critical of Israel passes, the U.S. cannot stop overwhelming support by other member states of many such General Assembly resolutions. However, these are not legally binding, so strong majority votes in the General Assembly can be ignored by Israel.

American military and diplomatic support is based on U.S. domestic institutional support. One indication of this was when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed a joint session of Congress on July 24, 2024. This was Netanyahu's 4<sup>th</sup> such address; Winston Churchill did so 3 times. In his 2024 speech of 56 minutes, Netanyahu enjoyed 52 standing ovations. In the speech, Netanyahu said

Like December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, and September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, October 7<sup>th</sup> is a day that will forever live in infamy. It was the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah. It began as a perfect day. Not a cloud in the sky. Thousands of young Israelis were celebrating at an outdoor music festival. And suddenly, at 6:29 a.m., as children were still sleeping soundly in their beds in the towns and kibbutzim next to Gaza, suddenly heaven turned into hell. Three thousand Hamas terrorists stormed into Israel. They butchered 1,200 people from 41 countries, including 39 Americans. Proportionately, compared to our population size, that's like 20 9/11s in one day. And these monsters, they raped women, they beheaded men, they burnt babies alive, they killed parents in front of their children and children in front of their parents. They dragged 255 people, both living and dead, into the dark dungeons of Gaza (Netanyahu).

The Israeli Prime Minister did not mention that Israel was then holding thousands of political prisoners, often as administrative detainees, or those being held without charge. B'tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, reported on

September 2, 2024, that "At the end of June 2024, the Israel Prison Service (IPS) was holding 3,340 Palestinians in administrative detention" (B'tselem). In November of 2023, Amnesty International reported that "The Israeli Prison Service informed human rights group HaMoked that as of 1 November it is holding 6,809 Palestinian prisoners." It went on to report about Israel's "inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners" and that it "failed to investigate incidents of torture and death in custody." (Amnesty 1)

In his speech to Congress, Netanyahu did not mention that before October 7, 2023, 200,000 Palestinians were driven into Gaza in 1948, that Israel captured Gaza in 1967, occupied it until 2005, disengaged in 2005, set up a blockade in 2007, created an open-air prison, blockaded it and turned it into an open-air prison as of 2007, invaded Gaza in 2008-2009 with 1,000 Palestinian deaths and the destruction of many homes, schools, and hospitals, a 2012 invasion leading to 100 Palestinian deaths, a 2014 Israeli invasion of Gaza that resulted in the deaths of 73 Israelis (mostly soldiers) and 2,251 Palestinians (mostly civilians) and destruction of 25% of homes in Gaza city and 70% of homes in Beit Hanoun, or a 2021 crisis that saw 256 Palestinians and 15 Israelis killed. These frequent invasions of Gaza were referred to in Israel as "Mowing the Lawn," a term coined by Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir. Yet, many continued to see the beginning of the Gaza crisis as having begun on October 7, 2023.

By the December of 2024, over 45,000 Palestinians had been reported as killed in the Israel–Hamas war, including over 17,000 children, over 150 journalists and media workers according to the Committee to Protect Journalists and the International Federation of Journalists, 120 academics, and over 224 humanitarian aid workers, including 179 employees of UNRWA. (Al Jazeera) Almost certainly, those numbers are higher given the number of bodies unaccounted for under the rubble left by bombings. More than half of Gaza's homes were damaged or destroyed, as well as 80 percent of commercial facilities, 87 percent of school buildings, Healthcare facilities - 17 of 36 hospitals are partially functional, 68 percent of road networks, and 68 percent of cropland. Israel has issued more than 65 evacuation orders for Gaza's 2.3 million people (AJLabs).

The level of destruction and statements made by Israeli officials, IDF soldiers, and others, led many to suspect that Israeli objectives in the assault on Gaza were more than recovering hostages and defeating Hamas.

For example, the *Times of Israel* reported in October 2024 that National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir had called for the reestablishment of settlements in the Gaza Strip and says that “encouraging emigration” of the Palestinian population from the territory was “the most ethical” solution for the current conflict. “If we want to we can renew settlement in Gaza,” he added. “We can [also] do something else – encourage emigration. The truth is, this is the most ethical and the most correct solution.” Oblivious to what was going on, he assured his listeners that this would be done “not by force” and that Gazans would merely be made aware of how Israel was “giving them the option” of going to other countries. “The Land of Israel {apparently including Gaza} is ours” he asserted (Shraron).

### ***C- American Policy vs American Public Opinion***

As the Israeli assault on Gaza and the West Bank wore on, U.S. policy remained unwaveringly supportive of Israel even while U.S. public opinion changed. Gallup reported that 45% of Americans disapproved of Israeli military action in Gaza in November 2023, but by March of 2024, that had risen to 55%. Approval of Israeli actions fell from 50% to 36% (Gallup).

Still, U.S. policy makers across the mainstream spectrum maintained their support of Israel. Kamala Harris did not permit a pro-Palestinian speaker to take the podium at the Democratic Party convention where she was nominated as the party’s presidential candidate. In her speech, she said

Let me be clear, I will always stand up for Israel’s right to defend itself, and I will always ensure Israel has the ability to defend itself, because the people of Israel must never again face the horror that a terrorist organization called Hamas caused on Oct. 7, including unspeakable sexual violence and the massacre of young people at a music festival (Haaretz Podcast).

Miriam Adelson, who, like her deceased husband, is a strong supporter of Israel, gave \$100 million to the Trump campaign. She said that Trump is a true friend and will "save the Jewish people." Trump told a group of Israeli supporters, “You have a big protector in me. You don’t have a protector on the other side.”

Trump also accused Harris of “pandering” to Hamas supporters and said "Jewish people have no excuse" for supporting his Democratic rival. Trump told the Israeli-American Council summit in Washington, DC that “You have a big protector in me. You don’t have a protector on the other side {Kamala Harris}” (McCammon). Once Trump was elected, he quickly compiled “one of the most pro-Israel teams of any administration in history.” (Kelly)

One of many examples of Christian Zionists in Congress is that of Doug Lamborn (R-Kansas). Among the reasons he cites for his lifelong support of Israel is

For me, faith provides a compelling factor in supporting Israel. I became a believer when I was 18 as a freshman in college. Putting aside my previous skepticism, I came to the point where I knew I needed something more in life. As part of my newfound Christianity, I discovered and believed the truth of Scripture.

Genesis 12:1-3 is a foundational text for both Judaism and Christianity. In these verses, God promises that Abraham will become a great nation. Those who bless Abraham’s descendants will be blessed, and those who curse his descendants will be cursed. For people of faith, like myself, this compels me to support Israel (Lamborn).

### **3. Explaining U.S. Support for Israel**

#### ***A- Christian Zionism***

As Ilan Pappé argues, “Zionism began {in Britain} as an evangelical Christian concept and later an active project” (Pappé). It went on to influence American religion and politics (see Goldman, Herman, Kiracofe, PALCI, Shapiro, Stackhouse). Over the past 2,500 years, Jews and Christians have each developed a range of interpretations of sacred scripture, and both have sometimes added to how we can draw from – and add to – our pasts. One topic for Christians has been the relationship of the Tanakh, Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament to the New Testament. Do prophecies made in the Old Testament foretell Jesus of Nazareth many centuries later? Is it better to accept the Jewish prophets’ concern with their own times? Are the prophets speaking to their own community at their time, or predicting a distant future of the world? Are words to be taken

literally or symbolically? What sections of the Bible are historical or mythical? Does Jerusalem refer to a city or to the Christian church? Is the entire Bible, both Old and New a single, coherent dictated Word of God? Is it a complex collection of writings and editing by many Jewish people over centuries? Christians such as John Hagee, who formed Christians United for Israel (CUFI), lean towards the more literal and completely historical view.

### **B- The Promised Land**

The Tanakh (Hebrew Bible, Old Testament) includes text in which God is said to have promised certain land (Greater Israel or Eretz Yisrael Hashlema) to the Hebrew people

Genesis 15:<sup>18</sup> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates,<sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,<sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,<sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

Exodus 23:<sup>31</sup> I will set your borders from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will hand over to you the inhabitants of the land, and you shall drive them out before you.<sup>32</sup> You shall make no covenant with them and their gods.<sup>33</sup> They shall not live in your land, lest they make you sin against me, for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.

Numbers 34:<sup>1</sup>The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>Command the Israelites, and say to them: When you enter the land of Canaan (this is the land that shall fall to you for an inheritance, the land of Canaan, defined by its boundaries), <sup>3</sup>your south sector shall extend from the wilderness of Zin along the side of Edom. Your southern boundary shall begin from the end of the Dead Sea on the east; <sup>4</sup>your boundary shall turn south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and cross to Zin, and its outer limit shall be south of Kadesh-barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar-addar, and cross to Azmon; <sup>5</sup>the boundary shall turn from Azmon to the Wadi of Egypt, and its termination shall be at the Sea. <sup>6</sup>For the western boundary, you shall have the Great Sea and its coast; this shall be your western boundary. <sup>7</sup>This shall be your northern boundary: from the Great Sea you shall mark out your line to

Mount Hor; <sup>8</sup>from Mount Hor you shall mark it out to Lebo-hamath, and the outer limit of the boundary shall be at Zedad; <sup>9</sup>then the boundary shall extend to Ziphron, and its end shall be at Hazar-enan; this shall be your northern boundary. <sup>10</sup>You shall mark out your eastern boundary from Hazar-enan to Shepham; <sup>11</sup>and the boundary shall continue down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; and the boundary shall go down and reach the eastern slope of the sea of Chinnereth; <sup>12</sup>and the boundary shall go down to the Jordan, and its end shall be at the Dead Sea. This shall be your land with its boundaries all around.

Add all this together, and the Lord is said to have promised the Hebrews all of what is considered today's Palestinian territories, Western Syria, Southern Turkey, part of Iraq, part of Saudi Arabia, part of Egypt and Lebanon. Another way to look at the text is that it was written and edited by Hebrews who gave their expression to their views. In this sense, the Bible is human words about God and other topics, not the Word of God.

Another aspect of the Genesis 15 text regards the right to land. One common current interpretation is that modern Israel is a settler-colonial state that lacks right to its land. Right comes from the first settlement. Indigenous people have a right to the land they live on. One problem with this is determining who the indigenous people in the Middle East are. It has been populated by many groups over millennia, and they have often supplanted or intermixed with each other. We cannot identify ancestors of people that have been living in the Middle East within the last century or two who were the first people to have first settled any particular land. Maybe we can identify people who have been living in Palestine for many centuries. They were maybe not indigenous, but they have been there so long that they have developed right to the land. The Jewish population was a small fraction of that total since the Romans banished the Jews in the first century CE but before the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps long-standing populations, even if they are not the first ones, have stronger rights to land than recent ones.

Genesis 15 gives no right to indigenous or long-standing populations. The right to land comes from the Lord granting it. And God promises to Abram and his descendants the "land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,<sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites, and the Jebusites." There were already a lot

of people living on the land before Abram, according to the text. The Lord gives their land to the Hebrews. God made the world, and He can take and give it to whom He chooses. On the other hand, if the texts were written by ancient Hebrews putting words into the mouth of a God they imagined, then these texts currently hold little weight.

### **C- Holy War**

What should we learn from reading the texts in the Bible about the use of force? How should we interpret the Exodus and Conquest of Canaan stories? Are they history or myth? Do they contain kernels of history but were written long after the events they discuss for purposes that authors were addressing in their own time? One interpretation stresses that God makes a preferential option for the poor and oppressed (Archdiocese, Boff, Gutiérrez). The Bible provides a universal message. Another reading is that this is about what is necessary for God's chosen people, the Hebrews, to achieve their freedom and promised land. The interpretation here will consider the use of force for the holy purposes of Hebrew liberation and control of sacred land. In the Exodus story, God (YHWH, Elohim, El, or Eloah) takes an active interest in the liberation of His people from slavery in Egypt<sup>1</sup>. He sends Moses to persuade the Pharaoh to let His people go. Persuasion did not work. Moses turns his staff into a snake, but Pharaoh's magicians can do that trick too.

Exodus 7 begins the story of the plagues. The first is when the Lord tells Moses that He will turn the Nile River into blood. "The fish in the river will die. The river will stink. The Egyptians will not be able to drink its water" (Exodus 7:18). There is no other source of water in the Egyptian desert. Exodus 8:20 ff tells the story of the Plague of the Flies. "All over Egypt, the flies destroyed the land." The account then describes how "all of the livestock of the Egyptians" died (Exodus 9:6). Then painful boils covered the bodies of all Egyptians (Exodus 9:11). A tremendous hailstorm fell all over Egypt. It beat down on people and animals alike. It struck everything growing in the fields of Egypt (Exodus 9: 22). Then came the locusts, which ate anything in the fields that the hail had not destroyed. Moses then says, "The Lord says, 'About midnight I will go through every part of Egypt. Every oldest son in Egypt will die. The oldest son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, will die. The oldest son of every female

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<sup>1</sup> The text at Genesis 47:13-26 tells the story of Joseph instituting slavery in Egypt 400 years before Moses.

slave, who works at her hand mill, will die. All the male animals born first to their mothers among the cattle will also die. There will be loud crying all over Egypt.” Exodus 11: 4-6; 12: 29-30 report that “At midnight the Lord struck down every oldest son in Egypt. He killed the oldest son of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne. He killed all the oldest sons of prisoners. He also killed all the male animals born first to their mothers among the livestock. Pharaoh and all his officials got up during the night. So did all the Egyptians. There was loud crying in Egypt because someone had died in every home.”

These texts from Exodus seem to be consistent with the infamous statement by then Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who said on October 9, 2023, “I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed” (Fabian). And if one has to choose between international humanitarian law that prohibits such wholesale attacks on civilian populations, and the Word of the God who created the universe, does the latter take precedence?

The next part of the story describes how God killed the Pharaoh’s charioteers (Exodus 14: 23-28). This use of force by God is not against humans and animals first born this time but against military targets. After this, God commands His people to use force to conquer the promised land from its earlier inhabitants and frequently blesses their fighting. In Leviticus 26:7, the Lord commands that the Hebrews “chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.”

Numbers 31:7- 12 describes how the Hebrews “warred against Mid’ian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and slew every male. And the people of Israel took captive the women of Mid’ian and their little ones; and they took as booty all their cattle, their flocks, and all their goods. All their cities in the places where they dwelt, and all their encampments, they burned with fire, and took all the spoil and all the booty, both of man and of beast. Then they brought the captives and the booty and the spoil to Moses, and to Elea’zar the priest, And Moses was angry with the officers of the army;” Moses was not angry because they had killed and stolen. Instead, he asks in verse, "Have you let all the women live?“. He adds in 16-18, “Behold, these caused the people of Israel, by the counsel of Balaam, to act treacherously against the LORD in the matter of Pe’or, and so the plague came among the congregation of the LORD. Now, therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known

man by lying with him. But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.” In 25-29, Moses explains how everyone, including the Lord, should get their portion of the booty.

In 1 Samuel 15:3, the Lord Almighty says, “Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israelis were united in their fight against Hamas, whom he described as an enemy of incomparable cruelty. “They are committed to completely eliminating this evil from the world,” Netanyahu said in Hebrew. He then added: “You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible. And we do remember” (Lanard).

Regarding providing aid to Israel and the obligations of non-Israelis to do this, Isaiah 60 lays out the prophet’s hopes for the future.

<sup>5b</sup> **the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you;  
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.**

<sup>6</sup> A multitude of camels shall cover you,  
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;  
all those from Sheba shall come.

**They shall bring gold and frankincense**  
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you;  
the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;

<sup>9</sup> For the coastlands shall wait for me,  
the ships of Tarshish first,  
to bring your children from far away,  
their silver and gold with them,

<sup>10</sup> **Foreigners shall build up your walls,**  
and their kings shall minister to you,

<sup>11</sup> **Your gates shall always be open;  
day and night they shall not be shut,**  
**so that nations shall bring you their wealth,**  
with their kings led in procession.

<sup>12</sup> **For the nation and kingdom  
that will not serve you shall perish;  
those nations shall be utterly laid waste.**

The total holy war narrative of the Torah and the statements of senior Israeli leaders were picked up by the Israeli Defense Force as it fought in Gaza. One battalion posted its mission as nothing less than a systematic, concerted, and deliberate effort to erase the intellectual, cultural, and social future of the Palestinian people. “Our job is to flatten Gaza,” the soldiers of the official D9 company of {Israel’s 749 Combat Engineering Battalion} battalion wrote on their Instagram page. They added, accurately: “No one will stop us” (Tirawi and Vanderlip).

In Genesis 12:3, the Lord told Abram that “I will bless those who bless you. I will put a curse on anyone who puts a curse on you.” Christian Zionists take from all of this that they must support the modern Jewish state in the promised land. They support the United States building up Israel’s walls and keeping its gates open, meaning to provide for its defense to the point that they need not even close the gates at night when there had been threats. Christian Zionists support bringing the wealth of the U.S. to Israel. God will bless the U.S. for blessing Israel, they hope and pray.

#### **4. AIPAC and the Israel Lobby**

When Biblical texts are insufficient to persuade people to support Israel, organization, money, and political power can help. While there are many lobbying groups, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is often cited as among the most effective (Barda, Findley, Hafdallah, Mearsheimer and Walt, Schwartz, Smith). AIPAC is so successful due in part to its insightful analysis of American politics. Its members realize that elected public representatives want to get re-elected. If representatives support what AIPAC does, they often get money. If they deviate in almost any way, they often suddenly face well-funded opponents and organized opposition. Once in office, they are contacted regularly by AIPAC representatives to keep them apprised of AIPAC’s positions and what is expected of them.

An example of an AIPAC supporter is Joe Biden. He has made his Irish Catholic identity well known. He has also said that “You don’t have to be a Jew to be a Zionist. I’m a Zionist” (Biden 3); In addition to being a Christian Zionist, he is also the top recipient of pro-Israel campaign donations from 1990-2024, which total \$4,229,598 (Open Secrets). The donors received a good return on their investment. On the other hand,

Congressional representatives Jamaal Bowman of New York and Cori Bush of Missouri learned the hard way about the costs of opposing AIPAC's views (Kassel, 61). Opposing candidates in the primaries were identified and encouraged to run, and AIPAC spent \$100 million on the 2024 elections. As their website asserts, every AIPAC-endorsed candidate won (AIPAC). Bowman and Bush lost.

## 5. Media Coverage

In 2018, the Associated Press found that the mainstream U.S. media reported Israeli deaths at a rate nearly four times greater than Palestinian ones. Other studies found similar or even greater differences (IAK). Francesca P. Albanese, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, said on December 18, 2024, "This genocide {in Gaza} would have not been possible without the shocking, shocking cover-up by the media." She criticized "The role that corporate media played in justifying crimes and spreading misinformation." She added that "The role of international media of Western media in acting in defense of the acts of a genocidal State this is unprecedented but it's also revealing of the global situation we are facing... had it not been for Independent Media including in the west, particularly in the West in fact, we wouldn't know much about what's happening in the occupied Palestinian territory" (Albanese).

Another example is the interview on CBS Mornings of the African-American intellectual, Ta-Nehisi Coates. Tony Dokoupil, one of three interviewers, aggressively questioned the author of *The Message*, which included a section critical of Israel's apartheid and Jim Crow style of treating Palestinians. Subsequent backlash against Dokoupil by many viewers led CBS to criticize their employee (Soave and Konst). However, the chair of Paramount Global, Shari Redstone, spoke in favor of Dokoupil. Paramount Global is a major stockholder of CBS. "I frankly think Tony did a great job with that interview," Redstone said "Paramount Global chair and National Amusements president Shari Redstone is one of the most powerful people in Hollywood. She is also an observant Jew and a supporter of Israel who has been reeling over the days since Oct. 7, when Hamas terrorists attacked the Jewish state" (Hollywood Reporter).

## 6. Congressional Investigations

Pat Buchanan had said that Capitol Hill is Israel's occupied territory (ADL). This is inflammatory rhetoric, but consistent and overwhelming votes in favor of Israel in Congress are factual. Whether due to personal conviction or calculations of how to benefit from currying favor, Representative Elise Stefanik (R-NY) led a congressional investigation of alleged antisemitism in elite American universities. Presidents and other university leaders from Harvard, MIT, the University of Pennsylvania, and others were called to testify. Due in part to their lawyerly but politically tone-deaf performances, the presidents of Harvard, Penn, Columbia, and others ended up resigning (Treisman). Columbia President Minouche Shafik hung onto her job until August 2024, but finally resigned when she realized that she could not navigate between pro-Israeli Congressional demands and many pro-Palestinian Columbia students and faculty (Shafik).

Large and hence influential donors also pressured these university leaders to resign, threatening to withhold or transfer their donations (Copeland, Halon, Powell). In December of 2024, The University of Michigan fired Rachel Dawson, a director in its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion office. She had said in a private conversation that "the university is controlled by wealthy Jews"; that "we don't work with Jews" because "they are wealthy and privileged and take care of themselves"; that "rich donors and Jewish board members control the president" and "silence" students from the Middle East and North Africa". While there was no recording of these comments and that they might have been paraphrased by others, the Michigan chapter of the Anti-Defamation League complained to the university of her antisemitic remarks.

Firings of university officials accused of being anti-Israel, anti-Zionist, or anti-Semitic were combined with rules fashioned over the summer of 2024 to reduce pro-Palestinian demonstrations at universities in the new 2024-25 academic year. The results were effective. Since the frequent pro-Palestinian university student demonstrations in the spring of 2024, universities successfully strategized over the summer about how to limit such expressions in the fall (Taft). An example is when some Harvard University students and professors silently put pro-Palestinian signs on library tables, they were banned from the libraries. Tents overnight were banned.

## **7. Limits of Pro-Israeli Influence**

The Israel Lobby does face limits on its influence. Given the public change of opinion on Israel's use of force in Gaza and elsewhere, the Lobby has had to spend more money on elections than has been required before to get the same results. Also, the Lobby's actions against Jamaal, Bowman, Coates, Claudine Gay, and others – all of whom are Black – exacerbated already uneven Jewish-Black relations. Bi-partisan support for Israel has been diminished by progressive Democratic party criticism of Israeli policy. Israeli policy has done more for the change in U.S. public opinion than the BDS movement ever had, and the Lobby has had to work overtime to combat that.

## **8. Could Anything Diminish U.S. Support for Israel?**

It has often been said that the U.S. could stop anything it objected to in Israeli policy immediately by cutting off military aid and diplomatic protection. Rather than doing this, the Biden administration continued providing aid and protection even as it objected to Israeli policy. This made the U.S. look hypocritical or pathetically dominated by its tiny ally. With the election of Donald Trump, his nominations of strongly pro-Israel cabinet secretaries and other officials, Republican majorities in Congress, and the continued majority Democratic party support of Israel, U.S. support for Israel's policies have become even more pronounced.

One long-term possibility is that the U.S. will at some point no longer have the resources to maintain its enormous defense expenditures. Its 2024 military budget is \$916 billion, more than the next top national defense budgets combined (Peterson 3). The U.S. budgetary crisis at some point may make such continued defense expenditures, including military aid to Israel, impossible.

The U.S. public debt now stands at a historic high of over 36 trillion dollars (The debt was just over \$4 trillion in 1993). That debt is 123% of the U.S. GDP, the highest since World War II when it reached 106%. At current levels of increase, which is expected to become 172% of GDP by 2054 (Peterson, Fiscal). In 2023, the federal government spent \$658 billion on net interest costs on the national debt. That total, which grew by 38 percent from \$476 billion in 2022, was the largest amount ever spent on interest in the budget and totaled 2.4 percent of gross domestic product

(GDP). Interest costs are on track to become the largest category of spending in the federal budget (Peterson 2).

By September 2023, interest payments had gone up to \$1.049 trillion, up 30% at the same time the year before (Cox). That is more than the U.S. spends on its defense budget or Medicare (Committee). Over the next ten years, the U.S. will pay some \$12.9 trillion that could have been spent on health care, social programs, education, defense, and so on. By 2053, interest payments will consume almost 40% of the government's revenues (Peterson 4). It may just become too expensive for available U.S. resources to keep up aid to Israel and other military expenditures. It is possible that as interest rates rise, some may not wish to continue military aid even if it might be possible. It may become increasingly apparent to many how U.S. support for wars benefiting Israel has cost the U.S. trillions of dollars. The U.S. war in Iraq alone cost about \$3 trillion (Stiglitz).

As these various programs start to be squeezed out by interest payments, there may be increased social dislocation in the U.S. There has even been considerable interest if U.S. political polarization in which political opponents are often seen as enemies could descend into civil war. There was a movie called *Civil War* that was in U.S. theaters in 2024. There have been a number of books on the topic (e.g. El Akkad, Kawczynski, Marche, Walter). This was more of a fear if Trump had lost the 2024 elections. His followers had assaulted Congress after he lost in 2000 and they remained persuaded that if he had lost, it would have been due to a rigged election. Since there are more guns than people in the United States, there was fear of a disloyal opposition which would not accept a loss at the ballot box. Democrats in fact lost the elections but have behaved like a loyal opposition in which they accept electoral defeat and start planning for how to do better in the 2026 midterm and 2028 general elections. Social unrest or even civil war would certainly curtail U.S. interventions abroad. At some point, like every other empire in world history, the American empire will come to an end (Watts).

## **9. Ethnic Cleansing and Genocide as Policy Tools**

The ousting of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024 cut the Syrian land routes that Iran had used to send military aid to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Syria too had traditionally often been hostile to Israel. For both reasons, the U.S. and Israel sought to fragment Syria. To this end, 2000 U.S. troops

and military aid supported the Kurds in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the Northeast of the country, denying Assad that region's agricultural and oil wealth. Turkey supported the Syrian National Army (SNA), which often fought against the SDF. With Russian resources drained by the Ukraine war, and Hezbollah and Iran weakened by Israel's attacks, Assad's army was unable to maintain its positions after a 13-year-long civil war. Officers in Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HATS) were said to be earning \$2,000.00 a month; Assad's officers were being paid \$40.00 and soldiers \$7.00. They stopped fighting allowing HATS to sweep across the country and take power within 11 days. Israel responded by making over 800 air strikes, destroying almost all of Syria's military equipment, as well as expanding the territory it has held in the Golan Heights. After that, Syria was defenseless and open to segments of the nation either competing for power or forming a series of ethnic statelets. Hezbollah has lost access to support from Iran. Israel continued to bomb Gaza and dislocate West Bank Palestinians.

As of this writing in February 2025, it appears that Israel has indeed remade the Middle East as had been planned for decades. Shortly after 9/11, General Wesley Clark was told of a Pentagon plan to take out the governments of Iraq and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, and Sudan and finish off with Iran (Clark). Benjamin Netanyahu had listed these countries as early as 1995 as the principal causes of terrorism (Netanyahu).

All of the listed seven countries save Iran were in chaos by 2024, and Iran has been weakened. We will have to see if President Donald Trump can be enticed to attack Iran directly with U.S. forces, as Netanyahu has wanted of the U.S. for years (Pinkas). With more than enough fighters and bombs provided by the U.S. and Germany, Israel may well feel secure enough to attack Iran on its own. In the meantime, Israel is carrying out ethnic cleansing and genocide in its bid to achieve a Greater Israel that includes Gaza and the West Bank. In February 2025, Trump announced that he intends to "own" or "have" Gaza after removing all of its inhabitants to Jordan, Egypt, Indonesia, and elsewhere without their right of return. Netanyahu and U.S. Secretary of State Rubio have affirmed their support for Trump's plan of ethnic cleansing (BIBA, WFFA, Reuters, Al Jazeera). If this illegal policy is actually implemented, the U.S. and Israel will have made what had been abhorrent into a tool of statecraft. The ethnic cleansing that began in 1948 will have been further achieved at the cost of the Palestinians. The liberal, rule-based international order imagined by

Woodrow Wilson and pursued by the U.S. after WWII, will have been overturned by the U.S. in Gaza. We will have created a new vision of world disorder that is consistent with the view of the Athenians in the Melian debate in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*: The strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must.

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## Bios of Editors

**Wassim Dagherir** holds a BA from the University of Carthage, an MA from the University of Grenoble (France), a PhD from the University of Paris (France), a Post-Doctorate degree from New York University (USA), and an HDR from the University of Sousse (Tunisia). He is an Associate Professor and PhD director currently working at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sousse. His areas of research interest include US History and Historiography, US Foreign Policy, US Democracy, and US Media. Professor Dagherir is also research active as he is the author of 6 books and 15 international articles dealing with several American Studies topics. His newest book is *The Trump Administration's Foreign Policy: A Trumpian World of Uncertainty or a Decline of Pax-Americana* (New York: Peter Lang AG International Academic Publishers, 2020).

**John Munro** teaches US history at the University of Birmingham. He is the author of *The Anticolonial Front: The African American Freedom Struggle and Global Decolonization*, editor with Kirrily Freeman of *Reading the Postwar Future: Textual Turning Points from 1944* and *Reading the New Global Order: Textual Transformations of 1989* and, with Radhika Natarajan, author of the *Public Books Imperialism Syllabus*.

## Bios of Contributors

**Gildas Le Voguer** is a Professor of American studies at Rennes 2 University, France. He has written about the political and historical dimensions of American intelligence and is the author of *Le Renseignement Américain – Entre secret et transparence* (2014). He has recently published an article about the Russiagate.

**Lowell Gustafson** earned his PhD from the University of Virginia in the US in 1984. Since 1986, he has been on the faculty of Villanova University in Philadelphia. He has authored and edited a number of books and published a number of articles. In recent years, he has served as an officer of the International Big History Association and is editor of the *Journal of Big History*. People in Big History study the developments from the Big Bang to the present.

**Sadok Damak** is an Associate Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Sfax, Tunisia. He holds a doctorate and a Habilitation degree. His research focuses on cultural anthropology, with a particular interest in ethnic and multi-dimensional identities in US society. His latest publications in this field include “Interculturation and Ethnicity: ‘Spanglish’ as the Emergence of a Third Identity”; *The Nation of Islam Cautious Return to Americanity*; and “Interculturality as the Outcome of Religious Cultural Encounters in the Autobiography of Malcolm X”.

**Yosra Amraoui** holds a PhD in English Language, Literature and Civilization from the University of Manouba, Tunisia. Her areas of research and teaching revolve around Historiography, Media Studies and Anglophone History. She is the head of a master’s program in English for Communication and an assistant professor at the High Institute of Languages of Tunis (ISLT), University of Carthage, Tunisia. She is also an entrepreneurship coach, a conference interpreter and a consultant in countering violent extremism (CVE). She co-edited two volumes with Cambridge Scholars Publishing: *On History and Memory in Arab Literature and Western Poetics* (2020) and *Poetics of the Native* (2021) and has published a number of articles on the history and identity of British and American Jews and their role in the creation of Israel. She earned a post-doc position at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University in 2022-2023 and is currently undertaking research on political prison narratives.

**Oussema Othmeni** is a Teaching Assistant of American Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Sousse, Tunisia. He holds a Ph.D. in American Studies with a focus on U.S. Foreign Policy and an M.A. in American Cultural Studies from the same university. He was a Fulbright Doctoral Scholar at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University (USA), and he is currently the Secretary General of the Tunisian Association for American Cultural Studies. Oussema is also an active member of the American Political Science Association, particularly within the Foreign Policy and Middle East and North Africa sections, and he is a current member of the International Republican Institute's (IRI) Generation Democracy cohort.

**Ines Kayel** is a professeur agrégé in the English department at the Higher Institute of Human Sciences of Jendouba, Tunisia. She has a Master's degree in Cross Cultural studies from the Higher Institute of languages of Tunis. She is a Fulbright Alumnus and is currently a doctoral student at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sousse.

**Fedi Abdelhamid Kantaoui** is a PhD candidate in American Cultural Studies and he holds an MA degree in the same field. He is currently a Teaching Assistant of English at IHEC Sousse. He provides classes to both the BA and MA levels. Kantaoui's research centers around the influence of Israeli lobbies and the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His research interests lie at the intersection of lobbying, public policy, and foreign policy.

**Hajer Ben Ameer** is a PhD student specializing in American cultural studies, with a particular emphasis on narrativity and populism. Her research, under the supervision of Prof. Wassim Daghbir, investigates the intersection of political discourse, cultural narratives, and populist movements in the United States. Beyond her academic work, Hajer is the Assistant Secretary General of the Tunisian Association for American Cultural Studies (TAACS) and a Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sousse. She is also an active member of the Young Scholars Initiative on Populism (Opus), further enriching her engagement in the field.

**Lamia Omrane** teaches in the Department of English at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sfax. She holds an MA degree in Applied Linguistics (2011). She is currently a Ph.D. researcher in American Cultural Studies.



