

# Iran war and the long shadow of oil colonialism



LETTERS FROM THE UK

**Dr Geof Wood,**  
a development anthropologist, is emeritus professor of international development at the University of Bath in the UK. He has authored several books and numerous journal articles.

**GEOF WOOD**

We are separated, the UK and Bangladesh, by a war zone. It is affecting us both, especially through a rise in energy costs, though not with equal effects across the different classes and groups that make up our respective societies. These costs are a sharp reminder of global interconnectedness, with new elements emerging daily. There are clear differences of opinion and judgement about the ongoing war within the UK: the populist right buying into Trump and Israel's agenda; the centre very cautious, seeking legality and adopting only a defensive stance; the left and Greens, along with peace groups and the Muslim diaspora, implacably opposed.

Much is intermingled in terms of history, responsibility, and present alignments. What is the longer view? Are we now looking at the denouement of a particular, extended "colonial" era arising from World War I, which entailed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and a Gulf region reset by rich, western industrialising societies intent upon capturing access to oil and establishing ownership through its exploitation once above ground (through refining and transportation)?

Obviously, a major part of the post-World War I settlement in the region was the formation of Israel. Britain held this West Asian space towards the end of that war and, in the 1917 Balfour Declaration, acceded to the Zionist quest for a homeland for displaced Jews "alongside" Palestinian pastoralists. This position was later ratified during the British Mandate for Palestine under the League of Nations. Over the last century, "alongside" has morphed into "at the expense of" Palestinians, predictably generating resistance to ongoing Israeli expansionism in the region and the resulting sequence of atrocities. Everyone in these territories is now at risk, with ultra-Christian Zionists in the US stoking a genocidal agenda.

More widely in the Gulf region, the last century has entailed a political resettlement beginning with the formation of new client

nations, comprising tribal and clan identities reorganised into monarchy and subjugation. These emergent "royal and oil" states were serviced by oil companies and educated immigrants from neighbouring urban cities, with residual desert pastoralism persisting in the hinterland of high-rise urbanism and refineries. Except for desert shepherds, all have been living off quasi-monopoly "rents" (the OPEC cartel) from globally desired fossil fuels, directly or indirectly, through royalties, profits, salaries, and construction contracts.

This oil colonialism was supported by transforming the pastoral and caravan traditions of Islam into this newly settled era over the last 110 years—a modern syncretism combining Western extractive technologies with conservative Islam: an international cultural alliance largely for the purpose of sharing the rents from oil exploitation. Thus did Christian colonialism intersect with Islamic dependency. The history of empire across Asia, whether under the Ottomans, Mughals, or the British, acknowledged the principle and convenient necessity of indirect rule, or suzerainty, leaving local institutions to manage the day-to-day conditions of colonial extraction and allocation of rents, enough to the domestic population to maintain its loyalty. This "colonial" settlement included Persia, especially exaggerated during the artifice of the short Pahlavi dynasty, which came to a sticky end in February 1979.

The outcomes of this "colonial" era have not been great for the ordinary people of the region. Palestinians suffer through displacement and marginalisation from their own space, as exemplified by the 1948 Nakba to Gaza and persistent Israeli encroachment into the West Bank. Note that Israeli Zionists have room for manoeuvre in this zero-sum expansionism: Israel does not import oil from within the region. Thus, ordinary Israelis are experiencing acute insecurity, with only a semblance of democracy now being tested by their elite's ultra-nationalistic ideology.

And outcomes for ordinary people

elsewhere in the region have not been favourable, either. Tiny elites have historically been assigned control over allocating rents across their subjugated populations, without democracy or freedoms of any kind. A significant proportion of these populations are immigrants, without even the rights of indigenes, liable to imprisonment or deportation at any hint of voice, especially women. These are authoritarian regimes

neighbouring hostile non-Shia Islamic sects. Women suffered, freedoms were curtailed, and obedience became a condition of personal security and safety. This Iranian version of anti-colonial sentiment has, alas, turned in on itself and become barely distinguishable from its neighbours. Its brief glimpse of post-colonial freedoms was crushed. Again, oil rents (via Kharg Island) are allocated by an unaccountable elite (Islamic Revolutionary

likely rooted in Western concern that Iran's post-Pahlavi assertion of autonomy has a demonstration effect in the region. This comes at a time when capitalist interest groups are fighting a rearguard action globally to protect their fossil fuel monopolies and associated rents from the reordering implications of renewables.

In this fight, the principals in the West and their elite regional agents share short-term common interests in defending existing business models, especially as the energy demands of the AI revolution are so high. Such AI development must not be impaired by the prospect of oil-rich countries like Iran escaping dependency and thus gaining the ability to influence global prices of increasingly scarce hydrocarbons. We saw this briefly in the 1973 "oil crisis." Perhaps this is why China and Russia seem content to stand back, monitor events, and extract advantages. Any demonstration effect of Iran's independence—despite its high internal cost to freedoms—would not ultimately serve China and Russia's interests either, at least until renewables and nuclear energy can replace oil and gas.

So, that brings us to Trump and his desire to continue the hydrocarbon business model. Like in Russia, US oligarchs also benefit from the present rise in oil prices at the expense of their own populations. The risks of transitioning to renewables are too great for Trump's brand of elite domination, his political agenda reliant on oil billionaires and his own business model dependent on ever-increasing debt to sustain his otherwise fragile property positions. He needs the banks, and they need oil. But Trump also needs a populist base to maintain his ability to orchestrate this rent-seeking behaviour, ensuring that he becomes too big to fail for the banks. It is a high-wire act. "They [the banks] are in blood, stepped in so far, that to retreat were as difficult as going o'er"—to quote *Macbeth*.

Maintaining that populist base requires Trump to imitate or mirror the behaviour of autocrats in the Gulf and elsewhere, except that, for now, he still has to operate within the remnants of democracy until he can dismantle them entirely. Will the 2026 midterms be cancelled? Signs of such an agenda are visible in present-day US politics, aided by entrenched capitalist interests and fragmented cultural factions of regressive Christianity, who see their paternalistic authority threatened by wokeism and female emancipation—much like in the Gulf region.



A view of a residential building damaged by a strike, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Tehran, Iran, March 23, 2026.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

hosting the neo-colonial military bases of Western allies to ensure the flow of oil at cartel prices (rents).

Persia, now Iran, might have escaped this Arab scenario in the February 1979 uprising against repression. This uprising can be seen as an outcome of rapid urbanisation from desert conditions during the Shah's nearly three-decade oil bonanza, courtesy of US- and UK-backed oil companies. Such rapid urbanisation releases a new urban "cheek-by-jowl" experience of relative deprivation—a lesson for all societies presently undergoing rapid transformation from desert or agrarian pasts. But the February 1979 uprising was quickly overtaken by a new, theocratic nationalism, requiring "othering" and enemies to cohere and subjugate the domestic population: Western "satans" and

Guard Corps, etc.), now boxed into a corner of self-preservation—directly and via regional proxies—at the expense of its people.

These ultimately fragile political settlements in the region are now under threat from the local divisions engineered by historical colonial forces. Some might be tempted to represent such divisions as sectarian splits within Muslims. Local wars have indeed been fought in these terms over the last three decades. But rather, it is the steady Iranian extraction since 1979 from its "colonial" dependency (with, of course, the dangers of entering other dependencies such as Russia) that has starkly revealed the choice elsewhere in the Gulf between autonomy and ongoing dependent existence—a division, or, dare one say, a "gulf"—easily represented externally by sectarian differences, but more

# A strategic roadmap for Dhaka's solid waste management



**Dr Nawshad Ahmed,**  
a retired UN official, is an economist and urban planner.

**NAWSHAD AHMED**

Dhaka is the second-most populous city in the world and is projected to be the world's most populous city by 2050, according to a 2025 report published by the United Nations on world urbanisation prospects. The rising population, coupled with unplanned urbanisation, makes Dhaka a challenging ground when it comes to solid waste management, which is one of the top environmental problems in the city and a major public health issue.

There are four city corporations in urban Dhaka—Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) covering some 197.18 square kilometres, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) covering around 109.24 square kilometres, Gazipur City Corporation (GCC) covering some 329.53 square kilometres, and Narayanganj City Corporation (NCC) covering an area of 72.43 square kilometres. The city corporations serve a total area of approximately 708.38 square kilometres, and the total population living in this area

is estimated to be around 13.94 million, as per the 2022 population census. This translates to a population density of 19,680 persons per square kilometre, which is the most densely populated part of the country, explaining why the four city corporations are struggling to manage the rapidly increasing volumes of solid waste.

The four city corporations in Dhaka generate about 11,500 tonnes of solid waste daily—6,500 tonnes from DNCC and DSCC, 4,000 tonnes from GCC, and 1,000 tonnes from NCC. The average per capita waste generation stands at 0.65 kg per day. Approximately 75 percent of the waste is organic with high moisture content, and 70-80 percent is collected daily.

The four city corporations have the herculean task of collecting, transporting, and making sure the solid waste is disposed of in a hygienic manner. However, this task is often obstructed due to the lack of proper infrastructure facilities and an acute shortage

of skilled manpower. During a string of visits to all four city corporations between September and November 2025, I have found that in DNCC and DSCC, the community-based organisations collect waste via rickshaw vans, transfer it to about 114 secondary transfer stations, from where about 400 trucks transport it to the final destination—the two landfill sites in Aminbazar of DNCC and Matuail of DSCC—each site covering about 100 acres of land. Gazipur and Narayanganj cities also collect a part of the solid waste through community-based organisations by door-to-door collection service and collect the rest of the waste by the municipal staff from the households, business establishments, institutions and industries, and keep them in dustbins from where about 300 municipal trucks transport them to respective landfill sites.

That being said, a huge amount of solid waste, about 20 percent, remains uncollected. The uncollected plastic bottles and polyethylene bags pollute the soil, water, and air and impact the local environment. The plastic waste often ends up in the drainage system, blocking and causing water stagnation and flooding. In addition, a huge amount of waste goes into the water bodies, causing pollution. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11—sustainable cities and communities—sets a target to "reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special

attention to air quality, municipal, and other waste management by 2030". Safe waste disposal is thus one of the major areas requiring significant improvements in order to achieve this SDG goal.

The city corporations, therefore, need to design proper waste collection and disposal methods and invest adequately in the next five years to achieve the 2030 agenda. They should also take it seriously to strengthen operational procedures, adopt innovative technologies, and involve local communities, NGOs, and the private sector in proper solid waste management. Furthermore, the corporations must also ensure safe disposal of waste to minimise pollution in surface and ground water, soil, and air through recycling, reuse, and incineration methods.

A very small amount of waste is segregated in Dhaka city, as domestic source segregation has not been introduced yet. An ideal and globally applied waste management approach is the 3R (reduce, reuse, and recycle) strategy. This approach helps to separate and reuse a large amount of recyclable waste, such as glasses and plastic bottles, paper, and hardboards, which can be marketed for profit. The organic items, which constitute about 70 percent of solid waste in Dhaka, can be transformed into composting fertilisers. Technology exists today for this transformation to produce organic fertilisers, which can drastically lower the volume of solid waste, improve food security and reduce the

use of chemical fertilisers. Although all four city corporations are thinking of introducing this transformational technology, none have put it on the ground yet. Consequently, waste recycling is still undertaken informally by scavengers belonging to underprivileged communities, who often risk their health while the formal sector neglects the opportunity for waste recycling in a land-scarce and densely populated urban environment.

Donor-funded solid waste management projects in Dhaka, implemented by the DNCC and DSCC, with support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the World Bank, have succeeded in somewhat improving the situation in recent years. These initiatives focused on upgrading from open dumping to sanitary landfills, promoting 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle) policies, and proposing waste-to-energy solutions. Despite these projects, limited collection, inadequate transportation, and unscientific disposal of a significant amount of daily waste in the capital city of the country cause an adverse impact on the environment, spreading diseases and badly affecting the health of the inhabitants. So it is essential for a city like Dhaka, which is the second largest in the world, to put a stronger effort at the highest political level and arrange the financial and technical support needed to transform Dhaka into an environmentally healthy city by 2030.

**CROSSWORD**  
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- 1 Blasting stuff
- 6 Studies intensely
- 11 Earthy color
- 12 Indian coin
- 13 Oscar winner
- Witherspoon
- 14 Ham it up
- 15 Cheese partner
- 16 Yacht spot
- 18 Paint buy
- 19 Before today
- 20 Scot's cap
- 21 PC key
- 22 Pi, phi, or psi
- 24 To boot
- 25 Try a plane
- 27 Gin flavoring
- 29 Cry of distress
- 32 Mythical piper

- 33 Singer Torme
  - 34 Boston team, familiarly
  - 35 Curved path
  - 36 Small worker
  - 37 Pilot's guess: Abbr.
  - 38 Hold up
  - 40 Boom type
  - 42 Draw out
  - 43 Underway
  - 44 Quite serious
  - 45 Daily events
- DOWN**
- 1 Ordinary
  - 2 Glacial period
  - 3 Francis Ford Coppola film
  - 4 Legal matter
  - 5 Electra's brother

- 6 Coffee add-in
- 7 Toddy base
- 8 Francis Ford Coppola film
- 9 Tin and titanium
- 10 Handled
- 17 Made of clay
- 23 Golf need
- 24 Completely
- 26 Was blue
- 27 Black suit
- 28 City on the Rio Grande
- 30 Newtonian concern
- 31 Forces, as payment
- 33 "Who Says" singer John
- 39 Tennis feat
- 41 One-kind

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11						12			
13						14			
15				16	17			18	
19				20				21	
22			23				24		
			25			26			
27	28				29			30	31
32				33				34	
35				36				37	
38				39				40	41
42								43	
44								45	

12-1

**SUNDAY'S ANSWERS**

L	O	F	T	S		S	A	L	O	N
E	L	I	O	T		E	X	I	L	E
G	E	N	R	E		V	E	L	D	T
G	A	L	M	A	R		F	A	T	
A	R	I	S	E	N		S	I	N	E
F	I	N	E	R	T		H	I	N	G
F	E	E	T			R	E	S	E	L
E	S	S				B	A	Y		P
T	O	P	A	Z			U	R	I	A
A	W	A	K	E			D	U	N	C
B	E	R	E	T			E	N	T	E

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR  
OPINION PIECES TO  
[dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com)