

# Israel Rides the Rollercoaster of Mass Hysteria

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Global Research, April 19, 2012

[The Electronic Intifada](#) 19 April 2012

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Religion](#)



The US continues to indulge Netanyahu's manufactured hysteria. ([Pete Souza](#) / [White House Photo](#))

Spending a week in Israel these days is like being trapped within a scene from the movie *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Like Jack Nicholson in the lead role of that classic film, you might not be insane but the doctors and nurses who run the psychiatric ward manufacture every few minutes a collective hysteria to keep everyone in the grip of fear and hatred. Everyone is an enemy, every a visitor an existential threat.

A retired French activist in her sixties — part of the most recent [Welcome to Palestine fly-in](#) — is met in the airport by a military brigade and massive police force that left much of Israel at the mercy of its petty criminals who had a field day while the officers of the law went to arrest the invading aliens who came from Europe.

A week earlier, a poem by an 85-year-old honest and noble Nobel laureate, [Günter Grass](#), which warned against an Israeli attack on [Iran](#) and pleaded with the Israelis to show compassion towards the occupied Palestinians, was depicted as a text that is not only worse than Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* but one that could have a similar impact on history. Hence, the national response was entrusted to the hands of Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) and Minister of the Interior Eli Yishai who banned the entry of the ageing bard.

## Hallucination in Washington

This was April 2012. The month before, Netanyahu, the world expert of manufactured hysteria, crossed the Atlantic to join his American counterparts. In Washington, before an AIPAC audience only too eager to indulge him, Netanyahu likened a refusal to launch a war against Iran as tantamount to refusing a request from Jewish leaders to bomb Auschwitz.

Together Netanyahu and his fawning American audience rode the roller coaster of mass hysteria of the most sickening, hallucinating kind at a time when the US needs leadership that will take it out of its economic crisis and Israel needs to find a way in a world that more than ever before refuses to tolerate its colonization, occupation and dispossession of Palestine.

On his way back from this mutual warmongering and fanaticism, Netanyahu and Defense Minister [Ehud Barak](#), mates from the days when they both played Rambo as Israeli

commandos, continued to send the Israelis into the bunkers and simulate chemical attacks in preparation for a massive Iranian attack that would be triggered by a pre-emptive Israeli strike on Iran.

French grandmas, a retired poet and nuclear holocaust are all threats of the same magnitude in the post-modern world of the current captains of the Israeli Titanic.

## Brinkmanship

Being part visitor and part inmate in the ward I found solace in three books, each one of which tells us how best to keep our wits even when the most armed and aggressive state in the region has replaced diplomacy and national strategy with hysterical brinkmanship that could easily transform into real war and greater bloodshed.

The first is an old classic, George Orwell's *1984*. In despotic Oceania, the leadership, the Inner Party, depends on a constant war with the other two global powers. The leaders manufacture hysteria to keep it going, but begin to believe in it themselves:

It is precisely in the Inner Party that war hysteria and hatred of the enemy are strongest. In his capacity as an administrator, it is often necessary for a member of the Inner Party to know that this or that item of war news is untruthful, and he may often be aware that the entire war is spurious and is either not happening or is being waged for purposes quite other than the declared ones: but such knowledge is easily neutralized by the technique of doublethink.

The second book is Miko Peled's *The General's Son*. Peled's research in the Israeli military archives exposed how the generals of Israel on the eve of the June 1967 war manufactured mass hysteria in Israel and spun a tale of an imminent second Holocaust — as did [David Ben-Gurion](#) in 1948 — knowing very well, in both historical instances, they were facing a weak, disarrayed opponent more willing to compromise than to fight.

The third is Jay Feldman's *Manufacturing Hysteria*, a compact history of how the leadership in the US manufactures collective hysteria whenever faced with real or imagined crises that had the potential to cost them their seat of power. Going to unnecessary wars, scapegoating minorities in the United States, oppressing other peoples around the world and the poor at home, are only some of the unavoidable outcomes of such hysteria (I dedicate this brief reading list to Wall Street Occupiers whose library was brutally destroyed and to whom I promised to recommend a reading list for a new future library, which I never managed to do).

Unlike in the Jack Nicholson movie, the hysteria is not kept within the ward, and it is not the inmates who are the problem but those who run the prison-hospital and want to intern even more people in their zone of hysteria, control and violence.

## Advanced stage of disease

But Israel in 2012 is in a far more severe and advanced stage of the disease, whether the one imagined by Orwell in 1984, reported by Peled about 1967 or summarized historically by Feldman in the US in 2012.

The hysteria manufactured in Israel has become a constant state of mind and nothing less than a strategy. Its main purpose is to keep both the Israeli Jewish and Palestinian populations within a certain, permanent, anxious existence. The Palestinian population under occupation is denied contact with those who want to show solidarity with their plight, so that the ghettoization of the West Bank would be as effective as the one achieved in the Gaza Strip by a military [siege](#), and yet at the same time would not be too bothersome for the international allies of the Jewish state.

Life there has to be oppressive enough to encourage people to leave or to remain jailed in the largest mega-prison on earth, but more seemingly plausible so as to discourage another uprising.

The Jewish population has to be constantly distracted from what pushed almost half a million of its members to protest massively in the streets of [Tel Aviv](#) last summer and continue to be oblivious to the oppression of the Palestinians on the one hand, and the growing global moral repugnance towards Israel, on the other.

In our ward here, the time between Passover and what Israel calls Independence Day, during which national Holocaust Day falls, is very special.

This is when we receive overdoses of manufactured hysteria directly into our veins. And then we begin to hallucinate: the Egyptian Pharaoh of ancient times, Hitler, the grandma from Paris, the old Poet from Berlin and Osama Bin Laden are all fused into one apparition, and everyone who is not a Zionist can embody that apparition.

Whether we think of them as the wardens of the Cuckoo's Nest, or the hysterical Inner Party, the rulers driving the hysteria mean business. They are armed to the teeth and have the power to push the red button that would send us, and everyone else around us, to hell or heaven as the case may be.

At the end of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* one of the heroes is brutally subdued by the ward's keepers while another escapes the confines of the ward. We cannot afford such an ambiguous ending. But it is not too late for us, as long as more of us join together to refuse to play their game.

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