

# How Many Millions of People Have Been Killed in America's Post-9/11 Wars? – Part One: Iraq

The numbers of casualties of U.S. wars since Sept. 11, 2001 have largely gone uncounted, but coming to terms with the true scale of the crimes committed remains an urgent moral, political and legal imperative, argues Nicolas J.S. Davies.

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

How many people have been killed in America's post-9/11 wars? I have been researching and writing about that question since soon after the U.S. launched these wars, which it has tried to justify as a response to terrorist crimes that killed 2,996 people in the U.S. on September 11th 2001.

But no crime, however horrific, can justify wars on countries and people who were not responsible for the crime committed, as former Nuremberg prosecutor Ben Ferencz patiently explained to NPR at the time.

"The Iraq Death Toll 15 Years After the U.S. Invasion" which I co-wrote with Medea Benjamin, estimates the death toll in Iraq as accurately and as honestly as we can in March 2018. Our estimate is that about 2.4 million people have probably been killed in Iraq as a result of the historic act of aggression committed by the U.S. and U.K. in 2003. In this report, I will explain in greater detail how we arrived at that estimate and provide some historical context. In Part 2 of this report, I will make a similar up-to-date estimate of how many people have been killed in America's other post-9/11 wars.

## **Mortality Studies vs Passive Reporting**

I explored these same questions in Chapter 7 of my book, Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq, and in previous articles, from "Burying the Lancet Report... and the Children" in 2005 to "Playing Games With War Deaths" in 2016.

In each of those accounts, I explained that estimates of war deaths regularly published by UN agencies, monitoring groups and the media are nearly all based on fragmentary "passive reporting," not on comprehensive mortality studies.

Of the countries where the U.S. and its allies have been waging war since 2001, Iraq is the only country where epidemiologists have conducted mortality studies based on the best practices that they have developed and used in other war zones

(like Angola, Bosnia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sudan and Uganda). In all these countries, as in Iraq, the results of comprehensive epidemiological studies revealed between 5 and 20 times more deaths than previously published figures based on passive reporting.

Body Count: Casualty Figures After 10 Years of the 'War on Terror' , a report published by Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) in 2015 found that the 2006 Lancet study was the most comprehensive and reliable mortality study conducted in Iraq, based on its study design, the experience and independence of the research team, the short time elapsed since the deaths it documented and its consistency with other measures of violence in occupied Iraq. That study estimated that about 601,000 Iraqis were killed in the first 39 months of war and occupation in Iraq, while the war had also caused about 54,000 non-violent deaths.

In the other countries affected by America's post-9/11 wars, the only reports of how many people have been killed are either compiled by the UN based on investigations of incidents reported to local UN Assistance Missions (as in Iraq and Afghanistan), or by the UN or independent monitoring groups like the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Iraq Body Count (IBC) and Airwars based on passive reports from government agencies, health facilities or local or foreign media.

These passive reports are regularly cited by UN and government agencies, media and even by activists as "estimates" of how many people have been killed, but that is not what they are. By definition, no compilation of fragmentary reports can possibly be a realistic estimate of all the people killed in a country ravaged by war.

At best, passive reports can reveal a minimum number of war deaths. But that is often such a small fraction of actual deaths that it is highly misleading to cite it as an "estimate" of the total number of people killed. This is why epidemiologists have instead developed scientific sampling methods that they can use to produce accurate estimates of war deaths through statistically valid mortality studies.

The huge disparities epidemiologists have found between the results of mortality studies and passive reporting (between 5:1 and 20:1) have been consistent across many different war zones all over the world. In countries where Western governments are not responsible for the state of war, there has been no political controversy over these results, and they are regularly cited by Western officials and media.

But Western politicians and media have dismissed and marginalized the results of

mortality studies in Iraq for political reasons. The U.S. and U.K.'s responsibility for the state of war in Iraq means that the scale of the slaughter is a serious matter of political and criminal responsibility for senior officials who chose to ignore legal advice that the invading Iraq would be "a crime of aggression".

In 2006, British officials were advised by Sir Roy Anderson, the Chief Scientific Adviser to the U.K.'s Ministry of Defense, that "The (Lancet) study design is robust and employs methods that are regarded as close to 'best practice' in this area..."

The BBC obtained copies of emails in which British officials admitted that the study was "likely to be right," and "the survey methodology used here cannot be rubbished, it is a tried and tested way of measuring mortality in conflict zones." But the same officials immediately launched a campaign to discredit the study. President George W. Bush publicly declared, "I don't consider it a credible report," and the subservient U.S. corporate media quickly dismissed it.

In "Playing Games With War Deaths" in 2016, I concluded, "As with climate change and other issues, UN officials and journalists must overcome political pressures, come to grips with the basic science involved, and stop sweeping the vast majority of the victims of our wars down this Orwellian "memory hole."

Some have argued that it is not important to know whether our wars have killed tens of thousands of people or millions, since all deaths in war are a tragic loss of life and we should just mourn them, instead of quibbling over numbers. But as the authors of Body Count noted,

"The numbers relayed by the media should in themselves be terrifying enough... But apparently they are still perceived as tolerable and, moreover, easy to explain given the picture of excessive religiously motivated violence. The figure of 655,000 deaths in the first three war years alone, however, clearly points to a crime against humanity approaching genocide."

I agree with the authors of Body Count that it makes a difference whether our wars kill millions of people or only ten thousand, as most people in the U.K. and the U.S. seem to believe according to opinion polls.

Most Americans would say that it matters whether Germany's role in the Second World War led to millions of violent deaths or only ten thousand. Suggesting the latter is actually a crime in Germany and several other countries.

So American politicians, journalists and members of the public who say it doesn't matter how many Iraqis have been killed are consciously or unconsciously applying a morally untenable double standard to the consequences

of our country's wars precisely because they are our country's wars.

### **A War That Keeps Killing**

While the 2006 Lancet study of post-invasion mortality in Iraq is recognized by independent experts like the authors of PSR's Body Count report as the most accurate and reliable estimate of war deaths in any of our post-9/11 wars, it was conducted nearly 12 years ago, after only 39 months of war and occupation in Iraq. Tragically, that was nowhere near the end of the deadly and catastrophic results of the U.S. and U.K.'s historic act of aggression.

The 2006 Lancet study documented ever-increasing violence in occupied Iraq between 2003 and 2006, and many other metrics indicate that the escalation of violence in Iraq continued at least until the end of the U.S. "surge" in 2007. The tide of mutilated bodies of death squad victims overwhelming morgues in Baghdad did not peak until late 2006 with 1,800 bodies in July and 1,600 in October. Then there was a five-fold increase in the U.S. aerial bombardment of Iraq in 2007, and January 2008 was the heaviest month of U.S. bombing since the invasion in 2003.

This pattern gives credibility to a survey conducted by a respected British polling firm, Opinion Research Business (ORB), in June 2007, one year after the Lancet study, which estimated that 1,033,000 Iraqis had been killed by that time.

The Lancet study estimated that 328,000, or more than half of the violent deaths it counted, had occurred between May 2005 and May/June 2006. So, if the ORB's estimate was accurate, it would mean that about another 430,000 Iraqis were killed in the year after the 2006 Lancet study was conducted.

While the figure of a million people killed was shocking, the continuing increase in deaths revealed by the ORB survey was consistent with other measures of the violence of the occupation, which continued to increase in late 2006 and 2007.

Violence in Iraq decreased in 2008 and for several years after that. But the Special Police death squads recruited, trained and unleashed in Iraq by the Iraqi Interior Ministry, U.S. occupation forces and the CIA between 2004 and 2006 (rebranded as National Police after the exposure of their Al-Jadiriya torture center in 2005, then as Federal Police in 2009) continued their reign of terror against Sunni Arabs in the North and West of the country. This generated a resurgence of armed resistance and led to large swathes of Iraq accepting the rule of Islamic State in 2014 as an alternative to the relentless abuses of the corrupt, sectarian Iraqi government and its murderous death

squads.

U.K.-based Iraq Body Count (IBC) has compiled passive reports of civilian deaths in Iraq since the invasion, but it had only counted 43,394 deaths by June 2006 when the Lancet study found an estimated 601,000 violent deaths, a ratio of almost 14:1. Just Foreign Policy (JFP) in the U.S. created an "Iraqi Death Estimator" that updated the Lancet study's estimate by tracking deaths passively reported by Iraq Body Count and multiplying them by the ratio between the mortality study and IBC's passive reporting in 2006.

Since IBC is based mainly on reports in English-language media, it may have undercounted deaths even more after 2007 as the the Western media's interest in Iraq declined. On the other hand, as it became safer for government officials and journalists to travel around Iraq, its reporting may have improved. Or perhaps these and other factors balanced each other out, making JFP's Iraqi Death Estimator quite accurate. It may have become less accurate over time, and it was discontinued in September 2011. By that point, its estimate of Iraqi deaths stood at 1.46 million.

Another mortality study was published in the PLOS medical journal in 2013, covering the period up to 2011. Its lead author told National Geographic its estimate of about 500,000 dead in Iraq was "likely a low estimate." The study had a wider margin of error than the 2006 Lancet study, and the survey teams decided it was too dangerous to work in two of the 100 clusters that that were randomly chosen to survey.

The most serious problem with the PLOS study seems to be that so many houses were destroyed or abandoned and so many families wiped out or just disappeared, that nobody was left to report deaths in those families to the survey teams. At the extreme, houses or entire blocks where everyone had been killed or had fled were recorded as suffering no deaths at all.

After the extreme violence of 2006 and 2007 and several more years of lower level conflict, the effect of destruction and displacement on the PLOS study must have been much greater than in 2006. One in six households in Iraq was forced to move at least once between 2005 and 2010. The UNHCR registered 3 million refugees within or outside the country, but acknowledged that many more were unregistered. The authors added 55,000 deaths to their total to allow for 15% of 2 million refugee households losing one family member each, but they acknowledged that this was very conservative.

The authors of Body Count calculated that, if only 1% of houses surveyed were empty or destroyed and each of these households had lost two family members, this would have increased the PLOS study's overall mortality estimate

by more than 50%. Ignoring the two clusters that in effect represented the most devastated parts of Iraq must have had a similar effect. The cluster sample survey method relies on the effect of surveying a cross-section of different areas, from the worst affected to many that are relatively unscathed and report few or no deaths. Most violent deaths are often concentrated in a small number of clusters, making clusters like the two that were skipped disproportionately important to the accuracy of the final estimate.

Since 2011, a whole new phase of the war has taken place. There was an Arab Spring in Iraq in 2011, but it was ruthlessly suppressed, driving Fallujah and other cities once more into open rebellion. Several major cities fell to Islamic State in 2014, were besieged by Iraqi government forces and then largely destroyed by U.S.-led aerial bombardment and U.S., Iraqi and allied rocket and artillery fire. Iraq Body Count and the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq have collected passive reports of tens of thousands of civilians killed in this phase of the war.

Former Iraqi foreign minister Hoshyar Zebari told Patrick Cockburn of the U.K.'s Independent newspaper that Iraqi Kurdish intelligence reports estimated that at least 40,000 civilians were killed in the bombardment of Mosul alone. Zebari said that there were probably many more bodies buried in the rubble, implying that the reports he saw were of actual bodies found and buried up to that point.

A recent project to remove rubble and recover bodies in just one neighborhood of Mosul yielded another 3,353 bodies, of whom 20% appeared to be IS fighters and 80% were civilians. Another 11,000 people are still reported as missing by their families in Mosul.

IBC has now updated its death count for the period up to June 2006 to 52,209, reducing its ratio to violent deaths in the 2006 Lancet study to 11.5:1. If we apply the method of JFP's Iraqi Death Estimator from July 2007 to the present using that updated ratio, and add it to ORB's estimate of 1.03 million killed by June 2007, we can arrive at a current estimate of the total number of Iraqis killed since 2003. This cannot possibly be as accurate as a comprehensive new mortality study. But, in my judgment, this is the most accurate estimate we can make based on what we do know.

That gives us an estimate of 2.38 million Iraqis killed since 2003, as a result of the criminal American and British invasion of Iraq.

### **Minimum and Maximum Range**

With significant uncertainty underlying this estimate, it is also important to

calculate a minimum and a maximum number based on possible variations in the numbers involved.

To arrive at a minimum and maximum number of people that may have been killed in Iraq, we can start with the minimum and maximum numbers of violent deaths that were each established with 97.5% probability by the 2006 Lancet study, which were 426,000 and 794,000. ORB in 2007 gave a narrower range for its minimum and maximum based on its larger sample size, but ORB was not considered as rigorous as the Lancet study in other ways. If we apply the same margins as in the Lancet study to the ORB study's main estimate, that gives us a minimum of 730,000 and a maximum of 1.36 million people killed by June 2007.

To update those minimum and maximum figures to the present time using a variation of Just Foreign Policy's method, we must also allow for changes in the ratio between IBC's tally of deaths and the actual number of people killed. The ratios of the Lancet study's minimum and maximum figures to IBC's revised count for June 2006 are about 8:1 and 15:1 respectively.

These ratios are well within the ratios between comprehensive mortality studies and passive reporting found in other war zones around the world, which have varied from 5:1 to 20:1, as I noted earlier. But maybe IBC has counted more or less of the actual deaths since 2006 than it did before. It must surely have tried to keep improving the scope of its data collection. On the other hand, in the most recent phase of the war, many people were killed by U.S.-led bombing and shelling in areas ruled by Islamic State, where people were punished or even executed for trying to communicate with the outside world. So IBC's data for this period may be more fragmentary than ever.

To arrive at a realistic minimum and maximum, we must allow for both these possibilities. IBC's 8:1 ratio to the Lancet study's minimum number killed by 2006 may have fallen closer to the historic minimum ratio of 5:1, or its 15:1 ratio to the Lancet study's maximum number in 2006 may have risen closer to the historic maximum of 20:1. Using a ratio of 6.5:1 to arrive at the minimum number of deaths and 17.5:1 for the maximum allows for a lower minimum and a higher maximum than in 2006, without equaling the most extreme ratios ever seen in other conflicts. That gives us a minimum of 760,000 Iraqis killed since July 2007, and a maximum of 2.04 million.

Adding these figures to the minimums and maximums we calculated for the period up to June 2007 gives us total minimum and maximum figures for the entire period since the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Iraq in 2003. We can estimate that the number of Iraqis killed as a consequence of the illegal invasion of their country must be somewhere between 1.5 million and 3.4 million. As is generally the case with such statistical ranges, the actual number of people killed is likely to be

closer to our main estimate of 2.38 million than to either the minimum or maximum end of this range.

### **Call for a New Mortality Study in Iraq**

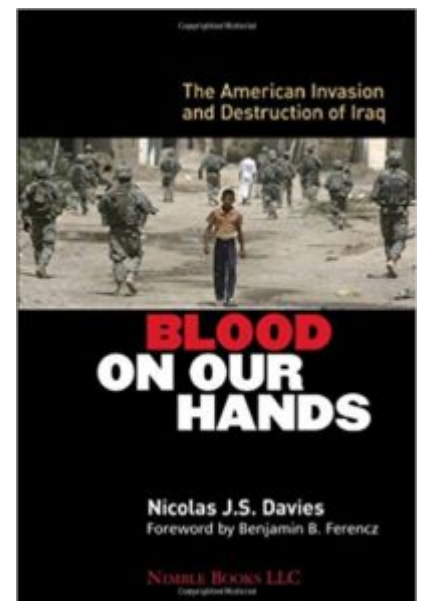
It is very important that the public health community provide the world with accurate and up-to-date mortality surveys of Iraq and other post-9/11 war zones.

A new mortality study for Iraq must find a way to survey even the most dangerous areas, and it must finally develop realistic procedures to estimate deaths in cases where entire families have been killed, or where houses or apartments have been destroyed or abandoned. This factor has been identified as a potential flaw in every mortality study in Iraq since 2004, and it is one that only becomes more significant as time passes. This cannot be ignored, and neither should compensating for it be left to guesswork.

Survey teams could compile records of empty and destroyed homes within the clusters they are surveying, and they could ask neighbors about empty or destroyed houses where large numbers of people or entire families may have been killed. They could also survey refugees and internally displaced people to estimate deaths among these populations.

Epidemiologists have overcome very serious dangers and difficulties to develop techniques to accurately measure the human cost of war. Their work must continue, and it must keep developing and improving. They must overcome powerful political pressures, including from the guilty parties responsible for the carnage in the first place, to politicize and discredit their incredibly difficult but noble and vital work.

On the 15th anniversary of the illegal invasion of Iraq, the Center for Constitutional Rights in the U.S. renewed its call for the U.S. to pay war reparations to the people of Iraq. This is one way countries that are guilty of aggression and other war crimes have traditionally fulfilled their collective responsibility for the death and destruction they have caused.





In *Blood On Our Hands*, I concluded my account of the U.S. war in Iraq with a similar call for war reparations, and for war crimes prosecutions of the senior U.S. and U.K. civilian and military officials responsible for the “supreme international crime” of aggression and other systematic war crimes in Iraq.

Coming to terms with the true scale of the crimes committed remains an urgent moral, political and legal imperative for the people of Iraq, the United States, the United Kingdom, and for the whole world. The world will never hold major American and British war criminals accountable for their crimes as long as the public does not understand the full scale and horror of what they have done. And the world will not know peace as long as the most powerful aggressors can count on impunity for “the supreme international crime.”

**Nicolas J.S. Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. He also wrote the chapter on “Obama at War” in *Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama’s First Term as a Progressive Leader*.**

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## The Iraq War and the Crisis of a Disintegrating Global Order

The following is a statement given by Inder Comar at a side event of the 37th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva, Switzerland, on March 15, 2018.

By Inder Comar

Democracy is dying. As we convene to remember the 15th year anniversary of the Iraq War, the fundamental lesson of that war is that our democratic norms are at grave risk when judges and courts fail to hold government leaders accountable for a patently illegal war.

It is impossible to understand the lack of accountability over the Iraq War without understanding the defining crisis of our time. And that is the crisis of Empire; of a disintegrating global order where the rule of law is now being replaced with the rule of might.

Aggression: the supreme international crime.

A crime that was banned at Nuremberg.

A crime which sent Nazi leaders to the gallows.

The prohibition against aggression is a *jus cogens* norm of international law, meaning a norm from which no derogation is permitted, and which states are obligated to uphold.

There is overwhelming legal consensus that the United States and the United Kingdom committed the crime of aggression when they launched their invasion in 2003. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan concluded that the US-led war was “illegal” in 2004 and in contravention of the UN Charter.

The Charter only allows acts of violence against another State under two circumstances. The first is in times of self-defense. The second is with explicit approval from the Security Council. Neither circumstance applied to the Iraq War.

There was no Security Council resolution that authorized the war. Language in Resolution 1441, passed in November 2002, threatening Iraq with “serious consequences” for failure to disarm was not enough.

The U.S. and the U.K. knew they needed a specific Security Council resolution to authorize an invasion. This is plainly evidenced by their frantic attempts to obtain a second resolution immediately prior to the war. That effort was abandoned when it became clear that a second resolution would be vetoed. The U.S. and the U.K. invaded Iraq anyway.

Where would we be if all States acted like this? What would be the purpose of the resolution process? What would be the purpose of the U.N.?

It is also clear the war was not conducted in self-defense. Self-defense is generally an immediate action against an imminent aggression. Iraq, which had been subject to more than a decade of crippling international sanctions, was not in any position to invade the strongest country on Earth. Iraq had no connection to al Qaeda, and had disarmed its weapons program—two truths the Bush Administration did not want to believe, and which they tried to cover up as they pushed for war.

In the 15 years since the U.S.-led invasion, there has been only one serious attempt to hold the responsible leaders accountable for this “supreme international crime.” Private Iraqi civilians who were affected by the war tried to hold Bush-era officials accountable in U.S. courts under a theory of aggression.

However, in 2017 a court of appeals ruled in the case *Saleh v. Bush* that former President Bush and other high officials were immune from civil investigation.

The appellate court relied upon a domestic law that grants U.S. officials immunity for alleged crimes, including heinous international crimes.

This shows that, in the United States today, international legal obligations are inferior to the protection of government leaders, even when those leaders have committed grave offenses against others.

The Coalition also committed numerous other war crimes during the Iraq War that I would like to address:

- o First, the Member States of the Coalition directed attacks against civilians who were not taking part in hostilities—a direct breach of the Geneva Conventions.

- o Second, human rights organizations, news agencies, and official military inquiries found that U.S.-operated detention facilities used various forms of torture during the occupation.

§ For instance, the torture at Abu Ghraib prison included common physical abuse like punching, slapping, and kicking detainees, as well as arranging naked male detainees in a pile and then jumping on them.

§ There is a documented history of sexual abuse and rape at the prison.

These acts of torture are grave breaches under the Geneva Conventions. They are war crimes and should be addressed as such.

The U.S. has never prosecuted any high-ranking government employee for these war crimes, including for torture. And in light of that 2017 judgment in *Saleh v. Bush* there is virtually no chance that a civil inquiry will produce restitution for victims, or change anyone's behavior in high office. In fact, just this week, the woman who helped oversee the Bush-era torture program has been rewarded for her complicity and is now the nominee to run the Central Intelligence Agency.

A world in which government officials are immune from judicial scrutiny is a world of despotism and tyranny. The essence of the rule of law is that no one is above the law; and that the actions of all people, including chief executives, can be scrutinized by a judge.

Today the rule of law, everywhere, is in grave danger. And we are dangerously close to living in a world where imperial norms are ascendant—even in Western countries.

Fifteen years after the U.S. invasion, what chills me the most has been the rapid acceptance and glorification of Empire in the United States.

In matters of foreign policy, and increasingly, in matters of domestic policy, the American president is totally unaccountable, immune from inquiry, and hostile to inalienable freedoms.

Today, President Trump claims the authority and the power:

- To invade any country at will, or destroy it completely with nuclear weapons;
- To assassinate any person with a robotic drone;
- To gather and collect any and all electronic communications;
- To hold any suspected terrorist indefinitely, without charge, in Guantanamo Bay;
- And to disregard preexisting laws, constitutional rights or judicial review.

The powers of the American president today are greater than that of any English king, or any Roman emperor.

Like the ancient Romans, who were fed a steady diet of bread and circus, modern Americans are subject to some of the most pernicious forms of propaganda ever developed. Concentrated media power has resulted in corporate news programming which demonizes Muslims, foreigners, and people of color.

Meanwhile, concentrated economic power has resulted in the greatest systemic inequality of wealth in American history.

And concentrated political power has resulted in a neo-fascist and openly racist Republican Party, and a neo-liberal and systemically racist Democratic Party.

More than ever, Americans accept the slaughter of people in the Middle East in the name of their security. In Bagram, Guantanamo, and elsewhere people are indefinitely detained, without trial, and are subjected to torture.

Imperial garrisons encircle our planet with more than 800 American military bases in 80 countries on every major continent, from Diego Garcia to Okinawa to Rammstein to Samoa to the Azores. Just in the last month, the American Government announced its plans to develop a new class of nuclear weapons, furthering an arms race with the Russians, the Chinese and the North Koreans. It also seeks a 13% increase in its arms budget from 2017.

Not since Rome has the world borne witness to so few controlling so many.

But, "these violent delights have violent ends." American society—my society—is ever more crippled by moral, ethical and humanitarian crises that routinely shock visitors from other countries.

Students are drowning in student debt, unable to start their careers or build families.

Lack of affordable health care and an addiction crisis is dragging American life expectancy downward. America's obsession with war has now turned inward, as a gun violence crisis results in the weekly sacrifice of children, to the cult of the Second Amendment.

De facto apartheid keeps power in the hands of a privileged white elite, who have destroyed labor unions, created enemies out of Muslims and blacks, have crippled millions of people into lives of debt servitude and destitution, and who buy and sell their favored elected officials by caprice and whim.

The country that produced the Iraq War 15 years ago is in far worse shape today.

There are three important reasons we need to urgently create accountability for the Iraq War.

First, we must restore an international order based on the rule of law.

Second, we must confront the bias of international law—holding only poor and non-Western countries liable for international crimes, while ignoring the crimes of Western powers. This bias is underscored and exacerbated if the international community declines to investigate and prosecute the Coalition's crimes in Iraq.

Third, we must provide justice to the victims of the Iraq War.

These three reasons are of course related.

The United Nations was manipulated as a tool to acquire wider support for the invasion—most prominently, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's 2003 speech falsely claimed facts about the Iraqi weapons program. In so doing, the United States abused the United Nations, turning these halls into a house of lies — lies spread to support the annihilation of another member state.

This abuse of the United Nations to further a perverse agenda—an agenda that stands in direct contradiction to the purpose of the United Nations—makes it essential to restore accountability.

Without accountability, we invite future abuse of this precious international system. And we exacerbate the divisions in our world where non-Western crimes are treated with far more scrutiny than those committed by Western Powers. A just world order depends on consistent accountability, for all nations, for war crimes and the crime of aggression. International law needs to be applied equally to all nations.

Without accountability, we leave Iraqi victims to fend for themselves. We fail them—as lawyers, as diplomats, and as ethical beings.

There is a choice facing our species at this very moment. Humor me when I tell you that I have glimpsed our future. And it is a future that is dark.

I foresee a world beset by environmental problems, with numerous species going extinct, with plastic choking our waterways and forests, and with climate change creating global chaos for which our world is simply not prepared.

I foresee displacement and refugee crises, as people flee their homes in the wake of rising seas, more powerful storms, and historic heat waves and droughts—people movements that will make the Syrian crisis seem like a child's game.

I foresee a world where people, devastated by economic despair, turn to demagogues and authoritarians—as they are already doing—as ways of dealing with the desiccation of their ways of life.

I foresee a world where our democratic freedoms, already withering, are replaced with stark imperial values.

But this does not have to be our future.

There is another way.

And that way begins here, today, with each of us. It begins with imagining a world where the rule of law and democracy are the fundamental building blocks of our shared human rights, our shared freedoms, and our shared civilization.

It begins with us realizing that we deserve to live in a better world than one in which leaders who commit grave international crimes can walk free, while the victims of those outrageous acts are forced to recover in the solitude and pain of trauma.

There is a choice we face—a choice between civilization and chaos.

The Iraq War was the gravest international crime since the Second World War. It was a malicious act committed by leaders of the most powerful country in history, with the full resources of a multi-trillion dollar economy.

We cannot build a civilized future for ourselves and for our descendants unless we build a robust international legal order.

The people who commandeered my country and my government must be held to account before a judge—so that they know, and others may know, that the supreme crime

cannot go unpunished.

Help me build that future. Help me in our shared quest for a civilized Earth.

I call today for the creation of an independent international tribunal, with jurisdiction to investigate and indict the British and American leaders who led the invasion, for the crime of aggression, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

I call for this tribunal to analyze, impartially, once and for all, the issue of immunity as it relates to grave international crimes.

I call for due process for the accused, that they be advised of the charges against them and be given access to counsel so that they may mount a defense. If convicted, I call for them to serve out their sentences in humane conditions, where they can reflect on what they have done. I call on the tribunal to order restitution to the millions of victims who suffered on account of their conduct.

I call for every nation concerned with justice to open their courts to claims of aggression on the basis of universal jurisdiction. Those who commit aggression, like those who commit torture, slavery, and piracy, are *hostis humani generis* – enemies of humanity, who may be prosecuted and held to account in the court of any civilized country.

The hope of our shared civilization rests on a renewed commitment to the United Nations and its vision of collective security. World leaders must settle their disputes through dialogue.

Thus, I urge the Human Rights Council to appoint a Special Rapporteur for the human rights situation in Iraq. I urge the United Nations to condemn illegal acts of aggression, torture and mass killings, including those committed by powerful countries like the United States.

And I ask my countrymen and women, in America, to walk back from the abyss of Empire. We have a special duty to hold our leaders responsible, to make redress to the Iraqi people, and to promote and sustain the global peace.

This is the way back to civilization itself, towards a deep and fulfilling justice that enables all of us to live out our lives in dignity and in peace. This is a future worth imagining and a future worth creating. It starts with justice for Iraq.

Thank you.

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# Senate Votes to Continue Yemen Devastation

On Tuesday, the Senate voted down a resolution that would have withdrawn US support for the Saudi-led war on Yemen, choosing instead to continue to illegally assist what the UN has called “the world’s largest humanitarian crisis,” reports Dennis J. Bernstein and Shireen Al-Adeimi in this interview.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

Shireen Al-Adeimi is a doctoral candidate at Harvard University. But she is having a hard time focusing on her studies, when friends and family back home in Yemen are under violent attack by the heavily armed, US-backed Saudi forces, with many going hungry as a result of the Saudi blockade.

Al-Adeimi said on Tuesday, March 20, “This month marks the third anniversary of the U.S.-backed, Saudi-led war on Yemen. Despite the dire humanitarian crisis, however, the United States continues to sell arms to the Saudis and provide them with military support.”

Senators Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Mike Lee (R-Ut.), and Chris Murphy (D-Ct.) had introduced a bill that aimed to force a withdrawal of the United States from the Saudi-led war, based on violations of the War Powers Act. But the Bill, [Senate Joint Resolution 54](#), cosponsored by 10 senators, was voted down 55-44 on Tuesday.

Of course it was no surprise, given the amount of lobbying money spent by the Saudis to buy congressional silence and support. The bill also was met with fierce opposition by various Trump administration officials.

The American Conservative Magazine reported that “the media has been laying out the red carpet for Crown Prince bin Salman in Washington. What the establishment press won’t tell you is that no less than 25 American lobbying firms worked for the Saudi Arabian government in 2017 to the tune of \$16 million, to burnish their image, manage the message, and get massive military contracts for the weapons of war that are now being used to kill, maim and slowly starve millions of civilians in Yemen today.”

I spoke with Shireen Al-Adeimi on Tuesday, March 20, directly following the vote by Congress to continue aid for the US-supported, Saudi-led slaughter.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Shireen, what is your response to the Senate voting to



continue aid to the Saudis?

**Shireen Al-Adeimi:** It is very disappointing because it ensures that millions more Yemenis will continue to suffer. On average, 130 children die every day in Yemen due to malnutrition and disease caused by the Saudi-led blockade. Many more will die because of US bombs which are dropped from Saudi jets. People continue to die for no reason at all.

**DB:** Could you give us a little background?

**SAA:** The Saudis began bombing Yemen in March, 2015. Right now, some 80% of a population of 24 million people are in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

Yemen is experiencing the world's worst cholera outbreak in modern history, with over 1 million cases. There is a severe water crisis affecting 15 million people in Yemen.

Hundreds of thousands have died of malnutrition and disease because Saudi Arabia is not only bombing Yemen but is also blockading Yemen by land, sea and air, ensuring that no aid or medicine can come into the country. The Saudis have created what the UN calls "the worst humanitarian crisis on earth today."

**DB:** Could you describe the United States' role in all of this?

**SAA:** In January, the US Army published an article detailing their support for the Saudis, including training Saudi soldiers, advising military personnel, maintaining and upgrading vehicles and aircraft, providing courses on communication and navigation, and providing Saudi jets with mid-air refueling.

This is in addition to the billions in weapon sales between the US and Saudi Arabia every year.

The bottom line is that the United States is benefiting from this relationship with the Saudis and it doesn't seem to matter that this has caused such a humanitarian toll in the process. Estimates are that over 75% of the targets in Yemen have been civilian targets.

**DB:** Is there a notable difference between the policies of the last administration and those of the Trump administration?

**SAA:** Absolutely not. This began under the Obama administration, which sold billions in weapons to the Saudis and provided them with the logistical services I just mentioned. The Trump policy in Yemen is basically on autopilot, following blindly what the Obama administration did. This is very much a bipartisan effort.

**DB:** Tell us more about how this is evolving on the ground.

**SAA:** People have lost their jobs. There is no future to look forward to.

People who were once wealthy or middle-class are now resorting to begging on the streets and selling their possessions. Three million are displaced internally because there is nowhere to go with the blockade in place. People can't find water, they can't find food, they can't find medicine or fuel. They can't decide whether to take a sick child to the hospital or provide them with food. It is as bad as it can get.

**DB:** The Saudi prince was just in D.C. He said that he really feels for the people of Yemen and that he is working on easing the blockade because he understands how devastating it has been. What is your response to that?

**SAA:** It is a complete fabrication. They are the ones imposing the blockade, they are the ones bombing a sovereign country. They have no business in Yemen at all. And then to claim that it is the Houthis who are preventing food and medicine from coming into the country is completely absurd. In fact, the Saudis have acknowledged that they are using starvation as a weapon.

They have already bombed most hospitals in Yemen. Four times they bombed Doctors without Borders hospitals. So far they have caused the death of at least 10,000 civilians through airstrikes and tens of thousands more through disease and malnutrition caused by the blockade.

**DB:** The US media has once again dropped the ball.

**SAA:** MSNBC reported on Yemen once in 2017 and not once since then. There is no reporting on the humanitarian crisis, on the resolutions before Congress. When it comes to the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia, people just don't want to go there.

**DB:** What are human rights organizations saying about the potential for famine?

**SAA:** The UN has designated Yemen a level 3 for famine out of a range of 1 to 4, but when you have people already dying of starvation it doesn't matter much what level they establish. In 2015, 15,000 children died of hunger and disease in Yemen and a similar number in 2016. We are not at the brink of famine, we are already there. People are dying of starvation every day.

**DB:** Is it possible to get through to folks on the ground there? Is there outreach from the country for support?

**SAA:** Organizations such as Oxfam and Save the Children do have their ships there and they do bring in aid and food to the 7 million people who depend on it every day. But even that flow is obstructed by the Saudis. The cost of fuel has increased 200%. Family members like myself are sending cash, as are

organizations like Doctors without Borders, to keep people employed and afloat. Kids are dying of diseases that are completely preventable. No one has to die from cholera.

**DB:** How do you explain these congress people who support this ongoing war and famine in Yemen? Are they owned by the weapons manufacturers?

**SAA:** Some claim that it protects Saudi interests and prevents Iran from spreading its tentacles in the region. But they undoubtedly have contact to the Saudis and to the weapons manufacturers who want to maintain their interests in Saudi Arabia.

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## Calling for Arms Talks with Russia, is the U.S. Raising a White Flag?

Raising a white flag is an internationally recognized sign of truce and request for negotiation, which may be what the U.S. is doing in its official response to Putin’s announcements on nuclear parity with the United States, Gilbert Doctorow explains.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Vladimir Putin’s presentation of Russia’s new weapons systems during his address to the Federal Assembly on March 1 seems to have finally elicited the desired response from its target audience in Washington, D.C. In that presentation, Putin spoke about strategic weapons systems employing cutting-edge technology that, he claimed, is more than a decade ahead of U.S. and other competition.

He scored a direct hit in the Pentagon, where senior generals were left dumbfounded. But, as is normally the case, when these gentlemen need time to collect their wits, we heard first only denial: that the Russians were bluffing, that they really have nothing ready, that these are only projects, and that the U.S. already has all of the same, but is holding it back in reserve.

Of course, not everyone among the U.S. political elite bought into this stop-gap response.

On March 8, Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), and Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) wrote an open letter to then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson urging him to send a delegation to open arms control talks with the Russians "as soon as possible."

This was an improbable demarche that even their supporters in the progressive camp, let alone mainstream Democrats, found hard to believe. Feinstein and Sanders have been vocal critics of Russia and were actively promoting the Trump-Russia collusion fairy tale in recent months. They were among those who had hissed at the pictures of Jeff Sessions, not yet Attorney General, shaking hands and smiling with Russian Ambassador Kislyak. Now they were calling for revival of arms control talks with... the Russians.

This was a story that died before publication everywhere except in Russia, where it had been a featured news item within hours of the letter's release. The American and world public knew nothing about it, although the letter was there for the reading on the home pages of the Senate websites of the respective co-authors. The American and world public know nothing about that letter today, nearly two weeks after its release, apart from readers of Consortium who were properly informed at the time.

In the meantime, the U.S. propaganda machine moved into high gear, producing diversionary issues to draw the attention of the U.S. public away from what had been the subject of Putin's speech of March 1.

And so we have been getting saturation news coverage of the "Skripal nerve gas attack," of the alleged cyber attack on the US energy grid and water systems. Both are pure "Russians did it" stories. And we read about the repositioning of U.S. naval forces in the Mediterranean to within cruise-missile range of Damascus for a possible punitive blow in response to a chemical attack on civilians by Assad's regime that still has not happened, all with intent to humiliate Assad's backers, the Russians.

Now, at last, after the denial and the diversion, the truth begins to emerge. The President of the United States himself is the bearer of a message that, given American hubris, amounts to the raising of a white flag.

We find the following on page one of the *New York Times* describing Trump's remarks about his phone call to congratulate Vladimir Putin on his electoral victory: "We had a very good call," the *Times* quotes Trump as saying. "We will probably be meeting in the not-too distant future to discuss the arms race, which is getting out of control."

The *Financial Times* has this to say on page one: "Donald Trump said he wanted to

meet Russian president Vladimir Putin to discuss an arms race that was 'getting out of control' and other issues over which the countries remain at loggersheads. 'Being in an arms race is not a great thing,' the US president said on Tuesday, adding that he would probably meet his Russian counterpart in the 'not too distant future'."

In other words, the re-instatement of Russian strategic parity with the United States appears to be making itself felt (see [Ray McGovern article](#)). But of course, one has to be an expert in reading between the lines to parse from Trump's statement the depth of concern about new Russian military potential.

It is a safe assumption that now arms talks with the Russians will begin soon. But the American public should be forewarned that the scope of the discussions will surely be much greater than that of the so-called reset under Barack Obama, which played to an American, not a Russian wish list of cutting warheads. This broader agenda will have to take in Russian concerns about the U.S. global anti-missile system. Should there be agreement, the change in approach to arms control will not come from U.S. charity, but out of U.S. fear.

Did Donald Trump raise the white flag and call for negotiations on a whim? Did he consult with his military advisers?

It is scarcely credible that this president came to the conclusion about the need to halt the arms race on his own or that he dared raise such an inflammatory subject without having the firm backing of Pentagon specialists who evaluated rationally and expertly where we now stand in strategic security with the Russians. No one will say this, but it is inescapable.

To put the present situation in an historical context: in the past year or two, the United States and Russia have reached a level of confrontation that approaches that of the Cuban Missile Crisis. That crisis was resolved by mutual retreats on positioning of nuclear capable missiles near the borders of the other side. The mutuality of the solution was not announced to the American public until decades later, when the withdrawal of U.S. missiles from Turkey was made public.

This time, the mutuality of major concessions will necessarily be part of the presentation of any solution reached to the global community. Vladimir Putin will not go the way of Nikita Khrushchev, who paid for his "concession" to the Americans by a palace coup at home.

**Gilbert Doctorow is an independent political analyst based in Brussels. His latest book, *Does the United States Have a Future?* was published in October 2017. Both paperback and e-book versions are available for purchase on**

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