

## Editorial

# Rough Violence

Studied cruelty pervades the conflicts which consume our attention during summer 2014. In Iraq, in Ukraine, and particularly in Palestine, the film reports are truly horrific

YouTube and Google's visual testimony includes civilian victims of all ages. Image searches line up rows of decapitated heads in Iraq. Islamic State is spreading its control across parts of Iraq and into Syria. Alastair Crooke of Conflicts Forum examines what underlies the beheadings, mass executions and other acts of 'rough violence' by which Islamic State spreads fear and alarm in Baghdad and elsewhere. He comments on their texts:

'The literature underlines that anyone who has actually experienced conflict (in contrast to those who simply theorise about it) understands that slaughter and striking fear into the hearts of the enemy is in the nature of war. The point is made by noticing that the Companions (of the Prophet) "burned (people) with fire, even though it is odious, because they knew the effect of rough violence in times of need".'

In Ukraine, recently elected President Poroshenko, having initiated a ceasefire at one stage, has subsequently stepped up the bombardments of the eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk. Elderly grandmothers weep for their dead and departed offspring, while their village homes smoulder. The conflict edges closer to the Russian border, across which many people have already sought safety from the summer onslaught. What will the winter bring?

The shooting down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 on 17 July claimed the lives of 298 people, of which more than half were from The Netherlands, which country is now leading a criminal investigation into what happened. Who did it and why? At the time of writing, the 'Get Putin' clamour has reduced only a little, as 'senior American intelligence sources' brief that this mass murder was 'probably' a mistake by pro-Russian separatists, with no apparent direct involvement of the Russian state. As yet, the US has supplied no actual evidence in support of this contention. In contrast, Russian military spokesmen have posed 10 searching questions about the terrible events of 17 July, which arise from radar and other data collected around that date. In particular, why did MH17 appear to deviate from the international flight corridor over

Donetsk, and why was what appears on the radar to be a military aircraft flying close to MH17 at the time of its destruction? Eyewitnesses spoke of a military aircraft in the sky at the time, as MH17 and its many unfortunate passengers descended on their villages. Was this a premeditated attack on a civilian aircraft? If so, who is responsible?

President Putin places the violence in Ukraine in a wider context:

‘... The potential for conflict is growing in the world, old contradictions are growing ever more acute and new ones are being provoked. We come across such developments, often unexpectedly, and we observe with regret that international law is not working, the most basic norms of decency are not complied with, and the principle of all-permissiveness is gaining the upper hand.’

International law is not working, most obviously, in Palestine. It is 10 years since the International Court of Justice, in an Advisory Opinion, declared Israel’s massive separation wall to be illegal. During that decade, the wall has been extended and more Palestinian land seized, all contrary to the ICJ’s considered opinion. Now, once more, we witness the public murder of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza, including many children, at the hands of the Israeli military. The slaughter is rough and violent in the extreme, criminal under international law, and contrary to all norms of conduct which seek to protect civilians.

*Tony Simpson*

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We take the opportunity to explore some problems festering away in Britain. Universities are changing fast as the market rules, and education is the victim, according to recent testimony from Warwick. The Co-operative Bank has taken a huge hit, which impacts on the wider co-operative movement, although there are also positive signs, as Nick Matthews recounts. And it’s 30 years since the Miners’ Strike and the Battle of Orgreave, where justice may yet be done. We revisit some first-hand accounts from Thurcroft in what was the heart of the Yorkshire Coalfield, while PC Wayne Richards enters the witness box, courtesy of Trevor Griffiths’ prescient play *Thatcher’s Children*.