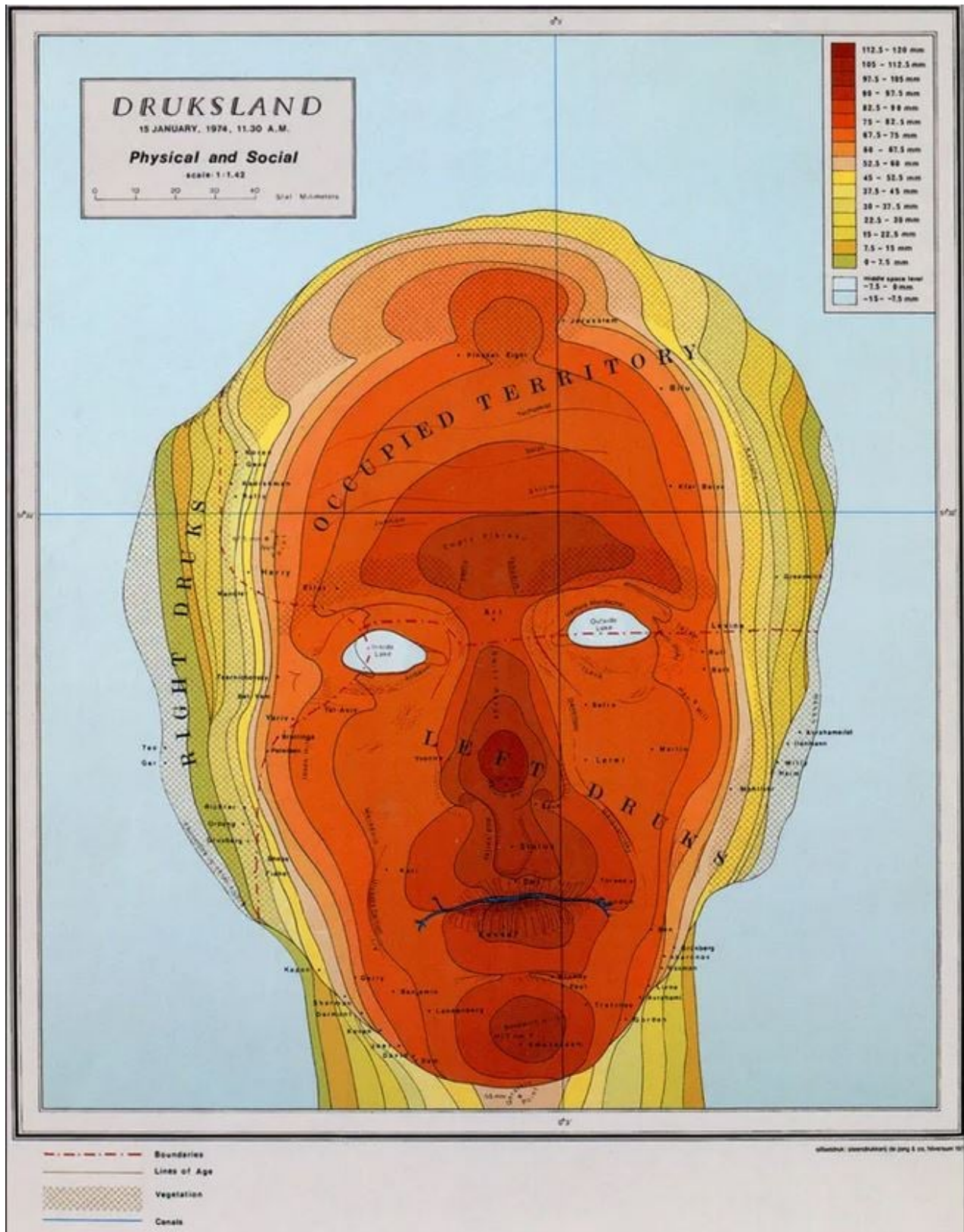


# Barrel of a Gun

by Nikos Akritas (June 2024)

Druksland– Michael Druks, 1973

**"Mr Nikos, is it true** that anyone can make a nuclear bomb?"

"I'm not really sure, but I think if you have a very good knowledge of physics it's possible to know how to make one."

"So anybody can learn how to make one?"

"Well, if they studied very hard, passed all their exams at school and then went to university and studied very hard there too, I think they would know how to make one. But that doesn't mean they'll have the materials to. Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to build one and drop it on those people."

"Which people?"

"Those people!"

"And those people are?"

"The people who are doing all that stuff in the news."

"What stuff?"

"Invading."

"So, because of *those people* invading, you want to drop a nuclear bomb and kill everyone in their country?"

"Yeah!"

"Even the people who are not doing the fighting? Even the young children and old people and people who are innocent?"

"Well, they shouldn't be invading!"

"Why are they invading?"

"I don't know."

"Isn't it because people entered their land and killed

innocent people?"

"Maybe."

"Which country are your parents from?"

"Sudan."

"Well, some years back there was a terrible war in Sudan and lots of bad people did horrible things to innocent people. Did you know that?"

"Yes."

"Is it good to kill innocent people?"

"No."

"Then should we have dropped a nuclear bomb on *those* bad people and killed all the innocent people with them?"

*Silence.*

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This was a conversation I had in late October/early November 2023 with a nine year old at the school I teach. It is not unusual to hear sentiments of this sort amongst children so young out here. It is a reflection of the visceral hatred of Jews amongst the majority of adults. When such ideas are drummed into those so young, shocking as it is, it is no wonder Muslim societies are anti-Semitic.

A colleague at the same school, originally from Canada, married to a Palestinian, informs me quite forthrightly she is not anti-Semitic but anti-Zionist. How so, I ask? She explains she is opposed to the current borders of Israel, that the borders should be those of pre-1967, and the Zionist settlers have no right to be there. I probe further. The Zionist settlers are all Jews who emigrated from Europe and elsewhere to Palestine.

"Where should they have gone, given the context of the antisemitism in Europe and its culmination in the Holocaust?"

"Well, not to Palestine."

I ask if Jews should have been granted any land at all in that area of the world to which she replies, "Only the Jews that were already there." After pointing out once they were granted land, surely they could allow whoever they wanted to settle on it; and that more Jews were displaced from Muslim lands as a result of the creation of Israel than Palestinians were (so shouldn't they have the right to exist and reclaim property in those lands?) the conversation becomes awkward.

The rest of the conversation is peppered with repeated remonstrations of 'virtue signalling' –on having nothing against Jews (and therefore not being anti-Semitic) but only against Zionists. Conversations like this usually reach a sticking point when 'anti-Zionists' are asked where Jews should seek refuge, given millennia of anti-Semitism; if Jews should have the right to self-determination; whether Israel (if acknowledged as having a right to exist), as a sovereign country, has the right to decide on its immigration levels; and what the immediate causes of its borders being expanded were in 1948/9, 1967 and 1973.

The answers to the first two points are usually, "somewhere else." To the third it is, "not to the detriment of Palestinians who are now refugees," without taking into consideration that most of those who replaced them were also refugees—the plight of the latter is never an issue of contention, but then again most woke liberals who support the Palestinian cause clearly aren't even aware of Jewish suffering in Arab lands. The last point is never met with an answer, except to insist those borders should be rolled back.

Another colleague at the same school, American, admits he doesn't know much about the history of the area but insists

the Palestinian people should have their own state and, “what does the statement *Israel has the right to exist* even mean anyway? Who says?” Oblivious to his own contradictions, I explain the concept of self-determination to him. He seems to be beginning to understand but then says, “Then shouldn’t the Palestinians also have the right to self-determination?”

“But who are the Palestinians?” I ask.

“The people living in Palestine.”

It is a complete revelation to him that Jews are also Palestinians but when I try to explain Palestine was a mandate from which the majority was carved Jordan, he doesn’t want to talk history, he wants to talk now. And this is the woke way, no context to anything. But thinking like this only sees the Israeli army in Gaza, it doesn’t stop to ask why it is in Gaza. Neither, as in the case of my colleague, does it ponder the fact that the government of Gaza was responsible for an armed invasion of Israel, killing civilians, and taking hostages—that this act, in itself, was a declaration of war. If the current UK government had sent its army over to France, to kill and kidnap French citizens, nobody would be questioning the right of France to retaliate—and part of that retaliation would be to invade the UK.

In the aftermath of World War II, the Allies occupied Germany. Given the Nazi regime’s belligerence and aims this made perfect sense. The regime had to be stamped out completely. Should Israel not retaliate when another state makes war on it? Should it not seek to stamp out that regime? There is no doubt innocent people in Gaza have died, as have innocent Israelis, but the war was not started by Israel.

To those like my woke colleagues, both of whom I am fond of, I would like to ask, “When one side starts an unprovoked war and the other side retaliates, only seeking to end the regime that started the conflict and free its citizens, why isn’t the

focus of criticism on the aggressor?" But when, as in the case of my American colleague, it is asserted Gaza had been under Israeli occupation or, when I highlight Israeli troops had pulled out some twenty years ago, completely blockaded (*really? completely?* And isn't it a country's right to close its own borders given its neighbour's belligerence?) is there really any point continuing?

Uninformed of even the most basic facts and, by their own admission, not knowing much about the history of a region, it is extremely odd people hold such strong views and unshakeable opinions. Merely questioning my colleagues' political beliefs and daring to suggest Israel might be the victim resulted in expressions of shock. I am sure they now see me in a different light, a sinister one.

But living in a milieu such as this, in the Middle East, does not lend itself to developing the attributes we claim to teach children to aspire to: being open-minded, inquiring, and respectful of others. The October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks were hardly news here (there were no expressions of sympathy for any victims—alive or dead). The IDF's entry into Gaza, however, immediately resulted in expressions of support for Palestinian victims.

I am constantly amazed, not that people differ in opinions to those such as mine but that they hold such strong, unshakeable ones so poorly informed. When probed, they admit to this lack of knowledge but they do not see this as a problem. Those of the Islamic faith I understand, they are conditioned to have a poor, at best, opinion of Jews, but those from Western countries, supposedly raised in an environment of liberalism?

When acquiring facts is not important to forming an opinion over issues involving life and death, democracy seems ill-fated. Contrary to woke ideology, democracy reduced to mere opinion is the rule of the mob. Without diversity of opinion, the freedom to express those opinions, and an education system

that nurtures skills of critical analysis, we end up with societies staring down the barrel of a gun.

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After I had written this a child in my class drew a picture of the Palestinian flag and wrote the words *I love Palestine* above it. Born in the Netherlands to Pakistani parents, I asked if he had ever been to Palestine. Of course, he hadn't. So I asked if he knew anything about Palestine. Again, no. "So why do you love Palestine?" "Because my dad says I must." Out of the mouths of babes ... And so continues the repugnant antisemitism of those that follow Muhammad's message, no matter if they live thousands of miles away and have no historical links to the land in question.

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