

PM: Of Cabbages and Kings

by Polly Mann

In this column, I'm addressing an eclectic collection of things I've been musing about of late. As the walrus said in the poem from *Alice Through the Looking Glass*: "The time has come to talk of many things..." and one of these things is "And why the sea is boiling hot..." which is why I'll begin with Iran.

Who Rules the Waves?

There's no question that the United States has the biggest, strongest, costliest armaments in the world and it devises the rules by which other nations use or display their ships, troops, and arms. Right now, for example, small Iranian naval boats are occupying the sea off the coast of Iran and we—the U.S.—have a problem with that. Why? Because we—the U.S.—have for years maintained warships off the Iranian coast and don't like to be bothered with the small Iranian craft occupying the same area as the U.S. aircraft carrier, *George W. Bush*. Iran has declared the carrier is a "nuisance." How dare they object to our warships off their coast? Certainly we would allow an Iranian ship to cruise off the coast of Maine or California.

Lightning Strikes

Then there is this: Lockheed Martin's F-35 Lightning II, the Joint Strike Fighter, the fifth generation of a stealth jet with advanced avionics, has been under development for more than twenty years at a cost of many billions of dollars. According to the *London Review of Books* (which publishes articles about highly significant topics that no other publication will touch): "Over the lifetime of the project the U.S. is expected to spend \$1.5 trillion on building and maintaining 2,500 planes for its own use, enough to forgive the entire nation's student debts, or pay for the healthcare of every low-income American for the next three years, or build a border wall that encircles the earth four times." [P.S. We certainly aren't suggesting that we want walls!]

Mums the Word on Palestine

And then, there is this: Two British universities cancelled lectures by the renowned scholar Richard Falk, professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University and former UN Special Rapporteur on Palestinian Human Rights (2008 to 2014). The cancellations at the London School of Economics and Middlesex University, London, took place after Falk co-authored a UN-commissioned report that concluded that Israel is an "apartheid state." Although campus procedure and safety policies were the reasons given for the cancellations, Falk wasn't buying it. He said the refusal to allow his presentation was, instead, evidence of an ongoing trend of limiting academic freedom on university campuses. He expressed regret that "depriving students of exposure to controversial issues limits their training and experience for becoming engaged citizens."

The media publication *Middle East Eye* further reported that Falk complained that attempts to discredit him do not address the content of his report: "It's been used against a variety of other people—playing the anti-Semitic card rather than dealing with the substance of Palestinian grievances or Israeli violations of international law." And, he said, "Palestinian refugees living in the occupied Palestinian territory are not allowed to return to their homes in Israel, while

Palestinian refugees and involuntary exiles outside Israel and the territory are not allowed to return to their homes in either the territory or Israel.”

Falk was careful to assert that the report was an academic study commissioned by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and it does not represent the views of the UN, but he asserted that ESCWA officials are “very enthusiastic about the quality of the report.” He implied that it appeared to be an “instance where the new UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, gave way to pressure coming particularly from Washington but also from Israel.” However, the Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary for ESCWA resigned in protest after Guterres ordered the study removed from the UN website.

Attempts to silence views critical of the state of Israel make it apparent that, in many venues, it is the only nation in the world whose actions and policies it is not possible to be critical of, or even examine or discuss unlike those any other nation. Yet the silver lining is that the very fact of censure draws attention to the issues.

Polly Mann is a co-founder of Women Against Military Madness, a regular columnist and contributor to this newsletter.