

Britain's Global Legacy of Conflict

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In each of these seemingly disparate conflicts, the seeds of violence were sown by one system – British colonialism and its malevolent engineering of sectarianism. It is an indictment of British rulers that decades on, and sometimes centuries on, people's lives are still being blighted by the legacy of Britain's predatory, criminal history."

It's been a busy news week for British colonialism, or more accurately, the violent legacy of British colonialism. A rash of ongoing or renewed conflicts across the globe speaks of the detriment that the once-powerful British bequeathed and for which people of today have to contend with through injustice and in some cases immense human suffering.

In Northern Ireland, Belfast city has seen resurgent riots between pro-British Protestant youths and Irish nationalist Catholics, with extensive injuries, property damage and a painful reminder of sectarian bloodletting in recent years.

Over in the South Atlantic, Argentines and their government are up in arms over the London government's proposal to hold a referendum on the future status of the Malvinas Islands, the British colony off Argentina otherwise known as the Falklands.

In the Middle East, Israel has committed yet more crimes against the besieged Palestinian people when fighter jets bombed the coastal Gaza strip, adding to the daily abject misery and terror of inhabitants.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, the people of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia continue their street agitations for democratic freedom from despotic monarchical rulers. In Bahrain, the calls for democracy were given added impetus when a court upheld the sentences against 20 political leaders, some of whom have been imprisoned for life.

Further East on the atlas, in the military junta of Myanmar, formerly known as British Burma, the persecution of thousands of Rohingya Muslims continues unabated, with hundreds killed at the hands of Buddhist gangs after being burned out of their shanty homes.

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In Northern Ireland, a peace settlement was reached after nearly 30 years of an anti-imperialist war between the guerrilla Irish Republican Army and the British forces. More than 3,000 people were killed during that conflict, which British government counter-insurgency policy succeeded in distorting into a sectarian bloodbath between pro-British Protestant loyalists and the mainly Catholic Irish nationalist population. The origins of that conflict lay

in the gerrymandering of Ireland by the British colonial rulers when they partitioned the island in 1920-21 – against international and democratic norms – into a pro-British northern statelet and a nominally independent southern state.

The British colonial rulers inculcated a supremacist mindset among the Protestant community in the new Northern Ireland, copperfastening the privileged misrule with political, economic and social discrimination against Catholics. Many Protestant working-class communities were in truth not much better off materially than their Catholic counterparts, but nevertheless British sectarian policy implanted deep seeds of hatred and distrust as a means of dividing and ruling.

The latest outbreak of rioting in Belfast was sparked when Catholics tried to hold a peaceful commemorative march at the weekend. Sections within the Protestant community could not tolerate such a demonstration, even though the 1998 peace accord supposedly guarantees religious and cultural equality in Northern Ireland. The mindset of sectarian hatred inherited from British colonial subjugation of Irish national rights is still a live issue. Politicians in London may tut-tut at the street mayhem in Belfast, but this is a manifestation of Britain's illegitimate meddling in Ireland.

British involvement in Ireland accrues from a self-styled mandate that stems from the historical implantation of a pro-British citizenry. The same gerrymandering to thwart natural territorial rights can be seen in the ongoing dispute over the Malvinas Islands, which were forcibly dispossessed from Argentina by Britain in 1833 and renamed the Falklands Islands. The two countries went to war briefly in 1982 after Argentinian troops occupied the territory. Argentina has substantial territorial claims to the islands off its coast, however Britain maintains that it has legal right to possession because the islanders, who descend from British colonizers, insist that they want to retain British status. This is classic British subjective gerrymandering to “get the right result”.

The British government continues to rankle Buenos Aires because it refuses to comply with United Nations resolutions to enter into a negotiated settlement. The latest move by British Prime Minister David Cameron to hold a referendum in the Malvinas on the future of the islands has been denounced by Argentina as a further British obstacle to resolving the dispute. Given the huge oil and fishing resources around the territory, and the recent militarization of the area by the British, the risk of a resumption of war cannot be discounted.

A different kind of British social engineering for colonial expedience is seen in today's plight of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims. These people were introduced by the British rulers of Burma and imperial India. The Rohingyas were transplanted from what became Bangladesh to the Southeast Asian British colony of Burma to serve as labourers and servants for their white masters. Although the Muslim Rohingyas have now lived in Myanmar for generations, they have never been accepted by the indigenous majority Buddhists, and they have endured decades of brutal persecution. This persecution has escalated recently with massacres and burning of villages and shanty towns. One possible factor is that following an official visit to Myanmar by British Prime Minister Cameron earlier this year, the ruling junta may feel they have gained the favour of the Western powers, who are eager to open up trade and investment, and thus are emboldened to resume their genocidal policy against the Rohingyas. Sacrificed in the past to do menial work for their British masters, these people are being sacrificed again as pawns for British capital.

The legacy of British misrule and exploitation spans the globe, but its centerpiece for bequeathed suffering must be the Middle East region. Today, the people of Palestine live as strangers in their own land, dispossessed of their rights and their homes to live in the world's biggest open-air concentration camp. This week saw Israeli warplanes bomb the impoverished Palestinians living under rubble and makeshift houses in Gaza. In truth, this is not news. Such crimes against humanity occur on a weekly basis in the Zionist-occupied Palestinian land, thanks in part to British political support, as well as American and European.

A look at historical maps of the Holy Land shows an inversion of politics and demographics between 1947 and today. In 1947, there was no state of Israel. British-controlled Palestine was a unitary territory predominated with Palestinian Muslims, as well as minorities of Christians and Jews. But the British rulers seduced by Jewish capitalists arrogated the right to deliver on the secretive Balfour Declaration of 1917 and hand over the territory to Zionists led by Chaim Weizmann and Ben Gurion. Today, the Palestinians are reduced to subsist on two diminishing territorial enclaves crucified by walls and checkpoints, their homes demolished and bombed at will by American-supplied Israeli warplanes and drones.

In the Persian Gulf monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the majority of people struggle to win democratic freedoms from the British imposition of despotic rulers. The Houses of Saud and Khalifa were grafted on to the majority Arab people by the House of Windsor to function as imperialist constructs to deliver oil wealth. These despotic rulers defy all norms of democracy and human rights thanks to the protection of British and American military might. The ongoing popular protests against these absolute monarchies in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and the silence from London and Washington, demonstrates the legacy of British misrule that these people are having to suffer in the present day. It also demonstrates the rank hypocrisy and cynicism of these powers and their Arab despots who claim to be supporting democracy and human rights in Syria.

This week, a Bahraini court upheld the sentences against 20 political leaders and human rights activists whose only "crime" was to peacefully call for elected government to replace the British-imposed and US-supported Khalifa absolute dictator. The political leaders include figures like Hasan Mushaima and Ebrahim Sharif; the human rights activists include Abdulhadi Al Khawaja and Abduljalil Al Singace. These are men of integrity and noble conscience. All were brutalized, tortured, illegally detained and forced to make trumped-up confessions.

Meanwhile, the British-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism revealed that the Bahraini king, Hamad Al Khalifa, donated \$4.7 million dollars to the British military academy Sandhurst – the academy that has functioned as a supplier of British militarism to the world over the centuries.

The above is only a snapshot of the ongoing legacy of British misrule across the planet. At the height of the British Empire, in the early 20th century, it is reckoned that Britain asserted domination over some 20 per cent of the Earth's landmass. Many more painful legacies could therefore be added to the litany of violence and suffering that so many people have to live with today.

The point is not to revisit history as some distant, past event. The point is to understand the seeds of conflict in today's world so that some attempt can be made at creating a solution from an accurate understanding of the root causes of conflict.

A further point is to accurately assess the moral and political bankruptcy of Britain's rulers in present world conflicts. When the British government pokes its moralizing finger at Iran or into the sovereign affairs of Syria, it should be seen as not only illegitimate, but as the bearer of conflict, suffering and destruction. The British government should be seen as having no positive role to play in resolving any conflict. Indeed, if it gets its covert way in Syria, the British involvement there will result in a hateful sectarian bloodbath, in much the same way that it has overseen in Libya along with its American, French and Arab despotic allies.

Britain may once upon a time have ruled the waves. Today, its mischief-making rulers should be waved away with contempt.

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