

Merger Mania in the Military Industry

Lockheed Martin's government contracts rival the operating budget of the State Department, writes William D. Hartung. And now it's about to have company.

By [William D. Hartung](#)

[TomDispatch.com](#)



When, in his [farewell address](#) in 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of the dangers of the “unwarranted influence” wielded by the “military-industrial complex,” he could never have dreamed of an arms-making corporation of the size and political clout of Lockheed Martin. In a good year, it now receives up to [\\$50 billion](#) in government contracts, a sum larger than the operating [budget](#) of the State Department. And now it's about to have company.

Raytheon, already one of the [top five](#) U.S. defense contractors, is planning to [merge](#) with United Technologies. That company is a major contractor in its own right, producing, among other things, the [engine](#) for the F-35 combat aircraft, the [most expensive](#) Pentagon weapons program ever. The [new firm](#) will be second only to Lockheed Martin when it comes to consuming your tax dollars – and it may end up even more powerful politically, thanks to President Donald Trump's fondness for [hiring](#) arms industry executives to run the national security state.

Just as Boeing [benefited](#) from its former Senior Vice President Patrick Shanahan's stint as acting secretary of defense, so Raytheon is likely to cash in on

the nomination of its former top lobbyist, Mike Esper, as his successor. Esper's elevation comes shortly after another former Raytheon lobbyist, Charles Faulkner, left the State Department amid charges that he had improperly influenced decisions to sell Raytheon-produced guided bombs to Saudi Arabia for its brutal air war in Yemen. John Rood, third-in-charge at the Pentagon, has worked for both Lockheed Martin *and* Raytheon, while Ryan McCarthy, Mike Esper's replacement as secretary of the Army, worked for Lockheed on the F-35, which the Project on Government Oversight (POGO) has determined may never be ready for combat.

And so it goes. There was a time when Donald Trump was enamored of "his" generals – Secretary of Defense James Mattis (a former board member of the weapons-maker General Dynamics), National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, and White House Chief of Staff John Kelly. Now, he seems to have a crush on personnel from the industrial side of the military-industrial complex.

As POGO's research has demonstrated, the infamous "revolving door" that deposits defense executives like Esper in top national security posts swings both ways. The group estimates that, in 2018 alone, 645 senior government officials – mostly from the Pentagon, the uniformed military, and Capitol Hill – went to work as executives, consultants, or board members of one of the top 20 defense contractors.

Fifty years ago, Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire identified the problem when he noted that:



“the movement of high ranking military officers into jobs with defense contractors and the reverse movement of top executives in major defense contractors into high Pentagon jobs is solid evidence of the military-industrial complex in operation. It is a real threat to the public interest because it increases the chances of abuse... How hard a bargain will officers involved in procurement planning or specifications drive when they are one or two years away from retirement and have the example to look at of over 2,000 fellow officers doing well on the outside after retirement?”

In other words, that revolving door and the problems that go with it are anything but new. Right now, however, it seems to be spinning faster than ever – and mergers such as Raytheon-United Technologies are only likely to feed the phenomenon.

The Last Supper

The merger of Raytheon and United Technologies should bring back memories of the merger boom of the 1990s, when Lockheed combined with Martin Marietta to form Lockheed Martin, Northrop and Grumman formed Northrop Grumman, and Boeing absorbed rival military aircraft manufacturer McDonnell Douglas. And it wasn't just a matter of big firms pairing up either. Lockheed Martin itself was the product of mergers and acquisitions involving nearly two dozen companies – distinctly a tale of big fish chowing down on little fish. The consolidation of the arms industry in those years was strongly encouraged by Clinton administration Secretary of Defense William Perry, who held a dinner with defense

executives that was later dubbed "the last supper." There, he reportedly told the assembled corporate officials that a third of them would be out of business in five years if they didn't merge with one of their cohorts.

The Clinton administration's encouragement of defense industry mergers would prove anything but rhetorical. It would, for instance, provide tens of millions of dollars in merger subsidies to pay for the closing of plants, the moving of equipment, and other necessities. It even picked up part of the tab for the golden parachutes given defense executives and corporate board members ousted in those deals.

The most egregious case was surely that of Norman Augustine. The CEO of Martin Marietta, he would actually take over at the helm of the even more powerful newly created Lockheed Martin. In the process, he received \$8.2 million in payments, technically for leaving his post as head of Martin Marietta. U.S. taxpayers would cover more than a third of his windfall. Then, a congressman who has only gained stature in recent years, Representative Bernie Sanders (I-VT), began to fight back against those merger subsidies. He dubbed them "payoffs for layoffs" because executives got government-funded bailouts, while an estimated 19,000 workers were laid off in the Lockheed Martin merger alone with no particular taxpayer support. Sanders was actually able to shepherd through legislation that clawed back some, but not all, of those merger subsidies.

According to one argument in favor of the merger binge then, by closing half-empty factories, the new firms could charge less overhead and taxpayers would benefit. Well, dream on.

This never came near happening, because the newly merged industrial behemoths turned out to have even greater bargaining power over the Pentagon and Congress than the unmerged companies that preceded them.

Draw your own conclusions about what's likely to happen in this next round of mergers, since cost overruns and lucrative contracts continue apace. Despite this dismal record, Raytheon CEO Thomas Kennedy claims that the new corporate pairing will – you guessed it! – save the taxpayers money. Don't hold your breath.

Influence on Steroids

While Trump briefly expressed reservations about the Raytheon-United Technologies merger and a few members of Congress struck notes of caution, it has been welcomed eagerly on Wall Street. Among the reasons given: the fact that the two companies generally make different products, so their union shouldn't reduce competition in any specific sector of defense production. It has also been claimed that the new combo, to be known as Raytheon Technologies, will have more funds available for research and development on the weapons of the future.

But focusing on such concerns misses the big picture. Raytheon Technologies will have more money to make campaign contributions, more money to hire lobbyists, and more production sites that can be used as leverage over members of Congress loathe to oppose spending on weapons produced in their states or districts. The classic example of this phenomenon: the F-35 program, which Lockheed Martin claims produces 125,000 jobs spread over 46 states.

When I took a careful look at the company's estimates, I found that they were claiming approximately twice as many jobs as that weapons system was actually creating. In fact, more than half of F-35-related employment was in just two states, California and Texas (though many other states did have modest numbers of F-35 jobs). Even if Lockheed Martin's figures are exaggerated, however, there's no question that spreading defense jobs around the country gives weapons manufacturers unparalleled influence over key members of Congress, much to their benefit when Pentagon budget time rolls around. In fact, it's a commonplace for Congress to fund more F-35s, F-18s, and similar weapons systems than the Pentagon even asks for. So much for Congressional oversight.

Theoretically, incoming defense secretary Mike Esper will have to recuse himself from major decisions involving his former company. Among them, whether to continue selling Raytheon-produced precision-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for their devastating air war in Yemen that has killed remarkable numbers of civilians.

No worries. Trump himself is the biggest booster in living memory of corporate arms sales and Saudi Arabia is far and away his favorite customer. The Senate recently voted down a package of "emergency" arms sales to the Saudis and the UAE that included thousands of Raytheon Paveway munitions, the weapon of choice in that Yemeni air campaign. A similar vote must now take place in the House, but even if it, too, passes, Congress will need to override a virtually guaranteed Trump veto of the bill.

The Raytheon-United Technologies merger will further implicate the new firm in Yemeni developments because the Pratt and Whitney division of United Technologies makes the engine for Saudi Arabia's key F-15S combat aircraft, a mainstay of the air war there. Not only will Raytheon Technologies profit from such engine sales, but that company's technicians are likely to help maintain the Saudi air force, thereby enabling it to fly yet more bombing missions more often.

When pressed, Raytheon officials argue that, in enabling mass slaughter, they are simply following U.S. government policy. This ignores the fact that Raytheon and other weapons contractors spend tens of millions of dollars a year on lobbyists, political contributions, and other forms of influence peddling trying to shape U.S. policies on arms exports and weapons procurement. They are, in other words, anything but passive recipients of edicts handed down from Washington.

As Raytheon chief financial officer Toby O'Brien put it in a call to investors that came after the murder of *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi, "We continue to be aligned with the administration's policies, and we intend to honor our commitments." Lockheed Martin CEO Marillyn Hewson made a similar point, asserting that "most of these agreements that we have are government-to-government purchases, so anything that we do has to follow strictly the regulations of the U.S. government... Beyond that, we'll just work with the U.S. government as they are continuing their relationship with [the Saudis]."

How Powerful Are the Military-Industrial Combines?

When it comes to lobbying the Pentagon and Congress, size matters. Major firms like Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Raytheon can point to the jobs they and their subcontractors provide in dozens of states and scores of Congressional districts to keep members of Congress in line who might otherwise question or even oppose the tens of billions of dollars in government funding the companies receive annually.

Raytheon – its motto: “Customer Success Is Our Mission” – has primary operations in 16 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, and Virginia. That translates into a lot of leverage over key members of Congress and it doesn’t even count states where the company has major subcontractors. The addition of United Technologies will reinforce the new company’s presence in a number of those states, while adding Connecticut, Iowa, New York, and North Carolina (in other words, at least 20 states in all).

Meanwhile, if the merger is approved, the future Raytheon Technologies will be greasing the wheels of its next arms contracts by relying on nearly four dozen former government officials the two separate companies hired as lobbyists, executives, and board members in 2018 alone. Add to that the \$6.4 million in campaign contributions and \$20 million in lobbying expenses Raytheon clocked during the last two election cycles and the outlines of its growing influence begin to become clearer. Then, add as well the \$2.9 million in campaign contributions and \$40 million in lobbying

expenses racked up by its merger partner United Technologies and you have a lobbying powerhouse rivaled only by Lockheed Martin, the world's largest defense conglomerate.

Eisenhower's proposed counterweight to the power of the military-industrial complex was to be "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry." And there are signs that significant numbers of individuals and organizations are beginning to pay more attention to the machinations of the arms lobby. My own outfit, the Center for International Policy, has launched a Sustainable Defense Task Force composed of former military officers and Pentagon officials, White House and congressional budget experts, and research staffers from progressive and good-government groups. It has already crafted a plan that would cut \$1.2 trillion from the Pentagon budget over the next decade, while improving U.S. security by avoiding unnecessary wars, eliminating waste, and scaling back a Pentagon nuclear-weapons buildup slated to cost \$1.5 trillion or more over the next three decades.

The Poor People's Campaign, backed by research conducted by the National Priorities Project of the Institute for Policy Studies, is calling for a one-year \$350 billion cut in Pentagon expenditures. And a new network called "Put People Over the Pentagon" has brought together more than 20 progressive organizations to press presidential candidates to cut \$200 billion annually from the Department of Defense's bloated budget. Participants in the network include Public Citizen, Moveon.org, Indivisible, Win Without War, 350.org, Friends of the Earth, and United We Dream, many of them organizations that had not, in past years, made

reducing the Pentagon budget a priority.

Raytheon and its arms industry allies won't sit still in the face of such proposals, but at least the days of unquestioned and unchallenged corporate greed in the ever-merging (but also ever-expanding) arms industry may be coming to an end. The United States has paid an exorbitantly high price in blood and treasure, as have countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, for letting the military-industrial complex steer the American ship of state through this century so far. It's long past time for a reckoning.

William D. Hartung, a [TomDispatch regular](#), is the director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy and the author of "[Prophets of War: Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military-Industrial Complex](#)."

This article is from [TomDispatch.com](#).

Trump Presides Over Dwindling Greatness

Russia and China are forging stronger ties, gaining ground on the U.S. and rattling Washington, writes Dilip Hiro.

By [Dilip Hiro](#)

[TomDispatch.com](#)



President Donald Trump was partly voted into office by Americans who felt that the self-proclaimed greatest power on Earth was actually in decline – and they weren't wrong. Trump is

capable of tweeting many things, but none of those tweets will stop that process of decline, nor will a trade war with a rising China or fierce oil sanctions on Iran.

You could feel this recently, even in the case of the increasingly pressured Iranians. There, with a single pinprick, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei effectively punctured Trump's MAGA balloon and reminded many that, however powerful the U.S. still was, people in other countries were beginning to look at America differently at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Following a meeting in Tehran with visiting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who brought a message from Trump urging the start of U.S.-Iranian negotiations, Khamenei tweeted, "We have no doubt in [Abe's] goodwill and seriousness; but regarding what you mentioned from [the] U.S. president, I don't consider Trump as a person deserving to exchange messages with, and I have no answer for him, nor will I respond to him in the future." He then added: "We believe that our problems will not be solved by negotiating with the U.S., and no free nation would ever accept negotiations under pressure."

????????? ?????????? ????? ?????? ????? ????? ??? ?????????? ?????????? ??? ?? ????? ?? ???
????? ??? ????? ??? ????? ????? ?????????? ?????????? ????? ?????? ??? ??? ?????? ?? ??????
pic.twitter.com/X3WzrKrH0a .?????

– ?????????? ?????????? (@ar_khamenei) [June 13, 2019](#)

A flustered Trump was reduced to briefly tweeting: "I personally feel that it is too soon to even think about making a deal. They are not ready, and neither are we!"

While I very much appreciate P.M. Abe going to Iran to meet with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, I personally feel that it is too soon to even think about making a deal. They are not ready, and neither are we!

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) June 13, 2019

And soon after, the president halted at the last minute, in a distinctly humiliating retreat, U.S. air strikes on Iranian missile sites that would undoubtedly have created yet more insoluble problems for Washington across the Greater Middle East.

Keep in mind that, globally, before the ayatollah's put-down, the Trump administration had already had two abject foreign policy failures: the collapse of the president's Hanoi summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (followed by that regime's provocative firing of several missiles over the Sea of Japan) and a bungled attempt to overthrow the regime of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

America's Global Standing at a Record Low

What's great or small can be defined in absolute or relative terms. America's "greatness" (or "exceptional" or "indispensable" nature) – much lauded in Washington before the Trump era – should certainly be judged against the economic progress made by China in those same years and against Russia's advances in the latest high-tech weaponry. Another way of assessing the nature of that "greatness" and what to make of it would be through polls of how foreigners view the United States.

Take, for instance, a survey released by the Pew Research Group in February 2019. Forty-five percent of respondents in

26 nations with large populations felt that American power and influence posed “a major threat to our country,” while 36 percent offered the same response on Russia, and 35 percent on China. To put that in perspective, in 2013, during the presidency of Barack Obama, only 25 percent of global respondents held such a negative view of the U.S., while reactions to China remained essentially the same. Or just consider the most powerful country in Europe, Germany. Between 2013 and 2018, Germans who considered American power and influence a greater threat than that of China or Russia leapt from 19 percent to 49 percent. (Figures for France were similar.)

As for Trump, only 27 percent of global respondents had confidence in him to do the right thing in world affairs, while 70 feared he would not. In Mexico, you undoubtedly won’t be surprised to learn, confidence in his leadership was at a derisory 6 percent. In 17 of the surveyed countries, people who lacked confidence in him were also significantly more likely to consider the U.S. the world’s top threat, a phenomenon most pronounced among traditional Washington allies like Canada, Great Britain, and Australia.

China’s Expanding Global Footprint

While 39 percent of Pew respondents in that poll still rated the U.S. as the globe’s leading economic power, 34 percent opted for China. Meanwhile, China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013 to link the infrastructure and trade of much of Southeast Asia, Eurasia, and the Horn of Africa to China (at an estimated cost of \$4 trillion) and to be funded by diverse sources, is going from strength to

strength.

One way to measure this: the number of dignitaries attending the biennial BRI Forum in Beijing. The first of those gatherings in May 2017 attracted 28 heads of state and representatives from 100 countries. The most recent, in late April, had 37 heads of state and representatives from nearly 150 countries and international organizations, including International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief Christine Lagarde and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Leaders of nine out of 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations attended, as did four of the five Central Asian republics. Strikingly, a third of the leaders participating came from Europe. According to Peter Frankopan, author of "The New Silk Roads," more than 80 countries are now involved in some aspect of the BRI project. That translates into more than 63 percent of the world's population and 29 percent of its global economic output.

Still, Chinese President Xi Jinping is intent on expanding the BRI's global footprint further, a signal of China's dream of future greatness. During a February two-day state visit to Beijing by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Xi suggested that, when it came to Riyadh's overly ambitious economic plan, "our two countries should speed up the signing of an implementation plan on connecting the Belt and Road Initiative with the Saudi Vision 2030."

Flattered by this proposal, the crown prince defended China's use of "re-education" camps for Uighur Muslims in its western province of Xinjiang, claiming it was Beijing's "right" to carry out antiterrorism work to

safeguard national security. Under the guise of combating extremism, the Chinese authorities have placed an estimated one million Uighur Muslims in such camps to undergo re-education designed to supplant their Islamic legacy with a Chinese version of socialism. Uighur groups had appealed to Prince bin Salman to take up their cause. No such luck: one more sign of the rise of China in the 21st century.

China Enters High-Tech Race with America

In 2013, Germany launched an Industry 4.0 Plan meant to fuse cyber-physical systems, the Internet of things, cloud computing, and cognitive computing with the aim of increasing manufacturing productivity by up to 50 percent, while curtailing resources required by half. Two years later, emulating this project, Beijing published its own 10-year Made in China 2025 plan to update the country's manufacturing base by rapidly developing 10 high-tech industries, including electric cars and other new-energy vehicles, next-generation information technology and telecommunications, as well as advanced robotics and artificial intelligence, aerospace engineering, high-end rail infrastructure, and high-tech maritime engineering.

As with BRI, the government and media then publicized and promoted Made in China 2025 vigorously. This alarmed Washington and America's high-tech corporations. Over the years, American companies had complained about China's theft of U.S. intellectual property, the counterfeiting of famous brands, and the stealing of trade secrets, not to speak of the pressuring of American firms in joint ventures with local companies to share technology as a price for gaining

access to China's vast market. Their grievances became more vocal when Donald Trump entered the White House determined to cut Washington's annual trade deficit of \$380 billion with Beijing.

As president, Trump ordered his new trade representative, the Sinophobe Robert Lighthizer, to look into the matter. The resulting seven-month investigation pegged the loss U.S. companies experienced because of China's unfair trade practices at \$50 billion a year. That was why, in March 2018, Trump instructed Lighthizer to levy tariffs on at least \$50 billion worth of Chinese imports.

That signaled the start of a Sino-American trade war which has only gained steam since. In this context, Chinese officials started downplaying the significance of Made in China 2025, describing it as nothing more than an inspirational plan. This March, China's National People's Congress even passed a foreign direct-investment law meant to address some of the grievances of U.S. companies. Its implementation mechanism was, however, weak. Trump promptly claimed that China had backtracked on its commitments to incorporate into Chinese law significant changes the two countries had negotiated and put into a draft agreement to end the trade war. He then slapped further tariffs on \$200 billion in Chinese imports.

The major bone of contention for the Trump administration is a Chinese law specifying that, in a joint venture between a foreign corporation and a Chinese company, the former must pass on technological know-how to its Chinese partner. That's seen as theft by Washington. According to Senior Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Yukon Huang, author of “Cracking the China Conundrum: Why Conventional Economic Wisdom Is Wrong,” however, it’s fully in accord with globally accepted guidelines. Such diffusion of technological know-how has played a significant role in driving growth globally, as the IMF’s 2018 World Economic Outlook report made clear. It’s worth noting as well that China now accounts for almost one-third of global annual economic growth.

The size of China’s market is so vast and the rise in its per capita gross domestic product – from \$312 in 1980 to \$9,769 in 2018 – is so steep that major U.S. corporations generally accepted its long-established joint-venture law and that should surprise no one. Last year, for instance, General Motors sold 3,645,044 vehicles in China and fewer than 3 million in the U.S. Little wonder then that, late last year, following GM plant closures across North America, part of a wide-ranging restructuring plan, the company’s management paid no heed to a threat from Trump to strip GM of any government subsidies. What angered the president, as he tweeted, caught the reality of the moment: nothing was “being closed in Mexico and China.”

What Trump simply can’t accept is this: after nearly two decades of supply-chain restructuring and global economic integration, China has become *the* key industrial supplier for the United States and Europe. His attempt to make America great again by restoring the economic status quo of before 2001 – the year China was admitted to the World Trade Organization – is doomed to fail.

In reality, trade war or peace, China is now beginning to overtake the U.S. in science and technology. A study by

Qingnan Xie of Nanjing University of Science and Technology and Richard Freeman of Harvard University noted that, between 2000 and 2016, China's global share of publications in the physical sciences, engineering, and mathematics quadrupled and, in the process, exceeded that of the U.S. for the first time.

In the field of high technology, for example, China is now well ahead of the United States in mobile payment transactions. In the first 10 months of 2017, those totaled \$12.8 trillion, the result of vast numbers of consumers discarding credit cards in favor of cashless systems. In stark contrast, according to eMarketer, America's mobile payment transactions in 2017 amounted to \$49.3 billion. Last year, 583 million Chinese used mobile payment systems, with nearly 68 percent of China's Internet users turning to a mobile wallet for their offline payments.

Russia's Advanced Weaponry

In a similar fashion, in his untiring pitch for America's "beautiful" weaponry, Trump has failed to grasp the impressive progress Russia has made in that field.

While presenting videos and animated glimpses of new intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear-powered cruise missiles, and underwater drones in a March 2018 television address, Russian President Vladimir Putin traced the development of his own country's new weapons to Washington's decision to pull out of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty with the Soviet Union. In December 2001, encouraged by John Bolton, then under secretary of state for arms control and international security, President George W.

Bush had indeed withdrawn from the 1972 ABM treaty on the spurious grounds that the 9/11 attacks had changed the nature of defense for America. His Russian counterpart of the time, the very same Vladimir Putin, described the withdrawal from that cornerstone of world security as a grievous mistake. The head of Russia's armed forces, General Anatoly Kvashnin, warned then that the pullout would alter the nature of the international strategic balance, freeing up countries to restart arms buildups, both conventional and nuclear.

As it happened, he couldn't have been more on the mark. The U.S. is now engaged in a 30-year, trillion-dollar-plus remake and update of its nuclear arsenal, while the Russians (whose present inventory of 6,500 nuclear weapons slightly exceeds America's) have gone down a similar route. In that televised address of his on the eve of the 2018 Russian presidential election, Putin's list of new nuclear weapons was headed by the Sarmat, a 30-ton intercontinental ballistic missile, reputedly far harder for an enemy to intercept in its most vulnerable phase just after launching. It also carries a larger number of nuclear warheads than its predecessor.

Another new weapon on his list was a nuclear-powered intercontinental underwater drone, Status-6, a submarine-launched autonomous vehicle with a range of 6,800 miles, capable of carrying a 100-megaton nuclear warhead. And then there was his country's new nuclear-powered cruise missile with a "practically unlimited" range. In addition, because of its stealth capabilities, it will be hard to detect in flight and its high maneuverability will, theoretically at

least, enable it to bypass an enemy's defenses. Successfully tested in 2018, it does not yet have a name. Unsurprisingly, Putin won the presidency with 77 percent of the vote, a 13 percent rise from the previous poll, on record voter turnout of 67.7 percent.

In conventional weaponry, Russia's S-400 missile system remains unrivalled. According to the Washington-based Arms Control Association, "The S-400 system is an advanced, mobile, surface-to-air defense system of radars and missiles of different ranges, capable of destroying a variety of targets such as attack aircraft, bombs, and tactical ballistic missiles. Each battery normally consists of eight launchers, 112 missiles, and command and support vehicles." The S-400 missile has a range of 400 kilometers (250 miles), and its integrated system is believed to be capable of shooting down up to 80 targets simultaneously.

Consider it a sign of the times, but in defiance of pressure from the Trump administration not to buy Russian weaponry, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, the only Muslim member of NATO, ordered the purchase of batteries of those very S-400 missiles. Turkish soldiers are currently being trained on that weapons systems in Russia. The first battery is expected to arrive in Turkey next month.

Similarly, in April 2015, Russia signed a contract to supply S-400 missiles to China. The first delivery of the system took place in January 2018 and China test fired it in August.

Expanding Beijing-Moscow Alliance

Consider that as another step in Russian-Chinese military

coordination meant to challenge Washington's claim to be the planet's sole superpower. Similarly, last September, 3,500 Chinese troops participated in Russia's largest-ever military exercises involving 300,000 soldiers, 36,000 military vehicles, 80 ships, and 1,000 aircraft, helicopters, and drones. Codenamed Vostok-2018, it took place across a vast region that included the Bering Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk, and the Sea of Japan. Little wonder that NATO officials described Vostok-2018 as a demonstration of a growing Russian focus on future large-scale conflict: "It fits into a pattern we have seen over some time – a more assertive Russia, significantly increasing its defense budget and its military presence." Putin attended the exercises after hosting an economic forum in Vladivostok where Chinese President Xi was his guest. "We have trustworthy ties in political, security and defense spheres," he declared, while Xi praised the two countries' friendship, which, he claimed, was "getting stronger all the time."

Thanks to climate change, Russia and China are now also working in tandem in the fast-melting Arctic. Last year Russia, which controls more than half the Arctic coastline, sent its first ship through the Northern Sea Route without an icebreaker in winter. Putin hailed that moment as a "big event in the opening up of the Arctic."

Beijing's Arctic policy, first laid out in January 2018, described China as a "near-Arctic" state and visualized the future shipping routes there as part of a potential new "Polar Silk Road" that would both be useful for resource exploitation and for enhancing Chinese security. Shipping

goods to and from Europe by such a passage would shorten the distance to China by 30 percent compared to present sea routes through the Malacca Straits and the Suez Canal, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars per voyage.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the Arctic holds petroleum reserves equal to 412 billion barrels of oil, or about 22 percent of the world's undiscovered hydrocarbons. It also has deposits of rare earth metals. China's second Arctic vessel, Xuelong 2 (Snow Dragon 2), is scheduled to make its maiden voyage later this year. Russia needs Chinese investment to extract the natural resources under its permafrost. In fact, China is already the biggest foreign investor in Russia's liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects in the region – and the first LNG shipment was dispatched to China's eastern province last summer via the Northern Sea Route. Its giant oil corporation is now beginning to drill for gas in Russian waters alongside the Russian company Gazprom.

Washington is rattled. In April, in its latest annual report to Congress on China's military power, the Pentagon for the first time included a section on the Arctic, warning of the risks of a growing Chinese presence in the region, including that country's possible deployment of nuclear submarines there in the future. In May, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo used a meeting of foreign ministers in Rovaniemi, Finland, to assail China for its "aggressive behavior" in the Arctic.

In an earlier speech, Pompeo noted that, from 2012 to 2017, China invested nearly \$90 billion in the Arctic region. "We're concerned about Russia's claim over the international waters of the Northern Sea Route, including its newly

announced plans to connect it with China's Maritime Silk Road," he said. He then pointed out that, along that route, "Moscow already illegally demands other nations request permission to pass, requires Russian maritime pilots to be aboard foreign ships, and threatens to use military force to sink any that fail to comply with their demands."

American Downturn Continues

Altogether, the tightening military and economic ties between Russia and China have put America on the defensive, contrary to Trump's MAGA promise to American voters in the 2016 campaign. It's true that, despite fraying diplomatic and economic ties between Washington and Moscow, Trump's personal relations with Putin remain cordial. (The two periodically exchange friendly phone calls.) But among Russians more generally, a favorable view of the U.S. fell from 41 percent in 2017 to 26 percent in 2018, according to a Pew Research survey.

There's nothing new about great powers, even the one that proclaimed itself the greatest in history, declining after having risen high. In our acrimonious times, that's a reality well worth noting. While launching his bid for reelection recently, Trump proposed a bombastic new slogan: "Keep America Great" (or KAG), as if he had indeed raised America's stature while in office. He would have been far more on target, however, had he suggested the slogan "Depress America More" (or DAM) to reflect the reality of an unpopular president who faces rising great power rivals abroad.

Dilip Hiro, a TomDispatch regular, is the author of "After

Empire: The Birth of a Multipolar World,” among many other books. His latest book is **“Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy”** (about which he has recorded **this podcast**).

This article is from [TomDispatch.com](https://tomdispatch.com).

A Howl for Blood in Iran as Americans Cheer US Bombers on July 4

The aerial parade of military aircraft was a chilling display of rampant killing machinery, write Medea Benjamin and Ann Wright.

By **Medea Benjamin** and **Ann Wright**

Common Dreams



President Donald Trump’s order to the Pentagon to have an aerial parade of military aircraft over Washington, D.C., on July 4 provided a history lesson of America’s war mongering in the past two decades, and a terrifying view of what might appear in the skies of Iran if National Security Advisor John Bolton gets his way.

The combat aircraft that were cheered by Trump’s supporters as they flew low over the monuments in the nation’s capital have not been cheered by people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Palestine as the same type

of planes fly over their homes – terrifying and killing their children and wreaking havoc on their lives.

Over those countries, Air Force B-2 Spirit, Air Force F-22 Raptor, Navy F-35C Joint Strike Fighter and F/A-18 Hornet stealth fighters and bombers fly so high they are not seen or heard – until the massive explosions from their 500- to 2,000-pound bombs hit and obliterate everything and everyone in their radius. The blast radius of a 2,000-pound bomb is 82 feet, but the lethal fragmentation reaches 1,200 feet. In 2017, the Trump administration dropped the most massive non-nuclear bomb in its inventory, the 21,000 pound “mother of all bombs,” on a cave tunnel complex in Afghanistan.

More Bombs Allowed

While most Americans have probably forgotten we are still at war in Afghanistan, the Trump administration “eased” the rules of engagement, allowing the military to drop more bombs in 2018 than in any other year since the war began in 2001. The 7,632 bombs dropped by American aircraft in 2018 made U.S. weapons makers rich, but hit 1,015 Afghan civilians.

The Boeing-made combat attack Apache helicopters, a crowd pleaser on July 4, have been used by the US Army to blow up homes and cars filled with civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Israeli military uses them to kill Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the Saudi military has killed children in Yemen with these death machines.

Billions of dollars worth of U.S. planes and bombs sold to Saudi Arabia raked in record profits for weapons manufacturers such as Raytheon and Lockheed Martin. But they

pummeled Yemeni civilians since the air war started in 2015, killing people in marketplaces, weddings, funerals, and 40 children on a summer outing in a school bus. Radhya al-Mutawakel, chairwoman of the Yemeni human rights organization Mwatana, says the U.S. has legal and moral responsibility for selling weapons to the Saudi-led coalition. "Yemeni civilians are dying every day because of this war and you (America) are fueling this war. It is a shame that financial interests are worth more than the blood of innocent people."

One notorious vehicle of death that was not flown above Washington was America's assassin drone. Perhaps it was too dangerous for an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) to be flown close to the president of the United States and a crowd of American citizens with its history of numerous inexplicable crashes and intelligence failures that have caused the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Iraq.

John Bolton, who has the ear of the president every day, wrote in an op-ed in 2015 that in order to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, the U.S. should bomb Iran. Now that he has goaded Iran into stepping up its enrichment of uranium as a result of the U.S. reneging on the nuclear deal and European signatories bailing out on their responsibilities in the agreement, Bolton is itching to start the bombing. So are Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mohammad Bin Salman, crown prince of Saudi Arabia. Both Israel and Saudi Arabia have been trying for years to drag the U.S. into a war with Iran. Colleagues in the humanitarian and refugee arenas in the Middle East tell

us a war is coming and are preparing for its nightmarish consequences throughout the region.

With the U.S. political and media dogs of war howling again for blood in Iran, Trump's decision to showcase America's aerial firepower must have been cheered by the war hawks in the administration and Congress, and their friends in the weapons industry. But to those of us who want peaceful resolutions to international disputes, the Fourth of July display was a chilling reminder of the horrific deaths caused by successive Administrations' propensity for war and the terror that might soon be raining down on the people of Iran if John Bolton gets his way.

Medea Benjamin is the co-founder of CODEPINK: Women for Peace and the author of numerous books including "Inside Iran," "Kingdom of the Unjust: Saudia Arabia" and "Killing by Remote Control-Drones."

Ann Wright is a retired U.S. Army Colonel and a former U.S. diplomat who resigned in 2003 in opposition to Bush's war on Iraq. She is the co-author of "Dissent: Voices of Conscience."

This article is from [Common Dreams](#).

Survey: Americans Have Remarkably Ignorant Attitude Toward Nukes & North Korea

Caitlin Johnstone says the correct response to North Korea having nuclear retaliatory capability is simple: leave it

alone.

By **Caitlin Johnstone**

CaitlinJohnstone.com



Half of the responders to [an innovative new survey of 3,000 Americans](#) conducted by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists and the British research firm YouGov reported that they would support a nuclear strike against North Korea if it tested a long-range missile capable of reaching the continental United States. A third said they'd actually prefer such a strike over other hypothetical responses.

“For example, while ‘only’ 33 percent of the U.S. public prefer a U.S. preventive nuclear strike that would kill 15,000 North Koreans, 50 percent approve,” the report reads.

The study found little change in preference for a preemptive nuclear strike whether the hypothetical scenario offered to respondents entailed the death of 15,000 North Korean civilians or one million. Preferences for a preemptive strike only dropped when the hypothetical scenario reduced the probability of success (meaning elimination of North Korea’s nuclear retaliatory capabilities) was reduced from ninety to fifty percent.

The survey found a large knowledge deficit in responders regarding nuclear weapons, with a majority reporting an unrealistic amount of confidence in both the U.S. military’s ability to eliminate all of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal in a preemptive strike and in its ability to shoot down North Korean missiles using current missile defense systems. This inaccurate perspective was significantly higher among

supporters of President Donald Trump.

While the study found that a majority of Americans would prefer to de-escalate against North Korea if given the choice, a jarring number of them would be willing to use nuclear weapons at the drop of a hat, and believe it's possible to do so at relatively little risk to Americans.

"As we have previously found, the U.S. public exhibits only limited aversion to nuclear weapons use and a shocking willingness to support the killing of enemy civilians," write the report's authors.

Why Expect Anything Else?

And really, why would we expect anything else? After all, Americans are taught the lie since they are children that their nation, the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons, did so with the goal of bringing a quick and painless end to a horrible world war. Like so much else, this ultimately boils down to the effects of propaganda.

"Most Americans have been taught that using atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 was justified because the bombings ended the war in the Pacific, thereby averting a costly U.S. invasion of Japan," reads an [excellent 2016 LA Times article](#) on this subject by Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznik. "This erroneous contention finds its way into high school history texts still today."

In reality, the sole purpose of dropping nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 was not to end the war, but to show the rest of the world in general and the Soviets in particular that the United States had both the capability

and the savagery to wipe out any city in the world with a single bomb. The war, in fact, had already been won, and the Japanese were already on the brink of surrender as the fearsome Soviet forces entered into the war in the Pacific. The narrative that the use of nuclear bombs was a tragic but necessary means to end World War II is a lie that the U.S. has used its cultural hegemony to circulate around the world, much like [the lie that America was mostly responsible for Germany's defeat](#) and not the U.S.S.R.

I always get a lot of pushback from Americans when I point to this, not because I don't have facts on my side but because it's so glaringly different from the dominant narratives that Americans are spoon fed in school. If you don't believe me, read the aforementioned *LA Times* article titled ["Bombing Hiroshima changed the world, but it didn't end WWII,"](#) or [this article from *The Nation*](#), or [this one from Mises Institute](#).

Seriously, read the articles if this is upsetting you. This is an established fact to which contemporary generals at the time have attested. The uncomfortable feeling you're experiencing upon reading this is called cognitive dissonance. It's what learning you've been lied to your whole life feels like.

This report on the American public's widespread ignorance of and indifference to the consequences of nuclear weapons use comes shortly after the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff briefly [published and then removed from public access](#) an update on their position on the use of nukes which contains the alarming line, "Using nuclear weapons could create conditions for decisive results and the restoration of

strategic stability. Specifically, the use of a nuclear weapon will fundamentally change the scope of a battle and create conditions that affect how commanders will prevail in conflict.”

So the people responsible for forming America’s nuclear strategies believe using nuclear weapons is not just acceptable, but potentially beneficial. The mass media have been completely ignoring this horrifying revelation, and the public are too awash in disinformation to do anything about it themselves.

The correct response to North Korea having nuclear retaliatory capabilities is the same as the response to any other nuclear power: leave them alone. The narrative that North Korea’s leadership is likely to launch an unprovoked attack is exactly as baseless and moronic as the narratives about Iraq or Iran launching an unprovoked attack. It’s not a thing.

The Warping Effect

As tensions continue to escalate between nuclear powers around the world while the faltering U.S. empire becomes increasingly desperate to maintain its global hegemony, human extinction via nuclear annihilation is just as real a possibility as it was at the height of the last Cold War.

But it isn’t just the use of nuclear weapons which threatens us. Their very existence warps us as a species. In her book *“The Algebra of Infinite Justice,”* Arundhati Roy writes:

“It is such supreme folly to believe that nuclear weapons are deadly only if they are used. The fact that they exist

at all, their very presence in our lives, will wreak more havoc than we can begin to fathom. Nuclear weapons pervade our thinking. Control our behaviour. Administer our societies. Inform our dreams. They bury themselves like meathooks deep in the base of our brains... The nuclear bomb is the most anti-democratic, anti-national, anti-human, outright evil thing that man has ever made. Through it, man now has the power to destroy God's creation."

This needs to change. And it won't be changed by those in power who benefit from the status quo. Humanity itself must awaken from the propaganda cages which have been built around our minds so that the people can use the power of their numbers to force a change. The time to wake up is now.

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly [at Medium](#). Follow her work on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or her [website](#). She has a [podcast](#) and a new book "[Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers](#)."

This article was re-published with permission from [CaitlinJohnstone.com](#)

Fake Meat: Big Food's Attempt to Further Industrialize What We Eat

We need to decolonize our food cultures and our minds of food imperialism, writes Vandana Shiva.

By **Vandana Shiva**

[Independent Science News](#)



Food is not a commodity, it is not “stuff” put together mechanically and artificially in labs and factories. Food is life. Food holds the contributions of all beings that make the food web, and it holds the potential of maintaining and regenerating the web of life. Food also holds the potential for health and disease, depending on how it was grown and processed. Food is therefore the living currency of the web of life.

As an ancient Upanishad reminds us “Everything is food, everything is something else’s food.”

Good food and real food are the basis of health.

Bad food, industrial food, fake food is the basis of disease.

Hippocrates said “Let food be thy medicine.” In Ayurveda, India’s ancient science of life, food is called “sarvausadha” the medicine that cures all disease.

Industrial food systems have reduced food to a commodity, to “stuff” that can then be constituted in the lab. In the process both the planet’s health and our health has been nearly destroyed.

Planetary Impacts

Seventy five percent of the planetary destruction of soil, water, biodiversity, and 50 percent of greenhouse gas emissions come from industrial agriculture, which also contributes to 75 percent of food-related chronic diseases. It contributes 50 percent of the greenhouse gases driving climate change. Chemical agriculture does not return organic matter and fertility to the soil. Instead it is contributing to desertification and land degradation. It also demands

more water since it destroys the soil's natural water-holding capacity. Industrial food systems have destroyed the biodiversity of the planet both through the spread of monocultures, and through the use of toxics and poisons which are killing bees, butterflies, insects, birds, leading to the sixth mass extinction.

Biodiversity-intensive and poison-free agriculture, on the other hand, produces more nutrition per acre while rejuvenating the planet. It shows the path to "zero hunger" in times of climate change.

The industrial agriculture and toxic food model has been promoted as the only answer to economic and food security. However, globally, more than 1 billion people are hungry. More than 3 billion suffer from food-related chronic diseases.

It uses 75 percent of the land yet industrial agriculture based on fossil fuel intensive, chemical intensive monocultures produce only 30 percent of the food we eat. Meanwhile, small, biodiverse farms using 25 percent of the land provide 70 percent of the food. At this rate, if the share of industrial agriculture and industrial food in our diet is increased to 45 percent, we will have a dead planet. One with no life and no food.

The mad rush for fake food and fake meat, ignorant of the diversity of our foods and food cultures, and the role of biodiversity in maintaining our health, is a recipe for accelerating the destruction of the planet and our health.

GMO Soya is Unsafe

In a recent article ["How our commitment to consumers and our planet led us to use GM soy,"](#) [Pat Brown,](#) CEO & founder of

Impossible Foods, says: “We sought the safest and most environmentally responsible option that would allow us to scale our production and provide the Impossible Burger to consumers at a reasonable cost.”

Given the fact that 90 percent of the monarch butterflies have disappeared due to Roundup ready crops, and we are living through what scientists have called an “insectageddon,” using GMO soya is hardly an “environmentally responsible option.”

In writing this, Pat Brown reveals his ignorance about weeds evolving to resist Roundup and becoming “superweeds” now requiring more and more lethal herbicides. Bill Gates and DARPA are even calling for the use of gene drives to exterminate amaranth, a sacred and nutritious food in India, because the Palmer Amaranth has become a superweed in the Roundup Ready soya fields of the U.S.

At a time when across the world the movement to ban GMOs and Roundup is growing, promoting GMO soya as “fake meat” is misleading the eater both in terms of the ontology of the burger, and on claims of safety.

The “Impossible Burger” based on GMO, Roundup sprayed soya is not a “safe” option.

Zen Honeycutt and Moms across America just announced that the Impossible Burger tested positive for glyphosate. “The levels of glyphosate detected in the Impossible Burger by Health Research Institute Laboratories were 11 X higher than the Beyond Meat Burger. The total result (glyphosate and its break down AMPA) was 11.3 ppb. Moms Across America also tested the Beyond Meat Burger and the

results were 1 ppb.

“We are shocked to find that the Impossible Burger can have up to 11X higher levels of glyphosate residues than the Beyond Meat Burger according to these samples tested. This new product is being marketed as a solution for ‘healthy’ eating, when in fact 11 ppb of glyphosate herbicide consumption can be highly dangerous. Only 0.1 ppb of glyphosate has been shown to destroy gut bacteria, which is where the stronghold of the immune system lies.”

Recent court cases have showcased the links of Roundup to cancer. With the build up of liabilities related to cancer cases, the investments in Roundup Ready GMO soya is blindness to the market.

Or the hope that fooling consumers can rescue Bayer/Monsanto.

There is another ontological confusion related to fake food. While claiming to get away from meat, “fake meat” is about selling meat-like products.

Pat Brown declares “we use genetically engineered yeast to produce heme, the “magic” molecule that makes meat taste like meat – and makes the Impossible Burger the only plant-based product to deliver the delicious explosion of flavor and aroma that meat-eating consumers crave.”

I had thought that the plant-based diet was for vegans and vegetarians, not meat lovers.

Big Food & Big Money Driving Fake Food Goldrush

Indeed, the promotion of fake foods seems to have more to do

with giving new life to the failing GMO agriculture and the junk food industry, and the threat to it from the rising of consciousness and awareness everywhere that organic, local, fresh food is real food which regenerates the planet and our health. In consequence, investment in “plant-based food companies” has soared from nearly zero in 2009 to \$600 million by 2018. And these companies are looking for more.

Pat Brown declares, “If there’s one thing that we know, it’s that when an ancient unimprovable technology counters a better technology that is continuously improvable, it’s just a matter of time before the game is over.” He added, “I think our investors see this as a \$3 trillion opportunity.”

This is about profits and control. He, and those jumping on the fake-food goldrush, have no discernible knowledge, or consciousness about, or compassion for living beings, the web of life, nor the role of living food in weaving that web.

Their sudden awakening to “plant-based diets,” including GMO soya, is an ontological violation of food as a living system that connects us to the ecosystem and other beings, and indicates ignorance of the diversity of cultures that have used a diversity of plants in their diets.

Interconnections

Ecological sciences have been based on the recognition of the interconnections and interrelatedness between humans and nature, between diverse organisms, and within all living systems, including the human body. It has thus evolved as an ecological and a systems science, not a fragmented and reductionist one. Diets have evolved according to climates

and the local biodiversity the climate allows. The biodiversity of the soil, of the plants and our gut microbiome is one continuum. In Indian civilization, technologies are tools. Tools need to be assessed on ethical, social and ecological criteria. Tools/technologies have never been viewed as self-referential. They have been assessed in the context of contributing to the wellbeing of all.

Through fake food, evolution, biodiversity, and the web of life is being redefined as an “ancient unimprovable technology.” That ignores sophisticated forms of knowledge that have evolved in diverse agricultural and food cultures in diverse climate and ecosystems to sustain and renew the biodiversity, the ecosystems, the health of people and the planet.

The Eat Forum, which brought out a report that tried to impose a monoculture diet of chemically grown, hyper-industrially-processed food on the world has a partnership through FrESH with the junk food industry, and Big Ag such as Bayer, BASF, Cargill, Pepsico amongst others.



Fake food is thus building on a century and a half of food

imperialism and food colonization of our diverse food knowledges and food cultures.

Big Food and Big Money are behind the Fake Food Industry. [Bill Gates](#) and [Jeff Bezos are funding startups](#).

We need to decolonize our food cultures and our minds of food imperialism

The industrial West has always been arrogant, and ignorant, of the cultures it has colonized. "Fake Food" is just the latest step in a history of food imperialism.

Soya is a gift of East Asia, where it has been a food for millennia. It was only eaten as fermented food to remove its anti-nutritive factors. But recently, GMO soya has [created a soya imperialism](#), destroying plant diversity. It continues the destruction of the diversity of rich edible oils and plant-based proteins of Indian dals that we have documented.

Women from India's slums called on me to bring our mustard back when GMO soya oil started to be dumped on India, and [local oils and cold press units in villages were made illegal](#).

That is when we started the "sarson (mustard) satyagraha" to defend our healthy cold pressed oils from dumping of hexane-extracted GMO soya oil.

Hexane is a neurotoxin. While Indian peasants knew that pulses, or legumes, fix nitrogen, the West was industrializing agriculture based on synthetic nitrogen, which contributes to greenhouse gases, dead zones in the ocean and dead soils. While we ate a diversity of "dals" in our daily "dal roti" the British colonizers, who had no idea

of the richness of the nutrition of pulses, reduced them to animal food. Chana became chick pea, gahat became horse gram, tur became pigeon pea.

We stand at a precipice of a planetary emergency, a health emergency, a crisis of farmers livelihoods. Fake food will accelerate the rush to collapse. Real food gives us a chance to rejuvenate the earth, our food economies, food sovereignty and food cultures. Through real food we can decolonize our food cultures and our consciousness. We can remember that food is living and gives us life.

Boycott GMO Impossible Burger. Make tofu. Cook Dal.

Vandana Shiva is an Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, and alter-globalization author.

This article is reprinted from [Independent Science News](#) under Creative Commons license.

The American Cult of Bombing

William J. Astore analyzes the fallacies behind the U.S. drive to wage war from the air.

By [William J. Astore](#)

[TomDispatch.com](#)



From Syria to Yemen in the Middle East, Libya to Somalia in Africa, Afghanistan to Pakistan in South Asia, an American aerial curtain has descended across a huge swath of the planet. Its stated purpose: combatting terrorism. Its primary method:

constant surveillance and bombing – and yet more bombing. Its political benefit: minimizing the number of U.S. “boots on the ground” and so American casualties in the never-ending war on terror, as well as any public outcry about Washington’s many conflicts. Its economic benefit: plenty of high-profit business for weapons makers for whom the president can now declare a national security emergency whenever he likes and so sell their warplanes and munitions to preferred dictatorships in the Middle East (no congressional approval required). Its reality for various foreign peoples: a steady diet of “Made in USA” bombs and missiles bursting here, there, and everywhere.

Think of all this as a cult of bombing on a global scale. America’s wars are increasingly waged from the air, not on the ground, a reality that makes the prospect of ending them ever more daunting. The question is: What’s driving this process?

For many of America’s decision-makers, air power has clearly become something of an abstraction. After all, except for the 9/11 attacks by those four hijacked commercial airliners, Americans haven’t been the target of such strikes since World War II. On Washington’s battlefields across the Greater Middle East and northern Africa, air power is always almost literally a one-way affair. There are no enemy air forces or significant air defenses. The skies are the exclusive property of the U.S. Air Force (and allied air forces), which means that we’re no longer talking about “war” in the normal sense. No wonder Washington policymakers and military officials see it as our strong suit, our asymmetrical advantage, our way of settling scores with

evildoers, real and imagined.

Bombs away!

Replacing the Body Count

In a bizarre fashion, you might even say that, in the 21st century, the bomb and missile count replaced the Vietnam-era body count as a metric of (false) progress. Using data supplied by the U.S. military, the Council on Foreign Relations estimated that the U.S. dropped at least 26,172 bombs in seven countries in 2016, the bulk of them in Iraq and Syria. Against Raqqa alone, ISIS's "capital," the U.S. and its allies dropped more than 20,000 bombs in 2017, reducing that provincial Syrian city to literal rubble. Combined with artillery fire, the bombing of Raqqa killed more than 1,600 civilians, according to Amnesty International.

Meanwhile, since Donald Trump has become president, after claiming that he would get us out of our various never-ending wars, U.S. bombing has surged, not only against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq but in Afghanistan as well. It has driven up the civilian death toll there even as "friendly" Afghan forces are sometimes mistaken for the enemy and killed, too. Air strikes from Somalia to Yemen have also been on the rise under Trump, while civilian casualties due to U.S. bombing continue to be underreported in the American media and downplayed by the Trump administration.

U.S. air campaigns today, deadly as they are, pale in comparison to past ones such as the Tokyo firebombing of 1945, which killed more than 100,000 civilians; the atomic

bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki later that year (roughly 250,000); the death toll against German civilians in World War II (at least 600,000); or civilians in the Vietnam War. (Estimates vary, but when napalm and the long-term effects of cluster munitions and defoliants like Agent Orange are added to conventional high-explosive bombs, the death toll in Southeast Asia may well have exceeded one million.) Today's air strikes are more limited than in those past campaigns and may be more accurate, but never confuse a 500-pound bomb with a surgeon's scalpel, even rhetorically. When "surgical" is applied to bombing in today's age of lasers, GPS, and other precision-guidance technologies, it only obscures the very real human carnage being produced by all these American-made bombs and missiles.

This country's propensity for believing that its ability to rain hellfire from the sky provides a winning methodology for its wars has proven to be a fantasy of our age. Whether in Korea in the early 1950s, Vietnam in the 1960s, or more recently in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, the U.S. may control the air, but that dominance simply hasn't led to ultimate success. In the case of Afghanistan, weapons like the Mother of All Bombs, or MOAB (the most powerful non-nuclear bomb in the U.S. military's arsenal), have been celebrated as game changers even when they change nothing. (Indeed, the Taliban only continues to grow stronger, as does the branch of the Islamic State in Afghanistan.) As is often the case when it comes to U.S. air power, such destruction leads neither to victory, nor closure of any sort; only to yet more destruction.

Such results are contrary to the rationale for air power

that I absorbed in a career spent in the U.S. Air Force. (I retired in 2005.) The fundamental tenets of air power that I learned, which are still taught today, speak of decisiveness. They promise that air power, defined as “flexible and versatile,” will have “synergistic effects” with other military operations. When bombing is “concentrated,” “persistent,” and “executed” properly (meaning not micro-managed by know-nothing politicians), air power should be fundamental to ultimate victory. As we used to insist, putting bombs on target is really what it’s all about. End of story -- and of thought.

Given the banality and vacuity of those official Air Force tenets, given the 21st century history of air power gone to hell and back, and based on my own experience teaching such history and strategy in and outside the military, I’d like to offer some air power tenets of my own. These are the ones the Air Force didn’t teach me, but that our leaders might consider before launching their next “decisive” air campaign.

10 Cautionary Tenets About Air Power

No. 1: Just because U.S. warplanes and drones can strike almost anywhere on the globe with relative impunity doesn’t mean that they should. Given the history of air power since World War II, ease of access should never be mistaken for efficacious results.

No. 2: Bombing alone will never be the key to victory. If that were true, the U.S. would have easily won in Korea and Vietnam, as well as in Afghanistan and Iraq. American air power pulverized both North Korea and Vietnam (not to speak

of neighboring [Laos and Cambodia](#)), yet the Korean War ended in a stalemate and the Vietnam War in defeat. (It tells you the world about such thinking that air power enthusiasts, reconsidering the Vietnam debacle, tend to argue the U.S. should have bombed even more – [lots more](#).) Despite total air supremacy, the recent Iraq War was a disaster even as the Afghan War staggers on into its 18th catastrophic year.

No. 3: No matter how much it's advertised as "precise," "discriminate," and "measured," bombing (or using missiles like the [Tomahawk](#)) rarely is. The deaths of innocents are guaranteed. Air power and those deaths are joined at the hip, while such killings only generate anger and blowback, thereby prolonging the wars they are meant to end.

Consider, for instance, the "decapitation" strikes launched against Iraqi autocrat Saddam Hussein and his top officials in the opening moments of the George W. Bush administration's invasion of 2003. Despite the hype about that being the beginning of the most precise air campaign in all of history, 50 of those attacks, supposedly based on the best intelligence around, failed to take out Saddam or a single one of his targeted officials. They did, however, cause "dozens" of civilian deaths. Think of it as a monstrous repeat of the precision air attacks launched on Belgrade in 1999 against [Slobodan Milosevic](#) and his regime that hit the [Chinese embassy](#) instead, killing three journalists.

Here, then, is the question of the day: Why is it that, despite all the "precision" talk about it, air power so regularly proves at best a blunt instrument of destruction? As a start, intelligence is often faulty. Then bombs and

missiles, even “smart” ones, do go astray. And even when U.S. forces actually kill high-value targets (HVTs), there are always more HVTs out there. A paradox emerges from almost 18 years of the war on terror: the imprecision of air power only leads to repetitious cycles of violence and, even when air strikes prove precise, there always turn out to be fresh targets, fresh terrorists, fresh insurgents to strike.

No. 4: Using air power to send political messages about resolve or seriousness rarely works. If it did, the U.S. would have swept to victory in Vietnam. In Lyndon Johnson’s presidency, for instance, Operation Rolling Thunder (1965-1968), a graduated campaign of bombing, was meant to, but didn’t, convince the North Vietnamese to give up their goal of expelling the foreign invaders – us – from South Vietnam. Fast-forward to our era and consider recent signals sent to North Korea and Iran by the Trump administration via B-52 bomber deployments, among other military “messages.” There’s no evidence that either country modified its behavior significantly in the face of the menace of those Baby-Boomer-era airplanes.

No. 5: Air power is enormously expensive. Spending on aircraft, helicopters, and their munitions accounted for roughly half the cost of the Vietnam War. Similarly, in the present moment, making operational and then maintaining Lockheed Martin’s boondoggle of a jet fighter, the F-35, is expected to cost at least \$1.45 trillion over its lifetime. The new B-21 stealth bomber will cost more than \$100 billion simply to buy. Naval air wings on aircraft carriers cost billions each year to maintain and operate. These days, when the sky’s the limit for the Pentagon budget, such costs may

be (barely) tolerable. When the money finally begins to run out, however, the military will likely suffer a serious hangover from its wildly extravagant spending on air power.

No. 6: Aerial surveillance (as with drones), while useful, can also be misleading. Command of the high ground is not synonymous with god-like “total situational awareness.” It can instead prove to be a kind of delusion, while war practiced in its spirit often becomes little more than an exercise in destruction. You simply can't negotiate a truce or take prisoners or foster other options when you're high above a potential battlefield and your main recourse is blowing up people and things.

No. 7: Air power is inherently offensive. That means it's more consistent with imperial power projection than with national defense. As such, it fuels imperial ventures, while fostering the kind of “global reach, global power” thinking that has in these years had Air Force generals in its grip.

No. 8: Despite the fantasies of those sending out the planes, air power often lengthens wars rather than shortening them. Consider Vietnam again. In the early 1960s, the Air Force argued that it alone could resolve that conflict at the lowest cost (mainly in American bodies). With enough bombs, napalm, and defoliants, victory was a sure thing and U.S. ground troops a kind of afterthought. (Initially, they were sent in mainly to protect the airfields from which those planes took off.) But bombing solved nothing and then the Army and the Marines decided that, if the Air Force couldn't win, they sure as hell could. The result was escalation and disaster that left in the dust the original vision of a war won quickly and on the

cheap due to American air supremacy.

No. 9: Air power, even of the shock-and-awe variety, loses its impact over time. The enemy, lacking it, nonetheless learns to adapt by developing countermeasures – both active (like missiles) and passive (like camouflage and dispersion), even as those being bombed become more resilient and resolute.

No. 10: Pounding peasants from two miles up is not exactly an ideal way to occupy the moral high ground in war.

The Road to Perdition

If I had to reduce these tenets to a single maxim, it would be this: all the happy talk about the techno-wonders of modern air power obscures its darker facets, especially its ability to lock America into what are effectively one-way wars with dead-end results.

For this reason, precision warfare is truly an oxymoron. War isn't precise. It's nasty, bloody, and murderous. War's inherent nature – its unpredictability, horrors, and tendency to outlast its original causes and goals –isn't changed when the bombs and missiles are guided by GPS. Washington's enemies in its war on terror, moreover, have learned to adapt to air power in a grimly Darwinian fashion and have the advantage of fighting on their own turf.

Who doesn't know the old riddle: If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound? Here's a twenty-first-century air power variant on it: If foreign children die from American bombs but no U.S. media outlets report their deaths, will anyone grieve? Far too

often, the answer here in the U.S. is no and so our wars go on into an endless future of global destruction.

In reality, this country might do better to simply ground its many fighter planes, bombers, and drones. Paradoxically, instead of gaining the high ground, they are keeping us on a low road to perdition.

A retired lieutenant colonel (USAF) and professor of history, William J. Astore is a TomDispatch regular. His personal blog is "Bracing Views."

This article is from TomDispatch.com.

Congress Angered by 'Escalated' Ballistic Missile Program Amid Concern of a Saudi Nuke

Rather than preventing ballistic missile proliferation in the region, the U.S. seems more intent on seeing Saudi Arabia strengthen its military muscle against Iran, explains Giorgio Cafiero.

By Giorgio Cafiero

Special to Consortium News

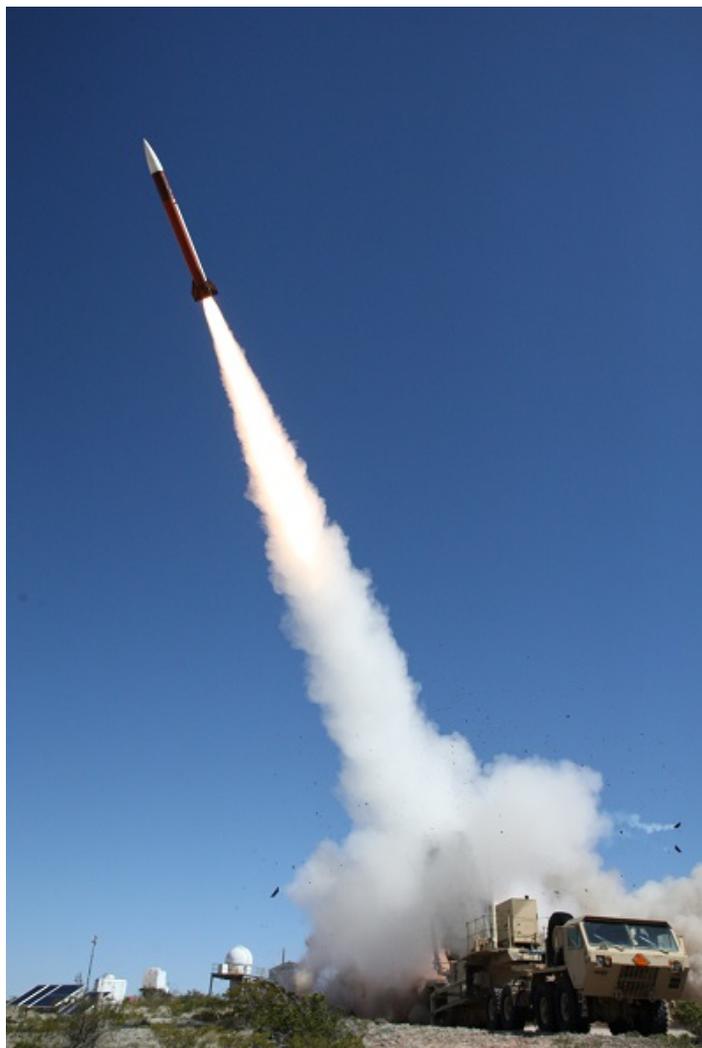


The U.S. has obtained intelligence that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia "significantly escalated" its ballistic missile program with Chinese help, CNN reported on Wednesday. Beijing has enabled the Saudis to expand their missile infrastructure and technology at a time of escalating tension in the Persian

Gulf, CNN said, with both the Saudis and Iranians perceiving a growing threat from each other.

The previously unreported classified intelligence has led U.S. lawmakers to express concern about undermining decades-old efforts to limit the proliferation of missiles in the Middle East.

The CNN report cited two former senior U.S. intelligence officials who said it is “likely” that President Trump received this intelligence in a Presidential Daily Briefing, given the close monitoring of ballistic missile developments and flows of material worldwide by U.S. intelligence.



Yet the Senate Foreign Relations Committee only acquired

this intelligence from a committee staff member who learned about the ballistic missile activity in Saudi Arabia from a “foreign counterpart” while on “an unrelated trip to the Middle East.”

The news increased anger in Washington about a perceived lack of congressional oversight on foreign policy matters in the Trump era.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Bob Menendez, (D-NJ) reprimanded Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and blamed the administration for its “unacceptable” failure to initially provide the committee with the classified information. Menendez declared that the State Department must “do a better job of engaging with us.”

Such outcry comes against the backdrop of mounting bipartisan criticism over the administration’s support for the Saudi/Emirati-led campaign in Yemen and the cover that Trump provided Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) following the CIA’s conclusion that he ordered Jamal Khashoggi’s killing.

Most recently, the administration’s decision to sell \$8.1 billion in arms to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while overriding congressional opposition by citing a national security emergency, highlighted how Saudi-related issues are creating partisan flashpoints between lawmakers, and conflict between Congress and the White House.

The Trump administration likely avoided disclosing the intelligence because of its tacit approval of the Kingdom’s ballistic missile activity. Based on the logic that if Saudi Arabia strengthens militarily Iran will come under greater

pressure, the Trump administration may view China providing ballistic missile technology to the Saudis as a positive. The 1987 Missile Technology Control Regime restricts the U.S. and other countries from providing Saudi Arabia with such technology. Notably, China is not a party to this multi-country [pact](#).

Next Step: A Nuclear Warhead?

News of this recent intelligence must also be read within the context of U.S. -Saudi [nuclear cooperation](#), which is another Saudi-related flashpoint pitting lawmakers against the White House. Members of Congress have been accusing the administration of recklessly authorizing U.S. firms to provide sensitive nuclear power information to Riyadh, and in an insufficiently transparent manner in the aftermath of Khashoggi's killing.

Some analysts [worry](#) that such information transfers could help the Kingdom develop a nuclear weapon at a later point if the Saudi government makes that decision.

Saudi Arabia's ballistic missile production thus raises important questions about a potential nuclear arms race in the Middle East. As MbS [articulated](#) in March 2018, Saudi Arabia will develop nuclear weapons if Iran pursues that path.

China's Foreign Ministry responded defensively, maintaining that such cooperation between "comprehensive strategic partners" is no violation of international law, nor a threat to efforts to thwart the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Not everyone was soothed by Beijing's words.

There are concerns that the technology that China has provided

Saudi Arabia could enable the Kingdom to possess ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads in the future if the Saudis become a nuclear weapons state.

Such a move would indicate Riyadh's declining trust in Washington's ability and willingness to continue serving as Saudi Arabia's security guarantor. Apparently, Saudi Arabia believes it most prudent to hedge against a perceived Iranian threat by investing in the missile program with help from Beijing. It is not clear, of course, what the Saudi end-game is.

With the U.S. no longer a signatory to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and Iran in reaction scaling back on its commitments under the nuclear accord, there are sharp increases in tensions between the U.S. , Saudi Arabia, and the UAE on one side and Iran on the other. Concerns about a potential nuclear arms race in the Middle East are valid.

To prevent such an escalation, the U.S. and China could use their leverage to pressure Riyadh and Tehran to hold talks and engage directly in bilateral discussions. It appears instead that China is keener to exploit the lack of Saudi trust in the U.S. and Riyadh's perceptions of a rising Iranian threat to capitalize on a new client, while making Beijing of greater strategic value to the Kingdom.

Rather than preventing ballistic missile proliferation in the Middle East, the Trump administration meanwhile seems more interested in seeing Saudi Arabia strengthen its military muscle as Tehran refuses to capitulate to U.S. demands under "maximum pressure."

Giorgio Cafiero ([@GiorgioCafiero](#)) is the CEO of Gulf State Analytics ([@GulfStateAnalyt](#)), a Washington-based geopolitical risk consultancy.

For Tech Giants, a Cautionary Tale From 19th Century Railroads on the Limits of Competition

The tech monopoly giants have a lot to learn from the railroad monopolies of the 19th Century during the First Gilded Age, writes Richard White.



Southern Pacific steam engine No. 1364 in 1891. ([Wikimedia Commons](#))

By [Richard White](#)

Stanford University

Late 19th-century Americans loved railroads, which seemed to eradicate time and space, moving goods and people more cheaply and more conveniently than ever before. And they feared railroads because in most of the country it was impossible to do business without them.

Businesses, and the republic itself, seemed to be at the mercy of the monopoly power of railroad corporations. American farmers, businessmen and consumers thought of competition as a way to ensure fairness in the marketplace. But with no real competitors over many routes, railroads could charge different rates to different customers. This power to decide economic winners and losers threatened not only individual businesses but also the conditions that sustained the republic.



An 1882 political cartoon portrays the railroad industry as a monopolistic octopus, with its tentacles controlling many businesses. (G. Frederick Keller)

That may sound familiar. As a historian of that first Gilded Age, I see parallels between the power of the railroads and today's internet giants like Verizon and Comcast. The current regulators – the Federal Communications Commission's Republican majority – and many of its critics both embrace a solution that 19th-century Americans tried and dismissed: market competition.

Monopolies as Natural and Efficient

In the 1880s, the most sophisticated railroad managers and some economists argued that railroads were "natural monopolies," the inevitable consequence of an industry that required huge investments in rights of way over land, constructing railways, and building train engines and rail cars.

Competition was expensive and wasteful. In 1886 the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway and the Missouri Pacific Railroad both built railroad tracks heading west from the Great Bend of the Arkansas River in Kansas to Greeley County on the western border, roughly 200 miles away.

The tracks ran parallel to each other, about two miles apart. Charles Francis Adams, president of the Union Pacific Railroad, called this redundancy the "maddest specimen of railroad construction of which" he had ever heard. And then his own railroad built new tracks into western Kansas, too.

After ruinous bouts of competition like this, rival railroad companies would agree to cooperate, pooling the business in certain areas and setting common rates. These agreements effectively established monopolies, even if more than one

company was involved.

Monopolies as Unfairly Subsidized

Anti-monopolists who opposed the railroads' power argued that monopolies originated not as a result of efficient investment strategies, but rather from special privileges afforded by the government. Railroads had the ability to condemn land to build their routes. They got subsidies of land, loans, bonds and other financial aid from federal, state and local governments. Their political contributions and favors secured them supporters in legislatures, Congress and the courts.

As stronger railroads bought up weaker companies and divided up markets with the remaining competitors, the dangers of monopoly became more and more apparent. Railroad companies made decisions on innovation based on the effects on their bottom line, not societal values.

For instance, the death toll was enormous: In 1893, 1,567 trainmen died and 18,877 were injured on the rails. Congress enacted the first national railroad safety legislation that year because the companies had insisted it was too expensive to put automatic braking systems and couplers on freight trains.

But a monopoly's great economic and societal danger was its ability to decide who succeeded in business and who failed. For example, in 1883 the Northern Pacific Railway raised the rates it charged O.A. Dodge's Idaho lumber company. The new rates left Dodge unable to compete with the rival Montana Improvement Company, reputedly owned by Northern Pacific executives and investors. Dodge knew the game was up. All he

could do was ask if they wanted to buy his company.

For anti-monopolists, Dodge's dilemma went to the heart of the issue. Monopolies were intrinsically wrong because they unfairly influenced businesses' likelihood of success or failure. In an 1886 report on the railroad industry, the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Interstate Commerce agreed, stating clearly that the "great desideratum is to secure equality."

Turning to Regulators for Help

To achieve equality, anti-monopolists wanted more government regulation and enforcement. By the late 1880s, some railroad executives were starting to agree. Their efforts at cooperation had failed because railroads treated each other no better than they did their customers. As Charles Francis Adams put it, his own industry's "method of doing business is founded upon lying, cheating, and stealing: all bad things."

The consensus was that the railroads needed the federal government to enforce the rules, bringing greater efficiency and ultimately lower rates. But Congress ran into a problem: If an even, competitive playing field depended on regulation, the marketplace wasn't truly open or free.

The solution was no clearer then than it is now. The technologies of railroads inherently gave large operators advantages of efficiency and profitability. Large customers also got benefits: John D. Rockefeller of Standard Oil, for example, could guarantee large shipments and provide his own tank cars – so he got special rates and rebates. Newcomers and small enterprises were left out.

Some reformers suggested accepting monopolies, so long as their rates were carefully regulated. But the calculations were complex: Charges by the mile ignored the fact that most costs came not from transport but rather from loading, unloading and transferring freight. And even the best bookkeepers had a hard time unraveling railway accounts.

Managing Power

The simplest solution, advanced by the Populist party and others, was the most difficult politically: nationalize the railroad routes. Turning them into a publicly owned network, like today's interstate highway system, would give the government the responsibility to create clear, fair rules for private companies wishing to use them. But profitable railroads opposed it tooth and nail, and skeptical reformers did not want the government to buy derelict and unprofitable railroads.

The current controversy about the monopolistic power of internet service providers echoes those concerns from the first Gilded Age. As anti-monopolists did in the 19th century, advocates of an open internet argue that regulation will advance competition by creating a level playing field for all comers, big and small, resulting in more innovation and better products. (There was even a radical, if short-lived, proposal to nationalize high-speed wireless service.)

However, no proposed regulations for an open internet address the existing power of either the service providers or the "Big Five" internet giants: Apple, Amazon, Facebook, Google and Microsoft. Like Standard Oil, they have the power to wring enormous advantages from the internet service

providers, to the detriment of smaller competitors.

The most important element of the debate – both then and now – is not the particular regulations that are or are not enacted. What's crucial is the wider concerns about the effects on society. The Gilded Age's anti-monopolists had political and moral concerns, not economic ones. They believed, as many in the U.S. still do, that a democracy's economy should be judged not only – nor even primarily – by its financial output. Rather, success is how well it sustains the ideals, values and engaged citizenship on which free societies depend.

When monopoly threatens something as fundamental as the free circulation of information and the equal access of citizens to technologies central to their daily life, the issues are no longer economic.

Richard White, is Professor of American History, at **Stanford University**

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Speeding into the Void of Cyberspace as Designed

Edward Curtin writes about the fabricated world of engineered emergencies and digital alerts.

By **Edward Curtin**

Edwardcurtin.com

“The internet was hardwired to be a surveillance tool from the start. No matter what we use the network for today – dating, directions, encrypted chat, email, or just reading the news – it always had a dual-use nature rooted in intelligence gathering and war.” – Yasha Levine, *“Surveillance Valley: The Secret Military History of the Internet.”*

“My Dear, here we must run as fast as we can, just to stay in place. If you wish to go anywhere, you must run twice as fast as that.” – The Red Queen in Lewis Carroll’s *“Alice Through the Looking Glass.”*



Speed and panic go hand-in-hand in today’s fabricated world of engineered emergencies and digital alerts. “We have no time” is today’s mantra – “We are running out of time” – and because this mood of urgency has come to grip most people’s minds, deep thinking about why this is so and who benefits is in short supply. Most people sense this to be true but don’t know how to extract themselves from the addictive nature of speed long enough to grasp how deeply they have been propagandized, and why.

A key turning point in the creation of this mood of an ongoing emergency and tense urgency was the naming of the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, as “9/11.”

“Quick, call 911” permeated deep into popular consciousness. The so-called “security” it elicited became a cloaked form of interminable terror. The future editor of *The New York Times* and Iraq war promoter, Bill Keller, introduced this emergency phone connection on the morning of Sept. 12, 2001,

in a *New York Times* op-ed, "America's Emergency Line: 911."

The linkage of the attacks to a permanent national emergency was thus subliminally introduced, as Keller mentioned Israel nine times and seven times compared the U.S. situation to that of Israel as a target for terrorists. His first sentence reads: "An Israeli response to America's aptly dated wake-up call might well be, 'Now you know.'"

By referring to Sept. 11 as 9/11, an endless national emergency became wedded to an endless war on terror aimed at preventing Hitler-like terrorists from obliterating us with nuclear weapons that could create another "ground zero" or holocaust. Mentioning Israel ("America is proud to be Israel's closest ally and best friend in the world," President George W. Bush would tell the Israeli Knesset) so many times, Keller was not very subtly performing an act of legerdemain with multiple meanings.

By comparing the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks to Israeli "victims," he was implying, among other things, that the Israelis are innocent victims who are not involved in terrorism, but are terrorized by Palestinians, as Americans are terrorized by fanatical Muslims. Palestinians/Al-Qaeda/Iraq/Iran/Afghanistan/Syria versus Israel/United States. Explicit and implicit parallels of the guilty and the innocent. Keller tells us who the real killers are, as if he knew who was guilty and who was innocent.

Pushing Buttons

His use of the term 9/11 pushes all the right buttons, evoking unending social fear and anxiety. It is language as sorcery. It is propaganda at its best. Even well-respected

critics of the U.S. use this term, which has become a fixture of public consciousness through endless repetition.

As President George W. Bush would later put it, as he connected Saddam Hussein, the late president of Iraq, to "9/11" and pushed for the Iraq war: "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud." All the ingredients for a linguistic mind-control smoothie had been blended.

Under President Barack Obama, it was Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and Russia, and now Trump touts Iran as the great threat. So many emergencies following fast upon each other are enough to make your head spin.

This sense of ongoing urgency and dread was joined to the fast growing (and getting faster by the day) internet and cell phone world that has come to dominate contemporary life. Permanent busyness and speed – a state of on-edge nervousness and panic with digital alerts – are today's norms.

The majority of people live "on" their phones with their constant beeps, and the digital media have fragmented our sense of time into perpetual presents that create historical amnesia and digital dementia. In a so-called progressive world of consumer capitalism, the era of what the astute sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has called "liquid modernity," time itself has become an online transaction, a fluid commodity that flows away faster than a scrolling screen.

We live in a use-by-date digital world in a state of suspended animation where "time is short" and we must hustle before our use-by date is past. The pace of private and

public life has outrun most people's ability to slow down long enough to realize a hidden hustler has taken them for a ride to Wonderland where the only wonder is that more people have not gone insane as they slip and slide away on the superhighway to nowhere.

Method of Imprisonment

John Berger, as only a sage artist would, noted this essential truth in his 1972 novel "G.":

"Every ruling minority needs to numb and, if possible, to kill the time sense of those whom it exploits. This is the authoritarian secret of all methods of imprisonment."

Today the vast majority of people, trapped by the manufactured illusion of speed, are in their cells, quickly texting and calling and checking to see if they've missed anything as time flies by.

Much is said about various types of environmental pollution, but the pollution of speed and its effects on mind and body are rarely mentioned, except to express gladness for more speed. The rollout of 5G technology is a case in point. Mental and physical health concerns be damned.

Back in the 19th century, when space and time were being first "conquered" by the camera, telegraph, and telephone, these inventions were described as flying machines. Time flew, voices flew, images flew. Soon the phonograph and film would capture and preserve the "living" voices and the moving images of the living and the dead.

It was scientific spiritualism at its birth. Today's comical

research into downloading “consciousness” to conquer death by becoming machines is its latest manifestation.

That the clowns behind this speed culture are growing rich on this research at our elite universities that are funded by the Pentagon and the intelligence agencies doesn't make people howl with sardonic laughter puzzles me. Laughter's good; it slows you down. I just had a good laugh reading an article about scientists wondering why new research “suggests” that the universe may be a billion years younger than they thought. I love their precision, don't you?

My students, in their learned helplessness and desire to be told what to do, have often asked me how long their term papers should be, and when I tell them probably 37 and one-half words, they look at me with mouths agape.

“What do you mean?” one finally asks. I tell them that writing 37 and a half words is much faster than having to think slowly as you write, and when you have nothing left to say, to just stop. A fast 37 and a half words solves the thinking problem. “Maybe you can text me your paper,” I often add, even though I don't do texting.

Totalitarianism in Technology

On a more serious note, a lifelong student of speed (dromology), the brilliant French thinker Paul Virilio, has shown how speed and war have developed together and how totalitarianism is latent in technology. Few listen, just as they did not listen to Jacques Ellul, Lewis Mumford, Neil Postman, and others who warned of the direction technology was taking us. Nuclear weapons are the supreme technological “achievement,” of course, devices that can eliminate all

space and time in a flash.

They work fast. Virilio says,

“The speed of the new optoelectronic and electroacoustic milieu becomes the final void (the void of the quick), a vacuum that no longer depends on the interval between places or things and so on the world’s very extension, but on the interface of an instantaneous transmission of remote appearances, on a geographic and geometric retention in which all volume, all relief vanish.”

As I write, I look down at my wristwatch lying on the desk and laugh. My sister gave it to me after her husband died. He had won it as a member of the Villanova track team that won the four-man, two-mile, relay at the famous Coliseum Relays in Los Angeles in near world record time.

Young men whose bodies were in motion to move across terra firma as fast as possible. No drugs produced in a technological chemical factory to aid them. No gimmicks. Just bodies in motion, unlike today. It is an analog watch that must be wound every day when the sun rises. But my brother-in-law never wound it because he never used it. He was saving it as a stashed-away memento in some sort of suspended time.

I like it because it always runs a bit slow, unlike the Villanova flashes. I like slow.

Control by Elites

In a brilliant book written in 1999 before the hyper-speed era was fully underway – “Speaking Into The Air: A History

of the Idea of Communication” – John Durham Peters, while not especially focusing on the issue of speed and technology as does Virilio, indirectly explores the fundamental issue that underlies technology and its control by the elites.

The problem with technology is that it is the use of a technique applied to physical things to control those who don't control the machines. Today, that is the internet and digital technology, controlled by those Virilio calls “the global kinetic elites.”

Many readers might remember the iconic line from the film “Cool Hand Luke” with Paul Newman: “What we have here is failure to communicate.” That is our issue. How to communicate, and to whom, and who controls our means and speed of communication. Speed kills genuine communication, which may be its point.

Here's what Peters has to say about the new media of the 19th century.

“Media of transmission allow crosscuts through space, but recording media allow jump cuts through time. The sentence for death for sound, image, and experience had been commuted. Speech and action could live beyond their human origins. In short, recording media made the afterlife of the dead possible in a new way. As Scientific American put it of the phonograph in 1877: ‘Speech has become, as it were, immortal.’ That ‘as it were’ is the dwelling place of ghosts.”

Despite our advanced technology today, we still die, but we live faster, which is not to say better. We live faster

until modern medicine makes our dying slower. Speed grants us the illusion of control, an illusionary sense of stop-time in the midst of techno-time, digital time, pointillistic time where so much is happening simultaneously across the internet and we “have” it at our fingertips.

Awash in cultural nostalgia that gives us a frisson of false comfort, we scroll the past as fast as we can. In the small town where I live, urbanites come in droves for nostalgia and create hyper-gentrification. I see them rapidly walking the country roads talking from their cells as bird song, rustling leaves, and lapping water passes them by, the technology serving as a shield from reality itself.

To realize that the Internet was developed as a weapon and has killed our sense of flesh and blood natural time to exploit us through speed should be obvious, though I suspect it isn't.

'Split Screen Marketing Trick'

The invention and control of the Internet by the Pentagon, the intelligence agencies, and their allies in Silicon Valley, as Yasha Levine chronicles in “Surveillance Valley,” is a fundamental problem that deserves focused attention. However, who can slow down enough to focus? As he says, “American military interests continue to dominate all parts of the network, even those that supposedly stand in opposition.”

This includes Tor and Signal, two encrypted mobile phone and internet services highly touted by journalists, political activists, and dissidents for their ability to

make it impossible for governments to monitor communication.

Levine writes,

“While Internet billionaires like Larry Page, Sergey Brin, and Mark Zuckerberg slam government surveillance, talk up freedom, and embrace [NSA whistleblower Edward] Snowden and crypto privacy culture, their companies still cut deals with the Pentagon, work with the NSA and CIA, and continue to track and profile people for profit. It is the same old split-screen marketing trick: the public branding and the behind-the-scenes reality.”

The Internet is, as he argues, an “old cybernetic dream of a world where everyone is watched, predicted, and controlled.” It is also where you are reading this, another article that will fast disappear from your mind as a stream of more urgent articles rush into print to push it aside.

We are homeless modern minds now, exiled from earth time, and if we don't rediscover our way back to a slow contemplation of our fate and the ontological reality of human being itself, I'm afraid we are speeding into the void.

Edward Curtin teaches sociology at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. His writing on varied topics has appeared widely over many years. He states: “I write as a public intellectual for the general public, not as a specialist for a narrow readership. I believe a noncommittal sociology is an impossibility and therefore see all my work as an effort to enhance human freedom through understanding.”

This article was first published on his website edwardcurtin.com.

CONFIRMED: Chemical Weapons Assessment Contradicting Official Syria Narrative Is Authentic

The leak undermines the fundamental assumptions behind many years of Western reporting, writes Caitlin Johnstone.

By **Caitlin Johnstone**

CaitlinJohnstone.com



The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has begun responding to queries by the press about a leaked document that contradicts official OPCW findings on an alleged chemical weapons attack last year in Douma, Syria. The prepared statement they've been using in response to these queries confirms the authenticity of the document.

To recap, a few days ago the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media (WGSPM) **published** a **document** signed by a man named Ian Henderson, whose name is seen listed in expert leadership positions on OPCW documents from **as far back as 1998** and as **recently as 2018**. It's unknown who leaked the document and what other media organizations may have received it.



The report picks apart the extremely shaky physics and narratives of the official OPCW analysis on the gas cylinders allegedly dropped from Syrian government aircraft in the Douma attack, and concludes that “The dimensions, characteristics and appearance of the cylinders, and the surrounding scene of the incidents, were inconsistent with what would have been expected in the case of either cylinder being delivered from an aircraft,” saying instead that manual placement of the cylinders in the locations investigators found them in is “the only plausible explanation for observations at the scene.”

Cylinders Did Not Arrive by Air

To be clear, this means that according to the assessment signed by an OPCW-trained expert, the cylinders alleged to have dispensed poison gas which killed dozens of people in

Douma did not arrive in the locations that they were alleged to have arrived at via aircraft dropped by the Syrian government, but via manual placement by people on the ground, where photographs were then taken and circulated around the world as evidence against the Syrian government which was used to justify air strikes by the U.S., U.K. and France. There were swift military consequences meted out on what appears now to be a lie. At the time, the people on the ground were the Al Qaeda-linked Jaysh Al-Islam, who had at that point nothing to lose and everything to gain by staging a false flag attack in a last-ditch attempt to get NATO powers to function as their air force, since they'd already effectively lost the battle against the Syrian government.

Leaked Document Pokes More Holes In Establishment Syria Narrative

"If you still believe at this point that the Syrian government dropped poison gas on #Douma last year, then I've got some Iraqi WMDs to sell you." #Syria<https://t.co/hFIbBF0J9x>

– Caitlin Johnstone ? (@caitoz) May 14, 2019

We now have confirmation that, for whatever the reason may be, this assessment was hidden from the public by the OPCW.

British journalists Peter Hitchens and Brian Whitaker have both published matching statements from the OPCW on this report. Hitchens has been an outspoken critic of the establishment Syria narrative; Whittaker has been a virulent promulgator of it. The statement begins as a very mundane and obvious assertion that it takes information from numerous sources and then publishes its conclusions, but concludes with an admission that it is "conducting an internal investigation about the unauthorised release of the

document in question.” This constitutes an admission that the document is authentic.

Text of Statement

Here is the text of the statement in full; the portion I’m drawing attention to is in the second-to-last paragraph:

The OPCW establishes facts surrounding allegations of the use of toxic chemicals for hostile purposes in the Syrian Arab Republic through the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), which was set up in 2014.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat reaffirms that the FFM complies with established methodologies and practices to ensure the integrity of its findings. The FFM takes into account all available, relevant, and reliable information and analysis within the scope of its mandate to determine its findings.

Per standard practice, the FFM draws expertise from different divisions across the Technical Secretariat as needed. All information was taken into account, deliberated, and weighed when formulating the final report regarding the incident in Douma, Syrian Arab Republic, on 7 April 2018. On 1 March 2019, the OPCW issued its final report on this incident, signed by the Director-General.

Per OPCW rules and regulations, and in order to ensure the privacy, safety, and security of personnel, the OPCW does not provide information about individual staff members of the Technical Secretariat

Pursuant to its established policies and practices, the

OPCW Technical Secretariat is conducting an internal investigation about the unauthorised release of the document in question.

At this time, there is no further public information on this matter and the OPCW is unable to accommodate requests for interviews.

Should Be Major Global News

This should be a major news headline all around the world, but of course it is not. As of this writing the mass media have remained deadly silent about the document despite its enormous relevance to an international headline story last year which occupied many days of air time. It not only debunks a major news story that had military consequences, it casts doubt on a most esteemed international independent investigative body and undermines the fundamental assumptions behind many years of Western reporting in the area. People get lazy about letting the media tell them what's important and they assume if it's not in the news, it's not a big deal. This is a big deal, this is a major story and it is going unreported, which makes the media's silence a part of the story as well.

Also conspicuously absent from discussion has been the war propaganda firm *Bellingcat*, which is usually the first to put the most establishment-friendly spin possible on any development in this area. If Eliot Higgins can't even work out how to polish this turd, you know it's a steamer.

As near as I can tell the kindest possible interpretation of

these revelations is that an expert who has worked with the OPCW for decades gave an engineering assessment which directly contradicted the official findings of the OPCW on Douma, but OPCW officials didn't find his assessment convincing for whatever reason and hid every trace of it from public view. That's the *least* sinister possibility: that a sharp dissent from a distinguished expert within the OPCW's own investigation was completely hidden from the public because the people calling the shots at the OPCW didn't want to confuse us with a perspective they didn't find credible. This most charitable interpretation possible is damningly unacceptable by itself, because the public should obviously be kept informed of any possible evidence which may contradict the reasons they were fed to justify an act of war by powerful governments.

And there are many far less charitable interpretations. It is not in the slightest bit unreasonable to speculate that the ostensibly independent OPCW in fact serves the interests of the U.S.-centralized power alliance, and that it suppressed the Henderson report because it pokes holes in the narratives that are used to demonize a longtime target for imperialist regime change. That is a perfectly reasonable possibility for us to wonder about, and the onus is now on the OPCW to prove to us that it is not the case.

Credibility Undermined

Either way, the fact that the OPCW kept Henderson's findings from receiving not a whisper of attention severely undermines the organization's credibility, not just with regard to Douma but with regard to everything, including the establishment Syria narrative as a whole and the Skripal

case in the UK. Everything the OPCW has ever concluded about alleged chemical usage around the world is now subject to very legitimate skepticism.

“The leaked OPCW engineers’ assessment is confirmed as genuine, which means the final report actively concealed evidence that the Douma chemical attack was staged by jihadists and the White Helmets,” tweeted British journalist Jonathan Cook. “The OPCW’s other Syria reports must now be treated as worthless too.”

Roger Waters, the English rock musician, responded on Twitter as well:

In light of the new evidence from an OPCW engineers report, leaked to 'Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media', previously suppressed by the OPCW themselves, about the alleged chemical in Douma...

Full statement and video here: [@guardian pic.twitter.com/2ax0RGBk3c](https://t.co/iq8CndKDTW@Freedland)

– Roger Waters (@rogerwaters) May 16, 2019

When I first reported on the Henderson document the other day, I received a fair criticism from a Medium user that I was actually far too charitable in my reporting on just how thoroughly the official Douma narrative was rejected.

“This article doesn’t really express just how damning the report actually is,” the user said. “It’s much more than just on balance their observations are inconsistent with the cylinders being dropped from aircraft. Just about everything about the official narrative is shown to be plain impossible, from the angles of the broken rebar in the roof, through the damage to the gas cylinders, to the pile of fins

on the balcony that couldn't have been attached to the cylinder, and more. There's simply no way they were dropped from helicopters."

I strongly encourage readers to [check out the 15-page document for themselves](#) to understand its claims and make up their own minds, and then sit a bit to really digest the possible implications. We may have just discovered a major piece of the puzzle explaining how seemingly independent international organizations help deceive us into consenting to wars and regime change interventionism around the world.

The narrative that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is a monster who gasses his own people has been used to justify Western interventionism in that nation which has included arming actual terrorist groups, enabling them to leave a trail of blood and chaos across Syria, as well as an illegal occupation of Syrian land and sanctions against the Syrian economy. This narrative is being used currently to maintain support for continuing to uphold the crippling sanctions that are making life hell for the average Syrian, today. This is not in the past, this is [happening now](#), and there is no telling when these siege efforts towards regime change will be ramped up further into more overt forms of military action. The violence, displacement and economic hardship that is being inflicted upon the Syrian people by this interventionism is causing incalculably immense suffering, and it is all made possible by [false narratives sold to the public](#).

Remember, they wouldn't work so hard to manufacture your consent if they didn't require that consent. So don't give it to them. The first step to ending the suffering caused by

Western interventionism is to help free public consciousness from the incredibly complex and well-oiled propaganda machine which manufactures the consent of the governed for unconscionable acts of violence and devastation. Wake people up to what's going on so we can all cease consenting.

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly [at Medium](#). Follow her work on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or her [website](#). She has a [podcast](#) and a new book ["Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers."](#) This article was re-published with permission.
