

Duping Americans on Healthcare and War

Exclusive: The American people have been sold a deadly bill of goods both for their lousy healthcare system and for their perpetual war machine – and there's no end in sight, as Nicolas J S Davies explains.

By Nicolas J S Davies

President Trump and his wealthy friends have just discovered how complicated healthcare is in this country – for the rest of us that is. They will soon find out that U.S. militarism is just as complicated, and for many of the same reasons.

Healthcare is uniquely complicated in the United States because the U.S. is the only wealthy country in the world where for-profit corporate interests have carved out such a dominant role in the sickness and health of its people. The lucrative role of for-profit insurance companies is unique in the entire world; prescription drugs cost many times more than in other countries; and for-profit corporations have taken over 21 percent of U.S. hospitals since 1965.

Every other wealthy country provides universal healthcare to its people mainly through its public sector, with smaller roles for private, usually non-profit entities. Drug prices are contained by the negotiating power of these large public healthcare systems.

These systems all face challenges as they try to maintain the quality of patient care amid the rising costs of new medicines and medical technology, but the basic structure of the healthcare system in each country is well-established and stable.

If people in other wealthy countries pay attention to the U.S. healthcare crisis at all, it must seem that we're making a meal of this for peculiar cultural reasons. We must enjoy having these huge debates over healthcare every few years for the same reasons that we eat in our cars or play different sports than they do. Outside the U.S., it's inconceivable that a rich country would really allow tens of thousands of people to die prematurely every year for lack of access to healthcare, or that the public lacks the political power to prevent this from happening.

Race to the Bottom

For the past generation, the U.S. has led a "race to the bottom" among developed countries to ensure that the rewards of advanced technology and increased productivity are allocated to wealthy investors and corporate executives,

instead of to the working people actually developing, operating and maintaining these new technologies, in the U.S. and around the world.

A central element in this neoliberal counter-revolution is the expansion of the corporate for-profit sector into areas of life otherwise rooted in the public sector, like health, education, utilities, transportation and criminal justice.

Despite huge imbalances in market power between ordinary people and large corporations, the quasi-religious belief in “markets” as the most efficient mechanism for managing all aspects of society requires that even public services like healthcare and education be privatized and submitted to the “magic of the market.” U.S. political and business leaders are determined to prove that privatized healthcare can work, and then to export it to the rest of the world as part of the relentless expansion of U.S.-based capitalism.

But if public services like healthcare and education cannot be successfully abandoned to the vagaries of “the market,” even in the United States, then the public sector will have proven to be more essential than the architects of neoliberalism have claimed.

When the U.S. finally admits that its brutal experiment in privatized healthcare has failed and it is forced to hand the reins of this critical part of American life over to the public sector, it will be a powerful signal that the neoliberal project has passed its high point – and that the political pendulum has begun to swing back toward a more rational and democratic future.

Deterrence or Aggression?

Like the privatized U.S. healthcare system, U.S. militarism is also uniquely complicated, in ways that the world is barely coming to grips with after 18 years of U.S.-led wars that have killed about two million people and left half a dozen countries in ruins.

It is hardly a coincidence that our healthcare and warfare crises have some disturbing things in common, since they are products of the same unique political and economic system.

Our dysfunctional medical industry and our murderous war machine are by far the most expensive “healthcare” and “defense” systems in the world. Both are hugely profitable, but neither provides value for money in the form of a healthier or a safer society, the stated missions that justify their existence and their endlessly-expanding demands on our resources.

These are also the two areas of public policy in which bad policy predictably and inevitably leads to massive losses of human life. In terms of keeping people

safe from disease and war respectively, U.S. “healthcare” and U.S. “defense” both fail catastrophically despite their ever-growing price tags. In fact, the huge amounts of money involved contribute to their failures by corrupting and distorting the non-commercial purposes they are both supposed to serve.

The Even-Worse War Machine

But U.S. militarism involves complications that dwarf even the ravages of the privatized U.S. healthcare system. While U.S. “news” media provide 24-hour “talking heads” coverage of the CIA and the Democratic Party’s accusations of Russian meddling in the U.S. election, American bombs are killing thousands of Iraqi civilians in Mosul, as they have been doing across Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and other Muslim countries since 2001.

In contrast to our endless healthcare debate, the contradictions of U.S. militarism have barely been debated at all. Politicians only discuss the purposes of the U.S. military in euphemistic terms, and any objective or honest appraisal of the death, violence and chaos we have unleashed in country after country for the past 18 years is strictly taboo across the political spectrum.

There is an inherent contradiction in trying to use weapons of war to keep the peace. I remember asking my father, a British navy doctor, how he resolved this contradiction, which was more glaring in his case as a doctor committed to “first do no harm.” He told me that he believed a strong defense was the most effective deterrent to aggression.

Apart from one day in June 1954, when his ship’s 6-inch guns “bombarded terrorist positions” on Kedah Peak in Malaya, my father spent his entire career in a shrinking peacetime navy as the sun set on the British Empire. The U.K. stayed out of Vietnam, aside from some covert operations, and no other country attacked the U.K., so my Dad’s view of his naval career as a deterrent to aggression survived largely unscathed.

Even President Trump subscribes to the view that the legitimate role of military power is as a deterrent to aggression by others. On Feb. 27, he declared his intention to add \$54 billion per year to the Obama administration’s military budget, which already set a post-WWII record. But in a speech a few days earlier, Trump couched his promise to build a bigger, more expensive war machine strictly in terms of deterrence, as he did regularly throughout his election campaign.

“And, hopefully, we’ll never have to use it, but nobody is going to mess with us,” he said. “Nobody. It will be one of the greatest military build-ups in

American history.”

Big-Stick Bullying

My father and our new president were both echoing Teddy Roosevelt’s warning to “speak softly and carry a big stick.” But there is an obvious distinction between carrying a big stick to let others know that you are prepared to defend yourself, and actually threatening and attacking other people with it.

Many Americans keep guns in their homes to protect themselves against crime, but long-standing statistics show that guns in the home are about 20 times more likely to end up injuring or killing someone in a suicide attempt, domestic violence or an accident than in self-defense against a criminal intruder. (My wife and I were once almost shot in our own home when we returned home late at night and startled a house guest who hadn’t even warned us she was armed.) Could we be making a similar mistake on an international scale in our desire to maintain a “strong defense”?

The idea that U.S. diplomacy should be backed up by threats of force has become central to post-Cold War U.S. policy, but it is not long since this was seen as a risky strategy, even in official circles. After catastrophic wars in Korea and Vietnam, U.S. leaders were wary of war, and therefore avoided making threats that would drag the U.S. into new wars.

They did not renounce the use of force altogether, but waged it through proxy forces supported by small deployments of U.S. special forces in Central America and by the CIA in Angola and Afghanistan. These “disguised, quiet, media-free” military operations, as senior officers have called them, were shielded from public scrutiny by layers of secrecy and propaganda, yet they still met with resistance from a war-wary U.S. public and Congress.

The Credible Threat Problem

In heated debates within the Reagan administration, Secretary of State George Schultz argued that U.S. diplomacy should be backed up by the threat of force, while Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger warned against threats or uses of force that could lead to another disaster like the war in Vietnam. Weinberger’s view was shared by U.S. military leaders, many of whom had fought as junior officers in Vietnam.

After the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut and the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983, Secretary Weinberger publicly laid out a doctrine of limited war in 1984, in which he accepted the thrust of Schultz’s argument, but defined strict limits and conditions on U.S. threats and uses of force. The Weinberger Doctrine declared that the U.S. should threaten or use proportionate force only

for clearly defined and achievable objectives, only when “vital” national or allied interests were at stake, and only with the support of the American public and Congress.

But the notion of a credible threat to support diplomacy is a dangerously seductive idea, and the Weinberger Doctrine became “the camel’s nose inside the tent” that was soon followed by the rest of the camel.

As U.S. leaders looked for ways to exploit the post-Cold War “power dividend,” hawkish officials and pundits suggested that General Manuel Noriega in Panama and President Saddam Hussein in Iraq had failed to surrender under threat of U.S. attack because they did not believe that the U.S. would follow through on its threats. The hawks insisted that, if the U.S. would only threaten and use force more readily and consistently, its threats would be “credible” and its enemies would give up without a fight.

The Deceitful Colin Powell

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Colin Powell was a former protégé of Weinberger but has made a career of covering up crimes and selling dangerous policies to the public, from his roles in Vietnam, Iran Contra and the First Gulf War to his misleading and treacherous performance at the UN Security Council in 2003. Powell embraced and promoted the “credible threat” theory in a *Foreign Affairs* article in October 1992, writing that, “threats of military force will work only when U.S. leaders have decided that they are prepared to use force... The president can only persuade an opponent of his seriousness when, indeed, he is serious.”

At about the same time, in what one of his acolytes dubbed the “Ledeen Doctrine,” military-industrial propagandist Michael Ledeen put the “credible threat” theory more bluntly in a speech to the American Enterprise Institute, “Every ten years or so, the United States needs to pick up some small crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business.”

Obviously, it is not a legitimate purpose of diplomacy for powerful countries to bully or destroy weaker ones as Ledeen described. In fact it is illegal under the U.N. Charter, which was formulated expressly to try to prevent this kind of international behavior.

Twenty-five years later, we can see clearly that threats of force by the U.S. and its allies, however credible, have not persuaded any of our country’s adversaries to back down, and have served only as pretexts for catastrophic wars, or escalations of them, in country after country: Kosovo,

Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Syria and so on.

Dooming Diplomacy

This is not because U.S. threats lack credibility, nor because our war machine is under-funded, as President Trump seems to believe. It is because threats undermine diplomacy by locking both sides into hostile positions that would be politically humiliating to back down from. When the side making the threats is a powerful, heavily armed country like the U.S., this effect is even more pronounced, not less, as the political pressure on both sides is even greater.

To his credit, President Obama stepped back from the brink after threatening a devastating attack on Syria in 2013, because U.S. intelligence agencies doubted that the Syrian government was responsible for the chemical weapons attack in Ghouta, the American public overwhelmingly told Obama and Congress that it was opposed to war, and Russia negotiated a diplomatic resolution. But Obama's retreat from the brink was so exceptional that he is still loudly condemned for it by hawkish U.S. officials and pundits.

U.S. leaders still claim that U.S. sanctions and threats "brought Iran to the table" over its nuclear program. But this does not bear serious scrutiny. In fact, during Obama's first term, his "dual track" approach to Iran, conducting negotiations in parallel with sanctions and threats, was an abysmal failure. This policy only succeeded in spurring Iran to build 20,000 centrifuges to produce its own nuclear material, while sanctions punished the people of Iran for asserting their right to a civilian nuclear program under the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

All the while, as a senior State Department official (and former U.S. Embassy hostage) explained to author Trita Parsi, it was the U.S. that refused to "take 'Yes'" for an answer, not Iran. The dispute was only resolved after John Kerry took over from Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State and began serious negotiations that were not undermined by new threats or sanctions.

The failure of U.S. post-Cold War diplomacy based on the threat and use of force would not surprise the American diplomats who drafted the U.N. Charter and witnessed its signing in San Francisco in 1945. Article 2:3 of the Charter reads, "All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered." In the very next clause, they backed this up with a prohibition, not only against the "use of force," but against "the *threat or* use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."

After the two most deadly and destructive wars in human history, American

diplomats of that generation needed no prompting to recognize that the threat of force more often than not sets the stage for the use of force, and that a world order based on the overriding necessity for peace must nip the danger of war in the bud by prohibiting the threat as well as the use of force.

Big Stick or Suicide Vest?

I hope this brief retracing of recent history illustrates what should be obvious, that there is a gaping chasm between the kind of “strong defense” most Americans believe in as a deterrent to war and the aggression of current U.S. war policy. In political rhetoric, there may seem to be a fine line between carrying a “big stick” to deter aggression and building a huge war machine to threaten and attack other countries, but, in practice, the difference is obvious.

Our dangerous post-Cold War strategy of “credible threats” is finally, and predictably, bringing us into confrontation with countries that can defend themselves more effectively than the relatively defenseless countries we have attacked and destroyed since 1999. The U.S. and our allies have failed to decisively defeat lightly armed resistance forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Pakistan, Syria, Palestine or Ukraine. Are we now “credibly threatening” to attack North Korea? Iran? Russia? China?

Like a gun in the home, the credibility of our threats has proved to be a double-edged sword that is ultimately as dangerous to us as to our enemies. We have twisted, “Speak softly and carry a big stick,” into something more like, “Threaten everybody and wear a suicide vest.”

It is time to take off the suicide vest, turn our backs on brinkmanship and war, and return to legitimate diplomacy that is not based on threats, credible or otherwise. The problem with our threats is not that other countries don’t think we really mean them. The more serious problem is that we do, and that this is a prescription for war, not a way to keep the peace.

I deliberately write “war,” not “endless war,” because every war does end, one way or another, and this one will too. But the escalating global war we have unleashed cannot possibly end well for our country or the world unless our leaders make a decisive choice to end it peacefully and diplomatically.

This would be a fundamental paradigm shift in U.S. policy, on a par with providing universal healthcare to all Americans. But the alternative should be unthinkable.

Nicolas J S Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. He also wrote the chapters on “Obama at War” in

Aiding Saudi Arabia's Slaughter in Yemen

President Trump is following the same path as his predecessor, bowing to the Saudi royal family and helping in their brutal war against Yemen, as Gareth Porter described to Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Saudi Arabia continues to escalate its war against Yemen, relying on the strong support of the U.S. government even as the poverty-stricken Yemenis are pushed toward starvation, according to investigative reporter/historian Gareth Porter.

Porter says the U.S. corporate press has failed to report the Saudi slaughter in a way in which it could be fully understood.

I spoke with Porter, an independent investigative journalist who wrote *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare* and whose articles on Yemen include "[Justifying the Saudi Slaughter in Yemen.](#)"

Dennis Bernstein: Is Saudi Arabia using starvation as a weapon of war against Yemen where there is mass hunger bordering on a famine? Gareth Porter has been writing extensively about this for Consortiumnews and other sources. I want to ... begin with a bit of an overview because a lot of people don't really understand the level of suffering, and the situation in Yemen. So, just give us a brief overview of what it's like on the ground now. How bad is it? And then I want to talk to you about this new policy about starvation as a weapon.

Gareth Porter: Sure. Well, unfortunately the way this war in Yemen has been covered, thus far, with a few exceptions, of course, the public does have the impression that this is a war in which a few thousand Yemenis have been killed, and therefore, it's kind of second to third tier, in terms of wars in the Middle East. Because people are aware that Syria is one in which hundreds of thousands of people have died. So, and I think that's the frame that most people have on the conflict in Yemen.

And that's very unfortunate, because maybe it's true that it's only been several thousands, or let's say ten thousand plus people, who have been killed by the bombs, directly. But what's really been happening for well over a year, I think it's fair to say a year to a year and a half, is that more people are dying of starvation-related or malnutrition-related diseases and starvation, than from

the bombs themselves. And this is a fact which I'm sorry to say simply has not gotten into the press coverage of the war, thus far.

And, of course, the Saudis launched the war in late March, 2015 with the full support of the Obama administration. They had that agreement ahead of time, before they started, that the United States would provide the logistical support, the bombs, help in targeting, not explicitly targeting but sort of technical assistance in making decisions about how to approach the war.

And, more important than any of those things, in some ways, was the assurance the United States government would provide the political/diplomatic cover, for this war. And I think that's really the crucial problem here. That the Saudis have felt that they could get away with not just continuing to bomb civilian targets, and infrastructure targets, and, essentially establishing a thorough going blockade, economic blockade of the country, preventing the fuel, the food, and the medicine from coming into the country that this poor... really the poorest nation in the Middle East have to have in order to survive. But now, as you suggested in your intro, is actually trying to impose, to use starvation as a weapon.

DB: And, just to be clear, how bad is the situation on the ground? How many people are at risk? Who's at risk? What do we know about that, before we get into this other stuff?



GP: Well, I've been trying to get through to somebody in the United Nations, specialized agencies, or volunteer agencies who could speak more precisely to that than has been the case up till now, publicly. And so far, at least, I have not succeeded in getting anyone to say...to go beyond the formal position of the U.N. system, of the humanitarian system of the United Nations, which is that as many as 462,000, I believe, is the most recent figure.

Yemenis face a sort of Status 4 of the situation as far as malnutrition, severe

malnutrition is concerned. That is, as you indicated, the closest stage to actual famine to starvation. Meaning that people are going to die of starvation.

And it means that they are ... at the tipping point. It could happen anytime. And, may already be happening. In fact, I would venture to say from what I have been able to pick up, it is probably already happening that thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, are right now in the process of dying of starvation in Yemen.

And so this is a problem of... a humanitarian crisis that... by which, in comparison to which the Syrian situation pales, or what we were told about the Syrian situation, during the height of the bombing, the Russian-Syrian bombing of Aleppo last year. This is many, many times worse. Far more serious in terms of the number of deaths that are at stake, lives and deaths.

DB: I want you to talk about, it's rather troubling to see this, and entertain this notion of using food and starvation as a weapon of war. But now we see a troubling collaboration in which the Saudis are trying to break the Yemen Central Bank which is sort of standing between this, where they are now, and absolute famine. You want to talk about that policy? I know the U.S. is deeply engaged.

GP: Sure. Absolutely. I mean the point here is that, as you say, the Central Bank of Yemen was, last year, the last refuge, if you will, the last thing standing between many hundreds of thousands of people and potential famine, because it was providing what little liquidity was available in that country, for the purchase of food stuffs. Very, very few food stuffs still getting into the country. But what there was, you had to have money in order to purchase it. And liquidity was very, very scarce. So the Central Bank was the only thing that was guaranteeing a minimum of liquidity in the Yemeni economy.

And I'm sorry to say that now it's too late. The Yemeni government, really the Saudis behind them, of course, manipulating the Yemeni government, decided, in their wisdom, that they were going to break the Central Bank. They were going to eliminate it as a factor, in order to basically cause the population of Yemen such suffering, such starvation, that they would, somehow, turn against the government, the authorities, the Houthis and Masala forces, who have now formed their own government in Sana'a. So that was the strategy.

And they did, in fact, eliminate the Central Bank of Yemen by fiat. They supposedly, they moved it to Aden, which is controlled by the Saudis, and their puppet government, the Hadi government. But it doesn't function, it's simply a non-functioning Central Bank. And it promised to actually provide the pay for millions, not millions, but 1.2 million civil servants on the payroll, but who are not being paid. Who have not been paid for many months now. But it hasn't

done it.

And as a result of that, of course, you then had that many more people, as of last September, which is when all this happened, it was August and September [2016] when it happened. None of those 1.2 million people now have any source of income. And so that is clearly adding to the distress, to the hunger, and the potential starvation in Yemen.

DB: And, say a little bit more about the U.S. role, and why is the United States so deeply engaged in what really could turn out to be a troubling war crime in Yemen.

GP: You are asking precisely the right question, Dennis. And that is a question that I have been trying my best to penetrate. Of course, you're not going to get anyone in the U.S. government, whether it was the Obama administration, or now the Trump administration, to ever say anything that will reveal the truth about this.

And the Trump administration, let's face it, has no interest whatsoever in doing anything to help the people of Yemen. All they care about is to support the Saudis because the Saudis are anti-Iranian. But that was really the M.O. of the Obama administration as well.

And so, if you really are going to answer that question based on the available evidence, you have to say that the reason that the United States has allowed the Saudis to essentially establish, or to impose a regime of starvation on the people of Yemen, is because of the U.S. de facto alliance, the political and military relationships, between the United States and Saudi Arabia. And then, if you go to the next obvious question: well why is it that we have to do that, or that we should do that?

You basically have to admit that it is a matter of the military bases, and military relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia, and close ally, Qatar, who control two of the major military bases of the United States, the base in Bahrain.

And, of course, the Saudis have allowed the United States, with the NSA and the CIA, to have a very lucrative set of deals over arm sales, which have reached as much as \$200 billion over – if you add in all the possible additional fees that can be charged on these deals – more than \$200 billion over two decades. That is real money for those in the Pentagon. And the NSA and the CIA have their own sweetheart deals with the Saudis to provide various intelligence services.

This, I'm quite sure, based on my own research, is the real reason why the United States is so wedded to Saudi interests here. Because there is no other

reason, it has nothing to do with oil. That may have been the case in 1945, when the U.S. first established its political relationship with the Saudi government, but it hasn't been the case for many years now, that we have such interest in oil that it would mandate anything like this kind of policy.

DB: And is there sort of a common interest here? Is Israel in support of the U.S. policy in favor of the Saudis?

GP: Yes, of course. There is a common interest between the United States and Israel, in this regard. I would not be willing to say, however, that it's the controlling factor, but it is a controlling factor in U.S. policy. I simply don't think it ascends to that level. I think it's far more relevant that the very powerful world bureaucracies clearly have very powerful vested interests in continuing the status quo of U.S. chummy relationship with Saudi Arabia. And I don't think that's going to change until there's a real citizens' movement, a powerful citizens' movement that says "No." And that of course, is a long ways off, at this moment.

DB: Is there a way to separate, is there an inter-relationship we should be thinking about in terms of what's going on in Syria, and the role that the U.S. government is playing there, and what appears to be an expanded role that Trump wants to play in the Middle East, in Iraq, in Syria, in Yemen?

GP: Well, there is a relationship, and by the way, I think I omitted the second military base in my previous answer, which is the base in Bahrain. Bahrain, of course, is where the U.S. Navy has its Fifth Fleet. And it's regarded as an extremely important U.S. interest there.

Qatar is a very close Gulf ally of the Saudis and, of course, part of the Saudi coalition in Yemen, carrying out the bombings. So, the two of them together really provide the two major bases in the Gulf for the United States. And those are interests which clearly have been relevant to what was going on in Syria, as well as the U.S. policy in Yemen.

Because it was the Qataris, the Saudis, and the Turks who urged the Obama administration, who pushed the Obama administration to basically carry out the policy of supporting the armed opposition to the Assad regime, starting in 2011. And we know that President Obama was extremely reluctant to do that. He regarded it as extremely dangerous when it was first proposed. But he went along with it, as presidents have done in many situations including the Obama administration, despite the risks that it entailed, starting with the covert CIA operation to provide the logistics, to get the weapons into Turkey, to be provided across the border to the Syrian armed opposition, in 2011-2012.

But that's a long story, but the short of it is that the United States did not want to disturb its relations with its Gulf allies, or with Turkey. Turkey being a NATO ally which, again, controls a major base that the [...] U.S. military holds as one of its jewels of its crown in the Middle East, Middle East and the larger Middle East region.

So, I think that this is really all about how these political military interests in the Middle East have become an end in themselves, and have taken over U.S. policy, rather than serving U.S. interests. And I'm afraid that the U.S. public has not caught on to that fundamental problem, in U.S. policy in the Middle East.

DB: Trump expressed some sort of different look, talked about a bit of a different policy, in Syria, working with the Russians. We have seen where that has gone, but Trump, really, he now seems to have fallen in line, and he's in line on steroids, wouldn't you say? It doesn't look good there.

GP: Well, I think that's a pretty good way of putting it. Yes. He seems to be almost trying to compensate for the impression that he was somehow at odds with the military and the whole National Security Complex by calling for a \$50 billion [\$54 billion] increase in the defense budget, by calling for more troops in Syria, and generally talking about upping the ante, militarily, in the entire region.

So, he clearly has caved in. I don't think he has a clear enough idea, himself, to support any resistance to the kinds of pressures that all presidents have been getting over the years from these very powerful bureaucracies. And so, it was really naive to believe that Trump was going to offer any real resistance.

DB: And, in terms of drone attacks and related attacks, and killing civilians, he's sort of up now, he's up to scale. Right? There are more attacks now.

GP: Well, I think he has. I think he's given more freedom to the CIA clearly. That's been announced that he's given the CIA freedom to decide when to use drones for attacks on... when they believe, or when they say they believe it's Al Qaeda or ISIS. And, so, that is, indeed, that's how the system works.

That's what the CIA fought for in both the Bush administration and the Obama administration, to get more freedom of action. That's the coin of the realm for them. To have greater freedom of action means that they have more power, and that means that they can justify more operations easily, get more money, and the system rolls on.

DB: And, just finally, sort of a sweeping look at the region. What are your concerns now? Do you see things getting more and more risky? Do you see a

possible confrontation with the Russians? How are you looking at this now?

GP: Well, I think that, certainly, the White House does not want a confrontation with the Russians. But, they are playing a dangerous game here, in Syria, by becoming more deeply involved. And it's very difficult to see how this situation is going to evolve. It's very complicated with Turkey, and the Russians being on different sides in some ways. With the United States playing in-between. Nobody knows exactly how that's going to play out. But it is, by its very nature, it's dangerous.

And that's the flashpoint, in Syria, but, of course, we also have this ongoing war in Iraq. The whole idea that the United States is going to continue to fight wars in both Syria and Iraq for the foreseeable future is not a prospect that one should take lightly.

And, on top of that, again we are complicit in crimes that have to do with potentially hundreds of thousands of people starving to death in Yemen. And the issue has not hit us, yet, in a sense that it's being fully reported, but this is something that seems to me the public really needs to be up in arms about. And, it's in some ways, far more serious than any military involvement by the United States at present, or in the foreseeable future in the Middle East.

DB: Is there any indication of the kind of human rights investigation, international investigation that begins to hold the Saudis accountable, and those who arm the Saudis accountable? Where is that?

GP: A very important question. What happened last year in the United Nations was, or more than a year now, in the United Nations was that the Dutch proposed an independent investigation of war crimes in Yemen, because of the Saudi bombing. At that point it was not so much the imposition of starvation through an economic weapon. It was precisely the bombing, hitting of infrastructure and civilian targets.

But, of course, as many of your listeners may know, the Saudis, with U.S. support, control the U.N. Human Rights Commission. And they managed to change that into a resolution which would welcome the Hadi government, that is, the Saudi sort of puppet government, in Yemen carrying out its own investigation.

And that is as far as it's gotten in the United Nation's system. So, I'm sorry to say that the United States exercises so much control over all of the major organs of the United Nations, particularly anything that has to do with U.N. Security Council, that they're not going to allow any independent investigation through that route. And the Amnesty International/Human Rights Watch, as far as I know are still not... they have called the bombing itself a serious violation of

the laws of war.

But, nobody, thus far, has really come out saying that this policy of blockade, plus getting rid of the Central Bank of Yemen, and in many other ways trying to impose starvation on the Yemeni people is in itself a crime of war. And that's what needs to happen, obviously.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

Trump Succumbs to Bush/Obama Perpetual War

President Trump is becoming the third post-9/11 president to prosecute bloody conflicts in the Mideast and impose mass surveillance at home, with no end in sight, observes retired Col. Ann Wright.

By Ann Wright

Fourteen years ago on March 19, 2003, I resigned from the U.S. government in opposition to President George W. Bush's decision to invade and occupy Iraq, an oil-rich Arab/Muslim country that had nothing to do with the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and that the Bush Administration knew did not have weapons of mass destruction.

In my letter of resignation, I wrote of my deep concerns about Bush's decision to attack Iraq and the predictable large number of civilian casualties from that military attack. But I also detailed my concerns on other issues: the lack of U.S. effort on resolving the Israel-Palestinian conflict, the U.S. failure to engage North Korea to curb nuclear and missile development, and the curtailment of civil liberties in the United States through the Patriot Act.

Now, three Presidents into the Iraq War and other unsettled conflicts, the problems that I was concerned about in 2003 are even more dangerous a decade and a half later.

As a U.S. diplomat, I was on the small team that reopened the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, in December 2001. Sixteen years later, the U.S. is still battling the Taliban in Afghanistan, as the Taliban takes more and more territory, in America's longest war, while the graft and corruption within the

Afghan government due to the mammoth U.S.-funded contracts for support of the U.S. military machine continues to provide the Taliban with new recruits.

The U.S. is now fighting against ISIS, a brutal group that emerged because of the U.S. war in Iraq, but has spread from Iraq into Syria, as the U.S. policy of regime change has resulted in arming international as well as domestic Syrian groups to fight not only ISIS, but the Syrian government. The deaths of civilians in Iraq and Syria continue to rise with the acknowledgement this week by the U.S. military that it is "likely" that a U.S. bombing mission killed over 200 civilians in one building in the Iraqi city of Mosul.

Slaughtering Palestinians

With U.S. government acquiescence, if not complicity, the Israeli military has attacked Gaza three times in the past eight years. Thousands of Palestinians have been killed, tens of thousands have been wounded and the homes of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been destroyed.

Over 800,000 Israelis now live in illegal settlements on stolen Palestinian lands in the West Bank. Israeli government has built hundreds of miles of separation/apartheid walls on Palestinian land which separate Palestinians from their farms, schools and employment. Brutal, humiliating checkpoints purposely attempt to degrade the spirit of Palestinians. Israeli only highways have been built on Palestinian lands. The theft of Palestinian resources has ignited a worldwide, citizen-led boycott, divestment and sanctions program.

Imprisonment of Palestinian children for throwing rocks at Israeli occupation military forces has reached crisis levels. Evidence of the Israeli government's inhumane treatment of Palestinians has now been formally called "apartheid" in a United Nations report that resulted in massive Israeli and U.S. pressure on the U.N to withdraw the report and force the Under Secretary of the U.N. who commissioned the report to resign.

The North Korean government continues to call for negotiations with the U.S. and South Korea for a peace treaty to end the Korean War. But the U.S. government has responded with a rejection of any discussions with North Korea until North Korea ends its nuclear program. The U.S. also has increased U.S.-South Korean military drills, the last one named "Decapitation," moves that have resulted in the North Korean government continuing its nuclear testing and missile projects.

The war on civil liberties of U.S. citizens under the Patriot Act resulted in unprecedented surveillance through cellphones, computers and other electronic devices, massive illegal data collection and indefinite, perpetual storage of private information of not only U.S. citizens, but all inhabitants of this

planet.

The Obama war on whistleblowers who have exposed various aspects of the illegal data collection has inflicted severe punishments on people accused of sharing truthful information with the public, including: bankruptcy for National Security Agency official Tom Drake in successfully defending against espionage charges; Pvt. Chelsea Manning's long prison sentence for exposing war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan; forced exile for NSA contractor Edward Snowden for revealing U.S. government lies about the NSA's bulk collection; Julian Assange's virtual imprisonment in London's Ecuadorian Embassy for fear of retaliation against WikiLeaks' disclosures of U.S. government secrets.

Trump's Complaint

In the latest bizarre twist, President Donald Trump has accused President Barack Obama of "wiretapping" the Trump Tower in New York City during the Presidential campaign but then – amid widespread denials – refused to provide any evidence, although it's true that virtually all citizens have become targets of electronic surveillance.

The past 14 years have been difficult for the world due to U.S. wars of choice and the growth of the surveillance state. And, the next four years do not appear likely to bring any relief to the citizens of planet earth.

The election of Donald Trump, the first U.S. President who has never served in any level of government nor in the U.S. military, has led to – in a little more than two months – an unprecedented number of domestic and international crises, many self-inflicted:

–The Trump administration has attempted to ban persons from seven mostly Muslim countries (later reduced to six);

–The Trump administration has appointed to Cabinet positions members of the billionaire class from Wall Street and Big Oil, people who have the intention of destroying the agencies they are to lead.

–The Trump administration has proposed a budget that will increase the U.S. military war budget by 10 percent, but slash the budgets of other agencies to render them ineffective.

–The Department of State and International Affairs budget for conflict resolution by words not bullets will be slashed by 37 percent.

–The Trump Administration has appointed a person to head the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) who has declared the worsening climate chaos a hoax.

In retrospect, I am glad I resigned from the U.S. government when I did. My decision to resign has allowed me to speak publicly in the United States and around the world on issues that jeopardize international security from the perspective of a former U.S. government employee with 29 years of experience in the U.S. Army and 16 years in the U.S. diplomatic corps.

I am glad that I could join the millions of citizens around the world who are challenging their governments when the governments violate legal standards, kill innocent civilians and wreck havoc on the planet.

Ann Wright served 29 years in the U.S. Army and Army Reserves and retired as a Colonel. She served as a U.S. diplomat for sixteen years before her resignation in March 2003 in opposition to the Iraq war. She is the co-author of *Dissent: Voices of Conscience*.

Trump-Obama Continuity for Nukes

The Trump administration is continuing a boycott, started by its predecessors in the Obama administration, against U.N. talks aimed at banning nuclear weapons, as Greg Mello explains.

By Greg Mello

At the United Nations headquarters in New York City, negotiations began this week on a treaty banning the possession, development and use of nuclear weapons. The agreement to negotiate such a ban was passed late last year by a wide margin in the most significant development in nuclear disarmament since the end of the Cold War.

But just as the proceedings were getting underway, U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley, supported by Britain and France, staged a protest outside the General Assembly, along with representatives of 18 other countries.

“You know me as the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., but first and foremost I’m a mom,” Haley announced. “As a mom, as a daughter, there’s nothing I want more for my family than a world without nuclear weapons. But we have to be realistic . . . today when you see those walking into the General Assembly to create a nuclear weapons ban, you have to ask yourself, are they looking out for their people? Do they really understand the threats that we have?”

The United States and the other eight nuclear weapon states are all boycotting

the negotiations, along with NATO states (with the exception of the Netherlands), Australia, South Korea, and Japan.

U.S. resistance to the nuclear ban began before Nikki Haley took office. A boycott was actually announced last October by the Obama Administration. Despite this opposition, a negotiating mandate was adopted by a vote of 123 to 38, with 16 abstentions.

Notably, North Korea voted to negotiate a nuclear weapons ban, and China, alone among the nuclear weapon states, abstained.

A Weakened Cornerstone

The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty is the undisputed cornerstone of the world's nuclear nonproliferation regime. Article VI of that treaty states: "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

Haley did not explain how boycotting the negotiations could possibly comply with the requirement that the United States act in "good faith." These negotiations are the culmination of a multi-year process principally led by about a dozen states, the Red Cross, and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, a network of more than 400 non-governmental organizations in ninety countries.

One hundred and twenty states are in attendance at the General Assembly this week. The four-week negotiating process will proceed from general statements and the drafting of a text, to final negotiations in late June and early July.

A Moving Account

On the second day of negotiations, as the opening statements concluded, Hiroshima survivor Setsuko Thurlow gave a moving first-hand account of the blast and its aftermath. Thurlow was followed by Sue Coleman speaking about the devastating impacts of British nuclear testing on aboriginal people.

These are moments of high drama in disarmament affairs. For a supermajority of U.N. member states to take the reins from the nuclear club and demand a treaty that declares nuclear weapons anathema once and for all, is entirely unprecedented.

Likewise unprecedented is Haley's conspicuous boycott and protest by the United States and its allies of a major U.N. disarmament meeting, arguably a flagrant

violation of U.S. Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations. It is certainly damaging to U.S. prestige – and no doubt a spur to negotiators, who are being reminded once again that the United States is not interested in multilateral nuclear disarmament.

The resolution establishing these negotiations rejects nuclear deterrence on moral and legal grounds. The resulting ban would lower the status and legitimacy of nuclear weapons, even within nuclear states. Its efficacy would develop further over time, as more states joined the treaty.

These negotiations are the product of the rising multipolar world, a tide which the United States cannot hold back. More than the legitimacy and status of nuclear weapons is in play. The ban process is in part about who can decide whether nuclear weapons are legitimate.

In a dark time, diplomats from countries without nuclear weapons and alliances are reasserting civilizational values. Despite the shameful efforts of the Obama and now the Trump Administration to impede the ban process, momentum toward a ban is strong.

Negotiations are being [webcast](#) in their entirety. [Reaching Critical Will](#) offers daily analysis, and analysis is available from the [International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons](#). You can also search twitter for [#nuclearban](#).

Greg Mello is executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group and is a leading expert on nuclear policy. [This article originally appeared at <http://progressive.org/dispatches/us-spurns-nuclear-disarmament-negotiations-citing-family-val/>]

Israel Hits Back Against Boycott

Exclusive: Israeli officials are attacking on several fronts against people who support the BDS movement as a nonviolent way to pressure Israel to respect Palestinian human rights, writes Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

On March 19, Israeli tax officials arrested Omar Barghouti, a prominent Palestinian human rights defender and co-founder of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Omar and his wife Safa, an Israeli citizen, were

detained for 16 hours and have been subjected to daily interrogation sessions.

Barghouti's arrest is indirect evidence of the growing strength of the BDS movement, a worldwide non-violent challenge to Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian lands, a protest campaign that the Israeli government has identified as an existential threat to Israel.

Israel is particularly sensitive in light of the new United Nations report concluding that it has established an "apartheid regime" and recommending that national governments support BDS activities to challenge Israel's illegal system of oppression of the Palestinians. The report was co-authored by Richard Falk, an international law expert and former U.N. Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories.

In his address to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated, "We will defend ourselves against slander and boycotts."

Barghouti wrote in the *New York Times*, "Having lost many battles for hearts and minds at the grass-roots level, Israel has adopted since 2014 a new strategy to criminalize support for BDS from the top" in order to "shield Israel from accountability."

Last year, the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs established a "tarnishing unit" to tarnish the reputation of BDS human rights defenders and networks.

According to the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee, the "inflammatory fabrications" against Omar Barghouti constitute the "latest chapter of repression and intimidation" against him. For years, various arms of the far-right Israeli government have subjected Barghouti to intense threats, intimidation and repression.

The investigation of Barghouti is part of Israel's "systematic efforts to criminalize the BDS movement, intimidate activists and stop free speech," the Committee said.

"After failing to intimidate them through the threat of revoking Omar's permanent residence in Israel, and after the effective travel ban imposed on him proved futile in stopping his human rights work," the Committee stated, "the Israeli government has resorted to fabricating a case related to Omar's alleged income outside of Israel to tarnish his image and intimidate him."

Travel Ban

The latest travel ban against Barghouti, imposed in connection with the

investigation, coincidentally comes shortly before he is scheduled to travel to the United States to accept the Gandhi Peace Award, along with Ralph Nader, at Yale University.

In addition to the travel ban on Barghouti, top Israeli officials have threatened BDS activists in general and Barghouti in particular. At a "Stop the Boycott" conference in Jerusalem last year, Israeli public security and strategic affairs minister Gilad Erdan warned that BDS activists "will know they will pay a price for it."

During the same conference, Yisrael Katz, Israel's intelligence minister, called for attacks on BDS leaders. Katz utilized the same Hebrew word the military uses for "targeted civil elimination," or civil assassination. Aryeh Deri, Israel's interior minister, told attendees at the conference that he might revoke Barghouti's residency permit.

After threats against Barghouti at the conference, Amnesty International stated it was concerned for the "safety and liberty of Palestinian human rights defender Omar Barghouti, and other boycott, divestment and sanctions activists, following calls alluding to threats, including of physical harm and deprivation of basic rights, made by Israeli ministers."

Adnan Ramadan, another co-founder of BDS, said, "All of this tax evasion business is just an excuse to pressure the BDS movement as a whole . . . part of their war against the campaign, but it won't work . . . because the BDS campaign isn't one person or two people or ten people, it's an organized movement of hundreds of thousands of people."

"This latest desperate chapter of repression and intimidation by the Israeli government against Omar Barghouti is the strongest indicator yet of the failure of the Israeli regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid to slow down the impressive growth of the BDS movement for Palestinian rights," the Committee stated.

And, according to the *Forward*, a report issued by the Anti-Defamation League and the Israel-based Reut Institute concluded, "Jewish communal efforts against the BDS movement have largely failed."

What Is BDS?

The BDS movement was launched in 2005 by representatives of Palestinian civil society. They called upon "international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era ... [including] embargoes and sanctions against Israel."

This call for BDS specified that “these non-violent punitive measures” should last until Israel fully complies with international law by (1) ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the barrier Wall; (2) recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and (3) respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their land as stipulated in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.

BOYCOTTS involve withdrawing support for Israel and Israeli and international companies involved in violations of Palestinian human rights, as well as complicit Israeli sporting, cultural and academic institutions.

DIVESTMENT campaigns urge banks, local councils, churches, pension funds and universities to withdraw investments from all Israeli companies and from international companies involved in violating Palestinian rights.

SANCTIONS campaigns pressure governments to fulfill their legal obligation to hold Israel to account by ending military trade, free-trade agreements and expelling Israel from international forums.

BDS was a major factor behind the 46 percent drop in foreign direct investment in Israel in 2014, according to a U.N. report. Israeli exporters have repeatedly complained that it is getting harder to export products to Europe. A World Bank report reveals that Israel’s exports to the Palestinian economy dropped by 24 percent in the first quarter of 2015.

Investors who have divested from companies targeted by the BDS movement include government pension funds in Sweden, Norway, New Zealand and Luxembourg. Investors include George Soros, the Bill Gates Foundation, the huge TIAA-CREF public sector pension fund in the U.S., Dutch pension giant PGGM and Norwegian bank Nordea.

BDS initiatives have been passed by more than 50 councils in Spain and by dozens of other councils in the U.K., Australia, Sweden, Norway and Ireland. U.S. churches, including the Presbyterian Church USA, the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church (UMC), and several Quaker bodies have voted to divest from Israeli and international companies targeted by the BDS movement.

Academic associations in the U.S., Canada, Ireland, South Africa and the U.K. have voted to support BDS. Thousands of artists and cultural figures, including Roger Waters, Marcel Khalife and Alice Walker support the cultural boycott of Israel. Lauryn Hill, Elvis Costello and Vanessa Paradis have canceled shows in Israel. World renowned scientist Stephen Hawking refused to attend a conference hosted by former Israeli president Shimon Peres.

The Chilean government suspended free trade agreement talks with Israel during its 2014 attacks on Gaza. Bolivia and Venezuela have cut diplomatic ties with Israel. Brazil refused to appoint a settler leader as Israeli ambassador to the country. The University of Johannesburg severed its ties with Israel's Ben-Gurion University.

More than 30 U.S. student associations and 11 Canadian student associations have voted to support divestment from Israeli apartheid. BDS is supported by the U.K. National Union of Students, 30 other U.K. student unions and student organizations in Belgium, South Africa, Brazil, Chile and beyond.

SodaStream closed its factory in the illegal Israeli settlement of Mishor Adumim following a high-profile boycott campaign against the company that saw retailers and investors across the world cut links with the company. SodaStream is still a major target of the BDS movement because it is a high-profile Israeli export, and the company was complicit in the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the Naqab (Negev) in the south of Israel.

French telecom Orange left the Israeli market, in response to BDS campaigns in France and Egypt about the role Orange's Israeli franchise holder played in supporting the Israeli military, its attacks on Gaza, and its involvement in illegal Israeli settlements.

G4S announced plans to sell its Israeli subsidiary after the international Stop G4S campaign cost the company millions of dollars in lost contracts. The Bill Gates Foundation cut its ties with the company. G4S provides security services and equipment to Israeli checkpoints, illegal settlements, and prisons where Palestinian political prisoners are held without trial and subjected to torture. G4S has a record of breaking promises to end its support for Israeli apartheid so the campaign against G4S is ongoing until the sale is complete.

French multinational Veolia withdrew from Israel after a BDS campaign over its role in Israel's colonization of Palestinian land, resulting in billions of dollars in lost contracts. Israeli state water company Mekorot lost contracts in Brazil, Argentina, Portugal and the Netherlands.

Community mobilizations during Israel's 2014 attack on Gaza prevented Israeli ships from docking at a port in Oakland, California, after actions by dockworkers at ports in South Africa, Sweden and India in recent years.

The E.U. has introduced rules prohibiting funding of Israeli companies and bodies based in illegal Israeli settlements and has warned businesses about the risks of doing business with illegal Israeli settlements.

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